

*A Study of the Effectiveness
of
Adult Education
within
County Kildare VEC*

Doctorate in Education

Dublin City University

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Date: _____

Dedication

I wish to dedication this work to my late parents, Thomas and Carmel Murtagh, for without their sacrifices, I would not have received my early education which started me on the road of lifelong learning and discovery.

They didn't live to see this study commence nor completed, but I hope my work for a more inclusive educational system will make them proud.

*Without reflection, we go blindly on our way,
creating more unintended consequences,
and failing to achieve anything useful.*

Margaret J. Wheatley

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Abstract

The importance of adult and further education is stressed by national, European and international policy documents as being critical to economic, social and cultural initiatives, capable of benefiting all sectors of society. In Ireland, the current economic recession, financial crisis, increased unemployment and enforced emigration has created an urgent need to re-shape the adult education provision to meet the educational, social and skill needs of society with particular emphasis on the workforce and the unemployed.

This thesis sets out to evaluate the effectiveness of County Kildare VEC adult education service. It strives to discover if Kildare VEC adult education service is adequately and strategically equipped to meet the needs of students in the future. This thesis investigates if appropriate courses and programmes are available to achieve the most effective outcomes for students within the current environment. The study describes the current educational, social and economic context in which Kildare VEC provides a range of services. It involves reviewing the relevant literature on adult education and lifelong learning in the context of societal and economic change. The methodology involved qualitative interviews with sixty-five individuals involved in VEC adult education. In addition, a study visit to Norway was completed to survey their adult education policies and practices. The study findings will be used to augment the research conducted in Ireland.

Semi-structured interviews were organised with Kildare VEC students, tutors, middle and senior managers and CEOs from external VEC which provide rich data describing the accomplishments and the challenges facing Kildare VEC adult education service. Kildare VEC was found to be responding to particular educational needs through its programme provision. However, deficits were highlighted in terms of the absence of an overall vision for adult education, continued professional development for staff and linkages with employment providers. The need for further research and analysis is also highlighted

which is required to inform a more appropriate educational response to the authentic needs of students in the future.

The research provides practitioners, stake-holders, policy makers and the implementers of adult education practice with interesting insights and eleven recommendations, that if implemented will improve the provision by Kildare VEC as well as other VECs in Ireland.

Finally, the outcomes of the research will specifically benefit Kildare VEC in re-structuring and creating an improved adult education and training provision. The recommended changes will result in a more comprehensive response to the needs of adult students facing rapid and transformational change in so many areas life and work.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABE	Adult Basic Education
AEO	Adult Education Officer
AEOA	Adult Education Officers' Association
AEGS	Adult Education Guidance Service
AFE	Adult and Further Education
AFET	Adult and Further Education Tutor
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
ANCO	An Comhairle Oiliúna
AONTAS	National Adult Education Organisation
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CE	Community Education
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEEEOA	Chief Executive and Education Officers' Association
CEF	Community Education Facilitator
CPD	Continued Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education Training
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DETI	Department of Enterprise Trade and Innovation
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EDO	Education Development Officer
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
EO	Education Officer
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
FÁILTE IRELAND	The National Tourism Development Authority
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council

FORFÁS	Ireland's policy advisory board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
IVET	Initial Vocational Education Training
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
LMT	Labour Market Training
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NDP	National Development Plan
NEES	National Employment and Entitlements Service
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate Course
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SOLAS	Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
STTC	Senior Traveller Training Centre
TEAGASC	The Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VET	Vocational Education Training
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme

Chapter 1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

County Kildare Vocational Education Committee (VEC) is the main provider of adult and further education in County Kildare. As author of this study, I am employed as the Adult Education Officer (AEO) with Kildare Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and I am responsible for the leadership and the management of the VEC Adult Education Service within the county. I have worked within the different educational sectors including primary, post-primary as well as adult and further education in Ireland over the past thirty years. Experiences gained from working within both primary and post-primary sectors directed me into the adult education sector in order to create a harmonised learning environment of 'cradle to the grave' education while also providing the educational opportunity to facilitate continuing and inter-generational learning. In addition to Kildare VEC, I have taught, planned and organised adult education programmes within three other VECs (Cavan, Roscommon and County Dublin). I have served on local, county and national education boards and committees that were engaged in furthering the growth and development of adult education as well as highlighting the significance and importance of on-going lifelong learning within a professional and responsive VEC service.

In 2007-2008, I carried out a pilot research project entitled '*A Study of Policies and Structures in VEC Adult Education Services*'. I interviewed eight VEC staff at management and CEO level in County Dublin and County Wicklow VECs (Appendix 1). The findings from the research revealed that changed economic circumstances during the period of the 'Celtic Tiger' (2000-2007) needed a different VEC management and leadership system that could implement the changes proposed by the European Commission to create 'a knowledge-based economy' (2000: 3) in Europe. Recommendations from the study included the need for continued professional development for all VEC staff, resulting in a more professional organisation along with the need for

further research to demonstrate the outcomes of VEC adult education services.

Having commenced this study in 2008, in 2009 I was selected as a member of a group of fourteen to visit Norway to examine their Vocational Education and Training system. The study visit was organised by the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) and it afforded me the opportunity to inform my knowledge of adult education and training within another European educational system. Norway is a country of similar population to Ireland that had embraced considerable educational change over the past two decades through legislative and educational modification. Having witnessed at first hand the educational system in Norway, I was better informed to examine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service.

Since commencing this study in 2008, considerable changes have taken place in Ireland, both educationally and economically. Economic cutbacks have resulted on a changed emphasis towards achieving a higher quality of educational provision, reduction in duplication of services and providing value-for-money within an increased evaluative market led provision. If Kildare VEC as an educational provider is to function efficiently and effectively in the current economic climate and I, as Adult Education Officer am to respond appropriately to the current educational challenges, I believe there is a need to study the effectiveness of the adult education provision provided by the VEC in County Kildare.

1.2 VEC education services in County Kildare

In Ireland, there are thirty-three statutory local education bodies (VECs) that administer second-level education, adult education, a small number of primary schools and other administrative services within the context of the overall educational provision (Appendix 2). County Kildare VEC had approximately 13,500 service users participating annually in schools and adult education services in 2010. Kildare VEC manages one primary school with over 50 pupils, nine second-level schools catering for over 4,000 students and nearly

9,500 students in a wide range of adult and further education programmes and services throughout County Kildare (Figure 1).

VEC Services throughout County Kildare



Figure 1: Map of County Kildare with locations and VEC services.

Kildare VEC adult education service involves a multiplicity of programmes - Youthreach, VTOS, Back to Education, Adult Basic Education, Community Education, PLCs, ITABE, Return to Learning, Workplace Learning, Skills for work along with fee-paying professional and hobby courses in schools and centres.

Figure 2 highlights the different adult education services provided by Kildare VEC in 2010 and the number of students who availed of courses and services in each of the categories.

VEC adult education services and participants - 2010

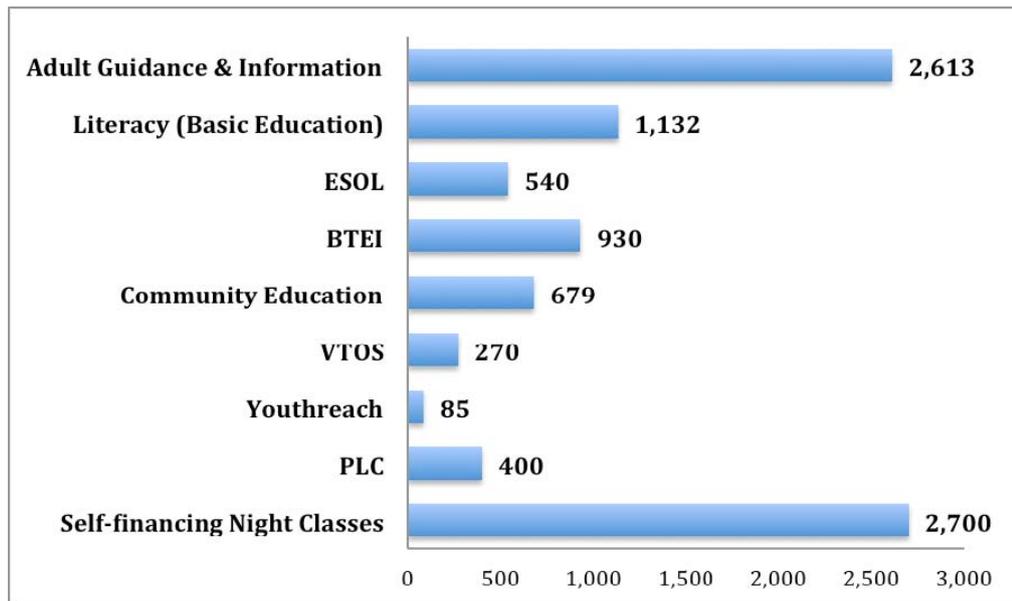


Figure 2: Kildare VEC adult student numbers in 2010

Kildare VEC fulfils its educational remit under the direction of a committee selected from community and parental representatives, elected county councillors and the management of the Chief Executive Officer (Figure 3).



Figure 3: County Kildare VEC organisation chart.

As Adult Education Officer, I have responsibility for these programmes and services within Kildare VEC (Figure 4):

Programmes and personnel under the direction of the AEO

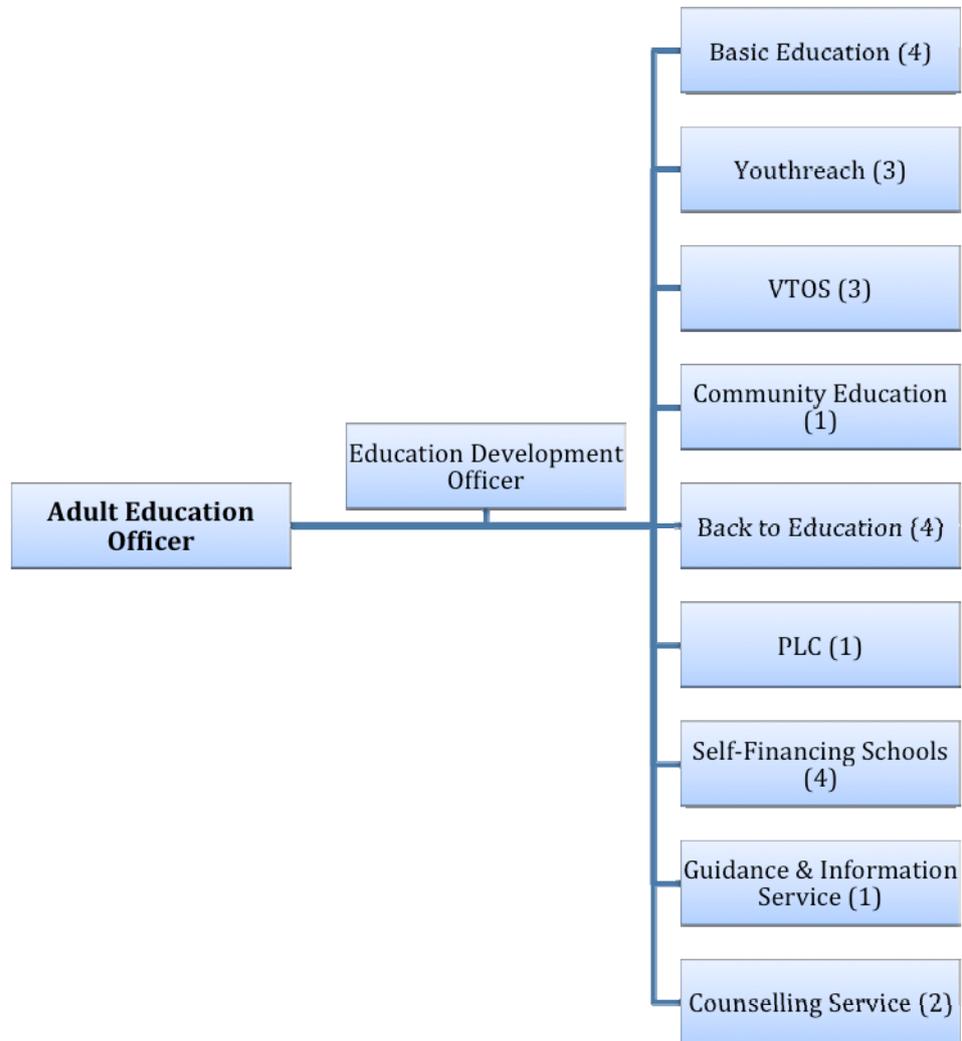


Figure 4: County Kildare VEC adult education service.

In addition to the direct provision of programme and services, Kildare VEC adult education service works in partnership with other statutory, community and voluntary bodies in the provision of courses and training for adults and despite the increasing number of adults seeking places on courses over the past number of years Kildare VEC is restricted in its service provision. The number of places in the VTOS, Youthreach and PLCs are capped nationally

by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), thus restricting Kildare VEC in their responsiveness to local needs and changing circumstances.

1.3 Rationale for the research

As Adult Education Officer (AEO), I am the third person to be appointed to the position in Kildare since AEOs were first appointed in 1979. My appointment began in December 2007. Under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the VEC Committee, I have responsibility for the management of programme co-ordinators and the delivery of adult education services. My position requires both management and leadership skills in order to successfully accomplish the following responsibilities in the furtherance of adult education in County Kildare:

- Strategic Planning
- Staff Development
- Policy Development
- Curriculum Development
- Inter-Agency Work
- Budget Management
- Health & Safety
- Buildings Management
- Technology Development
- Quality Assurance
- Programme and staff evaluation

Arising from my responsibilities as AEO as outlined in the Circular letter 42/79 of the Department of Education and in the light of the management duties of a system that has developed and expanded over thirty years, the focus of my research is to explore *the effectiveness of the Kildare VEC adult education service*. I expect to make recommendations that will improve the effectiveness of its provision within the current economic and educational circumstances.

1.4 Research question - to study of the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service

Having studied the literature relating to adult education and in the context of the changing educational needs of students, society and the economy, the purpose of this research is *to study the effectiveness of adult education within County Kildare VEC*. The objectives of this research study are:

1. Establish if the expectations and needs of students in adult education programmes and courses delivered by the Kildare VEC are adequately met.
2. Explore with tutors, co-ordinators and directors of adult education if the current VEC programmes and courses adequately respond to the needs of the students while addressing their up-skilling needs in the current economic climate.
3. Ascertain if Kildare VEC senior managers view the adult education provision as adequate to meet the significant challenges facing it as an educational organisation. A similar examination will take place among CEOs in three external VECs and an Executive of the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA).
4. Highlight effective initiatives that address the challenges facing Kildare VEC as it strives to provide a professional integrated adult education service capable of responding to the needs of current and future students within the context of the changing economic environment.

Prior to carrying out the research, I will describe the context within which Kildare VEC adult education service is operating while taking into account the broader social and economic environment in Ireland. I will describe how adult education and training services are spread across several Government departments and how at times, this has mitigated against the delivery of an integrated adult education service. I will also examine the literature on adult education to help identify the key issues that are impacting on its effective provision in County Kildare.

The research will involve interviewing the stakeholders in Kildare VEC adult education. I will begin my research by interviewing students and analysing the data collected. Subsequently, I will interview tutors, programme co-ordinators/directors and senior managers. In the final stage of the research process, I will interview three CEOs from external VECs and an Executive of the IVEA. My goal for this research is to gather a 'rich' understanding from sixty-five individuals involved in adult education. In conclusion, by discussing my findings from the Norwegian education and training sector, I envisage my findings from Kildare VEC will be enhanced within the context of a wider educational perspective.

Each stage of the process will build upon the previous findings in order to inform interview questions at the next level of research. This developmental process will help me to gain a deeper insight into *the effectiveness of the VEC adult education in County Kildare*.

1.5 Research issues that need addressing within this study

Crucial to this study is to define the purpose, meaning and understanding of adult education. How education in general and more importantly, how adult education in particular is defined will play a critical role in the development of this thesis, both from a philosophical and an experiential perspective. A clear definition and a shared understanding of the key elements that make up adult education will be instrumental in bringing about the changes and required improvements in Kildare VEC adult education services.

1.5.1 Definition of adult education

Finding a precise definition for adult education has proved difficult due in no small measure to the fact that education or learning is sometimes understood in terms of its outcome as distinct from the learning process that is on-going. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) definition of lifelong learning adopts a comprehensive view that covers all purposeful learning activity that aims to improve knowledge and competencies for all individuals who wish to participate in learning activities. In the OECD

Report *Lifelong Learning to Maintain Employability* (1997), adult education is described as an activity that is more than an add-on to formal education and is a process that takes place in formal, informal and non-formal settings. The Report states that:

Lifelong learning is far broader than the provision of second-chance education and training for adults. It is based on the view that everyone should be able, motivated and actively encouraged to learn throughout life. This view of learning embraces individual and social development of all kinds and in all settings: formally, in schools, vocational, tertiary and adult education institutions; and non-formally, at home, at work and in the community (OECD, 1997).

The 2003 OECD Report, *Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices* cites different definitions from Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (2003: 24). This OECD report attempts to create a definition of adult education taking into account all the factors involved, such as, formal/informal, full-time/part-time as well as conscious and unconscious learning. According to the report, the different contexts and circumstances make the analysis of adult education challenging (2003: 21). The main difference between the definition from each country lies within the realm of the focus placed by each country on adult education. Several countries focus their attention on the education/training aspect (curriculum) while others on the outcome (skills). Overall, the Report has very few references to the learning process within each countries search for a definition of adult education. When I come to examine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, the learning process and the student-centred approach plays a significant part in the development of its programmes.

The European Union (EU) published an extensive range of documents on lifelong learning since the early 1990's but it has not always defined with clarity what it means by lifelong learning. In addition, the definition of lifelong learning has shifted over time to encompass learning for the greater good of the individual and society and the economy. The EU definition that currently has strongest official support is contained in the 2002 Resolution of the EU Council:

Lifelong learning must cover learning from the pre-school age to that of post-retirement, including the entire spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Furthermore, lifelong learning must be understood as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. (2002: 2).

Similar in some respects to what is stated in several OECD publications, the EU documents tend to articulate what it sees as the outcomes of adult learning in terms of the creation of a knowledge based economy, the skills that are needed and the citizenship that will result from adults who partake in lifelong learning rather than defining precisely what it means by adult education or lifelong learning.

1.5.2 Adult education in the cycle of lifelong learning

A second important research clarification is needed regarding the place of adult education within the learning cycle. In addition, recognition must also be given to the various terms used within the literature to describe the activity whereby adults engage in the learning process. Terms such as adult learning, continuing education, further education, lifelong learning are all part of the vocabulary of adult education. This terminology endeavours to encapsulate the reality that while education in general may be viewed in terms of formal schooling, learning, on the other hand, is a continual process spanning the lifetime of every human being. Learning is on-going and not time related and it takes place within various environments - formal, non-formal and informal. Learning is an integral part of all human growth and development and is experienced in different ways and at various stages over the course of a lifetime by every individual. Everyone experiences the learning process differently as learning is a continuous cycle resulting from reflective engagement with changing circumstances and experiences. The learning process is described in the Faure Report for UNESCO *Learning to Be* (1972) as:

Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his/her life. The idea of lifelong learning is the keystone of the learning society. The lifelong concept covers all aspects of education, embracing everything in it, with the whole being more than the sum of

the parts. There is no such thing as a separate “permanent” part of education which is not lifelong (1972: 181-182).

Therefore, lifelong learning includes all learning that takes place from pre-school to higher education within the learning cycle. Adult education is one significant component of that learning process. The terms associated with adult education such as further education, continuing education and lifelong learning are used, sometimes interchangeably, in various writings and documents to describe the learning activity carried out by adults. It is important to recognise that these terms are not the same and that each one carries with it, meanings derived from different philosophical perspectives. These working philosophies can also produce different outcomes depending on the part played by the deliverer, the organiser or the funder of adult education programmes. For the purpose of this study, I will be using the term adult education to convey the description of the learning activity which adults engage in order to further their knowledge, their skills, their wellbeing and their experiences within programmes delivered and facilitated by Kildare VEC.

1.5.3 The role of adult education in Ireland

A third research issue is the significance and recognition given to adult education in Ireland. The first serious attempt by an Irish Government to study the nature of adult education in Ireland came in 1973 with the publication of *Adult Education in Ireland*, often referred to as the Murphy Report. In the report, adult education was defined as:

The provision and utilisation of facilities whereby those who are no longer participants in full-time school system may learn whatever they need to learn at any period of their lives.

The definition did not distinguish between formal and informal adult education but stressed that the process of adult education is geared towards “servicing the needs of adults in every sphere of human development”. That same definition of adult education was cited eleven years later in 1984 within a second Irish study of adult education, the *Report of the Commission on Adult*

Education: Lifelong Learning. It provided a fuller definition than the 1973 report:

Adult education includes all systematic learning by adults which contributes to their development as individuals and as members of the community and of society, apart from full-time instruction received by persons as part of their uninterrupted initial education and training. It may be formal education which takes place in institutions e.g. training centres, schools, colleges, institutes and universities, or non-formal education which is any other systematic form of learning, including self-directed learning (1984: 9).

In 1998, this was the same definition used in the Green Paper on *Adult Education: Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* (DES, 1998: 16). Clearly adult education was seen as involving education and training in both formal and non-formal settings. These two settings were also noted in the 2000 publication, *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*, which defined Adult Education as 'systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training' (2000: 12). For the purpose of this study, the 1973 definition of adult education used in the Murphy Report is most acceptable because it attempted to describe adult education that has a critical role to play in a rapidly changing society while seeking to provide information, knowledge, skills and attitude to change which people need in order to cope with altering conditions for the individual, for society and for the economy.

1.5.4 Fragmented nature of VEC adult education

A fourth important research consideration is the current fragmented nature of adult education in Ireland. The appointment of Adult Education Organisers (AEOs) to VECs in 1979 resulting from the publication of the 1973 report *Adult Education in Ireland* which detailed twenty-two suggestions necessary for the development of an adult education system in Ireland. With limited budgets, the role of the AEO in the early stages comprised largely of working with community groups and running self-financing courses. In the years following 1979, the implementation of government policies at national and European level resulted in additional adult education programmes being introduced by the Department of Education and Science (now Skills). Responsibility for

managing these new programmes, budgets, staffing, resourcing and development was allocated to the AEO within each VEC. The programmes and funding that evolved over the thirty years includes the following:

1985 - Introduction of a funding budget for adult literacy and community education

1989 - Youthreach, a programme for early school leavers

1990 - VTOS, a programme primarily aimed at the long term unemployed

1998 - A literacy budget was provided following the publication of the OECD report (1997) which reviewed literacy levels in Ireland

1999 - The adult guidance service was piloted

2002 - The Back to Education Initiative was launched

2003 - Community Education Facilitators were appointed to work mainly on community development

2004 - 2010 additional programmes included - Return to Learning, Workplace Learning, SkillVEC, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) and Skills for Work

To a large extent, the majority of these new programmes have been rolled out unconnected to the existing programmes within the VEC. They developed separate identities, often independent of other programmes within the VEC service and were delivered primarily in stand-alone locations. Most programmes had separate co-ordinators or directors, separate staffing arrangements, separate target groups, separate budgets, different staffing pay-scales and an individual reporting system to the Department of Education and Skills (DES). In some cases, local co-ordinators were reporting to national co-ordinators as well as to the VEC and DES. The outcome of thirty years of separate programmes has led in many cases to a fragmentation of the provision without clear direction and support from a single, overarching structure. The continuance of this VEC system, which lacks integration of services and without the examination of its effectiveness could leave Kildare

VEC lacking effectiveness in the eyes of the public, the stakeholders and working partners.

1.5.5 Recent changes in VECs

Vocational Education Committees (VECs) are currently experiencing a period of uncertain change. The findings and recommendations of this study will have to take into account these changes, the first of which is the proposed amalgamation of VECs. On June 29th 2011, the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairí Quinn, T.D., announced that the number of VECs will be reduced from thirty-three (Appendix 3) to sixteen (Appendix 4) and that legislation to bring about the changes was being prepared and will involve the consolidation of the existing nine Vocational Acts into one new Bill. The Minister stated that “this new bill will reflect the important role which these new entities will play in relation to education and training in the future”. A second change announced by the Minister on July 27th 2011 was the establishment of a new further education and training authority called SOLAS (Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna). Minister Quinn said:

‘The new SOLAS mandate will be to ensure the provision of 21st century high-quality further education and training programmes to jobseekers and other students. These programmes will be integrated, flexible, value-for-money and responsive to the needs of students and the requirements of a changed and changing economy. SOLAS will implement the significant transformation programme needed to deliver this. The Government is giving the further education and training sector a clear direction for the future’.

A third related change announcement by the Minister for Social Protection, Ms Joan Burton, T.D. August 3rd 2011, that will affect VECs or when they become Education and Training Boards (ETBs) was the establishment a new National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES). Minister Burton said:

‘We will replace FÁS with a new National Employment and Entitlements Service so that all employment and benefit support services will be integrated in a single delivery unit managed by the Department of Social Protection. This integrated service would provide a ‘one stop shop’ for people seeking to establish their benefit entitlements; looking for a job; and seeking advice about their training options...This service will offer users a higher level of personalised employment advice, with more frequent face-to-face interviews.’

All these changes resulting from the integration of the training section of FÁS, moving from what was the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Initiative (DETI) into the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the movement of FÁS employment services into the Department of Social Protection (DSP), will require significant adjustments on the part of VECs. These changes will necessitate both organisational and structural changes in all VECs. As the announcement stated, 'over time, FÁS Training Centre premises and most FÁS regional staff will be transferred to the VECs, so that VECs will ultimately be responsible for the delivery to the public in an integrated way of both further education and training services. This will strengthen the role of the reformed VECs in their local communities'.

1.5.6 Change in demographics

A further change effecting Kildare VEC results from a population increase in County Kildare of 23,620 (12.7%) from 186,335 (2006) to 209,955 (2011) people. This increase was built on a previous rise in population of 38% from 134,881 in 1996. The increasing population in Kildare has and will have direct consequences on future VEC provision in schools and adult education services.

1.5.7 Increase in unemployment rates

Another significant change has been the rise in unemployment levels in Ireland. The national unemployment rate was 4.5% in June 2006 according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and over the following five years, increased to 14.2%. In Ireland, the economic downturn has been more severe than in many OECD countries and it has particularly affected the construction sector, which included 22% of total male employment and 50% of apprentices in 2008 (OECD 2010: 26). In Kildare, the economic downturn has impacted significantly on the numbers in the labour force with almost 19,200 recorded on the live register in September 2010. The increase in unemployment was particularly noticed in the central area of County Kildare (Naas and Newbridge) as well as an increase in the southern area (Athy). In

2010, statistics reveal a slight decrease in unemployment rates in the north of the county.

1.5.8 Reduction in VEC personnel and resources

Adult education personnel working for Kildare VEC, with the exception of tutors/teachers, are not classified as front-line staff and hence, are not being replaced following retirements or resignations as a consequence of the government moratorium on recruitment within the public service. Without appropriate non-teaching adult education personnel, the current provision of services could in time become more restricted, reduced or cancelled, thus diminishing the level of effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service.

1.6 Content of the thesis

Chapter 2 will describe the County Kildare adult education service within the context of the overall VEC Education Service and the national economy. I will highlight the place of education and training within the county and the economic environment that necessitates changes in an adult education provision that will meet and address the challenges facing Ireland within the current economic environment. I will discuss my educational visit to Norway and the objectives behind this visit to examine another European country which faced the challenge to change its educational system in the past thirty years.

Chapter 3 will review the adult education literature from a theoretical and practical perspective. Irish educational policy documents over the past twenty years will be discussed within the context of a changing Ireland. I will review policy statements from the European Union, UNESCO and OECD on adult education and lifelong learning. Information gathered from the Norwegian education system will be highlighted. Finally, I will consider what the literature has to say in relation to evaluating educational programmes. Having reviewed all the literature, I will design the research interview questions and use data collection and analysis to discover insights to frame recommendations for improvements in the VEC service.

Chapter 4 will discuss a selection of research methodologies. Education is a process whereby individuals seek to discover meaning. Adult education is a means by which adults can understand and make sense of life. I will use grounded theory as the methodology and the case study method of research (qualitative interviews) will provide a certain degree of flexibility as the research process progresses. The interviews will be conducted among VEC students, tutors and middle management staff within the adult education service as well as VEC senior managers, three CEOs from external VECs and a representative of the IVEA.

Chapter 5 will involve an in-depth analysis of sixty-five interviews in order to identify the main findings. I will also carry out comparative analysis with adult education services in three external VECs and take into consideration the insights of an IVEA senior executive. Finally, I will integrate the relevant issues from the study visit to Norway which examined their adult education system.

Chapter 6 will examine the findings and highlight areas for improvement within Kildare VEC adult education service. I will emphasise existing gaps in provision where Kildare VEC is not providing a relevant, comprehensive and responsive adult education service.

Finally, Chapter 7 will draw conclusions and make recommendations for the future development of Kildare VEC adult education service. These recommendations will be framed to address changes in society that require the adult education service to change. These include the amalgamation of VECs and the establishment of the new Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS). It is expected that a number of the recommendations will carry a broader remit beyond Kildare VEC and may find a resonance with many other VECs throughout Ireland.

1.7 Conclusion

The provision of adult education in Ireland consists of a complex system of policies and practices, funded and organised by several government departments that has evolved from both national and European policies along with reports, findings and recommendations. In addition, adult education in Ireland involves a wide variety of students with particular needs and expectations of the provision. Within this complex system, the VEC, under the auspices of the Department of Education and Skills, is one of the main providers of adult education in Ireland. Maunsell, Downes and McLoughlin in the *National Report on Lifelong Learning in Ireland* stated:

While there are a range of adult and further education providers in the Republic of Ireland, the VEC sector has arguably more students than all other providers combined and could thus be considered the most pervasive adult education provider in the state (2010: 2).

It is envisaged that this research will enable me as Adult Education Officer for Kildare VEC to evaluate the effectiveness of the adult education service within the present context of multiple educational programmes. The research findings and recommendations will provide the opportunity to suggest the most effective means by which adult education can be provided by Kildare VEC in the future.

Chapter 2 Context

2.1 Introduction

In Ireland, a formalised system of technical education has existed from ancient times. Technical education is described as that which prepares trainees for specific trades or occupations that are based on manual or practical activities. It was not until the last decade of the 19th century that technical instruction legislation was enacted with the Technical Instruction Act (1899) and rolled out through the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI). This Act empowered the council of any county or urban district or any two or more public bodies jointly, to appoint committees for the purpose of carrying out a Technical Education Scheme. It provided administrative and executive educational structures at both national and local levels with a statutory system of financing from central and local funds. The Act had certain limitations in so far as it did not provide for financing of buildings, therefore disused premises, such as, fever hospitals, jails, workhouses and military barracks were renovated. In County Kildare, the technical school was housed in the town water tower building, in Naas. Technical instruction continued to be administered by the DATI until the establishment of the Department of Education in 1924 following the founding of the Irish Free State.

2.2 The Irish vocational education system

The first Education Act passed by the Free State Government was the Vocational Education Act (1930). This Act followed the report of the Commission on Technical Education by John Ingram, who with Marcus O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, helped frame the vocational education system in Ireland. Additional legislation was enacted with the Apprenticeship Act (1931) which also served to characterise and shape vocational education in Ireland. These two Acts established VECs as statutory education authorities with responsibility for vocational educational training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. Over the past 80 years, the thirty-eight VECs evolved into complex, community-connected organisations with

only minor amendments to the 1930 legislation in 1936, 1944, 1970 and a major overhaul of structures took place in 2001 with the enactment of the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act. Following the 2001 Act, the number of VECs was reduced from thirty-eight to thirty-three (Appendix 3). Each VEC continued to provide second level education, adult and further education, community based hobby, recreational and social courses along with literacy, return to education programmes and courses geared towards up-skilling students. By 2010 VECs had six key areas of responsibility (Appendix 5):

1. Community National Schools;
2. Second-level schools;
3. Adult and further education;
4. Youth work;
5. Administration of student support services;
6. The school transport scheme.

2.3 Key components of VEC adult education

The majority of VEC adult education components are funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) with a small proportion provided by the European Union. In 2010, the DES allocated to VECs a total of €430 million for adult and further education, a increase from €178 million in 2000. All VEC provide statistical returns to the DES (Appendix 6 - 2010 departmental statistics).

According to the AEOA Strategic Framework 2016, VECs deliver education/training to more than 180,000 adults annually. A significant proportion of those targeted have low basic skills/qualifications and a significant number are taking part in second chance education. These further education/training programmes are delivered in VEC centres of adult education, schools and colleges, workplaces and in a variety of community settings. Most of this education/training is provided over Levels 1 - 6 of the NFQ (Appendix 7), catering for learners whose needs span from those experiencing literacy difficulties to those progressing to third level education.

2.4 County Kildare VEC – its mission

The mission statement of County Kildare VEC is:

“Kildare VEC will provide learners with flexible education opportunities, which are of the highest quality and its programmes will reflect current and emerging knowledge and practices and will be relevant to the needs of the individual and our county. We will offer programmes, delivered in a professional manner in a friendly and supportive environment”.

The following values underpin the Mission Statement and educational provision of Kildare VEC:

1. **Accessible** – designing equality, diversity and inclusiveness in participation into all our programmes and activities.
2. **Relevant** – ensuring the continued relevance to industry, business and society of our teaching programmes particularly in the provision of quality lifelong learning experiences.
3. **Supportive** – through the provision of appropriate class groups, individual attention and a learning environment that will support student and staff in meeting their needs and aspirations.
4. **Friendly** – dealing with all stakeholders in a positive and responsive manner.

Each VEC has its own Mission Statement and while the core objectives are to a large extent similar, written illustrations of each mission statements differ within the thirty-three VECs. A sample of five VEC Mission Statements can be found in Appendix 8.

2.5 County Kildare VEC - its adult education provision

The aim of County Kildare VEC adult education service is to facilitate students to re-enter the education process to continue learning in order to enter employment and engage in continuous up-skilling to meet the changing needs of employment. A further aim is to assist students to participate in the community in which they live and work. The key components of Kildare VEC

are the wide range of adult programmes detailed below in addition to data and statistical analysis of returns submitted to the Department of Education and Skills at the end of 2010:

There is one VEC **Adult Guidance Service** and in 2010 it provided an information and guidance service to over 2,600 adults, facilitating the return to education and/or training of adults in Kildare with the intention of progressing to further education and employment.

Basic Education Services:

There are four ABE centres in Kildare with various outreach locations providing Basic Education to over 1,100 adults in 2010. Of the adults taking part in Basic Education, 33% had left school after primary and a further 76% had left school after Junior / Intermediate Certificate. In 2010, over 53% of participants were over 50 years of age.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

This programme is co-ordinated through the Basic Education Service and catered for over 500 adult new comers to Ireland in 2010. Of the adults taking part in ESOL programme, 35% had the equivalent of Junior Certificate. In 2010, over 69% of participants were between 25 and 44 years of age.

Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

The programme is run in many centres throughout the county and provided educational courses to over 900 learners in 2010. In 2010, nearly 81% of participants were unemployed or not in the labour market and 49% had left school early. The majority of participants (71%) were female and from the total group, 53% were aged between 24 and 44 years of age.

Community Education Programmes

There were nearly 700 learners taking part in courses facilitated in local communities throughout Kildare in 2010. Through this community-

based provision, Kildare VEC has established supportive learning environments that encourage adults back into education and enable them develop their skillsets and competencies, thereby providing stepping stones on to further learning and employment.

Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS)

There are three VTOS centres within the county providing a two year programme to 270 learners. Of the adults taking part in the VTOS programme, 55% had a Junior Certificate or below. In 2010, this programme has seen the number of male participants increase to 47% and 55% were between the age of 22 and 44 years of age.

Youthreach

There are three centres within the county providing a two-year programme for over 85 early school leavers. Of the young participants taking part in the Youthreach programme in 2010, 62% were male and 38% were female, 41% had less than Junior Certificate when they began the programme.

Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs)

In 2010 there were 18 full-time PLC courses run by Kildare VEC catering for over 200 adults who have completed second level education and wished to avail of courses that might prepare them for entry to third level education and/or employment.

Night Classes in VEC Colleges and Schools

Certified, leisure and hobby courses are provided in four VEC night schools catering for over 2,700 learners in 2010. Some of these courses have been extended to daytime provision and are provided throughout the year in one school.

Overall, adult education courses provided by Kildare VEC vary in their provision and duration and include hobby, leisure and community development, life skills, training and certificate courses at Junior and Leaving

Certificate, FETAC Level 3 - 6 and certified courses through third level institutions.

2.6 Other training agencies

In Ireland, the remit for Vocational Education and Training (VET) falls within several government departments, mainly the Departments of Education and Skills (DES) and Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (DETI). A major element of further training was the apprenticeship system, organised by FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority. Standard-based apprenticeships were available in a limited number of occupations, in traditional craft sectors (construction, electrical, motor, engineering and painting sectors).

Over the years, numerous training agencies have evolved with the majority were established as semi-state bodies and spread over several government departments. The most significant legislation in vocational training after the 1931 Apprenticeship Act related to the establishment of a number of public bodies between 1960 and 1970, including AnCO (the Industrial Training Authority). FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority, replaced AnCO in 1988. Fáilte Ireland was established to provide training in the tourism and hospitality sectors, replacing Bord Failte setup in the 1960's. ACOT was established for the development of agriculture and horticulture, some of whose functions were incorporated into TEAGASC under the Agricultural (Research, Advisory and Training) Act 1988. In addition, public bodies were established to advise on training in the forestry, fisheries, marine and nursing sectors and Enterprise Ireland was setup in 1998 to provide training in enterprise development.

2.7 Economic context

The origins of growth and development in Ireland, which led to what became known as the 'Celtic Tiger' era dates back to the publication of the *First Programme for Economic Expansion* in 1958. Between 1951 and 1961, unemployment in Ireland was high, emigration of Irish citizens was over 400,000 and the population dropped to 2.8 million people. Changes in

economic policies during the 1960s resulted in a movement from protectionism to free trade and the modernisation of the Irish economy through the incentivising of multi-national companies via tax breaks and grants to establish their manufacturing operations in Ireland. Other significant drivers of change during that period included the introduction of free post-primary education by Donagh O'Malley in 1967 coupled with Ireland's accession into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. These events were a catalyst in transforming Ireland from an agricultural based economy to one driven by hi-tech industry and global exports. With the help of funding from the EEC (later to become the EC and latterly, the EU), Ireland's infrastructure developed substantially and education standards improved resulting in the country becoming more attractive for outside investment.

2.8 From boom to recession

During the late 1990's and for the first five-to-seven years of the 21st century, Ireland experienced unprecedented economic growth resulting in net employment and immigration into the country for the first time in its history. Between 2000 and 2007 the total workforce expanded by 605,000 in sectors such as construction, public services, distribution and retail while other services such as manufacturing and internationally traded services fell from 315,418 to 305,121. So strong was the employment growth market, Ireland needed to source workers from abroad and according to the ESRI, the number of work permits increased from 6,300 in 1999 to 47,500 in 2003.

However since 2007, full-time employment has been falling and in 2009 it fell by 193,200 on an annual basis with declines in both male (-152,500) and female (-40,800) employees. According to the Central Statistics Office, the unemployment rate rose to a high of 13.7% in July 2010 but fell slightly to 13.4% in December 2010. In the space of five years, the average unemployment rate rose from 4.4% in 2005 to 13.6% in 2010 (Figure 5). The largest decrease in full-time employment has occurred in the construction

sector (-84,700), industry (-33,000) and wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles etc. (-28,500) sectors.

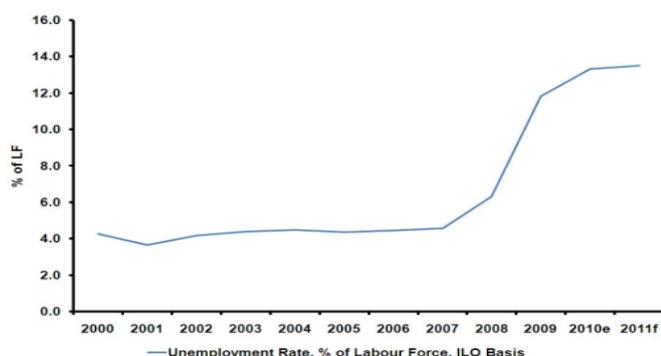


Figure 5: Central Statistics Office - unemployment rates 2000-2011

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) predicted the number employed to average close to 1.86 million in both 2010 and 2011 and in spite of the stability in the numbers employed, unemployment was forecast to fall between 2010 and 2011, averaging 13.75% in 2010 and 13% in 2011. Despite a migratory outflow from Ireland of 60,000 people during the period May 2009 to April 2010 and a further 40,000 by the end of April 2011, unemployment continued to rise to 14.4 in October 2011.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES							
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
January	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.8	9.4	13	14.3
February	4.2	4.4	4.4	4.9	10.1	12.8	14.0
March	4.4	4.4	4.4	5.2	10.8	12.9	14.0
April	4.4	4.5	4.5	5.3	11.3	13.1	14.0
May	4.6	4.5	4.6	5.6	11.8	13.4	14.1
June	4.5	4.5	4.5	5.9	11.9	13.4	14.2
July	4.5	4.5	4.5	6.4	12.1	13.4	14.3
August	4.4	4.5	4.5	6.8	12.4	13.5	14.5
September	4.4	4.5	4.6	7.1	12.7	14	14.3
October	4.3	4.4	4.6	7.6	13	14.5	14.4
November	4.3	4.3	4.8	8.1	13.1	14.8	
December	4.3	4.3	4.8	8.6	13.1	14.7	
AVERAGE	4.4	4.4	4.5	6.4	11.8	13.6	

Figure 6: Central Statistics Office - unemployment statistics 2005-2011(Nov. 2011)

In addition, in the twelve months to April 2010, 65,300 people left the country, a figure just below the 70,600 people who emigrated in 1989 – a year when unemployment stood at almost eighteen per cent and according to the FORFÁS National Skills Bulletin (2010), those in the under 25 age group continued to be at the greatest risk of unemployment. The unemployment rate for under 25s is reported to be more than twice that recorded for those aged 25-64.

2.9 Unemployment in County Kildare

According to the Central Statistic Office (CSO) Live Register figures for June 2010, Kildare had 18,708 registered unemployed adults (12,062 male and 6,646 female). In September 2011, CSO statistics show a slight decrease in the unemployment figures with 18,084 people on the live register (11,441 male and 6,643 female) (Figure 7).

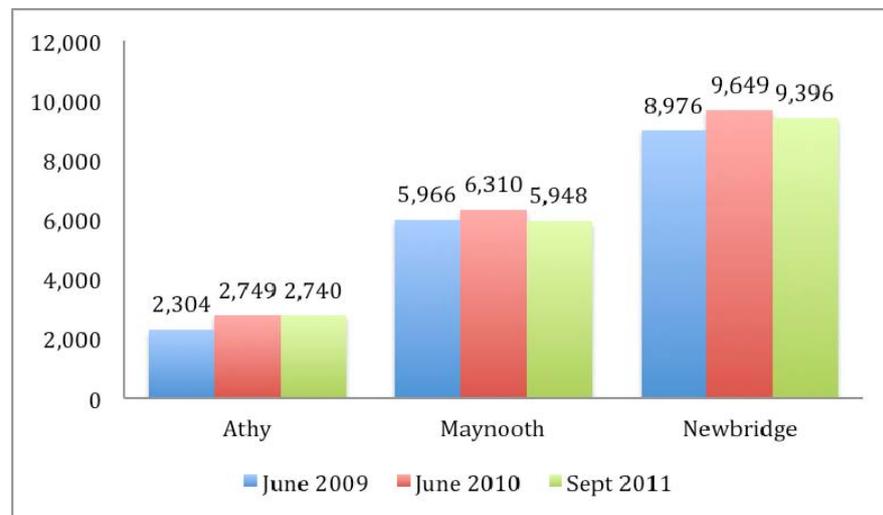


Figure 7: Kildare Unemployment statistics 2009 - 2011

Overall the unemployment figures showed an increase of over 1,400 between June 2009 and June 2010. However, statistics reveal a slight decline of over 600 fifteen months later in September 2011 in line with a 1% drop nationally.

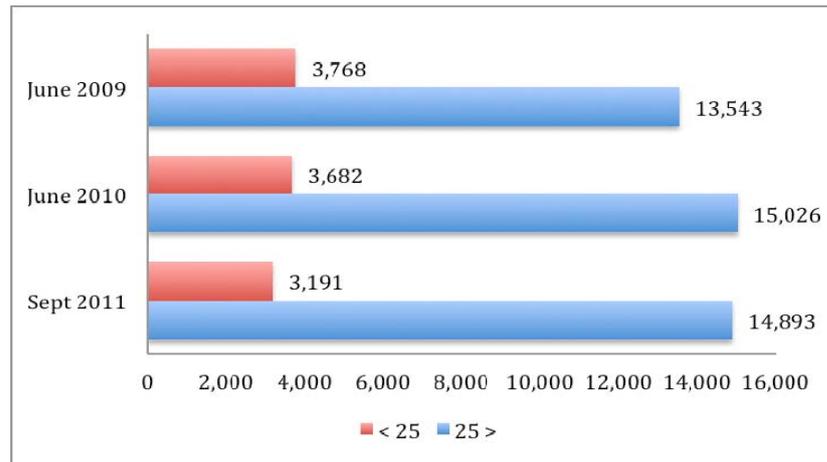


Figure 8: Persons < 25 and > 25 on the Live Register in Kildare (2009 - 2011)

These statistics (Figure 8), particularly for individuals under twenty-five years of age, which accounts for one-fifth of the unemployed, has a particular significance for the effectiveness and responsiveness of Kildare VEC.

2.10 Potential areas for growth and development in Kildare

According to Kildare County Development Plan (2011-2017), Kildare is one of the fastest growing counties in Ireland. It contains many vibrant towns spread throughout the county as well as large tracts of agricultural lands which has significant value, both as important agricultural enterprises, food sources or as open green areas between towns and built up areas. Currently, Kildare contains a number of significant employers including Intel, Hewlett Packard, and NUI Maynooth in north Kildare. In mid-Kildare, Pfizer in Newbridge, Bord na Mona activities (in both Newbridge and rural County Kildare) and the defence forces. There is also a large and extensive equine industry and it is estimated that 5,000 people are directly employed in this industry throughout the county, with a further 10,000 people in related industries and services. There are 145 stud farms recorded in County Kildare in the Irish Field Directory 2008. Racecourses at Punchestown, Naas and The Curragh, the State owned National Stud Farm, a National Equestrian Centre and Goff's Equine Auction Centre are important economic contributors to the county. Within County Kildare, there are many rural settlements and rural nodes

which provide clear locational requirements for employment generating uses including green energy projects such as renewable energies, resource recovery, food production, forestry and agri-business, bloodstock, horticulture, rural based tourism and resource based enterprises.

The decline in growth and influence of manufacturing industries and the changing nature of regional employment to higher value-adding activities is likely to give rise to challenges for industrial policy, R&D policy, land use zoning and human capital within Kildare. Kildare County Development Plan highlighted the presence of NUI Maynooth, Intel and Hewlett Packard, and Kildare could brand itself as the knowledge valley creating a centre of excellence in the national knowledge based economy. The centre of the county has developed a significant pharmaceutical industry and therefore the region could establish itself with greater distinction in the pharmaceutical, distribution, manufacturing, innovation, R&D sectors with such facilities in Newbridge. Mid county Kildare has also major employers in Bord na Mona, Horse Racing Ireland and the Department of Defence. The plan also supports innovation in indigenous industry (both high tech and traditional) that will encourage business start-ups in rural employment centres (i.e. villages / settlements) to enable them to contribute to the economy. The plan acknowledges that certain kinds of rural enterprises has a role to play in rural development, for example, sport and tourism. Sporting facilities such as golf, angling and horse racing have excellent potential for expansion and diversification. Kildare also has a rich architectural and archaeological heritage and is acknowledged as having many renowned structures and houses.

2.11 Adult education in a Nordic country

In 2009, the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) made an application for Leonardo da Vinci funding in order to conduct a study visit to Norway in summer of 2009. The project application, entitled '*A practical Study of Vocational Education and Training in Norway*' was informative from my perspective. The proposal involved a group of fourteen persons

associated with vocational education and training spending a week observing how the Norwegian vocational education system operates. The group of fourteen was composed of one senior official from the Department of Education and Skills, two IVEA executives and eleven VEC personnel that included three CEOs, three EOs, three AEOs and two ALOs. As the Adult Education Officer with Kildare VEC, I was invited to join the group visiting Norway.

2.11.1 Why a study visit to Norway?

Norway has a population of approximately 4.7 million people, similar to Ireland and covers an area of 324,000 km², larger than Ireland. The country is divided into nineteen counties and education is co-ordinated through two government departments and managed by county education authorities. These education authorities are similar to VECs in Ireland. As stated earlier, upon their establishment in 1930, VECs were more involved in vocational education in the past. In Norway, vocational and academic education go hand-in-hand in the second-level schools. Of the 187,314 pupils enrolled in upper secondary schools (2006-2007) in Norway, 52% applied for Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes in 2006. Enterprises in Norway differ considerably from Ireland as Norway has more small to medium size enterprises (477,237) of which 90.6% has 0-9 employees; 8% has 10-49 employees; 1.3% has 50-249 employees and only 0.1% has over 250 employees. A significant difference between Ireland and Norway was its unemployment rate of 2.8% in 2009.

According to the OECD report *Thematic review of adult learning in Norway*, 'educational opportunities for adults and lifelong learning are two tenets of Norwegian educational policy' (2000: 2). It was envisaged that by examining the Norwegian educational system, the fourteen members of the IVEA study group would be better informed in relation to another educational system and be more strategically placed to articulate improvements that could be made within the Irish educational system. While the Norwegian education system is different to the Irish education system in so far as it has an integrated

vocational education sector, important lessons can be learned particularly in the light of changed thinking by the Irish government in 2011 in relation to FÁS training being moved into the new ETBs. For my part, I was hoping that the visit would provide me with more insightful information on the Norwegian adult education system that would assess my research into the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service.

2.11.2 Aims and objectives of the study visit

Prior to the visit, two meetings took place to discuss the objectives of the visit. At the initial meeting, information was supplied on the Norwegian educational system and the educational facilities in the area of Modle and Romsdal in western Norway where the IVEA study group was to visit. As part of the planning, the group considered and discussed how best these learning outcomes could be achieved. At the second meeting, further information was supplied in relation to the venues, schools, organisations and Government Departments along with the individuals and personnel that the IVEA group would be meeting.

Arising from the above meetings and discussion, the following priorities were identified as most desired as the outcomes from the visit:

1. The IVEA study group would obtain an overview of the Norwegian Education System, both at second level and in the area of further education and training.
2. The IVEA group would be provided with opportunities to witness best practice in Norwegian system, such as:
 - a. How the Norwegian National Skills Strategy was being implemented with specific reference to the school and college, vocational education and training, work-based learning and the general development of skills for work and employment.
 - b. How the Norwegian educational system integrates generic skills, such as literacy, numeracy, ICT, etc. into vocational education and training programmes.

- c. How the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in vocational education and training was facilitated by the Norwegian educational authority in order to provide better access, transfer and progression routes.
- d. How the training process for vocational and educational teachers was organised and delivered at pre-entry and continuous professional development.
- f. What the vocational education streams in Norway's education system entails, along with which apprenticeships for young Norwegians.

2.11.3 Achieving the objectives of the study visit

It was proposed that the objectives of the visit would be achieved by:

1. Carrying out visits to schools and other centres of education and training to see how teaching and learning, student assessment procedures and recognition of prior learning takes place in the Norwegian context.
2. Visiting County Education Offices and meeting department staff responsible for directing and supporting the delivery of vocational education throughout the county.
3. Partaking in a visit to the local university college to discover how teachers/tutors in vocational education are trained, both pre-service and in-service.
4. Consulting with experts in academia as well as practitioners in the field of vocational education to discover the mechanisms behind the design and delivery of vocational education awards.
5. Visiting businesses engaged in work-based and learning programmes in conjunction with the schools and adult centres.
6. Participating in meetings with those working in the development of national vocational education programmes and in the development of support materials and resources for these programmes.

2.12 Conclusion

In 2000, the European Union (EU) emphasised investment in education as the key factor in obtaining sustainable growth and employment. This was envisaged in the Lisbon strategy (2000) which national governments within the EU agreed to implement. It formed the backdrop to the EU's drive to create a knowledge-based society where people would continue to update and improve their competences and qualifications, which as well as improving the economic climate, would also contribute to social cohesion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment.

In 2007, the *Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (Ireland's National Skills Strategy)* made it clear, well in advance of the commencement of the current economic crisis, that if Ireland wished to avoid serious future economic displacement, it would have to up-skill nearly 500,000 of the existing workforce by one or two steps on the 10-step NFQ qualifications ladder (Appendix 7). It paid particular attention to adults whose poor skills set placed them on the lower section of the ladder. The target date set for this up-skilling of the Irish workforce was 2020.

After years of continued growth, the current worldwide economic crisis has presented another challenge in which Ireland has experienced a return once again to high levels of unemployment as well as increased emigration. Faced with serious, social and economic challenges, Ireland must look once again to its educational provision and policies in order to reinvigorate and up-skill young people and adults with the most appropriate education and training suitable for the needs of society and an economy in the 21st century. It is imperative that all those seeking employment and those individuals wishing to continue in employment adapt to the reality of continuous learning and up-skilling. Future low skilled jobs will have a changed skill requirements of a more complex nature.

The VECs in general and Kildare VEC in particular have a long history of providing education and training. The effectiveness of Kildare VEC will be measured in its ability to respond to the current economic crisis with appropriate education and training, providing the skills necessary for 21st century students.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Many theorists have influenced and shaped adult education theories and philosophy such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Malcolm Knowles and Stephen Brookfield. The education of adults has also been created and formed by the philosophy and actions of people and groups at local, county, national and international level. In Ireland, organisations such as Macra na Feirme, the Irish Countrywomen Association (ICA) and the VECs have provided adult education and training for decades in schools, centres, halls and homes throughout the country. Policy makers such the Irish government, the European Union (EU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have all contributed to the process of adult education, the way it has been shaped, what it has to offer and the direction in which it is going.

Changing educational and economic circumstances in Ireland with the requirement to eliminate duplication and provide better 'value-for-money' has prompted this study into *the effectiveness of adult education within Kildare VEC*. There are a number of areas that need to be examined within the literature that will shed further insights determining the effectiveness of Kildare VEC. The following areas will be focused on in order to link the educational context with the educational reality within Kildare VEC:

- 3.2 Adult education as a concept and how it informs the research methodology
- 3.3 Significant developments for adult education in Ireland
- 3.4 The European Union as an instigator of lifelong learning policy
- 3.5 OECD and UNESCO contribution to adult education policies
- 3.6 Adult education in a Nordic country
- 3.7 Facing the challenge - unemployment, re-skilling and employability
- 3.8 Leadership / management in educational

3.9 Evaluating the effectiveness of adult education

3.2 Adult education as a concept and how it informs the research methodology

People seek to understand the world they inhabit and discover a sense of meaning and purpose to their lives. Understanding and meaning can be achieved through experience, through reasoning and reflecting on these experiences and then perhaps, through research and a deeper analysis of the events and circumstances. As Cohen, Manion & Morrison states, 'far from being independent and mutually exclusive, these categories (experience, reasoning and research) must be seen as complementary and overlapping' (2000: 3). The evolution of education theories and particularly adult education has come about as a result of people seeking to understand themselves, very often in the context of life shared with other human beings.

Education, social interaction, experience and reflection are contributing factors to the growth in understanding by human beings in what it means to be human and what it means to exist. It is through these practices according to Usher, Bryant and Johnston that 'one is enabled to gain knowledge of the inner self, to better enhance one's capacities and in this way become adapted and well-adjusted – in other words, to be 'at one' with one's self and one's environment' (1997: 19). Various terms have been used to describe this process of developing deeper insights, such as, 'critical reflection' (Mezirow 1990: 5), 'liberation education' (Freire 1973:12) and 'emancipation' (Habermas 1984: 310). For most educationalists, learning, growth and development are always in the context of social interaction with other human beings.

3.2.1 Progressive adult education philosophy

While philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle have contributed to the development of educational philosophy, a significant influence on progressive adult education thinking have been the American philosophers and educationalists, John Dewey (1859-1952) and Eduard Lindeman (1885-1953).

Dewey's underlying philosophical theory was that education provided for the advancement of development, growth and humanisation of human beings. Dewey maintained that education was not a technique or a pedagogical relationship between a teacher and a student, rather education was an evolutionary process of the human species. His theory of education is more anthropological in nature. It is built on the specific learning capacities of the human species, from which Dewey then derives his view of the development process, which he calls 'growth' (Finger and Asún 2001: 31). He maintained that education has three functions - i) preparation, i.e. updating people's knowledge and understanding; ii) potential, i.e. offering creativity to discover new meaning and iii) action, i.e. solving problems and arriving at a greater sense of understanding. The primary task of education for Dewey is to develop the potential of the learner and this is the goal of Kildare VEC for its 9,500 learners who access its adult education services. Dewey's philosophical thinking helped form progressive education and placed the learner at the centre of the educational approach. Unlike the liberal philosophy which espoused the teacher as the imparter of knowledge, Dewey saw the teacher more as the leader of the group activity:

The educator must survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of individuals with whom he is dealing and must at the same time arrange the conditions which provide the subject matter or content for experiences that satisfy these needs and develop these capacities. The planning must be flexible enough to permit free play for individuality of experience and yet firm enough to give direction towards continuous development of power. (1938: 580)

Overall, experience was the key to learning for Dewey and from an ontological perspective, reflections could only take place in the light of experiences, which means that individual learning is incomplete without a relationship to what he called 'the community or outer world'. It is within this context that adults learn to reflect upon their experiences.

As a result of this progressive philosophy, with its basis in socialising, adult education was viewed as an important component in lifelong learning. Dewey argues for an education that was truly lifelong:

Education must be reconceived, not as merely a preparation for maturity (whence our absurd idea that it should stop after adolescence) but as a continuous growth of the mind and a continuous illumination of life. In a sense, the school can give us only the instrumentalities of mental growth; the rest depends upon an absorption and interpretation of experience. Real education comes after we leave school and there is no reason why it should stop before death. (1916: 25)

If, as Dewey maintains, real education comes after leaving school, then it is important that Kildare VEC is effective in its delivery of adult education and responsiveness to the needs of adults in order that they can reach their full potential.

Another exponent of the progressive philosophy influenced by Dewey was Eduard Lindeman (1885-1953) and he maintained that this philosophy applied fully to the field of adult education. For Lindeman, texts and teachers play a new and secondary role in education; they must give way to the primary importance of the student (Lindeman 1926: 8-9). His concept of adult education was:

In terms of a new technique for learning, a technique as essential to the college graduate as to the unlettered manual worker. It represents a process by which the adult learns to become aware of and to evaluate his experience. To do this he cannot begin by studying subjects in the hope that some day this information will be useful. On the contrary, he begins by giving attention to situations in which he finds himself, to problems which include obstacles to his self-fulfilment. Facts and information from the differentiated spheres of knowledge are used, not for the purpose of accumulation, but because of the need in solving problems (1926: 160).

Lindeman goes on to give a definition of adult education that underlies the theoretical and practical thinking of many adult educators today. However, his conception of adult education was:

A co-operative venture is non-authoritarian, informal learning, the chief purpose of which is to discover the meaning of experience; a quest of the mind which digs down to the roots of the pre-occupations which formulate our conduct; a technique of learning for adults which makes education coterminous with life and hence elevates living itself to the level of adventurous experiment (1926: 3)

For Lindeman, personal learning is at the core of adult education, shaping individual's thinking in relation to life and work. A further interesting insight

into his thinking on the function of adult education is that learning should not have the improvement of work as its core, but rather the incorporation of the world of work into life. Lindeman maintained that education should give meaning to work within the larger context of life and living. Therefore, for Lindeman, education was all embracing of every experience. It is my contention that if Lindeman's thinking could be incorporated into what is termed the 'economic agenda', then skills for work would take on a different perspective in adult education. Lindeman's work concept fits with current thinking that the educational system needs to be educating people for employability rather than for employment. Educating for the skills deficit requires looking at the needs of the whole person in the context of life, work and society. His philosophical approach would compare with the learner-centred approach which has had a significant impact upon the field of adult education and the method of teaching employed by most adult educators within Kildare VEC. Implementing this holistic interpretation of the learner is challenging when a significant proportion of the educational agenda is dominated by economic renewal and regeneration within the global economy.

3.2.2 Humanist adult education philosophy

Another adult education concept advanced by psychologists Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) and Carl Rogers (1902-1987) resulted in what is respectfully described as humanist education. Responsibility for learning is placed with students who are free to learn what they want to learn and in a manner desired by the learner. A teacher can guide or facilitate the process, but the emphasis is placed upon the learning rather than teaching, on the student rather than the instructor. Within this philosophical thinking, the teacher does not simply provide information, rather it was the teacher's role to create the conditions within which learning can take place. Another exponent of this concept was Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997) and he characterises the role of the adult educator as that of a "helper, guide, encourager, consultant and resource, not that of transmitter, disciplinarian, judge and authority" (1970, 34). With the emphasis upon the learner and the development of human

beings, the concept of 'andragogy' as a theoretical framework was applied primarily to adult education by Knowles.

According to Knowles 'it is no longer functional to define education as a process of transmitting what is known, it must now be defined as a lifelong process of continuing inquiry ... the most important learning of all is learning how to learn, the skill of self-directed inquiry' (1980: 41). Knowles described the achievement of a learning outcome as 'self-awareness' and 'self-actualisation', the learners discover more than external knowledge or information, they also discover something about themselves and their ability to learn and discover. Adult education for Knowles was learner-centred and what he named 'andragogy'.

A significant component of adult education is the educator or facilitator of learning. Malcolm Knowles describes the mission of the adult educator as threefold (1980: 27),

- (a) meeting the needs and goals of the individual
- (b) meeting the needs and goals of the institution and
- (c) meeting the needs and goals of society

Arising from mission, Knowles describes the six functions that adult educators must carry out in order to achieve their mission (1980: 26).

Another person to espouse the humanist tradition in his early writing was Stephen Brookfield. His concept of adult education describes education as 'a transactional drama in which the personalities, philosophies and priorities of the chief players (participants and facilitators) interact continuously to influence the nature, direction and form of the subsequent learning' (1986: viii). However, his writings did cross different philosophical traditions as he emphasised the principle of critical reflection on practice, derived from the work of Dewey and Freire. In his later writings, Brookfield is more aligned with Freire in making the case for critical theory as the basis for a theory of adult learning and education. He maintained that 'a critical theory of adult learning should have at its core an understanding of how adults learn to

recognise the predominance of ideology in their everyday thoughts and actions and in the institutions of civil society' (2001: 20-21)

In carrying out this study to examine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, it will be important to ascertain from students and VEC managers if tutors are regarded as helper, as guides and as providers of encouragement to students and at the same time, seek to discover if the Kildare VEC adult education service is helping to develop and nurture creative thinkers. Humanist philosophy has contributed a lot to adult education in the 1970's and 1980's and the formation of community groups. Its attraction is less significant today when the educational agenda is set more by economics than empowerment.

3.2.3 Critical adult education philosophy

A significant turning point in adult education came with the publication in 1970 of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Freire criticised traditional education which he described as 'banking education' in which students received, filed and stored deposits of knowledge. His concept or philosophy of education emphasised the importance of dialogue and equality between teacher and learners. He also maintained that there was a positive role for the *teacher* in the educational process. Notwithstanding this role, Freire insists that 'teachers must also be students and that students can also be teachers' (Elias et al, 2005: 160). Within his philosophical thinking, the teacher could present material for consideration so long as he or she was open to clarifications and modifications. Teachers could suggest but not determine or impose the themes that serve to organise the content of the dialogues (1970: 4). This philosophy has had a significant influence on developmental adult education, particularly in areas of social justice and it has permeated certain VEC programmes, particularly programmes associated with the long-term unemployed, such as, VTOS.

Another factor that cannot be taken for granted in education, according to Freire, is that within the communication process, philosophical values are transmitted by educators. He focuses on the use of language within the

communication process. He maintained that language is never neutral and it possesses the power to convey a culturally transmitted world-view. According to Freire, language is pivotal in shaping the situation in which individuals find themselves. Freire's underlying epistemology was that culture is an integrated component of living and therefore people cannot be divorced from their culture. Therefore, the adult educator plays an important role in helping learners interpret their culture and discover new meaning. Once again, the role of the tutor within the adult education service cannot be over estimated and the value placed on their work within Kildare VEC should be explored within the research.

For Paulo Freire, the purpose of adult education is the 'liberation' of the student. It is 'problem-posing' or 'liberation education' as opposed to what he called 'banking education', which simply provided education without the tools for students to become self-critical or evaluate experiences. Freire's liberation is therefore a cultural action or process towards liberation that involved the student in critical consciousness. According to Mezirow, this personal emancipation was similar in some respects to Freire's political emancipation. Within his philosophy, Mezirow incorporated the concept 'critical reflection' (Mezirow 1990: 5) seeing this within the perspective of transformation in order to lead adults to a more integrated, more inclusive perspective. What takes place in adult education for Mezirow must ultimately lead to the discovery of meaning on the part of the student. In times of high unemployment, many adults seek meaning and purpose within their lives. Kildare VEC is striving to provide effective educational programmes that make a significant contribution to the lives of adults and the aim of this research is to determine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service.

Critical or radical adult education philosophy has played a challenging role among certain sectors of society. It has had at its core, justice and the human rights of the individual within society. During the 1990's and the era of the 'celtic tiger' in Ireland, this philosophy waned as employment increased along with the economic circumstances of many individuals. The current economic environment is motivating adult students to gain skills and qualifications and

the importance for Kildare VEC is the integration of 'soft skills' such as literacy and numeracy which Paulo Freire advocated within his philosophy.

3.2.4 Postmodernist philosophy

In examining the literature that has formed the thinking and practice of adult education, another philosophical approach that has had gained significance in recent years has been postmodernist philosophy. Initially, it tended to be used in art and literature but today, this philosophy permeates all disciplines, including education and especially, adult education. Based on the writings of Nietzsche and Heidegger and the French thinker, Michel Foucault, postmodernism is best seen in contrast to and as a critical response to modernism. Postmodern adult education extends its critique to all philosophies of adult education including liberal, progressive, behaviourist and humanistic. Within postmodernism, adult education is open to influences that may have been suppressed in the past through centralised planning, outcomes-based education and evaluation. According to Usher, Bryant and Johnston, postmodernist educators adopt the critical pedagogy in calling for vocationalism that seeks 'to help learners engage critically and productively with their private interests in securing and retaining work and gaining personal meaning and worth from it' (1997: 46-47). This philosophy recognises the importance of education and training for skills for more than the attainment of a particular job.

Elias and Merriam maintain that a postmodern approach to teacher education places the emphasis on diversity and on many different forms of knowledge and many different contexts (2005: 234). In order to achieve this form of diversity, Bagnall proposes that postmodern adult educators foster 'the upgrading of the value of the non-rational, the spontaneous and the *ad hoc*, both in the curriculum and in the form of educational engagement itself' (1999: 136). However, postmodernism is not without its critics, not just for its opposition to modernism but also for its theoretical lack of clarity and openness to positive aspects of certain philosophies.

This philosophical thinking has led to the use of a particular research methodology, i.e. interpretism. In their writings, Usher, Bryant and Johnston set out to place adult learning in the wider context of interpretation and the part played by tutors in assisting students interpret their reality. They describe this process of interpretation as 'characterised by a search for an underlying and unifying truth and certainty, a search for a definitive discourse that makes the world self coherent, meaningful and masterable' (1997: 10). Postmodernism enables a questioning of the scientific attitudes and methods, of the universal efficacy of technical instrumental reason and of the stance of objectivity and value-neutrality in the making of knowledge claims (1997: 7). In the postmodern world, knowledge is not only constantly changing but it is almost overwhelmingly available to students through so many different formats today, particularly through the Internet and the world-wide-web (Jarvis et al., 2003:14). This reality has serious implication for the student within a learning process and therefore in seeking to examine the effective of Kildare VEC adult education service, recognition must be given to how adults learn today and what new mediums of communicating education and skills need to be provided.

3.3 Significant developments for adult education in Ireland

Many significant developments in adult education have occurred in Ireland over the last forty years. These developments have helped to shape the context in which adult education finds itself today.

3.3.1 The Murphy Report

In Ireland, one of the first national attempts to examine the provision and needs of adult education as a separate entity from higher education came in 1973 with the publication of the report *Adult Education in Ireland*, (known as the Murphy Report). The Report suggested that adults should be in a position to continue learning throughout their lives. It dealt in some detail with a range of issues, including formulating a broad definition of adult education and providing statistical details on the number and socio-economic background of participants. The report expanded the following points:

- student centred philosophy of education
- the need for closer co-operation between adult education agencies
- and suggested improved structure for administering adult education provision

The Report also recommended the provision and utilisation of facilities for those no longer participating in full-time school system in order that they may learn whatever they need to learn at any period of their lives. In 1979, the Department of Education appointed Adult Education Organisers (AEOs) to all thirty-eight VECs in Ireland with the intention, according to the Circular Letter (42/79), of identifying the educational needs of adults, organising the programme approved by the VEC Adult Education Sub-Committee and liaising with local economic interests in relation to the organisation of courses for the provision of skills needed for local development.

3.3.2 The Kenny Report

A second attempt to distinguish adult education as a sector came in 1984 with the publication of a second report entitled *The Report of the Kenny Commission "Lifelong Learning"* was published (which became known as the Kenny Report). While this report focused primarily on the requirements of adult education and the development of administrative structures to deal with these needs, it did formulate a definition of adult education that incorporated:

All systematic learning by adults which contributes to their development as individuals and as members of the community and of society, apart from full-time instruction received by persons as part of their uninterrupted initial education and training (1984: 9).

3.3.3 Ireland's presidency of the European Union

A third factor that occurred was in 1996 when Ireland held the Presidency of the European Union. This was also the European Year of Lifelong Learning, a consequence of which was the Irish Presidency placing lifelong learning high on its agenda. The strategy documents and debates on lifelong learning that evolved under the Presidency had immediate relevance in Ireland at national level. One of the outcomes of Ireland's presidency resulted in the

knowledge that Ireland must increase the quality of education and training provision.

3.3.4 The adult literacy survey

A fourth significant factor to increase the importance of adult education was the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) conducted between 1995 and 1998 in co-operation with the OECD. The Irish survey results were published in 1997 and the literacy levels provided a major wake-up call to the Irish government. Results showed Ireland in a relatively poor light with almost 25% of the population scored at the lowest level (Level 1). This percentage was the second highest in any of the twenty countries surveyed, the highest being Poland. The survey identified three significant facts:

- substantially lower levels of literacy in the older age groups
- unemployed people scored lower than those in employment
- lower literacy levels were associated with lower income

Following the IALS Survey on Irish literacy, a FORFÁS survey in 1998 showed that 30% of companies saw skills deficiencies as a problem and 60% supported the need to increase skill levels in technology and customer services. Also, the *White Paper on Human Resource Development* (1997) drew attention to the relatively low levels of educational attainment in the adult population in Ireland by way of comparison with many other OECD countries. The Report pointed out that 'knowledge and skills of the workforce will increasingly become the principal source of competitive advantage for firms ... (and) for countries which compete for international mobile investment – both domestic and foreign sourced' (1997: 111). Ireland responded immediately through increased funding for adult literacy services through VECs.

3.3.5 A change in Government

A fifth contributing factor to the importance of adult education was the change in government in 1997 and the subsequent appointment of a Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science with responsibility for Lifelong

Learning. The new government set about carrying out consultations with those working in the field of adult education, the results of which saw the publication of a Green Paper on Adult Education in 1998, entitled *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning*. The Paper stated that “increasing international investment in adult education, compared to the low level of investment in Ireland will enhance the competitive advantage of those countries vis-a-vis Ireland (1998: 12). The Green Paper proposed an approach which recognises the importance of adult education:

as a component of an overall lifelong education system with a fundamental objective of promoting the well-being of all citizens;

as a key contributor to social and economic cohesion through:

(a) second chance education and training opportunities

(b) addressing skill needs of adults in a range of disciplines, particularly in the areas of literacy, communications and information technology

(c) provision of reflective learning opportunities for particular disadvantaged sectors of the population, such as women, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities (1998: 6)

During this period of government, additional legislation relating to the education and training framework included:

- The University Act (1997) – includes the objective for facilitating lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education by universities.
- The Education Act (1998) – promotes equality of access and opportunities for adults who did not avail of education in school.
- The Qualifications Act (1999) – provides the legislative basis for the development of the National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) ensuring that all education and training provides awards on the Qualification Framework.

In addition, several important reports contributed to shaping the content of the White Paper on adult education in 2000:

- The *Expert Group on Future Skills Needs* (1998) highlighted emerging skills shortages in various sectors of employment
- The *NESC Report, Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice* (1999) placed a major emphasis on the centrality of lifelong learning in the social and economic development strategy of the country.
- The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000) had lifelong learning as a central theme.

3.3.6 A White Paper on adult education

The sixth and most important factor in the recognition of adult education was the publication of the White Paper, *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (DES: 2000) which outlined the Government's policy for lifelong learning with a particular focus on adult education. The White Paper on adult education represented a significant policy development in Ireland. It provided a more concise definition of adult education as being 'systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training' (2000: 27). Underpinning the overall framework of lifelong learning in the White Paper, there were six areas of priority: Consciousness Raising; Citizenship; Cohesion; Competitiveness; Cultural Development and Community Building.

The White Paper was instrumental in setting out the role of adult education and recommended that adult education should be underpinned by three core principles (2000: 12-13) that would promote:

- **A systemic approach** - this requires that educational policies must be designed to embrace the life cycle, reflect the multiplicity of sites, both formal and informal, in which learning takes place, provide appropriate supports such as guidance, counselling and childcare.
- **Equality of access** - this set as a key priority, promoting an inclusive society and to target investment towards those most at risk with proactive strategies to counteract barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability.

- **Inter-culturalism** - this refers not only to combating racism and encouraging participation of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in education, but also to a recognition that many minority groups such as travellers, people with disabilities, older adults, and participants in disadvantaged areas may have distinct needs and cultural patterns which must be respected and reflected in an educational context.

However, the White Paper did envisage adult education in Ireland as having a broader dimension than merely a tag on to the economic rationale. The White Paper did prioritise the issue of social cohesion through its emphasis on active citizenship through personal, community and cultural development.

Overall, adult education has played a significant part in the thinking of successive governments over the last thirteen years, particularly during the period of high economic growth and development. The thirty-three VECs throughout Ireland had responsibility for instigating adult education policies and for delivering various adult education programmes (Appendix 6) funded by the Department of Education and Skills within their geographical area of responsibility. The 'Celtic Tiger' saw the need for an ever-increasing demand for high skilled workers and there was the recognition that workers, who were enabled through adult learning to re-skill, became more adaptable within the changing times. The importance given to adult education as a means of assisting adults with low skills to enter the labour market, re-skill and/or up-skill through the roll-out of the various adult education programmes over the past thirty years needs to be recognised.

In Ireland, over the last forty years, a significant amount of reports, documents and publications have been produced including a White Paper on adult education. All of these documents have highlighted the importance of adult education for individual learners, society and the economy. However, the educational system has remained largely untouched and the finance has not been provided to bring about the required changes to implement the proposed policies. This was particularly true in the case of the Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education (2000) which identified many areas for

improvement, such as, the establishment of the National Learning Council and the appointment of thirty-five Community Education Facilitators to Local Adult Learning Boards. The system remained unchanged and new programmes were rolled out in an ad hoc manner, sometimes without reference existing programmes and staffing structures. This study of the effectiveness of Kildare VEC will assist in highlighting changes that are required to improve the service.

3.4 The European Union and lifelong learning policies

The European Union has played a pivotal role in highlighting the importance of education and particularly lifelong learning during the 1990's and has made a significant contribution to the establishment of adult education policies.

3.4.1 A White Paper on adult education

Lifelong learning as a strategy was first articulated in the European Commission White Paper *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, published in 1995. This White Paper identifies the major challenges facing Europe in the 21st century as:

1. Globalisation: the emergence of newly industrialised and highly competitive countries
2. Demography: Europe's ageing population and migration flows
3. Rapid change: nature of labour market
4. ICT revolution: technology driven economies and societies

The White Paper suggested the two main responses to these challenges were to focus on the knowledge economy and building employability. In addition, five general objectives were identified:

- Encourage the acquisition of new knowledge
- Bring schools and the business sector closer together
- Combat exclusion
- Aim for proficiency in three community languages
- Treat capital investment and investment in training on an equal basis

This 1995 White Paper marked a turning point in the conceptual development of lifelong learning and the learning society. In addition to knowledge and employability, the White Paper saw education and training also as the main vehicles for self-awareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfilment. Education and training, whether acquired in the formal education system, on the job or in a more informal way, was the key for everyone to control their future and their personal development (1995: 2).

3.4.2 The Lisbon council meeting

The EU published various discussion documents as well as a White Paper during the 1990's, along with organising a European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 but a very important pronouncement came in March 2000 within the Lisbon European Council meeting. The Lisbon Council meeting set the objective of making the European Union the 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' by 2010 (2000, paragraph 5). The outcome of that decision was the invitation to 'Member States, the Council and the Commission ... within their area of competence, to identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all' (2000, paragraph 33). In addition, the Council set down the following five benchmarks for 2010:

- To reduce the percentage of early school leavers to no more than 10%

- To cut the percentage of low-achieving pupils in reading, by at least 20%

- To ensure that at least 85% of young people complete upper secondary education

- To increase the number of university graduates in mathematics, science and technology (MST) by at least 15%, and to decrease the gender imbalance in these subjects

- To have 12.5% of adults (25-64) participate in lifelong learning

The Commission's 2001 communication *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* and the 2002 Council Resolution on lifelong learning

stressed the importance of lifelong learning for competitiveness and employability but also for social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development. Adult learning is a vital component of lifelong learning and one of the main messages of the Commission was:

Traditional systems must be transformed to become much more open and flexible, so that learners can have individual learning pathways, suitable to their needs and interests and thus genuinely take advantage of opportunities throughout their lives (2001: 4).

The Lisbon Council and Commission also set up a reporting mechanism for each Member State reporting to the Spring European Council on the implementation of the work programme 'Education and Training 2010'. These reports and further recommendations have been published after conferences in Copenhagen (2002), Maastricht (2004), Helsinki (2006) and Bordeaux (2008). Along with these reports, reviews have also been issued by the Council encouraging refocusing and investment in order to attain the 2010 benchmark.

3.4.3 On-going developments in education and training

The Helsinki Report (2006) focused on progress towards agreed education and training objectives during the period 2007-2009. It was based on a detailed assessment of national reports and performance against a set of indicators and reference levels of European average performance (benchmarks). It also provided an overview for the development of national lifelong learning strategies to make vocational education and training (VET) more attractive and relevant to labour market needs. The European Framework for Key Competences (2006) for Lifelong Learning identifies and defines eight key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability in a knowledge society:

- communication in the mother tongue
- communication in foreign languages
- mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- digital competence

learning to learn
social and civic competences
sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
cultural awareness and expression.

Initial education and training should support the development of these eight key competences to a level that equips all young people, including the disadvantaged, for further learning and working life. Adult education and training should give real opportunities to all adults to develop and update their key competences throughout life. In examining the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, this study will help to identify if the adult education services are providing the most appropriate courses, best suited to the needs of the student as well as society and the Irish economy.

In the Communication from the Commission in 2007, the *Action Plan on Adult Learning: It is always a good time to learn*, the Commission addressed the issue of good governance by adult learning providers as an important contribution to effective learning provision. This good governance is characterised by:

focus on the adult learner
an innovative approach to learning
effective needs analysis
efficient administration systems and appropriate allocation of resources
professional staffing
quality assurance mechanisms for providers
strong evidence-based monitoring and evaluation systems within national frameworks
close relations with other educational areas and bodies such as learner's organisation, branch associations and sectoral institutes. As employers are providers of a large portion of training to adults through work-based learning and providing a supportive environment, employer involvement in local and regional planning is crucial.

In Ireland, many of these governances are being worked on and changes announced by the Minister for Education and Skills in July 2011 (1.5.5) with the establishment of SOLAS will see more of these recommendations becoming a reality.

3.4.4 Looking to the future for adult learning

Looking to the future, ten years after the Lisbon Council (2000) recommendations, the Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the *'Education and Training 2010 Work Programme'*, some progress has been made in increasing adult participation in education and training, but not enough to reach the 2010 benchmark of 12.5%. In 2008, 9.5% of Europeans aged 25-64 participated in the four weeks prior to the survey, with high skilled adults being five times more likely to participate than the low-skilled. Added to that, 77 million Europeans aged 25-64 (close to 30%) still have at most, lower secondary education. Irish statistical results revealed that 7.1% of adults participated in adult education (Appendix 9). As a result of not reaching the 2010 benchmarks, a further set of benchmarks have been developed for 2020 within the European Union:

At least 95% of children between the age of four and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education;

The share of 15-year-olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%;

The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%;

The share of 30 to 34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%;

An average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning.

In conclusion, the 2010 Joint Progress Report, *Education and training work programme* stated 'the implementation and further development of lifelong

learning strategies remains a critical challenge. Strategies are coherent and comprehensive only in a number of cases and some still focus on specific sectors or target groups rather than the full life-cycle' (2010: 4). The eight key competences highlighted in the Report (2010: 2) remain the focus of the European Union which recommended that:

Initial education and training should support the development of these key competences to a level that equips all young people including the disadvantaged for further learning and working life. Adult education and training should give real opportunities to all adults to develop and update their key competence throughout life.

The European Union has produced many fine documents espousing the need for lifelong learning. Throughout the 1990's, according to Morgan-Klein and Osborne, many of the 'EU policies and accompanying rhetoric present a model of education and learning as principally one of economic investment in human capital' (2007: 41). Globalisation was seen as a challenge and member states were required to report every two years on the educational benchmarks which were set in quantifiable numbers. While ascent was paid to the social regeneration in many of the EU document, the primary focus was largely on the economic agenda.

3.5 OECD and UNESCO contribution to adult education policies

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have both contributed significantly to the reflection on and the development of adult education in numerous countries. The OECD in particular has produced specific documentation relating to Ireland and its educational system. Following their analysis of the educational, economic and social context of a particular country or countries, the OECD makes recommendations that would result in improvements when implemented.

Adult education has been a very important concern for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) since its inception in 1945. The stated purpose of UNESCO was to contribute to

peace and security by promoting international collaboration through education, science, and culture. Its contribution to the field of adult literacy and basic education has been a very important part of its work throughout the world. While searching for its identity within the UN after the Second World War, UNESCO established its identity in *éducation permanente*, roughly translated as 'lifelong education'. The core philosophy of *éducation permanente* was to create a society where everyone was learning at all times. The philosophy combines a Marxist analysis of history with a humanistic vision with reflection at the core of the methodology arising from the ontology of critical inquiry.

The term 'lifelong learning' was first used in the publication of the Faure Report for UNESCO *Learning to Be* (1972) and stressed the all embracing nature of education and the lifelong was the sum of the parts:

Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his life. The idea of lifelong education is the keystone of the learning society. The lifelong concept covers all aspects of education, embracing everything in it, with the whole being more than the sum of its parts. There is no such thing as a separate "permanent" part of education which is not lifelong. In other words, lifelong education is not an educational system but the principle in which the overall organisation of a system is founded and which accordingly underlies the development of each of its component parts. (1972, 181-182)

Another and perhaps, more important international contributor to education and particularly, adult education and training is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The mission of the OECD is to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world. It took over from the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) in 1961 and since then, its function has been to build strong economies in its member countries, to improve efficiency and contribute to development in industrialised as well as developing countries.

The OECD is a unique forum of thirty governments working together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is also at the forefront of efforts to help governments respond to

new developments and concerns, such as corporate governance, the information economy and education and training. OECD Publishing disseminates widely the results of the Organisation's statistics gathering and research on various topics. It has contributed significantly to the educational development with its publication of *Education at a Glance*. This yearly publication addresses the needs of a range of users, from governments seeking to learn policy lessons to academics requiring data for further analysis to the general public wanting to monitor how its nation's schools are progressing in producing world-class students. The publication examines the quality of learning outcomes, the policy levers and contextual factors that shape these outcomes and the broader private and social returns that accrue to investments in education.

The OECD has also published important research finding in adult education:

- *Labour Market Policies: New Challenges Lifelong Learning to Maintain Employability (1997)*
- *Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices (2003)*
- *Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers (2004)*
- *Lifelong Learning and Human Capital (2007)*
- *Learning for Jobs: OECD Review of Vocational Education and Training in Ireland (2010)*

In *Labour Market Policies: New Challenges Lifelong Learning to Maintain Employability*, the OECD present a clear insight into the nature of adult education:

Lifelong learning is far broader than the provision of second-chance education and training for adults. It is based on the view that everyone should be able, motivated, and actively encouraged to learn throughout life. This view of learning embraces individual and social development of all kinds and in all settings: formally, in schools, vocational, tertiary and adult education institutions and non-formally, at home, at work and in the community (OECD: 1997a).

In addition, the OECD recognises the social benefits of education to society when it said 'education and training contribute to the human capital of

individuals and make them more efficient workers as well as better informed citizens in a knowledge society' (2003: 26)

More recently the OECD recommended, in *Learning for Jobs: OECD Review of Vocational Education and Training in Ireland* that:

In a small country like Ireland, multiple public agencies responsible for the same activity (in this case delivering VET) are unlikely to be cost-effective. In the longer term Ireland should consider whether a different institutional arrangement would better suit the country's needs (2010: 49).

Several of these OECD suggestions have informed my study process and contributed to possible areas of discussion with VEC personnel. These recommendations are also reflected in the proposal by the Minister for Education and Skills in July 2011 to establish SOLAS, the new national education and training agency.

Economic surveys are a key product of the OECD and their analysis and assessment of national policies and practices have the potential to improve economic performances. Their evaluation of national procedures in the light of international best practice and then make recommendations is to be welcomed. Unfortunately, in Ireland, it only in more recent years that attention has been paid to educational investigations by the OECD and changes are being implemented through the establishment of a single educational and training authority, SOLAS.

3.6 Norwegian education system

Prior to carrying out the study visit to Norway, I examined literature pertaining to the Norwegian educational system with particular emphasis on adult education. In keeping with my research in Ireland, I sought to examine the effectiveness of the Norwegian system and structures.

The OECD Thematic Report of Adult Learning in Norway (2000) presents a good description of the historical development of adult education in Norway. Being joined with Denmark for four hundred years until 1814 and with Sweden

until 1905, adult education in Norway shares a common heritage with the other Scandinavian countries. Norwegian adult education tradition has its traces in the Danish nineteenth century educational theorist N.F.S. Grundtvig, who advocated the Folk High School, which were used to develop social, cultural and cognitive skills. The first Act on Folk High Schools was adopted in 1949, eighty-five years after the first folk high school was founded (OECD 2000: 6). Up until the 1950s adult education had almost entirely been in the hands of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In 1958, as part of labour market policy, courses for unemployed adults were started with the intention of providing qualified manpower and training opportunities for unemployed people.

The Ministry of Education (KUF) established a Department of Adult Education in 1966 and an Adult Education Acts were adopted in 1976 and a Vocational Training Act came into force in 1980. According to the Act, a contract of apprenticeship involving full practical training could be entered into if the apprentice started at the age of 21 years or older.

In the first half of the 1980s education budgets were cut in Norway and access to higher education was made more difficult, particularly for adults without formal qualifications. However, several Reports to the Parliament (Storting) submitted in the mid-1980s emphasised the need for competence development in working life through continuing education and training. In 1986, an Official Norwegian Report on Lifelong Learning was published (NOU 1986:23). A Core Curriculum stating the overall objectives for primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and adult education, was implemented in 1993. According to the new curriculum, greater emphasis is placed on developing certain "personal qualities" such as social abilities, communicative, creativity and study and problem solving skills.

From 1995 onwards, there was a renewal of interest in adults' right to learn. Norway took a particular interest in participating in the lifelong learning strategies being carried out at the international level, within the European Union as part of the EEA Agreement, the OECD, the Council of Europe, and

UNESCO. In 1996 Norway participated fully in the European Year of Lifelong Learning.

In 2000, the OECD carried out a Thematic Review on adult education in Norway. It described the aim of Norwegian policy as raising the level of education of the entire adult population in order to meet the needs of the labour market for skills and competencies. It found that investment in human capital was essential to qualify people for a constantly changing labour market. The OECD also focused on closer collaboration between education and work, flexible learning methods including the use of ICT and distance education and teacher training. In 2002, the OECD published *Lifelong Learning in Norway: Reviews of National Policies for Education*. One recommendation included in the review stated that 'an information system easily accessible by the public be created to act a central source location of information about the entire lifelong learning system and a starting point for taking advantage of lifelong learning opportunities' (2002: 224).

Finally, in 2008, the OECD published *Learning for Jobs: Reviews of Vocational Education and Training* and made recommendations around apprenticeships, better career guidance, the use of more flexible VET to counteract dropouts from school and to enhance data and analysis relating to VET.

3.7 Facing the challenge - unemployment, re-skilling and employability

As stated earlier, the OECD International Adult Literacy survey in 1995 highlighted poor literacy levels among Irish adults. The survey made specific reference to the consequences of low literacy levels, particularly for unemployed people who scored lower than those who were in employment and that lower literacy levels was associated with lower income. The 1996 FORFÁS Annual Report stated that 30% of companies saw skills deficiencies as a problem and 60% saw a need for increasing skill levels in technology, quality and customer service. The *White Paper on Human Resource*

Development (1997) also highlighted the relatively low levels of educational attainment in the adult population in Ireland in comparison to other OECD countries.

Prior to the publication of *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* in 2000, a number of reports were published which helped shape the content of the White Paper and emphasised the centrality of lifelong learning in the social and economic development strategies for Ireland:

- 1997, the *International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland*.
- 1998, the *First Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs*.
- 1999, the *NESC Report, Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice*.
- 1999, the *National Employment Action Plan*.
- 1999, the *National Development Plan (2000-2006)*.
- 2000, the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.

Within the White Paper, *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*, Chapter 6 addressed the issue of Lifelong Learning and the Labour Market in Ireland. It highlighted the need for a proactive lifelong learning policy which would:

1. continue to focus on the labour market relevance of initial education and training
2. direct an increasing level of attention to the continuing education and training of those already at work
3. develop tailored programmes for groups wishing to re-enter the workforce, particularly for those with low educational levels; for women in the home, long-term unemployed or those aged over 60 currently out of the workforce or who may wish to re-enter it. (2000: 123)

Arising from the Report from the National Economic and Social Council (*NESC Strategy 2006: People, Productivity and Purpose*), the government published its programmes for government, *Towards 2016: Ten Year*

Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015 in which it highlighted the need for:

Improved investment in human capital and adapting the education and training systems, including emphasis on up-skilling those already at work and those who wish to return to work, including older people, and those whose need for learning is greatest and focusing on increasing education participation and completion at all levels and in all sectors (2006: 17).

Specifically under education and training, the Agreement cites the EU Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008 calling for the adaptation of education and training systems in response to competency requirements and to support quality standards in education and training, as well as the promotion of more flexible pathways. It highlighted key priorities in the context of ensuring an integrated approach to addressing skills needs across the education and training sector, addressing barriers to access and progression, the issue of life-long learning and tackling early school leaving and literacy and numeracy issues (2006: 32). The key priorities from the Social Partnership Agreement were:

1. Strengthen the technical and vocational dimensions of curricula and embed key skills such as learning to learn and ICT, to develop higher order thinking skills;
2. Drive the lifelong learning agenda by enhancing access to training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher-level qualifications;
3. Provide learning opportunities for adults targeted at vulnerable groups and those in disadvantaged communities with low levels of educational attainment.

The current National Development Plan (2007-2013) has allocated €2.2 billion for further education with the priority of addressing Lifelong Learning as the guiding principle for education and training policy in the context of the Lisbon Agenda. The major priorities of the National Development Plan were:

To up-skill the workforce through promoting access to appropriate training and lifelong learning;

To implement the National Skills Strategy with the goal of increasing the skill levels of a significant proportion of those at work in support of Ireland's aims of improved competitiveness and moving jobs quality up the value chain;

To expand the workforce through the activation of groups such as the unemployed, people with disabilities, lone parents, Travellers, ex-offenders, women and older people as well as the implementation of an appropriate skills based migration policy.

However, the current economic crisis has resulted in less funding being available to fund the Plan as originally envisaged. While the objectives of the Plan remain and are required in order to assist the unemployed and low skilled workers, the means of achieving the objectives has changed. The replacement of FÁS and the transfer of training staff into the new ETBs (formerly VECs) will help to achieve what the Minister for Education and Skills said of July 27th 2011 when he announced the establishment of SOLAS, 'new programmes will be integrated, flexible and value-for money'. In looking at the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, this study will look at programme content and delivery, integration and whether the VEC is responding effectively and efficiently to needs of current students.

While Ireland prioritised adult education within its Programmes for Government and National Development Plans, the OECD published *Learning for Jobs: Reviews of Vocational Education and Training in Ireland* in 2010. It made the following recommendations which would assist in bring about the priorities the Irish government had set in various reports, programmes and White Papers:

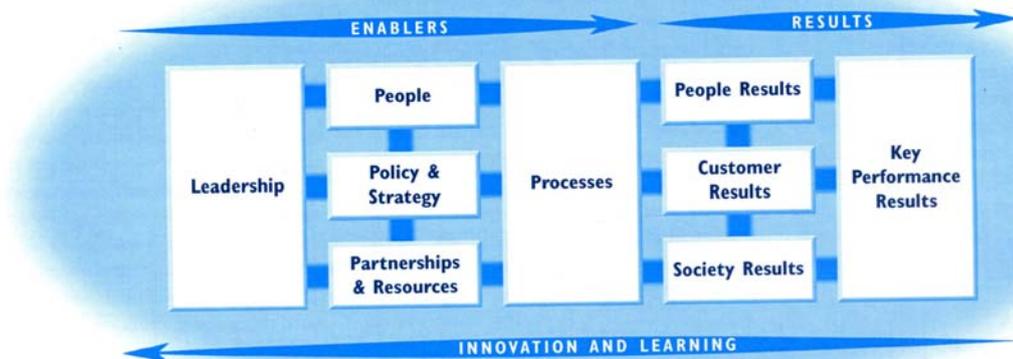
1. Review of the apprenticeship system to improve its efficiency for the labour market.
2. Target education and training programmes for adult learners at their particular skills needs as well as the needs of the labour market.

3. Identify the literacy and numeracy problems of those who come into contact with training services.
4. All teachers, trainers and instructors should have some pedagogical training in order to enhance competences of the VET workforce.
5. Track progression through education and training.
6. Undertake routine evaluation of programmes.
7. Encourage more research on VET.

With these OECD recommendations, it was proposed that Ireland could refocus and restructure its delivery and evaluation mechanisms in order to improve education and training for adults, thus benefiting the needs of the learner within society as well as the Irish economic environment.

3.8 Leadership / management in education

As part of my pilot project, I carried out observational research studying the management/leadership style of a 'senior manager' in a large training organisation. Within that organisation, they were using the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model as a structured process for delivering and evaluating their service provision. The nine areas (Figure 9) represent the criteria against which to assess an organisation's progress towards excellence. Of the nine criteria, five are 'Enablers' and four are 'Results'. The 'Enabler' criteria is what the organisation does and the 'Results' criteria covers what the organisation achieves. 'Results' are caused by 'Enablers' and 'Enablers' are improved using feedback from 'Results'.



© 1999 - 2003 EFQM

Figure 9: European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model

The EFQM starting premise is that excellent organisations have leaders who set and communicate a clear direction for their organisation. Leadership is the starting point and within this model, the leader is defined as the one who is able to 'develop and facilitate the achievement of the mission and vision. They develop organisational values and systems required for sustainable success and implement these via their actions and behaviours. During periods of change they retain a constancy of purpose. Where required, such leaders are able to change the direction of the organisation and inspire others to follow' (1999-2003: 13).

As part of the study to discover the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, it will be important to ascertain how effective the leadership is within the VEC. In carrying out this task, it will be important to distinguish between leadership and management within the VEC. Most organisational leaders have significant management responsibilities. However, despite that fact that the terms 'management' and 'leadership' are sometimes used interchangeably, there is a difference in their functioning and their outcomes. According to Leigh (cited in Bennett, Glatter, Levacic, 1994: 16), 'managers can be concerned with developing an overall vision with which to inspire and direct the organisational subsystem. Leaders, on the other hand, work toward creating and developing a shared vision, taking initiatives, empowering others and gaining support in the organisation'.

According to Hughes, Ribbins and Thomas, there is no single all-embracing theory of educational management. He maintains that:

Students of educational management who turn to organisational theory for guidance in their attempt to understand and manage educational institutions will not find a single, universally applicable theory but a multiplicity of theoretical approaches each jealously guarded by particular epistemic community' (1985: 223).

In business organisations and educational settings, management can be seen as planning and budgeting, organising and controlling. Leadership, on the other hand is primarily about establishing a vision, setting a direction, communicating goals while inspiring and empowering subordinates to deliver on the results required. Leigh (cited in Bennett, Glatter, Levacic, 1994: 18) describes succinctly what a leader is when he said, 'leaders create new approaches and imagine new areas to explore. They relate to people more intuitively and in empathetic ways, moving to where opportunity and rewards are high and projecting ideas into images which excite people'.

In this time of change for Kildare VEC, it will be important for leaders to have their sights set on the end goal and avoid diversions to less relevant ones. They must be able to understand and hold on to 'the big picture'. Bush (2003: 183) maintains that leadership can be understood as a process of influence based on clear values and beliefs, leading to a "vision' for the school, college or educational establishment. The vision is articulated by leaders who seek to gain commitment from staff and stakeholders in support of pursuing an ideal of a better future for the school, its students and stakeholders. Cuban in the introduction to *The Managerial Imperative and the Practice of Leadership in Schools* (1988: ii) described leadership as the 'mean of influencing others' actions in achieving desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivation and actions of others'. The characteristics of this leadership approach can be summarised through the following characteristics – a clear sense of direction, strong people values, excitement around the vision and mission, teamwork and accountability.

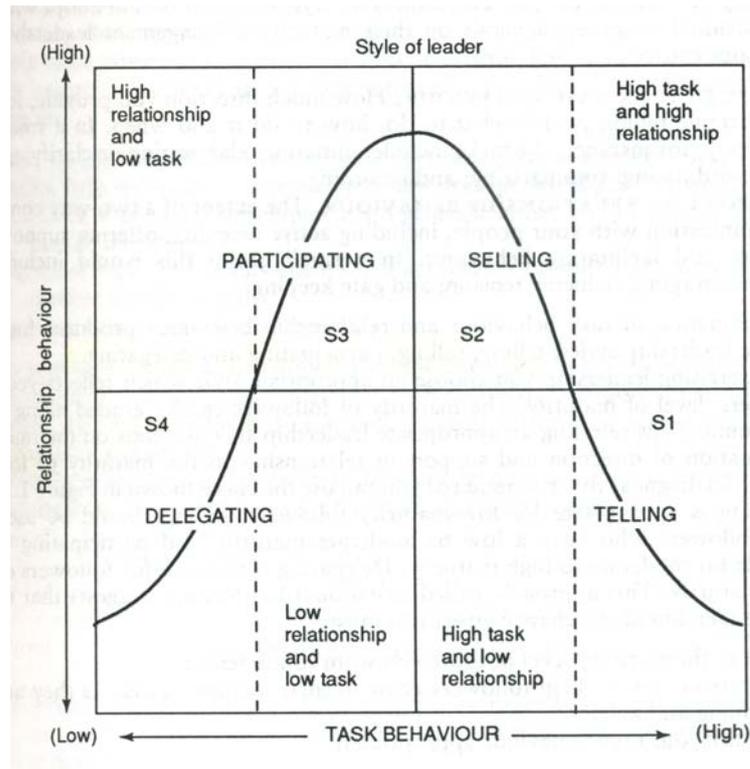


Figure 10: Leadership styles (Leigh p.23)

Hence, leadership is not limited by the functions of senior managers or CEOs in an educational organisation or institution. Ruth (2006: 5) describes a leader in similar terms as Bush, as a facilitator, a listener, a team builder, an enabler and a developer of people. Establishing a vision along with having the ability to explain and enthuse people with the “bigger picture” is a key feature of effective leadership. In seeking to establish the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, it will be most important to discover what is the vision for adult education held not only by senior managers but also by tutors and programme co-ordinators.

3.9 Evaluating the effectiveness of adult education

Ireland has not had a strong tradition in terms of educational evaluation of policies and programmes (McNamara et al. 2009: 105). Provision of EU funding in the 1980s necessitated Ireland implementing evaluation procedures with employment creation schemes and other community development programmes operated within the adult education sector. When looking for a definition of educational evaluation, McNamara and O’Hara cited Scheerens

definition (2002: 37-39) as being most appropriate. Scheerens says educational evaluation is 'judging the value of educational objects on the basis of systematic information gathering in order to support decision making and learning' (McNamara & O'Hara, 2007: 174).

Examining educational effectiveness, whether in terms of politics, policy and/or practice provided a challenge for the research. According to Connolly (2009: 1), the difficulty comes when attempting to define what we mean by 'effective' and how we know when a particular educational programme, intervention and/or approach is effective or not. Evaluating the effectiveness of educational programmes has been widely debated, particularly since the 1960's for various reasons from measuring outcomes to cost effectiveness. How one measures or evaluates educational programmes is ultimately determined from a philosophical standpoint - positivists may seek to measure outcomes and tasks that have been achieved while critical theorists would hold the belief that adults have developed a greater sense of critical awareness. Effectiveness fits into a paradigmatic framework described by Mertens (2005: 15) as postpositivist, constructivist or transformative paradigm. In addition, while having a philosophical dimension, measurement of educational outcomes also has consequences from public/private sectoral requirements. She makes the point that:

Evaluations are conducted on the merit and worth of programmes in the public domain, which are themselves responses to prioritised individual and community needs that resulted from political decisions. Programme evaluation is thus intertwined with political power and decision making about societal priorities and directions (2005: 49-50).

Contingent to the philosophical starting point is the education and training outcome that will determine the result(s), be they 'value for money', 'cost effectiveness', 'requirement to obtain new skills' or 'updating of existing skills'.

From a historical perspective, primary focus has been placed on input indicators such as student numbers and fiscal measures. The result of constructing evaluation on input indicators as a premise has tended to place the focus on the teacher instead of the learner and learning outcomes. Prøitz

(2010) points out that today, there is a paradigm shift taking place within education with a changed emphasis away from teaching to learning as the outcome (2010: 119). According to Prøitz, there are two main debates on the issue of learning outcomes. The dominant debate centres on whether learning and the outcomes of learning can and should be stated in full-ended, stable, pre-specified and measurable terms or in open-ended, flexible terms with limited opportunities for measurement (2010: 133). Robert Gagné (1974) and Elliot Eisner (1979) have each made key contributions to the discussion on learning outcomes. Gagné is recognised as a behaviourist (Burke 1995), while Eisner is considered a pragmatist and social constructivist (Allan 1996). Hence, Gagné and Eisner represent two different perspectives on learning which are accompanied by different perspectives on the outcomes of learning. Gagné was concerned with instructional design and interested in determining the kind of learning required to accomplish certain tasks involving planning and sequencing (Burke, 1995: 59). Eisner is concerned with the role of curriculum in learning and has defined a “trichotomy of outcomes”. According to Eisner, outcomes are partly dependent on the student, partly on the subject in question and partly on the teacher.

The current economic climate and the urgent need to reduce unemployment and to provide appropriate training for re-skilling and up-skilling adults would tend to adopt the Gagné behaviourist philosophy. In studying the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, recognition will have to be taken of the difference in responses given by students, tutors and senior managers arising from their perception of effectiveness.

Another approach to learning outcomes has emerged, which uses the attainment of defined learning outcomes as a measure of institutional effectiveness (Ewell 2005). This is part of the “assessment movement” that started in the mid-1980s with government calls to examine the effectiveness of funding allocated to public institutions. Evaluation as a governance strategy takes a myriad of forms. It manifests itself according to Vedung, as goal-achievement evaluation, stakeholder evaluation, client-oriented evaluation, professional evaluation, self-assessment, randomised

experimentation and quality assurance, to name but a few (2010: 263). Vedung goes on to describe historically ‘the Four Waves of Evaluation’ (2010: 263), each of which is derived from a particular philosophy, the results of which provides a particular outcome:

1. The **science driven evaluation wave** (1950’s) was performed by professional academic researchers who would assist governments in making decisions that were rational, scientific and grounded in facts.
2. The **dialogue-oriented evaluation wave** (mid 1970’s) tended to be non-experimental with information being elicited from users, operators, managers and stakeholders through discussion.
3. The **neo-liberal evaluation wave** (1980’s) took place in the context of services being replaced from public or governmental provision through deregulation, privatisation, efficiency and decentralisation to providing a greater level of competition, accountability and adds value for money.
4. The **evidence based evaluation wave** (mid 1990’s) involves a systematic review to provide the best available evidence on likely outcomes of various actions. Evidence based evaluation uses the slogan ‘What matters is what works’. Vedung describes the ideal practitioner in terms of ‘a doctor who acts as a clinical practitioner towards her patients while also doing scientific research on them’ (2010: 274).

In a not dissimilar approach, Guba and Lincoln’s historical description of the evaluation process in terms of *fourth-generation evaluation* methods based on a divergent paradigm variously known as the ‘constructivist, naturalistic, hermeneutic or interpretative paradigm’ (1989: 83). Therefore, in carrying out the task of studying the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, I will be working on more evidence based evaluation from the perspective of students, tutors, co-ordinators and senior managers.

3.10 Conclusion

In seeking to discover the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, I presented and examined various philosophies that have helped

shape the delivery and practice of adult education - Progressive; Humanistic; Critical theory and Postmodernist. Adult educationalists have interpreted these philosophies and used individual and/or shared thinking to shape and develop adult education into where it is today. These philosophies have contributed to the shaping of policy documents in Ireland, the European Union, Norway and organisations such as OECD and UNESCO. Philosophy is also at work in analysing the current economic situation in which the world, the EU and Ireland finds itself. These philosophies will also determine how countries respond to education from a social and political perspective and upon which judgements will be made when taking into account limited or scarce economic resources. Policy documents over the twenty years have clearly articulated the need for Ireland to develop a better educated and skilled workforce in order to meet the needs of the 'knowledge' and 'smart' economy. Finance has been provided for this endeavour but because the educational system has worked in a less than integrated manner, satisfactory outcomes have not always been achieved.

However, the evaluation and quality assurance culture is now firmly embedded within the EU and has gradually been incorporated as a key element of the national social partnership agreements which has determined economic and social policy in Ireland for nearly two decades.

As discussed in the Chapter 2, a significant example of organised evaluation of learning outcomes has been the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF was adopted by the European Parliament and Council in April 2008. The core of the EQF is eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do - 'learning outcomes'. Levels of national qualifications will be placed at one of the central reference levels, ranging from basic Level 1 to advanced Level 8. This will enable an easier comparison between national qualifications and will also mean that people do not have to repeat learning if they move to another country. This benchmark was set down in order to encourage countries to relate their qualification systems or frameworks to the EQF by 2010 and to ensure that all new qualifications issued from 2012 carry a reference to the appropriate EQF.

Prior to the current economic crisis, national partnership programmes such as Work and Competitiveness (1998), Prosperity and Fairness (2000), Sustaining Progress (2000-2005) and Towards 2016 all draw upon terms such as 'effective', 'efficiency', 'performance', 'quality', flexibility' and 'evaluation' throughout the documents. Reports, Programmes for Government and White Papers have all articulated what needs to be done with the intention of creating an effective and efficient system of education and training. Kildare VEC has been providing adult and further education and it is appropriate that its effectiveness is studied in order to achieve the best outcomes for the students, society and the economy.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Recent economic and educational changes have necessitated change in Kildare VEC educational provision. Taking these changes into account along with reviewing the adult education literature assisted me in narrowing the focus of my study in order to generate a researchable question that would help to reveal *the effectiveness of the adult education provision within County Kildare VEC*. A first important starting point according to Silverman is asking, 'what am I really trying to find out'? (2000: 68). A second important factor entailed uncovering the most appropriate research methodology and inquiry method(s). A third consideration was how I could appropriately conduct this research within Kildare VEC where I was both an employee and a senior manager of the Adult Education Service. The final factor necessitated visualising the expected outcome or outcomes of the research. (Figure 11).

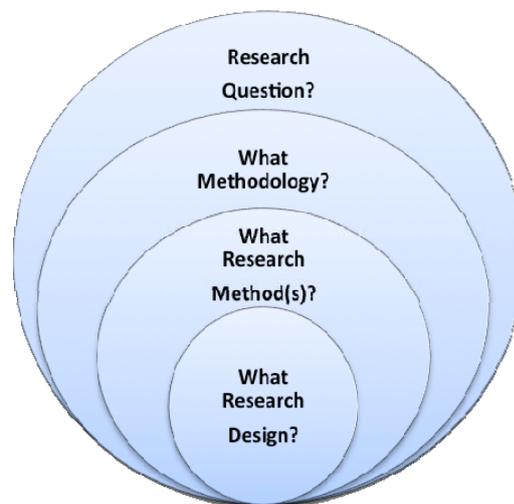


Figure 11: Research methodology process

Achieving these four objectives would assist my research process in order to articulate the effectiveness or otherwise of Kildare VEC Adult Education Service.

4.2 Planning the route

In the early stages of my research, while seeking to discover the effectiveness of Kildare VEC Adult Education Service, my thinking was aided by the four-stage planning model of Cohen et al. (2007: 94) who illustrated the various decisions required for each stage of the research process (Figure 12).

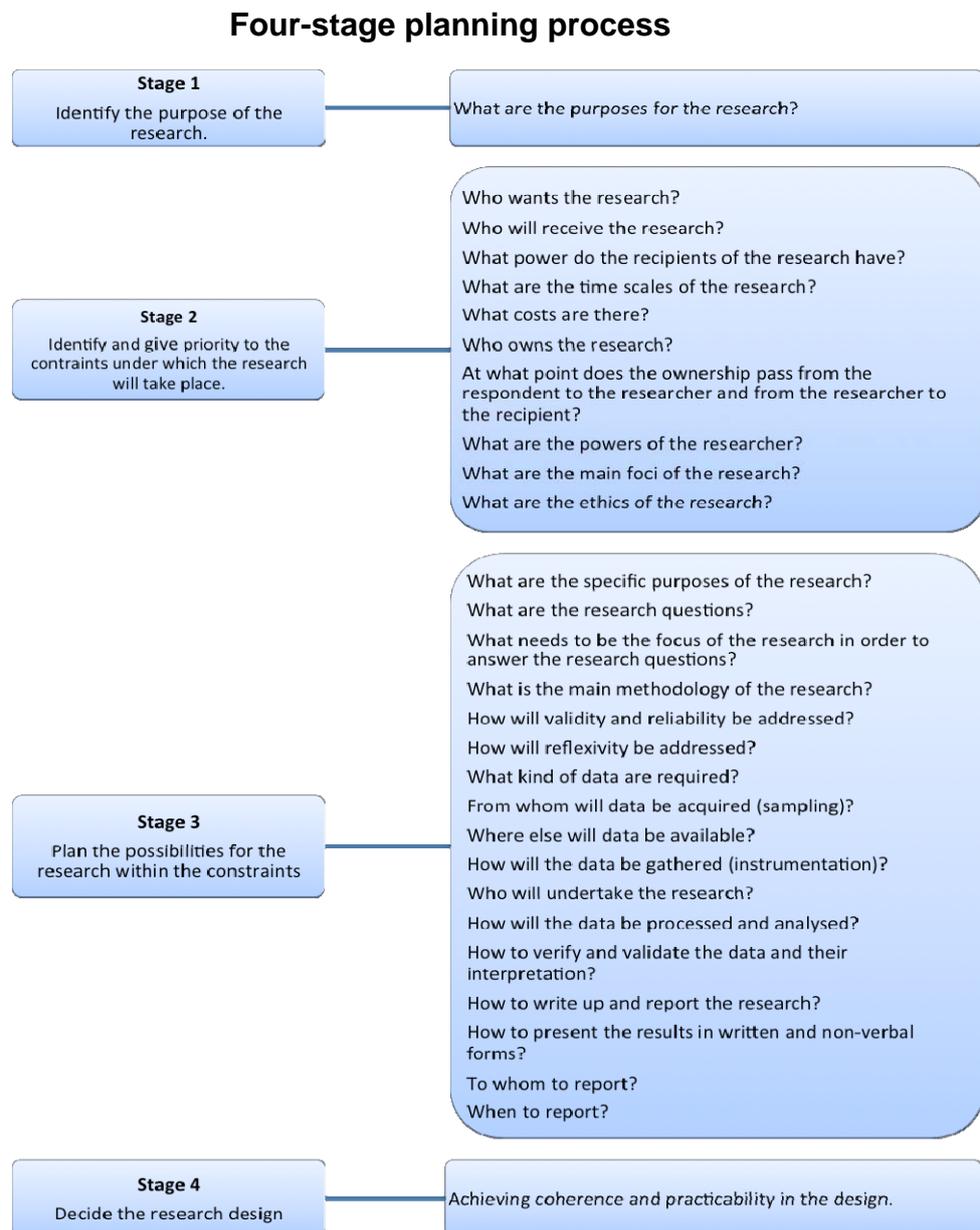


Figure 12: Planning sequence for research

Clarification of the purpose of my research and what needed to take place was further enhanced by Mertens (2005: 62) more concise description of the necessary steps for planning a general educational research study:

- Describe what is to be evaluated
- The purpose of the evaluation
- The stakeholders in the evaluation
- Constraints affecting the evaluation
- The evaluation questions
- Selection of the evaluation model

My conceptual framework involved what Creswell (2007: 5) described as the ‘entire process of research from conceptualising a problem to writing research questions and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation and report writing’. Therefore, having established my research question (*the effectiveness of adult education within Kildare VEC*), the methodology I will employ is Grounded Theory, the method I will use is Case Study and I will conduct Qualitative Interviews and a Study Visit to Norway (Figure 13).

Conceptual Framework

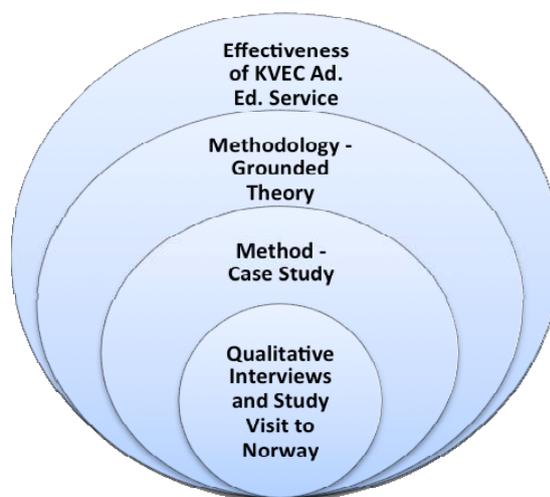


Figure 13: Chosen research methodology

4.3 Why grounded theory as the research methodology?

In deciding to examine the effectiveness of adult education within Kildare VEC, Crotty (1998: 2) suggests putting effort into answering two further questions: firstly, what methodologies and methods will be employed in the research and secondly, how is this choice of methodologies and methods justified? Justification for the choice of a particular methodology and research

method(s) arise from the assumptions about the reality or the 'world-view' that the researcher brings to their study (Appendix 10). As stated earlier, education is a process, the outcome of which individuals may discover new knowledge and insights. Adult education can provide the impetus to look at and reflect on life, which in turn contributes to the discovery of a new sense of meaning and purpose. Morrison (cited in Briggs and Coleman, 2002: 18) reduces the researchers' quest to two key questioners, namely, what is the relation between what one sees and understands (our claims to 'know' and our theories of knowledge or epistemology) and that which is reality (our sense of being or ontology)? In other words, how does one go about creating knowledge about the world in which we live? For their part, Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997: 173) suggests that rather than seeing epistemological and ontological questions as separate and distinct, they are both related since claims about what exists in the world also implies claims about how that which exists may be known.

4.3.1 Positivism / postpositivism

I examined the dominant research methods that have guided educational research, both *positivism* and its successor *postpositivism*. Positivism is based on the rationalistic, empiricist philosophy that originated with Aristotle, Francis Bacon, August Comte and Emanuel Kant. The positivist or empiricist epistemological approach has to a large extent, dominated how we view knowledge and how it stands up to scrutiny. According to O'Leary (2004: 5), the methodologies that the positivist researchers use have a fourfold dimension:

- Deductive*, it tests a theory with the intention of confirming its validity;
- Hypothesis-driven*, a tentative statement is proved or disproved;
- Reliable*, the same results will be achieved when trials repeated;
- Reproducible*, other researchers will arrive at same findings.

In general, the positivist or empiricist tradition view knowledge as logical, context-independent and generalised. Since its inception, positivism has been closely associated with scientific knowledge and according to Crotty,

positivism perceives the world ‘through the scientific grid as highly systematic, well-organised world. It is a world of regularities, constancies, uniformities, iron-clad laws, absolute principles’ (1998: 28). At it’s most basic, research within this tradition has been conventionally understood as a process where primary data is collected, analysed, presented and from that data, results are generalised in order to produce new knowledge or theories. Therefore, how knowledge is gathered and interpreted will determine it’s epistemological validity. Very often, but not exclusively, methodologies used by positivists tend to be quantitative in nature. O’Leary maintained that quantitative research is very often described as ‘an objective search for singular truths that relies on hypotheses and variables and is large-scale’ (2004: 99). O’Leary’s depicts the logical conclusion from starting with a positivist philosophical approach and methodology and methods employed (Figure 14).

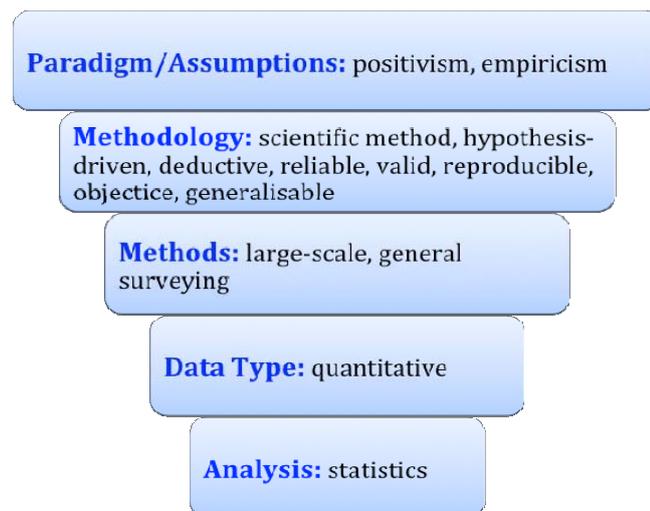


Figure 14: ‘Quantitative’ Method (O’Leary 2004: 99)

The down side to the positivist philosophical approach when applied to adult education is that it can tend to be more pre-occupied with outcomes rather than the process of learning and on the exit of the student rather than entrance requirements. Adult basic education, continuing professional education along with training in business and industry are three programme areas that very often make use of measurable outcomes to determine value for money. A less successful aspect of positivism according to Cohen et al. was:

Its application is to the study of human behaviour where the immense complexity of human nature and elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world. The point is nowhere more apparent than in the contexts of classroom and school where problems of teaching, learning and human interaction present the positivistic researcher with a mammoth challenge (2007: 11).

Polkinghorne points out (1992 cited in Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997: 123), that educational practitioners know only too well that applying methods of science to the human realm does not provide a means whereby children can be efficiently educated, prisoners reformed, workplaces organised, etc. Currently, work in adult education is more likely to be context-specific and particularised and therefore to many educational practitioners, theory can appear both remote and lack a relevance to adult educators working on the ground. Usher, Bryant and Johnston maintain that historically, adult education has adopted a critical stance towards theory and has instead valorised practice and experience (1997: 171). Over time, these fears and mistrust have been reduced somewhat through the use and acceptance of research methods other than scientific and quantitative approaches.

4.3.2 Interpretivism / constructivism

Another methodology being used with greater frequency in educational research that I examined was 'hermeneutic or interpretive' epistemology. This methodology focuses on human action and assumes that all action is meaningful and can be interpreted (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997: 181). The research methods most associated with this methodology have tended to be qualitative methods such as interviews, action research, case studies and observational methods and since the 1960's, these methods have become more recognised as a valid means of generating new knowledge. In reaching a decision as regards the methodology best suited to evaluating the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, I was informed by Morrison (cited in Briggs and Coleman, 2002: 24) saying:

The world of the educational researcher is different from the world of the natural science researcher – all educational research needs to be grounded in people's experience. For interpretivists, reality is not 'out there' as an amalgam of external phenomena waiting to be uncovered

as ‘facts’, but a construct in which people understand reality in different ways.

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000, cited in Mertens, 2005: 231), ‘identified qualitative methods as the preferred methods for researchers working in the constructivist environment’. Nisbet points out the value of quantitative study along with the benefit of qualitative study when he said

Quantitative research could show that there were wide ranges of individual differences in every kind of measure but seldom was able to explain the meaning or implications of the findings for everyday contexts: its aim was generalisation for the purposes of prediction and management. Qualitative research in contrast aimed at understanding and insight into the complexities of learning and human behaviour (2005:35).

In addition, O’Leary provided an alternative to the use of positivism and that is constructivism or post-positivism using qualitative methods (Figure 15).

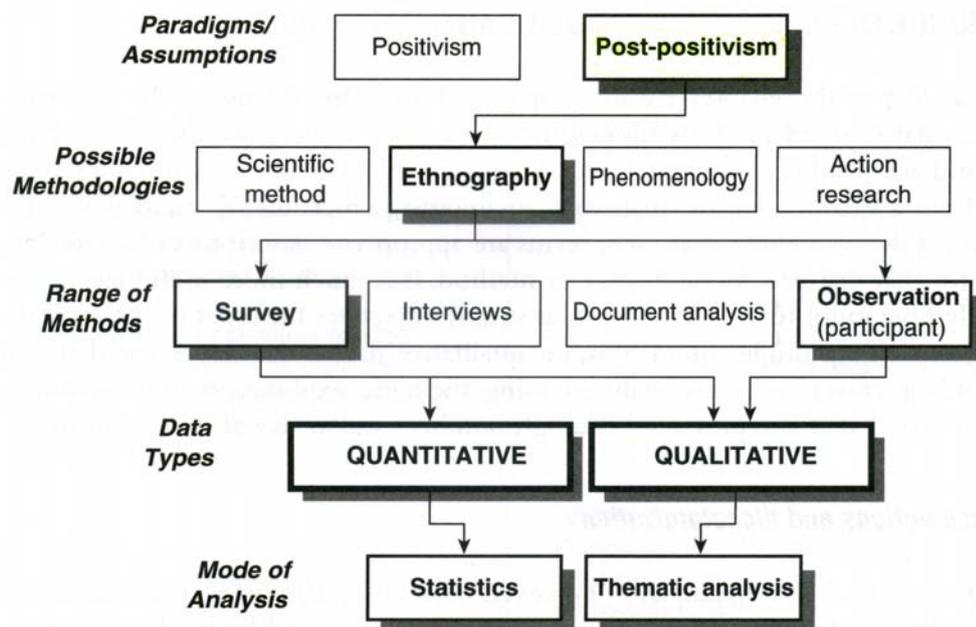


Figure 15: Opening up possibilities (O’Leary 2004: 100)

According to Mertens (2005: 12), the basic assumptions guiding the constructivist or post-positivist paradigm is that ‘knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it’. The diagram below (Figure 16) depicts

O’Leary’s logical conclusion from starting with a post-positivist philosophical approach, the methodology employed and the methods used.

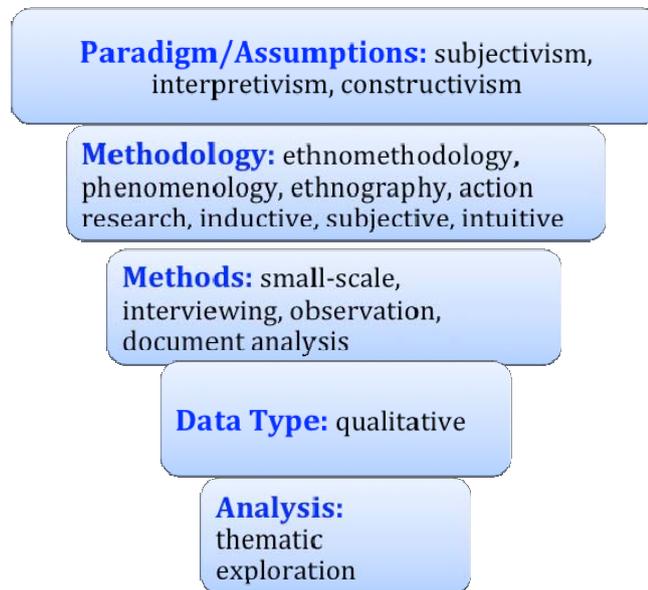


Figure 16: ‘Qualitative’ Method (O’Leary 2004: 99)

4.3.3 Grounded theory

Having examined the various methodologies, I decided to use grounded theory as my research methodology to study the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service. This methodology I believe would help me to interpret the adult education system in Kildare that has evolved over thirty years of separate programmes and the system is now being challenged to respond in an integrated manner to the current economic environment. I believed that this methodology would provide rich data because ‘grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants’ (Creswell 2007: 63). Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss and can be described as ‘a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed’ (1967: 273). It begins with research questions and not a hypothesis and as data is collected and analysed, theory will be confirmed. According to Glaser, ‘it is a total methodological package. It provides a series of systematic, exact methods that start with collecting data

and take the researcher to a theoretical piece that is publishable' (2010: 1). As Mertens says 'the emergent theory is grounded in the current data collection and analysis efforts' (2005: 242). As a methodology, grounded theory is well suited to adult education practice, in so far as lifelong learning procedures require continual evaluation, change and update. As Cohen et al. says 'grounded theory starts with data, which are then analysed and reviewed to enable the theory to be generated from them' (2007: 492). The key methodological features include:

- The researcher constantly interacting with the data
- Using theoretical sampling, that will help fill the gaps in theoretical formulation
- Using systematic coding
- Questioning that depicts the complexity, variation and relationships between the variables in the study

In using grounded theory as my methodology, I considered it possible to gather rich insights from the selected groups of personnel involved in adult education both from learners and from staff, particularly those who have responsibility for influencing policy and shaping the VEC provision. Creswell describes the process of data collection in grounded theory as 'a "zigzag" process: out to the field to gather information, into the office to analyse the data, back to the field to gather more information, into the office and so forth' (2007: 64). In conducting my research, this post-positivist methodological approach will entail formulating questions to be explored and developed with interviewees as opposed to a positivist hypothesis testing approach against empirical knowledge.

4.4 Case study as the research method

I have chosen to use case study as my qualitative research method because as Stenhouse said;

Educational case study [is where] many researchers using case study methods are concerned neither with social theory nor with evaluation judgement, but rather with the understanding of educational action ... they are concerned to enrich the thinking and discourse of educators either by the development of educational theory or by refinement of

prudence through the systematic and reflective documentation of evidence (1985 cited in Bassey 1999: 28).

This qualitative research method will enable me to describe and analysis the complex nature of Kildare VEC adult education service in order to evaluate its effectiveness.

As part of the first stage of conducting case study research, Bassey suggests:

Going back to first principles and that research is about trying to make a claim to knowledge, or wisdom, on the basis of systematic, creative and critical enquiry. It is about trying to make sense of something that was not known before and then communicating the findings to others. A helpful way of approaching the analysis of that 'something' is to see it as an *issue* to be explored, or a *problem* to be tackled, or a *hypothesis* to be tested (1999: 66).

In a later article, Bassey states the educational significance of case study as part of research saying 'education research is more concerned with improving action through theoretical understanding therefore case study means being where the action is, taking testimony from and observing the actor first hand' (cited in Briggs and Coleman 2002: 143). This is what Bassey calls 'theory-seeking and theory-testing case study' (Bassey 1999: 3).

So a case study allows for the investigation of real-life events, such as organisations, managerial processes, educational and community development projects and Bassey supplies seven stages in the process of carrying out case study research (cited in Briggs and Coleman, 2002: 149).

They are:

Stage 1: identifying the research purpose

Stage 2: asking research questions

Stage 3: drawing up ethical guidelines

Stage 4: collecting and storing data

Stage 5: generating and testing analytical statements

Stage 6: interpreting or explaining the analytical statements

Stage 7: deciding on the outcome and writing the case study

For a case study to be successful, good preparation is important, thinking out the implications of the various stages and consulting with the critical actors involved. The analysis of the research data will generate new knowledge and from it, the work of education will be enhanced.

According to Cohen et al., case studies 'can study cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects (2007 :253).

What can set case studies apart from other forms of study according to Hitchcock and Hughes is that:

Case studies are set in temporal, geographical, organisational, institutional and other context that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case; they can be defined with reference to characteristics defined by individuals and groups involved and they can be defined by participants' roles and functions in the case (1995 cited in Cohen et al. 2007: 253).

Finally, by using this particular method to study the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, it is anticipated that the findings and recommendations will enhance the organisation and the educational provision (Figure 16).

4.5 Qualitative interviews and a study visit

In this study I carried out sixty-five interviews and a study visit to Norway. At the early stages, I did consider the option of using a survey of VEC students, tutors, co-ordinators and senior managers as my research methodology which would produce quantifiable empirical data. The attractiveness of surveys according to Cohen et al. is 'its appeal to generalisability or universality within given parameters, its ability to make statements which are supported by large data banks and its ability to establish the degree of confidence which can be placed in a set of findings' (2007: 207).

In considering the end result and the purpose for which the research was being carried out, I was unsure if a survey would provide credible in-depth and transferable data in relation to the effectiveness of adult education within Kildare VEC. As my goal was to discover the effectiveness of Kildare VEC

adult education service, I felt that a survey would not adequately describe the Kildare VEC adult education context and explain its characteristics in order to provide rich data capable of generating new knowledge. I also judged that in order to capture the information required, I would have had to ask many open-ended questions, the results of which could prove difficult to collate and to analyse. I believe my thinking was justified according to Cohen et al. (2007: 207) when they highlighted the criteria for the unsuitability of surveys:

If a research is concerned to catch local, institutional or small scale factors and variables - to portray the specificity of a situation, its uniqueness and particular complexity, its interpersonal dynamics and to provide explanations of why a situation occurred or why a person or group of people returned a particular set of results or behaved in a particular way in a situation or how a programme changes or develops over time, then a survey approach is probably unsuitable.

4.6 Pilot research

In 2007-2008, I carried out a pilot research project entitled '*A Study of Policies and Structures in VEC Adult Education Services*' and I interviewed eight VEC staff (Appendix 1) at management and CEO level in two VECs. The findings of the research revealed the need for further study to demonstrate the outcomes of VEC adult education services. In 2009, I looked for a sample group to be representative of Kildare VEC adult education service in order to generalise my findings. However, according to O'Leary, 'the nature of the research question may find representativeness inappropriate or unaccessible. In these cases, research will still strategically select their samples but in a way that best serves their stated goals' (2004: 103). As a result of the specific nature of the adult education provision in Kildare, I used a sample group of sixty-five individuals representing students, tutors, middle management, senior management, CEOs from external VECs and a representative from the IVEA. This sample group represents individuals from within Kildare VEC as well as individual associated with other VECs. The choice of sample group links with what Caswell maintains that 'in grounded theory study, the research chooses participants who can contribute to the development of the theory ... the rationale for studying this heterogeneous sample is to confirm or disconfirm the conditions, both contextual and intervening, under which the model holds' (2007: 128).

4.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in all research are an integral part of the planning and implementation process. Researchers are responsible for shaping the character of knowledge and therefore it is important that the means used to gather this knowledge, its analysis and subsequent dissemination, must be conducted in a manner that protects the dignity and welfare of the researched (O'Leary, 2004: 43). Hitchcock and Hughes highlighted a particular ethical issue of conducting research in one's own workplace, when they argued that:

Doing participant observation or interviewing one's peers raises ethical problems that are directly related to the nature of the research technique employed. The degree of openness or closure of the nature of the research and its aims is one that directly faces the teacher researcher (1989, cited in Cohen, et al. 2007, 69).

Hitchcock and Hughes continued this thought process of conducting research in your own organisation by suggesting that:

The key to the successful resolution of such questions lies in establishing good relations. This will involve the development of a sense of rapport between researchers and their subjects that will lead to feelings of trust and confidence (1989, cited in Cohen, et al. 2007, 69).

A second issue which I had to consider in my study of the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service was what Cohen et al described as researching 'powerful people' (2007: 127), that is, people in key positions of responsibility, leadership and policy formation within the organisation. The ethical dilemma in academic educational research on powerful people according to Cohen et al. 'may be unlike other forms of research in that confidentiality may not be able to be assured. The participants are identifiable and public figures' (2007: 128).

In discussing education research, Strike (1990) offers two broad principles, firstly, the benefit of maximisation which hold that the best decision is the one that results in the greatest benefit for most people and secondly, the principle of equal respect which demands that we respect the equal worth of all people. The British Psychological Society's *Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and*

Guidelines (2005) include among many others, sections on competence, obtaining consent, confidentiality and personal conduct. The American Psychological Association's *Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct* (2002) names five general principles: beneficence and non-maleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice and respect for people's rights and dignity.

Prior to conducting this research, I obtained permission from the Dublin City University (DCU) Ethics Committee in May 2009 and I subsequently wrote the following instructions in my journal on 29th May 2009:

I must prepare today for all I have to do in relation to my research:

- Write and get permission from CEO to carry out internal work
- Finalise student copy of Plan Language and Consent Form
- Phone co-ordinators re. setting up student interviews
- Carry out a number of VTOS student interviews in xxx and xxx
- Carry out a number of PLC student interviews
- Test digital recorder
- Carry out preparation work for study visit to Norway

Later that week, I sought permission from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kildare VEC (Appendix 11) to interview learners and employees within his jurisdiction, assuring him that in the dissemination of the findings, personnel involved in the research would not be identified. Permission was given by the CEO (Appendix 12). It was also agreed to communicate the similar message regarding confidentiality to interviewees and every interviewee read or had read to them, the Plain Language Statement (Appendix 13) and then signed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix 14).

4.8 Data collection

Kildare VEC has nearly 260 staff working in adult education and nearly 9,500 learners. I carried out the study in the most manageable format. My epistemology starting point in beginning the research follows a constructivist paradigm. According to Schwandt, (2000 cited in Mertens 2005: 12-13)

The basic assumptions guiding the constructivist paradigm are the knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it.

As part of the preparation of the interview questions and prior to conducting interviews, I sought advice from colleagues working in adult education as suggested by Bell (2005: 118). In the light of this consultation, some of the questions were restructured because they were deemed to be leading and might colour the interviewees' responses. In refining the questions, I created more open questions guided by the writings of Ribbins who stated that "open questions are at the core of qualitative interviewing and have many possible answers (cited in Briggs and Coleman, 2002: 215).

In drafting my interview questions, I considered the five suggestions posed by Tisdell and Taylor (2007:7) relating to adult education and sought to probe the core values, thinking, beliefs, experiences and expectations of the sixty-five individuals to be interviewed. Key issues considered in formulating the questions were:

How effective is Kildare VEC adult education as an overall service?

How effective is Kildare VEC adult education service for students?

How effective is Kildare VEC adult education staff - tutors, managers, senior managers, etc.?

How effective are Kildare VEC adult education programmes and courses?

How effective are Kildare VEC adult education facilities and resources?

How effective is Kildare VEC in its responsiveness to current and future educational requirements?

What can be learned from the three external VECs as regards an effective adult education service?

How effective does the general representative body of VECs, the IVEA, consider VEC adult education services?

How effective is Kildare VEC adult education in the light of similar adult education provision in another European country?

4.9 Gaining access

The first step in collecting data was access to people who would provide ‘rich’ information that could be transferred into new knowledge. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service and make recommendations that will improve the provision of adult education in County Kildare, I had ready access to learners and staff members from various adult education programmes in centres and schools (Figure 17). The breakdown of the interviews included the following:

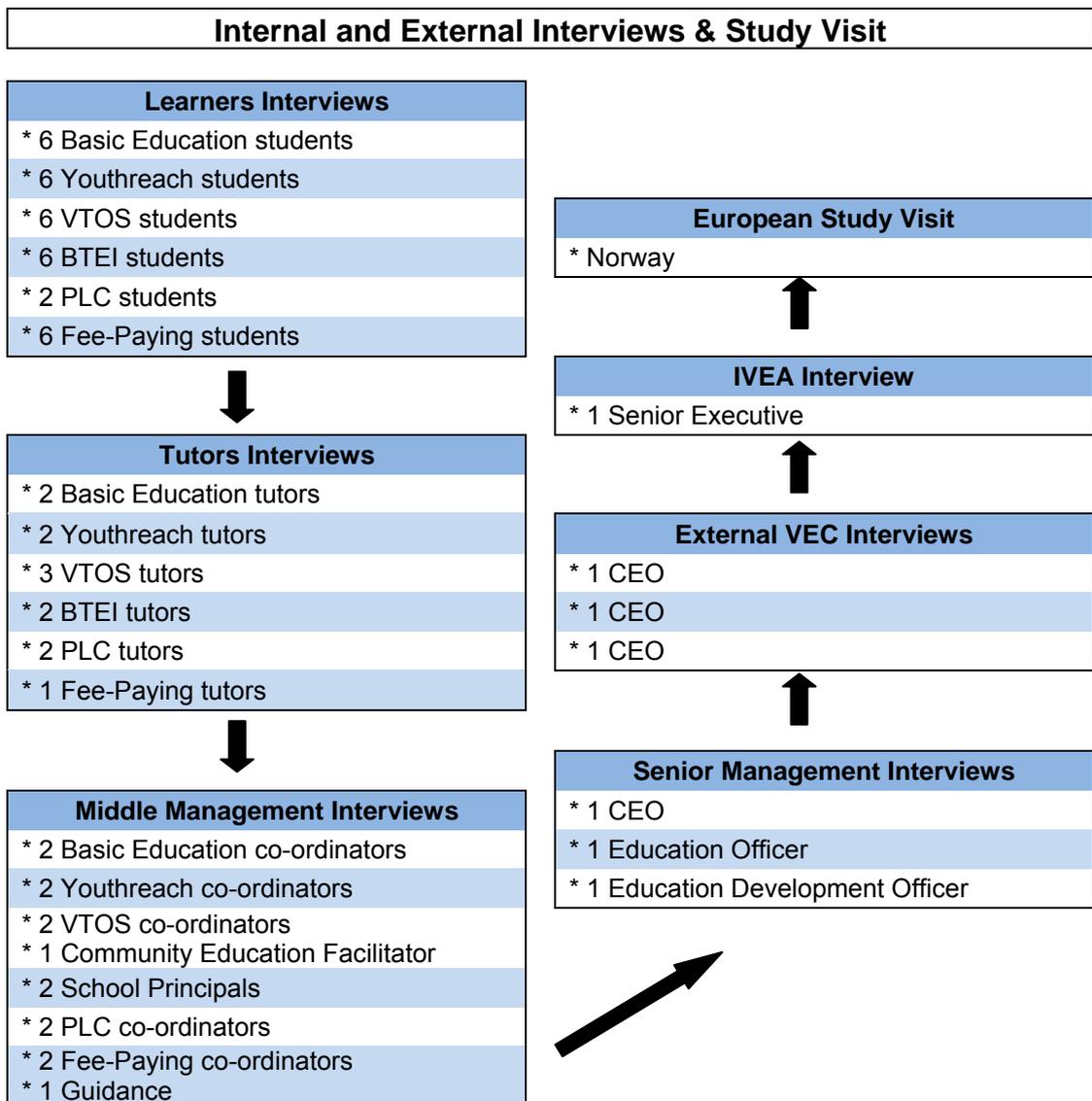


Figure 17: Breakdown of interviewees by programme and position

The selection of interviewees and using Grounded Theory as the methodology, Creswell maintained that 'the individuals may not be located at a single site, if they are dispersed, they can provide important contextual information useful in developing categories in the axial coding phase of research' (2007: 122). Therefore, the purpose of this study, the interviews took place across eighteen different locations which represented the dispersed context of Kildare VEC in adult education schools and centres.

4.9.1 Interviews

In conducting the sixty-five interviews (Figure 18) with students, tutors, middle and senior management, CEOs from external VECs and IVEA executive, a separate set of interview questions was prepared for each group depending upon the level of responsibility within the organisation (Appendix 15, 17, 19, 21, 23 and 25). The aim of the research was to discover the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education as understood by each interviewee. Many of the interviewees at senior level had priorities for their VEC and these priorities might form the basis of recommendations that will improve the performance of the Kildare VEC adult education service. Cohen et al. said that 'the order of the interview may be controlled while still giving space for spontaneity and the interviewer can press not only for complete answers but also for responses about complex and deep issues' (2007: 349). According to Bloomer and James, 'generalised claims may make some contribution to the deeper understanding of practice but only if they stimulate the practitioner in critical thought about the particular cases (individuals, groups, institutions) within her/his own practical experience. (2003: 250). It was only when all the one-to-one interviews with a particular group were completed and analysed that the questions for the next group of interviewees were formulated and the interviews conducted.

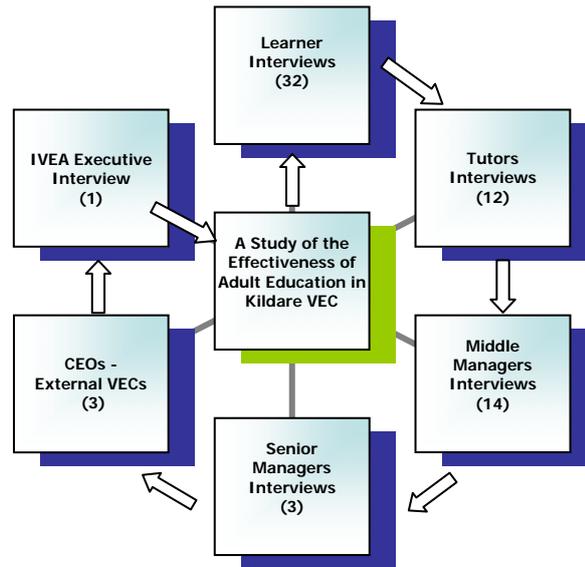


Figure 18: Interviews conducted with VEC and IVEA executive

In conducting the research, O’Leary maintains that ‘an early challenge is determining what type of interview is most suited to your research question’ (2004: 163). From the choice of interview questioning - structured; semi-structured and unstructured, I choose to use semi-structured interviews in an informal setting on a one-to-one basis that would fulfil the criteria allowing interviewees a considerable degree of latitude and as a result, many were free to give their views and talk about the topic in their own time (Mason 1996: 45). According to O’Leary, semi-structured interviews are ‘neither fully fixed nor fully free and are best seen as flexible. Interviews generally start with some defined questioning plan, but pursue a more conversational style of interview that may see questions answered in an order more natural to the flow of conversation’ (2004: 164). Cohen et al. (2007: 97) also made the point that semi-structured interviews may gather data on the more intangible aspects, e.g. values, assumptions, beliefs, wishes and problems more so than structured interviews. The breakdown of the target group of interviewees was as follows:

4.9.2 Students

Target Group 1	Rationale
Students (32)	<p>There are over 9,400 adult students availing of adult education services administered by Kildare VEC. Interviewees were selected by programme coordinators from within the various programmes in order to provide a good cross section of programmes and locations through the county:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• VTOS - 6 students;• Youthreach - 6 students;• Literacy - 6 students;• BTEI - 6 students;• PLC - 2 students;• Self-financing night class - 6 students.

Figure 19: Interviews of target group 1 - students

Twenty-seven questions were asked of thirty-two students (Appendix 15) and covered topics such as, (a) where did they hear about the VEC programme/course they attended, (b) what was their experience of returning to education and (c) what improvements would they suggest to the particular programme they were attending. The overall aim of these interviews was to ascertain the effectiveness of the VEC service for students on return to adult education and if their expectations were met.

4.9.3 Tutors

Target Group 2	Rationale
<p>Tutors (12)</p>	<p>Kildare VEC has several hundred tutors teaching adult education courses in over ten programmes throughout the county. The research sought to enquire at the initial stage why they were teaching in the VEC adult sector. Responses to the question revealed a much more in-depth insight into the philosophy from which each tutor worked. It also highlighted the professional relationship tutors had with the students and the subject(s) they taught. The programme co-ordinator or school principal chose twelve tutors. Tutors included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy - 2 tutors; • VTOS - 3 tutors; • PLC - 2 tutors; • Youthreach - 2 tutors; • BTEI - 2 tutors; • Self-financing night class - 1 tutor. <p>• All tutors were working in centres and schools throughout Kildare.</p>

Figure 20: Interviews of target group 2 - tutors

Following the analysis of the student interviews (Appendix 16), twenty-two questions were devised and asked of twelve tutors (Appendix 17), which covered areas such as, (a) why they were involved in teaching adults, (b) what they believed were the expectations of adults who return to education and (c) did Kildare VEC classes meet student expectations. The overall aim of these interviews was to build on information gained from the previous interviews and to examine the effectiveness and suitability of the VEC programmes in meeting the needs of the students. Data gathered would assist the process of enabling adults to be better served by Kildare VEC.

4.9.4 Middle management

Target Group 3	Rationale
<p style="text-align: center;">Middle Management (14)</p>	<p>Middle management personnel have responsibility for co-ordinating and directing the various adult programmes. In the majority of cases, they engage and work directly with the tutors and students. Middle managers were invited to select a representative from each category. The groups of 14 middle management personnel comprised the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy - 2 co-ordinators; • Community Education - 1 facilitator; • VTOS - 2 co-ordinators; • Youthreach - 2 co-ordinators; • Schools - 2 principals; • School - 2 directors of adult education; • PLC - 2 co-ordinators; • Guidance - 1 co-ordinator. <p>Middle managers were working in centres and schools throughout Kildare.</p>

Figure 21: Interviews of target group 3 – middle management

Following the analysis of the tutors interviews (Appendix 18), twenty-three questions were asked of fourteen middle managers (Appendix 19). With information gained from the previous set of interviews, similar interview questions were asked of middle managers in order to find out from them (a) whether Kildare VEC was meeting the needs of adult students, (b) what were the essential components of an adult education service and (c) what would help middle managers to accomplish better outcomes from the programmes in order to achieve greater effectiveness of provision by Kildare VEC.

4.9.5 Senior management

Target Group 4	Rationale
<p style="text-align: center;">Senior Management (3)</p>	<p>The Senior Management team has responsibility for providing the leadership and management of the delivery of adult education programmes and services in Kildare VEC. Their vision and priorities are crucial, not only in establishing the context in which adult education is provided in Kildare, but also facilitating the provision of resources. The senior management group comprises the following personnel who were interviewed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEO - 1; • Education Officer - 1; • Education Development Officer - 1. <p>The senior management team is based in the VEC head office.</p>

Figure 22: Interviews of target group 4 - senior managers

Following the analysis of the middle management interviews (Appendix 20), twenty-two questions were asked to three senior management personnel (Appendix 21). A new set of questions was developed by building on insights gathered from previous interviews. These interview questions sought to elicit from senior managers their vision and priorities when starting their position with the VEC. The questions sought to discover what VEC changes were necessary to meet the current educational needs of adults and how they could be better served by the Kildare VEC. As these three managers have executive responsibility and can bring about significant change, they were asked if as Minister for Education and Skills with full authority, what they would do to improve the educational provision provided by Kildare VEC? Many answers provided rich data on what Kildare VEC could do to improve its response to the needs of current and future students.

4.9.6 External VECs

Target Group 5	Rationale
<p>External VECs (3)</p>	<p>Exploring the rationale of three senior personnel in VECs outside of Kildare provided the opportunity to discern if the research findings discovered within Kildare VEC were similar and if there were common themes and priorities in vision and delivery across the VEC sector. The VECs selected were part of group who worked together with Kildare VEC to provide educational information to attendees at the Ploughing Championship (2009 and 2010). The interviewees comprised of three CEOs.</p>

Figure 23: Interviews of target group 5 - external VECs

Following the analysis of the senior management interviews (Appendix 22), the similar twenty-two questions were asked of three CEOs from external VECs (Appendix 23). Each interviewee was questioned about VECs in general. As per earlier questions, these questions also sought to discover (a) the CEOs interpretation of adult education and (b) the priorities they had and the priorities they now have for their VEC. Questions were asked to discover what changes were necessary in order to meet the current educational needs of students and how adult students could be better served by their VEC. Many of the answers from the three CEOs contributed to the recommendations on the effectiveness of VECs at a national level. It was envisaged that many of the responses would be triangulated with earlier responses from interviewees in Kildare VEC.

4.9.7 IVEA

Target Group 6	Rationale
IVEA (1)	As an association, the IVEA has responsibility for representing and actively promoting the interest of the members of the association and the general membership of the Vocational Education sector with the object of promoting the development of education and training. Once again, I sought to discover if similar priorities for adult education existed in the vision and leadership provided by the body responsible for co-ordinating work of all thirty-three VECs. The interviewee holds a senior position within the IVEA.

Figure 24: Interviews of target group 6 - IVEA executive

Following the analysis of interviews by CEOs from external VECs (Appendix 24), the twenty-two similar questions were asked of one senior executive from the IVEA (Appendix 25). The questions considered the effectiveness of the VEC as an educational provider in the current economic climate and they examined whether VECs throughout the country were capable of responding to the increasing demands for education and training for the unemployed and if VECs could contribute in a meaningful way to building the SMART knowledge and technology based economy? Again, responses could be triangulated with previous interview responses and Kildare VEC.

By analysing the findings at each level within Kildare VEC organisation and external VECs, it enabled information and insights obtained to be used in questions at the next level of the organisation or with CEOs from external VECs. By so doing, it was possible to carry out what Cohen et al. called '*Investigator Triangulation*' (2007: 142). This type of triangulation engages more than one observer and data is discovered independently from more than one 'observer' thus confirming authenticity of the various sources and supporting my findings.

4.10 The interview process

Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes in the place of study or work location of each interviewee (Appendix 15, 17, 19, 21, 23 and 25). At the beginning of each interview, I discussed the research topic and its purpose and each person signed the Consent Form having read the Plain Language Statement. Content was also obtained from each interviewee to have the interview recorded which subsequently would be transcribed. Each person was also advised that the transcript of the interview would only be examined by myself and by my supervisor, if required. The student and tutor interviewee's were chosen by their programme co-ordinators and in the case of middle management, senior management and external VECs, I telephoned each person and offered them the choice of taking part in the research. In addition, prior to conducting each interview, I supplied each interviewee with a copy of the interview questions.

Following every interview, I wrote up notes relating to the interview including my thoughts and observations in addition to my experience of the interview not captured on tape. Subsequently I used these field notes when listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts a second time. Holton highlights the importance of using field notes in grounded theory when she says 'field notes enable the grounded theory research to capture the essence of the participant's main concern and how that concern is resolved without the burden of laborious transcribing followed by the tedium of reading through and coding lengthy transcriptions (2010: 25). In addition, over the period of the research and the subsequence transcribing of each interview, I kept a reflective journal. Spradley cited in Silverman (2000: 141) suggests that in order to make deeper and more general sense of what is happening, observers should keep four separate sets of notes:

1. Short notes made at the time of interviews;
2. Expanded notes made soon as possible after each field session;
3. A fieldwork journal to record problems and ideas that arise during each stage of fieldwork;

4. A provisional running record of analysis and interpretation.

Having completed thirty-two student interviews, I had some of the recordings transcribed while I listened too and transcribed the remainder. In starting to analysis the transcripts, I discovered two things. Firstly, there were a considerable number of mistakes in the transcription, particularly VEC acronyms, etc. and secondly, I felt I had gathered more insights and information by listening to the recordings and transcribing them myself.

On 23rd April 2010, I recorded this entry in my Journal:

I have completed five tutor interviews in the past week. I have seven more tutors to interview with a total of possibly 22 more interviews in total to complete. In addition, I have to write about the Norway education service. A lot to do when I see it written down. I think I'll transcribe them myself. It will be quicker as the information I'm getting from the tutors has more substance than I thought and will be more relevant to the conclusions and recommendations I will make.

Therefore, at an early stage in the process, I decided that in order to complete the study in the most satisfactory manner, I would listen to and transcribe almost all interviews myself, totalling more than thirty hours of interviews played four or five times to comprehend and transcribe the full content of the interviews. All interviews, recordings, field notes and journal records were filed in a secure location to protect confidentially and information stored on computer was password protected.

4.11 Data analysis

According to Cohen et al. (2007: 184), the process of data analysis can be portrayed in seven steps (Figure 25).

Seven steps of data analysis

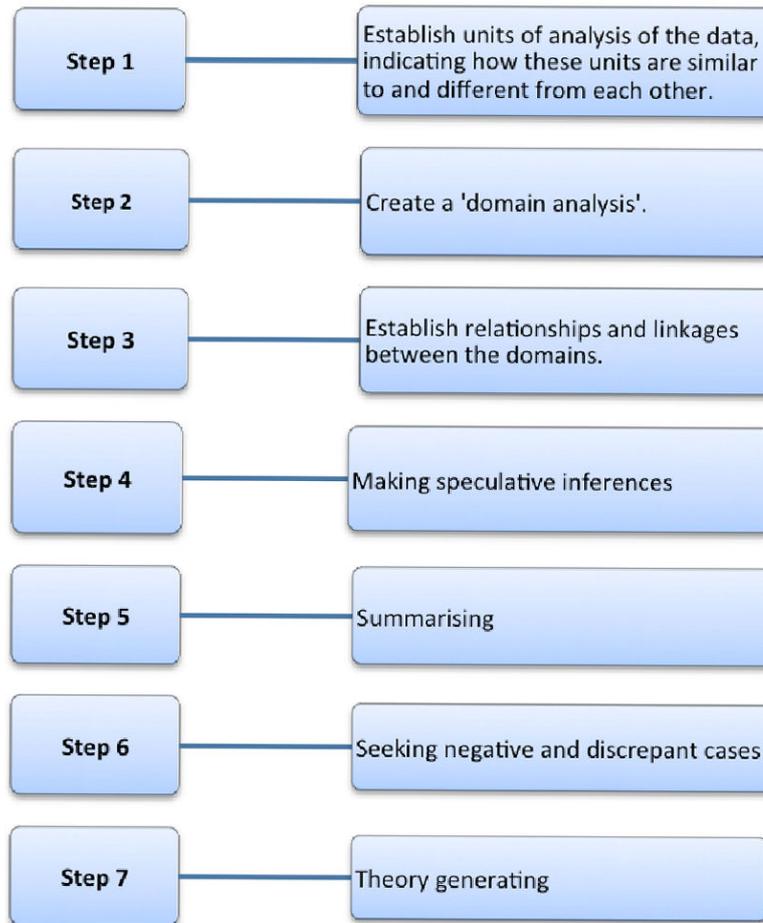


Figure 25: Seven steps of data analysis

I began the process of data analysis at step one by listening to and transcribing each of the thirty-two student interviews. In so doing, I heard the content of each interview, this time away from the interview rooms. I then read and re-reading each interview in order to detect words, phrases or sentences that formed a patterns of consistent expression that began to emerge from several of the interviews. Even at this early stage, what I was working towards was the discovery of themes. According to O’Leary, in qualitative analysis, ‘understandings are built by a process of uncovering and discovering themes that run through the raw data and by interpreting the implication of those themes for the research questions’ (2004: 195). During the second and third reading of the data, I highlighted text, I made notes in the margin and I copied and pasted sentences to another file on the computer. Cohen et al. described this form of analysis as ‘organising, accounting for and

explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes categories and regularities' (2007: 183-184). Slowly, I then began the coding process of grouping words, phrases and sentences into manageable groups.

In grounded theory, there were three types of coding: *open*, *axial* and *selective* that enabled the deconstructing the data into manageable chunks. Firstly, by using open coding, I sought to discover the meaning or feeling that interviewees had in relation to their work in adult education. This involved generating new codes and subsections as the interviews progressed to different and deeper levels. Some of the data gathered from interviews is presented in Chapter 5 and 6 in the form of verbatim quotes. Secondly, I sought to create links between the codes and categories and establish interconnectedness between words or sentences communicated by interviewees at different level within the VEC by using axial coding. Finally, I sought to identify core codes and the relationship between codes in themselves by using selective coding. With these selective codes, I sought to relate back to the literature, the theory and the adult education experience of all the interviewees. Flick et al. argue that 'repeated coding of data leads to denser concept-based relationships and hence to theory' (2004: 19) and as Cohen et al. maintains, 'the richness of the data is included in the theoretical formulation' (2007: 493)

After the first set of interviews was read and re-read, I started to create codes and categories in order that the analysis could begin. As Fielding said:

Coding is fundamental to qualitative data analysis. The corpus has to be divided into segments and these segments assigned codes ... which relate to the analytic themes being employed. Researchers aim for codes which capture some essential quality of the segment and which apply to other segments too (2002 cited in Briggs and Coleman 2002: 360).

Ezzy describes coding in greater detail when he says:

Coding is the disassembling and reassembling the data. Data are disassembled when they are broken into lines, paragraphs or sections. These fragments are then rearranged, through coding, to produce a

new understanding that explores similarities, difference, across a number of different cases (2002: 94).

In the early stages of the process, the work became very disorganised with the generation of hundreds of codes. Ezzy provided some encouragement when he said 'the early part of coding should be confusing, with a mass of apparently unrelated material. However, as coding progresses and themes emerge, the analysis becomes more organised and structured (2002: 94). An example of the analysis of one of the twenty-seven questions from the student interviews was Question 17 - What has been most helpful to you about your study or learning so far? A combination of twenty-eight words, phrases or sentences were highlighted and with further analysed, I was able to arrive at the selected themes (Appendix 27). The same process was conducted with the interviews of tutors, middle managers, senior managers, three CEOs from external VECs and the IVEA Executive.

Over the process of analysing the data, several themes began to emerge from the student interviews. These themes included:

1. People's lack of awareness of Kildare VEC adult education services
2. Students who had particular learning requirements because many had left school early
3. Students had particular reasons for returning to education
4. Programme suitability has to be tailored to the needs of adults
5. Many students want to continue learning and progression to further education and employment was important

The insights gathered through these themes formed the basis of the next and subsequent set of questions to interviewees. In paralleling the information either from a tutor, middle manager or a senior manager, themes continued to form. By further engagement and interaction with the data, the themes were refined and filtered down to the eleven themes that I will further analysis in order to create my theory. The eleven themes to emerge from the data were:

1. VEC Vision and priorities for adult education

2. VEC branding and image promotion
3. VEC management and communication
4. VEC learning programmes
5. Training and continued professional development for VEC staff
6. VEC staffing structure in adult education
7. Adult education buildings and resources
8. Suitability of VEC adult education provision
9. VEC future planning
10. Ability to respond to current and future needs
11. Progression routes for adult education learners

Throughout the process of interviewing and conducting data analysis, I was aware of the potential for a certain degree of bias in the construction of the research questions. I was careful that the process was fair and open and that questions asked would obtain responses that were honest and provide information that was transferable to generate knowledge. By using qualitative research, I was aware that the decision, the design and the strategy was on-going and was grounded in practice, process and context while at the same time having a design or template to work within (Mason 1996: 25).

4.12 Norwegian educational visit

The Norwegian educational authority (Appendix 28) had an established link with Ireland and educational representatives from More and Romsdal had visited a VEC educational centres in County Wicklow in 2007. In June 2009 , for the seven day visit by the IVEA study group (Appendix 29), I was based in More and Romsdal, a district of 250,000 inhabitants and one of nineteen counties in Norway (Appendix 30).

Each day, I attended pre-arranged lectures and discussion groups in a junior and upper secondary school, a University, the Directorate of Education and Training, the county administration office for vocational and education training, the local municipality, an educational training centre and several businesses training apprentices in particular skill sets. In each of these locations, I met

and talked with personnel at various levels within the educational and business community. I was briefed on the educational provision at local, regional and national level along with the responsibilities for managing that provision. I met and talked with students within the vocational systems, tutors who were teaching VET courses, business men and women who were the industrial partners on school boards and provided apprenticeships for students in conjunction with their school courses.

I kept a diary during the course of the visit recording places visited, discoveries made and suggestions for improvement that could be made to help the effectiveness of Kildare VEC. One example in diary is:

Today I learned that vocational programmes have twelve pupils in a class and that the system allows pupils to go to school one day per week and to work for four days in the week. This might be worth trying in a Youthreach centre as an alternative to block release for work experience (08/06/2009).

Each evening, following the activities of the day, an IVEA group reflection took place to discuss and document the learning outcomes for that day. The shared reflective insights and the discovery of new knowledge was typed and distributed to each individual. During the course of reflection, some Norwegian educational practices were compared with Irish practices and the merits of both systems were compared. An example of this material can be found in Appendix 31.

Upon returning home from Norway, I read the hand-outs of the Norwegian presentations, I reflected on the content of my diary, I checked the suggested Norwegian websites, I wrote up some models of good practice, new insights gathered and the learning outcomes (Appendix 32). I compared this new knowledge with the findings from interviews I conducted with students and staff of Kildare VEC and CEOs from external VECs and the IVEA Executive. From the analysis of these documentations, findings will be made and recommendations suggested that will improve the effectiveness of Kildare VEC.

4.13 Data validity

The problem in assessing the validity of qualitative research has also to be considered. Essentially, this is guaranteeing that the information gathered from the sixty-five interviewees is the information used in my analysis and findings. Another term used by Flick is 'construction of thought' (2006: 371) and that the construction or interpretation of the researcher and the researched match in what is deemed, valid information. Cohen et al. use the term 'reliability' and maintain that reliability can be regarded as a fit between what the researcher records as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting (2007: 149). Lincoln and Guba preferred the use of the terms 'credibility' (in place of internal validity), 'dependability' (in place of reliability), 'conformability' (in place of objectivity) and 'transferability' (in place of external validity) (1985: 158). Mason makes the point that, 'validity of interpretation in any form of qualitative research is contingent upon the end product' (2002: 191). The formulation of the research question (*the effectiveness of adult education in Kildare VEC*) and keeping this question at the core of every interview was crucial in order to reach the end result. In addition, while analysing the data as a researcher within my own organisation, I had to be prepared to be open minded to the discovery that thoughts or ideas I had going into each interview was not confirmed.

One way of validating the information is to demonstrate its validity is through 'triangulation of method', that is by using a combination of methods or data sources to explore one set of research questions. Cohen et al. maintain that 'exclusive use on one method may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular slice of reality being investigated' (2007: 141). Within this research, pressure of time made it impossible to meet and return interview transcripts to sixty-five interviewees. However, it was possible to carry out a triangulation of method by interviewing students and staff and various levels within Kildare VEC, each set of interviews building on the earlier interviews and then conducting parallel interviews with CEOs from alternative VECs and an Executive of the IVEA. In addition, I also carried out the study visit to

Norway which highlighted many of the same issues raised within the sixty-five interviews in Ireland.

4.14 Conclusion

In the 1960's, major expenditure was allocated to educational research in England and the United States. During this period, educational research began to emerge out of the shadow of disciplines such as psychology and sociology and to develop its own conceptual framework, producing evidence-based theories. Gaining ground within the 1970's was the change in approach from quantitative statistical research in education to the more exploratory dimension of educational issues through qualitative research. By carrying out a different approach to research and the use of smaller research samples, issues could be explored in great depth.

Qualitative research in educational studies provides a less generalised outcome resulting in a greater understanding and insight into the complexities of learning and human behaviour. In-depth interviews provide a different kind of data because it approaches a topic from the perspective of the interviewee. According to Mertens,

qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world ... this means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2005: 229).

In deciding to use qualitative research methods, I had to bear in mind Halfpenny's statement that:

depending on your point of view, quantitative research could be judged superior because it is value-free (hard, fixed, objective, survey, hypothesis-testing, abstract), whereas qualitative research is influenced by the researcher's political values (soft, flexible, subjective, political, case study, speculative, grounded) (1979: 799).

Through the use of qualitative research methods and interviews with sixty-five students and staff from Kildare VECs along with CEOs from three external VECs and an Executive from the IVEA, it is my intention to produce new

insights and knowledge that is credible, authentic and reliable. I expect that the findings will be beneficial to Kildare VEC by improving its effectiveness as an educational organisation within the current economic climate. I am of the belief that the information gathered will be transferable to other VECs throughout Ireland and that the knowledge and insights gathered will resonate within the sphere of educational learning.

Chapter 5 Research Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to *evaluate the effectiveness of Kildare VEC Adult Education Service*. According to Mertens (2005: 50), in conducting educational research and taking into account programme funders, administrators, staff and recipients of the service, the researcher is working within a pluralistic environment and developing the questions, the methods and the criteria for judging the merits and worth of the education provision. Therefore, in order to gather this information, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students engaged in adult education programmes, staff involved at different operational levels within Kildare VEC and four additional interviews with CEOs from three external VECs and an Executive of the IVEA.

Within the analysis of each set of questions, four distinct areas surfaced: a) general questions, b) questions relating to the learners, c) questions relating to Kildare VEC and d) questions with regard to suggested improvements to various aspects of Kildare VEC adult education service. Glaser and Strauss maintain that ‘the purpose of the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory ... and the theory is not intended to ascertain universality or the proof of suggested causes or other properties. Since no proof is involved, the constant comparison method ... requires only saturation of data - not consideration of all available data’ (1967: 102).

5.1.1 Students

In this research, seeking to ascertain the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, thirty-two students were interviewed for approximately 30 – 35 minutes and asked twenty-seven questions (Appendix 15). Students were chosen from six different adult education programmes by the co-ordinators of those programmes and a complete summary of the interviews can be found in Appendix 16.

General

The initial questions set the scene and established the starting point for each interview with students who have returned to education, for example, their age (15: 1), their age at leaving school (15: 2) and their experience of school (15: 3). From the total number of students interviewed, only seven had left school having completed the Leaving Certificate. Nearly 50% of interviewees were between 35-54 years of age and a large number expressed unhappiness with their early childhood education. At an early stage, data analysis revealed the need for appropriate adult education staff and resources in order to respond to the needs of adults whose educational starting point was low and whose confidence and self-worth require development. The need for 'professional staffing' was one of eight good recommendations specified in the *Action Plan on Adult Learning: It is always a good time to learn* (2007: 4). Responses to these questions assisted with the construction of later questions for tutors and managers within Kildare VEC.

Learners

Through the next series of questions I sought to explore why students returned to education (15: 5), where they heard about the particular programme (15: 6) and what was the response when they contacted the VEC service (15: 10). Through these questions, I sought to gather data relating to the effectiveness of Kildare VEC in providing courses that meet the needs of the students and how accessible the courses were to them. Each interviewee differed in their response as to why they returned to education but the common thread among all responses was that they wanted to accomplish something that would improve themselves such as learning to read or increasing their chance of going to college. Interviewees saw the VEC as a route to change and possibility employment and all students had their own particular reason for returning to education. Overall, students were not aware of other VEC services. The most common known VEC provision was night classes. Interviewees spoke of being received positively when they enquired about courses in schools and centres. The fact that potential students received a positive response came as a surprise to many students. Co-ordinators and front-line staff were considered to be very helpful and one

interviewee said of the initial contact, 'it was very pleasant, I've been out of the system so long, I didn't feel they were going to be interested in me'. Another interviewee said, 'I was terrified and ashamed that I couldn't read and when leaving the initial meeting, I felt very good'. Jarvis (2004: 75) cites Beinart's and Smith's (1997: 200) survey describing the five reasons why people enrolled on courses as: a) connected with work, b) future work in mind, c) voluntary work, d) potential impact on work and e) hobby or skill development. Interestingly, for many, the reason for enrolling was to meet other people.

Most interviewees were aware of VEC advertisement campaigns on radio, in papers and through brochures. Interviewees also made the point that for the VEC to provide a better service, it should advertise where people are queuing in banks, post-offices and in social welfare centres, particularly, for the unemployed.

The next series of questions were aimed at discovering if students were placed in courses best suited to their needs by asking questions, such as, were you informed that there were other VEC programmes (15: 13) and what was your experience as a student returning to education (15: 14). Most interviewees could not recall being informed that there were other VEC programmes. This detail could have been due to the fact that many students felt nervous about returning to education and some stated that prior learning experiences led them to the belief that they were not capable of formal learning. These responses have implications for further sets of questions to tutors and managers relating to the provision of entry-level courses for learners.

In asking the questions, how have you as a student benefited from returning to education (15: 16), what was most helpful and how helpful was the tutor (15: 18) and programme co-ordinator (15: 19), I sought to gather information about the worthwhile and effective practices currently provided by Kildare VEC. Students felt Kildare VEC was meeting their educational needs and some stated the courses were helpful 'to better themselves'. Others had

become unemployed or were in employment from which they would like to change and education was helping them. Overwhelmingly, tutors were spoken of most positively for the support and encouragement they provided to students. Students talked of gaining new knowledge unconsciously as a result of the support and the learning atmosphere created by tutors and co-ordinators. This highlights what Malcolm Knowles described what an educator should be - a helper, guide, encourager, consultant and resource (1970:34).

The interviews highlighted that adults who returned to education with Kildare VEC benefited from that experience and developed both in confidence as well as academically. Overall, interviewees felt positive about themselves and many looked to the future with in the prospect of gaining employment following their engagement with learning. They felt their self-esteem had been restored and that this was due to the fact that people (staff and fellow students) believed in them. Those taking part in night classes felt they learned practical skills that would be of benefit to them in their personal life or in work. A VTOS student having completed a two-year full-time course said, 'I found myself learning because I really wanted to learn' and another remarked that 'college was like a dream, now it is a reality'. A literacy student said 'I found I was on the right course going at the right speed for me' and another stated 'it means the world to me to be able to read a book'. One reason why students felt positive about their learning experience was summed up by one student who said 'I was treated like an adult'. These outcomes fulfilled Dewey's philosophy of the tutor when he said that 'the educator must survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of individuals with whom he is dealing and must at the same time arrange the conditions which provide the subject matter or content for experiences that satisfy these needs and develop these capacities' (1938: 580). While students were not asked about premises and facilities, many were complimentary of the overall atmosphere within the centres. Further questions will need to be asked of managers regarding the skill-set requirement and training needs for VEC tutors and front-line staff.

Kildare VEC

The final set of questions sought to examine what students thought about progression by asking questions relating to certification (15: 20) and about the VEC guidance service (15: 23) in order to ascertain how integrated guidance was in the services. Responses from interviewees regarding progression routes differed depending on whether students were on full-time or part-time programmes. Some full-time students tended to be more ambitious and would like to progress to higher education and employment. Some students stated they had received information about progressing to further education but the interviewees did not convey the sense that the guidance service was perceived as being part of the VEC provision. Having returned to education, many students felt that the provision of guidance at the beginning of the course would have helped them focus through the use of study skills in order to achieve the outcomes they required for higher education or employment. Many part-time students wished to continue with some form of courses while some interviewees did not articulate long-term educational plans. Analysis of the data directed me towards designing questions about appropriate courses enabling better progression routes for learners to higher levels of certification. According to Tight, 'part-time students are different from full-time students and they form a more diverse group' (1991: 106). The task of assisting adults to progress to further education and employment is fulfilling one of the priorities of the National Development Plan (2007-2013) 'to up-skill the workforce through promoting access to appropriate training and lifelong learning'.

Improvements

The concluding questions provided students with the opportunity to suggest improvements to Kildare VEC adult education service (15: 25, 26 & 27) that would help identify areas for improvement and reveal the effectiveness of the service. Suggestions for improvements included the provision of a guidance service prior to entering educational courses, more information on course content and improved screening of individuals prior to course acceptance to ensure that applicants are suitable for the course as some students noted resources being wasted because of 'drop-outs'. It was also suggested that

those who have successfully completed VEC courses should be called upon to highlight the benefits of adult education for future learners.

According to the analysis of the student data, Kildare VEC is effective in some of its adult education provision, such as:

- staff helpfulness
- tutor support and encouragement
- good centre atmosphere

However, some suggestions for achieving a greater level of effectiveness was to focus on:

- better advertising
- improved VEC branding
- wider availability of guidance

Knowles speaks of what he calls counselling which in Irish terms is better described as guidance and says it 'is especially important for the person in his thirties who begins to wonder what he has missed and where he is going. He may be seeking addition education or training in order to move up the ladder' (1980: 173). Guidance is very important at all states of the educational process but the age groups referred to by Knowles differs significantly in Ireland, especially within the current economic environment.

5.1.2 Tutors

Having completed research among thirty-two students to ascertain the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, I analysed the data and uncovered emerging themes: VEC advertisement, VEC branding, tutor training, guidance service and student learning environment. Tutors were chosen from six different VEC adult education programmes by the co-ordinators of those programmes. I then devised fifteen questions (Appendix 17) and I conducted twelve 35 – 40 minute interviews with VEC tutors (a summary of the interviews can be found in Appendix 18).

General

The initial questions set the scene and established the starting point for each interview with tutors in Kildare VEC adult education, for example, how long they were teaching in adult education (17: 2), had they taught in adult education centres other than Kildare VEC (17: 4) and what qualifications they had in adult education (17: 5). There was a high level of teaching experience among the tutor's interviews, between one year and twenty-five years and nine out of fourteen stated their only teaching experience was with Kildare VEC. Interestingly, eleven out of the twelve tutors have degree qualification status with one tutor having a Masters degree. From April 1st 2013, tutors who are working in adult education and paid from the public exchequer will have to obtain a graduate diploma in Adult Education in addition to their degree in order to work in the adult education sector.

Learners

Tutors were asked about the motivation and expectations of adults taking part in VEC education (17: 7) and what they believed to be the essential components of an adult service (17:11). The response by tutors was similar to that of students in so far as it was stated that a difference exists in the motivation of full-time and part-time students. Interviewees said that PLC students tended to be female and depending on their age profile were interested in getting back into the workforce. According to tutors, some part-time students had more basic needs, for example, to be able to read or to complete the Junior Certificate. Tutors of night classes said students were motivated to gain an additional skill and to meet new people. The two areas receiving particular mention when tutors were asked 'what were the essential components of an adult education service' were the atmosphere and the welcome back to education along with the quality of tutors. As the data revealed that tutors have a significant part to play in VEC education, the training and up-skilling of tutors will be a question to be asked of VEC managers. The actions of staff of Kildare VEC conceptualise what Eduard Lindeman maintained that texts and teachers play an important role in education but that they must give way to the primary importance of the student (1926: 8-9).

Kildare VEC

Tutors were asked what was good about Kildare VEC (17: 9) and were they aware of other VEC programmes (17: 13). There were a lot of positive comments regarding what was good about Kildare VEC such as the variety and range of courses and that many of the courses were provided free. The learning approach used in adult education was also considered to be good as well as what was referred to in an earlier question, the atmosphere in the centres was important. Having good premises, as was the case of PLCs tutors in new school buildings, was considered as a mark of professionalism on the part of Kildare VEC. For the most part, tutors were not aware of other VEC programmes and that was the case particularly for PLC tutors who worked in schools. However, the literacy programme was known as a VEC service by most tutors.

Tutors

When asked how they as tutors could achieve better outcomes in their courses (17: 12), suggestions were made regarding more contact between tutors teaching similar subjects. Provision of supports and resources along with information about the management system was also suggested. This question will be developed further with future interviews to establish how better communication systems can be put in place for tutors.

Improvements

Tutors were asked what improvements could be made that would enhance adult education (17: 10) and if they had any final thoughts or comments on VEC adult education in Kildare VEC (17: 14 & 15). Tutors were asked to comment on eight areas of possible improvements that arose from student interviews:

a) Promotion and advertisement

Responses from the interviewees in relation to promotion and advertisement were mixed. Advertisement was considered important with one tutor stating that 'it should be all year round', not just in September and January.

However, a Youthreach tutor said that 'I know in VTOS, they used to advertise but now they have a year waiting list'. Suggestions were made as to how best to advertise including mobile signs on motorways, more colourful advertisements in newspapers and leaflets. It was also suggested that a teamwork approach to promotion should be adopted rather than services advertising their own programmes in isolation from the whole service. Another tutor maintained that 'the problem with the VEC is that it is regarded as having night courses, the knitting and the art and hobby courses. It is not seen as a provider that would seriously enhance your job prospects'. A PLC tutor suggested that more advertising of the courses was necessary, it was also necessary to advertise the fact 'that the individual can do it and not to be afraid of taking the first step'.

b) Variety of courses

Tutors believed that Kildare VEC was responding well to the needs of students but a Youthreach tutor suggested that researching the needs of the student was something that should be continually on-going. The problem of predicting what future courses were needed was highlighted along with the suggestion from a Literacy tutor for 'more practical skills as there was a great variety of academic courses but the skills were missing'. The need for more technical and vocational curricula (2006: 31) was also made in the programme for government, *Towards 2016: Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015*.

c) Facilities and equipment

The concept of a single adult education centre or multiplex was suggested by a couple of tutors. A Youthreach tutor suggested that 'one building would be better from a financial point of view and that it would help with the natural follow-on for our students to VTOS'. The outcome of integration of services and a greater sharing of resources was described as 'the way forward both in terms of the product we are providing and cost effectiveness and giving people a sense of identity which is lacking when working for the VEC, because of its fragmentation'. A tutor made the point that appropriate facilities are necessary in order to provide the right courses. The White Paper

Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education mentioned the development of multiplex facilities which would provide a range of community services (e.g. course delivery, adult ICT access, crèche, café, advice centre, guidance, youth service etc.). One million pounds was made available for the first time in 1999 (2000: 81) but no capital budget has been provided for adult education from DES.

d) Accreditation of courses

A lot of tutors made reference to FETAC, both praising it as an accreditation system and wishing that there were more resources. It was also suggested that FETAC certification should be provided several times in the year. Other forms of certification were mentioned by some tutors, such as Junior and Leaving Certificate and it was believed that Maths, English and Physics should be more readily available, by day as well as by night. In 2011, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Bill was published that replaces FETAC, HETAC, NQAI and IUQB to form one training and QQAI which will provide a more integrated and coherent range of services to learners.

e) Progression routes for learners

Tutors, who were interviewed, knew of the guidance service but Youthreach tutors expressed their difficulties in relation to finding progression routes for young people. PLC and FÁS courses were not available as an option for early school leavers in the current economic climate. Some of the comments were echoed in the 2010 OECD Report, *Learning for Jobs*, highlighted a deficiency that 'career guidance services are fragmented and weakly underpinned by information on labour market opportunities' (2010: 6).

f) Training for tutors

Tutors realised their need for up-skilling in order to effectively provide the best quality teaching to benefit students in the current economic environment. One tutor stressed what was important for Kildare VEC was 'tutors being well trained because a lot of people coming back into adult education have difficulties for one reason or another and I think it is very important for tutors to

be trained to be aware of that'. For many tutors, they saw training from a practical as well as a theoretical perspective. A Youthreach tutor said that 'I think training courses are very welcome for tutors, updating and providing new skills and I also think that tutors getting together and networking is very good'. For many tutors, there was a strong desire simply to mix with other tutors and share ideas and as a VTOS tutor said 'I would love to see more training, we could have courses that tutors could go to and mix with other tutors, talk about their experiences and share ideas'. This suggestion was also made by a PLC tutor who said that VEC staff should have more 'connectedness' with each other. She said 'the biggest thing for me would be more contact with other people, not just people here in the college but across the sector. I would like to meet and have a conference with all teachers in the VEC on a regular basis, sometimes I think teaching is a lonely job and being able to share would be helpful'. In combining skills and academic training, the 2010 OECD Report, Learning for Jobs, made a clear recommendation that 'as a means of enhancing the competences of the VET workforce ensure that all teachers, trainers and instructors have some pedagogical training and as a longer-term goal offer pedagogical training to supervisors of VET students (e.g. apprentices, trainees) in companies. Encourage convergence in the qualification requirements for teaching in different sectors of the VET system' (2010: 7).

g) VEC management structures

The management structure didn't directly affect the working life of some tutors who were interviewed. This could be put down to the fact that their knowledge and understanding of the management structures lay with their programme co-ordinator as their line-manager. An interesting observation came from two tutors who obviously did not see themselves as part of the VEC organisation, despite the fact that they were employed and paid by Kildare VEC. One PLC tutor stated simply that 'the VEC structures don't impinge on me' and a BTEI tutor was more forthright in stating that 'from a tutor's perspective, what happens in the VEC doesn't really have an impact on the work that I do, so it is not really relevant'. Employee comments have implications for the perceived internal identity of Kildare VEC.

h) General resources

The need for continually upgrading resources was highlighted, particularly computer equipment. A Youthreach tutor linked the idea of single adult education building as been an aid to maintain better equipment as resources could be shared among the different programmes. A PLC tutor suggested a VEC website for downloading and sharing resources. It was also suggested that tutors within Kildare VEC could create more resource materials.

Conclusion

As well as commenting on the current situation within Kildare VEC, tutors also highlighted areas where Kildare VEC is effective in providing a large variety of adult education courses. They also provided many practical suggestions that would improve the service and assist in creating a greater level of effectiveness throughout the organisation, such as, cross service tutor meetings. A large number of these suggestions were used in the construction of questions asked of other managers and CEOs in subsequent interviews.

According to the analysis of the tutor data, Kildare VEC is effective in some of its adult education provision, such as:

- the quality of the tutors
- the variety of courses
- good centre atmosphere

However, some suggestions for achieving a greater level of effectiveness was to focus on:

- the promotion of VEC services
- conducting market research
- support for tutors in their teaching

The 2003 Irish Progress Report to the European Commission highlighted one of the key focuses of the Irish legislation and policy documents from 1995 to 2001 and that was 'to enhance quality through staff development, research and evaluation' (2003: 2).

5.1.3 Middle Managers

Having completed research among twelve VEC tutors to ascertain the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, I analysed the data to uncover the emerging themes: advertisement, supports for tutors, better consultation with learners. Middle managers were given the choice to be interviewed and co-ordinators/directors volunteered from seven different areas of adult education. I then devised fourteen questions for interviews (Appendix 19) and I conducted fourteen 40 - 45 minute interviews with VEC middle management staff and a summary of the interviews can be found in Appendix 20.

General

The initial questions set the scene and established the starting point for each interview with middle managers in Kildare VEC adult education, for example, how many years were they in their current role/position (19: 2) and had they worked in a similar position in a centre or school other than Kildare VEC (19: 3). There was a high level of experience among the middle managers interviewed ranging from one to twenty years experience of working with adults. Eight of the fourteen interviewees had ten or more years experience working in the role of co-ordinator, director or principal with Kildare VEC.

Learners

In order to examine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, middle managers were asked about the motivation and expectations of adults taking part in VEC education (19: 5) and what they believed to be the essential components of an adult service (19: 9), thus linking expectations of the learner with the vision of the provider. Middle managers said that in general, adults take part in programmes because they want to improve themselves, socially and academically as well as acquiring new skills. It was suggested by some interviewees that the current economic environment is more of a determining factor as to why adults return to education. A VTOS co-ordinator said she believed that the reason adults returned to education was because 'they feel their level of skills are not adequate for them to

function or succeed in the world today and they need to upgrade their skills so they can get a job in most cases or go on for further education'. Therefore learners perceived adult education as a means of improving themselves. Jarvis, in discussing the motivation of adults, suggests that a greater proportion of men learn because of their work and a greater proportion of women have future or potential work in mind when they return to study (2004: 75).

When asked what they believed were the essential components of an adult education service, middle managers said it included good well-trained staff, the provision a good user-friendly service, meeting the student's needs, supporting them in their educational journey and helping them achieve their goals. A PLC co-ordinator said that 'good teamwork was essential and having good programmes on offer, programmes that learners want rather than what the provider thinks they might want'. Responsiveness is what another co-ordinator highlighted as being important resulting from 'the awareness of what is going on out there, awareness of public demand and an ability to be able to react and also to be pro-active in anticipation of changes'. A principal suggested conducting market research as important in order to discover the real needs of students. Anticipating the needs of learners and the community requires strategic planning resulting in a more effective organisation. Similarly, a PLC co-ordinator stated that 'we have to constantly listen to the needs and be prepared to adapt and change and learn new skills, if needs be'. Therefore, responsiveness and planning are important and will entail inputs from reports such as Expert Group on Future Skills Needs 2010.

As part of this process of listening and hearing the needs of learners, a principal suggested that 'we could deliver a better quality adult education service if we looked at some form of evaluation'. He also highlighted the need for good teachers saying 'we need to start looking at the quality of people who are delivering courses. If people are coming and committing and paying money, they should be getting top quality service'. A night school director said 'I think we could be providing more professional courses so that people would improve their lives because that is what people want now, up-skilling'.

Providing high quality courses that meet the needs of adults was perceived by middle managers as important. Evaluation is important and Mertens says that the 'process normally involves some identification of the relevant standards of merit, worth or value along with some investigation of the performance of evaluands on these standards' (2005: 47).

Kildare VEC

Middle managers were asked as to whether they thought programmes provided by Kildare VEC were meeting the educational needs of students (19: 6). They were also asked what was good about Kildare VEC (19: 7) and to suggest four things that they believed were least satisfactory about the Kildare VEC (19: 10) in order to analyse if those things which were satisfactory or unsatisfactory had a bearing on the educational provision.

There was a mixed response from middle managers whether Kildare VEC was meeting the needs of students. Again, there was a similar response from middle managers and tutors. There was a marked difference between the responses of co-ordinators who managed full-time programmes and those who managed part-time programmes. Full-time programme co-ordinators tended to be more positive in their belief that Kildare VEC was responding well and that generally, the needs of students were being met. A VTOS co-ordinator stated, 'that within the resources available, within the funds available, within the space available, within the personnel available, I think we are doing as well as we possibly can in meeting everybody's needs'. Co-ordinators managing part-time programmes tended to see things from a different perspective. A principal with responsibility for a night school said 'we are not meeting the needs of students quickly enough and when we do get to meet the needs of those students, time has moved on another bit and requirements have also moved on another bit. Yes, they are met but I think there is a significant cohort of students that we are just not tapping into'. Co-ordinators and directors in most centres and schools stated that they couldn't meet the needs of all students because they didn't have the resources to meet the needs of all students particularly those with significant learning difficulties, poor social skills or severe literacy needs. In addition some

programmes have an intake of a large number of 'foreign nationals' whose primary need is for English classes to parallel their academic studies. A Youthreach co-ordinator said that, 'I think some needs are not met and I'm not quite sure if it is the fault of Kildare VEC or it's the changing times and the rapidness of the changing times'. A director of a night school said 'if you had asked me that question a number of years ago, I would have said yes because people had different requirements, different needs. Now I think with the downturn in the economy, things are changing out there and we need to change'. Once again, the need for responsiveness with the right courses was highlighted by middle managers. This need for change was commented on in the 2010 OECD Report, *Education at a Glance* when it said 'the continuing rise in participation and the widening diversity of backgrounds and interests among those aspiring to studies raises the question on the extent to which institutions need to expand admissions and adapt their programmes to the needs of new generations of students' (2010: 294).

Two aspects of Kildare VEC adult education service were considered good, the staff and the availability of so many courses. Staff were spoken of in very positive terms and they were described as 'motivated, hugely committed and focused on their job of helping, working with and assisting adults in their development and learning'. The variety of courses was also a contributing factor to what was good about Kildare VEC. Students were presented with wide choice of courses that could enable learning for skills, a social dimension, further education and employment. One of the values spoken of in the Kildare VEC Educational Plan (2011-2016) is 'supportive - through the provision of appropriate class groups, individual attention and a learning environment (Kildare VEC) will support students and staff in meeting their needs and aspirations' (2011: 8).

In seeking suggestion of things that were least satisfactory about the Kildare VEC produced a strong reaction. While the interview questions were focused on the adult education service, some of the interviewees tended to concentrate their answers more specifically on Kildare VEC as an organisation. The style and manner of communication of the VEC

administration was described as unsatisfactory. Another area of dissatisfaction was that the VEC did not provide the adult education service with a stronger identity. A Youthreach co-ordinator stated that 'within VEC, the schools are paramount and adult education is something of a Cinderella'. A further less satisfactory aspect of Kildare VEC was the perception that adult education was an add-on rather than an entity in itself within the organisation. Marketing, branding and promoting the adult education service was less satisfactory leading to a lack of identity and knowledge within the organisation about the working of adult education. The aspect of finance and inflexibility of budgets was described as unsatisfactory and it was felt that the situation resulted in duplication and wastage within the service. Communication, both internal and external is a challenge for Kildare VEC and VECs in general. Bennett suggests the critical importance of communication within educational organisations and says:

It is critical to spend the time providing updates to stake-holders through newsletters, promotional material, public relations and marketing so that the various interest groups within the community understand the background behind a decision or an action. Inside the school, developing and maintaining channels of communication . . . assists the principal [in] working with interest groups ... It is the responsibility of the principal to create opportunities for educational dialogue inviting people to seek clarification and to question how or why an action has occurred or a decision has been made (1999: 199).

Middle Managers

In two further questions, middle managers were asked what they believed were the qualities needed to carry out the role they performed (19: 4) and to suggest what would help them as middle managers to achieve better outcomes for the programmes that they manage (19: 11). These questions were asked in order to help middle managers reflect on their roles and responsibilities with Kildare VEC as well as to identify areas of effectiveness. The skills that interviewees said were required of people in their VEC position were administration, good communication, accounting expertise, managerial skills and in some cases, crisis management techniques. In order to fulfil the position of co-ordinator or director, it was necessary to be well organised, a good listener and possess the ability to support students and staff. For teachers' working in schools with adults, it was believed that it was different

and required more creativity and flexibility. In addition, a couple of middle managers said that a requirement for the position was awareness of change and ability to be responsive. Many of these qualities and skills required of middle managers will necessitate training provided by Kildare VEC.

When middle managers were asked what would help them achieve better outcomes for the programmes they managed, one suggested more counselling and guidance for learners throughout the county. The provision of more administration was suggested in order to assist co-ordinators with their educational remit. A director of a night school maintained that a great wealth of knowledge and experience existed among middle managers and that there should be a co-ordinated approach to management for the benefit of work. Some of the responses overlapped with other questions and suggestions included training for tutor, evaluation of courses, raising the profile of adult education within Kildare VEC as well as the provision of a new category of tutor with teaching, administration and co-ordinating responsibilities were all cited as changes that would assist middle managers to achieve better outcomes. Management and leadership skills are required of middle managers and Glatter said: 'the internal operation of educational institutions, and also with their relationships with their environment, that is, the communities in which they are set, and with the governing bodies to which they are formally responsible' (1979: 16).

Improvements

Middle managers were asked what improvements could be made that would enhance adult education (19: 8) and to suggest improvement in the same eight areas as tutors:

a) Promotion and advertisement

Promotion was considered very important by middle managers and several individuals said that a lot has been done recently to promote adult education. The single brand image was highlighted by a VTOS co-ordinator suggesting that standalone VECs are losing out to other organisations when it comes to recognition. He said 'I always feel we come after FÁS. Whenever there is

any publicity, the VEC and the work the VEC is doing for employment creation, for re-training, up-skilling is very rarely mentioned. It's because the VEC is thirty-three different organisations and there is only one FÁS'. It was suggested that promoting the VEC should be through an identifiable image because in the past, programmes were doing their own advertisement resulting in the public lacking awareness of the whole service and the wide provision of Kildare VEC. One literacy co-ordinator maintained that 'we need a more cohesive approach and it needs to be identifiable. We need adult education centres that are identifiable'. A principal suggested that greater use be made of websites and the internet to promote the service and the on-line enrolment has been very helpful but there is the need for a database of users and email information to them.

Middle managers, who know the importance of publicising VEC courses, strongly communicated the need for change. A principal said that 'in terms of promotion, I feel we are not aggressive enough, maybe we are a bit too passive and we expect the students to come to us. We need to contact the public in a different way'. A literacy co-ordinator summed up the situation regarding promotion when she said that 'it was very fragmented in the past. There was no definite image for the VEC so I think people outside of the VEC and even those working within the service weren't totally aware of the VEC in its entirety. I think there needs to be a defined image'. Overall, it was maintained that the identity of adult education should be strengthened, both internally within the VEC and externally with other organisations. The IVEA publication *A History of the Irish Vocational Education Association 1902-2002* highlights the monumental work and educational development that has taken place in VECs over the past eighty years but unfortunately, much of this work has not been promoted and acknowledged.

b) Variety of courses

A number of factors were commented in relation to the effectiveness and responsiveness of the VEC. Firstly, the slow pace of change within the VEC. One principal said 'courses are slow to change and VECs don't rapidly adapt to change'. Secondly, there is poor market research to ascertain the needs of

students and another interviewee stated, 'that there is no point in advertising stuff that is constantly not taking off'. Thirdly, the fact that courses are sometimes built around existing tutors rather than the other way round with one principal stating 'as an organisation, we have our tutors and we want the students to fit in with the tutors rather than the other way around'. This point was further confirmed by a VTOS co-ordinator who made the point that when courses such as VTOS and PLCs were established in the 1980's to meet the needs of the unemployed, those courses might not be relevant or what is needed in meeting the needs of people within the current economic climate. When speaking at the launch of SOLAS in 27th July 2011, Minister Ruairi Quinn said 'SOLAS will also ensure that there is a shift away from skills provision for traditional occupations like construction which have seen a huge fall in employment and a greater focus on training and education programmes which prepare jobseekers and other learners for occupations in growth areas like the services, ICT, medical devices, food and biopharma sectors'.

c) Facilities and equipment

When middle managers responded to this question, the contrast was evident between facilities available in schools and the much poorer facilities available in adult education centres. A night class director said 'that people expect good facilities when they are paying for classes'. A VTOS co-ordinator highlighted a gap in ability to respond to education needs when she said 'we don't have the practical facilities for skills-based programmes, particularly for the male student. The number of males students is increasing all the time and courses shouldn't be just academic. The academic will come if the other practical subjects are there'. Facilities are an important consideration when planning for responding with appropriate courses. Having purpose built adult education facilities was suggested which would be located within the hub of the community, the presence of which would serve to identify the importance of adult education just as a library or school building identifies their importance in the community. Several managers in centres stated that the expenditure on rented premises for adult education was a waste of money. Achieving this would require what was already stated, a capital budget from the DES. Interestingly, the White Paper *Learning for Life: White Paper on*

Adult Education in 2000 makes reference to the IVEA submission for capital for the establishment of Adult Education centres which would well serve the community and could be utilised by a number of agencies for a number of purposes in the promotion, provision and delivery of programmes/courses, advice centres etc. to meet the needs of adults (2000: 82).

d) Accreditation of courses

FETAC is the main provider of certification for adult education and the fact that this provision is better known, particularly by employers was regarded as positive. A night school director believed that Kildare VEC certification provision should not be limited to FETAC and suggested that 'more professional accreditation should be offered to students and that links should be forged with neighbouring third level institutions'. It was suggested that all courses should receive certification by awarding bodies or by Kildare VEC in order to provide recognition for learning that has taken place. The practical issues related to providing certification were also discussed and that the VEC will have to provide greater level of resources for tutors and centres in order to maintain the levels of certification.

e) Progression routes for learners

PLC co-ordinators believed that there should be a greater connection between courses they provide and third level institutions as students who study professional courses very often wish to progress further. Analysis of the data revealed that what was missing according to some interviewees was not the provision of guidance information as a service but the communication that this service was available to students. A literacy co-ordinator said that 'there are plenty of routes, they just need to be promoted'. Appropriateness of Kildare VEC provision was also referred to by another PLC co-ordinator when she stressed the importance of working in collaboration with others, particularly in establishing links with business and industry. She said that 'there should be stronger links with business because we are dealing with adults, if we could have some links with industry and perhaps sending people that they want trained up. I think that would be very beneficial to us. It would be good if businesses supported education and the courses we provide'. The

2010 OECD Report, *Learning for Jobs* complimented Ireland saying that 'the national qualifications framework is comprehensive, integrating both vocational and general qualifications and includes a strong commitment to the avoidance of dead-ends and pathways of progression' (2010: 5).

f) Training for tutors and co-ordinators

In general, the responses by all middle managers expressed over-whelming support for more training with the suggestion from a literacy co-ordinator that there is 'a need for more training now, it is very important because we have branched out into different stuff'. It was stated by co-ordinators that individual training is taking place in all centres, however, it was also important that full VEC organisational training should take place. Other aspects of training that were highlighted as necessary were the need for managerial training in order to lead and motivate staff. Training was also suggested in areas such as HR and a particular suggestion by Youthreach co-ordinators was training in relation to young people and the area of drug issues. A principal suggested the need for induction training for new tutors as 'there is no induction process for adult education tutors. Just because you have a qualification doesn't mean you can go into a class and teach a course. It is a weakness in the system'. Overall, it was suggested that countywide training would inform and unite all staff and management and as one co-ordinator said 'I think Kildare VEC as an organisation should have a learning policy for its staff, it should support its staff in knowing what is available in terms of training'. While writing of school teachers, the message of the 2010 Joint Progress Report of the Council and Commission could equally be stated of tutors in adult education centres, 'professional development for school leaders is vital because they are responsible for creating an environment in which pupils and teachers benefit from schools as learning communities' (2010: 3).

g) VEC management structures

A considerable amount of interviewees cited communication as a key difficulty with the VEC management structure. One Youthreach co-ordinator commented on the management structures by saying that 'Head Office was very far removed, they forget it (*education*) is a service we are providing and

there is a need for open communication from the top down and the bottom up'. Another Literacy co-ordinator said that 'my impression is that there is a hierarchy and more value is placed on the academic in certain schools, there is a lower level of value on others within that structure'. Overall, internal communication within the VEC was described as 'poor and disjointed with one section not communicating with another'. Overall, middle managers expressed the belief that their work was not understood and the difficulties and challenges they faced in delivering programmes to adults, not appreciated.

A VTOS co-ordinator spoke of those in administrative positions and said that 'the management is meant to be providing the support for us to do our job but what it can appear is that they are the structure, they are the core and we are just the foot soldiers, when I believe that the emphasis should be the other way around'. The lack of understanding was put down to the fact that all people working in Kildare VEC knew what second-level schools were and the work schools entailed. However, this was not the case in relation to the work of adult education because it did not always fit into a perceived second-level educational model. In *Educational Leadership and Management*, Bush discusses six managerial models and explains that no organisation can be explained by using only a single approach. However, research among middle managers of Kildare VEC adult education services reveals a leaning towards the 'formal model' which, according to Bush, has 'dominated the early stages of theory development in educational management. Formal structure, rational decision-making and 'top-down' leadership were regarded as the central concepts of effective management and attention was given to refining these processes to increase efficiency' (2003: 178).

h) General resources

In terms of facilities, IT software was highlighted as a requirement, particularly for the Literacy service and the suggestion was made that an specialist should be available to test such products in order that this software be made available throughout the county. The use of technology was considered

important and a Literacy co-ordinator suggested that a county the size of Kildare should have Colleges of Further Education.

A question asked of middle managers regarding what changes would they make within Kildare VEC if they were CEO (19: 12) provided interesting data, though sometimes confirming, restating and overlapping responses already made to earlier questions. Several middle managers saw the need to create a more united organisation and one Literacy organiser suggested a gathering 'were VEC staff were brought together for meetings with the intention of creating an awareness of the whole organisation' the outcome of which would bring all the parts of Kildare VEC together under a single vision. Again, improvement in communication would take place according to a VTOS co-ordinator who said 'they would change communication style and highlight the importance of all aspects of the organisation with adult education as a viable component of the overall service'. As CEO, one principal would like to create a better working relationship between the administration section of Kildare VEC and the rest of the organisation that would recognise and respect the work of middle managers in schools and centres throughout the county. An additional suggestion was made for a central location for organising all the adult education provision and an improvement in the use of technology for sharing of information. The need for organisational planning in consultation with staff was another function middle managers would encourage if they became CEO of Kildare VEC.

In conclusion, the middle managers were asked if they had any final thoughts or comments on VEC adult education (19: 13 & 14) and they stressed the importance of Kildare VEC continuing to develop and respond to the changing needs. The place of adult education was again described as the Cinderella of the education system and a suggestion was made to change the term of adult education to further education which might improve its standing in the eyes of the public. Once again, integration of provision was considered important along with the need for the VEC to cease re-acting to change but adopt an integrated, creative and responsive position tailored to the needs of individuals and communities throughout County Kildare through daytime or

night classes, part-time or full-time courses. One interviewee stated how she believed that 25 years ago, Kildare VEC was ground breaking in its adult education provision in its programmes and philosophy. She thought that such development had stopped for a time but it is now moving again as the service needs continued development in the current economic climate without losing its core values developed over the years. Another interviewee stated that overall data needs to be shared with all parts of the adult education service and listening to customers is important as is market research in order to determine the most suitable responses to educational needs of adults.

According to the analysis of data from middle managers, Kildare VEC is effective in some of its adult education provision, such as:

- it has good quality tutors
- the variety of courses
- good facilities in new schools

However, some suggestions for achieving a greater level of effectiveness was for Kildare VEC:

- to improve its communication system
- to improve its tutor training programmes
- be more responsive to the needs of learners

In the White Paper *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*, one stated aspect that should be shaping adult education is 'flexibility and adaptation to ensure that programmes offer a wider range of choices which are appropriate to learning, domestic and employment needs of learners' (2000: 85).

5.1.4 Senior Managers

Having completed research among fourteen VEC middle management staff to ascertain the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, I analysed the data to uncover the emerging themes: image, responsiveness, high quality courses and improved communication. I then devised sixteen questions for interviews (Appendix 21) that I would conduct with three senior managers. Each senior manager was

interviewed for 45 minutes and a summary of the interviews can be found in Appendix 22.

General

The introductory questions set the scene and established the starting point for each interview with the senior managers, for example, how long have you been a senior manager (23: 1) and did you always aspire to become a senior manager in Kildare VEC (23: 2). Each of the interviewees had been in that position within their VEC from one year to over ten years. Arising from their previous educational position, two of the three senior managers were happy to take on a higher level of responsibility within their VEC.

Learners

In order to examine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service, senior managers were asked how adult learners could be better served by Kildare VEC (21: 15) and which group of adults required particular VEC attention (21: 11) and finally, would the VEC be able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training (21: 9). While these questions were focused on how best to respond to the needs of learners, they are also connected with the capacity and the capability of Kildare VEC to respond to changing education provision.

The importance of consultation with the learners was suggested by a senior manager in response to the question of how adults could be better served. A greater flexibility of provision at times and in places that suit the needs of learners would also help. Another suggestion was made that would help the adult education sector was a centre evaluation which if carried out, would help identify areas of change. Regarding what group should receive VEC priority, the unemployed and early school leavers with low skills were suggested. Another suggested group was that some PLC programmes were addressed specifically at women returning to the labour market. As regards whether Kildare VEC would be able to respond to increased demands for educational and training courses, it was considered that it would be a struggle for VECs to

respond to the need for training for the unemployed according to a senior manager. The reason cited was the obvious lack of trained personnel with the required competencies available to carry out such training. A solution was to bring in the necessary personnel and to use the VEC facilities available in schools in evenings and at weekends. Another senior manager maintained that VEC structures were less flexible today due to legislative changes whereas the adult education sector was better at responding to changing needs in the past. As the analysis deepened, areas of provision began to emerge where Kildare VEC was less effective. The need for flexible learning to meet the needs of adults was referred to in 2000 in the White Paper *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (2000: 82).

Adult Education Staff

Senior managers were asked what they thought were the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff (21: 8). Two senior managers stressed the need for qualifications with one manager stating that 'we should endeavour at all times to employ teachers/tutors that are fully qualified and who wish to continuously up-skill themselves'. Currently, the difficulty lies with the fact that teaching qualifications are regulated by the Teaching Council and are subject based. The challenge for tutors of adult education lies in the fact that to perform their work, qualifications as well as skills and experience are required of them. Establishing adult education tutors based solely on qualifications was rejected by one senior manager with suggestion that generic skills were an important starting point rather than qualifications as Kildare VEC adult education service would become less flexible if people could only teach their subjects of qualification. Another manager proposed that while trained personnel were necessary in the adult sector, there was also a requirement for appropriate induction of staff. By April 2013, all teaching staff paid from the public exchequer will be required to have a qualification recognised by the Teaching Council. Work is well advanced in establishing recognition of VEC tutors in adult and further education by the Teaching Council and third level colleges providing specific recognised qualifications in adult education.

Kildare VEC

A series of questions were asked of senior managers seeking to discover their priorities upon commencing their current position (21: 3) and subsequently identify their priorities after some years in a senior management position (21: 4). Senior managers had various priorities relating to schools and adult education and these included uniting both of sectors within the VEC. It was believed by one senior manager that second level schools could benefit from the experience and work practices of adult education. Another priority was the review of self-financing class or night classes as it was stated that the content of these classes had not kept pace with the needs of people and society today. A more specific priority was the provision of distance learning, e-learning and other modes of delivery. Specifically with regard to adult education, securing capital funding was also a stated priority. Another senior manager highlighted the priority of achieving quality teaching and learning and increased professional development was needed in order to achieve the quality learning among staff. While a couple of the senior managers had been in their position for a couple of years, some of their priorities had changed, for example, to secure capital funding CPD for all staff within the organisation. Overall, a priority for the organisation was to grow the educational provision. A third senior manager identified the creation of internal awareness among the different co-ordinators as a priority in order to bring about progression routes as well as the creation of a greater awareness of the enormous work of Kildare VEC. Senior managers covered a wide range of priorities for Kildare VEC and at the heart of their vision was the betterment of the adult education service and the VEC staff.

A core element of this study is evaluating the effectiveness of Kildare VEC so senior managers were asked how effective they would rate Kildare VEC as an educational provider (21: 5) and what educational changes are needed to structures or services in the current economic climate (21: 7). Positive comments were made by all senior managers with two stating that Kildare VEC had a proven track record in effectiveness, that it delivers to the highest standard with many notable successes each year and when asked more specifically about adult education, it was said that 'the huge success had been

achieved in the last couple of years and these were attributed to the work of the AEO. When asked what changes were needed, two senior managers singled out PLCs for comment with one person stating that 'PLCs had been placed in schools with low growth of second-level pupils and this action benefited school teachers but had the effect of creating isolated and duplication of courses'. Further comments included 'PLC programmes should be delivered according to the needs of the community as distinct from delivering because there is a teacher of a particular subject in a second-level school'. Another senior manager summed up the situation by stating that 'courses are provided to suit the schools and are therefore, not meeting the needs of the learners' and another manager said that 'every year, the PLC sector put on educational programmes but I cannot be sure that there is a mechanism or structure to ensure with transparency that the skills they are providing are meeting the needs of industry, which is constantly evolving'. While the VEC was declared to be effective on several levels, obviously the situation in relation to PLCs could call into question the overall effectiveness of Kildare VEC.

Another senior manager cited an example where effectiveness could be questioned and this related to the short-term skills training is provided to individuals for the labour market. Short-term courses could have the effect of de-skilling individuals. The manager said 'research is required both at local and national levels in order to determine the real needs and then to train people in these skills'.

Other questions asked of senior managers were if Kildare VEC was flexible in its structure to respond to increasing educational demands (21:10). One senior manager said that 'current circumstances were hindering flexibility. The moratorium on recruitment was a hindrance to flexibility as is the work embargo by Trade Unions. The Public Service or "Croke Park" Agreement is a commitment by public servants and their managers to work together to change the way in which the Public Service does its business so that both its cost and the number of people working in the Public Service can fall significantly, while continuing to meet the need for services and improve the

experience of service users. Existing structures were not aiding flexibility and PLCs was given as an example because of their location within schools and the perception that they served the needs of employing teachers more than the students. Also the mind-set of some staff could also be described as a hindrance to flexibility'. Research would suggest that flexibility is missing within the current structures.

When questioned in relation to the role of Kildare VEC in assisting the development of the smart economy (21: 12), one senior manager said that 'the programmes that we are offering, such as, PLCs and VTOS are possibly out-dated, certainly some of them are and we need to look at what are the societal needs in a changing Ireland. We need to address that and deliver to the needs of the community as distinct from delivering (subjects) because we have a teacher with a particular subject'. Once again there was a reference by two senior managers to PLC courses with one manager stating that 'the structures are wrong because courses are put on to suit the schools and therefore are not meeting the real needs of people'. Another senior manager said that Kildare VEC was capable of responding to the demands of the Smart economy because significant investment had been made in IT hardware. What was needed was 'the collaboration of programmes such as BTEI and Labour Activation funding within schools resources' and for this to take place in the context of established links with industry and third level institutions. The EGFSN said that 'the provision of education and training courses should reflect the needs of the individuals and enterprise. This would foster improved linkages between the education system and enterprise' (2007: 15).

Adult Education

Following from a response by a school Principal in which he described adult education as the Cinderella service of the VEC, senior managers were asked how the importance of adult education can be enhanced (21: 13). Views differed among senior managers and it was believed by one that the negativity resulted from an attitude among adult education workers. Another manager agreed the adult education was the Cinderella service of the VEC because the majority of CEOs were school Principals and when appointed CEO,

continues to focus their attention on schools. In addition, an unhelpful perception among the public was that night classes were what constituted adult education within the VEC provision.

Improvements

Each member of the senior management team were asked what improvements could be made that would enhance adult education (21: 6). Senior managers were asked to suggest improvement in the same seven areas with five similar questions asked of middle managers and two new areas in the light of the analysis of the responses from the middle managers.

a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes

The relevance of courses to the needs of the community was highlighted by senior managers as well as 'what audit is carried among the public to determine their needs' and the importance of consultation with recipients of courses was stressed. However, it was believed that the basic and community education and BTEI were meeting the needs of learners but that the structures and provision of programmes such as VTOS and PLCs were not as relevant as when they were first established. Part-time programmes were considered to be more flexible in their response to changing times. Overall, conducting needs analysis was considered important in order to have relevant programmes. Required courses also entail a community dimension which provides local social and educational learning within the community.

b) Training for teachers, tutors and co-ordinators

Whole organisation training was considered very important by senior managers and it should be carried out in a planned approach within Kildare VEC. A senior manager stated his commitment to training when he said 'staff are our greatest commodity, we have to continue investing in them, provide professional development and support them' and he went on to say that training should be provided at all levels within the organisation.

c) Strategic planning

Organisational planning in Kildare VEC was considered important by senior managers and that planning should be inclusive of all individuals within the organisation. What was important was that 'each service should try to see the bigger picture and see where they fit in the overall picture'. It was suggested that all planning within adult education should be linked into the VEC Education Plan. The EGFSN pointed out that 'globalisation requires a flexible workforce. Ireland, as a small open economy, must be able to respond rapidly to changes in the world economic and technological environment; only a well-educated population is able to respond in this way' (2007: 51).

d) Facilities and equipment

One senior manager said that 'I have been in a couple of centres and I would say that the people are fantastic and that is worth anything but the facilities, such as, the condition of the buildings and the poor IT, are a disaster in every way'. The issue of communication between Head Office and the centres was raised as part of this question and it was suggested that a better understanding by administration of the educational work in centres that have poor facilities. The need for greater use of facilities was also raised in the National Report on Lifelong Learning in Ireland when it suggested that 'schools are publicly provided and well equipped resources that should be used at evenings, weekends, vacation times, etc. to facilitate lifelong learning opportunities' (2008: 29).

e) VEC management structures

Discussing the management structures with senior managers did not provoke a significant reaction. One senior manager said that 'some within the adult education sector may feel left out or isolated. What is happening within the regions through the work of the AEO is helpful but some within the service still feel isolated from the overall VEC service'. It was also claimed that some schools may also feel isolated and are happy to work within the local community without any reference to the VEC organisation or the bigger educational picture.

f) General resources

Among the senior managers, there was a slight difference of opinion as regards resources within the VEC and the adult education service. One manager said they were adequate while another included facilities with resources and said they were very poor, lacking equipment, IT as well as advice on IT. The issue of rented premises and the amount of money being paid on rent within the adult education sector was described as 'wrong and should not be taking place'.

g) Promotion and advertisement

It was suggested by senior managers that there is a need for clear corporate branding that identifies Kildare VEC for its educational performance. All sections of the service, schools and adult education centres should use the branded Kildare VEC logo on all publications - notepaper, posters, etc. However, one manager cautioned that '*image*' is not everything and of the 'reliance on glossy brochures and stressed that the importance of the quality of the work is of primary importance'. Knowles said that 'a programme is more effective if its parts are tied together with a theme, slogan, title or symbol ... it should appear on all promotion pieces - advertisements, printed materials and letterheads - in order that the relationship among the various pieces is immediately evident' (1980: 179).

Towards the end of the interview, each senior manager was asked if they were Minister for Education and Skills, what would they do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC (21: 14). Positive and constructive suggestions were received in response to this question. Suggestions from senior managers included:

a) Streamlining and formalising the adult education sector because of the multiplicity of programmes, each with different rules of engagement and different reporting procedures. It was stated that the current structure 'has resulted in energy being dissipated and a greater synergy would be delivered by the creation of an integrated system of adult and further education'.

b) Establishing a new grade of employee, an 'Adult and Further Education Tutor (AFET)'. It was stated by one senior manager that 'the current

employees in AFE do not have contracts, salary structures are lacking and there is no consistency in the State as to how they are paid or what conditions of employment are provided'. In visualising the competencies of the AFE Tutor, s/he was described as having 'a myriad of skills, life skills, practical skills and having the capacity to empathise with the client that they are dealing with and bring them from a very low base and low morale to a level where they can progress into higher FETAC'.

c) Provision of capital funding for the adult and further education sector.

d) PLCs should be removed from second level schools, that middle management positions in VEC centres should be restored and better training provided for all staff, including senior management.

Some of proposals made by the senior managers were actions referred to in *Learning for Life: the White Paper on adult education* published in 2000. A career path for practitioners 'will be addressed in the period ahead' (2000: 154) and 'the government is concerned with providing long-term funding (2000:116). These proposals have not been acted upon in the twelve years since the publication of the White Paper.

At the conclusion of the interview, each senior manager were asked if they had any overall thoughts on VEC adult education, its relevance and its impact and how it could make a bigger impact in the future (21: 16). Comments were made about the difficult position Kildare VEC finds itself in on occasions when parents have their expectations of the schooling system while others view VEC schools as 'techs'. A new system was suggested by one senior manager of the introduction of a European model with both academic and VET schools of excellence and that form of school would meet the needs of clients as well as industry. An earlier suggestion was re-stated that academic and technological facilities in VEC schools should be utilised for significant periods throughout the year. Consultation with the people and on-going research was needed in order to provide relevant and responsive courses was re-stated and in order to ensure that Kildare VEC is responding appropriately, there should be staff training, professional development and a support mechanism in place to assist new staff particularly staff experiencing

difficulties within the VEC system. Finally, Kildare VEC must expand its adult education sector according to a senior manager and be more pro-active in addressing the educational needs of learners and communities throughout Kildare.

According to the analysis of data from senior managers, Kildare VEC is effective in some of its adult education provision, such as:

- the high standard of some PLC buildings and FETAC examination results
- changes that have been initiated by the AEO, such regionalisation of the services and the greater use of ICT

However, some suggestions for achieving a greater level of effectiveness for Kildare VEC were:

- develop a strategic planning programme
- PLC courses should be linked to progression and employment
- review some of its existing educational programmes, such as, VTOS, PLCs and night classes

Many of the areas raised for discussion by interviewees call for a leadership response from with Kildare VEC in order to create a greater level of effectiveness. Ruth describes the skills and qualities required of a leader within any organisation as to 'collaborate with people and *facilitate* the process of finding answers to these questions. This puts the emphasis on the leader being a facilitator, a listener, a team builder, an enabler, a developer of other people and fundamentally, a thinker' (2006: 5). He goes on to say that 'true leadership is able to grasp and communicate the *big picture*. This raises people's sights beyond the immediate and short-term perspective and shows what is possible' (2006: 22).

5.1.5 CEOs from External VECs

The senior managers within Kildare VEC are called upon to provide the necessary management and leadership for Kildare VEC during this period of change within the organisation. Having completed research among three

VEC senior management staff to ascertain the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, I analysed the data and uncovered emerging themes:

- a) responsiveness to learners
- b) strategic planning
- c) VEC branding
- d) creating progression links to employment.

I then used the similar sixteen questions (Appendix 23) asked of Kildare VEC senior managers and conducted three 45 minute interviews with CEOs from external VECs. A summary of the interviews conducted with the three CEOs from external VEC can be found in Appendix 24. Through this set of interviews, I sought to obtain an outside view of VEC provision which would further assist with the triangulation process to ascertain the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service. These three CEOs also have responsibility for providing management and leadership within their own VECs and information gather will help with the triangulation process. In conducting these three interviews, I anticipated receiving what Ruth described as an 'inspiring vision articulated in a clear and accurate picture of past experience and current reality, painted in a picture of an attractive future and details of how people might move from one to the other' (2006: 22).

General

The introductory questions set the scene and established the starting point for each interview with the three CEOs from external VEC, for example, how long have you been a CEO (23: 1) and did they always aspire to become a CEO (23: 2). Each of the interviewees had been in their current organisational position between one year and ten years and no interviewee admitted aspiring to the position they now held.

Learners

In order to examine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service and VECs in general, the three CEOs from external VECs were asked how adult learners could be better served by the VEC (23: 15) and which group of adults required particular VEC attention (23: 11) and finally, would the VEC be

able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training (23: 9). While these questions were focused on how best to respond to the needs of learners, they are also connected with the capability of Kildare VEC and VECs in general to respond to the changing education provision. In answer to how adult learners could be better served by the VEC, one CEO suggested that if 'the thirty-three VECs came together to agree a particular design for adult education that would be coherent in its provision and in agreement about what VECs provide', that would aid learners. Another CEO emphasised the need for progression routes for learners that would provide better certification and enable learners to move to different providers. Another said 'VECs cannot and should not think they have to be responsible for all provision'. As regards what group should receive VEC priority, it was stated that the unemployed should be the main target that VECs are working with in order to re-train and re-skill those with obsolete skills or those who lack the basic generic skills. A final question asked of CEOs in relation to learners was would the VEC be able to respond to increased demands for education and training for the unemployed. The answer was that VECs would not be able to respond to the expected demands unless, as was stated, 'there was a change in the current way of doing things'. The way of doing things referred to the system and the structures within which VECs operate. This response has implications for the effectiveness of VECs. The provision of up-skilling and certification by the VEC was considered important and as a providers 'should strive to ensure that all courses designed to accommodate students who do not complete upper secondary education lead to a qualification within the National Framework of Qualifications and lead to certification, ideally at Levels 4 & 5' (2007: 96).

Adult Education Staff

The three CEOs were asked what they thought were the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff (23: 8). All CEOs maintained that every VEC staff member, including tutors should have qualifications in adult education, recognised by the Teaching Council. One CEO stated that VECs 'should be unashamed about saying VEC adult

education staff should have relevant qualifications to a high standard and that people can be supported to require them and develop them'. Another CEO said that the adult and further education section required the best tutors with capabilities beyond cognitive knowledge and with the ability to display empathy and understanding for the needs and concerns of the adult learners. The White Paper - Learning for Life emphasised the need for 'a highly trained corps of adult educators and trainers' (2000: 150) and how the onus is on the VEC to secure trained personnel.

General VEC provision

A series of questions were asked of the three CEOs in order to establish their priorities prior to commencing their current position (23: 3) and identify their priorities after they had taken up their position as CEO (23: 4). Priorities which CEOs had on beginning their work were that they wanted to improve the educational provision at primary, second-level, adult and further education and the overall VEC administration. The development of integrated programmes for adult education, creating a sense of belonging, organisation cohesion and identity were also regarded as priorities. The CEOs recognised the opportunity 'to develop the agenda of integrating programmes for adult education recognising the huge challenge in reviewing the programmes'. When asked how their priorities changed after some time in the position, one CEO said their priorities were the same but they had to be addressed in a different way than first envisaged. Staff development and professional development was seen as a high priority which would transverse all the services and aspects of the VEC. This was seen as particularly important when VECs and especially the adult education service was facing so much uncertainty with changing structures resulting from VEC amalgamations and the creation of SOLAS. The European co-operation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 strategy emphasises the importance of professional development when it says 'there is a convergence in the roles of teachers and trainers: a trainer in a work-based setting will need more pedagogical competences and must play a supportive and mentoring role; while a teacher in a school will need, like a trainer, a good understanding of work practices. This convergence should be reflected in policies for

recruitment and continuing development of skills and competences, which should be validated and reflected in their career status' (2010: 7).

The three CEOs were asked how effective they would rate VECs in general as an educational provider (23: 5) and what educational changes are needed to structures or services in the current economic climate (23: 7). Overall, it was stated that VECs are very effective organisations but for some, they may not be efficient. High levels of bureaucracy can result in more time and finance being spent on administration than on delivery. One CEO said VECs were excellent providers but the quality or the level of provision could be patchy and it may vary within VECs. Again, it was said that VECs are very effective but there is huge room for improvement. As regards changes needed to VEC structures, the CEOs said that VEC adult education now existed within a different economic climate. Various factors, such as, the moratorium on employment, is having an effect, particularly on the ability to respond to the educational and training needs of adults. It was suggested by one CEO that a different way of thinking is required and that some of the older models need to be changed in favour of more over-arching personnel across services, such as research officers or the ability to appoint teaching staff to the VEC adult education service, rather than to a particular programme. The 2010 OECD Report, Education at a Glance concurs with CEOs sentiments when it says that 'despite compelling evidence of the economic and social benefits of education, at a time of tight budgets, there is a strong need for effectiveness and efficiency in the education systems' response to the skill needs of a fast-changing labour market and countries must find new ways to generate greater value for money from educational investments' (2010: 12).

Other questions asked of the three CEOs if VECs in general were flexible in their structures to respond to increasing educational demands (23:10). One CEO said that flexibility was the cornerstone of the VECs success. Another CEO believed VECs were extremely flexible and has shown its adaptability over the years with all the new programmes they had introduced. A third CEO maintained that 'flexibility didn't mean being exploited, it means doing things differently and being supported to do it but there is a challenge in terms of

getting the culture of the organisation to change'. When asked were VECs capable of responding to the demands of the Smart economy (23:12), opinions differed among the CEOs. Some CEOs suggested that VECs lacked the capacity while others thought that there might be the possibility if there was a change in operation and VECs adopt an intra-agency approach. It would also require a sizable CPD investment in core staff in order to stimulate them into creating a whole service approach to education and training. Once again, VECs are depicted as effective organisations within the constraints of existing structures and the current economic restrictions. Once again, CPD was considered importance and the 'convergence in the roles of teachers and trainers'.

Adult Education

The three CEOs from external VEC were asked how the importance of adult education could be enhanced (23: 13). The adult education service is providing for basic education up to FETAC Level 6, from early school leavers to 90 years olds and another CEO proposed that education should be available free to all adults up to Level 4, no matter what age they left school. One CEO stated that adult education had 'piece-meal' structure because of separate funding streams along with highly qualified tutors working part-time with no career path within a system that has gained the perception of a Cinderella service in comparison to the VEC second-level system. Funding within the sector had increased considerable over the years but the service lacks a cohesive joined-up approach according to a CEO. Again, structures are affecting the effectiveness of provision. The Irish Progress Report to the European Commission (2003) highlighted one key focus of the Irish legislation and policy documents from 1995 to 2001 was 'to ensure a supply of high quality manpower to address the skills needs, widening access to lifelong learning in the context of an integrated approach to education and training' (2003: 2).

Improvements

All three CEOs were asked what improvements could be made that would enhance adult education (23: 6). The interviewees were asked to suggest

improvement to the same seven areas asked of Kildare VEC senior managers and two new areas in the light of the analysis of the responses from the middle managers.

a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes

One CEO said that 'if you are looking at responding to the social economic needs or the needs of the labour market, then the content will need to be reviewed and changed to make it more relevant because in any good curriculum, good educationalist would be continually reviewing the content and its relevance to the target market'. It was also cited that course content was as good as the staff and their ability to review and renew courses and programmes. The EGFSN said that 'substantial evidence points to the fact that certain key generic skills are growing in relative importance in the workplace: basic skills (in particular, literacy), people-related skills and conceptual skills. These skills should be prioritised and embedded into all publicly funded education and training provision in so far as possible.' (2007: 93).

b) Training for teacher, tutors and co-ordinators

It was agreed by CEOs that there is a need for training and up-skilling of VEC personnel. One CEO also stated that when looking at the VEC adult education service, an agreed baseline or standardisation in terms of teacher/tutor qualifications should be established. Once again, having a nationally agreed qualification system for all tutors was similar to senior managers of Kildare VEC.

c) Strategic planning

Strategic planning was said to be very important and one CEO stated that the first step in the process was to develop a vision for the VEC and the biggest obstacle to changing structures was the fragmentation of programmes within the VEC adult education services. The desire was expressed by one CEO to be able to bring the services together in a more integrated adult and further education service, eliminating fragmentation by history or by geography or by funding streams or even by target groups.

d) Facilities and equipment

It was agreed how disappointing it was that there was no capital investment in the adult education sector and what was needed was a multiplex campus for adult education services. Having programmes dispersed does not provide efficiency and economy of scale. It was mentioned that the Department of Education and Skills only deals with school building and does not have a building programme for adult education. Facilities were considered inadequate in terms of further education and programmes such as basic education and Youthreach according to a CEO.

e) VEC management structures

CEOs responses varied with one stating that there was nothing particularly wrong with the management structures as they are and another CEO stating that the current structures need reviewing. It was agreed that every VEC should have a senior management team and it was suggested that sometimes it is assumed that people who have core management skills because they have been appointed to particular positions within the adult education service. It was said that the number one influence for an effective organisation is leadership. The need for whole service training as was previously stated by senior managers of Kildare VEC.

f) General resources

The question of resources was very topical in the current economic environment and it was agreed by all CEOs that VECs will have to be more efficient and more creative in the use of resources and that they will need to think more carefully in times of economic recession. VECs will need to plan the kind of resources required and how they can be best targeted for educational use. One important point was made that there has been a waste of adult education resources around the country with the very high amount of money being spent on renting premises on short-term leases.

g) Promotion and advertisement

There was strong consensus among the CEOs that VECs were very good at providing a service but were very poor at selling the huge amount of work taking place throughout the country. One CEO said that advertisement and promotion 'could certainly be improved if there was the promotion of a single brand image, which highlighted the fact that VECs stand for everything that is good and excellent in education in this country. However as one CEO said, 'because services have got separate budgets, they go off and advertise themselves separately and people don't know they belong to the VEC family'. Another CEO suggested that promotion and advertising should not only be at individual VEC level, but nationally as well, just like what happened at the Ploughing Championship. This was an example of where VECs came together and created a common website and a particular identifiable image for a particular occasion.

Towards the end of the interview, each of the three CEOs was asked if they were Minister for Education and Skills, what would they do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC? (23: 14). Responses covered suggested areas such as, a) the financial and structural changes that should be brought about through increase funding and allowing greater flexibility with the funding streams. Finance should be made available for capital projects such as adult education multiplexes that would provide integrated education within the community, b) that every adult in the Ireland should receive education up to Level 4 on the National Quality Framework. Similar to the responses from Kildare VEC senior managers, the CEOs suggested the provision of capital funding and the change to flexible avenues of spending was suggested.

At the conclusion of each interview, the three CEOs were asked if they had any overall thoughts on VEC adult education, its relevance and its impact and how it could make a bigger impact in the future (23: 16). CEOs were positive about the contributions VECs are making to the provision of adult education in Ireland. As one CEO said, 'VECs do a unique thing uniquely'. According to another CEO, VECs have developed a huge understanding of what needs to

be done and how it needs to be done. It was clearly stated that VECs have the capacity and the experience to respond creatively to deliver adult education that is relevant provided they can organise themselves collectively to create the appropriate educational structure that which is required for the 21st century. In its submission to the DES regarding the future of the VECs, the IVEA said 'We firmly believe that VECs, as they are currently constituted, have a huge amount to offer Irish society – both now and in the future. Indeed, we believe that they are capable of efficiently and effectively delivering new services and supports to education/training – services and supports that that can make our education/training system more coherent and effective than it is currently' (2000: 22).

According to the analysis of data from interviews with the CEOs from external VECs, VECs in general are effective in some of its adult education provision, such as:

- the flexibility and adaptability of the VEC organisations
- VECs understanding of what needs to be done and how it needs to be done

However, some suggestions for achieving a greater level of effectiveness was for VECs:

- to re-brand the work of the VEC and the services provided
- to provide tutors with recognised qualifications
- to improve structures in order to be responsive to educational needs of learners

5.1.6 IVEA Executive

Having completed research among three CEOs from external VECs to ascertain the effectiveness of Kildare VEC as well as VECs in general, I analysed the data and uncovered emerging themes: re-branding VEC image, changes to the system, tutor qualifications and strategic planning. I then used the similar sixteen questions (Appendix 25) asked of the three CEOs and conducted a 45 minute interview with a IVEA Executive. A summary of the interviews conducted with the IVEA Executive can be found in Appendix 26.

General

The introductory questions set the scene and established the starting point for the interview with the IVEA Executive, for example, how long have you been an IVEA Executive (25: 1) and did he aspire to become an IVEA Executive (25: 2). The interviewee was in their current organisational position for over thirteen years and did not aspire to the position he now held.

Learners

In order to examine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service and VECs in general, the IVEA Executive was asked how adult learners could be better served by VECs (25: 15). In answer the IVEA Executive said that the current VEC structures are part of the problem. He said the adult learner should be able to access learning at times that suits them and centres and schools should be open 24/7, at weekends and in the evening time all year round. Staffing will need to become more flexible and the fabric of buildings improved. When asked which group of adults required particular VEC attention (25: 11), the IVEA Executive said that within the current economic climate, the unemployed should be the main target that VECs will work with in order to re-train and re-skill those with obsolete skills or those who lack the basic generic skills. Finally, the Executive was asked would the VEC be able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training (25: 9). He said the VEC are not be able to respond to the expected demands as the country is in a state of flux at the moment because of the training element of DETI being transferred in DES. VECs cannot play their part in re-training or re-skilling unemployed adults unless there is a change in the current way of doing things as PLC numbers remained capped and the BTEI is being cut. These responses and questions sought to discover the capability of Kildare VEC and VECs in general to respond to changing education provision. Clearly VECs lack the effectiveness to respond to certain education and training provisions. Many of the sentiments communicated by the IVEA Executive had been expressed by CEOs and Kildare VEC staff, particularly

that VECs cannot respond to increasing demands without a change in current VEC structures.

Adult Education Staff

The IVEA Executive was asked what he thought were the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff (23: 8). He responded that adult education would never be taken seriously unless teachers have recognised qualifications right throughout the VEC sector, otherwise it is seen as a Cinderella service with second best provision. He believed that adult education is seen as something inferior and ad hoc, lacking a sense of professionalism which in his opinion 'is not just about how well you do something but how well the VEC staff is trained'. Having a staff with recognised qualifications is important and was a requirement agreed already by Kildare VEC staff and CEOs.

General VEC provision

A series of questions was asked of the IVEA Executive in order to establish his priorities prior to commencing their current position (25: 3) and to identify his priorities after several years as an IVEA Executive (25: 4). The priorities of the Executive were to re-structure the VEC sector and another was to represent the VEC at second level and to promote the growth and enhancement of further education. Several years on, his current priority is to expand the VEC into a local education authority and to provide cross-community services to all schools at primary and second level. The announcement by Minister Ruairí Quinn on June 29th 2011 of the amalgamation of VECs and the establishment of ETBs is a move towards the establishment of local education authorities.

The IVEA Executive was asked how effective he would rate VECs as an educational provider (25: 5) and what educational changes are needed to structures or services in the current economic climate (25: 7). He responded by saying that adult education in many VECs is down to the calibre of the AEO and there is a need to standardise everything across the sector like processes, procedures, appointments and structures across Ireland. As

regards changes in structures, he suggested that VECs have to be more creative about how they spend their money. VECs need to have two or three operational models where there is more flexibility between the programmes in terms of students and staffing and he suggested that tutors should be appointed to the VEC rather than to programmes such as Youthreach or VTOS. Finally, he said the provision of multiplex's would aid integration of services. The need for a review and change of systems and structures is called for which will result in VECs doing things differently. Again, views expressed by the IVEA Executive concur with statements already made by interviewees.

Some other questions asked of the IVEA Executive were if VECs are flexible in their structure in responding to increasing educational demands (25:10) and if they were capable of responding to the demands of the Smart economy (25:12). As regards flexibility, he said the VECs success has been its flexibility and the benefits of the Back to Education programme is that finance is pooled and that VECs can create programmes to suite the individuals and that is an important element of flexibility. The Executive did not believe that VECs were capable of responding to the Smart Economy. Once again, views expressed by the IVEA Executive concur with statements already made by CEOs and Kildare VEC senior managers.

Adult Education

Earlier in the interview, the Executive made reference to adult education as the Cinderella service so he was asked how the importance of adult education could be enhanced (25: 13) in the light of that statement. He said that government policies need to recognise that education is more than first and second-level schools. Adult education is viewed simply as community education and it is not seen as a real player in the educational spectrum. He conceded that the IVEA should play a greater role in helping to highlight the important contribution VEC adult education is playing in Ireland. The IVEA publication *A History of the Irish Vocational Education Association 1902-2002*, written by Jim Cooke highlights the monumental work and educational

development that has taken place in VECs over the past eighty years. As stated earlier, much of this work has not been promoted and acknowledged.

Improvements

The IVEA Executive was asked to comment on seven topics (25: 6) similar to those discussed by three CEOs from external VECs. These topics could provide suggestions that would enhance the adult education service:

a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes

Adult education provision is certainly meeting certain needs but it requires improvement in other areas of Further Education. He said 'the PLCs sector put on educational programmes every year but I cannot ensure if there is transparency that the skills they are providing are meeting the needs of industry which is constantly evolving'. The response from the IVEA Executive concurs with the interview responses from Kildare VEC senior managers.

b) Training for teacher, tutors and co-ordinators

The IVEA has a strategy to get funding to hire a training co-ordinator. There is a grave need for training because there are different standards across the country.

c) Strategic planning

Strategic planning was very important and it is the first step in the process in developing a vision and in order to achieve that vision, the VEC had to stand back from current operations. The biggest obstacle to changing structures was the fragmentation of programmes within the VEC adult education services. All programmes have slightly different rules and regulations, different staffing structures, etc. and are housed in different locations around each county. Strategic planning requires leadership and Ruth articulates the role of the leader within an organisation as the person who has 'the ability to hold out a vision of how things could be better' (2006:22).

d) Facilities and equipment

The Department of Education and Skills only deal with school building and does not have a building programme for adult and further education. This response highlighted discrepancy between the different sectors and confirms some of the sentiments expressed by middle managers regarding their placement within the educational system.

e) VEC management structures

It was advised that every VEC should have a senior management team. He said that changes are coming with the amalgamation of VECs and there will be an Officer responsible for schools and the AEO will be responsible for adult education.

f) General resources

VECs will have to be more efficient and more creative in the use of resources because there will be less resources in the coming years. Resourcing is going to become a problem because the state won't be able to afford them and it will affect frontline services because adult education is not seen as necessary. The moratorium will have an effect of the adult education provision because of future staff reductions.

g) Promotion and advertisement

There was strong suggestion that VECs were very good at providing a service but were very poor at selling the huge amount of work taking place throughout the country. A national VEC budget was suggested by the Executive with a single brand image and VECs should be promoted through national campaigns on TV and radio advertising.

Towards the end of the interview, the IVEA Executive was asked if he was Minister for Education and Skills, what he would do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC (25: 14). He said he would look at resourcing of VECs staffing levels because at the moment the moratorium is applied to adult education staff and they are not seen as a front line services. There is also the need to look at a strategy for developing further education, funding it

and increase its flexibility in order to create better value for money while responding to the needs of the learners, society and the economy.

At the conclusion of each interview, the IVEA Executive was asked if he had any overall thoughts on VEC adult education (25: 16), its relevance and its impact and how it could make a bigger impact in the future (25: 16). Within the European context, he said, VET is very important. VECs should consider going back to a pure form of VET that provides rounded individuals with the skills that are needed and also serves the needs of industry and the economy. The emphasis on vocational education and training concurs with responses from Kildare VEC senior managers as well as tutors and middle managers. Overall, he said there is a need for skill based as well as academic training within VECs.

According to the analysis of data from interviews with the IVEA Executive, VECs in general are effective in some of its provision of adult education, such as:

- the calibre of the AEO providing an organisational vision
- the flexibility of the organisation

However, some suggestions for achieving a greater level of effectiveness is for VECs:

- to re-brand the work of the VEC
- to review some of its existing educational programmes
- to change its structures in order to be responsive to educational needs of learners

5.1.7 Analysis of the Norwegian study visit

On Monday, June 8th 2009, the IVEA study group visited Romsdal Upper Secondary School and met the principal, the deputy principal and the head of special education. Within that discussion, I learned about:

- Norwegian educational system with emphasis on upper secondary education
- Practical approach to vocational education and apprenticeship

- Implementation of the Norwegian National Skills Strategy
- Integrating basic skills into vocational education
- Accreditation of prior learning
- Collaborations between school and industrial companies

I also received a guided tour of the school and I learned was that the Norwegian school system provides great flexibility in meeting the needs of students. Upper secondary students can pursue their studies by following a vocational or academic route or a mixture of both vocational and academic. In upper secondary education, there is in the region of 180 programme areas that lead to vocational qualifications with a craft or journeyman's certificate. A student can receive a craft certificate after two years in upper secondary school plus two years in-service training as an apprentice. There is a link between education, training and business and students are supported and monitored during their training. It is also built into the system that adults who wish to re-skill in a particular trade, are allowed to do so with 25% apprenticeships laid down for adults.

On Wednesday, June 10th 2009, the study group met with the head of vocational training in the Department of Education. Within our discussion, I learned about:

- The structure of applicants and provision of educational programmes in a de-centralised school structure and how it meets the need for skilled workers in the regional labour market?
- The vocational training for adults – documentation and recognition of non-formal learning in relation to upper secondary education
- The mis-match between VET provision and labour market needs

What I learned was that adult education in Norway is regulated by the Adult Education Act (1976) and the Education Act (1998). Under the Adult Education Act, the provision of courses is the responsibility of the respective public education authorities. Vox is Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning and belongs to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The main

goal of the agency is to contribute to supporting active citizenship, improving employability and increasing participation by adults in education.

In Norway, the right to free education for adults up to and including upper secondary education is guaranteed by law. Adults who have missed out on primary or secondary education have a statutory right to receive education and responsibility for providing this primary or secondary education to adults is clearly divided between the municipalities for primary and lower secondary and the county for upper secondary. According to the OECD report, *Learning for Jobs*, around 20% of 20-24 year olds have not completed upper secondary education in Norway (2008: 19). The Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning said that during the academic year 2007-2008, a total of 4,128 adults participated in regular primary/lower secondary schooling and despite this free entitlement to make up for missed education since 2005, there has been a gradual decline in number of participants availing of these opportunities (2008: 6). These visits, along with visits to a University, the Directorate of Education and Training, the local municipality, an educational training centre and several businesses training apprentices in particular skill sets provided me with a good insight into the Norwegian educational system for adult and further education and training.

The Norwegian visit provided me with a large amount of data and I was faced with the task of how best to analysis this data and how it would contribution to my research question.

5.2 Emerging themes

Having set out to study the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service and conducting semi-structured with VEC staff and conducted a study visit to Norway, various themes emerged within each of the sectors and in triangulating the data between the different sectors and the operational levels within Kildare VEC and external VECs, I discovered that there was an overlapping of themes within the organisation. Eleven themes emerged which

were confirmed and enhanced as interviews continued with VEC staff at different levels. The eleven themes are:

Kildare VEC	Themes
VEC service	Vision and priorities for VEC adult education
VEC service	Branding and image promotion
VEC service	Management and communication structures
VEC learners	Students learning requirements
VEC staff	Training and continued professional development
VEC staff	Adult and further education teaching status
VEC facilities	Appropriateness of VEC buildings and resources
VEC programmes	Suitability of VEC adult education provision
VEC future provision	Planning
VEC future provision	Ability of Kildare VEC to respond and adapt to current and future educational needs
VEC future provision	Creating progression routes between VEC adult education, higher education and employment

Figure 26: The eleven themes that emerged from the research

These themes were reinforced with data supplied by CEOs from external VECs and an IVEA Executive. Each theme emerged, not as a stand-alone entity but rather as a theme that intersected and cross-referenced with other themes. I am presenting these themes in random order rather than in a particular sequence or order of importance and each of the eleven themes is linked to a aspect of Kildare VEC such as learners, staff, facilities, etc.

5.3 Conclusion

In order to examine the effectiveness of Kildare VEC, I carried out an in-depth analysis of the sixty-five interviews and a study visit to Norway to examine their adult education provision. The interviews sought to elicit what was the assessment and experience of students and VEC personnel in relation to the

effectiveness of Kildare VEC and its responsiveness to the educational requirements of learners. In the current economic climate, Kildare VEC is being challenged more and more to provide the necessary education and learning in order to increase the employment prospects of people throughout County Kildare. The effectiveness of Kildare VEC will be judged on its educational provision and responsiveness to the actual needs of learners. The finding behind the eleven themes will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Research Findings

6.1 Introduction

The provision of VEC adult education services in Ireland exists within a complex system of different policies, procedures and practices, rolled out over thirty years and implemented in different ways by various VECs. In addition, adult education involves a wide variety of students with particular needs and expectations of the educational system. In the current economic environment, a greater emphasis has been placed on the economic outcome of the adult education provision. This study has sought to discover the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service and at each stage of the process, information was gathered and analysed. This method helped the emergences and various findings were unearthed which helped determine the following eleven themes as well as pointing towards eleven recommendations that would increase the overall effectiveness of Kildare VEC.

6.1.1 Students

The research findings from the data analysis of students found that Kildare VEC was effective in its provision of adult education in the following areas:

- Positive reception on initial contact
- Helpfulness of staff
- Tutors regarded very highly
- Students benefited and developed in confidence
- Good centre atmosphere
- Advertisement of courses was good
- Awareness of VEC provision of night classes

The following suggestions were made by students that would help improve the effectiveness of Kildare VEC were:

- Focus on advertisements in particular locations
- Improve the branding of the VEC programmes and services
- Provide continual training for VEC tutors
- Include the availability of guidance upon commencement of courses

- Create a more positive learning environment for students
- Provide better information on all VEC adult education services

6.1.2 Tutors

The research findings from the data analysis of tutor interviews found that Kildare VEC was effective in its provision of adult education in the following areas:

- Quality of the tutors was very good
- Atmosphere in VEC centres was welcoming
- The variety of courses was good
- Kildare VEC responded well to the needs of learners

The following are suggestions from the interviews with tutors that would improve the effectiveness of Kildare VEC:

- Promote Kildare VEC as a whole service
- Advertise Kildare VEC with an common identifiable brand
- Provide supports for tutors in their teaching
- Increase internal awareness of adult education services
- Conduct educational market research
- Provide more skill based courses for learners
- Provide continued professional development for tutors
- Create awareness of the different motivational needs of full-time and part-time learners

6.1.3 Middle managers

The data analysis from middle managers interviews found that Kildare VEC was effective in its provision of adult education in the following areas:

- Kildare VEC had good staff
- There was a wide variety of courses
- Facilities in new schools was very good

The following are the suggestions made that would improve the effectiveness of Kildare VEC:

- Kildare VEC needs to be responsive to educational needs of learners
- Kildare VEC needs to provide high quality courses
- Kildare VEC needs to improve its communication systems
- Kildare VEC needs to improve its tutor training programmes
- Kildare VEC needs to establish its particular branding image
- Kildare VEC requires skill based facilities
- Kildare VEC needs to promote its services

For these suggestions to be accomplished, it requires what Jarvis et al. (2003: 144) describes as the creation of the Learning Organisation. He cites Watkins and Marsick's (1993: 8-9) definition of the learning organisation:

The learning organisation is one that learns continuously and transforms itself. Learning takes place in individuals, teams, the organisation and even the communities with which the organisation interacts. Learning is a continuous, strategically used process - integrated with and running parallel to, work. Learning results in changes in knowledge, beliefs and behaviours. Learning also enhances organisational capacity for innovation and growth. The learning organisation has embedded systems to capture and share learning.

Working towards the creation of Kildare VEC as a learning organisation will form part of the recommendations.

6.1.4 Senior managers

The following findings from interviews with senior managers found that Kildare VEC was effective in its provision of adult education in the following areas:

- Kildare VEC has a high standard of success
- Changes that have been initiated by the AEO

The following are the suggestions from senior managers that would improve the effectiveness of Kildare VEC:

- Re-branding of services and programmes
- Be more responsive to educational needs of learners
- Review some of the VECs existing educational programmes
- Provide more high quality courses

- Establish on-going strategic planning of programmes
- Provide CPD for all staff
- Link PLC courses to employability skills

Senior managers re-stated and further developed many of the earlier suggestions from students, tutors and middle managers but from a different perspective. Senior managers are in a position to change some of the suggestions, many of which were stated in the 2003 Irish Progress Report to the European Commission that highlighted one of the key focuses of the Irish legislation and policy documents from 1995 to 2001 was 'to ensure a supply of high quality manpower to address the skills needs, widening access to lifelong learning in the context of an integrated approach to education and training' (2003: 2).

6.1.5 External VECs

The data analysis from the interviews with CEOs from external VECs found that VECs in general are effective in their provision of adult education in the following areas:

- Flexibility and adaptability of the VEC organisations
- The understanding of what needs to be done and how it needs to be done

Suggestions from the interviews with the CEOs that would improve VEC effectiveness were as follows:

- Re-branding VEC services, programmes and provision
- Make the necessary changes in structures in order to be responsive to educational needs of learners
- Engage in strategic planning to ensure best use of resources
- Provide recognised qualifications for all tutors
- Improve management skills for VEC managers

The data analysis also found that similar to data from senior managers from Kildare VEC, there were some areas of adult education judged to be to

effective but in the case of external CEOs, there was a higher proportion of areas less effective, particularly current VEC structures.

6.1.6 IVEA Executive

The data analysis from the interview with the IVEA Executive found that VECs in general are effective in their provision of adult education in the following areas:

- Calibre of the AEO providing an organisational vision
- Flexibility of the organisation

The following are the suggestions from the interview with the IVEA Executive that would improve VEC effectiveness:

- Change structures and be more responsive to educational needs of learners
- Provide training and qualifications for all tutors
- Review some existing educational programmes
- Re-brand VEC services
- Improve management skills for VEC managers
- Engage in strategic planning to ensure best use of resources

In general, the data analysis found that there were some areas of adult education that were described as being effective in earlier interviews but in the case of external CEOs and IVEA Executive, there was a higher degree of areas that lacked effectiveness, such as current structures, planning and flexibility. In its submission to the DES regarding the future of the VECs, one of the points highlighted by the IVEA was the need 'to convert national adult and further national policy into practice' (2009: 1).

6.1.7 Norwegian study visit

The key findings from the Norwegian visit, which has relevance to Kildare VEC education system and particularly to my study of the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service were:

1. The capacity of Norway's education system preparedness to reform itself radically.
2. Each of the nineteen counties in Norway manages both upper secondary education and apprenticeship, thus creating a link between schooling and apprenticeship.
3. The Norwegian education system shows a clear process of progression routes from lower secondary to university level through the vocational system and/or the academic route at upper secondary level (Appendix 33).
4. The roll of the Ombudsman for upper secondary education and apprenticeships linking the rights based nature of Norwegian education.
5. The Norwegian system deemed social integration essential to all citizens in the family, in the community and in the workplace.
6. Norwegian schools provide good flexibility in meeting student needs. Individuals who failed within school system could undertake the work-based portion of their apprenticeship first and the school-based portion second when they are more mature and have gained work experience.
7. The Norwegian system strives to ensure that the duplication of courses is kept to a minimum. Programmes and courses are not the property of particular institutions and the system strives to ensure courses with limited drawing power are offered by only one school in a particular county or community.

The Norwegian education and training system:

The findings from the data analysis on the study visit to Norway also found that:

1. Norwegian adults can obtain trade qualifications on the basis of their work experience. Upon assessment of a person's prior learning, they have free access to programmes to make up their skill deficits before finally being assessed in order to obtain their qualifications.
2. Adults over 25 years of age have a legal entitlement to avail of any unused portion of their thirteen year's entitlement to free education and training. Adults with low basic skills are entitled to a skills' assessment and to have all their prior learning recognised for access, transfer and progression.

3. There is a clear route for adults to gain trade qualifications through the apprenticeship system as it is laid down in law that 25% of apprentices are adult.
4. The importance of generic skills is very much acknowledged and these skills are integrated into every syllabus with teachers of all subjects having responsibility for teaching these core skills.
5. Generally, both employers and unions were positively involved in Norwegian education and the relationship between schools and the workplace is complementary and co-operative.

In Ireland, the 2010 OECD Report, *Learning for Jobs* made the following policy recommended (2010: 9):

- Provide a mix of VET training places that reflects both student preferences and employer needs. Achieve this through provision of workplace training and through planning and incentive mechanisms
- For vocational programmes beyond secondary level, share the costs between government, employers and individual students according to the benefits obtained
- Engage employers and unions in curriculum development and ensure that the skills taught correspond to those needed in the modern workplace
- Through VET systems, provide young people with generic, transferable skills to support occupational mobility and lifelong learning, and with occupationally-specific skills that meet employers' immediate needs
- Ensure all students in vocational programmes have adequate numeracy and literacy skills to support lifelong learning and career development. Identify and tackle weaknesses in this area

If implemented, Ireland's VET provision could be brought into line within a system similar to Norway.

The Norwegian tutor training system:

The findings from the data analysis of the Norwegian study also found that:

1. There is a high emphasis on enhancing teachers' competence at all levels in the Norwegian system

2. Universities offer two-year part-time teacher training courses for vocational teachers who lack a pedagogical qualification. Teachers have a number of years within which to acquire a teaching qualification in order to retain their teaching posts

The IVEA study visit showed that the Ireland does not have a similar system of training for tutors and this finding will form part of the recommendations.

6.2 Findings

Having analysed the findings of sixty-five interviews and study visit to Norway, I was able to further refine the eleven themes in order to explore the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service. The findings are linked with Kildare VEC services and themes in Figure 27.

Kildare VEC	Themes	Findings
VEC service	Vision and priorities for VEC adult education	Limited vision for development
VEC service	Branding and image promotion	Lack of clear identity
VEC service	Management and communication structures	Poor management & communication structures
VEC learners	Students learning requirements	Students needs not being addressed
VEC staff	Training and continued professional development	Insufficient staff training
VEC staff	Adult and further education teaching status	No adult education staffing structure
VEC facilities	Appropriateness of VEC buildings and resources	Poor and inadequate facilities and resources
VEC programmes	Suitability of VEC adult education provision	Programmes not matching student needs
VEC future provision	Planning	Lack of integrated VEC planning
VEC future provision	Ability of Kildare VEC to respond and adapt to current and future educational needs	Ability to respond but insufficient structures
VEC future provision	Creating progression routes between VEC adult education, higher education and employment	Limited progression routes with employers

Figure 27: Main findings from interviews

6.2.1 Limited vision for development

The research findings suggested the importance of Kildare VEC developing a new vision which would point the way to how the system should operate both at county and at national level was discussed with senior managers and CEOs from external VECs. The findings revealed that:

- All VEC interviewees were committed to the position they held and all were interested in the creation of a better service for the students engaged in adult education.
- There was also recognition given to those learners whom the VEC services were not reaching.
- Senior managers and CEOs began with priorities for what they would like to achieve along with organisational changes they would like to implement within their VEC.
- Over the course of time, the senior managers, etc. said their priorities were refined or altered because of changing circumstances and expectations within their VEC and also from external national factors.
- While adult education may not always be the primary focus of the VEC, all interviewees' recognise the importance of adult and further education along with the need for its restructuring.
- Continued professional development for all VEC personnel featured significantly as a priority by CEOs and one senior manager stated that high quality learning can best be achieved by providing CPD for teachers, tutors and administrators. One CEO highlighted how staff professional development impacts on the whole organisation and should be a priority.
- Quality learning is best achieved through investment in staff development according to a senior manager. Middle managers and tutors also held the VEC in high esteem and communicated their commitment to the educational betterment of all students.
- A priority expressed by one literacy co-ordinator was the 'promotion of the VEC as a whole service, not the schools, not the adult education but one whole service as a provision that any person could slot into at any age.

- VECs are now providing education for all age groups from four year olds upwards but that needs to be communicated to people and it needs to be promoted.
- Integration was seen by one CEO as a priority in the context of 'better IT data gathering and auditing'. Because VECs were currently involved in a change environment with the creation of SOLAS, the establishment of ETBs and the disbandment of FÁS with the transfer of staff into ETBs, the overall VEC organisational vision is in a state of flux.

Jarvis (2004: 17) speaks of the education vision for the *learning society* where everybody would have access to part-time adult education throughout the whole of their lives. He cited Ranson's (1994: 106) description and vision for the learning society:

There is the need for the creation of the learning society as a constitutive condition of a new moral and political order. It is only when the values and processes of learning are placed at the centre of polity that the conditions can be established for all individuals to develop their capacities, and that institutions can respond openly and imaginatively to a period of change.

Kildare VEC could contribute to the learning society throughout the county with a creative and dynamic educational vision.

6.2.2 Lack of clear identity

The research findings suggested the need for Kildare VEC adult education service to establish its own clear identity within the VEC system. The service has evolved over thirty years and many of its programmes have developed their own identity and logos with which they advertise their educational provision according to senior managers. The consequence of this development has meant that programmes advertisement takes place without reference to the larger VEC organisation, of which it is a component. Therefore Kildare VEC is not identified as the main provider of adult education. Most interviewees from students up to the IVEA Executive voiced their opinion of promoting the 'whole VEC service' as a learning organisation which provides education and training for people from four years of age in the VEC primary school to adults of all ages. The findings also reveal that:

- A number of CEOs from external VECs as well as senior managers from Kildare VEC spoke of a single brand image or corporate identity for the VEC sector. This idea had evolved from the responses of several middle managers who cited the creation of a single brand image as a positive step.
- The current reality of thirty-three different portrayals of the same educational provision, carried out in different ways within the thirty-three VECs has the potential for ineffectiveness.
- FÁS as a training organisation was cited as an example of one organisation, clearly identified by its name and its logo. One middle manager said 'I think people outside of the VEC and even those working within the service aren't totally aware of the VEC in its entirety'. He maintained that this has resulted in the lack of a definitive image for the VEC.
- Many interviewees from tutors to CEOs from external VECs believed that VECs as an organisation have too many separate components which are standalone in their operating procedures.
- The lack of a clear identity has resulted in people, as well as VEC staff, not being aware of the total extent of Kildare VECs' educational remit, as students and tutors were not aware of other VEC programmes other than night classes.
- In highlighting the educational provision, the IVEA Executive suggested that a change of image would require a change of name in order to reflect the 'lifelong learning' educational approach provided by VECs. He suggested that the term, Vocational Education does not adequately convey the variety and extensive work which current VEC schemes provide in every county in Ireland.
- With specific reference to VEC adult education services, a middle manager said that VECs are not always highlighted as the Government funded provider of national and European recognised qualifications for students.
- In order to highlight and promote adult education services, senior managers suggested that VECs need to be more definitive in what they do

as a local and national education organisation and this was further underlined by CEOs from external VECs who said that VECs need to emphasise the successful educational stories.

According to the IVEA, Vocational Education Committees (VECs) lead, deliver and administer education and training programmes at local and community level across the country. The strength of Ireland's thirty-three VECs lies in their deep-rooted identity with local communities, making a real difference to the lives of people that VECs serve everyday. VECs have both piloted and been involved in the provision of education and training programmes which respond directly to local community needs and which enhance the educational development, employability and future career prospects of the wide range of learners of all ages. Such deeply rooted, 'hands-on' local responsiveness continues to be the hallmark of the vocational education sector, looking outward nationally and internationally whilst servicing education and training locally and individually. That is the identity that Kildare VEC need to live and communicate to its staff and the people of CountyKildare.

6.2.3 Poor management and communication structures

The research findings suggest the need for excellent management and communication structures. The research findings highlighted how:

- Kildare VEC management structures were discussed with interviewees from tutors up to senior managers and VEC management structures in general was discussed with CEOs and IVEA Executive
- The findings also revealed poor communication systems along with poor management structures
- The findings highlighted that the operation of the adult education service was not as well known as the second level system and the administration didn't have the same relationship with adult education staff
- Several tutors said that VEC management structures didn't really affect their teaching in so far as their awareness of management was limited to the co-ordinator or principal who acts as their line-manager. Another tutor said that 'the VEC structures don't impinge on me' giving the impression

that for some teaching staff, they had little or no connection with the VEC as their employer or as an organisation

- The lack of understanding and communication with the management system was described as an operational challenge, particularly by middle managers
- Many of them believed that the importance of their work was lower down the organisational chain with a higher value being placed on the academic aspect of education in second level schools. In particular, middle managers stated that they were not the main players and this belief was reiterated by a senior manager saying he believed that those working in adult education felt left out of the system
- The directors of education who teach in school by day and manage the night school and attend to the administration of that work said their work was not understood. This was particularly emphasised when the requirements of the administration were given higher priority to the daily work of those in centres
- A lack of communication from the 'top down' and the 'bottom up' was underlined as the cause of internal difficulties between administration and adult education middle managers
- Communication was also found lacking across other aspects of the organisation such as between schools and adult education as well as between administration and those working in the educational field or at 'the coal face' in schools and centres

In 2011, Kildare VEC launched its Educational Plan 2011-2016. The Plan is built upon the McKinsey 7s model of strategy, structure, systems, staff, skills, style and shared values (and communication). Under the communication strategy, it states that 'Kildare VEC communicates the key messages within the organisation to its external and internal audience' (2011: 29). In order to achieve this objective, Kildare VEC will:

- Develop a strategy where the objectives are organisationally driven rather than communications driven.

- Identify the tools and mediums that are most appropriate to communicating the key messages to our audiences and ensure that the tools and activities are aligned to the level of time, human and financial resources available.

With this objective, Kildare VEC could improve its communication systems, internally and externally.

6.2.4 Student needs not being addressed

The research findings revealed that:

- The reasons adults partook in educational courses varied according to their individual needs as per the responses of the thirty-two students interviewed
- For some, it was the need to up-skill, for others it was to partake in a hobby course and for others it was the need to learn to read
- The research showed the needs of each student varied greatly according to their educational starting point as well as the desired outcome from their educational studies
- For a sizable number of Kildare VEC participants, their needs were ‘second chance education’

The following table reflects the age at which the thirty-two interviewees completed their formal education and left school:

	Male	Female	TOTAL	%
12-14	2	3	5	16%
15-16	6	6	12	37%
17-18	4	8	12	37%
19+	1	2	3	10%
TOTAL	13	19	32	

Figure 28: Age at which interviewees left school

- The age at which VEC students left formal education along with the lack of prior certification gave an indication of the adult education programmes and pre-learning courses needed to be delivered by Kildare VEC.
- From the total number of VEC adult students interviewed, only eleven had completed the Leaving Certificate.
- The wide age profile of students taking part in Kildare VEC courses (Figure 29) is an additional factor contributing to the complexity of responding to educational needs of adults in Kildare. Interviews by tutors, middle and senior managers indicated that some of the services provided by Kildare VEC may not be suitable for all adults who seek to re-enter the educational domain.

The following table shows the age profile of the thirty-two interviewees:

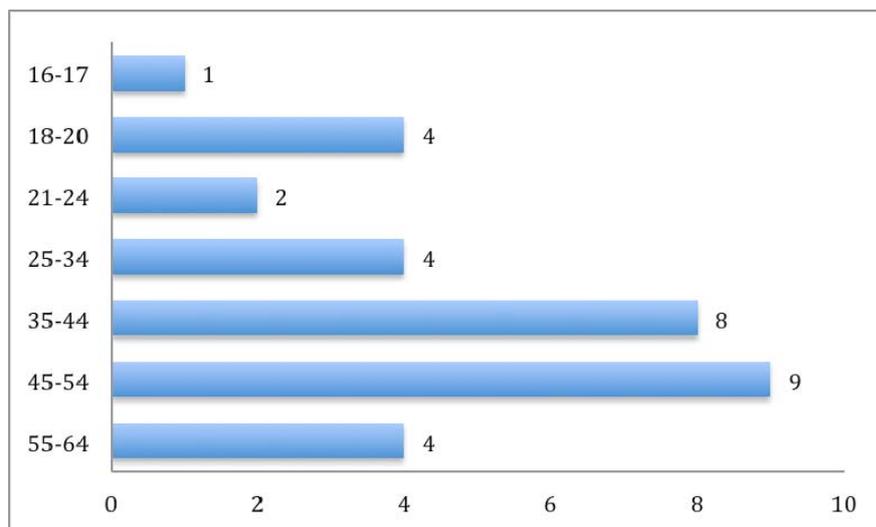


Figure 29: Age profile of interviewees

- Interviewees were asked if Kildare was capable of responding to the needs of learners and an important factor to be considered is the age at which students left school in addition to factors such as age profile, learning style, time commitment and financial status
- Commenting on the educational provision by VECs, one external CEO said that 'realistically the world will always have people who learn in different ways, people for whom the education system has failed and that is the reality. VECs should help to make it up at a later stage. One would

hope that there would be a good quality service for those who need it and when they need it'

- Student interviews revealed that they found the work of VEC tutors very constructive and commended them highly for their approach
- Students developed an interest in study because of the attitude and approach of most tutors and the word frequently used to describe the characteristics of Kildare VEC tutors was 'encouraging'
- Students felt accepted as they were and as one literacy student stated, 'I was encouraged to develop more and come out of my comfort zone'
- The night-class students felt the teachers gave so much of themselves and being prepared for class was important, with one student stating that 'if something wasn't going right, she supplemented with alternatives'
- Overall, students said that VEC tutors played a very significant part in helping so many students gain confidence by helping them to read books, fill in forms, obtain certification and as one VTOS student stated 'doors were opened that I didn't know existed'
- According to the IVEA Executive, adult students should have access to a good quality service when they need it and at times that suit them, in centres, schools and distance education
- Students provided good suggestions, such as, all course candidates for certain courses should be interviewed to prevent people being offered courses that were unsuitable for them and that information and guidance should be provided
- Students also suggested better advertisement, particularly in places where the unemployed frequented
- One tutor and several middle and senior managers maintained the importance of consultation with and researching the needs of current and prospective students

The research revealed that distance education is common means of meeting the needs of students in Norway. In the past, this consisted of correspondence courses but today more and more distance education courses are internet-based. Each year approx. 20,000 participants complete

courses run by more than ten authorised distance education institutions in Norway. By offering alternative and more flexible paths to education in Norway, distance education helped to meet the changing educational needs for continuing education and training.

6.2.5 Insufficient staff training

The research findings from the interviews with middle managers and tutors suggested the need for an integrated staff training programme. The findings highlighted:

- A high level of commitment and experience among middle managers and tutors
- The fourteen middle managers have worked in their positions with Kildare VEC for a combined number of 146 years or an average of 10.4 years per person. Interestingly, only two had worked in a similar position in another school or centre
- The twelve tutors interviewed showed a considerable degree of teaching experience with the combined number of years teaching adults at 116 years or an average of almost 10 years per person
- In order to build on, support and enhance the experience of middle managers and tutors, different forms of on-going training was suggested as necessary by all interviewees in order to manage change and motivate staff in the current economic environment
- On-going management training was cited as necessary in providing leadership and motivation within the overall VEC service in order to modernise administration and create greater efficiencies in the organisation
- Middle managers cited the need for professional support for all staff, particularly in times when society is changing and educational provision requires a more responsive, creative and imaginary approach. Training in leadership skills was suggested as a means of achieving a greater level of programme integration to bring teams together

- A quality VEC adult education service was a priority for Kildare VEC senior managers, CEOs from external VECs and the IVEA Executive when they assumed their position of leadership within their organisation
- Professional development was highlighted as very important for all staff in order to deliver quality learning. Provision of CPD was seen not solely as the need of frontline staff but whole organisation training was considered important. CPD was stated to be the missing link that could unite and improve the various aspects of Kildare VEC services - schools, adult education and administration. Without CPD, current programme provision as well as training for the development and delivery of new programmes capable of meeting the needs of students to develop the Smart economy would be missing
- Overall, the findings revealed that well trained tutors were very important to the VEC as stated by all senior managers and CEOs from external VECs. This is particularly true when the starting point of many of adult students is taken into account. Tutors interviewed spoke of their need for CPD particularly in areas that relate to updating their skills, meeting other tutors and learning from shared experiences
- Middle managers saw the need for training for tutors not just in curriculum and class related matters but also in the more generic areas of the curriculum
- Senior managers described 'the investment in staff' as very important with one manager stating that high-quality staff are the best asset the VEC have for providing an effective educational service

The White Paper on Adult Education - Learning for Life (2000), devoted a chapter to Support Service of which training of adult educators was a section.

The White Paper said:

If the Adult Education sector is to make the quantum leap envisaged for it in this White Paper, it can only do so on the basis of a highly trained corps of adult educators and trainers who are dynamic and equipped to lead change, to play a key role in the policy debate and to reflect the distinctive identity of the sector in the field of professional practice and research (2000: 150).

Training for tutors would enhance significantly the education and skills of learners within Kildare VEC.

6.2.6 No adult education staffing structure

The research findings suggest the need for an adult education staffing structure. It found that:

- The majority of adult education programmes have been rolled out separately over the last thirty years and were often independent of existing programmes
- Many programmes developed separate identities in stand-alone locations, independent of other programmes within the VEC service
- Most programmes have separate co-ordinators or directors, separate staffing arrangements, separate target group, separate budgets, different pay scales and an individual reporting system to the Department of Education and Skills (DES)

The Green Paper - Adult Education in an Era of Learning (1998) noted the fact that recommendations in the Murphy Report (1973) and the Kenny (1984) for the establishment of a national statutory body with responsibility for Adult Education had never been addressed. The White Paper on Adult Education - Learning for Life (2000) stated that 'this is a serious omission that now needs to be addressed as a priority' (2000: 185) and recommended the establishment of a National Adult Learning Council.

The White Paper went on to say that 'the National Adult Learning Council would have a core management staff of six - a Chief Executive, a Finance/Personnel/ IT Officer, and four Unit Heads, responsible for each of the Units outlined above. It will also have an Access Officer, an Irish Language Officer and a Research/International Officer, be supported with the necessary technical and administrative staff and be in a position to draw on the resources elsewhere within the system, such as national co-ordinators, Adult Education Organisers, community education facilitators etc.' (2000: 192). Unfortunately, the National Adult Learning Council was never

established and as a result, no structures have been put in place within the VECs.

6.2.7 Poor and inadequate facilities and resources

The research findings suggested the need for improved facilities and resources. Students were not asked a question in their interviews about the facilities in which they were studying. It found that:

- In their responses, students spoke positively about the atmosphere within the educational centres
- All other interviewees were asked their thoughts on the VEC adult education facilities. The type of Kildare VEC adult education facilities and facilities in other VECs received a high degree of negative comments by most interviewees
- Only those in a new school and a new centre had favourable comments to make. Others were critical of some buildings not fit for purpose
- Middle managers suggested that adult education centres should be identifiable buildings within the community and suitable for the provision of the required programmes
- A senior manager described some adult education buildings currently in use as a disaster' and lacked resources such as IT facilities
- Another finding raised by a senior manager and an external CEO was that the financial outlay in terms of rent and short-term leases was a total waste of money
- The fact that the DES provides no capital budget for VEC adult education was described as short sighted and wasteful of resources
- Tutors, middle and senior managers and the IVEA Executive suggested that designated centres providing integrated services should be established in locations throughout the county
- All senior managers and CEOs supported the notion of a 'single purpose building' for adult education services as the correct way to proceed
- The term "multiplex" was used to describe the integrated adult education campus

- A middle manager questioned why a county the size of Kildare didn't have a designated College of Further Education
- A CEO said, 'the way forward both in terms of the product we are providing and cost effectiveness and giving people a sense of identity which is lacking when working for the VEC because it is fragmented'
- Overall, the description of the quality of buildings revealed in the research data displayed a deficit in Kildare VEC adult education facilities, particularly the lack of identifiable VEC adult education buildings

The White Paper on Adult Education - Learning for Life (2000) highlighted concerns raised in the consultation process and as a result, stated that 'the Government will provide for a specific capital allocation for the Further Education sector. This will increase on a phased basis to a level of at least £10m per annum'. One specific area where the fund could be used was the purchase, 'where necessary, of additional facilities for adult education use' (2000: 105-6). The Local Learning Boards were never established and no capital funding was provided for adult education.

6.2.8 Programmes not matching student needs

The research findings from some middle managers, from senior managers and from CEOs suggested the need for the evaluation of courses and listening to people is the way to determine what educational programmes should be provided. The findings highlighted:

- An initial question posed by a tutor who asked 'who decides what courses are provided and what research or audit is carried out to find out the real educational needs of adults'?
- After proper market research is conducted, new programmes should be initiated and this information will bring about changes within Kildare VEC
- Changes will have consequences for middle managers and tutors as some will require re-training in order to acquire new skills
- More on-going research and analysis of students' needs as well as societal needs being conducted will result in the delivery of a better quality adult education service

- Evaluation of courses will continue to be provided and without it, there could be a disempowerment of students and result in what one senior manager described as 'de-skilling' by turning people out quickly without addressing their real educational needs
- The importance of course content was highlighted in relation to the relevance of courses such as VTOS and PLCs as the structure and design of these programmes were created more than twenty years ago to meet the needs of individuals at that particular time. As to whether these particular courses were meeting the skill needs of students and employers in the current economic environment was questioned by one senior manager
- PLC courses are school based was also highlighted as an issue by several senior managers and CEOs
- A senior managers suggested examination of course content and proposed change to make them more relevant
- A night school principal stated that out-dated classes can be as a result of classes built around tutors rather than the other way round. This point was re-iterated by the IVEA Executive
- The provision of more vocational courses was also discussed by a Kildare VEC senior manager and the IVEA Executive arising from good facilities in VEC schools
- Due to a perceived lack of research and needs analysis, VECs are slow to respond to change or to adapt to current educational requirements

The 2010 OECD Report, *Learning for Jobs* proposed two points, firstly that flexible pathways of recruitment be put in place in order to make it easier for those with industry skills to become part of the workforce of VET institutions and secondly, that sufficient teachers and trainers for VET institutions be recruited to ensure that the workforce is well-acquainted with the needs of modern industry (2010: 10). These suggestions were made by the OECD to ensure that education and training provision was meeting the needs of both the learner and the employment industries.

6.2.9 Lack of integrated VEC planning

The findings suggested the need to develop a clear strategic plan for the scheme, created from a vision developed by both individual VECs and as a collective body of VECs.

- A senior manager made the comment that some personnel working for Kildare VEC had limited knowledge of certain aspects of the overall VEC provision and how this placed limitations on strategic planning
- A VEC plan should entail bringing together all aspects of the system, the schools, the adult education sector and administration in an integrated manner
- The necessity for planning was considered particularly important in the current economic climate as VEC adult education personnel are not considered frontline staff and are not being replaced under the current employment moratorium
- Planning will entail prioritising limited resources and using them in an efficient and effective manner for the benefit of all students, thus benefiting society and the economy
- An important part of planning for the VEC is securing capital investment for adult and further education in order to secure improved educational facilities which will have the outcome of delivering appropriate programmes and courses

Under the heading of adult and further education, the Kildare VEC Educational Plan (2011-2016) stated that the VEC would develop a plan for the implementation of three regional structures consisting of co-ordinators and other relevant stakeholders. It also stated that the VEC would design and implement a regional operations management structure and that this would develop ways of working which adds value, enhances co-operation, sharing and mutual support and maximises synergies and savings (2011: 23).

6.2.10 Ability to respond but insufficient structures

Research findings from CEOs and the IVEA Executive suggested the need for structures to be put in place in order that Kildare VEC can respond to the needs of the learner, the community and society. It found that:

- VECs were not capable of responding to increased demands within this economic climate unless a re-organisation could take place. However, the IVEA Executive said that VECs' have the ability to provide relevant adult education if the capacity which has been reduced with the Government moratorium was increased
- Kildare senior managers, the CEOs and IVEA Executive also maintained that current VEC structures hinder flexibility in responsiveness of delivery
- Interviews with three CEOs from external VECs pointed out how VEC adult education services differ in their procedures, processes and appointments across the thirty-three VECs. On the positive side and within the current constraints, the effectiveness of the VEC adult education service in some VECs is put down to the driving force of the AEO according to one senior manager and the IVEA Executive
- The findings suggest that an important consideration for the VEC is its ability to respond to student needs with appropriate programmes, best suited to the needs of students. The slowness to respond and change because of existing VEC structures was discussed by the IVEA Executive along with the fact that sometimes students are expected to fit into courses because of existing contracted tutors rather than courses being designed around the needs of the student. However, most interviewees displayed a sense of realism when stating that the VEC could not meet all the educational needs of all adults but resources were adequate to meet the needs of a certain cohort of students with the current provision that is available

6.2.11 Limited progression routes with employers

The research findings suggest the need for progression routes for learners into further education and/or employment. Providing appropriate courses that

meet the needs of the student was discussed with interviewees from tutors upwards. The findings from the research highlighted:

- The need for progression routes within the service to further education or employment was also emphasised by PLC and VTOS managers
- The adult guidance was singled out as being very important for assisting students with progression within the adult education service. Adult guidance could direct students to the route best suited to their needs in order to obtain the skills required to progress. However, it was suggested by a PLC co-ordinator that the VEC does not offer support to people in their progression to further education
- That progression information has improved within the VEC but the need for better links with third level colleges, industry and employers was cited as a requirement within Kildare VEC by a night school director

In Norway, the Industry Provider Forums are a feature of the upper secondary vocational system and these ensure connectivity between the content of vocational education programmes and the skills needs for local companies. Employer organisations are represented on school boards in Norway to ensure curriculum is designed to suit the needs of the employer as well as the student. In relation to progression, a point was also made by a middle manager working in the community that progression means something different for people working in the heart of the community as it shows progression and development in a way other than academic progression and enables community development rather than the accepted route of further education.

6.3 Conclusion

The VEC adult education service is regarded as very important by all sixty-five interviewees. It was described as a life-changing event for a significant number of the students when they returned to education with Kildare VEC. The programme or course they attended enabled them to grow in confidence and develop new skills which empowered some students to start reading for the first time and others to progress to university. Tutors provide a very good

service despite limited resources, training and poor facilities. According to a night school director, tutors are the face of Kildare VEC adult education. Co-ordinators, directors and principals manage programmes catering for the needs of students and supporting staff. Changing times have brought new challenges to the VEC adult education sector to which managers have to adapt, review and change in order to facilitate new learning directions. All senior managers have to work within a system that has grown with separate programmes, funding mechanisms and reporting procedures. For VEC senior managers, the challenge is to maintain a vision for adult education and provide an integrated leadership, listening to the practitioners and adopting to the needs of the student while at the same time, analysing the requirements of economic environment and society as a whole.

These findings are presented in the context of two recent announcements by the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Ruairí Quinn, T.D. Firstly, the reduction of VECs from thirty-three to sixteen announced in June 2011 and secondly, the establishment of SOLAS, a new further education and training authority that will entail many of the services and personnel from FÁS transferring to the VEC. Ultimately, the VECs will be responsible for the delivery of both education and training services in a new and integrated way.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to evaluate *the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service* from the perspective of users of the service and VEC staff and to parallel the evaluation through interviews with CEOs from external VECs and an IVEA Executive in order to produce recommendations that will improve the overall effectiveness of Kildare VEC. Effectiveness of Kildare VEC will be determined by:

- how adequately the service meets the needs and expectations and of students
- how appropriate the programmes and courses are to the needs of students, society and the economy
- how Kildare VEC is responding to the challenges facing it as an educational organisation in the current economic climate
- what initiatives Kildare VEC have undertaken to improve its responsiveness to the adult education and training needs in County Kildare

A paradigm shift has taken place in education over the last number of years which has changed the emphasis from teaching to learning, from theoretical to practical, from rote learning to learning as reflection, from welfare needs to market demands (Jarvis et al, 2010). Mertens maintained that:

Evaluations are conducted on the merit and worth of programmes in the public domain, which are themselves responses to prioritised individual and community needs that resulted from political decisions. Programme evaluation is thus intertwined with political power and decision making about societal priorities and directions' (2005: 49-50).

Determining the effectiveness of the VEC organisation presents a number of challenges because of the many levels at which the organisation operates. What is deemed to be effective for a student may not be considered effective by management or from the perspective of the Department of Education and Skills. What is deemed effectiveness for management may present challenges to staff or students accessing the system.

Another challenge arises when employees evaluate effectiveness of their own organisation. It requires what Dirkx calls, 'practice-based research' (2006: 275). As Adult Education Officer with management and leadership responsibility for Kildare VEC adult education service, I sought what Dirkx describes as an insider research 'to honour and give voice to complexity and the multilayered nature of understanding that adult educators hold about the various dimensions of their practice, such as their students, the curriculum, teaching strategies and issues of gender, race, class, and other social issues' (2006: 284).

7.2 Changing times demand different responses

All Kildare VEC adult education programmes have evolved since the establishment of the VECs in 1930 in response to particular social, economic and political circumstances. There have been significant changes in adult education provision in Ireland over the last thirty years resulting from national and European social and economic policies. The current economic crisis demands a different response on the part of Kildare VEC to education and training. The disbandment of FÁS and the transfer of many of its staff into VECs along with the establishment of SOLAS as a new further education and training authority have implications for Kildare VEC and VECs throughout Ireland on how they will respond to the challenge of providing effective and efficient education capable of addressing the needs of students of the 21st century.

7.3 The effectiveness of Kildare VEC as an adult education provider

The research findings reveal many areas of effectiveness. Kildare VEC adult education service effectiveness was due primarily to its staff, particularly its adult education tutors and co-ordinators/directors. Depending on the particular VEC programme, tutors work directly with students in a paid or voluntary capacity, in a one-to-one, group or class context. Response by co-ordinators and directors to the needs of learners was effective to a large

extent and where restrictions occurred due to budgets, personnel, facilities or resources, these factors were sometimes outside of their control.

VEC students thought that Kildare VEC adult education service was effective in the delivery and outcomes of its programmes. The core skills of confidence building and learning competences delivered within the context of the adult education ethos were described as particularly effective. Many students cited confidence along with a renewed belief in their learning capabilities and others cited progression routes to third level institutions as positive outcomes.

The vision communicated by Kildare VEC senior managers and the three CEOs from external VECs and the IVEA Executive could also be described as depicting an effective organisation. The vision expressed by each of the seven senior personnel contained a considerable degree of similarity over certain issues. Each 'leader' highlighted the importance of the VEC adult education service and expressed as a priority, the improvement of adult education services. Areas highlighted were the requirement of capital funding, integration of services, change in VEC structures and the provision of a more professional qualified staff.

7.4 The ineffectiveness of Kildare VEC as an adult education provider

The areas of ineffectiveness on the part of Kildare VEC adult education service emanates largely from the separate and compartmentalised nature of provision by the VEC. Some management procedures along with internal and external communication systems were not helpful to the effectiveness of Kildare VEC. A considerable number of the issues that result in the ineffectiveness of Kildare VEC were fundamentally due to a lack of government coherent and joined-up policy in the adult and further education sector. Kildare VEC, despite the positive work of management and staff over the years, has evolved to its current position as an educational provider with funding and programmes being made available in an *ad hoc* manner by the Further Education section of the Department of Education and Skills. This

lack of overall cohesiveness, vision and policy by DES is what affects the provision. Kildare VEC has to operate out of its own vision, separate from the thirty-three VECs and other education providers. Finally, unlike Norway, Ireland does not have a clear ‘cradle to the grave’, easy to manage education and training system, comprised of academic and vocational courses with a clear progression route for students to further education and employment.

7.5 Recommendations

The data analysis and findings highlighted areas of effectiveness along with areas where effectiveness could be enhanced (Figure 30).

Kildare VEC	Themes	Findings	Recommendations
VEC service	Vision and priorities for VEC adult education	Limited vision for development	Create a new vision for VEC services
VEC service	Branding and image promotion	Lack of clear identity	Promote VEC services
VEC service	Management and communication structures	Poor management & communication structures	Establish a clear VEC communication system
VEC learners	Students learning requirements	Students needs not being addressed	Be more responsive to the needs of students
VEC staff	Training and continued professional development	Insufficient staff training	Upgrade VEC training provision
VEC staff	Adult and further education teaching status	No adult education staffing structure	Professionalise VEC teaching provision
VEC facilities	Appropriateness of VEC buildings and resources	Poor and inadequate facilities and resources	Upgrade VEC facilities and resources
VEC programmes	Suitability of VEC adult education provision	Programmes not matching student needs	Regular evaluation of VEC programmes and services
VEC future provision	Planning	Lack of integrated VEC planning	Develop whole service planning provision
VEC future provision	Ability of Kildare VEC to respond and adapt to current and future educational needs	Ability to respond but insufficient structures	Establishing links with enterprise and employment
VEC future provision	Creating progression routes between VEC adult education, higher education and employment	Limited progression routes with employers	Enhance guidance and information service

Figure 30: Analysis, findings and recommendations

The following recommendations are made with the intention of increasing the overall level of effectiveness by Kildare VEC and VECs in general:

Recommendation No. 1: Creating a new vision for Kildare

VEC services

Currently, thirty-three VECs produce, publish and submit five-yearly education plans to the Department of Education and Skills (DES). With the forthcoming amalgamation of VECs and the establishment of sixteen ETBs, the number of Plans will be reduced to sixteen. I would recommend that one national VEC Plan incorporating an education and training vision for Ireland should be produced by a body such as the IVEA in conjunction with data gathered from research agencies, such as ESRI and ForFás. While individual VEC Plans will take account of local circumstances, the production of a single Plan would provide a cohesive vision along with a set of goals and objectives for the development of adult education and training at a national level. As well as providing a clear response to individual, social and economic learning requirements, a national integrated approach to education and training would result in the integration of services, the provision of greater value for money and a more responsive service. A single Plan would be particularly beneficial in the light of the establishment of the new national education and training agency, SOLAS and the overall development of education and training in Ireland.

Recommendation No. 2: Promoting VEC services

Kildare VEC should create a unified approach to advertising, promoting itself as a whole service clearly showing that it provides the education, training and learning for all ages throughout County Kildare from the 'cradle to the grave'. Paralleling this promotion should be a name change to reflect the diverse nature of provision by Kildare VEC. In addition, with the amalgamation of thirty-three VECs, there is an urgent need for the creation of a national VEC corporate image that would identify the sixteen newly formed VECs as one educational organisation. A national coalition would enable the

standardisation of procedures throughout the country in order to ensure similarity of operational systems in each VEC in relation to staffing, resourcing and evaluating of education and training. More importantly, the new VECs structure should conduct a single service approach to advertising and promotion with national advertisement campaigns which would provide future students with definite information on the availability of education and training courses locally and throughout Ireland.

Recommendation No. 3: Establish a clear VEC communication system

A strong and consistent internal and external communication system should be established within Kildare VEC. ICT should be used to greater effect for communication with all personnel working for Kildare VEC and staff should be informed of changes and developments within the organisation with regular information sharing meeting and consultation taking place between the various sections of the organisation - administration, schools and adult education. Improved communication throughout the organisation would assist the establishment of a whole VEC organisation approach to education resulting in Kildare VEC becoming more responsive to the needs of its staff and a better 'listening organisation' and 'learning organisation' within County Kildare.

Recommendation No. 4: Be more responsive to the needs of students

Kildare VEC needs to be responsive, flexible and provide appropriate courses suited to the needs of the students for the 21st century. It must provide the most appropriate and relevant courses best suited to the social and economic development of society. Responsiveness will require increased capacity in the provision of vocational training alongside academic and social courses.

Kildare VEC student supports should include the following:

- Improve communication system with students
- Definitive information on all services, programmes and courses
- Provision of student handbooks and brochures

- Recognition of prior learning
- E-learning and on-line courses for students

Recommendation No. 5: Upgrade VEC training provision

Kildare VEC should establish both short and long term staff-training programmes. Appropriate training should take place at all levels within the VEC organisation, beginning with induction courses for new staff, continued professional development for existing staff and a clear training provision for all with management responsibilities. Training should not be restricted to particular adult education programmes and more 'cross programme' and subject CPD should be developed. Management and leadership training should also be initiated and provided for VEC staff at both local and national level by the IVEA.

Recommendation No. 6: Professionalise VEC teaching provision

A staffing structure should be established for VEC adult education personnel. A new recognised grade of VEC employee, an adult and further education tutor should be created along with standardised procedures implemented across all VECs. The creation of specific adult education teaching positions would enhance the work of Kildare VEC and increase the professional status of the adult education service. This recommendation would link with the Teaching Council requirements regarding qualifications for adult education tutors by April 2013. In addition, changes should be made to enable existing full-time adult education staff to work across the adult education service rather than being constricted to a particular programme. Future VEC employees should be appointed to the adult education service.

Recommendation No. 7: Upgrade VEC facilities and resources

Kildare VEC needs to establish adult education within identifiable centres with facilities best suited to the needs of adults. Within disbandment of FÁS and the transfer of staff and resources to the VECs, capital funding should be invested in VECs in order to respond effectively with integrated programmes

in multiplexes facilities to the educational and skills requirements. Kildare VEC will need to increase its capacity in vocational training in conjunction with academic learning. VEC school facilities should be made available for vocational training at times suited to the needs of adults at evening and weekend times in addition to purpose built facilities. The development of new resource materials and teaching aids are required for all tutors and investment in ICT should be secured in order to assist with the development and dissemination of on-line resources, supporting tutors in new models of best practice.

Recommendation No. 8: Regular evaluation of VEC service and programmes

Kildare VEC should regularly evaluate its educational provision to ensure delivery of the most appropriate courses and programmes. The VEC should evaluate all its provision with students, tutors and co-ordinators from the educational, financial and social perspective. In addition, the ability of Kildare VEC to respond to the educational needs of adults and society with suitable courses in facilities adequate for provision is critical. Kildare VEC in association with all VECs should engage in county, national and European research that will inform provision, planning and response to educational and training requirements. Analysis of data should be carried out in conjunction with organisations such as ForFás, ESRI, local SMEs, industries and employer groups.

Recommendation No. 9: Develop whole service planning provision

Kildare VEC should introduced new planning procedures involving all sectors of Kildare VEC. 'Whole organisational' planning would result in the creation of a strategic plan, owned and delivered by all staff, assisting communication and all contributors being party to the 'bigger picture' VEC provision. The whole service approach to planning would entail involvement of staff at all levels within the organisation in the process, thus improving communication

and creating a more effective and efficient organisation better suited to responding to the needs of students, society and the economy.

Recommendation No. 10: Establish links with enterprise and employment

Kildare VEC should develop working relationships with the business and industry sector in order to create a definitive link between education and employment in Kildare similar to existing structures in Norway. All adult education and training should interface with industry and employment in a manner that is beneficial to students and advantageous of employment. Regular dialogue should be established with a wide cross section of employers to ascertain the current and future training needs of businesses in County Kildare. This recommendation echo's a similar recommendation from the 2010 joint progress report of the Council and Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training work programme (2010: 6).

Recommendation No. 11: Enhance guidance and information service

Kildare VEC should enhance and develop the adult guidance service in order to respond to the needs of students within the economic environment. The OECD Report, Learning for Jobs recommends that guidance personnel should have clear experience of the labour market and be separated from psychological services (2010: 50). A national guidance website with guidance information accessible to all through the Internet should be created similar to the Norwegian adult education system (VOX) and recommended by the EGFSN (2007: 128). In addition, through the guidance service, Kildare VEC should establish links with internal and external educational and training bodies in order to provide progression routes for VEC students to Further Education Colleges, Institutes of Technology and Universities.

7.6 Conclusion

Historically, Ireland has had a strong community-based adult education sector underpinned by high levels of volunteerism. According to the White Paper on

adult education, lifelong learning was seen as the key to personal development and social inclusion as education empowers individuals to participate fully and creatively in their communities (2000: 24). However, the twenty-first century has seen a significant change in the Irish economy resulting in a growing awareness by the government and social partners that within the emerging knowledge-based economy, the workforce needs to become more competitive. To achieve this objective, skills will need to be kept up-to-date and relevant through on-going education and training. Support for lifelong learning is prioritised in programmes such as the National Development Plan (2007-2013) and in the Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2007) which stated that Ireland needed to up-skill nearly 500,000 of the existing workforce by 2020. The National Skills Strategy also recommended that literacy and numeracy should be embedded in all publically-funded education and training programmes.

In Ireland, vocational training programmes have mainly provided for entrants to the workforce, unemployed persons and early school-leavers. Responsibility for this training lay with bodies such as FÁS, Fáilte Ireland, Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Teagasc. In the European context, vocational education training (VET) plays a more significant role in preparing workers for the labour market. The OECD Report, Learning for Jobs, states that 'in the 21st century, those entering the labour market need immediate job skills, but they also need a range of career and cognitive competences that will enable them to handle changing jobs and career contexts and to sustain their learning capacity' (2010: 4). The challenge for providers of VET, such as Kildare VEC, is that it needs to be high quality, flexible and responsive to the needs of today and tomorrow. In the publication, Europe 2020, there is a strong emphasis on education and skills development to meet global challenges. Qualities such as, innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship and human intelligence should be integrated as part of learning skills.

Further more, VET systems do not exist in isolation, their effectiveness depends on links to the labour market. The engagement of employers

ensures the content of vocational programmes meets the needs of employers, students and the wider community. Another necessary component of establishing a VET system is the provision of a national, integrated, comprehensive structure for providing information and guidance to adult students. The OECD Report on Guidance said that 'the establishment of a national forum for guidance policy and systems development, which includes both government and key stakeholder representatives such as employers and trade unions, as well as the key organisations that deliver services, is an important step that governments can take to help to focus and develop policy agendas and to strengthen policy making' (2004: 8).

Kildare VEC adult education service has responsibility for enhancing employability along with a duty to advance social cohesion, active citizenship, equality and sustainability within the local communities as stated in the White Paper - Learning for Life (2000: 24). A critical challenge will be to bring a balanced perspective to the prevailing discourse which puts the needs of the economy to the forefront of the education agenda. It is increasingly important to demonstrate the impact of education on social inclusion, poverty reduction and overall empowerment of individuals, families and communities, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

Finally, this research was limited by design to VEC students and staff as well as three external VECs. An interesting study for future research would be an inquiry among the general public of County Kildare to ascertain their knowledge and experience of the effectiveness of Kildare VEC. However, it is my contention that Kildare VEC, which has been involved in education and training for over 80 years, it is now well placed to deliver many of the up-skilling programmes envisaged by the Expert Group on Future Skills. The VEC has the trained personnel providing basic education as well as those working at NQF Levels 1 to 6 (Appendix 6) within the different sectors. With the appropriate leadership, planning and vision, utilising its funding and resources and implementation of the eleven recommendations, the VEC can assist Ireland move out of the current economic crisis. By the acceptance and implementation of the recommendations of this thesis, Kildare VEC will be

better placed to respond to the needs of adult and further education within the county. The recommendations will help create an environment where adult students and the learning process is recognised for its importance and the outcomes of Kildare VEC adult education service will be a contributing factor to the betterment of individuals, citizens and economic environment. This research has sought to understand the effects of education and to be mindful of the provisional nature of any evidence gathered. As Oancea and Pring (2009, p. 28) have argued:

No search for evidence, however systematic, can give grounds for certainty in the conclusions reached. There is a need to live with uncertainty - to be open to further evidence, further re-conceptualisation of the evidence received and further criticism of the interpretation of that evidence. The state of knowledge is always provisional. The world, both physical and social, to which that knowledge applies is itself changing in an unpredictable way - the social world in particular because of the inevitable evolution of meanings attributed to experience as each interacts with each other.

In conducting this research and familiarising myself with the adult education literature, I have achieved a greater understanding and knowledge of the sectors as well as appreciation for all those involved in the work of adult education with Kildare VEC. Overall, the findings and data analysis far exceeded my expectation. The recommendations will provide a road map for my work as an Adult Education Officer, for Kildare VEC as an educational provider and for VECs in general in this time of change and transition from Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

Eleven Recommendations

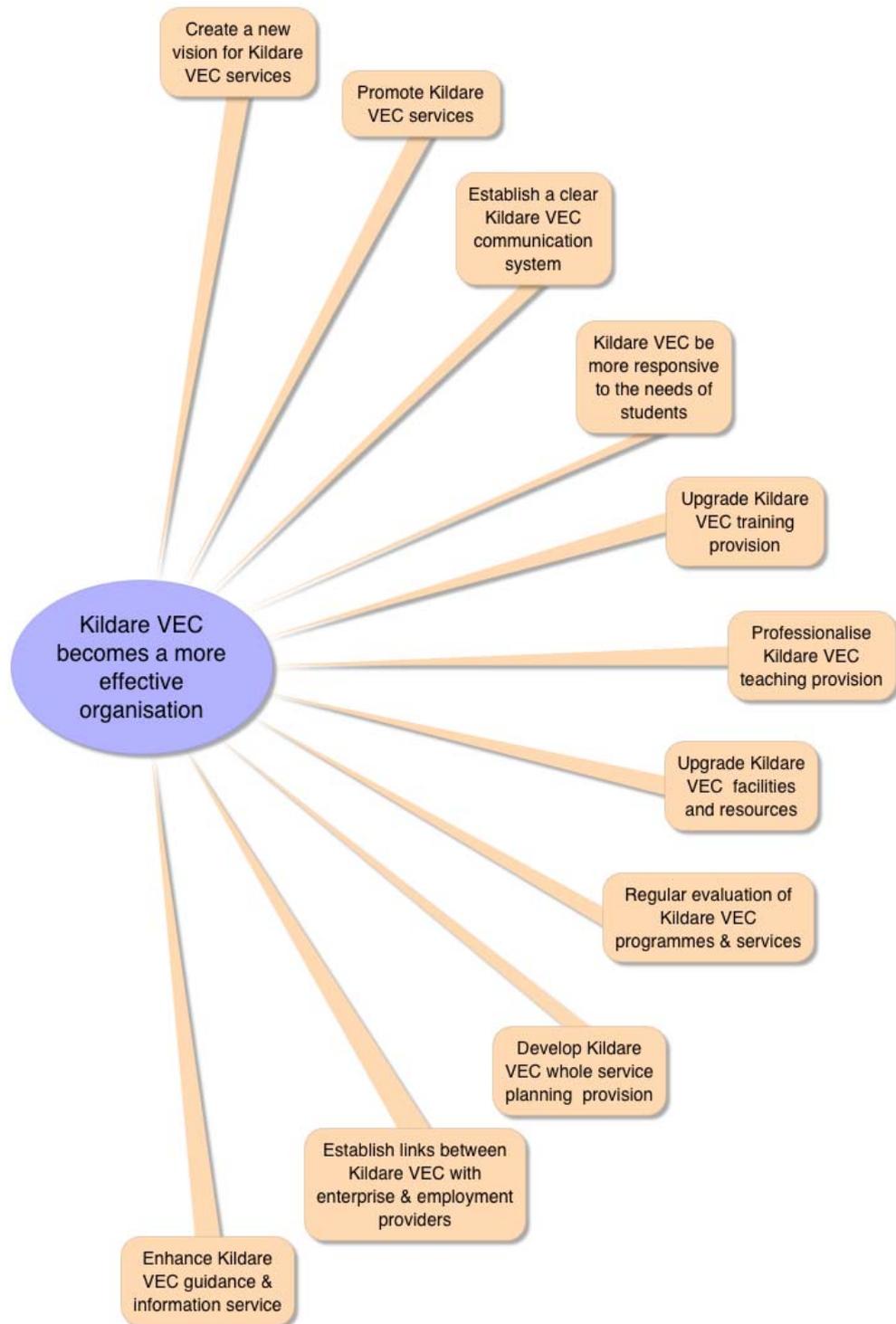


Figure 31: Eleven recommendations that will improve the effectiveness of Kildare VEC adult education service.

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Appendices

1 - 33

Appendix 1

Interview Questions (Pilot Project - 2008)

General

1. For the purpose of this Interview, can you tell me what your position within the VEC is?
2. What work do you carry out in the area of adult education?
3. Apart from your current position, how long have you been connected or associated with adult education work?
4. How has your prior experiences in adult education shaped your work in adult education today?

Policies

“Adult learning has not always gained the recognition it deserves in terms of visibility, policy prioritisation and resources, notwithstanding the political emphasis placed on lifelong learning in recent years”

Communication from the Commission: Adult learning: It is never too late to learn, Brussels 2006, p.3

1. Do you agree or disagree with the statement that adult learning has not always gained the recognition it deserves?
2. What would help adult learning achieve greater visibility in VEC Adult Education Services?
3. What policy prioritisation would you like to see VEC Adult Education Services adopt?
4. Are there other policies or resources that you think would help development of VEC Adult Education Services?

Structures

“The growth of activity under Adult Literacy and Adult Education generally, the expansion of the Back to Education Initiative, the development of supporting services such as guidance and childcare, the increase in youthwork activity, participation in Area-Based Partnerships, County/City Development Boards and the development of integrated approaches have all raised fundamental issues in relation to professional and administrative staffing levels in VECs”.

Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education, 10.6 Staffing of VEC's, p.199

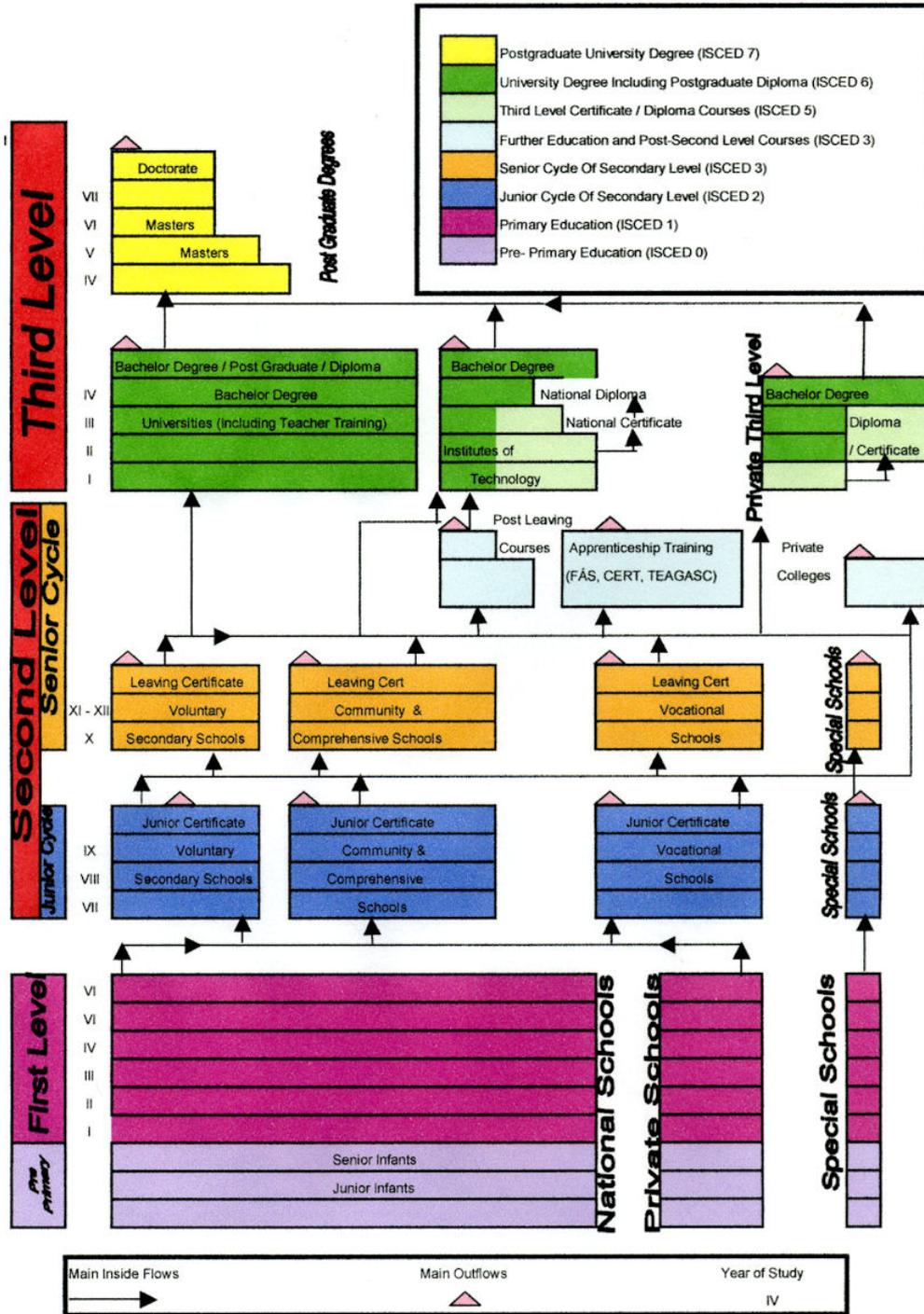
1. What do you think of the staffing levels in VEC Adult Education Services?
2. What issues do you think the development of integrated approaches in Adult Education Services raises for VEC's?
3. Is there a need for VEC Adult Education management structures to be reviewed or changed?
4. What makes a VEC Adult Education Service professional?

Conclusion

1. Are there any other aspects of the VEC Adult Education provision that you think could be helped by a review or a rethink?
2. Have you any overall comments that you would like to make relating to Adult Education Services provided by VEC's?

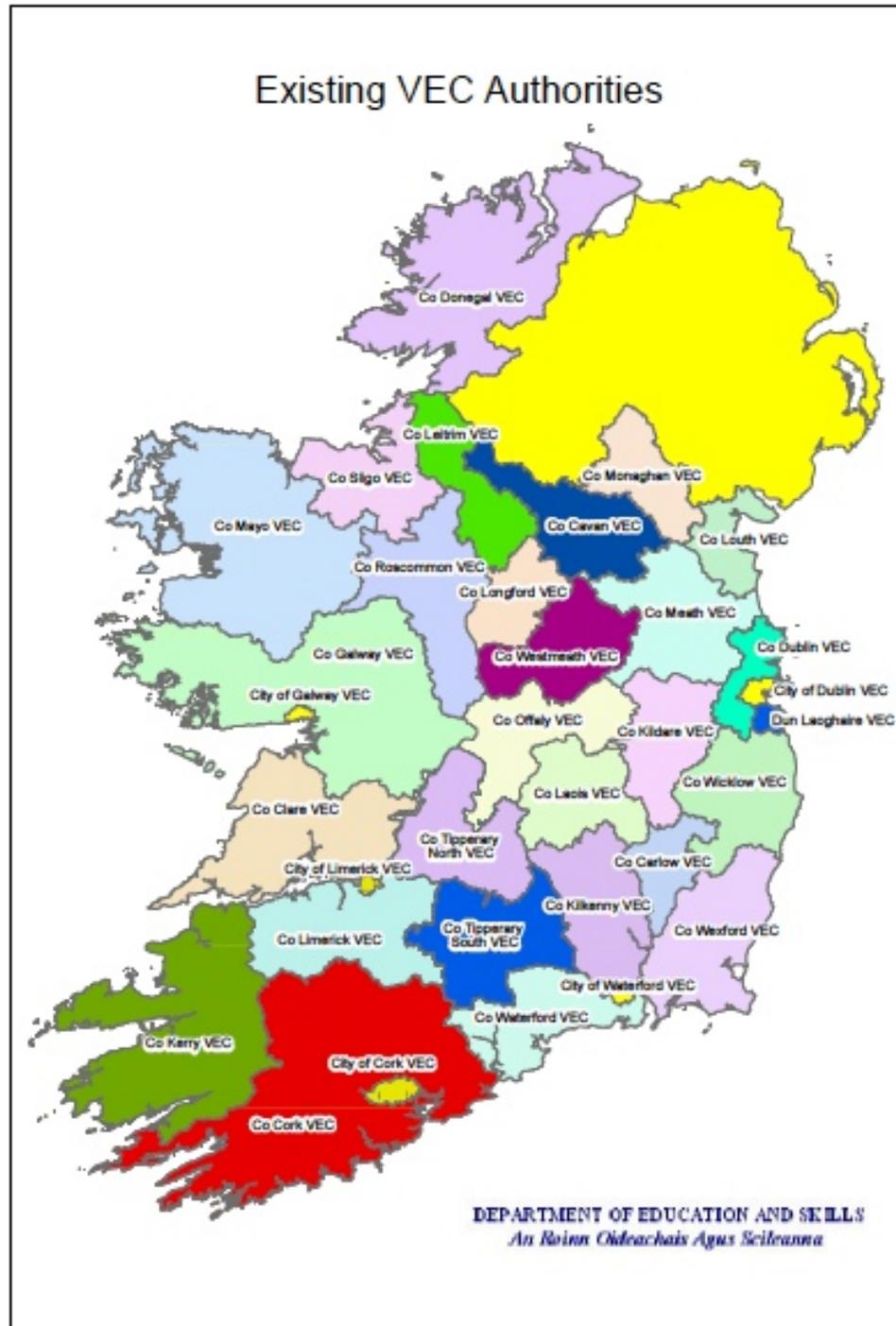
Appendix 2

The Irish educational system from primary through to third level



Appendix 3

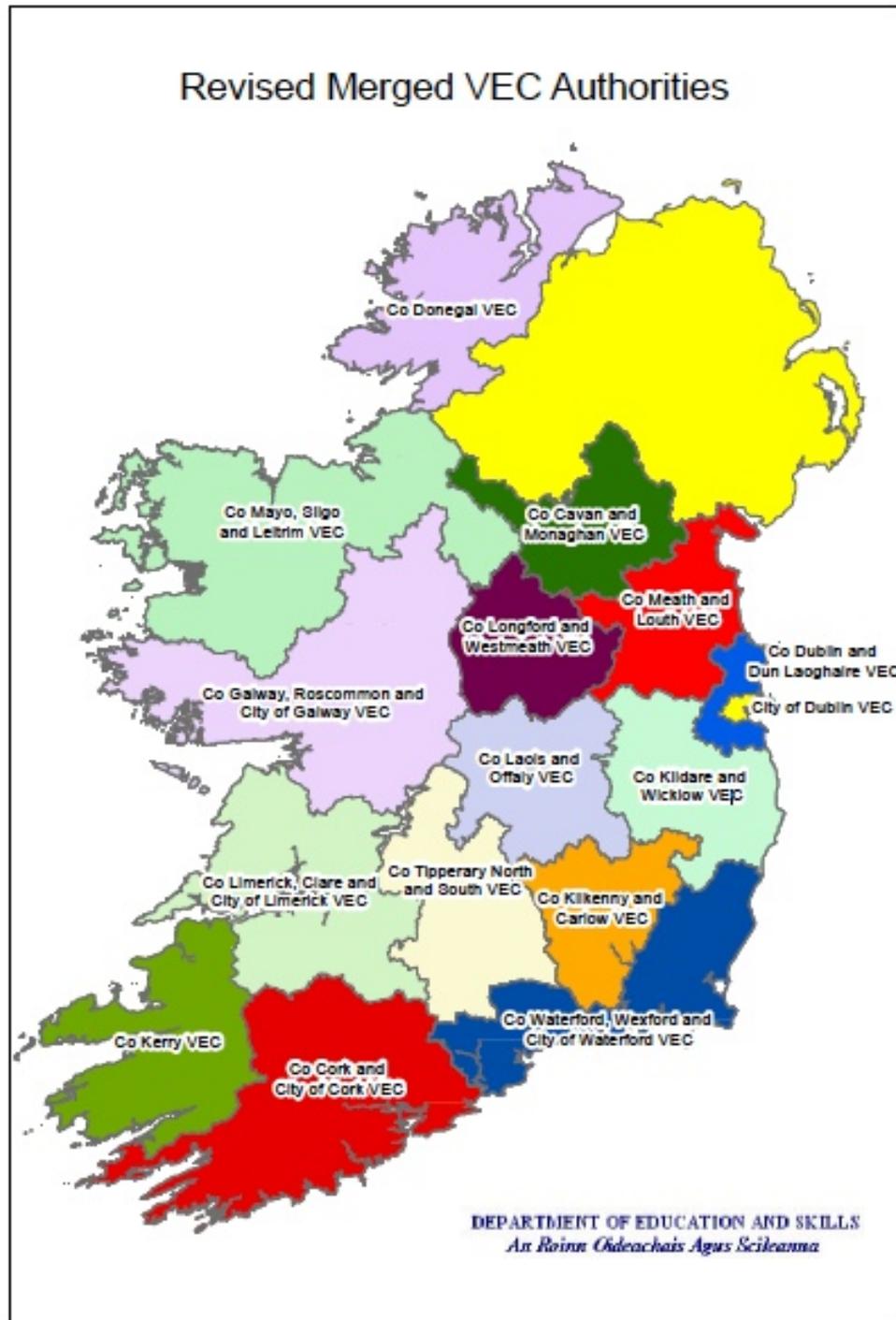
The thirty-three VECs as they currently exist



Department of Education and Skills 2011

Appendix 4

The new grouping of sixteen VECs following amalgamation



Department of Education and Skills 2011

Appendix 5

Six areas of responsibility for every VEC

1. Primary schools

Since 2008, three VECs have been given patronage for establishing and running community national schools.

2. Second level schools

Each VEC manages and operates second level schools within its city or county. VECs manage one third of all second level schools (247) in Ireland, catering for nearly 100,000 students and employing approximately 9,000 teachers. Over the years, VEC schools have become some of the most successful schools in the country – in academic, sport and cultural terms, with many of the schools moving away from particular emphasis on vocational education and training.

3. Adult and further education

Adult education has been a component of the educational provision before the establishment of VECs. However, adult education did become an integral part of county and city VECs with the enactment of the Vocational Education Act (1930). Adult education was described within the 1930 Act as "continuation education". Continuing education in the act means 'education provided in elementary schools and includes general and practical training in preparation for employment in trades, manufacturing, agriculture, commerce, and other industrial pursuits and also general and practical training for improvement of young persons in the early stages of such employment'.

4. Youth work

The Youth Work Act (2001) directed that VECs be given a number of functions and responsibilities for youth work programmes and services within their schemes and that Youth Officers be appointed to manage the new responsibilities. These officers work closely with the other

services provided by their VECs and with national and local youth organisations to ensure that the wider development needs of young people, particularly disadvantaged young people are focused on in an integrated manner.

5. Administration of student support schemes

Currently VECs administer some 55% (41,736 new applications and renewals in 2008/09) of all student support grant schemes for both Further and Higher education. VECs will have sole responsibility for the administration of grant applications in the near future.

6. The School transport scheme

The school transport scheme for both primary and post-primary education catering for 135,000 students is administered through VEC offices.

Appendix 6

Statistical returns to Department of Education and Skills 2010

VEC adult education services with statistics provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and from the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) for 2010:

The Adult Guidance Service operates an educational service to encourage/facilitate individuals to return to educational/training, thus enabling these learners to achieve their full potential, at work and in the community. It also includes those who are in employment as well as individuals seeking employment. In 2010, according to DES and the NCGE, a guidance and information service was provided to a total of over 60,000 adults with nearly 38,000 beneficiaries of face-to-face guidance and over 22,000 public information queries.

Self-financing adult education courses provide mainly part-time evening classes covering hobby, leisure as well as certified professional courses to approximately 70,000 adults annually.

The **Adult Literacy Schemes** are the main source of adult basic education (ABE) in Ireland. Over 52,000 adults availed of this service in 2010, including those registered for ESOL support and intensive ABE. This service involves over 1,500 paid and 3,200 volunteer tutors.

The **Back to Education Initiative** (BTEI) provided part-time education to over 28,000 adults in 2010 who were over 16 year of age with less than upper second level education and who, for various reasons could not take part in full-time education.

Community Education provided not just individual development but also community advancement, especially in marginalised communities to nearly 56,000 adults in 2010 in Ireland.

The **Youthreach** programme provided education and training to 6,000 young adults between the ages of 16 and 20 years in 2010 who left school before completing their Leaving Certificate.

The **Vocational Training Opportunities** (VTOS) Scheme provided full-time courses of up to two years duration to over 5,000 unemployed adults in 2010.

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses are provided at FETAC Level 5 and/or 6 awards to over 38,700 learners annually. VECs run 92% of PLCs and there are over 1,000 courses in 230 centres in a wide range of fields providing routes to employment and third level education for school leavers and adults (50%) returning to education.

Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs) were originally established to provide basic education for travellers aged between 16 and 25 and in 2010 provided education to 684 older female travellers.

The FÁS **Skills for Work (SFW)** initiative involves VECs providing training to some 1,600 workers with low levels of literacy and numeracy within the workplace.

SkillVEC programmes deliver workplace education and training to approximately 28,000 Health Service Executive (HSE) staff at FETAC Levels 5 - 6 throughout the county.

Return to Education programmes provide literacy tuition to Local Authorities throughout the country.

Prisoner Education involves a partnership between the Irish Prison Service and the VECs providing education to more than 35% of prisoners in 2010.

Outdoor Education: A number of VECs operate and manage outdoor education centres providing training and development programmes.

Appendix 7

FETAC Certification



Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC) is the national awarding body for all further education and training in Ireland. It is a statutory body, established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

Appendix 8

Sample Mission Statement of five VECs

County Cork VEC

County Cork Vocational Education Committee aims to deliver a high quality education service, in a partnership manner, to meet the existing and emerging needs, throughout the county region of Cork.

County Wicklow VEC

County Wicklow VEC's mission is to provide access to high quality integrated educational opportunities for all learners. We will be responsive to the changing education and learning needs of the community through innovation, partnership and the provision of appropriate support services.

County Laois VEC

The Mission of County Laois VEC is to provide, promote and support excellent education and training services which facilitate young people and adults in realising their full potential.

City of Limerick VEC

CLVEC responds to the Lifelong Learning needs of the people of Limerick, by providing quality Education & Training programmes and support services.

County Carlow VEC

The Mission of County Carlow VEC is:

- to provide and promote an inclusive and quality Educational/Training Service, responsive to the ever-changing social, economic and cultural needs of the community.
- to enable individuals develop their full potential by being a proactive strategic organisation that continuously reviews and adapts its policies and practices.

to ensure inclusive access to our programmes and support services for all according to their needs.

Appendix 9

Irish educational statistics (2000 – 2008)

IRELAND

		Ireland		EU average		EU Benchmarks	
		2000	2008	2000	2008	2010	2020
Participation in early childhood education (4 years old - year before start of comp. primary)		-	-	85.6%	90.7% ⁰⁷	-	95%
Low achievers (15 year-olds; PISA study results)	Reading	11.0%	12.1% ⁰⁶	21.3%	24.1% ⁰⁶	17.0 %	15%
	Mathematics	-	16.4% ⁰⁶	-	24.0% ⁰⁶	-	15%
	Science	-	15.5% ⁰⁶	-	20.2% ⁰⁶	-	15%
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)		14.6% ⁰²	11.3% b	17.6%	14.9%	10 %	10%
Upper secondary attainment (age 20-24)		82.6%	87.7%	76.6%	78.5%	85 %	-
MST graduates (higher education)	Increase since 2000	-	-3.6% ⁰⁷	-	33.6% ⁰⁷	+15 %	-
	Share of females	37.9%	31.3% ⁰⁷	30.7%	31.9% ⁰⁷	Improve gender balance	-
Higher education attainment (age 30-34)		27.5%	46.1%	22.4%	31.1%	-	40%
Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64; 4 weeks period)		5.9% ⁰³	7.1%	8.5% ⁰³	9.5%	12.5 %	15%
Investment in education Public spending on education,% of GDP		4.28%	4.86% ⁰⁶	4.91%	5.05% ⁰⁶	-	-

⁰²= 2002, ⁰³= 2003, ⁰⁵= 2005, ⁰⁶= 2006, ⁰⁷=2007, e= estimate, b = break, p = provisional,

National Report of Ireland by the Department of Education and Science,
July 2008

Appendix 10

Basic Beliefs Associated with Major Paradigms

Basic Beliefs	Positivism / Postpositivism	Constructivist	Transformative	Pragmatic
<u>Ontology</u> (nature of reality)	One reality; knowable within probability	Multiple, socially constructed realities	Multiple realities, shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender and disability values	What is useful determines what is true; participants perform reality checks by determining increased clarity of understanding
<u>Epistemology</u> (nature of knowledge; relation between knower and would-be known)	Objectivity is important; the research manipulates and observes in a dispassionate, objective manner	Interactive link between research and participants; values are made explicit; created findings	Interactive link between research and participants; knowledge is socially and historically situated	Relationships in research are determined by what the research deems as appropriate to that particular study
<u>Methodology</u> (approach to systematic inquiry)	Quantitative (primarily); interventionist; decontextualised	Qualitative (mainly); hermeneutical; dialectical; contextual factors are described	Inclusion of qualitative (dialogic), but quantitative and mixed methods can be used; contextual and historical factors are described, especially as they relate to oppression	Match methods to specific questions and purposes of research; mixed methods can be used

Source: Adapted by Donna M. Mertens (2005) from Guba and Lincoln (1994)

Appendix 11

Letter to Mr Sean Ashe, CEO, County Kildare VEC

25th May 2009

Mr Sean Ashe
Chief Executive Officer
County Kildare VEC
Aras Chill Dara
Devoy Park
Naas
County Kildare

Re.: Educational Research

Dear Sean

As you are aware, I am completing the third year of my Doctorate in Educational studies with Dublin City University. The structure of my research will have a threefold dimension, local, national and European. The objectives of my research are:

1. to learn if adults who engage in return to learning with the VEC receive the best adult education provision suited to their needs.
2. to investigate whether programmes such as VTOS, Basic Education, Back to Education Initiative, Youthreach, etc., have the desired learning outcome for students when the existing structures may sometimes operate independently of each other.
3. to discover if better learning outcomes could be achieved if there was an integration of programmes.
4. to explore the nature and composition of an integrated management team co-ordinating the VEC services.

In order to achieve these objectives, I propose conducting Research with learners, co-ordinators and senior management within County Kildare VEC. When analysis of these findings has taken place, I propose to parallel the work with a number of VEC in Ireland and with a similar organisation within a European country.

I would like permission to carry out research with the above mentioned personnel in County Kildare VEC. As per my application to the DCU Ethics Committee, confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and identities will not be revealed. The identity of senior management will be masked through the generic description of 'senior personnel'.

I look forward to response.

Yours sincerely

Des Murtagh

Des Murtagh
Adult Education Officer



**Coiste Ghairm
Oideachais
Co. Chill Dara**

Áras Chill Dara
Páirc Devoy,
An Nás,
Co. Chill Dara.

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Seán Ághas

Príomh Oifigeach
Feidhmiucháin

Seán Ashe

Chief Executive Officer

Appendix 12

Letter from Mr Sean Ashe, CEO, County Kildare VEC

26th May 2009

Mr Des Murtagh
Adult Education Officer
Aras Chill Dara
Devoy Park
Naas
County Kildare

Re.: Educational Research

Dear Des

Further to your letter of May 25, 2009, requesting permission to carry out research among personnel within County Kildare VEC, I wish to confirm that I grant my permission to conduct such research.

Wishing you success in your work.

Yours sincerely

Sean Ashe

Sean Ashe
Chief Executive Officer



**Coiste Ghairm
Oideachais
Co. Chill Dara**

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Feidhmiucháin

Seán Ashe
Chief Executive Officer

Appendix 13



DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Plain Language Statement

A Plain Language Statement should use language that reflects the participant age group and corresponding comprehension level. It should contain the following information:

I. Introduction to the Research Study:

Title

A Study of the Effectiveness of Adult Education within County Kildare VEC.

The School of Education Studies in Dublin City University (DCU).

The principal investigator is Desmond Murtagh, Adult Education Officer, Co Kildare VEC.

The reason for this research lies in the work that I perform as an Adult Education Officer with County Kildare Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The work involves leading and directing the County Adult Education Service which a sizable number of adult learners take part in the different programmes. The VEC adult education service provides a multiplicity of programmes such as Youthreach, VTOS, Back to Education, Adult Basic Education, Community Education, PLCs, Return to Learning, Workplace Learning, along with certified and hobby courses. The service also has its own Adult Guidance and Counselling service. The purpose of my research is to discover the effectiveness of separate stand alone educational programme in providing for the educational needs of adults who wish to receive the best and most effective education/learning that is available.

II. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require:

The interviewer is using a qualitative research method based on interviews with learners, tutors, co-ordinators, the Guidance service and senior personnel within the VEC. The interview will involve answering questions and should last between 30 and 45 minutes. Permission to record the interviews is being sought from each participant.

III. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life):

Participants will be advised that all information provided during the course of the interview will be treated as strictly confidential and used for the purpose of this

study only. They will be guarantee anonymity and participants will not be identified in the writings of my findings.

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study:

Participants may not benefit directly from participation in the research but they will be informed that through their assistance, the VEC adult education service will benefit as will other VECs through the publication of the findings through the Irish Vocation Education Association (IVEA) and the Department of Education and Science (DES).

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations:

Participants will be advised that all information provided during the course of this interview will be treated as strictly confidential and used for the purpose of this study only. They guarantee anonymity and participants will not be indentified in the writings of the findings. The identity of senior management will be masked through the generic description of 'senior personnel'. Confidentiality of the information provided is subject to legal limitations.

VI. Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period:

All transcripts of interviews and recordings will be destroyed as soon as I receive confirmation from Dublin City University (DCU) that the research has been accepted for the thesis of my Professional Doctorate in Education Leadership.

VII. Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary:

Participants will be informed at the outset that their involvement in this research is on a voluntary basis and that they may withdraw from the interview at any point. There will be no repercussions for them if they withdraw before the interview is completed.

VIII. Any other relevant information:

A Plain Language Statement should end with the following statement:

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

Appendix 14



DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

I. Research Study Title:

A Study of the Effectiveness of Adult Education within County Kildare VEC

II. Clarification of the purpose of the research:

The purpose of this research is to ascertain the effectiveness of VEC adult education programmes in the context of addressing the educational needs of adults who wish to receive the most appropriate and beneficial education/learning available.

III. Confirmation of particular requirements:

Each interview will be recorded and later transcribed. I would like your permission to record this interview.

Each participant will be given the following questions on a printed page and asked to verify their responses by their signature.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement

Yes / No

Do you understand the information provided?

Yes / No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?

Yes / No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?

Yes / No

Are you aware that your interview will be audiotaped?

Yes / No

IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary:

I would like to inform you at the outset that your involvement in this research is on a voluntary basis and that you may withdraw from the interview at any point. There will be no repercussions for you if you withdraw before the interview is completed.

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations:

I wish to advise you that that all information provided during the course of this interview will be treated as strictly confidential and used for the purpose of this

study only. I also guarantee anonymity and you will not be identified directly in the writings of my findings. Confidentiality of the information provided is subject to legal limitations.

VI. Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 15

Student Interview Questions (Main Study)

1. What age are you?
2. At what age did you leave school?
3. How would you describe your experience of school?
4. What qualifications did you receive while you were in school?
5. Why did you return to receive further education?
6. Where did you hear of this (Basic Education Service / VTOS / Youthreach / BTEI / PLC) programme?
7. Did you know that there were other VEC educational programmes?
8. If Yes, did you consider taking part in a different VEC programme?
9. How did you make contact with this (Basic Education Service / VTOS / Youthreach / BTEI / PLC) programme?
10. What was the response when you contacted the (Basic Education Service / VTOS / Youthreach / BTEI / PLC) programme?
11. Were you met, interviewed and your educational needs discussed?
12. What was that experience like for you?
13. Were you informed that there were other programmes that might be more suitable to your requirement?

14. How was your experience of returning to education?
15. As you got into the programme/classes, what has that experience of education been like for you?
16. Can you tell me how you benefited by returning to education?
17. What has been most helpful to you about your study or learning so far?
18. How would you describe the help you have received from your tutor(s)?
19. How would you describe the help you have received from the co-ordinator of the programme?
20. Have you received any certification for work you have done?
21. What do you hope to achieve by taking part in this educational programme?
22. Have you plans for progressing in further education?
23. Have you received professional assistance with progression routes?
24. If no, would you like to receive professional assistance with progression routes and how do you think it would help you?
25. Are there improvements you would like to suggest in relation to the (Basic Education Service / VTOS / Youthreach / BTEI / PLC) programme?
26. Are there any overall comments you would like to make about Adult Education in general and VEC Adult Education in particular?
27. Have you any suggestions as to how Adult Education might be improved?

Appendix 16

Summary of student responses

1. What age are you?

	Male	Female	Total	%
16-17	1		1	3%
18-20	3	1	4	12.5%
21-24	1	1	2	6%
25-34	1	3	4	12.5%
35-44	2	6	8	25%
45-54	3	6	9	28%
55-64	2	2	4	12.5%
Total	13	19	32	

2. At what age did you leave school?

	Male	Female	Total	%
12-14	2	3	5	16%
15-16	6	6	12	37%
17-18	4	8	12	37%
19 +	1	2	3	10%
Total	13	19	32	

This shows that 53% of interviewees left school with Junior Certificate or less. It can also be said that some of the 37% who left school between 17 and 18 would not have obtained a Leaving Certificate. Further clarification will be given on these findings in Question 4.

3. How would you describe your experience of school?

The majority of student interviewees stated that they did not have a good experience while they were at school and only on reflection having returned to adult education, discovered that they were capable of more than was initially communicated to them at school. Overall, students spoke of the fact that their individual needs weren't met when they were in school and several said that if they were not capable of 'keeping up' and they fell behind, then teachers no longer showed interest in them nor helped them to progress.

4. What qualifications did you receive while you were in school?

Initial indication gave the impression that the majority of interviewees had some form of certification. While interviewees stated that they had received some form of certification while at school, the interviewer did not question the level of certification and the honours obtained but rather accepted certificate title, e.g. Junior Certificate. Another factor determining the level of certification that interviewees had was the VEC programme they were in, PLC students must have a Leaving Certificate before joining the programme while those interviewees within the Literacy programmes had little or no certificates. This fact was also linked to the age profile of students, as a majority (27%) tended to be in their 40's. Interviewees from Youthreach had no Leaving Certificates but because of their age at leaving school, would have had obtained a Junior Certificate. Out of the total interviewed, only seven had completed the Leaving Certificate.

5. Why did you return to receive further education?

The motivation for interviewees returning to education differed depending on the programme they were in but core factor among the majority of responses was they wanted to do something to better themselves. All interviewees had a purpose for returning to learning, be it to read and write to go to college. Others had become unemployed or were in employment which they wished to change. Some stated the belief they had discovered in themselves that they were capable of more than their early education had led them to believe. This was also true for early school leavers who were a short time out of the schooling system.

6. Where did you hear of this (Basic Education Service / VTOS / Youthreach / BTEI / PLC) programme?

Answers included VEC advertisements in papers or brochures, radio, TV, social welfare and from people who had heard of the programmes or had taken part in one such programme.

7. Did you know that there were other VEC educational programmes?

For the most part, people didn't know other VEC educational programmes. Some stated that they knew of VTOS and night classes and computer courses.

8. If Yes, did you consider taking part in a different VEC programme?

There were no answers to this question.

9. How did you make contact with this (Basic Education Service / VTOS / Youthreach / BTEI / PLC) programme?

The majority of interviewees phoned a particular centre or in the case of younger people, phone calls were made for them. Only a few interviewees stated they called into a centre or used email.

10. What was the response when you contacted the (Basic Education Service / VTOS / Youthreach / BTEI / PLC) programme?

Every interviewee stated that the response to their contact with a particular centre was positive, which was a surprise to some of them.

11. Were you met, interviewed and your educational needs discussed?

With the exception of learners studying within the BTEI programme, the majority of interviewees were met, interviewed and their educational needs discussed. Because there was a time difference from when some made the initial contact, they could not recall whether they were 'interviewed'. This could have been because of the informal nature of the initial meeting that some may not describe the initial meeting as an interview.

12. What was that experience like for you?

Interviewees admitted to feelings of nervousness. However, the outcome of their first contact with a VEC person from the Adult Education Service was a positive experience and many interviewees said that they were made to feel 'adequate and worthwhile'. The six younger people from Youthreach didn't have the language to express their feelings while BTEI participants were not interviewed and had little to contribute to the question.

13. Were you informed that there were other programmes that might be more suitable to your requirement?

Very few interviewees could recollect being informed about other programmes and that was probably due to the fact that people went to particular programmes to obtain the courses they wanted.

14. How was your experience of returning to education?

In general, all interviewees found the experience of returning to education a good one. While interviewees described their experiences in terms of apprehension and nervousness in case they would be 'put on the spot', many looked forward to the new opportunities that education could provide. Generally, older interviewees found the experience more daunting.

15. As you got into the programme/classes, what has that experience of education been like for you?

Interviewees described the experience as being 'unlike school' and a total contrast to 'the first time round' because they learned 'what they could because they wanted to'. Some put down the learning to the atmosphere of belonging and support in centres. Overall, the majority of interviewees found the experience very rewarding and fulfilling with one person stating 'I found I was on the right course going at the right speed' and another remarking 'I was treated as an adult'.

16. Can you tell me how you benefited by returning to education?

The overriding word used by most interviewees as to how they had benefited by returning to education was that they were given confidence. People felt their self-esteem had been restored and that this was due to the fact that other people (staff and fellow learners) believed in them. Having completed a two-year course, one person remarked that 'college was like a dream, now it is a reality'. Another's stated 'I have learned not to write myself off' and those within the literacy programmes said 'I can read now'. Overall, all interviewees felt positive about themselves and some looked to the future with hope in the prospect of being able to gain employment.

17. What has been most helpful to you about your study or learning so far?

In responding to this question, interviewees spoke of two aspects that have helped them. Firstly, people especially tutors with whom they had direct contact and secondly, they had developed competences. Tutors played a very significant part in helping so many learners gain confidence in themselves which resulted in students reading books, filling in forms and one learner said 'doors were opened that I didn't know existed'. The positive attitude of tutors was commended on.

18. How would you describe the help you have received from your tutor(s)?

Terms such as brilliant, excellent, so good were freely used to describe the help and assistance learners received from tutors. The adult education system was compared to school by several interviewees and the difference was attributed mainly to the work of tutors. Tutors assisted students to develop an interest in study and students felt that tutors genuinely cared for them which surprised and impressed so many interviewees. Another word used to describe the characteristics of the tutors was encouraging - learners felt accepted as they were and encouraged to develop more and 'come out of their comfort zone'.

19. How would you describe the help you have received from the co-ordinator of the programme?

Co-ordinators were spoken of in positive terms - excellent, approachable, really nice, supportive, etc. Depending on the programme, some interviewees said they did not have much direct contact with the Co-ordinator of their programme. This was true for some in VTOS and BTEI but all knew that if they needed assistance, the Co-ordinator was available to help.

20. Have you received any certification for work you have done?

Depending on the programme, a lot of interviewees had received certification or would when the two-year programme was completed. Certification ranged from Junior / Leaving Certificates to FETAC up to Level 5. Some were receiving certification for third level access courses to universities. Only a minority within the literacy service stated that they had no interest in undertaking certification. Overall the level of provision of certification was high in VTOS and to a lesser extent in BTEI.

21. What do you hope to achieve by taking part in this educational programme?

The majority of interviewees who were in full-time courses such as VTOS and PLCs all had the ambition to go to college, with some stating they never thought that they would have the capabilities. The younger individuals in Youthreach had the objective of getting a job that they liked. One stated simply that they hoped to 'be able to read the paper'. Underlining their desired achievements, many stated they had grown in confidence which enabled them to work at and believe in their ability to achieve their goals. One individual had achieved their ambition and had written a book.

22. Have you plans for progressing in further education?

With the exception of one, all interviewees were open to the idea of progressing further with their education. The exception was due to age grounds but a sizable number would like to go to college. For others, the idea of doing their Leaving Certificate would provide an acceptable challenge and some of those in part-time education could see themselves progressing to full-time VEC education or taking a definite course that would enhance their career prospect.

23. Have you received professional assistance with progression routes?

This question received a mixed response because some interviewees gave the response that they were helped by their tutor and/or the Co-ordinator. Some had experience of being visited by a person in relation to the CAO or grants. A few interviewees had asked for assistance from the VEC Guidance Service and found it beneficial. Others would not have known of its existence. A large number said they had received no guidance, particularly interviewees in part-time programmes such as the BTEI.

24. If no, would you like to receive professional assistance with progression routes and how do you think it would help you?

The response to this question was mixed and very much depended upon the programme. Interviewees in full-time education programmes were particularly interested in finding out the best and most suitable education progression routes. Those with less ambitious or academic goals were

less interested in pursuing an academic path. Some who were taking part-time BTEI courses and had recently returned to education expressed a wish to receive direction.

25. Are there improvements you would like to suggest in relation to the (Basic Education Service / VTOS / Youthreach / BTEI / PLC) programme?

Overall interviewees were satisfied with the course they were taking part in and the impression was given 'not trying to fix something that wasn't broken'. On the other hand, full-time, older participants tended to be more articulate and cited things as greater access to modern computers and more creative courses or the provision of a wider variety of classes. One stated that guidance at the beginning of the course would be helpful and another that information about VEC courses should be better advertised, particularly among the unemployed.

26. Are there any overall comments you would like to make about Adult Education in general and VEC Adult Education in particular?

Interesting comments were made by people in VTOS who valued the educational opportunities given to them and suggested that more precise information should be provided to people starting courses in order to ensure a reduction in the drop-out level. It was also suggested that a screening process be introduced to ensure genuine people benefited from the learning opportunities. There were positive comments about the programmes and the effects the programmes have on the lives of the learners. The atmosphere in centres provided the opportunities for growth and development. Some stated that the route of the achievements they obtained lay in the confidence they were given. Reference was made to school or early education and the suitability of some people to school and the need for an alternative, more practical system of learning. It was stated that guidance at the beginning of a programme would prove beneficial in order to ensure that people were in classes most suited to their needs. The need to advertise and highlight the VEC programmes was also mentioned and the suggestion of an 'open night' was made.

27. Have you any suggestions as to how Adult Education might be improved?

More commitment from students was cited as a way of improving adult education and all participants should take more responsibility for what they do and hope to achieve. Again, better advertising of VEC adult education provision was cited by several with the suggestion that people familiar with the services should highlight the benefits of returning to learning. It was also stated that at the beginning of programmes, people should be guided to where they want to go. It was suggested, that in the economically challenging times, courses should not be 'wasted' on people who are simply doing courses for the sake of doing courses. Initial interviews and screening were stated as important in order that people would be placed on the right course.

Appendix 17

Tutors Interview Questions (Main Study)

1. Can you tell me what teaching post have you with Kildare VEC?
2. How long have you been teaching adult education courses?
3. How long have you been teaching with Kildare VEC?
4. Have you taught adult education in a centre or services other than Kildare VEC?
5. What teaching qualifications do you have?
6. Why did you start teaching adult courses?
7. In your experience, what is the motivation and expectation of adults who take part in education courses?
8. Do you think the needs of adult learners are met by VEC courses in County Kildare?
9. What is good about Kildare VEC adult education service?
10. What improvements could be made to enhance adult education in Kildare?
 - a) Promotion & advertisement
 - b) Variety of courses
 - c) Facilities & equipment
 - d) Accreditation of courses
 - e) Progression route for learners
 - f) Training for tutors
 - g) VEC management structures

h) General resources

11. What are the essential components of an adult education service?
12. What would help you as a teacher to achieve better outcomes in the courses you teach?
13. Apart from your course, are you aware of the other VEC adult education services or programmes in Kildare?
14. Have you any final thoughts as to how adult learners could be better served by Kildare VEC?
15. Have you any overall comments that you would like to make about adult education in general or the VEC adult education in particular?

Appendix 18

Summary of tutor responses

1. How long have you been teaching adult education courses?

BTEI Tutor	BTEI Tutor	Literacy Tutor	Literacy Tutor	Night Class Tutor	PLC Tutor	PLC Tutor	VTOS Tutor	VTOS Tutor	VTOS Tutor	Youthreach Tutor	Youthreach Tutor	TOTAL YEARS
8	25	6	12	2	10	1	20	17	8	4	3	116

3. How long have you been teaching with Kildare VEC?

BTEI Tutor	BTEI Tutor	Literacy Tutor	Literacy Tutor	Night Class Tutor	PLC Tutor	PLC Tutor	VTOS Tutor	VTOS Tutor	VTOS Tutor	Youthreach Tutor	Youthreach Tutor	TOTAL YEARS
8	25	5	12	2	10	1	12	17	8	1	3	104

4. Have you taught adult education in a centre or services other than Kildare VEC?

BTEI Tutor	BTEI Tutor	Literacy Tutor	Literacy Tutor	Night Class Tutor	PLC Tutor	PLC Tutor	VTOS Tutor	VTOS Tutor	VTOS Tutor	Youthreach Tutor	Youthreach Tutor
Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

Seven tutors had taught adults in VECs or services other than Kildare VEC with five having only experience of teaching within Kildare VEC.

5. What teaching qualifications do you have?

Eleven out of the twelve interviewees had a degree with six having a Higher Diploma and one tutor having a Masters Degree.

6. Why did you start teaching adult courses?

Some of the interviewees began teaching children and changed to teaching adults when an opportunity arose. Others started by volunteering within the literacy service and went on to complete a degree. One interviewee stated that they were an adult learner themselves and found the experience so rewarding, that they wanted to share the learning experience and encourage other adults to return to learning.

7. In your experience, what is the motivation and expectation of adults who take part in education courses?

Interviewees clearly stated that different motivations existed for students who attended part-time from those who attended full-time courses. Some part-time students in programmes such as Basic Education want simply to be able to read or to help with their children's education or get their Junior or Leaving Certificate. There was a mixture between obtaining new skills and the social dimension of meeting others.

Full-time students such PLC students, according to interviewees were women wanting to get back into education for perhaps social reasons while others wanted to be re-skilled. For some of these students, it was something to do and an impression was given that PLCs were for ladies in order to get back into the workforce for more mature individuals. For younger students, doing practical studies was important and they had a higher desire to achieve skills necessary for employment.

Overall, the student expectations were individual and varied and as students got into study, their expectation changed positively because of new insights and knowledge but negativity existed because of the current economic environment. However, education was seen as a means of change and especially for the unemployed who had free time to study and get a qualification.

8. Do you think the needs of adult learners are met by VEC courses in County Kildare?

Their answers varied between yes and no or sometimes because of the huge variety of needs and ultimately depended on the needs of students according to interviewees. Tutors involved in full-time courses like VTOS were more definite in stating that student needs were being met. Part-time courses like basic education were meeting the needs because of the personalised approach by tutors and co-ordinators.

Statements were made that when the Guidance Service was involved with student's prior to the commencement of courses, the students needs were more likely to be met because needs were matched with provision. Another factor is change, as times changes, so also do the needs of students and therefore so must the responses in terms of courses. It was also highlighted that there is a new need out there for vocational education/training that is not being met. The VEC school premises should

be used for up-skilling adults. Other factors cited by interviewees to ensure needs were being met was appropriate progression routes the need to follow up on students who dropped-out of courses.

9. What is good about Kildare VEC adult education service?

There was a multiplicity of answers from interviewees covering positive aspects of Kildare VEC adult education service, such as, the variety and range of courses throughout the county along with the fact that many courses are provided free. The adult education flexible approach to teaching and learning was good according to some interviewees and the centre atmosphere has an impact upon students building up their confidence and self-esteem. Also, having good premises assists the professionalism of the service according to tutors working in new schools providing PLCs and night classes.

10. What improvements could be made to enhance adult education in Kildare?

a) Promotion & advertisement

Tutors had some interesting suggestions to make in relation to improvements of Kildare VEC adult education service by focusing on advertisement in places where people are queuing, like a post office or social welfare centre. Also, there should be mobile signs on roads throughout the county and greater use should be made of radio advertisement. According to some tutors, the challenge facing Kildare VEC adult education service is that adult education is perceived as being night classes, the knitting, art and hobby courses. It is not seen as a provider of courses that would assist with re-skilling and up-skilling that would enhance adult job prospects. Further suggestions included the addition of specific detailed information on each course and that advertisements should be from a single source and phones in schools and centres should be answered with the words, Kildare VEC adult education service.

b) Variety of courses

Tutors working within full-time courses responded differently to part-time tutors on the variety of courses provided by Kildare VEC adult education service. Some VTOS tutors assume that there is sufficient variety of courses provided. Other tutors suggested that there is a need for less academic and to provide more vocational courses to meet the needs of the particular people requiring adult education in the current economic environment. The provision of such courses would require different facilities.

It was maintained that while there is a good variety of courses provided through Kildare VEC, provision is based on the premise that the VEC knows what people want. Therefore, research needs to be conducted to amass what courses the public requires.

c) Facilities & equipment

Several tutors suggested that a dedicated centre for adult education with good practical facilities would be ideal. Current adult education centres don't have the practical facilities for a skills-based programme, particularly for the male students. Since the rise in unemployment, the numbers of male students has risen and courses provided by the VEC should have more than academic subjects. Many tutors mentioned the lack of space within centres as a challenge in teaching classes.

d) Accreditation of courses

Tutors cited certain difficulties in using FETAC module descriptors. Some would like more resources and shared projects completed by other centres that would help stimulate greater creativity. It was also suggested that FETAC certification should be provided more than once a year and that other forms of certification should be considered along with FETAC. In discussing accreditation one tutor suggested that a wider range of night courses be provided, taking into account the needs of current society, an example being, the teaching of Chinese.

e) Progression route for learners

Progression was considered very important and VEC education should not be seen as the end of learning. Several tutors mentioned the availability of the guidance service tutors but stressed that it should be available through the county. Difficulties that students experienced was highlighted by Youthreach tutors that young people found progression routes to PLCs or further education or training lacking for individuals who may not have gone through the formal education system. Another difficulty communicated by a VTOS tutor was the lack of understanding of the education qualification system by some local Social Welfare offices.

f) Training for tutors

Overall, the majority of interviewees suggested that more training would be helpful for tutors and beneficial for students. Tutors spoke of the benefits to be gained if they were to gather regularly with tutors teaching similar subjects and share resources, experiences and projects. The importance of on-going training was highlighted due to the fact that the amount of services provided had increased and in order to be responsive, tutors needed renewal of their skills.

g) VEC management structures

Some interviewees expressed negative comments in relation to VEC management structures with one tutor stating that they had not always found the VEC management approachable about issues. It was also stated by two tutors that the management structure doesn't really affect

the working life, they understand the structure they are within through their co-ordinator as line-manager and also maintaining that the VEC structures don't impinge in on me as a tutor. It was agreed that it would be nice to be able to go and talk to somebody in the management system and it was suggested that more communication is needed with management in order that they understand the adult education service from the perspective of the tutor. It was felt that not everyone understands adult education because VEC structures are mostly concerned with second level schools.

h) General resources

One interviewee suggested the idea of shared resources. The VEC should provide a website dedicated to teachers, that tutors can download notes and information. The idea of one adult education building was suggested that would help with the sharing of resources as well as reducing the cost to the VEC. As well as Irish produced adult education material and resources, it was also suggested by tutors that they require personal information from HR or counsellors on how to handle difficult situations.

11. What are the essential components of an adult education service?

Two areas came out strongly when tutors responded as to what are the essential components of an adult education service. They were the atmosphere and welcome along with the quality of tutors. It was stated that people coming back into education might have various difficulties so encountering a supportive atmosphere where their educational needs were recognised was very important. Well-trained and resourced tutors help to create centres of excellence who take time to examine the goals of the students and with the assistance of mentoring and personal learning systems, help to meet the needs of the adult learners.

12. What would help you as a teacher to achieve better outcomes in the courses you teach?

Interviewees stated that they would like more contact with others tutors, particularly tutors teaching similar subjects. Some suggested supports from a counsellor and clearer management system and only one interviewee suggested training and another a teaching curriculum because again it was communicated that tutors were on their own and limited to their own resources.

13. Apart from your course, are you aware of the other VEC adult education services or programmes in Kildare?

Overall, most interviewees were not aware and couldn't name VEC adult education programmes, other than the one in which they were working. This was particularly the case of PLC tutors working schools but the lack of awareness was not limited solely to individuals working in schools. Of

all the programmes, the literacy was best known and the realisation that the VEC was the first port of call for adults with reading and writing difficulties.

14. Have you any final thoughts as to how adult learners could be better served by Kildare VEC?

The need for good facilities was expressed by a large number of interviewees. Adults who return to education should have access to good facilities in which to study and learn. Tutors expressed annoyance at the fact that new schools were provided for second-level students but tutors in adult education were expected to work in poor facilities. Another area that would assist adult learners was a better variety of courses, particularly courses linked to business and that courses provided by the VEC could assist the training needs of industry. Difficulties also arise because a high proportion of people working in adult education are part-time. For adult education to be taken seriously, more full-time personnel are required. Finally, one interviewee suggested that adult learners would be better served if the VEC was more consultative about course provision, rather than providing courses and expecting them to match the needs of adult learners.

15. Have you any overall comments that you would like to make about adult education in general or the VEC adult education in particular?

Overall, the interviewees were very positive about the service provided by Kildare VEC. Several spoke of the fact that without the services, people would be at a loss, particularly the early school leavers. It was stated that the learning provided was flexible enough to meet the needs of adults but it was regretted that a lot of people remain unaware of the work of the VEC. A final point was made that the VEC adult education service did not have a tracking mechanism that could follow students who leave to examine where they went and how they succeed and if the courses provided were the courses required for their success.

Appendix 19

Middle Management (Principals / Co-ordinators / Directors of Adult Education and PLCs) Interview Questions (Main Study)

1. What is your position with Kildare VEC?
2. How long have you been a co-ordinator / director with Kildare VEC?
3. Have you been a co-ordinator / director in a centre, school or service other than Kildare VEC?
4. What do you think are the qualities needed for a VEC co-ordinator / director?
5. In your experience, what is the motivation and expectation of adults who take part in education courses?
6. Do you think the needs of adults learners are met by VEC courses and programmes in County Kildare?
7. What is good about Kildare VEC adult education service?
8. What improvements could be made to enhance adult education in Kildare?
 - a) Promotion & advertisement
 - b) Variety of courses / range of programmes
 - c) Facilities & equipment
 - d) Accreditation of courses
 - e) Progression route for learners
 - f) Training for: i) tutors and ii) co-ordinators
 - g) VEC management structures
 - h) General resources
 - i) Any other

9. What are the essential components of an adult education service?

10. What are the four things least satisfactory about Kildare VEC adult education service?

11. What would help you as a co-ordinator / director to achieve better outcomes for the programme you manage?

12. If you were made CEO, what four changes would you bring about in order to create a better service in Kildare VEC?

13. Have you any final thoughts as to how adult learners could be better served by Kildare VEC?

14. Have you any overall comments that you would like to make about adult education in general or the VEC adult education in particular?

Appendix 20

Summary of middle management responses

1. What is your position with Kildare VEC?
2. How long have you been a co-ordinator / director with Kildare VEC?
3. Have you been a co-ordinator / director in a centre, school or service other than Kildare VEC?

	Years in the current role	Worked in a similar position in other school / centre
Community Education Facilitator	12	Yes
Director of Adult Education	4	No
Director of Adult Education	4	No
Guidance Co-ordinator	4	No
Literacy Organiser	14	No
Literacy Organiser	20	No
PLC Co-ordinator	14	No
PLC Co-ordinator	19	No
School Principal	17	No
School Principal	6	No
VTOS Co-ordinator	17	No
VTOS Co-ordinator	1	No
Youthreach Co-ordinator	10	No
Youthreach Co-ordinator	4	Yes
TOTAL	146	

4. What do you think are the qualities needed for a VEC co-ordinator / director or Principal with responsibility for adult education?

While the question asked what qualities were needed for a VEC middle manager, the responses made reference more to skills that were required. The required skills were, communication, administration, accounting,

managerial and in some cases, crisis management. The expressed qualities included being well organised, a good listener and possess the ability to support students and staff. For teachers' working with adults in schools, it is different and it requires more creativity and flexibility along with the awareness that one is the face of Kildare VEC. Also, a middle manager said there was the need to be aware how education is changing, how society is changing and therefore to be able to respond according to the real needs of learners and society.

5. In your experience, what is the motivation and expectation of adults who take part in education courses?

Responses to this question varied according to the programme. In general, adults take part in adult education because they want to improve themselves. The reasons for trying to improve differs for each person from seeking a new skill or qualifications for employment purpose or provide a social outlet or self improvement in order to assist their own children. As adults take part in educational programmes, their expectation can change as they immerse themselves in study. The starting point for all learners differs according to their life circumstances and many VEC learners are early school leavers and some may be totally unaware of what they wished to achieve. Middle managers working in Basic Education stressed the importance of the initial contact with learners. Another factor being stressed was the provision of support to learners while challenging them to achieve their full potential. One interviewee described their role as 'opening the door of learning' and providing the encouragement to learners to motivate themselves in order to recognise and achieve their educational goals.

6. Do you think the needs of adults learners are met by VEC courses and programmes in County Kildare?

Answers differed as to whether needs were being met through courses provided by Kildare VEC. Overall it was stated that needs were met to the extent of the resources being available, however people who are presenting with serious learning difficulties were not having their needs full needs met. Middle managers believed they were doing their best with the staff, resources and finance available but were realistic to know that there were people who were unaware of what the VEC provided and the service was not attracting them. A factor suggested as to why some needs of adult learners might not be met was the lack of consultation as regards the needs of learners. Another factor cited by a middle manager in a school was that the system may try to fit learners into the tutor structure as opposed to the system being built around students needs. It was agreed that times had changed and the needs of learners had changed and there was a greater emphasis on achieving skills to improve employment prospects and for this to happen, a more integrated approach to learning was required.

7. What is good about Kildare VEC adult education service?

Responses highlighted two areas that were good about Kildare VEC adult education service, firstly the staff were described in positive terms as a significant factor by the majority of middle managers and secondly, the variety of courses. The staff were described by interviewees as hugely committed individuals in the further education sector and there was a wealth of experience to be found within the staff. VEC personnel were motivated and focussed on their job - helping, working with and assisting adults in their development and learning. The move towards integration was described as positive and supportive of staff providing progression routes for tutors. The variety of courses was also a contributing factor to what was good about Kildare VEC. Students were presented with a wide choice of courses that could enable learning for skills, social dimension, further education and employment. The learning approach of staff within the schools and centres and the educational ethos also received a mention for its positive aspect of Kildare VEC adult education service.

8. What improvements could be made to enhance adult education in Kildare?

a) Promotion & advertisement

Promotion was considered very important by middle managers who considered that a lot has been done recently to promote adult education. It was agreed that promotion should involve integration of services with the suggestion that the FETAC wheel be used to advertise return to education at any level and the possibility of progression for learners. Promotion should convey an identifiable image of the VEC because in the past programmes were doing their own advertisement and the public were unaware of whole service and the extent of provision by the VEC. It was also suggested that greater use be made of websites and the internet to promote the service and the on-line enrolment has been very helpful but there is the need for a database of users and email information to them. It was also stated that advertisement is bigger than the local VEC and that the IVEA should be promoting the national learning agenda. FAS was cited as a single organisation and VECs were thirty-three. A single message would promote the adult education services more constructively while taking into account that different services require different means of advertisement on the ground.

b) Variety of courses / range of programmes

While many stated that there were a good variety of courses, it was also believed that there was definite room for improvement. It was stated that there were more young people seeking more practical and skill based courses that were not available. It was also felt that the adult education service was offering too many academic courses rather than skills. One interviewee suggested that the adult education service needs to be more innovative and more creative in what it provides. Care must be taken to

ensure that all accredited courses are of value and ensuring employment prospects. While it was maintained that there is always a place for hobby courses, all courses must be responsive to the needs of adults. Definite room for improvement was suggested in PLC and VTOS courses as these programmes employed tutors based on subjects rather than student needs. Market research was suggested to determine the needs of learners and the VEC system should move more quickly to address the needs of learners.

c) Facilities & equipment

The contrast was evident between facilities available in schools to adult education and the much poorer facilities available in centres. Schools had new buildings and facilities suitable to the needs of adult. The provision of night classes could be tailored to the facilities available within the school. It was stated correctly that people expect good facilities when they are paying for classes. Centres expressed the desire for more rooms and more up-to-date computer and laptop hardware. It was suggested that purpose built adult education buildings were required, located within the hub of the community and in order to achieve this objective, a capital budget was required from the DES. Current expenditure of renting premises for adult education was regarded as a waste of money. In addition, appropriate buildings would serve to identify the importance of adult education just as a library or school building identifies their importance in the community. In terms of facilities, IT software was highlighted as a requirement and a specialist should be available to test such products in order that this software could be made available throughout the county. The use of technology was considered important and another interviewee suggested that a county the size of Kildare should have Colleges of Further Education.

d) Accreditation of courses

A positive aspect of providing accreditation is that FETAC certification is becoming better known by employers. It was suggested that all courses should receive certification by awarding bodies or by Kildare VEC in order to provide recognition for learning that has taken place. The suggestion was also made that more professional accreditation should be offered and that links should be forged with neighbouring third level institutions. However it was also stated that when the route of certification is provided, that process requires the greater availability of resources for tutors and centres.

e) Progression route for learners

An improvement in the knowledge about progression routes was commented upon but it was suggested that clear progression routes should be provided to learners when they commence courses with Kildare VEC. This would enable learners make informed choices as to the route they will pursue with their studies. The greater use of the FETAC wheel in

advertising was suggested and shows how adult education provides the perfect opportunity to progress in a joined-up approach. It was also advised that within certain aspects of adult education, progression does not mean a movement upwards upon the FETAC ladder as in some cases, progression can take a more lateral approach to self-knowledge, self-development and community awareness.

f) Training for: i) tutors and ii) co-ordinators

There was a unanimous call for training both for co-ordinators/directors and for tutors. It was suggested that there should be induction for all new tutors and it should be compulsory across services as there is no induction process for adult education tutors. In addition, tutors should be provided with a handbook upon commencing service with the VEC and on-going training should be provided several times each year in order to meet with tutors of similar subjects. It was also stated by some interviewees that there was a need for a co-ordinators handbook upon commencing work with the VEC as well as training in matters such as, management skills, accounts, needs analysis and specific areas such as conflict resolution. It was agreed by school personnel that training should be on-going and how they found themselves more isolated and stated how they would benefit from sharing with other tutors. Some interviewees suggested countywide staff development which would enhance and support the adult education ethos in centres. Overall, it was suggested that Kildare VEC should have a learning policy for all staff and that co-ordinators should receive on-going training and sharing with colleagues.

g) VEC management structures

Some of the responses to this question are also raised in a later question dealing with the least satisfactory aspects of Kildare VEC. Many of the interviewees discussed the gap that exists between the expectations of Head Office staff and the working on the ground in a centre or school. It was suggested that there is a need for communication to overcome the gap because Head Office asks for things and ask again in a couple of months with no reference to that fact that the work has been submitted. Also Head Office can make unrealistic demands for information with very short time frames. It was felt that generally, VEC staff are helpful in Head Office but they can think that centres are the same as schools with their class systems. Interviewees communicated their impression that the VEC has a hierarchical structure and that more value is placed on the academic in schools than in the lower level Youthreach. People working in adult education were not the main players in the VEC. Communication was very bad, particularly the tone of some letters according to some interviewees and those in the adult sector knew they were not involved in news sharing. School directors found it difficult to deal with administrative matters when they were called from class. Adult education is only one task among many others for school directors. It was suggested that management should be providing the support for the organisers in centres and schools but very often it is the other way round. There was frustration

on both sides between school directors and Head Office according to an interviewee and the requirement for paper documentation should be reduced with the use of technology. Finally, it was stated that changing the VEC bureaucracy requires an understanding between the people in administration and those working in schools and centres and if a better understanding between the services could be achieved, all involved in the educational work of the VEC would be better served and achieve the outcome of providing a finer educational service to the public.

h) General resources

There was awareness among interviewees that changes over the last couple of years had brought about improvements to the adult education service. One cited the changes in management and the assistance of the two Education Development Officers as helpful. The on-line registration for night classes was a great improvement and reduced paper work. As expected, the provision of additional funding and more resource hours would help with the management of certain programmes. Also, it was felt that new staff members could bring new life to the centre. Additional helps would be the provision of administrative support, caretaking, a pooling of available staff and better computer software for learners within the basic education service. The provision of policies for tutors and co-ordinators/directors was asked for and the acquisition of marketing expertise for adult education. Finally, it was stated that it was important that consideration be given to looking at new ways of responding to the educational needs of the public in the current economic climate.

9. What are the essential components of an adult education service?

Essential components of adult education were described in terms of staff, responsive programmes of learning and the ethos of learning with centres and schools. A well-trained staff was suggested and in this context it was stated by one interviewee that as tutors are a huge resource, sufficient time and effort is not being put into supporting and developing them. As well, good teamwork among staff, the provision of good programmes that learners require is essential rather than offering courses which tutors or directors think are needed. The provision of flexible courses is also essential as well as a link between other courses and the important link with the adult guidance service. The ethos of the centre was considered very important, the service should be user-friendly and supportive of the learner in order to ensure that adults are treated respectfully, recognising their unique starting point when their return to education. The importance of market research was suggested and the sharing of information with all middle management in order to ensure that the correct and appropriate courses are being offered.

10. What are the four things least satisfactory about Kildare VEC adult education service?

Seeking to discover the least satisfactory aspects of Kildare VEC adult education produced a very strong reaction. While the question specified

the adult education service, some of the interviewees tended to concentrate their answers more specifically on Kildare VEC. Another area of dissatisfaction highlighted was the level of paper work, the bureaucracy involved and the expectation that services could respond instantly to direction from administration. These responses from interviewees, directed to the general VEC service, were born out of the fact that adult education services did not believe they had a strong identity. One middle manager stated that within VEC, the schools are paramount and adult education is something of a Cinderella. It was maintained that the identity of adult education needs to be stronger both internally and externally. The perception of adult education is that it is an add-on rather than an entity in itself within the VEC. Internal communication within the VEC was described as poor and disjointed with one section not communicating with another. Marketing, branding and promoting the adult education service was less satisfactory leading to a lack of identity and knowledge within the organisation about the working of adult education. Inflexibility of budgets was unsatisfactory resulting in duplication and wastage within the service. Finally, another unsatisfactory aspect was the perception that the motivation to change was not within the service when posts of responsibility were established and outcomes were not based on results and change and responsiveness to the needs of the learners.

11. What would help you as a co-ordinator / director to achieve better outcomes for the programme you manage?

Responses from interviewees covered areas that were not specific to their own programmes or areas of responsibility and one recommendation for achieving better outcomes was the provision of more counselling and guidance for learners throughout the county. This was referred to by several interviewees as was the provision of more administration on the ground in order to free co-ordinators to carry out educational work. It was stated that there is a great wealth of knowledge and experience among middle management personnel and that this should be shared for the benefit of all staff and learners. Another recommendation for achieving better outcomes was the centralising information about all classes so that a more cohesive response could be made to the public. Additional training for tutor, evaluation of courses, raising the profile of adult education within Kildare VEC as well as the provision of a new form of tutor with teaching, administration and co-ordinating responsibilities were all cited as changes that would assist middle managers spread throughout the county to achieve better outcomes.

12. If you were made CEO, what four changes would you bring about in order to create a better service in Kildare VEC?

There was some degree of overlapping when it came to the thoughts of middle managers when asked what changes they would bring about if they were CEO of Kildare VEC. Many would like to create a more united organisation, were VEC staff were brought together for meetings with the intention of creating an awareness of the whole organisation and working

towards bringing all the parts together under a single vision. Middle managers stated that they would change communication style and highlight the importance of all aspects of the organisation with adult education as a viable component of the overall service. As CEO, one interviewee would like to create a better working relationship between the administration section of Kildare VEC and the rest of the organisation that would recognise and respect the work of middle managers in schools and centres throughout the county. Once again a suggestion came for a central location for organising all the adult education provision and an improvement in the use of technology for sharing of information. The need for organisational planning in consultation with staff was another function middle managers saw as an aspect of their work if they became CEO of Kildare VEC.

13. Have you any final thoughts as to how adult learners could be better served by Kildare VEC?

Middle managers stressed the importance of Kildare VEC continuing to develop and not standing still. One interviewee stated that 25 years ago, Kildare VEC was ground breaking in its adult education provision. It was suggested that development stopped but that it is now moving again and the service needs continued development for the twenty-first century without losing any of the good values formed over the years. People are collecting information and evaluating courses separately but data is not shared with all parts of the adult education service. The need for guidance and clear progression routes was suggested and information that links courses between schools and centres throughout the county. Listening to the customer is important and conducting market research in order to determine the most suitable responses to educational needs of adult through daytime or night classes, part-time or full-time courses through Kildare VEC adult education service.

14. Have you any overall comments that you would like to make about adult education in general or the VEC adult education in particular?

Middle managers stated their belief in adult education as being hugely important within the provision of the VEC. It was restated by one interviewee that adult education is seen as the Cinderella of the education system, that it has not received the level of recognition it deserves and is perceived by some as comprising of only hobby courses. The suggestion was to change the term in usage from adult education to further education and show that learning continues throughout life. Another interviewee stated that adult education is what makes the VEC different from the voluntary secondary schools or any other educational providers. VECs respond to the educational needs of the whole community through its primary, secondary and adult educational provision. Communication highlighting the overall provision needs to improve that will inform all aspects of the VEC of its entire provision as well as informing communities within which the VEC is operating that the VEC is larger than a single course or programme. Integration of provision was considered important

and the need for the VEC to cease a re-active position and clearly establish and communicate the VEC adult education service as an integrated, creative and responsive provision tailored to the needs of individuals and communities throughout County Kildare.

Appendix 21

Senior Management (CEO / Education Officer / Education Development Officer) Interview Questions (Main Study)

1. How long have you been a member of the Senior Management team in the Kildare VEC and what position did you hold prior to it?
2. Did you always aspire to becoming a member of the Senior Management team in the VEC? If yes - why?
3. When you became a member of the Senior Management team, what was your vision for Kildare VEC and what were your four main priorities?
4. What would you now say are the important VEC areas outside of your four priority areas?
5. How effective would you rate Kildare VEC as an educational provider?
6. What improvements could be made in the following areas?
 - a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes
 - b) Training for teachers, tutors and co-ordinators
 - c) Strategy planning and implementation structures
 - d) Facilities and equipment
 - e) Management structures
 - f) General resources
 - g) Promotion and advertisement
7. What changes (structures or services) do you think are required of Kildare VEC in dealing with educational needs within the current economic climate?

8. What do you think are the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff?
9. Will Kildare VEC be able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training?
10. Is Kildare VEC flexible to the increasing demands on its resources as well as its future requirements?
11. What areas of need require VEC particular attention at this point in time – migrants, unemployed, employees with low skills, early school leavers, adult literacy or others? How best can these areas be address?
12. Is Kildare VEC capable of responding adequately to the demands of the Smart - knowledge, technology based economy?
13. Some earlier interviewees described adult education as the Cinderella service of the VEC, how can the importance of adult education be enhanced and the service professionalised?
14. If you were Minister for Education & Skills, what would you do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC? What four changes would you make?
15. How can adult learners be better served by Kildare VEC?
16. Have you any overall comments on VEC Education, its relevance, value, contribution and how it might make an even bigger impact in the future?

Appendix 22

Summary of senior management responses

1. How long have you been a member of the Senior Management team in the Kildare VEC and what position did you hold prior to it?

Each of the interviewees held responsible positions within Kildare VEC prior to appointment to the senior management team.

2. Did you always aspire to becoming a member of the Senior Management team in the VEC? If yes - why?

Each of the interviewees found their previous rolls fulfilling but two of the interviewees stated they were interested in taking on a greater level of responsibility within Kildare VEC.

3. When you became a member of the Senior Management team, what was your vision for Kildare VEC and what were your four main priorities?

Various priorities emerged from interviewees in relation to schools, adult education, specific programmes and staff working within the sector. The lack of connectedness within the VEC between the second level schools and the adult education sector was highlighted as schools could benefit from the experience and some of working practices of adult education. A priority was the need to unite both sectors within the VEC, as was the need for a review of self-financing class. Self-financing or night classes were considered by the public to be what adult education was about and the content of these classes had not kept pace with the needs of people and society today. A priority was the provision of distance learning, e-learning and other modes of delivery. Securing capital funding was also a priority for adult and further education. Another interviewee highlighted the priority of achieving quality teaching and learning but admitted that because the majority of his experience was gained through working in schools, his familiarity with adult education was limited. Professional development was a priority in order to achieve quality learning among staff.

4. What would you now say are the important VEC areas outside of your four priority areas?

The need to secure capital funding for adult education was highlighted by one interviewee. Also highlighted was the need for Continued Professional Development for all staff, at every level within the organisation in order to be able to provide a wider response to the educational needs throughout the county. Overall, a priority for the organisation was to grow the educational provision. A further priority was to enable planning at county level and to have the involvement of all

sectors, thus creating a major sense of awareness of all the work of Kildare VEC. Linked with the previous point, another interviewee identified as a priority the creation of internal awareness among the different programme co-ordinators in order to bring about progression routes within and beyond Kildare VEC.

5. How effective would you rate Kildare VEC as an educational provider?

Positive comments were given by interviewees that Kildare VEC had a proven track record and that it can deliver to the highest standard with many notable successes each year. When asked more specifically about adult education, the success of the last couple of years was attributed to the work of the AEO and that huge successes had been achieved. However, one interviewee maintained that Kildare VEC adult education was not as innovative in the last ten years because legislative and financial changes had resulted in less creativity within the sector.

6. What improvements could be made in the following areas?

a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes

The relevance of courses to the needs of the community was discussed as well as what audit is carried among the public to determine their needs. The importance of consultation with recipients of courses was stressed. However, it was believed that the basic and community education and BTEI were meeting the needs of learners but that the structures and provision of programmes such as VTOS and PLCs were not as relevant as when they were first established. Part-time programmes were considered to be more flexible in their response. Overall, needs analysis was considered important.

b) Training for teachers, tutors and co-ordinators

Whole organisation training was considered very important by interviewees that was carried out in a planned approach. Limited with training was conducting needs analysis within the organisation in order to determine the most appropriate forms of training. Also important was the appointment of qualified tutors who were willing to partake in Continued Professional Development.

c) Strategy planning and implementation structures

It was considered that everyone should be involved in planning. One interviewee stressed that for a strategy to work, it needed major planning and that this should fit into the VEC Education Plan. It suggested that if all services worked better together, there would be a better chance of creating a strategic plan. Each service should be assisted in seeing the bigger organisational picture in order to determine where each section fits in the overall picture. The notion of corporate identity was considered

weak within the VEC and a clear corporate image would assist with structural development within the VEC.

d) Facilities and equipment

Adult education facilities were described as disastrous by one interviewee but despite this, the quality of the staff in centres ensured that the educational work is being delivered. The issue of communication between Head Office and the centres was also raised within the context of this question with the suggestion that a better understanding of the educational work in centres which have poor facilities should be more forthcoming from administration.

e) Management structures

Some personnel within the adult education sector may feel left out or isolated according to one interviewee. What is happening within the regions through the AEO is helpful but some services still feel isolated from the overall VEC service. It was claimed that some schools may also feel isolated and are happy to work within the local community without reference to the wider organisation and bigger picture.

f) General resources

There was a slight difference of opinion as regards resources according to interviewees. One said they were adequate while another included facilities with resources and said they were very poor, lacking equipment, IT and advice on IT. The amount of money devoted to rent within the adult education sector was described as wrong and should not be taking place.

g) Promotion and advertisement

It was agreed that there is a need for clear corporate branding that identifies Kildare VEC for the educational work it performs. All sections of the service should be using identical notepaper, posters, etc. However, one interviewee cautioned against reliance on glossy brochures and stressed the importance of the quality of the work as being of primary importance.

7. What changes (structures or services) do you think are required of Kildare VEC in dealing with educational needs within the current economic climate?

Senior managers saw the need for review and change of certain programmes, structures and services. PLC programmes were mentioned by two interviewees stating that in the past, PLCs had been placed in schools with low growth of second-level pupils. This action benefited school teachers but had the effect of creating isolated and unconnected units of adult learning. Isolation also led to duplication of courses, such as, business studies to the neglect of higher-end technology courses. It

was suggested by one interviewee that programmes being offered are possibly out-dated and it was time to look at what our societal needs are in a changing Ireland. PLC programmes should be delivered according to the needs of the community as distinct from delivering because there is a teacher of a particular subject in a second-level school. Other PLC structures were criticised that required application for courses to be submitted by June when many adults haven't identified what they wished to study in the autumn. Another interviewee stated that courses are provided to suit the schools and are therefore, not meeting the needs of the learners.

Again, the VTOS programmes were not seen as providing sufficient progression routes to further education. It was also suggested that there should be clear progression routes from BTEI programmes to VTOS and PLC courses. In addition, new forms of educational modalities should be constructed such as e-learning that would assist learners in various parts of the county, thus making better use of the VEC skills and resources that sometimes are used in an underdeveloped manner.

Another interviewee cautioned against certain actions that could result in de-skilling individuals because the emphasis could be on training people with short-term skills to have them in the labour market quickly. Important research is required both at local and national levels in order to determine the real needs and then to train people in these skills. When the needs are identified, then the VEC will be in a better position to respond which will have long term benefits for individual, the community and society.

8. What do you think are the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff?

Some interviewees stressed the need for qualifications but having teaching qualifications as the starting point was questioned by one interviewee. It was thought that generic skills were more important starting point than qualifications as the service could become less flexible if people can only teach their qualifications subjects. Another senior manager believed full qualifications were required. As well as qualifications, it was also thought that empathy was required when working with adults along with a holistic view of adult education. The need for trained personnel was stressed along with appropriate induction for all staff.

9. Will Kildare VEC be able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training?

Overall it was considered that it would be a struggle for VECs to respond to the need for training for the unemployed. There was an obvious lack of trained personnel with the required competencies available to carry out the training. It was stated that the necessary personnel could be brought in, particularly as the facilities were available in schools in the evenings and weekends. Another interviewee commended on the inflexibility of the structures due to legislative changes and that the Further Education section was better at responding in the past.

10. Is Kildare VEC flexible to the increasing demands on its resources as well as its future requirements?

Current circumstances were hindering flexibility. The moratorium was cited as hindering flexibility as was the work embargos by Trade Unions. Existing structures were not aiding flexibility and PLCs was given as an example because of their location within schools and the perception that they served the needs of employing teachers more than the students. The mind-set of staff was also described as a hindrance to flexibility. It was hoped that the Croke Park agreement might provide a certain scope for flexibility.

11. What areas of need require VEC particular attention at this point in time – migrants, unemployed, employees with low skills, early school leavers, adult literacy or others? How best can these areas be addressed?

The definition of unemployed was questioned and the importance of unemployment was differentiated from unemployed. Each school leaver with low skill levels were considered important as was the recently unemployed. It was suggested that funding and resources should be placed in first level education as a preventative measure and that some PLC programmes should be targeted specifically at women returning to the labour market.

12. Is Kildare VEC capable of responding adequately to the demands of the Smart - knowledge, technology based economy?

It was suggested by one senior manager that Kildare VEC was capable of responding to the demands of the smart economy. Significant investments had been made in IT hardware, every teacher had received a laptop and school Principals had received an iPad. What was missing was high speed broadband and it was hoped that this would be delivered shortly. Another requirement for success was the combination of funding streams such as BTEI and Labour Activation funding along with the greater utilisation of school resources after hours. For this to happen, another interviewee suggested that a VEC plan was required. In addition, greater links need to be established with industry and third level institutions.

13. Some earlier interviewees described adult education as the Cinderella service of the VEC, how can the importance of adult education be enhanced and the service professionalised?

Views differed and it was believed that this negativity resulted from an attitude among adult education workers. This was counter balanced by another manager agreeing the adult education was the Cinderella service of the VEC because the majority of CEOs were school Principal and when appointed CEO, continue to focus their attention on schools. Another factor is the perception that night classes are the sum total of adult

education. Another point was made that VEC provision is spread too thinly across the county and needs more concentration in certain areas as well as improvement of facilities.

14. If you were Minister for Education & Skills, what would you do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC? What four changes would you make?

Senior managers provided positive constructive suggestions in response to this question. Suggestions included streamlining and formalising the sector because of the multiplicity of programmes, each with different rules of engagement and different reporting procedures. This structure has resulted in energy being dissipated and a greater synergy would be delivered by the creation of an integrated system of adult and further education. Another suggestion was the creation of a new grade of employee 'AFE Tutor'. It was described by one interviewee that current employees in AFE do not have contracts, salary structures are lacking and there is no consistency in the State how they are paid or what the conditions of employment are provided. A new grade would benefit the service and would afford the possibility of securing teaching staff with a myriad of skills. Also suggested that if Minister for Education, capital funding would be provided for the adult and further education sector. Another interviewee again suggested that PLCs should be removed from second level schools, middle management positions in VEC centres would be restored and better training provided for all staff, including senior management.

15. How can adult learners be better served by Kildare VEC?

Once again, the importance of consultation with the learners was suggested and a greater flexibility of provision at times and in places that suit the requirements of the learners. In doing this, it was also suggested that whole centre evaluation in the adult and further education sector should be carried out and changes should be addressed when possible.

16. Have you any overall comments on VEC Education, its relevance, value, contribution and how it might make an even bigger impact in the future?

Management expressed the conflict of interest between the different VEC sectors. Parents expected a certain curriculum in schools while others looked at VECs as simply technical schools. The need for a system similar to the European model was suggested with both academic and VET schools of excellence. According to one interviewee, such schools would meet the needs of clients as well as industry. Once again, it was suggested that these academic and technological facilities should be used utilised for significant periods throughout the year. Re-capping again, the importance of consultation with the people in order to provide relevant and responsive courses. In order to ensure Kildare VEC is responding appropriately, staff training, professional development and support

mechanisms should be in place, assisting new staff and those experiencing difficulties within the system. Research was stated as important by an interviewee and that the VEC is reaching out to people who are on the margins of society, more than other educational providers. It must expand its adult education sector so that it is not just reacting to circumstances but is pro-active in addressing the educational needs of learners and communities throughout Kildare.

Appendix 23

External VECs (Chief Executive Officers) Interview Questions (Main Study)

1. How long have you been CEO in your particular VEC and what position did you hold prior to it?
2. Did you always aspire to becoming a CEO in the VEC? If yes - why?
3. When you became CEO, what was your vision for your VEC and what were your four main priorities?
4. What would you now say are the important VEC areas outside of your four priority areas?
5. How effective would you rate VECs as an educational provider?
6. What improvements could be made in the following areas?
 - a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes
 - b) Training for teachers, tutors and co-ordinators
 - c) Strategy planning and implementation structures
 - d) Facilities and equipment
 - e) Management structures
 - f) General resources
 - g) Promotion and advertisement
7. What changes (structures or services) do you think are required of VECs in dealing with educational needs within the current economic climate?
8. What do you think are the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff?

9. Will VECs be able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training?
10. Are VECs flexible to the increasing demands on its resources as well as its future requirements?
11. What areas of need require VEC particular attention at this point in time – migrants, unemployed, employees with low skills, early school leavers, adult literacy or others? How best can these areas be addressed?
12. Are VECs capable of responding adequately to the demands of the Smart - knowledge, technology based economy?
13. Some earlier interviewees described adult education as the Cinderella service of the VEC, how can the importance of adult education be enhanced and the service professionalised?
14. If you were Minister for Education & Skills, what would you do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC? What four changes would you make?
15. How can adult learners be better served by the VEC?
16. Have you any overall comments on VEC Education, its relevance, value, contribution and how it might make an even bigger impact in the future?

Appendix 24

Summary of CEOs from external VECs interviews

- 1. How long have you been a CEO within your VEC and what position did you hold prior to it?**

Between 15 months and ten years.

- 2. Did you always aspire to becoming a CEO? If yes - why?**

No

- 3. When you became CEO, what was your vision for your VEC and what were your four main priorities?**

Upon commencing their position in the VEC, each CEO wanted to improve the educational provision at primary, second-level, adult and further education and the overall VEC administration. The development of integrated programmes for adult education, creating sense of belonging, organisation cohesion and identity were also regarded as priorities. Another CEO has a priority to linking lifelong learning communities with high levels of learner participation, achievement and satisfaction within the VEC and communities.

- 4. What would you now say are the important VEC areas outside of your four priority areas?**

Staff development and professional development was seen as a high priority which would transverse all the services and aspects of the VEC. This was seen as particularly important when VECs and especially the adult education service is facing so much uncertainty with changing structures. Staff are unsettled according to one CEO and need stability in order to respond creatively to all aspects of the local education service, without being a treat to other providers. Managing the uncertainty is a priority.

- 5. How effective would you rate VECs as an educational provider?**

Overall, it was stated that VECs are very effective organisations but for some, they may not be efficient. High levels of bureaucracy can result in more time and finance being spent on administration than on delivery. One CEO said VECs were excellent providers but the quality or the level of provision could be patchy and it may vary within VECs. Again, it was said VECs are a very effective but there is huge room for improvement.

6. What improvements could be made in the following areas?

a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes

One CEO said that if you are looking at responding to the social economic needs or the needs of the labour market, then the content will need to be looked at and changed to make them more relevant because in any good curriculum, good educationalist would be continually reviewing the content and its relevance to the target market. Another CEO stated that VEC courses were relevant but that they should be continually benchmarked against the NQF and then cross-referenced to the needs of the labour market, society and the community. It was also cited that course content was as good as the staff and their ability to review and renew courses and programmes.

b) Training for teachers, tutors and co-ordinators

It was agreed by CEOs that there is a need for training and up-skilling of VEC personnel. An example was given of initial teacher training for the Higher Diploma or a postgraduate diploma should provide the opportunity to experience a part of the adult or further education section and then in-service needs to be more targeted and specific for adult education tutors within the service. A CEO also stated that when looking at the VEC adult education service an agreed baseline or standardisation in terms of teacher/tutor qualifications should be established.

c) Strategy planning and implementation structures

It was stated strategic planning was very important and one CEO stated that the first step in the process was developing a vision. The biggest obstacle to changing structures was the fragmentation of programmes within the VEC adult education services. All programmes have slightly different rules and regulations, different staffing structures, etc. and are housed in different locations around the towns. The desire was expressed by one CEO to be able to bring the services together in a more integrated adult and further education service, eliminating fragmented by history or by geography or by funding streams or even by target groups. It was agreed that to implement the proper structure requires considerable thought in order to make it practical, understandable in order that people could deliver the service.

d) Facilities and equipment

It was stated that it was a shame that there was no capital investment in the adult education sector and what we need is the idea of the multiplex campus. Having programmes dispersed does not provide efficiency and economy of scale. It was mentioned that the Department of Education and Skills only deals with school building and does not have a building programme for adult education. Facilities were considered inadequate in terms of further education and the basic education and Youthreach according to one CEO. However, added to that statement was the

recognition that 'no amount of facilities and equipment will compensate for inadequate support for the tutors and the managers'.

e) Management structures

CEOs responses varied with one stating that there was nothing particularly wrong with the management structures as they are and another CEO stating that the current structures need reviewing. It was agreed that every VEC should have a senior management team and it was suggested that sometimes it is assumed that people have core management skills because they have been appointed to positions within the adult education service but the number one influence for an effective organisation is leadership. Support has to be given to enable programme leadership as it is unfair to assume that adult education personnel have these skills automatically.

f) General resources

The question of resources is very topical in the current economic environment. It is agreed by all CEOs that VECs will have to be more efficient and more creative in the use of resources and that they will need to think more carefully in times of economic recession and to plan the kind of resources required and how they can be best targeted for educational use. One important point was made that there has been a waste of adult education resources around the country where a very high amount of money has been used for renting premises on short-term leases.

g) Promotion and advertisement

There was strong consensus among the CEOs that VECs were very good at providing a service but were very poor at selling the huge amount of work taking place throughout the country. While it was agreed that VECs do spend substantial amounts of money individually advertising but little or no money is being spent measuring the effectiveness of local advertising campaigns. What would help would be if advertising was carried out in a more coherent way. One CEO said that advertisement and promotion 'could certainly be improved if there was the promotion of a single brand image, highlighting that the VEC stands for everything that is good and excellent in education in this country. However, because services have got separate budgets, they go off and advertise themselves separately and people don't know they belong to the VEC family. Therefore, people don't recognise the full scope of what the VEC is doing'. Another CEO suggested that promotion and advertising should not only be at individual VEC level, but nationally as well, just like what happened at the Ploughing Championship.

7. What changes (structures or services) do you think are required of VECs in dealing with educational needs within the current economic climate?

The starting point for several of the CEOs was that VEC adult education now existed within a different economic climate. Various factors, such as, the moratorium on employment, is having an effect, particularly on the ability to respond to the educational and training needs of adults. Just when adults are encouraged to come back to education, the limited number of places are filled. It was suggested by one CEO that a different way of thinking was required and that some of the older models need to be changed in favour of more over-arching personnel across services, such as research officers or the ability to appoint teaching staff to the VEC adult education service, rather than to a particular programme. In addition, no VEC service should operate in isolation and that VEC administration (finance and HR) had to be integrated into planning in adult and further education.

8. What do you think are the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff?

All CEOs maintained that every VEC staff member, including tutors should have qualifications in adult education, recognised by the Teaching Council. It was stated by one CEO that VECs 'should be unashamed about saying to VEC adult education staff to have relevant qualifications to a high standard and people can be supported to require them and develop them'. The establishment of a professional service requires trained personnel to the highest standard. Another CEO stated that the adult and further education section required the best tutors with capabilities beyond cognitive knowledge but with the ability to display empathy and understanding for the needs and concern of the adult learners. It was said that adult education 'shouldn't be a refuge for anything less than our best'

9. Will VECs be able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training?

The CEOs answered no, that the VEC will not be able to respond to the expected demands for the provision of additional education and training courses. The response was prefaced and explaining in the context of change. VECs could not play its part in re-training or re-skilling unemployed adults unless there is a change in the current way of doing things. It was stated that VECs wanted to respond and had the capacity to be creative but that it would require a re-organisation of current procedures. One CEO clearly stated that the capacity was there but the capability was lacking which would result in a loss for the VEC, a loss for the learners and a loss for society. Re-organisation of the VEC structures would assist in VECs in their capabilities to respond effectively. VECs have been creative in their responses over time and continue to be creative if there is an accepted change in structures.

10. Are VECs flexible to the increasing demands on its resources as well as its future requirements?

One CEO said that flexibility was the cornerstone of the VECs success and the benefits of the Back to Education programme was cited as a programme suited to responding in a flexible manner to educational and training needs. Another CEO believed VECs were extremely flexible and has shown its adaptability over the years with all the new programmes it has introduced. The term flexibility was clarified and it was stated that certain parts of the organisation were better at doing things differently and showing flexibility. One CEO maintained that 'flexibility didn't mean being exploited, it means doing things differently and being supported to do it but there is a challenge in terms of getting the culture of the organisation to change'.

11. What areas of need require VEC particular attention at this point in time – migrants, unemployed, employees with low skills, early school leavers, adult literacy or others? How best can these areas be addressed?

The CEOs suggested the obvious answer was the unemployed and early school leavers, particularly in the current economic climate. However, one CEO said that the focus in adult education has always been on the marginalised and the educationally disadvantaged and that it would be important in terms of responding to the economic agenda, that the really disadvantaged, the socially excluded who are less able to articulate their needs and are the more difficult to access and support and to demonstrate progress were not neglected. In the overall context, it was suggested not to label the groups of learners. Rather focus should be placed on the programmes in order to make them adaptable and flexible to the diverse needs of the learners so that they will be suitable and attractive to the adults who most need them.

12. Are VECs capable of responding adequately to the demands of the Smart - knowledge, technology-based economy?

Opinions differed among the CEOs as to whether VECs were capable of responding to the demands of creating a knowledge-based economy. Some CEOs suggested that VECs lacked the capacity while others thought that there might be the possibility if there was a change of approach and VECs adopt an intra-agency approach. It would also require a sizable CPD investment in core staff in order to stimulate them into creating a whole service approach to education and training. It was thought that VECs did have a record for innovation based on years of experience and responding would require the second-level as well as the adult education sector if a knowledge based economy was to be created.

13. Some earlier interviewees described adult education as the Cinderella service of the VEC, how can the importance of adult education be enhanced and the service professionalised?

One CEO stated that adult education had a 'piece-meal' structure because of separate funding streams along with highly qualified tutors working part-time with no career path within the system that has gained the perception of a Cinderella service in comparison to the VEC second-level system. Funding within the sector has increased considerably over the years but the service lacks a cohesive joined-up approach. The adult education service is providing for basic education up to FETAC Level 6, from early school leavers to 90 years olds and another CEO proposed that education up to Level 4 should be available free to all adults, no matter what age they left school.

14. If you were Minister for Education & Skills, what would you do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC? What four changes would you make?

Responses covered suggestions around both the financial and structural changes that should be brought about through increase funding and allowing great flexibility with the funding streams. Finance should be made available for capital projects such as adult education multiplexes that would provide integrated education within the community. It was suggested that flexibility would achieve better value for money as well achieving better outcomes. It was proposed that structural changes would require fewer people at lower grades and more people at middle management level providing better educational and support services. As Minister, another CEO suggested again that every adult in Ireland should receive education up to Level 4 on the national quality framework. Another suggestion was the establishment of a strategic management system that would set goals and objectives which would look for a return on investment in education and training. By becoming more accountable, VECs would become more professional according to one CEO.

15. How can adult learners be better served by VECs?

The underlying difficulty was highlighted, there are thirty-three VECs all doing things differently. The VECs in their current structure are part of the problem. A suggested solution by one CEO lies in the thirty-three VECs coming together to agree a particular design for adult education that would be coherent in its provision and in agreement about what VECs provides. The educational reality was described by CEOs who said that there will always be people who learn in different ways, people for whom the formal education system fails. VECs are there to provide a good quality service for those who need it, when they need it and where they need it. This response was added too by another CEO who emphasised the need for progression, to provide better certification and enable learners to move to different providers. VECs cannot and should not think they have to be responsible for all provision.

16. Have you any overall comments on VEC Education, its relevance, value, contribution and how it might make an even bigger impact in the future?

CEOs were positive about the contributions VECs are making to the provision of adult education in Ireland. As one CEO said, 'VECs do a unique thing uniquely'. According to one CEO, VECs have developed a huge understanding of what is needed to be done and how it needs to be done. Therefore, it was stated that VECs have the capacity and the experience to respond creatively to provide adult education that is relevant provided they can organise themselves collectively to create an educational structure that which is required for the 21st century.

Appendix 25

IVEA Executive Interview Questions (Main Study)

1. How long have you been CEO in your particular VEC and what position did you hold prior to it?
2. Did you always aspire to becoming a CEO in the VEC? If yes - why?
3. When you became CEO, what was your vision for your VEC and what were your four main priorities?
4. What would you now say are the important VEC areas outside of your four priority areas?
5. How effective would you rate VECs as an educational provider?
6. What improvements could be made in the following areas?
 - a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes
 - b) Training for teachers, tutors and co-ordinators
 - c) Strategy planning and implementation structures
 - d) Facilities and equipment
 - e) Management structures
 - f) General resources
 - g) Promotion and advertisement
7. What changes (structures or services) do you think are required of VECs in dealing with educational needs within the current economic climate?
8. What do you think are the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff?

9. Will VECs be able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training?
10. Are VECs flexible to the increasing demands on its resources as well as its future requirements?
11. What areas of need require VEC particular attention at this point in time – migrants, unemployed, employees with low skills, early school leavers, adult literacy or others? How best can these areas be addressed?
12. Are VECs capable of responding adequately to the demands of the Smart - knowledge, technology based economy?
13. Some earlier interviewees described adult education as the Cinderella service of the VEC, how can the importance of adult education be enhanced and the service professionalised?
14. If you were Minister for Education & Skills, what would you do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC? What four changes would you make?
15. How can adult learners be better served by the VEC?
16. Have you any overall comments on VEC Education, its relevance, value, contribution and how it might make an even bigger impact in the future?

Appendix 26

Summary of IVEA Executive interview

- 1. How long have you been an Executive of the IVEA and what position did you hold prior to it?**

For thirteen years.

- 2. Did you always aspire to becoming IVEA Executive? If yes - why?**

No

- 3. When you became IVEA Executive, what was your vision for your VECs and what were your four main priorities?**

Upon commencement of his position in the IVEA, he had as a priority the re-structuring of the service. Another priority was 'to represent the VEC at second level and to promote the growth and enhancement of further education'. Current priority is to expand the VEC into a local education authority and to provide cross-community services to all schools at primary and second level.

- 4. What would you now say are the important VEC areas outside of your four priority areas?**

The priority is the same, to continue to 'evolve VECs into proper local education authorities and the amalgamations may assist that process'. VECs have a catchment area, why can't it provide supports to everybody in an unthreatening manner such as building supports, financial supports or it might be HR supports.

- 5. How effective would you rate VECs as an educational provider?**

Adult education in many VECs is down to the calibre of the AEO and some VECs are too small to be effective. There is a need to standardise everything across the sector, such as, processes, procedures, appointments and structures would create great effectiveness across the country.

6. What improvements could be made in the following areas?

a) Content and relevance of adult education programmes

The broad adult education provision is certainly meeting needs but where it needs to improve is Further Education, the PLCs sector. In our PLC sector, every year, schools and centres put on educational programmes (PLCs) but I cannot say there is a mechanism or structure to ensure with transparency that the skills we are providing are meeting the needs of industry which is constantly evolving. A structure is needed whereby industry talks to education and communicates what education needs to be doing and what it doesn't need to do.

b) Training for teachers, tutors and co-ordinators

A priority for me now is to get funding to hire a training co-ordinator. We have the strategy and we need the person to drive this. There is a grave need for that because there is different standards, different rates of pay for tutors across the country.

c) Strategy planning and implementation structures

It was stated strategic planning was very important and that the first step in the process in developing a vision and in order to achieve that vision, VEC had to stand back. The biggest obstacle to changing structures was the fragmentation of programmes within the VEC adult education services. All programmes have slightly different rules and regulations, different staffing structures, etc. and are housed in different location around the towns.

d) Facilities and equipment

It was mentioned that the Department of Education and Skills only deals with school building and does not have a building programme for adult and further education. It was stated that it is very important now in the time of shortage of money because there are many fine adult education centres and there are some that are disgraceful centres.

e) Management structures

It was agreed that every VEC should have a senior management team and that changes are coming with the amalgamation of VECs. There will an Officer responsible for schools and the AEO will be responsible for adult education. Administration within the VECs will have to be examined.

f) General resources

VECs will have to be more efficient and more creative in the use of resources because there will be less resources in the coming years. Resourcing is going to become a problem because the state won't be able to afford them and it will affect frontline services and adult education will

not be seen as necessary, unlike schools. Many of the programmes are not seen as frontline and people are not being replaced when they leave or retire. That is going to be an on-going problem.

g) Promotion and advertisement

There was strong consensus that VECs were very good at providing a service but were very poor at selling the huge amount of work taking place throughout the country. A national VEC budget was suggested with a single brand image and VECs promoted through national campaigns on TV and radio advertising. It is also the case that VECs are more than vocational education and there is a need to change the name to Education Authorities.

7. What changes (structures or services) do you think are required of VECs in dealing with educational needs within the current economic climate?

VECs have to be more creative about how we spend our money. Budgets come in ring-fenced streams and pay and non-pay cannot be mixed. VECs need to have two or three operational models where there is more flexibility between the programmes in terms of students and staffing. Tutors should be appointed to the VEC rather than to a programme such as Youthreach or VTOS. Structurally, there should be multiplex's for adults in the context of a non-school setting. There is huge potential for such integrated centres because people associate real education with going to a place.

8. What do you think are the key qualifications, competencies and experiences required of VEC adult education staff?

Adult Education will never be taken seriously unless teachers have recognised qualifications right throughout the sector, otherwise it is seen as Cinderella, as a second best provision. Adult education is seen as something inferior and ad hoc and lacks a sense of professionalism. Professionalism is not just about how well you do something but how well the VEC staff is trained.

9. Will VECs be able to respond to increased demands following the Government intention for unemployed people to take part in educational courses/training?

The VEC will not be able to respond to the expected demands. The country is in a state of flux at the moment because the training element of DETI being transferred in DES. VECs cannot play their part in re-training or re-skilling unemployed adults unless there is a change in the current way of doing things PLCs remained capped at 31,500, the BTEI which is a very important programme for re-skilling it is being cut by 500.

10. Are VECs flexible to the increasing demands on its resources as well as its future requirements?

One of the cornerstones of the VECs success has been its flexibility and the benefits of the Back to Education programme is that finance is pooled and that you can create programmes to suite the individuals and that is an important element of flexibility.

11. What areas of need require VEC particular attention at this point in time – migrants, unemployed, employees with low skills, early school leavers, adult literacy or others? How best can these areas be addressed?

Within the current economic climate, the unemployed should be the main target that VECs are working with in order to re-train and re-skill those with obsolete skills or those who lack the basic generic skills.

12. Are VECs capable of responding adequately to the demands of the Smart - knowledge, technology-based economy?

No, VECs are not capable of responding. It is a big task and young people have different sets of skills and the VEC need to use all modern means of communication as well as the full range of IT skills.

13. Some earlier interviewees described adult education as the Cinderella service of the VEC, how can the importance of adult education be enhanced and the service professionalised?

One interviewee said that government policy needed to recognise that education is more than first and second-level schools. Adult education was viewed simply as community education and yet there were many adults without basic skills which VECs are assisting. It is not seen as a real player and yet it is the cornerstone and the backbone of the lives of many adults. It was agreed that the IVEA should play a greater role in helping to highlight the important contribution VEC adult education is playing in Ireland.

14. If you were Minister for Education & Skills, what would you do to improve the educational provision provided by the VEC? What four changes would you make?

There is the need to look at resourcing of VECs in terms of its staffing levels because at the moment the moratorium is applied to adult education staff and they are not seen as a front line services. There is also the need to look at a strategy for developing further education, funding it and increase its flexibility, thus creating better value for money while responding to the needs of the learners, society and the economy.

15. How can adult learners be better served by VECs?

An underlying difficulty was highlighted and VECs in their current structures are part of the problem. It was suggested that adult learners would be better served if their needs could be met 24/7 in centres and schools which are open at weekends and in the evening time all year round. The adult learner should be able to access learning at times that suits them. Another area that would help adult learners is if the fabric of the buildings was improved and that the provision of centres became more flexible. Staffing will also need to become more flexible. 'The sector is not there to be serviced by the customer, rather the customer is there to be serviced by the sector'.

16. Have you any overall comments on VEC Education, its relevance, value, contribution and how it might make an even bigger impact in the future?

In the European context, VET is very important. VECs should consider going back to a pure form of VET that provides a rounded individual with the skills that are needed and also serves the needs of industry and the economy. VECs abdicated at school level its real responsibility for VET. The service needs to go back to a pure form of VET (Vocational Education Training) that serves the needs of industry and that provides rounded individuals with the skills that are wanted and needed in industry.

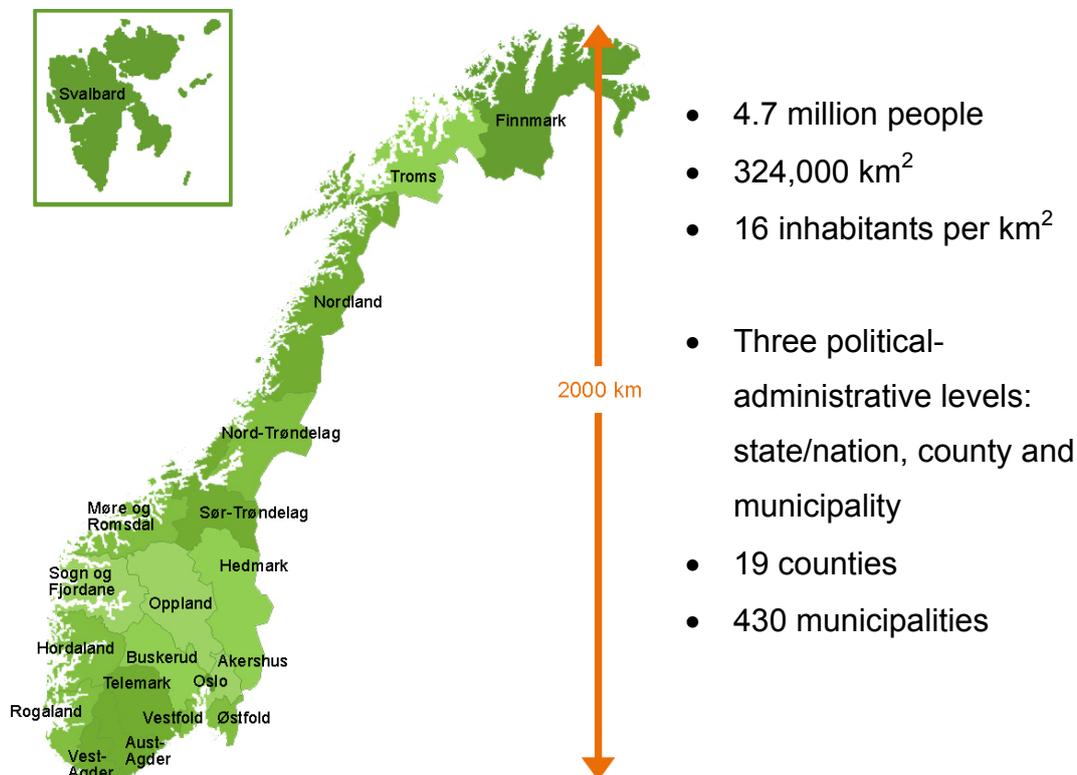
Appendix 27

**Analysis of Student Interview Question 17 - What has been most helpful to you about your study or learning so far?
The following words, phrases and sentences were produced.**

- You can try everything
- The people here have been helpful, not just the tutors. The atmosphere is friendly in the place
- The satisfaction of finishing an assignment and handing it in. Being able to do something from start to finish and know that I did it
- The commitment of the tutors
- The total attitude of the teachers of helpfulness
- To realise I have a brain and that I am bright and intelligent. I was told I was a slow learner but I'm sorry it took 43 years to do what I am doing
- Its not pressure but the encouragement to work as good as you can
- Knowing that I can achieve. Sense of achievement helps me feel better about myself
- Personal Development has helped me get to know myself
- Communication - writing about myself and discussing it helped me to know myself
- I'm a lot better at maths, smaller groups has helped me
- Tutors don't give out if you get things wrong. If you get something wrong, tutors help you out
- Confidence in myself
- I'm able to fill in forms
- I like the classes, woodwork and being in the kitchen
- I got my driving test
- You just have to ask for help and you'll be helped
- The classes are very helpful, they start at the right level.
- The one-to-one tuition was brilliant
- The tutors provides time for question to ensure you understand what's going on
- Tutors are available when you have problems
- It keeps the brain agile
- As well as the serious dimension of the class, there is also the time when we have a laugh
- An extra friendly approach in the centre and we support each other in the class and outside it
- Doors have been opened for me that I wasn't aware existed. The content is interesting even if you weren't going for a job. The tutor will help only if you put in the work
- What I came to learn, I am learning now
- I can put into practical use straight away what has been of benefit to me
- Notes being emailed to me about Pilates were and always will be a benefit to me

Appendix 28

Summary facts relating to Norway



National council for Vocational Education & Training

Tripartite cooperation between:

- Ministry of Education and Research
- major trade unions
- employers' organisations
- students' and apprentices' organisations
- teacher unions

Main functions:

- develop mutual trust and consensus
- contributions to policy development
- develop and monitor national VET
- ensure relevance and quality of VET

Appendix 29

IVEA Study Visit to Norway (2009)

Monday, 8 June

08.45 am Transport from Quality Hotel Alexandra to Romsdal Upper Secondary School

09.00 am Meeting in the auditorium at Romsdal Upper Secondary School.

Welcome by principal Bjørn Johannessen:

- Expectations for the study visit.
- Norwegian educational system with emphasis on upper secondary education.
- The structure of the study programs. The different vocational programs.
- Practical approach to vocational education and apprenticeship.
- Implementation of the Norwegian National Skills Strategy.

10.15 am Deputy principal Ivar Rød:

- Integrating basic skills into vocational education.
- Accreditation of prior learning.
- The use of ICT in upper secondary schools.

11.15 am Head of Department Harald Tomren, and teacher Kristian Fostervoll:

- Collaborations between school and industrial companies.

12.10 am Lunch in the school's canteen.

01.00 pm Teaching methods in the education programme for Service and transport.

- Head of department Eva Torsetnes. Room G-116.

01.30 pm A guided tour around the school centre.

02.45 pm In the auditorium:

- Adapted, inclusive and special education, by Head of Section Rose Mari Skarset.
- 03.30 pm** Apprenticeship for ICT and clerical work in public sector.
- Practical examples from the school's own staff recruitment system by Principal Bjørn Johannessen.
- 04.00 pm** Return to the hotel.
- 04.30 pm** Review of day – completion of reflective diaries, summarising of key learning's and preliminary conclusions about how such learning's might be relevant to the Irish context. This session will also seek to produce draft recommendations for inclusion in the study visit report – arising out of that particular day's learning's.
- 05.30 pm** Workday concludes.
- 07.00 pm** Welcome dinner at Molde Fjordstuer, hosted by Møre and Romsdal County.

Tuesday, 9 June

- 08.45 am** Transport from Quality Hotel Alexandra to the Directorate for Education and Training.
- 09.00 am** Presentation from the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training
by Marit Granheim and Matilda Burman.
- www.udir.no
- <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kd.html?id=586>
- The school and vocational training systems of Norway
 - The new reform – Knowledge Promotion:
 - The Core Curriculum
 - Quality Framework
 - Subject Curricula
 - Common core subjects in primary and secondary education
 - Programmes for general studies

- Vocational and training programmes
- Basic skills
- Sami content in many subjects and the Sami curriculum.

http://www.udir.no/Artikler/_Lareplaner/_english/Knowledge-promotion---Kunnskapsloftet/

- 12.00 am** Lunch in the canteen at the University College of Molde, nearby the Directorate.
- 01.00 pm** Programme / course design – how it is done and by whom?
- Implementation, local plans and guidance
 - Vocational content in the common core subjects
 - Relating the Norwegian vocational education and training to the EQF, a future NQF?
- 03.00 pm** Return transport to the hotel.
- 03.30 pm** Review of day – completion of reflective diaries, summarising of key learning's and preliminary conclusions about how such learning's might be relevant to the Irish context. This session will also seek to produce draft recommendations for inclusion in the study visit report – arising out of that particular day's learning's.
- 04.30 pm** Workday concludes.

Wednesday, 10 June

08.50 am: We walk from the hotel to the county administration.

www.mrfylke.no

09.00 am: The vocational education at the county level.

Challenges in Møre og Romsdal implementing the Knowledge Promotion, by Per Hoem, Head of the County Department of Education.

- School owner responsibilities
- Structure of applicants and provision of educational programmes in a de-centralised school structure. How does

this meet the need for skilled workers in the regional labour market?

- How does the county level meet the problems concerning high drop-out rates?
- The Quality Plan for Upper secondary Education and Training in Møre og Romsdal 2009-2013

Vocational training in Møre og Romsdal, by Anita Steinbru, Head of section Vocational Training and Inger Lise Trønningdsdal, Adviser in the same section.

- Presentation of the Section for Vocational Training and our co-partners.
- Some statistics: Placement and numbers of apprentices, numbers of successfully completed craft examinations, and the problem of drop outs among apprentices in some recognized trades.
- Schemes of flexibility: The training candidates
- Vocational training for adults – documentation and recognition of non-formal learning in relation to upper secondary education
- Instructors training – networking as a strategy
- The mis-match between VET provision and labour market needs. Case: The skilled Healthcare Worker.

12.00 am: Lunch in the canteen at the county administration.

01.00 pm: Regional planning and the project “Move To More”,
How to make skilled workers choose Møre and Romsdal for living and working.

Head of planning, Ole Helge Haugen.

02.30 pm: Enterprise in education - Councillor Kirsten Aure.

03.30 pm Review of day – completion of reflective diaries, summarising of key learning's and preliminary conclusions about how such

learning's might be relevant to the Irish context. This session will also seek to produce draft recommendations for inclusion in the study visit report – arising out of that particular day's learning's.

04.30 pm Workday concludes.

Thursday, 11 June

08.45 am: Transport from Quality Hotel Alexandra to University College Molde. www.himolde.no

09.00 am: College Presentation

- Teacher and instructor training.
- Implementation of the Norwegian National Skills Strategy.

12.00 am Lunch in the canteen at the University College of Molde.

01.00 pm Visit to Romsdal Upper Secondary School to see practical examinations in building and construction being conducted.

02.00 pm Visit to business in Molde involved in the training of apprentices, "Christie", building the new public bath in Molde.

<http://www.christie.no/nyheter/35-nyheter/99-moldebadet-blir-til>

03.30 pm Meeting with CEO Børre Tangen at Quality Hotel Alexandra about apprenticeships at the hotel, and the hotel's staff recruitment policy.

04.00 pm Review of day – completion of reflective diaries, summarising of key learning's and preliminary conclusions about how such learning's might be relevant to the Irish context. This session will also seek to produce draft recommendations for inclusion in the study visit report – arising out of that particular day's learning's.

04.30 pm Workday concludes.

05.40 pm We walk from the hotel to the Romsdal Museum.

06.00 pm A guided tour at Romsdal Museum, the largest folk museum in the region.

07.00 pm A Norwegian evening at Kyllingstua, one of the buildings of the museum, hosted by Romsdal Upper Secondary School.

Friday 12 June

08.45 am Walk from the hotel to the Town Hall.

09.00 am Presentation from representative of Molde municipality.

- Staff recruiting and training.
- Different apprenticeship programs in the municipality administration.
- Apprenticeship in health and social trades.
- The recruitment situation during the next years.

11.00 am Visit a kindergarten with apprentices.

12.00 am Lunch at the town hall.

01.00 pm Visit to Brunvoll Thrusters, a company providing high quality training for apprentices within mechanical trades. www.brunvoll.no

02.00 pm Transport to Brunvoll's department at Årø.

03.00 pm Transport to the hotel.

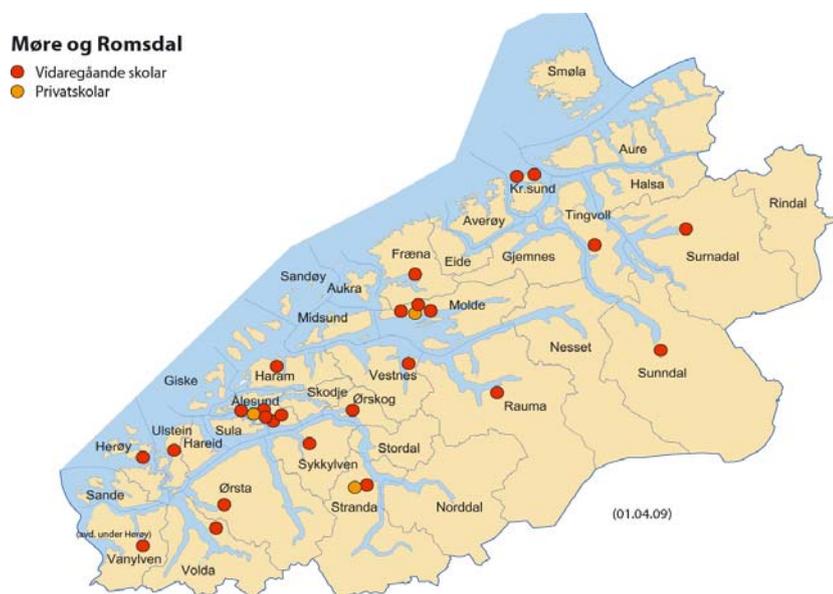
03.30 pm Review of day – completion of reflective diaries, summarising of key learning's and preliminary conclusions about how such learning's might be relevant to the Irish context. This session will also seek to produce draft recommendations for inclusion in the study visit report – arising out of that particular day's learning's.

04.30 pm Workday concludes.

Appendix 30

Summary facts relating to More and Romsdal

- 9800 students
- 25 schools
- 1500 teachers and school leaders
- 2200 apprentices
- 1300 training establishments
- Budget: 1.2 billion kroner (€140m)
- Central administration 40 persons



Vocational Education

- 56 % of 1st year students are on vocational programmes
 - Technical and Industrial Production the most numerous due to the big shipbuilding industry
 - gender segregation
 - 95 % of students on Health, Social Care, Design, Arts and Crafts are girls
 - 95 % boys on Building and Construction, Electricity and Electronics, Technical and Industrial Production

Appendix 31

Summary of findings for Wednesday, June 11th 2009

(Part one)

11/06/2009

Teaching school year is longer and expectations to be on site are longer and preparation as part of work:	XXXX
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 1687.5 working hours per year o 1 week=37.5 hours to planning and ed o 38 weeks in average 29.3 hours at school o 14 hours/week preparing afterwork at home or school o Teaching in upper secondary 16-20 lessons in a week within 29.3 hours 	
Compulsory training for school/service leaders	XXX
Integration Basic skills into mainstream vocational educational provision	XXX
National Digital Learning Arena is a move towards (NDALA.no) online content above and beyond the textbook. Norway is national platform to facilitate teaching and learning	XX
Grant for laptops – 3000KOR (€300)	XXXXXX
More holistic view of learning – treating education and training as if it were one	X
Adult legal entitlement (over 25) to avail of unused portion of the 13 year entitlement to education and training.	XXXXXX
This is linked with the entitlement of an adults with low basic skills to assessment and to APL	
Link between education (schools) and apprenticeships	XXXX
Link between VET schools and industry – i.e. RFFTF Forum – more formalised	XXXXXXX
Adaptive education	XXX
Schools have flexibility in meeting the needs of students they have enrolled	
Advantages of vocational stream	XXX
Ability to link back from vocational stream through supplementary programme	XX
Defined structure for tracking learners who drop out and support structures for keeping students in schools using flexible str	XXXXXX
Follow-up service to 21	
Subsidised kindergarden education and maternity/parental leave	X
School motto – Together we are shaping the future	XXX
More relaxed school atmosphere and no school uniform	X
VET system is school and business based as distinct from FAS system in Ireland	X
Assessment system less formal – no formal public/state system	X
School facilities available to communities outside school hours	
Integrated curriculum levels 1-13 (i.e. primary through to upper secondary)	XX
Use of Oral exams available in all subjects	XX
Continuous assessment	X
National centre for reading writing, reading, maths etc to support teachers	X
Continuous up-skilling of teachers in relation to special needs etc.	X
Dedicated time within school year – 1 week- for development, planning, meetings and school activities	X
Local autonomy in the context of nationally prescribed outcomes (seen by some as being a negative)	XX
Using the web to provide teachers and schools with guidance	X
School owner responsibility for teacher competence	X
Individual Education Plans are legally prescribed for learners with special needs	X
Use of digital media for conducting national examinations	XX
More emphasis on local and oral assessment rather than on centralised national system (one-off state exams)	X
In vocational education teachers must do a teaching qualification within a period of years from appointment	X
Technical staff available in upper secondary school system (5 in Romsdal)	X
One education act which is added to	XXXX
Two education ministers one for primary and secondary and one for third level	
Emphasis on reading in Junior schools	X
Total resources to the system are very impressive – higher % of GDP spent on education	X
Stepping stones approach to learning Norwegian at basic level for non-Norwegian speakers prior accessing the full Norwegian curriculum	X
Schools identifying with local community	X
Acknowledgement of importance of basic skills - integrated into every curriculum and teachers of all subjects are responsible teaching these core skills.	X
Much lower pupil-teacher ratio – – 8.6:1 (Academic) & 6:1 Vocational	XXXXXX
No third level fees and schoolbooks free of charge	X
New action plan for Sami language – preserving minority languages	X
Flexible routes through upper secondary	X
Psychological services better than Ireland – similar to Dublin VECs	X
Emphasis on enhancing teachers competence levels at all levels	X
Education provision is rights based	X
Key skills and embedding of same has become a common feature of national curricula across Europe	
Lean Admin structure inn County Office 40 for 9,500 students and 2,200 apprentices.	XX
Recognition that people learn at work and so work is very much educational adult are more literate than school students	X
Good model for training apprentice examiners	XXX
Ombudsman for upper secondary and apprentices	XXXXXX
Integrated approach to enterprise education 1 to 3 rd level 4 staff pop of 250,000 – early intro to enterprise	XXXXX

Summary of findings for Wednesday, June 11th 2009

(Part two)

Responsibilities of school owners very clear	X
Right of students to one of three upper secondary options	X
Clear process for Recognising Prior learning	XX
Choice of two options at end of secondary school – academic or vocational	X
More focussed and positive emphasis on and approach to vocational education	XXX
To some extent teachers' salaries based on performance	X
Alternative apprenticeship route for school tired and low functioning students.	XXx
Training centres set up by business networks and staff trained by county.	XX
Very structured teacher networks.	X
Heads of school departments have wider role – they manage all the resources, including the human resources.	X
Teachers in vocational education in Upper Secondary schools have the option of upskilling by working in business environment and those working in business can provide tutoring/teaching in the upper secondary – these help make the education in upper secondary vocational schools more work-place relevant.	X
Clear route for adults to gain trade qualifications through the apprenticeship system – 25% of apprentices are adult.	X
Adults have clear process available to them to obtain trade qualifications on the basis of their work experiences – they can have prior learning formally assessed, then be provided with programmes to make up any skill deficits and then undertake the necessary assessments to obtain their trade qualifications.	X
Practical exams monitored by teachers from neighbouring schools – seemed to work very well.	XXX
Free 1 year, Bachelors and post graduate courses available from university college – one year courses could provide pathway to university	XXX
University colleges offer two year p/t teacher training courses to unqualified (pedagogical) vocational teachers.	X
Variety of pathways to university – some universities have a foundation year.	XXXX
Quite small university colleges at local level – responding to local needs` of industry, etc.`	XXXXX
Norwegian system more coherent than Irish – we have too many different institutions and programmes	X
Norway sets out to provide people with the education they need in their local community – self sufficient communities.	X
Apprenticeships replace PLC system	X
Portion of university income is tied to graduation rather than enrolment numbers.	XXX
Ministry of education encourages local, national and transnational collaborations	X
Norwegian students encouraged to study abroad.	X
Norway ensures that duplication of courses is minimised and, in process, it supports small schools.	X
University college seeks to have all lecturers obtain pedagogical training.	X
Big emphasis on decentralised education even up to university level – to local communities.	XX
University and school library service integrated.	X
Entry to higher education more equitable than in Ireland.	X
Good blended learning approach to teacher education.	X
Research and development company associated with university seems to work well in providing the local community with advanced skills of the university .	X
Good government support for companies that provide apprentice training.	X
Apprentice system seems to work very well – monitored and supported effectively. Where employers not able to meet all training outcomes, education system can assist.	X
Did you note any policies/practices that are better addressed in Ireland? In what way is this so?	
No extracurricular activities at senior secondary level.	X
Irish VET system is broader based, more educational and more transferrable skills	X
Irish schools attempting to marry academic and vocational	X
Certification appears more structured and standardised in Ireland	XXXXX
Transfer system between one level and another seems more simplified and transparent in Ireland	X
Clearer guidance to teachers on what is required at each year level in each subject	X
Norwegian system of exams more difficult to follow – Irish system clearer	XXXX
Sami educational system may learn from Gaelcholaisti	
More standardised curriculum	X
Ireland has the NQF and all award standards relate to its various levels.	XX
Consultation for curricula development is better in Ireland	X
More structured adult Educ. Service in Ireland	XXX
Better literacy service in Ireland	XXXXXX
Adult education and second chance in Ireland is more diverse in Ireland better provided for	XXX
No right to second chance if you have availed of 13 years in education	X
PISA results better in Ireland.	XX
Achievement standards for apprenticeships are possibly more uniform in Ireland – given the national approach to apprenticeship.	XX

Appendix 32

Norwegian models of good practice

1. Norwegians entering Upper Secondary education have the right to opt for one of three programmes: (a) vocational, (b) academic or (c) mixture of vocational/academic. This is followed by a one-year programme to facilitate access to university and this access facility is also available to qualified apprentices.
2. Norwegian vocational system comprised nine different programmes: technical skills and industrial production, electrical and electronic subjects, building and construction technology, restaurant trades and nutritional subjects, health and social subjects, design and craft subjects, media and communication, service and travel, and agriculture, fishing and forestry.
3. Industry Provider Forums were a feature of Norwegian upper secondary vocational education and these Forums ensured connectivity between the content of vocational education programmes and the skills needs for local companies, thus assisting in the shaping of the national curriculum.
4. Teachers in vocational education in Upper Secondary schools have the option of up-skilling by working in business environments for a period. Likewise, individuals working in business can carry out some teaching in the upper secondary schools. This system provides the opportunity to link in a seamlessly manner the world of work and the world of education.

