

*Necessary prerequisites at the  
organisational level for  
(re)engaging disadvantaged  
learners in education*

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## Introduction: What is this paper about?

**Literature on re(engagement) of educationally disadvantaged adults into education predominantly focuses on the level of the training courses**

Over the past few years; there has been a strong focus at both the European and national levels on(re)engaging educationally disadvantaged people in adult education with the aim of closing the gap in participation rates between low and highly qualified people.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, there has been a lot of literature produced on the engagement of educationally disadvantaged people in further education and training. Very often this literature has had a strong focus on training and presents good practice examples of training content or curricula.<sup>2</sup> Also within this project, *in.education*, a report on three tested training courses for educationally disadvantaged people was produced.<sup>3</sup>

**With regard to the organisational level, mostly recommendations are available**

However, these good practice examples do not provide a lot of insight into the necessary prerequisites at an organisational level to develop training that reflects the needs of this target group, keeps them engaged and enables them to complete it successfully. What does the successful engagement of disadvantage learners imply for the composition and qualifications of staff, for public relations, support services, co-operation or partnerships and for the self-perception of an organisation or for the way an organisation is perceived by others? When it comes to these questions, existing literature provides guidelines and recommendations while examples from actual practice are scarce.

This report aims to answer these questions by giving some insight into the learning experiences at the organisational level of adult education providers which offer training for educationally disadvantaged people.

This report was produced within the Erasmus+ project *in.education*<sup>4</sup>. *in.education* aims to develop strategies to increase the participation of educationally disadvantaged people, especially those with basic educational needs, in adult education. To reduce possible barriers to education for educationally disadvantaged people, the project focusses on developing strategies at three levels: system, individual and organisational levels.

**But what are the necessary pre-requisites at organisational level to attract and keep educationally disadvantaged**

In its first phase, the project worked on the systemic level by seeking to activate and inform individuals in the social environment of educationally disadvantaged people, so that they could act as intermediaries informing the target group about existing educational opportunities and motivating them to take part. The second phase of the project focussed on the individual level. It did this by developing and delivering targeted training courses in Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom that could act as the

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<sup>1</sup> Tschank, J., Manahl, C. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Kil, M., Dasch, B., Henkes, M. 2013; Nechvoglod, L., Beddie, F. 2010; Hughes, J., Whalley, Margaret (2006), Macleod, D. et al. 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Manahl, C., Tschank, J. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Please see Annex 1 for a short description of the project *in.education*.

**people in training courses?**

**This paper attempts to answer this question**

starting point for participants to (re)engage with learning.

The third phase of the project, on which this paper is based, focuses on the organisational level. In this project phase, training programmes for adult education providers will be developed and implemented by the project partners.<sup>5</sup> This report serves as background information for this training.

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<sup>5</sup> ISOP Innovative Sozialprojekte (in Austria), Campaign for Learning (in the UK), Galway and Roscommon Education & Training Board (in Ireland).

## Methodology: What is this paper based on?

**This paper is based on a literature review and backed up by interviews with managerial staff of adult education providers in Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom**

The starting point for this report was desk research. This desk research helped to identify key dimensions at an organisational level which should be taken into account when providing training for educationally disadvantaged people.

As the desk research demonstrated, such key dimensions are often documented as guidelines and recommendations for adult education providers.

To shed some light on the learning experiences of adult education providers gained from working with educationally disadvantaged people, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted. Interview guidelines<sup>6</sup> were developed based on the key dimensions identified in the desk research. Interview partners included managerial staff of adult education providers in Austria, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.<sup>7</sup> In total, 9 people were interviewed. The interviews took 40 to 60 minutes.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then deductively coded following the eight key dimensions identified in the literature review and thematically analysed (see next chapter).

**It was envisioned to use the interviews to get an understanding of the learning experiences of organisations when catering for educationally disadvantaged people**

With regard to the interview partners, it should be noted that it was planned to interview people working in adult education organisations that did not target educationally disadvantaged people with their training offers from the very beginning – managerial staff from organisations which successfully expanded or shifted their focus towards this target group. The idea was that interviewing staff from such organisations would provide the best insights into the learning experiences for catering for this target group at an organisational level.

**However, it turned out to be very difficult to gain insight into these learning experiences as interviewees rather tended to tell success stories**

Unfortunately, it was not possible to establish contact to these kinds of organisations in all three countries. The interview partners in Ireland and the United Kingdom were rather organisations that had always had a certain focus on educationally disadvantaged people. In Austria, where interviews were conducted with staff of adult education providers who had “discovered” educationally disadvantaged people as a target group within the last two decades, it was not easy to gain insights into the learning processes at the organisational level either. There was the tendency to report well-established and successful practices rather than to elaborate on the necessary preconditions for these practices or to discuss trials and errors in the development of these practices. This might be because people tend to talk more reluctantly about failures than about successes – although the former would be more valuable especially for organisations undergoing similar challenges. This tendency could also partially be due to the interview situation. The respondents were interviewed over the telephone - an interview technique that has the

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<sup>6</sup> See Annex 2

<sup>7</sup> These countries were chosen as they are represented within the partnership of the project *in.education*.

disadvantage that establishing trust between the interviewer and the interviewee is more difficult than in a face-to-face setting<sup>8</sup> and establishing trustful interview situations might be important when discussing learning experiences of organisations.

Nevertheless, the results achieved from the interviews are able to provide some valuable insights for adult education providers.

The following part of this paper is structured by the key dimensions identified in the desk research. First, each key dimension is described based on the reviewed literature. Then findings from the interviews on their practical implementation are presented.

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<sup>8</sup> Vogl, S. 2012, p. 55.

## What must be considered at an organisational level when trying to (re)engage educationally disadvantaged people with learning?

**Rather than focussing on barriers associated with an individual person when discussing access to education, this paper focuses on the barriers that organisations place for this target group**

When talking about participation or non-participation in adult education, there is often a focus on barriers associated with the individual person. This is also reflected in the discourse about the so-called “hard-to-reach” target groups. In this paper, this question is reversed. It seeks to answer the questions: In which regard are adult education providers hard to reach for certain groups - especially educationally disadvantaged people - and how can institutional barriers be overcome?

Reducing or overcoming institutional barriers requires organisational learning; and organisational learning is a complex process – especially when the learning requires more than superficial problem-solving (the so-called “single-loop learning”) and fundamental goals and activities of an organisation are questioned (the so-called “double-loop learning”).<sup>9</sup> As demonstrated in the following chapters, the necessity to question fundamental aspects, strategies and activities of an organisation is very likely to occur when an organisation aims at providing educational offers that meet the demands and needs of educationally disadvantaged people.

According to MacKeracher, Suart, and Potter, the seven key elements of a responsive system of lifelong learning are recognition, support, flexibility, accessibility and availability, relevance and respect:

- “Recognition” means taking into account an adult learner’s needs, existing credentials and prior learning;
- “Support” includes considering learners’ needs related to academic skills as well as financial support, career development, family and work responsibilities, etc.;
- “Flexibility” as well as “accessibility and availability” require the adaption of teaching and learning formats to the needs of the learners;
- “Relevance” stresses the need for the content of learning offers to be consistent with the learners’ aspirations for personal or professional development;
- “Respect” finally addresses the way people are treated by all types of staff of adult education providers.<sup>10</sup>

**This paper is structured in 8 key dimensions which are essential for organisations to allow access to educationally disadvantaged people as well as keep them engaged**

These elements are also reflected in the recommendations Brüning, Kuwan and Pehl formulated for the organisational level to better address the needs of educationally disadvantaged people in adult education. They distinguish seven areas that must be considered at organisational level when working with educationally disadvantaged people:

- Organisational guidelines and principles;
- Guidance and counselling;

<sup>9</sup> Argyris, Ch. 1976, 363ff.

<sup>10</sup> MacKeracher, D., Suart, T., Potter, J. 2006, p. 5ff.



- Design of curricula;
- Human resource development;
- Public relations;
- Networking and co-operation; and
- Financing possibilities.<sup>11</sup>

Bremer and Kleeman-Göhring formulated questions which adult education providers should ask themselves in the framework of organisational development which very much reflect Brüning, Kuwan and Pehl's recommendations at the organisational level. However, they place a stronger emphasis on the organisation's profile, potential learners' perception of it, and the composition of staff – not only with regard to skills and competences but also with regard to gender, ethnic background etc.<sup>12</sup>

Based on this literature, this report is structured in eight dimensions, bearing in mind that several of them overlap. This is not to claim that these dimensions are in any way exhaustive, but rather that these dimensions cover aspects of high relevance for adult education providers working with disadvantaged learners, as highlighted in the literature and confirmed by the nine interviews carried out.

## Organisational background

According to Brüning, Kuwan and Pehl, a necessary precondition to work successfully with and for educationally disadvantaged people is having a mission statement, guiding principles and success indicators in place that reflect the target groups' possibilities and needs.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately Brüning, Kuwan and Pehl do not specify these aspects.

It was decided to entitle this chapter “organisational background” because guiding principles of an organisation usually reflect an organisation's history and its self-perception, which is essential to the way it is perceived by others and can either make it attractive to potential learners or constitute an additional barrier.

**The organisational background is not only reflected in its guiding principles or mission statement, but also in its self-perception and the way it is perceived by others**

According to Berndl this means to reflect on questions like: How do we perceive our participants? Do we see them as part of a social project to whom we give the chance for education or are they partners in a process in which they define their (learning) goals for and by themselves? Do we see education as a means for empowerment or primarily as something useful for the labour market and the economy? What makes these aspects especially tricky is that it does not suffice to agree on them at the management level or to have them written down in the guiding principles of an organisation, but the crucial point is that they also need to be reflected in the actions of all members of staff: Do the staff have common values that reflect the values of the

<sup>11</sup> Brüning, G., Kuwan, H., Pehl, K. 2002, p. 206ff.

<sup>12</sup> Bremer, H., Kleemann-Göhring, M. 2011, p.33f.

<sup>13</sup> Brüning, G., Kuwan, H., Pehl, K. 2002, p. 212.

**It is also reflected in the values and actions of all members of staff**

organisations and is everybody working on the same vision?<sup>14</sup> The self-perception of an organisation and by its staff is so important because it is reflected in the communication of an organisation, its partnerships, and its offers.

Therefore, “organisational background” here implies more than written mission statements and guiding principles. It also involves aspects that form the implicit knowledge of an organisation and its staff and influence the way an organisation works and is perceived by others.

Like Brüning, Kuwan and Pehl, the interviews reiterated the significance of having a mission statement following specific principles by which for example a specific target group, in this case educationally disadvantaged or educationally alienated people, can feel included and confident that their interests would be represented by the organisation. This includes having a very strong equality and diversity policy (UK-I2). An interview partner from Austria explained that it is particularly significant for an organisation situated in a disadvantaged area to have an inclusive mission statement:

*“Educationally disadvantaged or educationally alienated people are always the subject. This is also included in the mission statement. The focus has always been, especially in a rural area where mobility is restricted, that all groups of people can take part in education” (AT-I2).*

**The external perception of an organisation is not only influential on the target group but also the community in general**

As described in the literature and especially when the guiding principles focus very much on specific target groups, the communication from the organisation mirrors the self-perception created as a result. A good example of this was presented by an interviewee from the United Kingdom describing how they had to adapt their communication because their clientele changed to include many more people with literacy challenges, and also including deaf students. As both the deaf and hearing students are in need of basic education skills, they often find themselves sitting in the same classes. The deaf students typically need more support, for example through communicators. However, at the same time, the hearing students need to feel comfortable in the learning environment. As a result, when communicating information on courses, the organisation takes a lot of care not to disadvantage or alienate any of the students:

*“We are looking at running a number of different courses which would be aimed at deaf learners but will also be aimed at everybody else; but it will be clear that this course wishes to attract deaf learners because it makes it a little cheaper for us to run because we can have 3 or 4 deaf learners in a group and you are communicating to all of those learners and at the same time you are making sure that you are not disadvantaging the hearing students because maybe they would think that ‘I didn't*

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<sup>14</sup> Berndl 2008, p. 136ff.

*know that these deaf students are going to be in class', maybe they feel uncomfortable. But if you are actually upfront and you are advertising the course in that way, the message is clear. If you are going to the theatre it will say normal performance but sometime it will say signed performance so someone will be standing in a corner of the stage and delivering the programme in sign language. So as long as you are making the rest of the audience aware in advance, then they are more likely to accept it" (UK-I2).*

**The external image of an organisation is not only dependent on its contents e.g. mission statement, but also on its physical appearance and name**

The interviews not only highlighted the importance of Brüning, Kuwan and Pehl's notion of expressing the appropriate and fitting image of an organisation through its guiding principles and success indicators, but they also brought an additional aspect to the forefront that has not been covered by these authors; namely the external perception of an organisation based on its external image and even name. The question here is: does the organisation, purely based on its "physical" appearance and/or name, present a barrier in itself? An interview partner from Austria brought this aspect to light by saying:

*"For me, the interesting question 10 years ago was whether based on the fact that we are called "Schloss [part of the organisation's name and means "castle"]" whether this presents a barrier to the target group? But that doesn't seem to be a problem; they [people with reading and writing deficits] just come into the writing seminar [...]. We have a good reputation. Our organisation is not "posh" at all" (AT-II).*

Although the name or external image of the organisation, according to the quote above, does not seem to generate a barrier with regard to reaching the target group at first glance, it may still present a barrier to some groups of 'hard-to-reach' potential learners, as according to the interviewee, they do not have people with a migratory background on their courses. Obviously, this may be a result of many different reasons, for example the mix of the local population. However, it is definitely worth considering that people from specific social settings may find some organisations' self-presentation more accessible (or even appealing) than others. The image portrayed by such an organisation could still make it more difficult for some people to approach them, as they may associate the name or appearance of the organisation with elements that they themselves cannot identify with.

In addition, bearing in mind that the organisation described here has been in existence for over 5 decades, the interviewee also emphasises the need to continuously reflect on an organisation's image and when need be, to make suitable changes.

The examples above demonstrate the importance of the organisation's image as directly portrayed by the target group. However, another aspect that emerges from the interviews is the relevance of how an

organisation is perceived not just by the target group but also by the wider community. Including the community in the philosophy of an organisation can facilitate empowerment of both the target group and the wider population and thereby answering one of the questions posed by Berndt: “Do we see education as a means for empowerment or primarily as something useful for the labour market and the economy?” An interviewee from the United Kingdom illustrated this by explaining the community and educational ethos of their organisation:

*“We have a community development ethos as well as an educational ethos. So we are seeking to explore with communities how our education or to make an assumption of ourselves about how our education might help people to deliberate and think about what’s taking place in their communities and seek to find the mechanisms that fire an interest, and sometimes those interests come up as a result of widespread popular topics.”(UK-11)*

Another interviewee offered a competing point of view. The interviewee indicates that their organisation’s concept of education is very much interlinked with the labour market:

*“Our concept of education: We work a lot with reference to the labour market [...]. We have a wide view of education.”(AT-12)*

**Often, the guiding principles of an organisation reveal its understanding of the concept of education**

Arguably, education providers do not give a single “best” answer to Berndt’s question whether education should be viewed in relation to empowerment or to the labour market. The understanding of the concept of education among adult education providers varies according to the organisational background.

## Location

This chapter treats two aspects with regard to the location of adult education providers: One is the physical location of the premises where courses are held (including their proximity to disadvantaged learners and their infrastructure); the other is closely linked to the previous chapter and refers to the cultural location of an organisation. Both aspects are interlinked and deemed essential when targeting educationally disadvantaged people with training offers.

**Physical location pertains to the organisation’s proximity to the target group, its accessibility and infrastructure**

The idea not to wait for potential learners to find their way to education providers but rather to try to deliver education where potential learners can be found is a concept deeply rooted in Paulo Freire’s work. This approach is also adopted in the concept of Streetwork, which suggests that potential locations to reach educationally disadvantaged people and to also deliver training courses could be migrant community organisations, sports clubs, community work premises, nurseries, etc. – these are the so-called “cultural

**The cultural location of an organisation may reflect the “habitus” of certain social groups more than of others and can therefore be a barrier for certain groups**

locations” of organisations.

Such locations represent less of a barrier to educationally disadvantaged people than the regular premises of adult education providers, as these are locations that people visit and engage with in their everyday lives. Instead, the regular premises of adult education providers could be associated with negative school experiences or be “culturally distant” to educationally disadvantaged learners. “Culturally distant” here refers to Bourdieu’s idea that social differences are also reflected in physical locations for example in city districts. Museums, but also educational institutions, are places where some social groups “belong” more than others or which are exclusive to certain groups due to their “habitus”. Therefore, some social groups could feel out of place in certain premises.<sup>15</sup>

Nechvoglod and Beddie also support this notion of delivering educational offers in areas that are familiar to disadvantaged learners which would in essence connect the offer to the local community and reduce barriers.<sup>16</sup>

MacKeracher, Suart, and Potter write about “accessibility and availability”. They focus on the physical location of training provision rather than on the cultural dimension. They point out the importance of locations (and formats) suitable for the multiple responsibilities (work, family, etc.) of adults.<sup>17</sup> In this regard Nechvoglod and Beddie refer explicitly to transportation costs and availability of transport.<sup>18</sup>

The interviews with managerial staff of diverse organisations dealing with adult education in Austria, Ireland and the UK mirrored the same picture as in the literature. They highlighted the importance of location; both in the physical sense and also in the cultural sense. In many cases these two aspects were intertwined.

With regard to the physical location, one interviewee from the UK (UK-I2) explained the fact that their organisation is located in the heart of London makes it quite accessible to everyone as due to its central location, people know about it and the good travel links allow people to easily access it. Another interviewee, also from the UK, also emphasised the importance of adult education being provided on the doorsteps of the target group. The interview partner provided an example which combines both the physical and cultural location illustrating the importance of proximity to educationally disadvantaged people:

*“Unusually, even though we are a very big organisation we don’t own premises where students come to us like a college. The premises we own are typically administrative centres and therefore most of our provision takes place in the communities the people*

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<sup>15</sup> Bremer, H., Kleemann-Göhring, M. 2011, p.15ff.

<sup>16</sup> Nechvoglod, L, Beddie, F. 2010, p.15.

<sup>17</sup> MacKeracher, D., Suart, T., Potter, J. 2006, p. 6f.

<sup>18</sup> Nechvoglod, L, Beddie, F. 2010, p.25.

**According to the interview partners, delivering training in community based organisations works particularly well**

*live in and usually our students have to travel less than a mile to come to our courses and certainly less than five miles typically. Generally speaking we are very close to the students that we attract” (UK-I1).*

A cultural location element is exposed by the quote above; namely the use of premises of community based organisations. This aspect seems like a success factor as it was a common strand in most of the interviews (AT-I3, UK-I1 and UK-I2).

*“What we also tried and what also proved to be successful was that, at the beginning, we chose course locations outside our premises - not in [name of organisation] - for example in community centres where many events take place, where people simply go, where different associations are hosted or even where performances for children are organised. We also delivered training in a senior centre which also had a day care centre in a very central location with many different offers for social activities” (AT-I3).*

**Community centres provide a low inhibition level for educationally disadvantaged people**

Such an arrangement overcomes an important barrier to further education: the stigma attached to literacy and numeracy needs in adults. Many adults with reading and writing difficulties would feel ashamed especially if people in their community or neighbourhood found out about their learning needs in these areas. Traditional premises of adult education providers might therefore pose a barrier to people who are particularly sensitive about their numeracy and literacy needs. Offering numeracy and literacy courses in community centres where there are a lot of different activities and offers reduces and even to some extent eliminates this barrier altogether (AT-I3).

Furthermore, educational institutions in themselves present another barrier for people with educational disadvantages as they are seen as venues for *“purely intelligent people who can all read and write”* (AT-I3). Educationally disadvantaged people, according to one of the interviewees, would much rather attend a course at a community centre which lowers the inhibition level.

*“When someone meets me (at a traditional educational institution) and asks me what I am doing here, then I have to say. But I don’t want to be asked in the first place. That’s why the community centre was ideal” (AT-I3).*

Two interviews, one from Austria (AT-I2) and one from the United Kingdom (UK-I2) offered a new outlook on location. The literature and also experienced adult education practitioners frequently point out the importance of a learning environment different from school when training adults, especially in lower skill courses like literacy and numeracy. It is widely assumed that many adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties had often had very negative experiences in school. Yet in both these interviews, situations where adults

**Nevertheless, depending on the specific target group (e.g. migrant communities), traditional educational premises like schools could also work well**

successfully received training in literacy and numeracy in traditional schools were described.

The Austrian interviewee explains that people from particular cultures still strongly associate learning with school. For many of these people, the problem may not be negative experiences at school, but simply the fact that they never had the chance to go to school. In this context, a school-like environment may be regarded as a source of shared experience by families.

*“We had a co-operation with a school. The school came to us many years ago with the problem that many parents are not able to participate in school activities because of language problems. We now run basic literacy and numeracy classes for parents directly in the school thus providing access especially to migrants. This is an approach that has worked really well. Many native adults have reservations towards school. For migrants, school is the place which is characterised with learning and they have no reservations.” (AT-I2)*

**Due to the stigma attached to literacy and numeracy difficulties in adults, venturing into learning centres may be too big a step for some people**

Sometimes when speaking of “physical location”, it may be too far a step for people with literacy and numeracy needs, as explicitly explained by one interviewee from Ireland. This interviewee reports that some educationally disadvantaged people, for fear of being exposed for their limitations, consciously avoid any physical locations where learning may take place, regardless of whether it is a school, an adult education provider or even a community centre. To overcome this barrier, this adult educational provider in Ireland offers a distance learning option for such students as well as for remote or immobile ones. Although, it may be argued that learning how to read and write remotely is extremely challenging and bordering on the impossible, this adult education provider sees this as the first step of (re)engaging this extremely hard-to-reach group with learning.

*“We have a distance learning service. We work with students who call us and they take literacy classes over the telephone maybe once a week with a distance learning teacher. So they may not want to go into the adult literacy service because they don't want people seeing them or they are not able to go in because of geography or physical disabilities or they may not go it because it is not open at the time they have free time to do their adult literacy work. It is difficult but it works surprisingly well. And what we try and do is we always try and encourage those students after 6 months or especially after 1 year to go to their local adult literacy centre and get classes there. It is difficult for sure but we have experienced teachers who worked in the adult literacy service. It doesn't suit most people; it is a small number of students who do it” (IE-II).*

Another aspect of location exposed by the quote above is the infrastructure and physical environment of an organisation. The

buildings where training for adults is offered need to provide a welcoming and informal atmosphere even if these are traditional educational institutions like schools. Such an atmosphere can be built by for example ensuring that there are suitable structures like ramps to enable people on a wheelchair to easily access the facilities, the provision of refreshments during courses, spaces for informally gathering and talking, and so on (AT-I1 and UK-I2).

*“The other benefit is that we used to have 3 buildings and now we've just got one building since 2005 but which is fully accessible for people with disabilities. We are very accessible. When you come to the building you don't need to show your ID. Any member of the public can walk in and use the café; our library; read the newspapers; talk to somebody in the information and guidance area and so on. So in that sense it is less formal - a welcoming environment. You don't have to pass through a security gate or that sort of thing - that makes it quite easy for people.” (UK-I2)*

In summary, as seen in the literature and further elaborated by the interviews, the location of training could on one hand help to overcome barriers faced by educationally disadvantaged people, but might also be a barrier in itself. Not only is the physical location very important, especially in relation to its proximity and accessibility to the target group, but the cultural location can also go a long way in overcoming obstacles associated with learning for adults. Drawing from the interviews, it can also be concluded that there is no one “right” location for basic skills courses targeted at educationally disadvantaged adults, but rather that the “right” location is always dependent on the target group.

## Public Relations

**Establishing trust with the target group is key when trying to engage educationally disadvantaged people in learning**

According to Bremer and Kleemann, a key aspect when targeting educationally disadvantaged people as learners is the need to build up trust. This cannot be done by using traditional public relation strategies and materials. It rather requires proactive outreach work which is time consuming and demands a lot of (human) resources. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, especially when dealing with this target group, it is important for organisations to actively and physically approach the target group rather than wait for them to independently come to the organisation.<sup>19</sup>

The term “outreach”, developed in the 70s and 80s in the United Kingdom, summarises activities aimed at involving people who would otherwise not participate in lifelong learning. It is a concept that goes far beyond “traditional” communication or public relations: “Outreach is a process whereby people who would do not normally use adult education are contacted in a non-institutional setting and become

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<sup>19</sup> Bremer, H., Kleemann-Göhring, M. 2011, p.9-20.



**“Outreach” is deemed as indispensable when recruiting educationally disadvantaged learners as it allows for trust building**

involved in attending and eventually in jointly planning and controlling activities, schemes and courses relevant to their circumstances and needs”.<sup>20</sup>

McGivney distinguishes six steps of outreach work. The first two steps are of special relevance to this chapter:

- “Targeting” requires very detailed and specific knowledge of the local context and the target groups that go far beyond general definitions of the target group.
- “Contact and communication” means building up trust with already established groups/structures (association, school, churches ...) to get them on board for a project. The involvement of “gate keepers” who are people of importance in the social life of the target group, “agents” who are multipliers or intermediaries within the target group, and “peers” who already completed their educational plan successfully is of special importance.

The next four steps include “consultation and negotiation”, “programme development”, “programme implementation” and “progression” which will be discussed in the next chapters.<sup>21</sup> Nechvoglod and Beddie also refer to the importance of “key community figures to help establishing trust and confidence with the target group.”<sup>22</sup>

Brüning, Kuwan and Pehl, besides the need to use specific channels to disseminate information, also mention the need for continuity in public relations.<sup>23</sup> This is especially relevant for outreach work. It requires the building up of trustful relationships which requires a lot of resources and can be especially challenging when financing for outreach activities is exclusively based on project funding.

Public relations and communication strategies are shaped by the common understanding, values and vision of an organisation and its staff. For Berndl it is therefore essential to already engage all people involved in public relations and communication in the strategic planning of those activities.<sup>24</sup>

**Trust building requires a lot of time and as such it is essential that PR activities are long-term and continuous**

When dealing with the topic of how to approach and recruit educationally disadvantaged people or educationally ‘hard-to-reach’ groups, the literature focuses on outreach work, which normally involves an element of building trust with the target group as well as with other key figures and especially engaging them using the different outreach strategies. In essence, these elements are very well covered in the interviews carried out in this framework. However, the interviews delve into this topic even deeper and provide useful practical examples of how this target group could be reached in reality.

Bremer and Kleeman’s argument was particularly highlighted by one

<sup>20</sup> Ward, K. according to McGivney, V. 2001, p.39.

<sup>21</sup> McGivney, V. 2001, p.36ff.

<sup>22</sup> Nechvoglod, L., Beddie, F. 2010, p.17.

<sup>23</sup> Brüning, G., Kuwan, H., Pehl, K. 2002, p. 216.

<sup>24</sup> Berndl 2008, p.139.

of the interview partners from the United Kingdom, who underlined the fact that many of the educationally disadvantaged people who could specifically be identified as ‘hard to reach’, are identified as such because, among others, they do not tend to go outside their communities or so to speak their safety zones:

*“(Although our organisation is very accessible) that is sometimes too much of a big step for some people. [...] Some people don't go outside of their local environments, they don't take buses, trains or anything - that's why we do the outreach work; we work in their environment.” (UK-I2)*

According to a couple of the interviewees (IE-I1 and UK-I2), the reasons why some people do not explore outside their environments especially for training opportunities are diverse. On one end, it could be due to cultural specificities such as the domesticity of women, as explained in the example of a basic education course for Bangladeshi women held in a school. The interviewee from the UK who brought this example to the forefront explained that such a course could be seen as the first step to (re)engage such learners with learning:

*“[...] to begin the process you need to meet them on their terms otherwise you are not going to go anywhere. As time goes on they become more aware of other opportunities and you try and help them to make decisions perhaps that they didn't know was available to them.” (UK-I2)*

**Outreach means on one hand going to places one would find the target group and talking to them.**

Another reason, why hard to reach groups do not tend to venture voluntarily into adult education institutions, has been explained by an interview partner from Ireland (IE-I1) in the previous section talking about their distance learning course. This concerns the fear of being exposed as having deficits in literacy and numeracy. In order to win such potential participants over, it is inevitable to find ways to build trust with them as explained by various authors in the literature review. One such way is outreach as described above; “going to places where one might find people with literacy difficulties (IE-I1)” (this is described in more detail below especially with relation to “agents”) and approaching them directly or making use of intermediaries, in this case the people who work in these places and who have direct contact with the potential participants, who McGivney categorises as “gate keepers”, “peers” and “agents”.<sup>25</sup>

**On the other hand contact to the target group can be established through intermediaries**

According to the interview partners, all these different types of intermediaries are targeted in one way or another by their different advertising strategies. Intermediaries who are most closely related to potential participants, the gate keepers, who McGivney describes as those in the social environment of the participants, are mostly targeted by written advertisements like flyers, articles or announcements in newspapers and websites. This is for the reason that although many

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<sup>25</sup> McGivney, V. 2001, p. 40ff.

people with reading difficulties can read a little, most of their skills in this department are not advanced enough to decipher complex writing and thus written advertisements are normally targeted to third parties. An Interview partner from Ireland argued that “*if flyers are done in plain English, they could be good (understandable directly by the target group)*” (IE-I1). Nevertheless, although such written material is normally targeted at multipliers and intermediaries in general, it is only in very rare occasions that written advertisements explicitly address a particular group of intermediaries and especially “gate keepers”. An interview partner from Austria (AT-I1) explained that they pointedly target “gate keepers” of educationally disadvantaged people with the following statement in their course programme:

*“If you know any people in your family or social circle who may need this course, please inform them about it.” (AT-I1)*

**Peers can be used to recommend courses from their own experiences to potential learners or from their success stories, inspire potential participants or other intermediaries**

“Peers” according to McGivney are in a sense role models for educationally disadvantaged people, who have very similar backgrounds to the target group and who have managed to successfully complete their educational plan. These intermediaries too are involved in reaching educationally disadvantaged people but in a slightly different way from “gate keepers”. Whereas “gate keepers” are expected to inform educationally disadvantaged people of available offers and encourage them to take part, on top of recommending courses to potential participants from their own experiences, “peers” can also show especially educationally disadvantaged people themselves, or their “gate keepers”, the benefits that they could reap from basic education and thereby they could also help to break down any barriers and reduce stigma attached to numeracy and literacy deficits.

One of the interview partners from Austria (AT-I3) illustrated a rather clever way of integrating “peers” in their public relations strategy.

*“We organised cultural events in collaboration with other providers. The idea was to make people curious about the topic (of adult basic education). [...] by informing them, we would destigmatise and remove taboos from affected people. Here, we organised readings of texts written by participants of basic education courses. We got locally, well-known authors to read the texts with us. We made a nice event around the readings with music and a big buffet to lure people because we already knew that the topic alone would not attract so many people. Many different people came. [...] At the end, it became so well known that we no longer needed to advertise it in a big way. People simply came and with it, the courses also grew” (AT-I3).*

Although furthest from educationally disadvantaged people in the multiplier hierarchy, “agents” are the most targeted intermediaries by adult education providers according to the interviews carried out with

adult education providers in Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom. “Agents” tend to be key figures or organisations in a community who or which are trusted. Key figures include for example the mayor, other political figures, the Home School Liaison officer (HSLO) etc. The HSLO for example is a well-developed concept in Ireland. The HSLO coordinator is a teacher appointed to one or more DEIS schools (designated disadvantaged schools) in Ireland depending on their size. The HSLO coordinator’s role is to support parents in order to improve the educational outcomes of children. This means that in case the parents have literacy and numeracy difficulties, the HSCL coordinator is required to support them in improving these skills. Therefore, they need to be very aware of all the offers in the area so as to correctly advise the parents. Adult education providers therefore ensure that the HSLO coordinator in their area is well informed of the opportunities for basic education available to further disseminate the information (IE-I3).

Key organisations include for example schools; local community organisations or centres; information, advice and guidance services (IAGs); social services; local authorities; libraries; voluntary organisations; museums; public organisations, the social welfare office, local community education organisations, the post office, the church etc. They are usually targeted through multiple channels; the most common being the use personal contacts and also written material like flyers, websites and advertisements on newspapers. The idea here is to share as much information as possible among “agents” to ensure that there is no duplication but instead to enhance opportunities for individuals in need of basic education or their families; so that when they get into contact with any of the “agents”, they are made aware of the different possibilities that are on offer for them. The idea of incorporating “agents” into the public relations strategies of adult education provider means therefore, it is not just the providers advertising their own offers but getting the “agents” also to advertise on their behalf (AT-I2, AT-I3, IE-I1, UK-I1 and UK-I2)

**Like with the target group, it is also essential to forge trusted relationships with intermediaries. This should be a continuous process and not based on short project cycles**

According to the interviews, to enable “agents” to work as intermediaries in the recruitment process, adult education providers need to forge trusting relationships with them. This is a continuous process and like all other networks, these contacts need to be made and maintained over time and not just called upon on a project-by-project basis. Following Brünig, Kuwan and Pehl’s insistence that public relations need continuity, an interviewee from Austria (AT-I3) goes as far as to suggest that because many adult education providers are funded on project basis, public relations work should not be conducted by providers independently, but rather jointly at an overarching level like the national level. (AT-I3).

The passages above connect the results of the interviews to the literature review. However, as denoted at the beginning, the interviews were able to provide very many practical examples of different outreach and communication strategies that have been proven to work

and those that have been less successful when recruiting educationally disadvantaged people.

**If written advertisements are used, they should be simple and clear avoiding wordplay and diction**

As explained above, written material is not ideal to target people with literacy and numeracy difficulties directly; however it can work for intermediaries. Even so, one has to be careful of the information that is included as this information should be correctly and easily understood by the intermediaries to be passed on smoothly. The use of wordplay and diction is for example discouraged: for example “*AlphaBeth and Co*” (AT-I3) is quite difficult to understand, even for multipliers.

**Events are a good way of coming into direct contact with the target group and intermediaries, and to raise as awareness for the wider public**

Events, which go back to the concept of outreach, have been proven quite successful when recruiting educationally disadvantaged people to basic education courses. They give the providers of adult education the opportunity to come into contact with the potential participants themselves or even people in their social environments (“gate keepers”) but also with other organisations that are likely multipliers for this target group (“agents”). Events could take different forms - for example, information days or action days where providers are able to present their offers to the general public. In order to attract the wider public, an interview partner from Austria pointed out that such events are most successful when they do not take place at the premises of adult education providers but rather at places visited by the community on a day-to-day basis for example the town hall (AT-I3). This idea links in well with the aspect of cultural location in the previous chapter, which maintains that the basic education courses work well when they are delivered in the community.

Other than just using events to advertise for courses, events could also be used to help break the stigma in society with regard to numeracy and literacy difficulties in adults. This is an indirect advertisement strategy, as addressing this subject could help people with these difficulties gain the strength to seek help other than hide behind them. An interviewee from Austria presented a rather innovative approach to sensitise the wider population on the issues adults with numeracy and literacy difficulties face by giving them a test of what these people face:

*“During the action days, we made a kind of prize game. We distributed pieces of paper with an illegible quote on one side in hieroglyphics or something like that and on the back of the paper it read: ‘if you cannot read this, there is a solution at stand XY and there is also a prize.’ This resulted in very many people coming to the stand and ultimately to our courses.” (AT-I3)*

**Local media can be useful in the recruitment of educationally disadvantaged people**

Local media, although it can be expensive, have been recommended by the interviewees as a very useful communication strategy when targeting educationally disadvantaged people themselves or the intermediaries. In Austria and Ireland for example, there are many community radio stations and free newspapers. Advertising on the local radio stations is likely to reach the potential participants as many

of them can usually understand the local language as well as their friends and family (“gate keepers”) and other multipliers (“agents”) (AT-I1, AT-I2 and IE-I1). Video walls in trams, at metro stations and in the cinema are also a good way of reaching the potential participants directly and also intermediaries, as long as they use a mostly pictorial language (AT-I1). Advertising on local newspapers is more suitable for multipliers as potential participants are likely to have difficulties in reading (AT-I2). Furthermore, it is suggested that articles in newspapers work better than standard advertisements as they are more likely able to appeal to the so-called “gate keepers” (AT-I2).

**To reach men, the use of peers and co-operation with organisations that appeal to masculine extra-curricular interests work well**

Educationally disadvantaged people are hard to reach, but within this group, men with literacy and numeracy difficulties are even more difficult to win over for the courses than women. All the adult education providers interviewed confirmed that they have many more women in their basic education courses than men. A reason for this could be that men are still often the main bread-winners in the family and are more likely to get relatively better- paid unskilled work than women<sup>26</sup>. As a result, some providers have developed strategies to specifically attract men with literacy and numeracy needs. Two interviewees, one from Austria and one from the UK, gave two very different examples, of which both worked very well.

In Austria, word-of-mouth recommendations from “peers” (people who successfully completed a basic education course) worked well. Concretely, after taking part in a basic education course in the organisation, some men realised that some of their colleagues at work face the same difficulties. Due to their positive experience with the course, they were able to advise some of their colleagues as well as inform the manager of their organisation of the opportunities available and the improvements they would make. This worked particularly well because the dynamics of the labour market are constantly changing and job security for people with difficulties in reading and writing is widely seen to be decreasing (AT-I3).

In the UK, appealing to a traditionally masculine extra-curricular interest, namely the love of football, worked very well in recruiting men into basic education courses. The organisation of the interview partner made a partnership with a football club in England and has managed to successfully run basic education courses together with the club attracting many more men than they normally would. This worked well because it not only appealed to the interest of the target group, but the partnership was adept as the football club is very trusted and respected by the fans.

**Flagging up support services or having taster elements in the recruitment process help to eliminate anxiety**

The interviewees also suggest that regardless of the information channels used to inform potential participants of training provision, flagging up the support services and giving the participants a taste of what to expect during the training helps to eliminate uncertainties and

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<sup>26</sup> Manahl, C., Tschank, J. 2016, p. 11.

anxiety about joining a course (UK-I2 and IE-I2).

All the different approaches to recruit participants for basic education training above include ways which would result in the potential participants directly afterwards joining a basic education course. However, interviews from Ireland and the UK propose yet another way. In order to re-engage educationally disadvantaged people with learning by building their confidence, a number of interview partners suggest side-lining the issue of their difficulties by recruiting them into leisure courses or unusual interest courses, for example textiles, fashion, art, craft, sawing, painting, singing, cookery, which can be considered as a first step leading them to involvement with basic education. The rationale is that these will be opportunities to come back to learning without feeling pressure that there is an exam or they are going to be tested (IE-I3, UK-I1 and UK-I2). Our UK partners advise that until very recently in the UK there was in fact a specific public funding stream for adult leisure classes that fulfilled the function of ‘first steps learning’, aimed at drawing disadvantaged and low-skilled adults back into learning and build their confidence.

**Recruiting potential participants into courses that appeal to their interests or areas that have a resonance in popular culture can be a starting point for further educational activities**

*“We find it easier not to concentrate on the deficits that they (educationally disadvantaged people) may face in terms of their particular skills or attributes but to focus on the things that interest them [...]. Once subjects stop being associated with being difficult and simply about a personal requirement for example something that they would enjoy then we are opening the door for the beginning of that conversation. You can use this open door to take people into places that they don’t expect and that builds their confidence to engage in broader aspects of adult education and other things and that makes them believe that they are capable.”*  
(UK-I1)

Similarly, an interviewee from the UK explained, that their organisation tries to pull people in by offering some classes on areas that have a resonance in popular culture and starting to use these to start and pull people into their numeracy and literacy courses. For example a number of years ago in the UK, there was a period where subjects such as complementary therapy, aromatherapy and reflexology were of interest to a wide array of people, captured people’s imagination and brought them into the organisation because there were some offers around these topics (UK-I1).

To sum up, the available literature points out the importance of outreach activities as well as involving intermediaries when trying to recruit educationally disadvantaged people. These aspects are also reflected in the interviews carried out with managerial staff of adult education organisations. The interviews also provide very useful practical examples of what actually works when approaching this target group. Although a very successful picture has been painted by the interviews with regard to recruiting educationally disadvantaged

adults to basic education courses, the reality is that it is still a challenge. More awareness raising efforts are probably necessary. This is strengthened by the remark of an interviewee from Ireland who said: “only about 10% of the people in Ireland with a literacy difficulty go to a literacy centre for help with their literacy. So there are 90% out there who may or may not know about the literacy service or maybe they have other issues or problems and literacy is not highest on their priority of issues to deal with.” (IE-I1)

## Curriculum development & methodological approach

**Basic education training must address the participants’ immediate needs**

In the literature on the involvement of educationally disadvantaged people in adult education, there is a general consensus that training offers need to address needs or challenges in the target groups’ everyday lives so that the learners can see a concrete benefit from their participation in a training offer. Accordingly, MacKerracher stresses the need to develop educational offers relevant to the family, work and community responsibilities of adult learners in order to reduce barriers to participation: “At the very least, courses need to be applicable to their current responsibilities and consistent with their career aspirations and future professional and personal development.”<sup>27</sup> This requires a very good knowledge of the target group or their involvement in the planning of educational programs or training.

**Therefore, it is essential to consult and engage the target group in the curriculum development process. This requires the commitment at an organisational level**

The concept of “outreach” (as detailed by McGivney and others), which has already been mentioned in the previous chapter) gives an idea of what the involvement of the target group in the planning of an education offer could look like. McGivney distinguishes two steps in this regard: consultation & negotiation and programme development. During the process of consultation and negotiation, the target group defines its own learning needs. Very often these needs reflect concrete challenges in individuals’ lives, like welfare rights, housing, etc. During the programme development process, educational offers based on the consultation and negotiation process are developed together with the target group. These offers can be regarded as a step to empowerment through reflection of one’s own needs and may lead some people to enrol in further educational activities.<sup>28</sup>

The differences between social work, community work and adult education become very blurred in this process, but according to Bremer and Kleemann-Göhring a combination of competences and tools from these areas are essential when working with educationally disadvantaged people.<sup>29</sup> This is also well reflected in the term “community education” (in German: “*gemeinwesenorientierte Erwachsenenbildung*”) which has experienced a certain revival in recent years.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> MacKerracher, D., Suart, T., Potter, J. 2006, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Fleischer et al. 2010, 124f.

<sup>29</sup> Bremer, H., Kleemann-Göhring, M. 2011, p.18f.

<sup>30</sup> Erler, I., Kloyber, Ch. 2013, p. 01-3.



If the involvement of educationally disadvantaged people in the planning of their educational offers is taken seriously, then some resources that are not set up for specific projects with specific outcomes need to be budgeted for. Thus, there must be a certain commitment at an organisational level to successfully involve the target group in the planning of educational offers.

**However, the interviews revealed that involving participants is hardly reflected in practice**

The interviews with managerial staff of adult education providers in Austria, Ireland, and the United Kingdom made clear that McGivney's concept of outreach, which includes consulting the target group and involving them in the development of the training programmes, is hardly reflected in the practice of adult education providers nowadays.

With regard to consultation, one interviewee explained that they sometimes carry out a needs analysis of the target group by consulting people "on the streets" at random and asking them what a particular target group - for example, young people or adults - would need for their career progression. The results of such consultations were mostly disappointing for this adult education provider, as they tended to reflect the dominant discourse on "skills" rather than provide concrete answers relevant for the specific group of educationally disadvantaged people (UK-I1). The disappointing results of such a needs analysis are very likely to be due to the methodology used. In McGivney's understanding, consultation means getting in touch and getting to know a very specific target group and engaging them in discussions, which is a very different concept than arbitrarily asking a person in the street what they think someone else would need. Unfortunately, such practices of targeted and consultation and negotiation as described by McGivney were not followed in any of the organisations of the interviewees.

**Some funding mechanisms do not allow organisations to involve the target group when developing training as the format and goals are pre-defined**

This may be partly due to the funding mechanisms in place. For instance in Austria, the main funding programme for basic skills training clearly defines the format and the goals of training offers. Therefore, the possibility of adapting the training to the specific needs of a group of learners is shifted to the course level, depends on the flexibility of the trainers and is limited by learning goals which are pre-defined at programme level:

*"The [name of the programme] allows responding to the individual learning needs of the participants. The trainers try to respond to these learning needs as far as it is possible within the concept of the training course. But if there is e.g. a German course on the level of A1, I have to reach a certain goal within a certain number of hours" (AT-I2).*

Similarly, in the UK the negotiation process used to be standard in basic education but is increasingly rare as funding has become tighter and funders' requirements more prescriptive. This highlights a conflict of interest between quality management that defines

**Taking the participants' wishes into account largely depends on the trainers and their flexibility within a course**

standards for training, provides organisations that meet certain standards with certifications or funding on one hand; and on the other hand, the observation made in the literature that courses aimed at certain target groups need to involve this target group in their design which means that content and goals of a course cannot be pre-defined.

In any case, even if the training courses do not rely on public funding mechanisms or when their content is more flexible (because for example they are non-accredited courses), learners can mainly influence the content of the course within the framework of a concrete course they are attending. This highly depends on how open the involved trainers are to the specific needs and wishes of the participants (AT-I1, UK-I2).

Besides the content of a training offer, a second relevant aspect is how this content is delivered. Therefore the “methodological approach” is the second aspect treated in this chapter. Often the “traditional” learning approach of adult education providers is similar to the formal education system especially with regard to the focus on cognitive abilities.<sup>31</sup> This approach mostly reflects the learning practice of people with a higher educational background. For educationally disadvantaged people, such learning approaches are assessed as less valuable as they tend to recall school experiences which were probably unsuccessful and which may be associated with negative feelings.

**Training for educationally disadvantaged learners should be based on competences rather than accumulation of knowledge and focus on empowerment of the target group**

Correspondingly, Steiner, K. (et al.) suggests focusing training for educationally disadvantaged people on competences rather than on the accumulation of knowledge. By focusing on competences, it is possible to start from participants' (informally acquired) skills.<sup>32</sup> Especially for learners with low levels of literacy skills, the so-called “embedded literacy” – which means embedding literacy, language and numeracy training with other (more practice-oriented) skills training – has proven to be successful as it offers an integrated learning experience.<sup>33</sup>

Methodological approaches that have been mainstreamed in the last few years include the analysis of competences and potential of participants and “learning to learn”, as well as working with contents relevant to the participants' everyday lives. Furthermore, educational programmes for educationally disadvantaged people provide space for democratic participation and focus on empowerment.<sup>34</sup>

In different interviews it was stated that the methodological approach used was geared at empowering the participants or fostering critical

<sup>31</sup> Krenn, M., Kasper, R. 2012, p. 70.

<sup>32</sup> Steiner, K. et al. 2012, p. 24f.

<sup>33</sup> Nechvoglod, L., Beddie, F. 2010, p.24.

<sup>34</sup> Brüning, G., Kuwan, H., Pehl, K. 2002, p. 90.

thinking:

*“For example we might have a course in flower arrangement and we might use some of that to get them to find out about where flowers come from to be sold in the English market and one of the things that might take us into is discussions why flowers travel halfway across the world to be sold in England and what might be the implications of that in the horticultural economies in Africa for example. So we are beginning to discuss some of the issues of global trade with people who have come to a course to find out how to do flower mass arrangements” (UK-I1).*

**The interviews revealed that methodological approaches mostly depend on the individual trainers’ practice**

In other organisations, learning methodologies were inspired by Paulo Freire (AT-I3) and participants acquired or improved their basic skills by dealing with topics that are relevant in their every-day lives e.g. going to the bank, filling in forms etc. (UK-I2).

Especially in the interviews conducted with managerial staff of adult education providers in Austria, it became clear that the learning approaches used were a result of the trainers’ practice, experiences, convictions and also based on informal exchanges among trainers that were not defined at the organisational level (AT-I1, AT-I2, AT-I3). For example one interviewee stated:

*“I’m sure there is informal exchange, but there are no [methodological] concepts. I would not say that we are following a certain line with our contents or methods” (AT-I2).*

**It is rather uncommon to find methodological concepts defined and agreed on at organisational level**

In general, the interviews with adult education providers experienced in working with disadvantaged people present little evidence of institutionalised practices of consultation with the target group or their involvement in the planning of educational offers. It is only within the framework of concrete training offers that a certain flexibility to react to the needs and wishes of learners can be observed.

Within the framework of pre-defined courses, trainers develop a great variety of methods to respond to learners’ needs and empower them. There is a clear tendency to devolve responsibilities to trainers for developing their own training methods without having pre-defined methodological concepts at an organisation level. This could be interpreted as empowerment of the trainers. But as the exchange on successful training methods often relies on informal exchange among trainers, this appears more likely to be a sign of lacking appropriate structures at the organisational level to formally (further) develop the methodological competences of trainers.

## **Support offers**

In a paper dedicated to the analysis of lower retention rates of adult

**Support offers should include guidance before, during and after a course**

learners compared to younger learners, McGivney states that besides personal or external factors, “dissatisfaction with a course or institution is [...] a common reason for non-completion”.<sup>35</sup> Dissatisfaction can result from a course not meeting participants’ expectations or attendance at courses that are not appropriate with regards to participants’ competences. Both these outcomes can be prevented with adequate support offers like information and guidance prior to enrolment into a course.<sup>36</sup>

The importance of information, advice and guidance for (potential) learners before, during and at the end of a learning experience has also been emphasised by Kennedy. Guidance and advice before attending a course is deemed essential for identifying a training course that fits best with the learner’s needs; or as Kennedy states: “We cannot afford to dash people’s hopes by setting them up to fail, and wasting their hard-won motivation [...] Everyone should be entitled to obtain the help they need to make sound decisions”.<sup>37</sup> While information and guidance before attending a certain educational offer can help to make an informed choice, guidance during and at the end of a training course or programme can help to assess progress, boost confidence, overcome crises and enhance one’s chances of success.<sup>38</sup>

**Additional social support is especially relevant for people facing multiple barriers**

Current support offers are no longer exclusively focused on educational or career guidance but can also include services similar to those provided by social workers. These services can be especially relevant for potential learners who have a multitude of barriers in accessing education; for instance, MacKeracher mentions besides career guidance also support with regard to family and work responsibilities.<sup>39</sup> Already more than 25 years ago, McGivney distinguished between learning support and personal support - which encompasses financial and “pastoral” support.<sup>40</sup>

What McGivney calls “pastoral support” is nowadays usually associated with the skills of a social worker: “Non-traditional students require access to empathetic individuals (counsellors or personal tutors) who can understand their experiences and problems.”<sup>41</sup>

**The interviews show that in reality, support offers are often linked to specific projects or courses**

The practice of education providers in Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom shows that information and guidance as well as other support services are often linked to specific projects or educational offers.

If guidance is aimed at supporting potential learners to find the most appropriate educational offers for them, then it needs to be established at an organisational level at least to ensure that people

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<sup>35</sup> McGivney, V. 2004, p.39.

<sup>36</sup> McGivney, V. 2004, p.39-42.

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy 1997, p. 89.

<sup>38</sup> Kennedy 1997, p. 89ff.

<sup>39</sup> MacKeracher, D., Suart, T., Potter, J. 2006, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> McGivney, V. 1990, p.155.

<sup>41</sup> McGivney, V. 1990, p.156.

also receive further advice if a certain offer is not suitable for them.<sup>42</sup> This can be generalised for all kinds of support offers (including social support). These services should be established at the organisational level rather than being appendices to specific training courses.

In one interview, a person who was engaged in the development of basic skills training in the 90s described a co-operation which was developed between their organisation and an ecclesiastical counselling service (open to all faiths) at a very early stage. The place where the counselling service was located was familiar to the learners as they often participated in events and training organised by the adult education institute in the premises of the counselling service.

*“The counselling service is located in the very centre of the city. People can just go there, eat something, have a coffee and talk to someone. If they have a problem, they can get support. Our training participants made use of this offer” (AT-I3).*

Later on, this adult education provider also developed learning support offers for their training participants (AT-I3).

Presently, it is mandatory for courses funded by the Austrian national programme for basic skills training (“Initiative Erwachsenenbildung”) to provide learning support as well as guidance and social support to learners. These services have to be provided at the premises of the adult education institute.

One interviewee affirmed the importance of services which are not exclusively focused on educational topics or related to certain educational offers in order to establish lasting relationships between the adult education institution and its learners:

*“Support services ensure sustainable results. People who haven’t been here for a while come to us [to make use of these support services]. Migrants especially often look for a point of contact. [...] People for example come with a letter by a public authority and ask for help. We can build on this trust when we have a new educational offer” (AT-I2).*

**Guidance and social support are often additional tasks carried out by tutors**

Although there is a common understanding of the importance of support service for educationally disadvantaged people, the following statements provide evidence that support services and educational guidance are often “additional” tasks carried out by tutors:

*“Our tutors are incredibly committed to the groups of students that they work with and very often they go above and beyond*

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<sup>42</sup> E.g. in Austria in the last years, there have been efforts to provide educational guidance by networks established between adult education institutions. This should ensure more independence and help the (potential) learner to choose the most adequate offer for him/her.

*the call of duty to provide information and advice to the student group that they have” (UK-I1).*

*“The tutor provides quite a lot of the support [...]” (UK-I2).*

Although it seems only logical that learners would approach their tutors and ask for further support once they have built up a trusted relationship with them, there is a clear need to have professional support structures independent of tutors’ voluntary support to guarantee high quality, continuous support available for everyone who needs it.

Besides counselling services, some of the interviewed adult education providers also offer childcare services and some financial support to learners e.g. if someone cannot afford books or fees for a certain course they want to move on to (UK-I1, UK-I2).

To sum up, the interviews show that offering support services for (educationally disadvantaged) learners has become a well-established practice amongst adult education providers and is often a requirement of funding programmes. These support services mostly include counselling and social support before the start of an educational offer as well as during the course. These support services are not always established at an organisational level, but often linked to specific courses and training which limit their use to the wider target group. In these cases they are available only to participants in specific courses but not to participants in other courses, although they too could benefit from them.

Though there were accounts of former training participants that kept in touch with adult education providers after the end of a course and sought advice from time to time, the interviews gave little evidence that there are structured processes at organisational level in place to support the participants when an educational offer ends. Given the contribution of such professional support structures to programmes’ and participants’ success, it is suboptimal to limit them to particular programmes or courses or to leave a large part of the function to trainers’ voluntary efforts.

## **Staff**

**Work with educationally disadvantaged people requires competences and skills that go beyond formal**

Brünig et al. recommend that besides pedagogical staff working with educationally disadvantaged people having appropriate formal qualifications, they should also have competences in the field of counselling. This is deemed important because both educational counselling and counselling on social or family issues form an increasingly important aspect of their work. This is also reflected in some of the interviews cited in the previous chapter of this report. Furthermore proficiency in business management as well as the

## **qualifications of trainers**

ability to work in teams is assessed as important by Brünig et al.<sup>43</sup>

For work with educationally disadvantaged people, Bremer and Kleeman see a need for a combination of skills traditionally assigned to educational, social work and therapy professionals. Such a broad competence profile could challenge the current self-perception of adult educators (and possibly, other teaching professionals) as it implies that adult education does not primarily focus on increasing knowledge but also includes supporting the development of social, emotional and practical skills of participants that are needed in everyday life.<sup>44</sup>

Doberer-Bey's competence profile for trainers working with people with basic skills needs could also be valuable for trainers working with educationally disadvantaged people in general. In her view, a profile of an adult educator should include:

- A set of fundamental attitudes with regard to self-reflectiveness, co-operation, empowerment, equity and equality;
- general knowledge about and understanding of the living condition of the target group;
- professional competences and expertise; as well as
- personal competences such as respect, empathy, the ability to manage conflicts, etc.<sup>45</sup>

## **Respect and sensitivity are important qualities for all staff coming into contact with disadvantaged learners and not just for tutors**

“Respect” is an aspect also pointed out by MacKeracher, Stuart and Potter. They emphasise the relevance of this competence not exclusively for trainers but for all members of staff.<sup>46</sup> This is certainly important as participants in educational offers also have contact with administrators or other service staff of adult education providers. Very often the first contact is established through administrative staff who answer phone calls or work at the reception desk or as McGivney states: “The first people encountered by visitors or callers are switchboard operators, receptionists, secretarial staff and security guards, few of whom are experienced or trained in giving information”.<sup>47</sup>

As a result, all members of staff should have certain sensitivity especially when dealing with disadvantaged target groups. This is especially relevant when the lack of certain skills (e.g. reading and writing skills) is stigmatised in society and as a result, people might feel embarrassed when having to admit an educational need in this regard.<sup>48</sup>

For Krenn and Kasper, the question of what kind of staff is best suited for working with educationally disadvantaged people goes

<sup>43</sup> Brünig, G., Kuwan, H., Pehl, K. 2002, p. 88.

<sup>44</sup> Bremer, H., Kleemann-Göhring, M. 2011, p.19.

<sup>45</sup> Doberer-Bey, A. 2008, 2ff.

<sup>46</sup> MacKeracher, D., Stuart, T., Potter, J. 2006, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> McGivney, V. 1990, p. 150.

<sup>48</sup> Christof, E. 2008, p. 105ff.

**Social distance created when tutors have very different social backgrounds compared to disadvantaged learners can pose a barrier**

beyond qualifications, skills and competences. They see a potential barrier to education in the fact that tutors mostly have a different social background from educationally disadvantaged people themselves. This “social distance” may lead to a certain resistance to learning.<sup>49</sup> They therefore recommend a peer-to-peer learning model in which people with the same or similar social background as the target group work as trainers.

Besides peer-to-peer learning, the composition of staff with regard to gender, ethnic or migrant background etc. plays an important role for the work with educationally disadvantaged people and is worth considering.

Asked about requirements for staff composition, skills and qualifications when dealing with educational disadvantaged people, the interview partners from Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom focused almost exclusively on tutors and did not include other members of staff of an organisation.

One interview partner described their experiences when starting to develop training offers for people with basic skills needs and initially thought that primary school teachers would be appropriate trainers for this target group:

**When discussing requirements of staff, the interview partners focused exclusively on tutors although other members of staff also have direct contact with the (potential) learners**

*“12 years ago I read that there are 300,000 people with basic skills needs in Austria. And I thought this means that there are about 3,000 people with these needs in my province. I wanted to do something about it and went to the primary school of [city name], because I thought this would be a job for primary school teachers [...] This was cluelessness from my side, because adults learn completely differently [from children] [...], other qualifications and also social competences are needed” (AT-I1).*

Interview partners from Austria stressed the high skills and competences required by trainers working with people with basic skills needs. They put an emphasis on methodological competences as well as on social skills which are also part of a recently established mandatory training for basic skills trainers (AT-I3, AT-I2 and AT-I3). If trainers are not properly equipped with professional competences and expertise, it is considered a risk for reproducing frustrating learning experiences among training participants:

*“When you’re reproducing experiences from school the chance is high that people drop out. Therefore quality [in basic skills training] is far more important than in other courses” (AT-I3).*

The special competences of staff working with people with basic skills needs are also reflected in the experience of an adult education provider in Ireland. The organisation did not specifically target educationally disadvantaged people with basic skills needs with its

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<sup>49</sup> Krenn, M., Kasper, R. 2012, p. 71.



educational offers but increasingly discovered people with basic skills needs in their apprenticeship courses. This organisation then engaged people who specialised in the area of basic skills needs who organise additional learning support and who have an “open eye and ear” for this group of apprentices:

*“[This person] has what we call a library set up - a room where you can go in. She has that open for certain times and walk in service so they can come in and talk to her there too as well” (IE-I2).*

One interviewee also addresses the question of staff composition and underlined the importance of diversity in order to work successfully with certain target groups:

*“Trying to work with for example immigrant communities - it is very important to have members of the staff who are from those communities in order to be involved and in order to be trusted in those areas and try to make the kinds of liaisons that we would want to build” (UK-I1).*

This adult education provider also gave learners the possibility to stay engaged with the organisation after the training and thereby increased the diversity of the organisation’s staff. Students are encouraged to engage as volunteers with the organisation and “it is not uncommon to have people stay long enough to become employed” (UK-I1).

**Compared to the qualification of staff, the question of staff composition with regard to diversity is given less importance**

Nevertheless the aspect of diversity with regard to the composition of staff is given less importance than the aspect of qualifications and competences.

A main conclusion that can be derived from the interviews is that adult education providers are strongly sensitive to the needs for qualifications and competences when it comes to trainers or tutors working directly with educationally disadvantaged people.

However, there is little evidence that these considerations are applied when hiring other staff other than trainers or tutors or that there are well established practices for providing other members of staff with the competences needed in the communication and interaction with specific target groups such as educationally disadvantaged people. A UK initiative to train ‘front-line workers’ in the public sector in basic skills awareness was short-lived as funding became more limited. This is an issue that definitely deserves more attention in future.

## **Quality management**

According to Papastamatis et al. the increasing interest in the quality of adult education in the last decade derives from increasing competitiveness and the need to demonstrate accountability in public

services, or maybe more precisely, accountability for the use of public funds.<sup>50</sup> Different terms have been developed around the issue of quality management and are often used synonymously – e.g. “quality assessment”, “quality evaluation”, “quality review” and “quality assurance”.<sup>51</sup>

A main challenge when discussing quality in adult education is that there are different understandings of “quality” depending on the context and the perspective - the perspective of decision makers, the management of adult education institutions, trainers and learners.

Different definitions of and perspectives towards “quality” result in a great number of tools and methods to assess it. Papastamatis speaks of a “mushrooming of models” for quality management in Germany within recent years.<sup>52</sup> At the same time as standards are developed at different levels (e.g. European, national, and regional level), the “impossibility of establishing universal quality standards and uniformly applicable quality assurance procedures” is implicitly accepted.<sup>53</sup>

**Quality can be defined at three levels: national/system, organisational and the level of the individual**

According to Papastamatis, in contexts where adult education is seen as part of welfare services, public authorities (at the regional or national level) are regarded as agents authorised to define and control quality; in contexts where adult education is seen as a business or market, the authority to define quality is given to multiple stakeholders (learners, companies, funding institutions etc.). Therefore he sees a need to define “quality” at three different levels: at the organisational level, at the level of the learning individual and at the level of the (national) systems of adult education.<sup>54</sup>

Gruber asserts the importance of the level of the learning individual, because learning processes that work for one person are not necessarily appropriate for another person. Therefore, Gruber demands transparency with regard to educational offers to enable individual learners to make informed choices. In general, she sees the discourse on quality management as mainly focused on the management level while the perspective of the learners is neglected.<sup>55</sup>

For Poschalko, besides the perspective of the learning individual, the competences and qualifications of the staff are key aspects of quality assurance – which overlap with the previous chapter of this report. In this regard strong efforts towards professionalisation can be observed in recent years.<sup>56</sup>

Because this report focuses on the factors at an organisational level,

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<sup>50</sup> Papastamatis et al. 2009, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> In German terms like „Qualitätssicherung“, „Qualitätskontrolle“, „Qualitätsmanagement“, and „Qualitätsentwicklung“ are used (Poschalko 2011, p. 03-2)

<sup>52</sup> Papastamatis et al. 2009, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Papastamatis et al. 2009, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Papastamatis et al. 2009, p. 8f.

<sup>55</sup> Gruber, E. 2011, p. 01-2f.

<sup>56</sup> Poschalko, A. 2011, p. 03-4.

it also treats the issue of quality management on that level. This does not imply that quality management should be based exclusively on management procedures, on the contrary. The authors of this report strongly support taking learners' views (and especially the view of educationally disadvantaged people) into account in quality management and providing high quality educational offers implies having appropriate quality management procedures in place at the organisational level that include learners' and professional perspectives.

**The interviews show a lot of efforts but few standardised procedures to include the feedback of disadvantaged learners in quality management processes**

In the interviews there is little evidence of standardised procedures to include the feedback of educationally disadvantaged learners in quality management processes. One interview partner explains the dilemma of having standardised feedback questionnaires in their organisation that are not adequate for people with low literacy skills. As a result, trainers of literacy and numeracy courses tend to collect oral feedback at the end of educational courses (AT-I2). However, there appears to be a lack of established procedures of making use of this verbal feedback. Nevertheless, some interviews show that some organisations still attempt to collect written feedback from participants; and use standardised written evaluations even with participants with low literacy and numeracy skills using:

*“We also collect evaluation of the courses. [For people with low literacy skill] we try to find simpler methods of doing so. For example where we would be dealing with students with a learning difficulty then maybe drawing or ticking a smiley face as a response to a question [...] For particular groups of students, we try to keep the process simpler and easier to fill in” (UK-I1).*

Moreover, this organisation uses the results of examinations at the end of accredited courses for its quality management.

**In the UK an important element of quality management at organisational level includes observation of teaching and learning**

In addition, two interviewees from adult education providers in the United Kingdom reported quality management through “observation of teaching and learning” (UK-I1). Both organisations have very similar and standardised processes of assessing their trainers at a regular basis. It must be noted that these procedures focus on assessing every tutor within a certain timeframe and not on assessing every course. But still, the assessment takes place within training courses and therefore it provides the organisation with insights into the quality of their training and allows, in some cases, exchange with learners.

*“We have a wide range of mechanisms, we have a range of approaches to teaching and learning that we expect teachers to abide by and we check that overwhelmingly through the observation of teaching and learning - a programme of observation of teaching taking place in classes. This is the formal programme: 50% of our tutors every year are*

*observed” (UK-I1).*

*“What we do, we have an observation of the teaching and learning process which is where we have some “team reviews” across the college whose job is to go out and observe lessons. [...] It’s about teaching, learning and assessment. So are the learners being effectively assessed? Is there evidence that learning takes place? What’s the quality of the teaching? These are the three broad criteria, then broken down into smaller areas. [...] They would want to see the paperwork: what is the course about, the lesson plan; what were the activities planned for that session? And they will assess them whether things were being delivered effectively and then they would have a feedback session with the tutor [...]” (UK-I2).*

In addition, both organisations have less formal modes of “teaching observation” in place:

*“We have a less formal one where we quite quickly look at what takes place in classrooms by spending 10- 15 minutes in a classroom to get an idea of the atmosphere and the approach and maybe check a few things like whether the tutor’s lesson is planned, whether they’ve got appropriate materials, whether they’ve got a sort of understanding of where the students are. Informal in the sense that we are not formally grading the teacher – we don’t sit through the whole lesson but rather have some words with the teachers and some words with the students” (UK-I1).*

In one organisation this less standardised approach includes elements of peer-to-peer learning in the form of “learning walks” – where some time is spent in every class and some notes are taken. This is performed by members of the team and the experiences are shared with the whole team afterward (UK-I2).

It can be concluded that although quality management has become an integral part of adult education in recent years, including the perspective of educationally disadvantaged learners, especially those with low literacy skills, still poses a challenge for education providers. A lot of effort is being put in to find appropriate methods to collect feedback from this target group, but there seems to be a lack of well-tested and structured methods to collect feedback from participants and feed it into the further development of educational offers or improvement of existing ones.

## **Partnerships and co-operation**

### **Co-operation and partnerships**

Partnerships with other organisations have been found to be central in recruiting educationally disadvantaged participants for basic skills courses. When considering partnerships around this particular target

**with adult education providers help to ensure effective use of available resources**

group, different deliberations come into play from those concerning organisations that deal with other target groups. As seen in the previous chapters, some considerations include availability of premises for the delivery of training, existing trustful relationships with the target group, support offers, etc. Valuable partners may be sport clubs, schools, churches, migrant self-organisations, companies, works councils, social workers, community workers etc.

According to Brüning, Kuwan, and Pehl networking and co-operation would also ensure the effective use of available resources. They put a special emphasis on partnerships between adult education providers and counselling services at a regional level. Better co-operation from adult education providers could ensure exchanges of experience, common training activities for the staff and upscaling of successful programmes. Participants would further benefit from a close co-operation as the transition of participants from one educational offer to another would be improved.<sup>57</sup>

Although there is wide agreement that partnerships and / or co-operation at the organisational level are an important aspect when thinking of the conditions necessary to improve the access of educationally disadvantaged people to suitable courses, such inter-organisational relationships are not well covered in the literature. Their importance is clearly highlighted in the interviews which give a good overview of the kind of partnerships that exist as well as their benefit.

Many affiliations between adult education providers are of an informal nature (co-operation) although some more formal partnerships with a contractual relationship exist (partnerships). This element highly depends on whether the relationships are based on a financial or non-financial basis. Formal partnerships are mostly with organisations that provide funding to adult education institutions, such as local authorities. Partnerships are also used when the funding occurs in the opposite direction, for example from the adult education provider to a community organisation by means of rent payments for premises or partnership in delivery. The latter, however, are considered to be less formal than the former (UK-I1).

**Most co-operation has a symbiotic relationship in that arrangements are formed based on shared interests and each party involved benefits in one way or the other**

Informal relationships, on the other hand, exist when there is no financial relationship in any direction between the adult education provider and other organisations. These are the most common types of co-operation which are formed voluntarily, when two organisations identify a common area of relevance and are mainly formed to share resources (UK-I2) as also suggested by Brüning, Kuwan, and Pehl – the idea here is to have partnerships with organisations that complement each other. As such, most of the informal partnerships or co-operation have a symbiotic relationship. For example an interviewee from Austria talked of collaboration

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<sup>57</sup> Brüning, G., Kuwan, H., Pehl, K. 2002, p. 88f.

**Co-operation of non-formalised nature are often dependent on individual people in organisations**

with a school. The school was faced with the problem that some of parents were not able to support their children with their school work because of language difficulties. The adult education provider then started offering a basic education course in the school for parents. In this example, the school was able to benefit because the children were being indirectly helped and the adult education provider benefitted in the sense that it was able to easily recruit participants through the school as the school already had a trusted relationship with the parents and it was also able to get premises for its course free of charge (AT-I2). This kind of reciprocal relationship also occurs with community organisations who provide premises to adult education providers: merely for the fact that the courses take place in the community organisation's premises, they also are able to benefit from this relationship as their services also become known to the participants and are further disseminated (UK-I1).

**There are four main benefits of co-operation according to the interviews:**

One of the interview partners also made the distinction that co-operation unlike most partnerships is usually long-term. Although organisations may not constantly work with each other, because they maintain this informal relationship they are able to be easily called upon whenever need arises (UK-I2). Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that co-operation, which is informal in nature, frequently depends on the relationships between individual people and may fall apart if these people are taken out of the equation. On the other hand, individuals can also open the door for more people in their organisation or at an organisational level to co-operate.

**1) Recruitment of participants,**

The interviews uncover four main benefits of adult education providers co-operating with other organisations. The most commonly discussed benefit is in the recruitment of participants. Providers of adult education forge relationships with different kinds of organisation for this reason. For example some form lasting relationships with general information, guidance and information centres or with advice centres for specific groups of people like women and migrants. As these organisations come into daily contact with the target group, they are able to share information on available opportunities of the adult education provider (AT-I2 and AT-I3). Others co-operate with local media organisations which are able to advertise their courses in local radio stations/shows and / or newspapers (AT-I2). Some collaborate with organisations that are trusted in the community as this eases the recruitment processes. Good examples of such an organisation are football clubs in the UK (UK-I1).

**2) premises for training,**

As discussed in detail in the chapter on "location", many adult providers who do not own their own premises for training or who also offer courses in the communities, often build partnerships or co-operation with diverse community organisations including libraries so that they can deliver training on their premises (AT-I3, UK-I1 and UK-I2).

**3) Exchange on concepts and subjects,**

Other alliances aim to enhance exchange on concepts and subjects in basic adult education. These include other adult education providers or other educational institutions in general. Because the field of adult education is constantly changing, it is essential to collegially share information so as to keep up with it and improve offers for the participants (AT-I3). Other affiliations that can also benefit the content of courses are with for example libraries or book publishing companies, which can provide suitable books to participants (UK-I2). Sometimes, some organisations can offer placements to participants that can be integrated into the curriculum of basic education courses (UK-I2).

**4) Awareness-raising among the wider public on issues of literacy and numeracy deficits.**

As mentioned in the previous chapters, one of the biggest barriers that educationally disadvantaged people face is the stigma attached to adults having numeracy and literacy difficulty. This is a constant battle and adult education providers continuously take different actions to sensitise the wider public. From the interviews, in this regard, involving key figures in the community like politicians, prominent authors or people from religious organisations for example has been rewarding so far. An interview partner from the UK gave the example of involving politicians in their “mental wealth” festival:

*“Last year we had our first “mental wealth festival” rather than “mental health”, we called it “mental wealth”. [...] It was primarily aimed at people who suffer from depression, people with other mental health issues and it is about how learning can be a great way through difficult times with mental health issues partly because you are engaging with some social activity which leads you to be in touch with the community, you are learning something, so are developing skills. All of these things can have a positive outcome and studies have shown that. The mental wealth festival was trying to get politicians involved so we had some sessions in the parliament [...]” (UK-I2)*

The interviews provide a useful synopsis of the different kinds of partnerships and co-operation that can be formed as well as their benefits. Most collaborations with adult education organisations are informal and based on common interests and as such are interdependent. Other organisations are advantageous to adult education providers with regard to premises, recruitment of participants, content of courses and even in sensitising the general public to the topic of basic education needs.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the comprehensive literature review combined with the interviews with managerial staff of diverse adult education providers in Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom undertaken within the framework of this study provide a deeper understanding of the requirements at an organisational level to best cater for educational disadvantaged learners - beginning with engaging them to participate in training, but also engaging them to stay in training until completion and to possibly continue with further education and training.

To some extent, the interviews were able to confirm the recommendations presented in the literature, but especially for the more demanding recommendations, additional efforts are necessary to fully implement them in practice.

In the context of this study, the organisational background is reflected by its guiding principles or mission statement. Although all the organisations included in this study have a mission statement or guiding principles, they differ quite a bit with respect to their content. In general, guiding principles should be defined in a way that they include the target group, assuring them that their needs and interests would be well covered by the organisation. Furthermore, it is not enough to have these formally written down, more importantly they need to be reflected in the actions of all members of staff. The interviews were not able to illustrate whether this was the case or in how far this was assured at the organisational level.

Location is a factor that could constitute a barrier for educationally disadvantaged people's participation in education or overcome several barriers. Training provision for this target group should be available on their door steps (regarding proximity and accessibility) to avoid it being a barrier in itself. Furthermore, to overcome the stigma attached to reading and writing difficulties in adults, providing courses in "cultural locations" – places frequented by the target group in their daily lives like community centres – could reduce the fear of being exposed. Despite the common assumption that adult education should be delivered in a completely different setting to school, some people still associate learning with school and for them, this would be the ideal location for basic skills courses. As a result, there is no one "right" or "wrong" location for training, important is to consider the exact group one is dealing with.

Building trust with the potential participants is key when targeting educationally disadvantaged people. Although resource-intensive, organisations need to inject enough efforts and resources into appropriate approaches to contacting the target group directly, especially through proactive outreach. Intermediaries are also essential in recruiting educationally disadvantaged people to training. Although more public relations strategies can be used with



this target group, these should be appropriately differentiated for the different groups of intermediaries (“gate keepers”, “peers” and “agents”). Whereas the interviews provided a wide array of methods for engaging this target group, building trusted relationships requires time and effort, which often contradicts the logic of short-term project cycles and insecurity on future funding; therefore more continuous, long-term public relations efforts as well as more awareness-raising is necessary if educationally disadvantaged people are to be given a chance.

Although it is widely acknowledged that educational offers for disadvantaged learners must be well-fitted to the needs of this target group, structured procedures to involve this group in formulating their own learning needs and goals as well as in designing courses are hardly in place. They occur mostly informally and are often at odds with other organisational requirements regarding accreditation and quality management that favour a certain amount of standardisation. As a result, a lot of responsibility is shifted to the trainers and tutors and their flexibility to react to their learners’ needs within a specific training course.

Involving educationally disadvantaged people poses not only a challenge in the development of curricula, but also in quality management processes of adult education providers. Tested and structured methods to collect feedback from this target group and processes that guarantee that their feedback would be incorporated into the further development of educational offers still seems to be lacking. Further efforts are needed to ensure that the voices of disadvantaged learners are also included in quality management processes.

Educational guidance and support services like learning and social support are receiving an increasing amount of attention from adult education providers. A lot of effort is being made to engage educationally disadvantaged people in educational offers that fit their specific needs and supporting them during their participation in an offer. In future, a stronger emphasis should be placed on establishing these services at an organisational level, independent of specific educational offers - as it is frequently the case for advice and guidance services but to a lesser extent for social or learning support.

Adult education providers put a strong focus on qualifications and competences of tutors and trainers working with educationally disadvantaged people. In Austria and elsewhere, this goes hand in hand with the development of standardised and accredited training for trainers working with certain target groups (e.g. people with basic skills needs). As a next step, it should be considered, that some appropriate qualifications and competences are also relevant for other staff members who are also in direct contact with this target group including switchboard operators, receptionists, secretarial staff etc.

At the moment, as in the formal education system, the composition of teaching staff does not reflect the diversity of the learners. Therefore, emphasis should be given to increasing the diversity of staff with regard to their social background, ethnic origin and gender.

Partnerships and especially co-operation are indispensable when dealing with educationally disadvantaged people as they not only help in advertising courses and providing premises for training but they also provide opportunities for exchange of ideas on, among others, the content of the course as well as doubling up the efforts in sensitising the wider population about the topics of adult education. Consequently, these relationships need to be well-sought and nurtured over the long-term rather than being called on project-by-project basis. Such collaborations are usually based on individual contacts and as such can be challenging to the knowledge management at organisational level.

Although only a fairly limited number of interviews were carried out in the framework of this study, these interviews give evidence that even organisations that have been dealing with educationally disadvantaged people consistently, over a very long time, are still making progress in identifying and eliminating barriers for this target group's participation in (further) education at the organisational level. This reflects the assertion that providing offers for educationally disadvantaged people needs constant reflection and revision of an organisation's practice.

At the same time, the interviews reveal that even adult education providers that have been working with educationally disadvantaged people for many years do not seem to have a comprehensive understanding of the significance of the organisational level in recruiting and catering for educationally disadvantaged people. In all three countries under scrutiny aspects like public relations and formal qualification of trainers receive extensive attention while others like the way an organisation is perceived by others are underexposed.

Specifically, appropriate mechanisms to empower educationally disadvantaged people through their meaningful involvement in the design and further development of educational offers seems to be lacking. Establishing participatory processes in this regard is presumably very demanding but could result in courses that better meet and cater for the needs of educationally disadvantaged people.

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## Annex 1: Project description ‘in.education - inclusion & education’

### **Development of strategies to increase the enrolment of educationally disadvantaged people, especially those with basic education needs, into relevant educational programs**

Existing data as well as practical experiences show that educational programs - including those that specifically address educationally disadvantaged people - are not utilised enough by "all potential" target groups and sufficient diversification of participants groups is achieved only rarely. The reasons for this phenomenon are many and varied. They arise as a result of mixed organisational patterns, educational behaviour of individuals and are caused by structural, procedural and individual initial conditions, which have a common relevance to adult education. The often-mentioned structural change facing Europe in general and specifically each Member State, which particularly refers to migration and in diversity in society, can only be dealt with by providing equal and suitable conditions for accessing educational opportunities to people, who because of their personal situation, for example due to lack of educational qualifications, have difficulties in accessing education. The responsibility of the provision of these fair and adequate conditions for the participation in education should also be borne by adult education providers that obviously require adequate resources and legitimacy to overcome inequalities and lacks of opportunity for particular disadvantaged groups. They must be empowered to develop solutions to reduce barriers and offer diverse and targeted educational programs to especially those people who may not yet have found a satisfactory entry route into education or for those who have “finished” with education; so that they can reopen the education window for them.

*In.education* focuses on the development of strategies to increase the enrolment of educationally disadvantaged people, especially those with basic education needs, into relevant educational programs. The project therefore develops strategies to reduce possible barriers by focussing on system, individual and institutional related levels.

**Systemic level:** Following the hypothesis that people are deeply influenced by their socio-economic environment, methods and strategies are developed that proactively raise awareness and motivate enrolment in education. This will result in the activation and expansion of multipliers. Besides the identification of relevant target groups, application-oriented settings (pilot workshops) targeted towards stakeholder groups are developed. From this experience, *in.education* develops an application oriented curriculum.  
These activities are evaluated in this report.

**Individual level:** The hypothesis that that the enrolment rate in education increases when informally acquired educational qualifications are collected, described and recognised, leading to the admission of those concerned into the education system, emerges from a cycle of transnational co-operation in the collection and validation of informally gained educational competences of educationally disadvantaged people with basic education deficits. This is implemented by the provision of formal compulsory education measures in each partner country in order to validate whether faster possibilities of accomplishment of compulsory education for adults can be developed through this co-operation.

**Organisational level:** Starting from the presumption that adult education institutions have not yet adjusted sufficiently to the challenges generated from a diverse society and based on the implementation experience of *in.education* specifically derived from the learning outcomes and the competence-based training events on the systemic and individual levels, implementation competences that organisations dealing with educationally disadvantaged

individuals must have in order to increase enrolment and guarantee the quality of results for this groups of people is extracted. From these defined implementation competences, training are designed in which educational managers and trainers can participate.

As a consequence, curricula for three target groups (new multipliers, educationally disadvantaged people, and educational managers and trainers) are developed and tested. The products are user-oriented, prepared to be self-explanatory and include information on the process, content, methods used and allow a glance into the used materials.

## Annex 2: Interview guidelines

1. Please shortly describe your organisation
  - a. History
  - b. Goal; objectives; mission statement
  - c. Types of training programmes, target groups
  
2. *With respect to your basic skills training programmes:*
  - a. Who is your target group for these courses?
  - b. Since when have you been running them?
    - i. *If they have not been running these courses since the beginning:*
      1. What did you have to change at organisational level to reach this group and successfully train them?
  - c. Reflecting on your organisation's image or profile, do you think it addresses this target group?
  - d. What makes you attractive to this group? (e.g. network effect)
  - e. What sources of funding are being used?
  - f. In your experience, are course fees a barrier for the participation of this target group? If yes, how can this be overcome at an organisational level?
  - g. In your area, are you the only provider of literacy courses in your area?
    - i. What distinguishes you from the other providers?
  
3. *Outreach strategies:*
  - a. How do people in need of the basic skills training find out about your training offers?
  - b. Which strategies have you employed that have been successful
    - i. Why do you think these worked so well?
    - ii. Any surprises?
  - c. Which concepts have you tried that have been less successful?
    - i. Why do you think this was the case?
    - ii. Any surprises?
  - d. Are your outreach activities ongoing or are they course or project specific?
  - e. How do you think is your organisation perceived by potential learners?
  
4. *Partnerships:*
  - a. With which organisations do you work with from the planning to the delivery of the training programmes for this target group?
    - i. Why these organisations? What are the important considerations when choosing who to co-operate with?
  
5. *Content and methods:*
  - a. Do you have any "guiding principles" for the implementation of training at the organisational level?
  - b. To what degree is the content of the training programme and the methods used defined at an organisational level?
  - c. Do the learners have any influence on the content and methods of the courses?



6. *With regard to your location:*
  - a. Would you say that your organisation is accessible to this target group?
  - b. Does this target group have specific requirements with regard to the design of your premises?
  - c. Do you use other organisations' premises (e.g. community centres) to deliver training for this target group?
  
7. *Support measures:*
  - a. What support measures do you offer?
    - i. What would otherwise be desirable? What support measures are necessary for this target group before, during and after the training programme?
    - ii. What does this mean at an organisational level? New staff, co-operation, etc.?
  
8. *Staff:*
  - a. Which qualifications, previous experiences, and skills do your staff need to work with this target group?
  - b. How is the composition of staff with regard to gender, migration status etc.?
  - c. How does the staff working with this target group differ to staff working with other target groups?
  
9. *Quality management:*
  - a. How do you manage the quality of you training programmes? In particular basic skills courses for educationally disadvantaged learners?
  - b. Do you evaluate your programmes on a regular basis? Formally? Informally?