



**Presentation by the
PLANET Education & Training
Policy Group
to the
Joint Committee on
Education & Science**

Thursday, 8th July 2004

Introduction & Background

PLANET is an independent network of area-based partnerships, which exists to strengthen the contribution partnerships make individually, and collectively, to local development and social inclusion and to promote the partnership concept.

We do this by:

- Organising structured opportunities for our members to learn from and share with others
- Lobbying policy makers and decision makers on common critical issues
- Providing our members with expert support services that are more effectively and efficiently provided at national level

In summary, we provide the following:

- Networking
- Policy Development
- Advocacy
- Information
- Promotion

The PLANET Education & Training Policy group was established primarily to carry out work and make recommendations on how successful education/training actions piloted in Partnerships could be mainstreamed. The policy group is made up of Partnership Managers and Education Co-ordinators as well as the National Education Co-ordinator with Area Development Management Ltd (ADM).

The work of the Policy Group involves interaction with a number of bodies including the Department of Education & Science, the Vocational Educational Committees, the Educational Disadvantage Committee and ADM.

As part of the policy groups work in raising the profile of Partnerships work in tackling education disadvantage in their areas, we have sought to give an overview of the work to the Joint Committee on Education & Science here today.

In order to properly capture the range of work in this presentation, we are looking at the work from an urban as well as a rural perspective. We will conclude with relevant statistical information as to the outputs of the education measure since the year 2000.

The work of the Education Co-ordinators is framed within the context of the Community Based Youth Initiatives (CBYI) measure of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP). The LDSIP is managed by ADM and is the principal source of financial support for Partnerships, from the exchequer, in tackling social deprivation in their areas.

The Role and Function of Education Co-ordinator

Education Co-ordinators have been employed by Partnerships since the first 12 Partnerships were established in 1993. Initially they were seconded to Partnerships and the Department of Education & Science paid their full salaries. When the number of Partnerships was increased to its present number of 38, in 1996/97 the department agreed to fund half of the salary costs. However since 2003 it has proved difficult to get commitment to continue to fund these positions. To date there is no agreement to fill positions that are vacant in Partnerships. There are currently 8 vacant positions.

The Role and core functions

A 2nd level principal from Clondalkin, speaking on educational disadvantage in the Irish Times described the role of education

co-ordinator as “pound for pound the single best investment made by the department of Education in the last number of years”. There are a number of reasons why this may be the case.

Education Co-ordinators have helped create a quiet revolution in education in Ireland. They have played a unique role in bringing together educational interests from the primary and post primary sectors as well as adult and community education interests. They have facilitated a holistic look at educational issues at a local level. They have supported common issues being identified that hamper the educational achievement of young people and adults in disadvantaged areas.

They have carried out research to back up issues they have identified and to quantify the problem, they have also initiated pilot projects to show how these issues and problems might be tackled. Finally they have looked for mainstream funding to enable the work to be carried out. This area-based approach to education is unique. In many areas the lack of contact or dialogue between different education providers was stark. The increased communication as a result of the work of Partnerships has facilitated the establishment and development of government initiatives such as the School Completion Programme.

Focus of the work

Examples of the kinds of actions undertaken by Partnerships in the education area include the following:

Research on issues such as absenteeism from school, causes of early school leaving, the need for psychological services in rural areas, supporting young people from disadvantaged areas to access 3rd level, the needs of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties etc.

Projects have been developed that include, supporting students to make the transfer from primary to 2nd level schools, third level access programmes for young people and adults, homework clubs, training for parents as educational home visitors, computer literacy programmes etc. These projects will be discussed in more detail in the next presentations.

The primary focus of the education actions under the LDSIP is to combat the cyclical nature of education disadvantage and to re-integrate those people who are most excluded from educational provision thus preventing the drift into poverty and social exclusion while simultaneously addressing issues of inequality in terms of educational outcomes.

With this in mind education actions focus on the following:

- Improving access to all levels of educational provision for named target groups
- Ensuring an overall increase in participation levels from socially excluded target groups across all level of educational provision
- Enhancing overall attainment levels within formal education
- Improving the range and availability of educational opportunities for specific target groups
- Preventing early school leaving.
- Making education relevant and meaningful for groups who are disadvantaged / socially excluded
- Seeking to bring about institutional change where appropriate and relevant
- Promoting an integrated approach to the delivery of educational services thereby maximising local resource allocation to address educational inequality
- Seeking to influence mainstream policy and practice.

An Urban Perspective: Catherine Durkin, Education Co-ordinator, Blanchardstown Area Partnership

The agreement negotiated between the partners in the 1990's whereby the Department of Education & Science paid either the full salary or half the salary of Education Co-ordinators in Area Partnerships and which led to so many teachers and education personnel working in local development in areas of high disadvantage was a radical and progressive move by the Department of Education and Science at that time and part of their efforts to address educational disadvantage. This was radical by comparison with other Government Departments and most progressive and innovative. It was also a manageable intervention -after all 38 partnerships, with 12 full time and 26 half time salaries-a reasonable economic cost to the exchequer.

Area partnerships in urban areas developed area plans, which brought schools, agencies, and the community together, looked at local needs -of the child and young person in a school setting, the young person out of school, at the needs of parents and adults many of whom in areas of

e.g. Dublin would have themselves left school early, and identified local priorities, tested and piloted a range of initiatives-rich in creativity, ideas, flexibility, and centred in urban areas of greatest need, with high levels of early schools leaving, unemployment, social problems, including drug misuse and offending with numbers of young males in particular in jail.

There is a changed environment for the delivery of education services (Education Welfare Board, Regional Offices etc) but with the challenges remaining of combating early school leaving, increasing participation rates to Leaving Certificate, improving participation rates at third level. This is a particular challenge in the urban context of Dublin, with lower than average participation rates in education. In areas of urban disadvantage there are many adults who are now availing of life long learning opportunity but many more who are socially excluded and who in the future could benefit from education and training and outreach responses developed at local level under the aegis of the area partnerships

This wide knowledge of the local communities, know how in terms of implementing an areas based approach to education and expertise in the planning development and monitoring of initiatives should be harnessed throughout the full lifetime of the LDSIP. A further major benefit is the ability of the Partnerships to lever funding for the benefit of local disadvantaged communities.

If I may now give a brief account of my experience as Education Co-ordinator in Blanchard town. I was seconded in November 1997 from one of the local second level schools in Blanchardstown to the local area partnership

Case Study 1:

I was asked to set up an education group in January 1998. This group, which included representative of schools (principals/home/school / Community Liaison), parents, a Department of Education & Science inspector, managers of Youth Service, Youth Reach, Barnardos, the Adult Education Organiser and IBM.

An analysis of local education issues was undertaken over 4 meetings in January and February and the two key issues, which emerged, were early school leaving and third level participation. At that stage Dublin 15 had one of the lowest participation rates at third level in the country.

If I may mention a couple of the actions which followed. A third level access programme was planned and implemented.

In 1998 this included an Easter revision course with 90 plus sixth years attending from the 2 schools giving up 3-4 days of their Easter holidays. This was a great boost in the area and to the Education Group even though it was the two principals who did the hard work. Supervised study and mentoring followed and the next year French and German was offered on an after school basis to 6th class at primary school.

Moving on - this is now a continuing programme. The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown is a welcome partner. They deliver other exciting programmes including a week Robotics Course for 6th class in the four primary school in the disadvantaged areas.

We receive funds every year from the DES and also from the Society of St Vincent De Paul. The programme is now mainstreamed.

Case Study 2:

Another very interesting use of the funding is worth mentioning and was one, which illustrates how a small amount of funding can yield such results.

15,000 punts were given by the partnership (10,000 by the Partnership Education Group, and 5,000 the Partnership Employment Group) to research the incidence and profile of young offenders and ex-prisoners from the Dublin 15 area. The resultant research assisted with the lobbying which eventually led to the setting up of the BOND project (Blanchardstown Offenders New Directions).

Funding was received from the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund, and the VEC and the Back to education Initiative look after the Probation and Welfare Service, and the education need of these young people through a very generous donation.

The project now has 80 client's 74 males and 6 females A hostel for homeless ex prisoners has been opened with the building donated by Fingal Co Council. Unfortunately there was and still is a need for such a project but it started off with a degree of goodwill, local effort and 15,000 punts.

There are many other examples of Partnership work in an urban context. I have highlight below a selection of some other initiatives undertaken by Partnerships and Pacts in the Dublin area.

Northside Partnership - Dublin 17 Early School Leavers Initiative (School Completion Programme since 2002)

The Dublin 17 Early School Leavers Initiative (ESLI) was launched in 1998 to tackle the exceptionally low levels educational performance and school completion in the Dublin 17 area (less than 10% of student proceeded to third level in the mid-1990s according to official statistics published in that time).

Daily breakfast and lunch is currently provided to 1600 primary school students in Bonnybrook, Darndale and Priorswood and programmes are focussed on students identified by their school as most likely to benefit.

In-school programmes include attendance monitoring, breakfast and lunch provision, support teaching, art therapy, counselling and mentoring. ***After school and holiday programmes*** include homework clubs, summer camps, work experience and family support. They have also included very specific programmes such as personal development and yoga classes, drama, sports and computer clubs.

Northside Partnership Cont-: The Higher Education Support Scheme (H.E.S.S.) is designed to encourage students from schools within the Northside Partnership area to access third-level courses and to participate successfully at third level. Funded by the Department of Education through the Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage, H.E.S.S. has helped hundreds of students from vulnerable groups to overcome particular barriers to access and participation.

Dublin Employment Pact-: Among the pilot initiatives in which the Pact has been involved in this area has been the pilot project Linking Education and the Workplace, implemented in three disadvantaged areas of Dublin (Northside, Tallaght and Clondalkin). This project arose from the research work of the committee and was designed to enable early school leavers in employment undertake educational progression (FETAC) in agreement with employers and while retaining their jobs. Local consortia were created to develop and implement it on the ground, led by the local Partnership and involving employers, unions, the VEC, local schools and the community. The two-year initiative - co-funded to a total value p.a. of EUR150,000 by DEP, FÁS, Dept. E&S and local Partnerships - was completed in 2003 and deemed such a success that the Social Partners agreed in Sustaining Progress that the model should be supported and further developed in a second round.

A Rural Perspective: Mary Lyne, Education Co-ordinator, South Kerry Development Partnership

Inequality in Education

Through our research into the topic of inequality in education, education co-ordinators have concluded that historic explanations of disadvantaged individuals is not tenable any longer and that inequality in educational achievement is symptomatic of unequal distribution of wealth, power and resources at a broader level.

All of our research to date shows that positive discrimination is necessary in order to break the link between educational underachievement, social class and social identity.

The DES has committed considerable resources to tackling educational disadvantage. It is widely recognised however that, while the extent of investment by the state in those initiatives has been impressive, the effect of this to date has not resulted in significant change. The NESF (2002) report highlights that while the key government priority is to substantially reduce the numbers of young people leaving school without qualifications, in fact the actual number of early school leavers per annum remains practically unchanged since 1997.

Reasons & Consequences

- The phenomenon of underachievement in education and early school leaving is noteworthy by being generated by a range of interlinked factors of a personal, social, cultural and economic nature. A link exists between social class and educational outcomes in terms of achievement, completion to senior cycle and progression onto further and higher education where those who continue to underachieve come from lower socio economic and minority groups.
- Relationship exists between educational achievement and employment, income and wealth.
- Ireland – the 2nd most unequal state in a survey of 17 OECD countries

Education Co-ordinators & Work in Partnership Companies

The work of the education co-ordinator is needs based and relevant to the area. Consultation, planning & research, implementation and evaluation are hallmarks of the way in which education personnel work.

Our starting point is a commitment to equality of outcome. The Principles of Operation are:

- **Commitment to concept of lifelong learning** opportunities and to dealing with individuals - from preschool to mature citizens
- **Early learning opportunities crucial** - Age 0-5 vital. This need is even more urgent in the homes of parents who have multiple disadvantages i.e. low educational attainment, unskilled jobs/ unemployed, poor health /nutrition. Early care model but no model for support of early learning.
- **Work with parents facilitated** since recognition of the central role of parent in teaching, supporting and encouraging leading to greater confidence in learning– most effective schools are those with positive home school links.
- **Integration of services at local level crucial.** Interagency / inter school / collaborations facilitated since contact vital especially in transition between primary and post primary. Many professionals in different organisations work independently – need for Partnerships / Community Groups to be supported in facilitating contacts.
- **Youth work sector / informal sector in education supported** since child only spends 20% of waking hours between age of 5-18 actually at school (John Abbott – 21st century .org) Opportunities for support of informal crucial to youth – sporting, cultural, outdoor activities etc. Not sufficiently supported or available. We know that the broader and more diverse the experiences when very young, the greater are the chances that the individual will be able to handle new situations and become more adaptable as they grow older.
- **Work ongoing with schools** in linking parents/ home and teacher development /training – research and analysis of social exclusion, and its effect on children's performance. Inclusive and flexible education environment necessary.
- **Pilot programmes implemented** by Partnerships. / Community Groups but difficulty in getting funding to support these, difficulties in mainstreaming and in highlighting good practice.

Rural Issues:

- **Lack of infrastructure and personnel to support people with educational difficulties** – complete lack of programmes aimed at educational disadvantage evident in rural areas i.e. only 1 Breaking the Cycle programme in South Kerry, only 1 School Completion programme in the whole of Kerry (Listowel area), only 1 EWO located in Tralee (Rapid area) and no service for the rest of Kerry.
- **The remoteness from service providers** i.e. speech therapists, psychologists, counsellors, other expertise. There is a whole culture of isolation where those in need suffer in silence – they have no voice and make few demands and depend on school personnel, support groups (if they are there) to work on their behalf.
- **The issue of small numbers is constant challenge- most programmes** are designed to fit an urban model of concentrated numbers in 1 location/ school. In rural areas only 1 or 2 may need specialised attention in any one school yet it is an ongoing challenge for us to convince officials of the sense of looking at clusters of disadvantage and adoption of a district approach to those in need.
- **Lack of facilities and of support in terms of personnel / financial resources** for arts & cultural activities, informal youth activities, sports and outdoor education for the after school development of youth in rural areas.
- **Transport issues** are a constant challenge both provision of such and costs associated with it.

Good Practice Actions / Programmes in rural areas

- **Wexford Partnership** – Pilot training programme at FETAC Level 2 for organic horticulture developed – modules written up and submitted to the Board of Studies.

Sligo Partnership and OAK Partnerships developed pilot programmes in Early Reading Skills at Level 1 and 2 through FETAC.

Waterford Partnership & Galway Rural Development – both work with clusters of rural schools in developing pilot programmes of individual support of counselling, speech therapy, parenting programmes focusing on youth at risk.
Many rural Partnerships / Community groups work on homework clubs in small towns/ villages.

IRD Duhallow & North Kerry Together are 2 groups who both work with young people at risk and their parents in developing parental involvement in learning.

Roscommon Partnership operated a programme “ Investment in Excellence” which gave teachers skills in assisting young people discouraged in the education system.

Westmeath Partnership developed innovative actions and programmes relating to traveller women and their families.

South Kerry Dev Partnership –has a focus on substance abuse since research in 2000 indicated a problem of both adult and young people abusing substances particularly alcohol.

Launch of Life Education Mobile Unit in January 2004 – the 1st such unit in rural Ireland.

Opportunities for Future

- **Currently great insecurity and threat to the posts of education personnel in Partnerships / Community groups into the future.**
- **Funding cuts recently implemented in budgets has meant that many programmes / projects targeted at the most vulnerable have had to be discontinued. Are we saying that there is now no need for the continuation of programmes designed to respond to local situations of ongoing disadvantage throughout rural Ireland?**
- **Opportunities exist for education personnel to have a central role both in local area context, in the context of the emerging county structures and in the context of new regional offices being established throughout the country. Local research, information and knowledge and implementation of joint actions with other collaborators require the presence of personnel who have an understanding of the needs of disadvantaged groups.**

The PLANET Delegation consisted of Aileen O’Donoghue, Chairperson, PLANET – The Partnerships Network, Mary Lyne, Education Co-ordinator, South Kerry Development Partnership; Catherine Durkin, Education Co-ordinator, Blanchardstown Area Partnership; Brian Carty, National Co-ordinator, PLANET – The Partnerships Network.

**Community Based Youth Measure,
Local Development Social Inclusion Programme
Progress Report for 2000-2003 for Area-based Partnerships**

Output Indicator	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Youth supported under Community Based Youth Initiatives (1)	64,694	50%	65,728	50%	130,422
Adults supported under Community Based Youth Initiatives (2)	7,914	37%	13,724	63%	21,638

Source: ADM/SCOPE Outputs

- (1) This figure includes the numbers of disadvantaged young people supported directly and indirectly through targeted initiatives in disadvantaged communities. Individuals may benefit from more than one initiative.
- (2) This figure includes the numbers of adults (parents, guardians, teachers, etc.) supported directly and indirectly through targeted initiatives in disadvantaged communities. Individuals may benefit from more than one initiative.