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Department for
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Feasibility Study

to consider the merits of establishing a
Virtual Women's Further Education College

July 2008
DEL / Virtual Women's College

**FEASIBILITY STUDY TO CONSIDER THE MERITS OF ESTABLISHING A VIRTUAL
WOMEN'S FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE**

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

BDO Stoy Hayward was commissioned by the Further Education Division of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to conduct a feasibility study to test the merits of establishing a Virtual Women's FE College in NI.

The Further Education Division in DEL is responsible for the policy, strategic development and financing of the statutory FE sector and the essential Skills Strategy, to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of adults. In addition, the Division is also responsible for curriculum and qualifications below degree level. The division is also bound by Section 75 legislation and meets its obligation fully in providing for the needs of women at all levels.

1.1 The Further Education Sector

Prior to August 2007, there were 16 FE colleges in Northern Ireland, now reduced to six new groupings (effective from 1st August 2007). Our findings relate to the 16-college structure.

The FE College structure prior to August 2007 is depicted:

Colleges Prior to August 2007	
Armagh	Limavady
Belfast (BIFHE)	Lisburn
Castlereagh	Newry and Kilkeel
Causeway	North East Institute (NEIFHE)
East Antrim	North Down & Ards
East Down	North West (NWIFHE)
East Tyrone	Omagh
Fermanagh	Upper Bann

From August 2007, the new 6-college grouping is:

Colleges Since August 2007	Incorporating Previous FE Colleges
Southern Regional College	Armagh, Newry & Kilkeel, Upper Bann
Belfast Metropolitan College	BIFHE and Castlereagh
Northern Regional College	Causeway, East Antrim, NEIFHE
South Eastern Regional College	East Down, Lisburn, North Down & Ards
South West College	East Tyrone, Fermanagh, Omagh
North West Regional College	NWIFHE, Limavady

- *It should be noted that previous FE College names have been used throughout the report to ensure accuracy of information. The table above identifies the new college groupings and should be referred to.*

Many of the colleges are multi-campus with outreach centres in neighbouring towns and specialist vocational training centres within or outside the main campus site, with the reach depicted:



The FE colleges offer extensive outreach provision through their 48 campuses and 876 outreach centres across Northern Ireland. They vary greatly in size and in the diversity of the courses offered, ranging from Essential Skills and pre-vocational training, to degree level study. The main qualifications are set within the National Qualifications Framework.

The FE sector adheres to the principles of Section 75, hence it provides training to all, regardless of gender.

In 2005/06, there were 33,144 full-time enrolments and 115,045 part-time enrolments on vocational courses, which include adult basic education and a wide range of leisure, cultural and hobby courses. During 2005/06, 56% of vocational enrolments and 67% of non-vocational enrolments were female, equating to 60% of the overall total enrolments during this academic year.

1.2 The Women's Sector in Northern Ireland

Community based training and education groups for women have traditionally been supported through short-term and limited funding, from a variety of sources. Many FE Colleges have established relationships with these training organisations, to deliver vocational and non-vocational courses in a community setting.

Funding support to community-based women's education has been in decline, with some of the shortfall having been picked up by funding under Measure 2.8 the 'Accompanying infrastructure and equipment support'. Opportunities for the future are declining in terms of mainstream funding, with Peace funding being phased out, and fewer opportunities for training available under Peace III.

Following concerns that some centres, and the services they provide, would close at the end of March 2005 because of the ending of a number of short-term funding programmes, a position paper was prepared by Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (now Community Foundation Northern Ireland) in July 2005 which set out the contribution made by women's

organisations to community development in disadvantaged communities. This built upon research undertaken by NIVT in 2001 which described the work of the women's sector in Northern Ireland as follows: "Through its infrastructure, comprising regional support organisations, networks, women's centers, and local groups engaged in a diverse range of activities, it has made a valuable contribution to promoting equality, social and economic inclusion, peace-building, and the development of the voluntary sector and volunteering" (NIVT, p.1).

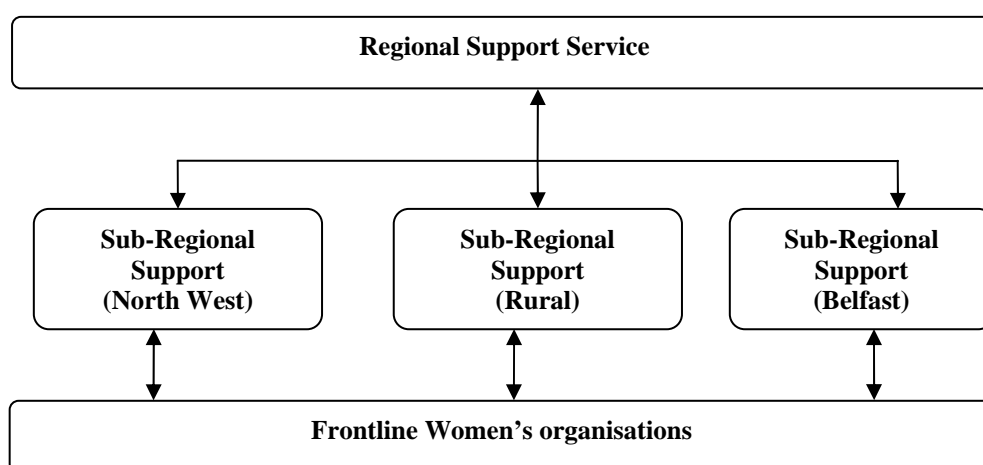
Following from this, a further short-term (6 month) programme to support key women's sector organisations, providing support and services to disadvantaged communities, was agreed by the then Minister for Social Development. Total funding of £1.1 million was allocated for the period April to September 2005. This was against an estimate that the total cost to Government of maintaining the support and services delivered by the sector was £6 million (including services to non-disadvantaged groups of circa £2.2m to £2.5m for disadvantaged areas only).

At the same time, an Interdepartmental Review Group on Women's Organisations providing support and services to Disadvantaged Communities was established in 2005 to consider:

- A definition of the women's sector and the levels that it operates at;
- A map of the existing infrastructure and services delivered by the women's sector and recommendations on changes to the infrastructure and services delivered; and
- Funding arrangements for the sector, as they currently exist and recommendations on future levels of support and sources of such funding.

Whilst the Review Group recognised the important work of women's organisations, many of which do not deliver support or services to disadvantaged communities but which contribute to policy development across Government, the remit was to focus on women's organisations providing support and services to disadvantaged communities.

Funding of £350,000 per annum was subsequently made available from DSD for Infrastructural costs based upon a revised delivery model, with a single infrastructural service delivering support regionally and sub-regionally provided by a consortium drawn from existing support organisations.



The report prepared by the Review Group also examined Women's Organisations under five headings, concluding:

Area	Comment
Infrastructure	The Review Group concluded that the model as set out above should deliver cost effective support, advice and guidance to the wider women's sector and will enable representation by the women's sector in formal meetings with Government.
Community Development	The Review Group concluded that core community development costs for major women's centres could be supported by DSD through either the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme or the Community Investment Fund as appropriate. Whether a particular centre is supported will depend on a number of factors including: local need; strength of application; effectiveness of service delivery; competing demands and availability of resources.
Training and Learning	The Review Group concluded that there is a significant gap between the level of support of current provision and the likelihood of support under the new DEL arrangements. The only route for women's organisations wanting to develop education and learning services will be through meeting the requirements of DEL in delivering training in partnership with local FE colleges. The full implementation of this policy may not be completed by the start of the next financial year (2006). If this work cannot be supported through DEL there is currently no other identified source of funding. It is unlikely that all education and learning services currently provided by women's organisations will be supported. Organisations willing to develop services that meet DEL requirements could consider seeking support from the Modernisation Fund when it is launched in 2005.
Childcare	So far as the longer term is concerned the Review Group appreciated the important role which childcare plays as part of the overall work of women's organisations. The Review Group's conclusion is that there is no scope under existing budgetary provision to address the longer term gap in childcare funding. Should the budgetary position become any more favourable the Review Group believes that priority should be given to the services in question that are delivered to disadvantaged communities.
Advice Services	The Review Group concluded that the future delivery of advice services by women's organisation can be taken forward by DSD through the Information and Advice Strategy. There are no immediate resource implications for women's organisations or government.

Given these factors, representatives from organisations engaged in women's training and education met with the then DEL Minister in 2006 to discuss sustaining community-based work in this way. A proposal was put to the Minister for a Virtual Women's College. This is the context for the current feasibility study.

1.3 The Assignment

BDO Stoy Hayward has thus been commissioned to conduct a feasibility study into a Virtual Women's College. As per the Terms of Reference and our proposal, we have sought to:

1. Determine the specific education and training needs of women in Northern Ireland, with particular regard to developing their role in the local economy.
2. Identify the extent to which the needs of female learners are being addressed by mainstream statutory providers, in particular FE colleges, and by existing non-statutory education and training providers.

3. Examine the feasibility of establishing a “virtual” Women’s College to meet needs which cannot be adequately fulfilled by existing statutory and non-statutory providers, and consider where such a proposal sits, within the Department’s current policy for further education of total integration; and, if appropriate...
4. Determine what a “virtual” Women’s College would entail
5. The assignment must necessitate:
 - Quantitative and qualitative analysis of available data – see Section 3;
 - Consultation with a range of parties, including representatives of community-based education and training groups for women, FE colleges and student representative groups – See section 4; and
 - A sound knowledge of the FE Sector in Northern Ireland within the context of the recent FE Review and, in particular, the extensive review of FE curriculum/provision and associated policy decisions – see Section 2.

As per our proposal, we have conducted this assignment within the context of what a Virtual College would entail, i.e. through a Virtual Learning medium. Virtual Learning Environments are commonplace in FE and HE throughout the UK, with web-based facilities enabling:

- Communication between tutors and students (enabling personalised support and tuition);
- Delivery of learning resources and materials;
- Shared work group areas (facilitating online discussion activities); and
- Submission of coursework online.

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

The strategic context section seeks to set out the context for FE provision in NI, the impact of the recent FE review, and in particular the extensive review of FE curriculum/provision and associated policy decisions.

2.2 Department for Employment and Learning

The Department for Employment and Learning (“DEL”) is responsible for third level education, training and a range of employment measures, all aimed at providing skills, knowledge and opportunities to work.

DEL’s strategic aim is:

“To promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy”.

In support of this aim DEL has two high level objectives:

- To promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and
- To help people into employment and promote good employment practices.

The Department’s two main customer groups are:

- Individuals who are seeking to improve their levels of skills and qualifications or who require support and guidance to progress towards employment, including self-employment; and
- Businesses in both the public and private sectors.

DEL’s four key areas of activity are:

- Enhancing the provision of learning and skills, including entrepreneurship, enterprise, management and leadership;
- Increasing the level of research and development, creativity and innovation in the Northern Ireland economy;
- Helping individuals to acquire jobs, including self employment, and improving the linkages between employment programmes and skills development; and
- The development and maintenance of the framework of employment rights and responsibilities

2.3 Success Through Skill, The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – A Programme for Implementation

Government's aim is to enable people to progress up a skills ladder, in order to raise the skills level of the whole workforce; to help deliver high productivity and increased competitiveness; and to secure Northern Ireland's future in a global marketplace.

The NI Skills Strategy sets out how DEL will take these proposals forward in order to deliver on a long term vision for skills in Northern Ireland, in partnership with employers and their representative bodies; individuals and trade unions; training and education providers; the

community and voluntary sector; and other Government departments and agencies. The Skills Strategy highlights the need to focus on:

- raising the skills of the current workforce;
- enhancing the ‘knowledge base’ of those entering the workforce; and
- addressing the employability skills of those not in employment.

2.4 Essential Skills

The Essential Skills for Living Strategy is critical to the continued growth of the Northern Ireland economy. The International Adult Literacy Survey (1996) showed that around 24% of the working age population of Northern Ireland (over 250,000 people based on current estimates of working age population) were operating at the lowest levels of literacy. Given the contribution that poor literacy and numeracy make to social exclusion in general and exclusion from the labour market in particular, the DEL launched the Essential Skills strategy and action plan in April 2002. The importance of essential skills within the overall skills framework has recently been underlined in DEL’s Skills Strategy published in February 2006 (“Success Through Skills: The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland”).

The strategy sets out the vision:

“To provide opportunities for adults to update their essential skills to assist them in improving their overall quality of life, personal development and their employment opportunities and by so doing to promote greater economic development, social inclusion and cohesion”

There are two broad phases to the action plan:

- Build the infrastructure to provide Essential Skills learning; and
- Build capacity and engage learners.

DEL set an ambitious target for learner engagement – that 18,500 learners would have achieved a recognised qualification in Essential Skills by 2007. These qualifications are delivered by accredited tutors working in Further Education (FE) Colleges, private training providers and community organisations.

2.5 Overview of the Further Education Sector

The FE sector is of growing importance to ‘non-compulsory’ education, in educational, social and economic terms:

- It provides academic and vocational courses to young people and adults on a full-time and part-time basis;
- It offers link courses to school pupils at Key Stage 4 and post-16, as well as education/training appropriate to the individual needs of a number of Key Stage 4 pupils;
- It undertakes just over half of all Training for Success training for 16-19 year olds;
- Just under ten per cent of its total effort is in full-time and part-time higher education;
- It provides bespoke training to companies; and

- Provides education, training and leisure courses to numerous individuals in campuses and out centres across Northern Ireland.

To summarise, the FE sector:

- Has a significant role in vocational education and training for 16-19 year olds and, therefore, in providing the skills necessary for entry into and progression within the labour market;
- Provides an alternative route to higher education, other than school, for 16-19 year olds and for adults;
- Provides training for New Deal and Training for Success;
- Provides support for those developing their Essential Skills (literacy and numeracy);
- Is increasingly involved with business/industry, especially small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), and with the public sector in offering support and bespoke training;
- Provides local communities with a wide range of interest, hobby and non-vocational courses;
- Is an integrated sector offering provision to students from all community backgrounds;
- Plays a key role in tackling poverty, by improving the employability of individuals and removing barriers to access for people at risk of social exclusion; and
- Supports a range of the Executive's strategies including Unlocking Creativity, Investing for Health, New Targeting Social Need (New TSN), Equality and the priorities of the Economic Development Forum.

2.6 FE Means Business - The Wider FE Strategy

The aim of the DEL is to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy. Its main unifying purpose is to improve access to skills and employment through education and training and to promote learning for social and personal development. The Department has a central role in enhancing the provision of learning and skills, including entrepreneurship, enterprise, management and leadership, to meet the needs of the economy.

The FE Sector plays a pivotal role in assisting the Department to achieve its aims, from tackling the skills gaps that exist in the workforce to helping address under-achievement amongst many school leavers. The "FE Means Business" Strategy emphasises that Further Education should become a key player in the promotion of economic development and enterprise, delivering skills up to Level 4, whilst making those skills and qualifications accessible to a wider range of people, including those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. This strategic priority is emphasised in DEL's Skills Strategy.

In both the NI Economic Vision and the Skills Strategy, primacy is given to the economic development role of the FE Sector. The Department has a vision of the FE sector, and the contribution it can make to Northern Ireland's competitiveness in the global economy. This vision, which is based on the assumption that the strategy *Further Education Means Business* is implemented in full, is described below in terms of outcomes that will have been achieved by the end of the decade:

- In 2010 the Northern Ireland economy is seen as highly competitive in global terms. It is based on a high value added labour market, increased export levels and attracts substantial amounts of inward investment. It is entrepreneurial and encourages the growth of small businesses based upon technology, IT and manufacturing and provides strong, coherent services and support for businesses of all sizes.
- The workforce is literate and numerate and has good ICT skills. Individuals have high generic skills including problem solving, teamwork, innovation, and enterprise and are used to, and expect to learn, new skills throughout their working lives. All children at Key Stage 4 and at post 16 are offered a wide range of vocational subjects within the curriculum and these are delivered in the main by the FE sector. Participation in post compulsory education is at a high level and learners are given good information and advice on opportunities and progression routes.
- Employers find that their skill needs are more easily met, the sector is highly responsive to these needs and recruits are ready and willing to learn. The FE sector offers very good value for money measured in terms of student advancement against international comparators. The FE sector is highly regarded and is able to attract a highly motivated and skilled workforce of teachers and administrators.
- The network of colleges has been rationalised to create a small number of management units with local campuses providing good quality learning opportunities and access for all. Centres of Excellence ensure that provision leads best practice in key subject areas. Online and distance learning is used wherever appropriate.
- The culture of the sector balances competition with collaboration and has established partnership working arrangements between colleges and with schools, Higher Education Institutions, employers, private sector training organisations and the community and voluntary sector which have led to enhanced quality control and synergy.
- A new funding model has been introduced, that meets design criteria of simplicity, transparency, accountability and equity.

The main objectives of the FE Strategy are to deliver a sector, which provides:

- A sharper and greater focus on skills provision for the NI economy;
- A curriculum which is more clearly related to economic needs;
- Support for businesses, in enhancing productivity and competitiveness;
- Learners with the skills and knowledge to enhance their employability;
- Clear progression routes for learners;
- Access to vocational education for school children;
- Key skills for all full-time learners; and
- Enterprise as a central component of further education.

The vision for the FE sector, as contained in FE Means Business, is that Colleges will be key drivers of local, sub-regional and regional economic and workforce development.

Whilst FE Means Business provides that FE colleges will have an increasing economic focus, the strategy also recognises their continuing role in enhancing social cohesion and in providing opportunities for lifelong learning. The strategy recognises the particularly valuable role the sector plays in giving people a second opportunity for education, and in encouraging those who are unemployed, or who are socially excluded or disengaged, to participate in education.

The strategy recognises that there are examples of good quality education and training provision being delivered by the voluntary and community sector. Often, this is the result of effective collaboration between voluntary and community groups and Further Education (FE) colleges. DEL notes that it wishes to promote such collaboration between the FE sector and other providers, in the interests of learners and the wider community, in order to make best use of resources, encourage participation, improve achievement and develop clearer progression routes.

A further key focus of FE Means business was on assessing the future size and structure of the FE colleges. There was uniform consensus within the FE sector and amongst key stakeholders that change was required/inevitable to the size and structure of the FE sector (as evidenced by the reduction in Colleges from 16 to 6). Specifically:

- A number of colleges had already had investment as Centres of Excellence. At higher qualification levels in particular, there was a requirement for greater consideration of critical mass, collaboration rather than competition, thus making best use of investment. Colleges should remain as general providers, but should be encouraged to develop specialisms in line with the Centres of Excellence policy.
- Critical mass, through a smaller number of larger colleges, should also mean economies of scale. There are issues around value for money and accountability when provision is diffused across 16 institutions; as a sector, it would be more efficient and effective if there were fewer Colleges with resources more efficiently diverted to the economic development agenda.
- There was a need to ensure continuing ease of geographical access of further education provision, particularly for those most removed from learning and at lower qualifications levels and to encourage those with no or few qualifications or physical or learning disabilities to take up learning or training. There should also be clear progression routes to higher-level skills.
- The focus, particularly, on the need for a greater degree of planning and collaboration, suggested that resources could be used to deliver the strategic agenda more effectively, and ensuring greater coherence across the sector, if the units of management were larger.
- Enhancement of the status of the sector would require the creation of Colleges which are larger in size than many of those which existed in 2006 (at the date of the appraisal), especially if, as the strategy suggested, they are to play a more significant role in local, sub-regional or regional economic development plans. Colleges need to work in a more ordered fashion, to a Regional Development Plan, with a range of other education and economic players.

- The colleges had been charged with an economic development agenda. There are issues surrounding the sector's ability to deliver:
 - The impact and influence on the economy of many smaller Colleges could be negligible;
 - Inconsistencies could arise in meeting demands and expectations because size and resources vary so considerably;
 - Geographical spread could result in over capacity in some regions and under capacity in others;
 - Accountability, administration and value for money issues arise from provision that is diffused across 16 institutions;
 - The need to balance ease of access for learners with the creation of Centres of Excellence and regional specialism; and
 - The ability of the FE structure to contribute to local, sub-regional and regional economic development plans.

Reducing the number of colleges, would address these issues i.e.:

- Securing better value for money;
- Making best use of investment;
- Ensuring greater coherence across the sector; and
- Enhancing the status of the sector,

whilst sustaining ease of access and equity to learners. The proposal was that successful achievement against these key principles would improve the capacity of the FE colleges to deliver to the economic development strategy.

Following an economic appraisal in 2006, the number of FE colleges were reduced from 16 to 6 Regional colleges. It is hoped that this will be instrumental in driving efficiency improvements and thus contributing to the overall NI efficiency drive as per the Review of Public Administration.

2.7 Learner Access and Engagement

Proposals have been developed in line with the stated aim in 'FE Means Business' to enhance collaboration between the statutory Further Education Sector and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The pilot programme, which will run for three academic years (2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11), will provide opportunities for non-statutory organisations, (mainly, but not exclusively voluntary and community bodies) to provide learner support through a contractual arrangement with a Further Education College. The programme will operate throughout Northern Ireland, with all six Further Education Colleges participating. Under these arrangements, FE Colleges will be able to contract for mentoring and support services for selected learner groups. Actual tuition will continue to be delivered by FE Colleges. Colleges will award learner support contracts on the basis of competitive tender. Those tendering will be asked to satisfy specified criteria around qualifications and accountability, as well as demonstrating a record of successful engagement with particular communities.

This learner support service will be targeted at adults, aged 19 – 65, not in work, who do not hold a qualification at Level 2 or above, who may have barriers to learning.

The learner support will focus on:

- engaging ‘hard to reach learners’;
- signposting learners to employment focused FE courses;
- advice on progression routes;
- on-course support and assistance to study;
- personal support and encouragement;
- signposting and guidance to external and FE support services; and
- exit and progression guidance and signposting.

Overall, it is hoped that this initiative will help improve retention, achievement and progression rates in further education.

Expected outcomes of the programme, which will be evaluated, include:

- increased adult enrolments in employment focused provision;
- increased adult enrolments in Essential Skills provision;
- increased adult participation in deprived areas;
- increased numbers of adults achieving recognised qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1;
- increased numbers of adults achieving Essential Skills; and
- increase numbers of adults progressing from Entry Level/ Level 1 to Level 2 provision or employment.

The focus therefore includes those groups supported by the women training organisations.

2.8 Appraisal of Essential Skills for Living – Evaluation 2006

Performance in the first 3 years of the Essential Skills strategy indicates that there have been over 21,000 learners reached during between 2002 and 2005.

The research suggests that the hardest-to-reach groups, such as unemployed males and the most socially excluded groups of society, are being engaged by Essential Skills. However, they are a part of the mix of participants, rather than constituting the majority of participants. Over time, as the overall target population decreases, it is likely that the remaining target population will become harder to reach; as the easier-to-reach progress, those remaining to be engaged are likely to have more complex barriers to participation, especially in terms of confidence levels. Therefore, as Essential Skills matures, it is likely that the emphasis of provision will need to shift more towards community and outreach provision, using innovative approaches to engage the most disengaged client groups.

Participants and non-participants reported a number of barriers to engaging in Essential Skills. These tended to be practical, such as:

- Not being able to get time off work;
- Childcare responsibilities outside of working hours; and
- Lack of transport.

In addition, some reported embarrassment at needing help. For some of them, having to attend a class in their own community would be a barrier – they wanted to go elsewhere (though not too far away) for their training. For others, the idea of attending a college was intimidating

and they tended to prefer community provision in a known environment. Importantly, these people reported that community provision was attractive because “*no one knows what you’re going into a community centre for – it could be for a keep fit class or a cup of coffee*”.

The report concluded that in order to maximise penetration into the hardest-to-reach groups, there will need to be greater emphasis on community and outreach provision; over time, those most in need will become an increasing proportion of the target group. These are also the least likely to cross the threshold of a college. It was therefore recommended that new and innovative approaches will be required to engage people in their communities.

2.9 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland - Statement of key Inequalities in Northern Ireland (October 2007)

Consideration is also given to the areas identified by the Equality Commission in relation to equality of educational opportunity.

The Commission has identified six broad areas which it believes must be addressed if NI is to progress towards realising equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland society: educational under-achievement, employment, access to and availability of health and social care, housing and communities, participation in public life and the impact of prejudice. In identifying these six broad areas, we have been guided by evidence of persistent inequalities that have not been notably improved either by legislation or by other public policy intervention.

Education plays a key role in determining a person’s life chances and opportunities in terms of social and economic mobility. Those with fewer qualifications and skills are disadvantaged in civic/community life and when competing for available employment opportunities. In this context, poor educational attainment can be seen as a clear barrier to labour market entry and progression. There is clear evidence of differential attainment by gender; of some differential in subject choices by gender; and of particular issues for Travellers, disabled students and for children from poorer households all of which serve to enhance the cycle of deprivation. This requires intervention from the Commission and others given the impact this has on daily lives.

Statistics on educational achievement have indicated concerns about underachievement among **working class pupils and in particular working class Protestant boys**. In 2001, research commissioned by OFMDFM concluded that the educational non-progressor was most likely to be a Protestant working class male; 29% of Protestant pupils (boys and girls) who were entitled to free school meals (FSM) achieved 5+ GCSEs A*-C or higher (or equivalent) compared with 42% of Roman Catholic working class pupils. This would indicate that there are issues in relation to educational attainment amongst this segment of the NI population, rather than specific gender issues.

2.10 Women’s Organisations Policy Position- CWES

The position paper on the role of the Community-Based Women’s Education Sector (CWES), promoted the role of this organisation in the delivery of a number of DEL’s strategies, namely the Skills, Further Education and Essential Skills strategies.

CWES has a *three-regions* representative structure to coordinate the work carried out in:

- Greater Belfast;
- Derry; and
- The Rural Women’s Networks.

CWES members have agreed a value base that includes commitment to:

- A feminist ethos with female leadership;
- Equality, justice and inclusion;
- Activism and social change; and
- Identification with a global women's movement.

CWES gathered together data from a sample (approximately 50%) of its membership that indicates the capacity, scope and achievements of the sector. CWES includes only those organisations that are members or affiliates of one of the three regional groups and does not refer to the wider, uncharted women's community and voluntary sector.

What follows is an analysis of the data gathered from CWES member organisations that gives quantitative indications of the scope, experience and potential of the sector in the field of lifelong learning.

2.10.1 Capacity of CWES

Among the learning providers surveyed there was a total of 375 years of experience of learning provision in areas of rural and urban disadvantage. The newest group had been in operation for just 2 years and the longest for 23 years. The average number of years' experience per group is 10 years.

Over the past academic year a total of 10,901 people have attended courses in the centers sampled. Of these 8,258 (76%) completed pre-vocational, vocational and accredited courses. A further 2,643 (24%) completed non-accredited, introductory and leisure courses. It should be noted that this information is provided by CWES but not validated by BDO Stoy Hayward.

2.10.2 Accreditation

Most of the smaller groups provide and accredit courses through partnership arrangements with larger Women's Networks, FE and local training organisations, Open Learning Centers, WEA and Ulster People's College. Over a third of the larger organisations (15) are autonomous accredited training delivery agents for awarding bodies: OCR, OCN, CCEA, BCS, NIPPA, OTCT, and CITB. In addition to this, groups work cooperatively with EGSA, Surestart, Youth Action, NICVA, RVH, Enterprise Ulster, LEDU, the University Sector, Schools and Cross-Border groups.

It was commented on by the groups that many partnerships are successful and productive. In some cases, groups continue to report that their relationship with FE is less than satisfactory; where women's premises are used to deliver courses, overhead costs are not shared and women's centres also meet childcare and other learner support costs.

2.11 DSD Report - The Review Group on Women's Organisations Providing Support and Services to Disadvantaged Communities

DSD considered the role of women's training organisations in its 2006 Review.

This DSD report commented on the training aspects of Women Organisations. In particular, the Review noted that the women's centres currently deliver a significant amount of training at an estimated cost of £700,000 per annum. The Review Group believes that there will be potential opportunities for women's centres to deliver training, in partnership with FE

colleges, and particularly in disadvantaged communities. There can however be no guarantee of support for any particular centre or for current services, support will depend on centres being able to reach agreement with FE colleges and meet the required delivery standards. It was noted that it was unlikely that all education and learning currently provided by women's organisations will be supported.

2.12 Conclusion

The section considers the policy position for education and training in NI. As the statutory provider, DEL has two high level objectives:

- To promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and
- To help people into employment and promote good employment practices.

DEL's strategy is set out in FE Means Business. The main objectives of the FE Strategy are to deliver a sector, which provides:

- A sharper and greater focus on skills provision for the NI economy;
- A curriculum which is more clearly related to economic needs;
- Support for businesses, in enhancing productivity and competitiveness;
- Learners with the skills and knowledge to enhance their employability;
- Clear progression routes for learners;
- Access to vocational education for school children;
- Key skills for all full-time learners; and
- Enterprise as a central component of further education.

The FE colleges are therefore the key mechanism for delivering DEL's objectives.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 Introduction

This section of our report provides a summary of statutory and non-statutory provision covering the period 2003/2004 – 2005/2006. In order to ensure that our research into virtual/women-only learning facilities was comprehensive, we undertook a brief analysis of Blackburne House, a women’s education provider, and Intute virtual training suite, a free online service providing access to web resources for education and research. We also considered the on-line facilities within the NI FE colleges.

3.2 Analysis of Statutory Provision in FE Colleges in Northern Ireland

In particular, consideration was given to data on FE participation based upon:

Data Analysed	Section
Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Mode of Attendance and Gender	3.2.1
Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by College and Gender	3.2.2
Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Gender and Age	3.2.3
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All data have been analysed both annually and over the three-year period 2003/04 – 2005/06, to show the trends in numbers and the level of access of women to the FE colleges.

3.2.1 Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Mode of Attendance and Gender

Vocational enrolments are as follows:

Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Mode of Attendance and Gender							
Year	Male			Female			Total
	FT	PT	Total	FT	PT	Total	
2003/04	16,885	44,170	61,055	13,626	65,863	79,489	140,544
2004/05	17,085	47,252	64,337	13,944	70,043	83,987	148,324
2005/06	17,939	46,877	64,816	15,205	68,168	83,373	148,189
Total	51,909	138,299	190,208	42,775	204,074	246,849	437,057

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Over the three years 2003 – 2006, women accounted for almost 60% (57%, 57% and 56%) of the vocational enrolments at the FE colleges. There were over 246,000 enrolments from women who attended vocational courses in total. Of these enrolments, more than 80% (83%, 83% and 82%) attended on a part-time basis, i.e. 204,074 with 42,775 vocational enrolments courses on a full time basis. This would suggest that women were well represented within the FE college structure, indeed there were more female enrolments at FE colleges on vocational courses than men.

Non vocational enrolments are as follows:

Non-Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Gender			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2003/04	22,498	49,445	71,943
2004/05	24,501	50,176	74,677
2005/06	24,265	49,661	73,926
Total	71,264	149,282	220,546

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Women accounted for 149,282 of non vocational enrolments. The above table demonstrates that, year on year, women have consistently represented slightly more than two thirds of the non-vocational enrolments within the FE colleges, dropping marginally from 69% in 2003/04 to 67% in each of the next two years. This shows that in terms of overall enrolments women are a large user of FE colleges for non-vocational courses.

Overall, for both vocational and non vocational courses, women enrolments totalled almost 400,000 over the three years:

Vocational and Non-Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Gender					
Year	Vocational		Non-Vocational		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2003/04	61,055	79,489	22,498	49,445	212,487
2004/05	64,337	83,987	24,501	50,176	223,001
2005/06	64,816	83,373	24,265	49,661	222,115
	190,208	246,849	71,264	149,282	657,603

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

For each of the three years 2003 – 2006, women accounted for 60% of the vocational and non-vocational enrolments at NI FE colleges. Of the total female enrolments, 62% were for vocational courses and 38% were for non vocational courses. Again, this shows the high level of enrolments for women within the FE colleges.

3.2.2 Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by College and Gender

In order to access regional representation, enrolments can be accessed by each of the (then) 16 colleges, firstly for vocational enrolments:

Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by College and Gender						
College	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Armagh College	2,250	3,121	2,522	4,095	2,754	3,404
Belfast Institute	11,881	16,432	12,685	17,335	14,615	20,528
Castlereagh College	2,852	2,888	2,831	3,027	2,974	3,201
Causeway Institute	1,558	2,142	2,008	2,808	2,507	3,128
East Antrim Institute	3,637	3,747	3,814	4,390	3,640	4,200
East Down Institute	2,930	3,722	3,000	3,634	2,616	3,447
East Tyrone College	1,629	2,740	1,837	3,082	1,463	2,471
Fermanagh College	3,864	6,425	3,363	5,325	2,539	3,541
Limavady College	2,092	1,839	2,178	2,156	2,133	2,319
Lisburn Institute	2,454	2,530	2,509	2,718	2,304	2,266
Newry & Kilkeel Inst.	4,982	6,449	5,075	6,648	4,619	6,382
North Down & Ards Inst	4,741	6,029	4,733	6,887	4,571	6,477
North East Institute	3,476	3,942	3,601	4,096	4,051	4,347

Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by College and Gender						
College	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
North West Institute	7,498	9,841	7,536	9,724	6,729	9,070
Omagh College	1,997	2,727	2,814	3,238	3,637	4,056
Upper Bann Institute	3,214	4,915	3,831	4,824	3,664	4,536
Total	61,055	79,489	64,337	83,987	64,816	83,373

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Within 14 of the 16 colleges, female vocational enrolments ranged between 50% (Limavady College) and 59% (Armagh College) throughout the three-year period. However, female vocational enrolments reached more than 60% within East Tyrone College (63%) and Fermanagh College (61%). Whilst male enrolments on vocational courses increased year on year, female enrolments increased between 2003/04 and 2004/05 and then decreased between 2004/05 and 2005/06.

The above would indicate that women are represented throughout all of the regions. Indeed throughout every region (based on the FE college statistics) women participating in vocational courses ranged from 2,200 (in Lisburn) to over 20,000 female enrolments at Belfast Institute in FE courses in 2005/6. 13 of the 16 colleges had more than 3,000 female enrolments in vocational courses in 2005/6.

Indeed, with the exception of Lisburn, where the number of men enrolments exceeded women enrolments marginally (by 38), there were more female rather than male enrolments for each of the FE colleges' vocational courses in 2005/6, this is reflective of the trends throughout the three years. There was also a good spread between colleges in more rural regions.

The analysis below is by non-vocational enrolments:

Non-Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by College and Gender						
College	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Armagh College	727	931	1,119	1,525	884	1,361
Belfast Institute	3,301	9,984	2,946	9,004	3,932	10,119
Castlereagh College	1,073	3,097	1,186	3,277	1,276	3,472
Causeway Institute	543	1,196	934	2,367	895	2,480
East Antrim Institute	1,285	2,731	1,565	3,386	1,484	2,731
East Down Institute	874	2,655	694	2,312	676	2,057
East Tyrone College	3,881	6,223	4,114	6,447	3,966	6,698
Fermanagh College	917	2,419	1,369	2,998	852	2,177
Limavady College	538	1,556	763	1,289	592	1,298
Lisburn Institute	398	294	697	755	428	351
Newry & Kilkeel Inst	2,197	3,973	2,013	4,078	2,344	5,044
North Down & Ards Inst	1,388	2,758	1,522	1,673	1,488	1,450
North East Institute	1,621	1,766	1,970	1,856	1,414	1,575
North West Institute	1,263	3,261	1,286	3,005	1,641	3,357
Omagh College	735	1,315	645	1,264	1,022	1,883
Upper Bann Institute	1,757	5,286	1,678	4,940	1,371	3,608
Total	22,498	49,445	24,503	50,176	24,265	49,661

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

This trend of a majority of female rather than male enrolments in FE colleges is more marked for non vocational courses. Almost half (7) of the colleges had between 70 – 76% female

enrolments over the three-year period. Slightly lower with regard to female enrolments were Armagh College (58%) North Down and Ards Institute (57%) and Lisburn Institute (48% of female enrolments in relation to non-vocational courses). Throughout every region (based on the FE college statistics) the number of female enrolments on non vocational courses ranged from over 350 in Lisburn peaking at over 10,000 female enrolments at Belfast Institute on FE courses in 2005/6. 10 of the 16 colleges had more than 2,000 female enrolments in non vocational subjects in 2005/6. As before, there was also a good spread between colleges in more rural regions.

3.2.3 *Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Gender and Age*

Enrolments were considered by gender, firstly for the vocational courses:

Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Gender and Age							
Year	19 and Under		20 - 24		25 and Over		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2003/04	30,338	26,969	7,731	10,415	22,986	42,105	154,946
2004/05	32,484	28,690	7,974	10,776	23,879	44,521	148,324
2005/06	33,626	30,453	8,268	11,029	22,922	41,891	148,189
Total	110,850	86,112	23,973	32,220	69,787	128,517	451,459

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

There was a constant trend in enrolments, by age, across the three years.

The greatest percentage of female vocational enrolments for each of the three years was in the 25 and over age range (52% with 128,517 enrolments over the three years, i.e. an annual average of 42,000). Whilst statistics on the age profile of women using the women's training organisations were not available, this age profile (with a weighting towards the over 25 years of age) may be comparable to the age profile of those most widely using the non statutory sector. The above would suggest that those outside of mainstream education are making widespread use of the courses available within the FE colleges. The second most populated age range was under 19 (35%). The lowest percentage of female vocational enrolments was consistent each year (13%) in the 20-24 age bracket.

With regards to non-vocational enrolments, the age profile is:

Non - Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Gender and Age							
Year	19 and Under		20 - 24		25 and Over		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2003/04	3,560	3,449	1,670	2,138	17,268	43,858	71,943
2004/05	3,901	3,704	1,927	2,461	18,673	44,011	74,677
2005/06	4,019	4,140	2,048	2,871	18,198	42,650	73,926
Total	11,480	11,293	5,645	7,470	54,139	130,519	220,546

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Within non-vocational courses 87% of females fell within the 25 and over age range. This again shows the high levels of participation in FE courses by those outside of mainstream education. Smaller numbers populated the under 19 (8%) and 20 – 24 age brackets (5%).

The above indicates that age is not a deterrent to participation in FE college courses, either vocational or non vocational.

3.2.4 Enrolments at NI FE Colleges by Gender and Subject Area

Enrolments by subject matter and gender are:

Vocational Enrolments at NI FE Colleges by Gender and Subject Area						
Academic Year	2003/4		2004/05		2005/06	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Administration & Office Skills	4,054	761	3,823	860	3,561	858
Art & Design	3,072	1,702	4,281	1,902	3,926	1,795
Business & Management	8,148	5,512	8,341	5,349	7,931	5,139
Construction, Built Environment & Civil Engineering	811	10,925	758	12,515	894	11,876
Distribution – Retail, Wholesaling & Warehousing	934	455	787	381	306	141
Electrical / Electronic Engineering	69	2,201	64	2,076	45	2,050
Hairdressing & Beauty	5,591	163	6,415	241	7,164	261
Health & Social Care	12,248	1,728	12,395	1,778	11,579	1,832
Hospitality	4,440	2,906	4,745	2,996	4,191	2,573
ICT	13,884	9,787	12,991	9,052	10,773	8,211
Leisure Tourism & Recreational	1,447	1,709	1,525	1,729	1,653	2,273
Mechanical Engineering	226	3,119	196	3,120	171	2,533
Motor Vehicle	35	1,147	34	1,383	21	1,485
Media & Communication	5,782	4,302	6,850	5,232	8,286	6,468
Applied Science	9,921	5,930	9,966	6,000	10,242	5,890
Education	6,846	6,711	9,022	8,016	10,849	9,336
Agriculture	512	433	321	134	583	260
Manufacturing / Processing	138	912	60	962	111	1,209
Mining, Oil Extraction and Quarrying	0	0	0	0	6	77
Transport	1,331	652	1,413	611	1,081	549
Total	79,489	61,055	83,987	64,337	83,373	64,816

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Of the vocational subjects above, the number of female enrolments exceeded the number of male enrolments, in 2005/6, on 13 of the 20 subject areas. This was particularly marked in terms of administration and office skills, art & design, business and management, hairdressing and beauty, health and social care, hospitality, ICT, media and communications, applied science, education and transport.

Subject areas where there was a larger number of enrolments from men included construction, built environment and civil engineering, electrical/electronic engineering, mechanical engineering, and manufacturing/processing.

There were no subject matters where neither men nor women were represented.

The course attracting the largest number of women was Health and Social Care. The highest increase in enrolments between 2003/4 and 2005/6 was in Education.

The above demonstrates a high level of involvement by women in vocational courses.

3.2.5 Essential Skills Enrolments at NI FE Colleges

Consideration is given to the number of women enrolled in Essential Skills courses:

Vocational Essential Skills Enrolments at NI FE Colleges			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2003/04	3,195	2,886	6,081
2004/05	3,893	4,095	7,988
2005/06	5,069	6,640	11,709
Total	12,157	13,621	25,778

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Essential skills is a key element in the DEL strategy.

Year on year, the percentage of women enrolling for vocational essential skills has increased proportionately with the overall increase in enrolments i.e. whilst females accounted for 47% of the essential skills enrolments in 2003/04, this increased to 51% the next year, and 57% in 2005/06.

The above also demonstrates that the number of women engaged in essential skills has increased at a higher rate than the male enrolments, ie from 2,886 female enrolments in 2003/4 to 6,640 in 2005/6 (an increase of 130%) as compared to an increase from 3,195 in 2003/4 to 5,069 in 2005/6 (an annual increase of 58%) for male enrolments.

3.2.6 Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by NVQ Level

Consideration is also given to the level of enrolments by NVQ Level.

Enrolments by NVQ level are shown for each year:

Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by NVQ Level							
	Academic Year	2003/4		2004/05		2005/06	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
NVQ Level (or equivalent)	Entry Level	2,083	2,697	2,607	2,468	2,752	2,784
	1	15,091	17,002	16,526	22,052	17,423	22,514
	2	20,661	27,271	21,274	26,884	21,157	26,522
	3	17,958	24,558	18,958	25,557	18,168	23,988
	Level 4 & above	5,262	7,961	4,972	7,026	5,316	7,565
	Total	61,055	79,489	64,337	83,987	64,816	83,373

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Whilst total female enrolments at NVQ levels are higher than men enrolments overall, it is noted that the number of female enrolments exceed male enrolments at NVQ Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4. At the entry level for NVQs, the number of female enrolments has remained constant over the period, ie on average 2,700 female enrolments a year. This mirrors the level of male enrolments at entry level, Except in 2003/04 when male enrolments were less than 2,100.

Overall, more than half of all vocational enrolments at the FE colleges by NVQ level were female over the three-year period. The greatest proportions in terms of gender split by NVQ level were at levels 4 and above (62%).

3.2.7 *Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Gender and Employment Status*

Consideration is also given to Enrolments by Employment status for Vocational courses.

Details are:

Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by Gender and Employment Status						
Academic Year	2003/4		2004/05		2005/06	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Full-time employment	16,203	17,136	16,482	16,000	18,200	17,571
Part-time employment	5,647	15,334	6,325	15,390	6,795	16,756
Unemployed	8,649	13,894	8,044	12,712	10,253	16,414
Economically Inactive	7,765	9,924	7,905	10,197	11,075	13,599
Not Known	22,791	23,201	25,581	29,688	18,493	19,033
Total	61,055	79,489	64,337	83,987	64,816	83,373

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Excluding the “unknown” data, where details are not available, on average, 53% of female enrolments were in full or part-time employment in 2005/6, with 47% of females either being unemployed or economically inactive.

The total number of unemployed females enrolled ranged from 12,712 in 2004/5 to 16,414 in 2005/6. There were more unemployed females than unemployed males enrolled on FE college courses.

The total number of females enrolments who are classified as economically inactive ranged from 9,924 in 2003/4 to 13,599 in 2005/6. There were more economically inactive females than economically inactive male enrolments on FE college courses.

The above demonstrates the wide range of female enrolments.

3.2.8 *Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges on Vocational Courses*

The following table sets out the enrolments on vocational courses by gender and their deprivation rank split into 10% groupings. This shows that there are more women from the more deprived areas using FE Colleges than there are from the least deprived areas.

Vocational Enrolments at the NI FE Colleges by the Deprivation Deciles, 2005/06							
		Female		Male		Total	
Multiple Deprivation Measure Deciles	Most deprived 10%	8,559	10.8%	6,460	10.4%	15,019	10.6%
	11 – 20%	8,839	11.2%	6,505	10.5%	15,344	10.8%
	21 – 30%	8,634	10.9%	6,363	10.2%	14,997	10.6%
	31 – 40%	8,132	10.3%	6,350	10.2%	14,482	10.2%
	41 – 50%	8,641	10.9%	6,908	11.1%	15,549	11.0%
	51 – 60%	8,247	10.4%	7,147	11.5%	15,394	10.9%
	61 – 70%	7,715	9.7%	6,072	9.8%	13,787	9.7%
	71 – 80%	7,236	9.1%	5,781	9.3%	13,017	9.2%
	81 – 90%	6,691	8.4%	5,353	8.6%	12,044	8.5%
	Lease deprived 91 – 100%	6,562	8.3%	5,294	8.5%	11,856	8.4%
Total		79,256	100%	62,233	100%	141,489	100.0%

(Source: Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

Furthermore, the table shows that by gender split, female enrolments are better represented (in absolute numbers) in the lower deciles.

3.2.9 Attendance in Vocational Courses

Consideration is therefore given to the level of participation, by employment status, as a percentage of the NI population (for women).

NI Labour Statistics Sept 07 'Women in Northern Ireland	Female Participation in FE courses in 2005/6	% Women participation in FE Courses
Employment	352,000	24,864
Unemployment	12,000	10,330
Economically Inactive (excluding those past retirement age)	169,000	6379
		7.1%
		86.1%
		3.8%

(Source: Labour Market Statistics Bulletin- Women in Northern Ireland Sept 07 DETI & Further Education Statistical Record FESR)

The above indicates the following in relation to the role of women, firstly, in the workplace.

Employment

The number of women in employment in NI (16+) has increased by 54% from 228,000 in 1984 to 352,000 in April – June 2007. This compares with an increase of 32% for men. 45% of those currently employed in NI are women.

Women in Northern Ireland have been experiencing historically high levels of employment (i.e. those who reported one hour or more of paid employment in the reference week) with an estimated 352,000 women employed in April – June 2007.

Unemployment

An estimated 12,000 women were unemployed in NI at April – June 2007 with an associated unemployment rate of 3.2% . This represents a slight increase from the rate for the same period one year ago (2.8%).

Economic Inactivity

At April – June 2007 there were 169,000 women of working age (16 – 59) who were economically inactive in NI. Women of all ages who were economically inactive totalled 337,000, the difference being those over 59 years.

Overall, the table shows that women in NI make a marked contribution to the workplace. Moreover, the number of women attending FE college courses is markedly higher for the unemployed category, with the data showing 10,330 women attending FE courses in 2005/6 (although some women have obviously attended FE courses on more than one occasion). 6,379 women or 3.8% of those being economically inactive attended FE courses, based upon those economically inactive in the age range of 16 to 59. The above would indicate that women of all socio economic groups are likely to be accessing the FE colleges.

3.2.10 Summary of Statutory Provision at NI FE colleges

The following provides a summary of the statutory provision:

- Based on the statistics provided by DEL (for the period 2003 – 2006), approximately 145,000 women, on average, participate in training within the statutory sector on an annual basis.
- This represents 60% of all vocational and non-vocational enrolments.
- Of these female enrolments, 62% attended vocational courses (an average of 82,000 pa) and 38% attended non-vocational courses (an average of 50,000 pa).

Vocational Enrolments

- More than half of all vocational enrolments were female and 80% of these were on a full-time basis.
- Proportionately to males, the greatest percentage of vocational female enrolments were in East Tyrone College (63%) and Fermanagh College (61%).
- More than half of vocational enrolments were in the 25+ age range (an average of 43,000 pa) and the least number of enrolments were between 20-24 (13%).
- The most popular vocational course for females was ICT (15%).
- Females accounted for approximately 50% of vocational essential skills enrolments.
- Approximately 10% of vocational enrolments by NVQ level were between levels 4 and 7.
- 17% of the total female enrolments were unemployed (average 14,300 pa) and 14% were economically inactive (average 11,200 pa). The above demonstrates the wide range of women participation.

Non-Vocational Enrolments

- More than two thirds of all non-vocational enrolments were female.
- 87% of all non-vocational enrolments were in the 25+ age range.

3.3 Analysis of Non-Statutory Provision

3.3.1 Introduction

This section of the report considers the non-statutory training sector. As per the methodology, details were sought on:

- Desk top research of Women's Education and Training provision;

- DEL projects funded over the last 3 years with emphasis on support to the non-statutory and community sector;
- Any evaluations of the same from DEL, highlighting benefits and issues arising (none available); and
- Desk Top research of the Educational Guidance Service for adults and their analysis of women's uptake of management, leadership and development, essential skills, NVQ, etc.

3.3.2 Level of Participation in Non-Statutory Women's Training Centres

As part of the research process, a consultation was undertaken with the Training for Women Network (TWN) and Kilcooley Women's Education and Development Group, who in turn, organised a focus group of training providers for women drawn from the non-statutory sector, with BDO Stoy Hayward in attendance. Subsequent consultations were also held with individual women's training centres, as well as requests for supporting information on participation in training by Women's Organisations.

3.3.3 Numbers Educated Within the Community

The following section sets out information from the Women's training organisations on the number of women educated by these organisations. BDO Stoy Hayward has not sought to verify the accuracy of this information.

Research carried out by the Community Foundation in Northern Ireland (CFNI) in 2001 identified 423 'activist women's groups' and 1071 'traditional women's groups'. Many of these groups value both women-only educational provision and other informal learning opportunities and a cautious estimate has been made of 500 women's groups involved in community-based education in NI. The CFNI research found that approximately 68% of these groups are working in areas of urban or rural disadvantage where substantial learning provision is being made. The Rural Women's Network and WRDA Strategic Plan for 2001-2006 identifies **10,700 women learning annually through six rural women's networks alone**. Other pieces of the statistical jigsaw have been provided through monitoring of Peace monies but the full extent of the lifelong learning provided by women in disadvantaged communities in NI has yet to be accurately mapped.

In addition, in 2005, Community Women's Education Sector (CWES) gathered together data from a sample (approximately 50%) of its membership that indicates the capacity of the sector. CWES includes only those organisations that are members or affiliates of one of its three regional groups and does not refer to the wider, uncharted women's community and voluntary sector.

This survey indicated that among the learning providers surveyed, there was a total of 375 years of experience of learning provision in areas of rural and urban disadvantage. The newest group had been in operation for just 2 years and the longest for 23 years. The average number of years' experience per group is 10 years.

Over the past academic year a total of 10,901 people have attended courses in the centres sampled. Of these 8,258 (76%) completed pre-vocational, vocational and accredited courses. A further 2,643 (24%) completed non-accredited, introductory and leisure courses.

(As stated above the information has not been verified by BDO Stoy Hayward)

(Source: CWES)

As part of the feasibility study, and following on from our consultations with the women's groups, each of the groups within the community sector was requested to forward details to BDO Stoy Hayward of:

- Numbers of learners (if feasible, over the last three years);
- Level/qualification; and
- Progression (gone on to employment, FE, etc).

This exercise was coordinated by TWN and was aimed at mapping the non-statutory provision in women's training. The table below provides a high level synopsis of the information provided (a full breakdown of the information forwarded is contained within Appendix II).

Organisation	Year(s)	Numbers of women participants
Training for Women Network	2004 – 2007	426
Women's Support Network	2005 – 2006	3,211
Banbridge District Enterprises Ltd	Sept 2005 – May 2007	119
Intercomm	2006 – 2007	126
Women's TEC	Sept 2006 – Sept 2007	210
Omagh Women's Area Network	3-year period	2,046
Lisburn YMCA	2005 – 2007	266
Women's Resource Development Agency		1,103
Darkley Community Organisation	2006 – 2007	99
North West Centre for Women's Programmes	2004 – 2007	425
Roe Valley Community Development Association	2002 – 2008	3,461
Positive Steps	2003 – 2004	1,830
Shankill Women's Group	2 year period	853
TOTAL		14,175

(Source: Women's Training Organisations)

There are a number of caveats associated with the data in this table, which should be noted.

- Not all women's community education groups forwarded information; and
- The information that has been captured relates to different time periods, with some data dating back to 2002. The above table therefore covers multiple years. Furthermore, dates were not provided for one of the groups presented.

The majority of women's groups offer a combination of accredited and non-accredited courses. Many also capture data in relation to the progression of students, either onto additional training and education or into employment.

A comparison was made by BDO Stoy Hayward on courses offered by fourteen women's training organisations and the FE colleges in their area, with a view to determining the level of overlap in course provision. Details are included as part of Appendix IV and summarized:

Women's Training organisations	Total Courses offered by Women's College	Offered by Local FE provision	Not Offered by local FE provision
Atlas Women's Centre, Lisburn	22	11	11
Ballybeen Women's Centre	20	13	7
Falls Women's Centre	11	5	6
Footprints Women's Centre	21	11	10
Greenway Women's Centre	21	11	10
Shankill Women's Centre	22	9	13
Women's Tec	10	6	4
Windsor Women's Centre	15	9	6
Strathfoyle Women's Centre	19	5	14
Waterside Women's Centre	22	7	15
The Women's Centre, Derry	55	39	16
Chrysalis Women's Centre, Craigavon	13	6	7
The Learning Lodge	16	12	4
First Steps Women's Group, Dungannon	14	10	4
Total	281	154 (54.8%)	127 (45.2%)

(Source: Women's Training Organisations and FESR)

Of the 281 courses provided by the fourteen centres, 154 were offered by the local FE college. Of the remaining 127 courses, these spanned courses such as yoga, parenting, various crafts, food hygiene etc. It is noted that some generic courses could however be provided by the colleges, particularly in relation to arts and crafts.

3.3.4 DEL funded projects

DEL provided details of 31 projects funded through ESF during the period 2003 – 2007 (see Appendix II). More than £6million (£6,234,583) was awarded to a wide range of organisations focusing on training needs of both employed and unemployed women. Of the 31 organisations funded almost one quarter (8) were from the statutory/FE sectors and funding received equated to more than one third (£2,480,766) of total funds allocated, therefore approximately £3.75million was awarded to the non-statutory and community sectors.

3.3.5 EGSA

EGSA do not collate separate data in relation to women's uptake of management, leadership and development, essential skills, NVQ, etc. All figures are available via DEL and these have been analysed within Section 3.2.

3.4 Comparator Analysis

3.4.1 Introduction

The Terms of Reference include a review of Blackburne House, a women's education provider. For comparative purposes, we have provided a brief overview of Blackburne and Intute virtual training suite, a free online service providing access to web resources for education and research.

3.4.2 *Blackburne House*

Now part of the Blackburne House Group, Women's Technology and Education Centre (WTEC) was established in 1983. The aim was to attract low paid or unemployed women and equip them with the skills to progress into employment in technical professions; an area in which women are traditionally under-represented.

Blackburne House Group is a training led organisation, which delivers training, education and consultancy services. The organisation employs 70 staff and offers 50 different courses with 1,000 full and part-time learning opportunities for women. It states that it is one of the leading women's education providers with a range of award winning social enterprises (although details of women's enrolments are not forthcoming). The organisation has been officially recognised as a centre of excellence having been awarded Grade 1, the highest possible grade, for education provision by the government's Adult Learning Inspectorate. In addition, the centre is ranked in the top 10% of colleges and educational providers in the UK. WTEC continues to offer a variety of courses and the training remit now encompasses not only women embarking upon education for the first time but also professional women looking to broaden their skills and enhance their career prospects. Information with regard to funding and more in depth statistical information were not available

Blackburne House courses are open to women with few or no existing qualifications. Entry requirements for higher-level courses vary. Long and short courses are offered to suit a variety of women, with subjects including internet skills, technical computing and personal & professional development, as well as ESOL and basic skills. All courses lead to nationally recognised qualifications.

Blackburne House provides a support system to students as follows:

- Individual advice, to help you choose the right course;
- A full induction;
- Highly qualified and experienced tutors;
- Industry standard technical training using the latest equipment;
- An individual support tutor;
- Free computer and internet use in the Library;
- Help with childcare expenses;
- Library information service;
- Education and careers guidance, including individual advice;
- Membership of the student forum;
- Confidential counselling service;
- Course enrichment activities, including teambuilding, relaxation sessions and external visits;
- Work placements on eligible courses;
- Personal references for students entering employment, FE or HE;
- A training allowance on eligible courses;
- Job search support; and
- Disability access support.

For the purposes of this feasibility study, the remit of which was to look at an online educational facility for women, limited information was available with regards to the degree to which I.T. is used within Blackburne House, either as an integral part of courses, or as a complimentary facility to supplement in-class learning. What can be taken from the brief analysis is that there is clearly a demand and a place in the market for this women-only

facility, which meets the unique needs of women seeking education via a mechanism other than that available within the statutory sector. As a Women's college, Blackburne House is, however, not directly comparable to the proposed Virtual Women's college. It is based in England and it cannot be assumed that the same market exists in NI

3.4.3 Intute – Virtual Training Suite

Intute is a free online service, launched in 2000, providing access to web resources for education and research. The service was created by a network of UK universities and partners. All material is evaluated and selected by a network of subject specialists to create the Intute database.

The database allows access to both subject-specific and cross-subject resources, all of which have been evaluated for their quality and relevance. Intute's mission is:

“To advance education and research by promoting the best of the web in one easily accessible place, providing access to quality resources through a process of evaluation and collaboration”.

Intute is a consortium of seven universities working with a whole host of partners, bringing together the expertise of people and processes to evaluate web resources and provide a structured approach to help people find and use them. Intute originates from the Resource Discovery Network.

The Virtual Training Suite is continually updated to provide free online Internet training tutorials for over 65 subject areas. Each tutorial covers Internet search and research skills for a different subject – there is one for most of the subjects taught in UK universities and colleges, with a few extras on topics of general interest. The service is aimed at students, lecturers and researchers in UK higher and further education, but is freely available for anyone to use.

This Virtual Training Suite is essentially the concept being researched within this feasibility study i.e. a facility to enable learners to remotely access learning materials without face-to-face interaction. There are no statistics captured by Intute with regard to the gender of users, their level of education prior to use, or progression after use. Feedback from representatives of Intute would indicate that it is a highly sophisticated facility, run by Universities and geared towards a certain calibre of student. In essence, Intute is possibly a victim of its own success i.e. it provides too much information via too many links and ultimately leads to a frustrating experience for the user/learner.

Should such a facility be pursued specifically for women re-entering education, it would need to be significantly easier to use than Intute and available in a much more simplistic format. Information would need to be explained in simple terms, with limited information on each page and very simple links between pages, to avoid confusion and enable the women to navigate the site without feeling frustrated and intimidated and ultimately giving up.

3.4.4 NI FE Colleges Online Facilities

Many of the colleges currently offer online facilities although these are additional rather than critical features.

Virtual Learning Environments (VLE's) are now commonplace in Further and Higher Education bodies throughout the UK; this web-based facility enables:

- Communication between tutors and students (enabling personalised support and tuition);
- Delivery of learning resources and materials (documents, video clips etc);
- Shared work group areas (facilitating online discussions/ activities); and
- Submission of coursework etc online.

Some of the colleges commented that it has proved almost impossible to get people to use the VLE facility despite its ease of use. Furthermore, NWIFHE observed that:

“There is an overall lack of interest in ICT, with even female staff in SERC being reluctant to accept ICT. During an independent evaluation of the programme, an electronic questionnaire was emailed to teaching staff. All the women printed off the questionnaire and wrote on it”.

BIFHE indicated that their ‘Blackboard’ facility did not tend to be used within community education, which is partly due to the lack of sophistication and confidence levels of those learners returning to education. Whilst within mainstream courses in Belfast Metropolitan College, students are required to submit assignments and liaise with tutors via ‘Blackboard’, it had limitations with regard to community based education, and ‘at best could be used to provide supplementary materials’. However, there was scepticism regarding the degree to which this information might be accessed.

3.4.5 Other Online Facilities

Consideration had been given to other online training facilities, namely those to be adopted by DHSSPS Strategic Health Authority/Five Trusts. Feedback is that this facility did not progress as planned.

Consideration is given to the Open University. In discussion, with the Open University, the OU commented that there were no Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled on Access type courses at the OU even though the OU operated such courses. *It is noted that the Open University would have a different target market i.e Open Direct will attract self starters and self motivators, whereas the Virtual Women’s college will be focussed on those not normally in an e - learning environment.*

3.5 Conclusion

This section of the report considered the level of provision within the statutory and non statutory training sector in Northern Ireland. Comments from participants are included in section 4. In summary:

The level of provision for 2005/06 is stated to be:

Para	FE Sector – Provision 2005/6	Number (Average Annual)
3.2.1	No of female enrolments in FE sector	133,034
3.2.1	No of female enrolments in FE sector – vocational full-time	15,205
3.2.1	No of female enrolments in FE sector – vocational part-time	68,168
3.2.1	No of female enrolments in FE sector – non vocational part-time	49,661
3.2.3	No of female enrolments in FE sector – over 25 years	84,541
3.2.7	No of female vocational enrolments in FE sector – unemployed and econ inactive	30,013
3.2.8	No of female vocational enrolments in FE sector – in 20% most deprived areas	17,398

Para	FE Sector – Provision 2005/6	Number (Average Annual)
	Non-Statutory Sector	
3.3.3	No of enrolments in women training organisations reported as part of feasibility study - multiple periods	14,175
3.3.3	CWES data (incomplete data)	10,901

The above compares the provision in the statutory and non-statutory sector. With regard to the 14,175 enrolments from the non statutory sector reported above to BDO Stoy Hayward as part of the feasibility study, not all women's community education groups forwarded information. Moreover, the information that has been captured relates to different time periods, with some data dating back to 2002. The above table therefore covers multiple years. Furthermore, dates were not provided for one of the groups

The women's training organisations have stated that the women organisation's provision was at least 10,901 for one academic year based on the sample data gathered by CFNI. The provision is across a wide range ie 423 'activist women's groups' and 1071 'traditional women's groups' as per CFNI, with the majority focused on education. This compares to the 148,189 female enrolments in the FE Sector in 2005/06, with 30,013 females enrolments drawn from typically disadvantaged group's i.e unemployed or economically active.

The FE provision is significant, spanning all regions and across 48 campuses and 876 outreach centres across Northern Ireland, and providing for various age groups, full and part time, employed, unemployed, vocational and non vocational, economically inactive and unemployed.

It is noted:

- There are more economically inactive female enrolments than economically inactive males participating in FE college courses.
- There are more female enrolments from the more deprived areas using FE Colleges than there are from the least deprived areas.
- Overall, women in NI make a marked contribution to the workplace. Moreover, female students attending FE college courses is markedly higher for the unemployed category, with the data showing 10,330 unemployed female students on FE courses in 2005/06.

Also in 2005/06, 6,379 female students or 3.8% of the NI economically inactive female population attended FE courses (based upon those economically inactive in the age range 16 to 59). The above would indicate that women of all socio economic groups are likely to be accessing the FE colleges.

With regards to the provision of a dedicated facility for women accessing education, Blackburne House proves an example of what can be achieved through a 'women only' college. There is clearly a demand and a place in the UK for this facility, however, only Blackburne House has been identified as one such example for the whole of the UK market. Whilst this is more in line with the devolved structure being proposed by the non-statutory sector within Northern Ireland, such a facility, would be in direct competition with the existing FE colleges and would further exacerbate the exiting problems associated with parallel provision, rather than facilitating efficiencies through greater collaboration.

Having explored the concept of an online facility through Intute Virtual Training Suite, it can be concluded that should such a facility be pursued specifically for women re-entering education, a much less sophisticated version, in a much more simplistic format would be necessary. The success of Intute is unknown and there can be no assumptions made with regard to its value in education, particularly at those levels where confidence and competence are significant issues.

Online facilities are currently available within NI FE Colleges, however, despite their ease of use, they are not widely used, particularly within community education.

4. CONSULTATIONS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report details the key findings from our consultations with:

- A sample of FE Colleges (and ANIC);
- Non-Statutory Providers;
- Students; and
- Statutory Organisations.

In conducting the consultations, feedback has been received on the need for a Virtual FE college led by the women's training organisations. The focus of the consultations have been on the need for the online facilities that such a virtual centre would afford. Consultations with women's groups have favoured the establishment of a devolved structure for women's training groups, with FE college status, with this providing women only learning opportunities as well as funding opportunities for the centres themselves. As per the women's training organisations:

- A virtual college for women would operate on a regional basis with women's centres and organisations providing campuses around which activity would take place in collaboration with women's groups on an outreach basis.
- The virtual college would also work towards mutually beneficial partnerships crucially with one another and also with Colleges of Further Education, Open University, Open College Network, Universities, Training and other Adult Learning Providers. It would not preclude groups and organisations forming independent and autonomous relationships with local colleges and Adult Learning and Training Providers
- Key courses could include:
 - Emotional Health and Well Being;
 - Women and Social Enterprise;
 - Community Development;
 - Non-traditional Skills;
 - Justice, Equality and Citizenship;
 - Management and Leadership;
 - Hospitality and Tourism;
 - ICT;
 - Childcare; and
 - Community Safety and Victim Support.

4.2 FE Colleges

Consultations were undertaken with each area-based college with the Chief Executive/Head of Departments, in addition to the Chief Executive of ANIC. The following highlights the key issues from these consultations. Key areas for discussion were:

- Trends in uptake by women;
- Adequacy of current provision for web based learning, uptake and barriers to uptake;

- Opportunity to build upon current provision;
- Factors that would encourage/discourage participation through conventional FE provision;
- Social inclusion aspects of current provision;
- Achievement levels of women vis a vis the NI average and factors that impact upon achievement;
- Course links to occupational needs/ aspirations of women;
- Details of women's only programmes , demand, outputs, delivery mechanisms;
- How the virtual college would be facilitated
- Input by the NI colleges in terms of management, promotion, course provision
- Need for a virtual women's FE college;
- How this would be facilitated (host location);
- Input by the NI colleges in terms of management, promotion, course provision (design, tutor availability, quality control, audit and accountability);
- Linkages to be established (physically and virtual) amongst the FE Colleges;
- Resources required to operate Virtual Women's FE College at the college level (hardware/software management resource, out of pocket expenses) and beneficiary costs (hardware); and
- Funding of the above.

The following sections set out the feedback from the consultees.

4.2.1 Main Findings

Women make up a substantial element of the participants of FE Colleges, as evidenced by data on female enrolments overall, and across NVQ levels.

There is no available information on the issue of progression from hobby and leisure courses to technical/ professional courses. Some colleges have stated that progression does happen however, when asked, no evidence was provided

The provision of women only courses was also discussed and again there was no evidence available of courses that had been specifically designed for women. There were certain courses that attracted only female enrolments such as hair and beauty/ child care but it was commented that these are also open to male enrolments.

The need for the Women's Organisations to be accredited was also discussed with the FE colleges, and there was considered to be no need for further accredited bodies and the emphasis to be on avoiding duplication of services.

The findings from the consultations with the FE sector was that the provision for web based learning, even by FE colleges, was weak. The need to build upon the current provision to ensure access for all, including women, was recognised, it being agreed that the relationships with the Women's Organisations varied by college. The colleges noted the changes in the FE funding mechanism and the reduction in funding for non-accredited and non-vocational courses, as well as funding constraints in general with all public funded bodies required to identify cost savings (with this driving the minimal class numbers of circa 12). It should be noted, however, that, as per the Department, funding for Level 1 and below provision or non NDAQ provision is not being cut. This provision will still form part of the FLU funding and FE colleges will incorporate this provision into the CDPs.

The FE colleges recognised that the women's training centres can be a good source of referrals into the colleges themselves, i.e. women can undertake a non-vocational course at the women's centre and then possibly move to the FE college for further vocational courses or Essential Skills. There is no data to determine the extent of this flow, or indeed if women then upskill themselves further in order to gain employment or progression. Notwithstanding this, the role of women in the community can be acknowledged, with the need for training for some community leaders etc in "citizenship" not always provided by the FE colleges.

4.2.2 Social Interaction

According to the FE colleges, women primarily undertake courses for the social interaction and engagement with other women. This may account for the high number of women participating in FE courses. It was reported by consultees that the social side is critical and for those participating in women only courses (through the women training organisation) there can be challenges in moving into mainstream learning.

It is the experience of the FE sector that women do not want to learn anytime, any place, anywhere. For example, NWIFHE has tried unsuccessfully to get women to come to classes during the day and has found this to be almost impossible.

4.2.3 Collaboration

From the comments made through the consultation process, there is a feeling that the FE colleges could potentially subcontract the community provision to competent groups with the expectation that the money would go further. Although there is no substantial evidence to back this up.

4.2.4 Need for a Virtual College

It is the view of the FE sector that a virtual FE college, with online facilities targeted at women only, would not generate demand. According to one consultee "most women do not take the time to go online themselves and prefer to meet on-site and tackle work/assignments together".

From a college perspective, many had difficulties with Learn Direct.

"In theory, a virtual facility is a fantastic concept but getting people to use it is the difficult bit. Women tend to have a fear of delving into the unknown. The uptake of a virtual facility would be very poor".

As per the FE sector, there is no evidence of need for a Virtual Women's FE College, with online facilities for learning and development. Indeed, this is contrary to the commonly held view that the preference is for face to face learning within a conducive learning environment.

BIFHE and NIWFHE, who offer online facilities, have indicated that whilst demand is not high overall, these facilities did not tend to be used within community education, reflecting the lack of sophistication and confidence levels of those learners returning to education.

The resources required to run a Virtual Women's only FE college would be substantial (ie hardware/software costs, management resource, out of pocket expenses) at a time when the FE colleges have restructured from 16 to 6 regional colleges in order to improve efficiencies. Notwithstanding that the FE colleges need to continually improve access, the provision of an

additional college would not be in keeping with the ethos of cost efficiencies and cost effectiveness of the sector.

4.3 Non-Statutory Providers

As part of the research, consultations were held with a selection of non-statutory providers. These included:

- TWN;
- Kilcooley Women's Education and Development Group;
- Positive Steps;
- Intercomm;
- Women's TEC;
- Women Into Politics;
- Chrysalis Women's Centre;
- Helios project, City on the Foyle;
- Women's Resource and Development Agency;
- Windsor Women's Centre;
- Shankill Women's Centre;
- Footprints Women's Centre; and
- Women's Support Network.

The above includes attendees at the focus group organised by TWN. Areas for discussion included:

- Evidence of need for Virtual FE College;
- Adequacy of current provision for e-learning/support mechanisms for women;
- Barrier to uptake of existing provision;
- Key barriers to meeting needs of women through conventional delivery mechanisms, i.e. financial constraints, transport etc; and
- Opportunity for the non-statutory sector to provide virtual based learning.

The following paragraphs highlight the key issues arising from consultations with the non-statutory providers, including both the above areas, and others that arose through our discussions. It is noted that there were some different views as to the need for a Women's Virtual College.

4.3.1 Evidence of Need for a Virtual FE College

The Dearing Report, which made recommendations for higher education in the UK over the next twenty years, places the importance of communication and information technology as central to the progression of the national education system.

As per the non statutory sector, the evidence of need for women in having a Virtual Women's college is one of access to a conducive environment for learning and development. In their view, women face multiple barriers to accessing FE colleges. While access to FE colleges for marginalised women should be a priority for the colleges themselves in their Development Plans, the reality is that years of trying to improve access have been unsuccessful and women have sought alternative modes of learning, mostly in the form of parallel provision at more accessible community facilities.

In terms of e-learning, and the need for an On-line learning facility, (as envisaged by DEL as part of the Terms of Reference), the non statutory were in agreement that there was not a need for such a facility. Their view is that women's groups do not want an online college or online training facilities. The evidence is that women are attracted to schemes and facilities that provide learning in the company of others, preferring mutual support and social interaction. E-learning provision has the advantage that potential transport problems can be overcome through remote access, but increases the sense of isolation and social detachment. Current thinking in terms of mental health is that community engagement and learning in supportive group surroundings is of the most benefit to those who have been marginalised or isolated. As per the statutory providers, there is no evidence of need for an e-learning facility.

4.3.2 Adequacy of current provision for e-learning/support mechanisms for women

There is much support for computer-based learning and development in groups supported by training organisations in community settings.

Barriers to e-learning include technophobia, access to suitable technology and the costs involved in installing the technology and potential isolation for those taking part. The up side is that users can learn at any time of the day and in any location, although the access to computers at home for women in disadvantaged areas will be low.

4.3.3 Barrier to uptake of existing provision

The non statutory providers note that women participating in community based education seek contact with like minded women and this provides an opportunity for them to participate in classes whilst their children are safe within the onsite childcare facilities.

Research from the American Association of University Women (Carlson, 2001) suggests there are also gender issues to the approach of learners to education. Of the 500 learners interviewed for their study, 462 were likely to undertake learning at what was termed the third shift:

“Early in the morning or late at night, in the free time between the first shift of a full-time job and the second shift of homemaking or taking care of the children”.

This clearly highlights the additional burden on women if they do not have access to learning at a time that suits them whether this is virtual or traditional.

4.3.4 Consultations with the women's training organisations identified the following key barriers to meeting needs of women through conventional delivery mechanisms

As per the women's training organisations, women face multiple barriers to access learning, such as:

- lack of childcare (which predominantly lies with women) is an inhibiting factor for women attempting to access education;
- Lack of cover for carers – burden of caring responsibility (predominantly lies with women) and places a severe restriction on women's ability to dedicate time for education;
- Self-esteem issues and confidence to return to education is an issue for many community-based women. Many participants felt they would not have the confidence to go into a college or other education institution, as they are cold and impersonal;

- Classes/courses are delivered and programmed for times of the day and evening not always suitable for the needs of women, especially those with caring responsibilities;
- Cost of courses can be very off-putting to women in disadvantaged areas,
- Costs of transportation in all areas and accessible transportation within rural areas;
- Age – for those who are entering training or education after raising a family, for instance, participants would not feel comfortable in a class of teenagers, or courses are directed towards school leavers;
- Class size – participants felt more at ease in a smaller group they can get to know other learners and have more access to the tutor;
- Special needs – some participants had specific problems or issues that would not be catered for in other education settings;
- Support – participants felt they needed emotional and practical support, encouragement and someone with whom they could discuss problems;
- Friendly atmosphere – participants felt they needed a friendly, more welcoming setting they consider more conducive to learning and participation; and
- Holistic treatment – participants felt they wanted to be treated as a person, not just a fee-paying number on a course.

It should be noted however that these issues are not unique to women – men face similar issues to.

Those engaged in learning within the community felt they had the support and encouragement they needed to overcome the barriers they encounter, such as on-site subsidised childcare, subsidised courses, mixed age groups, emotional and psychological support, friendly advice, a welcoming atmosphere and they feel they are treated as a valued person. Many of the participants felt that they would not have entered training or education at all if these support structures were not in place and this has given them the confidence to progress to consider other courses.

4.3.5 Opportunity for the non-statutory sector to provide virtual based learning

E-learning is a useful tool in terms of negating the need to travel to a place of learning. E-learning could take place at a community-based training and education facility where these support mechanisms and group learning opportunities are available.

With the increasing importance of virtual based learning as a future strategy for education, there is clearly an opportunity for non-statutory bodies to exploit this opportunity. The success of many projects, such as the Bytes project in Northern Ireland, which uses ICT and virtual based learning for a younger population, was recognised by the women's organisations. Further recognised were the intrinsic benefits for women in using ICT and availing of these services.

4.3.6 FE Colleges

It was commented that while some women's organisations have good relationships with FE colleges, for many, they feel that the relationship has been unequal. Points of contact and individual tutors have been very positive, but the FE college culture and procedures have not been sensitive to, or understanding of women's needs. There was comment that a women's college would have to be dealt with on an equal footing with other colleges, re-addressing the power balance.

There are some good relationships with FE colleges regarding delivery, the main beneficiaries being the women themselves, where tutors come to women's organisations to provide courses. Also, the increase in women's participation in FE has been facilitated by the groundwork done at community level to help women access FE.

There should be continuity on courses, rather than women taking part of the training locally and the rest in the colleges. The faculties could be spread out regionally, rather being concentrated in specific areas or in a small number of organisations. Local centres can be accredited to deliver and the college could work as a social enterprise.

4.3.7 Demand for Women's Training

According to non-statutory providers, women have higher expectations now and are demanding more qualifications than in the past. Whilst funding can be obtained for training and education leading to formal qualifications, it is not known how support for entry level qualifications will be achieved.

4.4 Students

BDO Stoy Hayward engaged with students in the consultation process through the following mechanisms:

- Statutory - 3 focus groups were held in FE Colleges (BIFHE, NWIFHE and Omagh College);
- Non-Statutory - 3 focus groups were held with a sample of the women's centres (Kilcooley, Bangor; Positive Steps, Cookstown; and Intercomm, Belfast); and
- Telephone consultations with/issued questionnaires to 91 students (26 from BIFHE, 36 from NWIFHE and 29 from Omagh College).

4.4.1 Focus Group Findings - Statutory and Non-Statutory Sector

The focus group sessions involved 118 women participants as detailed below. It should be noted that 78% of these women were in the non statutory sector and 22% were from the statutory sector.

Organisation	Course	No. of Participants
NWIFHE	SAGE	14
Omagh College	Beyond Leisure	6
BIFHE	CLAIT	6
Kilcooley Women's Group	SAGE, GCSE History, Paralegal	50
Positive Steps	GCSE Maths	25
Intercomm	WEAVE (Business and Crafts)	17
TOTAL		118

The women were asked eight questions and the responses are summarised under the question headings below.

Why did you re-enter education?

The focus groups were held with women participating in both academic and non-academic courses and as a result the responses were quite varied, as follows:

- Skills development;
- Career aspirations/job opportunities;
- Personal well-being;
- To keep up with their children;
- Social interaction and support;
- Qualifications;
- ‘Make up for lost time’;
- Personal growth;
- To meet people; and
- ‘To get out of the house’.

Why did you choose do the course here?

Reasons for attending courses either at the college or within the community tended to be for similar reasons, such as:

- Most local/Handy – transport would be a problem if had to travel further;
- Childcare allowance;
- Not available elsewhere;
- Timing of classes suited – don’t affect family life;
- Free/subsidised;
- Crèche facility;
- Attending with people in like/similar circumstances i.e. mums who have been out of work/out of school for a long time;
- Mixed age group; and
- Informal/relaxed.

Do you think that you are benefiting from meeting other women on your course?

All women found it beneficial to be meeting other women through their courses primarily because it was felt that ‘learning on your own is hard’. Meeting up with other women tends to make learning fun and provides a good form of encouragement, making the course inspirational and enjoyable. The resulting support network often results in women studying together and committing to meet up week on week. The women tend to form friendships, which helps them to cope with both their studies and their personal lives.

Are you interested in continuing your studies within FE?

All women indicated a desire to continue their studies upon completion of their current course, for various reasons, as follows:

- Keeps skills up to date;
- Helps promotion prospects at work; and
- Gets them out of the house.

Furthermore, a number of women stated that they viewed the non-academic courses as stepping stones which were needed to boost their confidence sufficiently in order that they may then apply for an academic/skilled/vocational course next year. These views were held by those undertaking non vocational courses in the statutory and non statutory sectors.

What are the barriers for women accessing FE colleges?

Availability of crèche facilities, location and cost. Most women either access courses for free or only pay a contribution i.e. depending upon the benefits the women receive, they only pay a 'top-up', therefore most students pay nothing.

Do you have confidence in the use of I.T. and access to I.T. facilities at home?

There was generally a high level of confidence in I.T. ability throughout the groups, and most women have access to a computer at home.

Would you use an online facility?

The majority of women i.e. approximately 99% indicated that they would not access courses online, primarily due to the lack of interaction with and support from peers and tutors.

The women indicated that they would maybe access supplementary information from home or access a facility that enabled them to ask their lecturer questions. However, the general consensus was that they all tended to make an effort to come to class and learn, something they may not make the time for at home. Generally women felt that they wouldn't feel competent enough to learn at home as they would not have the interaction with others, or anyone to answer their questions.

What would be the issues affecting your remote use of I.T. learning?

There were a number of reasons suggested, as to why women would not be inclined to access learning online, at home:

- The women felt they would tend to 'give up' at home. Family commitments would come first amongst other 'distractions' and women need the dedicated time to commit to studying, which is a luxury they are not afforded in the home.
- The women felt that the cost of courses online would be prohibitive.
- Internet learning would further isolate the 'hardest to reach' women.
- Learning from home is viewed as anti-social and impersonal.
- A number had tried this before and even though competent in the use of I.T. found the whole process complicated and convoluted.
- Many women indicated that they would be lost from the education system if their only option was to learn online from home.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the responses from the focus groups did not vary significantly between the statutory and non-statutory sector.

4.4.2 Questionnaire Results- Statutory sector

Questionnaires were undertaken via telephone consultation with Omagh College (now South West College) and NWIFHE (now North West Regional College). However, due to data

protection reasons questionnaires were distributed by hand to students from BIFHE (Belfast Metropolitan College now). In total, 91 questionnaires were completed (26 from BIFHE, 36 from NWIFHE and 29 from Omagh College).

The women were asked 11 questions and the responses are summarised under the question headings below (a full breakdown of all responses is contained within Appendix III).

Why did you re-enter education?

The majority of respondent's re-entered education for skills development (41%), 25% re-entered for their career aspirations, and 24% wanted social interaction. Other factors included relaxation (4%), to pass time (3%), to increase confidence (1%), personal fulfilment (1%) and to improve their flexibility (1%).

What course are you participating in?

The majority of respondents (31%) are participating on Sage/Accounts classes, 22% are taking the Women behind the Business course, and 12% are taking Pilates classes. Other courses include art, beauty, care, construction, interior design, IT, beyond leisure project, LMA, management, reflexology/massage, and yoga.

Why did you decide to do this course?

54% of respondents from Omagh College decided to do their course because it was local, 17% said it was because it was not available elsewhere, 15% stated there were suitable class times, 7% said the facilities and cost were factors that help them decide to do their course.

The majority of respondents from NW College, 35% said they decided to do their course because it was local, 28% because of suitable class times, 20% because of the cost, 11% said it was not available elsewhere and 6% said the facilities were a reason why they choose to do their course at the NW College.

44% of respondents from BIFHE said they decided to do their course their because it was local, 36% said the class times were suitable, 12% said they choose BIFHE because the course was not available elsewhere, and 4% stated that the cost was why they chose BIFHE.

Does this course meet your needs?

99% of respondents stated that the course does meet their needs. 1 respondent stated that it did not; the reason given for this was that it was believed that the course was too rushed. Reasons given by those who said the course did meet their needs included:

- It was a night class and good for personal development
- I learnt a lot about my own capabilities
- It provided a portfolio to get into university
- It is good for my CV
- Social interaction
- It can be applied to work
- It is approachable and accessible
- It helped refresh current skills and develop new ones
- You receive one-to-one tutoring
- It helps with the family business

- The tutor is on hand for information and covers all areas
- Receive formal qualifications
- It enhances your job prospects
- There is a good tutor and there is good social interaction
- You meet like minded people

Do you think you are benefiting from meeting other women on your course?

97% of respondents agreed that they were benefiting from meeting other women on their course. The main reason why respondents feel they are benefiting from meeting other women is the social aspect/networking (70%); this includes making new friends, meeting old friends, getting out of the house and meeting like minded people, and it is good fun. 23% stated they were benefiting from receiving support from others in the class and sharing knowledge, 3% believe they have increased confidence and communication skills, 3% said they are keeping fit and 1% stated they were benefiting from a friendly tutor.

Are you interested in continuing your studies within FE?

92% of respondents stated that they were interested in continuing their studies within further education. 8% stated that they were not interested in continuing studies; reasons for this are:

- No time due to business commitments
- Have completed all that they were looking to learn

What are the barriers for women accessing FE Colleges?

The two main barriers for women accessing FE Colleges are deemed to be the flexibility i.e. class times (23%) and the cost (23%), 16% stated location as a barrier, 5% said public transport and 5% stated other factors as barriers to accessing FE Colleges; these barriers included:

- Lack of confidence
- Gap in education
- Working and studying is tiresome

Do you have remote access to IT facilities?

88% of respondents have remote access to I.T. facilities.

Would you use an online facility i.e. accessing material from home instead of attending the FE College?

42% of respondents agreed that they would use an online facility, reasons for this included:

- It saves time
- It is convenient
- You have the comfort of your own home
- Can't always get childcare
- It is more flexible
- It cuts costs i.e. transport

58% stated that they would not use an online facility because:

- No access to computer/internet
- Lack of understanding of computers
- It would not be practical enough
- Support needed from tutor
- Would miss the social aspect
- Would not be as committed at home

Do you have any opinion on the adequacy of current provisions for e-learning/online support mechanisms for women?

65% of respondents had no opinion on the adequacy of current provision for e-learning/online support mechanisms for women, 35% did have an opinion; these included:

Positive:

- It is easy to use
- There is a lot out there
- It is good if you can't get out of the house
- It is an excellent idea
- It is convenient

Negative:

- It is not practical or enjoyable
- It feels limited
- There are not enough relevant courses
- Unaware of any provisions
- It is isolating
- Women may be afraid to use them
- Not everyone has access to computers

Do you have confidence in the use of ICT (for personal and occupational use)?

80% of respondents agreed that they were confident in use of ICT, 20% stated that they were not confident. Reasons for lack of confidence include:

- Afraid of making mistakes
- Not experienced enough
- Not happy using computers
- Lack of knowledge

What would be the issues affecting your remote use of IT learning?

The majority (34%) of respondents felt that learning remotely through the use of I.T. would be anti-social, whilst nearly one third (30%) felt that they needed the support of a tutor.

4.5 Statutory Organisations – DSD and Invest NI

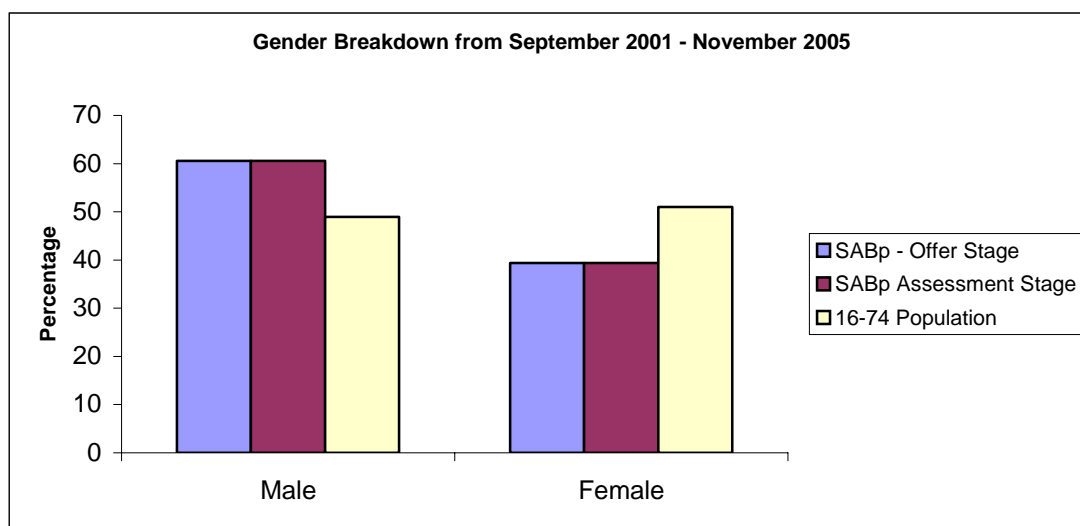
There is a view throughout statutory organisations that a virtual FE college will not assist in bringing women back into mainstream education. It is felt that the strength of the women’s training centres lies in their ability to recruit and to introduce women to training, where they have lacked confidence, or had issues with transport and childcare facilities.

Statistics reflect that the FE colleges attract women from deprived areas of Northern Ireland with FECs having outreach objectives within their business plans.

It was suggested that the Women’s Centres need to establish how best they can work with the FE colleges, for example, through signposting. It is more about determining how the FE colleges can be improved to meet current gaps in provision, rather than parallel provision of training and education in women’s groups and centres.

Invest NI has been promoting women starting up in business, rather than women in employment. The main support is through the Start a Business Programme (SABp),

Analysis by gender over the life of the previous Programme (2001-2005) is:



Consistently throughout the Programme, from September 2001 to November 2005 (the last programme), there have been a greater proportion of males both at lead in assessment and offer stage. However, whilst this imbalance was approximately two thirds male to one third female until August 2004, there has been a shift during the last 15 months. From September 2004 until August 2005, women accounted for more than two fifths (42%; assessment; 41% offer) of SABp participants. During the first quarter of 2005/2006 (Sept – Nov 2005) this has increased to almost one half, with 49% of lead in assessments being women (dropping to below 46% at offer stage). This is a relatively small period, but may indicate the success of targeted marketing at women.

Invest NI have four key sectors for targeted enterprise promotion, ie women, social economy, young people and over 50’s. SABp is currently being reviewed, with all sector groups likely to be incorporated within its new structure.

4.6 Conclusion

The above highlights the perceived barriers to training as identified by the women's training organisations. Overall, however, there is agreement by all consultees that demand for virtual learning was likely to be low. This is considered further in the conclusions.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

BDO Stoy Hayward was commissioned by the Department for Employment and Learning to examine the feasibility of a Virtual Women's College for female learners within Northern Ireland. Specifically, the Terms of Reference sought:

- Determination of the specific education and training needs of women in Northern Ireland, with particular regard to developing their role in the local economy.
- Identification of the extent to which the needs of female learners are being addressed by mainstream statutory providers, in particular FE colleges, and by existing non-statutory education and training providers.
- Examination of the feasibility of establishing a “virtual” Women's College to meet needs which cannot be adequately fulfilled by existing statutory and non-statutory providers, and consideration of where such a proposal sits, within the Department's current policy for further education of total integration.
- Determination, if appropriate, of what a “virtual” Women's College would entail.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 *Determination of the specific education and training needs of women with particular regard to developing their role in the local economy.*

In relation to the above, despite extensive research and consultation, the question of the need for gender specific training still remains unproven. An identifiable need can be determined as ‘a gap in skills/ behaviours’ therefore based on our benchmarking research and analysis of resulting data (see appendix IV) where the offerings of both were compared the remaining provision identified that is solely provided by the non statutory training centres appears to be mainly leisure focussed and not based on developing a transferable skill. There was an overlap of skills courses offered by both and within that offering little deviation in course provision. Therefore in terms of need, there appears to be no identifiable difference in the needs of women attending FE colleges and attending non statutory training centres. Finally from our benchmarking research we ascertained that FE colleges also catered for the same groups of women i.e. women in TSN, unemployed, economically inactive.

The research actually identified that the real issue was the fact that women encountered **barriers** when accessing training within the current FE system and moreover no specific needs were identified that related directly to women. Barriers can be determined as a fundamental obstacle in the provision and access to learning and development. The individuals interviewed cited **barriers** including:

- Lack of childcare cover/ facilities
- Self esteem issues for participants
- Costs of transport and course costs
- Unfriendly formal environment

In summary women are seeking an environment where their lives are accepted and catered for not just disregarded.

These constitute **barriers** to accessing the FE training programmes rather than a specific **training need** which can be defined as a specific skills gap and in the TOR for this study a skills gap that develops their role in the local economy. The current FE provision is not structured to specifically target women or groups of women but to bridge a generic skills gap in the marketplace. As the Dearing report reported current training programmes are not focused on particular groups such as women, ethnic minorities etc although the reality is that some provision is more likely to be taken up by some groups, e.g. women are the majority clients on New Deal for Lone Parents, while individuals from ethnic minorities will be the majority of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

Notwithstanding the above, the role of the Women's Organisations in delivering training is acknowledged by the FE colleges and statutory bodies.

With regard to the development of women's role in the local economy the research shows that with existing provision women are making a substantial contribution to the local economy and indeed in the role of entrepreneurs. This would suggest that provision is adequate to allow women to realise their full potential

5.2.2 Identification of the extent to which the needs of female learners are being addressed by mainstream statutory providers, in particular FE colleges, and by existing non-statutory education and training providers.

As the statutory provider, DEL has two high level objectives:

- To promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and
- To help people into employment and promote good employment practices.

DEL's strategy is set out in FE means Business. The main objectives of the FE Strategy are to deliver a sector, which provides:

- A sharper and greater focus on skills provision for the NI economy;
- A curriculum which is more clearly related to economic needs;
- Support for businesses, in enhancing productivity and competitiveness;
- Learners with the skills and knowledge to enhance their employability;
- Clear progression routes for learners;
- Access to vocational education for school children;
- Key skills for all full-time learners; and
- Enterprise as a central component of further education.

The extent to which the needs of women are being addressed can be seen by reference to the provision and uptake in 2005/6 .

The level of provision/uptake by the FE colleges for 2005/06 is shown below. Details are also provided of provision by the non statutory sector:

Para	FE Sector – Provision 2005/6	Number (Average Annual)
3.2.1	No of female enrolments in FE sector	133,034
3.2.1	No of female enrolments in FE sector – vocational full-time	15,205
3.2.1	No of female enrolments in FE sector – vocational part-time	68,168
3.2.1	No of female enrolments in FE sector – non vocational part-time	49,661
3.2.3	No of female enrolments in FE sector – over 25 years	84,541
3.2.7	No of female vocational enrolments in FE sector – unemployed and econ inactive	30,013
3.2.8	No of female vocational enrolments in FE sector – in 20% most deprived areas	17,398
Non-Statutory Sector (see note below)		
3.3.3	No of enrolments in women training organisations reported as part of feasibility study - multiple periods	14,175
3.3.3	CWES data (incomplete data)	10,901

The above compares the provision in the statutory and non-statutory sector.

The FE provision is significant, spanning all regions and across 48 campuses and 876 outreach centres across Northern Ireland, and providing for various age groups, full and part-time, employed, unemployed, economically inactive etc. There were 133,034 enrolments in 2005/6, full and part time and spanning the vocational and non vocational courses. Of the 83,373 vocational enrolments, 30,013 were known to be unemployed or economically inactive, whilst 17,398 fell within the 20% most deprived areas in NI.

It is noted:

- There are more economically inactive females than economically inactive males participating in FE college courses.
- There are more women from the more deprived areas using FE Colleges than there are from the least deprived areas.
- Overall, women in NI make a marked contribution to the workplace, Moreover, the number of women attending FE college courses is markedly higher for the unemployed category, with the data showing 10,330 women attending FE courses in 2005/6. 6,379 women or 3.8% of those being economically inactive attended FE courses, based upon those economically inactive in the age range of 16 to 59. The above would indicate that women of all socio economic groups are likely to be accessing the FE colleges.

Details on the provision by the non statutory sector was requested as part of this feasibility study. 14,175 enrolments were reported from the non statutory sector, however not all women's community education groups forwarded information. Moreover, the information that has been captured relates to different time periods, with some data dating back to 2002. The above table therefore covers multiple years.

Whilst none of the data has been verified by BDO Stoy Hayward, the women's training organisations have stated that the women organisation's provision was at least 10,901 for one academic year based on the sample data gathered by CFNI. This provision is stated to be across a wide range ie 423 'activist women's groups' and 1071 'traditional women's groups'

as per CFNI, with the majority focused on education. As before, this detail has not been verified.

Consideration was given to the course provision within fourteen women training organisation and the extent to which there was overlap with courses in the local FE college. Of the 281 courses provided by the fourteen centres, 154 were offered by the local FE college. Of the remaining 127 courses, these spanned courses such as yoga, parenting, various crafts, food hygiene etc. It is noted that some generic courses could however be provided by the colleges, particularly in relation to arts and crafts.

As noted above, the FE colleges are now reorganised into six colleges although the level of outreach etc has not changed. The Women's training organisations are more fragmented, although there are a number of larger training organisations. Overall, the evidence points to a high level of provision for women within the FE sector.

5.2.3 Examination of the feasibility of establishing a "virtual" Women's College to meet needs which cannot be adequately fulfilled by existing statutory and non-statutory providers, and consideration of where such a proposal sits, within the Department's current policy, for further education, of total integration

This feasibility study was to assess the level of demand and ultimate workings of a Virtual Women's College in NI. Consultations were undertaken across the statutory and non-statutory training providers and women users of these establishments. Findings were:

FE Sector and Statutory organisations

There was a consensus amongst the FE Colleges that demand for a Virtual Women's College would be extremely limited. It was noted that online facilities are currently available within NI FE Colleges, however, despite their ease of use, they are not widely used, particularly within community education.

The need to build upon the current provision to ensure access for all, including women, was recognised, it being agreed that the relationships with the women's organisations varied by college. The FE colleges recognised that the women's training centres can be a good source of referrals into the colleges themselves. It is be noted, that, as per the Department, funding for Level 1 and below provision or non NDAQ provision will still form part of the FLU funding and FE colleges will incorporate this provision into the CDPs.

The Colleges proposed greater collaboration between the FE Colleges and the community sector.

In addition, statutory organisations are of the view that a Virtual Women's College is not the mechanism to bring women back into mainstream education. Rather, greater collaboration between the women's centre's and the FE colleges (instead of competition for limited resources resulting in parallel provision) should result in a full service offering for women at all stages returning to education, and would result in the most efficient use of existing resources.

Non-Statutory Sector

The non-statutory sector i.e. the women's groups, view access as the greatest barrier to women entering FE colleges, due to perceived barriers arising from lack of personal confidence, with the demand for women only training organisations evident from the levels of participation.. In the context of the Terms of Reference, whilst they note that an e-learning provision has the advantage that potential transport problems can be overcome through remote access, it increases the sense of isolation and social detachment. In addition, access to computers at home for women in disadvantaged areas would be low. Access is however key, the barriers to entering FE colleges are considered to be real.

In relation to collaboration with the FE colleges, feedback from the women's groups suggests that there are some good relationships with FE colleges regarding delivery, where female tutors come to women's organisations to provide courses. There is a belief amongst the non-statutory sector that the increase in women's participation in further education has been facilitated by the groundwork done at community level to help women access further education.

Whilst the vast majority of students who participated in the research had high levels of confidence in the use of I.T., in addition to having access to a computer at home, the level of interest in learning online varied. Almost all focus group participants indicated that they would not learn online due to the lack of social interaction and uncertainty with regard to competence and progress made in the subject area. Many went as far as stating that they would be lost from the education system, if this was their only mechanism to learn. Questionnaire respondents were more open to the idea of an online facility due to the flexibility it offers and other issues such as the removal of transport costs and childcare problems.

Notwithstanding the above, there is no real support for a Virtual FE college, as per the Terms of Reference, from the women's training organisations or from the FE sector. From the level of participation in FE colleges, the majority of course provision can be met by the existing statutory providers. Where courses are offered exclusively by the women's organisations, these are focused on social development and recreational activities, which may have a limited impact on developing the women's roles in the local economy.

Furthermore, the Department's emphasis is on offering a further education provision which maximises integration. The high level of crossover of courses between the FE sector and the women's training sector would suggest that this could be achieved.

5.2.4 Determination of what a "virtual" Women's College would entail

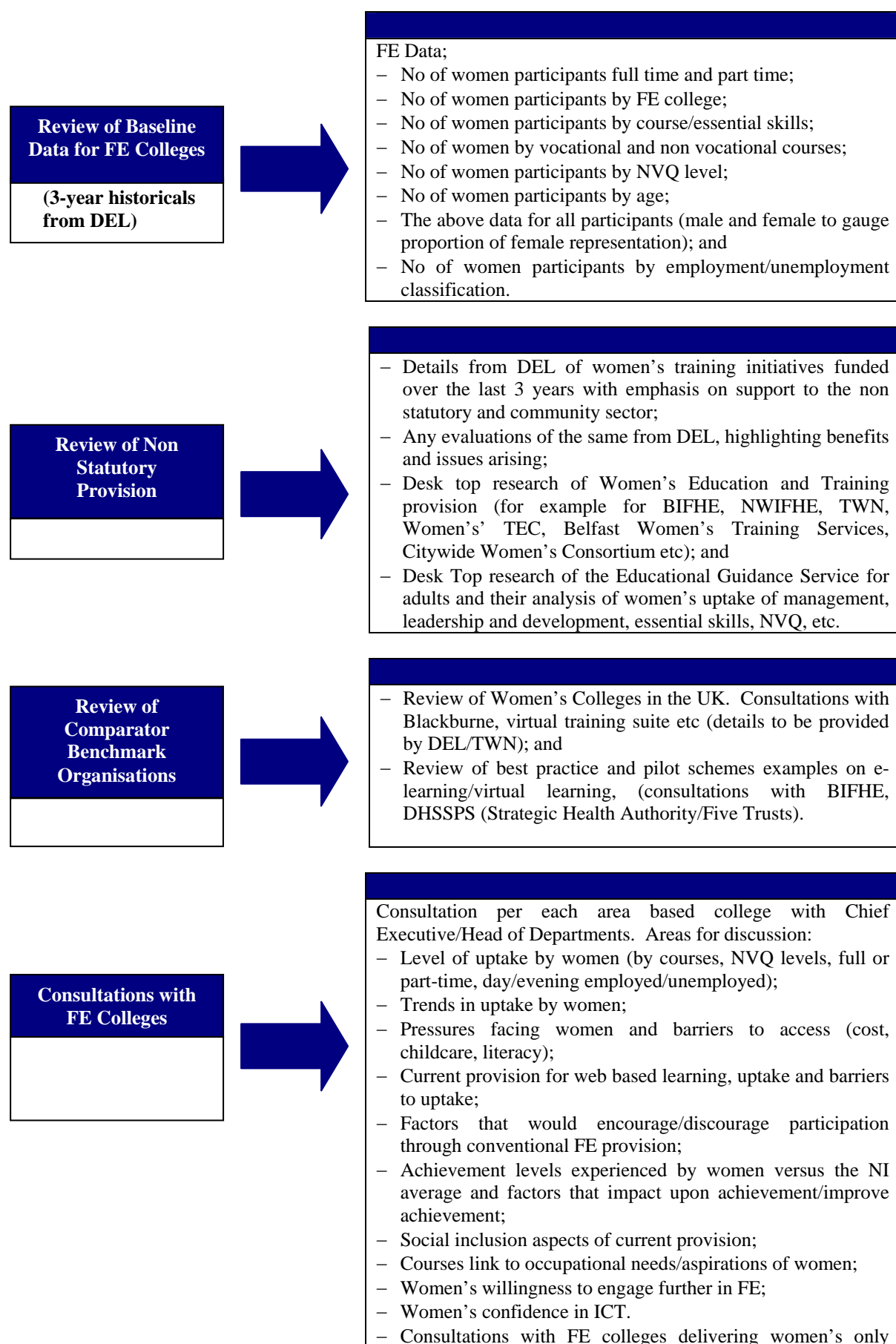
A virtual women's college would entail an administration centre, a website, potential upgrade of IT equipment i.e laptops acquired under funding needing upgrading every 3 years. Hardware maintenance costs and software costs for each laptop would be required. Programme Management would also be required as well as a system for accreditation. The Virtual College would therefore represent additional costs at a time when the focus for FE has been on delivery efficiencies for the sector.

5.3 Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, there would not appear to be a market driven need for a Virtual Women's FE College.

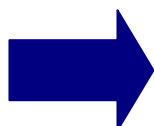
DEL's remit for achieving its high level objectives can be met by the FE colleges, whose increasing focus is on employability and enterprise. The above addresses the issue of the Virtual Women's FE college. It is however noted that whilst there is no specific need identifiable, there are barriers, perceived or real to women's participation in Further Education.

APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY



- programmes (i.e. Michelle McCaughey in BIFHE and Siobhan McLaughlin in NWIFHE);
- Details of specific women's only programmes, demand, outputs, delivery mechanisms (including gender of tutors).
 - Need for a virtual women's FE college;
 - Adequacy of current provision for e-learning;
 - Opportunity to build upon current provision;
 - How this would be facilitated (host location);
 - Input by the NI colleges in terms of management, promotion, course provision (design, tutor availability, quality control, audit and accountability);
 - Linkages to be established (physically and virtual) amongst the FE Colleges;
 - Resources required to operate Virtual Women's FE College at the college level (hardware/software management resource, out of pocket expenses) and beneficiary costs (hardware); and
 - Funding of the above.

Consultation with Non Statutory Providers

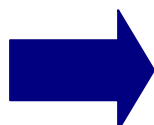


Consultations with non statutory providers.

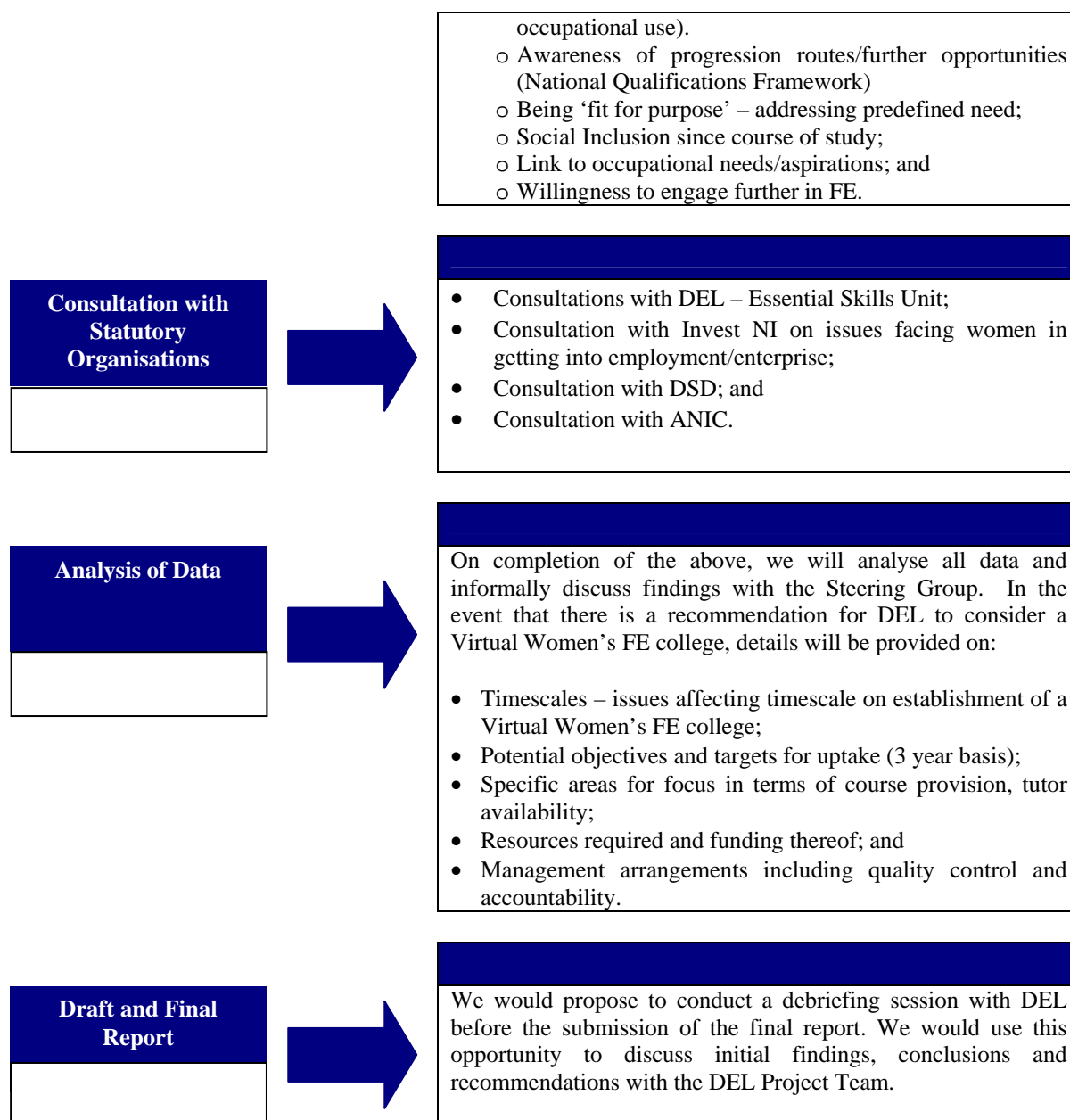
Areas for discussion include:

- Evidence of need for Virtual FE College;
- Adequacy of current provision for e-learning/support mechanisms for women;
- Barrier to uptake of existing provision;
- Key barriers to meeting needs of women through conventional delivery mechanisms, i.e. financial constraints, transport etc; and
- Opportunity for the non statutory sector to provide virtual based learning.

Consultations with student representative groups



- Consideration of mechanism to best engage with the student representative groups
 - Three FE Focus Groups (1 at Belfast College, 1 at North West College, 1 at Omagh College (agreed to take place in September 2007));
 - Non statutory groups – we will engage with TWN, Surestart, Belfast Women's Training Service and City Wide Women's Consortium with a view to attending up to 3 sessions being delivered by them, where the views of participants can be engaged
- In addition, we will undertake telephone questionnaires with a broad spectrum of previous participants drawn from current and past programmes of the FE colleges (100 questionnaires).
 - Areas for consultation will focus on (a) the rationale behind their choice of course/provider and (b) the benefits they have realised in real terms since completion of their course of study. We will focus on the key headings below:
 - Childcare Issues;
 - Public Transport;
 - Location;
 - Flexibility;
 - Cost;
 - Perception of Student Profile;
 - Literacy issues (including IT);
 - Confidence in the use of ICT (for personal and



APPENDIX II:NON-STATUTORY PROVISION

1. DEL Projects funded 2003 – 2007

Organisation Name	Project Title	Eligible Project Cost	ESF Awarded
BIFHE	Women into Self Employment (WISE)	£217,668	£141,484
Omagh College	Beyond Leisure	£217,998	£141,698
Newry Institute	EDGE	£241,779	£157,156
NWIFHE	Women Behind the Business	£470,153	£305,599
Youth Action Northern Ireland	Lifting the Limits- Community Leadership Programme	£239,238	£155,443
University of Ulster	Pathways to Education and Employment for Women	£1,418,617	£922,101
Workers Education Association NI	Job Rotation Project for the Unemployed & Economically Inactive Women	£370,305	£240,505
NOW Project	Employment Programme	£677,830	£440,588
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	Women's Employability Project	£193,544	£124,238
Women's Tec	Gearing Women up for Trades	£210,904	£137,087
Time Associates	Learn to Earn	£246,578	£153,527
Lenadoon Community Forum	Lenadoon Community Forum - Training & Education Project	£142,814	£92,829
Omagh District Training Consortium	Wraps (Women Redress Advancement in Public Sector)	£352,631	£200,434
RNIB Northern Ireland	Skills & Employability for Women	£203,173	£132,062
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group	Women's Empowerment Program	£198,698	£128,620
First Steps Womens Group Dungannon	A Future in Childcare	£176,260	£114,568
Castlereagh College of Further & Higher Education	Equal IT	£460,020	£298,984
University of Ulster	Women in Enterprise	£129,197	£83,978
Footprints Women's Centre	Adult Learners Support Project	£246,378	£160,145
Women in Business NI Ltd	Women in Business Network	£134,944	£73,416
Ace Ventures	W.I.T (Women IT Technician	£224,612	£142,112
East Belfast Enterprise	Volunteer Mentoring Programme	£98,446	£63,789
Roe Valley Community Education Forum Limited	Women to Work	£103,714	£67,856
Employers for Childcare	Childcare Solutions	£306,438	£199,185
Training for Women Network Ltd	Swift Employability Initiative	£699,891	£454,929
Women in Enterprise NI Ltd	Business Womens Network - Networking the Networks	£325,990	£209,000
Invest NI	Innovative Pathways to Increase Female Entrepreneurship	£508,840	£330,745
Women's Resource & Development Agency	Community Facilitation: A Path to Employment	£256,065	£166,425
Windsor Women's Centre	Euterpre Project 111	£249,124	£161,930
Ashton Community Trust	Womens Community Training Project	£181,303	£117,846
Youth Action NI	AWAKE - Women Achieving Knowledge + Employment	£178,955	£116,303
Total			£6,234,583

2. TWN

ILM and OCR courses undertaken in house through Building Sustainable Prosperity.

Total number of ESF beneficiaries on the project by economic status on entry

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
Unemployed	3	2	11
Employed	41	28	57
Still at School or FEC	1	1	1
TOTAL	45	31	69

Highest qualification level of beneficiaries at the start of the project

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
NVQ1 or equivalent	1	-	2
NVQ2 or equivalent	3	1	2
NVQ3 or equivalent	40	8	33
NVQ4 or equivalent	1	4	14
NVQ5 or equivalent	0	1	17
Other	0	17	1
TOTAL	45	31	69

Number of beneficiaries who completed the project or left early

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
Left Early	3	-	-
Completed the Course	26	16	51
TOTAL	29	16	51

Outcome for beneficiaries when they completed the project or left early

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
Full-time	27	14	39
Part-time	1	-	-
Self-employed	-	-	-
Voluntary	1	1	-
FE/training/other	-	1	1
Unemployment	-	-	11
Other	-	-	-
TOTAL	29	16	51

TWN ran a range of non-accredited taster sessions (workshops) for women (2003/04).

Training	Total Participants	Participants
Sales Training	36	36 (12)
Marketing & Publicity Workshops	60	60 (20)
Policy & Research Workshops	21	21 (7)
Training & Accreditation Workshops	51	51 (17)
ICT Workshops	33	33 (9)
Personal Development Workshops	9	9 (3)
Personal Development	51	51 (17)
Finance	39	39 (13)
Project Management	12	12 (4)
ESF Structural Funds Regulations	21	21 (7)
Personnel	9	9 (3)
TOTAL	330	330 (112)

3. Women's Support Network

Baseline Education Statistics for academic year 2005 – 2006

BELFAST GROUPS				
Centre Name	Total learners completing programmes*	Accredited Programmes	Numbers Achieving Accreditation	Progression
Atlas Women's Centre	768	19	339	621 FET** 147 unknown
Ballybeen Women's Centre	172	9	80	82 FET 10 employment 80 unknown
Falls Women's Centre	257	7	114	186 FET 21 employment 4 entered degree programme 2 joined management committee 44 unknown
Footprints Women's Centre	384	24	173	72 FET 70 employment 31 volunteers
Greenway Women's Centre	321	9	75	285 FET 12 employment
Shankill Women's Centre	247	6	61	108 FET 3 employment 2 self employment
Windsor Women's Centre	156	17	140	141 FET 20 employment
NORTH WEST GROUPS				
Strathfoyle Women's Centre	172	0	76	58 FET 2 employment 64 unknown
The Women's Centre	269	29	213	125 FET 11 Employment 69 unknown
Waterside Women's Centre	465	6	79	53 FET 11 employment 15 unknown

*Accredited & Non-Accredited

**FET – Further Education and Training

4. Banbridge District Enterprises Limited

Participant figures for ICT courses, which include IT for the petrified, Microsoft Programmes such as Word, Powerpoint, Excel, Digital Photography and ECDL. Only the ECDL course is an officially recognised qualification.

Figures from September 2005 to May 2007 (192) show that overall women (119) account for 62% of attendees.

5. Intercomm - WEAVE (Women's Enterprise and Vocational Education) Project

Peace II	2002 - 2006	2007 Extension
Number of Beneficiaries	66	60
Number of Qualifications	73	21
Number onto further training	38	
Number into business ownership / pre – ownership employment	16	
Number of women went in to full-time employment	5	
Number of women went into part-time employment	9	

Set up in business	
2003	4 women
2004	7 women
2005	5 women

6. EGSA (Educational Guidance Service for Adults)

EGSA do not undertake any analysis of women's uptake of management, leadership and development, essential skills, NVQ, etc. and directed us towards NINIS and DETI for statistics. More comprehensive data was obtained from DEL in relation to the necessary statistics.

7. WOMEN'S TEC

Women who went through for accreditation since September 2006:

Group	Number	Accreditation	
Proteus	47	OCNNI Level 2	These are all in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joinery • Horticulture • Electrics • Mosaics • Plumbing • Paint Effects
Girl Power	61	OCNNI Level 2	
SCOI	12	OCNNI Level 2	

8. Omagh Women's Area Network

Number of learners (over three years)	
Community Tutors Training – Level 3 NIOCN	44
Community Tutors trained to deliver “Vision Care Health Pack” with Health Promotion	6
Placement Counsellors studying Diploma in Counselling through QUB at Omagh F.E. College	4
Placement counsellor studying Advanced Diploma through Magee University	1
Women “Making the Leap/Dialogue training”	50
Women training in Women's Studies – NIOCN Level 1	10
Childcare workers – Child Protection	30
Participants – First Aid	50
Cook It in conjunction with Health Action Zone	40
Staff & committee members – Evaluation Training with CENI	3
Staff qualified in sage	1
Placements from OFE college provided with opportunities for learning and experience	6
Staff in Trainers for Trainers in Capacity Building	1
Women participated in a range of non accredited training	Approx 1,800
Approx Total	2.046

Level/Qualification	
NIOCN – Levels 1, 2 & 3	
Diploma in Counselling – QUB	
Advanced Diploma in Counselling	
Certificates of participation & attendance from various organisations	

Progression	
Community tutors employed with OFE College	3
Community tutors employed by Omagh Women's area network & other community development groups	10
Placements in administration employed by Omagh Women's area network	2
Counsellor employed by Omagh Women's Area Network	1

9. Lisburn YMCA

Course	Qualification	2005	2006	2007
Essential Skills	Entry Level 1	1	3	
	Entry Level 2	2	5	
	Entry Level 3	4	9	
	Level 1	2	4	
	Level 2	1	7	
ECDL	Pass	4	18	21
	Pass	15	11	11
CLAIT	Pass	17	14	21
Word Processing	Pass with distinction	4	2	4
NVQ – Child Care	OCN Level 2	4	3	4
Basic Food Hygiene	Pass	21	20	24
Youth Work	OCN – Level 2		6	4

10. Women's Resource and Development Agency

Numbers of Learners	Qualification/Level	Progression
Community Facilitator Programme		
48	NVQ Level 3 in Direct Training & Support	Employment, self employment, further education
32 ongoing at present	To be completed 2008	
Awareness Programmes		
156 Community Facilitators	Breast & Cervical Screening Awareness	Able to deliver to community groups
15 Community Facilitators	Parent's Promoting Sexual Health	Able to deliver to community groups
18 Community Facilitators	Counting the Cost of Alcohol	Able to deliver to community groups
11 Community Facilitators	Towards Better Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing	Able to deliver to community groups
823	Breast & Cervical Screening Awareness	

11. Darkley Community Organisation

Level 3 Social Care	7
Level 3 Childcare	8
Level 2 Social Care	5
Level 2 Childcare	5

Women have participated in community relations work with the facilitator	16
Women completed First Aid Training	10
Women participated in basic IT training	8
Plus children have participated in the community relations summer scheme	40

12. North West Centre for Learning Women's Programmes

1 Jan 2004 – 1 April 2006	236
From April 2006	191

13. Roe Valley Community Development Association

Adult Education Officer 2005 – 2006

- Worked successfully in recruiting women from the Borough to identify their needs in essential skills, they achieved in all levels
- 250 women (150 women achieved either Basic IT, Numeracy level 1 & level 2, Literacy level 1 & level 2) OCR/CEA Qualification

Confidence to Work 2007-2008

- 75 women over a period of 18 months
- April 2007- June 2007 (6 participants achieved level 1/Level 2 in numeracy and literacy)
- Programme to continue in September 2007 & January 2008
- 7 of these women have undertaken placements within the community to gain work experience and with the hope of gaining part-time or full-time employment within the labour market.

Europe on your Doorstep 2007-2008

20 women will avail of this fantastic opportunity to put something else back into their community as we have so many workers living within the Limavady Borough Area.

IT – New Clait 2 units (6 participants have achieved this)

Advanced Literacy (to start in September)

TEFL – teaching English as a foreign language (to start in January 2008)

OCR Level 3

Health Co-ordinator 2007-2008

Currently running 3 programmes within the Limavady Borough Area:

- Digital Photography (16 women)
- Beauty Therapy (17 women)
- Walk & Weigh for ladies (25 women)

Women to Work programme 2007-2008

40 women will take part in this course which will consist of 40 women taking part in either Essential Skills in:

Maths Level 1 & 2

English Level 1 & 2

ECDL

Worktrack Programme 2002-2005

This was hugely successful programme aimed at the long term unemployed to give participants the chance to gain a qualification in either IT, Retail, care, Basic Food Hygiene etc. We had over 100 women who gained a qualification and out of that 100 almost 50 of these women gained unemployment through the work experience they gained from their placement and the employer having a chance to see that person within a working environment whereby they may not have even considered them prior to this. Some of these ladies had to retrain after being in a factory for maybe 20 years and then the factory closed down. These women were left devastated and we feel that we really did help these women re-train and gain a qualification and receive a work experience within a different environment. This programme within the Limavady area was highly successful and DEL

recognised this. We had the highest rate of employment figures within the consortium of the worktrack providers.

Workforce Training Belfast

Outside of the statutory sector over the last 3 years 120 women rec'd an NVQ level 3 qualifications in Childcare with a near 100% completion and achievement rate. The absence of flexible part-time study in the statutory means that in the absence of such programmes these women would not have been able to access training and achieve.

Foyle Women's Aid

These are the figures we have for training we carry out training with voluntary and statutory groups so I have given you both sets of figures

Year	Voluntary/Community Sector	Statutory Groups
2005-2006	348	1,136
2006-2007	160	682
2007-2008	137	286

Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership

September 2006 – June 2007

49 women in total attended our programmes

6	Received City & Guilds Level III in keyboarding
4	Received NIOCN Level II in Child Protection
0	None as yet have gone on to employment

14. Positive Steps, Cookstown

2003 - 2004 584 participants registered on courses

14% of participants progress to employment (i.e. 82 participants)
 2% of participants start their own business (i.e. 12 participants)
 23% of participants from NTSN areas (i.e. 134 participants)
 27% of participants single parents (i.e. 157 participants)
 14% of participants register for essential skills for living (i.e. 82 participants)
 27% of participants disabled persons (i.e. 87 participants)

2004 – 2005 650 participants registered on courses

15.5% of participants progress to employment (i.e. 102 participants)
 2% of participants start their own business (i.e. 18 participants)
 20% of participants from NTSN areas (i.e. 97 participants)
 20% of participants single parents (i.e. 128 participants)
 10.5% of participants register for essential skills for living (i.e. 67 participants)
 16% of participants disabled persons (i.e. 104 participants)

2005 - 2006 596 participants registered on courses (a decrease in the previous year due to the fact that Peace II monies were coming to an end)

14% progressed to employment (i.e. 82 participants)
 4% have started their own business (i.e. 21 participants)
 18% came from NTSN areas (i.e. 107 participants)
 23% were single parents (i.e. 137 participants)
 12% of people registered on essential skills (i.e. 73 participants)
 9.5% of those registered were on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) (i.e. 58 participants)

15. Shankill Women's Group

Education Statistics for 2 years

Course	Learners Enrolled	Learners Completed	18-24	25-50	50-60	60+	Non Accredited	Accredited Course*	Progression
Intro C.Develope	8	8		8			x		5 FE
Basic Computers	8	7		3	4		x		2 FE
GCSE Maths	37	37	11	24	2			x	6 FE
GCSE Sociology	7	7	2	5				x	
GCSE English	7	7	1	6				x	3 FE
Essential English	20	18	1	14	3		x		12 FE
Essential maths	10	10	2	4	4		x		6 FE
Irish History	24	21	2	17	2		x		14 FE
Sign Language level I	6	6		6				x	2 FE
Personal Development	35	35	10	20	5		x		32 FE
Culture	11	11		11			x		1- p/t & 1 f/t
WISP women in search of peace	34	34	4	15	1		x		6 FE
Nail Art Diploma	9	8	3	5				x	2 self employed
Time for me	8	7		4	3		x		
Irish Language level I	10	6		4	1	1		x	1- f/t employment
Irish Language level II	10	6		4	1	1		x	
Health Cooking	6	6		4		2	x		5 FE
Flower arranging	12	9	1	6	2		x		3 FE
Cancer awareness	15	15	2	5	6		x		
Craft	20	20		8	10	2	x		17 FE
Special paints	16	16		6	1	2	x		7 FE
Ceramics	29	29		8	15	6	x		24 FE
Crochet level I	52	49	2	10	30	7		x	18 FE
Menopause	10	10		8	2		x		
Rickter	14	14	3	10	1			Licensed	8 FE
Colour me Beautiful	18	18	3	10	6		x		
Messiness	14	14	2	9	3		x		6 FE 1 p/t employment
Counselling level I	15	15	4	8	3			x	10 FE
Counselling level II	15	15	4	8	3			x	6 FE
Women's Studies (access)	9	9	3	6				x	2 FE

Course	Learners Enrolled	Learners Completed	18-24	25-50	50-60	60+	Non Accredited	Accredited Course*	Progression
Clait	8	8		8				x	5 FE
ECDL	18	18	8	10				x	1 employment
Nous	9	9		7	2		x		4 FE
Genealogy	21	21					x		6 FE
Holistic Therapies	9	9		9			x		
Yoga Workshop		10							
Menopause Workshop		14							
Time for Me		26					x		
Yoga class		8					x		
Cook It		37						x	25 FE
Basic Food and Hygiene Certificate		37						x	20 FE
Introduction to Reflexology		10						x	3 FE
Health Day Action Cancer Bus		73					x		
Over the counter drugs workshop		9					x		
Complimentary Therapy Workshop		16					x		
Weigh to Health		20					x		
Smoking cessation		16					x		2 stopped smoking
Suicide and Self-harm Awareness		10						x	10-further Ed
Cross Community Walk		20					x		Built networks
Breast and Cervical Screening Programme		15					x		Attended screening clinics

*Where course were accredited – all learners achieved accreditation

APPENDIX III: QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

1. Why did you re-enter education?

Q1. Why did you re-enter education?	N	%
Career Aspirations	39	25%
Skills Development	63	41%
Social Interaction	38	24%
Other	15	10%
Total	155	100%

The majority of respondents re-entered education for skills development (41%), 25% re-entered for their career aspirations and 24% wanted to social interaction. Other factors include relaxation (4%), to pass time (3%), to increase confidence (1%), personal fulfilment (1%) and to improve their flexibility (1%).

2. What course are you participating in?

Q2. What course are you participating in?	N	%
Art	1	1%
Beauty	3	3%
Women behind the business	20	22%
Care	1	1%
Construction	1	1%
Interior Design	8	9%
IT	3	3%
Beyond Leisure Project	1	1%
LMA	1	1%
Management	5	5%
Reflexology/Massage	2	2%
Pilates	11	12%
Sage/Accounts	28	31%
Yoga	6	7%
Total	91	100%

The majority of respondents (31%) are participating on Sage/Accounts classes, 22% are taking the women behind the business course, and 12% are taking pilates classes. Other courses include art, beauty, care, construction, interior design, IT, beyond leisure project, LMA, management, reflexology/massage, and yoga.

3. Why did you decide to do this course?

Q4. Why did you decide to do course at Omagh College?	N	%
Not available elsewhere	7	17%
Local	22	54%
Suitable class times	6	15%
Facilities	3	7%
Cost	3	7%
Total	41	100%

54% of respondents from Omagh College decided to do their course because it was local, 17% said it was because it was not available elsewhere, 15% stated there was suitable class times, 7% said the facilities and cost were factors that help them decide to do their course.

Q. 4 Why did you decide to do course at NW College?	N	%
Not available elsewhere	8	11%
Local	25	35%
Suitable class times	20	28%
Facilities	4	6%
Cost	14	20%
Total	71	100%

The majority of respondents from NW College, 35% said they decided to do their course because it was local, 28% because of suitable class times, 20% because of the cost, 11% said it was not available elsewhere and 6% said the facilities was a reason why they choose to do their course at the NW College.

Q4. Why did you decide to do course at Belfast Metropolitan College?	N	%
Not available elsewhere	6	12%
Local	22	44%
Suitable class times	18	36%
Facilities	0	0%
Cost	4	8%
Total	50	100%

44% of respondents from bifhe said they decided to do their course their because it was local, 36% said the class times were suitable, 12% said they choose BIFHE because the course was not available elsewhere, and 4% stated that the cost was why they chose BIFHE.

4. Does this course meet your needs?

Q5. Does this course meet your needs?	N	%
Yes	90	99%
No	1	1%
Total	91	100%

99% of respondents stated that the course does meet their needs. 1 respondent stated that it did not; the reason given for this was that it was believed that the course was too rushed. Reasons given by those who said the course did meet their needs include:

- It was a night class and good for personal development
- I learnt a lot about my own capabilities
- It provided a portfolio to get into university
- It is good for my CV
- Social interaction
- It can be applied to work
- It is approachable and accessible
- It helped refresh current skills and develop new ones
- You receive one-to-one tutoring
- It helps with the family business
- The tutor is on hand for information and covers all areas
- Receive formal qualifications
- It enhances your job prospects
- There is a good tutor and there is good social interaction

- You meet like minded people

5. Do you think you are benefiting from meeting other women on your course?

Q6. Do you think you are benefiting from meeting other women on your course?		%
Yes	88	97%
No	3	3%
Total	91	100%

97% of respondents agreed that they were benefiting from meeting other women on their course, reasons for this include:

Reasons	N	%
The social interaction/networking	54	70%
Receive support from others in the class	18	23%
Increased confidence and communication skills	2	3%
Keeping fit	2	3%
Friendly Tutor	1	1%
Total	77	100%

The main reason why respondents feel they are benefiting from meeting other women is the social aspect/networking (70%); this includes making new friends, meeting old friends, getting out of the house and meeting like minded people, and it is good fun. 23% stated they were benefiting from receiving support from others in the class and sharing knowledge, 3% believe they have increased confidence and communication skills, 3% said they are keeping fit and 1% stated they were benefiting from a friendly tutor.

6. Are you interested in continuing your studies within FE?

92% of respondents stated that they were interested in continuing their studies within further education. 8% stated that they were not interested in continuing studies; reasons for this are:

- No time due to business commitments
- Have completed all that they were looking to learn

7. What are the barriers for women accessing FE Colleges?

Q8. What are the main barriers for women accessing FE Colleges?	N	%
Childcare Issues	49	28%
Public Transport	8	5%
Location	28	16%
Flexibility	39	23%
Cost	39	23%
Other	9	5%
Total	172	100%

The two main barriers for women accessing FE Colleges are deemed to be the flexibility i.e. class times (23%) and the cost (23%), 16% stated location as a barrier, 5% said public transport and 5% stated other factors as barriers to accessing FE Colleges; these barriers include:

- Lack of confidence
- Gap in education

- Working and studying is tiresome

8. Do you have remote access to IT facilities?

Q9. Do you have remote access to IT facilities?	N	%
Yes	75	88%
No	10	12%
Total	85	100%

9. Would you use an online facility i.e. accessing material from home instead of attending the FE College?

Q10. Would you use an online facility?	N	%
Yes	36	42%
No	49	58%
Total	85	100%

42% of respondents agreed that they would use an online facility, reasons for this include:

- It saves time
- It is convenient
- You have the comfort of your own home
- Can't always get childcare
- It is more flexible
- It cuts costs i.e. transport

58% stated that they would not use an online facility because:

- No access to computer/internet
- Lack of understanding of computers
- It would not be practical enough
- Support needed from tutor
- Would miss the social aspect
- Would not be as committed at home

10. Do you have any opinion on the adequacy of current provisions for e-learning/online support mechanisms for women?

Q11. Do you have any opinions on adequacy of current provision for e-learning/online support mechanisms for women?	N	%
Yes	31	35%
No	57	65%
Total	88	100%

65% of respondents have no opinion on the adequacy of current provision for e-learning/online support mechanisms for women, 35% did have an opinion; these include:

Positive:

- It is easy to use
- There is a lot out there
- It is good if you can't get out of the house
- It is an excellent idea

- It is convenient

Negative:

- It is not practical or enjoyable
- It feels limited
- There is not enough relevant courses
- Unaware of any provisions
- It is isolating
- Women may be afraid to use them
- Not everyone has access to computers

11. Do you have confidence in the use of ICT (for personal and occupational use)?

Q12. Do you have confidence in the use of ICT?	N	%
Yes	64	80%
No	16	20%
Total	80	100%

80% of respondents agreed that they were confident in use of ICT, 20% stated that they were not confident. Reasons for lack of confidence include:

- Afraid of making mistakes
- Not experienced enough
- Not happy using computers
- Lack of knowledge

12. What would be the issues affecting your remote use of IT learning?

The main issues affecting the remote use of IT learning are deemed to be:		
Reason	N	%
Access to computer/internet	6	12%
Lack of knowledge	2	4%
Lack of confidence	2	4%
Need support from a tutor	15	30%
No experience	3	6%
Not as motivating/lack of commitment	5	10%
Not social	17	34%
Total	50	100%

The majority (34%) of respondents felt that learning remotely through the use of I.T. would be anti-social, whilst nearly one third (30%) felt that they needed the support of a tutor.

APPENDIX IV: BENCHMARKING ACTIVITY

Benchmarking Activity- Courses Offered by Woman's Community Colleges in general areas against FE provision

Belfast Area benchmarked with Belfast Metropolitan College

Atlas Women's Centre Lisburn;

The above centre offered a total of 22 courses. The following 11 were not offered by local FE provision.

Introduction to Computers
Confidence and Me
Digital Photography
Winter Crafts
Stress and Motivation
Your History & Tradition
Bits & Bobs
Women's Studies
Women's Treats
Pharmacy Healthy You
Painting for Pleasure

Ballybeen Women's Centre;

The above centre offered a total of 20 courses. The following 7 courses were not offered by local FE provision.

Local & Family History
Women Moving On
Creative Crafts
Women's Studies
Women's Health
Mixed Crafts
Seeing Others As We See Ourselves

Falls Women's Centre;

The above centre offered a total of 11 courses. The following 6 courses were not offered by local FE provision.

Journey to Self
Journey to Freedom
Stress/Relaxation
Mediation/Relaxation
Equal Skills Class
Conflict Resolution

Footprints Women's Centre;

The above centre offered a total of 21 courses. The following 10 courses were not offered by local FE provision.

Driving Theory
Personal Effectiveness and Confidence Building
Intermediate Access to University
People's History Course
Word/Text/Medical Processing

Brush-Up English
Enneagram
Slow Food Families
Mums and Kids: Food is Fun
Infant Massage Class

Greenway Women's Centre;
This above centre offered in total 21 courses. The following 10 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Painting for fun
Us & Them
Personal Safety Awareness
Flower Arranging
Local Safety
Conflict Management
Women's Studies
Personal Development
Personal Money Management
Tai Chi

Shankill Women's Centre;
The above centre offered a total of 22 courses. The following 13 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Weigh to Health
Complementary Therapies
Art & Craft
Personal Development
Steps to Development
Cook-It; Healthy Eating on a Budget
Day-to-Day Budgeting
Walking Club
Calligraphy
Driving Theory
Minding Me (Towards Better Health)
Crochet
Messines (History and Identity, Human Rights and Equality)

Women's TEC;
The above offered a total of 10 courses. The following 4 were not covered by local FE provision.

Electrical Maintenance
Mosaics
Digital Devices
Non Traditional Trades Sampling

Windsor Women's Centre;
The above centre offered a total of 15 courses. The following 6 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Positive Thinking
Baby Massage

Lipstick and Money
Crafts-Sewing
Slimming Club
Health and Safety

North West area benchmarked with North West Regional College and Northern Regional College

Strathfoyle Women's Centre;

This above centre offered a total of 19 courses. The following 14 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Stay and Play Parent and Toddler Group
Childminding Network Support Group
Pro Active Community Interest
OCR Word Processing Stage 2
Baby Massage
Home Comforts and Curtain Making
Floral Art
Start IT with Internet and Email
Time for Me
Jo Jingles Music and Movement for Young Children
Life and Laughter Confidence Building
Parenting
Cook It- Healthy Eating
Yoga

Waterside Women's Centre;

This above centre offered a total of 22 courses. The following 15 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Watercolours
Yoga
Beginners Swimming
Gentle Aerobics
Patchwork and Quilting
Seasonal Crafts
Tai Chi
Crochet
Improvers Swimming
Oil Painting
Novelty Applique
Deaf Awareness
Mother & Toddler Activity Group
Aqua Aerobics
Card Making

The Women's Centre, Derry;

The above centre offered a total of 55 courses. The following 16 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Advice and Guidance
Essential Skills
Driving Theory

Basic Food Hygiene
IPOD Emotional Health
Multi-Cultural Programme
Crafts
Healthy Eating Awareness Cert
Interview and Presentation Skills
MUM Programme
Garment Making
Child at the Centre Programme
IPOD Ready for Life
IPOD Physical Health
Special Paint Effects/Wallpaper
Hanging

Other areas of Northern Ireland benchmarked with Southern Regional College, South Eastern College and South West College

Chrysalis Women's Centre Craigavon;

The above centre offered a total of 13 courses. The following 7 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Walking for Fun
Money Management for Families
Crafts (various)
Job skills training
Introduction to computers
Cookery
Women's Health (Personal and Social Perspectives)

First Steps Women's Group, Dungannon;

The above group offered a total of 14 courses. The following 4 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Moving On
Community Crafts
Employment Skills
Beginners IT

The Learning Lodge;

The above centre offered a total of 16 courses. The following 4 courses were not covered by local FE provision.

Skills for Health
Creative Crafts
Yoga
Food Safety in the Catering Industry

Source: Women's Community Education & Training Prospectus

people:skills:jobs:



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