

**NALA/ WIT  
Accreditation  
Project**

**Strategic Plan  
2004 – 2007**

**June, 2004**

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### Acronyms Used In This Document

APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
DES	Department of Education and Science
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair – Training and Employment Authority
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology

## **Section 1: Introduction to the Project**

### **Background**

The NALA/WIT Accreditation Project was established in 1997 as a partnership between the Department of Adult and Continuing Education in Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). Its aim is to support the adult literacy sector in Ireland by providing recognised higher education qualifications for adult educators working in the field of adult literacy.

Following a period of consultation with key stakeholders, including representatives of the Department of Education and Science, the Vocational Education Committees, adult literacy practitioners and students, a series of professional accredited higher education programmes was developed. There are now recognised higher education qualifications at two levels which cater for managers of adult education schemes and centres and tutors working directly with adult learners. These are:

- the *National Certificate in Literacy Development*
- the *National Diploma in Literacy Development*.

Almost 150 practitioners have achieved one of these qualifications since the project began and over 500 people have received accreditation for single modules as part of a Single Certificate Programme which was launched in 2000. A degree programme is currently being developed.

### **Rationale for Professional Qualifications**

The purpose of offering higher education qualifications for adult literacy tutors and managers is to ensure that adult literacy learners get the best possible service which will enable them to progress towards achieving their life goals. High quality, accredited training provides support for the people who work with those learners. It does this by helping practitioners to:

- Identify and promote good practice which has been developed by people working in the field;
- Explore theories which underpin different aspects of adult literacy and adult education practice;
- Relate theory to practice;
- Create meaningful links with other education sectors.

These programmes also offer students the opportunity to

- Analyse the many changes which have taken place in the educational and social landscape in Ireland in recent years;
- Examine their own response to current and future developments;
- Clarify their own role and philosophy as adult educators;
- Enhance their professional development and career prospects as adult educators.

In these ways, the availability of higher education qualifications ensures that a pool of professionally trained and qualified staff is available to support the adult education sector. This in turn provides a quality assurance measure for the sector and reinforces its professional and academic status as an equal partner with the other levels and branches of education in Ireland.

### **Funding, Management and Staffing**

This initiative is funded by the Department of Education and Science. It is directed by a Management Committee composed of representatives of the two partner institutions, WIT and NALA. The project operates out of the Literacy Development Centre in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education in Waterford Institute of Technology. It is coordinated by the Project Manager and supported by a development and administrative team who contribute to course design, delivery and research.

**INSERT A DIAGRAM SHOWING THE PROJECT STRUCTURE AND WHERE IT FITS IN TO WIT STRUCTURE AND IN RELATION TO DES/VECS ?**

## **Section 2: The Strategic Plan, 2004 - 2007**

This is the first Strategic Plan for the Accreditation Project. It has been developed now because the Project is emerging from a process which involved extensive consultation followed by development, piloting and evaluation, into a phase of consolidation and planning for the future. This is therefore a crucial time in the life of the Project.

It is also an important time for the adult literacy sector and for the wider landscape of adult education in Ireland. The context in which adult literacy work is now being carried out has undergone fundamental and continuous development since the first qualification was made available in 1998. Lifelong learning at all levels, including adult literacy, has become a major part of education and economic policy at both national and European level.<sup>1</sup> Funding to the adult literacy sector has increased dramatically and a National Adult Literacy Strategy is now government policy. The range of services available has increased and there are many more managers, paid tutors and most significantly, learners taking part in the adult literacy service than before.

During this period of change, the NALA/WIT Accreditation Project has responded by developing recognised qualifications, structured to accommodate innovative accredited modules which can address new needs as these arise. After a seven-year period of consultation, development and piloting, during which three evaluations and a programmatic review analysed progress on all this work, the project is now moving into a new phase.

### **A Vision for the Future**

This Strategic Plan is based on a vision for the future of the Accreditation Project and the contribution it will make to education and society in Ireland. This is to work towards a society where there is equality of access to, and participation in, education for all, in which everyone is able to reap the personal, social and economic benefits of lifelong learning. Education can help people who have been excluded from those

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<sup>1</sup> See the National Adult Literacy Strategy Department of Education and Science (2000) Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education Dublin: Stationary Office pages 86 – 99.

benefits to question their situation and to take action which can transform their lives. The Accreditation Project has a role in this transformative process by supporting adult educators in their practice and professional development.

The Strategic Plan identifies the specific goals which the Project will need to accomplish in order to achieve this vision. It sets out clear definitions of success and includes a system for monitoring progress. All members of the Management Committee and staff team have taken part in clarifying the Project vision goals and these have been informed also by the views of key stakeholders. These include the DES, the VECs, practitioners, as well as new providers of adult education.

## **Section 3: Project Mission Statement, Aims and Goals**

### **Mission Statement**

The Project will promote social inclusion and equality in Ireland by supporting adult educators in their work with people who have been excluded from the benefits of the education system. The Project is based on an ethos which recognises the social and structural dimensions of education and especially, of educational disadvantage. We put the learners' needs at the centre of the education process and we are committed to an approach to teaching and learning which challenges narrow definitions of intelligence. We work from a broad, holistic concept of literacy which includes the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy; and which emphasises the social, personal and contextual aspects of learning.<sup>2</sup>

### **Aims**

The aims of the Project are:

- to enhance and promote good practice in literacy in an adult education context;
- to provide professional qualifications for adult literacy practitioners working in adult education;
- to promote a learner-centred ethos of adult literacy and adult education among all stakeholders.

There are six strategic goals through which the aims and the overall vision for the Project will be accomplished.

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<sup>2</sup> For NALA definition of literacy, See Appendix 2.

## **Goals**

**During the period 2004 – 2007, the NALA/WIT Accreditation Project will work to achieve these goals:**

### **1. Delivery of Nationally-Recognised Qualifications**

The Project will support high-quality literacy practice by providing nationally-recognised qualifications in adult education with a specialisation in adult literacy.

### **2. Stakeholder Consultation**

The work of the Project in developing relevant, accessible qualifications for adult educators will be informed by the views and expertise of the national stakeholders in adult education.

### **3. Research**

The research activities which support the work of the Project will contribute to developing the theory and practice of adult education and adult literacy.

### **4. Student Support**

The Project will provide a supportive learning environment which helps students to develop their potential for higher education study.

### **5. Information Management**

Information management systems will provide effective, efficient support for the work of the Project.

### **6. The Learning Organisation**

The Project will be a healthy learning organisation which pursues clear goals in a systematic way and provides a positive working environment for its staff.

## **Section 4: Actions and Indicators**

### **Goal 1**

**The Project will support high-quality practice by providing nationally-recognised qualifications in adult education with a specialisation in adult literacy.**

**To achieve this goal we will carry out the following actions:**

- Work to expand recognition among existing and new stakeholders that these qualifications are the main accreditation route for adult educators in the literacy sector, including degree and post-graduate level;
- Continue to support the original target group, ensuring that practitioners and potential students throughout the country know about the qualifications;
- Continue to expand the target group to include practitioners in Further and Community Education and other settings where literacy work takes place;
- Continue to provide a comprehensive single certificate programme in a variety of locations throughout the country;
- Ensure that all students experience a wide variety of teaching and assessment methodologies which are based on up-to-date theory and good practice;
- Develop and promote new approaches to teaching and learning among the student body;
- Develop and implement a system of supervised teaching practice for all students working towards full qualifications;
- Review the APEL process and increase the number of modules which students can access through APEL;

**We will monitor our progress according to these indicators of success**

1. Regular, constructive meetings take place with the key stakeholders: DES, IVEA, VECs and other relevant bodies.
2. These qualifications are valued by providers and practitioners as having a favourable impact on career development and conditions of service.
3. During the next three years, there will be an increase of 50% in the number of students who enrol for full qualifications.
4. Programmes are promoted and taken up by practitioners in Travellers' Centres, Youthreach, FÁS and others.
5. Programmes are promoted and taken up in geographic areas not yet strongly represented among the student body.
6. The feasibility of targeting new groups, including pre-service students, graduates and second level teachers, is researched and relevant action is taken.
7. Up-to-date developments and good practice are continually integrated into the courses and qualifications: eg e-learning, workplace literacy, family learning Mapping the Learning Journey,
8. Supervised teaching practice is included in all full Certificate programmes and offered as an option to single certificate students.
9. The APEL process and support materials are reviewed and their use expanded.
10. A review of all courses up to and including degree level is carried out, which highlights how these programmes relate to the National Framework of Qualifications; and clarifies any other issues which will improve the quality and effectiveness of the qualifications.

## **Goal 2**

**The work of the project in developing relevant, accessible qualifications for adult educators will be informed by the views and expertise of the national stakeholders in adult education.**

**To achieve this goal we will carry out the following actions:**

- Maintain regular, routine contact with the DES, the IVEA, local VECs and representatives of practitioners, students and graduates;
- Identify and contact other institutions and groups with an interest in literacy issues;
- Identify and contact institutions and groups with expertise in areas of emerging need in relation to literacy work;
- Develop a needs analysis system which supports the process of consulting with stakeholders;
- Develop new courses in consultation with representatives of the relevant stakeholders;
- Encourage project staff to network with and participate in relevant representative bodies and committees.

**We will monitor our progress according to these indicators of success:**

1. Regular meetings between stakeholders and Accreditation Project representatives take place and regular contact is maintained through other channels eg emails, phone calls, exchange of documentation and information.
2. A system for needs analysis is developed and implemented.
3. The module development process is agreed and formally documented.
4. A promotion /dissemination strategy is devised and implemented.
5. The project web-page and other promotional materials are up-dated.
6. The project is represented on external bodies.

### **Goal 3**

**The research activities which support the work of the Project will contribute to developing the theory and practice of adult education and adult literacy.**

**To achieve this goal we will carry out the following actions:**

- Conduct action-based research which draws on practitioners' experience, to inform emerging concepts of good practice;
- Identify and prioritise other research topics which are relevant to the work of the Project;
- Enhance the research capacity of the Project by identifying new areas of research to develop with post-graduate students and/or external partners;
- Identify new sources of funding for research activity;
- Encourage and support Project staff in conducting research related to their work;
- Carry out structured needs analysis to support planning;
- Document the process of needs analysis and research which contributes to the work of the Project;
- Collaborate with colleagues in the college and among the stakeholder organisations, including national and international stakeholders, who have similar research interests;
- Disseminate research findings in publications, among relevant networks and organisations and at conferences.

**We will monitor our progress according to these indicators of success**

1. A training and research policy is drawn up.
2. Research topics which advance the work of the Project and make an impact on relevant areas of policy are identified.
3. There is networking with students, post-graduate students and external partners, including international partners, and identification of areas for practitioner and Project-related research.
4. Members of staff carry out project-related research.
5. The research which contributes to current and recent work eg ESOL and Family Literacy, is documented.
6. Peers in the School of Education, adult education and other higher education institutions are contacted to explore areas of common ground.
7. At least one research paper per year emerging from the Project is published in a journal and/or disseminated through relevant networks.
8. The Project is represented and active in adult education research networks and in the Institutional Research Committees.\*

\* Research networks within WIT.

#### **Goal 4**

**The Project will provide a supportive environment which helps students to develop their potential for higher education study.**

**To achieve this goal we will carry out the following actions:**

- A support programme will be made available to students according to need;
- Ensure that all students are aware of all of the elements of student support;
- Ensure that students experience a wide range of assessment modes which maximise their chances of showing what they have learned;
- Give students accurate and rigorous feedback on their progress in relation to the standard required; and deliver this in a constructive, non-threatening way;
- Provide an environment which is conducive to adult learning;
- Help students to form supportive learning networks;
- Ensure that students have access to the learning materials they need to support their studies.

**We will monitor our progress according to these indicators of success**

1. The elements of a comprehensive student support system are developed and implemented as needed, to include mechanisms for: pre-screening of students' needs and identification of needs; a range of support interventions; tracking systems; evaluation and monitoring systems.
2. Details of the student support system are outlined in the Student Handbook.
3. Information on students' progress is communicated regularly to the relevant staff members.
4. Modes of assessment are reviewed to confirm there is a good overall balance of strategies.
5. Premises are suitable for adult learners and learning resources are made available when people need them.
6. At least 80% of students who enrol on courses achieve the required standard.
7. At least 85% of student course evaluations report a positive learning experience.
8. New mechanisms for the distribution of learning resources are explored.

## **Goal 5**

**Information management systems will provide effective, efficient support for the work of the Centre.**

**To achieve this goal we will carry out the following actions:**

- Investigate the administration and information needs of all project staff;
- Create systems which track and cross-refer participants on all full and single certificate programmes;
- Describe and analyse those areas of administration and information management which arise from the provision of a wide range of flexible, modular-based programmes;
- Draw up and disseminate a policy on the uses to which information on students' progress may be used.
- Analyse and document how the administration needs of the project operate in relation to the wider college systems;
- Disseminate the learning achieved during the project about the management of information in the context of modular programmes.

**We will monitor our progress according to these indicators of success**

1. A customised database is set up and functioning.
2. Information and other administrative needs are met smoothly and efficiently.
3. A policy on the use of information is drawn up and disseminated to the relevant stakeholders.
4. A report on the management of information systems in the context of flexible, modular programmes is published.

## **Goal 6**

**The Project will be a healthy learning organisation which pursues clear goals in a systematic way and provides a positive working environment for its staff.**

**To achieve this goal we will carry out the following actions:**

- Continue to provide induction for all new Project staff, including part-time tutors;
- Create regular opportunities for staff and for part-time tutors to exchange information and to reflect on their own practice;
- Support staff in pursuing study and training opportunities;
- Ensure that staff have access to the resources they need to carry out their work effectively;
- Evaluate modules and programme delivery according to a standard procedure;
- Implement a quality assurance procedure, including a comprehensive evaluation process, which meets the requirements of both the college and the adult education sector;
- Document all of the standard procedures which support the implementation and management of the Project;
- Carry out an analysis of the resources needed to ensure implementation of the Strategic Plan;
- Draw up a Project Implementation Plan, based on the goals and actions agreed for this Strategic Plan;
- Develop procedures whereby the Management Committee monitors the implementation of the Strategic Plan on a regular basis;

**We will monitor our progress according to these indicators of success**

1. At least one tutor development meeting is held each year.
2. Regular staff meetings are held.
3. Premises and staffing levels are adequate for the work of the Project.
4. A standard evaluation process is implemented for all courses delivered.
5. An organisational handbook is drawn up summarising the project structure, staff roles, evaluation, monitoring and management structures.
6. A Project Implementation Plan is drawn up showing time scale and costings.
7. Progress on the implementation of the Strategic Plan is reviewed by the Management Committee three times each year, in relation to the agreed actions and indicators.

## **References**

Department of Education and Science (2000) Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education Dublin: Stationary Office

The National Adult Literacy Agency (2002) Strategic Plan 2002 – 2006 Dublin: NALA page 8.

## **Appendix 1: NALA Definition of Adult Literacy**

All good adult literacy work starts with the needs of the individual, known as the learner-centred approach. 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 the mere technical skills of communication. The underlying aim of good literacy 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.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (2002) Strategic Plan 2002 – 2006 Dublin: NALA page 8.