

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIELD OF LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION

State of the art in Ireland

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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Literacy, broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all, is a fundamental human right. In every society literacy is a necessary skill in itself and one of the foundation of other life skills. There are millions who lack opportunities to learn or who have insufficient skills to be able to assert this right. The challenge is to enable them to do so. This will often imply the creation of preconditions for learning through awareness-raising and empowerment. Literacy is also a catalyst for participation in social, cultural, political and economic activities, and for learning throughout life. In the rapidly changing world of today's knowledge society, the progressive use of newer and innovative technological means of communication, literacy requirements continue to expand regularly. In order to survive in today's globalized world, it has become necessary for all people to learn (new) literacies and develop the ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use information in multiple ways.

While there is a growing demand for adult education and an explosion of information, the disparities between those who have access to education and those who do not are also growing. There is therefore a need to counter this polarity, which reinforces existing inequalities, by creating adult learning structures and lifelong learning environments that can help to correct the prevalent trend. In February 2003, the United Nations proclaimed the Literacy Decade for the period 2003-2012 towards the goal of education for all.

In Europe the development of literacy and basic education systems differs between EU member states. The professional development of teachers differs in each country and there are various examples of teacher education programmes to be found. Teacher training within the adult literacy sector can be a complicated issue given the sensitivities around literacy and because teacher and trainer have to deal with adults who may be marginalised or disadvantaged and who may have had previous negative experiences with education. Therefore adult literacy teachers need to improve their knowledge about psychological and social aspects of adult learning. They also need to develop innovative methods of teaching and learning, including using interactive technologies. The importance of training literacy and basic education practitioners and professionals cannot be understated however there is no uniform approach to professional development in the sector in Europe. In Belgium and the Netherlands there are established positions within the education sector and universities who provide training and degree level programmes; in Great Britain core curricula and standards have been developed for students and there are efforts by the government to improve teacher training in the field of literacy and basic education. However in many European countries (most of the participating countries in this project) there are a lack of teacher training qualifications.

The objective of the TRAIN project is to collect and analyse concepts, approaches and good practice examples in the participating countries; Germany, Ireland, France, Cyprus and Slovenia, as well as in countries which have developed structures around literacy teaching such as Denmark, Great Britain and the Netherlands. This project aims to develop a number of basic modules for adult literacy teachers with the objective of creating a model for teacher training for literacy teachers that represents best practice across Europe.

The following report depicts the development of adult literacy tuition in Ireland, the background to the adult literacy problem, the National Adult Literacy strategy and the current structures in place for literacy learners and those involved in the provision of the literacy service in Ireland.

This national report, focusing on Ireland, aims to give a comprehensive view of the background to the adult literacy service, the stakeholders involved in the provision of the service, the national adult literacy strategy in Ireland and the structures in place for teacher training for those working in the adult literacy service.

The information for this report has been gathered using a number of means and included a literature review, analysis of Irish government policy documents, a review of publications produced by key stakeholders in Ireland, group discussions with stakeholders and project staff in the Literacy Development Centre in Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) where the WIT/NALA Accreditation Project ¹ is based and internet based research.

Information gathering took place over a four-month period (December 2006 to March 2007). The group discussions took place at WIT and also at a number of centers in Dublin and Cork where groups of adult literacy teachers and managers were undertaking programmes delivered by WIT staff.

2 Development of Literacy and Basic Education in Ireland

The development of literacy and basic education in Ireland came about predominantly through the work of voluntary and community groups working to support adult literacy learners outside of a formal state structured or funded system. In the years up to 2000 there was no national policy or strategy addressing adult literacy and no formal structures in place to support literacy learners. The Irish government introduced a National Adult Literacy Programme in 2000 and since 1998 there has been significant increases in funding available for adult literacy.

Recognition of the extent of the adult literacy problem in Ireland came about following the publication of the OECD report on the International Adult Literacy Survey in 1997² which detailed Ireland's high percentage of the adult population with extreme literacy difficulties.

In the period between the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 and the 1960's, the Irish government passed the VEC Act 1930³ which provided for a structure under which 33 Vocational Education Committees were set up to establish systems under which vocational and technical education was provided and a suitable system of continuing education. The VEC sector became the major providers of adult education during this period. There was, however, no formal adult literacy service provided by the VEC's at this time. Support for adult literacy was provided by the non-governmental sector (associations such as the Irish Country-womens Association, the Irish Farmers Association and Teagasc; the national body responsible for training and advisory services to the agricultural sector) and community groups.

During the 1960's in Ireland, free second level schooling was introduced by the state. This marked a major change in the Irish education system and was to have an important socio-economic impact on Ireland over time. At a national policy level the focus was on the provision of second level schooling and there was little if any mention of adult education or literacy.

¹ The WIT/NALA Accreditation project is a partnership between Waterford Institute of Technology, a third level institution and NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency that develops and delivers third level programmes to practitioners in the adult literacy sector. The project is funded by the Irish Department of Education and Science under the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

² Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1997, Literacy Skills for Knowledge Society: Further Results from the International Adult Literacy Survey, Paris, OECD.

³ Government of Ireland, Vocational Education Act 1930, Dublin, Stationery Office

Two government policy reports produced in 1973 and 1984 focused on adult education. The Murphy Report (1973)⁴ proposed the introduction of formal structures and funding streams for adult education in Ireland. The report also advocated a student-centered approach to adult education. The Kenny Commission Report (1984)⁵ discussed resources, participation levels and barriers to participation in adult education and advocated local and national structures to manage adult education in Ireland.

Certain developments did take place during this period including the Department of Education setting up an adult education section (with associated funding) in 1980 and in 1984 the VEC's set up Adult Education Boards. These Adult Education Boards were set up on an ad hoc basis however they did provide for a formal stream of funding dedicated to adult literacy and community education programmes. This budget was called the Adult Literacy and Community Scheme budget (ALCES)

Two national organizations were set up during this time that were to play an important role in shaping national policy around adult literacy and attracting funds to support adult literacy learners in Ireland; Aontas, the Irish National Association of Adult Education and NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency. Both are voluntary, membership organizations and both have promoted awareness of adult literacy and have been involved in national initiatives to support the literacy problem in Ireland.

During the 1970's and 1980's in Ireland much of the support available to adult literacy learners was provided through voluntary organizations and community groups. Up to 5,000 volunteers were providing support, both home based and using community and other facilities to learners. There was little if any state support available and although there was a large number of adults with literacy difficulties there was no precise data or national statistics readily available.

Throughout the 1980's and up to 1996 a small amount of national funding for adult literacy was available through the VEC Adult Education budget⁶ and a limited service was provided in certain VEC's to learners in the locality.

The catalyst for change in national policy was the International Adult Literacy Survey carried out by the OECD⁷ in 1995. The report provided a profile of the literacy skills of adults aged between 16-64 in Ireland. The aim of the survey was to identify five levels of literacy to cover demands at work, in the home and in the community, level 1 being an extremely low level of literacy up to level 5 a high level of literacy.

The report concluded that one in four adults surveyed scored at level one and in Ireland did not possess the literacy skills and confidence needed to take part effectively in society.

2.1 Overview on development, national Policy, strategies and action plans

The OECD report on the IALS survey prompted a strong reaction from stakeholders in the adult literacy and adult basic education sector and awareness of the issue was raised at national level. A policy document was commissioned by the Department of Education address-

⁴ Government of Ireland, The Murphy Report : Adult Education in Ireland (1973), Dublin Stationery Office

⁵ Government of Ireland, The Kenny Commission Report ; Lifelong Learning (1984), Dublin, Stationery Office

⁶ Budget called ALCES

⁷ OECD 1997 Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society; Further results from the International Adult Literacy Survey, Paris OECD

ing the issue of adult education and adult literacy and a Green Paper⁸ was produced. This paper set out the case for a comprehensive framework of statutory policy, programming and funding in adult education. The paper identified literacy as the most urgent adult education problem and proposed a national adult literacy programme. The proposed programme was to address promoting awareness of literacy, developing outreach strategies and referral networks and developing innovative approaches to literacy provision. The paper recognized the contribution of adult education to enriching the lives of participants and society at large in the pursuit of a wide variety of educational interests for their own intrinsic appeal and in promoting an equitable and sustainable society.

The Green paper proposed increasing the level of funding available for adult education and in particular adult literacy. The paper also made a case for the recognition of the role of the adult educator as a professional and for the development of a variety of systematic training routes through which the quality and professionalism of the sector would be recognized and supported. This would have a significant impact on the literacy service since at that time there were no full time permanent positions or recognized qualifications in adult literacy.

Following its publication certain changes began to take root within the adult literacy service. Funding levels started to increase, allowing a broader range of literacy supports to learners and a funding stream within the statutory sector to become established allowing for certain adult literacy organizers and tutors to receive pay for work within the literacy service (Prior to the late 1990's the majority of work carried out was done by volunteers on an unpaid basis).

In addition to the publication of the Green Paper there were significant economic changes happening in Ireland that would have a bearing on future policy relating to adult education and adult literacy. During the 1990's Ireland started to experience a period of unprecedented economic growth, the Irish economy was growing at a rate that was faster than any of its European counterparts. This led to skills shortages in certain areas and highlighted the need to provide the structures to enable Ireland to have a skilled workforce.

The issue was to provide new skills to those within the existing workforce and also to enable adults who were not in the workforce with opportunities to partake in further education.

The next most significant policy development came with the publication of a government White Paper entitled "Learning for Life, White Paper on Adult Education" published in 2000⁹. The White paper provided for a framework for the future development of adult education in Ireland and significantly marks the adoption of a National Adult Literacy Strategy. The paper came about after a period of consultation with various stakeholders and was seen as a positive development towards developing lifelong learning opportunities for adults. Some of the most significant developments that resulted from the White Paper were an increase in funding for the adult literacy service from €0.85m in 1997 to €23m in 2006, this funding was provided under the National Development Plan 2000-2006¹⁰

This increased the number of adult literacy learners partaking in the literacy service from 5,000 in 1997 to 35,000 in 2005. Full time positions were created within the VEC sector called Adult Literacy Organisers, who managed the local literacy service and temporary part-time work became available for adult literacy tutors.

⁸Department of Education and Science, Green Paper on Adult Education (1998), Dublin, Stationery Office

⁹ Department of Education, White Paper - Learning for Life (2000) Dublin, Stationery Office

¹⁰ Government of Ireland National Development Plan 2000-2006, Dublin Stationery Office

Increased funding also provided for national campaigns to increase awareness about literacy and special projects covering a number of areas including Workplace Literacy, Community Employment and Family Literacy

In January 2007, the Irish government produced the new National Development Plan for the period 2007-2013¹¹. The plan sets out government policy over the next five years, and states that adult literacy is the government's top priority in adult education.

The social partnership agreement Towards 2016¹² commits to providing 7,000 additional places for adult learners within the VEC adult literacy service by 2009, increasing the number of adult literacy learners to 42,000 per annum.

The situation today in Ireland is that there is a stated National Adult Literacy Strategy and associated programmes. Funding has increased substantially (albeit from a very low base) both for the provision of a national adult literacy service and to local and community groups and special projects. Literacy remains a problem in Ireland and a recent report¹³ states that if Ireland is to remain competitive and continue to experience good economic growth, over 500,000 adults in Ireland need to improve their level of educational attainment by one level on the new National Framework of Qualifications.

There are a number of changes taking place within adult literacy in Ireland. Adults are increasingly developing their literacy skills in work, with the family and through distance learning and within the VEC Literacy Service the majority of learners take part in group tuition with about 20% receiving individual tuition. There is an increasing demand for tuition in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), a service provided through the adult literacy service in the VEC's. Already over 25% of adult literacy students are in ESOL classes. This is obviously having an impact on literacy tuition and the types of literacy classes taking place within the service.

2.2 Structure of Literacy and Basic Education in Ireland

Over 90% of adult literacy services are provided through the VEC's throughout Ireland. Each VEC (33 throughout Ireland in total) has an adult literacy service funded by the Irish government and this service provides one on one and group tuition to adults with literacy difficulties. There are approximately 1500 people in paid employment in the literacy service and about 3,000 volunteers who work with individual literacy schemes providing literacy tuition.

The adult literacy service is free to all adults in Ireland and when an adult literacy learner joins a literacy scheme they partake in two hours tuition per week. Tuition is provided both on an individual and group basis depending on the needs of the literacy learner.

Given recent developments in the education sector in Ireland resulting from the Bologna and Lisbon processes, learners, including adult literacy learners are now offered a number of learning programmes including those leading to accreditation at different levels on the national framework of qualifications in Ireland.

The VEC's are statutory bodies with the remit of providing continuation education in Ireland. In practice the VEC sector has been responsible for the provision of vocational and technical education at second level, post second level craft training and adult education programmes.

¹¹ Government of Ireland National Development Plan 2007-2015, Dublin, Stationery Office

¹² Department of an Taoiseach Towards 2016: Ten Year Framework for Social Partnership Agreement, 2006, Dublin, Stationery Office

¹³ Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a national skills strategy, 2006, Dublin, Stationery Office

Outside of the VEC Literacy service, support for literacy learners is provided through a range of community groups, charities and other organizations such as Senior Travellers Training Centres¹⁴, Youthreach and the Prison Services Education programmes.

Other stakeholders more recently involved in adult literacy include FAS – The Irish training and development agency. There has been an increased focus on up-skilling the workforce and FAS have become involved in funding Workplace Basic Education programmes incorporating literacy.

See Appendix 1 for all relevant bodies and providers.

3 Concept of teaching Literacy and Basic Education

3.1 National strategy in the field of professionalization of literacy teachers training

During the period prior to the Governments Green and White policy papers¹⁵ on adult literacy and basic education there were no real structures for those working in adult literacy in Ireland.

Within the community and voluntary sectors the majority of the work was carried out on an unpaid basis and while certain schemes received small literacy budgets this was on an ad hoc basis and did not provide for permanent paid work for staff.

Within the statutory sector the situation was not terribly different, although adult literacy schemes fell under the remit of the VEC's, there was a limited budget available (ALCES) for paid staff and this was limited to part-time teaching hours for adult literacy organizers and tutors.

The situation began to change in the late 1990's with a new national focus on adult literacy and increased budgets allocated to the VEC Literacy schemes in the statutory sector. The government policy papers also recognized the need for trained staff and quality standards required for those working in the sector. In 1998 the position of Adult Literacy Organiser was formalized and a budget for the post was created within the VEC sector. Many of these positions were filled by people who had been working in the sector for a number of years. The situation regarding adult literacy tutors was and still remains somewhat different. There are no full time permanent positions for adult literacy tutors. The budget for literacy tuition is given at a scheme level and is managed usually by the Adult Literacy Organiser (in certain cases it is managed by higher level management in the VEC's) and they allocate teaching hours to a panel of part time adult literacy tutors. Tutors receive hourly pay for tuition however it is not part of a permanent position within the VEC Literacy service. In many schemes volunteers still carry out much of the work on an unpaid basis.

When the full time position of Adult Literacy Organiser was created the Department of Education and Science recognized the need to create a standard qualification for those working within the Adult Literacy sector. The NALA/WIT Accreditation project was established as a partnership between Waterford Institute of Technology and the National Adult Literacy Agency with the aim of supporting the adult literacy sector by providing higher education qualifications for adult educators working in the field of adult literacy.

¹⁴ Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority in Ireland

¹⁵ This period was up to the late 1990's

Following a period of consultation with key stakeholders including representatives of the Department of Education and Science, the VEC's, adult literacy practitioners and students a series of accredited higher education programmes was developed.

All Adult Literacy Organisers who held paid positions within the adult literacy service were given a period of time¹⁶ to attain one of the above third level qualifications. This has become a pre-requisite for appointment to the position of Adult Literacy Organiser within the statutory sector.

Third level qualifications have also been developed for adult literacy tutors at a number of levels. In the community and voluntary sector there are no national criteria for literacy tutors regarding qualifications.

Within other sectors where adult literacy tuition takes place (Youthreach, Senior Travellers Training Centres, Prison Education Services) the qualifications required for permanent positions vary from one organization to the next. Required qualifications range from a general honours level degree to a Higher Diploma in Teaching in addition to a degree level qualification in an education related discipline.

Government policy documents detail the requirement for education and continued professional development opportunities to be offered to those working in the sector however to date they have not created funded positions for adult literacy tutors and do not currently recognize adult literacy tutors within the state funded education sector.

The qualifications developed by the NALA/WIT Accreditation Project are recognized by the Department of Education and Science as the required minimum level qualification for Adult Literacy Organisers.

3.2 The Evolution of the literacy training programme and the present overview of literacy teachers training programmes

Prior to the development of programmes under the WIT/NALA Accreditation Project in 1998, there were no third level qualifications specifically designed for adult literacy practitioners available in Ireland. The WIT/NALA Accreditation project was set up to design, develop and ultimately deliver third level programme to adult literacy practitioners.

There are a number of third level institutions in Ireland providing programmes for adult educators including degree programmes in adult and community education, further education and training and development among other areas (see Appendix 2 for other main providers).

The programmes offered by the WIT/NALA Accreditation project are the programmes that have been specifically designed for the adult literacy practitioners and include:

- Higher Certificate in Arts in Literacy Development (level 6)
- Bachelor of Arts (Ordinary) in Adult Education (level 7)
- Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Adult Education (level 8)

The programmes begin at level 6 and participants may work up to level 8 on the Irish national framework of qualifications. Level 8 is equivalent to University degree level studies.

¹⁶ 5 years from the date of their appointment

4 Review of Literacy Teachers Competences

Throughout the development of the above programmes for literacy organizers and tutors, extensive consultation took place among the stakeholders involved including the Department of Education, The Vocational Education Committees, Adult Literacy Organisers, tutors and learners about the proposed content of the programmes and the type of academic content and practical skills that would be required by those working within the adult literacy service.

In addition to the above consultation and for the purposes of compiling this report additional groups were consulted for their input into the identification of adult literacy teacher's competences¹⁷.

Participants were asked to identify literacy teachers competences based on their own experiences as adult educators and specifically adult literacy tutors. The following competences were highlighted as extremely important for literacy tutors:

- An understanding of adults with literacy difficulties
- An intellectual appreciation of how literacy difficulties impact on an adult's participation in society
- An ability to interact with adults with literacy difficulties
- An appreciation of the social practice model of literacy and what it means for adults with literacy difficulties
- Experience in the field of adult basic education
- The ability to teach reading, writing and numeracy to adults
- Strong inter-personal skills
- An ability to employ a range of teaching methodologies when working with groups of adults
- Excellent presentation skills
- An understanding of a curriculum, learning outcomes and assessment in adult basic education
- An appreciation of learning difficulties
- An understanding of the psychology and philosophy of adult learning
- Knowledge of a range of ICT tools that can be used when working with adults with literacy difficulties
- The ability to be able to work with individual learners and groups of learners and develop a safe learning environment where learners and the tutor build up mutual trust and respect.

4.1 Good Practice in the Field of Teacher Training

This report details practices that have been adopted as part of the NALA/WIT Accreditation Project. These practices are based on current literature in the field of adult basic education and teacher education and models of teacher education programmes found in Ireland and the UK.

Learner-centered approach

Teacher training in the adult basic education field differs significantly from traditional teacher training for adults teaching children in that the role of the learner is quite different.

Learner involvement is an important part of teacher training. Learners have an input into programme design and delivery and are encouraged to adopt a similar flexible approach with their own learners.

Assessment

Given the level of experience of adult teachers teaching other adults, the assessment on teacher education programmes should reflect the way adults learn. In the context of the NALA/WIT Programmes this means the inclusion of different modules of assessment such as peer observation, reflective learning journals, work related projects, action research and group presentation. The modes of assessment used aim to reflect Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory¹⁷ and provide several platforms for adult learners to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes set down for a particular module.

Programme Structure and Timings

All programmes are delivered on a part-time, modular basis specifically because learners are typically in part or full time employment and have difficulty committing to a full time day programme. The modular structure of the programmes means that learners can study at their own pace and opt to take a number of modules each academic year building up to a full qualification over time. This system has been developed in line with the Bologna process and policies relating to access, transfer and progression.

Interaction between learner and tutor

There is a different level of interaction in adult education teacher training programmes between the teacher and the (adult) learner. The teacher involves the learner in their own learning process and agrees learning outcomes and objectives with them. The learner plays an important role in this and it is an agreed path as opposed to one dictated by the teacher. Given the completely different types of motivation levels for adult learners the relationship between teacher and learner is different than in the conventional teacher/student setting. There are greater demands placed on the teacher in terms of communication with the adult learner, agreement on learning outcomes and levels of feedback given to the learner. Often a learning contract is agreed between the tutor and the learner in terms of what each party expects of each other, this helps to clarify expectations on both sides and creates a level of responsibility from learner to teacher and vice versa.

Evaluation

Within the adult learning teacher training environment comprehensive evaluation is important. The learner is given numerous opportunities to provide feedback to the teacher on the

¹⁷ Two groups of adult literacy tutors currently undertaking modules through WIT and the project staff at WIT were consulted.

¹⁸ Gardner, H (1983) *Frames of Mind, the Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Basic Books, New York

actual programme. This enables the teacher to become aware quite quickly of difficulties the learner may be experiencing. The programmes are evaluated both on an institute wide basis and on an on-going basis by the Project Team. At an operational level, each programme is evaluated during the academic year and reports on evaluation are presented to the Management team on a quarterly basis. All evaluation reports for each module on each programme are inputted and stored in a database and quarterly and annual reports can be produced when required. The project's External Examiner reviews evaluation reports on twice yearly basis as part of the quality assurance process at WIT. At an Institute wide level, programmes are reviewed every five years by an external panel and all programmes are subject to review and revision following this process.

Teaching Methodologies

A broad variety of teaching methodologies are employed throughout the NALA/WIT programmes. These methodologies are designed to enhance the learning environment for adult learners and include group work, role-play, presentation, facilitation sessions, video/DVD, games, drama, experiential learning and case studies.

Given the practical skills required by adult teachers, learners on the programmes are exposed to a range of methodologies that they are then encouraged to incorporate back into their own practice.

4.2 Prevailing Problems and Challenges

Teacher education in Ireland for adult literacy tutors in Ireland is reasonably well structured and national programmes are in place to provide a platform for professional development for those working in the sector. These programmes (provided by the WIT/NALA Accreditation Project) are funded by the Irish government department responsible for Education and adult literacy organizers and tutors can participate on the programmes at a very low cost. The programmes are delivered at various locations around Ireland so the programmes are accessible to tutors and organizers.

There are a number of challenges facing teacher education in the adult literacy sector including the lack of permanent positions in the sector. Although teacher education programmes are available in Ireland, the jobs in the sector are currently part-time and offer no opportunity for career development for adult literacy tutors.

There is no recognized national qualification for adult literacy tutors. The WIT/NALA programmes are recognized by the Department of Education and Science for Adult Literacy Organisers for the purposes of appointment into permanent positions however given that there are no permanent positions for adult literacy tutors there is no general recognition of qualifications in the area.

At present participation on the programmes provided by WIT consists mainly of part-time adult literacy tutors. Recent estimates¹⁹ of the number of people working in the adult literacy sector are 1,500 paid part-time tutors and 3,000 volunteers. Volunteers for the most part are not funded to participate on the programmes and for some part-time literacy tutors participating on the programme means giving up paid work since they are not paid while attending class. This can act as a barrier to participation on the programme for some tutors.

¹⁹ National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland 2006

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Ireland has a national policy relating to adult literacy and funding and programmes are in place to address the national adult literacy issue. The Irish government in their most recent National Development Plan²⁰ has identified the area of adult literacy as the single most important issue in adult education in Ireland today. Funding has increased substantially over the past ten years and a formal national adult literacy strategy is in place.

Adults with literacy difficulties represent almost 25% of the Irish adult population and only a small number of adults are availing of adult literacy programmes²¹. Although there have been a number of national media campaigns to raise awareness about the issue of adult literacy, the social stigma attached to literacy difficulties remains. The challenge is to ensure adults are given every opportunity to participate in literacy programmes. There are currently a number of national initiatives to encourage greater participation on programmes including a Workplace Literacy Programme designed for those in the workforce, a Family Literacy initiative, to bring literacy into the home and Intensive Literacy Programmes for current literacy learners who want to participate in an accelerated learning experience.

There are a number of qualifications available to those working in the adult literacy sector. The WIT/NALA Accreditation project is funded by the Department of Education and Science and designs and delivers programmes nationwide. There are programmes available up to Honours Bachelors Degree level designed specifically to address the skills and competences required by those working with adult literacy learners. These programmes are based on best practice in the adult literacy and broader adult basic education field. While the existence of a national adult literacy strategy and programmes are undoubtedly a positive development in Ireland there are a number of important issues relating to teacher education that remain to be addressed at a national level. The lack of permanent positions or recognition of the role of the adult literacy tutor means that the adult literacy service still sits outside the formal education system and there are few career prospects for those interested in working in adult literacy. The status of the adult literacy tutor needs to be on a par with second and primary level teachers if the sector is to be properly staffed by professionally trained adult educators. This remains a critical issue for those working in adult literacy.

While funding streams have increased substantially, there is a need for continued increased funding to ensure the national adult literacy programmes are accessible by all adults with literacy difficulties. Funding for work based, community and ICT based initiatives must reflect the needs of the adult literacy learner. Given the low levels of funding available in the third level sector in Ireland traditionally for research into adult literacy, there is a lack of evidence-based research on the issue. There are a small number of academics researching the area in Ireland and for national policy to reflect the true needs of those with literacy difficulties increased funding for research needs be made available.

Full participation in society cannot be achieved by almost 25% of all adults in Ireland today. The issue of adult literacy remains critical and continues to prevent a large proportion of the population from fully engaging in society.

Adult Literacy and teacher education remain extremely important in terms of Irelands future development as a knowledge economy. The Expert Future Skills Group say that 500,000 people in the workforce in Ireland needs to receive education and training to bring them up to the next level on the National Framework of Qualifications in Ireland. This figure represents a large proportion of the adult workforce who have low levels of educational attainment and

²⁰ Government of Ireland National Development Plan 2007-2013 (2007) Dublin Stationery Office

²¹ Department of Education and Science, VEC Adult Literacy Return Figures, 2005 Unpublished

includes those with low levels of literacy. This report emphasized the need to address this large proportion of the population in need of support and requiring assistance with literacy difficulties.

In conclusion, large numbers of adults in Ireland continue to have literacy difficulties. Although there is now a national adult literacy strategy and associated support programmes in place, it is vital that the issue of adult literacy remains to the forefront of national policy. It is imperative that structures supporting those working in the sector are put in place to enable the long-term success of initiatives supporting the adult literacy problem. A professional, trained workforce in the adult literacy sector will be pivotal to the success of the national adult literacy strategy.

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- www.nuim.ie
- www.ucd.ie
- www.wit.ie

7 Appendix 1

Principle Providers of Adult Literacy Programmes in Ireland

Adult Literacy Schemes (approximately 126 in total), Vocational Education Committee (nationwide)
 Adult Basic Education Service, Vocational Education Committee (nationwide)
 Adult Learning Centres, Vocational Education Committees
 Irish Prison Education Services
 Senior Travellers Training Centres
 Youthreach
 Community based groups
 Irish Trade Union Trust
 Centres for the Unemployed
 Post Leaving Certificate Courses
 National Training and Development Institute
 Rehab Centres

8 Appendix 2

Main Providers of Third level qualifications for practitioners in the adult literacy sector

Dublin City University
 National University of Ireland, Maynooth
 University College Dublin
 University College Cork
 University College Galway
 Waterford Institute of Technology