

# Session 4: Referrals and Boundaries

## Objectives of Session

Having completed this session, participants will have:

* Explored available supports, referral routes and the learner journey
* Examined the roles and responsibilities of practitioners and students
* Covered boundaries skills needed for engaging with people with unmet literacy needs

## Session Content

* The Adult Education Service as a whole and the Adult Literacy Service as part thereof
* The learner journey through the ALS
* Expectations of the learner
* Referrals from the wider FET sector
* Boundaries to be aware of when working with adult learners

## Resources for this session

* Handout 4.1
* Handout 4.2
* PowerPoint presentation
* Session plan
* Zoom and Internet access

## Slide 1: Referrals and Boundaries in Adult Education

***2 minutes***

Welcome participants back.

Introduce session 4. In our sessions so far, we have looked at some of the theories that are relevant to adult education, impacts and causes of unmet literacy needs, and creating a literacy-friendly environment.

In Session 4, we will look at referrals and boundaries in adult education, but first we will take some time to share our ideas and questions from last week's extension activity.

## Slide 2: Extension activity feedback

***15 minutes***

Recap on the extension activity from session 3. We will be using a Menti to take some written feedback and there will be time for discussion then.

Introduce the Menti, which should take the format of an “Open Ended” Menti with the question:

**"Reflect on three possible adjustments you would consider to make your organisation/workplace more literacy-friendly?"**

Share the Mentimeter.com presentation on screen so that all participants can: (1) see the menti code to enter, and (2) see other participants' submissions.

Draw some examples under the five headings of (1) environment, (2) digital access, (3) reading material, (4) staff awareness, and (5) verbal communication, asking participants to elaborate on their ideas and to ask questions of the facilitators to deepen their awareness and practice in particular areas. Allow some time for discussion amongst the group.

There will not be time to take verbal feedback from every participant. Reassure participants that there will be more practical tips and tools covered in Session 5. They are not expected to have all the answers immediately.

## Slide 3: Session aims

***2 minutes***

In this session, we will referral routes and boundaries skills needed when working with individuals with unmet literacy needs.

We will take a closer look at what supports are available and gain an understanding into what the learner's journey will look like. It is important to understand what a student can expect if they are referred to their local literacy service. Having this knowledge when making a referral can alleviate much of the fear of the unknown for the adult learner.

In recognising the roles and responsibilities of the practitioners and the learners, it is essential to maintain healthy and professional boundaries. We will look at boundaries as a set of skills that we need to practice in all of our dealings with learners.

## Slide 4: City of Dublin Adult Education Service

***5 minutes***

\*Edit to suit your own ETB

In Session 1 we very briefly looked at a general overview of Further Education and Training (FET) in the Education and Training Boards. The Adult Education Service sits within that structure.

Depending on the ETB, there are probably a number of other sections within the Adult Education Service additional to those listed on the slide, but in general these are the ones that work most closely together: Adult Literacy, Community Education, ESOL, and Adult Education Guidance.

The Adult Literacy Service will generally be the appropriate place to refer students for support with improving their reading, writing, maths, digital, or English language skills. Guidance plays a key role in working with students who are considering their progression routes and there will regularly be cross-referral and coordinated support offered by the Adult Literacy Organiser and the Adult Education Guidance Counsellor.

Ask participants if they are aware of where their local Adult Literacy Service is located. Are there areas outlined within the Adult Education Service that there are questions about or is it all familiar? Do participants have an idea of who the personnel are in each area? Have they met with students who have either progressed through or have benefitted from the support of the Adult Education Service?

## Slide 5: The CDETB Adult Literacy Service

***6 minutes***

The Adult Literacy Service can often be quite invisible. Most literacy services do not label themselves with the word "literacy". Literacy students are assured of confidentiality, and this has a knock-on affect for how visible the work of the service can be. We have already discussed how to talk about literacy. Adult literacy has traditionally not been a comfortable subject for discussion in Ireland, but hopefully that is changing.

We will delve more deeply into what new students can expect on joining the Adult Literacy Service shortly. By way of a general overview of the service, it can be very helpful to understand that the Adult Literacy Service classes take place in a safe and supportive environment. For example, rooms are not set up like traditional classrooms. Efforts are always made to create an environment that is adult-friendly and does not echo a childhood classroom, where the learner's experience may have been unhappy or traumatic. Students are treated as adults and mutual respect between the facilitator and the learner is a given. Adults return to learning with such a wealth of experience and that is the basis from which their learning journey is launched.

Classes take place either in very small groups or in one-to-one sessions. It is important to be very clear that attendance is voluntary. We have already discussed some of the impacts and causes, as well as the theories relating to adult education. Depending on the student's past experience or current circumstances, turning up may be just enough for now and learning may come later. For others, it can take several attempts to get up and running on their learning journey. The most important thing for the Adult Literacy Service is that the door is always open, regardless of which direction the student is going through it. It is always understood that students may need to take a break or may not be ready to learn, and they can always return when the time is right for them.

Finally, classes happen within the centre where the service is based, but also out in the community and in partnership with other organisations. It is the aim of the Adult Literacy Services to meet people where they are at. Establishing links and delivery options within the community is a key part of how the service works.

## Slide 6: A sample of courses offered

***8 minutes***

\*Edit to suit your own service – this slide may be very different for every service

Outlined here is a very small sample of the types of courses that run in your local Adult Literacy Service. Traditionally, we think of literacy in terms of reading and writing, but as you are now discovering, it involves so much more than that. There are a broad number of digital literacy and computer classes available, as well as, for example, Maths for Parents and other family learning programmes.

Many services have embraced remote and online options in recent times. Services may have a social media presence that can be useful to identify and share.

Ultimately, the Adult Literacy Service is learner-led, in that what runs is directed by what the learning needs are of the studentship and the local community.

Facilitators should take a time to fully explore the offering of their service with the participants.

## Slide 7: The Learner Journey

***8 minutes***

Now that a good understanding has been established of where your local Adult Literacy Service is located, what it offers, and looks like, we can take a closer look at the learner's journey once they have been referred.

The first step is to contact the Adult Literacy Organiser to make the referral. New students can self-refer, and this can be a really useful exercise in itself, as it means that the adult has ownership over their own learning from the outset. Referrals can also be made by a third party, but only with consent from the person. Some services may have referral forms, but in general, it is sufficient to either telephone the service or email the Adult Literacy Organiser to pass on the prospective student's contact details and any other pertinent information.

If the person that you are referring is very nervous, it can be useful to make the call for them and pass them the telephone to speak with the Adult Literacy Organiser or Support Tutor. It can be gentle and reassuring way for the individual to take the first step. Equally, it may be useful to visit the Adult Literacy Service with the person, if only to let them know where it is. The necessity for this is much rarer and it is important to be mindful of boundaries and respecting the learner as an adult in all of these interactions. It can be useful to keep in mind that you should be gently introducing the person to the supports and structures that are available to them.

Some learners do not want to attend their local service, and that is fully appreciated and understood by Adult Literacy Services. You can always refer a learner to somewhere less close to home if that is their preference.

Once the referral has been made, the Adult Literacy Organiser will arrange a time for the learner to come in for a chat to see how the service can best work for them. This conversation is never called an assessment so as not to put the student off. Adult Literacy Services are well practiced at assessing the learners literacy levels in a gentle and unobtrusive way. That first meeting is always held in a private place and usually takes about an hour. It will generally include talking about the learner's past educational experience, any support structures they currently have around them, and what their availability is like.

When this is completed, the Adult Literacy Organiser will generally offer the student at least one option of a class either immediately or at the very earliest opportunity. This could be in a small group of students with similar interests and at a similar level, or it may be a one-to-one with a tutor on their own.

In the case of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) referrals, the process is similar. The Adult Literacy Organiser will arrange for the new student to meet with a trained ESOL Tutor for assessment. Placement in a class may not be as immediate, as ESOL classes tend to intake on set dates throughout the academic year.

## Slide 8: What can new learners expect?

***5 minutes***

As established from the outset, it is important to understand what the experience will be like for a new learner joining the Adult Literacy Service, so that you can best set the scene for anyone you are referring. We've touched on many of the items listed here already.

It is impossible to underestimate how supportive adult learners can be for each other. Everyone attending classes with the Adult Literacy Services is there voluntarily and often with very similar motivations.

Classes work flexibly to suit the availability of the student. Adult learners tend to have very busy lives. It is key that they can access their education at times that work for them.

The service works on continuous intake, meaning students can join at any time throughout the academic year.

Give plenty of time to discuss items on the slide and to take any questions or observations from participants.

## Slide 9: Learner video

***4 minutes***

It is a good time now to meet some real students.

Play this one and a half minute video from CDETB Coolock Darndale Adult Literacy Service, where three students talk about their experience of returning to learning.

Take time for questions and discussion at the end.

# Slide 10: Break 5 minutes

## Slide 11: Referrals from the wider FET sector

**3 minutes**

Discuss the range of supports on offer to the wider sector. These can vary from location to location/budgets etc, due to the fact that some literacy services co-locate with colleges or in close proximity to PLCs and training centres. The range of supports can include:

* Advice on literacy awareness
* Suggestions on literacy integration into classes
* Support classes for PLC/apprentices
* Preparation for PLC courses (language, maths and academic writing)
* In-service/CPD (using this course or other developed sessions)

## Slide 12: Why consider boundaries in Adult Education?

***3 minutes***

The Adult Literacy Organiser has many years of experience with adults with literacy difficulties. This experience leads to heightened awareness of the often co-occurring lack of confidence that having unmet literacy needs has on a person. Although it may seem like a lack of skill, such as a spelling difficulty or a difficulty putting pen to paper, for the individual it is much more than that.

Tied into the literacy difficulty can be memories relating to the causes of the literacy difficulties, and a sense of shame or poor self-esteem as a result. Any conversations relating to literacy difficulties must be handled with care. Be cognisant that a learner may not be aware that they a have difficulty. If pointed out, it may cause embarrassment and disengagement. The learner may be aware and be embarrassed, often this shows up in a reluctance to put pen to paper, or to write to length. When thinking about referring someone to the literacy service, you may want to consult with the ALO in advance about how to approach that conversation. Clear boundaries can be helpful, and there may be an agreed protocol on how to refer locally. Boundaries when working with adult learners are worth exploring and reviewing routinely in general.

## Slide 13: Boundaries as skills

***1 minute***

Why consider boundaries? It is important to see boundaries as a set of skills which help us understand the remit of our roles as educators and in doing so, preventing ‘compassion fatigue’ or burn-out.

## Slide 14: Organisational Code of Practice

***2 minutes***

The ETB has a code of conduct which is a useful guide for staff to help prevent any allegations of misconduct, it helps maintain a healthy, professional learning environment.

Professional boundaries are associated with maintaining self-care within your role. While boundaries can be difficult to put into practice, and uncomfortable in some instances, it is worth investing some time and learning some of the skills to help you navigate the staff/adult learner relationship.

## Slide 15: Boundary points

***3 minutes***

Professional boundaries can also be viewed as a scaffold and a safe holding space for the adult learner. Maintaining a professional boundary within Adult Education does not mean that your relationship with learners should be cold and detached. Rather, you can remain helpful, empathetic, kind and responsive while upholding the professional guidelines. By establishing professional boundaries, you are focusing on the learners’ needs within the remit of your role.  Refer to CDETB Boundaries in the Adult Education Service Handout 4.1 as a sample supporting document.

## Slide 16: Breakout room

***25 minutes***

***3 minute Intro***

***10 minutes in Breakout Room***

***3 minutes / group x max 4 groups***

Introduce the Breakout Room.

**Task:**

Discuss any/all of the following incidents and how a tutor/teacher might respond.

Group 4 or 5 participants to each room. Provide each group with one scenario to examine. Remind participants not to identify any individuals in their discussions. Groups should identify one person to takes notes and feedback from the task at the end.

Give 8 minutes for discussion, with 2 minutes countdown time for the breakout rooms.

When the breakout rooms close, give 3 minutes to each group to share their feedback and discuss ideas and new learning.

## Slide 17: Breakout groups

In breakout rooms, discuss with your group what might be appropriate responses to the scenarios listed.

Tutor uses Frank O’Connor’s suggested answers (Handout 4.2) to bring group back for feedback and discussion.

## Slide 18: Differentiating between being friendly & being a friend

***3 minutes***

Discuss the boundary between being friendly and a friend. The adult learning environment can be tricky to navigate, as often the learner has returned to a positive learning space and wants to display their gratitude. Reassuring learners that this is your role, and ensuring they are aware of their own role as a learner, maintains boundaries which will help avoid embarrassment or misunderstandings.

## Slide 19: Dr.Karen Triesman visual

***1 minute***

Slide 19 demonstrates that our interactions with individuals in the education sector can have a great impact. Remind ourselves to broach conversations about literacy with care and consideration as we know that unmet literacy needs are often connected to emotional experiences in the past.

## Slide 20: Extension Activity

***3 minutes***

Introduce the Extension Activity to be practiced between now and the next session.

**Task:**

Reflecting on your practice in the past, have there been instances where you felt unable to support a learner with unmet literacy needs?

Are there any practical tips that you would take from this session that would inform your future practice.

Can you give any examples?

Remind participants to set aside some time for this practice. Suggest that participants may like to take some notes for sharing on our next session.