Widening Participation in Adult Learning

Guidelines for Effective Planning and Delivery of Back to Education Initiative Outreach Provision
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“If they are to have any measure of success, those ‘doing’ outreach work must be adaptable, open-minded, willing to take risks and able to judge when risks are unacceptable. Those ‘managing’ outreach work require exactly the same attributes”

Yates and Gilman (1990)
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- Staff and learners of the four VECs who took part in focus group discussions.
- Adult Education Officers of VECs and BTEI Community Strand Providers who responded to questionnaires on their experiences and views of outreach and community-based provision.
- The Steering Group established to oversee the development of the Guidelines, including representatives of Co. Donegal VEC, Co. Kildare VEC, City of Limerick VEC and South Tipperary VEC and all who contributed case studies.
- Killucan Care Ltd., Co. Westmeath (BTEI funded Community Group) who also contributed a case study.

1 Co. Donegal VEC., Co Kildare VEC., City of Limerick VEC., South Tipperary VEC.
The BTEI (Part-time) programme was established by the Department of Education and Science in 2002. At the time, it allowed for a major expansion of second-chance education and part-time learning options in Ireland. It was designed to complement existing full-time, further and adult education programmes and build the capacity of this sector to meet the changing needs of individuals, communities and society in Ireland.

The overall aim of BTEI is to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second level education in a range of flexible learning opportunities. The Initiative promotes formal recognition of learners’ achievements through the National Framework of Qualifications and facilitates access, transfer and progression in learning. The BTEI, which is comprised of two strands, the Formal Strand (mostly VEC provision) and the Community Strand has opened up education opportunities to a broad range of new learners, many of whom had been previously excluded from the education system.

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2 The National Framework of Qualifications, developed under the auspices of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, is designed to assist adults to access, transfer and progress to other education or employment pathways.
Section 1: Introduction

Why develop Guidelines on Outreach?

There is widespread recognition among adult education practitioners that outreach work is one of the most effective ways of engaging learners who do not usually access educational provision. These guidelines have been developed as a practical support for those engaged in BTEI provision. They highlight key issues in outreach work, the primary purpose of which is to widen access for new and non-traditional adult learners.

The guidelines also seek to challenge traditional mind-sets in educational organisations, promoting more flexible and tailored approaches to provision.

Some providers view outreach work simply as the provision of services and programmes outside of traditional centres. There is evidence to suggest that this approach will engage learners for whom the primary barrier to access is location of provision. However these guidelines go further in that they aim to promote the adaptation of organisational policies, practices and cultures to ensure more widespread consultation with communities around their learning needs, leading to joint planning of more flexible and tailored provision. This approach emphasises the crucial role of relationship and team building in the outreach process.

What is Outreach?

In these guidelines outreach is defined as the process engaged in by the education provider to bring services to the learners in ways that work for them. Three inter-related strands of development activity are pivotal:

Strand 1: Engaging with, consulting with and listening to those who are consistently not availing of educational opportunities (non traditional learners), and their advocates, to identify and understand their circumstances, motivation, needs and interests in relation to learning.

Strand 2: The physical relocation or moving of educational programmes, services and staff out of traditional colleges and institutions and into local settings. This means offering provision in familiar local venues as distinct from the more formal learning institutions and colleges.
Strand 3: Adapting existing educational provision and/or designing new programmes and initiatives to establish more appropriate starting points, modes of delivery, progression options and supports for learning, in line with the stated needs and priorities of the individuals and groups concerned.

What is the policy context for the Guidelines?

These guidelines reflect Irish national policy priorities from the White Paper on Adult Education, through to the most recent Social Partnership Agreement ‘Towards 2016’. Priorities include promotion of equality of access and participation in education, recognition of all forms of purposeful learning (formal, non-formal or informal), adoption of targeted approaches and better use of resources. Policy also points to the need for education providers to be flexible and responsive, providing tailored initiatives and supports that address barriers to participation in learning.

At European level, the year 2000 marked a decisive moment in EU policy when the Lisbon Council set a strategic goal for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world by 2010, and identified that education and training systems needed to be adapted and developed …to reach out to everyone, no matter how far from education and training they may consider themselves. The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning also sent out a key message that traditional systems must be transformed to become much more open and flexible, in order to provide learning opportunities as close to learners as possible, in their own communities.

In current EU policy, the European Commission Communications on Adult Learning prioritize the need for a high quality and accessible adult learning system and focus on five key messages, including the need to remove barriers to participation. Measures that bring learning closer to learners in their communities and workplaces should be prioritized.

Although the policy case has been established, many potential learners remain disengaged. Outreach has been identified as one powerful strategy which can help tackle this.

What about educational participation?

Sometimes non-participation by adults in learning is presented as an inadequacy on the part of the people concerned. These guidelines adopt an alternative perspective; namely, that it is the colleges and education providers who are often ‘hard to reach’. The European Commission has identified the
main barriers to educational participation as being:

1. **Policy-related**
2. **Informational** (i.e. level of access to good and timely information)
3. **Provider-related** (entry requirements, cost, level of learning support, delivery methods, nature of learning outcomes etc)
4. **Situational** (the cultural value attached to education, the extent to which the life situation of the family and social environment of the adult supports participation)
5. **Dispositional** (the self-esteem and self-confidence of the adult as a learner, often linked to failure in previous educational experiences)

These guidelines have particular resonance in relation to 3, 4 and 5 above. They specifically recognise the ‘situational’ barriers, i.e. the significant mismatch of cultures between education provider organisations and some potential learners. Outreach is a key strategy that can be used to overcome these barriers until learners have developed the confidence and capacity to succeed and experience the ‘wider benefits of learning’ that contribute positively to the well-being of individuals and ‘quality of life’ of a society.

Outreach is essential to enable equality of access and participation for groups and individuals who do not usually take part in education and learning. Statistical information from the Irish Labour Force Survey illuminates the situation further. The average percentage of the population aged 25-64, participating in education and training in the EU in 2006 was 9.6%. The figure for Ireland at this time was only 7.5%. Both figures are considerably below the EU Benchmark 2010 figure of 12.5%.

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<th>Percentage of Adults (25-65 yrs) in Education and Training, 2006</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU Average</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU Benchmark 2010</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
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Within these broad statistical parameters, specific target groups e.g. those with disabilities, Travellers, homeless people, substance mis-users, single-parents and migrant workers, fare even less well in terms of participation. Ireland also ranks poorly in relation to levels of adult literacy and early school leaving. The OECD International Adult Literacy Survey⁸ found that about 25% of the Irish population, some half a million people, had literacy

problems. The survey showed that early school leavers, older adults and the unemployed were most at risk of literacy difficulties. Currently only approximately 8% of the potential cohort are engaged in learning.

Recent research and policy documents also highlight the very low participation of men in adult and community education in Ireland.9

**What are the challenges of Outreach?**

Of the three (previously mentioned) strands of development activity, the physical re-location of educational provision (Strand 2) may involve time, effort and resources but is usually manageable. The other two strands of activity, which centre around engaging learners (Strand 1) and, adaptation/design of provision (Strand 3) are more challenging.

The challenge in engagement is to find appropriate and effective ways of communicating with potential learners, to enable them to have their voice heard and in turn enable providers to respond. It is time-consuming, skilled work which involves building relationships and establishing trust; “this process...goes far beyond advertising or communicating opportunities for participation ...however appropriate that participation might be. Prior experience with education has invariably been more negative than positive, and only the involvement of participants in articulating their own needs and possibilities can hope to build the necessary confidence for moving forward”.10

Adapting and tailoring provision is also challenging. Often it involves working with community and other partners to develop new and more appropriate educational responses to identified needs. Irish policy has consistently advocated an ‘integrated services’ approach to tackling educational disadvantage and promoting social inclusion, but despite this endorsement, effective partnership-working is difficult to realise in practice11. It is particularly important to avoid a ‘tokenistic’ approach to the involvement of other partners. The Educational Equality Initiative12 suggests that this can be avoided “if trust has been established and partners have clarified and mutually recognised their respective roles and strengths in responding to needs”.

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11 Some tools to support effective partnership working can be found in Clare Lifelong Learning Network’s Partnership Toolkit. See clarelearningnetwork.org
Section 2: The Guides

This section includes five guides, offering specific and practical suggestions in relation to selected thematic areas. They are:

Guide 1: How to set up and build Outreach Teams
Guide 2: How to get started in Outreach work
Guide 3: How to get learners interested and involved
Guide 4: How to make the learning experience enjoyable
Guide 5: How to help learners move on

Each guide includes:

- A brief Introduction to the topic under consideration
- Top Tips of the most important pointers and advice, as identified during research and consultation for these guidelines
- Some Pitfalls, or things to avoid
- A case study to help illustrate some element of good practice in the specific area under discussion.

While each guide is designed to have value in its own right, they work best if viewed in sequence. Together they form a potential blueprint for the outreach process.
Guide 1: How to set up and build Outreach Teams?

By definition, outreach work involves moving educational staff and services out of the ‘comfort zone’ of colleges and institutions. Sounds fine, but if that leads to people working alone or in isolation from colleagues, it can be lonely and difficult work. One way of ensuring this doesn’t happen is through working in teams. Role titles within the educational team can vary from one organisation to another, depending on the size and scope of the organisation, but the key roles are management, outreach/initial contact activity, tutoring and guidance/counselling. The following table gives a break-down of the key roles and functions of the educational team involved in outreach work:

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<th>Role</th>
<th>Functions</th>
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<td>Programme Co-ordinators/Managers</td>
<td>• Managing programme planning, budgeting, staffing, resourcing, evaluation etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Education Co-ordinators</td>
<td>• Identifying local learning needs, supporting local planning, liaising with learners &amp; providers, organising venues, schedules etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutors</td>
<td>• Designing and delivering educational initiatives, assessing/supporting learners, developing materials etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance Counsellors</td>
<td>• Listening to learners, assessing, advising, advocating, informing, referring, counselling, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach/Initial Contact Workers</td>
<td>• Listening to learners, informing, engaging, advocating, supporting, etc.</td>
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In addition to the team of educational personnel, and in the interest of developing an ‘integrated services approach’, it is important to work in partnership with a second set of people. These are the frontline workers, from a range of agencies and non-governmental organisations e.g. personnel from the fields of Health, Community Development and Social or Employment Services. The formal setting up of a network with these people can be useful both in terms of avoiding duplication of effort and for the purposes of communication and support.
Top Tips

• Be aware that outreach work demands a wider and more complex range of skills than those needed for work in traditional educational settings. Recruiting educational personnel with the right mix of skills and experience, as well as with the right attitude, is crucial to the success of the outreach work. Attributes like resilience, resourcefulness, adaptability and respectfulness are vital, as are skills of communication, organisation and networking. What is needed is a team-worker who is able to work alone; someone who is assertive but non judgemental and who has local credibility.

• Remember that the support needs of staff can vary from person to person. Some people may simply need access to a desk or a phone, while others will have significant training needs. Events which bring everyone together (tutors, support workers, administrators and managers) need to be organised on a regular basis despite the logistical difficulties.

Some Pitfalls

• Expecting staff to participate in training or attend meetings in their ‘own time’. While some staff in community or outreach settings have full-time employment contracts, many are employed on a part-time or occasional basis. Clear and transparent systems need to be in place to ensure that these staff avail of training and support activities as part of their work.

• Assuming that communication with staff in outreach settings is easy. It is important to adopt a multi-layered approach to communicating with staff, from the technological tools such as email, websites, blogs to other methods such as newsletters, meetings, visits to class settings. In many cases a mix of all of these will be needed. A local contact is also an important link in the communication chain.

Case Study 1: Co Donegal VEC: Building the team in Co Donegal VEC’s Community Education Support Programme

Co Donegal VEC’s Adult Education Service (AES) has developed its Community Education Support Programme (CESP) since 1999. Managed by the Community Education Facilitator (CEF), it provides financial and practical support as well as training and networking opportunities for organizing groups and locally-based tutors. The CESP also directly organizes the delivery of a small number of special-interest pilot programmes and a larger number of community-based BTEI programmes.
A conscious decision was taken to name the programme as a support programme: this is based on the principle of community education being rooted in and organized by and for community groups, with the VEC primarily in a supporting role.

This Case Study outlines some of the key areas of activity involved in setting up and/or supporting the community education teams which organize and deliver programmes and activities linked to the CESP.

The VEC’s Internal Team
This group is made up of the AEO, the CEF, the Community Education Support Worker (CESW) and the Administrator.

As in many VECs, the CESP was initiated and developed by the AEO initially; this work consisted of making contact with and visiting as many community groups as possible, with a view to the groups delivering locally based education programmes of their own choosing. Following the appointment of CEFs in 2003, there were opportunities for further development – more contact with local groups, leading to training and networking activities. The introduction of BTEI in 2003 and subsequent delivery of community-based (as well as centre-based) programmes identified the need for an additional support for groups and tutors and a Community Education Support Worker was appointed in 2004.

The CESP team links internally with other members of the Adult Education Service (AES) e.g. Literacy Organizers, BTEI Co-coordinator etc. This communication is increasingly seen as vital to the success of the programme and needs to be further developed.

External Community Education Team
The CEF and the CESW work directly with community groups who wish to provide educational opportunities for people in their locality (e.g. Family Resource Centres, Community Development Projects) or with smaller groups who are interested in doing something for themselves only (e.g. women’s groups, special interest groups). The community sector in Co Donegal is very active and capacity-building work has been taking place for many years, supported primarily by the Peace programmes, IFI and Interreg.

Significant amounts of time are invested in meeting with these groups and establishing relationships with them, to find out what they want to do and to work out the role they will have in providing courses in their area. The groups identify the programme or activity they would like to engage in; recruit participants and tutors; organize venue, refreshments and other practical details; deal with VEC administration. The level of support provided by the VEC will depend on the capacity of the community group.

Relationships have also been established with other agencies and organizations involved in community-based education provision, such as...
DSFA, Údarás na Gaeltachta, HSE (North West), Donegal Sports Partnership and Second Chance Education Project for Women. A number of initiatives have taken place involving inter-agency and community partnerships.

Both the AEO and the CEF participate on many committees and advisory groups related to the work of both community groups and agencies, which helps to facilitate communication and understanding of each others' work.

**Community Education Team-building activities which have been supported by CESP Tutor training course**

As the CESP expanded, a need was identified to provide training opportunities for tutors to equip them to be effective adult educators, as well as being proficient in their specific subject area. Many tutors active in community-based provision have not had formal training in programme planning and delivery to adult students and feedback from participants, organizing groups and tutors themselves identified this as a need.

The VEC’s AES has delivered the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) ‘Introductory Certificate in Practical Teaching Skills for Adult Tutors’ course annually since 2004. Participants on this part-time course acquire the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary in their role as adult education tutors.

Participants for the WIT course come from across all programmes in the AES, including Community Education, YOUTHREACH, Adult Literacy and the Back to Education Initiative. They are selected on the basis that they have some previous experience in teaching adults in the informal sector but no formal teaching qualification. On completion of the course, evaluations show that participants have increased confidence in their ability to deliver courses to adults and that support networks are established among participants. This results in more positive experiences for adult students across programmes provided directly by the VEC and by those offered by community groups.

This comment by a successful graduate from the course shows why it is worthwhile:

“I had been teaching crafts for two years part-time, but had no official credits in teaching. I learnt on a more structured basis how to be prepared for teaching i.e. to have computer pre-prepared notes on instructions for my pupils. I also got different ideas on how to use computer technology to assist me in my teaching. Some of these ideas would have been to take photographs when away on field trips as in The Birmingham Festival of Quilts and to have an evening in the computer suite in my centre to share these ideas with my pupils.”

Other training opportunities offered to community-based tutors in 2007 have included training in FETAC Policies and Procedures and training in specific subject areas.
The AES is investigating further courses in the teaching of adults with a view to offering a progression route to participants who have successfully completed the WIT course. The CESP is currently leading on a research project on community education practice in the county; initial findings would suggest the need for the development and delivery of training programmes for tutors in facilitation skills and in social justice models of education.

Network opportunities

The CESP organizes an annual theme-based seminar for community education providers and tutors to facilitate networking and understanding of community-education principles and practice. Themes have included active citizenship, the importance of non-formal approaches in engaging adults and the links between community development and community education. Additional supports include networking coffee mornings (area-based), regular telephone contact, resource rooms and newsletters for tutors and providers.

Proposed initiatives in 2008 include the establishment of a “buddy” system for new tutors.

All of these networking and training supports are crucial in the building and maintenance of a community education team which feels acknowledged and valued.
Guide 2: How to get organized for Outreach Work

Having made the decision to move educational programmes, support services and staff out of main centres or institutions into locally-based settings, further consideration needs to be given, particularly by managers, to the approach to be adopted, the people who have an interest in the work, the resources available and the specific initiatives that are appropriate to deliver. The most important thing is to avoid rushing in with a ‘quick fix’ solution, just to get something up and running. This approach may seem attractive at first, but may not be sustainable in the long-term.

Top Tips

• Before starting, develop a profile of the area. Maybe courses are already underway, or have recently been delivered in the locality. If so, find out about the course content, the target group, and whether they were successful or not. It is also essential to get out a map of the area and gather all relevant geographical, socio-economic and demographic information as this is critical to the design of any new locally-based educational initiative.

• Take the time to engage with and listen to as many local people as possible. Many of these will be potential future learners so it is important to get a full sense of their priorities. Be sure to consult widely and get a range of views and opinions before making the decision to start any programme or initiative.

• Establish links with key people who have local knowledge and are in touch with the potential learners on the ground. These people are sometimes referred to as ‘gatekeepers’ because they can open doors and enable things to get going, or, at worst, can block access. Work closely with them and ensure that they are partners in the outreach process. It may also be necessary to provide supports and training to facilitate them in their particular roles within communities. Often, other partners such as Local Development Agencies\(^\text{13}\) are well placed to do this capacity-building work.

• Be clear about the target group for a specific programme and initiative and take advice on the best way to market and promote it. The circumstances, interests, motivation and learning needs of the people you are trying to reach should be the primary driver of your plan and will determine who your partners are.

• Establish formal working relationships with other education and training providers and develop appropriate networking structures (inclusive of

\(^\text{13}\) Partnership Companies, Community Development Projects, Leader Programmes etc)
both agency and community partners) to enable regular and effective communication and co-operation. Make sure everyone in the network is clear about their remit and responsibility in order to prevent duplication and promote co-ordination and integration.

- Develop a plan, and be organized in advance in relation to all the practicalities such as tutors, venues, timing, costs and supports. The plan, which should be drawn up in co-operation with and agreed by all the relevant partners, must be flexible enough to accommodate changing and unforeseen issues and needs.

Some Pitfalls

- Using a pre-packaged plan. Just because something worked in one area, does not mean it will travel well. Flexible and ‘tailored’ approaches are all important.

- Working in isolation to develop the plan. One person can come up with great ideas but unless they are accepted and shared by other partners they are unlikely to lead to positive outcomes. Consultation, partnership-working and integration are critical at the initial stage. The most likely outcome of isolated planning is an empty room on the first night of the course.

Case Study 2: South Tipperary VEC: Consulting with Communities about Outreach

**Beginnings – building up personal contact with the community**

In spring 2005, the South Tipperary VEC Adult Education Team, under the direction of the AEO, decided to target areas for outreach provision. A simple way of initiating this was to enlarge a map of the area and put in coloured stickers to show where activity was currently taking place. This exercise was done by the AEO, the BTEI Co-ordinator and Community Education Facilitator (CEF) and was found to be a good visual way of identifying need.

At this time, it was noted that there was no Adult Education activity in Newcastle, a village situated at the foothills of the Knockmealdown Mountains, approximately 12 miles from Clonmel. The village has two shops, one pub and a church. Most locals work in farming, although recent housing initiatives have brought in young families to the area. Like many rural villages located on county borders, services here are scarce. It was agreed that the BTEI Co-ordinator and CEF would organise a meeting in the local
community hall in the village. This was a casual meeting, advertised through the community notes of the local newspapers. Links were also made with local representatives and community leaders.

About 25 people came on this night and the BTEI Co-ordinator and CEF introduced themselves and explained about the VEC Adult Education Services. This meeting was held in the local community hall which had few facilities. Members of the community made tea and scones and the meeting was kept very informal. This initial face-to-face contact with the community was vital in building up confidence and for putting a friendly face to the VEC. Requests were made for Adult Education courses in Computers, Childcare, and the Irish language.

**Adult Education Activity**

As a result of this initial bridge-building meeting, two FETAC Level Four modules were started in ‘Caring for Children’ and ‘Child Development & Play’. 18 women took part and the course was funded through the Back to Education Initiative. It commenced in April 2005 with learners eventually progressing on to complete FETAC Level Five. The group are working towards finishing a complete FETAC Certificate in spring 2008. A Partnership with the local Naíonra and County Childcare Committee was also established and this has worked well.

A further course in Basic Computers was set up by the CEF using the computer room in Newcastle National School. This was the only place where computers were available locally. The course started with ten participants and focused on Basic Computer Skills. The venue wasn’t the most suitable as it was a cold time of year and during school holidays, the heating system was switched off. Caretaking also needed to be arranged. These are the practical considerations that all providers need to consider and they highlight the importance of adequate resources in encouraging adults to return to education.

After these courses, the local residents saw the need for dedicated premises for Adult Education for the community as a whole. This prompted community members to engage in talks with local Councillors and apply for funding for a Community House.

**The Present Situation**

As a result of these early discussions and initiatives a Community House has now opened in Newcastle and it is a hive of activity in both mornings and evenings. The local residents have a purpose-built Computer Room and a lovely warm, inviting house where they can participate in Adult Education programmes. Great links have been established, and meetings have taken place over the past months to chat to the locals and prepare a plan of Adult Education for the coming year. This plan includes Basic Computers and Pre-ECDL through BTEI and Conversational Irish, Sewing & Crochet and Cookery.
through the Community Education Programme. Altogether, approximately 100 people will be involved in these programmes running in mornings and evenings.

This project has been a great success for the people and community of Newcastle. South Tipperary VEC was delighted to have been involved from the very beginning and look forward to ongoing involvement.
Guide 3: How to get learners interested and involved

Now that the initial talking and planning is done, it is time to put the plan into action. The next task is to get potential learners interested and involved. Without them the plan is redundant. The task of engaging and recruiting learners is a daunting one and often the biggest challenge for education providers. The programme has to be ‘packaged’ in a way that is acceptable to learners. Many of those who would benefit from learning have had previous negative experiences of education, and as a result are reluctant to get involved again. Talking to learners and designing the learning around their needs is vital. This intensive, informal work is sometimes referred to as ‘pre-development’. Never underestimate the time and quality of effort needed, at this early phase, to get learners into learning. If the approach used doesn’t fit the bill there will be lots of empty chairs.

Top Tips

- Keep the initial approach informal and make personal contact with individuals. Call to people's houses, talk to them in the streets or the shopping centre, hold coffee mornings, open days and visit existing clubs and groups. Let people see the person behind the learning initiative and word will soon spread if the face is a friendly one. Flyers and leaflets alone will not be enough to get people through the doors.

- Ease people into the learning process gradually, getting to know their needs, goals and circumstances. ‘Pre-development work’ is the broad term often used to describe the range of ways used to inform and prepare adults for returning to learning. These approaches and activities can include pre-entry guidance, taster courses, meetings, presentations and induction sessions but must begin with face-to-face contact with individuals. The value of pre-development activity is often under-estimated but it is crucial to the success of any adult learning programme or initiative. The amount of time needed will vary from group to group and from individual to individual.

- Focus on personal development. When people have had poor previous experiences of learning their confidence can be low and social skills under-developed. Time needs to be given in ‘safe’ settings to work on these areas and boost people’s self-esteem. This can be done through any programme where the learning is relaxed and informal.

- Offer taster courses. Short sessions don’t place too many demands on people and give them a chance to get a flavour of learning and make further choices. Remember, people are often put off by having to sign up to something for a long period of time, especially if they have no idea what it involves.
• Be open, clear and honest in communicating from the beginning. This can short-circuit problems before they arise. Provide people with useful information about the learning programme and any requirements, benefits or costs that might be incurred. These are the practical things that will be of immediate concern to potential adult learners.

• Support learners right from the very beginning by any means possible. Starting something new, in an unfamiliar place with people you don’t know can be intimidating. Involve other partners as appropriate in providing a range of learning supports including guidance, childcare, materials and transport assistance. Remember too that specific groups will have specific needs; conducting good initial assessments can give information on these e.g. a group of lone parents may need childcare provision, foreign nationals may need language support and those with disabilities may need assistive technologies.

• Be aware of literacy learning needs. Many people will not immediately admit that they have a reading or writing difficulty and may even actively try to conceal it. Promote the availability of literacy support to all in an open, ‘matter of fact’ way and encourage and refer learners who express an interest in accessing this support.

• Highlight the value of learning, all of the possibilities it offers and the doors it can open. Emphasise the difference between adult learning and school. Make the case for accreditation and explain that working towards formal recognition of effort in learning gives reward for achievement and is useful for progression.

Some Pitfalls

• Expecting results after the first meeting. It takes time and serious effort to build relationships and gain trust. Keep trying, don’t give up!

• Not putting the learner first. Use the contacts and knowledge gained through networking and partnership to point people in the direction of appropriate learning and development options such as enterprise support, mature student grants and work training programmes.

CASE STUDY 3: Killucan Care Ltd. (BTEI Community Strand):
Getting learners involved and keeping them interested.

Located in Co. Westmeath, Killucan is a rural area with poor transport links to the County town Mullingar. Killucan Care Ltd., provide a BTEI programme in a local Community Centre. The atmosphere they strive to achieve is one of
‘organized informality’.

The work is underpinned by ongoing consultations with the local community, BTEI learners, and other stakeholders such as the VEC, the Department of Social & Family Affairs, the Co. Childcare Committee and local Partnership Company all of which have representation on our Board of Management. The target groups for programmes vary, but many have literacy or numeracy difficulties and are lacking in self-confidence. Many people speak of their prior negative learning experiences and attribute this to their own ‘failure’ in education. Strategies adopted include:

Having induction for learners and tutors as the first step in the learning. This is a very informal session and the key theme is to establish that the learning will be delivered in ways appropriate to the adult learner. This theme is affirmed throughout the programme.

Providing an overview of what will be available on the course including options for FETAC accreditation. It is stressed that learners – not manager or tutors – will decide their subject choices, however, learners are asked to ‘try’ each subject for six sessions. After this they may opt to continue or not. Few have exercised the option of dropping out.

In-depth individual assessments are conducted. They include literacy assessments which are facilitated very informally. They help establish key areas of achievement, weaknesses and goals as well as identifying progression needs.

The timetable, pace and style of delivery is organized in response to the needs identified in the individual assessments. It can involve small group tuition, supported study time, one to one support and making referrals to other agencies relevant to the learners’ needs.

On commencement, learners are informed that they play a key role in decision making about their own learning. This happens through regular feedback sessions and making sure to follow up and implement what is possible.

Ensuring that the tutors who deliver the programme are trained in their subject area, and also that they have experience and training in the field of adult education, including adult basic education.

A small budget is allocated to the group to allow social and fun activities to be organized by learners themselves.

Some good things that learners say about their experiences:
“Friendly people, lovely, friendly, helpful Tutors and a variety of different activities”
“Being able to go back to education at an older age, meet new people and
Guide 4: How to make the learning experience enjoyable

The plan is clear, the learners and their needs have been identified, now it’s time to make sure that the learning environment is suitable and the overall experience an enjoyable and rewarding one. Education providers need to work hand-in-hand with local organisations if quality, value for money and learner satisfaction is to be guaranteed. The effective and appropriate delivery of courses is a crucial aspect, and one in which the tutor has a central role to play. It is important to remember, that even the best and most experienced tutor needs ongoing support and training. Sounds easy but its not, community-based learning is usually delivered by part-time staff who operate in many diverse locally-managed locations. This dispersed provision can make the task of systematically inducting, supporting, developing and generally communicating with personnel a very difficult task.

Top Tips

• Work with local organisations to provide an accessible, warm, welcoming and safe venue for learning. It makes all the difference. A building can be run down and in need of some renovation, but if the atmosphere is friendly, groups and individuals will thrive. However, having a room that is too small, cold or badly lit is not a good idea no matter how friendly and welcoming the people are.

• Match the tutor and the learning group appropriately. Provide a comprehensive briefing to the tutor before the programme commences. This could include information on the area, the profile of the group, the educational levels achieved and previous courses completed.

• Always remember that adult learners should be treated as equals in the learning environment. The relationship between learners and all involved in the delivery of programmes needs to be one based on mutual understanding and respect. Adult learners have a wealth of life
experiences and these experiences are very useful to draw on as sources for learning at different points. Those who return to learning are usually highly motivated and this is a huge asset that needs to be recognised and maintained throughout the learning process.

• Use creative, innovative and stimulating methods in the delivery of learning programmes and make the learning fun. Group-work is essential as are opportunities for peer learning. A wide range of resources suitable for adults is now available and these can be modified or adapted to the needs of particular learners or groups of learners. Encouraging and supporting the people to become independent lifelong learners has to be a primary goal of any outreach programme. Use of active, participative teaching and learning techniques and new technologies is especially important in achieving this goal.

• Monitor, review and evaluate the success or shortcomings of learning initiatives. The objectives and expected outcomes, as set down in the original plan, should guide the evaluation process. It is critical that monitoring and review activities are conducted in open, inclusive and participative ways, involving all the players: learners, tutors, community personnel and support workers. An agreed communication system that facilitates feedback to everyone is an essential pre-requisite for this evaluation activity. Showing positive outcomes from programmes is also vital for the credibility of course providers and for engaging the interest of new learners.

Some Pitfalls

• Using ‘off the shelf’ solutions. The content and the approach adopted for each programme must be tailored to the needs of the particular group. Times, venues, content and tutors that worked for one group will more than likely be unsuitable for another. Overall it is vital to remain open and flexible.

• Disrupting the agreed schedule of class. Cancelling classes at short notice sends out a negative message while unexpected breaks in classes can lead to loss of motivation and continuity.

• Not being adequately equipped to work with mixed ability groups. Varying levels of ability within the one class, especially in accredited programmes, can pose challenges for provider, tutor and learner. Assessing people beforehand, ensuring tutors have suitable materials, using Individual Learning Plan’s, adopting peer learning approaches and new technologies are all useful strategies.

• Giving negative messages about assessment or accreditation. Under the
National Framework of Qualifications it is now possible to offer learners recognition for their achievement no matter what level they are at. This should be a rewarding and positive experience but some tutors or organizers, often because of their own lack of understanding, can present the option of accreditation as an obstacle or problem for learners. This approach needs to be avoided, and assessment tasks tackled in simple, practical terms in order to lessen the stress involved for learners.

Case Study 4: City of Limerick VEC: Integrating technology into learning in CLVEC to make the experience more relevant and interesting

Background
In 2007, recognising that the effective and appropriate use of new technologies in learning can make learning experiences more enjoyable and support the development of independent learning skills, CLVEC began a specific initiative, with tutors from community based programmes. The work was initiated and supported by the CLVEC Community Education Facilitator and members of the Adult Education Service Development Team with expertise in Learning Technologies and Curriculum Development.

Why?
The initiative’s main purpose is to create a more vibrant, stimulating and collaborative learning environment for learners. It does this in three distinct ways:

- Providing learners and potential learners with detailed information about the wide range of learning opportunities available in Limerick City communities
- Presenting tutors with a tool to enhance the delivery of their learning programme(s) by using technology in creative, innovative and stimulating ways
- Allowing for the set up and maintenance of a web site where learners can log in, access course information (resources, websites, quizzes etc.), interact, share, and even teach others.

What was the idea?
The project involves using technology as a tool for promoting and delivering community courses. Tutors are engaged in the development and use of an online ‘Learning Management System’ (LMS), through the use of Moodle (see http://moodle.org).

All community tutors, no matter how little or much they knew about technology were invited to get involved in the initiative and to date a total of
13 are actively and enthusiastically involved. The first step was developing the online Learning Management System tailoring it to the needs of community based learners. Then the tutors were trained and provided with ongoing technical support to allow them to use the LMS to its full. Tutors have been offered in-class back-up to help them encourage and support learners to use the Learning Management System. To start with, photographs taken in class were posted online and the news and discussion fora were promoted. A self-access Learning Centre (with a bank of computers) is also available for use by learners. This is particularly important for those who do not have broadband internet access.

Outcomes of the Initiative to date
This initiative is just beginning and so it is difficult to say a lot about its long term impact. However it is possible to identify a number of key outcomes that have emerged to date;

- **Technology has been integrated into learning programmes**, where previously there was none

- Tutors have been universally positive about the initiative and all involved say that the **delivery of their learning programmes has been enhanced**

- There has been a significant improvement in the **ICT skills** of the tutors involved

- There is increased awareness among participating tutors and learners of the **relevance of technology** to their lives.

To see the fruits of the work in this initiative to date see [www.learnlocal.ie](http://www.learnlocal.ie)
Guide 5: How to help learners move on

The learning programme has come to an end. The learners are now at a position where they have to decide what to do next. At this point, the important thing is that learners are encouraged and supported to reflect on their experience and consider future options.

Personnel who are skilled in the provision of information, advice, guidance and support are critical at this stage to facilitate progression.

**Top Tips**

- Think and talk about progression in the widest sense. Progression shouldn’t be seen narrowly as a climb to the top of the academic ladder, but as a ziz-zag, approach to changing for the better. Progression is about setting the wheels of development in motion, not just academically, but in all aspects of the learner’s life, personal, emotional and social. It is about increasing awareness of existing opportunities, changing mindsets, building confidence and relationships, empowerment and not least, advancing educational levels.

- Offer guidance at the beginning, middle and end of learning programmes and involve all stakeholders in the planning of this, especially at pre-entry level. These structured opportunities for reflection and discussion on options and choices can happen in individual or group settings and are usually best provided by a skilled guidance counsellor. The role of a good tutor in providing front-line guidance is also a vital one and they will need training in relation to this.

- Celebrate achievements and reinforce positive messages as these can be the moments that make all the hard work and effort worthwhile. Encourage learners to invite family and friends to celebration events such as learner evenings or award-giving ceremonies and don’t neglect to take a photograph or send a press release to the media. Apart from the recognition for individual learners, these are like free advertisements for adult learning and its successes.

- Use contacts in other provider organisations to the full and refer learners if necessary. There are opportunities available in other organisations that will allow learners to continue to progress.

**Some Pitfalls**

- Inadequate or non-existent tracking systems. It may seem clear that learners are progressing and moving on but if there is only anecdotal evidence of this, there is no sound basis for future planning. A good database will support the collection of useful progression information for tracking purposes.
• Complacency within the learning environment. While it is essential that fun be a factor in learning, there is the possibility that, over time, the relationship between learners and other learners, or learners and their tutor can become ‘cosy’, or overly-dependent. This may result in a resistance to move beyond one’s comfort zone, and embrace new learning challenges. The process of completion and progression needs to be supported by relevant staff e.g. the Adult Guidance Service, who can address this fear of change.

Kildare VEC Case Study: Working together for the Community

Background
Over recent years, Kildare County Council set about establishing small community centres within Local Authority housing estates which could be used by the local community for the purpose of committee meetings, support groups (e.g. Mother & Toddler Group) and perhaps educational courses. Within one estate in Rathangan, the Housing Officer liaised with the BTEI Co-ordinator with a view to providing educational programmes for the community.

What went on?
An integrated consultative approach was adopted between Local Authority personnel, VEC personnel and the local community. Resulting from this consultation, the identified community needs emerged as basic education, committee skills, personal development in the form of confidence building and assertiveness. The BTEI Co-ordinator in conjunction with the Adult Literacy Organiser and the Community Education Facilitator, created an integrated pre-development programme comprising of Personal Development Courses and an Active Citizenship Course.

The outcomes of these BTEI pre-development courses on community members were:

• They learned how to take charge of their own lives
• They learned about local and national government
• They became empowered to tackle issues in their local area
• The overall number of voters in the 2007 National Election increased in the locality by 5%
• They became confident enough to move on to FETAC accredited courses under the BTEI within their local community.
Does your organisation promote a culture of equality and access? [Y N]

How to set up and build the outreach teams?
Are the roles and responsibilities of each team member clear? [Y N]
Has everyone been included? [Y N]
Are training sessions for the team planned/ongoing? [Y N]
Are specific training sessions provided for tutors? [Y N]
Is everyone working together? [Y N]
Are staff kept up-to-date regularly? [Y N]
Has the team a designated time/place to meet? [Y N]

How to get started in outreach?
Has a profile of the area been completed? [Y N]
Have the local people been talked and listened to? [Y N]
Have links been established with other service providers? [Y N]
Is there a plan in place? [Y N]
Have structures been created to allow for partnership working? [Y N]

How to get learners interested and involved?
Have a range of methods been used to promote to & make contact with learners? [Y N]
Are short taster courses on offer? [Y N]
Is information provided in an open, honest and clear way? [Y N]
Are supports in place for potential learners? [Y N]
Is learning valued?

Is everyone still trying?

**How to make the learning experience enjoyable?**

Are fun approaches encouraged?

Is the venue warm and welcoming?

Are learners opinions valued?

Are tutors carefully selected and allocated?

Are procedures for reporting, monitoring and evaluating provision in place?

Is the provision flexible?

Is a positive view of accreditation promoted and encouraged?

**How to help learners move on?**

Is progression encouraged?

Have learners met guidance personnel to discuss experience/ options?

Are learners’ achievements celebrated?

Are learners referred to other programmes and services when needed?

Is learner progress recorded and tracked?
### Glossary

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AEO</td>
<td>Adult Education Officer</td>
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<td>AES</td>
<td>Adult Education Service</td>
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<td>BTEI</td>
<td>Back to Education Initiative</td>
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<td>CEF</td>
<td>Community Education Facilitator</td>
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<td>CESP</td>
<td>Community Education Support Programme (Co. Donegal VEC)</td>
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<td>CESW</td>
<td>Community Education Support Worker (Co. Donegal VEC)</td>
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<td>CLVEC</td>
<td>City of Limerick Vocational Education Committee</td>
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<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education &amp; Science</td>
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<td>EEI</td>
<td>Educational Equality Initiative</td>
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<td>FÁS</td>
<td>Foras Áiseanna Saothair (Irish National Training &amp; Employment Authority)</td>
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<td>FETAC</td>
<td>Further Education Training and Awards Council</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communication Technology</td>
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<td>IFI</td>
<td>International Fund for Ireland</td>
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<td>LMS</td>
<td>Learning Management System</td>
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<td>NQAI</td>
<td>National Qualifications Authority of Ireland</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>VEC</td>
<td>Vocational Education Committee</td>
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References


McGivney, V., 2002. *Informal learning in the community, a trigger for change and development*. UK. NIACE.


Websites

Clare Lifelong Learning Network’s Partnership Toolkit.

http://www.clarelearningnetwork.org/clln/www/