



# POLICY SUBMISSION

## **Submission to The National Anti- Poverty Strategy Working Group on Educational Disadvantage**

**March 2001**

Combat Poverty Agency  
Bridgewater Centre  
Conyngham Road  
Islandbridge  
Dublin 8

Tel: 01 670 6746  
Fax: 01 670 6760

Email: [info@combatpoverty.ie](mailto:info@combatpoverty.ie)  
Web: [www.combatpoverty.ie](http://www.combatpoverty.ie)

## **1. Early Childhood Education**

### **Key Issues:**

Children born into poverty are disadvantaged in a number of ways which have a long-term effect on the quality of their lives and the lives of their children. Research has shown that the factors influencing educational achievement impact even before children have left primary school. A range of studies - educational, sociological and psychological - have all shown that high-quality early educational services have a positive impact on the future of educational and social success of all children including those born at risk of educational failure and of social exclusion.<sup>i</sup> At a very fundamental level, early education is a way of reducing poverty and reducing the risk of children falling into poverty or exclusion as they grow up. In this context, the current policy issues that need to be addressed are as follows;

- 1) The level of current intervention
- 2) Access to interventions
- 3) Quality of current provision

### **Target:**

All children should have access to quality early education before entering primary school.

### **Key Actions**

- 1) Universal early education provision (taking account of state, community and private sector provision) should be introduced on a phased basis, prioritising disadvantaged children including those from the travelling community, children with disabilities, children from lone parent families, homeless children and the children of refugees and asylum seekers.
- 2) The costs of early education provision should be subsidised for low income families.
- 3) Service planning and provision should take account of the developmental level of children, their cultural background and their individual needs. Early education services for young children should be integrated into a community policy that is inclusive of parents and family.
- 4) Ensuring that current and future provision is child-centred, of a high quality, well-resourced and with appropriately trained staff and good adult:child ratios.

## **2. Participation in Primary and Post-Primary Education**

### **Key Issues:**

There are three elements to this section of our submission; they relate to the costs of primary and post-primary education for families, early school leaving and literacy.

Full participation for children in primary and post-primary education can be hindered due to the direct and indirect financial costs associated with education particularly for low-income groups and groups from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

A significant number of children are not participating fully in education provision - not transferring from primary to post-primary, opting out of post-primary school with no, or minimum, qualification levels without subsequently engaging in other alternative non-formal education or training schemes - and therefore not deriving the same benefit from their schooling as children from more comfortable backgrounds.

The 1998 National Assessment of English Reading (2000) revealed that 1 in 10 children still leave primary school with significant literacy problems despite the reduction in class sizes and the increase in remedial teachers available.

### **Targets:**

- No child should leave primary school with literacy or numeracy difficulties..
- Reduce the number of children leaving school system with few or no qualifications.
- Reduce the teacher/pupil ratio with respect to children within designated disadvantaged schools.

### **Key Actions**

#### *1. Eliminate the costs of participating in education for families of school-going children:*

- Establish the full costs of clothing and footwear for school going children and uprate the clothing and footwear scheme to meet these costs.
  - Provide additional financial support through the clothing and footwear scheme to cover additional costs associated with transition from primary to secondary school and from the Junior to Senior cycle.
  - Integrate access to above supports with other educational subventions such as school meals scheme and schoolbooks scheme.
  - Enhance and broaden scope of school meals scheme.
2. Provide adequate investment for appropriate in-school equipment for children with disabilities and special needs and review the procedures to ease the claiming of such costs by school.
  3. Continue the development of the National Educational Psychological Service
  4. Ensure that current interventions at primary and post-primary level are effective in their targeting of children most in need or most at risk of leaving school early and address their academic, social emotional, behavioural issues. To this end, it is important to develop and fund locally-based integrated networks to develop strategic approaches to tackle educational disadvantage and early school leaving.

5. Ensure that actions to reduce early school leaving take account of less formal education and training opportunities and interventions outside the mainstream setting. Identify and develop progression routes for young people and ensure that each child has access to mentoring services to help them identify and plan their education or training paths.
6. Ensure that sufficiently strong incentives are in place to reduce the risk of children leaving school early in order to enter the workplace. At the same time, it is important to ensure that workplace initiatives for young people who are in need of basic education and literacy training are provided.
7. It is important to further develop and enhance the links between home, school and community.
8. Ensure that there is an adequate and appropriate provision of public and private transport to and from schools, including rural area provision.
9. Ensure an adequate level of financial resourcing and targeted provision of the remedial teaching service to eliminate the literacy problem among school children.
10. Every school-going child should be tracked and monitored, including those with school attendance problems.
11. Resources are needed to support the development of new and emerging models of parental involvement, which support parents as equal partners in tackling educational disadvantage. Also, it is important to recognise the role that older people play in children's lives and to involve older people in home-school-community initiatives to address educational disadvantage.
12. There has been a welcome recognition of the need for whole school planning and review. Training and support will be needed to maximise the potential of this approach. In addition, consideration should be given to including non-school educational partners (local, youth and community organisations, parents, statutory services etc.) in this process.
13. Develop and implement a programme of IT access and training for all children that reflects the different interests and needs of people living in poverty or disadvantaged areas.
14. All student teachers should be made aware of the global, national, local and personal dimensions of poverty and exclusion, of their educational relevance and of actions to combat them. They should also be enabled to develop an understanding of equality, human rights and social justice. This should be done through the development of appropriate modules both within initial teacher training and as part of ongoing in-service provision.

### **3. Access to and Participation in Further, Higher and Adult Education<sup>ii</sup>**

#### **Key Issues:**

The Combat Poverty Agency endorses the objectives towards Lifelong Learning as set down in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and the White Paper on Adult Education. There are a number of issues which it sees as important to address in relation to further, higher and adult education; these include costs of participation, level of service provision, non-completion rates, and literacy problems.

Access to and participation in further and higher education are hindered by financial costs and by the current inadequate level of service provision. These factors contribute to the low proportions of students in further and higher education from disadvantaged backgrounds and the high drop-out rates among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. A recent HEA report, *A Study of Non-Completion in Undergraduate University Courses*, revealed that universities with a high proportion of students from lower socio-economic groups and mature students have a high rate of non-completion.

The government must therefore ensure that access is widened, while simultaneously putting in place financial and institutional supports to ensure that students are given every chance to complete their chosen course.

Difficulties in second level education, especially in the sciences and mathematics, translate directly into impediments in university. Remedial action in terms of curriculum design and teaching practice, together with an informed and supportive school guidance system at second level are the prerequisites for success in third level.

A recent report by the Educational Research Centre to the Minister for Education on the International Adult Literacy Survey revealed that about 25% of the Irish population were found to score at the lowest level (Level 1).<sup>iii</sup> The survey found that the percentage of participants who are at the lowest level of literacy is higher in Ireland than anywhere else except Poland. The study also revealed that individuals who are currently unemployed are more likely to score lower than people in employment; literacy level is associated with wage income with those on higher incomes being more likely to score higher; more than three-fifths of individuals who had left school without completing the junior cycle score at the lowest level. Participation in adult education and training was low for people with low literacy skills and, at the same time, people in employment are much more likely to participate in adult education/training than unemployed people or people working in the home. The reasons for not participating had to do with work demands, family responsibilities, the time at which courses were available, and the financial expense of courses. These patterns and reasons suggest a need for wider availability of adult education/training, together with greater supports e.g. childcare, and for better targeting on those in greatest need.

### **Targets:**

- Increase the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds participating in further, higher and adult education.
- Eliminate literacy and numeracy difficulties within the adult population.

### **Key Actions**

1. Maintenance grants for all students availing of further or higher education opportunities should be enhanced in line with the costs involved in education.
2. Ensure adequate levels of funding and supports to enable current interventions to cater for higher numbers of students from low income or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

3. Ensure an increase in new and appropriate adult education interventions [£30 million allocated in New Deal].
4. Increase the number of places in universities reserved for students from low-income backgrounds. Increase the number of special access programmes and enhance and develop community-school-college initiatives.
5. All further, higher and adult education provision should include childcare supports.
6. Facilitate education progression routes for adults in work and for adults already in the education system [implementation of Qualifications Act 1999] and ensure appropriate accreditation systems are in place for adult learners.
7. Ensure that adults, including the elderly, who have need of literacy and numeracy training have access to services [taking account of state, community and private provision] and that literacy, numeracy and other appropriate supports are provided whether in the workplace or in education.
8. Prioritise adult/continuing education opportunities for people who have had least access to education in the past including older people, travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities.

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<sup>i</sup> CMRS (1992), Education and Poverty, Dublin: CMRS, p.xvii

<sup>ii</sup> Further education is defined as Post Leaving Certificate courses. Higher Education is defined as third level institutions including universities and institutes of Technology. Adult education, as set down in the white paper is defined primarily in terms of re-entry into further and higher education, as well as continuing and community education. The definition in the white paper of adult education is as follows; 1) re-entry by adults into further education (occurring between second and third level e.g. Post Leaving Certificate courses, second chance education (VTOS), Adult Literacy and Basic Education, and self-funded adult ed. Programmes); 2) re-entry by adults to higher education; 3) continuing education and training for people in the workforce; 4) community education; 5) other systematic and deliberate learning, formal or informal.

<sup>iii</sup> Morgan, M., Brendan Hickey, Thomas Kellaghan (1997), Report to the Minister for education on the International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland, Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College, Dublin.