

WRC Social and Economic Consultants

Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative (PTO)

Measure 21 of the EHRDOP

Implemented by Department of Education and Science

WIDER EQUALITY MEASURE STUDY

Supported by

Equality Studies Unit, Measure 33A of the EHRDOP



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS

WRC Social and Economic Consultants

Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative (Part-time Option)

Measure 21 of the EHRDOP
**Implemented by Department of Education
and Science**

WIDER EQUALITY MEASURE STUDY

Supported by

Equality Studies Unit, Measure 33A of the EHRDOP



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS

Contents

Section	Page
1. Introduction	4
2. Objectives and Methodology	6
3. Implementing Body – Department of Education and Science	8
3.1 Role and Organisational Structure	8
3.2 Equality Policies and Practices	9
4. Measure 2I: Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative	12
4.1 Overview of BTEI-PTO (Formal Strand)	12
4.2 Educational Provision / Courses Under BTEI-PTO	14
4.3 Recruitment Procedures for BTEI-PTO	17
4.4 Data Collection and Reporting Procedures for BTEI-PTO	17
5. Participation of the Four Groups in the BTEI-PTO	20
6. Experiences of VEC Personnel Involved in the Design and Delivery of the BTEI-PTO Concerning Persons from the Four Groups	24
7. Understanding the Framing of Policies and Practices Regarding Equal Opportunities in the BTEI-PTO	26
8. Summary of Factors Conducive to Securing Equal Opportunities in the BTEI-PTO	27
9. Lessons Arising from BTEI-PTO for Promoting Equal Opportunities	28

List of Tables

4.1 Eligibility and Entitlements under the Back to Education Initiative Part-time Programmes	13
4.2 Courses Provided Under BTEI-PTO by Certification Level (County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC)	16
4.3 Overview of Data Collection and Reporting Framework for BTEI-PTO	18
5.1 Schematic Outline of the Manner in which People from the Four Groups are Accommodated in the BTEI-PTO in County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC	21
5.2 Participants on BTEI-PYO Classified by their Target Group Codes	22
5.3 Courses Approved for 2004 under the BTEI-PTO in County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC by Target Groups for the Courses	23

List of Figures

3.1	Schematic View of Main Bodies Involved in Implementing the BTEI-PTO (Formal Strand)	8
4.1	Percentage of Persons with Less than Upper Second Level Education by Population Group and Gender	14

List of Boxes

3.1	The Challenges of Inter-culturalism in Adult Education from Learning for Life: The White Paper on Adult Education (2000)	10
3.2	Guiding Principles of the BTEI-PTO in the Areas of Equality, Accessibility and Inclusiveness and Recognising and Accommodating Diversity	11
4.1	Statement of Actions to Promote Equality and Diversity by the CDABES Network of County Dublin VEC	16
6.1	Summary of Main Experiences of Providing Training for Members of the Four Groups	24
9.1	Summary of the Learning Points Arising from the Measure Study of the BTEI-PTO in Relation to Removing Barriers to Participation in Labour Market Programmes	29

1. Introduction

In the context of the Employment and Human Resource Development Operational Programme (EHRDOP), the Equality Authority is implementing Measure 33a: Technical Assistance – Equality Studies Unit (ESU). The ESU is mandated to examine labour market inequalities and their implications for labour market policy. Its focus is exclusion and discrimination in the labour market as covered by equality legislation and for particular groups named in the EHRDOP including older people, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups in particular refugees, and members of the Traveller Community. A Management Committee, representing members of the EHRDOP Monitoring Committee and equality interests, is in operation to advise the Equality Authority on the work programme of the ESU.

In this capacity the Equality Authority has developed a rolling programme of measure studies. The aim of this rolling programme is to identify and promote changes required in the planning, design and delivery of the specific measures comprising the EHRDOP to enhance their capacity to promote equality and accommodate diversity. The relevance and value of undertaking measure studies was demonstrated in the ESU report titled *An Assessment of the Position of Selected Groups in Three Measures of the Employment and Human Resources Operational Programme*. That report provided a preliminary assessment of how people from the four groups are being accommodated in three measures of the EHRDOP and identified the issues arising in adopting a more systematic approach to undertaking measure studies.

WRC Social and Economic Consultants have been contracted by the Equality Authority to carry out the measure studies. These studies draw on the analysis developed in their report for the ESU *Accommodating Diversity in Labour Market Programmes*. This report, which synthesised the findings of a number of earlier ESU research reports, detailed the labour market situation of the four groups and their concerns together with an initial analysis of the capacity of the measures comprising the EHRDOP.

Three initial exploratory measure studies were undertaken in 2004. This report presents the findings of one of these, the study of Measure 21 Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative (Part-time Option) (BTEI-PTO) implemented by the Department of Education and Science through the Vocational Education Committees. The other two measures in this first series were Measure 12B Sectoral Entry Training Tourism (SETT) implemented by Fáilte Ireland and Measure 13 Skills Training for the Unemployed and Redundant Workers – Specific Skills Training (SST) implemented by FAS.

As a package, the first three studies aimed to develop and test the methodology for undertaking the rolling programme of measure studies as well as to provide an initial understanding of how the implementing agencies involved are addressing the Wider Equal Opportunities Principle (WEOP) of the National Development Plan (NDP). The WEOP is concerned with understanding, monitoring and supporting the participation of older people (i.e., people aged 50 years and over), people with disabilities, refugees, and members of the Traveller Community in the programmes comprising the EHRDOP. The output of each of the three studies is a concise report documenting the position of the four groups in the operation of the measure together with an analysis of the factors seen as contributing to the accommodation of the people from the four groups in the measure. Also, the experience of and lessons derived from the three initial measure studies will feed into shaping the design of the rolling programme of measure studies.

It is important to note from the outset that the measure studies are being undertaken with a view to contributing to capacity building in the area of equality among implementing agencies. In seeking to support a process of change the measure studies require the full engagement of those responsible for the design and delivery of the measures concerned. Measure studies are therefore undertaken on the

basis of a partnership between the Equality Authority and the organisation responsible for the measure in a way that achieves ownership of the process by the implementing agency. The outputs of the measure studies are subject to the decisions of the implementing agencies and are therefore owned by them.

While the initial three measure studies were in progress the EHRDOP Monitoring Committee agreed to prioritise the application of the WEOP to 10 measures of the EHRDOP, including the three measures that were the subject of the initial measures studies. While formally distinct exercises the subsequent review process of the 10 measures prioritised in relation to the application of the WEOP was informed by the approach and results of the three initial measure studies.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The main objectives of the three initial exploratory measure studies were to:

- Identify and document current understanding of the issues for older people, people with disabilities, Travellers and minority ethnic groups among organisations responsible for delivering measures;
- Identify existing practices and barriers regarding the application of the NDP's horizontal principle of equal opportunities to these groups;
- Examine how equality practices can be incorporated into the design and delivery of programmes; and,
- Identify any supports needed to improve practice in this area.

The criteria involved in selecting the three measures for study included ensuring that each measure had a different implementing agency and that each measure itself was of relevance to addressing the needs and concerns of the four groups as identified in the report *Accommodating Diversity in Labour Market Programmes*. In the case of the Department of Education and Science (DES) the measure selected is Measure 21 Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative.

There are two main elements to Measure 21 Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative. The first of these elements is the full-time education option provided under the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) Programme and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). The second element is the part time education option provided under the Back to Education Initiative (Part-time Option). Following discussions with the DES, it was decided to focus this study on the Back to Education Initiative (Part-time Option) and within this the 90% of the programme that falls within what is termed the VEC / Schools Strand or Formal Strand. The rationale for this selection included the referencing of all four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle in the guidelines prepared by the DES to support the implementation of the programme in 2004 and the more recent start-up of the Community Strand¹ of the Back to Education Initiative (Part-time Option) (BTEI-PTO).

As the BTEI-PTO is implemented at local level by Vocational Education Committees (VECs), two VECs were selected for inclusion in this study: County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC². The former covers the three administrative areas of county Dublin (i.e., Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin, is mainly urban, and caters for a population of 627,000. The latter covers the county of Mayo, is predominantly rural, and caters for a population of 117,500. The selection of these two VECs from among the 33 VECs nationally was designed to provide an insight into how the BTEI-PTO is implemented in two different local contexts and in two VECs that differ in the scale of their operations and in their geographical locations.

¹ Ten per cent of funding under the BTEI-PTO is ring-fenced for what is termed the Community Strand. This strand is implemented by organisations involved in providing community based education courses. A complementary support initiative is also in place that provides for a network of 34 Community Education Facilitators to be based in VECs.

² Individual schools (either secondary, community, comprehensive or special schools) can apply directly for funding under the Formal Strand of the BTEI-PTO. The number of such applications and the resulting provision constitutes a small element of overall provision under the BTEI-PTO and is not covered in this study. For example, just 27 non-VEC schools were funded in 2002/2003.

The methodology for this study involved:

1. Undertaking a review of documentation concerning the design and delivery of the BTEI-PTO and related documentation on monitoring and reporting on the programme at national and local levels. The documentation examined included the programme complement for the measure, monitoring reports covering the years 2001, 2002 and 2003, and guidelines and reports on the implementation of the BTEI-PTO prepared by the DES. At national level, documentation on those aspects of educational policy dealing with equality and diversity were reviewed (e.g., *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* published in 2000 and the recent *Statement of Strategy 2003-2005* of the DES). Also, at national level, information and data on the overall operation of the BTEI-PTO provided by the Further Education Section (FES) of the DES were collected and reviewed. The documentation reviewed regarding the implementation of the BTEI at local level in the two VECs selected for the study included data on courses implemented during 2002 and 2003, plans for course provision for the year 2004, application forms and promotional materials.
2. Undertaking a set of semi-structured interviews with personnel involved in the delivery of the BTEI-PTO. The personnel interviewed included, the Principal Officer of the Further Education Section of the DES (1), Further Education Development Co-ordinators in the Further Education Development Unit (2), the Education Officer CDVEC (1), the County Co-ordinator in CDVEC (1), the Adult Education Organiser Mayo VEC (1), personnel involved in actual course organisation in both CDVEC and Mayo VEC (9). The issues that were covered in these interviews include the following:
 - Identifying levels of awareness concerning the wider equal opportunities principle of the NDP and its application to the measure
 - Documenting the current state of play regarding actions taken to secure equality on the four grounds
 - Investigating the actual experience of and identifying the lessons arising from engagement with members of the four groups
 - Identifying the factors that have shaped/influenced the actions taken in relation to applying the equal opportunities principle to date
 - Identifying plans or future directions in relation to securing equality on the four grounds in the measure
 - Identifying concerns and the issues arising in relation to securing equality on the four grounds in future actions, and
 - Identifying the nature of the resources required to secure greater equality on the four grounds.

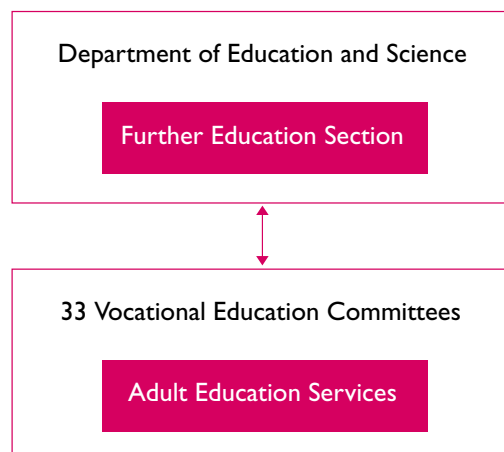
3. Implementing Body

3.1 Role and Organisational Structure

All elements of Measure 21 Lifelong Learning BTEI are implemented by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in conjunction with VECs, non-VEC schools/colleges and community education groups. Within the DES, responsibility for implementing the measure falls within the Further Education Section (FES). This section is responsible for implementing a wide range of programmes in the area of adult and further education that collectively seek to address the diverse needs and circumstances of adult learners. The complement of programmes implemented by the FES covers: the needs of young early school leavers (e.g., Youthreach); providing second chance education for adults (e.g., VTOS and the BTEI-PTO); catering for the educational and vocational needs of members of the Traveller community (Senior Traveller Training Centres); providing vocational and training opportunities for people entering or re-entering the labour market (e.g., PLCs); and, promoting adult literacy (e.g., Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme – ALCES).

Supporting the FES in implementing the BTEI-PTO are two two-full-time Further Education Development Co-ordinators (FEDCs) as well as two support personnel. The FES undertakes a range of functions in relation to implementing the BTEI-PTO including managing the application process for funds from 33 VECs nationwide, making assessments of VEC applications, liaising and supporting VEC personnel in implementing the BTEI-PTO, and collecting and collating data on the progress of the BTEI-PTO at local and national levels.

Figure 3.1: Schematic View of Main Bodies Involved in Implementing the BTEI-PTO (Formal Strand)



Front-line responsibility for the design and delivery of courses under the BTEI-PTO is undertaken by 33 VECs nationwide. Within each VEC the adult education service is responsible for implementing the BTEI-PTO. These committees, initially established under the Vocational Education Act 1930, have had their responsibilities and functions updated by the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001. As defined by the recent Act, their main function is to “plan, coordinate and review the provision of education and services ancillary thereto in recognised schools and centres for education established or maintained by that committee” (p. 11). The recent legislation also requires that VECs prepare five-year plans in respect of educational services in their areas and report to the Minister on an annual basis on the implementation of their plans.

VECs are responsible for identifying local needs that can be met through the BTEI-PTO, making applications for funds from the FES, employing personnel to co-ordinate the delivery of the BTEI-PTO in their areas, and monitoring and reporting on activity under the BTEI-PTO at local level. Within the two VECs in this study, front-line responsibility for co-ordinating and delivering courses under the BTEI-PTO is primarily discharged by VEC personnel operating in the areas of adult literacy and adult education (e.g., Adult Education Organisers, Adult Literacy Organisers/Co-ordinators, VTOS Co-ordinators). It should be noted that actual practice with respect to this varies across VECs with, for example, some VECs having appointed a co-ordinator to support the implementation of the BTEI-PTO.

3.2 Equality Policies and Practices

The policy and operational context within which the BTEI-PTO operates as it concerns the issues of equality and diversity is outlined in a number of documents which have provided a framework for as well as a specific focus on these issues in the design and delivery of the BTEI-PTO.

In *Learning for Life: The White Paper on Adult Education* (2000), equality and inter-culturalism are identified as two of the core principles underpinning adult education (the other being a systemic approach). These nature and operation of these principles is defined as follows:

“**equality** of access, participation and outcome for participants in adult education, with pro-active strategies to counteract barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability. A key priority in promoting an inclusive society is to target investment towards those most at risk;

inter-culturalism – the need to frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one, and the development of curricula, materials, training and inservice, modes of assessment and delivery methods which accept such diversity as the norm. This refers not only to combating racism and encouraging participation of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in education, but also to a recognition that many minority groups such as Travellers, people with disabilities, older adults, participants in disadvantaged areas have distinct needs and cultural patterns which must be respected and reflected in an educational context. It also envisages a more active role by adult educators in the promotion of the Irish language and culture.” (p. 13)

In catering for diversity, the White Paper acknowledges that uniform, nationally organised educational systems find it difficult to respond to the needs of particular sub-groups. The challenges the White Paper identifies in the area of inter-culturalism in adult education are summarised in Box 3.1.

In its recent Statement of Strategy 2003-2005, the DES identifies supporting an inclusive society as the second of its five high level goals: “We will support, through education, a socially inclusive society with equal opportunities for all. The second objective under this goal state: “We will promote the development of a high quality further education and vocational training system for young people and adults, which is relevant to social and economic needs” (p. 29). The BTEI-PTO is identified as one of the means to achieve this objective. The promotion of gender equality for adults at all levels of education is identified in objective 2.6 under the high level goal of achieving a socially inclusive society.

The guidelines prepared by the FES of the DES to support the implementation of the BTEI-PTO identify a set of seven principles that underpin the design and delivery of courses run under the measure. These seven principles are learner centeredness, equality, accessibility and inclusiveness, recognising and accommodating diversity, innovation, local consultation and an area based approach and quality assurance. An elaboration of the three principles dealing explicitly with the issues of equality, accessibility and inclusiveness, and recognising and accommodating diversity is presented in Box 3.2.

As outlined in Section 4.2, a considerable number of the courses provided under BTEI-PTO are accredited by the Further Education Training and Awards Council FETAC.³ FETAC is currently engaged in developing guidelines for quality assurance procedures among providers in the further education and training sector. As the issue of equality is one of the core descriptors that is being considered, it is likely that when the guidelines are issued to education and training providers they will provide a specific impetus for the development of practices based on accommodating diversity in education and training programmes. In this regard, it is our understanding that the guidelines in respect of the equality descriptor will cover the issues of an equality plan at provider level, staff training in equality, and the collection of data on equality grounds for the purpose of monitoring and reporting.

Box 3.1: The Challenges of Inter-culturalism in Adult Education From Learning for Life: The White Paper on Adult Education (2000)

- Recognition that many immigrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, have specific urgent requirements, from basic information through to language training;
- The fact that many refugees and asylum seekers may not have the requisite job market skills or may have difficulty in achieving recognition for qualifications;
- Recognition that many minority groups, such as Travellers or people with disabilities, may also have distinct cultural patterns which must be acknowledged in an educational context;
- The need to develop mechanisms to support different groups in ways which are empathetic to and which respect, their own heritage and cultural diversity;
- The need to provide specific tailored programmes and basic literacy and language education for all immigrants as an elementary part of provision;
- The acknowledgement that the indigenous population also needs educational support as it adapts to an inter-cultural context;
- Recognition of awards and qualifications achieved in other countries;
- The need to provide mechanisms whereby all minority and marginalised groups have the possibility to influence policy and to shape interventions which have a bearing on them;
- The need to build structures which are predicated upon the requirements of a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one, and the development of educational curricula, resources and materials, training and inservice strategies, modes of assessment and delivery which accept such diversity as the norm. (p. 51)

Currently, all VECs are engaged in the development of policy statements covering the issues of equality and diversity for their personnel. A framework / template for the policies of individual VECs in this area has been developed by the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) which is the national representative body for VECs. The IVEA has also produced a draft policy statement for VECs in the area of customer service. While the latter does not directly address the issues of accommodating diversity in the provision of services, it does identify commitments and standards related to ensuring the availability of accessible and up to date information for customers of VECs.

³ The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) is a state-sponsored body established in 2001 under the Qualification (Education and Training) Act, 1999. It is the national awarding body for all further education and training in Ireland and carries out the functions of the former National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA).

Box 3.2: Guiding Principles of the BTEI-PTO in the Areas of Equality, Accessibility and Inclusiveness and Recognising and Accommodating Diversity Back to Education Initiative Guidelines 2004

Equality: Equality legislation is designed to counter discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, race and membership of the Traveller community. Applied to education, the principle of equality requires that all learners be afforded the opportunity of reaching their potential in their social, cultural, political, economic and other roles. Accordingly, those providing programmes under the BTEI are expected to develop a pro-active strategy or proofing mechanism to target and prioritise those most at risk, e.g. setting out an Equality Checklist. This will assist in optimising learner access to, participation in and benefit from relevant programmes, and in counteracting barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability.

Accessibility and Inclusiveness: The principle of access and inclusiveness means that barriers to participation are removed. Under the BTEI, providers are asked to make determined efforts to meet the needs of learners for whom existing provision of long-cycle full-time courses is unsuitable and who need to combine their return to learning with family, workplace and other responsibilities. Where necessary, this will mean targeting resources at those on the margins. Geographical considerations are important in this respect. A flexible approach to the timing of provision, entry and admission criteria, delivery methods, assessment and validation of learning, accumulation and transferability of credits and learning and other supports is encouraged.

Recognising and Accommodating Diversity: The principle of recognising and accommodating diversity implies a strong commitment to addressing difference and inter-culturalism, in terms of both access and service provision. Therefore, programmes should reflect and respect the cultural background of the participants they serve. Engagement with learners in regard to programme choice, content and delivery methods is essential to ensure that course participants are motivated to join and complete programmes that are relevant to their needs. (pp. 9-10)

4. Measure 21: Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative

The Programme Complement for the Back to Education Initiative measure describes it as involving “the merger and continuation of existing provision under the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training programmes with new forms of provision (i.e., part-time). It will play a key role both in addressing the needs of those with minimal or no educational qualification, and provide a re-entry route for those who wish to upgrade their skills in line with emerging needs”. The overall aim and objective of the measure “is to address the needs of those with minimal or no educational qualifications and provide a re-entry route for those who wish to upgrade their skills in line with emerging needs through flexibly delivered and timed provision allowing reconciliation with family or employment responsibilities”. The intended beneficiaries of the measure are identified as “unemployed with minimal or no educational qualifications and employed seeking to upgrade qualifications”. In the context of this study it is notable that the programme complement does not specifically identify people from any of the four groups and, in this regard, the primary targeting of the programme is based on the educational level of intended beneficiaries.

This measure is located in the Adaptability Pillar of the EHRDOP. The central objective of the Adaptability Pillar is to “raise workplace-relevant skills and the competencies of individuals” (EHRDOP, p. 72). Within the Adaptability Pillar, the Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative falls under the Lifelong Learning sub-priority. The central aim of the Lifelong Learning sub-priority is “to enhance the quality of labour supply through continued investment in education and training and, in particular through developing a strategic and flexible framework for lifelong learning” (EHRDOP, p. 74).

4.1 Overview of the BTEI-PTO (Formal Strand)

A set of guidelines to support the implementation of the BTEI-PTO has been produced by the Further Education Section (FES) of the Department of Science (DES). In these guidelines the overall aim of the BTEI-PTO is stated as “to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second level education in a range of flexible learning opportunities” (p. 4).

The BTEI-PTO places a high priority on reaching and responding to the needs of adults with low levels of literacy and the large number of adults that have not completed upper second level education. On the basis of data from the 2002 Census, there is a total of 1.12 million persons aged 15 years and over that have not completed upper second level education and just over 552,000 of these ceased their full-time education at primary level. In the context of the present study it is notable that the proportions of people with less than upper second level education among older people, people with a disability and members of the Traveller community are considerably higher than that of the population as a whole (see Figure 4.1). In this regard, the programme is particularly applicable to meeting the educational needs of people covered by the wider equal opportunities principle and addressing the inequalities they experience in relation to educational qualifications and the labour market.

Within the broad target population for the BTEI-PTO, the guidelines prepared by the FES of the DES identify all four groups of persons covered by the NDPs wider equal opportunity principle as well as a number of other groups that are considered priorities for the programme as well as being recognised as “more difficult to engage in the formal learning process” (p. 5). The latter includes homeless people, drug users, and ex-offenders. From among these target groups three general categories of participant are catered for under the BTEI-PTO in terms of eligibility and entitlements (see Table 4.1). As is shown in Figure 4.1 the majority of participants in the BTEI-PTO are either unemployed or not in the labour force and possess less than upper second level qualifications.

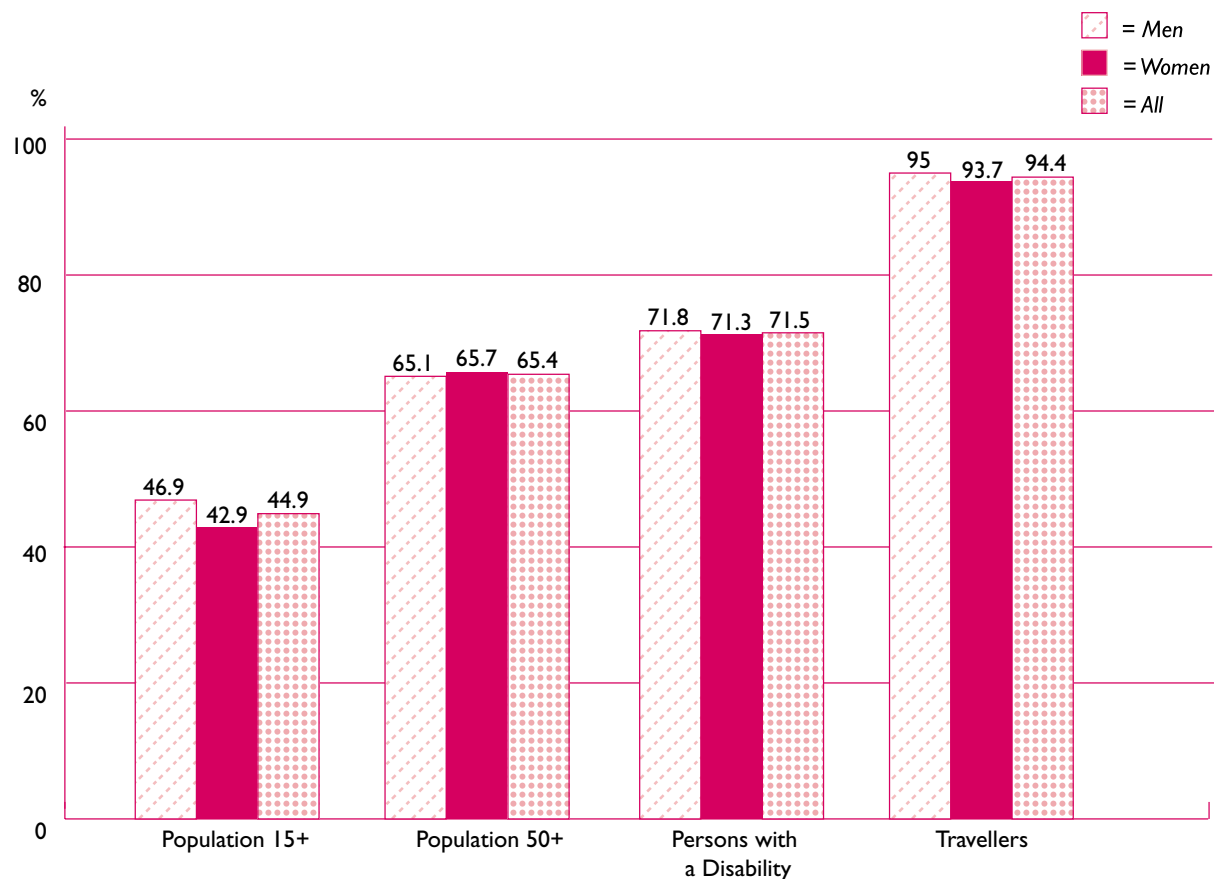
The Programme Complement for the measure indicates a mid-term (2003) target of 14,000 persons on an annual basis taking-up part-time options under the measure rising to 16,500 in 2006. It also states the budget allocation for the whole of Measure 21 is €1,183 million at national level for the period 2000-2006. On the basis of the most recent Monitoring Committee Report on the measure the total budget committed in respect of the Formal Strand of the BTEI-PTO over 2002 to 2003 was €17.5 million with an additional €12.6 million being committed to support the implementation of the programme during 2004. The BTEI-PTO is co-funded by the European Social Fund.

Table 4.1: Eligibility and Entitlements under the Back to Education Initiative Part-time Programmes

Category	Participant Eligibility	Participant Entitlements
Cat 2a	<p>Persons entitled to, or dependants of persons entitled to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a medical card; - an unemployment payment; - a means-tested welfare payment; - a Family Income Supplement Payment <p>and with less than upper second level education.</p> <p>Persons eligible to take part in full-time courses under VTOS, Youthreach or Traveller Training Programmes and with less than upper second level education.</p>	<p>Free tuition.</p> <p>Continued welfare payment is subject to satisfying the conditions of the Department of Social and Family Affairs.</p> <p>Training allowances will not be paid in the education sector. The exception to this is persons who are Youthreach or Traveller eligible who may not have an underlying welfare entitlement and who may be paid a pro-rata training allowance funded by the Department of Education and Science.</p>
Cat 2b	<p>Persons entitled to, or dependants of persons entitled to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a medical card; - an unemployment payment; - a means-tested welfare payment; - a Family Income Supplement Payment <p>and who have completed upper second level education.</p> <p>Persons eligible to take part in full-time courses under VTOS, Youthreach or Traveller Training Programmes and who have completed upper second level education.</p>	<p>Free tuition.</p> <p>Continued welfare payment is subject to satisfying the conditions of the Department of Social and Family Affairs.</p> <p>Training allowances will not be paid in the education sector. The exception to this is persons who are Youthreach or Traveller eligible who may not have an underlying welfare entitlement and who may be paid a pro-rata training allowance funded by the Department of Education and Science.</p>
Cat 3	<p>Persons not in Cat 2a who are unwaged and with less than upper second level education e.g. persons not in the labour force.</p>	<p>Reduction of tuition fees to a level of 30%.</p> <p>Training allowances will not be paid.</p>
Cat 4	<p>Others</p>	<p>Fees will be charged</p> <p>Training allowances will not be paid</p>

Guidelines (2004), p.6

Figure 4.1: Percentage of Persons with Less than Upper Second Level Education by Population Group and Gender



4.2 Educational Provision / Courses Under BTEI-PTO

Priorities for Educational Provision Under the BTEI-PTO (National Aspect)

As indicated above the BTEI-PTO involves the provision of part-time courses for persons eligible for existing full-time options provided under the PLC, VTOS, Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training programmes. It is also designed to provide a range of new part-time options for its target group/ eligible participants to pursue courses in a very wide range of areas including information and communications technology training, electronic technician training, language skills, enterprise development, business, tourism, art and craft and child care. A particular priority of the BTEI-PTO is to increase provision at FETAC Foundation and Level 1 or equivalent for those with low skills, and to ensure a progression bridge is in place for participants from the adult literacy service.

The BTEI-PTO provides for participant entry at a number of levels:

- Access to FETAC Foundation Level or Junior Certificate or equivalent levels of basic education for those who have no prior educational qualifications. A key priority at this level is to provide an effective bridge to certified learning for those progressing from the literacy service;
- Access to FETAC Level 1 or Leaving Certificate or equivalent options for those who enter having completed lower second-level education; and,
- Access to FETAC Level 2 or 3 programmes for those who have completed upper second-level education or are in a position to successfully complete a programme at this level. Within this area, key priorities will be the provision of ICT, electronic, engineering and e-commerce training, the development of foreign language proficiency, and the provision of childcare training.

The Back to Education Initiative provides a participant teacher ratio to 10:1 for all participants accessing the programme with less than upper second-level education and 16:1 in the case of the other eligible groups. Course provision under the BTEI-PTO is typically on a modular basis with modules varying in duration from 25 to 80 contact hours. Flanking the operation of the BTEI-PTO – as well as other provision in the area of adult education – is the Adult Education Guidance Initiative.⁴

The process of obtaining approval for courses and the associated funds is by way of application from VECs to the Further Education Section of the DES. The application form requires details of proposed courses to be provided including the name of course, certification body and level, number of teacher contact hours, number of participants, target groups covered and course locations. Information is also requested from applicants on the rationale for the proposed activity, the nature of the planning and consultation processes adopted to inform the application, the needs identified at local level and the innovative approaches adopted by the proposed courses. Currently, application for funds from the BTEI-PTO is on an annual basis.

Identifying Priorities and Needs for Educational Provision Under the BTEI-PTO (Local Aspect)

Both the guidelines for the BTEI-PTO and the application form for funds require that VECs making applications for funding engage in local consultation and undertake an analysis of the pattern of local needs that can be addressed through provision under the BTEI-PTO. In both County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC this was addressed through consultation with local statutory, voluntary, and community based organisations. Among the organisations cited as having been consulted are: active retirement groups, area based partnership companies, community development projects, community drug teams, Enable Ireland, FÁS, health boards, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, men's groups, the National Training and Development Institute, Rehab, Travellers' groups, and youth projects. Both VECs engaged in open days and workshops as part of the initial information dissemination and planning process for their initial applications for funding under the BTEI-PTO. Both VECs liaise and work through intra and inter-agency consultation in planning and implementing the BTEI-PTO at local level.

In addition to the above, in both VECs an important input to the planning process is the ongoing contact of VEC personnel working in the areas of literacy provision and adult education with local people, programme participants, and personnel in local statutory, community and voluntary organisations. This on-going contact provides the basis for identifying a considerable number of the courses actually provided under the BTEI-PTO.

Differences between the two VECs are evident in the manner in which courses get prioritised for inclusion in applications for assistance under the BTEI-PTO and, allied to this, in deciding what courses to offer. In the case of the County Dublin VEC courses are prioritised on the basis of: (i) demand (i.e., that is courses that are most likely to run or for which actual participants have already been identified); (ii) equality (i.e., an effort is made to ensure that all groups in the population – including groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle – are provided for); and, (iii) geographical fairness (i.e., ensuring an equitable distribution of courses across the five areas of County Dublin). While equality and geographical fairness elements do arise in Mayo VEC, the procedures for dealing with these issues are less formal and the main emphasis is on prioritising and developing courses on the basis of demand and contact with groups and organisations working with the people in the range of target groups for the BTEI.

⁴ The core objective of the Adult Education Guidance Initiative is to provide comprehensive information on adult learning opportunities in a format accessible to all. It provides a telephone help line service as well as ICT information points in libraries and community education centres.

Box 4.1: Statement of Actions to Promote Equality and Diversity by the CDABES Network of County Dublin VEC

- Identifying specific strategies to promote access for disadvantaged groups
- Targeting resources in favour of such groups
- Meeting the support needs of such groups
- Working in partnership with the community and relevant groups or agencies to promote co-operation and integrated services
- Addressing the support and professional development needs of our staff
- Promoting a positive and inclusive ethos across the service
- Celebrating the achievement of learners
- Evaluating our provision
- Documenting our provision and promoting our services.

Table 4.2: Courses Provided Under BTEI-PTO by Certification Level (County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC)

Certification Level	Examples of Courses
Pre-Foundation	Interior Design, Preparation for Work, Numeracy, Basic Communication Skills
FETAC Foundation	Aquaculture, Art/Arts & Crafts, Career Information, Childcare, Communications, Computers, Consumer Affairs, Cookery, Conversation, Data Entry, Drama, English as a Foreign Language / English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Food and Nutrition, German, History, Horticulture, Irish, Literacy/Art Literacy/ Communications, Maths, Music, Personal Effectiveness, Pottery, Sign Language, Spanish
FETAC Level 1	Basic Maths, Childcare, Child Development, Computer Applications, Office Administration
FETAC Level 2	After School Support Skills, Book Keeping, Business Calculations, Childcare, Desk-Top Publishing, Floristry and Plant Care, Human Development, Health and Safety, Intellectual Disability Studies, Landscape Construction, Nursing Studies, Nutrition, Office Administration, Palliative Care, Plant Identification, Radio Production, Reception Skills, Social Studies, Understanding Youth / Working with Young People
FETAC Level 3	Child Development, Social and Legal Studies, Supervision in Childcare
Other	Basic English (IAS), Basic Numeracy (IAS), Car Maintenance (FÁS), ECDL, ECDL Advanced, Business Development (City and Guilds), Financial Management (City and Guilds), First Aid (Order of Malta), Management (City and Guilds), Microsoft Office User Support (FIT), PC Maintenance (FIT), Personal Development (City and Guilds), Junior Certificate (Business Studies), Junior Certificate (English), Junior Certificate (Maths), Leaving Certificate Applied (Various Courses), Leaving Certificate (Business Studies), Leaving Certificate (English), Leaving Certificate (Geography), Leaving Certificate (Home Economics), Leaving Certificate (Maths)

In the case of County Dublin VEC also, a position statement and strategy in relation to equality has been drawn up by personnel involved in its CDABES Network.⁵ In this statement attention is primarily directed to addressing the educational needs of persons experiencing social disadvantage with this being defined in terms of: disadvantage means a lack of access to and opportunities within the educational system for a variety of reasons including poverty, membership of an ethnic or cultural minority, disability. The statement outlines the actions the Network is committed to in respect of promoting equality and diversity (see Box 5.1) and, in addition, includes a commitment to developing equality proofing as an element of its strategy in this area.

Courses Provided Under the BTEI-PTO in County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC

Based on courses provided during 2002/2003 and courses approved for delivery during 2004, Table 4.2 gives an indication of the range of options provided under the BTEI-PTO in the two VECs included in this study.

4.3 Recruitment Procedures for BTEI-PTO

A wide range of procedures is used by both VECs to promote awareness of the BTEI-PTO and to recruit participants for courses. In general, courses under the programme are advertised in the local media and press as well as by placing posters in locations various locations (e.g., community development projects, Social Welfare offices, and premises used by members of particular target groups). Such procedures are more prevalent in relation to courses targeted at the wide educationally based target group of the BTEI-PTO. In both VECs direct contact with local statutory as well as community and voluntary organisations plays an important part in promoting awareness of the BTEI-PTO and recruiting participants. This is particularly the case in catering for people with disabilities and older people under the BTEI-PTO where there is evidence that many of the courses specifically organised for people from these groups are “joint” initiatives by VECs and other groups or organisations directly working the people from these groups.

In County Dublin, provision for members of the Traveller community on a “group specific” basis is undertaken by the Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) for Travellers. This position, established 2001, and which is countywide in its remit, is dedicated to the development and implementation of provision for members of the Traveller community. A key aspect of the work of the ALO for Travellers in relation to the BTEI-PTO is undertaking outreach work involving direct contact with potential course participants as well as contact with groups and organisations working with members of the Traveller community in County Dublin (additional information is provided Table 5.1). In addition, the ALO for travellers liaises with other County Dublin VEC personnel in respect of the recruitment/participation of members of the Traveller community in the courses they organise.

4.4 Data Collection and Reporting Procedures for BTEI-PTO

Since the BTEI-PTO became operational in late 2002 considerable attention has been paid to the issue of developing data collection and reporting procedures. For 2004, the FES has provided a suite of templates/forms to VECs for completion and return to the FES (see Table 4.3 for description of the main templates/forms). A set of guidelines on the completion of the various templates/forms has also been issued to VECs.

An analysis of the capacity of the suite of templates/forms to provide data on participation by people from the four grounds of concern in this study points to a number of issues. Among the main issues arising are the following:

⁵ The County Dublin Basic Adult Basic Education Schemes - CDABES - Network is chaired by the County Co-ordinator of Literacy Services and its members are Adult Literacy Organisers and Adult Education Organisers. As noted earlier, both of the latter groups of personnel are involved in identifying and organising courses under the BTEI-PTO.

First, the sole source of individualised data resides with each VEC. In this regard, it is of note that the systems for compilation of aggregate data and data analysis differ in the two VECs in this study with aggregation being done by course organisers/AEO in one VEC and by input to a dedicated database system in another. Also, the absence of individual level data at a central level places limitations on the nature of the analyses that can be undertaken with this, in turn, limiting aspects of reporting on the programme.

Second, while data on membership of the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle is collected in each of the templates/forms, potential inaccuracies arise due the manner in which the data is collected and processed. This arises primarily due to the categorisation of participants on the basis of a pre-identified set of categories referred to as *target group codes*.⁶ In the case of data relating to individuals at the time of their registration, participants can potentially indicate that they belong to more than one target group in the Participant Details Form (e.g., ESOL Student and Asylum Seeker; Person with a Disability and Refugee; or Literacy Student and Traveller). Also, in the case of the Course Activity Report, two target group codes may be used where the course is designed to cater for persons from both groups (the individual numbers in each case not being recorded). A further point regarding the target groups codes is that they include codes referring to groups of people on the basis of their educational need (e.g., Literacy, ESOL), their economic status (e.g., unemployed, in work), and their membership of particular groups (e.g., people with a disability, Travellers). This practice confounds the clear identification of people from the grounds covered by NDPs wider equal opportunities principle.

Table 4.3: Overview of Data Collection and Reporting Framework for BTEI-PTO

Template/Form	Frequency	Data Collected	Comments & Observations
Participant Details Form	When participant is registering, leaves or completes courses / modules under the BTEI-PTO	Data on gender, age nationality, target group, economic status, duration of unemployment, welfare and training allowance status, highest educational level achieved, participant funding category, course / modules studies and awards achieved, supports (childcare and guidance) provided, reasons for leaving early, progression status	Participant signs form indicating their consent to sharing data on the form. Form states the confidentiality of identity of person. Data on form is held by VEC and used to complete other reporting templates / forms concerning courses / modules and participant profiles for return to the FES of the DES. Data on the four grounds covered by the NDPs wider equal opportunities principles is collected.
Course Activity Report	Twice yearly	Details of each course provided including module titles, certification body and level, numbers of men and women, numbers of participants in each funding category, and target groups among participants	Data on gender is collected. A pre-specified list of target groups is used to profile participants on each course but does not record the number of participants from each target group except where the course is catering for members of a single target group.
Implementation Report (Participants)	Twice yearly	As per Participant Details Form	The format is tabular requesting data from Participants Details Form on an aggregate basis over previous six months. Data on four WEOP groups is collected.

⁶ The actual list of target group codes changed between 2003 and 2004. The codes in use up to the end of 2003 are listed in Table 5.2. The current list of target group codes is shown in Table 5.3 below.

Third, certain of the key codes used in the templates (e.g., employment status) are not in line with external sources of data relevant to the target population of the BTEI-PTO (e.g., the Census, Quarterly National Household Survey). This makes analysis of certain issues difficult (e.g., comparing population on the programme with the target population for the programme at national and local levels).

Finally, it should be noted that the issues arising in relation to data collection and the nature of the categories and codes used in relation to the BTEI-PTO as outlined above are not unique to this measure. This points to an underlying/cross-measure issue regarding the development of appropriate and consistent procedures to collect, code and analyse data in relation to the membership of the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle.

5. Participation of the Four Groups in BTEI-PTO

Three sources of data were used to estimate the level of participation in the BTEI-PTO by older people, people with a disability, members of the Traveller community and members of minority ethnic groups. These data sources were: (i) interviews and semi-structured questionnaires with personnel in the two VECs; (ii) national data from the monitoring report on the BTEI-PTO covering the period January to December 2003; and, (iii) analysis of the target groups for courses planned for delivery during 2004.

In both VECs, the personnel interviewed reported that persons from the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle were among participants in the courses that they organised. However, there are some differences between the two VECs both in the *extent* of their engagement with members of the four groups and in the *manner* in which persons from the four groups are accommodated within the BTEI-PTO. A schematic outline of the manner in which the four groups are accommodated in the BTEI-PTO in both VECs – based on qualitative data from the interviews with VEC personnel – is presented in Table 5.1. A key issue arising in this regard is the extent to which persons from the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle are accommodated in a “group specific” manner (i.e., all participants are from the same group) or on the basis of educationally based needs resulting in their participation on courses for non-homogeneous groups of participants. The observations and views of the VEC personnel interviewed regarding this issue are presented below.

In both VECs, the personnel interviewed drew attention to two issues arising in relation to accommodating people from the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle in the BTEI-PTO. The first of these issues concerns the extent to which accommodating diversity requires or is primarily based on developing “group specific” courses on the one hand, or accommodating members of the four groups in generally targeted courses, on the other. For the most part, personnel in both VECs pointed to the dangers of “group specific” courses in “ghettoising” participants from the four groups, particularly if there are no clear progression pathways to courses catering for the wider educationally based target group of the BTEI-PTO or to other education and training programmes. This was seen to be particularly an issue in relation to members of the Traveller community. Set against this position, however, is a recognition that in relation to each of the groups and for different reasons, “group specific” provision is a necessary feature of the first point of engagement with people from the four groups. The clearest example of this is the provision of ESOL courses for non-English speaking members of ethnic minority groups. In the case of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses the shared learning need for competency in English leads to “groups specific” provision.

Group specific provision is also made for persons from each of the other three groups. In the case of members of the Traveller community this primarily arises from a combination of a stated desire for such provision on the part of members of the Traveller community and the tendency for existing provision to mainly provide courses on a “groups specific” basis for members of the Traveller community. In the case of people with a disability and also older people (though to a lesser extent), “group specific” provision results in some cases from the manner in which a course is identified (i.e., a group/organisation working with people with a disability or older people approaches the VEC seeking courses for its clients/members) and in other cases – particularly in the cases of people with a disability – because of the need for specific facilities to enable participation.

The second issue concerns the extent to which effectively accommodating diversity is more properly located, achieved and examined within the totality of adult and further education services at local level rather than within one component strand of these services (in this case, the BTEI-PTO). Among the

issues arising here are: (i) a degree of overlap in the targeting and eligibility for such programmes; (ii) the presence of linkages and progression from one programme to another; and, (iii) the degree of local and national co-ordination that arises in the delivery of such programmes.

Table 5.1: Schematic Outline of the Manner in which People from the Four Groups are Accommodated in the BTEI-PTO in County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC

	County Dublin VEC	Mayo VEC
Older People	Older people are mainly catered for through courses organised for the educationally based priority target group of the BTEI-PTO (i.e., people with less than upper second level education) rather than being catered for as a specific target group in their own right. Outside of the BTEI-PTO, County Dublin VEC provides an Educational Programme for Older Citizens (EPOC).	Older people are catered for both through specific courses (especially computer applications) organised for groups of older people (often as a result of contact with active retirement groups and organisations working with carers) and to a lesser extent by courses aimed at people with less than upper second level education.
People with a Disability	Within the VEC area people with a disability tend to be catered for by programmes offered by particular centres (e.g., Stillorgan College of Further Education) and to a lesser extent on other courses provided for mixed groups of people in terms of their target group status. In the case of Stillorgan College of Further Education the impetus for, as well as the resulting provision, is due to a collaboration between the College and a local organisation working with people with a disability.	Courses accommodating people with disabilities tend to be organised through contact with people/organisations working with people with a disability (particularly Enable Ireland, National Training and Development Institute, Western Health Board). This results in most provision for people with a disability being organised on a group specific basis (i.e., all participants on courses are people with disabilities).
Members of Traveller Community	County Dublin VEC has appointed an Adult Literacy Organiser who works solely with members of the Traveller Community. She organises mainly “Traveller specific” programmes under the BTEI-PTO in the areas of Personal Development, Health Care, Basic English, Family Learning, Leaving Certificate English and Job Skills. Members of the Traveller community – mainly women – also participate on other courses (particularly childcare related) provided under the BTEI-PTO.	Mayo VEC mainly caters for members of the Traveller community outside of the BTEI-PTO and its activities in this area are co-ordinated by a Director of Traveller Activities. A small number of individual members of the Traveller community - mainly women - have participated in courses provided under the BTEI-PTO though not as a result of specific targeting of such courses.
Members of Minority Ethnic Groups	There is quite a high level of provision under the BTEI-PTO designed to meet the needs of persons from minority ethnic groups in County Dublin VEC. The main form of provision is English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The main form of provision for members of minority ethnic groups is ESOL.	The main form of provision for members of minority ethnic groups is ESOL.

Turning to national data on participation, on the basis of data concerning participants on courses provided under the BTEI-PTO between January and December 2003, a total of 9,178 persons participated in the programme with 75% of participants being women. While figures relating to persons in the 50 plus age group are not available, 17.3% of participants were in the 45 to 54 year age

bracket, 9.2% in the 55 to 64 year age bracket, and a further 6.7% were aged 65 years or older. In terms of economic status, the majority of participants are either unemployed (41.8%) or not in the labour force (19.2%). Just 6.7% of BTEI participants are employed full-time with a further 11.4% being in part-time employment. The majority (69.2%) of participants on courses provided under the BTEI-PTO have completed less than upper second level education.

Table 5.2: Participants on BTEI-PTO Classified by their Target Group Codes

	Men	Women	Total
Early School Leaver	8.9	27.3	36.2
Lone Parent	0.2	10.5	10.7
Traveller	0.6	2.4	3.0
Disability	6.3	9.0	15.3
Ex-offender	0.4	0.1	0.5
In work	1.7	7.5	9.2
Literacy	2.1	3.9	6.0
Literacy – ESOL	1.8	3.2	5.0
Unemployed	8.1	21.8	29.9
Refugee	0.8	0.8	1.6
Asylum Seeker	2.4	2.4	4.9
Homeless	0.3	0.1	0.3

From Table 5.2 it is clear that persons from the other three (Travellers, People with a disability, Refugees/Asylum Seekers) of the four groups of concern in this study also featured among participants on courses provided under the BTEI-PTO during 2003. Taking into account the figures concerning the age of participants listed above (i.e., 33.2% are aged 45 years and over), and allowing for some overlap between age and membership of the other three groups, a rough estimate of the total proportion of participants in the BTEI-PTO accounted for by members of the four groups covered by the NDP's wider equal opportunities principle is of the order of 40 to 45%. Of this the majority are older people, followed by people with a disability, followed by members of minority ethnic groups, and members of the Traveller community. However, it must be noted that the figures in Table 5.2 should be interpreted with caution as they are not based on individual participants but refer to the target group codes chosen by individual participants on registering for the BTEI-PTO.

Analysis of planned provision for 2004 in each of the two VECs on the basis of the target group codes used to identify course participants shows that in both VECs a considerable proportion of the courses planned for implementation during 2004 under the BTEI-PTO are either "mixed" (i.e., they are targeted toward the general educationally based definition of the target population of the BTEI-PTO) or "other" (i.e., they are primarily targeted to accommodate two or three specific target groups). The most common combinations among the latter are "early school leavers and lone parents", "early school leavers and unemployed", and "early school leavers, unemployed and lone parents".

The figures in Table 5.3 also show that in County Dublin VEC three of the four groups have courses being provided for them on a group specific basis in 2004. As no code is attached to older people, specific provision for older people is not identifiable. In the case of Mayo VEC specific courses are being provided for people with a disability and for members of minority ethnic groups.

When considered together, the three sources of data examined here are consistent in showing the participation of persons from all four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle in the BTEI-PTO. What is noteworthy, however, is that it is only when data on the specific targeting of individual courses is examined that the manner of the accommodation of persons from the four

groups is highlighted (i.e., the mix of “group specific” participation and participation by persons from the groups in non-group specific courses). To a considerable extent persons from three of the four groups (i.e., members of Traveller community, people with a disability, and members of minority ethnic groups) are catered for through “group specific provision”.

Table 5.3: Courses Approved for 2004 under the BTEI-PTO in County Dublin VEC and Mayo VEC by Target Groups for the Courses

	County Dublin VEC	Mayo VEC
	(%)	(%)
Lone Parents (LP)	0.0	1.9
Early School Leavers (EL)	7.7	1.9
Travellers (T)	8.3	0.0
Unemployed (UN)	4.8	1.3
Disabled (DS)	10.1	13.4
Drug Dependent (DR)	1.6	0.0
Second Language Speakers (ESOL)	16.0	5.1
Literacy (AL)	1.3	2.5
Homeless (HL)	0.0	0.0
Ex-offenders (EXO)	0.0	0.0
Rural (R)	0.0	12.1
Urban (U)	0.0	0.0
Disadvantaged Men (DM)	0.2	1.9
Disadvantaged Women (DW)	4.5	1.3
In Work (IW)	0.0	0.0
Mixed (M)	10.9	42.0
Other	34.6	16.6
Total %	100.0	100.0
Total Courses	376	157

6. Experiences of VEC Personnel Involved in the Design and Delivery of BTEI-PTO Concerning Persons from the Four Groups

Box 6.1 summarises the main points arising from the responses of the personnel interviewed regarding their actual experiences of accommodating people from the four groups in the BTEI-PTO.

Box 6.1: Summary of Main Experiences of Providing Training for Members of the Four Groups

<p>Older People</p>	<p>It is recognised that older people – on average – have lower levels of educational qualifications than their younger counterparts and also that literacy difficulties are experienced by many older people. Attention was also drawn to the fact that the older population is not homogeneous: some are active and part of this activity involves seeking opportunities to participate in education and training. These “more motivated” older people tend to turn up in various forms of provision organised by the VECs (e.g., night classes) outside of the BTEI-PTO.</p> <p>There is an acknowledgement that in rural areas the combination of low initial levels of educational attainment, age and isolation – especially among men – presents a particular challenge for programmes such as the BTEI-PTO. A parallel situation is acknowledged to exist in urban areas, particularly in areas with high concentrations of disadvantage, where the absence of a tradition of participation in education programmes – especially among men – results in very few men coming forward on their own initiative to participate in education and training courses. More generally, many older people see themselves as being “beyond learning” and many lack the self-confidence to initiate participation. Other barriers mentioned include the growing practice of older people caring for their grandchildren during daytime hours and the lack of actual/systematic information on the interests of older people.</p> <p>Suggestions for increasing the participation of older people in BTEI-PTO included making the transition to a formal learning setting easier by providing pre-foundation/non-accredited options based on their personal interests. The experience of one of the VECs also indicates that when older people are “given the chance” to access courses dealing with information and communications technologies – computers – they approach it with considerable enthusiasm.</p>
<p>People with a Disability</p>	<p>On the basis of the experience and practices of the two VECs, accommodating people with a disability in the BTEI-PTO tends to be achieved by having organisations with experience of working with people with a disability provide specific courses or to organise courses for people with a disability in conjunction with organisations working with people with a disability. In general, the organisers of courses under BTEI-PTO considered that there was a need for specialised support to be available to enable them to work more effectively with people with a disability. Also, more information on how to cater for the needs of people with specific disabilities (e.g., visually impaired) was seen as needed in order to be able to accommodate people from this group.</p>

	<p>The diversity present among people with a disability was also noted. This diversity includes people with learning disabilities, mental health difficulties, wheelchair users, people with sensory disabilities, people with an acquired disability versus people born with a disability, and people experiencing long-term disabling conditions (poor cardiovascular or respiratory health) resulting in securing a right to Disability Allowance/Benefit. The presence of such diversity and in particular the issue of the “severity” of disability in terms of the challenge it poses for providers in terms of the need for specialist knowledge and assistive technology was noted.</p>
<p>Members of the Traveller Community</p>	<p>Much of provision under the BTEI-PTO for members of the Traveller community is “Traveller specific” (in the case of County Dublin VEC) or provided outside of the framework of the BTEI-PTO (in the case of Mayo VEC). There is an acknowledgement of the potential of this type of provision to isolate members of the Traveller community from other courses provided under the BTEI-PTO and from more mainstream provision. Tackling this requires that participants on “Traveller specific” programmes are encouraged and supported to progress to other programmes with mixed participant groups. However, this also requires that providers of other courses are trained to accommodate members of the Traveller community in their courses and also that potential prejudice on the part of other course participants is addressed.</p>
<p>Members of Minority Ethnic Groups</p>	<p>Experience indicates that there is considerable diversity in the educational levels, vocational skills, and English language competencies of persons who are members of minority ethnic groups. Research on this issue undertaken for County Dublin VEC (in conjunction with the City of Dublin VEC) indicates that greater effort is required to assess the specific learning needs of members of minority ethnic groups in order to be able to respond effectively to the diversity of need among the population.⁷</p> <p>For members of minority ethnic groups in employment, the provision of evening/night courses was seen as problematic due to fatigue from work.</p>

⁷Ward, T (2002) Asylum Seekers in Adult Education: A Study of Language and Literacy Needs. Published by City of Dublin VEC and County Dublin VEC.

7. Understanding the Framing of Policies and Practices Regarding Equal Opportunities in BTEI-PTO

As indicated earlier (see Section 3.2) a number of factors can be identified as providing a positive context for the engagement of the BTEI-PTO with the issue of equal opportunities and, more specifically, the wider equal opportunities principle. These factors include the strong commitments regarding equality and diversity in key policy documents (e.g., *Learning for Life: The White Paper on Adult Education (2000)* and the *DES's Statement of Strategy 2003-2005*), initiatives concerning quality assurance and its equality dimensions in FETAC's draft guidelines for education and training providers, and, at VEC level, in terms of the development of their education plans and equality policies. In this regard, the manner in which the BTEI-PTO is addressing the NDPs wider equal opportunities principle must be located in the wider context of policy in the area of adult education as well as in the more immediate context of the policies and practices of the VECs implementing the programme.

On the basis of the limited engagement of this study with just two VECs one must be cautious not to over-generalise in making conclusions regarding the policies and practices of VECs as a whole with respect to the issues of promoting equality and accommodating diversity in their education and training provision. However, having said that, it is evident that the manner and state of development of "formal" policies in these areas and particularly the extent to which such policies and associated practices are formally documented and communicated varies across the two VECs included in this study. Were more VECs included in the study, it is likely that further variation would have been observed.

On the basis of this study it is evident that the BTEI-PTO is securing participation by members of all of the four groups covered by the NDPs wider equal opportunities principle. As is indicated in the following section, the reasons for this are varied. However, in so far as most personnel interviewed at VEC level do not have an awareness of the NDPs wider equal opportunities principle, we can conclude that the level of accommodation of the four groups covered by the principle does not arise from a formal attempt to put the principle into practice in the programme but rather from the operation of a number of other factors influencing policy and practice. These are discussed in Section 8.

8. Summary of Factors Conducive to Securing Equal Opportunities in BTEI-PTO

A number of factors can be identified as having facilitated participation by members of the four groups covered by the NDP's wider equal opportunities principle in the BTEI-PTO. These factors operate at the level of the implementing department and at the level of VECs as the bodies responsible for actually identifying programmes and recruiting participants under the programme. Cross-cutting these factors is the stated awareness among the personnel interviewed during the course of this study of the requirements of existing equality legislation as this relates to ensuring the provision of services on a non-discriminatory basis.

At the level of the implementing department, the provision by the FES of the Department of Education and Science of guidelines naming certain groups of people as among the primary target groups for the programme sensitised VEC personnel to the need to include these groups in provision being made available under the BTEI-PTO. More specifically, the guidelines regarding both target groups and the core principles underpinning the design and delivery of specific courses under the BTEI-PTO directed VECs – as the front line implementing agencies – to a more direct engagement with persons from the four groups than might otherwise have been the case in the absence of such guidelines. The fact that these groups were also named in monitoring and reporting templates reinforced this.

At VEC level, the implementation of the BTEI-PTO occurred at a time when active consideration was being given to the issue of equality – both internally in terms of personnel policies and externally in terms of the clients of VEC services. Also, the prevailing culture of VEC adult education provision is to strive toward ensuring that the needs of all adult learners are catered for. While this culture does not necessarily ensure or rationally analyse whether or not VECs are equitably catering for members of all four groups within their locality, the organisational culture and practice of adult education has meant that, prior to the BTEI-PTO, VECs were catering to varying degrees for people from all of the four groups covered by the NDP's wider equal opportunities principle within the overall framework of their education and training provision.

At the level of front-line personnel (e.g., Adult Education Organisers, Adult Literacy Organisers, VTOS Co-ordinators), strong individual commitments to catering for people experiencing educational disadvantage and ensuring that all persons coming forward to participate in learning are accommodated were voiced. While this is not equivalent to having clearly worked out policies regarding how to promote and, more importantly to secure, equal opportunities in courses provided under the BTEI-PTO, it does highlight that a positive disposition to this prevails and that action is taken to facilitate the accommodation of persons from the four groups. In this regard, many of the personnel interviewed indicated that their involvement in this study highlighted the need for more focused attention to be paid to meeting the educational needs of people on the basis of their group membership.

9. Lessons Arising from BTEI-PTO for Promoting Equal Opportunities

Based on the findings of this study it is possible to identify both a number of factors that have facilitated the accommodation of diversity on education and training programmes and a number of challenges arising in ensuring that progress in this area is meaningful and sustained. An indicative summary of the facilitating factors and challenges identified is presented Box 9.1.

In terms of the factors facilitating the accommodation of diversity, the findings of this study indicate the positive influence that the wider policy context can have in creating a climate conducive to securing the participation of persons covered by the wider equal opportunities principle in education and training programmes. In this regard, the presence of strong statements and commitments in recent policy documents concerning adult education as well as associated initiatives at VEC and other institutional levels have all placed securing equality among their key high level aims. The key issue here, however, is that there is both an awareness of commitments to securing equality within the sector and that active efforts are being made to translate high level commitments into meaningful and effective actions on the ground. This is not to say that all is well or that more action is not required. Part of the learning of this study on this matter is that it is only by engaging in practical efforts to translate commitments into action that the strengths and weaknesses of particular actions can be identified and, related to this, deficiencies in actions identified and addressed. However, and this is one of the challenges identified, effective learning at organisational and individual practitioner levels needs to be supported by accurate data on the level and nature of participation and of the outcomes of participation being secured by persons from the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle as well as the availability of information on “what works and why”.

With regard to the first aspect of this challenge, this study identified the need to ensure that data concerning various aspects of participants’ situations and circumstances are collected and disaggregated along the lines of educational / learning needs, economic status, and group membership and that data regarding these aspects of participants’ lives should be based on individual participants as well as the target groups covered by individual courses. Moreover, there is a need to ensure that the manner in which certain data are coded is consistent with national sources such as the Census and the Quarterly National Household Survey. With regard to the second aspect of this challenge, it is clear that there is relatively little opportunity for systematic reflection and learning regarding “what works and why” across VECs. The findings of this study, which cover just two of the 33 VEC implementing the BTEI-PTO, indicate the presence of a diversity of practice with respect to accommodating persons from the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle and point to the value of adopting a systematic approach to collecting and reflecting on the practices in this area across all VECs.

A second factor that can be highlighted as having facilitated the participation of persons from the four groups in courses organised under the BTEI-PTO is the level of contact between VEC personnel with responsibility for implementing the programme and organisations that are working with persons from the four groups. It is of note that this inter-organisational contact occurred during the initial planning stage and during the implementation of programmes under the BTEI-PTO. In this regard, the element of good practice that is of more general applicability is the value of active dialogue and consultation with groups and organisations working with people from the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle concerning the educational needs of their constituencies and the manner in which such needs can be most effectively addressed.

Box 9.1: Summary of the Learning Points Arising from the Measure Study of the BTEI-PTO in Relation to Removing Barriers to Participation in Labour Market Programmes

Barriers to Participation in Labour Market Programmes	Learning Points from the BTEI-PTO
<p>Contextual Barriers: These include prevailing labour market conditions and trends, the policy stance towards issues such as social exclusion, equality, and educational disadvantage, and the mix of programmes available as well as their target populations. They also include factors deriving from prevailing social attitudes and practices toward particular issues and groups of people. (Note: The latter when internalised can be viewed as dispositional barriers.)</p>	<p>Recent policy documents directly related to the development of provision under the BTEI-PTO include clear commitments to ensuring equality in educational provision. These sector specific documents have created a high level of awareness on the part of personnel involved in the design and implementation of the BTEI-regarding the need to take action to promote equality in the design and implementation of the programme.</p>
<p>Institutional Barriers: Institutional barriers concern factors related to the image, ethos, administration and practices of education and training providers. To a large extent these have evolved in the context of providing education and training for young adults and only in more recent years have mainstream providers begun to consider how they might attract and cater for “non-standard” participants including members of the four groups being considered here.</p>	<p>At national level, the FES issued a clear set of guidelines outlining the principles that should inform the development of provision under the BTEI-PTO. Taken together the seven “guiding principles” have provided the basis for developing provision under the BTEI-PTO in a manner that addresses many documented institutional barriers, including locations, timing, delivery methods, forms of teaching and validation.</p> <p>At the level of VECs, policies and practices regarding equality are now receiving increasing attention. Among the important features of this development are the preparation of written policies regarding equality and the identification of specific actions that will be taken to underpin the achievement of equality.</p>
<p>Informational Barriers: The third set of barriers concerns information about education and training opportunities and related issues such as information on the relationship between education / training and outcomes such as securing employment, employment stability over one’s labour market career, and potential income.</p>	<p>Flanking the operation of the BTEI-PTO is the Adult Guidance Initiative. This initiative provides guidance to adults - particularly adults experiencing educational disadvantage - regarding the educational options available to them under the BTEI-PTO and other programmes. Also, one of the main roles of the 34 Community Education Facilitators appointed to support programmes provided under Measure 21 generally is to roll-out effective strategies to ensure that the target groups of the BTEI-PTO receive information on the options provided by the programme.</p> <p>In both VECs studied, various forms of outreach and more particularly inter-organisational work are undertaken with a view to reaching persons from the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle.</p>
<p>Situational Barriers: Situational barriers such as lack of time, family / care commitments, and the cost of participation play an important role in restricting access to education and training among sections of the adult population. These barriers include what are termed participation costs and opportunity costs. The former are the additional expenditure incurred in participating – on transport, books and materials. The latter include foregoing the opportunity to earn income by taking up a place on a programme.</p>	<p>While the funding mechanism for the BTEI-PTO was not designed to directly provide childcare support, VECs are permitted to use the funds for this purpose on a case by case basis. Also, course organisers work with other local agencies providing childcare in order to ensure that participants are not excluded because of a lack of childcare provision.</p> <p>One significant challenge that is highlighted by the operation of the BTEI-PTO to date is the relatively low level of participation by persons in employment. This is recognised by personnel involved in the programme and its resolution is seen as requiring greater co-operation with and from employers with a view to ensuring that employees can avail of learning opportunities during working hours.</p>
<p>Personal / Dispositional Barriers: The final set of barriers arise from personal / dispositional factors. Included under this heading are demographics, particularly gender and age, initial educational levels, and a range of experiential, attitudinal and motivational factors.</p>	<p>The presence of dispositional barriers is recognised and addressed through the provision of courses (at pre-foundation/induction level) that are designed to build the confidence of adults returning to learning in a formal setting. Support and mentoring is also intrinsic to course provision and is aimed at ensuring that participants receive the inputs they require on an individual basis to enable them to effectively participate in and complete the programme.</p>

Finally, an important issue highlighted by this study is the level of diversity that exists within the four groups covered by the wider equal opportunities principle and the challenges that this poses for providers of education and training. This “within group” diversity was noted in terms of: (i) gender (particularly, the greater propensity of Traveller women compared to Traveller men to engage in education and training); (ii) type and severity of disability (particularly as this raised issues concerning knowledge of how best to support people with different types of disability – learning, sensory, physical, acquired); (iii) motivation (particularly among older people where it was noted that among this group one finds highly motivated people as well as people who see themselves as “beyond education”); and, employment status (particularly among members of minority ethnic groups in relation to whom it was noted that persons in work could not participate in daytime provision and were often too tired to participate in evening / night-time provision). Related to the latter point is the low participation rate of educationally disadvantaged but employed persons from the four groups in education and training and the need for initiatives in this area to support their participation in lifelong learning.

Equality Studies Unit

Measure 33A of the Employment and Human Resources Development
Operational Programme

Funded by the Irish Government and part-financed by the European
Union under the National Development Plan, 2000-2006

Your Plan – Your Future



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAS