English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Blended Learning Project Report

Distance
Learning
Service

NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

The National Adult Literacy Agency 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.

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Foreword

Learners seeking to learn English have become a large part of Irish society. Many want to gain an Irish qualification and increasingly do so through local literacy and numeracy services provided by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

In 2012, NALA, in association with City of Limerick VEC, County Limerick VEC and Doras Luimní, sought to investigate how ESOL learners in the Limerick area were engaging in blended learning by combining local tuition with use of NALA's www.writeon.ie.

This report summarises the findings of the project and suggests some ideas that will make the provision of services and accreditation to this body of learners more effective.

We thank all three organisations for their cooperation in this project, and the learners in particular, for taking the time to talk to our researchers and provide their insights.

We hope this report will contribute in some way to the ongoing discussion about best practice in provision of services to ESOL learners.

Inez Bailey, Director
May 2014

Main Messages

- The majority of learners were from Eastern Europe and of these 60% were from Poland.

- Over half of the learners were female and more than half were in the 35-44 age category. These numbers broadly reflect the gender and age profile of learners in the adult literacy service in 2012 (NALA, 2013).

- Nearly one third of learners (31%) described their personal situation as learner. This was followed by 27% working for pay and 27% unemployed, indicating an even spread amongst those who are employed and those who are unemployed.

- The majority of respondents (80.5%) indicated that they are not taking another learning course.

- Less than a fifth (19.5 %) identified themselves as taking another English language course along with their ESOL classes.

- The majority of respondents placed a strong emphasis on improving existing English skills, and said this was their main motivation for joining the course.

- For the majority of respondents, engaging in their children's education was not a motivating factor.

- The learners reported that since completing the ESOL blended learning course their confidence had increased in a number of situations.

- The learners reported increased confidence levels when expressing themselves in English.

- The percentage of learners who reported that they found subjects hard to learn had greatly reduced across all subjects.

- The number of learners who found subjects easy to learn increased across all subjects.

- All of the learners reported the importance of accreditation to them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this report we recommend the following:

1. Centres should provide blended learning to ESOL learners to offer increased learning opportunities and expand capacity.

2. Centres should develop blended learning approaches that best suit the skills and needs of ESOL learners.

3. Where ESOL learners are keen to improve skills outside of the classroom, offerings such as www.writeon.ie should be promoted.

4. www.writeon.ie should be considered as a means of offering accreditation to ESOL learners through Recognition of Prior Learning.

Introduction

This report describes the findings from a research project carried out in 2013 by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) at the request of the Limerick English for Speakers of Other Languages Partnership (LEP). The Partnership comprises:

- Doras Luimní, and

- Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB)[1]

The focus of the project was learners' use of www.writeon.ie, as part of a blended learning approach along with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The joint blended learning project was carried out over a ten-week period and involved 41 learners.

The primary purpose of this work was to document how ESOL learners used www.writeon.ie in conjunction with local tuition.

The aims of the report are to:

- document a blended learning approach that meets the needs of ESOL learners;

- develop a profile of ESOL learners as a means of increasing our knowledge and understanding of them from an age, gender, educational, employment and cultural perspective; and

- highlight the benefits to learners, providers and organisations of using www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach to the tuition of ESOL and adult literacy learners.

[1]Formerly City and County Limerick Vocational Education Committees (VECs).

Background

In 2008, a review of English Language provision in Ireland found that a low standard of English language competence affected the ability of non-Irish nationals to maximise their earning potential. It also highlighted the importance of English language competence amongst parents in terms of enhanced educational opportunities for their children (Horwath, 2008). In order to address the broad and varied language and education needs of non-Irish nationals the review made a number of recommendations including:

- The adoption of English language competence at Quality and Qualifications Ireland Level 3 as the acceptable standard of functional competence.

- The provision of 5,000 additional publicly funded places.

- The acceptance that 200 hours of English language training is required for a learner to reach Level 3 competence.

- The combination of class room tuition and supporting informal methods of tuition, such as aural and digital, are combined (Horwath, 2008).

Since the publication of the review in 2008, Ireland has continued to see an increase in the number of non-Irish nationals living in the state. The 2011 Census data shows over half a million non-Irish nationals living in the state. This is a 30% increase over the five years since Census 2006. The largest non-Irish group living in Ireland are from Poland. Census 2011 also shows that over half a million residents speak a foreign language at home, and that Polish is the most common language followed by French, Lithuanian and German (CSO, 2012).

In terms of educational attainment, 12.5% of non-Irish nationals completed education up to Junior Certificate and 16.2% had a technical or vocational qualification. Figures for the DES adult literacy returns from 2011 show that over 11,000 ESOL learners took part in adult literacy programmes in Ireland and 37% of these had Junior Certificate equivalent or lower.

In 2012, the Department of Education and Skills Adult Literacy Operation Guidelines prioritised ESOL provision at QQI Level 3 for target groups including low income EU immigrant workers. The Adult Literacy Review (2013) recommended that the DES should re-emphasise this priority and that ESOL learners should be provided with tuition that will bring them to a level of functional competency or QQI Level 3. The Adult Literacy Review found that in 2011 nearly 900 ESOL learners achieved accreditation at QQI Level 3 and

that over 400 learners achieved accreditation at Levels 4 and 5. The Adult Literacy Review also recommended that:

> Access to distance and blended learning should be integrated into all service delivery and these options should be promoted for all students in Adult Literacy programmes in order to increase access to learning opportunities. Therefore, every VEC should offer distance and blended learning options such as www.writeon.ie to students both as standalone and integrated into mainstream delivery (Adult Literacy Review, 2013, p:50).

NALA's Distance Learning Service

Since 2000, NALA has been operating a Distance Learning Service (DLS) that uses mass media, particularly television, to highlight literacy issues and provide individualised learning to those learners not engaging with local services. The primary aim of NALA's Distance Learning Service is to provide high quality free distance learning opportunities targeted at improving literacy without regard to social, economic or cultural background and taking account of all levels of technical ability. In NALA, Distance Learning is defined as occurring when learners and tutors are separated by either space or time. This is a broad definition, reflecting the fact that distance education can involve people studying in a range of personal contexts.

In September 2008, NALA launched www.writeon.ie, a learning web site offering learning and national accreditation at Level 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland. In October 2010, the site was updated to offer Level 3 learning and accreditation. The site was intended for use with distance learners but it was quickly recognised by local providers as an efficient means of providing blended learning and accreditation to learners. In 2010, NALA ran a Blended Learning Project to see how the site was being used in 12 local contexts. This report, published in 2011 found that:

- centres and NALA collaborated effectively in providing additional flexible learning opportunities to learners;
- centres found that basic literacy learners were interested in using ICT to improve their literacy skills;
- www.writeon.ie had proven to be a useful tool in providing accreditation options to interested learners, both from the learners and from the centres' viewpoint;
- learners' ICT skills improved as a result of taking part in the project;
- blended learning provided a means of extending learning time and encouraging independent study; and
- the approach allowed tutors to more effectively address individual learning needs in a group context.

The report is available to download on www.nala.ie.[2]

Since it was launched, www.writeon.ie has been used by distance learners and learners in blended learning contexts in over 180 different learning centres in Ireland. Through this site, NALA has provided 14,990 Level 2 minor awards and 3,312 Level 3 minor awards to just under 3,000 learners. During 2013, 61,558 different people visited www.writeon.ie, spending an average of 22 minutes and 24 seconds on each visit.

[2]http://www.nala.ie/resources/blended-learning-report-2011

Blended Learning - an Introduction

Research suggests that there is not one single shared definition for the term blended learning (Rochester Institute, 2004; Smith, 2004). NALA has adopted the following definition:

> Blended learning is about facilitating learning using a variety of approaches, best determined by the needs of the learner and the capability of the provider. It may or may not involve computers. It is simply a way of creatively matching different approaches to learners, content and contexts. (NALA, 2009).

Blended learning means creatively blending learning resources and media in different learning settings to offer diverse learning solutions and opportunities. In many ways, adult literacy tutors have probably been practising blended learning for years - using authentic materials, going on field trips, study visits and agreeing non-classroom based projects. All these tasks and activities show a blended learning approach.

NALA believes that literacy practitioners and learners should have the opportunity to devise a blended learning programme that best fits their needs, environments and aspirations and that www.writeon.ie offers a new dimension as part of this.

In addition, a blended learning approach using www.writeon.ie offers advantages to tutors and centres by providing free supplementary support to learners outside of class time.

It also provides a route to accreditation that minimises impact on tutor and administrator time, thereby allowing centres to divert more resources to learning support.

Methodology for ESOL Blended Learning Project

The research used a mixed method approach that involved the using online questionnaire and focus groups. A total of 41 learners took part in the research.

The survey was designed to gather quantitative data and the questionnaire had twenty-four questions on demographics; the literacy, numeracy and ICT skills of the learners; and the importance of accreditation to them. The focus groups sought to explore in more depth the themes contained in the questionnaire.

The findings contained in this report cannot be generalised to all ESOL learners engaged in adult literacy and numeracy. Rather they are specific to the learners who took part in this study. However, the findings do provide valuable data on ESOL learners and their views on taking part in tuition that uses a blended learning approach to teaching adult literacy and numeracy.

Limitations of the study

This research sought to elicit the views and experiences relevant to ESOL learners in three organisations in Limerick. As with any study, care should be taken in generalising the results of this research to all ESOL learners. For example, the majority of learners were migrant workers from Eastern Europe, with a smaller number of refugees and asylum seekers. We encountered some methodological challenges in relation to sample size. For example, Doras Luimní had a smaller sample size compared to the other two sites. However, every effort has been made to present the data in a way that minimizes these challenges.

Final word

Finally, this study raises further research challenges and questions. Its unique interest lies in its description of adopting a blended learning approach using www.writeon.ie with ESOL learners. Based on the findings presented in this study we would argue that there is a need for further study in this area.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Blended Learning Project 2013 Report

Learner Profile

The following six charts describe the 41 learners who took part in this project.

What is your Nationality?

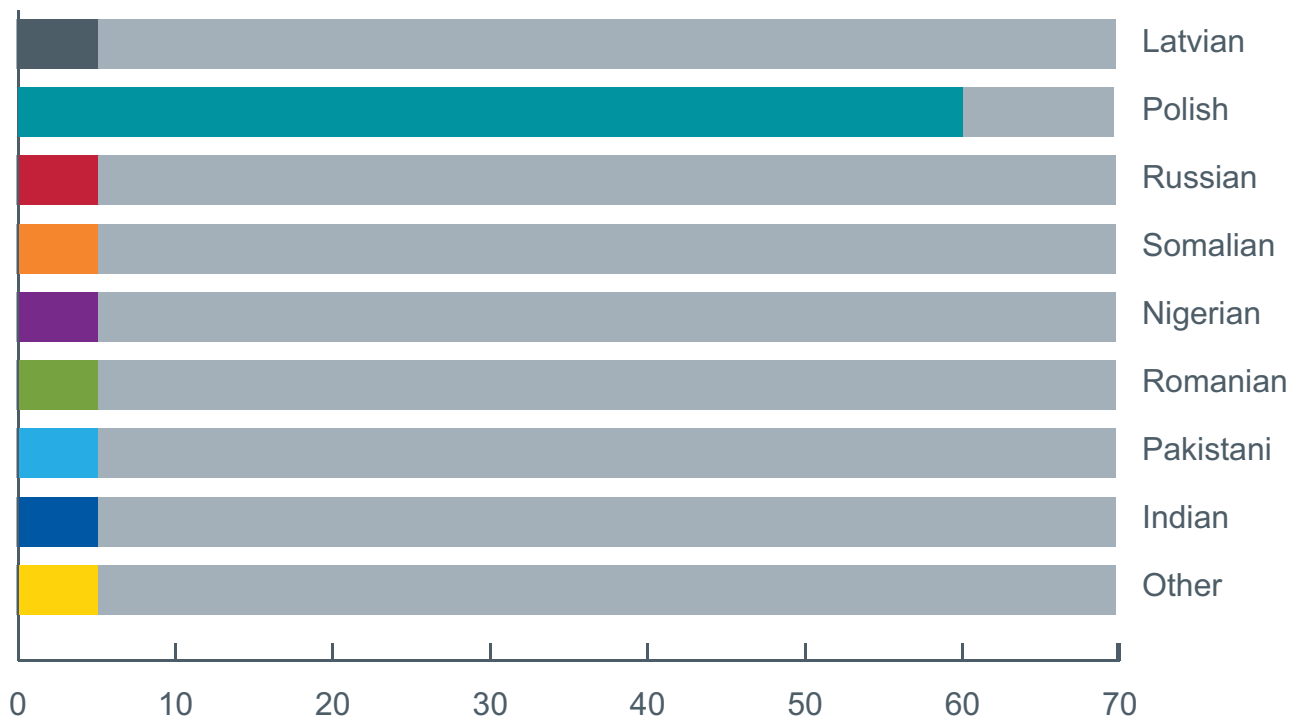Latvian, Polish, Russian, Somalian, Nigerian, Romanian, Pakistani, Indian, Other

Chart 1: What is your Nationality?
The learners come from different countries with the majority of the learners coming from Eastern Europe, in particular Poland.

Gender

Male
Female

Chart 2: Gender
Over half of the learners (58.5%) identified themselves as female and 41.5% as male. This percentage is in line with gender participation in the adult literacy service in 2012.
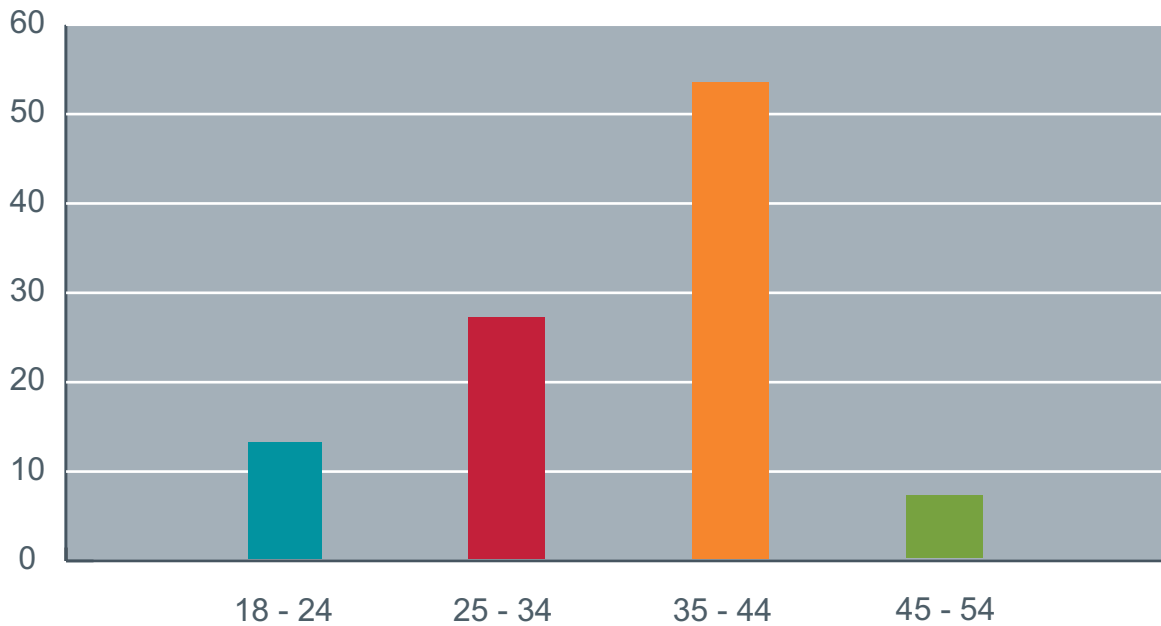
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Age Profile

Chart 3: Age Profile

More than half of the learners (53.3%) were aged 35-44 years. A small proportion of learners (6.7%) were aged 45-54 years. See Chart 3 for a full breakdown of the age profile of learners.

Where do you study?

- City of Limerick VEC
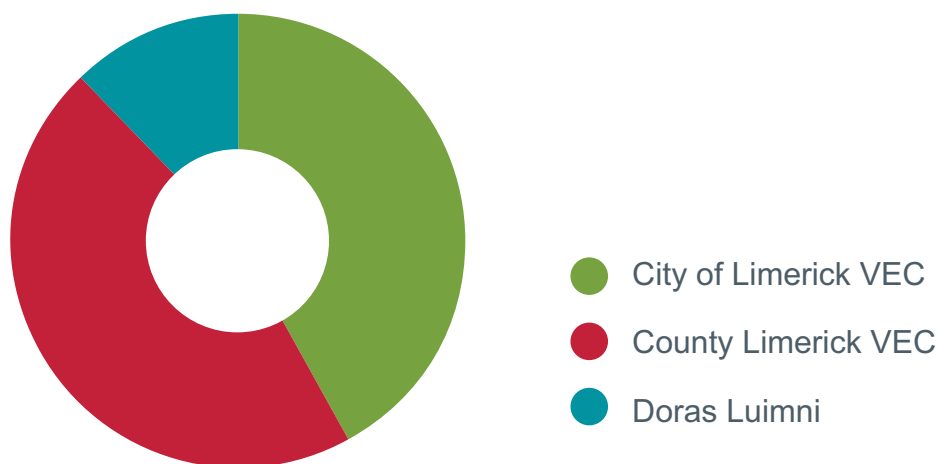- County Limerick VEC
- Doras Luimni

Chart 4: Where do you study?

Forty-six percent of learners were enrolled in ESOL classes with County Limerick VEC, followed by 42% in City of Limerick VEC (Currently Limerick and Clare ETB) and 12% were taking ESOL classes with Doras Luimní.

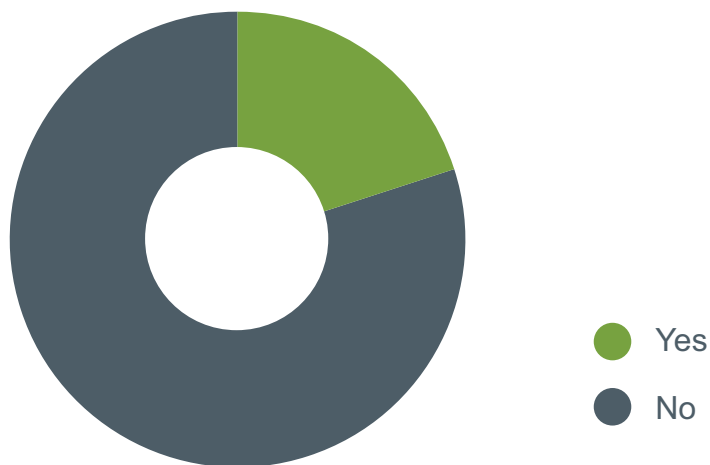# Are you taking part in any other learning course?

Chart 5: Are you taking part in any other learning courses?
Less than 20% of the learners were taking part in other learning course outside of their ESOL classes. These learners were engaged in English language courses.
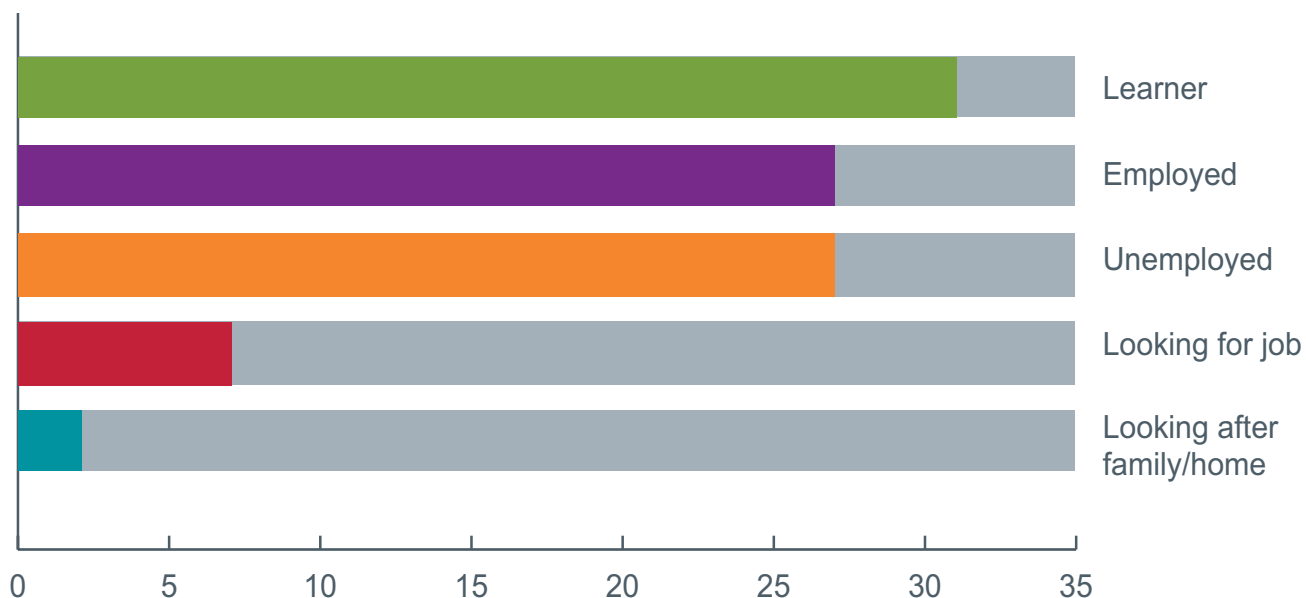
Personal situation

Chart 6: Personal situation
Over 30% of the learners described their situation as students. Twenty-seven percent stated that they were in employment and 27% declared that they were unemployed. A much smaller number (2%) descibed their situation as looking after family/home.

Learner Use of ICT

The data shows that the majority of learners use a computer at least once a day. Over 40% stated that they use the internet for learning purposes. See Table 1 for a full breakdown of ICT usage.

Table 1: ICT Usage

	Almost every day %	At least once a week %	At least once a month %	Hardly ever %
Use a computer at home	75.5	22.0	2.5	0.0
Use a computer for learning	40.0	45.0	5.0	10.0
Use the internet for learning	43.9	41.5	9.8	4.8
Use the internet for leisure	51.3	30.8	7.7	10.2
Use the internet for communication	40.0	35.0	15.0	10.0

Learner Motivation

This section presents the views of the ESOL learners with regard to their motivation for returning to learning, their literacy and numeracy skills and their confidence in their ability to communicate effectively in English.

Table 2: Three most important reasons why you joined course

	Most important %	Very important %	Important %	Unimportant %	Not important at all %
To improve my English	53.7	34.2	2.4	7.3	2.4
To improve my skills in reading, writing or numbers	19.5	41.5	14.6	19.5	4.9
To improve my skills in computers	2.4	3.0	20.0	35.6	39.0
To improve my chances of getting a job	12.2	12.2	34.1	24.4	17.1
To complete my education	0.0	2.4	9.8	56.1	31.7
To get a qualification	22.4	12.4	14.6	14.7	35.9
To help me be more involved in my children's education	9.8	4.9	5.0	12.2	68.1

The data shows that the three main reasons for joining an ESOL course were to improve their English language skills (90%); to improve reading, writing and numeracy skills (76%); and to improve their chances of getting a job (59%).The least important reason for joining was to complete their education.

Learner Use of www.writeon.ie

Having explained how www.writeon.ie worked and provided training to tutors, learners began using the site. NALA carries out regular usability testing on www.writeon.ie and publishes these findings on www.nala.ie.[3] As a result of previous findings, we used this project as an opportunity to elicit the views of ESOL learners on specific issues identified in usability testing. The results are explained in the table below. As had been anticipated, the two most important functions to the group were having a Text to Speech function 'read out' onscreen text, and also having a tutor present to answer questions.

Table 3: Importance of www.writeon.ie functionality

	Very important %	Somewhat important %	Not important at all %
Availability of accreditation	57.5	42.5	0.0
Having a tutor to explain how the site works	65.9	29.3	4.8
Having the facility to have the text read out on the site	70.7	29.3	0.0
Learning journal	42.8	54.3	2.9
Discussion forum	36.6	43.9	19.5
Chat option	34.1	46.3	19.6

Learner usage of www.writeon.ie

Over the duration of the project, we monitored learner usage of www.writeon.ie in terms of how often they logged in and how long they stayed online. We were not provided with logon details for all learners so we were unable to track these data completely. This information is presented in Charts 7, 8 and 9 below.

[3]http://www.nala.ie/resources/wwwwriteonie-usability-testing-report-nala and http://www.nala.ie/resources/nala-writeonie-usability-testing-report-october-2011

Average number of logons

Chart 7: Average number of logons
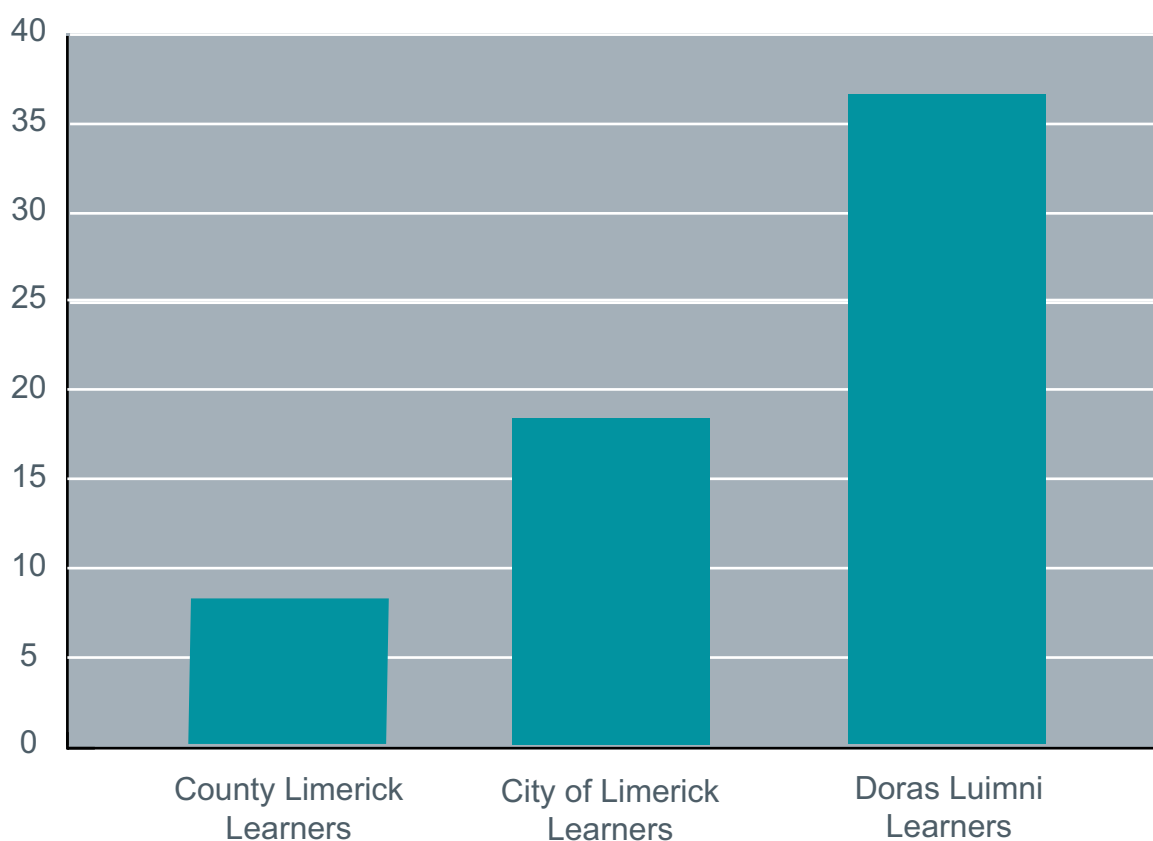
The data show that the learners in Doras Luimní logged in more frequently and spent longer online than the learners in County Limerick and City of Limerick Adult Literacy Services. The average number of logons for Doras Luimní was 37 times, while City of Limerick averaged 18.24 logons. County Limerick's average number of logons was 8.58, which was lower than the other centres.

Average time logged on

Chart 8: Average time logged on

The data show that the average time spent logged onto www.writeon.ie was highest for Doras Luimni and County Limerick learners, averaging 20 minutes per session. City of Limerick learners spent less time on the site with an average of two minutes per session.

Number of logons after 6 pm

Chart 9: Number of logons after 6pm

The average number of logons after 6 pm was once again highest for Doras Luimni and County Limerick learners with an average of 34 logons. City of Limerick averaged 10 logons after 6 pm.

Learner Progression - Perception

One of our aims in working on this project was to determine if learners progressed in terms of actual or perceived skills and knowledge levels. We gathered this information through reflective questioning, asking learners to consider how they would rate part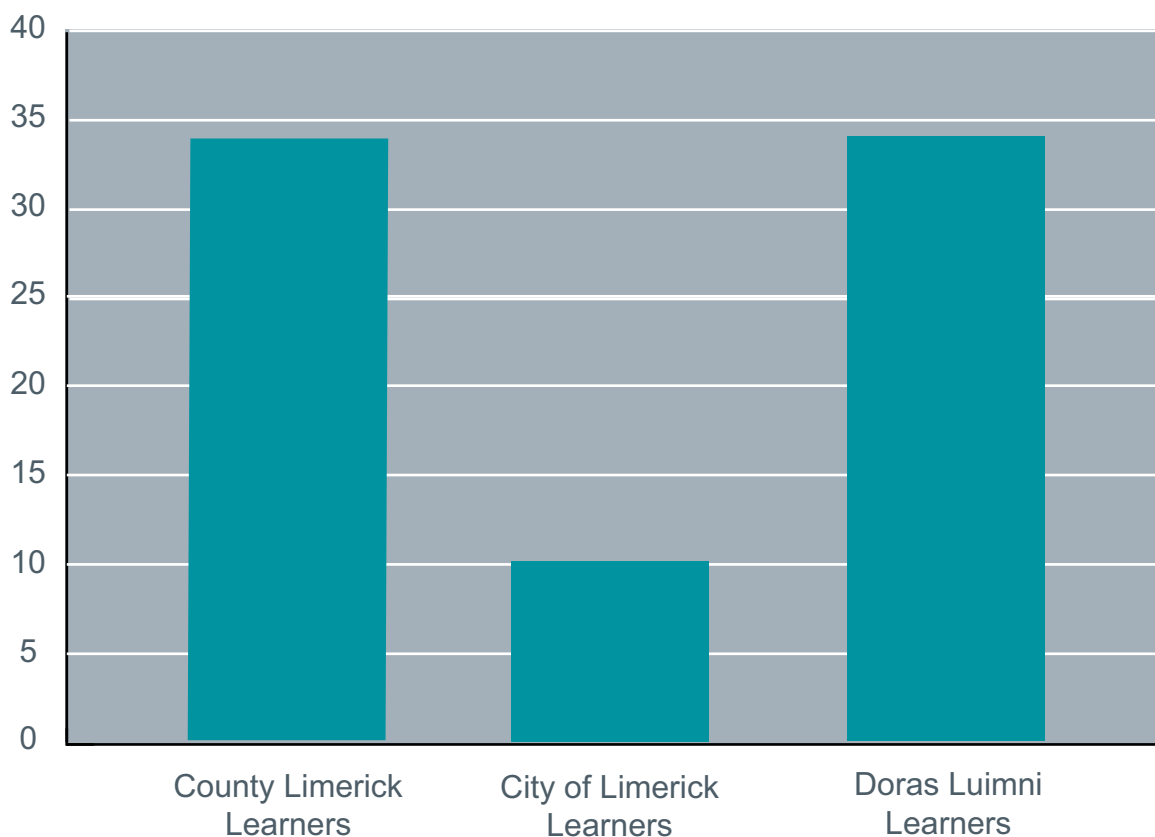icular skills they use regularly. We asked the same questions before and after the learners had completed the course. The results are set out in the Tables below.

Table 4: Before starting the course how confident did you feel in the following situations?

	Very confident %	Confident %	Not confident %	Not confident at all %
When expressing your views and opinions in English	12.5	35.0	47.5	5.0
When reading in English	9.5	68.3	22.2	0.0
When writing in English	9.8	56.1	31.7	2.4
When doing numeracy in English	26.2	46.3	24.1	3.4
When spelling in English	12.5	40.0	45.0	3.4
When filling out an official form	10.3	51.3	35.8	2.6
When discussing information in English	9.8	41.5	46.3	2.4

The survey data shows that before starting the course the learners were confident in reading (77.8%), writing (65.9%) and numeracy (72.5%). However, they were less confident when expressing their views or opinions in English (52.5%).

Table 5: Since completing the course how confident do you feel in the following situations?

	Very confident %	Confident %	Not confident %	Not confident at all %
When expressing your views and opinions in English	15.3	53.2	31.5	0.0
When reading in English	10.5	73.7	15.8	0.0
When writing in English	17.1	57.9	25.0	0.0
When doing numeracy in English	27.8	50.0	22.2	0.0
When spelling in English	21.1	52.6	26.3	0.0
When filling out an official form	15.6	56.7	27.7	0.0
When discussing information in English	15.3	47.4	37.3	0.0

The data show an increase in confidence levels amongst learners after completing the course. Confidence in reading had increased by almost 7% to 84.2%, confidence in writing had increased by 10% to 76%, and confidence in numeracy had increased by 5% to 78%. However, the biggest increase can be seen in the learners confidence levels in expressing themselves in English which has increased by 16% to 68%.

When we compare the data in the Tables 4 and 5 we find that overall there has been a shift upwards in how the learners rate their confidence levels.

We then asked the learners how they felt about certain skills, whether they were easy, medium or hard for them to master. We did this before and after the course. The results are set out in Tables 6 and 7 below.

Table 6: Leaners' perception of skills before taking course

	Easy %	Medium %	Hard %
Reading	22.0	61.0	17.0
Writing	10.0	55.0	35.0
Listening and speaking	14.7	58.5	26.8
Numbers	54.4	41.9	3.7
Technology	7.9	65.8	26.3
Learning skills	12.5	70	17.5

Table 7: Learners' perception of skills after taking course

	Easy %	Medium %	Hard %
Reading	34.1	63.4	2.5
Writing	17.1	68.3	14.6
Listening and speaking	24.4	63.4	12.2
Numbers	56.4	43.6	0.0
Technology	14.3	68.6	17.1
Learning skills	18.4	71.1	10.5

Overall, there was a move away from the 'hard' across all the categories. For example there was a 15% decrease in the numbers that described their reading skills as 'hard' and a 20% shift when it came to writing skills.

Learner Progression – Accreditation

The research data show that accreditation was important to all the learners in the study.

Chart 10 shows that the most popular Level 2 awards are Reading and Listening and Speaking which accounts for 13% each of the awards started by the learners. The Level 2 awards that generated the least amount of interest amongst the learners are Using Technology and Computer Skills.

The data in Chart 11 shows that the Level 3 award that generated the most interest among the ESOL learners is Personal Effectiveness accounting for 18% of awards started. The Level 3 awards that proved least popular were Career Preparation and Managing Personal Finances.
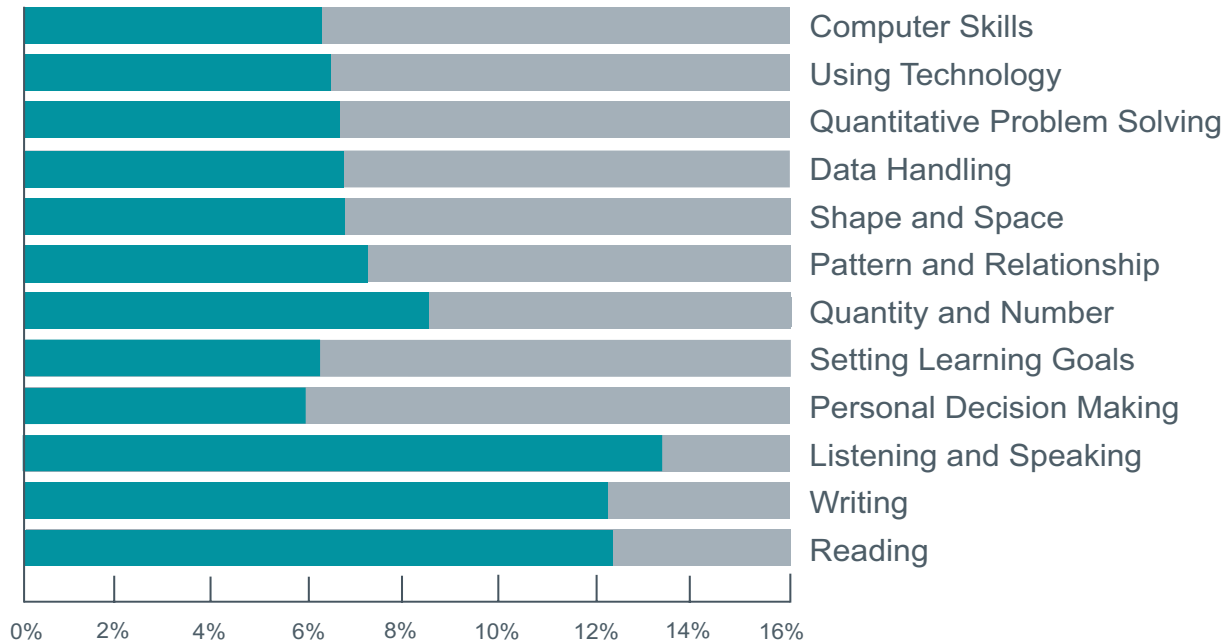
Award started by ESOL learners – Level 2

Chart 10: Awards started at Level 2

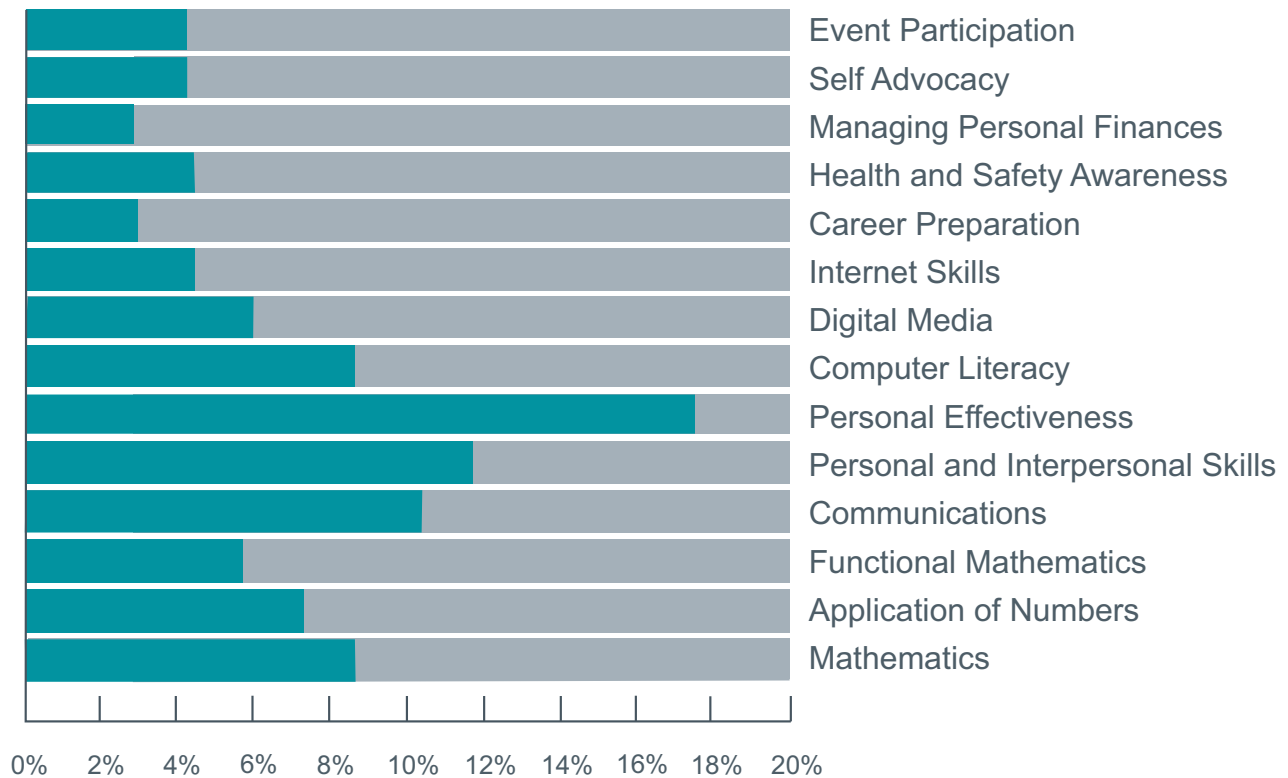# Award started by ESOL learners – Level 3

Chart 11: Awards started at Level 3

Learners' Views on Using www.writeon.ie

According to the learners, using www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach was beneficial to their learning outcomes in a number of ways. They report that using www.writeon.ie allowed them to:

- improve their English language skills through listening to the voice, 'looking up' words they did not understand using Google Translate;
- work independently at home; and
- 'catch up' on course work that they had missed due to family, work or other commitments.

Generally, the learners felt that the programme was most effective in helping them improve their English language skills.

> It is an opportunity to learn English. I am happy that I can learn English it is important in my life.

> I use it for words, for some new words to learn.

During the focus group interviews, the learners told how the classroom is often the only place where they speak English on a regular basis.

> In here, it is an opportunity to speak English. Outside I understand not everything ... in here I can explain what I want, what I think.

'Speaking' English in the classroom is viewed as effective by both learners and tutors as it allows for practising the language in a real and safe environment. The learners reported that they tend to speak their native language in the home, or when socialising with friends who are usually the same nationality. Therefore, there are limited opportunities to use English outside of the classroom. This view is supported by the some of the course tutors.

> They have Polish friends, they watch Polish TV, they read Polish newspapers so outside of here they don't get the chance to speak much English.

> Their children usually have better English than they do, so they can often rely on the kids to be interpreters. So, they don't see it as a priority to speak English. We also see that those with lower levels of educational attainment are less likely to do the work outside of the class.

Some of the learners reported that when they engage in everyday events, for example going to the local shop, they use whatever limited English they have. They try to avoid engaging in conversation with other locals, including their neighbours. They are often 'embarrassed' by their lack of English and they struggle to communicate with others in a meaningful way. This is often a barrier to participating fully in work place conversations and social situations where they are required to speak English. However, they are enthusiastic about putting what they have learned into practice.

> You feel better, when you go to shop or somewhere, for something to eat. You can talk about weather, you can talk about things, we have our opinion we want to talk about it, but still we have a small vocabulary.

Using www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach is beneficial to the learners as they get an immediate response from completing tasks on the site.

> I like that I could correct myself, I like that I can go back to a question.

> I like the tests, I like that I work on my own.

> It was fun, I can check my answers and my skills, it make me confident.

Using www.writeon.ie is also beneficial as it allows them to 'learn' English at home. The learners reported that they use the site at home to listen to and learn English rather than for other educational purposes, for example, completing an assignment or working towards accreditation.

> I am happy that I learn English. It is important to my life it make me confident and I can improve my skills.

Some of the learners told us that they have recommended the website to family and friends in their home country as a way of learning English. The use of www.writeon.ie also directs the learners to other online resources. The most talked about and used online resource is Google Translate. The learners reported that they use this resource extensively.

> If I have a problem I copy it into Goggle and put it in the translator.

> If I have a problem with a sentence I put it into translator in Google.

According to the tutors, Google Translate is particularly useful for independent learning:

> They translate a lot, most of them would have the translation button open at the top and when they didn't understand they'd click and it would translate.

> With this group they work fairly independently and what I find excellent is when they don't understand something rather than ask me they go onto Google Translate. I love to see that, I love to see them do that.

The learners cited two major difficulties that they have when using www.writeon.ie. The first one is a technical issue in that they sometimes have difficulty understanding the text-to-speech voice. The second issue is a cultural one and relates specifically to the Sports section on the site.

> I have problems with Sports, I don't know anything about Hurling, I don't know nothing about this, I don't understand the scores.

The tutors also reported that the cultural element to the Sports section sometimes created a difficulty in the class. However, this difficulty can provide a learning opportunity that might not otherwise exist.

> What is the GAA and what is Hurling? Needs a lot of explaining. So the cultural thing can cause a problem. But, I don't mind doing it because I find it's an opportunity to teach them about Irish culture.

Use of www.writeon.ie by other ESOL Learners

In addition to the 41 learners involved in this project, NALA also looked at how other ESOL learners used www.writeon.ie in two centres in Louth and Meath ETB and in Kilkenny and Carlow ETB during 2012 and 2013.

Table 8: ESOL learners outside of project

	2012	2013
Number of ESOL Learners	27	65
ESOL Learners Male/Female %	44/56	38/62
Number of minor awards	169	539

The Table above shows that in 2012 and 2013 the www.writeon.ie site was used more by female than male ESOL learners. The majority of learners were interested in pursuing accreditation and the number of awards provided to ESOL learners in just these two centres increased from 169 to 539. This represents 8.8% of all awards provided through www.writeon.ie during 2013.

The figures below show the popularity of awards by level among these two groups of ESOL learners.
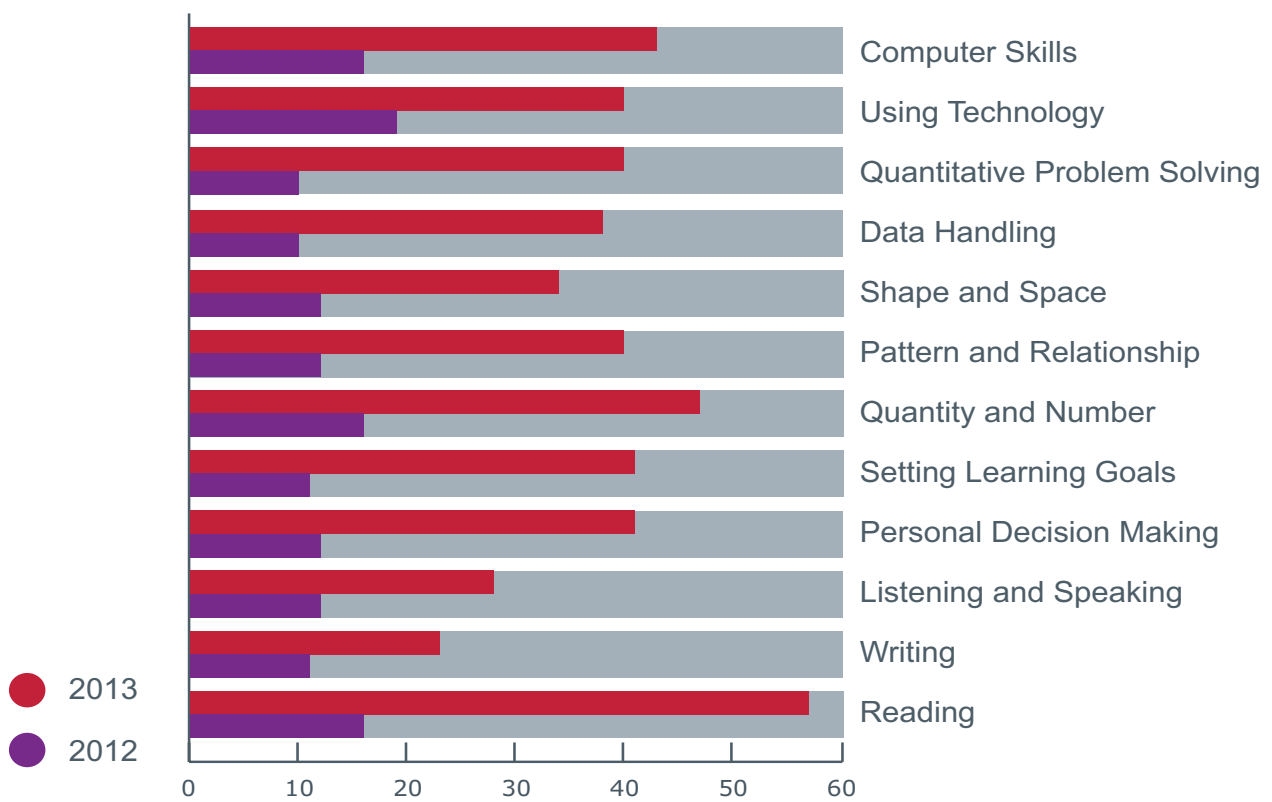
Chart 12: ESOL Level 2 award achievements - outside of this project
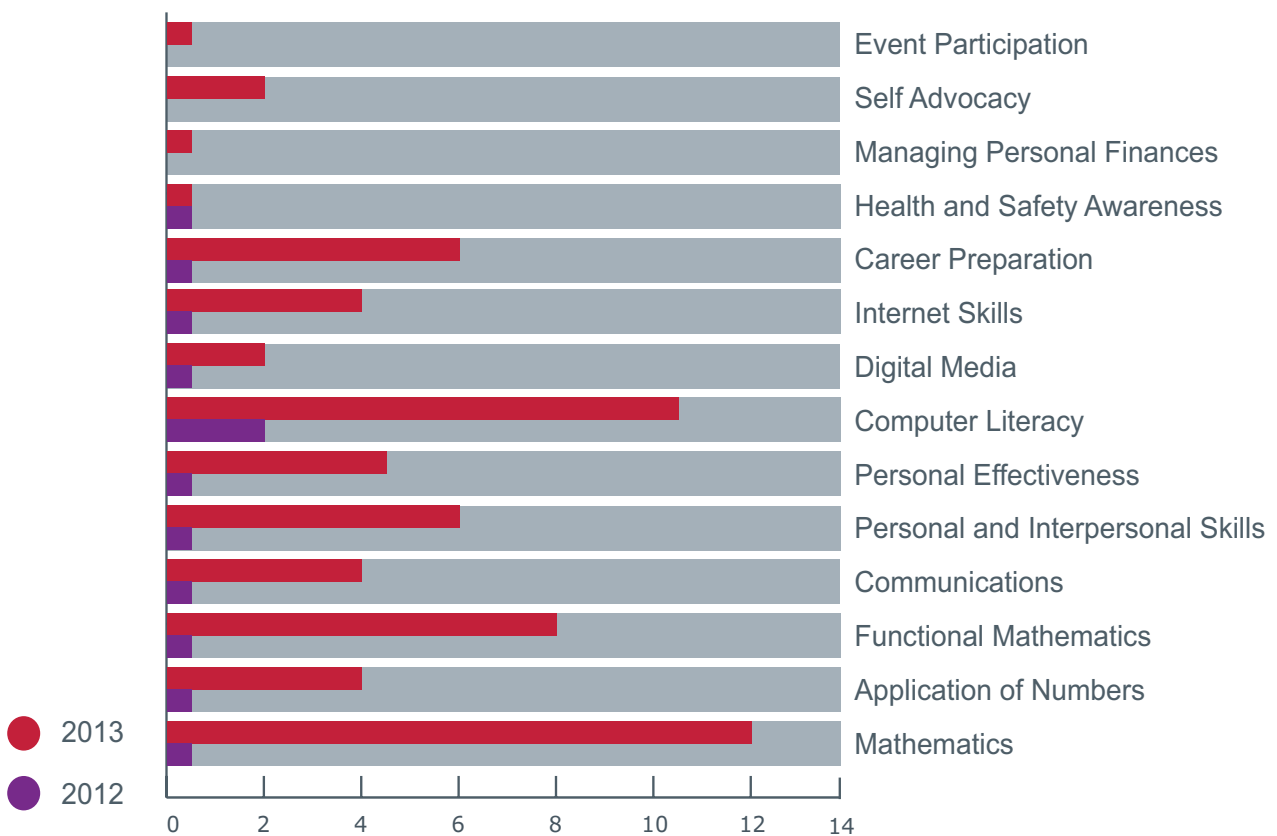

Chart 13: ESOL Level 3 award achievements - outside of this project

We also used Google Analytics to check if www.writeon.ie was being used outside of Ireland. We found the site had been used in 51 different countries in 2013. We also found that the top ten countries using www.writeon.ie changed between 2012 and 2013. It should be noted that most development work on www.writeon.ie is done in Germany and this would explain the number of German logins.

Table 9: Top 10 Countries visiting www.writeon.ie 2012

Top 10 Countries that visited the writeon website in 2012	
Country / Territory	Visits
Ireland	54811
United Kingdom	414
Germany	361
United States	216
Australia	44
Brazil	43
France	35
Canada	20
Slovakia	18

Table 10: Top 10 Countries visiting www.writeon.ie 2013

Top 10 Countries that visited the writeon website in 2013	
Country / Territory	Visits
Ireland	60324
Germany	268
United States	259
United Kingdom	155
New Zealand	97
Poland	77
Saint Barthélemy	60
Australia	51
Ukraine	45
India	28

Conclusions

This report describes the findings from a research project carried out by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) at the request of the Limerick ESOL Partnership (LEP). The focus of the project was the use of www.writeon.ie, as part of a blended learning approach with ESOL learners.

The data from this study show that:

- ESOL learners are keen to study outside of normal classroom time and that www. writeon.ie provides an opportunity to extend learning time.

- Learners whose first language is not English find it useful to have access to a learning resource for literacy and language development that works at an individual's pace and is accessible at times that suit their lives.

- The learners reported that since completing the course their confidence had increased in a number of learning situations. They reported increased confidence levels when expressing themselves in English.

- Most ESOL learners we encountered have the technical skills to engage in online learning.

- When accreditation is offered, as with www.writeon.ie, ESOL learners are interested in achieving national certificates.

- Learners reported that their skills have improved following a blended learning course using www.writeon.ie along with face-to-face tutoring.

- An interesting observation on site usage was the number of learners that logged on after 6 pm. Most centres would be closed by this time, so it was evident that learners were using the site independently of the centres. This was a stated intention of the project as the three Services were keen to encourage learners to engage in using English outside of class time.

- Overall, it was clear from the data that Doras Luimni and County Limerick learners logged on more often after 6 pm.

Finally

ESOL learners are not a homogenous group and often have very different cultural backgrounds, literacy needs, language needs and past educational attainments. Some may have literacy difficulties in their native language as well as in the English language. They may also have a very different perspective on learning and 'how you learn' from their Irish counterparts.

Literacy issues such as grammar, spelling, reading and writing are challenging for ESOL learners. Especially, when added to the demands of learning a new language. In order to address some of these issues, practitioners adopted a blended learning approach to teaching adult literacy to ESOL learners and to support their needs in the classroom.

The ESOL learners who took part in this research confirmed how a blended learning approach using www.writeon.ie along with face-to-face tutoring has helped to meet their learning and language needs. The research has also demonstrated how blended learning provided a means of extending learning time and encouraged independent study, as well as encouraging work towards accreditation at QQI Levels 2 and 3. Whilst the majority of learners in this survey reported the importance of accreditation, not all of them have achieved this to date.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this report we recommend the following:

1. **Centres should provide blended learning to ESOL learners to offer increased learning opportunities and expand capacity.**

2. **Centres should develop blended learning approaches that best suits the skills and needs of ESOL learners.**

3. **Where ESOL learners are keen to improve skills outside of the classroom, offerings such as www.writeon.ie should be promoted.**

4. **www.writeon.ie should be considered as a means of offering ESOL learners accreditation through Recognition of Prior Learning.**

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