CITY OF DUBLIN VEC AND COUNTY DUBLIN VEC

INTERCULTURAL PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

January 2011
CDVEC and County Dublin VEC Intercultural Project 2010

BACKGROUND
As part of the National Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) and the Intercultural Education Strategy, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) developed an initiative to promote interculturalism in Further Education. This initiative was funded under the NAPAR.

As the starting point of this Further Education intercultural education initiative, a set of guidelines ‘Promoting Interculturalism in Adult Learning Settings’ was developed and distributed. The guidelines focused on diversity in terms of nationality, country of origin, culture and/or language.

In December 2009 the DES invited applications from VECs, individually or collectively, to promote continuous professional development (CPD) to VEC staff in VTOS and STTCs to support the implementation of the guidelines. Funding was made available for this element of the initiative.

County Dublin VEC and City of Dublin VEC made a joint application in January 2010, having met and discussed the merits of working in partnership together. The proposal reflected the following:

• The two VECs together cater for 33% of the national cohort of core VTOS participants and 14% of learners in Senior Traveller Training Centres
• A management / expert group would guide and manage the project on behalf of the two VECs
• The project would support the development and implementation of a pilot programme with structures that would enable the two VECs to later extend and sustain intercultural continuing professional development and support across their Adult and Further Education Services

In May 2010 the partnership was awarded a grant of €18,250 to implement the project.

AIMS
The aims of the partnership were to:

• Support the implementation of the guidelines ‘Promoting Interculturalism in Adult Learning Settings’
• Support interculturalism through the development of a culture of inclusion and equality in County Dublin VEC and City of Dublin VEC STTCs and VTOS centres
• Develop the capacity of staff to respond positively to diversity, thus enhancing the experience of all VTOS and STTC learners
• Build capacity and future sustainability by training staff within the two organisations to deliver training and provide support to centres
• Promote collaboration, partnership and sharing of good practice between the two VECs in the area of interculturalism.

OBJECTIVES
The objectives of the partnership were to:

• Facilitate reflection on awareness and attitudes towards diversity
• Develop understanding of equality and human rights
• Facilitate development of inclusive policies and procedures in centres
• Promote an inclusive whole centre approach
• Develop capacity to recognise and address discriminatory practices
• Integrate policies and procedures with existing tools and frameworks e.g. QA, QFI
• Evaluate the pilot project in order to maximise learning from the experience
• Disseminate learning to inform the wider system and other sectors.
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APPROACH
A capacity-building approach was taken, as opposed to organising delivery of all training by external facilitators. A group of 25 staff across the two VECs took part in a five day course of training, provided by an external agency, in intercultural training facilitation. A number of participants in this training then undertook co-facilitation of full-day and half-day training events for VTOS and STTTC staff. The whole process was co-ordinated jointly by the Deputy Director of the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit and a County Dublin VEC Development Officer, and guided by an advisory group representative of the two VECs.

Advisory Group
An advisory group was formed to guide and advise the project co-ordinators. The group consisted of Education Officers from both VECs, the Director of the Curriculum Development Unit and development/management staff with experience and expertise in intercultural education from both VECs. A list of advisory group members is attached in Appendix. The group met for the first time in May and again in June 2010. Its advice at this stage was crucial in shaping the project strategy and design. The final meeting of the group took place in January 2011, postponed from its scheduled meeting in December due to weather conditions.

Engagement of consultants
Partners (Training for Transformation) was the agency engaged to provide facilitator training. Partners is an independent agency which is part of a larger world-wide Training for Transformation network. The agency provides training and training resources in many areas including facilitation skills training and intercultural education. It has an excellent track record of responding creatively and appropriately to the needs of groups and organisations with whom it works, mainly in the community and voluntary sector. Each piece of work the agency does is designed with the participating group. In this case, the two project co-ordinators met with the Partners facilitators a number of times between April and August 2010 and liaised with them in planning and designing the training of facilitators.

Recruitment of trainee facilitators
In May 2010, a notice was circulated within adult and further education services in the two VECs, inviting expressions of interest from staff:

| INTERCULTURAL TRAINING |
| PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY |
| City of Dublin and County Dublin VECs are working in partnership, with support from the Department of Education and Skills, to plan and facilitate intercultural training for VTOS and Senior Traveller Training Centre staff across the two VECs. |
| With a capacity-building approach in mind, we are inviting staff from both VECs to express interest in taking part in a Training for Trainers programme. Those expressing interest should have experience of working with diverse groups of adult learners and have a commitment to promoting a whole-centre approach to interculturalism. |
| There will be three days of training in June 2010 (Friday 11th, Wednesday 16th and Friday 18th June) and two/three days in late August (August dates to be arranged). |
| It is envisaged that participants in the training programme will facilitate training in STTCs and VTOS centres later in 2010. |
There was a good response to the notice, with 16 expressions of interest from County Dublin VEC staff and 23 from CDVEC. Partners were willing to work with a maximum of 25 participants, so 12 participants from CDVEC and 13 from County Dublin VEC were selected, using the criteria of experience of working with diverse groups of adults and some experience of facilitating staff development.

Facilitator Training
Training of facilitators took place during Summer 2010, with three training days in June and two in late August. The course combined exploration and awareness of cultural identity with building of facilitation skills. The approach was very interactive and experiential, with a succession of participatory activities interspersed with short theoretical inputs. Reflection on activities, both as experienced by participants and as they might be used in training with other staff or with learners, was integral. The first three days, in June, focused on development of intercultural awareness, while the final two days in August moved the focus towards planning intercultural awareness training with other groups.

Recruitment of Centres
VTOS: All centres offering core VTOS-funded programmes (12 in County Dublin VEC and 15 in CDVEC) were circulated in September 2010. Following a summary of project aims and activities to date (see Appendix) the notice informed centres that:

During the next stage of the project (which is a pilot phase) we will be offering joint training to six VTOS centres and all five STTCs across the two VECs.

In order to identify the six VTOS centres who will participate in the training we are inviting expressions of interest from VTOS centres.

Centres taking part would commit to all of the following:

Part One:
**One full day’s training** in intercultural awareness for three key staff members including VTOS Co-ordinator on an allocated date which will be either 19th or 20th October 2010.

and

Part Two:
**Hosting two half day centre-based workshops** to be attended by the whole VTOS team. Workshops will take place in November/December on dates to be agreed between centres and facilitators. One workshop will focus on intercultural awareness and the other on policy and planning.

Recruiting centres to take part posed some challenges. In County Dublin VEC, Adult Education services, although interested, were unable to take part owing to the pressures of introducing a large number of Labour Market Activation funded programmes in September 2010. However, with follow-up and encouragement from the project co-ordinator, two colleges with core VTOS groups agreed to participate in the project. In CDVEC while the opportunity for training was offered to all VTOS centres, four centres expressed interest with three eventually opting to participate.

STTCs: The single Senior Traveller Training Centre in CDVEC and the four in County Dublin VEC all agreed to take part in the project and to participate in training as outlined (above) for VTOS centres.

Support for Facilitators
Further training and support for trainee facilitators were organised by the co-ordinators following the initial five training days. In early October, a workshop on Equality Planning was organised and was attended by 15 participants. Attendance at this workshop was essential for participants.
interested in facilitating in-centre workshops, as centres were to be offered workshops on equality planning.

At this stage, participants were asked to indicate their interest in facilitating one-day intercultural awareness training and/or in-centre workshops in intercultural awareness and/or equality planning. The co-ordinators selected six participants to facilitate two full-day training sessions for mixed groups of VTOS and STTC staff, each day to be co-facilitated by three people. Selection of facilitators was based on considerations of cross-VEC, centre type and gender balance. The project co-ordinators facilitated a planning session for these six facilitators, at which an outline programme for the training days was drawn up. The facilitators then arranged their own planning meetings to plan the training in more detail.

After the two days of training, another evening meeting was held in early November, to review experience and evaluation of the two days of training and to plan for in-centre workshops which were to take place in November/December. After this meeting, participants were asked to indicate interest in facilitating in-centre workshops.

**Full day Training**

Two staff development days were facilitated in late October, each attended by approximately 20 staff from CDVEC and County Dublin VEC VTOS and STT Centres. The training focused on intercultural awareness, cultural identity and cross-cultural communication.

**In-centre Workshops**

The logistics of organising follow-on workshops posed another challenge for the project. The initial plans had envisaged two workshops taking place in each centre, one focusing on intercultural awareness, the other on equality planning. When the project co-ordinators began to make contact with centres in early November to confirm that workshops would take place, it quickly became evident that the initial plan should be modified and that it would be more realistic to hold one rather than two workshops in each centre. Centres were then asked to indicate their preference for either intercultural awareness or equality planning as the workshop topic and their preferred date(s). On the basis of this information and facilitator availability the project co-ordinators allocated two facilitators to each centre. The facilitators organised their own planning meetings and arranged dates and times of workshops with the centres.

Most centres opted for equality planning as the workshop theme, with two colleges choosing an intercultural awareness workshop. Due to adverse weather conditions in December, a number of workshops had to be postponed to January 2011.

**EVALUATION**

**Training for facilitators, five days June and August 2010**

All participants rated this training as ‘very useful’ with no ‘useful’ or ‘not useful’ ratings. Responses to the question: “Which session/s, if any, did you find most useful? Why?” included: “All sessions were very useful. All provided experiential/ theoretical/ practical ways to facilitate intercultural training”. “All of them! Every exercise we did provided me with a new tool to be used when I am facilitating or teaching”.

Concluding comments included “The training was a wonderful learning experience”. “I have gained such valuable information and teaching techniques”. “I would recommend this training to any educator – it will have far reaching implications beyond the training itself”.

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One-day training events for staff from STT and VTOS centres

39% of participant evaluations rated the training as ‘very useful’, 39% as ‘useful’ and 22% as ‘not useful’.

Responses to the question: Which session/s, if any, did you find most useful and why? included:
“All were really useful, maybe the communications styles: in conversation with international VTOS students, some people can come across very demanding – it made me more aware of a possibility of differences in communication styles”; “Interview/conversations: shows us the different ways in which people interpret things – makes us more aware of these in the classroom”; “Session on communication styles was interesting in itself but also useful - it has practical applications”; “The Personal, Universal, Cultural exercise was food for thought, interesting how different people perceived things”; “High context/low context: discussing such concept in the classroom might enhance communication between students from different cultures”

Concluding comments included “It was as really enjoyable and rewarding experience. It was great to understand our own cultures so that we can then try to understand others”; “Delivered very professionally by all three people involved”. “It created a better awareness of cultural differences”; “I will be more aware of differences among cultures/people”; “I will have an appreciation of different communication styles and will try to take this into account when communicating with the learners”; “Be more aware or be sure I’m getting the correct message across – check for understanding”; “I’d like to see intercultural awareness and differences extended to the broader spectrum of teaching staff in the college”.

Criticism of workshop delivery expressed by some participants (e.g. “Some exercises were good but could have been more compact – get feedback quicker from participants”) were taken into account in planning and facilitation of subsequent training events.

In-centre workshops on intercultural awareness/ equality planning

These workshops were rated ‘very useful’ by 74% of the participants, ‘useful’ by 25% and ‘not very useful’ by one participant.

Comments on workshops on Intercultural Awareness included: “More aware of cultural differences within classroom dynamics”; “Highlighted the need to be more aware of your own cultural values and that might impact on others, vice versa”; “Be more sensitive to students who may be ‘saving face’”; “Make sure I respect personal space and watch out for messages sent through body language and eye contact”.

Feedback on the Equality Planning workshops included: “Has increased motivation, helped us to focus and to understand and plan”; “Try to improve equality and be more aware”; “Made us think of different things, e.g. progression opportunities, physical environment etc”; “I will be more aware of diversity within the centre”; “Productive, excellent session”; “Work more closely with the learners to see what they need”; “It started discussions that should have come about before but have been either ignored or overlooked”.

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IMPACT
A total of 140 staff across the two VECs took part in training, whether the five-day facilitator training with follow-up support sessions, one day intercultural awareness training, or half-day in-centre workshops on intercultural awareness or equality planning. Of these 140 participants, 25 trained in facilitation of intercultural training and ten of these subsequently facilitated intercultural awareness training for other groups. Through this capacity-building, the project leaves a legacy of skills and experience which can support further development of intercultural awareness and policy-building.

At a final review session in January 2011, the 25 staff members across the two VECs who had been trained as facilitators were asked to evaluate the impact of the training and the project:
All agreed that participating in the training impacted on their familiarity with and grounding in a range of concepts, information and theories concerning culture, ethnicity, racism, communications, systems etc. and that it provide ‘helpful insights into communication styles and issues faced by minority groups e.g. self-esteem’.

In general facilitators agreed that participating in the training enabled them to engage in self-reflection on their own identity, beliefs, values, perceptions etc. ‘...opportunity to realise common issues and aspirations we all face regardless of our ethnic group’. ‘Delivery of training facilitated reflection on own organisational structure, and beliefs/values of organisation’.

The training helped to develop knowledge of and competence in the skills, techniques, processes etc. necessary to facilitate fruitful interaction among others. ‘Was good for raising awareness of our facilitation/teaching styles but mostly, knowledge was gained implicitly’.

It also provided opportunities to reflect on and learn from one’s own experience and practice and that of others. ‘Yes, very much so – one of the main strengths of programme. Participants felt very comfortable reflecting openly and collaboratively on their own practice’.

All agreed that the project promoted collaboration, partnership and sharing of good practice between the two VECs in the area of interculturalism. This was achieved through a ‘balance of involvement from both VEC’s (numbers)’, ‘sharing experiences during training expanded our understanding of good practice’, ‘created a willingness to work with staff from other VECs’.
‘Each organisation has slightly different ethos/structure – training facilitated exchange of ideas and reflection on own practice’.

Facilitators were asked to identify some of the highlights of being involved in this project.
Areas highlighted included: ‘Enhanced own awareness’, ‘Very valuable to have the amount of time allocated to training of trainers (partners input)’, ‘Social aspect getting to know the group’.
‘Change of venues introduced participants to partner organisation culture’, ‘Appreciated having the time to think and work with a group of very positive professionals with and wide range of experience’, ‘Self selecting meant people were interested which helped set the tone for project. Great dynamics’.

Many strengths of the training were identified. These included: ‘Awareness of other people’s sensitivities – re: racism/equality etc.’, ‘Networking (especially inter-VEC)’, ‘Resources/reading lists provided’, ‘Journey of self-discovery’, ‘Quality of trainers’, ‘Balance of theory and practice – fact that theory was so well integrated’.
1. CDVEC/County Dublin VEC Intercultural Project

Advisory Group Members

Aidan Clifford, Director CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit (CDU)

David Treacy, Education Officer CDVEC

Deirdre Keyes, Education Officer County Dublin VEC

Geraldine Condron, Development Officer (DO) County Dublin VEC

Finola Butler, Support Officer Further Education Support Service (FESS)

Ken Smartt Regional Co-ordinator Youthreach and STTCs County Dublin VEC

Jessica Farnan, Co-ordinator of Separated Children's Education Services CDVEC

Lorraine Downey, ESOL Co-ordinator CDVEC

Marie Rooney, DO County Dublin VEC

Mary Gannon, Manager Education for Reconciliation Project

Mary Kenny, DO County Dublin VEC

Miriam O'Donoghue, Deputy Director, CDU and National Co-ordinator, FESS

Rachel Farrell, Director St Basil’s Senior Traveller Training Centre
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ADVISORY GROUP
At its final meeting in January 2011, the Advisory Group made recommendations for building on and disseminating learning from this project. It was emphasised that the multi-layered purposes and effect of the project and its legacy of capacity-building to the two organisations should be acknowledged. Continued collaboration and joint strategy between the two VECs in the area of interculturalism was strongly recommended. The conclusion of this phase of the project should be regarded as a beginning rather than an end to the interculturalism agenda. A meeting of managers of the two VECs with the project co-ordinators should be organised in order to consider how to proceed in building on outcomes of this project.

Following on these recommendations the following actions have been planned:

- Senior management of the two VECs will meet with the project co-ordinators and the Director of the Curriculum Development Unit in February 2011 to consider how further collaboration could build on this project to promote interculturalism and equality planning in adult and further education across the two VECs.
- The CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit has incorporated into its Spring 2011 Continuing Professional Development Calendar two sessions entitled Approaches to Developing Intercultural Awareness in Schools and Centres in CDVEC and County Dublin VEC, in which project members will share some of their learning and support activities that can be implemented in schools and centres. The calendar also includes workshop facilitated by another project participant on Teaching intercultural groups, offering the opportunity to explore cultural values, behaviours and norms, and raise awareness of intercultural communication styles/types of talk.
- A day of professional development for participants in the project’s facilitator training will be organised by the project co-ordinators in June 2011.