

CONFINTEA VI

Workshop on barriers to participation

NIACE was invited to contribute to a workshop called “Lifting obstacles to participation in adult learning and education: A condition for the right to education.” This was organised by the Institute for Co-operation in Adult Education (ICAE), Canada. The purpose of the workshop was to share some of the actions being taken to address barriers to participation and inform and agree an amendment to the proposed “Belem Framework for Action”.

We heard from Andree Racine of the Quebec Education Ministry about developments in Quebec, Canada, around policies relating to widening participation. We heard from Normand Levesque about specific activities linking with people from Francophone communities where there are significant literacy difficulties. Bernie Brady from the Adult Learning Organisation of Ireland, AONTAS, shared some resources and activities which have been developed in addressing barriers to learning. I presented a small handout, indicating some of the activities we have undertaken to influence policy, in order that those most excluded from learning have more and better opportunities.

The workshop involved questions, dialogue and discussion about the presentations and then shared the proposed additions and amendments to the “Belem Framework for Action”, concerning participation and inclusion, especially around actions related to removing obstacles to participation.

The proposal agreed by the workshop suggested:

- a) A global and integrated approach to increasing access;
- b) National strategies for access to adult education;
- c) Identification of obstacles to participation;
- d) Indication of specific responsibilities of the state;
- e) Description of the anticipated contribution of civil society organisations, of labour market stakeholders and of the learners themselves.

The final draft document contained the following paragraph at 15(g), under the heading, Participation, Inclusion and Equity:

“We commit ourselves to

(g) adopt a holistic integrated approach including a mechanism to identify stakeholders and the responsibilities of the state in partnership with civil society organisations, labour market stakeholders, learners and educators.”

In addition, other aspects of the proposal were included in the list of actions a) – g).

The work of people during the months before CONFINTEA V1 as well as of the workshop, resulted in a positive outcome in the Belem Framework for Action (draft).

Jan Eldred December 8th 2009.