

# NIACE Research and Development



## Key Findings



### Information and Learning Technology in Adult and Community Learning Practice

#### Abstract

The report is the result of an intensive six month research project conducted with a number of Learning and Skills Council funded Adult and Community Learning (ACL) providers. The research sought to obtain qualitative data, from both ACL managers and practitioners, on the Information and Learning Technology (ILT) practice taking place within the ACL sector. It forms part of wider research that NIACE is conducting in this field to inform strategy implementation. This research aimed to explore:

- ❖ the views and opinions of Managers and Practitioners regarding ILT and e-Learning
- ❖ the staff development and training issues associated with using ILT
- ❖ the perception of those working in ACL regarding the challenges and enablers linked to the use of ILT in mainstream ACL delivery
- ❖ the extent to which staff have suitable access to ICT equipment in their roles
- ❖ an indication of the type of information and communications (ICT) equipment being used within adult learning centres and in which curriculum areas.

Managers and practitioners from over thirty ACL providers took part in the research, conducted between September 2004 and February 2005, and the findings provide a 'snapshot' of practice.

#### Research methodology:

The team used the following methods to collect evidence:

- ❖ telephone interviews based on a structured questionnaire, one for managers and one for practitioners
- ❖ outcomes of discussions recorded at Focus Group meetings
- ❖ additional information gathered from individuals via email.

#### Key Findings

##### The main conclusions of the project are:

- ❖ Where there was awareness of the e-learning agenda, resources and mechanisms were not yet sufficiently mature within ACL to take e-learning forward.
- ❖ A lack of senior management understanding, often at levels of leadership outside the ACL providers' management structure, was considered a major barrier in progressing e-learning beyond pockets of practice.
- ❖ There were some comments on the difficulty of accessing regular funding for ILT developments, and that once funding sources were found, the amount of time taken up

with writing bids to try and access them.

- ❖ The use of IT and ICT remained predominantly within the ICT curriculum, and where learning centres were well equipped, the resources were devoted mainly to this subject area.
- ❖ Working in outreach situations added another layer of complexity with regard to infrastructure and resources in that the resources were not always owned or controlled by the tutors' employer. This made it difficult for tutors to know what was available, where it was located, how to gain access to it and how to use it.
- ❖ The non-ownership of resources also contributed to difficulties with regard to tutors a) having access to consistent IT support, b) ensuring the security of equipment, and c) logging on to computer networks and the internet.
- ❖ Systems for monitoring use of resources and good practice in e-learning within ACL provision are still in their infancy and need to be refined if progress and impact are to be evaluated.

## Recommendations

- ❖ In order to encourage senior management to 'buy in' and raise awareness and understanding of e-learning issues, a named individual within the ACL senior management team should lead on the organisation's ILT/e-learning Strategy development and implementation.
- ❖ An ACL ILT/e-Learning Strategy group or development team should be set up by each local authority ACL service and LSC directly funded organisation to oversee the implementation of ILT/e-Learning activities, which in turn could feed into the organisation's development plan, any local authority wide ILT/e-Learning Strategy initiative and into relevant regional initiatives.
- ❖ Local Learning and Skills Councils should consider having a named contact who would take a lead in ILT/e-Learning activities and initiatives within the area.
- ❖ Some aspects of the funding for adult, at least in the short-term until ILT/e-Learning is more established with ACL, should include a budget for ILT/e-Learning Developments linked to the organisation's ILT/e-Learning Strategy outcomes.
- ❖ ACL providers should be encouraged to offer staff development training in ILT/e-Learning either during paid working hours or there should be payment for the individuals to attend training if it takes place in their own time.
- ❖ There should be requirement for all newly appointed ACL tutors to become ILT/e-Learning competent within a fixed period after engagement, with the financial support of the organisation.
- ❖ An appropriate level of immediate technical support, at all the main venues used for adult learning delivery, should be agreed with providers and a clear process instigated for the reporting and repair of faulty equipment, both fixed and mobile.

## Output

- ❖ De Cicco, E. (2005) *Information and Learning Technology in Adult and Community Learning Practice*. NIACE: Leicester.

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Requests for 'Key Findings' in other formats, such as large print, are welcome. We would be pleased to consider your request.

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