

Self-evaluation of Write On 4 Work for the Labour Market Activation Fund 2010

15th August 2011



NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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Introduction

Write On 4 Work was a distance learning programme for adults in receipt of a jobseeker's payment for longer than three months, who wished to improve their basic skills and gain a qualification at FETAC (Further Education & Training Awards Council) Level 3. Participants worked at their own pace, using the learning website www.writeon.ie. They could enrol directly onto the programme and learn independently online until accreditation, or could avail of the assistance of a tutor over the phone. 500 free places were available on this programme, which began in October 2010 and ended on the 30 June 2011.

The course offered major awards at FETAC Level 3 in Employability, General Learning and Information and Communication Technologies. There were 11 minor awards (listed below) and participants could apply for a one off €100 success bonus upon completion of one of these minor awards.

The 11 minor awards were:

1. Career Preparation;
2. Computer Literacy;
3. Digital Media;
4. Communications;
5. Functional Maths;
6. Personal and Interpersonal Skills;
7. Application of Number;
8. Personal Effectiveness;
9. Mathematics;
10. Internet Skills; and
11. Health and Safety Awareness.

NALA's Distance Learning service has been operating successfully since 2008, including providing a FETAC Level 2 (with Recognition of Prior Learning capacity) online resource. NALA's Level 3 distance learning programme was the first in Ireland to be accredited by FETAC under the new Common Awards System in October 2011 and www.writeon.ie is the only website in this country to offer accreditation at FETAC Level 3.

Write On 4 Work aimed to develop a learner's basic skills, including improving literacy, numeracy and ICT skills for the purpose of job seeking, preparation for a career and planning lifelong learning. Participants could also acquire concrete job-seeking skills, including developing a CV, cover letter and preparing for interviews through the programme.

As well as offering the above and the possibility of formal certification, the programme also encouraged learners to identify areas and opportunities for personal development and increased self-confidence. They developed personal learning plans and were supported throughout on their pathways to progression.

Forward to the Minister for Education and Skills

Write On 4 Work directly addressed the targets set out by the Labour Market Activation Fund and also proved the continuing demand for distance learning and accreditation.

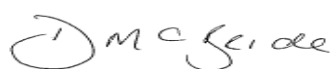
NALA delivered this project by:

1. working with partners to promote this programme and target this 'hard to reach' client group;
2. building on our previous distance learning work to deliver a quality and flexible online learning programme at FETAC Level 3;
3. supporting adults over the telephone and online during their learning journey;
4. offering FETAC accreditation; and
5. exploring progression into further education and training and career opportunities.

This project proves that NALA's Distance Learning Service (DLS) can provide a quality and flexible learning opportunity for adults who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and work towards accreditation. It provided the first-ever recognised prior learning system for adults at Level 2 and we are awaiting Level 3 approval from FETAC. The DLS service supported 594 job seeking participants engaged in the learning programme with 161 of them achieving a FETAC award.

This project's success also lies in the long-term sustainability of www.writeon.ie. The web based learning resource remains available to all adults seeking to improve their literacy and numeracy or to gain a national qualification at Level 3. As it includes the option of RPL, writeon.ie offers significant cost saving potential for other programmes and providers.

NALA recommends that policy makers support the work of NALA's Distance Learning Service into the future and that providers grasp the opportunity presented by blended learning, thereby giving basic learners a broader choice when it comes to improving their basic skills and getting back into education.



Denise McBride
NALA Project Co-ordinator



Inez Bailey
NALA Director

Executive Summary

Write On 4 Work has been a very successful labour market activation fund (LMAF) programme, with **594** eligible participants engaging in the FETAC Level 3 online learning programme (exceeding the LMAF target of 500). More continue to enrol as the website www.writeon.ie remains available post this project to all potential learners. The majority of learners recruited (**304**) were long term unemployed. **92%** of participants had only reached either primary or lower secondary level education and with a gender balance of **70% men to 30% women**, www.writeon.ie has proven to be a particularly attractive form of learning for unemployed men. Finally, highlighting the effectiveness of this programme in engaging younger people, **47%** of participants who provided details were under 35.

161 Individual learners achieved **16** major awards at FETAC level 3 (junior cert equivalence). There were **359** minor awards applied for through writeon.ie and **81** learners completed multiple awards. This is a high success rate for learners at FETAC level 3 and NALA will continue to support the remaining 436 through the website www.writeon.ie if they wish to obtain an award at their own pace.

Write on 4 Work met the below quality outcomes as identified in the original project proposal:

- engagement of 500 unemployed adults in a distance learning programme at FETAC Level 3;
- use of website and e-learning for unemployed adults with literacy and numeracy needs;
- use of tutor telephone support to help with learning and maintain motivation;
- to be the first distance and online major awards at level 3 in Ireland catering for people with low skills and qualifications;
- to be the first online system of recognised prior learning (RPL) at FETAC Levels 2 and 3 in Ireland
- possibility of first awards for some of the participants;
- better job-readiness of the participants;
- increased motivation to learn and progress to further education and training;
- progression of the participants to employment or further education and training; and
- enhanced provision for education and training providers working with unemployed adults.

594 unemployed adults engaged and a range of adult education providers used the teaching and learning resources to support their learning programmes for other learners. They continue to do so. Perhaps the greatest value for money from the once-off LMAF investment in this project is the long-term sustainability of the learning programme on www.writeon.ie, which will last far beyond the project deadline. It remains available to all adults seeking to improve their literacy and numeracy or to gain a national qualification at Level 3. This is particularly relevant to adults with low or no qualifications and will facilitate achievement of the National Skills Strategy objectives.

In October 2010, NALA's Level 3 programme was the first programme in Ireland to be accredited by FETAC under the new Common Awards system and is the only learning website in Ireland to offer accreditation at FETAC Level 3. In June 2011, NALA submitted the FETAC Level 3 programme to be a system for 'Recognition of Prior Learning' enabling participants to formally recognise and thereafter build on existing skills gained through past work and life experience.

NALA built on strategic partnerships with other organisations such as VECs, FÁS training centres and Local Employment Services as www.writeon.ie provided a complementary service enhancing literacy development. A comment from NALA's external evaluation¹ reinforced this

“There are a lot of literacy programmes out there, group and one to one, but the good thing about Write On 4 Work is that participants feel safer with the distance. Talking one to one on other literacy programmes makes people feel embarrassed. If it's in an open environment, someone might overhear. Also many people come from a background of poverty and sometimes people can judge them on their location. We don't want them feeling bad in the environment.”

Write On 4 Work directly addressed the targets set out by the Labour Market Activation Fund and also proved that there is a continuing demand for distance learning and accreditation. NALA believes that the distance learning programme Write On 4 Work offered unemployed adults an innovative high quality learning opportunity at Level 3 that did not exist before, thus filling a gap in provision. It adds to the accessibility of provision for adult education and training at a national level and proves that technology and web based learning are a cost effective and efficient addition that should be built into national systems.

¹ FGS McClure Watters (2011), Draft Report on Write On 4 Work (unpublished currently)

Programme Description and Delivery

Composition and relevant expertise of project team, tutors and mentors; and description of inputs from invited/guest contributors

The project team consisted of:

- Inez Bailey, Director, who oversaw the overall management of this project
- Denise McBride, Project Co-ordinator, who co-ordinated the day-to-day running of the project (Funded by the LMAF project)
- Fawzia McGlone, Financial Manger, who oversaw the budget and accounting of the project, with the support of an auditor
- Tom O'Mara, Distance Learning Co-Ordinator, who co-ordinated the running of the distance learning element
- Joan Butler, Tutor Co-ordinator, who co-ordinated and supported the Distance Learning Tutors (Funded by the LMAF project)
- 1 Instructional Designer, 6 Web Authors and 3 Web Editors. The design and development was handled exclusively by Avallain, an E-learning company based in Switzerland. (Funded by the LMAF project)
- NALA's 3 Freephone operators who manned the recruitment and Freephone helpline (Funded by the LMAF project)
- Grainne Fitzpatrick, Freephone Co-ordinator, who oversaw the freephone operators.

We recruited 13 Distance Learning Tutors and 16 Learning Support Workers to deliver support and tutoring to the participants. All were qualified and experienced in adult literacy tutoring and received initial and ongoing training. These costs were funded by the LMAF project.

Other NALA staff who worked on the project included

- John Stewart, National Adult Literacy Co-ordinator, who provided management support for the project and who worked on the accreditation of FETAC level 3 content to National and FETAC standards.
- Clare McNally, PR Officer, who supported the promotion of the project.
- Helen Ryan, Policy Officer, who supported the project when required.

Description of target groups for the programme(s) and the rationale for their selection – indicating any changes to the profile of actual participants versus that originally intended, and the reasons for such changes

The programme targeted those on jobseeker's payments for longer than three months, who had limited or no qualifications or had literacy and numeracy needs which can be a barrier to education and employment. In addition, these learners can feel the stigma of having such difficulties and a feeling of shame which can lead to low self-confidence and esteem. The programme was aimed at those who were most distant from and benefited least from current labour market activation interventions². The emphasis was given to the long-term unemployed (that is, unemployed for at least one year) and where possible, those formerly employed in declining sectors – such as construction. The innovative use of the technology in online learning attracted the under 35s, while having an appeal across all age groups.

² FORFÁS (2010), Review of Labour Market Programmes Summary Report

Rationale

In their report 'National Profiling of the Unemployed In Ireland' (2009) the ESRI stated that one of the main probabilities of remaining on the Live Register was associated with literacy and numeracy needs. The National Skills Bulletin (2011) stated that those who remain at the greatest risk of unemployment are adults holding less than upper secondary qualifications (the current rate is 23.2% of those unemployed in Q4 2010).

NALA research shows that people with literacy and numeracy difficulties are less likely to participate in education and training and those with low or no qualifications have benefitted least from investment in training and adult education. NALA felt that Write On 4 Work contributed to filling the gap for specific, targeted innovative and flexible training interventions for unemployed people.

Profile of actual participants

NALA recruited 594 eligible participants. The majority of learners recruited (304 or 51%) were long term unemployed. 92% of participants had only reached either primary or lower secondary level education. With a gender balance of 70% men to 30% women, www.writeon.ie has proven to be a particularly attractive form of learning for unemployed men. 47% of participants who provided details were under 35, highlighting the effectiveness of this programme in engaging younger people. Participant's locations were geographically diverse, with all counties represented which implies that the programme was well publicised and popular across the country.

The only change to the expected profile was perhaps the inclusion of 31 participants who had upper secondary education (ISCED 3). Through our research, NALA are aware of the 'spiky profile' of some of our learners who may have 'rusty' literacy and numeracy skills, despite their previous educational achievement. As literacy is like a muscle – you use it or lose it – many people who achieved a Junior or indeed Leaving Certificate many years ago and had not practised these skills in years may have 'deskilled' in these areas, leaving them vulnerable when faced with, for example, applying for jobs, especially online.

How the learning and support needs of participants were met in practice – including involvement of and collaboration with relevant stakeholders

In order to register on Write On 4 Work, individuals called a freephone number or went online and enrolled independently at www.writeon.ie. In the first instance, during the freephone call, an operator collected background information on each person. Following registration, a Learning Support Worker then called participants in order to gather more in-depth information on their background, their learning needs and to establish what their skill levels were prior to beginning the programme. If agreed, the individual was then referred onto a Distance Learning Tutor who rang them to begin the learning programme.

Independent learners, who chose not to engage with our Distance Learning Tutors, logged directly onto www.writeon.ie and were guided by the online learning system to first select a relevant major award then to work through one or all of the relevant compulsory minor awards. For each award, an initial assessment was required which then created a personal learning plan for that award. Based on this learning plan, the system then guided the learner to study and complete any outstanding Specific Learning Outcomes for the chosen minor award. An independent learner could access a tutor or learning support if required by phoning the Freephone line.

Involvement of and collaboration with relevant stakeholders re learner needs

A Stakeholder Group was established to assist in identifying and recruiting unemployed adults to use the distance learning programme. At the beginning of the project, we contacted the following Departments and organisations to seek representation on a Stakeholder Group:

- AONTAS
- Citizens Information Centre and MABS
- Department of Social Protection
- Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)
- National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)
- The Library Council
- Skillnets

FÁS was not in a position to sit on the Stakeholders Group but did help greatly in promotion of the project and wished to be kept informed of developments. The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) declined to take part in the group, but NALA subsequently worked with individual VECs.

NALA worked closely with the various stakeholders to promote the programme to unemployed people. We did this in a number of ways:

- Sent flyers and posters to local offices and centres;
- Sent promotional emails and e-flyers to organisations to circulate to their clients;
- Attended events, open days, staff meetings to give a presentation on the project; and
- Using local radio advertising.

We also worked with various stakeholders to support learners. These include:

- Local libraries, through agreement with the Library Council, offered learners free access to the internet to facilitate learners without broadband.
- The National Centre for Guidance in Education, on behalf of the Adult Education and Guidance Initiative, agreed that Distance Learning tutors could refer learners for guidance interviews and / or contact the service for information on education opportunities on behalf of their learners, if required.
- Based on the 'best fit' for learners who contacted our Freephone, our operators would make referrals to local VECs.
- Through AONTAS, we promoted the programme to their Community Education Network and offered their learners a possible route to certification.
- The Citizens Information Centre and MABS promoted the project throughout their 342 local centres with some centres requesting awareness training for their volunteers, who deal directly with the marginalised in local communities.
- We promoted to the Local Employment Services and Jobs Clubs of the ILDN whose objectives are to counter disadvantage and to promote equality and social and economic inclusion. Again, reaction was very positive on behalf of their clients as Write On 4 Work offered both the opportunity for free literacy and numeracy support and the possibility of upskilling with optional FETAC certification.

Nature of programmes delivered – and overall learning goals intended and the extent they were achieved

Write On 4 Work enabled jobseekers with literacy and numeracy needs to improve their basic skills and gain a qualification through a flexible distance learning model, using an interactive learning website and tutor telephone support. The learning programme offered upskilling in 11 minor awards leading to possible major awards in Employability, General Learning and ICT. It offered for the first time ever online content and accreditation at FETAC Level 3.

Minor awards at Level 3 allowed achievement of Level 3 Component Certificates in:

<input type="checkbox"/> Communications Computer Literacy Mathematics (including 5 credit component awards in Application of Number and Functional Maths) Career Preparation	Preparation for Work Personal and Interpersonal Skills Personal Effectiveness Health and Safety Awareness Internet Skills Digital Media
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The distance learning programme was available to individual jobseekers to learn at their own pace and in locations of their own choice in order to:

- improve their basic skills and education;
- gain a national qualification at Level 3;
- enable progression to further education/training and qualifications;
- bring them closer to labour market opportunities; and
- allow for better prospects of getting a job.

The programme objectives were:

- to reach adults who may not have previously engaged in adult literacy learning and were on jobseeker’s payment for longer than three months
- to provide high quality learning opportunities at Level 3 with the option of accreditation;
- to create an online repository of FETAC Level 3 learning materials;
- to develop a system of recognised prior learning for adults with no or low qualifications;
- to increase capacity for the provision of blended learning opportunities; and
- to prove the concept of online learning is viable for unemployed adults with basic skills needs.

All of these above objectives were met. The programme assisted learners to identify their own learning goals through the carrying out of initial assessments and the development of an individual learning plan based on the learner’s particular interests, strengths and personal attributes. Where appropriate, this progression plan was linked to certification including a named major award.

Forfas stated that “For those that left the school system without any formal qualifications, the initial options are much more to do with gaining general work and life skills...”³ Write On 4 Work met the ‘softer’ learning goals of facilitating personal development and increasing the self-confidence of learners. Our external evaluators Farrell Grants Sparks (FGS) McClure Watters report that Write On 4 Work “had the largest impact on participants’ confidence levels with the proportion of participants who rate their ability as good increasing by 21 percentage points”. The learning programme covered life and work skills such as ‘Presenting and selling yourself’, ‘Finding jobs and networking’, ‘Using ICT and other technologies’ and emphasised the importance of people-related skills such as communications, interpersonal and customer-service skills.

It also offered concrete job-seeking skills, including sourcing opportunities, responding to opportunities appropriately, developing a CV and cover letter, and preparing for interviews. It enabled learners to make informed choices as to future employability and career path and explore work opportunities, hence bringing participants closer to labour market opportunities and allowing for better prospects of getting a job.

The steps taken to operate the quality assurance standards set down by the relevant qualification authorities including any external assessments of compliance with such standards

Write On 4 work operated under the FETAC approved NALA Quality Assurance (QA) Agreement (July 2007). This document sets out the quality assurance process applied by NALA in its learning programmes.

In October 2010, FETAC validated the NALA Level 3 programme “Write On 4 Work”, leading to the Level 3 Major awards in Employability Skills, General Learning and Information and Communication Technologies (Provider Registration Code No: 07200442). This programme outlines how the learning programme operates in compliance with the QA agreement and details the assessment processes involved.

NALA has completed 3 rounds of quality assurance of the “Write On 4 Work” programme, and a fourth round is ongoing. Each round involves 5 stages

1. Internal assessment;
2. Internal verification, involving a panel of management, staff and students;
3. External authentication, involving a panel of management, staff and students with an external authenticator from the FETAC register;
4. A results appeal process; and
5. Results approval.

Learning support and formative assessment were available to all 594 participants. The summative assessment process lead to accreditation and 161 participants had submitted for certification by June 30.

The programme has also been subject to further evaluation processes including a Self-evaluation and Programme Improvement process, reporting to FETAC.

³ Forfas (2010) ‘Guiding Principles for Proposals’

The minutes and reports from these processes indicate a high level of satisfaction with the integrity of the processes. There have been no appeals to date and in total 161 learners have received certification of a Level 3 minor or major award.

As well as the above, the programme has been subject to an evaluation by external providers. FGS McClure Watters were appointed from the beginning of the project and their final report is currently being completed.

In June 2011, NALA made a submission on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to FETAC for inclusion on the FETAC Register of RPL providers at Level 3, based on our Quality Assurance Agreement and the success of our Level 2 RPL processes.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs report examines how RPL can be further developed in Ireland, particularly in its role in upskilling, meeting the National Skills Strategy objectives and engaging people in education and training. The report described the NALA RPL process available in www.writeon.ie as “an effective RPL mechanism”, and recommended it as a platform for the development of an integrated national RPL service covering Levels 1-3, to be led by the Department of Education and Skills.⁴

⁴ Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2011) *Developing Recognition of Prior Learning*

Programme Impacts

Complete data on starts, departures, and finishers on each programme by gender, age, membership of vulnerable groups, levels of educational attainment etc

Certification Body and Level	Date of Programme Start-Up	No. of participants commencing		No. of participants attending at date of Final Report		No. of participants completing		No. of participants receiving awards on Programme Completion	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
FETAC Level 3	18/10/10	415	179	342	155	342	155	111	50
		Total	594	Total	497	Total	497	Total	161

The number of participants leaving the programme before the completion date was 97 (Male 73 Female 24).

The profile of the learners includes:

- The majority of learners recruited (**304 or 51%**) were long term unemployed.
- **92%** of participants had primary or lower secondary education.
- With a gender balance of **70% men to 30% women**, www.writeon.ie has proven to be a particularly attractive form of learning for unemployed men.
- **47%** of participants who provided details are **under 35**, highlighting the efficacy of this programme in engaging younger people.
- **161** individual learners applied for **certification** by June 30, achieving 359 minor awards with 81 learners completing multiple minor awards. This is a high success rate for learners at FETAC level 3.

Progression statistics – of total participant intake the numbers gaining qualifications/ awards, those getting jobs or setting up businesses, and progression to other programmes

Literacy and numeracy issues in progression

NALA was aware the target group for this programme may first have to address their literacy and numeracy difficulties before moving on to further education or training or into employment. The significant volume of learning involved in this course, the time commitment and the skill level and confidence of the learner had to be carefully managed to avoid overwhelming many learners and support persistence.

The programme was also delayed until October 18th 2010 which reduced the time window for accreditation and this would also have impacted on achievement rates.

Progression outcomes included:

- **25** participants got jobs during the programme
- **15** progressed to other programmes
- **16** learners achieved major awards at FETAC Level 3
- **81** learners completed multiple minor awards at FETAC Level 3 on www.writeon.ie, **53** applied for 3 or more minor awards.

Analysis of early departures from programmes and reasons cited for such departures

NALA recruited **594** learners from October 2010 with **97** leaving the programme.

Reasons cited included:

- 'personal problems
- 'that the NALA service didn't suit' - if a learner found that distance learning did not suit them as a method of delivery, then they could be referred to face to face learning in a VEC.

Some learners deferred their course until September 2011. This could be attributed to childcare concerns over the summer period. Other learners deemed themselves 'too advanced', in which case they were referred on or 'too basic' for the Level 3 programme, in which case they could either work on the FETAC Level 2 site or be referred to a local VEC literacy service.

It should be noted that NALA consider some of these 97 as 'drop ins'. In our project proposal we highlighted that we "expected some loss of retention and possible fluctuating engagement with the learning programme." International research identifies that adult literacy learners tend to dip in and out of learning and that persistence is a better indicator of success than retention. In this project, as the learner decided the pace, intensity and duration of the course, we will continue to engage with the participants over time as they may dip in and out of it." (NALA Project Proposal, Page 15) Given the profile and the experiences of adult literacy learners who engage in provision, some of these 97 'hard to reach' participants may re-engage with our distance learning at a future date.

Selected testimonials from participants (and enterprises facilitating work placements), success stories and case-studies

One obvious success of Write On 4 Work is that **161** participants applied for FETAC certification, gaining 680 component certificates. **81** learners completed multiple minor awards at FETAC Level 3 on www.writeon.ie with **53** applying for 3 or more minor awards.

One female learner from Co. Mayo completed 7 awards, received her €100 success bonus and has now requested tutor support to help finish other awards post June 2011. She has also availed of career guidance to help her as she needs to change direction in jobs.

A young male learner (under 35), ex construction worker, from Waterford, completed 8 minor awards, explaining that he loved the way he could 'dip in and out' of the programme.

A female learner from Louth joined Write On 4 Work after the closure of another LMAF programme and completed 8 minor awards, availing of free internet in her local library.

Value for money analysis of programme delivery, including commentary on savings to Exchequer achieved by programme(s)

The achievable, quality outcomes were identified in the original project proposal as follows:

- engagement of 500 unemployed adults in a distance learning programme at FETAC Level 3;
- use of website and e-learning for unemployed adults with literacy and numeracy needs;
- using tutor telephone support to help with learning and maintain motivation;
- first distance and online major awards at level 3 catering for people with low skills and qualifications;
- first online system of recognised prior learning (RPL) at FETAC Levels 2 and 3;
- possibly first awards for the participants;
- better job-readiness of the participants;
- increased motivation to learn and progress to further education and training;
- progression of the participants to employment or further education and training; and
- enhanced provision from education and training providers working with unemployed adults.

The programme met, and in some cases surpassed, these objectives. For example 594 unemployed adults engaged, while a range of adult education providers used the teaching and learning resources to support their learning programmes for other learners. They continue to do so. The external evaluation report is documenting the motivation and progression issues for participants.

Perhaps the greatest value for money from the once-off LMAF investment in this project is the long-term sustainability of the learning programme on www.writeon.ie, which will last far beyond the project deadline. The web based learning resource remains available to all adults seeking to improve their literacy and numeracy or to gain a national qualification at Level 3. This includes the target group of the LMAF eligible participants, as well as other categories of the unemployed, adults not in the labour force, and adults employed in declining industries. www.writeon.ie also includes the first system for the recognition of prior learning leading to a National Qualification at Levels 2 or 3. This is particularly relevant to adults with low or no qualifications, and will facilitate achievement of the National Skill Strategy objectives.

The availability of this RPL system at these levels has a significant cost saving potential for programmes and providers, as well as facilitating the rate of progression and achievement of the unemployed who are accessing short courses.

In addition to the 594 jobseekers, there were also another 214 unemployed learners who engaged in the programme who did not qualify for funding under the LMAF. These included those on benefits such as lone parents, disability, carers allowance, widows, those assessed under their partners benefits and the formally self employed who received no benefits at all. 73 of these 214 participants were under 35, 31 were over 55 and 134 had Junior Cert or below education. These participants and the Level 2 learning website were funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

Publicity for the NALA Freephone service was included at the end of a national television series broadcast on RTÉ One in May /June 2011 which is supported financially by An Post. An Post also funded advertising space to broadcast two series of radio ads for the Freephone referral service, some of these calls were referred to Write On 4 Work.

This project is value for money as it has delivered a learning programme to 594 adults on jobseeker's payments longer than three months. The programme addressed their literacy and numeracy needs and provided the option of accreditation. The cost per person was €995.25. NALA also accessed in house expertise such as our Distance Education Co-coordinator (see project team above) at no cost to the project.

NALA also provided savings to the Exchequer by using resources already in place as the E-learning infrastructure and architecture were already designed. In addition a number of learning materials sent to participants were already published, therefore saving on printing costs. There were efficiencies to running this programme, no class room locations required, no large scale tutor costs. There was efficiency for people in terms of their time as they didn't have to stop if they got a job or their circumstances changed, they could learn after traditional hours of classroom learning ceased. There was also the added value of helping other organizations meet their client's education and training needs especially with respect to accreditation. (see below) This all points to the necessity of continuing this service, as a direct provision offer, but also integrated into existing education and training opportunities for the unemployed.

Wider impacts – for enterprise, local economy, community/social inclusion and social solidarity

The current National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007/16 recognised that “lack of adequate literacy can be a significant barrier to self-esteem, employment and more generally to achieving social inclusion”. It set out the national target to reduce the proportion of the population with restricted literacy to between 10% and 15% of the population by 2016, being a reduction of about 15% to 10% points on the proportion recorded in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), taken in 1995. (Restricted literacy being defined as Level I on the International Adult Literacy Survey scale or equivalent). From the 594 participants on the course, 359 minor awards were achieved by 161 participants, contributing to this national target.

Goal 5 of The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016 was to support those on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment including lone parents. As well as the 594 jobseekers who signed up to Write On 4 Work, in the period of October 10 – June 11, 214 other unemployed adults signed up, who were claiming other benefits such as lone parents, disability etc.

The Write On 4 Work model has been widely welcomed by diverse groups including trade union groups for their workers, the community and voluntary sector, disability groups and NALA expects its usage to spread. As a result of the Level 3 FETAC, NALA worked in a blended learning capacity with many organisations including VECs, Community Training Centres (CTCs), Enable Ireland, Rehab, Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs), St John of God centres, probation services and some drug rehab programmes.

An aspect of the site that was highlighted by one centre was the fact that it acts as a great 'leveller'. This referred to the fact that a group of adults exhibiting typical 'spiky' profiles were able to work on their individual areas of weakness. Whereas sometimes tutors are unable to deal with specific individual needs in group contexts, settling for common denominator content areas, www.writeon.ie changes learning group dynamics, allowing a single tutor to deliver multiple one-to-one interactions at the same time.

The privacy aspect of working on www.writeon.ie means it directly addresses the issue of stigma and allows people to improve skills in the comfort of their own home. In this regard, it is ideally suited for those individuals less inclined to engage with local literacy services, thereby directly addressing the needs of a very hard-to-reach audience.

Write On 4 Work participants spoke to our external evaluators (FGS McClure Watters) about the influence doing the course had on their linking into the community. One learner stated that "...a few of her friends and herself want to set up a woman's group". Another remarked that they "Did community work as a direct result..." of new established confidence during the course.

There were examples given during the programme from learners working with tutors, who spoke about initiating 'family learning'. Parents who were learning, engaged more with their children's learning and there were grandparents, who, prior to engagement with the programme would have avoided any engagement with homework and reading, now helped with homework. NALA was also aware that there were personal recommendations from learners who encouraged friends and family to log onto writeon.ie. This can represent a significant step from a literacy learner.

Some comments from learners gave other insights into what the course offered.

A learner felt that the course had a "positive mental health impact -..(it) feels good to be doing something" Another stated that "It was something new and (as he) left school at 13 he was very keen to brush up on skills" Others praised it's accessibility (I am) "at home alone with baby and it's very handy" also, (I) "have no qualifications and it's handy to do it at home" A learner explained that he "wanted to keep upskilling while waiting for job" and these two learners acknowledged writeon.ie's contribution to their increased confidence: "I've just got a part-time job. I couldn't have done that 12 months ago" (female) "Even just getting help with your CV is brilliant. They tell you what should be on there and what shouldn't. That will definitely help me in applying for jobs" (male)

Wider impacts in community/social inclusion and social solidarity were also achieved in close collaboration with some of our stakeholder group. For example:

- Promoting the programme to AONTAS's Community Education Network and offering their learners a possible route to certification.
- The Citizens Information Centre and MABS promoting Write On 4 Work throughout their 342 local centres with some centres requesting awareness training for their volunteers, who deal directly with marginalised people in local communities.
- Promoting the programme to the Local Employment Services and Jobs Clubs of the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) whose objectives are to counter disadvantage and to promote equality and social and economic inclusion. Reaction was very positive on behalf of their clients as Write On 4 Work offered both the

opportunity for free literacy and numeracy support and the possibility of upskilling through FETAC certification.

- While our programme was not directly marketed to enterprise, as part of our promotional plan, NALA worked with the TESCO community champions to reach our target audience in community settings.

As a standalone learning resource, www.writeon.ie is ideally suited for integrated models of provision within the workplace. The site diagnoses learner strengths and weaknesses across a range of areas and as such it provides a support opportunity for those organisations without dedicated literacy resources on hand.

Qualitative Assessment of Programme(s)

How the programme(s) fitted with the policy objectives as set out in Request for Tender document and the Forfás background paper, and the correspondence of actual programme outputs to such objectives

The focus of education and training provision under the Activation Fund was on two main areas:

1. Activation – “Improving the employability of unemployed persons by providing ‘progression pathways’ of relevant job search, training, education .. opportunities”. The Write On 4 Work programme prioritised the low skilled, particularly those below NFQ Level 4. 92% of participants had primary or lower secondary education and the majority of learners recruited – that is 51% – were long term unemployed.

NALA feel that the programme met the aims of social inclusion, equality and innovation by providing an intensive, free and accessible to all service for a priority group of unemployed people. With a gender balance of 70% men to 30% women, Write On 4 Work has proven to be a particularly attractive form of learning for unemployed men. Of the 161 successful applicants to FETAC for level 3 certification, 111 were male.

A particular innovative element of this project was that if participants got work or circumstances changed, they didn't have to give up the programme, so there was no disincentive attached to taking up employment or another training place if you were enrolled on writeon.ie

2. Upskilling – Write On 4 Work covered fields of learning in areas of identified skills shortage required for the ‘Smart Economy’ such as the ICT skills acquired through achievement of the Major award in Information and Communication Technology. Of the total 359 level 3 component certificates gained through the programme 119 were in Digital Media, Computer Literacy and Internet Skills.

The programme also focused on upskilling generic skills, identified as being required by all enterprises. Key elements that were included in the Write On 4 Work skills portfolio as well as literacy, numeracy and using technology were people-related skills. There were minor awards in Communications, Interpersonal skills and Personal Effectiveness and other awards available online included upskilling in team-working, conceptual and thinking skills, problem-solving, planning, organising and learning-to-learn skills. Of the total 359 level 3 component certificates gained through the programme, 147 were in Communications, Personal and Interpersonal Skills

and Personal Effectiveness. Throughout all the above modules, learners developed their capacity for independence and self-reliance.⁵

It offered a comprehensive, quality FETAC level 3 programme with 11 minor awards to 594 eligible participants. Initial assessment was provided to all participants either online and/or over the telephone with the tutor. The programme provided individual learning plans and programmes, ongoing online assessment and development of customised assessment briefs for those engaging with telephone support.⁶

NALA in their proposal stated that the course would be a stepping stone to progression and bring people closer to labour market opportunities. Of the 594 participants, 25 got jobs during the programme, 15 progressed to other programmes and 161 applied for FETAC certification. 81 learners completed multiple minor awards at FETAC Level 3 on www.writeon.ie and 53 applied for 3 or more minor awards.

This distance and on-line learning programme at Level 3 is innovative as it delivered FETAC Level 3 content online for the first time ever. It was a flexible model of delivery that catered for unemployed adults who wished to learn in their home, library, FÁS centre or VEC or community setting. Finally, it is sustainable post completion of the project with minimal costs and can also support blended learning in the VECs, Community Education organisations, Job Clubs and elsewhere.

How the programme fulfilled your own organisational goals and expectations

The distance learning programme Write On 4 Work offered unemployed adults an innovative high quality learning opportunity at Level 3 that did not exist, thus filling a gap in provision. It adds to the accessibility of provision for adult education and training at a national level and proves that technology and web based training are a cost effective and efficient addition that should be built into national systems.

Through the LMA funding NALA was able to enhance its distance learning service and build a Level 3 infrastructure which is sustainable after the project.

It has aided 594 eligible jobseekers, upskilled 161 participants who achieved 680 minor awards and 16 major awards, bringing them closer to readiness for the labour market. We exceeded our 'recruitment' target of 500 by nearly 20%, which is a testament to the universality of the programme. While we experienced setbacks such as the unexpected delay in FETAC accreditation which forced us to delay launch of the level 3 site until the 18 of October 2010, this did not impact our ability to exceed our target in only a 10 month period and enrolment still continues on the site.

It has been submitted as the first system for recognised prior learning at Level 3. Based on feedback, NALA believe it has been a hugely beneficial resource to individuals and also to other education and training and labour market activation providers as an extended component of their learning courses.

⁵ NALA (2005), Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Practice

⁶ All of the above are subject to internal verification and external authentication processes in line with NALA's FETAC Quality Assurance agreement (Provider Registration code: 38190T).

NALA's DLS directly addresses our stated Strategic Plan objective of 'developing better literacy and numeracy learning opportunities' by providing content and accreditation options for www.writeon.ie, including Recognition of Prior Learning. The DLS also meets the needs of two very particular groups. It attracts more men than women, in direct contrast to local literacy services where the gender balance is inverted.

A notable success was the low cost targeted promotional and outreach plan that was devised and rolled out in order to recruit the 'harder to reach' groups, with the assistance of the Department of Social Protection, FAS, the INOU, the Irish Local Development Network and others. The project successfully recruited 304 jobseekers who had been unemployed for longer than a year.

Writeon.ie has proven to be a non threatening resource to other providers in that it provides a direct learning opportunity and FETAC accreditation to individuals in organizations that do not have education provision. It was also utilized by other successful LMAF projects (most notably JobFit) to both offer additional certification and increase access to provision. This was a learning breakthrough for NALA as well as others. While NALA felt that from the outset of the project, they engaged very successfully with various stakeholders and interested parties, the idea of independent learners (i.e. not 'NALA' learners) using a learning website is a new concept. Due to the competitive and 'number based' success criteria of the LMAF, there was a challenge to get all providers to work in the best interest of the client as opposed to perhaps protecting their 'numbers'.

Programme impact on improving participants skills levels (statistics drawn from NALA's external evaluation due for completion by end of August)

The evaluation measured participants' self-rating of skills at the beginning of the Programme, at the mid-way point and at the end of the programme. Skills rated included: Reading Skills, the proportion of those rating their reading as either good or ok increased from 73.8% at the beginning to 82.5% by the end of the programme. Those reporting their reading ability as poor fell from 11.6% at the beginning to 1.9% at the end of Write On 4 Work. These are significant improvements at this level. Writing skills: 32.8% of participants rated their writing as good at the beginning of the programme, this rose to 42.3% by the end. Participant's confidence in their numeracy skills rose by 9% post engagement with the programme and in ICT skills, the progression was remarkable - with a 13% upturn in skills rating evidenced.

Participants who gave feedback on Write On 4 Work's impact on their training and education progression included comments such as: "Very positive, going ahead with FETAC Level 5, wants to do a BA in the future." The report noted from another that the course will help [him] to complete a night course (when he goes back in September) for which he has avoided the maths and scientific modules - now feels he can do them ..(he)..was a mechanic by trade. One ex- construction worker explained:

"I've been working in the building trade all my life and have been away from learning for so long. I wanted to enrol on a college course and knew that I needed to improve my skills, maths in particular, before I could do that. It's been great. I've enrolled on the course and I start in September for two years, I might even go on to do the degree after that!"

Some participants also felt that it had a very positive impact on their job seeking skills, one learner said that he“.. has just been offered a job.”Others felt it “helped in that they put it on CV” and one felt “.. he can now expand the type of job he will look for.”

The principal obstacles experienced in delivering your programme(s), including local/regional challenges; welfare-related issues concerning participants, and other issues

NALA experienced two critical setbacks during the project, FETAC delayed accreditation under their new Common Awards system, so we had to delay launch of the level 3 site until the 18 of October 2010. This delay impacted on the time available for both recruitment and learning and negatively impacted the amount of participants achieving FETAC certification. Then the composition of one of the major awards was changed, initially forcing NALA to change the infrastructure of writeon.ie, costing us both time and money, in the critical first months of the website being live. This was however rectified and FETAC were extremely helpful in facilitating a validation screening exercise to aid recovery of time lost.

Local/Regional Issues

Write On 4 Work attracted learners from all 26 counties. Assisted by regional promotion in all Department of Social Protection offices and most FAS offices, NALA did not encounter any local or regional constraints

Welfare-related issues concerning participants

As well as the 594 jobseekers, there was a total of 214 unemployed learners on social welfare who enrolled but did not qualify for the one-off success bonus payment of €100 as part of the project. NALA felt these learners were equally disadvantaged as those eligible and therefore offered learner support at no additional cost to the project. It was however very unfortunate that these learners could not avail of the €100 success bonus.

One major obstacle to the course being provided by distance learning and having rolling enrolment was that it proved difficult to get participants to provide the letter from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to prove their LMAF eligibility. Literacy learners did not want to draw attention to themselves in the DSP office and reported embarrassment at having to ask the DSP office to stamp the letter. Learners were also afraid that doing the course would impact on their payments.

NALA met with Minister O’Cuiv at the beginning of the project to request cooperation centrally, however this was not followed up within the DSP subsequently, despite further efforts by NALA. NALA would like to acknowledge the exceptional support of Barry Kennedy, Regional Manager, DSP (Western Region) who facilitated access to the DSP network, information days in local offices and dissemination of information.

In future design of labour market activation programmes, there should be a better system for the education and training provider to verify this. NALA welcome the new National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES) and will share their experience on this project to help assist future design and developments.

The principal things learned by the organisation and project team in delivering your programme(s)

The principal learning for NALA, reinforced by Write On 4 Work is that online learning is viable for unemployed adults with basic skills needs. Also formal recognition through FETAC certification has now become the longer term goal for a lot of our recruited learners. 76.3% of our learners who engaged with our external evaluators (FGS McClure Watters) stated that they were interested in attaining accreditation.

Interestingly, the €100 success bonus was not the deciding factor in participants either in enrolling in the programme or pursuing FETAC accreditation. Only 10% of respondents stated that it influenced their decision to sign up, with the more popular reasons being to help get a job, qualification or to continue with training and education.

It is also important to acknowledge that

- self directed learning works.
- lower skilled literacy learners can successfully avail of innovative and technology driven learning.
- distance learning is a successful method to engage the 'hard to reach' especially males and under 35s.
- writeon.ie offers an opportunity for blended learning and adds to the flexibility of provision.

How you would do things differently for any future programmes of this type

NALA normally do not gather personal information such as date of birth and PPS numbers at enrolment due to the confidential nature of our service. However, given the LMAF requirements for proof of eligibility, we would now request that a learner provides any required proof of eligibility before commencing the course, rather than waiting until they are applying for their FETAC accreditation.

As the date for submission of Department of Social Protection verification letters was brought forward by the LMA funders, due to concerns raised by them post their March monitoring visit, NALA felt that time was lost by the project team in labour intensive administration. An action plan was implemented immediately to encourage learners to get DSP letters, this was a slow, time consuming process and it was felt by NALA that this compromised the confidentiality that is reassuring and necessary for literacy learners.

NALA may consider having a dedicated project administrator in future projects of this size, depending on budget constraints.

The merits, or otherwise, of this activation funding model, and your views on the nature and scope of any future iteration of this model.

The activation funding model worked well in a number of ways. These included:

- Clear Guiding Principles document and outline for tender
- Quick response from Department when questions or clarifications needed

Areas which may need more thought into the future:

- How the Department can better support providers to prove unemployed status that doesn't require a participant to have to get a letter signed in Social Protection offices.

This proved problematic for some of our participants due to embarrassment of going in to get a letter signed. There could perhaps be a central point providing these letters, based on a request from successful programme provider.

- In light of Government priority to reach people with the lowest level of education, it is essential that Levels 1 to 3 are prioritised within any future model.
- In the future where there are Level 4, 5 and 6 programmes being delivered, the area of integrating literacy into these programmes should feature. Therefore any participant who was able for the content but may have literacy or numeracy needs, those needs could be met within the programme. NALA would be happy to discuss this further.

Fund Administration by the Department of Education and Skills (and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation)

Public Procurement:

The approach to the procurement and selection of projects for Fund support including the merits or demerits of the open competition system

- Request for tender – The tender process was fine.
- Clarity/comprehensiveness of requirements – The tender was detailed and clear. The public meetings and FAQ on the e-tenders website answered many questions that saved a phone call to the Department.
- Criteria and marking system – This was clear. It would be useful to get feedback on how a proposal scored in each area.
- Timescales and logistics for submitting tenders – This was fine.
- Follow-up post tender – The Department were responsive to any questions we had.

Fund Administration:

- Overall standards of customer service in dealings with projects - Overall customer service from the department was satisfactory, with requests for clarification of requirements responded to in a timely and clear manner.
- Communications with projects; payments processing, meetings with projects, site monitoring visits etc.

Most communications with the Labour Market Activation funders were positive. The site visit we received was informative, encouraging and reassuring and payments were on schedule. The only criticism would be that some unscheduled updates were required during the project at short notice. Even though reasons and explanations for the requests were always furnished, it meant that Write On 4 Work's work schedule was interrupted with no notice.