Department of Education & Skills
Review of ALCES funded Adult Literacy Provision

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The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education and Skills.

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Following the publication of the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS), the *White Paper on Adult Education* set targets for the participation of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy in VEC provision. These participation targets have been attained. It is not known if the skill levels of the Irish population have changed since 1995 but the publication of the results of the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) in October 2013 will provide this information. The Skills Strategy and other Government policy statements relating to activation measures propose that an additional 500,000 individuals within the workforce need to progress by at least one level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) by 2020.

While no new overall strategy for the development of Adult Literacy in Ireland has been devised since the publication of the White Paper in 2000, there have been a number of specific initiatives taken by Government which complement the initial provision framework (Intensive Literacy (ITABE), DEIS Family Literacy, projects focused on the workplace). Blended and distance learning initiatives have also been supported. These issues should inform the development of any new Adult Literacy strategy by SOLAS.

All the key research reports included as part of this review provide important findings for Ireland. In particular, they all focus on the need to improve practice, by widening and extending the learning opportunities available to adults and improving the quality of provision by addressing tutors' qualifications and professional development needs.

Section Two   Participants

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Operational Guidelines specify that the priority target cohorts for Adult Literacy programmes are adults whose literacy and numeracy do not match those at Level 3 on the NFQ and that these learners must be prioritised. Approximately, 70% of Adult Literacy participants fall in to the Department of Education and Skills priority target group category, as designated in the National Social Inclusion Policy, but no information is available for the remaining cohort. Nearly 50% of ESOL participants are migrant workers.

In 2011, 42% of participants were men and 58% were women. Just over 40% of Adult Literacy participants were aged between 25 and 44 but nearly 70% of ESOL participants fell in to this age bracket.

Overall 38% of participants in 2011 were unemployed but the figure for ITABE participants is higher, at 55%. Approximately, one third of all unemployed participants were classified as long-term unemployed, but data returned for this cohort were

incomplete. 45% of ESOL participants are unemployed and 46% were classified as Migrant Workers.

Overall, 40% of Adult Literacy participants and 15% of ESOL participants had primary education or less in 2011 but there are wide variations in education levels reported. The highest proportion of individuals with primary education or less was reported as 59% with the lowest at 13%. There are also wide variations in the literacy levels of participants reported at individual VEC level for 2011. There is no information available on the language levels of ESOL participants. It is currently not possible to correlate data submitted in relation to education and reported literacy levels. 50% of VECs offer priority to adults with lower literacy and education levels, as opposed to offering access on a first come, first served basis.

There is a need to improve the quality and range of data collected as part of the administrative returns in order to give a clearer social and economic profile of those participating in Adult Literacy provision.

Section Three   Provision

The VEC Adult Literacy programme is characterized by an approach which strongly supports learners as they re-engage with education. A number of VECs have undertaken initiatives to review and change aspects of their service but an analysis of Tutor Contact Hours delivered in 2011 indicates that provision in most VECs is still structured along the traditional model, with limited amounts devoted to numeracy, intensive literacy and family literacy. Tutor Contact Hours for standalone ICT and ESOL are very high in a minority of VECs. A majority of VECs offer access to blended and distance learning options. There is strong research evidence, as well as evidence from practice in Ireland, to support the extension of intensive learning options, as well as more family literacy provision.   There is also promising evidence to support the widening of learning opportunities through the use of ICT.

Policy in relation to the use of 1:1 and group tuition differ considerably. Volunteers may provide an important role in supporting Adult Literacy participants but their roles should be clarified by the development of written volunteer protocols with more emphasis placed on supporting group tuition.

Adult Literacy programmes deal with a very broad range of adults with diverse needs, including adults with intellectual disabilities and specific learning difficulties and a more formalised access policy would provide support for VECs.

Section Four   Assessment

There is still no nationally consistent formal procedure for initial assessment in use in Adult Literacy programmes and practice varies considerably. Research indicates that the

development of standardised tools that yield useful information is complex; however, research also shows that inconsistent results may result from the use of inadequate tools and clearer guidelines and more formalised systems are needed. Less than half of VECs undertake formative assessment every term and structured processes in current use should also be recorded and disseminated.

Section Five   Achievement and Progression

Current policy at both national and EU level stresses the importance of enabling learners affirm their skills through the achievement of external awards, but the level of accreditation achieved at NFQ Levels 1-3 in Adult Literacy programmes varies considerably. In general outcomes in relation to Communications and Numeracy at NFQ Levels 1-3 are low.   There is currently no system in place to capture the so called "wider benefits of learning". 37% of students remained at their current level in 2011, with a further 18% progressing to other options, including group provision within the literacy service or other further education and employment.   Many VECs have structured systems in place, in cooperation with the Adult Guidance Service, to facilitate participants' progression but data in relation to this area are incomplete.

Section Six   Recruitment, Referral and Outreach

Research demonstrates that there is a continuing low awareness of literacy difficulties amongst those who need support. During the review the positive impact of the national TV advertisements in relation to Adult Literacy issues was noted by many VECs. Responses on effective recruitment and advertising methods show that VECs use a wide range of approaches and systems but 10 would appear not to have formal referral policies in place. Almost all VECs provide support to outside organizations but most of this work is not provided in cooperation with the Community Education Service.

Section Seven   Staffing

Research indicates that there is a positive association between tutor qualifications and experience and learner progress. Qualifications required for new appointments indicate that a third level qualification is requested by most VECs for group tutors and resource workers. The survey did not include an audit of existing staff's qualifications. CPD support varies widely and there is a need for more structured initiatives in this area. The need to develop a coherent staffing structure for Adult Literacy Programmes was articulated by many during this review process.

Section Eight   Structure of the Service

There are differing degrees of integration and cooperation between Adult Literacy programmes and other VEC programmes. There is strong research evidence to support the integration of literacy and numeracy with broader learning opportunities. Existing

good practice in Ireland in relation to the integration of literacy at NFQ Levels 3 and 4 should be identified and disseminated.

Introduction

Background to Review

The review was undertaken by the author at the request of the Department of Education and Skills with the aim of informing and developing future policy in relation to Adult Literacy provision. It was carried out in conjunction with Co. Dublin VEC, which hosts the ITABE National Coordinator, also currently acting as interim co-ordinator for adult literacy provision. The review was tasked with evaluating the extent to which services delivered by VECs and funded under the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES), ITABE, and the Family Literacy pilot project have met the aims, objectives and targets of the schemes in relation to Adult Literacy provision (numeracy and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) were also included).

The objectives of the review were as follows:

- Respond to commitments made in the Programme for Government, recommendations by Oireachtas Joint Committees, and calls from stakeholders for a review – the VEC Adult Literacy programme has never been reviewed;
- Serve as a basis for future policy decisions that might be made by SOLAS;
- Provide a policy link to the forthcoming publication of the results of PIAAC in October 2013.
- Prepare for further work around policy development, research and improvements in administration.

Key areas to be included

- A desk-based analysis of existing research, both national and international;
- An analysis of existing quantitative and qualitative data, both from the Department, and other sources;
- An assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of provision, based on levels and trends of costs, staffing resources and statistical data available;
- A detailed survey in relation to current Adult Literacy provision, circulated to all VECs and the Dublin Adult Literacy Centre (DALC). Responses were received from all VECs and DALC.
- Meetings with stakeholder representatives, including managers, staff and participants;
- Visits to Adult Literacy programmes and consultations with participants in ALCES-funded programmes;
- Review of provision for targeted groups, particularly the hard to reach and the unemployed;
- Recommendations for inclusion in operational guidelines which may then be further reviewed and developed after the establishment of SOLAS.

Section One

Rationale for Review and Research Background

"We envisage a Europe where adults get more than one chance; a Europe in which poor literacy skills are no longer a taboo subject and in which every adult suffering from literacy problems has access to high-quality, affordable (if possible free) Adult Literacy provision. We envisage a proactive approach based on data and evidence and focused on motivating adults to acknowledge their shortcomings, and addressing them wherever they are best addressed: in colleges, in the workplace, as part of a vocational course, in libraries, in community centres or at home – and with the support of ICT."[1]

Key Points in this Section

Policy Background

Following the publication of IALS, the White Paper on Adult Education set targets for the participation of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy in VEC provision. These participation targets have been attained. It is not known if the skill levels of the Irish population have changed since 1995 but the publication of the results of PIAAC in October 2013 will throw light on this issue. The Skills Strategy proposes that an additional 500,000 individuals within the workforce need to progress by at least one level on the NFQ by 2020.

Research

All the key research reports included as part of this review provide important findings for Ireland. In particular, they all focus on the need to improve practice, by widening and extending the learning opportunities available to adults and improving the quality of provision by addressing tutors' qualifications and professional development needs.

Ireland established a number of policy priorities for Adult Literacy provision with the publication of the *White Paper on Adult Education*[2] in 2000. The evidence presented in IALS (1995 – report published in 1997), which showed Ireland in a relatively poor light compared to other European countries, drove this policy development. The IALS survey confirmed evidence offered by those adult education practitioners who had been providing a service since the mid-1970s, that significant numbers of Irish adults did not have the literacy skills needed for today's knowledge based economy. Investment in

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[1] *EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy: Final Report*, European Commission, 2012.
[2] Department of Education and Science, *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*, Government of Ireland, 2000.

Adult Literacy was deemed necessary to enable those adults without adequate skills to participate fully in society, from personal, social, community and economic perspectives. The IALS survey report stressed "the need for a comprehensive strategy for developing literacy that requires support from Government, employers and social partners, local communities and families. The first step is to create a framework of understanding that literacy is important to economic productivity, to health and well-being and to social cohesion in a modern society; that literacy is everyone's concern; and that reducing inequalities in opportunity is the key to achieving high literacy scores"[3]

White Paper and National Adult Literacy Programme
The White Paper established Adult Literacy as a top priority for Government action in the field of adult learning, along with other measures to increase participation of adults with low skills. Low levels of literacy and poor education levels, particularly among older adults, were deemed to pose fundamental challenges for Ireland in maintaining competitiveness and growth, and in promoting social inclusion. A programme for Adult Literacy was outlined in the *White Paper* and the *National Development Plan 2000-2006* set targets for increasing substantially the number of participants in Adult Literacy programmes, improving the quality of the service offered and developing new modes of work to reach out to those who would not normally access conventional services. The aim was to increase the number of clients to 113,000 by 2006, prioritizing those with the lowest literacy levels.

The White Paper set out specific targets in relation to the following areas:

- A continuous increase in the numbers of clients reached;
- Prioritization of those with the lowest literacy levels;
- Implementation of the quality framework developed by NALA in order to monitor the effectiveness of the service;
- Development of new modes of targeting potential learners, especially through the use of referral networks;
- The development of a TV literacy awareness and tuition programme to encourage a mass audience to access help and support;
- A change in orientation of education and training for the unemployed towards more basic levels of skill;
- Expansion of provision for workplace literacy;
- Develop strategies to address the under-representation of men in literacy and other basic education programmes;
- Continue to develop specific initiatives for disadvantaged groups, i.e. people with disabilities, the homeless, Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers;
- Increased collaboration with the public library services;

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[3] Morgan, M., et al., *Education 2000: International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland*, Department of Education and Science, 1997, page 85.

- Increase collaboration with TEAGASC and other relevant interests in relation to meeting the literacy needs of farmers.

Following the publication of the *White Paper* funding for Adult Literacy provision was considerably increased. The *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning*, published in 2002, set out a number of further recommendations in relation to basic skills. These included a recommendation that the initiatives then underway should be strengthened, in order to ensure that all adults should have access to basic skills. Other programmes relating to Community Employment were to be extended to all regions. *The Taskforce* also recommended that FAS should initiate a process to put in place diagnostic measures to identify "client literacy and numeracy weaknesses at applicant or participation stages of all relevant courses".[4]

In 2004, NALA published a *National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme Development Plan*,[5] in cooperation with all stakeholders. The report made a number of recommendations, which were designed to progress the commitments that had been laid out in the *White Paper*. The plan aimed to address the need to consolidate systems in order to build further capacity, while continuing the integration of Adult Literacy programmes into other VEC Adult Education provision. It focused on developing progression pathways for learners and addressing employment and career opportunities for staff in the sector.

Further Policy Initiatives
Following the *White Paper* and the *Taskforce on Lifelong Learning* there have been subsequent initiatives taken by the DES in relation to the development of the Adult Literacy programme. The ITABE programme was established in 2006 in order to promote more intensive tuition opportunities. A family literacy pilot programme organized in the context of DEIS to encourage VECs to expand this aspect of work, was also initiated in 2006. Family literacy (from a schools perspective) was also included in the DES *National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy of Children and Young People* in 2010. Workplace provision originally funded through the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment is now funded through the DES.[6] The DES also funds the development and annual operation of distance learning through NALA via www.writeon.ie.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland launched the NFQ in 2003. New awards for Levels 1 and 2, informed by literacy practitioners and interest groups, were subsequently developed.

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[4] Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, *Taskforce on Lifelong Learning*, Stationery Office,2002, page 26
[5] NALA, *National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme: Implementation Plan,* NALA 2004
[6] The Skills for Work initiative is funded separately to the ALCES budget and so was not included in this review.

A number of the recommendations set out in the NALA *National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme Development Plan* were also proposed by the *Joint Oireachtas Committee Report in 2006*[7]. A further policy review was commissioned by NALA in 2009[8]. The Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education Report reiterated the recommendation in December 2011 that "a National Adult Literacy Strategy should be developed and published as a matter of top priority."[9] The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs report *Developing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)* [10](2011) recommended the development of an integrated national RPL service, covering NFQ Levels 1-3, to be led by the Department of Education and Skills.

The 2011 Programme for Government proposed that Lifelong learning, community education and vocational training for jobseekers were to be a high priority, with literacy and basic workplace skills also prioritized. Training options for jobseekers across the VEC, further and higher education sectors were to be expanded to facilitate up-skilling of the labour force. Finally, the "widespread and persistent problem of Adult Literacy" would be addressed through the integration of literacy in vocational training and through community education.

In July 2011, the Government decided to create a new authority to be responsible for the coordination and funding of Further Education and Training (FET) in Ireland. Further education and training were to be integrated into an FET sector under SOLAS on the basis that an integrated service would be both the most efficient, from a value-for-money point of view, and the most effective, from an outcomes and quality point of view, model to drive the change agenda of ensuring that FET programmes were fit for purpose in the 21st century economy and labour market, as outlined in the National Skills Strategy.

The establishment of SOLAS will result in significant change within the sector. FAS Training Division is to transfer to the VECs who will report to the new authority SOLAS in respect of FET. Alongside this change, FAS Employment Services are transferring to the Department of Social Protection (DSP) as part of the establishment of the National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES), now 'INTREO'. The 33 VECs are being rationalised into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the existing awarding bodies (FETAC, HETAC, NQAI and IUQB) have been amalgamated into a new agency known as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).The new authority will develop its own policies and criteria on quality assurance, programme validation and awarding over time. SOLAS will have strategic responsibility for all FET, including Adult Literacy provision.

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[7] Houses of the Oireachtas, Joint Committee on Education and Science: *Adult Literacy in Ireland*, 2006
[8] Dorgan, J. *A Review of Adult Literacy Policy*, NALA, 2009
[9] Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education (December 2011),
[10] EGFSN, *Developing Recognition of Prior Learning*, Forfas, 2011

In 2012, the DES published *Operational Guidelines for Adult Literacy*[11], which provide the definition and parameters for Adult Literacy work as funded by the Department. The operational guidelines are supported by NALA *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work*[12], which outline the principles, and philosophy of Adult Literacy work as it has evolved in Ireland in order to support practice.

What skills are needed?
Across countries, survey results show that adults with low foundation skills are overrepresented among:

- Minority populations;
- Immigrants and speakers of other languages (that is, other than the majority language);
- Those with low levels of education, including early school leavers;
- Older learners;
- Individuals with disabilities;
- The unemployed or those having low incomes;
- Prison-based populations;
- Individuals living in socially excluded areas (urban or rural).

Low foundation skills affect the economic, health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities. Adults with low literacy, language and numeracy skills are more likely to be unemployed and to earn less over their lifetimes. An emerging body of evidence indicates a causal relationship between years of education and voter registration, voting and some other forms of civic participation. [13]

The final report of the International Adult Literacy Survey[14] underlined the fact that in 14 out of 20 countries, at least 15% of all adults have literacy skills at only the most rudimentary level, making it difficult for them to cope with the rising skill demands of the information age. The OECD defined literacy as "the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." The report stressed that low skills are found not just among marginalised groups but also among significant proportions of the adult populations, in all countries surveyed. Between one-quarter and three quarters of adults assessed in the various waves of the survey did not attain Literacy Level Three, considered by experts as a suitable minimum skill level for coping with the demands of modern life and work. While commentary in Ireland

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[11] *Department of Education and Skills: Adult Literacy Programme. Operational Guidelines for Providers 2012.* Department of Education and Skills.
[12] NALA 2012, *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work*
[13] Fernstein, L., et al, 'What are the effects of Education on Health?' in Desjardins, R. and Schuller, T. (eds), *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic/Social Engagement*, 2006, OECD, Paris.
[14] OECD, *Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey*, Paris, 2000.

invariably focuses on the 500,000 adults with literacy levels on the first stage of the IALS framework, it is important to remember that approximately 50% of Irish adults failed to achieve Level Three, as 29.9% were found to be at Level Two of the IALS framework.[15] The OECD report stressed that while the relationship between educational attainment and literacy skills is complex the most important predictor of literacy proficiency is educational attainment.

Unlike other European countries like the United Kingdom, France and Germany Ireland has not organised a follow up national survey to IALS. A European Commission study outlining policies in relation to the evaluation of basic skills in several European countries concluded that there was agreement amongst experts that direct assessments of skill are the best source of information concerning basic skill competence, while acknowledging that the nature, purpose and actual use of such assessments remain complex within countries.[16] Ireland has participated in the latest international survey organised by the OECD, PIAAC, the results of which are due to be published in October 2013.

In his 2009 policy review for the National Adult Literacy Agency Dorgan set out projections for literacy standards to 2020. Extrapolating the IALS results, he projected a steady improvement in literacy standards, as "standards are inversely related to age because of greater educational opportunities open to younger age cohorts". However, Dorgan cautions that "the projections imply no real improvement in literacy standards, only an increase in the proportion of those with good standards and a decline in those with low standards. On this basis, the figures suggest that the "National Action Plan for Social Inclusion target of 10-15% of the population in IALS Level One by 2016 was destined for attainment without any additional policy action." Dorgan's analysis was published prior to the latest round of PISA results (2009) which showed a decline in Ireland's rating on performance of 15 year olds in literacy, numeracy and science. However, results from PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Study) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) for primary school students published in December 2012 showed Ireland performing above the average in all three domains.

Adult Literacy Targets
While there was no subsequent national Adult Literacy programme or strategy after 2006, as outlined above the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2007-13)* proposed targets for raising literacy standards. The report recommended the reduction in the number of adults with 'restricted literacy' (IALS Level One) to between 10% and 15% of the population by 2016. Following a recommendation in the *White Paper*, the Joint Oireachtas Committee Report in 2006 had proposed a new national survey (with one

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[15] Department of Education and Science, International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland, Government of Ireland 1997

[16] Haahr, J., and Hansen, E., *Adult Skills Assessment in Europe: Feasibility Study*, Danish Technological Institute, 2006

every three years thereafter) to evaluate progress. The Adult Literacy targets set out in the *White Paper* did not allude to the 500,000 adults deemed to be functioning at Level One of the IALS scale, or make commitments in relation to the number of people at the lowest levels that should be reached. The objectives were simply to increase participation to 113,000 by 2006. Unlike the United Kingdom, which undertook similar Adult Literacy initiatives following the publication of their IALS results, there were no targets set for the numbers of adults to attain literacy and numeracy qualifications.

However, the Adult Literacy programme is co-funded by the EU and there are participation targets built into the funding provision on which progress is reported bi-annually. The mid-term evaluation of the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme found that in terms of outputs up to 2010, the Adult Literacy programme had exceeded targets set for participation, achievement of certification and progression. However, the evaluation recommended that the targets for numbers achieving certification and progressing to further education and training be increased. [17]

The National Skills Strategy[18] set out an economic imperative for the up-skilling of workers with low or no qualifications by setting targets for improving the levels of education then in existence by 2020. The Strategy also made the recommendation that literacy and numeracy development should be embedded in all publicly-funded education and training programmes. In order to achieve these objectives, the Strategy proposed that an additional 500,000 individuals within the workforce would need to progress by at least one level on the National Framework of Qualifications. More specifically, the targets entailed up-skilling **70,000** from NFQ Levels 1 and 2 to Level 3; **260,000** up to Levels 4 and 5; and **170,000** to Levels 6 to 10.

In assessing progress in 2010, the National Skills Strategy Group emphasised that despite the changed economic environment the targets set in 2007 were more important than ever and acknowledged that while considerable progress had been made to date at higher levels, the most significant challenge for the period to 2020 was up-skilling those at Levels 1-3 to Levels 4 and 5. [19]

The priority cohorts amongst unemployed people were deemed to be:

- Those with lower skills or education levels below Leaving Certificate;
- The long-term unemployed (more than 12 months);
- Those aged up to 34 years, especially those aged under 25 years;
- Those previously employed in declining sectors.

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[17] Fitzpatrick Associates, 2011, *Mid-Term Evaluation of the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013*, Department of Education and Skills
[18] EGFSN, *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy*, 2007, Forfas.
[19] Department of Education and Skills, *National Skills Strategy Implementation Statement*, March 2010.

The Strategy indicated that there was substantial evidence to indicate that generic skills are regarded as equal, if not more important, to employers as technical or job-specific skills for the 21st century workplace. These generic skills included basic or fundamental skills — such as literacy, numeracy and using technology.

Research Background

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) published a *Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies* in 2011[20] to inform policy development in Ireland. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in England published a *Review of Research and Evaluation on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills* in December 2011.[21] These two documents provide useful recent references against which to benchmark an Irish review.

The Literature Review published by NALA summarized and discussed research on Adult Literacy policies and initiatives in eight countries, chosen for their relevance to the Irish context.[22] The importance of literacy skills to economic, social and personal growth and well-being is highly emphasised in all countries selected.   A number of common themes and messages emerge from the research on these countries:

- Policy and programme stagnation occurs in countries who do not actively strive to maintain momentum in the development of Adult Literacy policy;
- Barriers to learning must be addressed in order to encourage high levels of participation;
- Research suggests that courses that yield quantifiable literacy gains involve more than 100 hours of coursework;
- There is clear evidence that Adult Literacy initiatives do lead to improved employability skills, improved health, increased social capital and greater civic engagement. However, there is only limited evidence in relation to the capacity of Adult Literacy provision to produce meaningful short-term employment or earnings gains for learners – more long term research is required;
- There is strong evidence from England in relation to the value of embedding Adult Literacy provision within VET;
- The state of Massachusetts in the US has been particularly successful at improving Adult Literacy provision by focusing on quality and intensity;
- Research has found that good quality family literacy programmes improve parents' ability to support their children's cognitive and non-cognitive development, as well as providing parents with the motivation to engage in learning.

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[20] National Adult Literacy Agency (2011), *A Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies*, prepared by National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Institute of Education, University of London.
[21] Vorhaus, J., et al, (2011) *Review of Research and Evaluation on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London.
[22] Australia, Canada, Finland, New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden, England and the USA.

The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) researchers in their study for NALA underline the limitations of the study and caution that in general Adult Literacy work is under-researched. Detailed analysis of implementation, which comprised methodologically rigorous research, was often not available. An important note for policy makers is underlined: lack of evidence of success is not evidence of failure.

Implications for current study

- Recommendations need to provide practical guidelines for change in order to maintain momentum and make the service more effective. At a policy level, there is a need for a renewed strategy for Adult Literacy to focus on imminent changes in the education and training landscape for adults;
- There is a need to focus on recruitment of the most vulnerable and specific target groups;
- In the first instance the need to establish a strategy for the integration of literacy provision more closely with other F.E. part time programmes, including Back To Education Initiative (BTEI) and community education;
- The need to integrate or embed literacy and numeracy development into all vocational and training provision;
- Increase the numbers of learning hours available to students, even if this means reducing the numbers enrolled, and by providing more flexible supports such as self-directed learning and blended learning;
- Increase the proportion of existing allocations expended on family literacy.

The purpose of the research review undertaken by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills in London in 2011 was to summarize findings from research on Adult Literacy from the previous decade that were pertinent to the Department's forward planning and how returns to Adult Literacy learning might be increased through effective and cost-effective interventions. The evidence base was also reviewed in terms of its quality and robustness.

Six fields were identified as relevant: (1) Economic, personal and social returns to learning; (2) Quality and effectiveness of provision; (3) The number of learning hours needed for skills gain; (4) Learner persistence; (5) Retention and loss of skills over time; (6) Literacy and numeracy skills that are needed.

The review found good evidence in relation to adult basic skill levels, teaching and learning and personal, social and economic gains:

- Good practice in teaching literacy and numeracy;
- The benefits of embedding literacy in vocational programmes;

- The positive impact on learners of working with qualified teachers;
- The need for multiple ways of engaging in learning, - in class, in self-study, distance learning and ICT supported learning;
- The personal and social impact of literacy.

There is promising evidence in relation to the following:

- Blended learning - combining face to face and technology based, formal and self-study options;
- The significance of techno-mathematical literacies – a combination of ICT, literacy and numeracy skills;
- The time required to make significant learning progress – often in excess of 100 hours.

There was limited evidence found on skills acquisition, retention and loss and on adults' everyday practices in literacy and numeracy, including patterns of self-study.

Little evidence was found on the cost effectiveness of Adult Literacy programmes, either as a whole or of specific delivery methods and inputs. The evidence of the impact of Adult Literacy on productivity was found to be very weak (it is stronger, but far from robust, on further learning and on employment and wages). There is lack of good evidence on information and communications technology, and on the role and impact of ICT in blended learning provision.

Implications for current study:

- The benefits of embedding literacy in vocational programmes;
- The positive impact on learners of working with qualified teachers;
- The need for multiple ways of engaging in learning, - in class, in self-study, distance learning and ICT supported learning;
- The personal and social impact of literacy;
- The time required to make significant learning progress – often in excess of 100 hours.

The EU High Level Group on Literacy reported in September 2012. It made a number of age specific recommendations. Those for adults are grouped in four areas:

- Establish systems to monitor Adult Literacy levels and practices;
- Communicate widely about the need for Adult Literacy development;
- Strengthen the profession of Adult Literacy teachers;
- Ensure broad and varied access to learning opportunities.

Implications for the current study

- The need to establish more robust monitoring systems;
- The need to review the continuing professional development needs of staff in the adult literacy programme;
- The need to broaden the range of learning opportunities currently available.

Section One Conclusions

While no new overall strategy for the development of Adult Literacy in Ireland has been devised since the publication of the White Paper in 2000, there have been a number of specific initiatives taken by Government which complement the initial provision framework (Intensive Literacy, DEIS Family Literacy, projects focused on the workplace). Blended and distance learning initiatives have also been supported.

The Skills Strategy and other Government policy statements relating to activation measures underline the necessity to upskill over 300,000 people to upper second level equivalence. These issues should inform the development of any new Adult Literacy strategy by SOLAS.

All the research findings outlined provide important findings for Ireland. In particular they all focus on the need to improve practice, by widening the learning opportunities available to adults, including blended learning, new technologies and approaches, and improving the quality of provision by addressing tutors' qualifications and professional development needs.

Section Two

Participants

"Literacy changes lives, including adult lives. It is central to personal wellbeing and social development, and contributes to economic independence. Adults who improve their literacy skills do much more than get better at reading and writing; they improve their self-confidence, develop better attitudes to learning, improve their health, and increase their levels of civic and social involvement. Improving adults' literacy serves as a stepping stone not just to further education, improved outcomes for their children and better employment, but to greater social inclusion, active and informed citizenship and more fulfilling lives."[23]

Key Points in this Section

Approximately, 70% of Adult Literacy participants fall in to the Department of Education and Skills priority target group category as designated in the National Social Inclusion Policy but no information is available for the remaining group.

Nearly 50% of ESOL participants are migrant workers.

Just over 40% of Adult Literacy participants are aged between 25 and 44 but nearly 70% of ESOL participants fall in to this age bracket.

Overall 40% of Adult Literacy participants and 15% of ESOL participants had primary education or less in 2011 but there are wide variations in education levels reported.

There are also wide variations in the literacy levels of participants reported at individual VEC level for 2011.   There is no information available on the language levels of ESOL participants.

A significant percentage of Adult Literacy participants are unemployed (38%) but the figure for ITABE (intensive provision) is higher, at 55%.

45% of ESOL participants are unemployed.

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[23] EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, *Final Report, September 2012*, European Commission.

Policy Background

The DES *Operational Guidelines for Adult Literacy*, circulated in January 2012, provide a definition and scope for Adult Literacy provision. The guidelines were devised following extensive consultation with stakeholders and practitioners and offer guidance in relation to good practice. The definition of Adult Literacy was stated as:

"the provision of basic education, including reading, writing and numeracy skills, and ICT for adults who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy competencies to enhance their functional participation in personal, social and economic life."

The DES priority target cohort for Adult Literacy programmes are those adults whose literacy and numeracy skills do not match those skills at Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

Within that target there are individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation, identified in Government and EU policy documents such as the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion. Within the cohort of unemployed people and in the context of the current high levels of unemployment the following four areas have been identified as a priority:

- The low skilled;
- The long term unemployed;
- Under 35s;
- Those formerly employed in declining sectors - construction, retail and manufacturing sectors.

The current economic situation and the high level of unemployment - 434,200 individuals on the Live Register, over 188,117 (43%) of whom are on the Live Register for a year or longer – has resulted in significantly increased demand for education and training. More and more people are seeking to upskill or reskill in order to enter or re-enter the labour market. Government policy is focused in particular on the need for further education and training providers to respond with measures that provide clear and purposeful pathways to employment or to further and higher education and training.[24] As already referenced in Section One, the Skills Strategy highlights the need to focus on the education and training needs of adults at lower levels of the NFQ and other analyses of the Irish VET system have also reinforced this policy perspective.[25]

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[24] Department of Education and Skills, *An Action Plan for SOLAS (An Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh Agus Scileanna) The New Further Education and Training Authority*, 2012

[25] Kis, V., OECD *Review of Vocational Education and Training: Ireland*, OECD, Paris, 2010 and Forfas, *Guidelines for the Alignment of Further Education Programmes with Skill Needs of Enterprise*, Dublin, 2012.

The Interim Protocol established between VECs and the Department of Social Protection, enables welfare offices to ensure access by unemployed people to relevant further education programmes.[26]

What do we know about current participants in Adult Literacy programmes in Ireland?
An analysis of administrative statistical returns for the Adult Literacy programme conducted by NALA[27] shows a substantial increase in the number of literacy participants since 2000. In response to **Question 1** of the Survey on participation, undertaken as part of this review, respondents indicated that 48,586 people participated in Adult Literacy programmes funded through the ALCES and ITABE budgets in 2011. A total of **20,276 (42%)** men and **28,310 (58%)** women participated. This compares to a combined total participation figure of **54,814[28]** reported through the 2011 DES statistical returns for ALCES and ITABE.

The lower participation rate of 48, 586 recorded in the survey is attributable to the fact that providers were asked to account for participants only once, regardless of the number of groups for which they were enrolled.

A number of data headings collected in the Adult Literacy[29] Statistical Returns for 2011 provide an insight into the degree to which the programme is meeting social inclusion and labour market activation indicators. These include economic and educational status of participants, as well as their reported literacy level.   Data are also returned on target groups.

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[26] "VECs and welfare/employment service offices should agree relevant contact points (..) so that welfare offices can ensure access by unemployed people to relevant further education programmes, from their offices." Interim Protocol to Enable Referral of Unemployed People to Further Education Programmes, DES Circular Letter, 0076/2011

[27] Daverth, G. and Drew, E., *Profile of Adult Literacy Learners in Ireland,* 2000-2009, NALA, 2011.

[28] The figure has been adjusted to remove Skills for Work, Return to Learning and Return to Education participants as these programmes were not included in this review.

[29] The statistics for ITABE and Adult Literacy have been amalgamated for this section of the analysis of the DES statistical reports. The statistics for ESOL are presented separately, as ESOL returns do not include data on "Literacy level on entry" or certification outcomes.

Priority Adult Literacy Target Groups

Most participants are returned under 'Early School Leaver' (43%) or 'Other' (33%).

| Target Group	Number	Percentage
Person with disability	3,856	8.4
Substance Misuser	460	1
Ex-offender	83	.18
Early School Leaver	19,880	43.5
One Parent Family	1,045	2.2
Traveller	1,499	3.2
Homeless	65	0.1
Refugee	635	1.39
Asylum Seeker	633	1.38
Migrant Worker	869	1.9
Other	15,049	33
Unknown	1,523	3.3
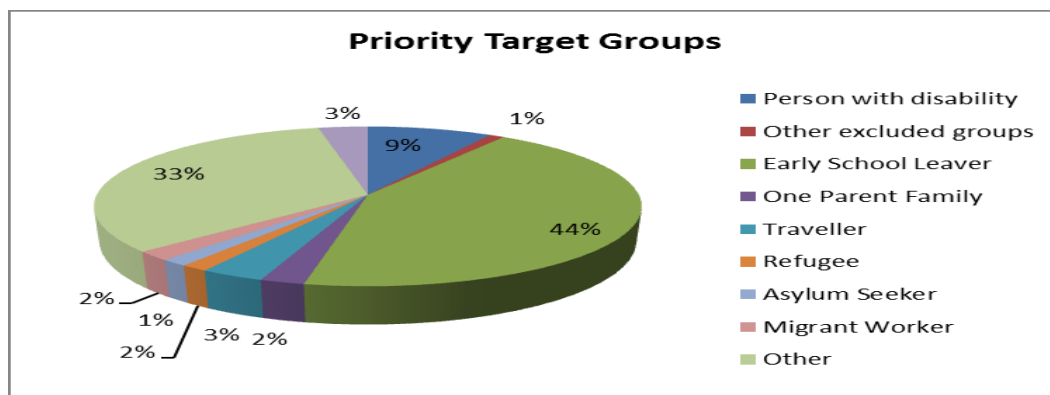
Approximately, 70% of Adult Literacy participants reported fall in to the 'Priority Target Groups as designated by the DES as part of social inclusion policy. However, there is no information available in relation to these priority target groups for over 30% of the cohort.

In the survey, VECs were asked how they respond to the needs of 'Hard to Serve' cohorts. Most responses reiterated the priority target groups specified in the DES Operational Guidelines. In a few cases, specific target groups were mentioned (older women working in the home, young ex-offenders, rural isolated dwellers, urban disadvantaged areas, men, those with very low levels of literacy). Only 15 VECs offer priority to adults with lower literacy levels (1 and 2), as well as lower levels of educational attainment, as opposed to offering access on a first come, first served basis.

Age Profile of Adult Literacy and ITABE participants[30]

Age group	Number	Percentage
18-20	1,276	2.83
21-24	2,299	5.1
25-34	8,162	18.1
35-44	11,079	24.6
45-54	9,805	21.8
55-64	7,484	16.6
65 and over	4,773	10.6
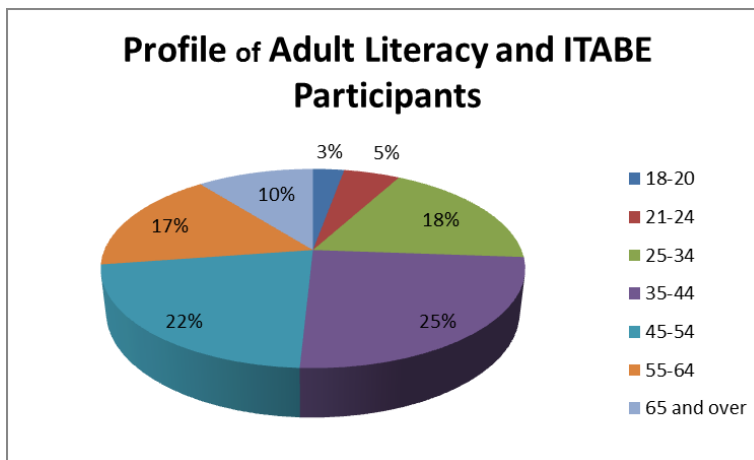
42% (19,241) of participants in 2011 were aged between 25 and 44 and a further **38%** (17,289) were aged between 45 and 64. Census 2011[31] provides detailed information about the education levels of the Irish population and educational disadvantage. Among those who had completed their full-time education in 2011, young people are significantly better educated than their older counterparts, illustrating the on-going gains in educational attainment in Ireland. The Census demonstrates that there are **54,718** people in the State aged between **25 and 44** with primary education or less but there are far higher numbers of adults with primary education or less aged between 45 and 64, a total of **170,057.**   This implies that literacy providers should target older age cohorts as well as younger people in the 25 to 44 age bracket because of the higher concentration of educational disadvantage amongst the older group.

Research on Adult Literacy provision in Waterford City[32] suggests that younger people are more willing to come forward for help. The research underlined views expressed in

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[30] ITABE does not collect data on 16-17 year olds, so they are excluded from the table.
[31] CSO, *Census 2011, Profile Report 9, A Study of Education, Skills and the Irish Language*, November 2012
[32] Gilhooly, D., 2009, *Provision of Adult Literacy in Waterford City: A Snapshot*, City of Waterford VEC

interviews with various public service organizations who felt, anecdotally, those they encountered with the greatest literacy difficulty were in the over 50 age group.
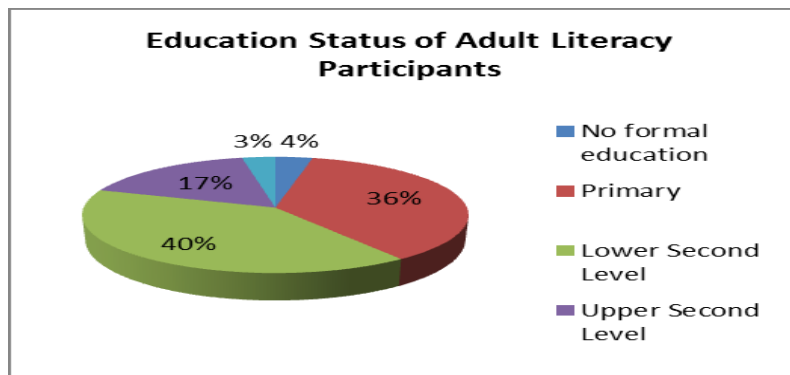
Education Status of Adult Literacy Participants
Census 2011 illustrates the increasing educational levels of the Irish population and IALS demonstrated a strong association between age and literacy performance[33].   The Census results show that for persons aged 15 years and over whose full time education has ceased (3,003,490 in total), 456, 896 had only primary education or less (15%). A further 499,489 (16%) had only lower secondary education.

The Census illustrates that the proportion of adults with low education levels varies between different parts of the country with higher levels of educational disadvantage reported in counties like Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan and in the cities of Limerick, Dublin and Waterford.

The DES statistical returns for 2011 demonstrate the following education levels for participants enrolled in Adult Literacy programmes:

Education Level	Number	Percentage
No formal education	1,549	3.5%
Primary	15,972	36.4%
Lower Second Level	17,632	40.1%
Upper Second Level	7,362	16.7
NFQ Level 6 or above	1,384	3.15%

In 2011, approximately **40%** overall of participants had primary education or less. **40%** of participants had already gained lower second level education and **20%** of participants in Adult Literacy programmes had upper second level education or above. The reports demonstrate that the picture at individual VEC level in relation to 'Education Level on Entry' is very mixed. The highest proportion of individuals with primary education or

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[33] International Adult Literacy Survey, Results for Ireland, page viii.

less was reported as **59%** with the lowest at **13%**.   Only 12 VECs reported that 40% or more of their participants had primary education or less.

In this regard so called "Matthew-effect" may be applicable to Adult Literacy provision – that is, those with higher levels of education are most likely to receive further training while those with skill deficits are more likely to be excluded from it[34].

Adult Literacy Participants: Literacy Levels on entry
VECs are requested to assign a literacy level to each participant, making an informed judgment, based on the level definitions provided in the publication [35] produced by NALA in 2007 at the request of the DES.   The definitions are described as standard bands benchmarked against the NFQ levels 1-3[36] and are assigned following initial interview and assessment.   The guidelines specify that "an individual's sets of knowledge skills and competencies in relation to reading, writing, speaking and listening and numeracy may all be at different levels...a student may have identified a need in relation to writing, but be an accomplished reader."   Further clarification indicates that "The primary need of the student will be the key determinant of level and it is the set of skills and competence that the student is addressing that should be the subject of the report"

In 2011 students' literacy levels on entry were reported as follows:

Literacy Level (NFQ)	Number of Participants	Percentage
Level 1	8,239	18%
Level 2	18,654	42%
Level 3	17,635	40%

Participants Literacy Levels on Entry

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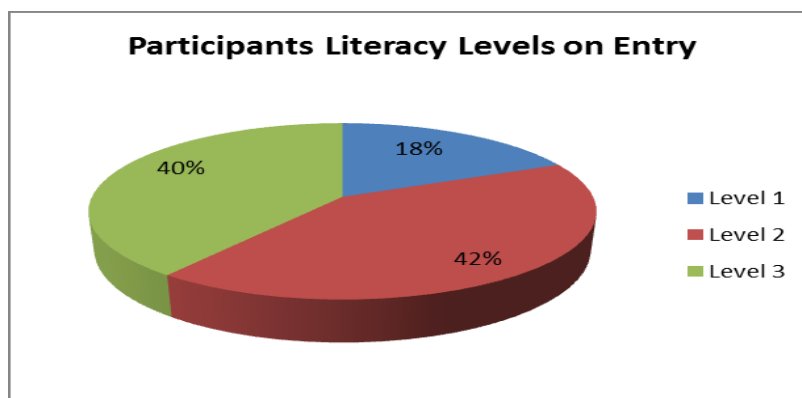
[34] " The term "Mathew Effect" is a reference to the Gospel of Matthew "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath". (Matthew XXV: 29, King James Bible)" cited in Looney, J. *Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Adults: Improving Foundation Skills*, OECD, 2008.
[35] NALA, *Level Definitions for the Department of Education and Science VEC Adult Literacy returns, 2007.*
[36] The levels are described as "Level 1: working towards a standard equivalent to the NFQ at Level 1" etc.

There are wide variations in the literacy levels reported at individual VEC level for 2011. An analysis of the ALCES literacy returns shows that the lowest percentage reported for Level 1 was **4.6%,** with the highest at **33%. 8** VECs reported a figure of less than **10%** for the Level 1 cohort. Similarly for Level 2, the lowest figure reported was **18%** with the highest at **58%**. For Level 3, the percentages reported ranged from **10.6%** to **59%.** This may imply that VECs are targeting provision at very different cohorts, or alternatively there may be different interpretations of the guidelines for assigning literacy levels on entry (see Section Five on Assessment). The publication of PIAAC results for Ireland in October 2013 will provide a rich source of data against which to benchmark literacy levels of participants in VEC services.

Currently it is not possible to correlate data submitted through Adult Literacy statistical reports in relation to education level on entry and reported literacy level because of the absence of a national database that permits individual tracking of participants and a more extensive correlation of data presented. In these circumstances it is not possible to make any hypotheses about the relationship between education and skill levels of the current cohort of adult literary participants. However, it is noted that research shows a clear correlation between low education outcomes and lower literacy levels.[37]

Economic Status of Participants

Individuals with literacy difficulties are more likely to be unemployed and research by the ESRI found that literacy and numeracy difficulties were critical factors that increased the likelihood of long-term unemployment. Research undertaken by the ESRI on behalf of NALA concluded that when those with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties do receive training they benefit by much more than average. The research concludes that this cohort can be effectively activated within the mainstream NEAP system[38]. Other research[39] undertaken in relation to basic skills initiatives for unemployed people underlines the importance of flexibility and the ability to meet clients' needs and aspirations, as crucial to the success of programmes.

The 2011 U.K. research review undertaken for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills concluded that while there is extensive and robust evidence on the relationship between literacy and numeracy and economic outcomes much less is known about the impact of basic skills interventions designed to promote them. The researchers stress that it is a priority to conduct robust research on the promising features of interventions in order to establish whether and to what extent they affect earning and employment. Research is also needed to establish whether participation in Adult Literacy and numeracy provision is associated with improvements in skills and attitudes that serve as a foundation for improved economic outcomes, including positive changes in self-esteem and a commitment to education and training.

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[37] Kett, M. and Morgan, M. (2003) *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey, Results and Implications*, IPS.
[38] Kelly, E. et al *Literacy, Numeracy and Activation among the Unemployed,* ESRI and NALA, 2012.
[39] Tusting, K. and Barton, D., 2007, *Programmes for Unemployed People since the 1970s: the changing place of literacy, language and numeracy*, NRDC.

38.4% of overall participants in Adult Literacy and ITABE programmes were returned as unemployed and **34%** of this cohort was classified as long term unemployed (more than 12 months). Data on long term unemployment were not returned by a number of VECs. The overall percentage of unemployed in the ITABE programme was much higher, at **55%**. Overall 27.8% of participants in both programmes were employed but only **15%** of ITABE participants were employed. The high percentage of unemployed participants accessing ITABE programmes indicates that more intensive provision is attractive to unemployed people.

Interim Protocol and Social Welfare Referrals
During visits, all VECs highlighted the impact of the new labour market activation measures. In some instances the impact of the closer referral process was seen as positive, resulting in increased enrolments and enabling the Adult Literacy programme to access the 'hard to reach', including men, who would not otherwise have availed of provision. In other cases, the response was less positive and there were fears expressed that the change will result in large numbers of enrolments by those with very low or no motivation to engage in tuition. VEC staff specified the key issues in relation to the Interim Protocol as follows:

- The need for a good working relationship between the local Adult Literacy programme and the Social Welfare Office;
- The need for established detailed protocols for referral, so that VEC personnel are notified in advance of individuals' attendance for interview;
- The need for students to have a choice in relation to attendance;
- The need for the Interim Protocol discussions to focus on the most vulnerable unemployed, with low education levels.

ESOL Participants
The Census shows that the growth in non-Irish nationals has continued since 2006, albeit at a slower pace and 12% of Irish residents are now non Irish nationals.[40] There are separate administrative statistical returns collected for ESOL participants funded through the ALCES budget. In 2011 there was an overall total of **11, 238** ESOL participants recorded in the statistical returns.

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[40] CSO, Census 2011: Profile 6 –Migration and Diversity in Ireland: A Profile of Diversity in Ireland, October 2012.

ESOL Participants' Target Group Profile

Target Group	Number	Percentage
Refugee	286	2.6
Asylum Seeker	788	7.1
Migrant Worker	5,061	46
Other	4,849	44

ESOL Target Group Profile

- 3% Refugee
- 7% Asylum Seeker
- 46% Migrant Worker
- 44% Other
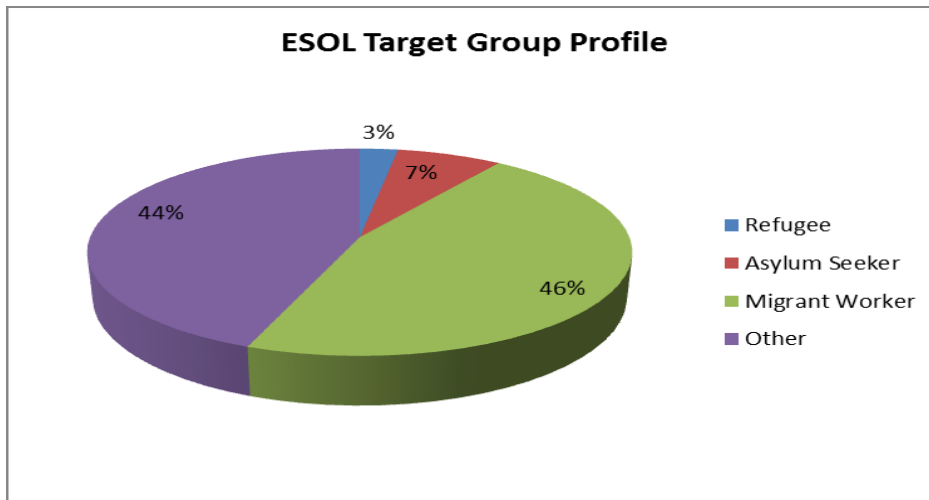
The data demonstrate that 44% of ESOL participants were migrant workers and less than 10% were refugees and asylum seekers, reflecting an on-going decrease in the numbers of these latter cohorts.

Age Profile of ESOL Participants
The 2011 DES statistical returns for ESOL demonstrate that a higher percentage of ESOL participants than Adult Literacy participants are aged between **25** and **44** (**69%**). Age profiles are as follows:

AGE	Number	Percentage
16-17	4	0.3
18-20	253	2.2
21-24	852	7.6
25-34	4,294	38
35-44	3,494	31
45-54	1,620	14.4
55-64	488	4.3
65 and over	193	1.7

This age profile reflects that illustrated by the Census, which shows that 60% of all non-Irish nationals in 2011 were aged between 22 and 44, compared with just 32% for Irish nationals.

Age Profile of ESOL Participants
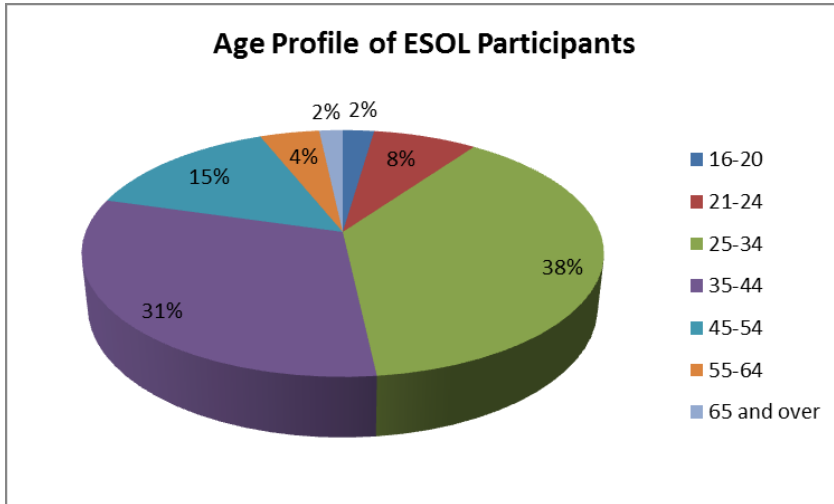
Education Status of ESOL Participants

In 2011, **62%** of ESOL participants in Adult Literacy programmes had upper second level education or above and so were outside the priority target group set by the DES Operational Guidelines.

Education Level	Number	Percentage
No formal Education	421	3.9
Primary	1,253	11.6
Lower Second Level/NFQ Level 3	2,331	21.7
Upper Second Level/NFQ Level 4/5	4,778	44
NFQ Level 6 or above	1,958	18.2

Education Status of ESOL Participants

No formal Education — 4%
Primary — 12%
Lower Second Level/NFQ Level 3 — 22%
Upper Second Level/NFQ Level 4/5 — 44%
NFQ Level 6 or above — 18%
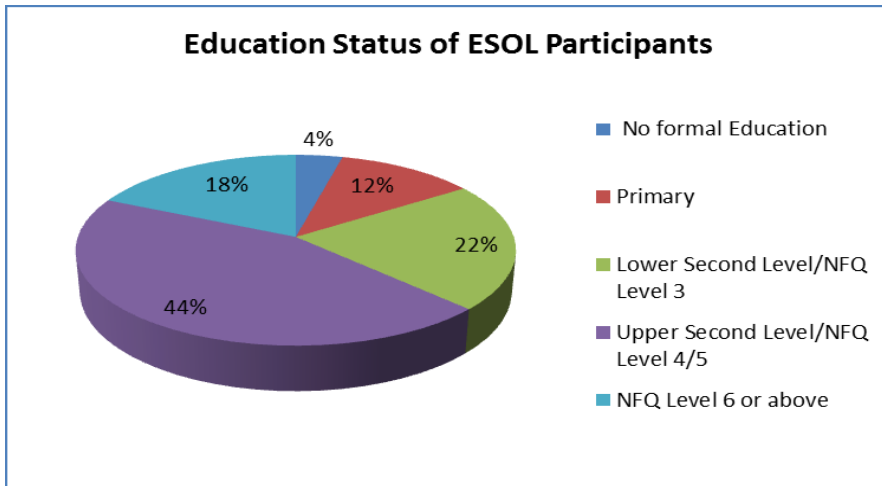
Census 2011 results show that the number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland who had completed their education was 344,929 in April 2011. It also shows up differences that existed in the levels of education attained between Irish and non-Irish nationals aged 15-64. For example, 28.7 per cent of Irish nationals in this cohort who had completed their education were educated up to lower secondary (Junior Certificate or equivalent). The same rate for non-Irish nationals was 12.5 per cent.

The Census also asked about non-Irish nationals' ability to speak English. This question was asked only of persons who speak a language other than English or Irish at home. An overall 19% said they did not speak English well, did not speak at all or gave no response. Improvement in ability over time is recorded: of the non-Irish nationals who arrived in Ireland in 1990 for example, three quarters indicated that they spoke English very well in April 2011. In contrast for those non-Irish who arrived in 2010 just over 37% spoke English very well, while 24% could not speak English well or at all. Currently the DES statistical returns provide no information on language competency level of ESOL participants.

The Census shows that 15% of the workforce in April 2011 was non-Irish. Nearly 18% of persons with a non-Irish nationality whose education had ceased were unemployed. A number of VECs have given feedback in relation to requests from the Department of Social Protection to establish more courses for unemployed migrant workers.

45% of ESOL participants were unemployed in 2011 and **46%** were classified as Migrant Workers.

Section Two Conclusions
There is a need to improve the quality and range of data collected as part of the administrative returns in order to give a clearer social and economic profile of those participating in Adult Literacy provision. The National Reporting Platform established for BTEI provision should be extended to the Adult Literacy programme.   More complete information is needed on priority target groups and on the correlation between education and literacy levels of participants.   There is currently no data available on the language levels on entry of ESOL participants.

There is currently a wide variation in the profile of those recruited to VECs for both Adult Literacy and ESOL provision. There is a need to focus on recruitment of the most disadvantaged adults, particularly those with only primary education and low levels of literacy and language competency.

Recommendations
1.   The survey conducted as part of this review indicated that there are wide variations in the education and literacy levels of participants reported at individual VEC level. The research review shows a clear correlation between education and skill levels, e.g., those with less education have lower levels of skills. The DES Circular on interim referral protocols requires that VECs should enable the smooth referral of unemployed people to further education programmes. In that context:

     •   There should be a renewed emphasis on the priority target group, adults whose literacy and numeracy skills do not match Level 3 on the NFQ;
     •   Within this target group, priority should be given to unemployed adults and those adults with literacy levels 1 and 2/those with only a primary education or less;
     •   VECs should avoid "first come, first served" policies but develop clear and transparent enrolment policies, which focus on the priority groups identified above.

2.   Census 2011 has produced Small Area Population statistics (SAPS) for specific areas and education is one of 15 available themes. These statistics can be used as a tool to aid local planning and targeting. Therefore:

     •   VECs should use Census SAPS profiles to target older people with low education levels (primary education or less) as well as those in younger age brackets.
     •   The Census SAPS statistics should also be used by providers to obtain a clearer picture of the economic status of adults in local areas.

3.   As outlined in the Interim Protocol agreement, VEC Adult Literacy programmes and welfare/employment service offices should agree relevant contact points so

that welfare offices can ensure easier access by unemployed people to Adult Literacy provision as appropriate.

4.   In relation to ESOL:

- VECs should formally assess language competency level on entry of ESOL learners.
- The DES should re-emphasise that priority should be given to ESOL learners for whom tuition that would bring them to a level of functional competency (A2 on the Common European Framework of References for Languages, or NFQ Level 3) is relevant.
- The DES should collect administrative data in relation to language competency on entry and accreditation outcomes on ESOL learners.

5.   The review revealed gaps and inconsistencies in data collection which hinders both the VECs in delivering Adult Literacy programmes and the DES in making evidence-based policy decisions. Therefore:

- Data relating to educational and literacy levels on entry of participants should be correlated to provide a more complete picture of the Adult Literacy cohort.
- The DES should provide further support to providers in relation to the recording and return of progression statistics for Adult Literacy participants.
- The DES in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs) should examine the potential to extend the National Reporting Platform implemented by the DES for BTEI to the Adult Literacy Programme.

Section Three

Provision

"Central to any teaching of adults is that the approach and courses match learners' individual needs. While contexts may vary, adult learners of literacy thrive in small classes (10 learners or fewer) without too much variation in learners' literacy levels. Learners who are well motivated and have specific objectives for their literacy learning are more likely to persist, as are those who purposefully monitor their progress towards those goals. For some adults these goals may be external incentives, such as qualifications; in other cases the goal may be more personal. There is evidence that most adults prefer problem-centred rather than subject-centred learning, and that individual learning plans can help teachers tailor provision to individual goals. "[41]

Key Points in this Section

The VEC Adult Literacy programme is characterized by an approach which strongly supports learners as they re-engage with education. A number of VECs have undertaken initiatives to review and change aspects of their service but an analysis of Tutor Contact Hours delivered in 2011 indicates that provision in most VECs is still structured along the traditional model, with limited amounts devoted to numeracy, intensive literacy and family literacy.

Tutor Contact Hours for standalone ICT and ESOL are very high in a minority of VECs. A majority of VECs offer access to blended and distance learning options. There is strong research evidence, as well as evidence from practice in Ireland, to support the extension of intensive learning options, as well as more family literacy provision. There is also promising evidence to support the widening of learning opportunities through the use of ICT.

Policy in relation to the use of 1:1 and group tuition differ considerably. The percentage of learners engaged in 1:1 as opposed to group tuition varies from 1% to 20%.

Organisational Framework and Ethos

The Adult Literacy programme typically provides a range of learning opportunities. The 2004 National Adult Literacy Implementation Report classified these learning options as follows:

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[41] EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, *Final Report*, 2012.

- Core options including one-to-one and group tuition;
- Family literacy;
- Workplace basic education partnership projects;
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision;
- Intensive literacy provision.

The 2012 DES Operational Guidelines specify that this core service should be provided during daytime and evening and that tuition may be provided for up to six hours per week. The guidelines specify that learners should be provided with the option of group tuition in the first instance. Numeracy should be an integral part of the service, both as an integrated aspect of mainstream literacy provision and as a standalone subject. VECs should also develop family literacy provision as part of their core provision, as well as through the DEIS service. Services are also requested to prioritize the development of intensive tuition options outside the ITABE allocation (as well as mainstream work based basic education outside the Skills for Work scheme). Finally providers are required to maintain an appropriate balance between ESOL and mainstream literacy provision.

The *EU 2012 report on Literacy* recommends that adults should be provided with a variety of personalised learning opportunities of adequate length and pace, at convenient times, in convenient settings – as well as with ICT support - and preferably related to their life or work context.

It is clear from both responses to the survey and information provided during site visits attached to this project that adults accessing VEC literacy services experience an atmosphere of encouragement and respect for their status as learners. The service is characterized by an approach which strongly supports learners as they re-engage with education. This philosophy is informed by a strong learner-centred ethos that has been embedded in Irish Adult Literacy programmes since voluntary schemes were initiated in the 1970s. The ethos is now supported by various quality and equality frameworks such as FETAC Quality Assurance Agreements and the NALA Evolving Quality Framework. For example, over two thirds of all VECs responded positively to the question on student charters in the survey. These charters incorporate learner handbooks or communication processes to enable and facilitate initiation and persistence.

The site visits conducted as part of this review also included meetings with current learners enrolled in literacy services. While a number of testimonies evidenced the difficulties and very negative experiences individuals had encountered during their initial education, Adult Literacy provision would appear to universally offer an opportunity to access a far more enabling and positive learning experience, with a focus on responding directly in the first instance to adults' expressed needs in relation to literacy and numeracy. This approach was in evidence in all Adult Literacy programmes that were visited, rural and urban, large and small. Learner-tutor contracts are

discussed and agreed as part of the induction process and student councils have been established in some VECs.

Both survey responses and site visits to VECs have demonstrated that many Adult Literacy programmes are in the process of change and adaptation to a changing environment, within the broader landscape of adult and further education provision. A number of VECs have undertaken changes and reforms to various aspects of their service. These changes include:

- Common recruitment policies with other part-time programmes;
- Provision located in local VEC adult education centres where Adult Literacy programme shares facilities with other programmes;
- Development of new initial and formative assessment frameworks with detailed administrative guidelines for staff;
- New intensive provision outside that delivered through ITABE funding;
- Strong focus on curriculum and programme development for both accredited and non-accredited learning;
- In some cases, prioritization and promotion of numeracy provision throughout the service;
- Development of new written protocols for specific aspects of their work – e.g. work with volunteers, disability, ESOL;
- Support for self-managed learning in conjunction with other part-time programmes and www.writeon.ie.

Access to Provision
Survey responses demonstrate that VECs offer well-structured provision with good access. All provide group tuition at least 3 evenings a week and 11 provide classes on 5 evenings. 17 respondents to the survey offer provision on Saturdays. 31 providers offer provision in June and 24 offer provision in July. Family and holiday commitments as well as administrative constraints were cited as the rationale for not providing tuition during the summer months.

32 respondents said that they assign students to groups by level usually with reference to the NFQ. However, narrative responses indicate that the policy may vary depending on the availability of a suitable group and venue, as well as funding limitations. The complexity of this issue is underlined by the fact that 26 respondents said that groups were mixed ability. Some respondents stressed that "spiky profiles" will be always apparent in adult learning settings and that tutors are "expected to expect the unexpected" and be prepared to cater for diversity. Transport arrangements, class scheduling, and size of centre also impact on policy.

Access Policy

During the site visits, there were a number of requests for the Department to work with VECs to design an Access Policy, taking stock of Equality Legislation. The complexity of working with adults with a range of learning needs that may be affected by mental health and/or addiction issues was stressed. Adults with a history of violence who are referred by the Probation Service also may present difficulties. However, this is an issue that affects all adult and further education programmes, not just literacy, although there may be a higher number of referrals to the literacy service because of its 'open door and continuous intake' policies.
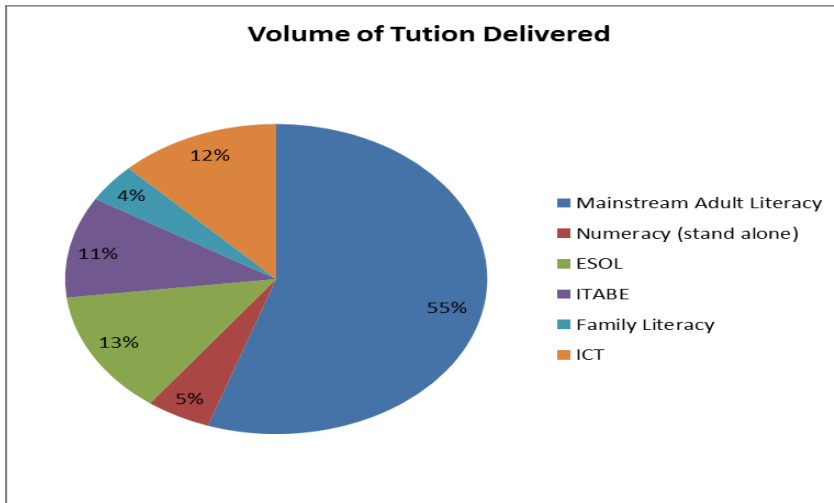
What type of tuition do students access in Adult Literacy programmes?

Section 3 of the survey asked for information on the volume and type of provision offered through the literacy service. Information was also requested on policy in relation to group and 1:1 tuition and initial and formative assessment. These issues were also discussed in detail during visits to eight VECs.

Volume and Type of Provision Delivered in 2011

In Questions 9 to 14 of the survey, VECs were asked to list the number of hours delivered under various aspects of the service, as set out above. They were also asked to specify the number of volunteer tutor contact hours, locations where provision is delivered, numbers of groups and numbers of learners in accredited courses.

Subject	Paid Tutor Contact Hours	%
Mainstream Adult Literacy	151,159	55.2%
Numeracy (stand-alone)	13,545	4.9%
ESOL	35,258	12.8%
ITABE	28,916	10.5%
Family Literacy	11,051	4.03
ICT	33,684	12.3%
Total paid tutor contact hours delivered 2011	**273,613**	**100%**

Volume of Tution Delivered

- Mainstream Adult Literacy — 55%
- Numeracy (stand alone) — 5%
- ESOL — 13%
- ITABE — 11%
- Family Literacy — 4%
- ICT — 12%

Mainstream Literacy Provision

In response to Question 9 respondents indicated that **55%** of all provision was devoted to mainstream literacy. Provision was delivered in 748 **locations** to **3,960 groups** of learners. This would indicate that at national level learners received an **average of 38** hours tuition in each group in 2011. However, the average number of hours delivered to each group varies widely between VECs, with very low hours delivered in some cases. (The 'average' number of tuition hours only represents an indication of the volume of provision accessed by each individual learner in mainstream literacy. It does not allow for the fact that the learner may be enrolled in other provision such as numeracy or ICT or family literacy). A more comprehensive reporting system, which includes a 'unique learner identifier', is required to capture this information accurately.

The **proportion of provision** devoted to mainstream literacy options varies considerably. While 18 VECs devoted 60% or above of their Tutor Contact Hours to mainstream literacy, 6 devoted only 30% or less. In some cases, this implied that the VEC was allocating more hours to numeracy and family literacy. However, in other cases there were a very high percentage of hours devoted to standalone ICT provision (up to one third of total provision).

16,932 learners were enrolled in **accredited** mainstream literacy courses in 2011 (**35%** of total participants presented in response to Question 1). However, this figure also differs considerably from one VEC to the next. The figure presented ranges from **3%** to **100%** of participants enrolled in accredited courses. Further consideration of certification outcomes is included in Section Five on Achievement and Progression.

Group and 1:1 tuition

The DES Operational Guidelines state that as a general principle, learners should be offered the option of attending a group in the first instance. Policies in relation to the use of 1:1 and group tuition differ considerably. The 2011 statistical reports demonstrate that the percentage of learners engaged in 1:1, as opposed to group

provision, varies widely from over 20% to 1%. The emphasis on the use of volunteers in some VECs is decreasing with a number reviewing their volunteer recruitment policies as well as developing formal protocols. In response to Question 15 of the survey on choice of 1:1 or group tuition for new entrants, 23 VECs reported offering learners a place in a group in the first instance. One report suggested that adults presenting might have an expectation of 1:1 tuition when they have been referred by an outside agency and that the implications of the DES guidelines need to be more widely disseminated.

> *"It is the experience of the staff here that students at point of entry will invariably prefer 1:1 tuition to group tuition when it is presented as an option, but a best practice approach to needs assessment should clearly identify the needs and best interests of the student: not all students who would prefer one-to-one tuition actually need it."*
>
> *Survey Respondent*

Research on Adult Literacy provision by City of Waterford VEC indicated that a higher number of men than women seek 1:1 provision, as women may be "more comfortable" in groups, a view confirmed by others during the consultation process.

A number of criteria were cited for assigning volunteers to learners on entry in survey responses. These included the literacy level; specific disability; very low confidence and self-esteem; issues relating to initial negative educational experiences or absolute inability to work in a group. The desire for total anonymity and confidentiality was also cited. In rural areas, non-availability of groups or lack of transport was also a factor. In some cases it was reported that the "choice is left to the learner" or the individual is placed with a volunteer to "assess their level of need". An alternative approach given was to offer 1:1 tuition with a volunteer to students who are ready to progress but need some extra tuition. In some VECs students with very low levels of literacy on entry are matched with an experienced resource worker on a short term basis in order to complete a comprehensive assessment process.

The Dublin Adult Learning Centre conducted research into 1:1 provision in 2007. The research showed that significant non-accredited literacy progression takes place for students through one-to-one tuition. Students are more likely to report progression in terms of grounded practical changes in their lives.[42]

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[42] Murray, K., *'One by One' – A case study of One to One Adult Literacy Tuition in the Dublin Adult Learning Centre*, DALC, 2007

The 2011 NIACE Enquiry into Adult Literacy considered evidence on volunteering as part of its remit.[43]   A number of factors were attributed to the widespread use of volunteers in the first Adult Literacy campaign in the UK launched in the 1970s. These included the haste with which the campaign was launched, as well as the lack of expertise and precedents established by community based groups. Finally as individual tuition was seen as paramount there was simply an assumption that volunteers would be used. It was suggested that volunteer support agencies may provide advice in relation to the use of volunteers. Further details on volunteer involvement in current Adult Literacy provision are included in Section Eight on staffing.

Adults with Learning Disabilities and Adults with Specific Learning Difficulties
A wide variety of responses were provided in relation to the question on protocols for work with adults with learning disabilities and dyslexia. Not all VECs have developed formal protocols for one or both of these areas of work.

Adults with Learning Disabilities
The complexity of this issue was raised by many VECs during visits and in the survey; responses and local services have made different decisions in relation to the proportion of the literacy budget to be expended on work with people with learning disabilities. There may have been a policy decision to reduce the amount of provision offered, on the basis that this constitutes too large a portion of resources available. Some VECs offer very limited provision or there is a service contract with defined time lines, as well as support and training for service agencies to continue literacy provision 'in-house' when this contract is completed. Difficulties may arise because of pressure exerted by Service Organizations on the Adult Literacy programme to offer provision on an on-going basis to clients.   (Service Organizations may make requests to a range of different VEC programme coordinators, so coordination in relation to this issue is essential). Accreditation at Level 1 is offered only in some cases. It was suggested that there is a need for specialist training to work with adults with learning disabilities, which VEC Adult Literacy staff typically do not have. There is a need for clearer guidelines for literacy providers in relation to this area of work.   NALA produced guidelines for people with intellectual disabilities[44] in 1999 and guidelines on working with students with disabilities were drawn up for BTEI funded provision in 2010.[45] These documents should be reviewed and updated.

Adults with Specific Learning Difficulties
Approaches to working with adults presenting with Specific Learning Difficulties also differ between VECs. There may be a specific assessment for people presenting with

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[43] Volunteers are currently used to a very limited extent in England, where the focus has been on professionalizing the workforce. http://www.niace.org.uk/literacy-inquiry
[44] http://www.nala.ie/resources/guidelines-inclusion-adults-learning-disabilities-literacy-schemes
[45] http://www.education.ie/en/AdvancedSearch/?q=Delivering%20accredited%20programmes%20to%20learners%20with%20disabilities

dyslexia and these individuals may be given extra 1:1 support or tutors with specific expertise. Not all those who state they have a specific learning difficulty have had a confirmed diagnosis through an educational assessment. In some cases, there have been links forged with local Dyslexia Associations who provide CPD, or the VEC has commissioned specific methodologies from the UK.   The lack of access to psychological assessments, because of cost, was cited as problematic in some cases. (VECs may simply provide information in relation to costs and sources of psychological assessment.) In one instance, the VEC is using a checklist designed by the Irish Dyslexia Association for educational establishments.   This checklist approach is used in conjunction with staff training – there is a focus on provision of practical methodologies for working with adults with dyslexia.

However, other respondents emphasised that the literacy service provides for adults with very wide spectrum of learning needs and does not undertake the 'labeling' of students. These responses emphasised that the integration of students into mainstream provision needs to be more formalised and that resources are best used in helping students understand how they learn.   Some VECs offer short programmes to support students to identify their preferred learning style and to manage in specific aspects of learning, particularly memory and organizational skills.   It was also reported that dyslexic students may be assigned to groups to work specifically on functional literacy and numeracy skills and are generally more interested in acquiring skills than certification.   Guidelines on working with people with specific learning disabilities[46] were developed and disseminated by NALA in 2004 and these should be reviewed in conjunction with NEPS with a view to the dissemination of templates for developing protocols for this area of work.

Intensive Provision
American research shows that learners generally need to attend at least 100 hours of instruction to achieve progress equivalent to one US grade level. For adults attending at least 150 hours the probability of progressing one grade level is deemed to be 75%. Comings and Soricone (2005) report that a key decision adult education leaders made at the beginning of the Massachusetts reform effort was to change the system's goal from trying to serve as many students as possible with the funds available, to serving only the number of students who could receive high-quality services with the available funds. The existing system purported to serve 40,000 students; however, many received as few as 12 hours per year. Rather than waiting for additional funding to become available, the adult education leadership committed to improving quality by cutting the number of students served with the existing budget by two thirds, from 40,000 to 12,000. The service articulated a uniform set of guidelines for programmes it would fund, based on consultations with practitioners. The guidelines followed the goal of increasing resources for each student and put it into a set of limits on how many students programmes could serve with the funding they were provided, as well as a minimum

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[46] http://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/Keys%20for%20learning_1.pdf

number of contact hours. External evaluation found a high rate of progression for Adult Literacy students, with 56% gaining at least one grade equivalent and approximately 30% gaining at least two grade equivalents.[47]

These findings are now corroborated by UK research that found that learners who attend courses for more than 50 hours make more progress than those who attend less and that regular attendance is correlated with better progress.[48] Longer and more intensive courses are needed and classroom time can be used more efficiently. "This presents a challenging conundrum for policymakers and programme designers: for the achievement of measurably significant gains, longer– and therefore more expensive – courses may be required for most learners".[49]

ITABE

ITABE (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education) data corroborate international research.   The ITABE programme, which commenced in 2006, provides participants, in groups of 6 – 8 students, with an opportunity to access 6 hours of tuition per week over a 14-week period as opposed to the average of 2 hours per week normally provided, thereby facilitating accelerated learning. VECs are allocated a specific number of projects and must report annually with regard to both provision and outcomes.

From 2006 on, feedback from providers and students along with results from post-course assessments has demonstrated the success of the programme. The initial evaluation showed that participating students could identify improvement in skills and almost 90% of them said the progress they made exceeded their expectations. The development and piloting of a summative assessment tool for use in Adult Literacy provision, along with the involvement of the Adult Guidance Service, were important aspects of the ITABE programme. Data relating to students' skill improvements in reading, writing, speaking and listening and numeracy are available at national level through pre and post course assessments. VECs have agreed formal protocols for working with the Adult Guidance Service. Demand for provision through ITABE has continued to grow since 2007 and the number of students working towards accreditation has steadily increased since the project commenced.

2011 ITABE statistical returns record that approximately 40% of participants increased their reading, writing and numeracy skills by one NFQ level, with 36% achieving certification. Of most significance however are statistics relating to the participation of those students who have attended for more than 200 hours. An analysis of returns between 2008 and 2010 shows that 85% of this cohort had only primary education or less but with 46% achieving certification. All students demonstrated accelerated skills increases in all four key areas, with over 90% progressing by at least one NFQ Level.

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[47] Comings and Soricone, 2005 cited in NRDC *Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies*, NALA, 2011.
[48] Brooks, 2010
[49] NRDC, *An International Review of Adult Literacy Policies*, NALA, 2011

Between 12 and 15% of participants progressed from NFQ Level 1 to Level 3 in reading, writing and numeracy.

Survey responses show that a total of **10.5%** of all provision (or **28,916** tutor contact hours) was delivered under **ITABE** funding in 2011 in 156 locations to 327 groups. 1,888 learners were enrolled in accredited courses, **3.8%** of total participants presented in Question 1 of the survey. However, **59%** of all ITABE participants were enrolled in accredited courses. ITABE statistics show that nearly 50% of all participants are unemployed, indicating intensive provision should be aimed at this target group in the first instance.

DES 2011 administrative returns indicate that only 287 participants were enrolled in intensive tuition options outside ITABE. During the consultation process there were mixed views expressed on this issue by providers. Some emphasised that many adults find it difficult to attend for more than one session a week, particularly those in rural locations who need to travel to attend a centre. Others stressed that the changing nature of the Adult Literacy cohort means that more learners from specific target groups, particularly the unemployed, are now available to attend for longer periods every week and that if students are presented with the option of more intensive provision at interview, many will avail of it. There was evidence given during visits of a move towards piloting new approaches and extending intensive provision options, using the ITABE and other 'Return to Education/Learning' models. In some instances, there is cooperation with BTEI (joint funding).

In one VEC there has been a shift to make the major part of provision "intensive". This system allows in most cases for two three-hour sessions per week at NFQ Level 2 or 3. Key themes are used to provide focus. Alternative "taster" courses are also offered for those unwilling to commit to this structure. The new approach allows for structured progression routes through the VEC adult education service and is much clearer and helpful for students. High quality brochures "map" the provision and progression routes. A number of other VECs have also organized pilot intensive programmes outside ITABE, sometimes in cooperation with BTEI. During the consultation process there were suggestions that the DES should allocate all funding along ITABE/BTEI models, which is for specified amounts of tuition.

Given the very positive outcomes from intensive provision, indicated by both international research and Irish practice, providers should consider shifting a greater proportion of work towards intensive provision.

Numeracy Provision
Numeracy has traditionally been the 'poor relation' of basic skills provision; research in the UK shows that for many with poor numeracy skills the biggest barrier to participation in numeracy provision is fear rather than complacency, but focused attention through advertising on numeracy as a specific skill has yielded results.

Between 2000 and 2005 enrolment rates in publicly funded basic numeracy provision in England nearly doubled and achievements nearly trebled. Research has also found that embedding numeracy in vocational provision greatly improves achievement rates.[50] Evidence provided by VECs during the review corroborates this finding: in VECs where an increased focus has been placed on numeracy and Maths provision enrolments and outcomes have improved. Intensive training may be offered to staff in relation to FETAC numeracy modules, as well as participation of staff in in-service training for Project Maths. Forfás has underlined that VECs should expand on good practice in relation to both literacy and numeracy: "Consultations have also indicated the need for a renewed focus on Maths within Further Education courses as a core skill for development, and that an initiative for further education that complements Project Maths in the secondary education system may be required."[51] The Adult Literacy Organisers' Association has highlighted a number of strategies to promote and encourage Maths and numeracy education in the new Education and Training Boards. These include promotion strategies at national and local level, curriculum development and Continuous Professional Development for staff.[52]

The survey results demonstrated that there is currently very little numeracy provision delivered in VEC Adult Literacy programmes. VECs reported that only 5% of all tuition was devoted to **standalone numeracy/Maths provision** in 189 locations to 447 groups in 2011. (This figure does not capture the volume of numeracy provision delivered in an integrated manner as part of mainstream literacy). This would indicate that learners received an **average** of **30** hours tuition in each group in 2011. 4 VECs delivered no standalone numeracy provision. Only 3 VECs allocated over 10% of their tuition to numeracy and 18 allocated less than 5%. 2,095 learners were enrolled in accredited numeracy courses (**4.3%** of total participants presented in response to Question 1).

VECs should adopt a higher focus on numeracy, both as standalone and integrated into broader basic skills provision. Numeracy should be strongly promoted as a core option for learners.

ESOL Provision

A number of reviews and policy guidelines for ESOL have been published since the *White Paper on Adult Education*[53]. The DES Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015[54] underlines that it is to be expected that immigrants will remain a definite feature of Irish society and education into the future. The Horwath Review of English Language

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[50] NRDC Numeracy Research Briefing, 2008

[51] Forfás, *Guidelines for the Alignment of Further Education Programmes with the Skill Needs of Enterprise*, 2012

[52] ALOA, *Adult Literacy and Basic Skills in a Changing Sector, 7 Priorities to Consider*, 2012

[53] NALA, *ESOL Policy Guidelines, 2003*; IVEA, *Towards a National ESOL Strategy*, 2008, Horwath Consulting Ireland, *Development of a National English Language Policy for Legally Resident Adult Immigrants: Final Report to the Office of the Minister for Integration and the Department of Education and Science*, 2008.

[54] DES and Office of the Minister for Integration, *Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015.*

Provision (2008) stressed that many immigrants are not maximizing their earning potential because of their low standard of English. English Language competence by parents can also lead to enhanced educational opportunities for 'second generation' immigrants.

The DES Adult Literacy Operational Guidelines state that ESOL provision should prioritise particular target groups to whom tuition is offered to a level of functional competency only (A2 on the Common European Framework of References for Languages, or NFQ Level 3). Priority target groups would include asylum seekers and low income EU immigrant or migrant workers. ESOL provision is delivered in literacy schemes but in other VEC programmes such as BTEI as well.   There are key differences with literacy. Learners range from the highly educated to those not literate in their first language. It is clearly a 'basic skill' or 'key competence' but it is a separate area of expertise to literacy.

ESOL provision in 2011 represented **12.8%** (35,258 paid tutor contact hours) of provision in 205 locations to 761 groups. This would indicate that learners received an average of **46 hours tuition** in each group in 2011, a higher average than in mainstream literacy. Although providers reported that ESOL provision is limited in most cases and restricted to 2 - 4 hours a week, allocations were very high in a minority of VECs – 6 devoted over 20% of their tutor contact hours to this work. In other cases, the amount of provision is quite limited, with waiting lists established when classes are full. Provision for ESOL should be based on a local needs analysis and demographic details of the local migrant population, using Census 2011. 5,343 learners were enrolled in accredited courses (**10.9**% of total participants presented in Question 1) and one third of provision was accredited above Level 3.

As in literacy, a two-hour a week course does not facilitate rapid progress: research[55] in the UK found that general language provision for learners at beginner to intermediate levels is not adequate for them to be able to move into the workplace and further education.

Providers have drawn attention to the need for standardised and appropriate assessment techniques, which take account of international best practice in language teaching, drawing on the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Language. An assessment tool would facilitate the return of data in relation to language levels on entry of ESOL participants. Existing accreditation mechanisms have also been criticized by providers who have requested new awards in the FETAC framework with module descriptors linked specifically to an ESOL framework, in co-operation with bodies such as QQAAI. New programmes should be based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

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[55] Schellekens, P., (2001) *English Language as a Barrier to Employment, Training and Education*, London, DFEE.

The Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA) has also requested the development of a national policy with guidelines and specific budget allocation for ESOL. Some VECs have also developed ESOL protocols or policies and established ESOL as a separate curriculum area, which has its own expertise. ESOL co-ordinators with specific language teaching experience manage the work outside the literacy service, but as part of the broader local adult education service team.

These policies or protocols could form the basis for discussion in relation to the development of ESOL guidelines for practitioners. Greater coordination of all programme budgets currently devoted to ESOL would also allow for more coherent provision.

Family Literacy
In a comparative analysis of family literacy policies and programmes throughout Europe, Carpentieri et al (2011)[56] argue that family literacy should be a primary focus of government intervention, both because of strong reported returns on investment and because intergenerational programmes address a range of key policy issues. The key finding of this 2011 EU report is that family literacy programmes are effective, both in improving child literacy and in improving parental support skills. However, evidence regarding Adult Literacy improvements has been mixed. Some research has found gains for parents, while other studies have found otherwise (Brooks et al, 2008).[57] Brooks' research found little evidence of the impact on parents' actual skills with some exceptions. The evidence is clearer regarding successful parental development of a range of other competencies, which better enable them to support their children's literacy development. Brooks et al concluded that on balance the evidence suggests that parents' skills do benefit but that there is a need for more systematic gathering of data.[58] However, Carpentieri's research referenced above also found that institutional barriers frequently limit the development of family literacy initiatives.

Feedback from the DEIS Family Literacy project operated through Adult Literacy programmes indicates a number of positive outcomes including increased engagement with school by parents and high completion rates with adult participants progressing to other programmes within the Adult Literacy and adult education service. Many participants in these courses would not have previously engaged in provision through the VEC Adult Education Service. The projects also resulted in increased cooperation between VEC Adult Education Services and local primary schools, through the Home School Community Liaison Service. There was relatively little reporting of the involvement of the local library service in the DEIS pilot projects and the steering group recommended that this area of partnership should be promoted more strongly, with a focus on the specific expertise that the library service may offer, as well as premises and

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[56] Carpentieri, J., et al (2011) *Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development.* London: NRDC, Institute of Education.

[57] Quoted in NALA Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies
[58] Quoted in BIS Literature Review

resources.   Consultations with VECs, during the review (particularly those who devote significant proportions of their main budget to family literacy) confirm these findings: most family literacy is non-accredited but provides an important entry route for many who would not otherwise contact the service.   Courses are short but a significant number of participants go on to enrol in mainstream provision on completion.

Survey responses indicate that Family Literacy provision accounted for **4.03%** (11, 051) of all tuition hours in 2011 in 271 locations to 504 groups. This would indicate that learners received an average of only **22 hours** tuition in each group in 2011. While 3 VECs devoted significant amounts of their budgets to Family Literacy (over 15% of tutor contact hours), 5 indicated that they delivered no family literacy tuition in 2011 and an overall 18 VECs devoted less than 3% of their tutor contact hours to this area of work. (Some VECs also received allocations for family literacy through DEIS). 2,021 learners in this area were enrolled in accredited courses **(4%** of total participants as reported in Question 1).

Responses show that Adult Literacy programmes work in cooperation with a wide range of partners to deliver family literacy, including personnel from local schools and community groups, County Childcare Committees, Active Retirement Groups and other VEC partners.   Only 8 VECs referenced the Library Service, reflecting findings from the DEIS Family Literacy Initiative. While one VEC specified that a county wide family learning group had been established, wide variation in levels of provision for this aspect of work is still evident as 5 reported no family literacy work in 2011.

Given the positive outcomes associated with family literacy DES should re-emphasise the need to use mainstream allocations to deliver this aspect of provision.

Standalone ICT provision
The NRDC 2011 review of research indicates that there is limited evidence available in relation to the benefits of ICT and Adult Literacy and numeracy provision but learning technology can make learning more flexible in how, when and where learning takes place. The review states that learning technology may improve learner progress and achievement but the evidence is at best mixed. There is a small body of evidence that suggests learning technology helps to attract, engage and motivate learners. Learners (and employers) are more likely to perceive basic skills training as relevant when it is marketed under the guise of ICT training.

This finding is strongly evidenced by research undertaken by NALA. A report on blended learning collaboration between VECs and other providers using www.writeon.ie concluded that blended learning provided a means of extending learning time and

encouraging independent study and also that centres and NALA collaborated effectively in providing additional flexible learning opportunities to learners[59].

The NRDC research review finds that the value of technology for literacy and numeracy is conditional on learners' existing ICT skills; learners are more likely to drop out if their acquisition of skills is unsupported. The NRDC conclude that the findings suggest that ICT skills and basic skills may benefit from simultaneous development, referencing Mellar et al's 2007[60] study, which found that learners improved in almost all cases in both literacy/ESOL skills and ICT skills and confidence.

Under standalone **ICT** provision, **12.3**% of all tuition (**33, 684** paid tutor contact hours) was delivered in 277 locations to 985 groups. This would indicate that learners received an average of 34 hours tuition in each group in 2011. 5 respondents indicated that they delivered no standalone ICT provision in 2011. However, in contrast to numeracy and family literacy, 4 VECs allocated over 30% of provision to standalone ICT and a further 4 allocated over 20%. 5,562 learners were enrolled in accredited courses (**11**% of total participants as reported in Question 1).

26 survey respondents said that ICT was always incorporated as part of literacy and numeracy provision and **20** said that the literacy service offers access to distance learning options. **24** respondents said that the service offered blended learning options. Responses to the question on distance learning varied considerably. NALA's "Write On" programme is used in most cases, although some other examples were provided.[61] Distance learning options are used for specific target groups e.g. asylum seekers in Reception Centres (using volunteers). In some cases students are given access to distance learning programmes but with the support of a paid tutor at all times. However, some responses demonstrated less positive attitudes towards technology, particularly for learners at Levels 1 and 2.

Section Three Conclusions
The data presented in this section demonstrate that provision in most VEC Adult Literacy programmes is still structured along the traditional 2-3 hours per week model, with limited amounts devoted to areas such as numeracy, intensive literacy and family literacy and a number of VECs are devoting very considerable proportions of tutor contact hours to standalone ICT. Research demonstrates that ICT and literacy both benefit from simultaneous development, so that ICT should be integrated with literacy provision rather than offered as a standalone subject.

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[59] *NALA, Blended Learning Report* (2011)
http://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/NALA%20Blended%20Learning%20Project%20Report_1.pdf
[60] Mellar et al, *Effective Teaching and Learning: Using ICT*, London, NRDC
[61] BBC Skills Wise; Mathisfun.com; Reading Companion

Adult Literacy programmes deal with a very broad range of adults with diverse needs, including adults with intellectual disabilities and specific learning difficulties and a more formalised access policy would provide support for VECs.

Shorter courses as well as less intensive options are certainly a gateway into learning for adults who would not otherwise participate in education. However, two to three hours week tuition a week is insufficient for most adults who have lifelong problems with literacy.   There is also a need for a much stronger focus on the delivery of numeracy and family literacy provision. More detailed guidance in relation to the apportioning of budgets needs to be established in order to achieve this.

Volunteers may provide an important role in supporting Adult Literacy participants but their roles should be clarified by the development of written volunteer protocols with more emphasis placed on supporting group tuition.

A more formalised assessment system for ESOL participants would facilitate the return of data in relation to language levels.

Recommendations

6.   Working in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs), the DES should consult with the Equality Mainstreaming Unit of the Equality Authority with a view to developing an Access Policy for VEC Adult Literacy Programmes.

7.   The DES, in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs) should examine the potential for introducing an annual application process for Adult Literacy similar to that used for BTEI. This will assist VECs in planning, bring a clearer focus on target groups for VECS and give the DES a better picture of planned activity levels.

8.   In common with the earlier recommendation in relation to centralized reporting, the DES, in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs), should examine the potential of recording the number of tuition hours delivered (volume of tuition) as is currently the case for BTEI and ITABE. The DES should also examine the potential for making allocations on the basis of projected tuition or volume of tuition as is the case for BTEI, rather than as a block grant.

9.   VECs should strongly promote group tuition as a first option, as opposed to 1:1 tuition, to new students.

10.   All VECs should develop formal volunteer protocols. The protocol should include appropriate criteria for the assignment of students to volunteers. The DES should consult with the IVEA (representing VECs) in relation to developing more detailed information on this topic as part of the Operational guidelines.

11. International research indicates that more intensive literacy provision is of more benefit to learners; VECs should deliver intensive literacy options to learners of at least 6 hours a week as part of their core service.

12. VECs should strongly promote numeracy as an option for Adult Literacy participants and seek to increase participation in both standalone and integrated numeracy options.

13. Given the positive outcomes associated with family literacy DES should re-emphasise the potential to use mainstream Adult Literacy programme allocations to deliver family literacy programmes.

14. As part of the National Literacy and numeracy strategy the DES should promote the value of Family Learning and Literacy to Primary Schools Principal Teachers as well as to the Home School Community Liaison Service as a core school activity. Protocols to enable formal links between Home School Community Liaison Networks and VECs should be established, with specific actions to be put in place to build structured partnerships between HSCL services and VEC Adult Literacy programmes.

15. Access to distance and blended learning should be integrated into all service delivery and these options should be promoted for all students in Adult Literacy programmes in order to increase access to learning opportunities. Therefore, every VEC should offer distance and blended learning options such as www.writeon.ie to students both as standalone and integrated into mainstream delivery.

16. Providers have requested clearer guidelines in relation to work with adults with Specific Learning Difficulties and the Department should consult with NEPS in relation to developing these. As a first step, and in conjunction with stakeholders, the existing guidelines for working with adults with learning disabilities should also be reviewed and adapted for current Adult Literacy provision. VECs should ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication in relation to provision for adults with learning disabilities (e.g. between Adult Literacy and BTEI).

17. The DES should consult with the IVEA (representing VECs) to assess the feasibility of adapting the existing Level 3 Award in English as a Second Language to reflect the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL). The current alignment of the NFQ against the CEFRL should also be reviewed.

Section Four

Assessment

"High quality diagnostic assessments help instructors to identify barriers to learning and to avoid compounding negative experiences."[62]

Key Points in this Section

There is still no nationally consistent formal procedure for initial assessment in use in Adult Literacy programmes and practice varies considerably.

Research indicates that the development of standardised tools that yield useful information is complex; however research also shows that inconsistent results may result from the use of inadequate tools.

Less than half of VECs undertake formative assessment every term.

The DES Operational Guidelines specify that VEC Adult Literacy programmes should carry out a structured initial assessment to identify learning needs and that evidence should be gathered in a systematic manner and not exclusively on the basis of 'self-report' or information provided by the learner. These systems should also reference the NFQ and form the basis of Individual Learning Plans. The Operational Guidelines also state that all learning should be assessed formatively as this gives the learner insight into their progress, facilitates them to reflect on their learning and to set goals. In this section the issues of initial and formative assessment are discussed. Summative assessment is discussed in the section on achievement and progression.

Initial Assessment

Unlike the United Kingdom, practice in Irish Adult Literacy programmes does not generally differentiate between screening ('skills checking'), initial and diagnostic assessment. "There are distinct and different views among researchers and practitioners on the question of initial assessment and screening.   Opinions differ on how formal or informal initial assessment should be. Specific approaches may be often contested as being too formalised and therefore off-putting for the learner or on the other hand too informal and yielding little relevant information".[63] However, Looney (OECD 2008) states that this sets up an artificial dichotomy. In an extensive study, Looney outlines

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[62] Looney, J. (2008) *Teaching Learning and Assessment for Adults: Improving Foundation Skills*, OECD.
[63] IVEA *Guidelines on Screening and Initial Assessment of Literacy Needs in the Recruitment Phase of Further Education Courses* http://www.ivea.ie/services/literacy_screening/literacy_screening.shtml

very different approaches to the assessment process taken by programmes that participated. In some cases, approaches were very formalised; in others, the focus was far more on informal approaches. Looney concludes that while an assessment that creates great levels of stress is not likely to yield useful results, validated instruments are needed to ensure that the right questions are asked in a way that will yield the needed information. The purpose of the initial assessment process in overall terms should be to begin to build up a picture of the learner, their literacy needs, abilities and short and long-term goals. Diagnostic assessment requires skill in identifying why people are making 'mistakes' rather than just identifying what those mistakes are. [64]

Despite considerable investment in screening, initial and diagnostic tools based on national standards by the previous Government, the NRDC Review of Research for BIS (2011) notes that some researchers have called for improvements in assessment practices in the UK and the introduction of uniform standardised tests to provide better benchmarking and monitoring data. Their 2009 research on entry-point levels for Skills for Life learners showed that teachers in England assess the performance of learners in different ways and at different times.[65] Several studies illustrate the consequences of not having standardised initial assessment tests. One report criticized inconsistent results emerging from the 'Fast Track' method used for assessing offenders' learning needs and called for "more comprehensive initial assessment techniques specifically designed for those who have complex and multiple learning needs."[66]

Approaches to Initial Assessment in Ireland
A 2007 report by Adult Literacy stakeholders to the then Department of Education and Science[67] outlined that there was no nationally consistent formal procedure for initial assessment then in use in Adult Literacy programmes and that practice varied. The conclusion of this current report, based on the results of the survey and feedback from site visits is that little has changed since then.

In response to Question 4 of the survey on initial assessment methodologies, 12 respondents indicated that learners self-assessed their literacy skills and 12 said that they used an informal interview without interview schedule for initial assessment. However, 27 respondents replied that that they used an informal interview with a formal schedule, with 7 VECs stating that they used both approaches. A further 22 respondents indicated that they used a formal assessment tool as part of the initial interview process. Overlapping responses may be accounted for by the fact that

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[64] Derrick, J. and Gawn, J. (2010),'Planning and Assessment' in *Teaching Adult Literacy, Principles and Practice*, Eds Hughes, N. and Schwab, I., Open University Press,

[65] Cited in BIS (2011) *Review of Research and Evaluation on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills*, page 123.

[66] Adult Learning Inspectorate (2007) cited in BIS (2011) Review.

[67] Mapping the learning Journey Mainstreaming Committee, (2007) *Exploring Assessment for Accountability Purposes in Adult Literacy*, NALA.

individual VECs have no written initial interview or assessment policy. Approaches used may also differ within VECs, depending on the applicant.

In response to Question 5 of the survey on the administration of initial assessment, 14 respondents indicated that ALOs undertake this work. In 6 VECs programme coordinators or Literacy Resource Workers are responsible for undertaking initial assessment. Tutors are responsible in 1 VEC and 1 VEC also indicated that the Adult Guidance Service is responsible for initial assessment.

In response to Question 7, 32 respondents answered that the initial assessment was devised by the VEC. In most cases, this would appear to involve adapting an existing assessment tool as part of an informal interview.

Approaches and methodologies used for initial assessment are varied. All VECs have systems in place but these differ in relation to the extent that they have been formalised and the types of assessment tool being used. A number of VECs have invested in developing locally devised tools, informally aligned to the NFQ. However, in other examples given learners are simply allowed to evaluate their own abilities and identify their own needs.

During a number of the site visits, it was emphasised that initial assessment is a process, rather than a once-off event and the assessment may take place on one or more meetings and in the initial stages of tuition. Based on the outcomes of the assessment the applicant may then be advised of a range of tuition options. It was also stressed that informal approaches are used in order to reassure the applicant and put them at their ease, as they may under-estimate or over-estimate their abilities.

"The aim of the initial assessment may be to guide the service in meeting the stated needs of individuals at point of entry, rather than comprising a detailed analysis of what they can and cannot do. Guided questions may be used to determine the literacy level and the applicant may be asked to read a piece of text or fill out a simple form. Assistance is provided if required in some instances. Assessments may be corrected in conjunction with the applicant to ensure clarity and reinforce the formative aspect of the process."

Examples of locally devised assessment tools include:

- Statements of entry level adapted from a published screening tool devised to ascertain levels;
- Adaptation of existing English assessment tools that have been 'aligned' to the Irish NFQ. Specific tools may be selected for use, based on learners' needs;
- Adaptation of ITABE and 'Mapping the Learning Journey' assessment tools;
- Systems that integrate initial and formative assessment (the same tool is used for both purposes);
- A set of informal interview questions along with a simple enrolment form to assess reading, writing and spelling. A short piece of free writing to assess sentence construction, punctuation and spelling, and finally a short set of basic Maths questions to assess skills in the four main operations;
- Guided questions used to "determine the literacy level". The applicant may be asked to read a piece of text, fill out a simple form, with "assistance given if required".

Future Developments

Some tools currently used would appear to be inappropriate for use with adults.[68] A number of respondents (including some practitioners interviewed during site visits) requested that a national standardised model of initial assessment be developed and implemented to ensure consistency of learner placement across the country, with some offering their own systems for dissemination for wider use. The ALOA has also recommended the development and implementation of a standardised assessment tool which will inform and support learners' entry onto courses in the new Local Education and Training Boards. The development of a standardised tool would be an expensive and complex process. The type of tool developed would also need to be carefully considered and evaluated, as a strong focus on objectivity may limit the items isolated for measurement. Many standardised literacy assessment tools do not include writing skills. Contextualising the questions may raise issues of cultural bias. A new standardised (criterion) referenced assessment tool would involve the specific construction of a set of items linked to levels 1-3 of the Irish NFQ, with subsequent piloting and calibration to ensure validity and reliability.

The ALOA has also requested the implementation of a plan for RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning), to support access and progression, and to recognize experiential learning. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Report on Recognition of Prior Learning[69] recommended the provision of an entitlement for all adults to an assessment of core

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[68] This opinion was underlined in the 2007 report above.
[69] EGFSN,(2011)*Developing Recognition of Prior Learning*, Forfás.

skills with a view to making their prior learning visible and promoting their participation in further education and training.   The report also recommended a review of the NALA www.writeon.ie assessment and its potential to be translated to other education and training classroom settings.

Formative Assessment and Individual Learning Plans
"Formative assessment is an integral part of literacy practice and is essential to the learner centred ethos that characterises literacy services".[70] It should play a critical role in the teaching and learning process, as it should represent the main means by which tutors establish and continuously revise what needs to be taught.   As with initial assessment, the key aspect of this process should be a dialogue between the tutor and the adult learner so that the latter develops their capacity to make critical judgements of the quality and effectiveness of their literacy activities, both inside and outside the classroom.   "Formative assessment (may be identified) when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs"[71]

A formative assessment framework (***Mapping the Learning Journey- MLJ***) to help tutors and learners manage the learning process was published by NALA in 2005 with funding from the then Department of Education and Science and a mainstreaming initiative subsequently took place between 2005 and 2007.   The MLJ has **four components (or cornerstones)**, ***Knowledge and Skills*** and three process cornerstones, ***fluency and independence; depth of understanding and critical awareness; range of application***. The three process cornerstones are designed to record the growth in confidence and independence that learners may demonstrate and give a more rounded picture of progress than an assessment based solely on the technical knowledge and skills involved in literacy and numeracy. Using materials that are part of the normal learning process, learners are placed on a **nine-point scale** (which incorporates three broad levels of difficulty and proficiency) in relation to the four cornerstones. The Framework suggests that it is possible to be at an advanced stage in relation to some cornerstones and at a beginner stage in relation to others.   There is no composite score achieved.   The outcomes of the assessment process are based on the opinions of the tutor and learner. It is suggested that the framework be used with learners three times a year. The MLJ framework cannot be used for accountability purposes.   However, the framework informed the development of awards at Levels 1 and 2 of the NFQ.

The assessment tool devised for the **ITABE** or Intensive Literacy allocations, designed as a support for both formative and summative assessment, is comprised of a series of checklists whereby the designated staff member in consultation with the student, ticks off a series of statements relating to specific abilities.   Informed by the MLJ, the checklists are broken up into levels equivalent to NFQ levels 1 to 3 and each level is then

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[70] NALA, 2007, *Level Definitions for the Department of Education and Science Adult Literacy Returns*
[71] Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998) *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment* http://blog.discoveryeducation.com/assessment/files/2009/02/blackbox_article.pdf

sub-divided into 3 stages. Statements are linked to FETAC Communications and Numeracy Specific Learning Outcomes at levels 1 to 3. There are checklists for Listening & Speaking, Reading, Writing and Numeracy. Response to the ITABE Assessment Tool has been very positive and there would be some evidence that it is used in broader contexts outside ITABE allocations.

12 survey respondents indicated that formative assessment was carried out on a monthly basis in Adult Literacy provision and 15 indicated that it was carried out every term. 6 VECS only carried out formative assessment on an annual basis and one respondent indicated that there was no formative assessment conducted.

Questionnaire respondents again gave a wide variety of answers in response to the question on formative assessment tools, listing very varying approaches.

- Carried out as appropriate, at the discretion of the tutor, "to established goals and learning increments";
- Skills checklist completed with learner on a one-to-one basis with class tutor, reviewed every 6 weeks (placed on learner's file);
- On-going at the end of each session, using a Learning Journal and facilitated group feedback sessions;
- Mapping the Learning Journey, ITABE assessment or FETAC worksheets/portfolio, On-line resources including moodle;
- Monthly tutor reports, with template provided;
- ALO/centre manager visits groups each term and carries out programme evaluation at end of programme/year;
- All tutors trained in assessing progress using standardised reading and spelling tests.

The responses indicate that in some instances processes to ensure dialogue with and feedback to learners is firmly embedded into Adult Literacy programmes. In other cases formative assessment is deemed to be fulfilled by the use of more formal instruments or reports.

Individual Learning Plans
An Individual Learning Plan may be defined as a "statement of learning goals for a specified period of time for an individual learner, as well as a statement of the steps by which these goals will be achieved."[72] A record of progress is then made at regular intervals and such systems are particularly valuable to teaching and learning

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[72] DfES (2003) *Planning learning and recording progress and achievement: a guide for practitioners* http://archive.excellencegateway.org.uk/media/SFL/import/batch1/BATCH%201%20-%20100%20MB%201/PLRA1%20(1)/83306_Access%20Plus.pdf

processes.[73] It would appear that in Ireland there is a variety of practices to the use of these plans. Some may be written as distinct individual plans while others are included as part of learners' logbooks. Only **19** survey respondents indicated that Individual Learning Plans were developed for all students.   These providers presented evidence of systematic procedures and written protocols for formative assessment, as well as the intention to initiate a formal review of formative assessment procedures within the service.

"Formative assessment plays a key role in teaching and learning within (the VEC's) Basic Education Service. No formal tool is used, but the following format is in place: Formative assessment is recorded in class logbook as part of the feedback to learners and takes place as follows:

- *At start of tuition to check that learners and tutors have a shared recognition of desired goal;*
- *To get evidence of current position;*
- *In preparation for summative assessment to create an understanding of what is needed in skills development;*
- *To close the gap between current position and moving towards criterion referenced outcome."*

The class logbook is also used to provide material for Continuous Professional Development for staff.

Despite a mainstreaming and training plan undertaken with VECs, this review has found overall little evidence, either from the Questionnaire or visits to VECs, that ***Mapping the Learning Journey*** continues to be used on a wide spread basis, mainly because of administrative and logistical difficulties cited in relation to its implementation, particularly in groups. A number of providers however stressed the contribution that ***Mapping the Learning Journey*** has made in relation to informing their thinking about formative assessment as well as assisting them to devise local frameworks or procedures.

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[73] Mapping the Learning Journey Mainstreaming Steering Committee, (2007) *Exploring Assessment for Accountability Purposes in Adult Literacy*, NALA

Section Four Conclusions

Clearer guidelines and more formalised systems are needed for initial assessment in Adult Literacy programmes. Processes to ensure dialogue with and feedback to learners through formative assessment are firmly embedded into some services and these systems should be recorded and disseminated to all VECs. Any developments of guidelines or processes in relation to initial and formative assessment tools should reference work that already exists, particularly *Mapping the Learning Journey* and the *ITABE Assessment Tool*.

Recommendations

18.   It is recommended that in the first instance guidelines for the administration of initial assessment in Adult Literacy programmes be drawn up by the DES in conjunction with IVEA (representing VECs).

19.   The development of a national standardised model of initial assessment would be a complex, lengthy and expensive project. It is therefore recommended that a review of existing assessment instruments adapted by VECs and suitable for use with adults should be undertaken, with a view to disseminating these for general use. This review should also consider the recommendations of the EGFSN's Report on Recognition of Prior Learning. Any assessment tools disseminated should reference the NFQ and include evidence gathered in a systematic, objective manner and not exclusively on the basis of 'self-report' or information provided by the learner.

20.   It is recommended that formative assessment is included as part of the review of initial assessment protocols and procedures with reference to work that already exists, particularly *Mapping the Learning Journey* and the *ITABE Assessment Tool*. Guidelines for the administration of formative assessment systems should also be developed alongside those drawn up for initial assessment.

Section Five

Achievement and Progression

"Learners with prior qualifications were more likely to complete and achieve on their current course, as compared with those with no such prior qualifications. Persistence may be associated with having more experience as a learner, and with learning how to learn, and this suggests the importance of:

- *good induction*
- *clear progression routes*
- *supporting persistence through new technologies*
- *regular review, support and advice*
- *making learners feel part of a learning environment*
- *training teachers to support learners in learning how to learn.*

The evidence suggests that if this group of 'inexperienced learners' receives sufficient support and attention to get them through a first qualification, at whatever level, this could put them on the path to lifelong learning"[74].

Key Points in this Section

Accreditation outcomes vary widely and 7 VEC Adult Literacy programmes do not offer all students access to accredited provision.

In general outcomes in relation to Communications and Numeracy at NFQ Levels 1-3 are low.

There is currently no system in place to capture the so called "wider benefits of learning".

Many VECs have structured systems in place, in cooperation with the Adult Guidance Service, to facilitate participants' progression but data in relation to this area are incomplete.

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[74] Quality Improvement Agency, *Motivating Skills for Life Learners to Persist, Progress and Achieve Research Project*: Individual Learner Record Data Report

Policy and Research Background

The DES Operational Guidelines define summative assessment as providing evidence of achievement of the learner's goals and whether he or she has achieved a specific standard. Informal summative assessment is especially appropriate during the adult learner's initial engagement in the Adult Literacy Programme but formal assessment should also be offered after this phase is completed and learners should be encouraged and facilitated to engage in programmes leading to accreditation. The Operational Guidelines specify that accreditation options at Level 1 to 3 of the NFQ (especially in the areas of core skills) should be promoted and provided by all services.

A distinction is often made between formative and summative assessment, which only takes place at the end of the course of study. However, this may be regarded as a simplistic division as all assessment should be formative, if learning is a continuous, progressive and deepening process.

In Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe, there is a growing emphasis on the outcomes of learning, particularly outcomes leading to formal external awards. Modularized awards help to motivate low-skilled adults by the possibility of taking small steps towards full awards over time. Such qualifications provide affirmation and recognition of added value and progression. The Irish NFQ is acknowledged as providing small, clear, transparent steps towards accreditation for low-skilled individuals at Levels 1-3. Component and whole awards provide pathways for learners to progress at their own pace through the framework.[75]

This is particularly important in the activation agenda. FORFÁS has recently highlighted the need for providers to ensure continued accredited outcomes for people with low levels of education. It recommended the provision of support for providers in relation to processes needed to achieve targets set in relation to specific cohorts, as there may be 'mission drift' towards adults demanding provision at higher levels of the NFQ. FORFÁS noted that provision at Levels 1 and 2 is extremely low compared to NFQ level 3 and above, and that some VECs do not offer any accredited programmes at these levels currently, "which may be providing a barrier to access to education for some learners in some locations around the country".[76] This barrier could be addressed by increasing understanding of the levels, and raising competency in how to carry out assessment for certification at Levels 1 and 2.

The European Commission Action Plan on adult learning[77] also emphasises that it is not enough to simply attract adults into education and training, there must also be a real

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[75] European Commission, Action Plan on Adult Learning: *Summary Report on Peer Learning Activity on 'One Step Up'*, 2009.

[76] Forfás (2012) *Guidelines for the Alignment of Further Education Programmes with Skill Needs of Enterprise*, Dublin, 2012.

[77] European Commission (2010), *Action Plan on Adult Learning: Basic Skills for Adults, Policy and Practice Guidelines*

opportunity for them to progress and raise their level of qualification and to better integrate in all aspects of life. Qualifications provide affirmation, recognition of added value and progression. They are also part of the practice-policy feedback loop in that they enable transparency and accountability on the part of tutors and facilitate funders to measure outcomes and returns on learning.[78]

There is also clear, convincing and statistically significant evidence that participation in Adult Literacy and numeracy provision, and having higher levels of literacy and numeracy, has a positive personal and social impact on individuals and communities. [79] However, there are currently no systems in place to capture and report on these "wider outcomes" of learning in Adult Literacy. SOLAS is to establish a working group to explore the issue of the wider benefits of learning.

Access to Accredited Courses
27 survey respondents indicated that students are offered access to accredited courses and 7 indicated that they do not offer access to accredited courses to all students.

FETAC Level 1 and 2 Programme Validation and National Framework of Qualifications
Only 19 VECs have validated programmes at Level 1 and 23 have validated programmes at Level 2. 30 respondents answered that learning objectives were referenced against the NFQ while 4 said that they were not referenced. Some VECs stated that they provided positive encouragement to all students to take up accreditation and that while not all unaccredited learning is immediately referenced to the NQF, access routes from uncertified learning to progression/certification are a key feature in planning the service. Course design, including design of non-accredited courses may also be informed by the specific learning outcomes set down at the relevant FETAC level.

> *"Tutors link learning objectives in relation to immediate and everyday social and economic needs to FETAC Learning Objectives where applicable. Each uncertified themed course, in addition to topic specific Learning Objectives, incorporates specific literacy and/or numeracy learning objectives that are referenced to Learning Outcomes specified in the FETAC modules at Levels 1, 2, or 3. This learning is recorded in assessment tasks and can be included as evidence in future accredited courses. This helps to form a bridge between uncertified and certified learning and so enables progression."*

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[78] European Commission (2010), *Basic Skills Provision for Adults: Policy and Practice Guidelines*.
[79] NRDC Review of Research for BIS

However, a number of responses indicate that in some cases only accredited provision is referenced against the NFQ.   The difficulty of linking 1:1 tuition to the NFQ was raised as well as the need to respond to learners' social, family and personal needs in the first instance and that these "might not correspond to learning outcomes specified on NFQ (Awards)".

Certification Outcomes

Survey responses provide the following data on overall accreditation outcomes:

Total no. of males achieving certification 2011	Total no. of females achieving certification 2011	TOTAL
5,491	7,884	**13,375**

27% of the total cohort of 48, 586 achieved certification in 2011. **27% of men and women** respectively achieved certification. **24%** of the Adult Literacy cohort (excluding ESOL learners) was reported as achieving certification through the DES administrative return for 2011. (DES administrative data relating to certification outcomes for ESOL learners were not collected for 2011).
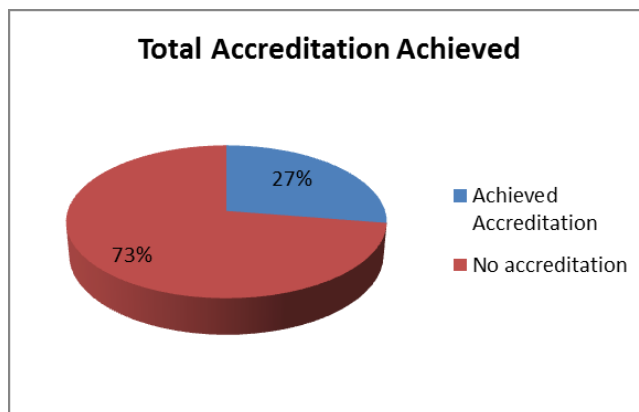
Unemployed

5,224 or **39%** of those who achieved certification were unemployed:

Total no. of unemployed men achieving accreditation 2011	Total no. of unemployed females achieving accreditation 2011	TOTAL
2,191	3,033	5,224

DES administrative data for 2011 report **16,410** (**38**% of Adult Literacy total cohort) unemployed in Adult Literacy provision and **4,996** (**44**% of ESOL total cohort) unemployed in ESOL provision (total of 21,406).   According to survey responses, **24%** of this total unemployed cohort achieved certification.

The data returned through the survey demonstrate the following overview of awards achieved in 2011 at Levels 1-3. The data do not include other awards made at higher levels of the NFQ.

Overview of awards achieved at Levels 1-3

Subject	Total No. Participants	%
Communications	2,229	22.8%
Numeracy/Maths	1,178	12%
ICT	5,100	52%
PIPS	1,260	12.9%
TOTAL	9,767	
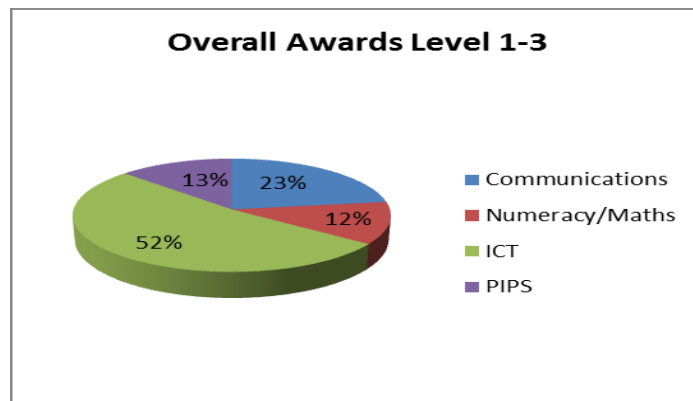
In all cases, at least **75%** of awards were at Level 3.

- Only **4.5%** (2229) of the total cohort of 48,586 achieved an award in **Communications** at Levels 1-3 of the NFQ;
- Only **2.4%** of the total cohort of 48,586 achieved an award in **Numeracy/Maths** at Levels 1-3 of the NFQ;
- **10.4%** of the total cohort of 48, 586 achieved an award in **ICT** at **Levels 1-3** of the NFQ;

- **2.5%** of the total cohort of 48,586 achieved an award in PIPS/Personal Effectiveness.
- A more detailed breakdown of awards achieved by Adult Literacy participants at Levels 1-3 is contained in Appendix Two.

ESOL

Survey responses demonstrated that 893 ESOL participants achieved accreditation at FETAC Level 3 or equivalent in 2011, based on responses supplied by VECs for the review. A minimum of **436** learners also achieved accreditation at Levels 4 and 5.

The levels of accreditation achieved differ widely between VECs. The data provided in the survey allow an analysis of certification achieved at Levels 1-3 of the NFQ in Communications, Maths, ICT and Personal and Interpersonal Skills. They demonstrate that for Communications, the rate of achievement at these levels as a percentage of total enrolment in each VEC ranges from less than **1%** to **16%**. For numeracy/Maths, the rate of achievement at Levels 1 to 3 ranges from less than **1%** of all enrolled to **9%**. For ICT the percentage is from less than **1%** to **26%**. The survey data do not include other achievements at higher levels of the NFQ or Junior and Leaving Certificate outcomes.

Summative Assessment in Non-Accredited Groups

28 respondents reported that they conduct summative assessment in non-accredited groups and that these assessments are recorded. **17** respondents provided details.

- The format varies, according to the group and the subject being taught;
- Informal summative assessment only – built around the provision of feedback to the learner regarding progress and possible progression options;
- ALO visits each group at the end of programme to carry out evaluation and determine progression options;
- Both tutor and student have to give a detailed written report and present examples of work done throughout the course, which is kept in the event of students presenting a FETAC portfolio for accreditation in the future;
- Record sheets completed by students which inform ILPs. ILP reviewed after one year.

Progression

The DES Operational Guidelines state that progression within and from the Adult Literacy programme should be promoted and developed. While learners should be encouraged to establish the relevant competencies and skills before embarking on broader accredited programmes with a specific vocational focus a balance needs to be struck between learners progressing at their own pace and challenging them to move on to programmes at higher levels of the NFQ.

The changing circumstances of people's lives over time will influence their learning choices and their progression. A study published in 2008 concluded that providers must recognize and acknowledge the multiple motivations people have for being engaged in learning in order to support their progression towards their goals. The impact of strong tutor support, particularly in relation to building confidence and impacting on progress and progression was strongly emphasised in this report. Most adults interviewed cited teacher qualities, encouragement and increasing self-confidence as motivating them to go on further than they originally intended. The need for in-depth guidance supports in the learning environment was also stressed. [80]

Research[81] on the impact of the Skills for Life Initiative on Adult Literacy learners in the UK identified three forms of progression:

- **Moving on** (to other forms of learning or employment)

- **Moving around** (carrying on with the same course or an equivalent level of learning. This might apply to people who are unable to attend regularly because of physical or mental health issues, people who come mainly for the social aspect of learning, or those who want or need to learn at a slower pace than many of their peers.

- **Moving out:** leaving learning altogether. This might arise for a variety of reasons, from being disappointed with the experience of learning, to a change in life circumstances. Moving out of provision could be seen as a positive development, indicating that learners had achieved what they wanted.

The FORFÁS Guidelines on alignment of further education programmes with the skills needs of enterprise underline that data across F.E. programmes including Adult Literacy in relation to progression is very weak, making it difficult to analyse outcomes. The report states "This is perhaps one of the most significant deficits to be addressed in future as this information is vital in assessing the effectiveness of programmes." [82]

Most survey respondents provided identified progression as a key aspect of their service. An analysis of DES administrative returns shows that only **14%** of literacy students had been attending VEC services for more than 3 years. However, this proportion varies considerably, with over **30%** of students attending for this length of time in a small number of cases.

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[80] Hodge, R. et al, (2008) *Progression: Moving on in Life and Learning*, 2008, NRDC.

[81] Rhys Warner, J. & Vorhaus, J. (Eds) *The Learner Study: The Impact of the Skills for Life Strategy on Literacy, Numeracy and Language Learners*, NRDC, 2008

[82] Forfás (2012)

The 2011 DES statistical returns provide data on progression pathways for mainstream Adult Literacy programme participants. No details were provided for 42% of those enrolled:

Progression	Number	Percentage
To Group	1,930	7.7
BTEI	914	3.7
VTOS	176	0.7
Other F.E. Options	1,060	4.2
Training	48	0.19
Employment	288	1.15
Remained at current level	9,176	37
Unknown	11,406	45
TOTAL	24,998	
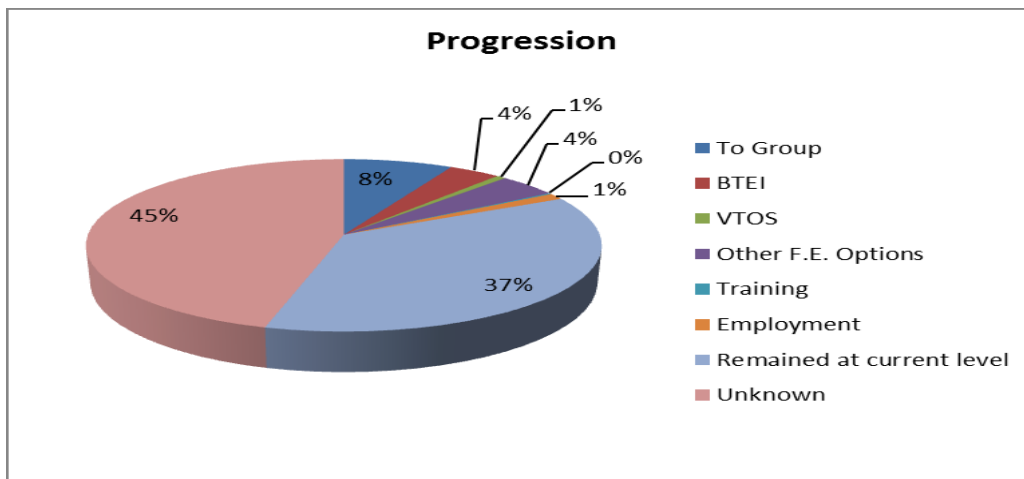
Progression to other options within the Adult Literacy programme
The following internal progression options were provided:

- Students progress from 1:1 to small groups to accredited programmes;
- Intensive provision may be used to support groups with low skill levels;
- The Adult Guidance Service provides support in relation to progression options;
- Tutors complete a progression report for each class group, identifying potential progression options for each individual learner who is then offered a place in a suitable programme;
- For 1-to-1 learners, tutors also complete a progression report but work closely with Volunteer Coordinator (Resource Worker) to identify the best progression option for learners;
- End of course evaluations carried out in all groups include "Next Steps".

Progression to other VEC programmes

Approaches differ in relation to supporting progression outside the literacy service. In some cases participants are simply provided with information about progression options. In other cases, systems that proactively promote other opportunities are in place. Methods used included introductory courses for learners who are reluctant to consider progression (in practical subjects such as woodwork, gardening, and creative art). Other systems operate through an integrated part-time programme structure. For example, ITABE (Level 3 General Studies) may be used as a preparation for 'Return to Learning' Level 4 (BTEI), which in turn is preparation for VTOS.

The physical location of adult education services within one campus, as well as joint assessment and planning processes, has a significant impact on facilitating progression.

Adult Education Guidance Service

The DES Operational Guidelines state that guidance should be a key aspect of Adult Literacy programmes and should be available at all stages, including pre-entry and pre-exit. The Guidelines stress the need for structured protocols between the Adult Literacy programme and the AEGS.

A study on learner persistence found that access to guidance can positively influence a learner's persistence, progression and achievement and that persistence is supported when learners are encouraged to recognize small steps in progress and achievement.[83]

The European Commission Guidelines on Basic Skills provision stress that the role of guidance as a one-to-one and/or group activity in relation to progression is widely acknowledged, particularly in the case of individuals who, for whatever reason, may find it difficult to progress to various learning and other opportunities.

The 2011 DES administrative returns report a total of 5,921 Adult Literacy and ESOL participants availing of support through the Adult Guidance Service. All ITABE participants access support from the AEGS as formal protocols are now agreed between the AEGS and the Adult Literacy programme in relation to ITABE provision. The guidance programme may include inputs on RPL, motivation and decision making as well as information and advice on learning and progression options. Both group and 1:1 guidance sessions may be scheduled.

32 respondents to the survey reported that there was a formal protocol in place between the Adult Education Guidance Service and the mainstream Adult Literacy programme. However, the cooperation described varied considerably and protocols may not actually be formalised in all cases. In some cases, contact took place only in relation to specific categories of participants (e.g. ITABE groups) or individuals are simply

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[83] Quality Improvement Agency, *Motivating Skills for Life Learners to Persist, Progress and Achieve Research Project*: Individual Learner Record Data Report

referred to the guidance service. In other cases, the AEGS and the ALS work together proactively as part of a broader team and there are formal protocols agreed between the two services on specific areas such as referrals, programme planning, support for progression and progression planning. The guidance counsellor may visit all groups or individual meetings are organised if required or requested and information sharing may take place via internal interactive documents.

One VEC gave examples of specific initiatives on areas such as ITABE, disability, delivery of full awards or educational needs assessments for under 25s on the Live Register (with funding from Department of Social Protection). In cases where protocols are less developed contact is restricted to information sharing on respective services.

Section Five Conclusions

Current policy at national and EU level stresses the importance of enabling learners affirm their skills through the achievement of external awards but the level of accreditation achieved at NFQ Levels 1-3 in Adult Literacy programmes varies considerably. More formalised systems to record the outcomes of non-accredited learning are also needed. Currently too little is known about the progression outcomes of all Adult Literacy and ESOL participants, but this mirrors the situation in other F.E. programmes. ITABE Guidelines for the establishment of protocols between the Adult Literacy programme and the AEGS should be adapted and extended across the entire literacy service.

Recommendations

21.   Achieving certification on the NFQ empowers and enables learners to progress. However, currently, a very small proportion of Adult Literacy learners achieve certification in Communications and Numeracy. The DES should emphasise to VECs that every effort must be made to encourage and empower learners to avail of accredited options, including Levels 1 and 2. Therefore, every VEC should make accredited options at appropriate levels, available to Adult Literacy learners so that they can avail of progression opportunities and build qualifications and skills.

22.   In order to improve the availability of accredited options for Adult Literacy students, the DES should examine the potential for further supports to be made available to VECs for the programme implementation of accredited provision. In this context, it is noted that the IVEA in conjunction with VECs is currently conducting a review of Levels 2 and 3 with a view to agreeing a national template for programmes at this level. It is anticipated that previously validated programmes will be transferred to this template with a view to being made available for sharing by other VECs. Under Quality Assurance Agreements with FETAC, providers are responsible for the development of CPD for their staff, but this work could be coordinated in cooperation with the IVEA, the Further Education Support Service and NALA.

23. Every provider should establish a formal protocol in respect of the Adult Literacy Programme and the Adult Education Guidance Service in order to assist and support progression and ITABE Guidelines for the establishment of protocols between the Adult Literacy Programme and the AEGS should be extended across the literacy service.

Section Six

Recruitment, Referral and Outreach

Limited aspirations within employment and education were seen to be a significant barrier to participating in training. Very few participants wanted to or felt able to leave their current situation, and instead were focused on maintaining this. Individuals' priorities were primarily based around family and work, and they did not associate themselves with the possibilities offered by academic success. As a result, very few participants looked to continue learning or re-train.[84]

Key Points in this Section

Research demonstrates that there is a continuing low awareness of literacy difficulties amongst those who need support.

During the review the positive impact of the national TV advertisements in relation to Adult Literacy issues was noted by many VECs.

Responses on effective recruitment and advertising methods show that VECs use a wide range of approaches and systems but 10 appear not to have formal referral policies in place.

Almost all VECs provide support to outside organizations but most of this work is not provided in cooperation with the Community Education Service.

Policy and Research Background

The DES Operational Guidelines highlight the need for a wide range of publicity, awareness raising and promotion at both local and national levels. The guidelines emphasise the need for specific targeted approaches for vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups.

Research shows that adults with low literacy and numeracy skills do not necessarily seek tuition.[85] An evaluation of the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2006)[86] undertook extensive interviews with students. The analysis showed that learners were mainly motivated to start their programmes by self-improvement and wanting to develop their reading, writing and Maths skills (41%) with the next highest category being employment related reasons (24%) to get into, progress in work or access training

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[84] Welsh Assembly Government, (2010), *Qualitative Research with Seldom Heard Groups*.
[85] OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000. Murray 2003 cited in Tett (2006).
[86] Tett et al, (2006) *Evaluation of the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy: Final Report*, Scottish Executive.

programmes. Participation in Adult Literacy provision may also be in response to life changing events, such as the loss of a partner, new employment, and children starting school.[87]

The barriers to participation cited by learners in the Scottish study were mainly to do with either perceptions of the stigma attached to being an Adult Literacy learner followed by a concern about their ability to cope with learning. They were also concerned that provision might be like school as many had found school a fairly unhappy experience where they saw themselves as failing to learn. These findings were strongly mirrored by the feedback provided by Irish literacy learners during the current review. Learners in the Scottish study were most likely to be encouraged to enrol on their programmes by friends and family and self-encouragement. Official people were the next most common source so this was seen to imply that official networks were working to some extent.

The report concluded that the most important barrier to be removed was the stigma attached to being a literacy/numeracy learner and the clearest pathway into learning is better publicity both locally and nationally which should be directed at changing the negative public image of poor literacy. A key emphasis should be on how people can improve their own skills and in so doing become more capable and elf-confident.

Findings in the Scottish study are corroborated by research conducted on Adult Literacy provision in the City of Dublin VEC. 40% of participants heard about the scheme from a family member or friend.[88]   This report concluded that students have a variety of reasons for involvement in Adult Literacy tuition, but that the majority of respondents specifically indicated that they had come to a point in their lives where they had the time, energy and motivation to confront a problem that had dogged them all their adult lives.

Bynner and Parsons' research[89] based on a longitudinal study of adults with very low literacy and numeracy difficulties highlights important issues in relation to advertising of services. The research found that there is a continuing low self-awareness of literacy and numeracy difficulties amongst those who were found through assessment to need support. The research found that by asking questions about highly specific difficulties to the whole sample and not, as in the past, just to those who acknowledged difficulties, the proportions increased.   Bynner and Parsons underline that what is particularly significant in policy terms is that once the awareness is present, interest in improvement tends to follow.

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[87] McGivney, V. (2001) *Fixing or changing the pattern?* Leicester: NIACE and Schuller T. et al., (2004) *Wider benefits of learning*, London: Routledge Falmer cited in Tett (2006).
[88] O'Sullivan, E., (1999) *CDVEC Adult Literacy Provision: Who are the Participants? What are the Issues*? CDVEC.
[89] Bynner and Parsons (2006)

Research by the Welsh Assembly Government[90] to investigate barriers and triggers to participation in education and training focused on two distinct and seldom heard groups in Wales – those with basic skills needs and employees with low qualifications.

The main barriers (excluding cost and time) to participating in learning and training noted by participants can be summarized under two broad themes: a lack of confidence and personal fear of failure, and limited aspirations and awareness of opportunities.

The most common trigger noted by the seldom heard individuals that took part in this research was that they would want a guaranteed or tangible outcome from training. Most commonly this was described as gaining a job although qualifications were also valued by the sample group. Policy implications of these findings were deemed to be the need to provide tangible, 'hands-on' incentives (e.g. work placements) as well as 'smarter' approaches to overcoming attitudinal barriers by embedding or integrating basic skills provision. Inter-agency work with agencies that have direct contact with these target groups was also deemed to be a priority. NRDC Review of Research and Evaluation suggests that motivations are complex and many learners "may have diverse and multiple reasons for wanting to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Learner motivations are not fixed."

The 2012 European Commission report[91] on strategies for improving participation in adult learning stresses that adult education is thought to be best promoted if campaign initiatives are developed and implemented through joint stakeholder cooperation net-works. The report proposes a carefully structured approach, based on a wide range of good practice case studies, including specific identification of target groups. It emphasises that promoting adult learning as an abstract concept and "assuming you know what adult learners need" will not yield useful results. The guide lists 16 of the top ranking strategies to improve participation and awareness of adult learning. The NALA Distance Learning Service is one of the 16 case studies included.

VEC Recruitment and Advertising Methods
Responses to the questions on effective recruitment and advertising methods demonstrate that Adult Literacy programmes are currently using a wide range of approaches and systems. 'Word of mouth' was deemed the most effective recruitment method; referral networks with community groups and statutory agencies, including key contact people in organisations and housing estates, were also mentioned frequently. Local media including radio and newspapers were also highly promoted. It was noted that there were more positive responses to actual articles and stories in relation to Adult Literacy provision than conventional advertisements. Brochures and flyers, leaflets and posters, including notices in church newsletters, were also frequently mentioned. Leaflet drops urban areas, school bag drops, and other direct targeting initiatives were

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[90] Welsh Assembly Government, (2010), *Qualitative Research with Seldom Heard Groups.*
[91] European Commission, (2012), *Strategies for Improving Participation in Adult Learning*

also deemed effective. Family literacy programmes were also highlighted as a very efficient recruitment method.

The AEGS, as well as other 'internal' VEC partner programmes, refer significant numbers of applicants to the literacy service. The Department of Social Protection and FAS, (including joint open days as well as referrals) were also listed by many VECs.

The national TV advertisements and programmes organised by NALA aim to reduce the sense of stigma and embarrassment attached to seeking Adult Literacy support, as well as motivating people to contact a Freephone number where they are encouraged to contact their local VEC service. They were included by survey respondents but local media advertising received a higher priority rating from a greater number of respondents. However, during the site visits all VECs stressed the very positive impact of the national TV advertisements in relation to reducing the level of stigma attached to literacy difficulties and raising awareness.

"When learners have a positive learning experience with us, they tell others   Taster programmes where art/music/learning through fun are the focus.   By ensuring that the learning experience for learners is positive and courses/programmes are relevant to the needs of learners - this in a rural area works well in that this feeds back to others and they then become aware of the service offered."

Referral Policy

10 respondents said that they do not have a referral policy. Detailed responses were very mixed however and demonstrate that providers have differing understandings of what a 'referral policy' may comprise. In some cases, there was reference to informal working relationships with the range of organisations listed earlier in response to questions on recruitment and advertising. Other respondents referenced directly the Interim Protocol of Understanding with local offices of the Department of Social Protection. Some specified that all general enquiries are referred to the Adult Guidance Service. One VEC has a 'Partner Organization Agreement Template' to agree the roles and responsibilities of partner organisations. Another specified that the policy in relation to referrals from external services was dependent on the individual requesting assistance.

Referral Organisations

The Department of Social Protection was the organisation listed as making the highest number of referrals, followed by the Local Employment Service, FAS and Community Employment Coordinators. The Adult Guidance Service was the next most frequently

listed organisation.   Other organisations listed included the HSE, Home School Community Liaison Service and local community organisations and groups.

Outreach

32 respondents said that they provided support to a wide range of organisations outside the VEC, including statutory and voluntary agencies working with specific target groups. Most work appeared to involve direct provision of services to specific agencies. There may be a 'shared resource' approach whereby the VEC delivers the tuition with the organisation concerned responsible for premises and facilities. Contact may also involve provision of literacy awareness sessions or in-service training for staff, as well as advice on literacy friendly publications.   However, very little of this work appeared to be delivered in partnership with the Community Education Service but this issue needs further exploration.

Section Six Conclusions

Effective recruitment systems are in place in VEC Adult Literacy programmes but research demonstrates that there is a need for a continued specific focus on raising awareness and enrolment of adults with literacy difficulties, at both national and local levels.

Recommendations

24.   Recruitment and advertising should be organised in partnership with other VEC programmes (see Section Eight), but a specific focus on literacy and numeracy should be maintained.

25.   All VECs should develop referral policies for all target groups.

26.   Detailed guidelines for planning and delivery of outreach provision for BTEI funded provision were drawn up in consultation with VECs in 2010. These guidelines could be reviewed and extended with a specific focus on work with adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

Section Seven

Staffing

Research on this topic is clear: for both literacy and numeracy there is a positive association between teacher qualifications and experience and learner progress. The recognition that learners make better progress with qualified teachers provides support for strategies to up-skill and professionalise the workforce. Contrary to popular belief, teaching basic literacy and numeracy to adults is not something that anyone can do; having qualifications does make a difference. The research evidence also indicates that specific benefits to learners are associated with having teachers who are on full-time contracts.[92]

Key Points in this Section

Research indicates that there is a positive association between tutor qualifications and experience and learner progress.

Qualifications required for new appointments indicate that a third level qualification is requested by most VECs for group tutors and resource workers but the survey did not include an audit of existing staff's qualifications.

CPD support varies widely in VECs and there is a need for more structured initiatives in this area.

The need to develop a coherent staffing structure for the Adult Literacy Programme was articulated by many during this review process.

Policy and Research Background

The Skills for Life Strategy in England placed great emphasis on improving the quality of the teaching workforce with the primary mechanism for this approach being a focus on teacher qualifications. Regulations were put in place requiring new teachers to possess teaching qualifications and a subject specific qualification.[93] However, as of 2006, only 35% of teachers were deemed to hold the appropriate teaching qualifications. Beginning in 2007 all new Adult Literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers need a full generic adult teaching qualification and a specialist qualification in teaching literacy, numeracy or ESOL. The professionalization of the adult learning workforce is a central goal of government policy in England and the workforce is probably the best qualified in the world. Despite this NIACE Enquiry into Adult Literacy[94] (2011) emphasised as part of its

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[92] Vorhaus, J., et al, (2011) *Review of Research and Evaluation on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London.
[93] Carpentieri et al (2009), cited in NRDC Literature Review for NALA
[94] http://www.niace.org.uk/literacy-inquiry

recommendations to government that there was a need to continue to increase the number of qualified Adult Literacy teachers and to offer priority training in sectors where least teacher development had taken place. NIACE also stressed that there should also be Continuing Professional Development opportunities for all teachers, including part-time staff, particularly in the use of digital learning and resources, blended approaches and making the curriculum and accreditation work responsively for learners.

The need to develop a coherent staffing structure for Adult Literacy programmes has been articulated in a number of Irish reports, including the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science "Report on Adult Literacy".

The National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Plan (October 2004) recommended the following structure for Adult Literacy programmes, with a set of staffing norms outlined, to be reviewed as appropriate:

- Adult Literacy Organiser;
- Literacy Resource Worker;
- Adult Literacy Tutors (full and part-time);
- Volunteer Tutor;
- Administrative and ancillary staff.

Current Staffing Levels and Structure
All VECs employ Adult Literacy Organisers. 28 employ staff as resource workers. All VECs have paid tutors as well as volunteers.

2011 DES Administrative Reports: Staffing

Category	Full-Time	Part-Time
Adult Literacy Organiser	62	25
Resource Worker	60	64
Tutor	37	1,400
Volunteer	N/A	2,969
Administration	26	42

Many VECs raised concerns in relation to the impact of the moratorium on public service appointments on service delivery, particularly in relation to ALO posts. The need for a clear staffing structure as part of a quality Adult Literacy programme was also identified.

Staff recruitment policies

Save for ALO (Circular M15/2001, those that are not qualified teachers are required to hold a qualification in Adult Education), there are no set requirements in relation to qualifications or other terms and conditions for staff in the Adult Literacy programme. In any case, all except one VEC indicated that they had a tutor recruitment policy, with some requiring tutors to have (or be in the process of acquiring) a primary degree in a relevant area (See Appendix 2 for more details). Some other specific requirements listed were:

- Paid tutors must have worked as volunteer for at least 12 months;
- Paid tutors must have or be in the process of obtaining relevant third level qualification;
- FETAC QA Recruitment Policy for adult education staff;
- DES guidelines.

NALA-WIT Partnership

While there is no set of required qualifications for Adult Literacy programme staff, since 1997 the DES has funded a partnership between the Waterford Institute of Technology and National Adult Literacy Agency with the aim of providing recognised higher education qualifications and professional standard training for Adult Literacy practitioners. These qualifications are available on a modular basis:

- Certificate in Adult Literacy Studies (Special Purpose Award);
- Higher Certificate in Arts in Literacy Development level 6 NFQ;
- Bachelor of Arts in Adult Education level 7 NFQ;
- Bachelor of Arts in Further and Adult Education, Level 8 NFQ.

A total of 426 practitioners have achieved a third level qualification since 1997 through the partnership while 1,200 have accessed one or more modules of the Higher Certificate since 2002. Overall, it is estimated that approximately one third of the workforce has completed third level qualifications through WIT. Almost 60% of practitioners studying through WIT possess other third level qualifications. This figure has grown in the past 5 years. While some staff have completed qualifications, others may possess equivalent qualifications gained through other Higher Education Institutions but there is no national data available on this.

For Further Education in general, the Teaching Council (in Regulation Five) has set out requirements for registration with the Council as a teacher in further education. This requirement applies only to those delivering tuition on courses leading to recognised NFQ awards and only to those who are in teaching posts. As stated above, there are no set qualifications requirements for those delivering tuition as tutors in the Adult Literacy programme.

VEC Policy for CPD

Under the quality assurance procedures required by the Qualifications Act, all further education providers are required to demonstrate that staff have sufficient experience and expertise to fulfil their designated roles. Survey responses to the question on CPD varied considerably. In some VECs there is a proactive strategy for CPD, which includes an annual analysis of training needs, with a scheduled number of events designed to address specific areas.   Integrated in-service events are offered for all adult education staff and in other cases staff are facilitated to attend training events where possible. One respondent specified that the CPD committee has established Communities of Practice for each core area.

WIT's submission to this review suggests that the CPD needs of existing staff typically fall under three areas:

- The pedagogy of Adult Literacy practice (teaching and learning strategies for Adult Literacy);
- Skills based needs resulting from policy initiatives (Assessment requirements under the new Common Awards System for example);
- Training to address existing and emergent areas within Adult Literacy (family literacy, numeracy, ICT in literacy, literacy and specific learning difficulties etc.).

These needs are currently being addressed to some degree by in-service training, some third level programmes, training provided by the Further Education Support Service and some practitioner events provided by NALA.   NALA is also developing an on-line resource centre for literacy practitioners. Following this review a specific national CPD needs survey of Adult Literacy practitioners would be beneficial in terms of informing a national approach to CPD across the service.

Tutor Appraisal

15 respondents said that they had a system of tutor appraisal. These systems involved completion of appraisal forms either every term or once a year with follow up meetings. An informal appraisal system is utilized in some instances, which allows ALOs to address issues of concern and identify training requirements or additional supports. Where no tutor appraisal system exists, some VECs have established reporting and monitoring mechanisms. Such appraisal systems revolve around administrative systems (review of schemes of work, records of attendance, staff and student feedback, adherence to programme specifications and successful outcomes).   One respondent said they would "welcome the introduction of such an appraisal system".

Volunteers

23 VECs said that they had a formal volunteer policy (dealing with codes of conduct, screening, training, supervision, commitment to a period of volunteering and self-assessment) and 26 Garda vetted volunteers.

Of the approximately, 3,000 volunteers, some 1,200 received initial training of between 20 and 46 hours, with an average of 28. The duration of this initial training varied considerably between VECs.   38 of these in 14 VECs were former Adult Literacy students.

24 VECs said the training was accredited (mostly the WIT Literacy Methodologies 1 module, from the Higher Certificate in Literacy Development). 4 VECs did not train any volunteers. All except 1 VEC had in-service training for volunteers.

Only 148 of the 3,000 volunteers worked alongside tutors to deliver tuition to groups with 1 VEC using 36 volunteers in this capacity and another 5 using at least 10 volunteers each.

Two thirds of VECs have developed formal policies for volunteers, including issues relating to the volunteer's role, and procedures for recruitment, training and supervision. 8 VECs have no arrangements in place for garda vetting.

Section Seven Conclusions
Research underlines the importance of upskilling Adult Literacy staff in relation to learners' progress but currently there are varying levels of CPD support available at VEC level to Adult Literacy practitioners.   There are indications that there is a need for training in relation to teaching and learning strategies, assessment requirements under the new Common Awards System and training to address new and emerging areas such as ICT and family literacy.

The need to develop a coherent staffing structure for Adult Literacy Programmes was articulated by many during this review process.

Recommendations
27.   It is recommended that the DES, in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs) and relevant stakeholders (NALA, WIT), develops a national approach and strategy to CPD across the service so that priority areas for CPD delivery can be established and to assist in the implementation of good practice.

28.   Survey respondents identified the need for a clear staffing structure to be established in the Adult Literacy Programme. It is recognised that there is currently a major change process underway in the FET sector (SOLAS, ETBs). In that context, it is recommended that these views be considered by the DES as part of those processes.

Section Eight

Structure of the Service

"Education is coming to occupy an ever larger place in people's lives as its role among the forces at work in modern societies increases. Learning throughout life is not a remote ideal, but a reality which is tending more and more to take shape in a complex educational scene. In order to organize it, we must stop regarding the different forms of teaching and learning as independent from one another and, in a sense, as superimposable or even competing: we must try, on the contrary to enhance the complementary character of the stages of modern education and the environments where it is provided."[95]

Key Points in this Section

There are differing degrees of integration and cooperation between the Adult Literacy programme and other VEC programmes.

There is strong research evidence to support the integration of literacy and numeracy with broader learning opportunities. Existing good practice in Ireland in relation to the integration of literacy at NFQ Levels 3 and 4 should be identified and disseminated.

Integrated Organizational Structures

The DES Consultation Paper[96] on the establishment of SOLAS stressed that the current system of funding and administration for FET in Ireland impacts on delivery; the range of systems in place impose "burdens on administrators without requiring or facilitating a concomitant enhancement of standards or quality." This method of funding has led to a 'silo based' FET system, which works against integration and does not facilitate collaboration or cooperation across programmes or within areas. The SOLAS Action Plan published in December 2012 also strongly emphasises the need for strategic direction for the further education and training sector, to replace the uncoordinated system currently in existence.

In addition, a submission paper on SOLAS published in November 2011 by the Adult Education Officers' Association stressed that the priority focus should be the design of a "new integrated structure that will accommodate and support the wide range of part-time and full-time further and adult education and training programmes. (…) Critically

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[95] Delors, J. et al, (1996) *Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*, UNESCO.
[96] DES December 2011

there will be a need to move away from a programmatic focus based on funding strands, in order to develop a coordinated, whole organisational framework."[97]

The DES Adult Literacy Operational Guidelines also place emphasis on the need for the development of an "Integrated Service Approach" whereby there are specific policies in place at VEC management level for all part-time programmes to ensure a focus on strategic planning and avoid duplication. "Single programmes of adult learning for geographical areas within the VEC should be developed." The Operational Guidelines outline that "an integrated service model depends on more than regular meetings and examples given of such a model include a common applications process, joint assessment of enrolments by coordinators, a common database, pre-course placement sessions, operational planning meetings, joint brochures and publicity, cross programme tutor packs, generic course descriptions and outreach meetings." [98]

VEC Adult Education Service Plan
In response to the survey, 28 VECs said that there was a specific strategic plan for Adult Literacy within the broader framework of the VEC adult education plan with a small number of respondents providing some further details in relation to specific goals and targets or indicators.

It would appear that most VECs currently operate the traditional 'egg carton' system whereby Adult Literacy programmes undertake their own work within the broader overarching context of general VEC adult education plan objectives. Common systems for outreach and recruitment, databases and programme delivery do not appear to be the norm although a number of very positive examples of specific joint initiatives with other programmes were provided through survey responses and during site visits. 27 VEC Adult Literacy programmes reported having engaged in some joint work.

> *"The Alpha Learning Service comprises all Further Education programmes… a 'one stop shop' for learners. The 'alpha ladder' helps learners move seamlessly between course at different levels without having to be concerned about moving between different programmes and services. All of this requires increased planning and cooperation so that we can create an integrated suite of provision for learners and reconfigure service in light of current needs."*

Other examples included specific initiatives such as common advertising and application processes as well as once-off project delivery in partnership with other part-time programmes. Development of new FETAC programmes at Levels 3 and 4 has also facilitated the integration of specific literacy and numeracy content in some instances.

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[97] AEOA, (2011) *Education and Training Boards: Balancing Effectiveness and Equity in the new Further Education and Training Sector*
[98] *DES Operational Guidelines*, page 9.

Evaluation

All respondents said that there were mechanisms in place to evaluate the Adult Literacy programme. Most responses referenced the FETAC QA Self Evaluation system. A number of others listed the NALA Quality Framework, as well as annual administrative evaluations of the implementation of the Adult Literacy programme's Development Plan. A minority of respondents had undertaken specific research, either on their overall service or aspects of it. The proposal in the SOLAS Action Plan for single quality assurance agreements between each ETB and QQI should facilitate the development of more integrated organisational structures.

Integrating Literacy

More 'joined up' organizational structures would support the development of policies to integrate literacy into broader vocational programmes. Such initiatives have been prioritized by a number of bodies and recent research reports. The National Skills Strategy recommended the integration of literacy and numeracy into all publicly funded education and training programmes in so far as possible[99]. The 2010 OECD review of Irish Vocational Education and Training [100] emphasised the need to strengthen numeracy and literacy skills development within FET. The Programme for Government 2011 commits to "address the widespread and persistent problem of Adult Literacy through the integration of literacy in vocational training and through community education."[101]

Most recently, a number of stakeholders, including the ALOA[102], the AEOA and the NALA-IVEA Integrating Literacy Group have published policy statements in relation to the integration of literacy into broader vocational education programmes following the establishment of the new ETBs and SOLAS.

Research supports these policy statements. A study (2005)[103] on embedded learning emphasises how vocational courses motivate learners by offering them a new 'professional identity' and membership of a new 'community of practice'. In this context, vocational courses with embedded literacy and numeracy are a powerful motivator for adults who would not otherwise enroll in provision to improve their basic skills. Except where a single teacher had dual responsibility for teaching vocational skills and literacy, numeracy and language, Casey et al. (2006)[104] found that learners on embedded or integrated courses had better retention and success rates than those on non-embedded courses, and more positive attitudes to the value of literacy and numeracy study. When the data were analyzed by vocational level, the increase in

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[99] Forfás Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, (2007) *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy.* Dublin: Forfás

[100] Kis, V., (2010) OECD *Review of Vocational Education and Training: Ireland*, OECD, Paris.

[101] Department of the Taoiseach (2011), *Programme for Government 2011.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

[102] Adult Literacy and Basic Skills in a Changing Sector: 7 priorities to consider

[103] Roberts, C. et al, (2005), *Embedded Teaching and Learning of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL: Seven Case Studies*, NRDC.

[104] Cited in Vorhaus et al (2011)

success rates associated with embedding was particularly strong for vocational Level 2 courses (Irish NFQ Level 4 equivalent).

This research found that the programmes reviewed differed substantially in their approach to the integration of literacy and that there was no one set of features that formed a 'winning profile'. There were significant differences in relation to structural approaches and the research found that attitudinal factors to be equally important. A number of features were found to have a significant statistical association with achievement in literacy and numeracy. The top features were listed as:

- Formal shared planning in officially allocated time;
- Management structures support embedded learning;
- Staff development policy supports literacy integration;
- Literacy teachers are viewed by staff and learners as contributing to learners' vocational aspirations;
- Both literacy and vocational teachers are willing to develop their skills;
- Literacy teachers understand and engage with the vocational area as part of their work;
- Individual/diagnostic assessment contributes to the integration process;
- ILPs and other forms of on-going formative assessment also contribute to the process.

Research undertaken by NALA[105] found that language and literacy support and development can be provided in a range of ways, each of which has advantages and drawbacks:

- Support can be sought through the local Adult Literacy Scheme although its focus is normally pre-level 5;
- If a Learning Support Service exists within the F.E. College, it may make available 1:1 or small group literacy support. However, this service may be limited in relation to the numbers it can serve;
- Language and literacy can be integrated into all FE courses through collaborative partnerships between subject and literacy specialists. Again, this may be limited by available resources.

This report suggests that a successful approach to integrating excellence in language and literacy across a whole FE college is dependent on a strategic approach to staff development. It makes a number of specific recommendations for "literacy friendly F.E." or a whole-organization approach. These recommendations include creating literacy friendly systems including those for recruitment and induction. The

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[105] Feeley, M. and Hegarty, A., *Literacy Friendly Further Education and Training*, 2009, NALA.

employment of literacy specialists is also advocated along with the development of resource banks.

However, a Briefing Sheet on Embedding produced by NIACE underlines that "embedding (or integrating) is challenging, complex and time consuming and resources to support team planning, team teaching and team assessment must be identified."[106] Recommendations in relation to the integration of literacy and numeracy into mainstream vocational programmes must take stock of the need to identify specific resources to undertake this work, or re-align existing resources.

The research cited above, along with other work conducted in the U.S., Australia and New Zealand, makes a strong case for integration of literacy into broader vocational programmes although research findings from other jurisdictions may be reliant on different organizational and staffing structures to those that exist in Ireland.

Current survey responses for this review demonstrate that the majority of VEC literacy services provide "bolted on" support to other programmes, either as preliminary induction courses or on-going study support and to date it would appear that there has been limited development of mainstream vocational programmes within VECs with integrated literacy support.   Examples of current approaches included:

- Support for individual or groups of students on Level 4 and 5 courses, with assistance with completion of specific academic assignments;
- Pre-entry Level 4 Computers and Communications for students applying to F.E. College (April to August);
- Provision of training on integrating literacy and awareness sessions.

It was noted that the moratorium has severely impacted on this support process. However, some work to integrate key skills into vocational programmes at both Level 3 and Level 4 has already taken place. Once these programmes are validated for use at national level the focus should be on the provision of CPD for staff in their use. Other initiatives at Level 5 should be identified and the results disseminated.

While clarifying that providers should continue to make course admission decisions on the basis of individual applicants to complete courses successfully and core skills, the IVEA Policy Statement on Integrating Literacy suggests that VECs should develop policies on integrating literacy, which are supported by literacy awareness and continuous professional development initiatives for both management and staff.[107]   Adult Literacy programmes may provide specialist advice in relation to the development of literacy awareness policies at VEC F.E. College level, particularly in relation to programmes at Level 5. Literacy services may also collaborate with colleagues in the delivery of

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[106] www.niace.org.uk
[107] IVEA 2012.

communications, Mathematics, ICT and study skills for other part-time accredited programmes at Levels 3 and 4.

Section Eight Conclusions

There are differing degrees of integration and cooperation between the Adult Literacy programme and other VEC further education programmes and there is a need for more strategic direction to support a more coordinated, whole organisational framework. Research supports the integration of literacy and numeracy into broader learning opportunities as a way of supporting more adults to address their basic skills needs. Existing good practice in Ireland in relation to the integration of literacy should be identified and disseminated.

Recommendations

29. Every VEC should develop a strategic plan with key performance indicators for its Adult Literacy Programme. This plan should make specific reference to how the Adult Literacy Programme will operate on an integrated basis with the BTEI and community education programmes, in particular, but also with other further education programmes. Plan should include reference to clear progression options between programmes, joint recruitment and advertising and common branding.

30. VECs should seek to eliminate unnecessary duplication between programmes.

31. Building on previous recommendations in this report, VECs should seek to promote the integration of Adult Literacy into further education through the development and validation of all new programmes in the Common Awards System.

32. The integration of key competences into programmes at Levels 3 and 4 provides learners with a firm foundation for progression to higher levels of the NFQ. It is recommended that existing good practice in relation to the integration of literacy into vocational specialism components at these levels be identified and disseminated.

Section Nine

Summary of Recommendations

1. The survey conducted as part of this review indicated that there are wide variations in the education and literacy levels of participants reported at individual VEC level. The research review shows a clear correlation between education and skill levels, e.g., those with less education have lower levels of skills. The DES Circular on interim referral protocols requires that VECs should enable the smooth referral of unemployed people to further education programmes. In that context:

   - There should be a renewed emphasis on the priority target group, adults whose literacy and numeracy skills do not match Level 3 on the NFQ.
   - Within this target group, priority should be given to unemployed adults and those adults with literacy levels 1 and 2/those with only a primary education or less.
   - VECs should avoid "first come, first served" policies but develop clear and transparent enrolment policies which focus on the priority groups identified above.

2. Census 2011 has produced Small Area Population statistics (SAPS) for specific areas and education is one of 15 available themes. These statistics can be used as a tool to aid local planning and targeting. Therefore:

   - VECs should use Census SAPS profiles to target older people with low education levels (primary education or less) as well as those in younger age brackets.
   - The Census SAPS statistics should also be used by providers to obtain a clearer picture of the economic status of adults in local areas.

3. As outlined in the Interim Protocol agreement, VEC Adult Literacy programmes and welfare/employment service offices should agree relevant contact points so that welfare offices can ensure easier access by unemployed people to Adult Literacy provision as appropriate.

4. In relation to ESOL:

   - VECs should formally assess language competency level on entry of ESOL learners.
   - The DES should re-emphasise that priority should be given to ESOL learners for whom tuition would bring them to a level of functional competency (A2 on the Common European Framework of References for Languages, or NFQ Level 3) is relevant.

- The DES should collect administrative data in relation to language competency on entry and accreditation outcomes on ESOL learners.

5. The review revealed gaps and inconsistencies in data collection which hinders both the VECs in delivering Adult Literacy programmes and the DES in making evidence-based policy decisions. Therefore:

- Data relating to educational and literacy levels on entry of participants should be correlated to provide a more complete picture of the Adult Literacy cohort.
- The DES should provide further support to providers in relation to the recording and return of progression statistics for Adult Literacy participants.
- The DES in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs) should examine the potential to extend the National Reporting Platform implemented by the DES for BTEI to the Adult Literacy Programme.

6. Working in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs), the DES should consult with the Equality Mainstreaming Unit of the Equality Authority with a view to developing an Access Policy for VEC Adult Literacy Programmes.

7. The DES, in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs) should examine the potential for introducing an annual application process for Adult Literacy similar to that used for BTEI. This will assist VECs in planning, bring a clearer focus on target groups for VECS and give the DES a better picture of planned activity levels.

8. In common with the earlier recommendation in relation to centralized reporting, the DES, in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs), should examine the potential of recording the number of tuition hours delivered (volume of tuition) as is currently the case for BTEI and ITABE. The DES should also examine the potential for making allocations on the basis of projected tuition or volume of tuition as is the case for BTEI, rather than as a block grant.

9. VECs should strongly promote group tuition as a first option, as opposed to 1:1 tuition, to new students.

10. All VECs should develop formal volunteer protocols. The protocol should include appropriate criteria for the assignment of students to volunteers. The DES should consult with the IVEA (representing VECs) in relation to developing more detailed information on this topic as part of the Operational Guidelines.

11. International research indicates that more intensive literacy provision is of more benefit to learners; VECs should deliver intensive literacy options to learners of at least 6 hours a week as part of their core service.

12. VECs should strongly promote numeracy as an option for Adult Literacy participants and seek to increase participation in both standalone and integrated numeracy options.

13. Given the positive outcomes associated with family literacy DES should re-emphasise the potential to use mainstream Adult Literacy programme allocations to deliver family literacy programmes.

14. As part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy the DES should promote the value of Family Learning and Literacy to Primary Schools Principal Teachers as well as to the Home School Community Liaison Service as a core school activity. Protocols to enable formal links between Home School Community Liaison Networks and VECs should be established, with specific actions to be put in place to build structured partnerships between HSCL services and VEC Adult Literacy programmes.

15. Access to distance and blended learning should be integrated into all service delivery and these options should be promoted for all students in Adult Literacy programmes in order to increase access to learning opportunities. Therefore, every VEC should offer distance and blended learning options such as www.writeon.ie to students both as standalone and integrated into mainstream delivery.

16. Providers have requested clearer guidelines in relation to work with adults with Specific Learning Difficulties and the Department should consult with NEPS in relation to developing these. As a first step, and in conjunction with stakeholders, the existing guidelines for working with adults with learning disabilities should also be reviewed and adapted for current Adult Literacy provision. VECs should ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication in relation to provision for adults with learning disabilities (e.g. between Adult Literacy and BTEI).

17. The DES should consult with the IVEA (representing VECs) to assess the feasibility of adapting the existing Level 3 Award in English as a Second Language to reflect the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The current alignment of the NFQ against the CEFRL should also be reviewed.

18. It is recommended that in the first instance guidelines for the administration of initial assessment in Adult Literacy programmes be drawn up by the DES in conjunction with IVEA (representing VECs).

19. The development of a national standardised model of initial assessment would be a complex, lengthy and expensive project. It is therefore recommended that a review of existing assessment instruments adapted by VECs and suitable for use with adults should be undertaken, with a view to disseminating these for general use. This review should also consider the recommendations of the EGFSN's Report on Recognition of Prior Learning. Any assessment tools disseminated should reference the NFQ and include evidence gathered in a systematic, objective manner and not exclusively on the basis of 'self-report' or information provided by the learner.

20. It is recommended that formative assessment is included as part of the review of initial assessment protocols and procedures with reference to work that already exists, particularly *Mapping the Learning Journey* and the *ITABE Assessment Tool*. Guidelines for the administration of formative assessment systems should also be developed alongside those drawn up for initial assessment.

21. Achieving certification on the NFQ empowers and enables learners to progress. However, currently, a very small proportion of Adult Literacy learners achieve certification in Communications and Numeracy. The DES should emphasise to VECs that every effort must be made to encourage and empower learners to avail of accredited options, including Levels 1 and 2. Therefore, every VEC should make accredited options at appropriate levels, available to Adult Literacy learners so that they can avail of progression opportunities and build qualifications and skills.

22. In order to improve the availability of accredited options for Adult Literacy students, the DES should examine the potential for further supports to be made available to VECs for the programme implementation of accredited provision. In this context, it is noted that the IVEA in conjunction with VECs is currently conducting a review of Levels 2 and 3 with a view to agreeing a national template for programmes at this level. It is anticipated that previously validated programmes will be transferred to this template with a view to being made available for sharing by other VECs. Under Quality Assurance Agreements with FETAC, providers are responsible for the development of CPD for their staff, but this work could be coordinated in cooperation with the IVEA, the Further Education Support Service and NALA.

23. Every provider should establish a formal protocol in respect of the Adult Literacy Programme and the Adult Education Guidance Service in order to assist and support progression; ITABE Guidelines for the establishment of protocols between the Adult Literacy Programme and the AEGS should be extended across the literacy service.

24. Recruitment and advertising should be organised in partnership with other VEC programmes (see Section Eight), but a specific focus on literacy and numeracy should be maintained.

25. All VECs should develop referral policies for all target groups.

26. Detailed guidelines for planning and delivery of outreach provision for BTEI funded provision were drawn up in consultation with VECs in 2010. These guidelines could be reviewed and extended with a specific focus on work with adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

27. It is recommended that the DES, in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs) and relevant stakeholders (NALA, WIT), develops a national approach and strategy to CPD across the service so that priority areas for CPD delivery can be established and to assist in the implementation of good practice.

28. Survey respondents identified the need for a clear staffing structure to be established in the Adult Literacy Programme. It is recognised that there is currently a major change process underway in the FET sector (SOLAS, ETBs). In that context, it is recommended that these views be considered by the DES as part of those processes.

29. Every VEC should develop a strategic plan with key performance indicators for its Adult Literacy Programme. This plan should make specific reference to how the Adult Literacy Programme will operate on an integrated basis with the BTEI and community education programmes, in particular, but also with other further education programmes. Plan should include reference to clear progression options between programmes, joint recruitment and advertising and common branding.

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31. Building on previous recommendations in this report, VECs should seek to promote the integration of Adult Literacy into further education through the development and validation of all new programmes in the Common Awards System.

32. The integration of key competences into programmes at Levels 3 and 4 provides learners with a firm foundation for progression to higher levels of the NFQ. It is recommended that existing good practice in relation to the integration of literacy into vocational specialism components at these levels be identified and disseminated.

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Appendix One

List of Assessment Tools Referenced

- ITABE Level Descriptors
- UK Excellence Gateway Diagnostic Assessment Tools (devised for Skills for Life Initiative)
- National Framework of Qualifications.
- 'Skills Checker'(adapted from UK Probation Service)
- Bangor Test (for Dyslexia)
- Dolch List
- Schonnell Reading and Spelling Test
- Initial Key Skills Assessment
- Salford Test
- Basic Skills Agency Initial Assessment for Reading, Writing, Spelling and Numeracy
- 'Fast Track' (BSA Screening Test)
- BSA Maths Assessment
- Standardised /graded tests for literacy and numeracy, as well as Specific Learning Difficulties (not named)
- Vark Learning Styles
- Edexcel (adapted from UK), with ITABE marking scheme (mapped to NFQ levels)
- Alpha to Omega
- NALA Guidelines for Inclusion of Adults with Learning Disabilities.
- Aston Index.
- LADS (Lucid Adult Dyslexia Screening)
- Letter recognition
- Familiarity with alphabet.
- Neales Analysis
- Burt's Assessment
- Marino Test to determine Reading Age.
- Rosenthol Diagnostic Phonics
- IVEA Screening and Initial Assessment Needs in Recruitment Phase of Further Education
- 2012 DES Operational Guidelines
- ESOL Assessment Tool (locally devised)
- Oxford/Cambridge Quick Placement Test

APPENDIX TWO

BREAKDOWN OF AWARDS ACHIEVED, LEVELS 1-3

Communications

AWARD Communications	Number of learners achieved	% of all awards in communications
Level 1 Male	56	
Level 1 Female	69	
Level 1 TOTAL	**125**	**5.6%**
Level 2 Male	125	
Level 2 Female	119	
Level 2 TOTAL	**244**	**10.9%**
Level 3 Male	239	
Level 3 Female	799	
Level 3 TOTAL	**1,860**	**83.4%**
OVERALL TOTAL	**2,229**	

Numeracy/Maths

AWARD Numeracy/Maths	Number of learners achieved	% of all awards in numeracy/Maths
Level 1 Male	32	
Level 1 Female	41	
Level 1 TOTAL	**73**	**6.1%**
Level 2 Male	109	
Level 2 Female	88	
Level 2 TOTAL	**197**	**16.7%**
Level 3 Male	365	
Level 3 Female	543	
Level 3 TOTAL	**908**	**77%**
OVERALL TOTAL	**1,178**	

Information Communications Technology (ICT)

AWARD ICT	Number of learners achieved	% of all awards in ICT
Level 1 Male	66	
Level 1 Female	107	
Level 1 TOTAL	**173**	**3.3%**
Level 2 Male	136	
Level 2 Female	184	
Level 2 TOTAL	**320**	**6.2%**
Level 3 Male	1,991	
Level 3 Female	2,616	
Level 3 TOTAL	**4,607**	**90.3%**
OVERALL TOTAL	**5,100**	

Personal and Interpersonal Skills (PIPS)

AWARD PIPS/Personal Effectiveness	Number of learners achieved	% of all awards in PIPS/Personal Effectiveness
Level 1 Male	19	
Level 1 Female	26	
Level 1 TOTAL	**45**	**3.5%**
Level 2 Male	73	
Level 2 Female	74	
Level 2 TOTAL	**147**	**11.6%**
Level 3 Male	421	
Level 3 Female	647	
Level 3 TOTAL	**1,068**	**84.7%**
OVERALL TOTAL	**1,260**	

Appendix Three

Qualifications required for group tutors, resource workers and Adult Literacy Organisers

1. **Examples of qualifications required for Group Tutor:**
    *   4 specified components from WIT Higher Level Certificate in Literacy Development and 2 years volunteer experience with VEC
    *   minimum Level 6 qualification
    *   'trained literacy tutor' and in-service training, 'ideally' adult education qualification e.g. WIT/degree or equivalent as approved by DES
    *   WIT Higher Certificate in Literacy Development or equivalent as approved by DES
    *   3rd level qualification in English or Maths or Adult Literacy or Primary School qualification/Montessori qualifications/Higher Diploma in Secondary teaching
    *   Level 8 degree
    *   Level 7 degree.
    *   At least Level 6 qualification or higher
    *   initial tutor training (tutors come through voluntary system)
    *   VEC's initial tutor training course and 2 years work as voluntary tutor plus qualifications in relevant curriculum area
    *   registration with Teaching Council is promoted (90% of tutors are registered)

2. **Resource worker:**
    *   WIT Level 7 degree or equivalent with appropriate experience
    *   Primary degree
    *   Youthreach qualifications
    *   Degree or equivalent as approved by DES
    *   WIT Higher Certificate in Literacy Development or equivalent
    *   3rd level adult education qualification as approved by DES with 3 years experience.
    *   No resource workers ('project support' hours)
    *   A number of respondents specified that the VEC does not employ resource workers.

3. **Adult Literacy Organiser**
    *   DES circular
    *   WIT Higher Certificate and experience
    *   3 years experience in addition to DES Circular
    *   3rd level qualification in English or Maths or Adult Literacy or Primary School qualification/Montessori qualifications

- Higher Diploma in Secondary teaching plus Masters Degree
- Level 8 and IT skills

4. **General qualifications listed for all three posts:**
   - Weighting given to qualifications and experience at interview
   - Degree and/or qualification in Adult Education or 'Train the Trainers.
   - 3 years experience in Adult Literacy.
   - Third level education (relevant).
   - Group tutors' policy in development.
   - A combination of academic qualifications literacy training and experience as well as personal qualities.
   - ICT competencies
   - All must have or be in the process of attaining 3rd level qualification.
   - Policy to recruit TC registered staff but unregistered staff considered depending on subject area as appropriate.

5. **Outreach worker:**
   - High standards of education, local knowledge and contacts. WIT modules

6. **Family Learning Organiser:**

   - Training and experience in childcare, personal development and "other fields".

7. **ESOL Coordinator:**

   - experience in EFL and ESOL/Level 7 and DES recognised English language qualification
   - CELT