

Report

Exploring assessment for accountability purposes in adult literacy

Report From the Mapping the Learning Journey
Mainstreaming Steering Committee
to Department of Education and Science
February 2007



NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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Particular thanks are due to the members MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee, and the MLJ sub-group that worked on the report. Thanks are also due to the VEC adult literacy services around the country for their support and inputs.



Summary

The Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ) Mainstreaming Steering Committee set up a Sub-Group on Assessment for Accountability (hereafter the sub-group) to respond to a request by the Department of Education and Science (DES) to explore how accountability in adult literacy could be progressed. The sub-group held seven meetings between January 2006 and January 2007 and considered a range of processes and issues for the recording of progress of learners within adult literacy services.

On the basis of the report from the sub-group, the MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee makes four recommendations to the Department of Education and Science.

1. Replace the DES levels used in the VEC adult literacy return forms.

- (i) Replace the current DES levels 1, 2 and 3 with the following three levels
“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 1”,
“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 2” and
“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 3”.
- (ii) Produce a set of guidelines for Adult Literacy Organisers.
- (iii) Provide a briefing session to ALOs by June 2007.
- (iv) Give notice of the planned change early in 2007 to facilitate providers organisational arrangements.

2. Research project to inform development of initial assessment tool(s) for adult literacy in Ireland

Many of the tools and methodologies currently in use for initial assessment appear to be dated and some could be considered inappropriate for use with adult learners. The sub-group concluded that supports for initial assessment for ALOs should be identified and disseminated or developed, and training provided.

As a first step, it is recommended that a research project should be developed with the aim of informing a decision on how to support the quality of initial assessment for adult literacy. This may involve recommending the development of an initial assessment tool / methodology or the adapting of an existing assessment tool / methodology.

3. Research approach to qualitative data on progress

It is recommended that a research approach be adopted to provide qualitative data on the progress of literacy learners as a result of tuition. Specifically, a research project should be undertaken to identify learners progress as a result of literacy tuition, based on a study of a representative sample population of learners. This study could identify starting points and the literacy progress and achievement, analyse the inputs provided and their impact on progress, and the literacy outcomes that accrue.

4. Future Changes

As there are medium terms plans for the development of a Further Education Management Information System, the sub-group is not recommending any further changes at this point.

Report from the MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee to Department of Education and Science February 2007

The Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ) Mainstreaming Steering Committee set up a Sub-Group on Assessment for Accountability¹ (hereafter the sub-group) to respond to a request by the Department of Education and Science (DES) to explore how accountability in adult literacy could be progressed.

The objectives for the sub-group, as set out by the MLJ committee, are:

- To examine the process of recording progress for all learners, including non-accredited learning;
- To consider the consistency of approach to initial assessment, based on the informed judgement of Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) and practitioners;
- To review the DES levels used for reporting in relation to MLJ and FETAC Levels 1-3;
- To explore the use of individual learning plans in relation to summary reportage; and
- To make recommendations to the Committee on the summary reportage of adult literacy activity and progress via the adult literacy returns.

1 The Sub-Group on Assessment for Accountability consists of Mary Kett, Further Education Coordinator, Department of Education and Science; Frances Ward, CDVEC ALO/ Chairperson NALA; Terry McCann, Co. Dublin VEC Literacy Coordinator/ALO; and John Stewart, National Adult Literacy Coordinator.



Methodology

The sub-group held seven meetings between January 2006 and January 2007, issuing an interim report to the MLJ committee in March 2006. The sub-group considered a range of processes and issues for the recording of progress of learners within the adult literacy services, including;

- a range of processes and issues for the recording of progress of learners within the adult literacy service. These included the different functions of assessment at different stages of the learning process; informal approaches; formal tests, individual learning plans; accreditation; and system constraints;
- a review of the DES/VEC adult literacy returns, initial assessment practices in eight² VEC adult literacy services, national policy and other reports; and
- recent developments relevant to assessment in Ireland including the development of the National Framework of Qualifications, national standards for FETAC awards at Levels 1 and 2, Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ) and the Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programmes and assessment pack.

Introduction

Assessment in the Irish adult literacy context has been practiced informally and often intuitively by literacy practitioners and has developed without a comprehensive national standard. Assessment is an integral part of literacy work. However, there remain significant fears and concerns about assessment development from various adult literacy stakeholders, which means that consultation is required with practitioners on change.

Given the relative resources available to adult literacy services, the sub-group was conscious that any recommendations ultimately made by the sub-group should be practical and feasible and take account of the existing infrastructure of adult literacy services. In this context the balance between the flexibility and the rigour of an accountability system was identified as key.

There are three main purposes of assessment³ - for accountability purposes (sometimes called quality assurance purposes⁴), for accreditation purposes and for teaching and learning purposes. In exploring assessment for accountability purposes the sub-group was conscious of these other purposes and the adult literacy service and system constraints, and sought

2 From the CDVEC, Co. Clare VEC, Co. Kerry VEC, Co. Louth VEC, Co. Laois VEC, Co. Wexford VEC, City of Limerick VEC, and Co. Leitrim VEC

3 Issues and Opportunities in Assessment, Merrifield et al, NALA 2001

4 See Assessment, 2001, Brown G. & Mutch A

to avoid duplication. In some cases processes are interlinked, for example initial assessment in adult literacy provides information for both teaching and learning purposes and accountability.

National Standards and Accreditation

The National Framework of Qualifications is a ten level framework of standards for accreditation purposes, launched in October 2003. FETAC has responsibility for the development and certification of awards at levels 1-6. Levels 1 and 2 are new levels and Level 3 is equivalent to the previous NCVA Foundation Level. These three levels are of particular relevance to adult literacy practice. FETAC assessment guidelines are not currently available but are being developed. In 2005, 7,657 (21.5%) literacy learners were partaking in courses leading to accreditation at level 3, with 4,073 (11.5%) achieving some certification at that level in that year⁵.

The number of awards expected to be made at level 1 and 2 is very limited in 2007, and will be restricted in 2008. It is expected that the availability of the new levels 1 and 2 will significantly increase the numbers participating in certified courses from 2008 onwards. Certification will continue at level 3. Over the next number of years, this information will contribute significantly to an understanding of progression within adult literacy and to accountability. However, in developing an accountability process, the sub-group is concerned that accreditation would not become the most valued aspect of participation, and considers that it is vital that participants continue to take part in adult literacy learning activities with an option of accreditation.

Review of the DES levels used for reporting on VEC adult literacy services

The sub-group reviewed the DES levels in the VEC adult literacy return forms used for reporting on literacy learning. The current definition of the levels outlined by the DES in their adult literacy return forms used for reporting by the VEC adult literacy services are:

Level 1 = know alphabet but have difficulties with reading.

Level 2 = can read, but difficulties with writing, spelling and grammar.

Level 3 = can read and write but need improved skills due to return to learning/promotion etc.

The sub-group conclude that the current descriptors are no longer suitable and a more appropriate reference is to the National Framework of Qualifications and the national standards of FETAC Levels 1-3.



The sub-group makes four recommendations in this area.

(i) Replace the current DES levels 1, 2 and 3 with the following three levels

“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 1”,

“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 2” and

“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 3”.

(ii) Produce a set of guidelines for Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs).

(iii) Provide a briefing session to ALOs by June 2007.

(iv) Give notice of the planned change early in 2007 to facilitate providers organisational arrangements.

The proposal recommending these changes is attached as appendix 1.

Initial Assessment

There is no nationally consistent formal procedure for initial assessment currently in use in adult literacy services, and practice varies. A wide variety of tools and materials are used, from international tools, including the Basic Skills Agency initial assessment tools, Schonnel Reading and Spelling tests⁶, Rosenthal diagnostic tools⁷, and word lists including Dolch Lists⁸. In practice, ALOs select, adapt and use parts of these tools and have developed their own processes. Initial assessment as currently practiced is done for teaching and learning purposes and has much broader objectives than assigning a level to a learner i.e. the accountability dimension.

There is however a common approach in terms of the ethos and principles underlying the initial assessment as informal, adult friendly, and carried out by initial interview with the Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO). “Guidelines for

6 Schonnel FJ, Schonnel FE. Diagnostic and attainment testing. 4th edn. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd; 1960

7 Rosenthal, Nadine, Teach Someone to Read. A Step-by-Step Guide for Literacy Tutors, Including Diagnostic Phonics and Comprehension Assessments. Lake Publishers, Belmont, CA, 1987

8 Edward W. Dolch The Dolch lists are made up of 220 frequently used ‘service words’ (primarily pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and verbs), and a further 95 common nouns. These lists are estimated to contain 50-75% of the words in children’s books.

Good Adult Literacy Work⁹ provides a useful statement of the underlying principles and the philosophies that inform practice. Initial assessment practice typically:

- Is based on the informed judgement of the ALO;
- Identifies the motivation of the learner and their reasons for coming to a literacy service;
- Provides an initial informal assessment of literacy need in terms of reading, writing, and spelling, and often numeracy, computer skills and English For Speakers of Other Languages –ESOL;
- Identifies what the learner can do, and what they would like to do;
- Assists the matching of learners to a group / 1:1 appropriate to the availability, times, level, interests, and comfort of the learner as far as possible;
- Supports tutors in terms of a starting point and indications about learners levels, goals and interests, as well as contributing to an individual learning plan for the learner; and
- Gathers statistical information and profile required by DES, and supports the assignment of level within the DES annual adult literacy returns.

There are professional qualifications and training for ALOs and other practitioners through the NALA/WIT Accreditation Project, as well as adult education courses and qualifications in universities such as NUI Maynooth and Dublin City University. There is also ongoing non-accredited training for literacy practitioners. For example, the 2005 ALO Forum explored capturing progress, particularly around soft skills, in adult literacy work.

The sub-group is concerned that some of the tools and materials used for initial assessment appear to be dated and were not specifically designed for the initial assessment of adult literacy learners and that the supports for initial assessment need to be improved. The sub-group conclude that supports for initial assessment for ALOs should be identified and disseminated or developed, and training provided.

As a first step, the sub-group recommend that a research project should be developed with the aim of informing a decision on how to enhance the quality of initial assessment for adult literacy. This may involve



recommending the development of an initial assessment tool / methodology or the adapting of an existing assessment tool / methodology. This research brief is included in appendix 2.

Recording Progress

Recording progress in adult literacy services involves the student, tutor and ALO, and for accountability purposes the adult education officer and the VEC reporting to the DES. Collating and reporting progress within the DES VEC adult literacy returns has been largely based on participation in and achievement of FETAC accreditation, but there is no reference to the progression made by learners, the inputs or services provided or the length of time involved.

Recent developments relevant to assessment include the National Framework of Qualifications and a range of awards under the new FETAC Levels 1 and 2. The quality assurance processes required of providers to offer accreditation include a focus on assessment, including initial assessment.

Mapping the Learning Journey is an assessment framework for teaching and learning and its development involved significant research and consultation which fed into a paper entitled 'Issues and Opportunities in Assessment'. While MLJ provides a system for the identification and recording of progress in relation to teaching and learning, it was not designed for accountability purposes and is not compatible as it stands to such a purpose.

The Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programmes run in 2006 involved 6-hours literacy tuition per week for 14 weeks. The process required a pre-programme and post-programme assessment based on detailed checklists for reading, writing, oracy and numeracy, completed by the practitioner and learner. "The checklists are broken up into levels equivalent to NFQ levels 1 to 3 and each level is then sub-divided into 3 stages equivalent to Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. "The Beginner stage equated to little or no ability to carry out the specified skill related task, Intermediate indicated the student could reasonably complete the task in a supported setting and Advanced meant the student could use the skill with a level of independence"¹⁰.

The results of the assessments were collated by the IVEA ITABE Coordinator as part of the overall evaluation process. In 2006, 893 participants completed the first round of these programmes, and the above assessments were completed for over 600. The evaluation report identified the progress made by participants and this is summarized in Table 1 below. The evaluation also concluded that there was a "significant level

10 ITABE Evaluation Report 2006 IVEA

of acceptance of the ITABE Assessment Pack” among practitioners in the VEC adult literacy services. The budget for the ITABE programmes was effectively doubled to €2 million in 2007. It is reasonable to expect that the numbers of participants involved will increase and the percentage of participants completing the assessment process may also increase. The contribution these programmes will make to reporting and understanding progress and accountability in adult literacy is expected to be significant.

Table 1 Summary of progress made by ITABE participants according to stages of the ITABE Assessment Pack.

	No increase registered as a percentage of all participants	1 stage increase registered as a percentage of all participants	2 stages registered as a percentage of all participants	3 stages or more as a percentage of all participants
Numeracy	35%	45%	9%	11%
Oracy	49%	33%	9%	9%
Reading	39%	44%	7%	10%
Writing	40%	46%	10%	4%

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

The sub-group explored the feasibility of integrating individual learning plans into reporting and accountability processes. The sub-group looked at approaches both in Ireland and the UK¹¹. In Ireland there are a variety of approaches to the use of individual learning plans. Some are written as distinct individual plans while others are included as part of learners logbooks. Individual learning plans are particularly valuable to teaching and learning processes. The use of individual learning plans were also explored in the context of capturing progress in relation to soft skills. This relates to how fluently or independently literacy knowledge and skills can be used in the real life situations they are required for by learners, and issues such as confidence and personal development.

The sub-group considered that in current circumstances it was not appropriate or feasible to formally integrate the content or outcomes of individual plans to accountability and reporting systems.

¹¹ Including NIACE projects ‘Recognising And Recording Progress and Achievement in non-accredited learning’ (RARPA) and on Individual Learning Plans



However, it is suggested that an accountability system could capture indicators that the processes and practices in adult literacy are inclusive of personal development, independence and learner centeredness. For example, these could include the use of individual learning plans, the use of the Evolving Quality Framework or other self evaluation processes, quality assurance policies and procedures, or resources and events which support the principles of good adult literacy practice. These should be considered further within the context of the development of a comprehensive Further Education Management Information System (FEMIS).

Progress and Accountability

One of the key questions in the development of accountability for adult literacy is the identification and collation of data on the progress learners make as a result of literacy tuition and learning. The DES requested that consideration be given to the collection of data that will show:

- Information on literacy levels on entry – based on informed decision of ALO, not through formal testing procedure. (*currently collected*)
- The number of clients who have presented for certification (*currently collected*)
- The number of clients who have achieved certification (*currently collected*)
- The number of clients who have progressed to the next level, including those involved in non-accredited learning (not currently collected)
- Information on progression in terms of ‘literacy levels on entry’, above. (not currently collected)

The DES collects data from the VEC adult literacy services via the national adult literacy returns each year. Requiring services to report comprehensively on the progress of all learners would involve significant changes in the forms and the providers data collection systems. This could involve assigning each learner an identification number and recording the:

- (i) results of initial assessment and assignment of level;
- (ii) tuition hours and other services provided;
- (iii) end of year assessment, noting any difference in level;
- (iv) annual assessments thereafter; and
- (v) accreditation achieved.

There are medium term plans for the development of a Further Education Management Information System (FEMIS). This was an important consideration for the sub-group. Adjusting current systems to better identify progress could involve a significant burden on providers in terms of their assessment, reporting and administration resources and processes. The value of initiating such change at this point is questionable if the whole system is then changed again before sufficient evidence on results and indicators accrues. The sub-group concluded that due to system constraints, staffing and resource implications, it is not desirable, timely or efficient to make further significant changes to the reporting forms and systems to gather data on progress ahead of the development of FEMIS (other than those recommended here). Similarly, the integration of individual learning plans into reporting and accountability processes was explored but it was not considered appropriate or feasible to link the content or outcomes of such plans to accountability systems.

The sub-group noted the finding from the MLJ research and consultations that

“Assessment for accountability -- requires disinterested evaluation of the programme as a whole. Judgements must follow agreed and consistent criteria, and must allow aggregation of results for reporting purposes. This form of assessment does not need to be done frequently, and there is no need for quick results. Nor do all learners need to take part -- a properly drawn representative sample will suffice.”¹²

As currently systems are not sufficiently robust to comprehensively collect and report on the range of data highlighted above, the sub-group recommend that a research approach be adopted to provide qualitative data of the progress of literacy learners. Such an approach would involve setting up a research project to identify learners progress as a result of literacy tuition, based on a study of a representative sample population of learners.

A summary research brief for this proposed study is attached in Appendix 3.

Links between FETAC, MLJ, and ITABE

There have been a number of national developments related to assessment and levels over the last 3 years including the development of FETAC standards at levels 1 and 2, the mainstreaming of MLJ and the introduction of the ITABE 6-hour intensive literacy programmes with a requirement for pre- and post- course assessment. The evaluation of ITABE identified a need to make the links between the ITABE and MLJ processes. The sub-group recognize the need to demonstrate how these are connected and linked to FETAC, in order to facilitate ongoing development in this area.



How MLJ Evidences achievement

Tutors and students use MLJ to review their work 2-3 times per year based on four cornerstones 1. Knowledge and Skill (the four areas of learning covered are Reading, Writing, and Listening and Speaking and Numeracy), 2. Depth of Understanding, 3. Fluency and Independence and 4. Range of Application. MLJ uses a nine point scale to record progress across the relevant cornerstones, broken down into Beginning (1-3), Mid- (4-6) and Upper (7-9) levels.

How MLJ links to FETAC Levels 1 and 2

FETAC Level 1 and 2 minor award specifications in Reading, Writing, and Listening and Speaking match very closely to the Beginning level and Mid-Level of MLJ respectively. There are strong links between the development of MLJ and the new Levels 1 and 2. Critically, both systems have been informed by the views of key stakeholders, including VECs and their adult literacy services, and take into account the existing practices and policies within the Irish context, together with international and national research.

The Learning Outcomes of the Level 1 and 2 award standards for *Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking* and *Non-verbal Communication* were drafted by NALA based on the MLJ Beginner and Mid- levels and according to a template provided by FETAC. These drafts were reviewed by the FETAC Expert Group on Levels 1 and 2 ultimately approved by the FETAC Council. MLJ has also informed other awards in the areas of Numeracy and Learning to Learn. FETAC have acknowledged that MLJ has been a valuable reference in the development of these awards and levels to date.

The upper level of MLJ operates within the range of the new Level 3, but does not completely fulfill the standards of that level. This is because the Level 3 awards are more extensive than the range of MLJ, so it is not aligned to the same extent as with Levels 1 and 2.

How MLJ Links to the FETAC Quality Assurance

The MLJ can contribute to a providers assessment policy and assessment procedure as part of the FETAC quality assurance processes. Use of the MLJ alone will not meet FETAC quality assurance requirements, which are much broader in scope. FETAC have stated that MLJ “may support a provider’s assessment policy in particular, assuring the provider that

the learner is ready for assessment for the purposes of accreditation and providing a common frame of reference in this regard across a scheme or network of provision”¹³.

How MLJ Links to the NQAI

There are very clear similarities between the four MLJ cornerstones and the sub-strands of Knowledge, Skill and Competence defined by the NQAI in their policies and criteria for the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications. Table 2. below outlines how the MLJ cornerstones fit with these sub-strands.

Table 2. Links between MLJ and the National Framework of Qualifications

Mapping the Learning Journey - Cornerstones	National Framework of Qualifications - Sub-strands Knowledge, Skill & Competence
Knowledge and Skill	Knowledge - Kind - Selectivity
Depth of Understanding and Critical Awareness	Competence - Insight - Learning to Learn
Fluency and Independence	Skills/Know-how - Selectivity - Role
Range of Application	Skills/Know-how - Range - Context

How MLJ links to ITABE

The assessment process for the Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education programme were devised by a working group including the IVEA, DES and NALA. The level descriptors of the assessment tool for *Reading, Writing and Speaking and listening* were based on FETAC Levels 1 and 2 which, as we have seen above, were informed by MLJ. Other similarities include the use of a nine-point scale model as evident in MLJ. The evaluation of the ITABE programme noted the linkages with the MLJ and the need to highlight these further.



Recommendations

1. Review of the DES levels used for reporting in relation to MLJ and FETAC Levels 1-3

The sub-group recommends the following:

(i) Replace the current DES levels 1, 2 and 3 with the following three levels

“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 1”,

“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 2” and

“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 3”.

(ii) Produce a set of guidelines for Adult Literacy Organisers.

(iii) Provide a briefing session to ALOs by June 2007.

(iv) Give notice of the planned change early in 2007 to facilitate providers organisational arrangements.

2. Research project to inform development of initial assessment tool(s) for adult literacy in Ireland

The MLJ sub-group on assessment for accountability identified that many of the tools and methodologies currently in use for initial assessment appear to be dated and some could be considered inappropriate for use with adult learners. The sub-group concluded that supports for initial assessment for ALOs should be identified and disseminated or developed, and training provided.

As a first step, the sub-group recommends that a research project should be developed with the aim of informing a decision on how to support the quality of initial assessment for adult literacy. This may involve recommending the development of an initial assessment tool / methodology or the adapting of an existing assessment tool / methodology.

3. Research approach to qualitative data on progress

It is recommended that a research approach be adopted to provide qualitative data on the progress of literacy learners as a result of tuition. Specifically, a research project should be undertaken to identify learners progress as a result of literacy tuition, based on a study of a representative sample population of learners. This study could identify the starting points,

the literacy progress and achievement among a sample group of learners and analyse the inputs provided and their impact on progress, and the literacy outcomes that accrue.

4. Future Changes

As there are medium terms plans for the development of a Further Education Management Information System, the sub-group is not recommending any further changes at this point.

Appendix 1 - Proposed changes to literacy levels in the DES adult literacy returns

The Mapping the Learning Journey Mainstreaming Steering Committee set up a Sub-Group on Assessment for Accountability (hereafter the sub-group) to respond to a request by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in December 2005 to explore how accountability in adult literacy could be progressed. The sub-group met seven times between January 2006 and January 2007. As part of its work the sub-group reviewed the DES levels in the adult literacy return forms used by VECs for reporting on literacy learning.

The current definition of the levels outlined by the DES in their adult literacy return forms used for reporting by the VEC adult literacy services are:

Level 1 = know alphabet but have difficulties with reading.

Level 2 = can read, but difficulties with writing, spelling and grammar.

Level 3 = can read and write but need improved skills due to return to learning/promotion etc.

The sub-group conclude that the current descriptors are no longer suitable and a more appropriate reference is to the National Framework of Qualifications and the National Standards of the FETAC Levels 1-3.

The sub-group recommends the following:

(i) Replace the current DES levels 1, 2 and 3 with the following three levels

“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 1”,

“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 2”, and



“Working towards a standard equivalent to the National Framework of Qualifications Level 3”.

(ii) Produce a set of guidelines for Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs).

(iii) Provide a briefing session to ALOs by June 2007.

(iv) Give notice of the planned change early in 2007 to facilitate providers organisational arrangements.

The sub-group have identified the following ‘Key Elements’ for the guidelines.

- The context for change and the need for ongoing development of accountability in relation to learning and progress of participants in adult literacy services.
- A description of the proposed new level descriptors with reference to, and supporting information on, the National Framework of Qualifications, FETAC Levels 1-3, the Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programmes and the related assessment instrument and guidelines, Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ) and resources and supports available. The guidelines should highlight the linkages between these developments. Level summaries relating to the standards for reading, writing, speaking and listening and numeracy will also be provided.
- A learners' right to attend for personal, family or other reasons without working towards a formal qualification at whatever level should be respected. This option should be clearly and strongly emphasized in the guidelines.
- The primary need of the learner will be the key determinant of level.
- Examples or profiles of case studies mapped to the various levels will be provided.
- Some exploration of issues relating to the process of assigning levels to learners will be included. This may include issues such as the informed judgement of the ALO, the nature of progress in literacy work, promoting the identification of progress over the period or years of participation, recording levels, reference to FEMIS and a single consistent personal identifier for each learner.
- Language style will be to avoid jargon and explain technical terms, including a glossary.

Appendix 2 - Summary Research Brief to support the quality of initial assessment in adult literacy

The sub-group on assessment and accountability identified in its report concerns that some of the tools and materials used for initial assessment appear to be dated and were not specifically designed for the initial assessment of adult literacy learners. The sub-group concluded that supports for initial assessment for ALOs should be identified and disseminated or developed, and training provided.

As a first step, the sub-group recommend that a research project should be developed with the aim of informing a decision on how to enhance the quality of initial assessment for adult literacy. This may involve recommending the development of an initial assessment tool / methodology or the adapting of an existing assessment tool / methodology.

Research Aim

To provide research based recommendations to enhance the quality of initial assessment for adult literacy and further education contexts in Ireland.

Research Objectives

1. Review literature and research on initial assessment for adult literacy practice.
2. Describe the educational environment and developments in Ireland in relation to assessment of adult literacy and numeracy.
3. Consult with stakeholders including learners from a range of settings, tutors, ALOs, providers, policy makers and funders, and experts in assessment methodologies to identify needs and experiences in relation to initial assessment.
4. Identify the features of (criteria for) high quality initial assessment.
5. Identify appropriate initial assessment tools and supports currently available in adult literacy and other adult basic education contexts in Ireland and other English speaking countries.
6. Identify supports required to ensure high quality initial assessment. In this context, the research should consider whether the development of a new initial assessment tool / methodology or the adaptation of an existing assessment tool / methodology could best advance this objective.



7. Produce a project report, including conclusions and recommendations in relation to how to advance and support the quality of initial assessment in Ireland.
8. Present the report to the MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee.

Project management procedure

The MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee propose to act as the steering group to the project in relation to:

- Finalising the research brief and securing funding from the DES;
- Disseminating and promoting the research brief;
- Nominating a selection committee to evaluate submissions and selecting a researcher/research team based on the tenders received;
- Providing initial briefing, and ongoing advice to the researcher(s) in relation to the carrying out of the project, including consultation processes involved;
- Setting out a timeframe for the staged completion of the project; and
- Providing feedback on the draft report and discussing the final report with the researcher(s).

Costs

It is estimated that the research project would involve 30 days work and cost in the region of €15,000.

Call for Tenders

Interested parties should forward a project proposal, outlining their interest, expertise, experience and other relevant information to the MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee by (DEADLINE TO BE AGREED).

Appendix 3 - Summary Research Brief for a study to identify progress learners make in adult literacy services

Context

One of the key questions in the development of accountability for adult literacy is how to identify and report the progress learners make as a result of literacy tuition and learning. The DES requested that consideration be given to the collection of data that will show:

- Information on literacy levels on entry – based on the informed decision of the ALO, not through formal testing procedure (*currently collected*);
- The number of clients who have presented for certification (*currently collected*);
- The number of clients who have achieved certification (*currently collected*);
- The number of clients who have progressed to the next level, including those involved in non-accredited learning (*not currently collected*); and
- Information on progression with reference to 'literacy levels on entry', above. (*not currently collected*)

The DES collects data from the VEC adult literacy services via the national adult literacy returns each year. Getting further information from services on progress of all learners would require significant changes to the current forms and providers systems of collection. This could involve assigning each learner an identification number and recording the

- (i) results of initial assessment and assignment of level;
- (ii) tuition hours and other services provided;
- (iii) end of year assessment, noting any difference in level;
- (iv) annual assessments thereafter; and
- (v) progression, including accreditation achieved.

There are medium-term plans for the development of a Further Education Management Information System (FEMIS). The sub-group concluded that due to system constraints, staffing and resource implications, it is not desirable, timely or efficient to make significant changes to the reporting forms and systems to gather data on progress ahead of the development



of FEMIS. Similarly, the sub-group concluded that it was not appropriate or feasible to link the content or outcomes of individual learning plans to accountability systems.

The sub-group recommend that a research approach be adopted to provide qualitative data of the progress of literacy learners. This is based on the premise that currently systems are not sufficiently robust to comprehensively collect and report on the range of data highlighted above.

Such an approach would involve setting up a research project to

- take a representative sample of learners,
- identify their starting points and progress over a period of time,
- analyse the inputs and services provided, their impact on progress, and
- the literacy outcomes that accrued.

Research Aim

To identify and report progress literacy learners make as a result of literacy tuition.

Research Objectives

1. Review literature and research on progress and accountability in adult literacy practice.
2. Consult with stakeholders including learners from a range of settings, tutors, ALOs, Adult Education Officers and managers, providers, policy makers and funders, and experts in assessment methodologies to identify needs, indicators and experiences in relation to the assessment and reporting of progress.
3. Produce a research plan to identify the approach and research methodology, the sample proposed and the indicators of progress to be explored.
4. Take a representative sample of adult literacy learners and establish their starting points, literacy progress and achievement, analyse the inputs provided, the impact of services on progress, and the literacy outcomes that accrued. Outcomes could include certification and non-accredited learning on a range of skills and competencies such as knowledge and skills, independence, fluency, range of application and personal development.
5. Produce a project report and present that to the MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee.

Project management procedure

The MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee propose to act as the steering group to the project in relation to:

- Finalising the research brief and securing funding from the DES;
- Disseminating and promoting the research brief;
- Nominating a selection committee to evaluate submissions and selecting a researcher/research team based on the tenders received;
- Providing initial briefing, and ongoing advice to the researcher(s) in relation to the carrying out of the project, including consultation processes involved;
- Setting out a timeframe for the staged completion of the project; and
- Providing feedback on the draft report and discussing the final report with the researcher(s).

Call for Tenders

Interested parties should forward a project proposal, outlining their interest, expertise, experience and other relevant information to the MLJ Mainstreaming Steering Committee by (DEADLINE TO BE AGREED).



www.nala.ie

What is NALA?

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent membership organisation, concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and offering advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland. NALA was established in 1980 and has campaigned since then for the recognition of, and response to, the adult literacy issue in Ireland.



National Adult Literacy Agency
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NALA Cork
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Useful websites

NALA www.nala.ie
Literacy learning and tuition www.literacytools.ie
The Really Useful Guide to Words and Numbers www.rug.ie

Freephone **NALA 1800 20 20 65**

