

DIMA Case Study¹

Partner organisation: Department of Adult and Community Education,
Maynooth University, Ireland.



Date 26/06/2017

Author of the case study (stakeholder name and professional background) and contact for further information: Michael Kenny, Lecturer, Department of Adult & Community Education, Maynooth University (Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad)



Biography

Adult Educator, Community Educator & Agriculturalist . Experience in Adult Education & Youth Work in the non-formal sector, Overseas Development Work in Africa and Community Activism. Very active in Community Development, Enterprise Development and Personal Development/Leadership. Innovator in E-Learning and Rural Development. Lecturer at Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Masters Level.

<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/our-people/michael-kenny>

Location Maynooth University School of Education
Floor 1st
Room 113
Phone (01) 7083590
Email michael.kenny@nuim.ie

<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education>

Welcome to the Department of Adult and Community Education

Established in 1975, Maynooth University Dept. of Adult and Community Education is the only academic department that specialises in Adult Education in Ireland and it is at the forefront of teaching, training, research and development. We believe that education is a fundamental human right and collaborative, critical adult education has the power to transform individuals and change society for the better.



1. What change was the DIMA project intended to make or problem was it designed to solve?

The DIMA project is piloting open learning resources to support a hardcopy or digital open access toolkit that will assist policy makers in making policy for adult learning.

¹ DIMA – A Toolkit for Developing, Implementing, and Monitoring Adult Education Strategies [Project Number: 2015-1-CY01-KA204-011850] Led by the Ministry of education and culture, Cyprus.)

2. Successes and lessons learnt:

- **Key benefits:** The purpose of the DIMA project is to address the discrepancy between the target of 15% EU wide participation in adult learning by 2020 and the current 9.1 per cent (2015) participation rate. It has been identified that the absence of an integrated policy in adult learning at national, regional and/or, local level (depending on the geographical location) is limiting the optimal participation of adults in learning. The implications of this is that the target of 15% will not be reached.

The research undertaken in the DIMA project proposal, country report data collection during the early stages of the project (Intellectual Output 2), and the audit of partner countries for the state of Art Report, identified that in many cases there is an inadequately developed adult learning strategy at national / regional level. The project research also identified that in all cases, local level adult learning practitioners do not see themselves as having the skills or influence to affect policy making in adult learning.

The verdict through feedback from DIMA project participants in Ireland is that the benefit of this project is to firstly, bring a greater awareness of the competencies in adult learning policy development to those responsible for policy making, and secondly, to widen the range of active adult educators so that they can impact on policy making. The DIMA project has benefited the sector by publishing a toolkit that guides policy makers seeking to make inclusive adult learning policy, and providing an online openly accessible training course tailored to the DIMA toolkit that briefs policy makers on the process and the range of tools available to assist in adult learning policy making and strategy development.



- **What worked best:** In the preparation for the pilot testing of the online course this DIMA partner (the Department of Adult and Community, Education Maynooth University) invited almost 400 individual's active in adult education to undertake the pilot course review. The DIMA Project Implementation Report on the Pilot Course notes that almost one in four of those invited responded, and that thirty nine (39) completed the pilot course and submitted feedback sheets. In view of the time of year (end of academic year in Ireland), the workload of practitioners (student assessment preparation and recruitment of students for the coming academic year), and the geographical dispersion of the invited target group, the response is indicative of the significant level of interest in policy making for adult learning.

It is particularly notable that practitioners who participated noted that they generally would not consider themselves to be policy makers and that engaging with the DIMA pilot project enhanced their self-efficacy as professionals with practical knowledge and learner engagement experience to make a valuable input into policy making. In view of the pre-project and early stage research for the DIMA project noted above this is a significant impact and this case study suggests is an example of what has worked best.

When a project can empower and enthuse practitioners, who in normal circumstances would perceive themselves to be passive receivers of policy outcomes and of having no opportunity to impact on policy, there is a significant benefit. Indeed, this benefit can have

significant impact in the vertical integration of adult learning policy downwards and upwards. We argue that its impact is significant because practitioners directly impact on the participation of adult learners close to and within communities. Practitioners can also have a significant impact by informing middle and upper management of past policy impacts and the benefits of amending policy to be more inclusive and more participative resulting in higher rates of participation.

Over time on the ground practitioners will be promoted within their organisations to be policy makers and managers. In this situation their influence would be greater. Some in time will become directly responsible for policy making and therefore their influence will be very significant.

To achieve the target of 15% EU wide participation in adult learning it is critical that we engage with the professionals who in turn engage the adult learners through promotion, delivery, management, and policy making.

Therefore what works best is the empowerment and the capacity building of practitioners to be influencers of policy.

- **Is this practice transferable?** Providing accessible information in a format appropriate to those in the 'delivery space' between the learner and the government level policy maker is a transferable practice that has impact. When that information is made available online at no cost then it is a public good that enhances capacity for the whole of society. This practice is transferrable if it accommodates different cultures, accommodates diversity within countries / regions, and is interactively open to change and enhancement over time. Making the outputs of this project available online suggest that its availability is only limited by Internet access.



3. What change was the DIMA project intended to make or problem was it designed to solve?

In the Irish context the DIMA project was an important intervention to determine who and to what extent is policy making reflective of the on-the-ground reality for learners and for those delivering adult education at local level around the Republic of Ireland. The DIMA project also highlighted the dearth of accessible resources to enhance engagement in policy making for adult learning. The DIMA project highlighted that policy making in adult learning remains the remit of an elite who still construct their policy removed from the challenging reality of the learner's situation and the challenges for those who deliver. The DIMA project also highlighted the need to build capacity at the adult learning delivery practitioner level so that practitioners and learners can impact on an ongoing basis in adult learning policy making.

4. Further information:

- Resources used from the DIMA toolkit and e-learning modules:

This case study is based on a subset population of 39 persons who completed the pilot course and the toolkit review. The completed feedback documents indicates that these respondents reviewed the entire DIMA toolkit and e-learning modules. They did this because that was the task that was set for them, and they became engaged in the content which led to volunteer reviewers reviewing modules 1 to 9.

- Which parts / pages were used effectively?

Respondents discussed particularly engaging with Module 1 because it explained what policy is, Module 3 because of its practitioner orientation, and Module 9 because of the examples it provided.

5. Use a quote that highlights the case study:

"I never saw myself as a policy maker so I was surprised when I received the invitation to review a pilot course on policy making and a policy making toolkit. Now I realise that I am a policy maker and that I can influence policy within the area in which I work; adult education."

These are the words of a highly experienced female adult education practitioner who responded to the invitation to review the pilot course and toolkit, participated in the review focus groups, and completed the feedback questionnaires.

6. Short description as to why they got involved as a pilot user of the DIMA Project (motivation):

In this section I am commenting on the motivation of experienced adult education practitioners volunteering as a pilot user of materials generated in the DIMA project.

I suggest there are five key motivators:

1. They received a clearly presented invitation to participate that detailed the expectations of them and the supports available to them while participating.
2. They had regular updates on the progress of the pilot and their opportunity to stay involved or opt out as the pilot process progressed.
3. More than one option was made available for them to attend focus group feedback.
4. The DIMA project materials (online course and toolkit) was accessible, user friendly, and informative. In particular it was related to their experience of being involved in adult learning delivery.
5. There was a recognition of their contribution (Certificate of Completion).

Module 1 From DIMA Open Education Resource (OER)

Module 1: What is Polic

Home / My courses / English / Module 1

Module Overview

Introduction

This module aims to provide learners with an opportunity to explore the elements and stages of policy-making and discuss the importance of policy for adult education. Learners will critically examine the purposes and characteristics of policy.

Learning

At the end of learners will b

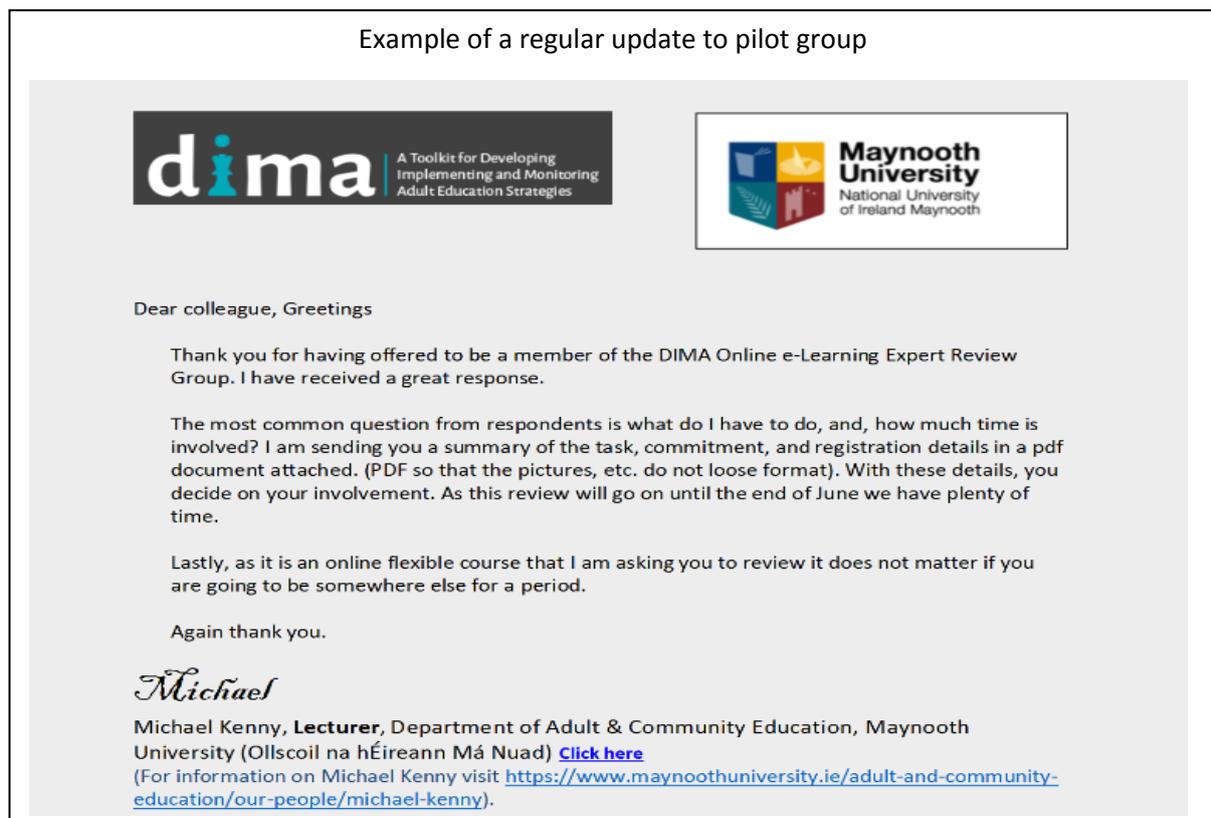
- Discuss the policy for a
- Describe th stages of p

Announcements

Module Content

Study the material online

Each of the above suggests why they got involved and remained engaged.



END