

Research report on Community Education provision in Co. Fermanagh

Report prepared by the Fermanagh Trust on behalf of the Fermanagh Community Education Forum



Supported by the Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme (Department for Social Development)



Preface

The Fermanagh Community Education Forum was formed on 27th May 2004 and Forum's mission is to;

"Identify learning needs in Fermanagh and work in partnership to provide educational opportunities to all learners".

Aims of the Fermanagh Community Education Forum (FCEF):

- ❖ To work co-operatively and collectively to identify learning needs in Fermanagh;
- ❖ To gather and exchange information relating to educational provision in Fermanagh and surrounding areas;
- ❖ To raise awareness in relation to the availability or lack of resources necessary to provide adequate learning opportunities to all in the community;
- ❖ To provide, as a collaborative group, encouragement for community groups and individuals in the provision and delivery of quality training programmes;
- ❖ To develop and adopt policies and guidelines that adhere to equal opportunity, educational marginalisation or exclusion.

Objectives of the forum:

- ❖ To monitor educational provision in the community from pre-nursery level, identifying gaps in provision and recommending a cohesive strategy to ensure quality educational provision for all;
- ❖ To facilitate the promotion and implementation of research and surveys in relation to educational provision and to publish the results of such surveys;
- ❖ To encourage networking, exchange of information, the sharing of resources and to promote partnerships between statutory and voluntary sectors in the delivery of formal and informal educational opportunities;
- ❖ To promote lifelong learning and to identify a variety of first step learning opportunities and encourage people to return to learning.

Forum Membership

The following persons are the elected officers of Fermanagh Community Education Forum Executive Council as of November 2006:

<i>Chairperson:</i>	Noel Maguire
<i>Vice-chairperson:</i>	Anita Maguire
<i>Secretary:</i>	Gabriel Keown
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Ken Goreham

Role of Fermanagh Trust

The FCEF invited the Fermanagh Trust as an independent and external body to carry a needs analysis research on Community Education provision within Co. Fermanagh. Within the terms of reference outlined by the FCEF research brief, the Fermanagh Trust conducted a comprehensive survey of community education provision in Co. Fermanagh. It is anticipated that this report will provide an overview of the current status of community education provision, its benefits to the community, the challenges for its future and the potential roles that the Fermanagh Community Education Forum can have in the future.

Contents

Preface	ii
Forum Membership	iii
Role of Fermanagh Trust	iii

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale and methodology	1
1.2 Geographical and population characteristics of Co. Fermanagh	2
1.3 Current education status of Fermanagh population	3
1.4 Role of Community and Voluntary organisations & larger service providers	3

Section 2: Research findings

2.1 Types of Community education courses	6
2.2 Time of year that Community education courses are held	6
2.3 Length of Community education courses	7
2.4 Origin of Participants	7
2.5 Age of participants	7
2.6 Community education course accreditation	8
2.7 Community education service providers	9
2.8 Rationale for community education courses	10
2.9 Facilities utilised	12
2.10. Sources of Funding	12
2.11 Advertising of community education courses	14
2.12 Monitoring of community education courses	14
2.13 Barriers to community education courses within Fermanagh in the future	15
2.14 Further information	17

Section 3: Discussion

3.1 Rationale for Community education	19
3.2 Range of organisations	20
3.3 Changing environment	20
3.4 Potential roles for the Fermanagh Community Education Forum (FCEF)	22

Section 4: Recommendations

Reference List	25
Appendix 1	26

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale and methodology

Rationale for research

For individuals aged 16+ in Co. Fermanagh access to education can be restricted, particularly for people living in remote communities. For those who chose not to continue their education in the spectrum of formal education, community education provides an opportunity to sustain personal learning development as well as initiating the first step back to full time education.

In order to afford greater opportunities to all individuals, specific education service providers and many rural and urban community/voluntary organisations have endeavoured to provide educational courses under the umbrella term of Community Education (CE). Indeed the growth of community education may be in recognition of demand, in addition to wider rural development initiatives.

This research is carried out in partnership with the Fermanagh Community Education Forum (FCEF), with the aim of providing an overview of the status of community education in Fermanagh at present. The FCEF is a voluntary association involving representatives of community and statutory education providers within Co. Fermanagh. The aims of the Forum are to identify the learning needs in Fermanagh and working in partnership,

provide education opportunities to all learners.

The purpose of the research was to provide a picture of the current status of community education within the Co. Fermanagh region, and in so doing provide a practical tool for use in future development, and organisation of educational classes within Co. Fermanagh. The findings will allow for positive recommendations to be made regarding the future development and organisation of community education within Co. Fermanagh as well as identifying areas such as gaps in provision and opportunities for development in the future.

Research objectives

'To identify educational provision, both recreational and vocational, throughout Co. Fermanagh for 16+ age group' and

'To identify gaps in educational provision, both recreational and vocational, throughout Co. Fermanagh for 16+ age group'

Methodology

In order to fulfil the above objectives organisations throughout Co. Fermanagh, who provide community education courses were contacted and asked via questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, organisations were asked to provide specific information and their opinions on the current provision of ¹

community education courses. Information requested included course type, average duration, participant details, sources of funding and, service provider, as well as general feedback on community education.

1.2 Geographical and population characteristics of Co. Fermanagh

Fermanagh, a predominantly rural county, is situated on the periphery of N. Ireland. It has a population of 59,300¹. Lough Erne divides the county in two, and is a contributing factor in restricting access to formal education. The county town of Enniskillen is situated at the shortest crossing point of the Lough, and has developed into the main centre for industry, business and education. However, less than a quarter of Co. Fermanagh's population live in Enniskillen, and like many rural areas transport services to and from urban areas can be limiting. With villages and towns often great distances from Enniskillen attendance on educational courses from people living in rural areas may be less than those from urban areas. Hence the rationale for community education courses throughout Co. Fermanagh.

A number of characteristics applicable to all areas (and in particular to single men), such as low self-esteem, a lack of confidence, and poor education levels,

¹N. Ireland Statistics online

may prevent individuals applying for and gaining positions on formal education classes. Therefore it cannot be assumed that individuals living in more urbanised areas automatically have access or take advantage of educational courses.

Attitudes to education differ within Co. Fermanagh with individuals from more rural areas traditionally placing less emphasis on gaining educational qualifications. Of particular concern, as highlighted by the 'Men on the Border project'², is the high percentage (70%) of men living in rural border areas that have low level literacy skills as well as 'poor communication and social skills'. It has been suggested that although resources for adult education have increased the delivery of these entirely through statutory bodies is not most effective³. As a result community and voluntary organisations with their relaxed, flexible and accommodating attitude have been at the forefront of education provision to rural and localised urban areas. Furthermore attendance on educational courses provided by community and voluntary organisations, particularly those that are accredited, are considered by many to be the first step towards returning to formal education.

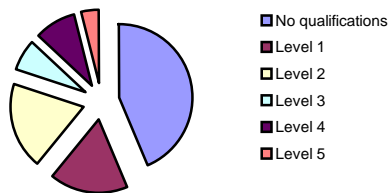
²North Leitrim Men's group

³ Education Policy Statement; Community NI © NICVA

1.3 Current education status of the Co. Fermanagh population

Pie Chart indicating education status of Fermanagh's Population.

Fermanagh 2001; % persons aged 16-74 with;



(Legend details see Appendix 1)

As the level of qualification increases there is a clear decline in the percentage of the population in Co. Fermanagh represented. Almost half of the population in Co. Fermanagh aged 16-74 is without any level of qualification and only 4% with level 5 qualifications.

Co. Fermanagh's only third level education body, the Fermanagh College is the largest education provider in Co. Fermanagh. It is based principally in the County town of Enniskillen, however the college utilises the facilities of a number of community venues throughout Co. Fermanagh to administer some of the College's community education provision. However with imminent changes (the amalgamation of the Fermanagh, Dungannon, and Omagh College's) scheduled for further and higher education provision in Co. Fermanagh, it is to be expected that this will have

implications in the provision of community education.

With respect to rural community and voluntary organisations who independently initiate and maintain educational courses, it could be inferred that the previously mentioned changes i.e. amalgamation of the colleges, will have little or no impact on their community education provision.

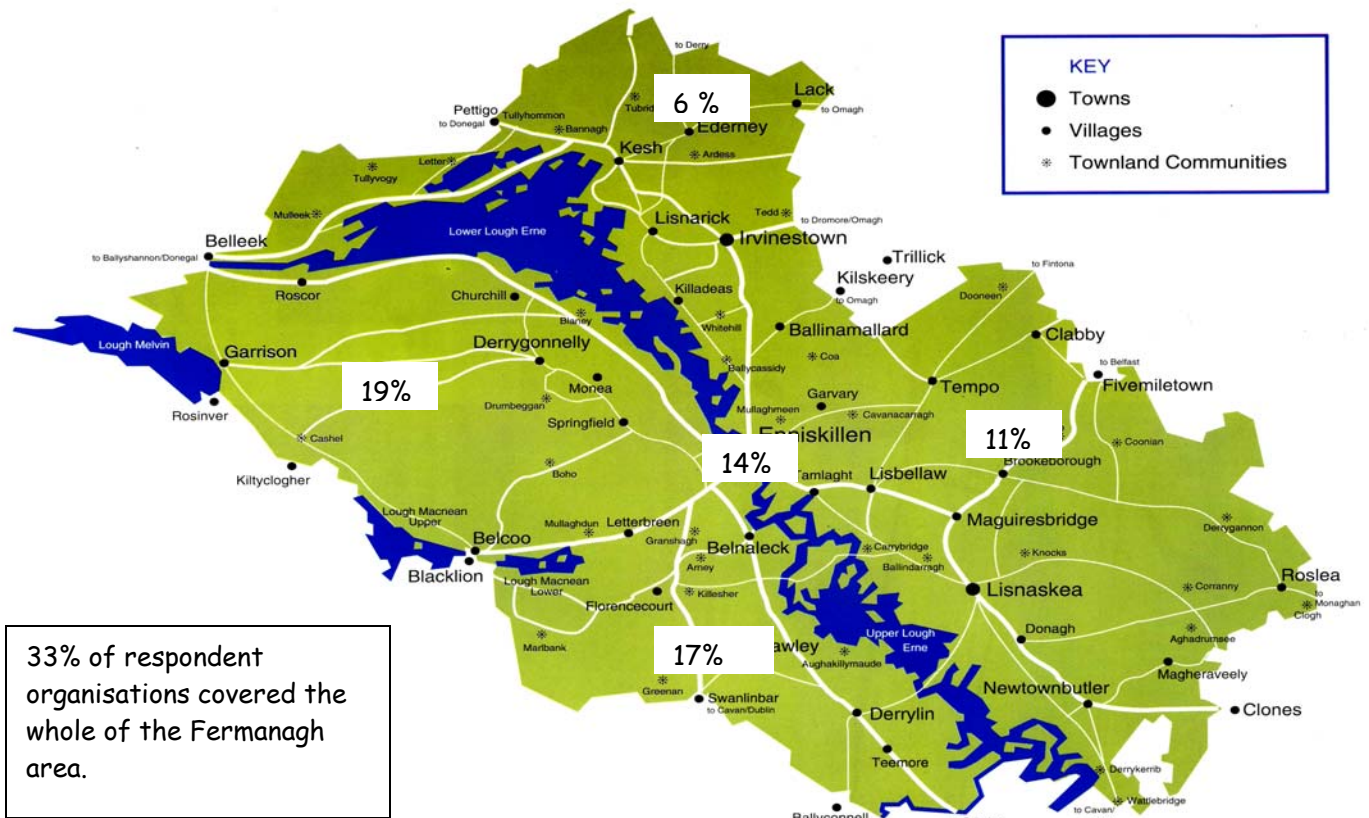
1.4 Role of Community and Voluntary organisations and larger service providers.

Many community and voluntary organisations were established to encourage community development, aid social interaction as well as improving community relations within the area. In many cases the provision of education courses followed, and were opportunistic ventures in that the facilities and capacity were available. It was with subsequent recognition that there was a demand for courses, and also the important role they have in fulfilling the potential of rural areas by increasing social capacity and interaction, which led many of the community organisations to initiate educational courses. In some instances large educational service providers such as the Fermanagh College approached organisations concerning the possibility of running courses in the area utilising community venues.

Unlike the majority of local based community and voluntary groups, the education providers themselves are essentially businesses and the provision of community education courses must be on the merit of making a profit in order to sustain their business.

Section 2 Research findings

Over 50% of all organisations contacted participated in the survey. Combined with the supplementary follow up interviews it is considered that a wide geographical and range of community education providers was covered in the research. Although it may seem that the northern part of the county is underrepresented it is important to note that there is a significant number of groups whose remit covers the whole of the county. Additionally the response of organisations and their geographical location is not specifically representative of the organisations contacted by the Fermanagh Trust in carrying out this research. The map below indicates the percentage of respondents from each area in Co. Fermanagh.



Furthermore it is important to note that organisations sometimes gave more than one reply to all the questions and to remember this when regarding statistical data.

2.1 Types of Community education courses.

The pie chart below indicates the different types of community education courses held in Fermanagh.

Fig. 1 Showing the types of educational courses held throughout Fermanagh

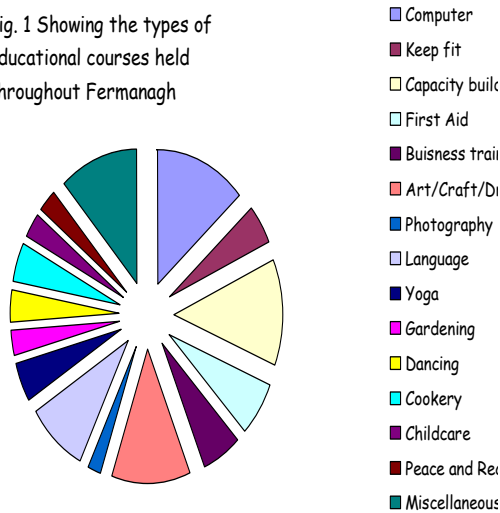


Fig.1 clearly indicates that there is a diverse range of educational courses available throughout Co. Fermanagh, with computer, capacity building and art/craft/drama courses the most common. There is also a strong indication that healthy lifestyles are of importance as keep fit, yoga, dancing and cookery make up a combined distinct proportion. There are also peace and reconciliation courses organised by different groups.

Other courses are specified to show the diversity of interests and those represented in the miscellaneous sector

are amongst others clothesology, cultural diversity workshops and media participatory programmes.

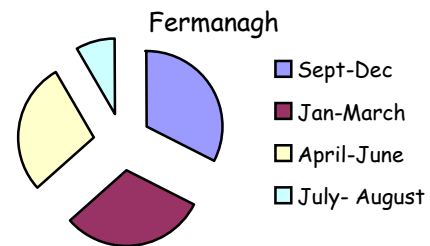
Overall the broad range of courses reflect the demand, and level of interest in educational courses and also the flexible nature that community education has; that it caters to the demands and needs of communities.

• Diverse range of community education courses available throughout Co. Fermanagh

2.2 Time of year that Community education courses are held

Most community education courses are held from September through to June each year Fig. 2. However, there are some organisations that organise and hold courses throughout the year including the summer months, as outlined in the pie chart below.

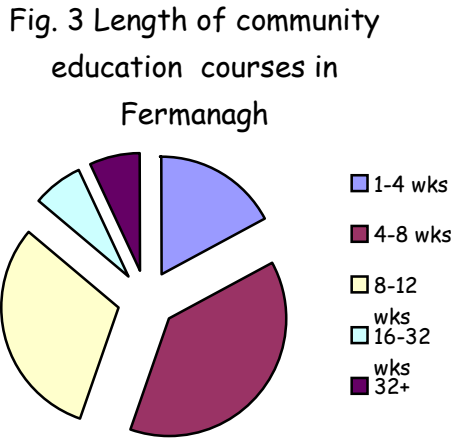
Fig. 2 Time of year that community education courses are held in



• Community education courses mainly held from September to June

2.3 Length of Community education courses

The following pie chart indicates the length of education courses.



Appropriately 40% of courses, as shown by Fig. 3, last between 4-8 weeks with 8-12 weeks the next common length. There are also a significant number of courses that last more than 16 weeks including a few that are more than 32 weeks in length.

• Community education courses generally run on average over a 4-8 wk time span

2.4 Geographical origin of Participants

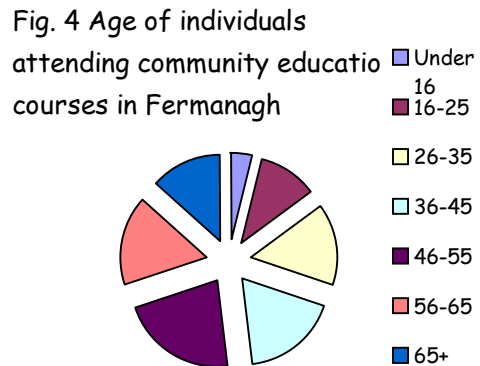
The origin of individuals attending educational courses is well distributed. Attendance of local people on Community education courses is marginally higher than any of the other categories; within 10 miles, the Co. Fermanagh region, and outside Co. Fermanagh. However the

attendance of individuals from the other areas is almost equal and, broadly speaking is suggestive that the appeal of community education courses throughout Co. Fermanagh is not restricted to local areas. Many community education courses which attract individuals from outside local areas and from other counties.

• Almost equal representation from all areas i.e. local area, within 10 miles, within Co. Fermanagh and outside Co. Fermanagh

2.5 Age of participants

The pie chart below represents the attendance by age of participants on Community Education courses in Fermanagh.



There is good representation from all ages attending community education courses (Fig. 4), with age group 46-55 as the largest by a slight margin. Women dominate attendance on these courses;

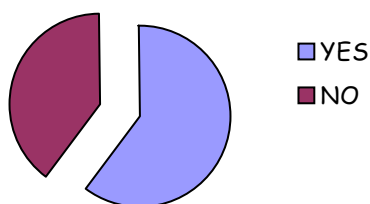
there are no courses that are attended only by men. There are a significant number of courses that are mixed, especially those offered by non-gender specific organisations. There does not seem to be any difficulty in maintaining attendance on courses but there were instances noted that courses that needed specific numbers had in the past been cancelled because required numbers had not been achieved on the first night of the course. These are courses that are provided by the Fermanagh College. On the other hand Omagh College is considered more flexible in that they allowed for a few weeks grace in achieving requisite numbers

- Good representation from all ages on community education courses

2.6 Community education course accreditation

The following pie chart demonstrates if Community Education courses are accredited.

Fig. 5 Are community education courses accredited?



With respect to accreditation there were strong differences in opinion. For the vast majority of respondent's accreditation is the only reason for organising community education courses, as well as the main basis for funding. The rest of the organisations however demonstrated a different view as regards the provision of community education in not supplying accredited courses. It is their opinion that community education cannot be categorised into a defined purpose. That it is a multifunctional concept with the overall aim of fostering a sense of community by means of social integration.

More than half of the organisations that participated in the survey provide accredited educational courses on the basis that accreditation is a means of attracting individuals to the courses, and is also meeting the demands of the community. Accredited courses are typically skilled or training courses such as computers, or business training. For some individual's community education can be the first step back to 'formal' education therefore accreditation may be necessary. For others accreditation is desired to boost their C.V., improve skills/knowledge base or assist in 'moving up' the career ladder. However concern was expressed at the difficulty of obtaining the actual certificates from the examining body following examination, leading to disillusionment

with respect to the value of accreditation.

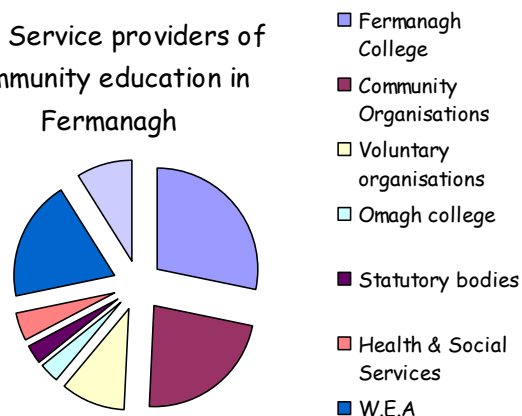
Conversely some organisations maintain that accreditation only served as a deterrent in that it is difficult to get people to attend courses in the first place. It was conceded however, that in some instances having "reeled people in" there were requests being made for accreditation? For some of the groups accreditation is simply not appropriate and other methods such as displaying work in public was more suitable.

- Over half of respondent's organisations provide accredited courses as an attraction to participating in the course
- Accreditation also considered a deterrent

2.7 Community education service providers

The pie chart below clearly indicates the range of Community Education providers in Fermanagh.

Fig.6 Service providers of community education in Fermanagh



Fermanagh College and locally based Community organisations themselves are the main providers of community education throughout Co. Fermanagh, particularly for accredited courses. In addition Omagh College also provides community education courses to areas within Co. Fermanagh. Both colleges utilise community organisation capacities and facilities, and either were proactive in their approach or were contacted directly by the local community organisations. For recreational courses (typically non-accredited) such as cookery, dancing and yoga, organisations tended to arrange their own courses by recruiting tutors or drawing on their own resources, though some of the recreational courses are provided by the colleges. Furthermore a small number of the organisations in the future aim to

draw on their own resources/capabilities, by training their 'own people' to reduce reliance on external tutors and thus reduce costs.

The Workers Educational Association (W.E.A) has also a major role in providing community education courses.

Some of the organisations provide courses on an ad hoc basis and are very much demand driven. These groups tend to utilise private consultants or colleagues in administering educational courses.

- Fermanagh College, the W.E.A and Community organisations themselves are largest service providers.
- Omagh College is also a service provider within Fermanagh
- Future reliance on organisations 'own' resources considered

2.8 Rationale for community education courses

This was an open question and allowed for organisations to state the reasons for organising community education courses. The responses varied, and placed emphasis on a variety of factors.

The overriding reason for community education courses from the groups is to provide skills and training to individuals who are not taking advantage of

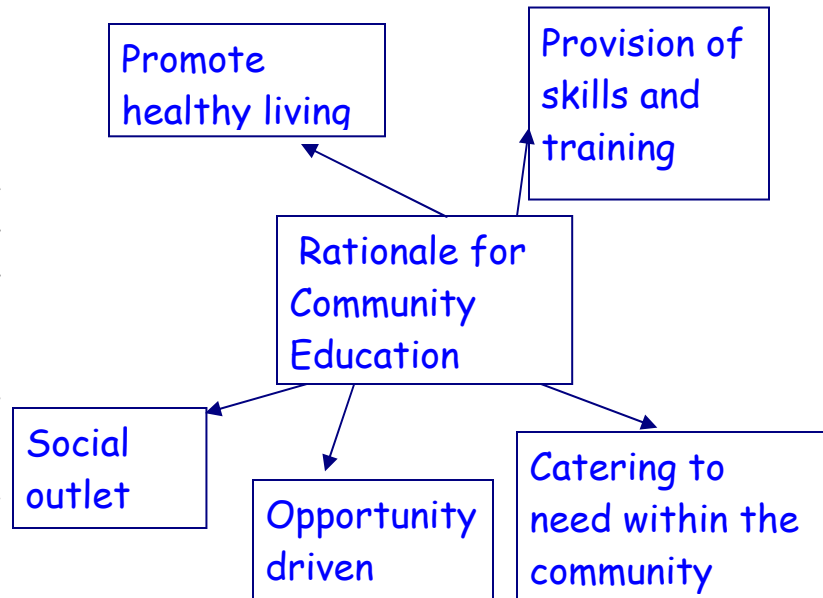
educational services in Co. Fermanagh. By bringing education courses to the people, making them more accessible, it is hoped that the outcome will be two-fold; provide opportunities to improve skills and training to more isolated areas of the county (geographically and socially), as well as increasing social integration thus social capital throughout the community.

The emphasis placed on healthy lifestyles as noted in section 2.1. must also be highlighted. For a number of groups, mainly the women's groups, there was at least one healthy living activity be that yoga, dancing, cookery, or lifestyle awareness.

Furthermore women's groups often viewed community education courses as important means to social integration, a social outlet for women who are generally isolated and cut off from activities. Indeed some of the women's groups considered the education itself as secondary to the important social networking and support that meeting every week provided. At this point it is important to remember that there are no men's groups dealing with male issues in Co. Fermanagh and, to highlight a comment made by one of the interviewees, which is perhaps reflective of attitudes; that 'men don't do courses'.

A number of groups including women's groups were proactive and recognised the need/demand for education and training in their own area as well as throughout Co. Fermanagh. The next step for these groups was either to approach educational providers or organise the courses themselves by engaging independent tutors. Conversely some of the organisations stated that the Fermanagh College has in the past perceived a need in a particular area then contacted the appropriate organisation. This practice is no longer continued by the college who state that, 'as it is not the colleges' obligation to provide community education they do not approach groups and that at present it is the organisations that contact the college'.

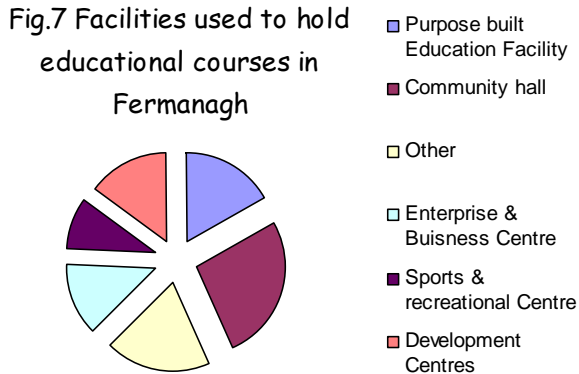
discussions. Or, an organisation was created for a different purpose but with structure and capacities already in place i.e. committees and facilities making it possible/easier to organise community education courses.



The provision of community education courses was also opportunity led. For some organisations the provision of educational courses to the community was considered to be the best use of the funding which was made available for their use. Also the building and development of facilities such as development centres and community halls enabled the provision of community education courses, which had previously not been possible. Furthermore the provision of community education courses grew organically from previous activities, which perhaps could not be described as community education courses e.g. historical and political

2.9 Facilities utilised

A number of facilities are used to hold Community Education courses as demonstrated by the pie chart below



A wide range of facilities are utilised to accommodate educational courses demonstrating an opportunistic approach to facilitating community education. The emphasis is on location i.e. to make the courses as accessible as possible therefore utilise whatever facilities are available/ accessible.

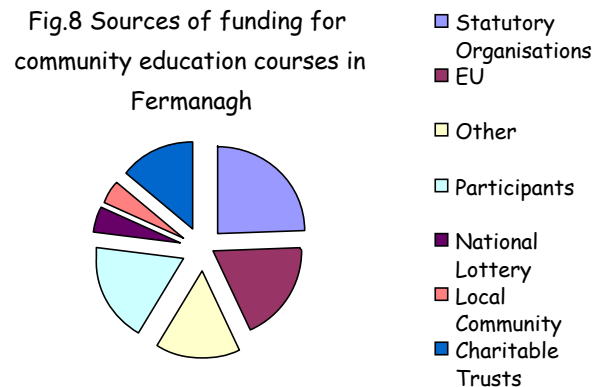
As, many of the community education courses are held from September to June it is viable to access school venues. However if the course runs through the summer then the use of this venue is no longer applicable. Although community halls are the most widely used facility they have usually an affiliation with one side of the community or the other. Therefore some groups have had built educational centres or are taking advantage of newly built development/enterprise centres. These venues aid the accessibility and appeal of community education courses to all

members of the community as they can be considered as neutral venues. Many organisations made use of 'other' facilities such as hotels, entertainment centres and other forms of resource centres.

- Wide range of facilities used to accommodate community education courses
- Emphasis on making community education courses accessible, therefore location very important
- Importance of neutral venue.

2.10. Sources of Funding

The pie chart below indicates the numerous sources of funding for Community Education courses.



There are clearly many sources of funding that are drawn upon to provide community education within Co. Fermanagh, thus highlighting a lack of dependency on one particular source. From the research it appears that

comprising 25% of responses statutory organisations are the largest single source of funding for community education within Co. Fermanagh. Combined (36%) EU funding and the contribution of participants are significant sources of funding for community education provision.

Payment from participants, on many of the non-accredited courses is on a weekly basis and at a nominal charge. However for accredited courses, particularly those run by the Colleges, payment is in advance with a reduced fee for low wage earners. Together with accreditation, payment upfront is aimed at maintaining attendance. Additionally as an incentive, the Fermanagh College pays community organisations a fee per hour if they run a course and maintain numbers. Also as noted previously, courses have been cancelled in the past if the requisite numbers have not been achieved. But in areas that the Fermanagh College recognised would have difficulty in achieving requisite numbers there has been a fund available to supplement any shortfall in revenue. The future availability of this fund is however uncertain.

At present to assess the viability of organising an accredited course (typically vocational), Fermanagh College employs the Student Powered Unit Response (SPURs) Funding Formula. In the future and in accordance with the

Department of Education and Learning's (DEL's) '*FE Means Business*', it is considered that recreational course provision will move towards the delivery of courses which are subject to regulation i.e. NQF (National Qualification Framework). Consequently when allocating funding to any recreational type courses DEL will place great emphasis on the progression and currency of curriculum such courses. But, the College's aim to achieve accreditation for all courses, thereby maintaining funding for courses, is inhibited by resistance in the community for such recognition (see section 2.6).

Incorporated into the statutory organisations sector of Fig. 8 there are specific funds for cross-community relations, peace and reconciliation courses, as well as generic community education courses, which encourage cross community interactions, are funded by specific programmes such as PEACE II+ and the Community Relations Council. One respondent went as far as to suggest that unless "you were cross-community you wouldn't get anything".

There are a number of organisations that are self-funded i.e. through quiz sheets, draws etc. Indeed these smaller organisations considered applications for funding as being perhaps too time consuming and difficult and that they would rely on participants and community funding to sustain the community

education courses. As many of the organisations work in a voluntary capacity this source of revenue is sufficient. For the slightly larger groups with a paid employee it becomes essential that other sources of funding be found.

These other sources include both the larger funding bodies such as the National Lottery who through the Big Lottery fund have contributed £70,619,406 to N. Ireland education initiatives since 1995, as well as contributions and donations made from the local community. Together these sources contribute to 10% of the funding used to provide and sustain community education courses.

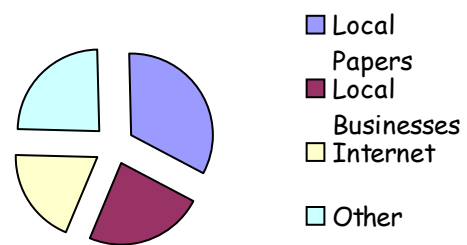
- Numerous sources of funding
- Participants make significant contributions
- Some organisations self-sufficient
- Financial incentives made by larger service providers.

2.11 Advertising of community education courses

Advertising

The vast majority, more than 75% of responses stated that their organisation advertised their community education courses by a number of different mediums, Fig. 9.

Fig.9 Mediums used to advertise community education courses in Fermanagh



The 'other' sector comprises of word of mouth, the use of church bulletins, press releases, mail shots, and the use of district notes in the papers. These methods reduce advertising costs, which can be expensive. Posters in local businesses as well as utilising the internet are also cost efficient methods of advertising community education courses.

2.12 Monitoring of community education courses

Only one of the organisations stated that they did not ask for feedback and it was on the basis that the community

education courses are informal. This same organisation however facilitated computer classes for the colleges; therefore feedback on these courses at least was given.

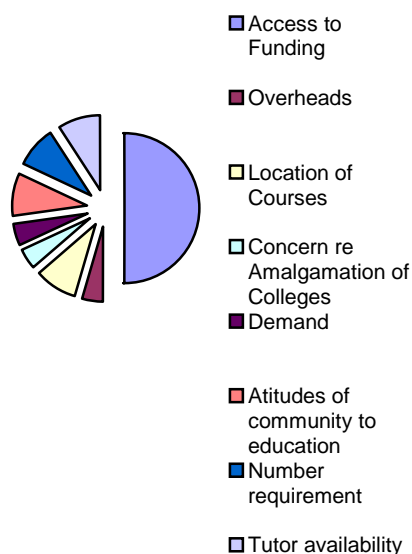
40% of the respondents stated that they asked for or received *both* verbal and written feedback. The other 60% only asked for or received one form of feedback. However what was done with this information varied. The majority of organisations suggested that it could be used as an informative tool in improving community education courses in the future. However, a number of organisations admitted that they themselves did not look at the information merely kept it on file or on the organisations database and, that the purpose for its collection was to give it to the funders.

- Majority of organisations advertised courses on some level
- Feedback was received from at least one of the courses that each organisation held.
- Feedback used as an improvement tool.

2.13 Barriers to community education courses within Co. Fermanagh in the future

As demonstrated by the pie chart below there are a number of potential barriers envisaged.

Fig. 10 Potential barriers to future development and organisation of community education courses in Fermanagh



It is important to note that in this category a number of organisations gave more than one answer and that some of the respondees did not give an answer at all.

Clearly one of the biggest potential barriers to community education

provision outlined by most of the respondents is access to funding; 49% of respondents viewed sources of funding as a potential limitation to Community Education in the future. Indeed the continuation of courses already in existence as well as the introduction of new courses often depends on funding, as noted by some of the organisations.

In section 2.10 it was noted that some organisations are self-sufficient however approximately 90%, are not. Overheads such as hire of venue, lighting and heating in addition to tutor and staffing fees can be costly. Therefore additional funding is necessary on top of fees paid by participants. Feedback suggests that access to funding can be inhibited by the necessary form filling which can be time consuming. Furthermore organisations felt very strongly that funding and the uncertainty of its attainment would impede development and the organisation of community education courses.

5% of respondents highlighted their concerns with respect to the planned future amalgamation of Fermanagh Omagh and Dungannon colleges and the impact this may have on the future provision of community education.

Other barriers include the sourcing of essential equipment as well as appropriate tutors. An internal issue of

concern for some statutory and education providers is the level of training that tutors reach. These organisations considered that there should be in place stricter regulations regarding the co-ordination and training of tutors. With the end result being that tutors are highly qualified and engaging, thereby attracting individuals to courses and maintaining their attendance.

The majority of community organisations are run in a voluntary capacity. Therefore assistance in the form of support workers from the colleges, or the council is greatly appreciated. The potential problem is that it was felt that those currently in these positions had invaluable knowledge, were extremely helpful and that perhaps their replacements in time may not be as supportive. Concern also exists that the attitude towards community education may change and therefore impact negatively on community and rural development as a whole, i.e. note the recent change in language from 'lifelong learning' to 'Further Education means businesses'.

Finally, concern was raised by a number of the respondents with regards to the attitude within communities. The reluctance to participate in courses could hold back personal development as well as community development as a whole, in addition to making it difficult

to attract service providers in the future if numbers are not maintained. Further to this demand for the courses and requisite numbers needed are also considered as potential barriers (9% each).

- Funding considered by all groups to be the main barrier
- Funding applications considered too difficult and time consuming
- Lack of equipment
- Stricter regulations and co-ordination needed for tutors
- Concern re future support and outreach officers
- Concern regarding the amalgamation of the Colleges
- Lacklustre attitude of communities re community education and development.

2.14 Further information

Additional feedback received during the consultation process was varied.

Reflective of many of the organisations was that;

- Community education should be continuous and that funding and tutors should be available for the benefit of those who left school with little or no qualifications;

- Community education courses available in rural areas, where transport services to the main education centre are poor, enables individuals to take advantage of previously unavailable courses;

- If community education is to be the first step back to education the informal and relaxed atmosphere of community education is more appealing than the 'long corridors' of the colleges;

- Community education on the broader level of community and rural development can be of assistance due to integration and networking of participants;

- The importance of networking was highlighted with respect to replication of courses and pooling of resources; and that

- There is a need for greater communication amongst the groups, for partnerships to be established thus reducing pressure on resources and enabling sufficient money and quality tutors to be available to run community education courses.

There was concern voiced specifically with regards to the encroachment of other service providers into a niche, 'which is already adequately filled'. There is an element of competition detected amongst the organisations regarding the provision of specific courses.

Many of the organisations felt that there is an atmosphere of a 'free culture' in existence i.e. an expectation amongst the public that courses, equipment etc should be available free of charge. That this has to change was voiced by many of organisations and it was suggested that communities and the individuals, whose benefit community education courses are for, will need to make a greater commitment, both in attendance and funding, to community education courses. Additionally some of the larger service providers considered that organisations should perhaps take on a greater ownership re: the provision of courses.

Finally there exists a certain level of scepticism is in existence with respect to the type of courses available and

their suitability. It was considered that there are courses being organised without a needs analysis done first to identify community educational needs.

Section 3 Discussion

3.1 Overview

The research findings outline;

- 1) The current provision of community education in Co. Fermanagh.
- 2) That there is a demand and evident need for community education which is at present catered for.
- 3) Demonstrates a number of different rationales for community education.

With the decline in agriculture, the closure of many manufacturing companies in Co. Fermanagh and, the growth of technological based enterprises, many individuals require additional skills if they are to compete for jobs. Additionally the growth in awareness of how important a healthy body and mind is, also contributes to the range of community education courses provided.

The informal and flexible nature of community education courses (vocational and recreational) enables the people of Co. Fermanagh to improve their future job prospects as well as their lifestyles based on their need. Consequently community education has a significant and central role in furthering and maintaining the educational, personal and social development of individuals.

School leavers, who left with minimum or no qualifications, and also older members

of society, can obtain basic qualifications in a number of disciplines by participating on community education courses. These individuals may find community education courses more accessible than the formal education route and may use community education as a stepping-stone back to formal education. However, accreditation of community education courses did divide opinions amongst the organisations; 60:40 in favour. Some considered accreditation as a means of attracting and retaining participants, though others felt that accreditation was in fact a deterrent to participation.

Recreational courses, which are typically not accredited, provide less tangible benefits to individuals and their communities but are by no means less important. The benefits of having courses delivered are valuable to the social and economic development of any local community. Exercise and dance classes for instance benefit the physical health of a community population, also the overall wellbeing through social interaction on a regular basis, which is a most important spin off from recreational and vocational courses. Many of the organisations considered this to be more important than gaining qualifications, and that the confidence and self-esteem of individuals must be built first before bringing in forms of assessment. It was widely expressed that the procurement of courses should

not be discriminated against according to accreditation with regards to funding, (See section 2.10).

Another issue arose regarding the meaning of community education. Some service providers and organisations offer community education as a means to enhance the skills of those individuals who work in the community/voluntary sector. For others it is an opportunity for individuals within communities to participate in courses that will improve both their mental and physical capabilities. Enhancing skills within communities is core to some community education providers but to others the provision of community education is a 'business opportunity' or 'all about business'.

Whatever the rationale for community education its provision must be maintained due to its integral and supportive role that it has within Co. Fermanagh. Its flexible and dynamic nature will allow it to accommodate demand for different branches of learning, variable funding availability, and changes in governance, but the success of community education would benefit from an enhanced support structure.

3.2 Range of organisations

In addition to the wide range of course types on offer, there is a substantial number of locally based community

organisations that are either directly involved or have supportive roles in the delivery and running of community education courses. These organisations cater to the needs of all areas in Co. Fermanagh as well as outside of the county (the latter in reference to the peripheral location of organisations in Co. Fermanagh). And, with so many service providers and community organisations providing similar courses it highlights the role of competition in the provision of community education courses. However with reference to funding concerns perhaps a need exists for organisations to develop better communication links and where possible work in partnership.

3.3 Changing environment

The flexible nature of community education will aid its success with regards to an ever-changing environment with regards to; funding; demand for different types of courses, amalgamation of colleges; the Review of Public Administration (RPA).

Of great concern to many of the respondents is the availability and accessibility of funds. Although a small number of the respondent's organisations are self-sufficient, the majority require support from funding bodies and participant contributions. In the past EU funding has contributed significantly to community education provision however this funding is

decreasing for a number of reasons. In light of the reduction in funding available, as well as a means to reduce costs, a number of organisations are initiating training amongst their own members so as to provide community education courses internally in the future. However for the majority of organisations alternative sources of funding must be accessed or greater assistance given from Government sources or from a specialist community coordinating/ facilitating body.

The research also highlighted a dependence on older members of the community to organise, and coordinate community education activities. Concern exists for the future sustainability of community organisations if there is a limited youthful presence to maintain the organisation and their activities. Succession planning within these organisations is an important issue.

Coupled with the above, concern exists as an indirect impact of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) and the amalgamation of the Further Education colleges in the West. A number of the voluntary and community support organisations are similar in format and geographical parameters to statutory bodies. Hence it is possible that these organisations may follow suit and perhaps consolidate their activities in line with the RPA proposals. If so, then the administrative, advisory and

facilitative role that some of these organisations have may be, not necessarily lost, but certainly less accessible to organisations within Co. Fermanagh.

Both Fermanagh and Omagh College are important providers in the provision of community education within Fermanagh. The availability of the two colleges and other providers to facilitate community education courses enables organisations to source the most suitable courses for them. However amalgamation will lead to the removal of this element of competition as well as raising concerns regarding the funding of non-accredited courses i.e. recreational courses. Currently accredited courses (vocational), provided by the colleges can obtain supplementary funds by accessing SPURS funding. However, such funding is not available for recreational (typically non-accredited) courses. and is unlikely to in the future if colleges adhere to DEL's *FE Means Business* report. Therefore the future provision of these courses which is currently provided by the colleges is uncertain.

3.4 Potential roles for the Fermanagh Community Education Forum (FCEF).

The findings, as well as the potential impact that amalgamation of the colleges and the RPA will have on community education provision, highlights a number of opportunities for the FCEF.

There is a number of potential roles for FCEF;

- 1) A coordinating body,
- 2) A facilitator of courses.
- 3) Accessing and coordinating funding applications.

In order to fulfil this role there is of paramount importance that FCEF has an active membership representative of all key providers and, includes significant engagement from local community based organisations across the county.

The FCEF has the capacity to coordinate community education activities within Co. Fermanagh. There is a need for a coordinating body as a result of the changes expected in the future, changes, which will directly impact community education provision. At present community education is surviving as a result of the effort, often by volunteers, on behalf of community organisations committees or individuals that enable community education to be available to the general public of Co. Fermanagh. As noted in section 3.3

many of these committees or individuals are composed of older members of the community.

Therefore as well as coordinating role the FCEF could possibly encourage the participation of younger members of the communities and support the development of new emerging Men's based initiatives.

Some of the organisations identified gaps in education provision with specific reference to capacity building courses such as negotiation, facilitation and management training.

Both the reduction in funding and the major organizational changes taking place may lead to a reduction in provision of these courses. In consideration of these future changes the FCEF could have a more direct role in the provision and facilitation of community education courses. For example it would be possible for the FCEF to organise an annual programme of events and courses that they have identified through a needs analysis.

The FCEF would have the potential to obtain funding for this as well as identifying future funds that community organisations may access for example; the 'Live and Learn' funding programme from the Big Lottery Fund and the GRUNDTVIG lifelong learning action of the SOCRATES 2 EU programme.

Strong leadership, effective membership and coordination will be required to ensure the opportunities which exist both now and in the future can be harnessed

Section 4: Recommendations

- Consideration to be given to raising awareness of community education opportunities and its value possibly by organizing award events and developing other PR opportunities, etc so as to create empowered articulate communities. Helping build awareness of the benefits of community education i.e. challenge stereotypes particularly amongst men.
- FCEF to take a proactive role in the organisation and facilitation of Community education provision.
- Support organisations to provide greater assistance with funding support and applications.
- Clarification needed regarding the future role of the Colleges, and other education providers and improved communication
- An opportunity exists to develop a comprehensive education programme on an annual basis involving all providers and support organisations aimed at community and voluntary organisations membership across Fermanagh.