

Distance Literacy: filling the gaps in a time of recession

An Evaluation of NALA's Distance
Learning Service in 2012 Final Report

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in 2012

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National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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NALA Foreword

By Inez Bailey, Director of The National Adult Literacy Agency

For over a decade NALA has been concerned with bringing learning opportunities closer to adults with literacy and numeracy needs. As part of this work we have used technology to overcome barriers to participation in learning through the creation of a Distance Learning Service, initially using the media of television and radio and more recently the internet. This work has been pioneering and as result often challenging and at times contentious. It is why an evaluation of the work and its outcomes from the principal beneficiaries is so necessary.



This evaluation sets out the context of adult literacy work in which NALA and the Distance Learning Service (DLS) operates. What this tells us is that there is compelling international and national evidence for the use and promotion of distance learning for adult learners. The report then outlines the impact of using the DLS according to a sample of its beneficiaries. In addition to their specific and detailed accounts of what it has meant to them in terms of their family, career and education progression, there is also the quality standard that accreditation offers for those who follow that path.

I would like to thank the Distance Learning Team and all the staff in NALA who have worked on this project, as well as our key stakeholders: learner representatives, members, IVEA, AEOA, ALOA, and particularly the Further Education section of the Department of Education and Skills who fund this work.

I very much hope providers, practitioners, learners and researchers will read this report and take inspiration from it, especially those who strive for better adult learning opportunities for those to have benefitted least from the education and training system and our perhaps most vulnerable in Irish society today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Inez Bailey', written over a horizontal line.

Inez Bailey

Director, National Adult Literacy Agency

Acknowledgements

In the five months that it has taken to complete this evaluation we have carried out in-depth interviews with many learners and staff involved in the National Adult Literacy Agency's (NALA) Distance Learning Service (DLS). We have benefitted from their honesty, commitment and enthusiasm and recognise and appreciate the expertise they have shared with us.

Literacy remains a challenging field of adult education where only a small fraction of those in need of learning options are engaged in provision. In the context of a severe economic recession the drive to present new learning solutions takes on an added urgency as a way of accessing and protecting employment. NALA's DLS is making a pioneering contribution to this quest for new approaches to literacy learning in an ever-changing economic and technological context.

We hope this report does justice to the ideas and recommendations of distance learners and staff and offers some contribution to ensuring the provision of adult literacy in Ireland continues to become more and more effective.

Maggie Feeley and Ann Hegarty

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	List of acronyms
ALOA	Adult Literacy Organisers' Association
CAQDA	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DL	Distance Learning
DLS	Distance Learning Service
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
ET2020	Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training
FET	Further Education and Training
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
LMAF	Labour Market Activation Fund
LMETF	Labour Market Education and Training Fund
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NDA	National Disability Authority
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ORF	Output Related Funding
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
SOLAS	Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

Main Messages

- In 2012, NALA's Distance Learning (DL) supported 609 learners through online and telephone tutoring. This evaluation found a high level of satisfaction with the service that supported people to improve literacy, numeracy and IT skills to fulfil goals related to work, family and self-esteem.
- DL attracted people who wanted to fill skills gaps that were highlighted by the economic recession. Many had lost jobs, particularly in construction-related employment; some felt vulnerable in their work because of anxieties about their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills; others wanted to be in a more competitive position to apply for new jobs. Generally, distance learners wanted the additional sense of wellbeing and security that improved basic skills gave them.
- DL contributed to national and EU policy in that it allowed adults to incrementally increase their core skills and gain recognised accreditation for their learning.
- NALA's DL provision has gained major international recognition as an exemplary form of 'high quality, easily accessible and equitable adult learning' (CEC, 2012: 5).¹
- Distance learners told us that the flexibility of DL matched the demands of their busy lives. They could arrange a telephone lesson to fit with shift work, childcare and other training courses. The individualisation of DL meant learners were able to move at their own pace and this was associated with more rapid achievement of learning goals.
- The stigma attached to unmet literacy needs persists and the privacy and confidentiality provided by DL was important for some users. They noted that as they began to achieve their learning goals, the element of secrecy became less important and many progressed into group

¹ The TV series 'Written Off' was one of 16 projects showcased in the EU best practice guide for improving participation in and increasing awareness of adult learning:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2012/adult_en.pdf

learning situations. DL provided a stepping-stone into other forms of learning.

- Speakers of English as a second language found that DL helped them to build confidence in spoken and written language, allowed them greater autonomy and eased their integration into the school and local community. This also benefitted their children.
- NALA's website www.writeon.ie was used by independent, telephone and blended learners from other forms of provision. It allowed people to improve basic traditional skills of literacy and numeracy at the same time as developing new digital literacies. Many learners enthusiastically welcomed the fact that www.writeon.ie provided accessibility to accreditation at FETAC Level 2 and 3. Technology was both a means and an end in terms of filling a skills gap.
- DL structures and tutoring were described as efficient, welcoming, encouraging and 'unlike school'. The system of induction and initial assessment helped establish clear learning goals and aided retention. The model of distance tutoring developed in DL is innovative and effective in terms of cost and time and should be further analysed and shared with others in the field.

Recommendations

1. A method of tracking and accounting for referrals through NALA Freephone to VEC literacy provision should be agreed.
2. Awareness and explication of NALA's distance learning should be extended using media and other available sources of publicity.
3. The packs sent to DL learners should contain materials matched to specific needs and interests, including maths and ICTs. Items should be recorded to avoid duplication in future.
4. Ways that DL learners can meet one another occasionally should be explored and facilitated.

5. The innovative DL model should be analysed, written up and shared with others working in the field.
6. A study into the pace of literacy learning made possible by DL and blended learning should be given consideration.
7. Ways of extending DL to other specific audiences should be explored. These may include the Deaf community, those with mobility issues, members of the Carers' Association, lone parent groups, refugee and asylum seekers and immigrant advocacy groups.
8. www.writeon.ie content might be refreshed/repackaged to meet the needs of beginner ESOL users. This could include cultural material; vocabulary specific to a range of contexts: the school, health, shopping etc; exemplar conversations 'spoken slowly' and information about housing and employment rights. The data revealed an interest in Level 1 accreditation as well as language development at an introductory level for those whose mother tongue is written in a different alphabet and uses diverse sound patterns.
9. Other recommendations from learners to expand www.writeon.ie include: a 'ladder' specific to punctuation; audio books; more youtube and video links; video sessions on maths; resources.writeon.ie should be organised in a more user-friendly way and made more widely available as a repository of resources for tutors and independent learners.
10. All DL learners should be introduced to www.writeon.ie as a source of additional skills practice and/or accreditation of skills at Level 2 and 3. Currently, many DL learners do not use writeon for learning or accreditation for a variety of reasons. Those without home Internet should be directed to their local library or nearest free Internet point.
11. DL should supplement, rather than take the place, of FET responsibilities to integrate literacy and numeracy into courses and provide learning support for all students.

12. Future DL tutor training should include a focus on digital literacies and how telephone and online tutoring can exploit digital media to the full. In particular learners want to use social networking opportunities and literacy chat rooms but lack the confidence to do so. Tutors need to support this as it connects learners and provides opportunities for literacies in practice.

13. DLS staff respond rapidly and innovatively to changing demands of policy and new literacies. They therefore need time for reflection, review and strategic dialogue so that DL systems and structures keep pace with development.

Part 1. Introduction – Distance literacy in a time of recession

In a time of recession when existing jobs become more uncertain and new positions are more competitive, the value of education and accreditation increases. Not surprisingly, those with literacy learning gaps become more conscious of them and more motivated to fill them. At the same time, old fears about learning remain stubbornly in place and so choices about where and how to learn take on added importance. Recent NALA research highlights that ‘different adult learning settings appear to attract different groups of learners’ and understanding these diverse aspects of provision is vital to raising the national literacy profile’ (NALA, 2012a: 5). In this study, we found that distance learning plays a significant role in filling a whole host of gaps, often to do with work, for those who returned to learn some aspect of literacy in 2012.

The report that follows gives details of the views and opinions of learners and staff who have been part of NALA’s Distance Learning Service (DLS) during the year 2012. We outline the manner and the extent to which the service has supported learners in achieving their goals as well as looking at ways that it might be changed and developed.

Distance Learning

DLS has been an important aspect of NALA’s work since 2000 when the Agency first began to use media and technology to attract more adult literacy learners. Alongside a variety of television programmes aimed at raising awareness and reducing fears about becoming a literacy learner, NALA has had a form of telephone tutoring service in place that provided answers to individual learning challenges (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010a). In 2007, the role of Freephone operator and telephone tutor became separate and a unique system of telephone, postal and online tutoring began to take shape. NALA’s recently updated guidelines for good literacy practice explains how DL works:

The DLS uses experienced home-based tutors to support students over the telephone, through the postal service and online. Tutors phone students at prearranged times to suit the students’ needs, typically in the evenings. NALA’s DLS also offers accreditation options to interested students. *NALA (2012b: 9)*

Today, as technology changes rapidly, the process of improving literacy skills includes many more options than in the past and the DLS remains at the forefront of innovation in literacy learning. Across the EU and beyond, NALA's DL is acclaimed as a creative and ground-breaking form of adult learning and literacy practice. DL has been a core element in international recognition for NALA's provision of exemplary 'high quality, easily accessible and equitable adult learning' (Commission of the European Communities (CEC), 2012: 5). The TV series 'Written Off' was selected as one of only sixteen projects from across the EU-27 that demonstrated a model form of adult learning. Provision of one-to-one distance tutoring and the availability of accreditation were singled out as special features of innovative adult learning practice. Praise for DL also comes from a number of EU organisations, UNESCO and the National Research and Development Council in the UK.² NALA's DLS is repeatedly asked to speak about innovative distance and online learning approaches to audiences in Europe and as far away as Brazil.

Despite this continuous change and considerable recognition, the DLS ethos remains constant as one that is learner-centred and dedicated to making free, quality literacy learning experiences available to those who want them.

Learning Options

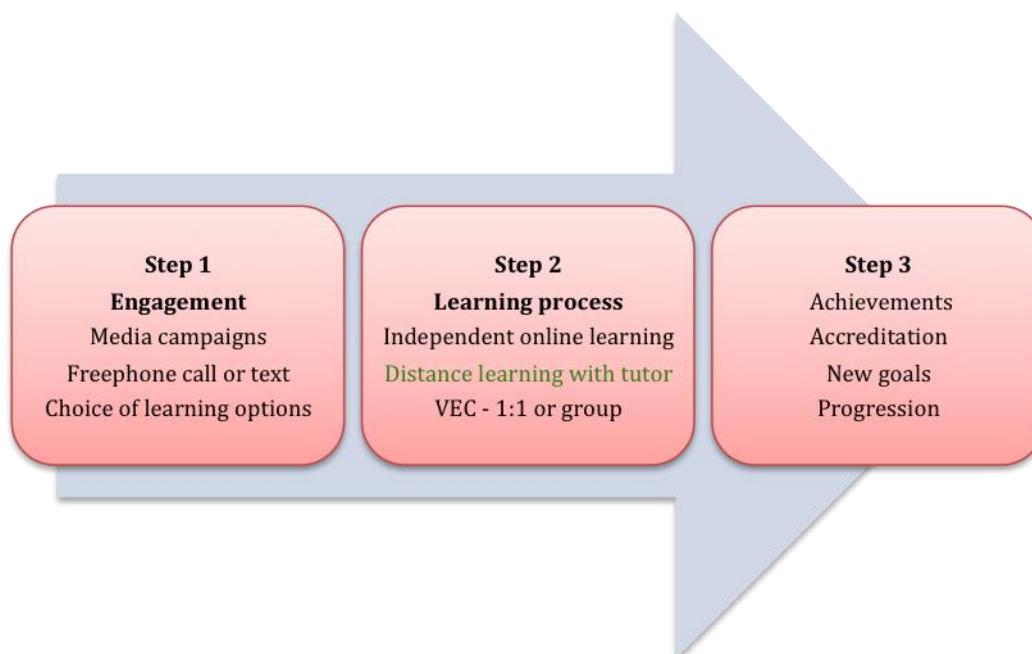
The main steps in the process of adult literacy learning are outlined in Figure 1 below. Through a range of awareness-raising campaigns, new learners are offered the option of phoning or texting NALA's Freephone number³. An operator will then speak to (or call back) each caller and outline the options for learning. These include information and referral on to 1:1 or group learning in local Vocational Education Committee (VEC) programmes. While there is no current arrangement between the VECs and NALA to monitor and account for the outcome of these referrals, NALA does regular scheduled callbacks to check up on learners who were referred to other services.

² <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/news/19669.aspx>; NRDC Reflect issues 12 and 13 - <http://www.nrdc.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=951>

<http://www.unesco.org/ui/litbase/?menu=15&country=IE&programme=75>

³ NALA's Freephone number is 1800 20 20 65

Figure 1: *Main steps in adult literacy engagement through NALA*



Another choice for Freephone callers is independent learning using the DLS online learning resource www.writeon.ie. This offers the chance to learn and gain accreditation and recognition of prior learning at Levels 2 and 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland. Learners may also choose not to apply for accreditation and simply use the site to practice and improve their skills in literacy, numeracy, computer skills and a host of other topics. At the end of 2012, www.writeon.ie had 26,768 current learning accounts. This represented an increase of 9,000 since 2011, which is a significant rise given the difficulties associated with attracting learners to traditional literacy provision. NALA's Annual Report for 2012 recorded 14,183 different learners who visited the www.writeon.ie website for an average of 22 minutes each, resulting in a total of almost 56,000 visits during 2012. www.writeon.ie is also available to VEC and other centre-based learners as well those who opt for distance learning with tutor support. An evaluation of www.writeon.ie in 2010 found that this blended approach to literacy produced high levels of learner satisfaction (Hegarty and Feeley, 2011).

Those who require tutor support but are not yet ready or free to attend face-to-face provision may select a distance learning (DL) option. DL matches learners with a telephone tutor who will call them at least once a week and provide a programme of individualised learning. Calls last on average thirty minutes. Freephone callers receive printed and audio-visual materials that help them understand the ethos and culture of literacy learning and may provide a taster of the resources on offer. NALA DLS is involved in the awareness-raising media campaigns, Freephone operator service, the distance learning tutoring and the www.writeon.ie website. All these elements form an important part of the alternative to literacy learning for those who are unable or unwilling to attend their local VEC service.

The verification of online FETAC accreditation is an expanding part of DLS work as more and more independent, DL and blended learners complete accredited courses using www.writeon.ie. Online, automated verification removes a considerable burden of administration from adult learning centres yet importantly still allows them to count learner outcomes within their numerical returns to the DES.

Although all these elements of engagement mentioned above arise in the data, it is the DL, tutor-supported learning option that forms the focus of this evaluation.

Evaluation Goals

Through a process of competitive tendering, NALA commissioned this evaluation of their DLS in the year 2012. In particular the study aimed to explore emerging trends and preferences in the provision of DL including delivery options, accreditation and progression routes. The specific preference for learning literacy, at a distance from other learners, with the support of a telephone tutor, was the primary area of empirical investigation. The second part of this report examines the findings of the study in detail.

In addition to reviewing the achievements and challenges for DLS in 2012 the evaluation outlined here provides evidence-based recommendations for the future development of DLS. All these findings and suggestions are based on

detailed and in-depth consultation with learners, DLS staff and other stakeholders.

Methodology, Evaluation Design and Process

The NALA DLS evaluation was primarily qualitative although numerical data are used and discussed where relevant. Underpinned by a feminist, egalitarian methodological approach we endeavoured to really listen to and value the voice and experiences of participants and to accurately represent their views (Lynch, 1999; Lynch and O’Neill, 1994). The empirical phase gathered information about the uses and impacts of DL on the user group supported by the perspective of NALA staff and tutors. Such triangulation is recognised as a powerful means of verifying the validity of findings in qualitative studies. Triangulation was originally a navigational technique used by sailors to pinpoint a particular destination and is used here to describe the collection of data from a range of perspectives to enhance the reliability of findings (Cohen et al, 2000; Denzin, 1997).

The evaluation of DLS 2012 included ninety-one people, some of whom were consulted on a number of occasions. After an initial consultation with NALA DLS staff, a focus group was held with fourteen Learning Support Workers and Distance Learning Tutors. Semi-structured telephone interviews took place with seventy-three learners and in-depth individualised interviews with DLS staff. These focussed on their particular areas of responsibility and expertise. A telephone interview with the designer of the www.writeon.ie website clarified how DLS compares to others involved in distance literacy in other parts of the world. Finally, the initial research findings were discussed with 4 learners in a feedback focus group where they verified and extended the research data.

Figure 2: *Number and type of evaluation interviews*

Interview type	Interviewee/s
Focus group	NALA DLS staff n=3

Focus group	NALA DL tutors n=14
Semi-structured telephone interviews	DL learners n=73
Semi-structured interviews	DLS staff n=3
Semi-structured interview	Web-designer n=1
Focus group	DL learners n=4

Qualitative research methods, such as one-to-one interviews and focus groups, can provide opportunities for respectful, reciprocal, democratic and empowering dialogue (Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Daly, 2000; Fowler and Mace, 2005). Oakley describes the qualitative approach as the underdog, the alternative, the querulous voice (Oakley, 2000: 29) that seeks to democratise the research process by enabling previously disregarded, overlooked and neglected voices of research participants to be heard. In democratising research, a more egalitarian model emerges and one that often is transformative for participants. This affirms Lather's claim that research can be a form of praxis (Freire, 1972; Lather, 1986).

Creating opportunities for dialogue is at the heart of good qualitative research practice. Mason (2002) asserts that qualitative research seeks to understand the rich multi-layered and textured meanings of events and processes. She identifies four key features: the exchange of dialogue which occurs in qualitative research; the relatively informal style of the exchange; the flexibility of the process which allows for unexpected themes to emerge and finally the co-production of meanings and understandings by the researcher and interviewee during the process of enquiry. These were all key factors in the telephone interviews and focus groups for this study.

Qualitative Telephone Interviews

Learner participants in the research were drawn from NALA's database of distance learners. In all, six hundred and nine people used the DLS in 2012⁴. A sample of eighty participants was purposively chosen from this group to be interviewed by telephone. This sample mirrored the overall number of urban/rural and male/female participants. In all, eighty learners were telephoned and seventy-three took part in telephone interviews. This represents a participation rate of 91%.

In thinking about how to go about research with people who maybe chose distance learning because of its implicit promise of privacy, it was clear that traditional methods of collecting qualitative data might not be appropriate. However, it was fair to assume that possible interviewees would be comfortable and confident in using the telephone as a means of communication.

Telephone interviews are not a common means of collecting qualitative data yet in a research project into visitors and correctional officers' perceptions of visiting county jail inmates, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004), found that data collected from telephone and face-to-face qualitative interviewing was comparable in depth and quality.

The telephone interviews provided rich data about the DL tutoring service.⁵ People provided many verbal cues during interviews through tone of voice, faltering, laughter, and the energy of both response and silence. We learned to assess the level of engagement and strength of feeling through reading these cues. We found that we could take notes without distracting interviewees and that as the telephone relationship developed and interviewees relaxed into the conversation we could return to and explore points made earlier in the discussion. The interview notes were handwritten, direct quotes were noted and the data was subsequently imported into MAXqda for coding and analysis. MAXqda is a Computer Assisted Qualitative data analysis tool or CAQDA and is used to more rigorously manage and

⁴ All data are drawn from NALA's Annual Report for 2012.

⁵ See Telephone interview schedule at Appendix 1

analyse qualitative data. This in turn adds to the assurance of validity and reliability.

Interviewees chose the time and most comfortable, convenient location for the conversations. These lasted from twenty minutes to an hour. This time variation depended on several different factors. Caring responsibilities, work or leisure commitments all influenced the available time. We noted that the degree of change and development that had been experienced by learners as a result of engaging with the DLS also impacted on the level of engagement in reflective and analytical conversation. This was immediate evidence of the impact of the DL process.

Focus Groups

Two separate focus groups with NALA DL tutors and learners were undertaken. The discussion with tutors took place early in the process and established the issues they saw as relevant to the evaluation. The final focus group with learners was used to reflect on the data already gathered. Focus group interviews can provide an opportunity for participants to collectively reflect on their learning and to dynamically learn from one another and produce shared meanings and understandings of events and processes. They can illicit new information that is generated from a collective process that might not be gathered from individual interviews (Cohen et al, 2000). The focus group with learners produced such collaborative learning and considerably enriched the study. All participants received a certificate of participation that recognised their skills.⁶

How the report is organised

In keeping with the ethos of NALA, this evaluation has the needs and voices of learners at its core. Literacy learners have been respected throughout the study as experts in how best to provide literacy learning that works and so it is the words of learners first and foremost that fill the report.

⁶ See copy of Certificate of participation at Appendix 2

There are 4 parts in the report:

Part 1 - Introduction – Distance literacy in a time of recession

Part 2 - Theoretical and policy context for DLS 2012

Part 3 - Evaluation findings

Part 4 – Recommendations

Part 2. The theoretical and policy context for DLS 2012

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was established in 1980 as a membership organisation 'to act as a coordinating body for all involved in adult literacy work, to raise awareness and to lobby for funding and recognition' (www.nala.ie). Since then, NALA has been advocating on behalf of those with unmet, new or changing literacy needs in their personal, social or working life.

Literacy - not just reading and writing

NALA adopts a socially situated view of literacy that emphasises the different literacies that are deployed in diverse social contexts.

Literacy involves: listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy, and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. But it includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change. (NALA, 2010a)

Although it is an important step towards educational equality, adult literacy is not just about getting a firm grasp on the basics of speaking, reading, writing, spelling and maths. The meaning and focus of literacy shift according to the requirements of particular social groups and social settings. The New Literacy Studies movement have shown us that language and literacy is integrated throughout society: home and family; school and college; paid and unpaid work; community activity; politics; religion; the media; leisure and all the ways in which we interact with each other and our world (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000). As we have begun to recognise the pervasiveness of literacy in our lives this means that literacy work has become correspondingly more and more diverse. For example, as Ireland becomes more culturally diverse there are those who seek to learn and accredit their capabilities in English as a second language (ESOL). ESOL learners now account for 21% of all adult literacy learners and NALA is currently undertaking a blended learning evaluation project with ESOL learners exploring the use of www.writeon.ie as

a part of traditional face to face centre based tuition (<http://www.nala.ie/literacy/current-nala-research/blended-learning>).

In the interests of widening access to information and increasing markets, businesses, public and voluntary organisations have become more aware of their effective use of spoken and written language. In increasing numbers they seek NALA's advice and support in becoming more efficient through the use of Plain English. So we can see that adult literacy has ceased to be solely a concern of those who missed out on primary schooling but rather literacy work expands and evolves to match the changing demands of a globalised communication age.

New literacy skills are also made necessary by the rapid expansion of the means of technological information exchange. As a result of dynamic changes in electronic means of connectivity, irrespective of our basic literacy skills, literacy practitioners and learners alike are all repeatedly cast in the role of 'new learner' of some developing form of communications.

Multimodality

Today's definitions of literacy vary in scope and in the dimensions that they include in the concept of literacy. Some focus on limited mechanistic definitions of the traditional components of language, reading, writing and sometimes maths. Others prefer to speak of literacies, in the plural. These perspectives tend to be more inclusive and to include vernacular as well as elite uses of language and the contexts in which they are used. Similarly they recognise how new technologies have changed and expanded the concept of what it is to be literate in the multimodal, digital information age (Kress, 2010; Kress and Street, 2006; Lankshear, 1997; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). The DLS reflects a responsiveness to this shifting conception of literacy that takes account of the needs that arise and the potential made possible by the digital age.

Blended Learning

The divide between online and face-to-face learning is not always absolute and the amalgamation of various approaches to literacy has been found to be very effective (Hegarty and Feeley, 2011; NALA, 2011a). Blended learning is so called for its use of different media and approaches to facilitating learners' diverse needs and learning styles. Theories of Multiple Intelligences have clarified the need for wide-ranging ways to scaffold learning so that the strengths and propensities of all students are maximised (Gardner, 1993; 1999; Sternberg, 1998). Whilst clearly meeting this need, literacy learning that combines face-to-face and online learning also satisfies the needs of those who want to learn about ICTs as well as text and numbers. It extends the reach of learning and allows learners to work independently at a pace and time that fits busy adult lives. Furthermore, NALA's www.writeon.ie is unique in the fact that it provides free, automated accreditation at FETAC Level 2 and 3 to those most in need of updating and adding to their basic skills. Both the National Skills Strategy (EGFSN, 2007) and the goals agreed in ET2020 (CEC, 2010) are well served by this approach (NALA, 2011b).

The shift towards technological literacies changes not only what is included in 'literacy' but also the learning relationship. In blended learning, the dynamic between tutor and learner has shifted in that literacy learners may be equally adept with new technologies as are their tutors. The tutor may guide and intervene to facilitate literacy acquisition and understanding while at the same time learners become more autonomous in their online practice of new skills (Askov et al, 2003; Hegarty and Feeley, 2011; Lankshear, 1997; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003; Street and Lefstein, 2007).

In recessionary times, the role of literacy in employment, earnings and wider economic recovery, takes on added urgency (NALA/ESRI 2012c; NALA/ESRI, 2012d). Studies in the UK have been used to show the negative impact of unmet literacy and numeracy skills on productivity and justify more coercive tactics in promoting participation and accreditation (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). Undoubtedly, improving basic skills can help individuals with literacy issues gain employment or feel more secure and confident in an existing job; however, from a critical perspective, it is the voluntary engagement and

learner-centred nature of the provision that is central to the preservation of a respectful, rights-based approach to adult learning (Ibid; Hilliard, 2011).

EU Perspectives

Concerns about 77 million adults in the EU with literacy and numeracy needs, has led to calls for greater cooperation in this area of education. Since 2009, the *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training* has been in place. This forms the basis for national policy development as well as EU cooperation. The goal is to develop the skills that will encourage economic recovery while at the same time addressing persistent social and educational disadvantage. Known as ET2020, the strategy encompasses all sectors of education from early childhood to adult education and is focused on the development of 'key competencies'. There are 8 core competencies outlined in the EU strategy:

- 1) Communication in the mother tongue (including reading, writing and speaking with confidence);
- 2) Communication in foreign languages;
- 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- 4) Digital competence;
- 5) Learning to learn;
- 6) Social and civic competences;
- 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- 8) Cultural awareness and expression. (CEC, 2010: 5)

At the core of basic educational development across the EU is the recognition of the centrality of digital literacies and the use of new technologies:

As ICT use becomes more pervasive in people's lives, these issues should be explicitly addressed in teaching and learning. The potential of new technologies, for enhancing innovation and creativity, new partnerships and for personalising learning, needs to be better exploited. (Ibid: 7)

As part of the implementation of ET2020, the strategy includes recognition of the key role of educators and recommends that they have access to the necessary training to update their level of skills to match the demands of a new educational era. This highlights the universal need for the acquisition of new literacies that has become a central feature of the digital age.

In a recent submission to the EU Commission High Level Expert Group on Literacy, NALA articulated the growing recognition that literacy needs are not the preserve of a particular section of society. Skills gaps exist for many even those who successfully completed national qualifications.

If a person needs to develop confidence and skill in particular aspects of literacy, it does not mean that they have difficulty with all of the basics. Equally, if a person has a qualification, it does not always mean that they have high levels of literacy. Some will have left school confident about their numeracy and reading skills but find that changes in their workplace and everyday life make their skills inadequate as the literacy demanded by society is in constant flux. Many adults who have not practised their literacy for a number of years lose confidence and skills. (NALA, 2011b: 3)

This changing landscape of literacy learners that is prompted by rapid technological development also has digital literacy as its subject matter and means of delivery. It is both the means and the end. Whichever way we turn now in terms of literacy, some digital device is flashing on the horizon and this takes on increased importance as the concentration on economic recovery focuses attention on competitiveness and maximising resources (Street, 2012).

Literacy in a Time of Recession

Since 2008, Ireland has been immersed in a pervasive economic recession that is taking place against the volatile backdrop of the wider Euro Crisis. Throughout this period, recession-related perspectives have dominated all areas of Irish society including the adult literacy sector. This is not surprising given that the recession has meant a sharp rise to over 14% in the proportion of the population that is unemployed (CSO, 2011). The economic crisis has led to a starkly increased number of people leaving Ireland to take up work opportunities elsewhere in the world. At the same time, job scarcity at home has led to heightened competition for any emerging vacancies and increased the pressure on applicants to have accredited skills if they are to participate in the recruitment process. The National Skills Bulletin (Forfás, 2012) cites that the long-term unemployment rate reached 8.6% in Quarter 4, 2011, up from 7.6% observed a year previously. This translated into approximately 182,000

persons seeking work for 12 months and longer. The National Skills Strategy also cites a sizeable proportion of the potential workforce with at best Junior Certificate (21%) or Leaving Certificate (40%).

These major changes in Irish society and in the means we use to communicate with each other have all impacted on the work of NALA and on the way we construe literacy.

Expanding Literacy Provision

An inevitable overlap exists between those with literacy issues and those who are recently long-term unemployed. An international adult literacy study (IALS) in the latter part of the last century showed that over a quarter of Irish adults struggle with the basic literacy demands of daily life, in the home and family as well as in wider community and workplace settings (Morgan et al, 1997). The IALS was the catalyst for increased resources and activity in the adult literacy field and greater numbers of people now engage in adult literacy learning than ever before.

The point has been made that in order that all aspects of adult learning become more efficient and more accountable, greater attention needs to be paid to the collection of data about both engagement and outcomes. The latter particularly needs to be understood in terms of the time needed for long-term, disengaged, literacy learners to produce measureable outcomes (NALA, 2011b)

NALA works closely with the VECs in their design and delivery of literacy programmes across the country. Evidence suggests that the majority of mainstream adult literacy learners are under 45 years of age, more likely than not to be unemployed and female/male in a ratio of 60:40 (DES, 2010). Between 2009 and 2010 there was a substantial increase (11%) in participation with almost 7,500 new learners joining classes. Indeed, throughout the past decade, the overall trend in participation has seen more than a 200% increase, rising from 17,150 in 2000 to 54,741 in 2010. Most recent evidence suggests that 56,797 people, an annual increase of 4% since 2010, attended adult literacy provision in 2011 (NALA, 2012e). Figures for

VEC provision in 2012 are not yet available but during that period DLS saw an increase of 9000 in the number of people setting up online learning accounts. This suggests that interest in literacy provision continues to be strong and that technology is playing an increasing role in serving the needs of that market (NALA, 2013).

Despite these impressive rises in engagement, a majority of those (approx 90%) with unmet literacy needs still do not participate in adult learning opportunities. Consequently, from a social justice as well as a productivity perspective, there is an ongoing imperative to make engagement with adult literacy provision more attractive and accessible.

Working in partnership, the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA) and NALA have outlined 7 priorities for adult literacy provision in the new Further Education and Training (FET) sector. These include the development of strategies in the new Education and Training Boards (ETBs) for the enhancement of literacy and digital skills through the use of ICT, blended learning and emerging technologies (IVEA, 2012).

PIACC - Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

Sixteen years after the publication of IALS, the current proportion of the adult population with unmet literacy issues will only be clarified when the results of the most recent international study are published by the CSO in October 2013. The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) builds on the areas covered by IALS to include an additional focus on literacy in the workplace and 'problem solving in technology rich environments' (OECD, 2010). This report will be published early in October 2013 and will certainly have enormous impact on adult literacy discourse and funding in the following years. What can be said with certainty is that innovative approaches to adult literacy will continue to be essential features of the adult learning agenda for the foreseeable future.

New Local Education Training Boards

With the passing into legislation of the proposed Education and Training Boards Bill 2012 and the Further Education and Training Bill 2013, the reformed FET sector will be finally established. SOLAS (Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanunaigh agus Scileanna) will become the coordinating body for FET provided through 16 new ETBs encompassing the former roles of FÁS and 33 VECs. The publication of draft legislation to enact the reforms to the sector prompted responses that sought to strengthen learner representation on the new bodies and ensure that adult literacy was strategically prioritised (IVEA, 2012; NALA, 2012f).

NALA's comprehensive submission to the SOLAS consultation process outlined how adult literacy and numeracy might be given increased value, become more effective, equitable and accountable. Reiterating previous advice from a number of bodies, NALA called for a cohesive approach to all forms of literacy across sectors, ideally articulated within a comprehensive adult literacy strategy (IVEA, 2012; NALA, 2012f; NESF, 2009). This would sit alongside the strategy published in relation to school-aged literacy, which included adults only in their role as parents and as family literacy workers (DES, 2011).

Specifically in relation to DL, NALA suggested that the 'existing FET infrastructure should be expanded through the use of distance, self-directed and blended learning provision' (NALA, 2012f: 4); that 'Service Level Agreements should require providers to build comprehensive blended learning approaches into programmes, such as www.writeon.ie' (Ibid: 7); that SOLAS should 'develop a policy on the use of technology and blended learning in FET and prioritise funding to providers that build technology and comprehensive blended learning approaches into programmes' (Ibid 9). In influencing the future of literacy provision in this way, NALA reflects the interests of learners in new technological literacies as well as European policy enshrined in ET2020 (Hegarty and Feeley, 2011; NALA, 2012f; CEC, 2010)

The Labour Market Activation Fund (LMAF)

The LMAF was a distance learning initiative jointly funded by the DES and the European Social Fund (ESF). NALA's innovative project - the Write on 4 Work programme - was a twelve-month project that began in October 2010 and aimed to engage 500 adults, in receipt of a jobseeker's payment for longer than three months, who wished to improve their basic skills and gain accreditation at FETAC Level 3. The NALA www.writeon.ie website was the core learning and accreditation platform. Learners were recruited through an extensive publicity drive using new and existing networks. In addition to the opportunity to gain accreditation they were offered the incentive of a modest financial reward on completion of the accreditation. The DL learning options were flexible and included independent online learning, telephone tutor support and additional advice around CV and interview preparation.

Experience of the LMAF project has allowed useful recommendations to be made to the new FET structures (NALA, 2012g) in relation to data collection and accountability. It has also contributed significant experiential learning about the usefulness of DL, in engaging and providing flexible delivery options to those wishing to raise their basic skills level whilst at the same time looking for work.

The Labour Market Education and Training Fund (LMETF) - Momentum

In December 2012 the Momentum programme was launched as part of the measures supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Labour Market Education and Training Fund (LMETF). Training, work experience and careers advice will be made available to 6,500 long-term unemployed people with a view to matching the skills needs of employers and reducing the numbers of those in unemployment. The programme will be administered through FÁS/SOLAS in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills and will adhere to a model of output related funding (ORF) where providers will gain elements of funding in relation to delivery on anticipated targets in relation to retention, accreditation and employment.

Building on other successful work-related pilot projects, the NALA Distance Learning team will cooperate with Dun Laoghaire and Rathdown, Southside Partnership and Local Employment Service to provide 'Write On - Personal Pathways to Work'. Over 32 weeks, 60 unemployed people under 25 will be recruited and individually supported to achieve accreditation at FETAC Level 3. This will happen through a blended approach combining on-line learning and telephone tutoring. Participants on the NALA project will also receive career advice and support in finding work experience and employment.

This project marks a significant development in the DL portfolio of activities and demonstrates the versatility of DL in responding to diverse learning needs and contexts. It builds on evidence from previous studies about the match between DL and male learning identity, the efficacy of blended learning in simultaneously developing both text and digital literacies and the imperative to raise skills levels for both self-esteem and employment (Hegarty and Feeley, 2011; NALA, 2012c; 2012d). The learning from 'Write On - Personal Pathways to Work' will provide vital pointers for the nature of future work-related basic skills initiatives. In anticipation of the publication of the PIAAC findings, evidence of cost and time effective models of adult literacy intervention will take on much greater importance.

Family Literacy

Literacy is integrated across all aspects of life, all education sectors and all generations. Increasingly, the importance of early years education at home and in childcare provision is acknowledged in giving children a fair start in terms of language and literacy development (Swain et al, 2009; Hegarty and Feeley, 2010b; Carpentieri et al, 2011). The cycle of educational disadvantage that is rooted in wider social inequalities means that even at the very beginning of the schooling process, some children are already irreparably behind others. At the same time, despite some efforts, literacy standards in primary schools have not changed in 30 years and the gap between schools in disadvantaged and more privileged areas is discernible (Department of Education and Skills, 2011; ERC, 2004; Eivers et al, 2005).

The new childhood and youth literacy strategy *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* (DES, 2011) acknowledges the vital role of parents in supporting language and literacy development and the need for parents to be given the know-how to carry out this role. As part of its own response to family literacy learning needs, NALA has launched a new web resource www.helpmykidlearn.ie with support and guidance for doing literacy and number work with children from birth to 12 years of age. In the first 3-month period, 12,500 people visited the site. NALA calls for a multi-sectoral cohesive approach to supporting the adults who impact on children's language and literacy development. They suggest that:

SOLAS should support family literacy programmes for adults through the LETBs, on the basis that schools and adult education providers work with parents, guardians and other family members to support literacy development and to combat educational disadvantage for children and adults. (NALA, 2012f: 9)

Conclusions

As we wait for results of PIAAC and the final shape of the new national FET sector, we can say with certainty that diverse, quality literacy and numeracy provision for Irish adults will be needed well into the future. The majority of those identified in the IALS have not participated in learning provision (NALA, 2012e) and evidence from school-based studies suggest that a considerable number of young people will continue to need literacy support in adulthood (ERC, 2004; Eivers et al, 2005; NESF, 2009; Perkins et al, 2010). Despite increasing demands on literacy, the challenges to engage adults in provision persist (Bailey and Coleman, 1998). Social stigma, gendered learning identities and the pressures of adult life are just some of the impediments to going back to learning (Goffman, 1963; 1990; Mc Givney, 2001; Hegarty and Feeley, 2011). A varied range of provision increases the possibility of finding a match for adult learners and distance and online learning can contribute innovatively to the portfolio of choices.

This evaluation of DLS 2012 is carried out against the contextual backdrop outlined here in Part 2. Part 3 provides evidence from distance literacy

learners about the extent to which DL can fill the gaps in literacy provision for particular learners.

Part 3. Findings – Introduction

This part of the report presents the findings from the empirical aspect of the evaluation of DLS in 2012. We focussed the enquiry around the chronological process involved in DL and have organised the findings around 4 headings:

- 1 Engaging with learning
- 2 The DL process
- 3 Outcomes and progression
- 4 DL systems and structures

In addition to the theoretical and policy context described in Part 2, we begin by setting NALA's DL provision within the overall picture of those who made contact through the Freephone number. In 2012 there were over 5,500 calls to the Freephone and an additional 1,056 people free-texted the word 'learn' and received a call back from NALA Freephone operators. When information about learning choices was given to callers, a little over 9% (n=609) of people chose to learn with a telephone tutor or online. Some callers require only information; however, it is worth noting that as yet there is no mechanism agreed between NALA and the VECs to follow up on those who choose to learn face-to-face in local community-based programmes.

Figure 2: *Freephone contacts in 2012*⁷

	Free texts 2012	Freephone Calls - 2012
January	226	1199
February	102	505
March	27	391
April	49	282
May	188	584
June	73	308
July	41	268
August	27	215
September	242	850

⁷ All figures provided by NALA from two data collections systems used in 2012

October	34	526
November	39	355
December	11	185
Totals	1059	5668

Figure 3 provides an overview of the evaluation sample at a glance. Because of the switchover in NALA data collection systems during 2012, it was not possible to match the sample accurately to the overall database. Nevertheless we have sampled for gender, age and location as well as including a number of ESOL, independent and Centre learners.⁸

Figure 3: *DLS 2012 – Research sample at a glance*

Male: 45 (56%) Female: 35 (44%) Total: 80 (100%)
Rural male: 31 (69%); Rural female: 18 (53%)
Urban male: 14 (31%); Urban female: 16 (47%)
Employed male: 24 (53%); Employed female 16 (47%)
Unemployed male: 21 (47%) Unemployed female 18 (53%)
Average age of learners: 42 years
Average age of male learners: 43 years (Age spread: 21 years - 73 years)
Average age of female learners: 42 years (Age spread: 23 years – 65 years)
Percentage known to be early school leavers: 53%
Percentage of learners with Internet access: 74%
Percentage who used www.writeon.ie : 44%
Percentage of sample contacted: 91%
Percentage satisfied with DL services: 76%
Percentage for whom DL did not suit: 24% (As a learning style - 10%; because of life issues – 14%)
Motivation/s of DL learners: Work – 55%; family - 25%; self-esteem – 38%
Primary area/s of interest (and/or): Language - 11%; literacy - 81%; maths – 12%; ICT – 14%

⁸ See Appendix 3 for full details of the research sample

In total we managed to contact 91% (n=73) of the sample, which is a very satisfactory rate of engagement. The data around which the findings are presented come from these core interviews with learners, the focus groups and other interviews outlined in the methods section above. Research participants' words are cited frequently to authentically account for their views.

Findings about Engaging with Learning

Evaluation participants listed a now well-known range of reasons for missing out on literacy and numeracy at school. This included being disadvantaged in terms of resources, mis-recognition of a learning difficulty/disability, interrupted schooling to meet family care demands or to work in a family farm. School had been an inhospitable place for many. Across generations, economic reasons were given for early school leaving, lack of accreditation and gaps in basic skills. A number of people who had achieved the Leaving Certificate were disappointed that they had been allowed a level of accreditation that belied their poor literacy and numeracy skills. All in all, there were fewer people who had reading difficulties and more who wanted to fill gaps in writing, spelling and number skills and learn to use computers.

The motivation for all to come back to learning in 2012 was work, family, self-esteem or some combination of those three factors.

Motivating Factor: Work

We heard from participants that fear of gaps in literacy being revealed in the workplace had grown as demands for written records and reports spread through most sectors. Care Assistants were required to make records on a regular basis throughout their shifts. One factory worker had to complete a questionnaire periodically and lived in dread of it being distributed. Others had been motivated back into learning as literacy events had become a key part of the working day.

My reading and writing is terrible. I am a maintenance technician and now have to write reports at work. I often have to write things in front of people.

Before the system allowed me to take it home and write it up but now it is on the spot and it is terrible pressure.

To begin with I needed certain phrases for work but I have gone way beyond that now and have started doing training in the workplace as well. *Telephone interviewee*

The desire to gain more challenging employment also encouraged some back to learning and they realised that more complex work required higher level literacy skills.

I am a HSE worker and I want a job that suits my skills better so I need to brush up on the basics. I realise that confidence and self-esteem have held me back and I just decided to deal with it. *Telephone interviewee*

One woman in her early 50s, who admitted to having become an addict of online learning, showed the complexity of one person's trajectory back to learning and the resilience needed to hold on to that goal. In this case work operated as an impediment to engagement rather than a motivation.

I come from a very large family of 15. I was sent out to work young; married young. It was a bad marriage and I had to go to work to survive myself and keep the family. So I never could go back to education. I was a cleaner... cleaning houses in the morning and then cleaning schools and colleges in the evening. As the years went on I always said that I would like to get a proper job, as I called it... as opposed to cleaning. I always wanted to go back to learn. I went back once but couldn't keep it up because of work. I did pick a few things up so at least I knew it was a time issue. *Focus group participant*

The economic recession and its impact on work was by far the biggest catalyst for those who engaged with DL in 2012. Many had lost work associated with construction: plumbing, carpentry and kitchen fitting; others had lost employment in retail and in small businesses that folded in the downturn. Many of these, men and women, narrated stories of taking children out of paid childcare and using DL at home to fill gaps in skills so as to be better prepared when work became available. As well as work-related skills, those new to staying at home often wanted more skills to help children with homework and general language and literacy development.

I am an out-of-work builder so the recession is a big factor for me. I'm doing some childcare now at home and it's an opportunity for me to get on top of my writing and spelling. Texting and emails are big things for me. *Telephone interviewee*

I worked in manufacturing for 31 years in the same company. It closed in 2010 because of the recession. I have a small spelling issue and was always poor at maths. Now I need to get it all sorted. *Telephone interviewee*

Quite a number of participants had moved from redundancy to some form of training course where their literacy and numeracy gaps had become apparent. Others continued to work in poorly paid and part-time work and had taken on training as a route to better employment options.

I had my own business and am now doing a course with FÁS; they told me to phone NALA for support with my spellings and I am improving big time.
Telephone interviewee

While others were retraining, those still in work were feeling increasingly vulnerable and motivated to close the skills gaps they had been able to tolerate in a more generous economic climate.

I have worked in retail for 10 years but I am vulnerable now with the recession.
Telephone interviewee

I am a plumber by trade and feel vulnerable now at work because of my spelling.
Telephone interviewee

Things are so bad you wouldn't know what to do to be prepared.
Telephone interviewee

Others had become conscious that accreditation adds greater certainty to the process of insuring against job loss.

I work in health care but my spellings are ropey. The recession means fewer jobs and the need for more certs. I am doing FETAC Level 3 on www.writeon.ie.
Telephone interviewee

A NALA DL staff member confirmed that interest in accreditation had grown in recessionary times.

In the context of the recession, people feel a greater need to get accreditation. They see it as linked to brushing up skills and fending off redundancy through getting qualifications.
DL staff member

As adults became more focussed on strengthening their employability they were reviewing gaps in skills that might weaken their overall strength as an employee. Their view of skills gaps had changed in the recessionary context and what was acceptable before was no longer tolerable.

I was surviving the best... didn't need it until now and all the problems with people losing their jobs. I am 52 and have never been unemployed but now I am worried.
Telephone interviewee

The profile of distance literacy learners notably included those with higher level qualifications who had pinpointed an area of skills weakness that they were eager to address.

One woman suggested that filling basic skills gaps should be systematically built into all training courses so that those who have unmet literacy and numeracy needs access support as a matter of course.

There should be a partnership with FÁS where filling your literacy gaps becomes a part of every course... before you go on to something else. I have seen other people in my course who have issues like me and dealing with them lifts such a weight off people. It should be built in. My sister is 34 and can only write her name. A lot of people are so scared to do this. *Telephone interviewee*

More highly skilled learners using DL as a form of study support was indicative in the data of a heightened awareness of the need for more robust basic skills. The website www.writeon.ie was frequently mentioned as a way of addressing individualised skills gaps without taking on a longer-term commitment to a course of study. Learners in the focus group suggested that this aspect of DL might be more widely publicised within training courses and workplaces.

Motivating Factor: Self-Esteem

Closely linked to going back to learning was the desire to build self-confidence and overcome feelings of self-deprecation internalised because of the stigmatisation of unmet literacy and numeracy needs. People often talked about knowing that they had the capability of improving literacy and numeracy but never quite getting around to it for a whole host of life factors. In the data, participants talked about finally prioritising time to pursue a dream of being able to do something others seemed to do with ease, realising long-held personal ambitions and overcoming self-doubt.

I am a carer in the home, very isolated and confined. My spellings are rotten. Learning how to spell keeps the brain ticking over. I am not so isolated as I have contact with outside. You are making yourself well. I have a regular call so I have a routine and I leave space to talk to the tutor that is time for me. I am doing something for myself. It has always been family first but now it's time for me. *Telephone interviewee*

Parents whose children had grown up now found they had time to devote to their own learning needs. Others who had not before found a form of learning that suited them were attracted to DL for reasons to do with their personal learning preferences.

It is always in the back of my mind that I have these issues. It makes me uneasy. I was offered classes but they wouldn't be appropriate for me. I would never read aloud in front of people. *Telephone interviewee*

Once before in a class I had a 'bad' tutor... a retired teacher. It felt like punishment all the time and I thought the year would never end. *Telephone interviewee*

Some who were told they were unable to learn engaged with DL to prove something to themselves and to those who denied them learning in the past. One man was assumed to be 'messing' when he had epilepsy whereas another was 'treated badly' because of speech difficulties that have now been resolved.

I was at a special school and I wasn't given a chance. I knew I was able to do more so now I am proving them wrong. *Telephone interviewee*

Dependency had been a feature of life for some who lacked confidence in their literacy and numeracy and gaining greater autonomy was an integral goal in improving self-esteem. A number of people told us that partners had remarked that they were being asked for help less often. One family no longer needed to ask a neighbour to read family letters. One woman had gained control of her personal finances.

I can write out my own slip at the Credit Union. The change in my confidence is unreal. I know how much money I have. *Telephone interviewee*

I am 69. My father was illiterate and I had no mother. As a child I was often working on the farm and we had no books in the house. I am retired now and always saw my wife reading the paper and now I thought it would be grand to be able to do that – to be able to read and write a bit. *Telephone interviewee*

Self-esteem and autonomy were factors for a number of women learning ESOL. Prior to engagement with DL they had been dependent on others for

social interaction and wanted to regain the degree of autonomy they had experienced in their first language.

Motivating Factor: Family

Women and men were motivated to engage with DL to help younger children and to 'keep up' with older ones, particularly in relation to new technologies.

I have always had crap jobs and now I would like to do a FETAC course. I want to help my son. I want to do a computer course because it is the future.
Telephone interviewee

The moral imperative, especially on mothers to do family literacy work meant that those who felt unable to do so felt it very deeply.

I wasn't able to do what a mother should do. *Telephone interviewee*

Fathers, unused to being home and involved in childcare, felt the pressure of helping with homework in areas where they were uncertain of their skills. Some saw the Internet as a source of support and there was a great deal of interest in NALA's new website for parents www.helpmykidlearn.ie when this information was passed on during interviews.

Mothers who were new to Ireland, and speakers of other languages felt acutely their lack of language skills in helping their children with English homework. They were reluctant to participate in the social life of the school and both they and their children were marginalised because of their language and literacy issues in English.

A DL staff member cited examples where adults visibly learning in the home were modelling positive literacy habits to children. They saw parents reading, writing, spelling and sometimes working on the computer and wanted to emulate them. This was seen as family learning in practice and reinforcing a model of lifelong learning in the home.

DL Filling Gaps in Provision

Some people we spoke to had tried face-to-face learning and found the pace and nature of group work did not suit them. Others were pleased to be able to

choose their own time, to be able to stay at home and fit learning around shift work and family commitments. Fear of the public gaze emerged as an issue for male learners as did the difficulty of taking the first step unsupported.

We men find it hard to go out of the house. We wait until the last minute... until pushed to the wall before doing it. Going to a class would be just one more thing to do. Unless someone signs you up you might never do it.
Telephone interviewee

DL is different from other forms of learning and does not appeal to everyone, particularly those who prefer group interaction. Some participants said they would prefer to learn in a group setting but the associated costs and the timing were prohibitive. At the same time, there remain a large number of adults who are not attracted by mainstream literacy provision and DL offers a robust and effective alternative.

Cost, location and accreditation were all cited as reasons for selecting DL. Learning at home evaded the need for childcare, travel costs, time expenditure and the pressures associated with organising life around family and work demands. People spoke of DL as a relaxing, unpressured, 'gentle' way of learning. Where accreditation was not available in a Centre, learners adopted a blended approach by combining Centre learning with accreditation through DL.

In discussion with DL staff the issue of NALA acting as a provider of learning and accreditation was clarified. A proportion of learners who cannot or will not attend VEC literacy programmes find a complementary, alternative learning option in DL. In terms of accreditation, whereas NALA supports Centres with the facility to offer accreditation through www.writeon.ie, learners continue to be counted in returns made by the Centre. As such, any perceptions of competition are unfounded and DL supports learners and Centres by filling gaps in provision and access to accreditation.

Tutors find the flexible nature of DL matches their lifestyle needs and allows them to have a career. This is a valuable feature of DL at a time when qualified literacy tutors are in short supply and some learners report long waiting times for VEC provision.

Being part of NALA's DLS has provided me, as a tutor, with an exciting opportunity to learn new ways of teaching and working. As well as meeting the needs of learners, this flexibility suits me and my personal circumstances.
DL tutor

Sources of Information

By far the majority of people had found the NALA Freephone number through the advertising campaigns on TV, radio, print media and through accessing the NALA website. One person had heard about DL through visiting a stand at the National Ploughing Championships where he had spoken to other learners about the options for learning literacy. Those attending FÁS and VEC courses had been given information about DL as a form of additional support while others had found the Freephone contact on a leaflet in a Citizen's Information or Social Services' Office. Several parents, who required ESOL support, had been referred by the classroom teacher in their children's school.

DL users were evangelical about extending the awareness and reach of DL. They had spoken to local radio stations, posted about DL on Facebook, told friends and relatives. They felt that being able to envisage how DL worked would encourage people to engage and that a DL role play should be included as part of an advertising campaign. In the learner focus group they discussed using Saorview, Free to Air channels to have live televised, phone-in literacy and numeracy programmes.

Getting in Touch

The impact of publicity is clear in the monthly profile of responses to the Freephone shown in Figure 2 where surges in interest correspond to new advertising campaigns. Even those who were reluctant to address their literacy needs had found the ads compelling.

I had put it off but the ad jumped out at me. I thought they were all in the same boat as me and that made me realise there was nothing to be afraid of. It's like the ad introduces you to it... the ad works so well it makes you do the next step. Even now when I see the ad it makes me smile because I am proud that I did it. *Focus group participant*

Most found their initial phone call allayed their fears and gave them the information they needed. They were quickly assigned a tutor and began

learning. The initial phone call resulted in a pack of material being sent out and most people found the contents useful and interesting. Those we spoke to talked about being inspired by the stories of other learners that gave them the belief that they too could return to learning.

I ran my own business before but now I need help with texting and emails which have brought my spellings more out in the open. I thought 'here's my chance' when you see people in a similar situation. *Telephone interviewee*

In a small number of cases, materials were felt to be at a level that did not match the learner's needs and in one case the pack contained only literacy materials while the caller's interest was in maths. In the focus group we probed the issue of the contents of the pack and found general agreement that it was motivating and provided a personal resource bank that people continued to use. One man had received the same short novel on a number of occasions indicating that records of what is sent might be of use.

Plans were discussed for a DL prospectus to be developed and sent to learners. This will include a DL learner charter and information about the DL service. Focus group participants thought that a role-play of how DL worked would be interesting in terms of demystifying the process.

A small number of people who had called early in 2012 had experienced a lengthy delay before being given a tutor but this possibility has now been eliminated by the introduction of a new Salesforce data system. Customised to the needs of DL, the system provides specific information on those awaiting induction, initial assessment, assignment to a tutor and other vital data for efficient programme management.

Inevitably some of those who phoned, and found access to learning relatively easy, regretted not taking the step earlier. The telephone operators were highly praised and most people's transition from Freephone caller to distance learner was smooth and encouraging.

Findings about the DL Process

Induction and Assessment

The introduction of an induction and assessment phase for new learners had helped clarify expectations and radically reduced the number of people who fell away from DL without explanation.

Each learner who opted to learn through DL had an initial period of induction and assessment where they were made familiar with how DL worked and helped to clarify their learning needs and expectations. Learning goals were set and reviewed regularly. DL Learning Support Workers who spent time with new learners reported that they had the impression that 'no-one has given the learner time before'.

People are surprised that someone is taking time with them to figure out what they need in terms of literacy or numeracy and how they, as an individual, like to go about learning. We get the chance to make clear the role of the service and where the boundaries lie. *Tutor focus group*

Through the induction process, tutors were matched to learners' needs and learning context. For example some tutors were happier with beginner learners while others have more expertise in numeracy, ESOL or uses of technology.

From the learner perspective, for the most part, the induction and initial assessment worked efficiently. People felt listened to and understood that it can take time to work out the right level for each person. One man was heartened to find he was 'at a higher level' than he expected while another was amazed when he was given the choice of his preferred time for receiving a DL call.

One woman felt that she had not been heard clearly when outlining her learning needs. This had also happened to her when she had attended face-to-face provision. She attributed her difficulty to perceptions of her social class and the associated expectations held by tutors.

I have a middle class voice and so people don't hear... or don't believe me when I say I can't do something. It is hard to keep repeating the same

message over and over. It is an emotional roller coaster. *Telephone interviewee*

As literacy needs are ever-changing and now sometimes as much to do with new literacies as unmet primary skills, it becomes even more important to reflect on assumptions and expectations and not allow these to mask the message that learners are giving.

Advantages of DL

Not surprisingly, the fact that DL was cost-free was very important to learners. Not having to drive, take public transport, pay for childcare or resources were all significant factors for those feeling the pinch of the economic recession.

I had my own company until the recession hit. I am retraining and need to improve my spelling. I am living on nothing because I was self-employed so the fact that it was free was important. The mortgage is a nightmare. *Telephone interviewee*

I come from North Africa and work part-time as a cleaner. I needed help with spoken language and writing to help my children at school. It was really necessary for me that it was free and that there was no need for childcare. *Telephone interviewee*

Evaluation participants praised the flexibility of DL and the freedom of choice that was afforded them. Those working unpredictable hours were able, when necessary, to change the time of the weekly DL call to fit around work demands. Without this facility they would not have been able to continue learning. Similarly, those with family demands felt able to fit learning into schedules that change without warning when children are ill. Generally, DL learners understood that the system was friendly to their erratic and changing schedules.

You have to get on with everyday life. This way there is no pressure. *Telephone interviewee*

When you fall off a class it is hard to go back; with DL you know that you will be welcome. *Telephone interviewee*

Learners liked that DL did not stop during the summer months when they would otherwise lose momentum in their learning. One woman was pleased when she rang in June to find that she could start learning immediately and keep going through the summer.

For many it was the fact that they did not have to accommodate others in a group that was the most attractive feature of DL. They relished the individual attention and pace of learning and the uninterrupted focus this allowed them.

I had tried a group but I didn't go back. It was really boring and very slow progress. We did lots of punctuation! DL is the opposite of school for me. You have the tutor's full attention. She is encouraging and non-judgemental. It really knocked my confidence when I went to a class and made no progress... it felt like school. *Telephone interviewee*

The DL system operates in 6-week blocks where learning goals are recorded for this period and reviewed and updated before another block begins. This ensured that targets remained in focus and there was a high degree of transparency and accountability in the new data system.

There were repeated references in the data to the 'pace of learning' that DL allowed. Sometimes people had been impatient and frustrated by the way that group learning delayed their progress. It is clear that some of those we spoke to saw DL, and blended learning that included www.writeon.ie, as an accelerated way to deal with skills gaps and this may merit further attention.

The internalised stigma attached to having unmet literacy needs meant that some adults, men in particular, felt shame and embarrassment about learning in public. The privacy attached to DL was important for many people. Some said they would never countenance attending a group-learning situation. Others had tried a group but outside their immediate area. This was mentioned especially by those living in small towns, where anonymity is impossible. Others recognised that their need for confidentiality was linked to their level of progress in meeting their learning goals and could foresee a time when they would consider moving on to a group.

I don't have to face anyone. I am still too scared to consider a group. *Telephone interviewee*

It is important not to be known; online is anonymous. *Telephone interviewee*

Some part of me feels the embarrassment. *Telephone interviewee*

I think men are more for the confidential thing. *Telephone interviewee*

Confidentiality was important for me before but not now. DL was a stepping-stone. I am not really worried about what other people think of me now. *Telephone interviewee*

Hopefully, in common with all adult learning, a great advantage of DL was its lack of resemblance to people's memories of learning at school. This was characterised by a sense of being relaxed and respected while learning.

She really does stay with you. Sometimes I think, 'Oh God...is she going to explode at me?' because you are going back years to when you were younger. The pressure from teachers was enormous. I got clattered and battered at school. *Focus group participant*

I carried the memory of making mistakes at school. It was nice to make a mistake and just have it explained. *Telephone interviewee*

The term 'non-judgemental' was mentioned repeatedly and the absence of 'humiliation'. The memories of trying to learn under pressure were not effaced but superseded by 'a more gentle way of learning'.

Literacy

The greatest number of the research sample - 81% (n=59) had engaged with DL to improve some aspect of their literacy skills. Improving reading, writing and spelling, whether on paper or in a digital context, were central to people's personal, family and work-related lives. The extent that unmet literacy skills impacted on all areas of learners' lives was evident in narratives that mentioned 'constant pressure', 'panic', 'constant worries', and 'problems' related to some aspect of using text. Spelling was mentioned most frequently.

Spelling is my Achille's heel. *Telephone interviewee*

My spelling and reading have stopped me going for promotion. *Telephone interviewee*

I would need help with spelling and putting sentences together. *Telephone interviewee*

I needed to improve my spelling as it was wrecking my confidence. *Telephone interviewee*

I need to get my reading and writing sorted first. It is awkward enough at work. *Telephone interviewee*

Following NALA's guidelines for good adult literacy work (NALA, 2012) but working at a distance, tutors devise strategies and deploy resources that match the specific needs of learners. Using posted, emailed and online materials, tutors use telephone support to facilitate literacy learning. Learners described reading aloud and getting encouragement and support from the tutor and were surprised by the effectiveness of improving reading by phone.

I couldn't see how it could work at first but no-one else can see me or hear me so I don't mind at all if I make a mistake. I practise in between phone calls and some of the family will help me if I need them. *Telephone interviewee*

The process of posting or digitally exchanging materials was an implicit part of the learning process – a form of distance, integrated literacy. Often the tutor acted more as a guide to prompt and encourage people to learn new material for themselves. Learners and tutors drew up lists of words and phrases needed in the workplace and used them as the basis of a learning event. Distance learning demands strategic, incremental learning steps. Of necessity, tutors needed to ensure that learners were very clear about what to do next and how to do it. Of necessity, distance learners then assumed responsibility for rehearsing and learning new material. Most people we spoke to spent regular amounts of time, often on a daily basis, preparing and learning their given material. They kept diaries, wrote letters and stories, practised spellings, read newspaper articles and short books sent by the tutor. These were so popular that one man suggested expanding the series as he had read them all.

In a few cases, we heard about frustration about the pace of progress however in most cases it appeared that the 6-week learning block worked well in terms of providing measured goals and expectations. Below, under the heading of 'findings about outcomes', we outline some of the achievements and progression routes that distance literacy learners told us about.

Maths

Of the research sample, 12% (n=9) had contacted the Freephone specifically to address gaps in their numeracy skills. For the most part this was because they were undertaking an accredited training course that had a numeracy element that they felt unable to tackle. NALA has decided to increase the attention it gives to numeracy and it seems that interest in this area of basic skills is expanding. As well as more basic levels of numeracy we spoke to those completing FETAC Level 5 and 6 courses where they found they needed support in both literacy and maths. The role of NALA in addressing basic skills gaps should be balanced alongside the responsibility of the FET

sector to integrate literacy and numeracy and provide study support at an appropriate level to those enrolled on their courses.

ESOL

In the course of the evaluation of DLS 2012 we spoke to learners from Brazil, India, Algeria, Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Afghanistan, Israel and one person whose mother tongue was Irish. All these people have found DL a positive factor in learning spoken and written English. For some this was an issue related to helping children with the demands of school. For others it was also to do with the broader issues of autonomy, integration and access to training and work.

One young man had completed secondary education in his own country but never studied either spoken or written English. He is now married to an Irish woman, has a small child and wanted to get a place on an outdoor pursuits course with an ultimate goal of starting his own business. He learned to speak English from his wife but had an issue with spelling because of the lack of similarity between English and his first language.

I saw an ad in the newspaper for NALA and I thought, 'this is it!' This is what I needed to get started writing. I rang them up and they got back to me straight away with papers and no waiting around. This DL is one of the best inventions ever because people who are stuck like I was they don't see a way out. They don't see all the possibilities because you just think you are stupid and you have to get on with life. DL is brilliant but lots of people could do this.
Focus group participant

This man was still engaged in DL but also had just been accepted onto a 3rd level course beginning in September. He was continuing to build his language and technology skills in preparation for his new course of study at Level 7.

Another young Afghani man was using DL while also doing a FETAC Level 5 Hospitality course with the goal of becoming a hotel receptionist - because he loves 'to make people feel at home.' DL gave people access to a weekly structured, spoken language class as well as attention to traditional and digital literacies. DL was a safe place to rehearse conversations and build vocabulary in a systematic way and this led to increased confidence,

improved skills and accelerated social integration. The benefits of ESOL were also immediately transferred to the children of learners.

ICTs

A major motivating factor for people to engage with literacy is rooted in the desire to participate in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). DL learners wanted to text, send emails, use computers for a range of purposes, and write on Facebook and other social media without worrying about spellings. ICTs and the language that has developed around them were already an integral part of DL. From the outset, digital technology was used by learners to text NALA's Freephone. Mobile phones were the means of delivery of telephone tutoring. Tutors and learners scheduled sessions by 'texting'. They Skyped. They emailed work back and forward using PCs and laptop computers. People talked about 'posting' and 'liking', 'chatting' and 'downloading'. One woman told me she had sent photos as part of an assessment using 'Bluetooth'. Another learner said she now frequently sent emails and felt great at her achievement. Technology was a firmly established and rapidly expanding part of literacy and people wanted to use it.

I would like DL support for learning to use my computer properly. *Telephone interviewee*

I wanted to do IT literacy and DL was perfect. I had tried a computer class but it didn't work. I needed to do the very basics. My tutor gave me customised materials and I have gained enough skills to move on and experiment for myself. I am an independent IT user now. *Telephone interviewee*

DLS staff expressed the view that computer literacy and text-based literacy are skills that learners can, and indeed should, learn at the same time. The discrepancy between the number of learners who have internet access and those that have used www.writeon.ie suggested that not all tutors were comfortable with a digital approach.

Tutors need to be more readily using computers and Internet to support all forms of literacy. Tutors should be thinking about learners living in the real world today. They are doing them a disservice not to introduce them to computer literacy... not to encourage them to be using technology to improve their reading skills. *DLS staff member*

Possible areas for technological development in pedagogical approaches were identified that would include more innovative, adventurous use of

wikigroups, weekly Skype sessions with learner groups, more texting and using mlearning⁹ as well as youtube and video resources that are already freely available at resources.writeon.ie. Given the constantly changing technology climate for literacy tutors, it is clear that training needs to be planned so that they can keep up with learners' expectations. Many learners and tutors were conscious of their need for support to keep up with younger, seemingly 'native' users of new technologies.

Blended Learning

The strengths of a blended learning approach were evident in the data where those who were attending a training course or literacy programme may also be receiving DL telephone tutor support with specific skills gaps. Many were simultaneously also using www.writeon.ie and reported that they reaped multiple benefits.

I am a welder and lost my job. I am doing a fulltime FETAC course and needed help with my spelling. I am dyslexic and DL has really helped me. My confidence is much better. *Telephone interviewee*

I am a housefather who stopped work to look after the children. They are now grown up and I am doing a fulltime Level 5 FETAC course. I need a lot of support with the written aspects. *Telephone interviewee*

I did level 2 and 3. I swopped my password with the tutor so she was on the same page as me at the same time. She sent me support materials for things I needed to learn from scratch. So between the two things I got there in the end. *Telephone interviewee*

It was clear from the data that VEC and FÁS tutors referred people to NALA for literacy and numeracy support and thereby learners gained the additional focus on basic skills that allowed them to meet the literacy and maths' demands of their course. In conjunction with NALA's drive for integrated literacy and the provision of study support in some organisations, DL contributed to relieving the pressures on adult learners and enabling them to successfully complete their course.

Tutor and family support

⁹ *mlearning* refers to use of mobile phones for learning

Support for learners from family and a tutor was central to their success in DL. Partners, siblings and children all offered support that helped learners over hurdles and made learning possible. People tended to keep the circle of support small and limited the number of people with whom they shared their literacy or numeracy issue.

My girlfriend knows and she would help me but it isn't anyone else's business. *Telephone interviewee*

My daughter aged 8 helps me with ESOL. It is a good example for her that I am studying. *Telephone interviewee*

My partner helped me when I needed it but she has noticed that I ask her less and less. *Telephone interviewee*

Evaluation participants were fulsome in their praise of DL tutors in terms of their knowledge, skills and attitude. They felt accompanied on their learning by someone who 'stayed close'.

She is very reliable. She is there for me every week. She is there every step. *Telephone interviewee*

Many who had unhappy learning experiences in the past were heartened by a tutor's relaxed, unpressured approach, which they repeatedly described as non-judgemental and encouraging. This affective quality was most significant to those we spoke to and superseded the import given to skills and knowledge. It was also clear that in DL the initial telephone contact is decisive.

From the first call I knew the tutor was very professional and friendly. The tone of voice and attitude gives a clear impression. *Telephone interviewee*

I have plenty of trust in her. She makes me relaxed and really understands. *Telephone interviewee*

She was helpful and reassuring. I always felt good after the half hour. She was calm and patient and made learning easy for me. *Telephone interviewee*

Learners commented on the skill and clarity with which tutors explained problematic aspects of the learning programme. They felt heard and understood and noted that they were often asked for feedback on their level of satisfaction with the sessions. Learners were told in induction about their role in ensuring the level of work is appropriate to their needs but longstanding fear of critique sometimes worked against this in practice. One woman

admitted that she was not honest in her feedback and so the learning level was not right for her.

I am not always honest in the feedback I give. Sometimes I am bored and find the pace too slow. She was really nice but the level wasn't right and I just gave up. I did learn some things and might go back. *Telephone interviewee*

With the exception of one learning support worker who also does some online verification, all DL tutors are women and so the gendered nature of care persists. There is still much evidence in the data that men prefer this DL learning relationship to the public gaze of attending a group although DL staff guarded against dependencies developing. After a certain number of sessions learners are told that their tutor may change and the new data system contains 'flags' that indicate when such a change is due.

Time and Self-Management

In the course of our interviews we spoke to adults with busy working and home lives who sometimes struggled to make time for everything. Establishing a routine was difficult with changing work schedules, care responsibilities or fulltime training courses as well as other demands of adult life. Some participants had stopped DL when the time pressure became too great but retained the idea that they could return when life eased a little.

I couldn't really manage the time but it gave me a little hope that if I had the time, I could really learn. I will look at www.writeon.ie. *Telephone interviewee*

I was kind of busy and never really got it together. I would still like to do it but need to get started again. *Telephone interviewee*

Others managed the time issues and DL learning process with great efficiency. They worked for regular periods each day. Some took telephone calls from their tutor 'late at night' to fit around other demands; the flexibility of tutors in this regard was never questioned. A number of participants described a work area they had set up where they had organised their books and papers.

The routine is good. I like the routine. *Telephone interviewee*

I write a list of what I am stuck on when I am working online and have it ready when the tutor rings. *Telephone interviewee*

In the learner focus group we heard that the induction process had been very supportive in helping people establish good learning habits and strategies and this was clearly having an impact on retention and learner achievement.

The learners who came to the focus group discussed the benefits of meeting occasionally with other learners and the benefits it might bring. They suggested that tutors might hold occasional regional meetings, once or twice a year, with small groups of learners. This was also seen as a way of easing transition into a group learning situation. Another suggestion was that DL learners automatically become members of NALA and are invited to learner events where there might be a space to meet and discuss issues that concern them.

www.writeon.ie

In addition to interviews and focus groups with DL learners and staff, we interviewed the Managing Director of Avallain, the company responsible for developing www.writeon.ie. He explained that there are similar models across the globe in Germany, Turkey, the Netherlands and some African countries where the online focus is on health rather than literacy. Ireland is unique in that it is able to offer nationally recognised accreditation whereas this was not possible in Germany because of high levels of regulation and bureaucracy. The www.writeon.ie website is structured in order to support accreditation but it might also be made available to ‘anonymous’ learners. We learned in our discussion with the web designer that when the German website was opened to anonymous learners it quickly attracted more learners than all the face-to-face provision in Germany at that time. This demonstrated that online learning has an appeal for those who will not engage with group learning. It also raised issues about what happens when learners require support and thus the blending of DL and www.writeon.ie presents a solution.

I couldn't even switch the computer on but the tutor really helped me and encouraged me and now I am flying on it. I went on and got Level 2 and mostly managed that myself. Now I am doing Level 3. Sometimes I am up until 2 in the morning. I just have the maths to do now. I am still on the phone with the tutor because I need her support. *Focus group participant*

The focus group spoke at great length about the benefits of blended learning and for one learner who had not used www.writeon.ie, they spent some time extolling its virtues. One woman explained how to get started and praised the clarity of the voiced explanation at the beginning. They explained that online learning was motivating in that 'you always want to go on to the next step'. Another woman in the focus group said she had become addicted to www.writeon.ie and often worked late into the night because she just 'wanted to climb those ladders'.

As well as finding the website motivational, others enjoyed the way they became absorbed in topics and were able to manage their time and progress. The removal of 'failure' was a popular feature and learners enjoyed being able to retry things that were difficult until they understood them.

It really helps your concentration and your memory. It sharpens you up. I really noticed the difference in myself. *Focus group participant*

With www.writeon.ie there is no-one there to put you under pressure. *Focus group participant*

People should be made aware that there is no failure in www.writeon.ie. *Focus group participant*

In the telephone interviews we spoke to those who had used www.writeon.ie independently or with the support of a tutor. Learning online had captured people's imagination. It was anonymous, private, flexible and it allowed people to become adept at using a computer and improve their skills at the same time. Some completed entire awards while others used it to target specific skills areas like maths.

I love the site. There is great variety. It makes it easy to learn and allows you to choose the time you study. *Telephone interviewee*

Online really works for me. I would definitely do more like this ...every so often. I have found my way of learning and will keep going. It keeps you on your toes. *Telephone interviewee*

One avid user of the website would like to see it expanded to have new and fresh content about history, geography and global issues. Someone else suggested youtube clips about spelling rules and another man wanted audio books that he could follow on screen. In the focus group, learners discussed the forum on www.writeon.ie as a way of satisfying the social needs of

distance and independent learners. They were reluctant to try it and a little fearful of exposing their spelling difficulties but thought this was something that a tutor might help them overcome.

I would love to use the forum but I don't know how to. Maybe I could talk to the tutor and then could arrange to be online with her other students. We could all go on together. *Focus group participant*

Both in the learner focus group and through the telephone interviews, we came across learners who had not heard of the www.writeon.ie website and yet who were immediately interested in the concept. Perhaps learners miss out on information when there is a lot to absorb and so it would be useful if tutors reminded people periodically about the online aspect of DL. We see from the sample details at Figure 3 that a proportion of those with Internet access have not used www.writeon.ie and the data suggest that at least some of them would wish to do so.

A number of ESOL learners had found www.writeon.ie invaluable as a way of expanding vocabulary about a range of topics. Because of the educational nature of the site, much of the material coincided with their interest in becoming more involved in their children's schooling. The suggestion arose of reorganising some of the www.writeon.ie material with a specific focus on ESOL learners. This might incorporate topics that would build cultural awareness and information about employment and rights.

As imperatives in learning and training change, so www.writeon.ie has shown it can evolve. Addressing growing interest in initial assessment and learners' desire to fill gaps in their basic skills profile, www.writeon.ie was updated in March 2013 to include a Skills Checker tool that provides suggestions for learning priority areas. Prospective learners will complete a short online questionnaire and then the Skills Checker will produce an individualised 'spiky profile'. This will show areas of strength and weakness and hence will guide people to areas that need attention.

Findings about Outcomes and Progression

This section brings together the data about reported outcomes of the DL process including personal gains, accreditation and progression.

Achievements

Participants in the study articulated a wide variety of specific skills achievements in literacy, numeracy and ICTs. They talked about understanding the structure of words; having eyes trained into what is right in terms of spelling; improved punctuation; more flowing writing; being able to do maths in the head and having 'soaked in' a whole lot of learning.

I have read more books in the past few months than I have all my life.
Telephone interviewee

So many pennies have dropped for me. I have learned so many things about shapes, sounds of letters. So many new things! I am achieving every week.
Telephone interviewee

New skills brought satisfaction in and of themselves but these achievements had further consequences that were also positive. Parents were able to help children with maths and spelling, those on training courses were less pressured and new skills were deployed in the workplace.

I can write with ease now. I enjoy going to work whereas before I was anxious. There was always a certain dread. *Telephone interviewee*

I have new skills for work. I can do forms, report writing and administering tablets for elderly people. *Telephone interviewee*

Form filling, typing online, email, text...anything written I can do with more confidence. *Telephone interviewee*

People spoke of a sense of everything having improved; of the surprise at being able to do the unimaginable; of having a taste of success. Many were praising of NALA's role in their accomplishment. One man in his late 60s who had learned to use a computer expressed his sense of revival.

NALA is the best thing. It is like starting an old engine with a flat battery. They started me up anyway. *Telephone interviewee*

A sense of accomplishment in specific goals was often accompanied by rising confidence and a sense of greater wellbeing. Learners gave examples of increased independence, less anxiety, greater openness about learning literacy and numeracy. One ESOL learner described no longer fearing making mistakes because of having built up confidence with her tutor. Others found that learning situations were no longer to be dreaded.

I work nights and have a busy life. I wouldn't have time for a class... wouldn't go anyway for confidence and privacy reasons. Now I have got my confidence back and discovered that it is not too bad going back to learning.
Telephone interviewee

Accreditation

Accreditation was its own reward and brought unexpected levels of delight and in a few cases even tears. Accreditation offered the affirmation of potential and the opening up of new possibilities.

I was crying when I got my certs. They came in a registered letter and I couldn't imagine who would be sending me something like that. I cried when I opened it. *Focus group participant*

I feel more confident. I didn't do any exams and so completing Level 3 has proved my ability to me. *Telephone interviewee*

Getting Level 2 and 3 is a great achievement for me. I have raised expectations of myself... maybe I have a better chance of getting a job now that I have a cert. I am interested in Level 4 and joining a group if the time suits. *Telephone interviewee*

As well as providing the chance to do Level 2 and 3 online, DL enabled others working for higher level courses and qualifications to fill the skills gaps that were causing them anxieties. The data showed evidence of increased value on accreditation in the recessionary climate and DL played a role in 2012 in supporting those working for qualifications at Level 4, 5, 6 and 7.

New Goals and Progression

We asked evaluation participants if their work with DL had led them to set new goals. The responses described raised expectations, determination to move on to the next level and persevere with tackling unresolved issues. In all

cases these new aspirations were announced with realism, optimism and evident self-belief.

I have such a sense of achievement; such a buzz about getting words down on paper. I am spending more time with words; looking more carefully at words. I am still avoiding writing at work but will keep ploughing away at it and know I will get there now. *Telephone interviewee*

I am going to tackle maths now. *Telephone interviewee*

I am thinking of starting my own business. I am doing a course now. *Telephone interviewee*

I am going to do an ECDL course now. Previously it was out of reach. *Telephone interviewee*

The majority of those who had engaged with DL had begun to achieve or already accomplished their goals and set new strategies in place. Many had moved on to higher levels of study and had aspirations about enhanced employability, less vulnerability to redundancy and a more secure future. Perhaps most importantly, DL learners had regained their self-esteem and the belief that they could successfully engage with learning and become themselves more brilliantly.

DL Structures and Systems

The focus of the evaluation was on DL learners' experience of the service and they were almost uniquely positive about their encounters with NALA/DL staff. It was clear that the new data system had increased the speed and efficiency with which tutors were matched to students and the system of induction had almost eliminated dropout. Below we outline a few structural issues that arose during our inquiry and which might be worthy of attention.

One member of NALA staff works part-time on management of the data collection system and administration of FETAC accreditation. There is a part-time tutor coordinator who oversees day-to-day issues to do with DL provision, database oversight and quality control, tutor coordination, training and FETAC management. A fulltime Distance Learning Coordinator manages all aspects of DLS: staff, programme delivery, liaison with television

production companies, budget oversight and strategic development of all aspects of the DLS including www.writeon.ie.

Calls to the NALA Freephone are generated by advertising campaigns and these are sometimes associated with motivational TV programmes. Evidence suggests that strategic placement of publicity materials in community locations also attracts new learners. We spoke to a number of people who had received information about NALA and DLS in local primary schools, VECs and Citizens Information Bureaux (CIBs). Others had been told by learners already engaged with DL and by community educators who were knowledgeable about forms of literacy provision. Those who would not be attracted to group literacy were pleased to be given information about an alternative way of learning.

Both calls and texts to the Freephone were answered by a fulltime Operator (jobshare) helped, when needed, by NALA administrators. Operators had a script that details the information to be given to callers and data gathered from learners suggested that operators were adept at putting callers at ease and imparting information with clarity. This first encounter with NALA was encouraging and reinforced people's decision to return to learn. Many of those who called the Freephone number in 2012 (90%) were referred on to VEC programmes but no agreement exists between NALA and the VECs to account for the outcomes of these referrals. NALA does scheduled callbacks with learners who were referred to other services to check on progress and offer other referral options if required. However, accord would greatly enhance accountability for these learners. We are aware that a review of VEC provision has been carried out recently and such improved systems may well be part of the forthcoming report.

Behind the engagement and achievements of DL learners was a team of 14 telephone tutors, three of whom worked in the area of learning support and online assessment of FETAC Level 2 and 3. The tutors have developed considerable expertise in telephone tutoring and facilitation of basic skills in an innovative and care-full manner. For the most part they work alone from

home and meet with other tutors only twice a year for staff training and development. A focus group with tutors revealed high levels of satisfaction with the new data system and the clarity it had brought to the DL system. Since telephone, distance and elearning are unusual forms of adult literacy pedagogical practice it would be interesting for DLS to write up their experience for the benefit of others in the field.

DL is a learner-centred service that runs for 12 months of the year. Since the introduction of the new database in July 2012 it has the capacity for micro systems management of all aspects of the service and for high levels of transparency and accountability. Individual learner goals are recorded by tutors and accessible to the tutor coordinator for oversight. Tutor hours can be accounted for in the regular half hour teaching block or smaller segments of this if necessary. DL staff members felt that they provided a valuable, efficient service at a relatively low cost.

One half hour session of DL costs 20 euros and cost is tracked on the data system. We can accurately give you a cost of providing a stepping-stone into mainstream learning. Some people move after 3 sessions so that is very cost effective when you consider the number of people who don't engage at all.
DL Staff member

'Call Backs'

Records were made of all calls, and attempted calls and if a learner failed to respond 3 times it was assumed that they no longer wished to continue learning. The Freephone Administrator had concerns that some additional, systematic 'call backs' were required to ensure that people who may want to come back are not missed. He suggested that a more rigorous follow-up procedure would catch people who had 'wavered momentarily in their learning' but would like to come back. The data system contains flags like 'no contact' and 'interested party' and it was not clear if all these people had been followed up.

We are at the stage where the technology is really good in terms of recording data related to learners and tutors. We just need a little time out to fine-tune the processes. *DL staff member*

The new system has been in use for 7 months now and we need time to review that. The opportunity exists in the contract with the system developers

to tweak the system so it makes financial sense to avail of that opportunity by carrying out a review. *DL staff member*

This view was supported in the evaluation process. In the course of the research we reconnected a number of learners with NALA's DL. They wanted to return to learning and yet were shy about calling the Freephone again. There is obviously a possibility here of recalling those who have dropped away as well as making it abundantly clear to learners in induction that they may always come back if their learning is interrupted for any reason. At the same time there is a delicate balance to be struck between making unwanted phonecalls to learners and allowing people the opportunity to come back. This is both a strategic and a resource issue.

With the expansion of the numbers seeking FETAC accreditation and the associated administrative burdens, DL staff were feeling squeezed in terms of time and human resources. Some staff felt that they were constantly under pressure from accreditation deadlines and would appreciate time to reflect on some strategic issues, increase efficiencies and manage development. The nature of DL is that it evolves rapidly in line with new technologies and the development of new pilot programmes like the LMAF in 2010 and the LMETF, which began at the end of 2012. The need for time out to examine the existing structures and plan for development was raised, individually, by all team members. This needs to become a regular feature of DLS so that change can be embedded smoothly into existing systems.

Other possible strategic developments in DL included discussion about the development of FETAC Level 1 for www.writeon.ie for which some believe there is a market. An application for funding is currently under review which would allow the conversion of the www.writeon.ie systems to make them MAC and iPad friendly. One research participant raised the fact that www.writeon.ie was not available for iPad as an impediment for him. There are also exploratory discussions with the National Disability Authority (NDA) to explore ways of increasing accessibility to DL for those with a range of impairments. Clearly the relationship between adult literacy and technology is set to get even stronger.

Conclusions

In 2012 DLS continued to match the needs of a specific set of individual literacy learners and we consulted intensively with a sample of those learners to see what is working well and what might be improved. In keeping with NALA's learner-centred ethos we have kept DL users at the heart of our evaluation and their responses and proposals have generated the data and the recommendations that emerged.

Learners' words are what hold the wisdom about making DL better for them. There are always loads of experts who have views about what is needed but the learners' views are what hold the wisdom. *DL staff member*

We achieved a very high rate of response from the research sample and verified the findings in discussions with tutors, staff and a summative learner focus group. We found that not everyone was totally satisfied with DL in 2012. Some people missed being with other learners in a group and others could not routinely make space for learning in their lives at that moment in time. Nevertheless, DL emerged from the findings as a highly effective, time and cost efficient way of learning literacy, numeracy and digital skills. People repeatedly spoke of the pace of learning, not having to wait for a group and enjoying the individual focus on their learning needs and interests. Those who were fearful of going to a group took comfort from the privacy and confidentiality that DL afforded. Many increased their confidence to the extent that they could defeat the stigma and were planning to move on to group learning. Others had filled specific skills gaps and moved on to higher-level accredited courses. By far the majority of those who opted for DL, including many who had already tried group provision, expressed high degrees of satisfaction.

Not all learners who had Internet access had been introduced to www.writeon.ie and this may be an area that merits more attention. Those who had conquered the use of digital literacies in texts, emails, Internet and social networks felt included in their own and their children's world. They had been equipped with the literacy tools of the future. Most significantly for many

DL users, they are able to access free, online accreditation at Level 2 and 3 and the impact of this was transformative.

The recessionary context featured in much of the data and we found that DL helped people feel less vulnerable to redundancy and more prepared to compete for employment opportunities. Digital literacies were also high on the agenda of those who saw ICTs as key to economic development, writing accurate business emails and professional quotes for contracts.

Others were motivated to become distance learners to support their children, learn English as a second language or satisfy a lifelong yearning to learn something previously denied to them. Whatever the specific context of individual learners, it emerged clearly from the data that DL is successfully filling gaps in a number of ways. Firstly it is responding to those who have particular literacy, numeracy and IT issues that they want to tackle without committing to a full course of study. DL is able to customise learning to match precise and individualised needs and it is providing the chance of accreditation that not all centres offer. This is the lure for both individual and blended learners.

DL is providing an option for those who are unable or unwilling to attend local programmes because of care responsibilities, the absence or cost of transport to classes or their own deeply-felt lack of readiness for public learning.

Finally, in line with national and EU policy, DL is contributing to filling the literacy, numeracy and ICT skills gaps in Irish society. At a time when the struggle to emerge from recession is focussing attention on building strength, increasing basic skills capital is an intelligent immediate and long-term investment.

Part 4. Recommendations

1. A method of tracking and accounting for referrals through NALA Freephone to VEC literacy provision should be agreed.
2. Awareness and explication of NALA's distance learning should be extended using media and other available sources of publicity.
3. The packs sent to DL learners should contain materials matched to specific needs and interests, including maths and ICTs. Items should be recorded to avoid duplication in future.
4. Ways that DL learners can meet one another occasionally should be explored and facilitated.
5. The innovative DL model should be analysed, written up and shared with others working in the field.
6. A study into the pace of literacy learning made possible by DL and blended learning should be given consideration.
7. Ways of extending DL to other specific audiences should be explored. These may include the Deaf community, those with mobility issues, members of the Carers' Association, lone parent groups, refugee and asylum seekers and immigrant advocacy groups.
8. www.writeon.ie content might be refreshed/repackaged to meet the needs of beginner ESOL users. This could include cultural material; vocabulary specific to a range of contexts: the school, health, shopping etc; exemplar conversations 'spoken slowly' and information about housing and employment rights. The data revealed an interest in Level 1 accreditation as well as language development at an introductory level for those whose mother tongue is written in a different alphabet and uses diverse sound patterns.
9. Other recommendations from learners to expand www.writeon.ie include: a 'ladder' specific to punctuation; audio books; more YouTube and video links; video sessions on maths; resources.writeon.ie should

be organised in a more user-friendly way and made more widely available as a repository of resources for tutors and independent learners.

10. All DL learners should be introduced to www.writeon.ie as a source of additional skills practice and/or accreditation of skills at Level 2 and 3. Those without home Internet should be directed to their local library or nearest free Internet point.
11. DL should supplement, rather than take the place of, FET responsibilities to integrate literacy and numeracy into courses and provide learning support for all students.
12. Future DL tutor training should include a focus on digital literacies and how telephone and online tutoring can exploit digital media to the full. In particular learners want to use social networking opportunities and literacy chat rooms but lack the confidence to do so. Tutors need to support this as it connects learners and provides opportunities for literacies in practice.
13. DLS staff responds rapidly and innovatively to changing demands of policy and new literacies. They therefore need time for reflection, review and strategic dialogue so that DL systems and structures keep pace with development.

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Appendix 1: NALA DLS2012 Evaluation Phone interview schedule

Contact telephone:

Any specific instructions (time/anonymity etc):

Interview number: DLS12T/

Date/s completed:

1. Introduction

Brief explanation - what the evaluation is for and overview of what the questions will be about

Consent: **Y** **N**

Any questions you would like to ask me?

2. Background information

1. Gender **M** **F**

2. Location **County** _____ **urban** **rural**

3. Age

4. What age were you when you left school?

5. What formal education qualifications had you completed then?

6. Have you done any other qualifications since then? **Y** **N**

Details:

7. Have you attended literacy classes before? **Y** **N**

How was that? Why did you stop?

8. Are you working at the moment? **Y** **N**

What work are you involved in?

If unemployed – when?

How long?

Partner working?

Was literacy a factor?

9. Why begin learning now?

Was work a factor? Were children a factor? Other?

10. How did you find out about the DLS?

11. Why did you choose DL?

12. How long have you been involved in DL?

13. Why does this way of learning suit you?

14. Was getting accreditation a factor for you in coming back to learning?

15. Do you have Internet access? **Y N**

16. Provider?

3. Processes

Getting started

18. What was it like phoning the Freephone number the first time?

a. What information did you get at that point?

b. Was it useful? **Y N**

c. Do you have any ideas about how that information could be made even more useful / clearer?

d. Did you get a pack of materials/ was it useful?

First DL Telephone call

19. How soon after your talk with the Freephone operator did your tutor contact you?

20. Can you remember your first conversation with your tutor?

21. How were you feeling before the call?

22. What happened during the call?

23. How were you feeling after the call?

24. How do you agree on when s/he will call you?

42. Changes?

Independent learning

43. What are the advantages of learning literacy on your own?

44. What are the disadvantages?

45. Do you ever feel that it would be useful to meet up with other literacy learners? **Y N**

46. Advantages?

47. Disadvantages?

Motivation

48. Have you ever felt like quitting? **Y N**

a. What made you change your mind?

Confidentiality

49. How important is confidentiality to you?

a. Why is that?

4. Relationships

Tutor

50. How would you describe your relationship with your tutor?

51. What does s/he do that helps you work with her/him?

52. How does your tutor communicate with you?

53. Do you get a chance to give her/him feedback on how the tutoring is going for you?

54. Have you any ideas that might improve the working relationship with your tutor?

Other

55. Do your family / friends know you are involved in this work? **Y N**

56. **(If yes)** What support do you get from them?
(If no) Why do they not know?
57. How have your personal/family relationships been affected by your work with the DLS?
58. How have your work relationships been affected by your work with the DLS?

5. Outcomes

59. How would you describe your **reading** at the beginning of the work with your tutor?
60. Can you name any improvements?
61. What has helped? / Hindered?
62. How would you describe your **listening and speaking skills** at the beginning of the work with your tutor?
63. Can you name any improvements?
64. What has helped? / Hindered?
65. How would you describe your **writing** at the beginning of the work with your tutor?
66. Can you name any improvements?
67. What has helped? / Hindered?
68. How would you describe your **maths/ numeracy** skills at the beginning of the work with your tutor?
69. Can you name any improvements?
70. What has helped? / Hindered?
71. What other areas have you worked on with your tutor?
72. Can you name any improvements?
73. Are you doing FETAC accreditation work? **Y** **N**
74. What made you decide to do that?
75. Are there any other benefits from being involved in the work with your tutor?
76. Remembering back to that first phonecall and your plan to work on your literacy would you say that the DLS met your expectations?

77. Have you made any changes to your life as a result of the work you have done with your tutor? **Y** **N**

78. Are you planning any changes in the future? **Y** **N**

79. What do you think you will do next to further strengthen your literacy skills?

Nearly finished now!!!

Have you any other ideas about how the service could be improved?

Focus group participation

We are hoping to meet with a small group of learners involved in DLS on the Friday 22 February to discuss this some more – it will be in Wynne's Hotel from 10.00 -1.00pm and there will be a nice lunch on the day and any travel expenses will be covered. Would you be interested in coming along?

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Truly appreciate it.

END

Appendix 2: Focus group certificate of participation



Research Focus Group NALA DLS 2012 Certificate of Participation

participated in a focus group on Friday 22 February 2013. The event was planned and facilitated on behalf of NALA by [ACTRaD](#).

The focus group included in-depth reflection, discussion and analysis on the topic of Distance Learning. Participants took part in a range of group exercises and made recommendations to NALA based on individual and group experience.

Maggie Feeley PhD

Appendix 3: DLS 2012 evaluation research sample

X: denotes data unavailable

ESOL: English for speakers of other languages

WOV: www.Writeon.ie verification

ID	Gender/Age	Location	Paid work	DL/other	Outcome
1. LS-10994	Female/40	Cork	Yes	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
2. LS-17046	Male/21	Kerry	No	DL/ESOL	Satisfied/accreditation
3. LS-16305	Male/33	Cork	Yes	DL	Work/family interfered
4. LS-16814	Female/39	Mayo	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
5. LS-17044	Male/24	Sligo	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
6. LS-16817	Female/57	Galway	X	DL	Satisfied/now in VEC
7. LS-15396	Female/50	Carlow	No	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
8. LS-16994	Female/60	Dublin	No	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
9. LS-16987	Female/47	Cork	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
10. LS-10778	Female/33	Dublin	No	DL/ESOL	Satisfied/accreditation
11. LS-17031	Female/53	Dublin	No	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
12. LS-16980	Female/35	Mayo	No	DL/ESOL	Satisfied/ongoing
13. LS-14960	Female/54	Kerry	Yes	WOV	Satisfied/now in VEC
14. LS-13767	Male/55	Westmeath	Yes	DL	Satisfied/time issues
15. LS-16028	Male/53	Dublin	No	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
16. LS-12393	Male/52	Mayo	No	DL	Satisfied/now in VEC
17. LS-16014	Male/73	Cork	No	DL	Wanted higher level
18. LS-16613	Male/32	Cork	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ complete
19. LS-16145	Male/30	Cork	Yes	DL	Satisfied/now in VEC
20. LS-16928	Female/43	Laois	No	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
21. LS-16743	Male/42	Sligo	Yes	DL	Satisfied/chose group
22. LS-17033	Male/38	Dublin	Yes	DL	Unable to contact
23. LS-17015	Male/48	Kildare	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
24. LS-17000	Male/50	Dublin	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing

25.	LS-16914	Female/29	Dublin	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
26.	LS-09792	Male/X	Wicklow	Yes	DL	Unable to contact
27.	LS-17037	Male/42	Mayo	No	DL	Satisfied/now in FAS
28.	LS-16026	Female/31	Dublin	No	DL	Unable to contact
29.	LS-15911	Female/47	Louth	No	DL/ESOL	Missed calls/wants group
30.	LS-10795	Female/60	Cork	No	Independent learner	Accreditation complete
31.	LS-16967	Male/69	Mayo	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
32.	LS-16309	Male/34	Louth	Yes	DL	Time issues/stopped
33.	LS-16674	Female/X	Westmeath	Yes	WOV	Satisfied/accreditation
34.	LS-17014	Female/24	Offaly	Yes	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
35.	LS-15698	Female/50	Dublin	No	DL	Satisfied/complete
36.	LS-16554	Male/52	Dublin	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
37.	LS-17032	Female/34	Cork	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
38.	LS-16057	Male/53	Clare	No	DL	Satisfied/now in VEC
39.	LS-14968	Male/56	Dublin	Yes	Independent learner	Satisfied/complete
40.	LS-16697	Female/31	Dublin	Yes	DL/ESOL	DL didn't suit
41.	LS-16704	Male/70	Dublin	Yes	DL	DL not quite right
42.	LS-16863	Male/52	Donegal	Yes	DL	DL didn't suit
43.	LS-17003	Male/44	Limerick	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
44.	LS-13779	Male/48	Meath	No	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
45.	LS-16068	Male/X	Louth	No	DL	Unable to contact
46.	LS-16996	Male/60	Kilkenny	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
47.	LS-15402	Male/37	Kerry	Yes	DL	Time issues/stopped
48.	LS-16889	Female/46	Kerry	No	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
49.	LS-16942	Male/42	Dublin	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
50.	LS-10808	Female/29	Meath	No	Independent learner	Satisfied/ESOL
51.	LS-14970	Male/28	Meath	No	DL	Laptop broke/time
52.	LS-17005	Female/33	Dublin	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
53.	LS-17042	Female/45	Limerick	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing

54	LS-16964	Female/35	Monaghan	Yes	DL	Satisfied/now group
55	LS-17010	Male/32	Mayo	No	DL/ESOL	Satisfied/accreditation
56	LS-13793	Female/30	Dublin	No	DL/ESOL	Satisfied/ongoing
57	LS13793	Female/33	Dublin	Yes	DL	Laptop broke/stopped
58	LS-17039	Male/31	Wexford	Yes	DL	Time issues/on hold
59	LS-16852	Male/37	Leitrim	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
60	LS-15818	Male/X	Tipperary	Yes	DL	Unable to contact
61	LS-16991	Male/46	Tipperary	Yes	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
62	LS-12481	Male/54	Roscommon	No	DL	Satisfied/now VEC
63	LS-16951	Male/27	Cork	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
64	LS-16922	Female/X	Kerry	Yes	DL	Unable to contact
65	LS-16638	Female/36	Offaly	Yes	DL	Life issues/on hold
66	LS-16983	Female/23	Limerick	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
67	LS-16583	Male/41	Offaly	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
68	LS-16882	Female/65	Wicklow	Yes	DL	Satisfied/completed
69	LS-09836	Female/55	Waterford	No	DL	Did not suit/will try again
70	LS-16557	Male/37	Waterford	No	DL	Life issues/on hold
71	LS-13805	Male/49	Tipperary	Yes	DL	Did not suit/try group
72	LS-16822	Female/44	Westmeath	Yes	DL	Time issues/on hold
73	LS-16860	Male/43	Cork	No	DL	Satisfied/now level 5
74	LS-16059	Male/X	Dublin	Yes	Centre learner	Unable to contact
75	LS-16818	Female/38	Tipperary	No	DL	Satisfied/complete
76	LS-16542	Male/37	Cork	No	DL	Satisfied/ongoing
77	LS-14922	Male/44	Donegal	No	DL	Satisfied/completed
78	LS-17035	Female/41	Sligo	Yes	DL	Satisfied/accreditation
79	LS-16738	Male/26	Waterford	Yes	Centre learner	Unhappy with VEC class
80	LS-16703	Male/30	Donegal	No	DL	Missed calls/stopped