

AONTAS Community Education Network - NALA Accreditation Support and Information Seminar



Date: Wednesday 22nd June

Time: 10.00am – 2.00pm

Venue: Carmelite Community Centre, 56 Aungier St. Dublin 2



Niamh O' Reilly | Head of Membership Services
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Summary

The AONTAS - NALA support seminar was developed in response to the demand for practical examples of how the FETAC level 3 validation process works and how NALA's [distance learning service](#) can be incorporated into community education provision. John Stewart, National Adult Literacy Co-ordinator, shared his experience of the FETAC level 3 validation process which NALA undertook for the online distance learning Write On 3 programme. By integrating information about the distance learning service with practical information on how the validation process was approached, John provided a clear, practical overview of how community education groups can approach validation. Discussion groups focused on any outstanding questions, a facilitated feedback session enabled participants to share their knowledge and experience whilst John provided further clarification if required. The possibility of sharing programmes between community education organisations was proposed and a list of available and sought programmes was compiled (see page 5). For a list of FETAC approved validated programmes for sharing please see appendix 1. Finally, Joan Butler, Tutor Co-ordinator, NALA Distance Learning Service, gave a detailed input on how organisations can use the online distance learning service (www.writeon.ie) as part of their own education provision. By providing a blended learning approach learners can be supported by their community education organisation whilst working at their own pace at home. The added advantage of integrating this service into community education provision is that when learners successfully meet the requirements online, NALA will take care of the accreditation process, thus allowing groups to support accredited learning at FETAC level 2 and 3.

Introduction

The community education network meeting is the only space that draws together community education groups, from various backgrounds at national level. After almost 5 years of development the CEN focuses its work on a number of themed areas:

- Community of Practice: supporting community education groups in evaluating outcomes
- Community of Educators: how the continuous professional development of educators can be facilitated
- Community of Support: by facilitating a space and inviting experts to address key issues, e.g. FETAC issue
- Community of Advocacy: by building the capacity of community education groups to use existing lobbying tools and engage in advocacy work.
- Community of Reflection: creating activities and events for facilitating discussion on community education

As part of the *community of support* area of the work AONTAS sought to create a support seminar for CEN members who were experiencing difficulty with the FETAC validation process in order to:

- Gain support regarding the FETAC level 3 validation process by learning from a practical example of the process
- Learn about how you can use www.writeon.ie, FETAC level 2 & 3 accredited distance learning courses
- Share programmes with other community education providers, help each other in developing your FETAC level 3 programmes.

Content of the day

Niamh O'Reilly presented a short overview of the work of the [CEN](#) and a background to the day. John Stewart from NALA gave a background to the context of adult literacy in Ireland and the rationale for developing the online distance learning service www.writeon.ie. This service addresses some of the issues faced by learners including:

- **Stigma** reduced as service is private and confidential
- **Not like traditional schools** – no building, no desks, self-directed learning, personalised curriculum
- **Childcare less of an issue** – study at own time, after children are in bed
- **No transport** required
- Study at **own time** and **at own pace**
- **Free**
- **Expands capacity** for those in existing services

John charted the process for validating their FETAC level 3 programmes:

3M0874: Level 3 Certificate in General Learning

3M0935: Level 3 Certificate in Employability Skills

3M0877: Level 3 Certificate in Information and Communication Technologies

By starting with their learners' profile they developed programmes around their needs therefore creating programme objectives that were wider than the award standards. This approach allowed the criteria of the programme content to match the FETAC award specification whilst maintaining its learner centred approach. Building on their experience of level 2 programmes NALA involved 3-4 key staff in the process from identifying learner needs, programme aims, objectives, mode of delivery and methodologies which were then matched to the award requirements. The method for assessment was developed in keeping with what success would look like after the learning experience. The validation process took 2 months from submission to validation and involved one request for further information, involving 4 points.

During the course of John's input there were a number of questions posed by participants and explanations were provided, mainly about the validation process and the write on distance learning service, all of which were addressed by John and Joan Butler (in the later session).

Discussion session 1

The discussion session was designed as a place for reflection, discussion and clarification around the FETAC level 3 validation process by drawing on participants' experience and knowledge on the topic. Rather than being a definitive account of the discussion the following points encapsulate some of the areas of discussion.



Questions/comments posed

Answers by group

The number of hours assigned to a minor award (contact and independent learning) appears very long

If you put a case for the number of hours you propose for each (contact and independent) it will be assessed. It is a range rather than a rigid requirement.

How much detail is required for the application, e.g. indicative context?

It was suggested that 1-2 pages per question was sufficient.

Are there templates for filling out FETAC forms on the website? FETAC forms – guidelines book. Common Award System - do we did it?

NALA designed the programme first, then filled in the FETAC forms.

Yes, if you are intending on providing FETAC level 3 awards (major or minor) you must have your programme validated first.

I only want to provide two minor awards, do I still have to go through the validation process?

Yes you do. You will still have to get these programmes validated but you should be able to do it through the express validation service.

How do you assess standards?

For example – you could produce a book and use that as the assessment for writing. Have a reading night – people read something in front of people, this is demonstrating the outcome that they can read.

Other comments:

The use of NALA's distance learning programme was recommended by a number of participants as it has proved successful for the groups' learners and as a means to offer accredited learning. The sharing of existing programmes was strongly recommended for DES funded groups especially those which were developed by www.FESS.ie: Using Information and Communication Technologies in Everyday Life (Level 3 Certificate General Learning 3M0874) and Learning in Everyday Life (Level 3 Certificate ICT Skills 3M0877). Further information is available from the [FETAC website](http://www.fetac.ie).

Discussion session 2

Participants were asked to consider if they would like to 1) offer to share validated programmes with other members of the CEN as a support to their work and 2) if there are any programmes they are interested in obtaining, the outcomes are detailed in table 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1: Programmes that CEN members can discuss regarding the possibility for sharing

NAME OF PROGRAMME	ORGANISATION
1. Most level 3 FETAC Modules	afallon@westcd.ie
2. Variety of FETAC level 5	afallon@westcd.ie
3. Minor Health and Fitness (Not validated yet)	Focus Ireland
4. Making new links to employment	Longford Women's Link
5. Life Skills to work Skills (employability skills)	Warrenmount CEN Centre
6. We will be using the FESS but willing to talk to people	D8 Community Education Centre
7. FETAC communications, maths, IT, cooking	TARGET

Table 2: Programmes that participants would like to obtain in order to assist in developing their own programme

NAME OF PROGRAMME	NAME & ORGANISATION
1. Care of the Elderly FETAC level 5	afallon@westcd.ie
2. Minor Awards: art & design, craft, food & nutrition, horticulture, all ICT courses, career preparation	Niamh Feeney, FOCUS Ireland
3. Childcare FETAC level 3 & 4	Yvonne McCarthy, HACE
4. Maths, communications, IT, P&I skills, office procedures, food & nutrition	Samantha McCarthy, Clare Local Development Company
5. Start your own business FETAC Level 3 & 4	Terenure Enterprise Centre
6. Does anybody have material/ experience of training staff up to level 8 IT?	Marian Flannery, Women of the North West
7. Horticulture	An Cosan, Jobstown, Tallaght
8. Personal effectiveness, yoga	St Dominic's Community Response Project
9. Aspirational - languages, arts & crafts, food production & processing, holistic therapies	TARGET
10. FETAC Level 5 & 6 childcare, Level 5 healthcare support	Killucan Care Ltd, Westmeath
11. Computer literacy – for validation	South West Wexford CDP

NALA Distance Learning Service www.writeon.ie

Joan Butler delivered a session on the use of www.writeon.ie in a blended learning setting. Joan highlighted how use of the site can be driven by learner needs and also discussed the various ways of integrating the site into the teaching and learning process. The process of gaining accreditation through the system was outlined in stages and equally it was noted that the site can be used for learning only and not for accreditation. NALA will provide training for tutors in September, if you interested in participating please contact Joan directly. For community education providers the benefit of supporting your learners to use the www.writeon.ie:

- **Accredited learning** learners who use the online service for blended learning can obtain FETAC accreditation directly from NALA
- **It support learners** to learn independently at home
- **It enables** community education groups to provided a blended learning option

Discussion

This seminar sought to create a space for shared learning and experience around the FETAC validation process, by creating discussion and greater links amongst community education organisations. The need for such a seminar stemmed from the number of issues which CEN members raised regarding the validation process. Initially a letter was drawn up incorporating the views of the CEN which FETAC received, a response to this letter is available in appendix 2. In addressing both the needs of CEN members and in response to the FETAC letter a number of actions have been proposed for the CEN which AONTAS will support in their development:

Actions for CEN members to take, please consider and answer:

A repository of validated programmes that CEN members can share with other organisations will be set up

Groups who offered to share their FETAC validated programmes (or in progress) will be put into a database. The titles of the programmes will be shared with the CEN and if other groups are creating a similar programme they will make contact with the group to discuss how they will develop a similar programme for their learners. The groups will then use the appropriate FETAC validation process for this programme. [Organisations could also explore creating a shared programme in this regard.](#)

To view the list of programmes available [click here](#)

To add your programme to the list for sharing, fill in the short online [form here](#)

If you do not see the programme you are interested in please add a suggested programme to the list.

A pool of volunteer authenticators for use by CEN members will be established

One of the issues raised by CEN members was the cost of the external authenticator. The CEN will develop a pool of volunteer FETAC registered authenticators from within the network. It would be expected that groups would act in a reciprocal and fair manner by authenticating other groups voluntarily.

Are you a FETAC registered authenticator? If so, are you interested in acting as a volunteer capacity? Please complete the [form here](#).

This report aims to give an overview of the day, errors in information may have occurred, outstanding questions were posed to FETAC and we will reply with answers as soon as they are available.

Appendix 1

Sharing Approved Programm

If you are a DES funded community and voluntary organisation you may be able to share the following approved programmes for sharing. You will then need to get the programme validated for your centre – read more about it from the FETAC website [here](#).

Programme Title	Awards	Approved for Sharing with:
Using Information and Communication Technologies in Everyday Life	Level 3 Certificate General Learning 3M0874	All VEC Providers Special Schools Community/Comprehensive Schools Higher Education Institutes Voluntary Secondary Schools Department of Education and Skills funded Community and Voluntary Organisations and Youth Services
Learning in Everyday Life	Level 3 Certificate ICT Skills 3M0877	All VEC Providers Special Schools Community/Comprehensive Schools Higher Education Institutes Voluntary Secondary Schools Department of Education and Skills funded Community and Voluntary Organisations and Youth Services

Appendix 2 FETAC response from CEN letter

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Dublin 6
June 2011

Dear Niamh

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the Community Education Network. FETAC is aware and appreciative of the unique contribution community education makes nationally. You raise a number of points, which I attempt to address below.

Regarding the high demand on time and cost, FETACs goal is to ensure that learners enjoy the highest quality of service that can be aspired to nationally. This does impact administratively and structurally and a great deal of care is taken to ensure that registered providers have the professional capacity to meet the requirements. That said, requirements are not derived in a vacuum but are balanced with a pragmatic approach to what is feasible. Requirements are also the subject of national consultation.

Providers have taken different approaches to ensuring that their service meets the requirements. In many instances, community education providers have agreed administrative supports and relationships with VECs. This appears to work well. There are other options, including that the Network would act effectively as a co-ordinator, but this is a matter for the sector itself to work through. There are also national supports, such as the Further Education Support Service, who make a wide range of resources available, including validated programmes for sharing nationally. Validating a shared programme is much less labour intensive and is essential to capture the unique aspects of community education vis a vis other forms of educational opportunity.

Cost of external authentication will in effect be part of the DES funding; the matter becomes how the local provider will use the funding allocated. However, again there are a range of options available, including pro-bono exchanges with other like providers, or linking with VEC services, once the Authenticator is on the FETAC Register.

With regard to the validation documentation; specific feedback on areas perceived as unclear are welcome. The Further Education Support Service are promoted nationally by FETAC and will meet with groups of providers to enable meeting the requirements. Perhaps it would be a good idea to invite them to do a session for the Network, if this has not already happened. It is very likely that similar issues arise for all. Alternately, FETAC may be able to respond to such an invitation as has been done previously.

The Common Awards system has a number of unique characteristics; standards are broadly expressed as outcomes, enabling a diverse range of programmes. Awards each have a credit value assigned which provides for the accumulation of credit over time, at a pace that suits the learner.

For more information on common awards view:

[http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/Common Awards System for FET leaflet.pdf](http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/Common_Awards_System_for_FET_leaflet.pdf)

The list of new awards available to date and the associated former award can be viewed on:

[http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/Managing Transition to the CAS.pdf](http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/Managing_Transition_to_the_CAS.pdf)

It is planned to update this document at the end of June/beginning July 2011.

Regarding changes to awards, the introduction of the Common Awards System is different from previous awarding practice which had some inequities and vulnerabilities. Some locally devised awards have not been carried forward to become Common Awards. If there are particular locally devised awards that are perceived as particularly necessary but are not currently listed, please advise us and we will examine the decisions made. However it is also important to be very aware of the changes to the ways standards themselves are expressed as part of the Common Awards System. Learning outcomes are expressed neutral of delivery, without the particular flavours of specific programmes. It may be that the former locally devised module is entirely deliverable leading to newly expressed broader learning outcomes.

On duration of programmes, FETAC credits give an important indication of the appropriate duration of a programme for the 'typical learner' with needs at a particular level. In preparing for programme validation, providers have the opportunity to make the case for a duration that is appropriate for the learners they will serve. Some learners will require more time and others less. Providers must make that call themselves, and ensure that whatever duration the programme is validated for, that this enables them to meet the learners needs effectively. The duration of programmes is therefore flexible. The figures quoted in the examples cited in the letter do not make sense to us, as it would not be logically possible to jump from level 3 to level 4 in 15 hours, if the learning need was accurately diagnosed as requiring intervention at both these levels.

There is no intention to provide retrospective validation at present. Validation is a legislative requirement and is a key element in the approach to quality that underpins the FET system. Validation for a minor award or number of minors is fairly quickly achieved, provided the application is made with respect to the requirements. Similarly the range of programmes that are in fact required may be less extensive than first appears. It may be helpful to consider how many programmes in fact meet different learner group needs, lead to different awards and so on. It may be that the rapid response programmes are in fact courses which may well be consistent with the broader programme already validated. The Further Education Support Service may be able to tease some of these issues out with the network.

Regarding costs of certification, the potential impact of the rise in cost to low income learners is acknowledged. Providers to some degree can mitigate this by making certification applications smartly, in other words apply for as many as is possible for a learner at a given time. In that way a component certificate might reflect 3 component awards at a cost of 20 Euro as opposed to 3 individually at a cost each of 20 Euro. The cost is set by the Minister and applies only to Levels 4 and 5. Candidates with medical cards etc are exempt in the usual way.

FETAC welcomes the reflections and recommendations of the Community Education Network, and values highly the contribution of the sector nationally. These reflections are noted. It is our hope that the Common Awards System and the approach to enhancing arrangements for quality assurance through validation among other measures, remains capable of embracing diversity and inclusion. We hope to continue working closely with you to ensure that learners you serve continue to have opportunities at a time, place and within a pedagogical perspective that works for them.

Kind regards

Andrina Wafer

Head of Access and Communications