

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Preface	ii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Factors enabling effective implementation	5
Chapter 3 An Implementation Guide	10
Chapter 4 Summary, conclusion and recommendations	24

Appendices

1 Profiles of Return to Education programmes	27
2 Preparation of good practice guide : methods used	30
3 Participant experience of ‘Return to Education’	52
4 Origins of factors enabling effective implementation of Return to Education programmes	55
5 Budget breakdown for ‘Return to Education’	62
6 Outline course content for Return to Education	63
7 Roles and responsibilities	64

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following for their contribution to this report :

- NALA staff, Inez Bailey, Director and Helen Ryan and Mary Toher, Development Workers;
- The Adult Literacy Organisers who participated in individual interviews and group discussions;
- The Co-ordinators of Return to Education programmes who participated in individual interviews and group discussions;
- The participants in Return to Education programmes who welcomed her to their classrooms and participated in individual and group meetings;
- VEC AEOs who participated in telephone and face-to-face interviews;
- CE Supervisors who participated in individual interviews;
- FÁS personnel in regional and national offices who participated in telephone and face-to-face interviews.

Copyright © 2000 National Adult Literacy Agency

ISBN 1-871737-07-9

Published by: National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
76 Lower Gardiner Street
Dublin 1
Telephone: (01) 8554332
Fax: (01) 8555475
Webpage: www.nala.ie
e-mail: literacy@nala.ie

Preface

This report concerns the Return to Education initiative which has been designed to meet the basic education needs of Community Employment (CE) participants. There have been three parties to the initiative, FÁS, VECs in each local area and NALA which instigated the first Return to Education programmes in 1998 and which has been fulfilling a support role since then. NALA now plans to adopt a reduced support role in relation to the initiative. The purpose of this report is to provide a resource and a guide to individuals and organisations who will be involved in implementing Return to Education programmes in the future.

Readers come to reports with different information needs and interests. This report has been structured to meet the needs of two audiences : the audience which wants an overview ; and the audience which wants the overview and the background information on which the overview is based.

The body of the report provides the overview. There are four chapters. The first introduces the Return to Education initiative. The second outlines the factors which enable the effective implementation of Return to Education programmes. The third is ‘an implementation guide’ with a focus on organisational and systemic aspects of practice. The fourth chapter presents a summary, conclusion and recommendations in relation to the future implementation of Return to Education programmes.

For readers who want more detailed, background information there is a series of appendices. The first profiles the 1999-2000 Return to Education programmes. The second outlines the approach used in the development of the implementation guide. The third presents participant feedback from programmes in three local settings. The fourth illustrates the factors identified as enabling effective implementation with the comments and feedback of programme participants. Appendices five and six are concerned with Return to Education programme budgets and course content. Appendix seven outlines the roles and responsibilities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Return to Education Programmes

The Return to Education programmes were established as an initiative to meet the basic education needs of participants on Community Employment schemes. During the period October 1999 - June 2000, Return to Education programmes have been run in fifteen settings throughout the country. There have been three parties to the initiative : NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency; FÁS, the national training authority; and the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which are the statutory providers of education for adults in their own areas. An expansion in the number of Return to Education programmes is now planned.

1.2 Origins of the Return to Education Programmes

In 1998, a NALA report¹ identified the need for work-based literacy programmes to enhance the access and participation of people with reading and writing difficulties. Community Employment, funded and administered by FÁS, is the main state-funded work experience programme for unemployed people. FÁS had also identified the literacy difficulties of a proportion of CE workers as a barrier to their progression to employment in the mainstream labour market. In late 1998, NALA in co-operation with FÁS and supported by local VEC staff, initiated two pilot programmes in Ballyfermot, Dublin and Mullingar, Co. Westmeath to address the literacy needs of CE workers in both areas. In effect, the pilot initiative enabled CE workers to participate in a basic reading and writing skills course as part of their CE work experience programme.

Following an evaluation commissioned by NALA², FÁS asked NALA to contact each of the ten FÁS regions to ascertain their interest in introducing Return to Education programmes³. NALA did so, negotiating with each of the regions separately. Simultaneously NALA engaged the co-operation of VECs in implementing the programmes in their local areas.

1.3 Purpose of this Report

Over the past year, NALA, FÁS and VEC personnel have been jointly involved in developing the Return to Education initiative around the country. NALA has viewed its role as being one of facilitating and supporting this developmental process. FÁS and the VECs have had a more 'hands-on' role in relation to the direct implementation of the programmes. The 'Return to Education' initiative is now set to expand and the expectation is that, in future, arrangements for the implementation of programmes will be negotiated directly between FÁS and VEC personnel at local level. NALA anticipates playing a much reduced support role with a focus on those settings where Return to Education programmes are being initiated for the first time. In light of the plan to reduce its own involvement in the future, NALA commissioned the present report.

¹ Bailey, I. and Coleman, U., (1998), Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Schemes, Dublin : National Adult Literacy Agency.

² McArdle, M., (July 1999), Evaluation Report of the NALA Return to Education Course in Mullingar and Ballyfermot, A FÁS Initiative, Dublin : NALA.

³ The ten FÁS regions are Dublin North, Dublin South and Wicklow, Dublin West and Kildare, Midlands, Mid West, North East, North West, South East, South West and West.

All of the parties to the Return to Education initiative have accumulated valuable experience since the programmes were first conceived in late 1998. The purpose of this report is :

- To draw on that accumulated experience to identify the factors enabling the effective implementation of Return to Education programmes;
- To incorporate those factors into an 'Implementation Guide' which will act as a resource for those involved in the future management, co-ordination, implementation and evaluation of 'Return to Education' programmes at national and local levels, particularly those who are engaging with the initiative for the first time,
- Through the presentation of an 'Implementation Guide', to encourage the mainstreaming of collaborative 'Return to Education' programmes as an integral part of FÁS-VEC provision in the future.

1.4 The Return to Education Model : How the Programme works

The Return to Education programme is intended to give Community Employment workers an opportunity to participate in intensive basic education provision.⁴ Participants are released from their CE work for nine hours per week to attend the programme over a period of thirty weeks throughout the year. Usually, the programme takes place over three mornings in the week from 10 a.m. – 1p.m. The maximum number of participants in each programme is fifteen. As well as reading and writing skills development, course content includes elements of mathematics, personal development and computer skills.

The programme is run by a Co-ordinator who also acts as core tutor. Further tuition, up to a total of nine hours per week, is provided by one or more additional tutors. Both Co-ordinator and second tutor are employed by the VEC. This is enabled by a funding allocation for the Return to Education programmes from FÁS which, in 1999 - 2000, was channelled through NALA. Within the VECs, the Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) play a key role in establishing and supporting the Return to Education programmes and the Co-ordinator and tutor.

The participation of CE workers in Return to Education provision is voluntary. Some are recruited through their CE Supervisors. Others identify themselves to Co-ordinators who visit their CE schemes to speak about the Return to Education programmes before they start up in a local area.

Community Employment Supervisors have a crucial role to play in both recruiting and supporting workers in terms of their participation on the Return to Education programmes. Consequently, FÁS encourages Supervisors' participation in a one day Literacy Awareness Training event prior to the start-up of a Return to Education

⁴ NALA provided a definition of Adult Basic Education as follows: "Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. It also encompasses aspects of personal development – social, economic, emotional - and is concerned with improving self-esteem and building confidence. It goes far beyond mere technical skills for communication. The underlying aim of good practice is to enable people to understand and reflect critically on their life circumstances with a view to exploring new possibilities and initiating constructive change."

programme in a local area. In 1999 – 2000, NALA co-ordinated the conduct of these Literacy Awareness Training events around the country.

The fifteen Return to Education programmes are profiled in Appendix One of this report.⁵

1.5 Development of Implementation Guide : Methods Used

NALA's brief to the author of this report requested that she would, in developing a Good Practice Guide, do the following:

- Build on the evaluation report of the pilot Return to Education programmes.⁶
- Examine relevant project documentation and all of the evaluation data that NALA had been gathering in relation to the Return to Education programmes, including questionnaires completed by CE workers, Co-ordinators and CE Supervisors.
- Consult directly with a selection of CE participants, Co-ordinators, ALOs, AEOs (VEC Adult Education Officers) and NALA and FÁS representatives.⁷

The author has done all three of the above, also drawing on her own experience as an evaluator to identify factors enabling effective implementation in the Return to Education initiative. The details of her approach, and in particular of the consultation process, as well as the detail of the evaluation data available from NALA are set out in Appendix Two of this report.

1.6 Key Findings

There are two key findings that underpin the succeeding chapters in this report. The first is that there is a very high level of satisfaction amongst CE workers who are participating in the Return to Education programmes. The details of their feedback are set out in Appendix Three of this report.

⁵ The fifteen programmes are in Athlone (Co. Westmeath VEC), Ballybay (Co. Monaghan VEC), Ballyfermot (CDVEC), Bray (Co. Wicklow VEC), Carlow (Co. Carlow VEC), Clonmel (Co. Tipperary S.R. VEC), Coolock (CDVEC), Galway city (City of Galway VEC), Kilkenny (Co. Kilkenny VEC), Limerick city (City of Limerick VEC), Newcastlewest (Co. Limerick VEC), Longford (Co. Longford VEC), Monaghan town (Co. Monaghan VEC), Mullingar (Co. Westmeath VEC) and Tullamore (Co. Offaly VEC).

⁶ McArdle, M., op. cit.

⁷ In the agreement reached between NALA and author, a total of twenty two days were to be allocated to the work.

The second is that issues are arising in terms of the structures and systems within which the Return to Education programmes have been implemented in 1999 - 2000. Those issues are reflected in and shape the content of Chapters Two and Three of this report.

Chapter 2: Factors Enabling Effective Implementation

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of factors enabling effective implementation of the Return to Education programmes, with a brief description of each factor. The source and significance of these factors is illustrated with comments and feedback from programme participants in Appendix Four of this report.⁸ The factors are presented here in five categories. These are : organisational factors, factors related to the purpose of the initiative, factors related to inter-relationships within and between organisations and individuals, process factors and factors related to the learning milieu.

2.2 Organisational Factors

A Co-ordinated Approach between Organisational Management

Management staff in the participating organisations see themselves as being in a formal relationship with each other to implement a common project. Staff in each organisation are encouraged by management to undertake project-related activities in a way that is co-ordinated, proactive and mutually supportive.

Integration between CE and Return to Education Experience

Community Employment workers participating in Return to Education programmes are enabled to integrate both experiences, for example through the application of new or enhanced skills from the programme in the CE setting. Organisational management promotes this integrative process.

Adequate Resources

A sufficient level of resources is available to implement the programme effectively : that is enabling Co-ordinators, tutors and CE workers, who are coming to 'Return to Education' programmes with different levels of reading and writing competence, to concentrate their energies on the core objective of developing their basic skills.

⁸ The author acknowledges the influence of two other publications on the **format** of this report. Mattessich, P.W. and Monsey, B.R., (1992), Collaboration : What makes it work and Mattessich, P.W. and Monsey, B.R. (1997), Community Building : What makes it work, both published by the Wilder Foundation, Minnesota. The example of Mattessich and Monsey is followed in that factors are presented positively, though sometimes their absence or a relevant negative experience has highlighted their importance.

Shared Contribution of Project Resources

Each of the participating organisations is seen by the other(s) to be contributing some of their own resources - be they human, physical, financial - to support the implementation of the project.

Funding Transparency

Funding arrangements for the project are negotiated between the participating organisations on the basis of a transparent and accurate exchange in relation to budget requirements and availability.

2.3 Purpose of the Initiative

Clarity of Purpose

The purpose of the Return to Education initiative is clear to all those who are connected, whether directly or indirectly, with the programmes. This includes FÁS and VEC personnel and CE Supervisors and sponsors.

Shared Purpose

All of those who are connected with Return to Education programmes share a commitment to - and, by implication, understand - its core purpose: addressing the basic education needs of CE workers. The needs of the workers and a shared commitment to addressing those needs over-ride problems such as personality conflicts and competition or mistrust between organisations in a local area.

Tangible Progress

There is tangible evidence that the common project is worthwhile and that programme participants are achieving a measure of skills development and personal progression.

2.4 Organisational and Personal Inter-Relationships

Relationships of Trust and Respect

At each level of the project – inter-organisational, intra-organisational, personal, as between tutor-student - there are relationships of trust and respect between participants.

Roles and Responsibilities are Clear

The roles and responsibilities of each of the participating organisations need to be clear.⁹ Similarly, at each level within those organisations, staff need to be clear about their individual roles and responsibilities. Guidelines and procedures are available to enable individuals to exercise their responsibilities and these are applied with flexibility.

Given the geographical spread and range of organisational practice, all AEOs, ALOs and Co-ordinators will not, for example, exercise roles and responsibilities in exactly the same way.

Capacity to fulfil Roles and Responsibilities

Inter-related with the two preceding factors is this third : the capacity of individuals and organisations to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. The skills and qualities, for example, of Co-ordinators , tutors and CE Supervisors are central to the effectiveness of Return to Education programmes.

A Communication System Exists

There is a flow of accurate information between the programme participants at various levels. Views on the progress of the initiative are exchanged within and between organisations and issues identified and tackled as they arise. A communication system exists to enable information flow and exchange about specific dimensions of the programme between participants who have a stake in those dimensions.

2.5 Process Factors

Consultation enables Ownership

Where there is meaningful consultation with the participants in the Return to Education initiative at any level, from participants to organisational management, their sense of ownership of and organisational/personal responsibility for the initiative is enhanced. Participants want to feel that they have ‘a say’, in a real sense, in a programme to which they are being asked to give time, energy and commitment.

Exercise of Autonomy

At each level of the initiative, within the boundaries of clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, individuals are encouraged to exercise autonomy. Where the reverse happens and roles are duplicated, incomplete information is shared or access to other programme participants or key events is blocked, the exercise of autonomy is compromised. There are attendant consequences in terms of frustration, loss of energy and under-development of the Return to Education programmes.

⁹ Appendix seven outlines the roles and responsibilities of NALA, FÁS and the VEC developed by NALA after the pilot programmes in 1998/1999.

Flexibility

Flexibility on the part of staff in each of the participating organisations enables effective implementation of the Return to Education programmes. Notwithstanding well-established organisational procedures and practices, the willingness of key individuals to adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach to problem-solving is a key determinant of success.

Support Needs are Met

Support needs of staff and programme participants, be they for information, guidance, specific training, are met in a way that is timely and appropriate to their needs.

2.6 Within the Learning Milieu¹⁰

Meeting the Needs of CE Participants

Within the learning milieu, the parameters of the work undertaken by Co-ordinators and tutors with CE participants, are determined by the needs, personal goals, levels and competencies of those participants.

The Adult Status of the Participant is Respected

Participants in 'Return to Education' programmes are treated like adults and their adult status is respected in all dimensions of the programme. This is reflected in their voluntary participation, involvement in self-assessment and goal-setting, the nature of relationships with tutors and participation in decision-making, most notably about those aspects of the programme that may conflict with their right to confidentiality.

Access to Accreditation as an Option

Participants are offered access to accreditation as an option for their work on the Return to Education programmes.

¹⁰ Many of the factors identified in relation to Return to Education programmes, in terms of how the learning milieu can best serve the basic education needs of participants, echo the guiding principles and statements outlined in an earlier NALA publication. See *Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education Workbook* (1999), Dublin : NALA.

Progression is Facilitated

Participants who, to achieve a satisfactory level of reading and writing competence, wish to continue to learn for a second year within the milieu of an intensive programme are facilitated within the Return to Education framework. Participants who want to pursue other progression routes are provided with adequate information and guidance to enable this process.

Chapter 3: An Implementation Guide

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an 'Implementation Guide' for all those connected with the Return to Education programmes. The factors enabling effective implementation of the programmes, which have been described in the previous chapter, are applied in the practice guidelines set out here. Where issues affecting implementation have been identified and remain unresolved, these are noted in boxes within the chapter.

3.2 Structure of the Chapter

The chapter is organised as follows :

- the objective of the FÁS/VEC Return to Education programmes (as they will be known in future) is outlined ;
- the funding arrangements for the programmes are discussed;
- the aspects of the programmes which fall within the remit of FÁS and the VECs respectively are outlined;
- the roles and responsibilities of key personnel, CE Supervisors employed by FÁS and Adult Literacy Organisers and Co-ordinators employed by VECs, are outlined¹¹;
- there is comment on NALA's role in relation to the initiative; and
- key stages in the life of the Return to Education programme are described, with recommended steps and/or procedures in relation to each of those stages identified.

3.3 Objectives of the Return to Education Programmes

The core objectives of the FÁS/VEC Return to Education programme are:

- I. To provide CE workers with literacy difficulties with an opportunity to participate in an intensive basic education programme as part of their Community Employment experience.
- II. Through the programme, to enable CE participants to achieve a tangible improvement in their reading and writing skills.

¹¹ Author met with a group of thirteen Co-ordinators and ten Adult Literacy Organisers in the course of preparing to write the Implementation Guide. She also interviewed four Community Employment Supervisors and surveyed questionnaires returned to NALA by two groups of Supervisors; one whose workers had participated in 'Return to Education' programmes and another group whose workers had not done so.

- III. To provide reading and writing tuition within a milieu which enhances the personal and social development of participants.
- IV. Through the medium of the programme to facilitate the progression of participants in terms of further education, training or employment.

Issues to Consider

A fundamental issue to consider is that of the **literacy levels** of recruits to Return to Education programmes. In 1999 – 2000 programmes, participants ranged from those with the most severe literacy difficulties (able to write own name only) to those who had broader basic education needs. This has a number of implications.

- The current funding allocation for the programme does not provide for 1 : 1 tuition (currently on a voluntary basis) which participants with very severe difficulties may both need and want to avail of.
- Within a group where a minority of participants have severe difficulties, the programme may not meet their needs.
- If the number of participants who achieve accreditation within a limited time-frame is used as a measure of success in a Return to Education programme, more ‘able’ recruits will be targeted for participation.
- If the desired number of fifteen participants is to be achieved in rural areas in particular, a broad mix of literacy levels amongst participants is inevitable.

Finally, the widespread view among those interviewed for this report is that Return to Education programmes should target and aim to meet the needs of participants with the most severe literacy difficulties.

3.4 Funding Arrangements for ‘Return to Education’

In 1999 – 2000, a budget for the Return to Education programmes was allocated by eight FÁS regions to NALA which then channelled funding to each of the fifteen programmes around the country. The average allocation for each programme from NALA was £15,812.¹² This provides for the employment of a Co-ordinator for sixteen hours each week (to cover nine hours tuition and six hours co-ordination activity), an additional nine hours of tuition time, a materials and a travel allowance. The budget breakdown is set out in Appendix Five of this report. In 2000 – 2001, the budget for each Return to Education programme will be negotiated directly between the Community Services Manager in each FÁS region and a representative of the VEC. Depending on the practice in a VEC area, this may be the CEO (Chief Executive Officer), the AEO and/or the ALO.

¹² For example, in the Midlands where courses ran for twenty eight weeks, the allocation was less.

Issues to Consider

According to a majority of Co-ordinators and ALOs, the budget of £15,812 does not cover all the costs of the programme. The materials and travel allowance is inadequate in terms of social events for participants such as trips to theatre or places of educational interest. In many instances, VECs have met additional needs from their own budgets, for example, for extra tutors and for hosting 'graduation' events for programme participants. They have done so willingly, but it was not planned or negotiated in advance.

FÁS interviewees have expressed the view that all of the financial costs of Return to Education programmes should not have to be met by FÁS; that VECs have a statutory remit in relation to adult literacy; and that government funding of adult literacy provision has never been more generous.

Finally, many programmes have been beset by difficulties in relation to the lack of childcare provision and travel allowances for participants who have to come long distances to attend the programme¹³. Overall, participation and retention of participants within Return to Education programmes has been high. Where there have been difficulties, lack of childcare provision has been a major contributor. The issues have been addressed on a case by case and/or programme by programme basis, sometimes accessing alternative supports through the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and, in one region, the Territorial Employment Pact, but there is no standard travel and childcare policy for Return to Education participants.

3.5 Remit of FÁS and of VEC respectively

3.5.1 FÁS

The aspects of 'Return to Education' programmes that fall within the remit of FÁS are outlined here with respect to CE Supervisors, sponsors and participants.

CE Supervisors

- Informing CE Supervisors about the programme.
- Responding to practical concerns and questions about how, for example, worker absence from the CE schemes will affect sponsors, the planned work programme and colleagues on the scheme.
- Encouraging Supervisors' promotion of and support for the programme.
- Inviting their participation in a Return to Education Information day¹⁴ in their area prior to the start-up of a Return to Education programme.

¹³ FÁS staff in the midlands region where a pilot Return to Education programme was piloted had the option of using a 'Customised Training Grant' to provide travel allowances to participants. This option was removed in the second year of the programme and they suggest that its restoration is a way of dealing with the issue of travel allowances.

¹⁴ Known in 1999 – 2000 as Literacy Awareness Training (LAT).

- Promoting the integration of CE and Return to Education experience for CE workers by their Supervisors.

CE Sponsors

- Informing sponsors about and encouraging their support for the programme.
- Responding to sponsors' practical concerns about the programme.

CE Workers

- Enabling release of CE workers from their schemes to participate in Return to Education programmes.
- Responding to practical issues for workers such as continuation on a Return to Education programme if their CE scheme ends or if a second year's participation is desirable.

Issues to Consider

From the FÁS point of view, there are a number of issues to consider.

- In terms of Supervisor development, there is recognition that steps could be taken to build broader Supervisor awareness of literacy issues as part of the Supervisors' training provided by FÁS.¹⁵
- There is a view that Supervisors, when drawing up the Training Plan for a scheme, should be requested by FÁS to incorporate the literacy issue as an integral part of that Plan ; in other words not to deal with the issue as an 'add-on' or purely in relation to Return to Education programmes when the opportunity emerges locally.
- In terms of sponsors, there are a number of issues. Overall, there is a view that they need to be 'kept on board' and that their expectations around the fulfilment of work commitments by the CE scheme must be met. There is recognition that sponsor support is essential to the success of the programmes. However, there is also a view that the mechanisms available to FÁS through which to raise sponsor awareness are limited. One proposal is that FÁS could work with new sponsors through their Sponsor Application workshops, though it is agreed that this would not address the issue with existing sponsors.
- Again in relation to sponsors, FÁS practice has varied from place to place. In one FÁS region, the Community Services Manager has taken the view that sponsors cannot be expected to accommodate CE worker absence for nine hours each week. Participants attend 'Return to Education' for five hours of CE time, four hours of their own time. In another setting, when three workers from one scheme wanted to participate in 'Return to Education', FÁS responded to sponsor concerns by including an additional worker on their scheme to meet the shortfall in worker availability.¹⁶

¹⁵ A Literacy Module devised by NALA is to be piloted at a Supervisors' Training event in Autumn 2000.

¹⁶ FÁS staff member in question has also said that this was a once-off and would not recommend release of three workers from any single scheme in the future.

- In terms of CE workers, there are real difficulties for those who are reaching the end of their three year allocation of time on CE, but who now want to continue with Return to Education provision. In general, FÁS staff are willing to accommodate workers who are within the three year time-frame on a case by case basis. However, when workers have completed three years on CE, the view is that they become the responsibility of other providers.

3.5.2 The VECs

In relation to the Return to Education programmes, the VECs do the following :

- Oversee the management and delivery of the programme.
- Administer the budget allocated, keeping accounts and records of all receipts and payments.
- Source and employ a Co-ordinator / core tutor and tutor(s) to deliver the programme.
- Source premises.
- Work with the Co-ordinator to promote the programme.
- Support the Co-ordinator in fulfilling her/his role and in meeting the needs of students.
- Liaise with FÁS personnel throughout the programme and with NALA in terms of its support role.

Issues to Consider

There are a number of issues to consider.

- Many VEC personnel indicate that ensuring the quality of the Return to Education programme, and by implication the credibility of their own work, is and will be an ongoing issue for them. In this regard, the quality of the Co-ordinator recruited to run and tutor the programme is pivotal; and, where good candidates have been appointed, their maintenance within the programme is a concern for some.
- The importance of a co-ordinated and consultative approach to the programme has been noted. In many instances, VEC staff - ALOs in particular whose specific brief is literacy provision – found themselves in the past year working on the programme at very short notice and with incomplete information in relation to emerging issues. In terms of forthcoming Information Days, both ALOs and Co-ordinators should have the option of attending, with CE Supervisors and FÁS representation.
- A concern has been expressed that the Return to Education programme might become ‘accreditation-driven’, to the detriment of meeting the needs of participants. Though access to accreditation has been clearly identified as an option rather than a requirement for participants, Co-ordinators in the first year of the programme were keenly aware that it was a pilot and that they wanted it to succeed; and that numbers

of participants achieving accreditation would be viewed as a tangible measure of progress.

- In terms of reporting to CE Supervisors on participant attendance at and progress within the Return to Education programmes, practice has varied around the country. However, there is a concern that this should be managed so as to both support the progression of participants and respect the learning contract between tutors and participants and their rights to confidentiality.
- The FÁS organisational structure is complex and there is a lack of clarity about who to approach in FÁS, and at what level, in relation to issues emerging on programmes. In particular at local level, there is a need for a designated FÁS contact person with responsibility for linking with and responding to Return to Education queries.

3.6 Roles and Responsibilities of CE Supervisors, Adult Literacy Organisers and Co-ordinators

3.6.1 The CE Supervisor

In relation to a Return to Education programme, the **role** of the CE Supervisor is to promote the programme to CE workers and to support their participation in it.

The **responsibilities** of the CE Supervisor are to :

- Inform CE workers about the programme.
- Facilitate the Co-ordinator in visiting the CE Scheme and meeting with workers.
- Participate, with the Co-ordinator, in the recruitment of workers to the programme.
- Inform sponsors and liaise with them in relation to the programme.
- Link with the Co-ordinator to ease the transfer of workers between the CE scheme and the Return to Education programme.
- Support and affirm the participation of workers in the programme.
- Respond to concerns that may arise on the part of non-participating workers about, for example, the implications of reduced personnel on the scheme for three days of the week.
- Provide opportunities for the application of skills acquired on the programme within the CE setting.
- Avail of the Co-ordinator's input in guiding workers vis a vis their progression options.

Issues to Consider

Practice amongst CE Supervisors has varied during the 1999 – 2000 programmes. Some have provided extraordinary levels of support to their workers. This has ranged from driving nervous participants to the venue for the first sessions; to releasing a number of workers from one scheme with the Supervisor filling the resulting gaps; to the Supervisor advocating strongly on behalf of workers with anxious sponsors. It is also clear that on some CE schemes, there are high levels of openness between Supervisors, programme participants and their work colleagues. This results in an easy exchange of information about what happens on programmes, with individuals freely displaying their written work-in-progress to both Supervisor and peers. However, many issues have also arisen and these include the following :

- Supervisors failing to give Co-ordinators access to CE workers.
- Lack of knowledge and/or understanding about purpose of the Return to Education programmes.
- Uncertainty about how to identify workers with literacy difficulties and, if identified, about how to broach the matter with them ; also lack of clarity about how to ‘pitch’ the programme in terms of literacy levels.
- Pressure on workers to absent themselves from the Return to Education programme, for example, on outdoor schemes when the weather is good and there is grass to be cut, painting to be done, maintenance work to be carried out.

3.6.2 The Adult Literacy Organiser

In relation to the Return to Education programme, the **role** of the Adult Literacy Organiser is to enable and support the implementation of the programme in their area.

The **responsibilities** of the Adult Literacy Organiser are to :

- Participate in the recruitment/appointment of the Co-ordinator (in conjunction with the AEO).
- Source and agree a second tutor(s) for the programme, in conjunction with the Co-ordinator.¹⁷
- Contribute to the design of the programme with the Co-ordinator and tutor (s).
- Provide support to the Co-ordinator and tutor(s), with scheduled team meetings;¹⁸ frequency to be negotiated between the participants.
- Act as a link between the programme and the VEC via the AEO.
- Support Co-ordinators in their promotion of the programme with CE Supervisors and workers.¹⁹

¹⁷ Some ALOs have sourced voluntary 1 : 1 tutors for participants with severe literacy difficulties and this has been a very positive contribution to the programmes.

¹⁸ Scheduled meetings do not have to be formal. In one centre, ALO, Co-ordinator and tutor come together weekly for a working lunch and this meets their needs very well.

- Oversee the budget for the programme and inform the Co-ordinator about the parameters of the budget for the programme.
- Agree with the Co-ordinator a clear delineation of responsibilities in terms of the handling of the budget for the programme and the sourcing of premises, materials and other supports, including childcare supports.
- Participate in VEC/FÁS meetings in relation to the initiative.

3.6.3 The Co-ordinator

In relation to the Return to Education programme, the **role** of the Co-ordinator is to implement the programme.

The **responsibilities** of the Co-ordinator are to :

- Promote the programme with CE Supervisors and workers.
- Participate in Return to Education Information Days.
- Recruit workers to the programme, in co-operation with Supervisors.
- Co-operate with the ALO in the selection of a second tutor (s) to the programme.
- Carry out an initial, collaborative assessment of participants' literacy levels.
- Design, timetable, facilitate and tutor on the programme.
- Maintain programme records.
- Link with and support the second tutor to the programme.
- Provide access to accreditation as an option for participants.
- Provide feedback to the ALO and participate in scheduled team meetings with ALO and other tutor(s).
- Participate in FÁS/VEC meetings related to Return to Education programmes.
- Maintain contact with Supervisors for the duration of the programme.
- At the end of the programme, provide Supervisors with information about further education and training options that are appropriate to the progression needs of participants.

¹⁹ ALOs in some VEC areas already have links with CE Supervisors and, where this kind of groundwork has been done, it is of value to Co-ordinators in relation to Return to Education programmes.

- Agree with the ALO a clear delineation of responsibilities in relation to the handling of the budget for the programme, the sourcing of premises and materials and of other supports, including childcare.

Issues to Consider

The following issues emerged:

- Co-ordinators are agreed that the scope of their job far outstrips the sixteen paid hours per week that are available to them to fulfil their responsibilities.
- Co-ordinators' paperwork requirements are felt by them to be excessive. Whatever their role in relation to programme budgets, they are involved in handling travel and childcare claims and expenses on a day-to-day basis. There are regular written reports to NALA, as well as the completion of questionnaires. In some VECs, written reports are also requested, in one case, on a weekly basis.
- The lead-in/recruitment time for the programmes is felt to be too short, adding to pressure on Co-ordinators and ALOs (where ALOs have been involved in this aspect of the work).
- There are differing views about who should source premises, with some staff seeing it as a joint responsibility. In this, as in relation to budget management, there is need for clear delineation of responsibilities within each VEC setting.
- There is a balance to be struck in relationships between ALOs and Co-ordinators in terms of maintaining the quality of the programme, providing an appropriate level of support and enabling autonomy in relation to agreed roles and responsibilities. In some settings, this balance has not been struck during 1999 - 2000.
- At local level, VEC personnel would like to be able to link with a designated FÁS staff member about issues, concerns and queries arising in relation to the Return to Education programmes.

3.7 NALA's Support Role

NALA will continue to play a support role in relation to the Return to Education programmes, but it will do so within narrower parameters than in the period 1999 - 2000. As part of its support role, NALA will :

- Co-ordinate a series of Return to Education Information Days for CE Supervisors, ALOs, Co-ordinators and FÁS representatives around the country.
- Provide training for new and existing Co-ordinators in October 2000.
- Continue to provide a forum within which Co-ordinators can meet with their colleagues, share information and ideas and address issues together that are relevant to the quality of the Return to Education programmes such as curriculum design and content, needs assessment and tuition strategies.

- Convene a forum for ALOs to meet approximately twice a year with regard to the Return to Education programmes.²⁰

Issues to Consider

The following issues bear on the nature of NALA's future support role :

- FÁS and VEC personnel who have co-operated with each other in relation to the 1999-2000 Return to Education programmes are negotiating the next set of programmes at regional level and do not need third party involvement to do this. However, in areas where Return to Education programmes are coming on stream for the first time, external support and advice may be needed. The feedback from existing Co-ordinators is that they valued the support role played by NALA in terms both of the hosting of peer meetings and the provision of neutral advice and information in response to problems and queries. The likelihood is that new Co-ordinators would experience similar needs. Further, existing Co-ordinators would welcome NALA's continued involvement.
- From the perspective of FÁS at Programme development level, the advantage of NALA involvement in the first year was that it streamlined the process to some extent since FÁS regions dealt with one national level organisation, rather than several in relation to 'Return to Education' programmes. Though programmes are now being negotiated at regional level, a view has been expressed that a continued NALA role is desirable to ensure quality standards for the programmes. Concerns to ensure the provision of high quality programmes have also been expressed by VEC personnel and one VEC interviewee proposed that NALA should now focus on the application of the ABE Quality Framework²¹ to the Return to Education programmes. However, such a role for NALA would need to be managed with sensitivity : this is due to the perspective of some VEC personnel who have expressed unease at a perceived extension of NALA's role in literacy provision.

²⁰ ALOs' have requested provision of such a forum.

²¹ Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education, op. cit.

3.8 Stages in Return to Education programmes²²

This section of Chapter Three looks at three stages in the life of the Return to Education programmes. Stage one incorporates two phases, **Creating Awareness** and **Recruiting Participants**. Stage two is about **Easing Participants into the Programme** and **Developing the Learning Programme**. Stage three is concerned with drawing the programme to a close.

3.8.1 Stage One²³

Creating Awareness of the Return to Education Programme

- FÁS region informs CE Supervisors and sponsors about the programme and the forthcoming Return to Education Information Day; participation is recommended.
- FÁS also provides to Supervisors and sponsors a written question and answer document which will address the most commonly voiced, practical concerns about Return to Education programmes.
- NALA hosts a Return to Education Information Day with the participation of sponsors, Supervisors, local ALO (if available), Co-ordinator and FÁS representative(s). Participants are requested to make a commitment to attend all of the day-long event.
- Supervisors need to receive a clear and consistent message about the range and level of literacy difficulty that the Return to Education programme is intended to address.
- Supervisors also need an opportunity to share with each other practical strategies that they have or might use to both identify and then broach the literacy issue with their workers. (Strategies already identified by Supervisors include the following: using 1:1 sessions with participants to explore core skills; acting on feedback from external facilitator, given with prior permission of the individuals concerned; listening to workers who said they would like a chance to finish their schooling; noting a reluctance to participate in training, to write in the Supervisor's presence or to read aloud in the group.)

²² Where the use of new documents and procedures is proposed, or a point needs to be addressed, thus creating a task for the responsible organisation, italicised print is used.

²³ Many of those involved in the implementation of Return to Education programmes in 1999 – 2000 have made two practical points : that the lead-in time should be extended to forty hours in programme budgets ; and that programmes should run in conjunction with the school year.

Recruiting Participants to the Programme

- The Supervisor speaks to the workers on his/her scheme about the Return to Education programme and tells them that the Co-ordinator will be visiting the group.
- The Co-ordinator meets with the group to tell them about the programme. They hear about the range of subjects on offer - communication, maths, art and computer skills - but this should not dilute the clear and consistent message that this programme is for people who want to improve their reading and writing skills. It may be helpful to draw on the experience of the last round of programmes, giving general examples of the range of people who participated, some having left school very early, for example. Interested individuals are not asked to identify themselves in a group setting. The Co-ordinator indicates that she/he will be having a cup of tea in a named (private) place if anybody wants to talk to her/him. Workers should also be encouraged to follow-up with their Supervisor if they prefer to do that.
- In some settings, the option of involving former programme participants in the recruitment stage is being considered. Where this happens, there should be adequate preparation with, and support for, the individuals concerned during and following their participation.
- Before the programme starts, each individual recruited, whether by the Supervisor or the Co-ordinator will take part in a 1:1 interview with the Co-ordinator, preferably in their own CE setting. Style is important and Co-ordinators will need to be friendly, informal, but not pushy or over-enthusiastic.²⁴

3.7.1 Stage Two

Easing Participants into the Programme

- For participants, the first sessions of the Return to Education programme are likely to be an ordeal. Feedback from former participants indicates all kinds of (unrealised) fears and anxieties : that it would be like school all over again; that tutors would be unsympathetic; that their difficulties would be revealed if they met neighbours in the group; that they would be asked questions they couldn't answer.²⁵
- It is a time when the Supervisor can give vital encouragement and when the Co-ordinator focuses on settling the group, giving participants a chance to ease their way in initially with a cup of tea and a chance to meet and talk informally.

Developing the Learning Programme

²⁴ Ideally, Co-ordinators will have significant literacy experience and this will not be an issue.

²⁵ There is also some questionnaire feedback which indicates that a small number of participants left in the early stages of programmes because they didn't feel comfortable in groups.

- Co-ordinators and participants collaborate in an initial assessment to enable the identification of needs and levels. An assessment guide is available for those who want to use this as a tool .
- If the larger group of participants is sub-dividing according to level, the participants themselves have an opportunity to decide which working group they would like to be part of.
- With support from the ALO, Co-ordinator and tutor design the learning programme, blending the needs of participants with the outline framework for course content devised by NALA. This framework forms Appendix Six of this report.
- The needs of participants with severe or special difficulties are identified and responded to within the group. Once they have been recruited to the programme, there is a responsibility to do this.
- The programme includes educational outings and participants themselves will have a say in deciding where to go and how best to organise the outings.
- Access to accreditation is offered as an option on the Return to Education programmes. Again interview feedback suggests the need to provide practical support to Co-ordinators and tutors on the management of accreditation as a strand of the programme, Ideally, it should reflect work that is accomplished, rather than shape every facet of the learning process.
- In the course of the learning programme, Co-ordinators link with Supervisors to stimulate their support for participants : encouraging Supervisors' to invite (without being intrusive) discussion on course content and issues; and providing opportunities for the application of new skills.
- Participant attendance at the programme is a requirement due to their status as CE workers. They should know that if they are absent without explanation for a number of sessions, the Co-ordinator will have to discuss this with their Supervisor.
- Participants themselves should discuss with Co-ordinators the headings under which their progress might be discussed with Supervisors if this is requested.²⁶

²⁶ Views are divided on the appropriateness of providing such reports. If given, it should be under broad headings. For example, an individual is pursuing NCVA Foundation Level accreditation in Maths and has completed two modules. More personalised reporting is out of step with good ABE practice.

3.8.3 Stage Three

Bringing the Programme to a Close

- As the programme draws to a close, participants may value the opportunity to celebrate their learning and achievement on Return to Education programmes at a special event with Co-ordinators, tutors and, if it is agreeable to all, CE Supervisor, FÁS and VEC personnel.
- The CE Supervisor is primarily responsible for guiding and advising workers in terms of their progression options. However, Co-ordinators should provide information on appropriate further education and training opportunities to both participants and their Supervisors.
- Participant feedback from the first round of Return to Education programmes shows that it whets their appetites to learn and develop further. At the end of the programme, each participant should have a possible next step in mind.
- These progression support needs have implications beyond the immediate confines of the Return to Education programme, but are noted here because they have implications for the main participating organisations, FÁS and the VEC. On the one hand, the participants' needs may be such that FÁS ought to accommodate them in a further year of Return to Education provision or in another FÁS training programme. On the other, participants' needs may lead them towards existing VEC provision such as Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). Where available education and training provision does not meet their needs, as is the case with some participants, what is being highlighted are the systemic gaps which block the longer term progression of adults looking for 'second chance' education.

Chapter 4: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Summary

The Return to Education initiative is designed to meet the basic education needs of Community Employment workers, enabling them to combine CE work experience with an opportunity to participate in an intensive reading and writing skills programme. The first Return to Education programmes were piloted by NALA and FÁS, supported by local VEC staff in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath and Ballyfermot, Dublin in late 1998. Following an evaluation of those programmes, NALA was contracted by eight FÁS regions to support the introduction of Return to Education programmes in each of their regions. NALA has done so, engaging the co-operation of the VECs in implementing the programmes in their local areas. There were fifteen Return to Education programmes running around the country during the period 1999 – 2000. The target number of workers for each of those programmes was fifteen. In the coming year, Return to Education programmes will be implemented jointly by FÁS and the VECs in each local area and NALA will play a much reduced support role.

In the writing of this report, the experience accumulated by participants in all levels of the Return to Education initiative has been drawn on to do two things. The first was to identify the factors enabling the effective implementation of Return to Education programmes. The second was to devise an ‘Implementation Guide’ which would act as a resource to individuals and organisations involved in the future management, co-ordination, implementation and evaluation of Return to Education programmes. The focus of the ‘Implementation Guide’ has been on structural and systemic dimensions of programme provision since Return to Education provision is implemented within a complex model involving at least two organisations and tiers of staff within those organisations.

Five categories of factors enabling effective implementation of Return to Education programmes have been identified. These are: organisational factors, factors related to the purpose of the initiative, factors related to personal and organisational inter-relationships, process factors and factors relating to the learning milieu. In the ‘Implementation Guide’, the objectives of the Return to Education programmes are set out, as are the funding arrangements. Dimensions of programmes falling within the remit of FÁS and the VEC respectively are outlined and the support role of NALA is considered. The roles and responsibilities of major players in the direct implementation of Return to Education programmes, the ALOs, Co-ordinators and CE Supervisors are defined. In addition, each stage of the Return to Education programme is considered: the first stage to which there are two dimensions, creating awareness of the programme and recruiting participants; the second when participants are being eased in and the learning programme is developing; and the third stage when the programme is drawing to a close.

The thrust of feedback from the majority of those consulted in the preparation of this report is that - in terms of the relevance and value of the Return to Education programmes and the reported satisfaction levels of CE participants - the initiative is a worthwhile one which should be supported. At the same time, a range of **issues** have been identified which are unresolved and which will bear on future practice in relation to Return to Education programmes. Broadly, these reflect needs to:

- Devise a standard mechanism to meet the support needs of CE participants in terms of travel and childcare allowances.
- Provide for additional Co-ordinator and tutor time in planning and funding programmes.
- Work proactively to enhance Supervisor and sponsor awareness and understanding of the Return to Education initiative.
- Tackle CE related problems for participants i.e. schemes finishing, week-on/week-off schemes, coming to the end of their time on CE.
- Clarify the target group for Return to Education in terms of literacy levels; recognising the attendant consequences in terms of resourcing, time-frame for the programmes and results as measured by accreditation.
- Maintain the ‘student-centred’ ethos of good Adult Basic Education provision within the framework of the Return to Education initiative.
- Address concerns about maintenance of quality within and evaluation of Return to Education programmes.
- Work collaboratively at organisational levels to implement a joint approach to the implementation of Return to Education programmes at local level.
- Consider ongoing support needs vis a vis current and future programmes.

4.2 Conclusion

The model within which Return to Education programmes are implemented confers clear advantages. Community Employment workers with reading and writing difficulties are being identified and enabled to address those difficulties. From the VEC point of view, they are accessing and working with a key target group. From a FÁS point of view, a recognised barrier to CE worker progression to the mainstream labour market is being tackled by providers with the relevant expertise.

However, the model also presents significant challenges to all of those involved in managing, planning, co-ordinating and supporting Return to Education programmes. Effective practice ‘on the ground’, that is within the parameters of individual programmes, requires a confluence of enabling factors. Foremost amongst these is the streamlining of organisational roles and responsibilities and a proactive approach on the part of individuals and organisations to the fulfilment of those responsibilities.

The leadership role of key individuals within participating organisations is central to this kind of systemic and structural adjustment. In turn, the nature of the process through which key individuals have themselves been engaged in the Return to Education initiative and the nature of the process through which they subsequently engage colleagues - that is, the extent to which it embodies the process factors outlined earlier in this report – will influence the degree to which this kind of streamlining is and will be achieved. Those process factors highlighted the value of meaningful consultation, the

need to enable the exercise of autonomy, the importance of a flexible approach to problem-solving and the provision of appropriate support to meet needs of both staff and participants.

In terms of future practice on Return to Education programmes, a range of practical and policy issues remain to be addressed. Recommendations in relation to each of these issues follow.

4.3 Recommendations

- In relation to travel allowances, FÁS should undertake responsibility for meeting the support needs of participants.
- In relation to childcare provision, VECs should take responsibility for meeting the childcare needs of participants.
- In relation to two issues - calculating increased Co-ordinator and tutor time as a guideline for future Return to Education programmes and devising criteria vis a vis participant literacy levels - NALA should work in consultation with both ALOs and Co-ordinators to complete both tasks.
- FÁS should devise a clear and simple question and answer document for Supervisors and sponsors to address FAQs, that is frequently asked questions in relation to interaction between CE schemes and Return to Education programmes.
- There should be a named and designated FÁS staff member in local offices with whom VEC personnel can link in relation to Return to Education programmes.
- Community Services Officers in FÁS local offices should be encouraged by organisational management to adopt a proactive role in relation to generating awareness and understanding amongst both sponsors and Supervisors about Return to Education programmes.
- Within FÁS, the practice of flexible responses to Return to Education participants' issues should be promoted from the national level i.e. possibility of a second year on the programme; accommodation within another scheme if one ends; facilitation of participants whose three year CE time-frame is ending.
- The application of the existing ABE Quality Framework to the Return to Education programmes should be actively pursued. NALA should undertake this work.
- Co-ordinators will have ongoing support and training needs and ALOs would like to meet as a group in relation to the Return to Education programmes periodically. NALA should facilitate responses to both needs.
- Meetings at organisational management level between FÁS and VEC personnel in local areas should be encouraged at least at the beginning and end of each Return to Education programme

**APPENDIX ONE
PROFILES OF RETURN TO EDUCATION PROGRAMMES**

Introduction

The fifteen Return to Education programmes are profiled in this section of the report.²⁷ The information for the profiles is collated from twelve Co-ordinators' End of Year Reports; ten completed Co-ordinator questionnaires; student questionnaires from five programmes; and, in the case of two programmes, feedback from NALA's Development Worker. More detailed information is available for some programmes than others and this is reflected in the table below.

Table One
Programme Profiles

	No. of Participants commencing	No. of Participants completing	Sex ²⁸		Age-range
			Male	Female	
Athlone	11	8	9	2	35 – 50
Ballybay	8	5	4	4	26 – 55
Ballyfermot	12	15 ²⁹	1	11	24 - 60
Bray	12	9	5	5 ³⁰	26 – 55
Carlow	15	10 ³¹			30 – 50
Clonmel	12	11 ³²	3	8	26 - 55
Coolock	12	12	3	9	25 - 52
Galway	14	13	4	8	25 – 55
Kilkenny	12	12	5	6 ³³	26 - 45
Limerick City	15	12	2	9 ³⁴	18 - 55
Longford	15	13	5	9 ³⁵	24 - 49
Monaghan	14	10	3	11	18 -55
Mullingar	15	12	4	11	30 - 60
Newcastlewest	9	8	6	3	30 - 60
Tullamore	15	11	5	6 ³⁶	26 - 65

²⁷ Of the remaining three, one took place in Ballyfermot which was also the location for the pilot Return to Education programme and two others, Clonmel and Carlow, started in March 2000 and are running over into the Autumn due to their late start.

²⁸ Based on numbers commencing unless otherwise stated.

²⁹ Additional participants joined the programme in March.

³⁰ Based on figure of ten in report; nine stated to have completed in questionnaire without sex breakdown.

³¹ Up to the Summer holidays

³² Up to Summer holidays.

³³ Eleven completed participant questionnaires

³⁴ Eleven completed participant questionnaires

³⁵ Based on numbers in report

³⁶ Based on those completing programme

Table One continued

	Schooling	Nature of CE work	Comments on Early Leaving
Athlone	8 had completed N.S.; 3 had some 2 nd level schooling.	Outdoor labour and maintenance; 1 a Homework Club Supervisor.	CE scheme finished; Withdrew from CE scheme.
Ballybay	All had completed N.S.; 1 attended 2 nd level up to 16 yrs.	Men, outdoors maintenance; women, indoors cleaning, making tea.	2 left to take up employment; 1 transferred to R to E programme in Monaghan town.
Ballyfermot	Average school leaving age was 13 years.	All indoors; most in caring work.	1 left due to ill-health.
Bray	1 left school before 12; 2 before 14; 4 before 16; and 1 before 18.	Indoor cleaning, maintenance; outdoors green-keeping, building; also schools and care workers.	2 left when CE schemes finished; 1 left due to childcare problems.
Carlow	Majority had left school before age 13.	Both indoor and outdoor work.	4 left to take-up jobs; 1 for health reasons.
Clonmel	Majority had left school by age 13/14.	Outdoor and indoor; community work and Maintenance.	2 left; 1 got full-time job; other left for personal reasons.
Coolock	School leaving age ranged from 12 – 15.	5 in outdoor work, gardening, maintenance, security; 2 catering; 1 childcare; 4 local information services.	Did not arise.
Galway City	1 left school at 12; 4 at 13; 3 at 14; 5 at 15 – 16.	Mixture of outdoor & indoor work; 2 in charity shops; 2 in schools.	1 left programme and CE due to change in personal circumstances.
Kilkenny	2 left school before 14; 5 b. 16; 3 b. 18 and 1 b. 20.	Schools work: literacy, maths, computers and self-development.	Did not arise.
Limerick City	1 left school before 10; 3 b.12; 5 b.14; 2	Indoor work.	2 left due to personal circumstances; 1 ‘weak’

	b. 16.		participant could not cope with group.
Longford	All but I had left school before 15; some as early as 12.	6 general domestic work; 2 pre-school group; 1 admin.; 4 outdoors; 1 driver for voluntary organisation.	1 left for family reasons; 1 to start own business.
Monaghan	3 left school before 13; 2 b.14; 1 b.15; 3 b. 16; 4 b. 17; 1 b. 18.	4 office duties; 3, outdoor work; 4 caretakers; 2 domestic; 1 Care Assistant.	1 had attended to please Supervisor and left early on; 2 changed work on CE schemes and had to leave; 1 for employment reasons.
Mullingar	3 left school before 12; 10 b. 14; 2 b.16.	2 cleaning & office duties; 2 cleaning; 2, care-taking; 4 childcare; 1 Classroom Assistant; 1 school .	1 left when CE scheme finished; 1 due to family circumstances; 1 (a CE Supervisor), found combinations of roles stressful.
Newcastlewest	Reported in terms of literacy levels: 2, Level 1; 3 Level 2; 4 Level 3. ³⁷	Mostly outdoor work.	1 wanted programme with focus on computer skills.
Tullamore	2 left before 12; 4 b.14; and 5 b. 16.	2 Classroom Assistant; 2 youth services; 2 care in community; 1 caretaker. ³⁸	4 left due to family and childcare difficulties; 1 felt the programme was not for her.

³⁷ Level 1 described as v. poor r & w skills; Level 2, adequate r. skills, needing help with w. and spelling; and Level 3, skills adequate leaving school, now needing updating.

³⁸ A further 4 had moved from CE to employment, but were continuing to participate in Return to Education programmes in their own time.

APPENDIX TWO PREPARATION OF IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE : METHODS USED

Introduction

This section of the report includes :

1. The approach adopted by the author in consulting with a selection of CE workers, Supervisors, programme Co-ordinators, VEC, FÁS and NALA personnel prior to writing the report.
2. Details the range of evaluation documentation available from NALA and consulted as part of the same process.
3. Samples of NALA evaluation questionnaires and feedback report guidelines.

APPROACH TO CONSULTATION

Consulting with a Cross-Section of Return to Education Personnel

As part of this consultative process, the author did the following :

- Visited three Return to Education programmes.
- Conducted group discussions with participants in two settings, Clonmel and Longford. Met individually or in pairs with participants in Coolock (within class setting).
- Conducted a group discussion with a group of thirteen programme Co-ordinators.
- Conducted a group discussion with a group of ten Adult Literacy Organisers.
- Conducted individual interviews with three FÁS regional Community Services Managers, two face-to-face and one by telephone; met with a member of the FÁS Programme Development section; and conducted a telephone interview with a FÁS Community Services Officer working at local level.
- Conducted interviews with three VEC Adult Education Officers, one face-to-face, the others by telephone.
- Conducted individual interviews with NALA's Director and two Development Workers with responsibilities in relation to the Return to Education programme.

Visits to Return to Education Programmes

The Return to Education programmes visited were in Coolock, Dublin, Longford town, Co. Longford and Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. These visits incorporated the following :

Coolock

- Individual interviews with Co-ordinator, ALO and Supervisor whose workers were participating in the programme .
- Morning in the classroom while a session of the Return to Education programme was in progress. Participants were working individually, in pairs and small groups on portfolios for NCVA accreditation.
- Talked with all of the nine participants present, individually or in pairs, within the classroom setting. Two tutors also present and met with them informally during coffee break.

Longford

- Individual interviews with Co-ordinator, ALO, AEO, Supervisor and Assistant Supervisor whose workers were participating in the programme and with a Supervisor whose workers were not.
- Group discussion with eleven participants in the programme.

Clonmel

- Joint interview with Co-ordinator and tutor.
- Group discussion with seven participants in the programme.

Focus of Interviews and Group Discussions

- With CE participants, the focus was on : how they had made the transfer from CE to the programme and their views on that process; their experience of the learning programme; issues arising in the interaction between CE and the Return to Education programmes; outcomes of participation; and recommendations for the future.
- With other individual and group interview participants, the focus was on : their experience of the Return to Education programme from the perspective of their own role; the strengths and weaknesses of the model within which the programme is provided; issues they would identify; views on the roles and responsibilities of each of the organisations participating in the Initiative; and recommendations for the future.

RANGE OF NALA EVALUATION DOCUMENTATION

The range of evaluation documentation available from NALA was as follows :

1. Co-ordinators were asked to:

- Fill in questionnaires in December 1999 (Sample 1 (a) below) and at the completion of the programme (Sample 1 (b) below).
- Compile a mid-term report in April 2000 (Sample 1 (c) guidelines for report below).
- Compile a final report in June 2000.

NALA received twelve December questionnaires; nine April reports, along with student evaluation questionnaire feedback; twelve June reports and nine completed Co-ordinator questionnaires.

2. Participants on the programmes were asked to:

- Complete an evaluation questionnaire at the end of programme

One hundred and two participants completed these questionnaires (Sample 2).

3. CE Supervisors from schemes participating in the programmes were asked to:

- Complete an evaluation questionnaire at the end of programme

Twenty three questionnaires were completed (Sample 3).

4. CE Supervisors from schemes not participating in the programmes were asked to:

- Complete an evaluation questionnaire at the end of programme

Thirty questionnaires were completed (Sample 4).

SAMPLES OF NALA QUESTIONNAIRES AND REPORT GUIDELINES

Sample 1 (a)

NALA/FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programmes 1999-2000
Co-ordinators feedback up to December 1999

1. Name

.....

2. Location of programme

.....

3. Starting date as Co-ordinator

.....

4. Starting date of Return to Education Course

.....

5. Number of students on course at outset

.....

6. Number of students on course presently

.....

7. Did you take part in the NALA Literacy Awareness Training day? Yes No

8. If yes, did you find the day served its purpose of raising awareness of literacy issues, promoting the course and recruiting students? Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

9. Are you happy with how students were recruited for the course? Yes No
Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

10. Are you happy with ongoing contact with your students' CE Supervisors?
Yes No
Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

11. Are you happy with ongoing contact with local FÁS personnel? Yes No
Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

12. Are you happy with the way the course is running? Yes No
Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

13. So far how would you rate the reading and writing skills of the students before joining the course and the numbers of students at each rate?

Very good Good Functional Poor
 ___ students ___ students ___ students ___ students

14. So far how would you rate the reading and writing skills of the students since joining the course?

Very good Good Functional Poor
 ___ students ___ students ___ students ___ students

15. Did you take part in the NALA Induction day for Co-ordinators?
 Yes No

16. If yes, did you find the day useful? Please outline the reasons.

.....

17. Are you happy with the support provided? Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

18. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sample 1 (b)

<p>NALA/FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programmes 1999-2000</p> <p>Course Co-ordinators Questionnaire</p>
--

1. Name

.....

2. Location of Programme

.....

3. Type of work carried out by the schemes e.g. outdoor, indoor, schools etc.

.....
.....

4. Number of students completed the course

.....

5. How many students began the course?

.....

6. Why do you think that some students did not stay with the course?

.....
.....
.....

7. What changes do you think are necessary to ensure students (a) participate in the course and (b) remain in the course

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8. Do you think the course has met the needs of the participants? Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

9. Are there any changes that you feel should be made to the course? Yes No

If yes, please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. Are you happy with ongoing contact with

(a) students' CE Supervisors?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) FÁS personnel?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) VEC personnel?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

11. What level of accreditation was achieved by the participants?

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| None | <input type="checkbox"/> | No of students |
| Foundation | <input type="checkbox"/> | No of students |
| Level 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> | No of students |

12. In an overall sense how would you rate the reading and writing skills of the students before joining the course and the numbers of students at each rate?

Very good Good Functional Poor
____ students ____ students ____ students ____ students

13. In an overall sense how would you rate the reading and writing skills of the students since completing the course?

Very good Good Functional Poor
____ students ____ students ____ students ____ students

14. In an overall sense how would you rate the course in terms of enhancing the opportunities of the students in seeking employment and/or further education/training?

Very good Good Functional Poor
____ students ____ students ____ students ____ students

15. What major changes have you seen in the students since the course began?

.....
.....
.....
.....

16. Did you take part in the Co-ordinators meetings? Yes No

If yes, did you find these days useful? Please outline the reasons.

.....
.....
.....
.....

17. Are you happy with the support provided by NALA? Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

18. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sample 1 (c) Guidelines for report

GUIDELINES FOR CO-ORDINATORS END OF YEAR REPORT

Number of Students

Gender

Age group

Previous Educational Background or qualifications.

Attendance and general participation on Programme.

Any specific problems encountered by students ie Childcare, Travel, Scheme finishing before completion of Learning Programme.

Type of C.E. scheme students were on ie outdoor or indoor. Type of work carried out by participants on their Scheme.

Budgets - were you happy with allocation, if not suggest suitable amount needed.

Accreditation you completed.

If students left the course, give reasons.

Did you as Co-ordinator receive sufficient support from FÁS, VEC, and NALA Development Workers?

What major changes have you seen in your students since the course began.?

Did you attend the NALA Co-ordinators meetings, if yes did you find them useful?

Sample 2

NALA/FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programmes 1999-2000
One-to-one Student Questionnaire

1. Please complete the following by ticking] the relevant box

Sex: Male Female

Age range: 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65

Marital status: Married Single Separated Divorced Widowed Co-habiting

Do you have children? Yes No

Currently residing: Urban location (city/town) Rural location (village/country)

Age left school: before 10 before 12 before 14 before 16 before 18 before 20

2. How did you hear about the Return to Education course? Please tick] the relevant box.

By word of mouth

Referral by CE Supervisor

Other, please specify

.....

.....

3. Are you happy with how you were recruited for the course?

.....

.....

.....

4. Why did you decide to take part in the course?

.....

.....

.....

5. What were your expectations before taking part in the course? Were they met?

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. What have you gained from taking part in the course?

.....

.....

.....

.....

**7. How would you rate your reading and writing skills before joining the course?
Please tick | the relevant box.**

Very good Good Functional Poor

**8. How would you rate your reading and writing skills since joining the course?
Please tick | the relevant box.**

Very good Good Functional Poor

9. How would you rate the course in terms of enhancing your opportunities in seeking employment and/or further education and training?

Excellent Very good Good Not good Needs improvement

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. Are there any changes you would like to see taking place on the course?

Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

11. How is your experience of being part-time on the CE scheme and part-time on the course?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

12. Are you happy with the support provided throughout the course by the following?

Supervisors Yes No

Co-ordinator Yes No

Tutors Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

13. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sample 3

NALA/FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programmes 1999-2000
Community Employment Supervisor Questionnaire
(of CE schemes participating in course)

1. Name of Community Employment Scheme

.....

2. Type of Scheme

.....

3. Location

.....

4. How many from your CE scheme are participating on the Return to Education course?

5. What, if any, impact has there been on your scheme?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

6. How were CE participants recruited for the course?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7. Are you happy with how students were recruited for the course? Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

8. Were you happy with the overall support you received with the recruitment?
Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

9. What changes could benefit the successful recruitment of participants, in your opinion?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. Are you happy with ongoing contact with the Course Co-ordinator? Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

11. Are you happy with the way the course is running? Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

12. In an overall sense how would you rate the course in terms of enhancing the opportunities of the students in seeking employment and/or further training?

Excellent Very good Good Not good Needs improvement

Give examples.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

13. Did you take part in the NALA Literacy Awareness Training day? Yes No

14. Did you find it useful? Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

15. What did you learn from the day?

.....

.....

.....

.....

16. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sample 4

NALA/FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programmes 1999-2000
Community Employment Supervisor Questionnaire
(of CE schemes not participating in course)

1. Name of Community Employment Scheme

.....

2. Type of Scheme

.....

3. Location

.....

4. Did you take part in the NALA Literacy Awareness Training day?

Yes No

5. Did you find it useful?

Yes No

Please outline the reason/s for your answer.

.....

6. What did you learn from the day?

.....

7. Are you familiar with the Return to Education course?

Yes No

8. Did you advertise this course within your Community Employment Scheme?

Yes No

9. If you ticked no to question 8, please specify why the course was not advertised.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. If you ticked yes to question 7, please indicate if there was any interest among CE participants in taking part in the course. Yes No

11. If yes to question 8, please specify whether any CE participants applied for the course and what was the outcome.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

12. Are there are changes/recommendations that should be made for recruitment purposes?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

13. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

APPENDIX THREE PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE OF RETURN TO EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Introduction

This section of the report presents feedback from participants in Return to Education programmes in Clonmel, Coolock and Longford.

Recruitment to the Programme

Participants had been recruited for programmes by Supervisors, Co-ordinators, ALOs; in some instances with one of those individuals following up or reinforcing the influence of another. This had happened in a variety of ways :

“The Supervisor mentioned the course and asked would I like to go. Then R.(Co-ordinator) and P. (ALO) came to visit. The Supervisor encouraged us and arranged cover for four of us ... we were sharing all these new experiences.... When the Supervisor mentioned it, I was delighted. All through my life, I said ‘I’ll go back to school’”

Some participants had already spoken privately with Supervisors about their difficulties with reading and writing. They had been encouraged to do the programme when the chance arose. One participant recalled : “The Supervisor said when an opportunity comes up at your age, grab it.”

Others had been asked by Supervisors if they had a difficulty, for example when they had been asked to read or fill in forms and not wanted to do so. In some instances, participants had been doing 1:1 training with external facilitators when problems preparing C.V.s emerged and had given facilitators permission to speak to their Supervisors. Where the difficulty was known to a Supervisor, he/she arranged individual meetings with Co-ordinators when they visited schemes.

In one instance, individuals had been asked to express interest in a group setting, something they hadn’t liked. It was said to be better to speak to the group and then give individuals an opportunity to speak with a visiting Co-ordinator. Apart from this instance, the experience of recruitment to the programme was positive. There were reactions of anxiety, embarrassment “It was hard coming out”, fear “that the course would be too hard”, but nonetheless a desire to give the programme a try. For several, a key motivating factor was the desire to help their children with schoolwork: “I really went back to help my kids...my young fella is bad as well.”

Perceptions of the Programme

For the majority of participants, starting the programme had been an ordeal. There were various fears : “Who would you meet ?”, that “you would arrive and find the door of the building locked”, “would they make us feel stupid ?”. In one programme where there

had been a problem with premises in the first term, participants had found that unsettling : “The premises need to be clear. You don’t need that when you’re starting.” Participants were helped to settle in by the lack of formality. In one programme, “We had tea and coffee on the first morning and that made it easy”. They were eased in by the style and approach of Co-ordinators and tutors : “They treat you with respect”, “They have a sense of humour”, “The student-tutor relationship is on an equal basis”. They experienced great support and back-up from each other : “I felt shy about it, but when we spoke, we were all here for the one reason”.

Perceptions of the programme in each of the three settings were positive. Participants felt they were both learning and enjoying themselves in the process. There were variations in programme content and literacy levels within and between the three groups. However all of the participants spoke about aspects of their work on the programme with enthusiasm : reading newspapers, presenting and writing letters, doing crosswords and spelling exercises, coming to grips with computers, painting, building portfolios, tackling maths again. One remarked : “Second class was the last time I ever learned.”

Many factors contributed to their positive experience of programmes. In one group, initial assessment had been handled with “simple exercises” and participants had a say in deciding which table (level) they would sit at. In each setting, participants spoke of the “patience” of tutors, the “relaxed” atmosphere and of the ease with which they could say they had a problem : “I never felt bad saying I can’t do this.” They enjoyed each other’s company and, in one setting, were pleased that they had set up a committee to organise their own outings.

Several participants spoke about the support from Supervisors, the interest taken in their work on the programme and the response of peers on CE. A few individuals had felt guilty about the increased workload for others in their absence. One, doing office work on CE was now building the office work into her Return to Education computer time. There were examples of peers who now regret the fact that they weren’t on the programme as well : “Others are sorry they didn’t jump in”.

Issues

The range of issues included the following:

- Participants in one setting were very keen that the Return to Education programme should run in conjunction with the school year. Attendance during school holidays was a real problem for those who were parents.³⁹ (In the same setting, participants asked for more time on the weekly programme, four hours per day instead of three).
- Again in one setting in particular, the need for both childcare and travel allowances was strongly indicated.⁴⁰ The need for a travel allowance was illustrated by one participant who said that he was travelling sixteen miles each way to attend the course three mornings a week.

³⁹ A view endorsed by many Co-ordinators in their feedback on participant attendance.

⁴⁰ Again, a view endorsed by Co-ordinators and participants in written questionnaire feedback.

- A proportion of participants in the two settings where the programme was ending wanted a second year on 'Return to Education'. There were comments like : "I was barely able to read and write when I came in.... I've improved a lot, but I'm not good enough to go out to the workplace still."
- A small number of participants were coming to the end of their three year allocation of time on CE and wanted to continue with Return to Education. One, for example, found herself finishing both without a sufficient level of skill to apply for secretarial work, which is what she would like to do. Another (in Clonmel) found that she would have to leave the programme a short time after starting. Continuation for her would depend on coming in her own time, if she could find a part-time job with suitable hours.
- Participants in one setting were expressing ambitions to, eventually, undertake Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate or other longer-term educational options. They were not clear if it would be possible to do this in their local areas or what, if any, bridges might exist between the Return to Education programme and further options.
- In two settings, literacy levels were identified as an issue by Co-ordinators : in one case because a small group with very severe difficulties needed more individualised support than it was possible to give; in another because one individual who wanted to do the programme had much higher literacy levels than peers.

Outcomes

- The majority of the participants reported increased self-confidence and a newly-discovered pleasure in learning.
- All of the individuals asked were able to point to an example of a reading or writing task that they would now undertake with greater skill and confidence. Examples included reading books, newspapers, magazines, helping children with homework and reading stories as part of childcare duties on CE.
- Those asked about accreditation were pleased that it had been an option for them and that they had pursued it. There were comments like : "I'm glad of the cert." and "With the folder, at least you know yourself what you've done".
- With the support of Co-ordinators and Supervisors, a number of the participants were identifying progression options. These included : movement to VTOS, ECDL, childcare, self-employment, a FÁS sponsored Telesales course in Washington, plans to study for Junior Certificate and a Certificate in Counselling.

**APPENDIX FOUR
ORIGINS OF FACTORS ENABLING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF
RETURN TO EDUCATION PROGRAMMES.**

Introduction

Earlier in the report, five categories of factors have been identified as enabling the effective implementation of Return to Education programmes. These categories are : Organisational factors; factors related to the purpose of the Initiative; factors related to inter-relationships within and between organisations and individuals; process factors; and factors related to the learning milieu. In this section of the report, the comments and feedback of personnel engaged with the Return to Education initiative are presented to illustrate the origins and significance of the factors outlined earlier.

Organisational Factors

Co-ordination and Integration

The Return to Education initiative brings two organisations, FÁS and VEC into direct interaction with each other, as well as staff at different levels within those organisations. Both FÁS and VEC staff are also in contact with CE Supervisors, sponsors and workers. A key point emerging from feedback is the need for streamlining of roles and responsibilities and a proactive approach on the part of participants at each level of the project to the fulfilment of their own responsibilities. It is also clear that co-ordination and integration need to be initiated and managed, rather than solely reliant on the personal commitment of individuals dotted throughout the system. The following is a positive illustration of how this co-ordinated and integrative approach worked in one setting.

A Positive Experience

A FÁS Community Services Manager describes how the interaction will work in one region : “Each VEC negotiates with FÁS at regional level, at Community management level.. the Co-ordinator links with the local FÁS office, with the Community Services Officer who introduces her to Supervisors.. the Co-ordinator then links directly with Supervisors..” At local level in the same region, the Community Services Officer describes the importance of “facilitating the VEC through access to CE Supervisors” and says “The Community Services Officer is central to the sponsors’ understanding of what the project is about”. From their point of view, satisfaction with the way the local programme was handled by the VEC is high : “It was well managed and run”.

From the point of view of VEC staff and Co-ordinator in the same setting, the co-operation received from FÁS at local level has been central to the success of the programme. The Co-ordinator said : “FÁS support is very important. The support of ‘X’ for me made my role so much easier in relation to the Supervisors”.

In their turn, two Supervisors are satisfied that the programme has been to the benefit of participants . They had identified likely recruits and spoken with ALO, Community

Services Officer and sponsors to facilitate transfer of the participants to the programme. As the programme progressed, they saw participants extend the range of tasks they would take on in a scheme. They also noted a greater willingness “to voice their opinions”. One went on to say :

“They have more of an input into what is going on.. its good in a way, but if you had a Supervisor who’d say ‘No, that’s not the way it is’, you could kill that...”

A Negative Experience

In contrast, in a different setting, a Co-ordinator End of Year Report cited some of the difficulties experienced where this proactive approach was lacking. These included the following : a proportion of the Supervisors in an area were invited to the Literacy Training event, not all; of these, some had little prior information about the Return to Education programme and were not inclined to recruit participants; the others opted to inform workers about the programme themselves, rather than to facilitate Co-ordinator access to their schemes; and, having taken this approach, found it difficult to handle the sensitivities of the situation with workers. Each of these factors contributed to difficulties in identifying and recruiting participants to the programme.

Resourcing the Programme

In terms of the level of resources formally allocated to the Return to Education programmes, there are a number of areas of concern. These are : the lack of travel allowances for participants, similarly the lack of childcare allowances; the allocation of Co-ordinator hours which is said to be insufficient in relation particularly to both lead-in time for the programme and administrative requirements; the allocation of tutor hours which is insufficient, specifically in relation to the needs of participants requiring specialised support; and travel and material allowances are inadequate.

In relation to travel and childcare allowances, all the parties to the programme recognise their significance in terms of participant access, attendance and retention within the programme. Considerable energy has been expended in 1999-2000 in tackling these issues on a programme by programme basis. However there is no agreement as to how the matter should be resolved in the future.

In terms of Co-ordinator time, many Co-ordinators have expressed the view that a lead-in time of sixty rather than the current forty hours would be more realistic. They are also of the view that their administrative time allocation should be increased.

Mutual Contribution

In terms of the shared allocation of resources to the initiative, some FÁS and VEC staff respectively see shortcomings in the contribution of the other organisation.

“There is a tendency from the VEC that FÁS should fund everything, that the VEC will run it for FÁS who must pay... this is a joint project and we’re meeting co-ordination costs..” (FÁS)

“We’ve had proposals from VECs for 100 % of the costs. There should be a contribution from the VEC budget or, if not, at least a recognition that they’re not making one”.(FÁS)

“There was a complete lack of interest on the side of FÁS. I was to contact them on a regular basis, but they didn’t respond very much”(VEC)

“A lot of the participants’ problems were FÁS-related and needed to be addressed by FÁS” (VEC)

“I’m available to Supervisors, but not them to me”(VEC)

Purpose of the Initiative

Tangible Progress towards a Clear, Shared Purpose

One of the key points about which the majority of those engaged in Return to Education programmes are agreed is that participation has been beneficial for CE workers. Participants themselves and those who meet and/or work with them identify enhanced self-confidence as the key visible outcome. Co-ordinators and participants also identify progress in literacy skills development as an outcome.

‘Lets get this thing going’

Whatever the issues and difficulties that have arisen in the course of the initiative, key individuals return to the satisfaction of participants as an indicator of its value. One VEC AEO remarked : “We have no reservations about the programme because the clients don’t seem to have any.” The same AEO quoted a FÁS staff member as saying during the set-up period, “Let’s get this thing going”. The VEC reacted in similar vein : “We said the same, because of the nature of the target group and the nature of the objective.. it has been a wonderful example of co-operation.”

Lack of Understanding

Where this kind of co-operation has not developed, in some instances it can be traced to lack of understanding. For example, Co-ordinators have experienced problems around recruitment and support to workers with Supervisors “who have no understanding of education” or “who have no understanding about adults returning to education and who are prying a little too much”(asking for more detailed information than the Co-ordinator thought was necessary). There were also experiences of Supervisors who were “threatened by more educated participants” and others who wanted to come on the programme themselves.

Another experience has been of “sponsors wanting to pull the plug”. Of the sponsors, one very proactive and supportive Supervisor said : “The people you have to convince are the sponsors who don’t want people missing from their projects for four days”.

Personal and Organisational Inter-Relationships

The significance of personal relationships of trust and respect is evident in the feedback of programme participants on the tutor student relationship (described in Appendix Three); and in the feedback quoted earlier from one local setting about how VEC and FÁS staff worked together to implement a Return to Education programme.

Organisational inter-relationships are equally a factor in the implementation of any initiative. One interviewee described partnership as : “Discarding your own particular hat and self-interest for the needs of the people you’re set to serve.. and abandoning traditional work practices in your own organisation.... (adding) .. you don’t often get thanks in your own organisation for that”. It is evident from some of the feedback already cited that many of those involved in Return to Education programmes are striving strenuously to put the needs of participants first in their work. It is equally evident - and perspectives, shaped by local history and experience, vary hugely from one part of the country to another - that some are entangled in suspicion in relation to each other.

This kind of suspicion has also clouded perceptions of NALA’s support role during the past year. One interviewee noted: “Some VECs were very touchy about NALA’s involvement. They see NALA getting involved in the business of the VEC, they see it as their patch and see NALA wanting to achieve credit and getting good press out of what they do..”

Roles and Responsibilities

The matter of roles and responsibilities has been teased out in some detail in the body of the report because issues related to this point were such a feature of both individual and group interviews. These related to roles of VEC, FÁS and NALA and roles and responsibilities of Supervisors, Co-ordinators and ALOs particularly. Comments here relate particularly to roles of ALOs and Co-ordinators.

Within the ALO group, there was feedback that NALA set up the project, but there was very little clarity at the outset about the roles of the VEC and of FÁS. One ALO commented : “I wasn’t happy about the initial stages. NALA and FÁS assumed I had the information they had about the programme”. The funding arrangements presumed an employer role which another ALO was unhappy about. Another found herself at a Literacy Awareness Training event with CE Supervisors who had a lot of FÁS-related questions. There was no FÁS representative present and she had not been briefed to deal with the queries.

For both ALOs and Co-ordinators, there was confusion about the delineation of responsibilities between both positions. A key concern for some, not all, Co-ordinators is that they should have a level of autonomy within the boundaries of their own role. There were comments like :

“I don’t have a say in anything, not even the hours spent on computers.”

“We have ‘x’ to spend and three weeks to go” (in the absence of any ongoing budget information or responsibility).

“If ALO is meeting a FÁS person, I should be there. This wasn’t allowed.”

“The autonomy of the Co-ordinator needs to be more defined.. I felt maybe the ALO was doing my job when I was paid to do it”.

The above comments contrast with the experience of another Co-ordinator : “It was all left to me. I had a lot of responsibility”.

Capacity to Fulfil Roles

This comment on the capacity of Co-ordinator and tutor echoes that of many others made in interviews : “We were so lucky that M. was available we could have been badly stuck for a quality tutor.. if M. was offered a full-time position, she would have to take it and we would be scuppered..”

Within FÁS, there is also recognition that “there is huge variety amongst Supervisors in terms of quality and motivation .. we have been saying that sponsors should not be allowed to appoint Supervisors who have literacy difficulties”.

Process Factors

Consultation

In terms of consultation, there were various issues in the development of the Return to Education initiative. One of these related to the involvement of the ALOs who, within the VECs are the staff members with direct responsibility for literacy provision. From their perspective, there was a gap in the consultation process in relation to their role in the initiative. Two comments from ALOs about the set-up of the programme are illustrative:

“NALA should have met with ALOs and taken it from there.”

“My main complaint is that I was the last person to be consulted ... then I had to pull it out of the hat at short notice. LAT was long arranged before I heard about it... I heard about it on the grapevine... we would be totally supportive of the idea (of Return to Education) and would have wanted to do it... we were lucky we had the right people and the capacity... and that the VEC was willing to put extra funding into it..”

On this issue, from NALA’s perspective, a range of methods were used to share information and create awareness about the Return to Education programme. These included presentations to the Adult Literacy Organisers’ Forum, the Adult Literacy Organisers Association and regular updates in the NALA newsletter.

Again, from NALA’s perspective, timing was an issue in the consultative process. In encouraging the set-up of new Return to Education programmes around the country,

NALA first contacted FAS regional offices to ascertain their level of interest in the initiative. When they were assured of FAS interest, NALA then contacted VECs about the programme. The rationale for this was that it would be unwise to contact VECs and “raise expectations” if regional FAS staff were not going to support the set-up of Return to Education programmes. In one region, NALA contacted FAS regional staff who then contacted local VEC staff before NALA had an opportunity to do so. This resulted in some acrimony about the perceived failure of NALA to consult appropriately with local VECs.

Flexibility

This factor has been repeatedly identified as significant by individuals commenting on the effective implementation of Return to Education programmes. It has been reflected in VEC willingness to provide additional resources to programmes in the year past; FÁS willingness to interpret rules and regulations flexibly; sponsor willingness to release workers from programmes, Supervisors to re-arrange work schedules when the need arose. One individual summed it up when he remarked : “I don’t ring-fence anything”.

Within the Learning Milieu

Factors relating to the learning milieu have, in the main, been discussed in parts of Chapter Three of the report and in Appendix Two. However there is a gap in relation to feedback on participant literacy levels and accreditation. Both are dealt with here together.

Literacy Levels and Accreditation

The difficulties of meeting the needs of participants with widely varying literacy levels within one group and within the resources allocated have been noted by both ALOs and Co-ordinators. It is also evident in the questionnaire feedback of a small number of participants : “More time given to slower students”, “I would have liked more basic reading and writing and less computers”⁴¹.

There is a view from some ALOs in particular that criteria for literacy levels need to be agreed to guide recruitment to the programmes : “There was conflict as to what sort of a programme it was .. it is too loose to leave it to participants to determine the level”.

There are two concerns about levels : one that the programme should target and draw in those with the more severe literacy difficulties; the second that a push for accreditation should not drive the level of the programmes up in a way that contradicts this basic goal. On the matter of levels, a FÁS staff member says: “There were people there with good literacy and numeracy skills. Its back from that we need to start ... those really needy in terms of literacy and numeracy. There are other ways there for those needing Personal Development and self esteem”.

⁴¹ Overall, the very positive participant response to the inclusion of Computer Skills in the programme should be noted.

On the part of some VEC personnel, there is a fear that the programmes will become accreditation rather than student-driven because of the FÁS involvement. Three FÁS staff members give their views on accreditation below.

“Accreditation is desirable, but not essential. If participants have no literacy or numeracy skills, you can’t expect accreditation at the end of the year. If they have moved forward and identified a desire to continue, that’s the outcome... and a second year would be good for weaker people.”

“It is FÁS policy that all training is to be accredited ... FÁS centrally is very hung up on accreditation”.

“Accreditation in my mind is not a God, but in the organisation’s mind, it would be..”

An ALO who feels that accreditation should reflect the student’s progress rather than map it in advance says : “We never considered literacy as training. We considered it education.. flexibility was important... sometimes a group started in September and rolled over rather than trying to complete in a year.. maybe they needed extra time to deal with the basic literacy skills and from that you developed a folder (for accreditation)”

There is, in the view of some, a clear link between the application of accreditation as a measure of success and the likely recruitment pattern for participants : “The stronger group is the easier group to work with and its easier to write up reports around it...” Like many others from a literacy background, this ALO was of the view that the management of literacy as an option is essential, if the Return to Education programmes are to meet the needs of those with severe difficulties.

In relation to the concerns expressed about an over-emphasis on accreditation, NALA takes the view that these reflect “pre-existing practitioner fears around accreditation”. A NALA staff member says that NALA and FÁS did not “put out” messages of this kind about accreditation as a measure of success for the Return to Education programmes.

APPENDIX FIVE BUDGET BREAKDOWN FOR RETURN TO EDUCATION PROGRAMMES
--

Average Total Cost based on a 30 week programme	£20,000
Running costs (to VEC for delivery of the programme)	£15,812*
Management costs (to NALA for support and evaluation)	£4,188

* Breakdown as follows:

Preparation hours	$£17.40 \times 10 \text{ hrs p.w.} \times 4 \text{ wks} + 12\% \text{ Employer PRSI} =$	£780
Co-ordinator hours	$£17.40 \times 6\text{hrs p.w.} \times 30 \text{ wks} + 12\% \text{ Employer PRSI} =$	£3508
Tutoring hours	$£17.40 \times 2 \text{ people} \times 9\text{hrs p.w.} \times 30 \text{ wks} + 12\% \text{ Employer PRSI} =$	£10,524
Materials Allowance		£500
Travel Allowance		£500
TOTAL		<u>£15,812</u>

Some regions had different budgets depending on length of programme and tutor-student ratio.

<p>APPENDIX SIX OUTLINE COURSE CONTENT FOR RETURN TO EDUCATION PROGRAMMES</p>
--

In outline, the course content would include the areas of:

- English:
 - Reading - including reading for information, enjoyment, scanning, comprehension & instructions
 - Writing - including developing and enhancing writing skills such as punctuation, structure and sentence formation, paragraphs, etc.
 - Spelling - including use of strategies for learning spelling, word building skills, memory aids, spelling rules

- Communications: including letter writing, both formal and informal; form filling; note taking and recording of telephone messages; following instructions; giving directions and map reading; listening skills; groupwork and verbal communication skills including discussions and conversations.

- Computers: including basic computer skills; understanding computer technology; identifying the different components of a computer; keyboard skills; basic word processing and spreadsheets.

- Numeracy: including understanding mathematical signs and terminology; basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division skills; decimalization, percentages, ratios and fractions; measurement; understanding the 24 hour clock, timetables, calendars and temperatures; use of a calculator; budgeting; basic statistics.

- Personal Development: including self-awareness; decision making; assertiveness and conflict resolution skills.

- Job Orientation Skills: including identifying skills, qualities and interests; relating these skills with possible work placement; CV preparation, completion of job application forms and interview skills.

APPENDIX SEVEN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

These roles were developed by NALA after the pilot programmes in 1998/1999.

NALA's role includes:

- Monitor the administration, management and delivery of programme by the local VEC, Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) and Co-ordinator
- Facilitate a one-day induction session for Co-ordinator
- Investigate accreditation for programme participants with the local ALO and the Co-ordinator
- Liaise and support the local ALO and Co-ordinator throughout the programme
- Liaise with FÁS personnel throughout the programme and assist in any difficulties
- Organise quarterly meetings with ALO and Co-ordinator to facilitate the exchange of information
- Discuss and respond to on-going developments
- Monitor the need for modifying the programme as identified by the ALO/Co-ordinator
- Manage the evaluation study of the programme

FÁS's role includes:

- Promote the programme to CE supervisors in the area
- Arrange the release of CE participants as required for the programme
- Liaise with the local Adult Literacy Organiser and programme co-ordinator throughout the programme
- Assist in facilitating that any participant who begins the programme can remain for the 30 weeks
- Participate in the evaluation process

VEC's role includes:

- Oversee the management and delivery of the programme
- Administer the monies from the specified budget and keep complete and accurate books of account and records of all receipts and payments
- Source and employ a co-ordinator/core tutor and tutor(s) to deliver the programme
- Source premises
- Attend Literacy Awareness Training
- Work with the co-ordinator to promote the project
- Liaise with NALA and FÁS personnel throughout the programme
- Participate in the evaluation process