

Becoming literacy-friendly

The Fingal Centre
experience



ISBN: 978-1-907171-10-9

Written by: Elizabeth McSkeane

Published by: The National Adult Literacy Agency 2010

This research was commissioned by NALA and carried out by Elizabeth McSkeane. The views expressed in this report are not necessarily the views of the National Adult Literacy Agency. The content of this report is the copyright of NALA. Any piece may be reproduced by permission and with relevant credits.

NALA © 2010

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

Contact NALA at:

Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Sandford Road
Dublin 6

Telephone: + 353 1 412 7900

Fax: + 353 1 497 6038

Email: literacy@nala.ie

Web: www.nala.ie

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the help and support of the many people who participated in this project and contributed to the process and the final report. This collaborative effort involved people from the Fingal Centre and from the National Adult Literacy Agency.

Special thanks are due to the staff of the Fingal Centre:

Mary Ryan, Manager, Helen Byrne, Linda Caffrey, Niamh Dowdall, Barbara Leanord, Sinead McGrath Sinead O'Brien and all of the Community Employment Staff who took part in the research and assisted with this report.

From the National Adult Literacy Agency, the following people contributed particular support: Inez Bailey, Director, John Stewart, Kerry Lawless, Helen Ryan and Blathnaid Ní Chinnéide.

All of them contributed time, effort and insights, for which I thank them.

Liz McSkeane



Table of Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	5
Section 1: Background and Context	9
Introduction and context	9
The literacy-friendly organisation: rationale	10
Aims and rationale for this project	11
The Process: methodology and structure of report	12
Section 2: The Process	13
Overview of Step 1: Initial review and planning	13
Overview of Step 2: Close analysis of centre procedures	23
Overview of Step 3: Action plans	32
Overview of Step 4: Implementing the action plans	37
Overview of Step 5: Monitoring and review	44
Section 3: Conclusions and Recommendations	48
References	51
Appendices	52
Appendix 1: Right from the Start Checklists	52
Appendix 2: Literacy Awareness Workshop Session Plan	72
Appendix 3: Do's and Don't's: Identifying literacy difficulties	76

Executive Summary

Becoming literacy-friendly: The Fingal Centre experience

1. Introduction

The Fingal Centre whole-organisation project is a research study that was conducted on behalf of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) between December 2008 and September 2009. The project set out to explore the process of developing a whole-organisation approach to supporting literacy in a community-based organisation.

Being 'literacy-friendly' means removing any literacy-related barriers that could make it difficult for people to access the service, or participate in the activities that the organisation provides. This means adjusting certain ways of working in relation to customer service, staff recruitment and staffing policies, staff training and development and health and safety or data protection. The Fingal Centre project examines these issues in a community centre context.

NALA's Literacy Advisory Service comprises a range of consultancy, training or guides that can be used at all levels in an organisation. One support tool is *Right from the Start* manual which was used throughout this research with the Fingal Centre.

2. Rationale for the literacy-friendly organisation

In many countries there is a growing awareness amongst employers that some of their employees and customers find reading, writing and handling numbers difficult. Research has shown that literacy-related barriers can make it difficult for some staff and customers to engage fully with an organisation. These barriers can cost the organisation money and talented staff may refuse promotion or even leave. Becoming a literacy-friendly organisation means identifying and removing or compensating for such obstacles.

The research conducted with the Fingal Centre went through this process in a community context. It followed the five-step process set out in the *Right from the Start*. This models how the process can be conducted and yields insights that may be useful in other situations. It generates conclusions both for the Fingal centre, and for how the five step process can be implemented in a multi-dimensional context. These in turn provide the basis for more general observations on the process of becoming a literacy-friendly organisation and how organisations of different kinds can make best use of the five-step process in supporting their staff, clients and potential clients in accessing their services and products.

3. The process: how the research was carried out

The qualitative process of working through the five steps was carried out through a combination of:

- desk research;
- one-to-one and group interviews conducted with core centre staff and Community Employment (CE) staff;
- delivery of two Literacy Awareness Training workshops to core staff and CE staff; and
- development, with the CE staff, of sets of guidelines in literacy practice for use in their work.

The process followed for the project comprised the five steps from *Right from the Start* manual, supported by the text and checklists from that document. The steps are:

- Step 1: Initial review and planning
- Step 2: Literacy audit
- Step 3: Develop action plans
- Step 4: Implement action plans
- Step 5: Monitor and evaluate actions

4. Conclusions: findings generated by the process

Arising from the implementation of these five steps, the following general findings were generated in relation to the work of the Fingal Centre and the five-step process and also for the National Adult Literacy Agency.

A: For the Fingal Centre

1. The Fingal Centre demonstrates a high degree of awareness of literacy issues amongst the core staff. Many literacy-friendly policies and procedures were already in place and were enhanced through the work of the project. An early recommendation to embed good practice in policy, rather than depend on the expertise of committed individuals, was acted on and is now part of the strategic plan.
2. The implementation of the policy commitment in the strategic plan should be monitored on an ongoing basis so that continuing attention is paid to the practices of visiting facilitators and tutors and that recruitment processes continue to identify the potential for literacy needs to be addressed in the Centre.
3. The Community Employment staff should receive regular up-dated literacy awareness training to ensure that new staff are equipped to meet the literacy demands and needs in their role.

4. The centre should use the induction process as an opportunity for initial literacy assessment, on an informal basis.
5. Core centre staff should take part in plain English training to maximise the accessibility of the Centre's documentation.
6. The development of health and safety procedures and materials should keep literacy-friendly principles in mind. Conveying health and safety issues through written texts, carefully-designed, is another informal opportunity for early identification of literacy needs in new recruits.
7. The centre should explore alternative methods of evaluation which do not require reading or writing.

B: Findings for the National Adult Literacy Agency

1. Literacy Awareness Training (LAT) should be a normal part of the service for all groups or businesses engaging with the *Right from the Start* process.
2. NALA should continue to customise LAT to meet the needs of the organisations and groups, preferably in conjunction with key staff, and using the NALA materials as a basis.
3. Except in special circumstances, such as when centre staff already have these skills, plain English training should be strongly recommended for all organisations. Most staff have responsibility for communication at some level, either in-house, or with external clients, and the need for clear documentation is key for all organisations, at all levels.
4. The *Right from the Start* materials provide a clear, transparent basis for identifying literacy needs in an organisation. It is important not to overwhelm organisations with too much written material, too soon. The strategy of working through the manual in small chunks was effective in this case and is worth replicating.
5. NALA should investigate the possibility of having LAT incorporated into the professional development and preparation of childcare workers and into the Information Provider Programme module and people working in Citizens' Information Service.

C: General findings on the five-step process

A number of specific conclusions were generated in relation to each of the five steps.

Step 1

- Present *Right from the Start* materials in stages.
- Create explicit contact and communication strategies at the start of the process.
- Focus on existing structures and documentation.
- Identify current or forthcoming developments in the wider organisation and explore how these may be used to promote literacy-friendly policies and practices.
- Identify influences and demands from outside the organisation, and how these could help or hinder the creation of a literacy-friendly ethos.

Step 2

- Pay particular attention to health and safety, communications and induction.
- Use the *Right from the Start* checklists to structure the close analysis and report on it.

Step 3

- Manage the development of action plans by getting agreement from all stakeholders on their content; and by maintaining a suitable degree of confidentiality at the early stages in their development.
- Keep expectations realistic by ensuring that action plans are achievable in the short term, within the current resources of the organisation.

Step 4

- Expand literacy awareness within the organisation to include all levels of staff.
- Include some work where stakeholders contribute to changes.
- Produce observable results.
- Implement literacy awareness training as part of the process.

Step 5

- Ensure that people who are responsible for achieving outcomes are included in the monitoring and review process.
- Consider increased awareness and improved attitude on literacy issues as an outcome, and monitor that.
- Create alternatives to the *Right from the Start* monitoring check lists.
- Use and distribute *Right from the Start* materials throughout the process, as appropriate for each stage.
- The five-step process, and the materials supplied by the *Right from the Start* manual, provides a transparent, workable and effective mechanism by which to examine the literacy policies and procedures of an organisation. It also provides a useful set of tools by which to structure feedback and reporting. These materials can also be easily customised for different contexts.

Section 1: Background and Context

1.1 Introduction and context

The Fingal whole-organisation project is a research study conducted on behalf of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) between December 2008 and September 2009. The project set out to explore the process of developing a whole-organisation approach to supporting literacy in a community-based organisation.

The National Adult Literacy Agency defines literacy as

“listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. It includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions.”

The personal and social dimensions of literacy include being able to interact with the organisations and institutions we meet as part of our daily lives, whether at work or as a customer or service-user. Many NALA activities in recent years have therefore focused on helping organisations to address the literacy dimensions of their work. This usually involves identifying and removing any literacy-related barriers that staff or customers may meet in their dealings with the organisation.

This aspect of NALA’s work is highlighted its current strategic plan¹, which includes an objective to

“persuade organisations to be fully accessible to people with literacy and numeracy difficulties”

This includes a commitment to carry out research into the whole-organisation approach to literacy in different contexts.

NALA has already carried out substantial work to promote the integration of literacy into education and training programmes. This includes several initiatives that support tutors and trainers in vocational and professional education. These include guidelines² for education and training centres in developing a whole-organisation approach to literacy. Staff can also follow a third level Certificate, in Integrating Literacy, which NALA developed with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth and a module in Extending Literacy in Waterford Institute of Technology. Recent research also in an education setting, explored the policies and

¹ NALA (2007) *Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010* Dublin: NALA

² Ni Chinneide, B. (2002) *Integrating Literacy Guidelines*, Dublin: NALA

procedures in a college of further education³ and in a vocational training centre⁴ that transform these learning environments into literacy-friendly organisations.

Being 'literacy-friendly' means removing any literacy-related barriers that could make it difficult for people to access the services or participate in the activities that the organisation provides. A literacy-friendly organisation makes a commitment to remove literacy-related barriers to access, participation and achievement. In practice, this means making sure that people with literacy difficulties are able to access its services, communicate with the organisation, work and seek promotion, be included in staff consultations and generally be treated fairly.

This can mean, among other things, adjusting certain ways of working in relation to customer services, staff recruitment and staffing policies, staff training and development, and health and safety or data protection. The whole purpose of becoming a literacy-friendly organisation is to remove unnecessary literacy-related barriers to any of these areas of participation.⁵

NALA's Literacy Advisory Service is a resource that organisations of all kinds can use to achieve this goal. The service comprises a range of consultancy, training and guides which can be used at all levels in an organisation. One support tool is *Right from the Start*, a practical guide that enables organisations to investigate whether all of their customers and staff have full access to their products and services; and help the organisation to become literacy-friendly by removing any unnecessary literacy-related barriers. *Right from the Start* was used throughout this research with the Fingal Centre.

1.2 The literacy-friendly organisation: rationale

In many countries, including Ireland, there is a growing awareness amongst employers that some of their employees and customers find reading, writing and handling numbers difficult.

This is backed up by international research. An important OECD study⁶ found that as many as one in six of the Irish workforce have difficulty completing the reading, writing and number-related tasks that are part of daily and working life. This means that tasks that many people take for granted, such as reading notices, using health and safety equipment or preparing invoices, could present a real barrier for some people at work.

³ Hegarty A. and Feeley M. (2009) *Literacy-friendly Further Education and Training*, Dublin: NALA

⁴ McSkeane, E. (2009) *Living Literacy: a whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy in a vocational training setting*, Dublin: NALA

⁵ NALA (2009) *Right from the Start: A guide to Supporting Staff and Connecting with Customers*, Dublin: NALA

⁶ Morgan, M., Hickey, B., Kelleghan, T. (1997) *Report to the Minister for Education on the International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College/OECD, page 43, page 50

As well as this, for one in four of the general population who finding reading difficult, the presentation of promotional material or product information could be making it difficult for them to engage with an organisation.

Research has shown that literacy-related barriers can make it difficult for some staff and customers to engage fully with an organisation. Misunderstandings, errors, reduced efficiency and absenteeism arising from literacy barriers can cost the organisation money.⁷ It can also cost the services of talented staff who refuse promotion or even leave the job because of literacy-related obstacles in their work. Becoming a literacy-friendly organisation means identifying those obstacles and taking steps to remove or compensate for them.

1.3 Aims and rationale for this project

The aim of the project is “to work in cooperation with the Fingal Centre to develop evidence-based research” concerning the nature and the impact of a whole-organisation approach to literacy in the context of this centre. One aspect of this study concerns the five-step analysis process set out in the *Right from the Start*.⁸ This project provided the opportunity to reflect on the process itself, on how effectively it provides information of practical use to an organisation, and especially, on any implementation issues that could be generalised to other settings.

The second dimension of the research concerns the findings that related directly to the Fingal Centre. Most of the policies and procedures probed are specific to the particular context. However, as the Fingal Centre is a community-based organisation that supports many service-providers within the local area, a wide range of activities and services is addressed in the research. In addition, all of the staff involved in this study frequently come into contact with people who find reading, writing or working with numbers difficult. This made it possible to implement the five-step process with a target group of people who were already known to have experience of literacy issues, either through their work with the people from the locality or, in some cases, through their own direct experience. This models how the process can be conducted and yields insights that may be useful in other situations.

Therefore, it was envisaged that this study would generate conclusions that would illustrate how the five-step process can be implemented in different contexts. Although many of the recommendations relate to the specific situation of the Fingal Centre, they

⁷ Leavey, J (2007) *Improving Teaching and Learning for Adults with Basic Skill Needs through Formative Assessment*, Learning Connections, Communities Scotland/OECD Country Study and Workbase (nd) *The Key Steps Forward for Workforce Literacy*, Auckland: Workbase/Business New Zealand

⁸ NALA (2009) *Right from the Start*, Dublin: NALA

provide the basis for more general observations on the process of becoming a literacy-friendly organisation. These conclusions show how organisations of different kinds can make best use of the five-step process in supporting their staff, clients and potential clients in accessing their services and products.

The process comprises:

- Step 1: Initial review and planning
- Step 2: Literacy audit
- Step 3: Develop action plans
- Step 4: Implement action plans
- Step 5: Monitor and evaluate actions

These five steps provided the framework for the research conducted for this study.

1.4 The process: methodology and structure of report

The qualitative process of working through the five steps, which is described in more detail in Section 2, may be summarised as follows:

- desk research including examination of the centre documentation, strategic plan, support materials and copies of programmes followed;
- a series of one-to-one and group interviews conducted with core centre staff and Community Employment (CE) staff employed through the centre;
- delivery of two literacy awareness training workshops to core staff and CE staff;
- development with the CE staff, of sets of guidelines in literacy practice for use in their work.

Initial review and planning (Step 1 of the process) generated the description of the Fingal Centre and identified areas for more detailed analysis. This is outlined in more detail in the next section.

Section 2 also outlines the findings of the literacy audit, (Step 2 in the process), which clarifies how far existing centre procedures support or hinder access for people with literacy difficulties.

Section 3 contains conclusions arising from these actions, both in relation to the work of the Fingal Centre and to the five-step process.



Section 2: The Process

2.1 Overview of Step 1: Initial review and planning

The Fingal Centre is a community-based organisation that provides a range of services for individuals and organisations in and around the Finglas area of Dublin. During the initial review stage of this project, Step 1, the policies, procedures and general approach to service provision in the Fingal Centre were examined. This involved probing in detail the range of activities that the centre provides, and especially, the roles of the individual members of staff. This generated a general overview, described in this section, which provided the basis for the later steps of examining:

- the literacy requirements of the centre's activities, policies and procedures;
- the extent to which these are already supported by the centre; and
- the areas of activity where service provision could be improved by more literacy-friendly practices.

This section gives a brief account of the process by which the initial review stage was carried out; and summarises the findings in a short description of the Fingal Centre's main areas of activity.

2.1.1 Step 1: The process

Step 1 was carried out partly through desk research, and partly through a series of initial interviews with the centre manager, followed by meetings with the acting manager and core centre staff. Given the heavy workloads of all centre staff it was important to agree a strategy that would be effective in providing the research findings but realistic in terms of the time demands on individuals. It was agreed that this would be discussed with the staff themselves, after the centre manager had presented the basic idea.

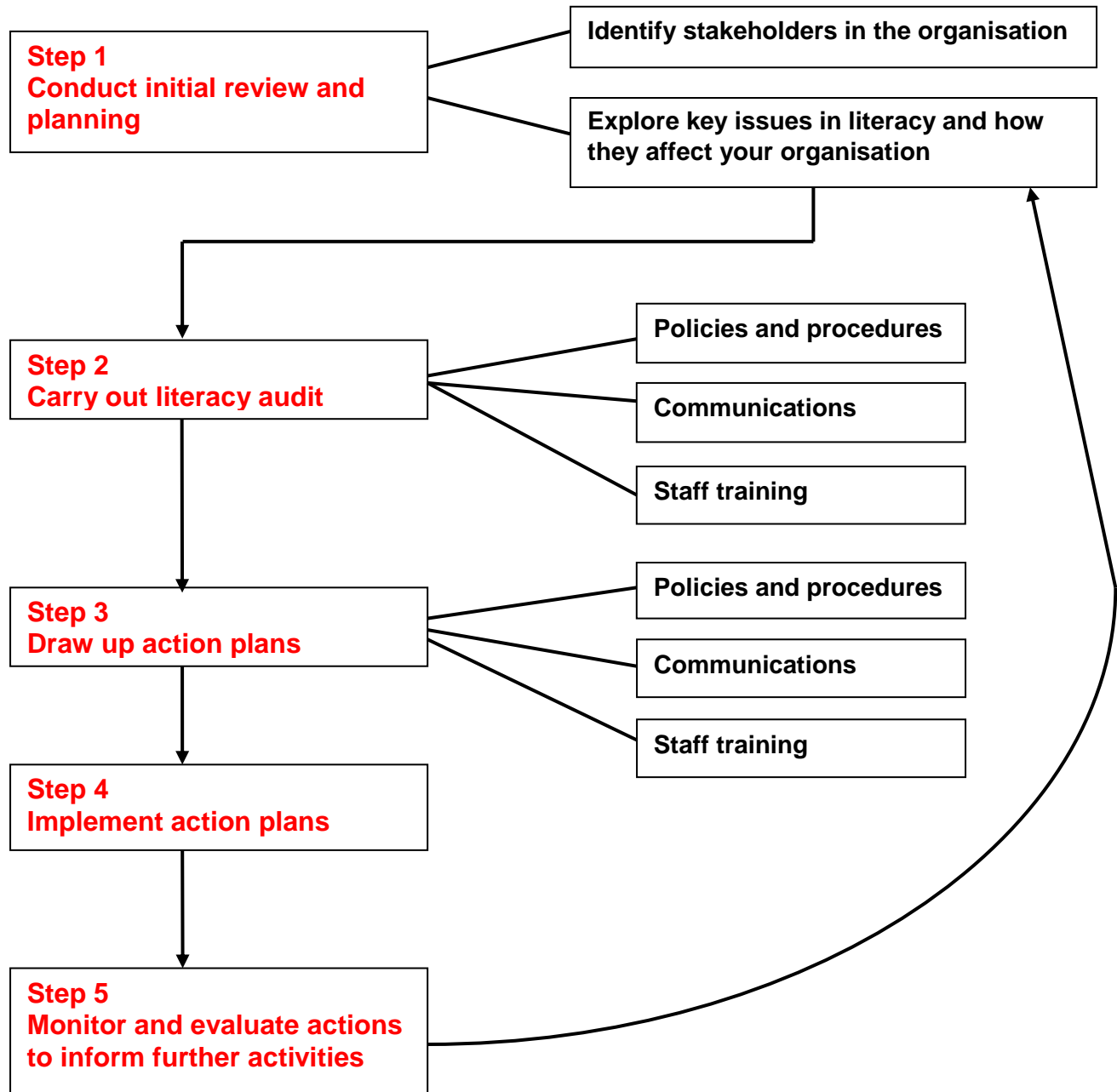
A useful resource at this early stage was the *Right from the Start* flow chart which summarises the five-step process⁹ and is shown on page 14. This was a helpful visual representation of the general process and was complemented by a one-page summary of the process in bullet points. In this way, a general overview of the five-step process could be presented to the manager and staff without asking them to read the full *Right from the Start* guide.

It was decided at that point to present the materials from *Right from the Start* in stages. Therefore, by the end of the process, the centre staff had worked through the whole process and received the relevant sections of the manual in phases. This emphasised its function as

⁹ NALA (2009) *Right from the Start*, Dublin: NALA

a working document, to be used as a practical tool. It also ensured that the people in the organisation had help from the external researcher in working through the process.

Figure 1: Five-step process



One of the first issues to be addressed at this stage was how best to contact and communicate with staff. It was decided that in this organisation, the most efficient strategy was for the consultant to contact staff members individually by email or telephone and set up one-to-one meetings, as convenient for both. The acting manager was identified as the main contact to receive regular concise progress reports from the researcher and review progress and recommendations at key stages.

The initial meeting between the researcher and the centre manager was followed by a group interview attended by all six of the core centre staff. This meeting explored in detail the expected role of the researcher, and that of each staff member. Each staff member agreed to meet the researcher individually and to provide in advance a copy of their work plan.

The work plans proved to be an important resource at this early stage in the process. In the Fingal Centre, every staff member draws up their own work plan, under the guidance of the centre manager. This sets out the individual's areas of work, the objectives of their work, the actions they will take to meet those objectives, the resources required and the projected outcomes. The fact that these work plans were made available to the consultant at the start of the project made it possible to analyse the range of specific activities being supported by the centre. An interview schedule based on each person's individual area of work was then drawn up. These and other topics were then probed during an individual interview with each member of staff.

During these interviews, which lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours, each person discussed their work plan, described in detail their role in the centre and the projects for which they had responsibility or acted in a supportive capacity. This provided an anchor for individuals to recognise and identify any literacy-related activities that they had already taken steps to support, or that might benefit from further input.

These interviews showed that although each person has their own area of responsibility, there is some overlap when members of staff support their colleagues in particular areas. Furthermore, it also became clear that the tasks people carry out in reality are often more varied and extensive than those written in job descriptions and, in this case, work plans. This highlights the importance of complementing data gathered from written sources with discussions of the reality of the work on the ground.



2.1.2 Step 1: The Fingal Centre - Overview

The Fingal Centre is a community-based organisation with origins in the national network of Centres for the Unemployed. The network was set up in the 1980s by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), supported by funding from FÁS. At that time, as the network name suggests, the function of these 25 centres countrywide was to support unemployed people by, for example, providing training in:

- vocational subjects,
- personal and social development,
- literacy, and
- other life-enhancing areas.

As the economic situation improved in later years and the number of long-term unemployed people decreased accordingly, the function of the centres shifted in response to emerging needs and opportunities. Increasingly, this shift has centred on providing services and programmes for local communities. Many of these activities have been sustained through the Community Employment programme.

The Fingal Centre is therefore part of the ICTU Congress Centres network and receives its funding from a range of sources, including FÁS, the Drugs Task Force and the local area partnership. It works with local communities and in particular with people who are unemployed or at risk of social exclusion, including minorities, people in recovery from drug addiction and people with literacy and numeracy needs. Centre activities are designed to support young people, older adults and also families.

The mission of the centre as stated in its recently-published strategic plan:

”The Fingal Centre is committed to the empowerment of the community of Finglas and surrounding areas in combating all forms of poverty and social exclusion.”¹⁰

This is put into action through a diverse range of programmes and services that are designed to support different sections of the community in response to locally-conducted needs analyses.

2.1.3 Fingal Centre activities

A range of programmes support particular target groups including people in recovery from drug addiction, parents and young people. These activities are co-ordinated by a team of six core staff comprising the centre manager, the financial administrator and four programme staff. Two of these staff are Community Employment supervisors.

¹⁰ The Fingal Centre (2010) *Equality and Empowerment through Excellence: The Fingal Centre Strategic Plan 2010 – 2013*, Dublin: Congress Centres Network, page 3.

The activities of the Fingal Centre are represented graphically on the tree diagram below taken from the Centre's Strategic Plan.



CE supervisors are responsible for recruitment and induction of CE staff. One of their functions is to support CE staff by developing an Individual Learner Plan (ILP) for each person and by organising relevant training to meet each person's learning goals. The cohort of CE staff who are managed and supported by the Fingal Centre emerged as an important target group in the course of this study.

In addition to their own specific areas of responsibility, all of the core centre staff assist their colleagues in any of the other programmes, as required. This demands a high degree of communication and teamwork amongst all of the staff. As Section 3 shows, these factors proved to be significant in generating some of the recommendations for literacy-friendly practices.

However, this first stage of analysis aimed to create a general picture of the range of activities provided and supported by the centre.

Supply of Service Providers to Local Agencies and Businesses

The Fingal Centre employs 48 CE workers. These part-time jobs are funded by FÁS and managed by the two core staff who are CE Supervisors. The services supported by these workers include maintenance and caretaking, administration, child-care and the provision of information in the centre's Community Information Service. The Fingal Centre is open to requests from local organisations, especially those with an employment and social inclusion focus. The centre takes responsibility for recruiting, managing, training and developing

these 48 workers who provide the community services in a wide range of sites throughout the locality.

Employment Support Services

The employment support services is a community support service consisting of typing, photocopying, emailing, faxing and preparing CV and job applications. The service is open throughout the week, including one evening each week, and also provides internet access to the community in response to the changing needs of job-seekers. It is co-ordinated by a member of the core staff and carried out by a team of CE workers. The core staff member who oversees this programme is also one of the CE supervisors with responsibility for recruiting and supporting CE workers.

The **Voyages Programme** is a 26-week programme aimed at adults in recovery from drug addiction. Participants work towards a FETAC Level 3 qualification in Computer Literacy which is delivered by an external tutor, in collaboration with the programme co-ordinator. Participants also experience a wide range of other activities designed to promote their personal and social development and integration. Individuals can be referred by any local service provider or agency, such as a local GP, counsellor or the HSE Rehabilitation Integration Service. Individuals can also refer themselves to the programme. Voyages is funded by the Local Drugs Task Force.

The **Active Parenting Programme** involves a wide range of activities and programmes, which are designed in response local needs. Courses are designed, developed and delivered by the programme co-ordinator or sometimes by external facilitators or organisations brought in to address specific areas of expertise. Active Parenting course includes topics such as understanding play and child development, children's health and nutrition, communicating with teenagers, handling difficult behaviour and stress management. There is also an ongoing five week baby massage course supported by materials and methods from the Association of Infant Massage in Ireland (AIMI); and a teen parenting programme in partnership with the local Teen Parent Support Programme, aimed at very young parents. Participants can be referred by relevant local agencies including GPs or Public Health Nurses. Individuals can also refer themselves.

Health and safety

A Health and Safety Officer was appointed in recent months and a new Health and Safety Committee has been set up. This committee is currently planning its work programme, which will involve providing training and sourcing or developing materials.

Participation in local networks

Some of the staff participate in formal networks such as the Local Drugs Task Force, the 16+ Task Force, the Finglas Suicide Network, breakfast clubs and the Community Development Sub-Committee of the Tolka Area Partnership. They represent the centre and keep agencies and networks informed about the operation of the centre and its services. They also communicate developments in the locality back to the centre.

However, there are also less formal opportunities for networking where centre staff come into regular contact with representatives of other key agencies, even if they are not part of a formal structure. The Co-ordinator of the Active Parenting Programme regularly meets Public Health Nurses; the Voyages staff have contact with HSE and the Probation and Welfare Service, the Finglas Addiction Support Team (FAST), the Cabra Resource Centre local counsellors and some GPs. The CE supervisors are in contact with all of the agencies or employers who have CE staff, or who may be able to assist in progression of staff to education or employment, as well as to FÁS.

2.1.4 New or emerging work in the centre

Several recent or ongoing initiatives are underway, which could have a bearing on the development of a whole-organisation approach to literacy in the centre.

FETAC registration

The Fingal Centre is a registered FETAC provider and during this research, aspects of registration requirements were under review. Literacy-friendly policies, procedures and materials can provide material and evidence for the FETAC quality assurance processes.

Induction manual

At the time of writing, an induction manual is being developed in the centre by a team of the core staff and a small group of CE staff. It is intended that the manual will contain key policy documents, in loose leaf format, with sections for different target groups including core staff, external tutors and CE staff. New entrants will be guided through the resource. The issues addressed in the course of this whole-centre literacy research project has contributed to the on-going development of the Induction Manual.

Strategic plan

At the time of writing, the strategic plan for the Fingal Centre has just been published. Literacy awareness has been highlighted as one of the Centre's core values:

“The Fingal Centre is committed to a whole-organisation approach to literacy and numeracy.”¹¹

How this will be achieved is set out in specific elements of the Centre’s goals and objectives, for example to develop literacy-friendly promotional materials and to engage with the National Adult Literacy Agency.

2.1.5 Initial findings from Step 1

The initial analysis of the organisation highlights a number of significant factors that are relevant to creating a literacy-friendly environment in the Fingal Centre and in the satellite activities it supports.

Staff team work

The flexibility of the staff who have multiple roles and support each other’s work indicates the importance of effective communication and teamwork. Any measures implemented to support a literacy-friendly approach to communication will therefore be most effective if delivered with the whole team of core staff working together.

Community Employment

The fact that the Fingal Centre manages a large team of Community Employment staff who work in the local area is significant. CE staff are an important resource for the community. They receive support, training and access to relevant services that can help them to achieve the learning goals set out in their Individual Learner Plan (ILP). It is worth noting that some CE staff ask for support in their reading or writing.

However, three important issues emerge concerning the Community Employment staff in the Fingal Centre. The first concerns initial assessment of CE workers’ learning needs. Following recruitment, Fingal Centre staff report that they have very little information about the learning needs of new CE recruits. These are identified once the person has joined the centre, in the course of drawing up the ILP. Centre staff are already alert to the signs that an individual may have a literacy difficulty. However, they all report that it is not always possible at the very early stages to identify whether a new recruit needs help with reading or writing, and, if so, how much. The Individual Learning Plan, which all CE staff draw up with the CE supervisor, does probe this issue. However, gaining a rounded picture of an individual’s literacy needs takes some time. Centre staff report that as a result, in one case an individual was placed in a job that they found too difficult. This was specifically because they were unable to manage the immediate literacy demands of the role.

¹¹ The Fingal Centre (2010) op. cit., page 4.

Therefore, initial assessment of literacy needs of new recruits is an important issue to address to ensure that the organisation maintains a literacy-friendly working environment. This need not involve formal testing. One approach to addressing this issue was explored with Fingal Centre staff and is described in the final section.

The second issue that is important for the CE staff concerns the role of external tutors and trainers. CE workers attend training in a wide range of topics, including health and safety, core skills and job-related training. Much of this training is delivered by external facilitators or tutors using their own materials. Education and training events often rely heavily on written materials. Therefore, the work of external consultants needs to be considered as part of the process of developing literacy-friendly policies and practices.

The third important issue concerning CE staff is the work that they themselves carry out and the services they provide within the community. It is not only the core centre staff who come into contact with people who may find reading and writing difficult: CE staff also may meet people who have literacy needs. This also must be taken into account when creating a literacy-friendly working environment. The more detailed literacy audit, Step 3, in the next section probes this in some detail and suggests appropriate actions for this context.

Networking

The Fingal Centre is in contact with and uses the services of a wide range of local agencies and service providers, including GPs, crèches, local counsellors and community groups such as the Finglas Addiction Support Team, Finglas Traveller Development Group and some local employers. It also has direct or indirect contact with many organisations, some working at national level. Direct contacts include FÁS, the local VEC, the HSE Drug Rehabilitation Service, the Probation Service, Public Health Nurses, Dublin City Council, Tolka Area Partnership. Indirect contacts include the Citizens' Information Board, which plans training for the Citizens Information Service; Heartbeat, the health and safety training provider, and the Association of Infant Massage in Ireland.

Any literacy-awareness work carried out in the Fingal Centre could provide an initial point of contact for other literacy work with some of the other agencies mentioned.



2.1.6 General issues emerging from Step 1

Analysing literacy issues contributes to the organisation achieving its goals

The process of carrying out the initial analysis showed that even in a working environment where there is a high degree of awareness of literacy issues, there are literacy-related barriers that can present obstacles to the organisation achieving its goals.

Presentation of *Right from the Start* materials

Right from the Start is a substantial document containing detailed information and checklists. The approach adopted for the Fingal Centre project, to present this material in sections, according to the current stage of the five-step process, worked well. In bigger organisations people may not have time to read the material closely before work on the process begins. In addition, it is useful for the external consultant to present the material as the organisation is working through the process. This ensures that participants fully understand the relevance of the information and processes described in *Right from the Start*, for their organisation.

Contact and communication strategies

Different organisations work within different limitations and resources. It may not always be possible for the external consultant to have direct one-to-one contact with all of the individuals who will need to be contacted. In larger organisations, one contact person may need to channel all communication and contact between the organisation and the consultant.

Agreeing a workable set of strategies for contact and communication is one of the first tasks which the external consultant and the organisation's contact people must accomplish.

Probing existing structures and documentation

Becoming a literacy-friendly organisation most likely involves making small but significant changes to structures and documentation that are already in use, rather than creating new ones.

To determine how those structures and documents operate in practice, it is important to talk to the people who use them. Relying on staff manuals or human resource materials will show how the procedures are intended to operate, but this may not necessarily correspond to the reality. Staff job descriptions, for example, are sometimes only a partial record of what individuals actually do and, therefore, their sphere of impact and influence.

Using current or forthcoming developments in the wider organisation

Internal processes, such as the development of the Fingal Centre strategic plan, can provide a vehicle for promoting or creating literacy-friendly policies and procedures. The Fingal Centre Strategic Plan was a high-profile process within the organisation. Other, less visible initiatives in bigger organisations could be equally useful and important. It is therefore worth

probing at the outset whether the organisation is engaged in any significant internal changes or reviews.

Gaining clarity about external influences and demands

Most organisations have to address issues that emerge from external influences. Sometimes external requirements, such as the FETAC quality assurance policies and procedures, can be used to positive effect in developing a literacy-friendly ethos.

2.2 Overview of Step 2: Close analysis of centre procedures

The initial review and findings from Step 1 suggested particular areas of activity that were likely to make literacy-related demands on the staff, or the service-users, or both. Step 2 consisted of a close analysis of the specific procedures used in the Fingal Centre in relation to six main functions:

- recruitment, when people are interviewed and hired, both for CE positions and for the core staff;
- induction, when staff are orientated into the policies and procedures of the centre;
- initial assessment of the general and specific training and learning needs of new recruits;
- needs analysis, when the relevant content for programmes provided by the centre is identified according to the needs of the users;
- implementation of training; and
- evaluation of training and other activities.

This section describes the process by which this close analysis was carried out and reports on the findings. It indicates areas where literacy-friendly procedures are already in place and includes recommendations for improvements.

2.2.1 Step 2: The process

This analysis was carried out in two ways: document analysis, and interview. Documents examined included application forms, contracts, a centre manual provided by FÁS, publicity materials for programmes and other activities, contact letters, handouts and some training materials. These written materials were used to support the six functions listed above.

The purpose of this analysis was to judge whether a person who finds reading or writing difficult would be able to get the basic message or give the required information from the materials provided. This of course depends to a great extent on the degree of difficulty that any one individual may have. However, some general guidelines are available on making

written material as accessible as possible, including a range of support materials provided through NALA's Plain English Service.

Features of presentation including font size, spacing, layout of text and use of visuals are some of the factors which can make a document easy or difficult to read. Another important feature is the type of language used. The plain English movement provides specific guidelines on how to avoid over-complicated structures and over-formal language and abbreviations. The close analysis of Fingal Centre's documentation for these six functions considered the extent to which these general principles of accessible documentation were present.

The information gathered from this analysis was then complemented by data from individual meetings with members of the core staff. The following six sections show that the written word is not the only medium used in the centre to carry out the six functions analysed. Rather, a whole range of strategies is used to carry out the different procedures probed during this stage.

The main resource used to support this stage of analysis was a set of checklists in the *Right from the Start* manual. These are shown in Appendix 1. These checklists provided a structure for the analysis and also for reporting and communicating the findings to the staff in the Fingal Centre. Judgements were recorded on the checklists, circulated to the Fingal staff for comment and then adjusted in a small number of cases. The findings were then discussed in an interim report and the Literacy Audit, which was circulated to the Fingal Centre and to NALA at the mid-way point in the project. That report provides the basis for much of this section.

2.2.2 Recruitment of staff and programme participants

The Fingal Centre uses a variety of methods to recruit staff and participants in all programmes and activities. Positions for the core centre staff are advertised in newspapers and contacts through the national training and employment agency, FÁS.

When new programmes are formed, such as those described in on page, participants are recruited in different ways. Personal contact and word-of-mouth are important communication strategies for informing people of a programme or activity that could be useful for them. Some people are referred by other agencies and the Fingal Centre staff also actively seek the help of other agencies. The Centre staff also distribute specially designed flyers, leaflets and posters, make direct telephone contact with individuals and sometimes approach people individually.

Positions for Community Employment jobs are formally advertised through the FÁS website and promoted through referrals from the FÁS Local Employment Service, in the newspapers, by word of mouth and by direct, unsolicited application to the centre.

Recruitment for the active parenting programmes is carried out to a large extent by word of mouth, and especially through personal contacts with the Public Health Nurses, other local agencies and schools. Posters and flyers are also distributed, but these are intended as a reminder for the contact people in the agencies, rather than a sole contact method with potential participants.

Clearly, there is considerable variety in how the different activities in the Fingal Centre reach potential staff or participants. Potential recruits for the Voyages programme are contacted through direct liaison with representatives of agencies who can identify and refer people. Voyages is a high-support programme and making contact with a potential participant is the first step in what is often a long process in engaging the person's active involvement on the programme.

Even after being contacted or, in many cases, referred by a local agency, the individual may not yet be ready to take the step of participating in a 26-week programme. In this case, people who are referred verbally by an agency are sent a letter from the co-ordinator. This is always followed up by telephone contact and sometimes this needs to happen several times. Clearly, the personal contact is very important in recruiting for the Voyages programme. However, the significance of receiving a letter of invitation was stressed. This puts the individual's participation on an official basis and grants it status and importance within the system. The contact letter is therefore used for confirmation, and not as the sole source of contact.

Overall, the Fingal Centre uses a wide variety of procedures to recruit staff and participants to jobs and programmes. None of the processes relies exclusively on the written word. This makes it possible for people who find reading and writing difficult to know about the jobs and services, and take steps to access them, thereby minimising barriers to access presented by exclusively written methods. Some documentation is used. This, for the most part, is well-structured and presents information clearly and transparently. That said, some of the written material could be even more accessible, especially in the use of fonts, layout and visuals.

2.2.3 Induction

Induction of CE participants is the responsibility of the CE supervisors, who generally carry out this process on one-to-one. As new recruits tend to start work in the centre one at a time, there is rarely, if ever, any need to carry out induction with a group.

As things stand, part of the induction process involves guiding the new recruit through a large amount of written material. This comprises the many documents that set out the centre's policy and ways of working. There are also several guidelines on policies and procedures for important issues including internet use, bullying and equality. This material was not generated by the Fingal Centre but was supplied by the national training and employment agency, FÁS. Many of these documents are very dense, closely-typed and written in formal, quasi-legal language. They are not easy to read and given the importance of the policies they describe, this is potentially a significant issue.

The Fingal Centre core staff manage this difficulty by giving a verbal explanation to the new recruit. However, this strategy relies a great deal on each new entrant's power of concentration and on their ability to remember the fine detail. For these reasons, verbal explanation of difficult policy statements should only be used as an interim measure. Important policies and procedures should be summarised in accessible language, in a user-friendly format.

This applies most especially to any documentation concerning health and safety requirements and procedures.

The ongoing work on developing an induction manual includes the process of gathering together all relevant material, including the documentation just mentioned. The specific guidelines provided by the plain English approach could assist the writers of that manual to make the document as accessible as possible.

2.2.4 Initial assessment

In the case of Community Employment staff, initial assessment of their work and learning goals takes place when developing an Individual Learner Plan. This is a FÁS-sponsored process that ensures that everyone working on Community Employment has access to learning opportunities that will support their development and progression. One part of the ILP probes whether the individual is likely to need help with reading, writing or using numbers. If so, the CE supervisor can arrange for the person to access the local VEC Adult Literacy Service.

Having early information about people's learning needs, including literacy, ensures that they are equipped for any work tasks and training demands they are asked to undertake in their early days in the Fingal Centre. It also ensures that, if they do need help, it can be organised at an early stage, rather than when they have been in the centre for a time.

Currently the CE supervisors probe this sensitive question during informal initial meetings. Usually it is possible to identify at that stage if it is likely that the person will need help. However, it would be useful to include a systematic approach that would reveal how much

help, and what kind of help, a person will need. A systematic process is not necessarily a formal event: it is possible to use naturally-arising literacy and numeracy activities to observe systematically which tasks people can manage easily and which they find more difficult.

One such opportunity is the induction process. The work-in-progress on developing a new induction manual provides a context within which supervisors and new recruits can work together, as appropriate, to decide if work on literacy should be part of the new participant's Individual Learner Plan.

Strategies for achieving this were built into the action plans outlined in section 2.3. Some actions were taken and these are described in section 2.4 below.

It is worth noting that the person who carries out the informal process of initial assessment, both for CE and for recruitment to other centre programmes, needs to have some awareness of literacy issues and of the signs that can indicate that a person needs help with reading or writing. Clearly, this also calls for a sensitive approach to communication. The Fingal Centre staff already had a high degree of awareness and sensitivity on literacy issues. They also decided that they would like to be even better equipped in this area. This, too, is reflected in the action plans and implementation stages reported in 2.3 (page 32) and 2.4 (page 37).

2.2.5 Needs analysis

Needs analysis is a significant task that is carried out regularly by core Fingal Centre staff. The process of developing an Individual Learner Plan with each CE staff member is carried out by the two CE supervisors. This comprises a detailed needs analysis of each individual's learning goals. For example, the Active Parenting programme is structured according to the identified needs of the prospective participants. Core Fingal Centre staff take part in periodic training that meets needs they identify themselves.

For the most part, the process of needs analysis in each of these contexts is carried out verbally. This takes place during a one-to-one interview with the CE staff. The same approach is used in the parenting programmes, complemented by informal talks with small groups of participants. The programme co-ordinator facilitates these talks and uses them to probe the interests and needs of those taking part. All of the centre activities use written tools to record the outcomes of the needs analysis.

It may therefore be concluded that needs analysis in the Fingal Centre is conducted in ways that are accessible to people who may need help with reading or writing. The outcomes of the needs analysis are recorded in writing, which is essential as a formal record of the starting point is required. No action needs to be taken therefore in relation to this aspect of the work of the centre.

2.2.6 Implementation of training

The implementation of training in the Fingal Centre is an important issue, as many education and training processes rely heavily on texts, handouts and flip-chart notes, especially in conveying information.

A very significant issue is therefore the methodology and related materials of whatever training is provided for CE staff. This is largely determined by the training provider. If this is one of the core staff in the Centre, the individual staff member has control of the teaching methodology and the materials used to support it.

Centre staff described in detail the methodology they used in the programmes such as the Active Parenting course. The general approach indicates a strong awareness of literacy issues in relation to methodology. Methods used involved a wide variety of experiential techniques and only a small amount of reading and writing. For example, participants may be asked to write personal and contact details or to read from the flip chart and from some carefully designed handouts.

The support materials used for this and other programmes were made available to the researcher. In common with the documentation used for recruitment, the written materials used by Fingal Centre staff in training are already literacy-friendly. These are carefully written, make good use of visuals and provide clear and easily-read guidelines. Broadly speaking, the training materials are in line with the principles of plain English, although staff could benefit from some small revisions to layout and format and expression to make these even more effective. Overall, however, the materials and methodology used by the Centre staff generally support people who find reading or writing difficult.

However, Centre staff do not provide all of the training. Some of the programmes employ external trainers and much of the training for CE staff is conducted by external consultants. In several cases, such as the computer applications tutor for the Voyages programme and some of the facilitators to the Active Parenting programme, the tutor is well-known to the programme co-ordinator. This means that the co-ordinator is able to discuss with the tutor in advance the specific needs of the group, including literacy, and ensure that the methods and material will be accessible to all.

However, in a few cases, it is not so clear that the external tutors are literacy-aware and are using literacy-aware materials. That is not to say that they are not. However, the training materials used by external agencies, including Heartbeat Health and Safety training and materials, FÁS Core Skills materials and the Infant Massage Programme Materials, were not examined for this study. It is therefore not possible to say whether all texts and handouts

are designed and structured to be accessible to the widest possible audience. Similarly, there is no way of knowing the range of methods used by some of the external trainers.

This is a crucial issue. Sometimes, people who find reading and writing difficult cope with this by absenting themselves from training opportunities. It is important to have clear guidelines for all external trainers concerning the type of materials and methods considered suitable for use in the work of the centre. It would be useful for the Centre to put in place a policy statement that would make it a regular part of the Centre procedures to examine materials and discuss methods with external facilitators.

2.2.7 Evaluation

All of the programmes and activities conducted in the Fingal Centre are subject to regular evaluation and review. Generally, this is carried out by asking people to complete a simple questionnaire at the end of the programme or, in the case of CE staff, training course. Often this is complemented by group or one-to-one discussion, when participants are invited to give verbal feedback as well.

The evaluation questionnaires reviewed for this study are generally clear, well-organised and expressed in simple language. They could be enhanced by increased use of visuals or even by converting the evaluation questionnaire to a mostly visual format.

Although the questionnaire is a commonly-used method of gathering people's responses for evaluation purposes, there are many alternatives, including the use of art work, photographs and diagrams, role play and group exercises and others. As evaluation is a process that tends to be dominated by the written word, it is possible that the views of people who find it difficult to read the questions could be lost. Alternative methods of evaluation that do not require reading or writing would provide an important tool in further enhancing the Fingal Centre's profile as a literacy-friendly organisation.



2.2.8 Findings from Step 2

Most of the findings arising from the close analysis conducted for Step 2 indicate that in the Fingal Centre, most of the existing procedures already demonstrate a high degree of literacy awareness and literacy-friendly practices. These may be summarised as follows:

- For the most part, procedures such as recruitment, training needs analysis and implementation of training do not rely on the written word but use a wide range of methods that are accessible to all.
- Most of the written materials used for these purposes, and for other functions, are already well-structured and use simple language.
- All of the staff demonstrate a high degree of understanding of the importance of literacy issues, and have experience of addressing these with new recruits in a sensitive manner.

The existing literacy-friendly policies and procedures provide a basis on which to build. This will allow the Fingal Centre to enhance and refine their approach. The findings of this section suggest a number of recommendations for future action. The Fingal Centre should:

- adopt a more systematic approach to initial identification of the literacy needs of new recruits. This need not be a formal assessment. The induction phase could provide an opportunity to carry out this process using naturally-occurring literacy and numeracy tasks.
- continue to monitor the methods and materials used by external trainers and ensure that these are literacy-friendly.
- use a wider range of methods to carry out evaluation.

In the course of the analysis conducted for Step 2, it became increasingly clear that most of the good practice already happening in the Fingal Centre is a result of the expertise and interest of the members of the core staff, as individuals. Many aspects of the ways of working are embedded in their own practice, rather than being formally expressed as Fingal Centre policy. This is a significant distinction, as individuals are not always available or may leave. If this happens, there is no guarantee that their replacements will have the same background or awareness.

It is therefore important to incorporate good practice into formal statements of the centre's policies and to describe the specific procedures by those policies are carried out. To some extent, this study provides the centre with a record of the literacy-friendly procedures already in place. Stating this at the level of policy is the next step. The strategic plan, which was being developed at the same time as this study, provides one opportunity to do this and this has already been acted on. The induction manual, which is currently being developed, is another. These actions are explored in more detail in Section 4.

2.2.9 General issues emerging from Step 2

Processes common to all organisations

All organisations, whatever their size or function, carry out certain processes that equip staff to work effectively and safely. Workers have a legal entitlement to a safe working environment. It is therefore crucial that every individual be aware of the roles and responsibilities and, especially, of all of the health and safety demands and procedures. If this information is accessible only to some staff, and not only to those who read, write and use numbers easily, the general well-being and efficiency of some individuals could be compromised. To some extent, depending on the context, this may apply also to clients such as those who use the company premises or visit the site of business.

Two processes that are common to all organisations in fulfilling these requirements are induction and training for health and safety awareness. Often, much of this information is conveyed through the written word. As a general principle, the close analysis comprising this stage of the five-step process should look for communication strategies that include other mediums, including visual, oral and action orientated. If these are not present, such findings can provide the basis for action plans that will enhance the organisation as a literacy-friendly place, in which to work and conduct business.

Using the *Right from the Start* checklists

Stage 2 of the five-step process consists of a very detailed analysis of specific procedures and processes in the organisation. The checklists from *Right from the Start* Guide were one of the main resources for drawing up the action plans. The format of the checklists was used to structure the findings from the first two steps. It also provided a framework for reporting those findings to the centre staff and to NALA. These checklists are shown in Appendix 1.



2.3 Overview of Step 3: Action plans

Once the initial and close analysis of Steps 1 and 2 had been completed, the next phase involved identifying specific areas where actions could be taken to enhance the Fingal Centre's policies and procedures. This section documents the development of a series of action plans which the centre staff agreed would enhance their way of working with people who find reading and writing difficult.

2.3.1 Step 3: The process

The first element in drawing up the action plans was consultation. The staff in the Fingal Centre examined the *Right from the Start* checklists that had been completed by the researcher and provided a summary of findings on specific topics relevant to the centre, as described in the last section. This material was complemented by a written report called the literacy audit, which gave an overview of the whole analysis and discussed the findings in detail.

The core staff of the Fingal Centre then provided written feedback on both the checklists and the literacy audit. This was followed by a meeting with the researcher to discuss how these interim findings could be taken forward in concrete actions. Based on these discussions, the researcher drew up a set of plans for five actions.

Right from the Start also contains a template that can be used to structure action plans. The format includes a number of sections that were used both to record the plans, and to structure discussions with Fingal Centre staff in the plans. The specific issues that need to be agreed for this planning process, and which are set out on the action plan template were: area of work; actions; person responsible; monitoring method and timescale. In this way, developing action plans was a joint process with Fingal Centre staff. This helped to ensure that the recommended actions were both acceptable and realistic in terms of the practical demands they would make on the resources of the centre.

It is worth mentioning that the first version of this planning stage produced plans for five distinct actions. These were circulated privately amongst the core Centre staff and NALA. However, during later discussion, it became clear that logistical obstacles would present difficulties in implementing two of the actions recommended.

The action plans that were taken forward were as follows:

1: Staff training and development

Conduct a literacy awareness training workshop for:

- (a) all core staff, and
- (b) all Community Employment staff.

The workshops should take place by the end of April 2009 and evaluate it one or two months later, using interviews and/or questionnaires.

2: Guidelines on induction materials

Provide guidelines on using the induction materials and process as a vehicle for informal initial identification of the literacy needs of new recruits. This would be carried out by NALA with the centre staff, completed by mid-April 2009 and evaluated by interview.

3: Statement of policy

Express a commitment to implementing literacy-friendly policies by incorporating relevant statements into the Fingal Centre's new strategic plan, to be completed by the end of May 2009.

As these action plans were put into practice, yet another measure was identified as a useful method of enhancing the services supported by the Fingal Centre. It was agreed that CE staff could benefit from having a set of guidelines tailored to their working circumstances. The development of this document is discussed in the next section, which explores how the action plans were implemented.

The rest of this section summarises briefly the rationale for highlighting these measures as areas for action in the short term.

2.3.2 Literacy Awareness Training: core staff and CE staff

Although the core staff already had a high degree of awareness of literacy issues, they also thought that it would be beneficial to update their knowledge on the current situation nationally and internationally and also to share experiences and ideas on how to address situations arising from literacy-related barriers.

In addition, it was clear that many of the CE staff come into contact with people who have difficulty in reading, writing or using numbers. The CE staff help the centre to provide services for the local community, which sometimes involves reading, writing or using numbers. CE staff members therefore must be explicitly aware of those literacy demands,

and how to deal with difficulties as they arise. If they are not, then those services may not be completely accessible to the local people who use them.

When the Stage 3 action plans were being drawn up, the 48 CE staff who are managed by the Fingal Centre and who provide these local services had not yet examined their work role from a literacy perspective. For this reason, it was agreed that literacy awareness training should be provided to the full cohort of the Fingal CE staff.

Given the close working relationship between the Fingal Centre staff and the CE staff, it was agreed that these two actions could be addressed together. Literacy awareness training was therefore scheduled to take place with the whole CE group, together with the Fingal Centre core staff.

2.3.3 Guidelines on induction materials

Several of the recommendations concerning measures to enhance the Centre's literacy-friendly policies can be incorporated into the forthcoming induction manual. Induction materials typically include information about an organisation's policies and procedures. As this work-in-progress is currently revising existing documentation, it presents a timely opportunity to incorporate guidelines on literacy-related issues.

This strategy has the advantage of ensuring that literacy-friendly procedures are addressed in the context of all of the regular processes that take place in the Fingal Centre. Being a literacy-friendly organisation involves weaving these policies and procedures into all aspects of the work, rather than considering this as a separate process.

The second function that this action plan can fulfil concerns the use of the induction phase as an opportunity to observe the literacy skills of new recruits. Newcomers need to fill in forms and become familiar with working conditions and other policies, including health and safety issues. Much of this information is conveyed through documentation. Core staff can therefore identify at an early stage the people who may need help with literacy. If this is carefully structured, it is also possible to judge how much help, and what kind of help, individuals may need.

2.3.4 Statement of policy

One of the main observations arising from the audit for Step 2 is the high level of awareness amongst the core staff, and the very extensive range of strategies they already use, noted in Section 2.2. Until now, the principal gap is an explicit statement of policy to support their procedures in key areas. During this study, Centre staff worked on various drafts of

statements to be inserted into the new strategic plan, which was being developed at the same time. This is important because without this, good practice is embedded in the awareness of individuals, rather than in the Fingal Centre's modus operandi and that good practice could be lost if people leave.

Such policy statements of support for a literacy-friendly environment and practice should also be included in other key documentation, such as the induction manual.

2.3.5 Findings from Step 3

A number of observations emerge from the action plans developed in the course of Step 3.

Firstly, despite the Centre staff's prior knowledge about literacy issues, they decided that literacy awareness training was an essential measure in supporting their literacy-friendly organisation. Much awareness raising is process-oriented and the individuals expected to gain as much from sharing their experiences as from updating their knowledge with new information.

Secondly, the structure of the Fingal Centre and the range of services it supports in the local community greatly expanded the potential area of influence of any support measures taken. The presence of 48 Community Employment staff providing different services throughout the locality offered a unique opportunity to install the beginnings of literacy awareness in a much wider range of organisations than one community centre. How this developed is explored in more detail in the next section.

Thirdly, it was possible to incorporate some elements of these action plans with other measures that have a whole-organisation impact: the strategic plan and the new induction manual.

Finally, the fact that two of the original plans needed to be postponed demonstrates the importance of consultation with the people who are most affected by the actions set out in the plans.

2.3.6 General Issues emerging from Step 3

Drawing up action plans is the stage which supports the organisation in translating the aspiration to become a literacy-friendly environment into reality. The analysis of the existing system that takes place during Steps 1 and 2 tends to clarify which specific measures are needed to embed this ethos into the organisation's natural way of working.

However, the most relevant and ideal actions may not always be achievable, in the short term. Part of the planning process at this stage should include taking account of the potential limitations within which organisations and individuals work.

Managing action plans

Managing the action plans means drawing these up in such a way as to maximise the motivation and engagement of the people who will put them into practice or who will make practical use of any materials produced as part of this stage. This highlights the importance of involving all relevant stakeholders in drafting actions plans, and of securing their agreement for the specific elements such as staffing and time scale.

A second general principle worth considering is the issue of confidentiality. Although it is important to involve the relevant stakeholders at an early stage, certain actions may generate uncertainty or raise expectations. In such cases it may be advisable initially to limit the number of people involved in discussing the action plans to those who would have direct responsibility for managing or implementing those measures. If such actions need to be postponed or cancelled for logistical reasons or differences of opinion and judgement among stakeholders, some degree of privacy is advisable at this early stage.

Keeping expectations realistic

Action plans that are drawn up in light of the current resources available to the organisation are more likely than longer-term or more extensive measures to be translated into reality. For this reason, it may be useful to distinguish between short and long-term actions for this initial application of the five-step process, with the benefit of support from the external consultant, it may be most useful to focus on actions that can be implemented sooner rather than later and that are on a scale that is likely to demonstrate some initial results.

It is therefore more useful to plan for two or three smaller actions that are achievable in the short term, in preference to complex plans that depend on uncertain circumstances in the future.

Incorporate literacy action planning into wider organisational planning processes

General planning and development processes in an organisation can be enhanced if literacy issues are identified and addressed. This was possible in the Fingal Centre because of the timing of the development of the new strategic plan and of the induction manual. The experience of participants in the five-step process contributed to these new developments in the Fingal Centre. It is likely that a successful five-step process carried out in other settings would similarly alert key stakeholders to literacy issues in areas of their general planning and development.



2.4 Overview of Step 4: Implementing the action plans

Each of these actions was implemented in the period between May and September 2009. The monitoring and review of the impact of the literacy awareness training, which is explored below was carried out one and two months following delivery of the workshops.

This section describes the planning aspect of implementation and the actual delivery, feedback from the literacy awareness training, plus findings that emerged on the spot.

2.4.1 Step 4: The Process

To a large extent, the implementation stage of the five step process was concerned with planning.

The development of the half-day literacy awareness training workshop was carried out by the researcher in consultation with core Fingal Centre staff. Materials were provided by the NALA Literacy Advisory Service. A first draft of the workshop outline was presented to the core staff, discussed at a meeting and as a result, parts of the session plans were substantially revised to cater more effectively for the target group. For example, one useful resource was a questionnaire on self-assessment of literacy awareness contained in the *Right from the Start*. This was reworked and the new draft used as an anchor to focus group discussion during one of the LAT sessions. The final version of the workshop is given in Appendix 2.

2.4.2 Literacy Awareness Training

On 24 April and again on 12 May, two literacy awareness training workshops were delivered to the core staff and the CE staff managed by the Fingal Centre. On both occasions the workshops covered the same content and followed the same format. The workshop comprised a combination of small and large group discussion and practical tasks, interspersed with short presentations that provided information about literacy issues, facts and figures.

During the workshops on the day, reflections emerging from the small and large-group discussion indicated that participants gained insights into literacy issues during the discussions. The group demonstrated a rich understanding of what is meant by 'literacy'. This emerged from focused reflections on their personal and professional experiences. As well as this, participants began to gain an awareness of the literacy demands involved in certain areas of employment. In some of the work roles represented, it emerged that literacy is a crucial dimension for the service providers and for the people who use the service.

One of the action plans had set the goal of developing specific literacy guidelines for different areas of the work of the Fingal Centre, which could be included in the new induction manual. During the LAT workshop, CE staff and core staff worked together to draw up a short information sheet. This sets out the main signs by which a literacy need may be identified and suggests a range of actions - 'Do's and Don't's' - that staff should take when they meet someone whom they think might have difficulty in managing the written materials needed to use the service they are providing. These guidelines are shown in Appendix 3.

(i) What is 'literacy'?

In response to this question, participants themselves identified the familiar technical skills of reading, writing and spelling. Using numbers was also included. Literacy was also considered to be a practical set of tools that facilitates us in daily life, such as helping children with homework. It was noted also that what we mean by 'literacy' changes over time: using computers and technology could increasingly be included in our definition.

However, people noted that there is also an important personal dimension: 'literacy' also encompasses understanding and being confident in carrying out literacy tasks. Being 'literate' is also connected to motivation and to beliefs about ourselves that come from different sources, especially from school. As it is a necessary skill for life, literacy is deeply embedded in sense of self-worth and difficulties with literacy can contribute to depression and damage quality of life in practical ways.

This in turn can have social and societal consequences, contributing to the exclusion of some people from community and working life, and hence leading to social isolation.

"It can be a crutch or it can hold you back."

Some people thought that social policy also had an impact on the development or lack of development of some people's literacy skills, such as approaches to non-attendance at school in places where this is common. There are many other barriers to literacy such as jargon, and how people view other people who may have difficulties in this area:

"You don't see the ability – just the dis-ability."

However, literacy is not an 'either-or' situation: there are degrees of skill, ability and confidence, which people can improve.

All of these reflections, which emerged from discussions with the participants themselves, convey a concept of literacy that is consistent with the socio-cultural view embedded in the NALA definition of literacy in Section 1.

(ii) Prior experience of literacy issues: personal

Almost all of the participants had had at least some prior experience of literacy issues that had affected them personally, in their daily life. In some cases, people knew a friend or a family member who was either availing of literacy support through the VEC Adult Literacy Service, or who had some difficulty that they had not yet addressed.

However, workshop participants also spoke openly about their own experiences. Two people are already taking part in the VEC Adult Literacy Service. Several others referred to particular experiences such as getting a letter from a solicitor that was difficult to understand, finding it difficult to help a child with particular homework or feeling too embarrassed to ask a question during training. Some people had unhappy memories of school and others had direct experience of specific learning difficulties including dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

It is clear that literacy issues have touched most people in some way in their daily lives. As well as this, people's perception of what constitutes a 'literacy difficulty' was not confined to needing support with very basic reading and writing: the example of the solicitor's letter illustrated the point made by one participant:

"We all have literacy issues we can improve on – spelling, computers."

(iii) Prior experience of literacy issues: at work

As noted earlier, a very wide range of community services is supported by the CE staff managed through the Fingal Centre. Two areas in particular stand out as being especially relevant in relation to their literacy content:

Citizens' Information Service (CIS)

Staff working in the CIS are the first point of contact for members of the public who seek information. All of the CIS staff reported meeting people quite regularly who had difficulty with various aspects of the interaction, such as reading or filling in forms. In a few cases, the service user would actually express uncertainty and ask for help. One CIS reception worker reported that a young woman asked for help and said that this was the first time she had ever revealed to anyone that she could not read. The group agreed that the CIS staff member had handled the situation sensitively and effectively. However, there was general agreement that more help and guidance on this delicate issue was needed.

"People will open up if they can trust us."

"People are very intelligent as they have a lot of coping skills."

CIS staff already receive substantial training to fulfil their role. Some of this includes working with diversity and supporting social inclusion. However, there is as yet no detailed and specific training on how to notice a potential literacy difficulty, and then on how to respond when this does emerge. The individuals who participated in this LAT workshop demonstrated a high level of awareness in how to communicate effectively with people who may be having difficulty with the reading and writing demands of their service. Once again, however, this comes from the insight and life experience of the individuals, rather than from any systematic training or practical guidelines. The LAT work and the guidelines developed during this workshop provide a useful first step. This suggests a more general training need among the wider population of CIS staff and also, amongst Community Employment staff in general.

Childcare

Literacy is a very important part of the childcare process, both for childcare workers and for parents. One of the roles of the childcare assistant is to keep records of children's behaviour and experiences using an observation sheet. This is an obvious area where staff recruited to this position could experience difficulties in fulfilling their role. They are also obliged to keep records of any specific incidents that need to be communicated to parents and also periodically provide written reports on the children's progress.

Parents who enrol their child in a crèche immediately find themselves faced with substantial demands on their reading skills:

"There are so many forms that have to be filled in. The parents are told to take them and fill them in at home."

Sometimes, the childcare staff offer to go through the documentation with the parents but if this offer is not taken up:

"We don't know if they actually read the material. Do parents really know what they are signing up to?"

Once their child is enrolled in the crèche, from time to time the parents are asked to sign off on any written reports supplied about their children. Workshop participants employed in the childcare area said that they had at times been concerned that some parents may not regularly read these reports, for example an accident report. This means that they are not fully informed about their children's situation:

"The parent is supposed to read the report and sign it. Some of them just sign it. Maybe that's because of a literacy problem. I had never considered that before."

The childcare workers at these events were extremely interested in the possibility that some of the reactions from parents that had surprised and concerned them, for example in not reading important information related to their child's welfare, might be linked to a lack of confidence in reading.

2.4.3 Development of CE literacy support guidelines

During the LAT workshops, CE staff and core centre staff, with the researcher, developed a set of guidelines on how to recognise potential literacy difficulties and on strategies for responding in an appropriate manner.

Part of this involves recognising the signs. Many of these were identified by workshop participants themselves, based on their own experience or observation. The guidelines that emerged from the facilitated discussions at the LAT workshop are very similar to those contained in *Right from the Start*. However, the fact that this version emerged from discussions between the individuals present ensures that the format is tailored particularly to their experience, both personal and arising from their CE working environment.

These guidelines are now available in the form shown in Appendix 4 to all those who were present at the LAT workshops. They can also be incorporated into the induction manual for the Centre, either in the current format or as an abridged version.

2.4.4 Induction planning

Revising the induction process, and the materials used to support it, was one of the major tasks that the centre staff carried out during this project. This is a substantial undertaking and at the time of writing, is still a work in progress.

During the final stage of this project, the action plan addressing this area was advanced through a half day planning session involving the researcher and the two staff responsible for devising the new manual. Existing documents were examined in detail. Specific strategies were identified to make them more accessible in reading terms.

Staff also identified strategies that would enable the CE supervisors to use the induction process as an opportunity consciously to observe how well new recruits are able to manage the reading and writing demands of the induction process. Tasks that are a normal part of induction, and that can reveal much about an individual's ease with reading and writing, include filling in forms, reading rules and procedures and discussing working conditions as set out in contracts.

Work on developing this manual involves addressing many induction issues. Although this action plan was not fully accomplished during this study, work on the manual is currently in progress. The literacy issues addressed throughout the project are now being incorporated into the content and format of the manual. This includes plans for using the range of strategies suggested for making the written material literacy-friendly and for using the induction process as a vehicle to initially identify the learning needs of new recruits.

2.4.5 Policy: literacy awareness in the strategic plan

Staff started to implement this action at a very early stage in the project, even before the formal development of the action plans. Work on the Fingal Centre's strategic plan had been in progress for some time before the start of this project. This made it possible for the centre staff and board to incorporate an explicit commitment to being a literacy-friendly organisation into its mission statement, as quoted in Section 1.

This action was carried out by Fingal Centre staff, in consultation with the researcher, who read an early draft of the strategic plan and suggested specific areas where literacy issues could be relevant. Centre staff then reviewed these recommendations. As the development of the strategic plan progressed, different versions of literacy-friendly policies were drafted. The document has now been finalised. In addition to including a literacy-friendly ethos in the Fingal Centre's mission statement of the plan, the plan makes more specific references to particular procedures in the work of the centre where literacy could be relevant.

At the time of writing, the strategic plan has been published. Writing these commitments and practical strategies into the strategic plan ensures that the principle of being a literacy-friendly organisation is embedded in the centre's policies and procedures. It will be important to ensure that the practice is regularly monitored, to ensure that any new staff are recruited and inducted bearing these commitments in mind.

It is worth bearing in mind that a Strategic Plan is an accessible document, in the public domain. The explicit commitment of the Fingal Centre to adopt a literacy-friendly ethos will be an important awareness-raising device among all of the service providers and organisations whose work is supported by or otherwise intersects with the work of the Fingal Centre.

2.4.6 Centre findings from Step 4

The process of implementing the action plans yielded a number of conclusions concerning the work of the Fingal Centre and its core and CE staff. It also provides some useful insights into the process of implementation itself.

Firstly, the planning and delivery of the LAT demonstrated that the core and CE staff already had quite a high degree of general awareness of literacy issues and how to address these. Core staff made important contributions to the design of the LAT workshop. CE staff themselves drew on their own knowledge and experience to create a set of literacy guidelines.

This collaboration illustrates the importance of probing the existing knowledge that people have of literacy issues, and using that as a basis on which to build greater awareness. This is important, as general awareness, although significant, needs to be coupled with specific knowledge and information. The childcare workers who had just understood the high level of literacy involved in specific aspects of using the community crèche, both for staff and for parents, is one example of this.

Another finding from this study concerns the issue of specific literacy demands embedded in the provision of different services. In addition to childcare, the CIS is a community service that can demand a lot of reading or writing from staff and from the people using the service. This suggests a wider training need amongst the cohort of people who staff this service, which could be of more general interest to the National Adult Literacy Agency and provide insights on general application in relation to the whole-organisation approach to literacy. This is addressed in the next section.

2.4.7 General findings from Step 4

By the end of the implementation phase, two processes should be carried out: the action plans should be achieved or in progress and a momentum should be created that will engage key stakeholders in the organisation to carry on the work when the process of analysis and review is complete. The following strategies can help to accomplish this.

Expand awareness within organisational community

To consolidate a literacy-friendly ethos and practices within the organisation, it is necessary to identify potential champions and provide opportunities for them to mobilise their interest.

Include some work where stakeholders contribute to changes

Although the external consultant may carry out some action plan tasks, it is important to ensure that stakeholders in the organisation contribute some time and input. If individuals carry out some aspects of the action plans, this will equip them to work on promoting literacy-friendly practices when the analysis process is complete.

Produce observable results

It is important for those involved in embedding changes to an organisation's policy and practice that they can point to concrete, short-term outcomes of the process, such as the LAT training and the new understanding of the literacy content of certain work areas. A sense of ownership will be enhanced if stakeholders can also create a product, such as the short literacy guidelines created by the CE staff.

Implement Literacy Awareness Training as part of the process

Literacy awareness training should be embedded in the five-step process as a matter of course.

2.5 Overview of Step 5: Monitoring and review

The purpose of the monitoring and review stage of the five-step process is to ensure that measures planned and set out in the action plans are fully implemented or that work is in progress towards implementation. If plans have to be revised or postponed, this can be incorporated into the monitoring and review stage. In this way, the organisation can ensure that the process of analysing and planning for a literacy-friendly approach is not an end in itself but is translated into action.

To a large extent, this can be supported by ensuring that monitoring and reviewing actions are recorded at different stages. *Right from the Start* provides a set of monitoring checklists that are designed to match the format of the action plans.

This section gives an overview of how the monitoring and review process took place in the Fingal centre, and discusses the outcomes and impact of the actions taken.

2.5.1 Step 5: The Process

Two main approaches were adopted for the monitoring and review of the actions planned for the Fingal Centre project.

The review of the LAT workshop was carried out through a series of interviews. Two group interviews and two meetings with individual CE staff were conducted six weeks after the workshop. The purpose of these interviews was to determine if the issues covered had been relevant for the staff since they had attended the workshop.

The core staff of the Fingal Centre had also been present at the LAT workshops and it was important to probe their views on the same questions. A series of individual interviews was conducted in the final weeks of the project.

The action plan to incorporate literacy-friendly policy into the strategic plan was monitored periodically throughout the project by examining different drafts of the document as these emerged and by reviewing the final version that is now complete and ready for launch.

2.5.2 Centre findings from Step 5

The first question probed in this stage concerned the relevance of the information and processes addressed during the literacy awareness training.

The immediacy of the issues explored varied according to the area of work in which the CE staff member was engaged. People working in grounds maintenance and caretaking tended to have had no contact, as far as they knew, with members of the community who find reading or writing difficult. However, those engaged in reception in the Fingal Centre, said that they had regularly met people, almost on a daily basis, who needed help with reading some documents.

“I didn’t realise how big it [literacy] was. It’s always there, it’s in everything.”

Some people identified particular events or tasks that triggered their awareness of the relevance of the recent LAT work. In one case, an individual approached the centre’s reception staff for help in reading a document, which turned out to be a cheque. This incident highlighted the significance of the recent awareness-raising work they had taken part in at the LAT workshop.

“Knowing that it’s such a problem - I’d had no idea of the extent of it.”

Some participants reported that they were now more willing to engage with the issue of literacy more directly than before, when they might have found the topic intimidating, or had no strategies with which to broach the subject with an individual.

“I’m on the ball now. I don’t know much, but before I’d delegate. Now, I’d like to know more.”

“In one-to-ones I’m more aware, it’s in my comfort zone now. We’re more willing to talk about it”.

Although the policies and procedures in the Fingal Centre already supported a literacy-friendly approach to their work, the process of working through the information and discussions facilitated during the LAT workshop brought home to the core staff the importance of being

alert to potential difficulties arising from literacy-related demands and, most importantly, of addressing them more openly than before.

“It’s a less delicate thing than it was before. It’s a little bit more open.”

This is particularly important if any of the CE staff themselves have difficulty with reading, writing or using numbers. Community Employment offers people a significant array of opportunities to address learning needs and improve their skills. If this includes addressing literacy needs, then it is essential that any CE participant who could benefit from help with literacy is supported in that.

Several of the people interviewed observed that they now perceived identifying an individual’s literacy needs more as part of a process, rather than as a once-off event:

“I think you only notice if you’re with someone for a while.”

Literacy awareness, therefore, is not only a question of information, although it is important for people to know how the VEC Adult Literacy Service can be accessed and what the individual can expect if they take that route. However, an important part of being a literacy-aware individual is bound up with attitudes:

“It’s about attitudes. That’s what we’re after getting this [the project] for.”

It is worth noting that this process of review took place just one month after the main activities arising from the project had been implemented. Even within that relatively short time, a number of concrete changes had been made to certain policies and procedures. One group of CE staff, the Employment Support team, had created new templates for recording documentation and had developed these keeping in mind the principles of literacy-friendly language and presentation. One person following a third level programme in community education incorporated literacy issues into an assignment. The inclusion of a literacy-friendly ethos in the strategic plan has already been noted. Work is in progress on the induction manual, drawing on the literacy-friendly strategies noted on page 34 (2.3.4).



2.5.3 General findings from Step 5

One of the functions of this step is to ensure that the action plans have been carried out or are in progress. The other is to monitor the impact, where possible, of those actions, although these may be most visible in the long term.

Make extensive and systematic use of *Right from the Start*

Both the text of *Right from the Start* and the checklists were used at key points during the whole process of engaging participants' involvement, carrying out the literacy analysis, reporting and feeding back findings. This project has shown that these materials provide a useful resource that can be presented selectively, as appropriate. Although there is room for tailoring and organising the materials according to the needs of the organisation and those involved in the process, the content and structure of *Right from the Start* provides a common process.

Involve people who are responsible for achieving outcomes

Managers should have a language and a method for monitoring how potential literacy barriers could have a negative impact on the work of the staff or on the accessibility of the organisation's products and services. An alternative is to delegate an individual to fulfil this role and report to the manager.

Increasing awareness and improving attitude is an outcome

Many of the literacy-friendly practices described for the Fingal Centre are based on an understanding of literacy issues and their impact on individuals, and on adopting a positive and constructive attitude when these issues arise. Therefore, it is worth considering the raising of awareness and attitude as an outcome in itself, on which future actions can be built.

Creating alternatives to the *Right from the Start* monitoring checklists

This was the only stage of the five-step process that did not make extensive use of the relevant checklists from *Right from the Start*. These tools may be considered as potentially useful under some circumstances. In this case, however, a more generic, narrative format was used to record the monitoring and review phase.

Section 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 For the Fingal Centre

1. The Fingal Centre demonstrated at an early stage, in the course of the literacy audit, a high degree of awareness of literacy issues among the core staff. Many literacy-friendly policies and procedures were already in place and were enhanced through the work of the project. The recommendation to embed good practice in policy, rather than depending on the expertise of committed individuals, was acted on and is now part of the strategic plan.
2. It will be important to monitor on an ongoing basis the implementation of the policy stated in the strategic plan. Specifically, this should ensure that continuing attention is paid to the practices of external facilitators and tutors; and that recruitment processes continue to take account of literacy needs.
3. The CE staff should receive updated LAT regularly, to ensure that new staff are reached and are equipped to meet the literacy demands of their position.
4. The centre should use the induction process as an opportunity for initial informal literacy assessment.
5. Core centre staff should take part in plain English training in order to maximise the accessibility of the Fingal Centre's documentation.
6. The development of health and safety procedures and materials should keep in mind literacy-friendly principles. Conveying health and safety issues through written texts, carefully-designed, is another informal opportunity for early identification of literacy needs in new recruits.

3.2 For the National Adult Literacy Agency

1. Literacy awareness training (LAT) should be a normal part of the service for all groups or businesses engaging with the *Right from the Start* process.
2. LAT needs to be customised for different groups, preferably with key leaders and use the NALA materials as a basis.
3. Except in special circumstances, such as when centre staff already have these skills, plain English training should be strongly recommended for all organisations.

Most staff have responsibility for communication at some level, either in-house or with external clients and the need for clear documentation is key for all organisations, at all levels.

4. The *Right from the Start* materials provide a clear, transparent basis for identifying literacy needs in an organisation. It is important not to overwhelm organisations with too much written material, too soon. The strategy of working through the manual in small chunks was effective in this case and is worth replicating.
5. NALA should investigate the possibility of having LAT incorporated into the professional development and preparation of childcare workers and into the Information Provider Programme module and people working in Citizens' Information Service.

3.3 General findings on the five-step process

The experience of implementing the five-step process has shown, firstly that an organisation with an already high level of awareness of literacy issues can identify areas where policy and practice can be improved. Specific areas have been highlighted where potential literacy barriers can prevent organisations and individuals from achieving their goals. Thus, analysing and catering for literacy issues is an important strategy in supporting organisations to achieve their wider goals.

In this case, the five-step *Right from the Start* approach provided a workable process. Future work with organisations in implementing the process should be informed by the following observations, which summarise the general findings about the process presented at the end of each section above.

Step 1

- Present *Right from the Start* materials in stages.
- Create explicit contact and communication strategies at the start of the process.
- Focus on existing structures and documentation.
- Identify current or forthcoming developments in the wider organisation and explore how these may be used to promote literacy-friendly policies and practices.
- Identify influences and demands from outside the organisation, and how these could help or hinder the creation of a literacy-friendly ethos.

Step 2

- Pay particular attention to health and safety, communications and induction.
- Use the *Right from the Start* checklists to structure the close analysis and report on it.

Step 3

- Manage the development of action plans by getting agreement from all stakeholders on their content; and by maintaining a suitable degree of confidentiality at the early stages in their development.
- Keep expectations realistic by ensuring that action plans are achievable in the short term, within the current resources of the organisation.

Step 4

- Expand literacy awareness within the organisation to include all levels of staff.
- Include some work where stakeholders contribute to changes.
- Produce observable results.
- Implement literacy awareness training as part of the process.

Step 5

- Ensure that people who are responsible for achieving outcomes are included in the monitoring and review process.
- Consider increased awareness and improved attitude on literacy issues as an outcome, and monitor that.
- Create alternatives to the *Right from the Start* monitoring check lists.
- Use and distribute *Right from the Start* materials throughout the process, as appropriate for each stage.
- The five-step process, and the materials supplied by the *Right from the Start* manual, provides a transparent, workable and effective mechanism by which to examine the literacy policies and procedures of an organisation. It also provides a useful set of tools by which to structure feedback and reporting. These materials can also be easily customised for different contexts.

3.4 General conclusion

This small-scale qualitative study has generated a number of conclusions of general relevance, by examining in depth the policies and procedures of one community organisation. The findings have illustrated the extent of the impact that literacy issues can have on people working and using services in a range of different settings. It has also shown how the work of a small organisation can impact on activities taking place in many different contexts and influence the awareness and practice of staff, clients and the wider organisation.

References

Hegarty, A. and Feeley, M. (2009) *Literacy-friendly Further Education and Training*, Dublin: NALA

Leavey, J. (2007) *Improving Teaching and Learning for Adults with Basic Skill Needs through Formative Assessment*, Learning Connections, Communities Scotland/OECD Country Study.

McSkeane, L. (2009) *Living Literacy: a whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy in a vocational training setting*, Dublin: NALA.

Morgan, M., Hickey, B., Kelleghan, T. (1997) *Report to the Minister for Education on the International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College/OECD.

NALA (2007) *Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010*, Dublin: NALA.

NALA (2009) *Right from the Start: A guide to Supporting Staff and Connecting with Customers*, Dublin: NALA

Ni Chinneide, B. (2002) *Integrating Literacy Guidelines*, Dublin: NALA.

The Fingal Centre (2010) *Equality and Empowerment through Excellence*, Dublin

The Fingal Centre (2010) *Strategic Plan 2010 – 2013*, Dublin: Congress Centres Network

Workbase (nd) *The Key Steps Forward for Workforce Literacy*, Auckland: Workbase/Business New Zealand

Appendix 1: *Right from the Start* Checklists

Form 1: Assessment of literacy briefing group

Consider the range of people in your organisation who will help to advance the approach to becoming a literacy-friendly organisation. How urgent is their participation in a literacy briefing seminar?

- Who are the first people your customers contact when they deal with the organisation?
- Who are the first people your customers or partners meet?
- Who are the people with whom your customers or staff interact if they have a query or a problem?
- Who carries the final responsibility for the quality of the goods or services the organisation provides?

Staff due for literacy briefing	Soon	Later	Never
The team			
Front-line staff who interact with customers			
IT experts who design and administer IT systems			
Supervisors, line managers who organise staff			
Senior managers			
HR staff who handle recruitment, staff appraisal			
Essential services staff who provide maintenance, cleaning, canteen			
Contract workers and consultants			
Other?			

Form 2a: Record of existing policies and procedures

Please fill in this form to record the policies that currently apply to each activity and the general procedures that put those policies into practice. You may decide to use the form for the organisation as a whole, or, if it is more useful, for each section of your organisation in turn.

Customer service activity	Policy	Procedure (including the extent of reading and writing involved)
Initial contact with organisation		
Accessing services		
Complaints		
Other (specify)		
Staff activity	Policy	Procedure (including the extent of reading and writing involved)
Recruitment (job specs, application process, advertising)		
Consultations		
Entitlements and obligations		
Other (specify)		

Checklist 2a: Rating of policies and procedures

Based on your comments in Form 2a and the good practice guidelines, answer this question:

Are you satisfied that your policies and procedures in the following areas are literacy friendly?

Customer service	Yes	Could be better	No	Not relevant
Initial contact with organisation				
Accessing services				
Complaints				
Other (specify)				
Comments – customer activity				

Staff activity	Yes	Could be better	No	Not relevant
Recruitment (job specs, application process, advertising)				
Consultations				
Entitlements and obligations				
Other (specify)				

Comments – staff activity

Form 2b: Record of how you communicate

This form helps you record how you communicate inside and outside the organisation. You may decide to use the form for the organisation as a whole, or, if it is more useful, for each section of your organisation in turn. Tick each box that applies and include short notes.

Customer service activities	Written only	Written, with supporting images	Face to face	By phone	Online	Other
Initial contact						
Making appointments						
Directions and instructions						
Essential information (entitlements, legal notices)						
Dealing with complaints						
Surveys and feedback						
Other (specify)						

Staffing activities	Written only	Written, with supporting images	Face to face	By phone	Online
Advertising vacancies					
Feedback and appraisals					
Surveys					
Key policies and employment information					
Grievance and disciplinary procedures					
Instructions (health and safety notices, job procedures and so on)					
Other (specify)					

Checklist 2b: Rating of communications

Based on your comments in Form 2b and the good practice guidelines on page x in Section A, answer this question:

Are you satisfied that your communications are literacy friendly?

Use the spaces in the boxes to jot down some brief notes to explain your answers.

Customer activities	Yes	Could be better	No	Not relevant
Initial contact				
Making appointments				
Directions and instructions				
Essential information (entitlements, legal notices)				
Dealing with complaints				
Surveys and feedback				
Other (specify)				

Comments – customer activity

--	--	--	--	--

Staffing activities	Yes	Could be better	No	Not relevant
----------------------------	------------	------------------------	-----------	---------------------

Advertising vacancies				
Feedback and appraisals				
Surveys				
Key policies and employment information				
Grievance and disciplinary procedures				
Instructions (health and safety notices, job procedures and so on)				
Other (specify)				

Comments – staffing activity

--	--	--	--	--

Form 2c: Record of existing staff training and development

This form helps you record specifically how you organise and provide training for your staff. You may decide to use the form for the organisation as a whole, or, if it is more useful, for each section of your organisation in turn.

Staffing activities	When it happens	Scope (range of topics and range of staff)	Method
Induction			
Literacy awareness training for key staff			
Dedicated literacy tuition			
Training needs analysis			
Integrating literacy into training design			
Integrating literacy into training delivery			
Assessment			
Evaluating impact of training			
Other (specify)			

Checklist 2c: Rating of staff training and development

Based on your comments in Form 2c and the good practice guidelines, answer this question:

Are you satisfied that your staff training and development are literacy friendly?

Use the spaces in the boxes to jot down some brief notes to explain your answers.

Staffing activities	Yes	Could be better	No	Not relevant
Induction				
Literacy awareness training for key staff				
Dedicated literacy tuition				
Training needs analysis				
Training design				
Training delivery				
Assessment				
Evaluating impact of training				
Other (specify)				
Comments – staffing activities				

Form 3a: Action plans by area

In the left-hand column, fill in the area that you are addressing: policies and procedures, communications or training and development. It may also help to further specify whether the processes apply to customer service or to staff. Once again, you may choose to devise action plans across the whole organisation or for each section of the organisation in turn to start off.

Area	Actions	Person responsible	To be done by (when)	Monitoring by (method, date)

Form 3b: Indicators of progress

Identify the area of activity in the first row and then list the actions and signs of progress for each one. Depending on the range of activities, you may decide to use one form for the whole organisation or to use it for each unit in turn.

Area of activity		
Actions and steps	Indicators of progress	Goals(s) of actions

Form 4a: Plain English checklists for documents

This checklist offers a quick way for you to review a letter, leaflet, booklet or short report to see whether it uses plain English and is easy to follow. Not all questions will apply to every document, but try to answer 'yes' as much as possible to the questions that do apply.

	Yes	No
<p>Language, punctuation and grammar</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the document use 'you' and 'we', where possible? 2. Does it use the active voice most of the time? 3. Does it keep technical terms and abbreviations to a minimum? 4. Does it define any necessary terms and abbreviations clearly? 5. Does it keep 'corporate jargon' to a minimum? 6. Does it avoid Latin and French phrases and Latin abbreviations? 7. Does it use the same term for the same concept throughout? 8. Does it have an average of 15 to 20 words in each sentence? 9. Does it use the simplest verb tense possible? 10. Does it avoid abstract nouns where possible? 11. Does it use correct punctuation? 12. Do nouns and verbs agree (singular noun with singular verb, for example)? <p>Structure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13 Does it organise information according to the reader's needs and interests? 14. Does it use informative headings or questions to break up text? 15. Does it include a natural flow from one point to the next? 16. Are paragraphs relatively short? 17. Does it use bullet point lists for detailed or complicated information? <p>Page design</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Does it avoid underlining, groups of italics and unnecessary capital letters? 19 Is text in a readable typeface (font), aligned to the left and 1.5 spaced? 20. Are images, charts or blocks of colour, if any, clear and relevant to the text? 		

Form 4b: Plain English checklist for forms

This checklist offers a quick way for you to review a form to see whether it uses clear language and is easy to follow. Not all questions will apply to every document, but try to answer 'yes' as much as possible to the questions that do apply.

	Yes	No
<p>Language, punctuation and grammar</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the document use 'you' and 'we', where possible? 2. Are most questions in the active voice? 3. Are questions written clearly and unambiguously? 4. Does the form define any necessary terms and abbreviations clearly? 5. Does the form avoid Latin and French phrases and Latin abbreviations? 6. Are questions punctuated correctly? 7. Do similar questions use similar words and punctuation? 8. Do questions use the simplest verb tense possible? 9. Do questions avoid abstract nouns? <p>Structure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Does the form include clear instructions at the start? 11. Are 'official use only' sections, if any, near the end of the form? 12. Does the form ask questions in a logical order? 13. Does it avoid unnecessary or repeated questions? 14. Does it group similar questions together under useful headings? 15. Does it keep numbering as simple as possible? <p>Page design</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Does it avoid underlining, groups of italics and unnecessary capital letters? 17. Does the form use a typeface (font) that is easy to read? 18. Is it clear where to answer? 19. Is there enough space to answer? 20. Does the form use tick-the-box questions where possible? 		

Form 4c: Audit for literacy awareness training

Send this form to relevant staff – and offer the opportunity for staff to answer verbally if necessary – to identify how best to deliver literacy awareness training. Each person should answer only for themselves, inserting the letter a, b, c or d after each question.

a= I know a lot about this

b= I don't know much and would like to learn more.

c= I don't know much and would like to delegate this to a colleague.

d= This is not relevant for my work.

Literacy and numeracy topic	Rating			
General knowledge of literacy and numeracy issues				
1. Overall awareness of literacy issues – causes, facts, figures, effects.				
2. Knowledge of literacy and numeracy in the wider environment.				
3. How to notice if someone may have literacy difficulty.				
4. How to respond if someone does have a literacy difficulty.				
Specific knowledge and skill in literacy issues				
5. Identifying literacy and numeracy in the general training or working environment.				
6. Identifying literacy and numeracy demands of particular jobs.				
7. Practical tips for an initial interview or meeting to help identify if a new recruit has a literacy or numeracy need.				
Taking concrete action to support literacy development				
9. What action to take if a literacy or numeracy difficulty is identified.				
10. Different ways of working on literacy and numeracy and who provides the service.				
11. Tips on making the work environment literacy-friendly.				
12. How to make documents and events more literacy friendly				
13. Building literacy and numeracy work into induction.				
14. Building literacy and numeracy work into goal-setting.				
15. Integrating literacy into training design and delivery.				
16. Encouraging a person to take action to work on their literacy.				
17. Organising access to literacy tuition.				
18. Building a relationship with the local adult literacy service.				
Supporting progression				
19. Monitoring a person's progress in literacy and numeracy.				
20. Exploring the practicalities of literacy issues in job-seeking and further training.				
Total	a	b	c	d

Form 4d: Setting up a workplace basic education programme

The following checklist is based on elements that of Irish and international best practice in workplace basic education programmes.

	Yes	No
<p>Development of WBE programme</p> <p>1. Did you use a partnership approach, involving stakeholders such as employers, employees, trade union reps and literacy tutors?</p> <p>2. Did you appoint an existing staff member as a liaison person in the workplace?</p> <p>3. Did you appoint a co-ordinator to promote and recruit participants?</p> <p>4. Did you use a range of methods to promote the programme?</p> <p>5. Were you aware of the sensitivities that employees can feel?</p> <p>6. Did you ensure confidentiality is maintained?</p> <p>7. Is all participation voluntary?</p> <p>8. Is the programme integrated into the organisation's overall training and development programme?</p> <p>9. Will the course take place on-site?</p> <p>10. Will the course take place on work time?</p> <p>Design of course</p> <p>11. Are there agreed learning objectives?</p> <p>12. Do these take account of the particular needs of participants?</p> <p>13. Did you consider the number of tuition hours based on the level and needs of learner?</p> <p>14. Are class sizes agreed based on the learners' abilities and needs?</p> <p>15. Are there no more than seven to eight learners in a group?</p> <p>16. Was the initial assessment flexible, informal and appreciative of achievement? Were a variety of methods used?</p> <p>Delivery of course</p> <p>17. Was the curriculum negotiated with relevant stakeholders?</p> <p>18. Is the course delivered using many methods and approaches?</p> <p>19. Is the delivery flexible?</p> <p>20. Are extra literacy supports available to participants?</p> <p>21. Are you offering accreditation (should be optional and voluntary)?</p> <p>22. Does the course allow for progression?</p> <p>Evaluation</p> <p>23. Has the course got built-in ongoing feedback from participants?</p> <p>24. Will you evaluate it?</p>		

Form 4e: Integrating literacy into training

This checklist offers a quick way for you to review whether your staff training and development across all skills and areas takes effective account of literacy issues.

	Yes	No
<p>Recruitment</p> <p>1. Are the documents you use to advertise staff training in plain English and laid out in an easy-to-read format?</p> <p>2. Does course information state that difficulties with reading and writing will not prevent people from taking part?</p> <p>Analysis of all training and development courses</p> <p>3. Do you identify what specific types of reading, writing and language or numeracy skills are involved in courses so that you can design or organise staff training and development that includes adults with literacy difficulties?</p> <p>Course design, delivery and evaluation</p> <p>4. Are courses designed to include a range of teaching and learning methods, aside from text-based?</p> <p>5. Are courses designed so that any printed materials are clearly laid out and are in easy-to-read language and format?</p> <p>6. Does the course design aim to reduce literacy barriers to taking part in and learning on the course?</p> <p>7. If appropriate, does the course design include activities that build participants' confidence and skill in literacy in the context of the main course topic?</p> <p>8. Do course delivery plans include methods that specifically address the language, literacy and numeracy issues identified in the earlier course analysis?</p> <p>9. Can participants evaluate the training using a range of methods, not just forms and writing?</p> <p>10. Does evaluation invite participants to comment on and suggestions about any reading and writing activities and materials involved in the course?</p>		

Training for trainers

- 11.** Are trainers and facilitators of staff development courses themselves trained in how to design, deliver and evaluate programmes that take account of literacy issues?

Form 5a: Monitoring sheet by area

Use this form to keep track of progress in achieving the actions. Depending on the range of activities, you may decide to use one form for the whole organisation or to use it for each unit in turn.

Area of activity:				
Action	Indicators of progress	Started	In progress	Done

Form 5b: Assessment of how well the actions are achieving the intended goals

Use this form to assess how well each of your planned actions is meeting its intended result(s).

Area of activity:						
Action	Goal	Yes	Mostly	A little	No	Comments

Appendix 2: Literacy Awareness Workshop Session Plan

Participants: 6 core staff from the centre and 45 CE staff

Time	Session Task	Materials
9.30 am	Registration	Participant list
9.45 10 mins 10 mins	<p>Introductions and Welcomes</p> <p>(i) Introduction from NALA: put the day in context</p> <p>(ii) Welcome from Fingal Centre: how the idea for the workshop arose. Introduces Liz as facilitator for the day.</p>	<p>Powerpoint LAT pres slides 1 – 3.</p>
10.05	Purpose and overview of Day	
10 mins 5 mins	<p>(i) Liz asks people to get into pairs to fill out the LAT 'What do I know' questionnaire. They put their names on it and we will revisit this at the end of the research project and see if their self-ratings have changed.</p> <p>Liz collects the questionnaires, making sure people have put their names on them.</p> <p>(ii) Outlines purpose of the day: “to equip staff working in and with Fingal centre to recognise when literacy barriers affect people they meet; and to take the best action for the situation.”</p> <p>Objectives of the day – by the end, people will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - explain what is meant by 'literacy' and a 'literacy barrier'; -give some facts and figures about the literacy issue in Ireland and internationally; -talk about the causes and the impact of literacy difficulties -identify the main signs that someone may be experiencing a literacy difficulty; -identify some of the situations in their own work or daily life when people could or have 	<p>LAT 'What do I know' Questionnaires</p> <p>Powerpoint slide with Aims and Objectives</p>

	<p>been affected in this way; -draw up guidelines on what to do if this happens; - draw up a list of benefits to being a 'literacy friendly' organisation -recognise if they could benefit from getting help themselves in their reading or writing; -talk about the range of options and supports available locally and nationally. -identify what else the Centre could do to be a literacy friendly organisation</p> <p>(ii) Gives out and goes over the agenda and the housekeeping.</p>	Agenda
10.20 am	What is Literacy?	
20 mins	<p>Group work Each of the core staff acts as facilitator for one group: 8 – 10 people in each group. Liz moves between groups.</p> <p>Each group gets a flip chart sheet and brainstorms its answers to these questions:</p> <p>"What is 'literacy'? 5 minutes</p> <p>"What is my own experience of literacy? (Either in work or in personal life) 15 minutes</p> <p>Each group notes down its conclusions in bullet points on the flip-chart.</p>	Flip chart sheets and markers for each of the 6 groups
10.40	Feedback	Flip chart and markers
10 mins	(i) Each group gives one answer to the first question, what is literacy. Then we go around again, to get a variety of answers 10 minutes	LAT presentation slides 4 – 7.
10 mins	(ii) Input from Liz on this topic 10 mins	
11 am	Coffee	

11.15	Quizzes	
15 mins	(i) People get into groups of three and do quiz (Did you know) questions 1 – 4 together; and question 5 on their own. 5 mins (ii) Then they do the ‘flags’ activity. 5 mins (iii) Then Liz gives out the answers and they correct their own work 5 mins	Quiz worksheet + Answers Flags Flags answers
11.30	National and International Situation, plus causes	LAT slides 10 - 13
10 mins	Liz gives brief input 10 mins	
11.40	Impact	
15 mins	People go back to their groups with the facilitator from the first exercise. They look at the bullet points they prepared on their previous experience of this issue. Then they spend 15 mins discussing these questions, where possible drawing on their own experience: “What effects could literacy difficulties have on people’s a) working life and b) personal life? “What positive impact could having a literacy difficulty have on the person?”	
11.55	Input on Impact	
10 mins	Liz gives brief input on impact.	LAT slides 15, 16, 19
12.05	What Can We Do?	
5 mins	(i) Recognising the problem: Distribute this sheet. People get into pairs. Decide if they have ever come across any of these signs. 5 minutes	Signs of Literacy Difficulty page from manual
10 mins	(ii) First responses 10 mins	
15 mins	Each pair joins another pair. Together they draw up a list of do’s and don’ts – what to do, what not to do, when you meet this issue in work or in your personal life.	

	(iii) Each group of 4 joins another group of 4. They compare notes, see whether they agree or disagree. They try to finalise a list of do's and don'ts. 15 mins We put these up around the room	
12.35	Reflection and Review	
10 mins	We spend 10 minutes walking around, looking at the posters created setting out dos and don'ts. One person from each group stays at the poster to explain it as if they were explaining it to a 'visitor' to the Centre.	Blue tack
12.45	Overview of Actions to take	
15 mins	Input from Liz on a) Dos and don'ts and b) Range of actions and supports that are available	LAT slide 27

Appendix 3: Do's and Don't's: Identifying literacy difficulties

Could there be a literacy barrier? Some General signs

If I ask someone to work with written material or read aloud in public, I will notice if anyone

- Says , “ I forgot my glasses.”
- Says , “ I’ve got a sore throat.”
- Says , “ The print is too small.”
- Says , “ My pen has run out.”
- Says , “ I’ll do it at home.”
- Makes some other excuse.
- Asks someone else to read for them.
- Changes the subject.
- Creates a diversion.
- Starts making jokes.
- Gets angry.
- Disrupts the situation if they are with other people.
- Makes an excuse to leave the situation.

If I am talking to someone on the phone and I ask them to read something, or to write something down, I will notice if they

- Say or do any of the things listed above;
- Say, “You’re breaking up.”
- Ask me to read out loud the section they are talking about, or
- Make an excuse to hang up.
- Just hang up.

At work, I will notice if a person

- Says or does any of the things listed above.
- Uses a private code to make notes.
- Calls in sick when jobs involving reading or writing come up.
- Calls in sick when training comes up.
- Asks other people to do things that involve reading or writing.
- Avoids doing certain things for no obvious reason.
- Drops out of a course when qualifications are mentioned.
- Does not go forward for promotion, even when they are capable or have leadership qualities.

Note: there could be many reasons why someone would say or do these things, so they are not proof that there is a literacy barrier. But if a person does several of these things, often, it may be an indication that there is.

If there is a literacy barrier- some general do's and don'ts

Do	Don't
Respond in a sensitive way.	Act shocked or surprised.
Be careful about confidentiality.	Address the situation in front of anyone else, or talk to anyone else.
Be tactful.	Ask the person straight out if they have a problem.
Show understanding and interest.	Act as if you don't care, or laugh, or do anything that could embarrass the person.
Be positive.	Make assumptions, or judgements, for example by assuming that the person is a victim.
Make sure the person knows that there is help there, if they want it.	Press them to do anything that they are not ready to do.
Give specific information, or tell them where to get it, about the help that is there.	Make a big issue of it.
Use Plain English, graphics and pictures to give information.	Always use the written word to give information.
Share information and knowledge about literacy, for example a success story from your own experience.	Expose a person's difficulty with reading or writing in front of other people.