

**Researching Online and Online Blended Learning
with Adult Literacies Learners
in Scotland**

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Executive Summary

About This Research

In 2008, Learning Connections – part of the Scottish Government – commissioned ODS Consulting to research the use of online and online blended learning with adult literacies learners in Scotland. Using ICT in adult literacies learning is one of eight priority development areas for Learning Connections. Promoting and supporting online and online blended learning forms an important part of this.

The study was to provide a clear understanding of how and when online and online blended learning approaches were used with adult literacies learners in Scotland. It will provide a baseline to allow Learning Connections to track the effectiveness of future activities.

Methodology

The research involved an online survey designed to gather a breadth of information from people working in adult literacies about the use of online or online blended learning approaches. A total of 179 survey responses were received. Responses were received from every local authority area, although the volume of responses received did vary substantially geographically. This is likely to be because some of the Adult Literacies Partnerships were more proactive in encouraging others to participate.

Then, five case study examples were developed, to explore interesting approaches to using online and online blended learning in more detail. These were selected from the survey responses, with people asked to identify examples of successful approaches to online and online blended learning and any relevant initiatives or pilots.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Terminology

There is confusion about the terminology used to describe online and online blended learning. For example, in some cases, approaches identified by adult literacies workers as successful examples of online learning actually involved simply printing off materials from the internet.

Throughout this research, we have defined 'online learning' as a learning experience using either the internet or an intranet system. This could include using websites, blogs, wikis, discussion groups, virtual learning environments and online learning courses.

Blended learning is slightly more difficult to define, and people do use it to mean different things. Often it is used simply to describe using more than one type of learning approach. In the context of ICT, it is often used to refer specifically to learning which combines online learning with other learning approaches. For clarity and consistency, throughout this research the term 'online blended learning' has been used to specifically mean a mix of online learning with other learning approaches – including face to face tutor support, email, or telephone support.

There is a need for the adult literacies field in Scotland to agree, use consistently and publicise simple definitions for both of these terms. This would help to raise awareness of the approaches and their meaning.

Current Use of Online and Online Blended Learning

Most adult literacies workers are using online or online blended learning with their learners in some way. The spectrum of online and online blended learning approaches used in Scotland includes:

- accessing resources online;
- planning learning activities;
- communicating online;
- researching online;
- activities on general websites;
- using blogs and discussion forums;
- online literacies activities and games;
- online literacies courses;
- virtual learning environments; and
- learner developed websites.

Most adult literacies workers were using approaches at the lower end of this spectrum – using online or online blended learning for communicating, researching, using general websites, blogs / discussion forums and one off activities and games. But this does not mean that these approaches are less valuable. Developing adult literacy and numeracy

skills through using general websites relevant to learners' interests was seen as an important way of connecting learning to real life activity.

There were fewer examples of providers in Scotland developing their own online literacies courses (that the learner works through on an ongoing basis within an online learning environment), virtual learning environments and learner developed websites. Some adult literacies workers had developed new online learning opportunities – including blogs and discussion forums. But generally they were accessing materials that were already available online and could be used immediately. BBC Skillswise, which includes interactive online activities, was by far the most commonly used online learning resource for adult literacies learning.

Impact of Online and Online Blended Learning

It is clear that online and online blended learning can bring many benefits for both adult literacies learners and tutors, particularly in making learning fun, accessible, flexible and encouraging more independent learning. Online and online blended learning can also help to situate learning in real life. This evidence is largely anecdotal – primarily based on the perceptions of adult literacies workers - as few online and online blended learning approaches with adult literacies learners have been evaluated.

It is important to note that there are also potentially negative impacts of online and online blended learning. Although independent learning was identified as a potential benefit, there were concerns that too much online learning could lead to isolation and a lack of interaction with tutors and other learners. Here, the importance of using a blended approach to online learning becomes apparent. The tutor-learner relationship remains critical, in agreeing the role and extent of online learning, individualising learning opportunities and supporting learners to access these.

Barriers to Using Online and Online Blended Learning

The main barriers to using online and online blended learning approaches primarily related to access to the internet, either for the learner or for the tutor. In some cases workers were facing organisational barriers to access – including lack of resources and inability to influence wider organisational priorities. Related to this, even those who did have access to the internet found that there could be practical and technical barriers to accessing the resources they needed.

Others did not use online and online blended learning approaches as they felt that there were no suitable resources or sites. Even those who did use online learning approaches mentioned that there were issues with accessing grown up resources. Many online resources are designed for children and young people, and were therefore not seen as well suited to adults. Few survey respondents were developing their own online learning resources, designed to be suitable for adults.

Gaps and Support Needs

This baseline study has found that there is not a current bank of knowledge within the adult literacies field in Scotland relating to the impact or effectiveness of online and online blended learning. It is important that as new activities develop in this area, these are monitored and evaluated effectively, and lessons learned for future activities.

There is also a need for national support to help adult literacies learners and workers to use online and online blended learning approaches effectively. Survey respondents would like to see:

- more resources relevant to adults and the workplace;
- more resources with interactive and critical feedback;
- more networking opportunities and skills development for tutors;
- regular updates on new resources; and
- a central bank of useful websites and resources along with a guide on using these.

There is a continued need for support to adult literacies staff to develop online and online blended learning approaches in Scotland, particularly in skills development and resource development, co-ordination and distribution.

1. Introduction and Methodology

1.1 About This Report

In 2008, Learning Connections – part of the Scottish Government – commissioned ODS Consulting to research the use of online and online blended learning with adult literacies learners in Scotland. The study was to provide a clear understanding of how and when online and online blended learning approaches were used with adult literacies learners in Scotland. This study will provide a baseline which will allow Learning Connections to track the effectiveness of future activities.

1.2 Study Aims

The overall aim of the study was to give a clear picture of the nature and extent of current use of online and online blended learning approaches with adult literacies learners in Scotland. Specifically, the research was to:

- identify and explore online and online blended learning opportunities available across all 32 Adult Literacies Partnerships;
- gather information on barriers and success factors for developing online and online blended learning approaches;
- explore how online learning was being used;
- identify any commercially developed online learning platforms being used in Scotland;
- gather and synthesise existing evaluation reports on the effectiveness of online and online blended learning in Scotland; and
- produce a research report on findings, and disseminate this via an ICT conference in June 2009.

Overall Learning Connections wanted the study to give an initial sense of how effective existing online learning provision was, and help to identify training and support needs for further development of online and blended learning.

1.3 Methodology

To achieve the study aims, a methodological approach was designed which aimed to gather both a breadth and depth of information about online and online blended learning in Scotland. Three stages were involved:

- **Stage One: Online Survey** – This was designed to gather a breadth of information from people working in adult literacies about the use of online or online blended learning approaches. The survey included a knowledge review to identify any existing evaluation reports on the effectiveness of online learning.
- **Stage Two: Practice Profiles** – Five case study examples were developed, to explore interesting approaches to using online and online blended learning in more detail.
- **Stage Three: Reporting** – A research report was produced setting out the study findings and conclusions.

Stage One: Online Survey

The first stage of the study involved an online survey open to everyone working in the field of adult literacies. The aim of this survey was to gather baseline information from people working in adult literacies about the way in which they use online and online blended learning approaches with literacies learners. An online survey was chosen as an effective method of getting a breadth of information from adult literacies staff across Scotland.

A relatively short scoping survey was issued, focusing on how and when adult literacies learners use online and online blended learning, and views on the effectiveness of this approach. The survey explored the following key themes:

- use of online and online blended learning;
- style of online and online blended learning being used;
- how online material is used;
- when online learning is appropriate;
- impact of online and online blended learning;
- success factors (and any barriers);
- gaps in existing provision; and
- local evaluation of activity and examples of good practice.

The survey also gathered basic information about each individual who completed the survey – including their employer and sector of adult literacies (youth work, ESOL, and so on). This allowed us to compare responses from different sectors. It also asked for contact details to enable us to follow up examples of good practice and gather any evaluation materials for the wider study.

The survey was made available online (through Survey Monkey) and people were asked to complete the survey through a range of methods:

- **Direct emails** –Direct emails with a link to the survey were sent to key contacts, including all Adult Literacies Partnerships (ALPs), thematic literacies networks, national adult learning organisations and further education providers. Over 600 direct survey emails were issued. Direct emails also asked recipients to forward the survey on to any other providers they felt would have an interest – thus ‘cascading’ the survey.
- **Learning Connections e-bulletin** – The survey was promoted through the Learning Connections e-bulletin, with a link to the survey.
- **Learning Connections website** – A link to the survey was added to the Learning Connections website.
- **Promotion at events** – The International Literacy Day Conference and Scottish Learning Festival were used to publicise the survey.

All 32 Adult Literacy and Numeracy Partnership Key Contacts were contacted, to let them know about the study and gather contact details of others involved in adult literacies provision locally. It was emphasised that the study was to gather the views of people working across different sectors and organisations.

There were some challenges with this approach. For example, some Key Contacts preferred to provide a small selection of contact details for people they thought were particularly interested in online or online blended learning, rather than a list of all local adult literacies providers.

Two weeks before the survey closed, we spoke with Adult Literacies Partnership Key Contacts in local authority areas which had low response rates. This approach was very useful in boosting the response rate. A total of 179 survey responses were received. Responses were received from every local authority area, although the volume of responses received did vary substantially geographically. This is likely to be because some of the Adult Literacies Partnerships were more proactive in encouraging others to participate.

We then reviewed the existing bank of knowledge relating to online and online blended learning in Scotland, and its use with adult literacies learners. This involved gathering research and evaluation reports identified by survey respondents.

The aim was to gather baseline information on how online and online blended learning was used in Scotland. But although the survey sought to gather examples of evaluations and research on the topic, in reality very few people were able to provide any information about the success of online and online blended learning in their area. This is likely to reflect the stage that many people are at in developing online and online blended learning activities – with many just beginning to use this approach.

Stage Two: Practice Profiles

As part of our survey of people working in the adult literacies field, we asked for examples of:

- successful approaches to online and online blended learning; and
- online or online blended learning initiatives or pilots.

72 people (40 per cent) identified approaches that they believed to be successful, and 20 people (11 per cent) identified online or online blended learning initiatives or pilots. From these, we drew together a list of 44 examples of pilot approaches or those identified as successful, which focused specifically on online or online blended learning with adult literacies learners. The remainder were ignored because they either related to wider use of ICT (not online or online blended learning) or were not related to adult literacies.

We held individual telephone interviews with people who raised interesting issues in the survey, or gave examples of good practice. This was to allow us to select five examples which were interesting and innovative. There were some examples of interesting and innovative practice in online and online blended learning. But in many cases, further exploration of the interesting examples identified by survey respondents demonstrated that:

- some approaches were no longer in operation and had not been evaluated, providing little opportunity to learn about the impact of these approaches;
- some approaches did not actually involve learning using the internet or intranet – and simply involved tutors accessing resources online and printing these off;
- some practitioners were not keen to talk about their experience of online and online blended learning, as there was no clear lead contact for taking forward online learning (or the lead contact had not been able to focus sufficient time and resources on this to feel confident talking about their experience); and
- in one case, we went to visit tutors and learners because a manager believed that they were participating in online or online blended learning. In reality, this approach was not being used.

This process allowed us to identify potential case study examples. We were able to identify seven examples which were developed into five practice profiles – one profile focused on the use of BBC Skillswise in three different areas. The practice profiles involved an in depth interview with the individual responsible for developing the approach – often an adult literacies tutor. These were held either face to face or over the telephone. We also spoke to learners in three of the areas. We spoke to tutors (and some learners) about:

- how online and online blended learning was used;
- why this approach was used and what the impetus was;
- what resources and approaches were used;
- what impact and outcomes this had for learners;
- what lessons they had learned and advice they would give to others; and
- what they planned to do next.

Stage Three: Reporting

A draft report was produced bringing together our findings and initial conclusions. It formed the basis of a discussion with the Advisory Group, and a final report was produced incorporating comments.

2. Context

2.1 Introduction

This study aims to provide baseline information on the use of online and online blended learning with adult literacies learners in Scotland. Developing adult literacies skills across Scotland is a key priority for the Scottish Government. Learning Connections is a division within the Scottish Government's Lifelong Learning Directorate, covering community learning and development. The Adult Literacies Team within Learning Connections supports the implementation of the Scottish Government's Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Learning Connections has placed a strong focus on using ICT with adult literacies learners, including supporting the development of online and online blended learning approaches across Scotland. Learning Connections is keen to continue to focus on this area in the future, and has been reviewing examples of how online learning has been developed in other places.

For example, it is particularly interested in the [LearnerWeb](#) system set up by Portland State University, and whether this type of approach would be suitable in Scotland. The LearnerWeb makes online resources available to learners seeking to improve their adult literacies skills, and other learning goals such as citizenship. It provides links to existing online resources, and provides the opportunity for communities and organisations to add their own resources to this online bank. Learners are then pointed in the direction of the most useful resources for them, based on their learning goals. The system also encourages online and offline interaction between learners and tutors. A useful summary of the system is [available online](#).

A similar system offering free online interactive resources for developing reading and writing skills has also been developed - called [USA Learns](#). Learning Connections is interested in learning from both approaches.

This chapter sets out the Scottish approach to adult literacies, and how online and online blended learning fits with this.

2.2 Defining Adult Literacies in Scotland

In Scotland, adult literacies are defined as:

"The ability to read and write and use numeracy, to handle information, to express ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners."

(Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland Report, 2001)

There are two important underlying principles in this definition. Firstly, in Scotland the term 'adult literacies' is used to cover both literacy and numeracy skills. 'Adult literacies' is preferred over 'adult literacy and numeracy' as it reflects the range of complex capabilities and skills involved.

Secondly, the Scottish approach to adult literacies is based on the social practice model, which sees adult literacies as an aspect of lifelong learning. An important principle is that learners are much more likely to develop their skills if they are relevant to their own everyday experiences. Literacy and numeracy are important to people in terms of their work, family and quality of life.

2.3 Literacies Levels in Scotland

It is very difficult to provide an accurate up to date figure of the number of adults in Scotland with low literacy levels. But there is clear evidence that low and insufficient literacy and numeracy levels are widespread in Scotland.

The [Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland \(ALNIS\) Report](#), produced by the Scottish Government in 2001, brings together a wide body of research into adult literacies in Scotland. This report was intended to provide a focus for the development of a national policy and strategy on adult literacies. It draws on the 1996 [International Adult Literacy Survey](#), which suggested that in Scotland 800,000 adults had very low literacy and numeracy skills. This is 23% of all adults in Scotland. The ALNIS Report also suggests that a further 500,000 people would define themselves as having poor or moderate literacies skills.

This research was supported by a [review published in 2004](#), which tracked a 'cohort' of people born in 1970 (and reported at regular intervals since then)¹. This research suggested that 1,500,000 adults in Scotland (37%) have literacy skills which impact on employment opportunities and life chances and 2,900,000 (71%) adults in Scotland have numeracy skills which have similar negative impacts.

In 2009, the Scottish Government is conducting a new national survey to measure adult literacy and numeracy levels, which will result in more accurate and up to date information about adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland.

2.4 Defining Online and Online Blended Learning

The terminology used to describe how ICT can support learning is sometimes confusing. A wide range of terms – including e-learning, virtual learning, online learning, web based learning and online blended learning – can be used. Definitions for these terms vary. E-learning covers any learning which involves ICT. This research relates specifically to one component of e-learning – learning which includes some component of online learning.

Throughout this research, we have defined **online learning** as a learning experience using either the internet or an intranet system. This could include using websites, blogs, wikis, discussion groups, virtual learning environments and online learning courses.

Blended learning is a slightly more difficult term to define. Often it is used simply to describe using more than one type of learning approach. It is also often used to refer specifically to learning which combines online learning with other learning approaches.

“Blended learning is a mixture of the various learning strategies and delivery methods that will optimise the learning experience of the user. Classroom training sessions, computer based training via a CD ROM, and web based training can be combined.”

(Kurtus, 2004²)

¹ 1970 British Cohort Study, Sixth Update (at age 34), Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, University of London

² Kurtus, R; Blended Learning, School for Champions, 2004

There is considerable debate about what the term blended learning means, and if it should be continued to be used given this lack of clarity. For example, Oliver and Trigwell (2005³) suggest that blended learning can be used to refer to:

- mixing e-learning (any learning using ICT) with traditional learning;
- mixing online learning specifically with face to face learning;
- mixing any type of learning media – for example speech, print, on screen;
- mixing any type of learning context – for example classroom and at home;
- mixing different learning theories; or
- mixing different learning objectives.

Clearly the term can have many different meanings, and there is no agreement about exactly what the term ‘blended learning’ means. It can have different meanings depending on the context in which it is used.

For clarity and consistency, throughout this report the term ‘**online blended learning**’ has been used to specifically mean a mix of online learning with other learning approaches – including face to face tutor support, email, or telephone support.

2.5 Online Learning and Adult Literacies in Scotland

The policy context for adult literacy in Scotland is driven by the 2001 Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland Report, and annual Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy documents. Since the publication of this report, there has been a strong focus (backed by resources) on adult literacy in Scotland. Only 15,000 learners were engaged in literacy programmes across Scotland in 2001 when the Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland Report was published. By 2006, more than 137,000 learners were supported with a target to support 200,000 learners by this year.

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland Report did highlight the important role that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could play in supporting adult literacies. It stressed that ICT could be used more effectively in adult literacies learning, and play a key role in ensuring a high quality learning experience. This includes a wide range of approaches – including mobile learning, computer based learning, online learning and using sound and video.

³ Oliver, M and Trigwell, K; Can Blended Learning Be Redeemed? E-Learning, Volume 2 (1) 2005

Learning Connections has worked to take this agenda forward across Scotland. Using ICT in adult literacies learning is one of eight priority development areas for Learning Connections. So far, this has resulted in the establishment of an ICT and adult literacies network, and a programme of ICT training, research and support. This has involved grants to enhance software and hardware capabilities in Adult Literacies Partnerships, and funding for specific innovative projects around Scotland to develop and encourage new uses of ICT with literacies learners. More recently, emphasis has been placed on promoting and supporting online and online blended learning as an important part of this.

2.5.1 Innovations in ICT and Literacies

In 2004, Learning Connections set up a project focusing on supporting [innovation in using ICT](#) in adult literacies provision. The aim was to encourage creative and effective use of ICT. Small grants of up to £6,000 were awarded to a total of 26 projects between 2004/05 to 2006/07. Some of these projects involved using online and online blended learning approaches.

In 2007/08 a slightly different approach was used. Learning Connections contracted consultants to provide support to Adult Literacies Partnerships, focusing particularly on those who had not been involved in the previous three year programme. All 32 partnerships were contacted, and the consultants discussed the support and assistance required to develop new approaches to using ICT within their local area. Small grants remained available, and a total of 22 projects in 19 areas received support. In 2004, Learning Connections also provided each Adult Literacies Partnership in Scotland with a laptop and printer – and asked for feedback on how this was used.

2.5.2 ICT Training Programme

Learning Connections has also developed a training programme to support people working in adult literacies to develop their ICT skills. This programme has involved running a series of workshops, and producing related learning materials. Seven tutor training units have been developed to enhance the ICT skills of literacies tutors, two of which relate specifically to online learning:

- [Unit 3: Using the internet in adult literacies learning](#) - covers issues such as using online templates, web quests, blogs, online games and safe internet surfing; and

- [Unit 7: Working with adult literacies learners online](#) – including how to set up a Moodle site (an Open Source virtual learning environment), converting paper based materials to online versions, using internet messenger, managing emails, etc.

2.5.3 ICT and Adult Literacies Network

Learning Connections has established an ICT and Adult Literacies Network. This is for tutors and others working in adult literacies across Scotland, who are interested in using ICT with their learners. It encourages people to share practice and experiences, as well as giving people opportunities to influence national initiatives. The network communicates through an online discussion forum – Communities of Practice in Adult Literacies (CoPAL) - and holds two meetings per year.

2.5.4 Online Learning Support Programme

From October 2008 to March 2009, Learning Connections has employed an ICT consultant to provide support to adult literacies practitioners with online and online blended learning (on a basis of three days a week).

This has been coupled with a support fund (as part of the wider ICT and Literacies Support Fund) to provide funding for activities arising from the support provided. Grants of up to £2,000 were available to support learning in an online environment. The fund focused on supporting the set up of Virtual Learning Environments, websites with online learning materials, converting or developing resources suitable for online learning, software and hardware purchase related to online learning, and training tutors in online and online blended learning activity. Thirteen grants were given to develop various online learning approaches, including the setting up of Moodle Virtual Learning Environments, the use of Wordpress software to set up online learning sites, and the use of partnership websites for more targeted adult literacies learning. These are still at the early stages of development.

2.5.5 Adult Literacies Online

Finally, Learning Connections has also developed [Adult Literacies Online](#). This website provides a bank of useful resources and encourages tutors to share their experience and expertise. It also includes links to useful online resources for use with adult literacies learners. Practitioners are able to submit relevant materials to share with others.

2.6 Summary

- This study aims to provide baseline information on the use of online and online blended learning with adult literacies learners in Scotland.
- It is very difficult to provide an accurate up to date figure of the number of adults in Scotland with issues with literacy and / or numeracy. But there is clear evidence that low and insufficient literacy and numeracy levels are widespread in Scotland.
- Research suggests that 37 per cent of all adults in Scotland may have literacy skills which impact on employment opportunities and life chances and 71 per cent may have numeracy skills which have similar negative impacts.
- The terminology used to describe how ICT can be used to support learning can be confusing. A wide range of terms – including e-learning, virtual learning, online learning, web based learning and online blended learning – can be used.
- Throughout this research, we have defined online learning as a learning experience using either the internet or an intranet system. This could include using websites, blogs, wikis, online discussion groups, virtual learning environments and online learning courses.
- Blended learning simply means using more than one type of learning approach. Online blended learning specifically means a mix of online learning with other learning approaches – including face to face tutor support, email, or telephone support.
- The Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland Report highlighted the important role that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could play in supporting adult literacies. This includes a wide range of approaches – including mobile learning, computer based learning, online learning and using sound and video.
- Learning Connections has worked to take this agenda forward across Scotland. Using ICT in adult literacies learning is one of eight priority development areas for Learning Connections. Promoting and supporting online and online blended learning form and important part of this.

3. Use of Online and Online Blended Learning

3.1 Survey on Online and Online Blended Learning

To explore the use of online and online blended learning we issued a survey to adult literacies staff. Information about how the survey was administered is provided in Chapter One. This chapter sets out our findings.

3.1.1 Total responses

In total, there were 179 responses to the survey. The majority of these (58%) came from local authority respondents. Thirty-two responses (18%) came from further education institutions and 26 (15%) were from voluntary organisations. Responses also came from private sector bodies (2%) and 'other public bodies' (3%). Seven respondents (4%) did not fit into any of the given categories.

Table 3.1: Survey respondents

Sector	No.	%
Local authority	102	58
Voluntary organisation	26	15
Further education	32	18
Private sector	4	2
Other public body	6	3
Other	7	4
Total	177	100
<i>No response</i>	2	-

3.1.2 Thematic areas covered by the respondents

The respondents were asked what thematic adult literacies areas they cover in their work. Many selected more than one area.

Table 3.2: Thematic areas of respondents

Thematic area	No.	%
Adult literacies in the community	132	77
Numeracy	109	63
Literacies and specific learning difficulties	76	44
Literacies and disability	68	40
Youth literacy	66	38
Adult literacies in the workplace	63	37
English as a second or other language	63	37
Literacies and offenders	47	27
Other	22	13
Total responding	172	100
<i>No response</i>	7	-

More than three quarters of those responding to the question (77%) said that they worked in adult literacies in the community. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) said that they were involved with numeracy. Significant proportions were also involved in literacies provision for those with specific learning disabilities (44%) and learners with a disability (40%). Youth literacies, adult literacies in the workplace, and English as a second or other language were areas which involved more than a third of those responding to the survey. A smaller proportion of respondents were involved with literacies and offenders (27%).

Twenty-two respondents (13%) gave other comments on their area of work. While some respondents gave more detail in relation to the themes given, several said that they were involved primarily with other aspects of CLD (including ICT, adult learning in Further Education colleges and schools, and financial literacy) with literacies issues also addressed. Another thematic area that was highlighted by literacies providers was “family literacy”.

3.1.3 The respondents’ roles

Respondents were asked if they are in a full-time or part-time salaried post or whether they are a volunteer. Nearly all of the respondents were in salaried posts, with 96 (54%) working full-time and 75 (42%) working part-time. Just six respondents (3%) were volunteers.

Table 3.3: Respondent posts

Post	No.	%
Full-time	96	54
Part-time	75	42
Volunteer (FT / PT)	6	3
Total	177	100
<i>No response</i>	2	-

The respondents were asked what their role involved.

Table 3.4: Role of respondents

Role	No.	%
Literacies tutor	131	75
Does development and outreach work to engage learners	96	55
Trains people to support learners	80	46
Manages a service for learners	78	45
Develops policy and strategy for adult literacy	44	25
Other	20	11
Total responding	174	100
<i>No response</i>	7	-

Three-quarters of the respondents were involved in direct tuition of literacies learners. More than half of the respondents (55%) were involved in development work and outreach work to engage learners. Eighty respondents (46%) were involved in training others to support learners while a similar number (45%) were responsible for managing a service for learners. A quarter of respondents were involved in the development of policy and strategy for learners.

Twenty respondents (11%) made other comments about their responsibilities. Some stated that literacies provision represented a small part of their overall workload (in roles such as health and further education). Other respondents stated that they are responsible for coordinating networks and partnerships (including the local Adult Literacy Network). A couple of respondents are promoting literacies (and ESOL) in the workplace.

3.2 Use of Online and Online Blended Learning

The respondents were asked if the learners they are involved with ever use the internet / intranet for their adult literacies learning.

Table 3.5: Do your learners ever use the internet/intranet for their adult literacies learning?

	No.	%
Yes	154	87.5
No	22	12.5
Total	176	100
<i>No response</i>	3	-

A significant majority of respondents to the survey (87.5%) said that the learners they are involved with use the internet or intranet in their learning. Twenty-two respondents (12.5%) said that their learners have never used the internet or intranet in their learning.

Table 3.6: Use of internet / intranet for literacies learning by sector

	No.	%*
Local authority	87	85
Voluntary organisations	24	92
Further Education	29	91
Private sector	2	67
Other public sector	6	100
Other	5	83

* Of respondents from sector

All sectors appeared to use online the internet or intranet for literacies learning in broadly equal proportions. Given the small numbers involved (particularly in the private sector and other categories) care should be taken when interpreting these results.

Table 3.7: Why don't you use the internet or intranet with adult literacies learners?

	No.	%
My adult literacies learners don't have access to the internet or intranet	13	72
There are no appropriate resources or sites	7	39
I don't work directly with adult literacies learners	4	22
I don't have access to the internet or intranet	4	22
I don't feel I have the skills to work with learners online.	1	6
I find online learning ineffective for adult literacies learners	0	0
Other	8	44
Total responding	18	100
<i>No response</i>	161	-

Of the 22 respondents who said that they do not use the internet or intranet with adult literacies learners, 18 indicated reasons for this. By far the most common reason given was that learners don't have access to the internet or intranet (13 – 72%).

Seven of those responding (39%) felt that there were no appropriate resources or sites that they would use with their learners. Other reasons given were that the respondent doesn't work directly with adult learners (22%) or that the tutor doesn't have access to the internet / intranet themselves (22%). Eight respondents (44%) raised other issues. These included:

- not having an internet connection in the location where teaching takes place;
- using the internet is not part of the learning strategies included in the programme and course opportunities on offer.

“I have been pushing for internet access for last 12 months with no success. I have a cupboard of laptops that can connect to internet but none of the centres have wi-fi.”

(Local Authority Youth Literacies Support Worker)

“The facilities for internet access are in a different area and would mean leaving the group unattended. If enough assistants are available then, yes, we would use the internet for appropriate learning.”

(Local Authority Tutor)

Table 3.8: How do you use the internet / intranet in your work with adult literacies learners?

	No.	%
I direct adult literacies learners to specific online resources to supplement face to face sessions	108	84
I suggest learners search the internet/intranet themselves to find out more about topics discussed in a learning session	93	73
I use the internet or intranet to illustrate points in individual tutoring sessions	75	59
I use the internet or intranet to illustrate points in group tutoring sessions	69	54
Learners working online can contact me by email or phone if they need any support	39	31
I use the internet or intranet in other situations (please specify)	34	27
Total responding	128	100
<i>No response</i>	51	-

Respondents were asked how they use the internet or intranet in their work with learners. The most common approach (84%) was to direct learners to specific resources to supplement activities in face to face sessions. The second most common approach (73%) was to encourage learners to use the internet / intranet themselves to find out more on the topics discussed in a learning session. Other approaches used by more than half of those responding to this question were using the internet / intranet to illustrate points in individual tutoring sessions (59%) and in group sessions (54%).

More than a quarter of respondents (27%) said that they use the internet / intranet in other situations. The most common was that the internet is used to develop learners ICT skills as part of integrated literacies and ICT teaching. Several tutors said that they use the internet for research and to develop coursework. Some said that due to limited internet access they print off materials from the internet and then use them in face to face sessions.

“We mostly use the internet to access online tutoring materials which are then printed out and distributed to the learners during face-to-face tuition.”

(Local Authority ESOL Coordinator)

“Our learners have extremely limited access to the internet. I will often download worksheets from BBC Skillswise etc, for learners to use. I also use 'Images' from Yahoo and Google for ESOL work.”

(Local Authority Literacy Support Worker)

Table 3.9: How often do you use the internet or intranet with adult literacies learners?

	No.	%
I use the internet or intranet with all or almost all of my adult literacies learners	43	33
I use the internet or intranet with over half of my adult literacies learners	44	33
I use the internet or intranet with less than half of my adult literacies learners	36	27
I don't use the internet at all with adult literacies learners	9	7
Total responding	132	100
<i>No response</i>	47	-

There was no significant trend in the frequency of use of the internet / intranet with adult learners. A third of those responding to this question (43 respondents) said that they use the internet with all (or nearly all) of their adult literacies learners. A similar proportion (33%) said that they use the internet / intranet with more than half of their adult literacies learners. Thirty-six respondents (27%) use the internet / intranet with less than half of their adult literacies learners. Nine people (7%) said that they don't use the internet at all with their learners.

Table 3.10: What do you use the internet / intranet to access?

	No.	%
Websites with interactive adult literacies resources	105	79
General websites which you can adapt for use in adult literacies learning	102	77
Online adult literacies courses	47	35
Resources which help the learner to record their learning journey	28	21
None of the above	7	5
Other	10	8
Total responding	133	100
<i>No response</i>	46	-

The respondents use the internet / intranet to access a range of resources. It was most common for the respondents to access websites with interactive adult literacies resources with 105 respondents (79%) giving this response. A similar proportion (77%) said that they access general websites which can be adapted for use in adult literacies learning.

A smaller proportion of respondents (35%) access dedicated adult literacies courses online. Just more than a fifth of those responding to the question (21%) use the internet / intranet to access resources which help the learner to record progress during their learning journey.

Ten respondents (8%) made other comments on how they use the internet / intranet to support adult literacies learners. Three stated that they use the internet generally to help learners develop skills in using search engines, websites and internet-based email. Others

stated that they use the internet or intranet to “download lesson plans” and to develop resources to compliment other activities taking place in lessons. One person stated that learners also have the opportunity to look through the taught delivery program online – either in their own time or alongside their literacies tutor. Another respondent said that they use the internet to source images – “excellent for ESOL learners”.

The survey asked respondents which online resources they use, both regularly and occasionally. A vast array of resources are currently being used across Scotland – we have included a full list of these as **Appendix One**. By far the most popular online resource for practitioners was the BBC Skillswise website. Other resources being used regularly included LTScotland and Adult Literacies Online. Aside from these resources, there were very few used by more than one or two practitioners. Everyone gave very different examples of the resources they used.

Very few respondents gave examples of purchasing commercially developed online or online blended learning resources for adult literacies learners:

- One respondent had used [Target Skills for Work](#). This resource can be hosted on a dedicated virtual learning environment, but was not used in this way in this case.
- One respondent had used [Learn Direct's Learning Bytes](#). These are available to learners for a very small charge, and many are available free of charge.
- One respondent had bought worksheets for use offline from [Chalkface.com](#). Again, this is not online or online blended learning, but simply using the internet to purchase materials.

There are many companies that are able to provide ‘off the shelf’ online learning resources for adult literacies learners at a cost, and still more that would provide support to develop and set up online and online blended learning approaches. In the UK, some publishers – including organisations like [Heinemann](#) and [Pearson Longman](#) - have introduced online and blended learning packages for purchase. For example, Heinemann’s [Sure Skills](#) programme is a bank of online interactive adult literacies resources. But there was no evidence from the survey that adult literacies practitioners in Scotland are supporting adult literacies learners to use this type of resource.

3.3 Impact of Online and Online Blended Learning

3.3.1 Impact on groups of learners

Respondents were asked how effective they felt online and online blended learning is with particular groups of learners.

Table 3.11: Do you think that online and blended learning is more effective with certain groups of learners?

Learner group	Online learning generally works well		Online learning doesn't generally work well		Don't know		Response Count
	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.
Young people (16-24)	100	86	4	3	13	11	117
Adults (25-64)	98	83	11	9	10	8	119
Older people (65+)	43	40	17	16	47	44	107
ESOL learners	38	38	12	12	49	50	99
Workplace learners	45	48	5	5	43	46	93
Community learners	78	72	6	6	24	22	108
Home learners	52	53	5	5	41	42	98
Family learners	41	45	3	3	48	52	92
Disabled learners	53	55	5	5	38	40	96
Learners with specific learning difficulties	55	58	11	12	29	31	95
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	27
Total responding	-	-	-	-	-	-	124
<i>No response</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>55</i>

* Of those responding for each group

The respondents felt that, generally, online learning works well with both younger adult learners aged 16 – 24 (86%) and adult learners aged 25 to 64 (83%). Online learning was also considered effective for community learners, disabled learners, home learners and learners with specific learning difficulties (although 12% said that online learning doesn't work well with this final group).

There were varied views about use of online learning with disabled people. Some respondents commented that using online resources is popular and effective among learners with disabilities and additional support needs. However, respondents emphasised that this depends on the disability as well as the learners' literacy skills and confidence using ICT.

“With disabled people or those with specific learning difficulties it depends on the disability. For those with physical problems (arthritis etc) using a computer keyboard can be a barrier. But with others it can be successful.”

(Local Authority Adult Literacies Development Officer)

The responses indicate that online resources are perceived to work less well in literacies provision for older people (over 60) and ESOL learners. However, for both these groups the most common response on the effectiveness of online learning was ‘don’t know’ – indicating that many people did not work with these groups.

Respondents were invited to comment on the appropriateness of online and online blended learning for any other groups of learners. Respondents stated that for learners living in rural and remote areas (and with appropriate internet access) online and online blended learning represents a significant opportunity.

“...if the access is there, I think blended learning could be a major asset for increasing learning hours and progression as well as learners having control and responsibility for their learning.”

(Youth Literacies Support Worker)

Several respondents stated that it was difficult (and perhaps unhelpful) to generalise on the appropriateness of online learning by groups of learner. It was felt that this “depends on the individual”. One respondent stressed that before any learner can be left to use online learning unattended they need to have developed:

- a sufficient level of literacy;
- a sufficient understanding of the technology; and
- an understanding of how they themselves learn.

One respondent also raised the issue that one group of learners (offenders in secure institutions) are not permitted to access the internet – and that some kind of compromise solution would be helpful.

3.3.2 Fit with the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework

Respondents were asked what elements of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework fit well with the use of online and online blended learning. Online and online blended learning was considered to fit best with:

- using ICT to communicate information (92%);
- using ICT to learn and practice skills (89%);
- learning through research (86%); and
- using ICT to manage information (85%).

Table 3.12: Do you think that online and blended learning fits particularly well with certain elements of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework?

Element	Online learning generally works well		Online learning doesn't generally work well		Don't know		Response Count
	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.
Writing to convey information, ideas and feelings	78	70	20	18	14	13	112
Reading with understanding	75	65	22	19	18	16	115
Listening and observing effectively	54	50	31	28	24	22	109
Speaking so others can understand	22	21	49	47	34	32	105
Using ICT to learn and practice skills	104	89	5	4	8	7	117
Using ICT to manage information	92	85	5	5	11	10	108
Using ICT to communicate information	105	92	3	3	6	5	114
Reflecting and evaluating	43	40	28	26	36	34	107
Co-operating with others	36	35	30	29	37	36	103
Resolving conflict and negotiate	17	16	41	39	48	45	106
Planning	66	61	16	15	26	24	108
Learning through research	96	86	4	4	12	11	112
Solving problems and making decisions	58	53	23	21	28	26	109
Communicating numerical information	61	57	11	10	36	33	108
Interpreting numerical information	60	56	12	11	36	33	108
Understanding and applying numerical skills	66	60	11	10	33	30	110
Applying numerical skills to solve problems	61	56	12	11	36	33	109
Total responding	-	-	-	-	-	-	120
<i>No response</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>59</i>

* Of those responding for each element

Online and online blended learning was considered to fit less well with the following elements of the Curriculum Framework:

- Speaking so others can understand (47%);
- Resolving conflict and negotiating (39%);
- Co-operating with others (29%);
- Listening and observing effectively (28%);
- Reflecting and evaluating (26%).

3.3.3 Positive impacts for adult literacy learners

Of the 179 people responding to the survey, 96 (54%) highlighted positive impacts that they felt online and online blended learning have for adult literacies learners. Many respondents felt that introducing online resources to the classroom makes learning more fun and offers greater variety for learners. Respondents mentioned that learners can also find that it makes learning more fun, getting away from the more formal traditional environment:

“It is another way to help engage with learners who might be scared of the pencil and paper, ‘old school’ way of learning.”

(Voluntary Sector Literacies Tutor)

“It changes the traditional classroom environment”.

(Further Education Adult Literacies Worker)

Respondents felt that introducing online resources helps learners that are getting tired with or struggling with traditional resources. Some respondents also felt that the use of ICT has broadened the resources available meaning that materials are more up-to-date and interesting for learners.

“We believe learners’ concentration spans increase with these tools.”

(Community Learning and Development Worker)

It was broadly felt that using online learning supports and encourages independent learning. Individuals are able to undertake learning at their own pace and with some level of independence either in the classroom or at home.

“It encourages self-directed learning both within the group and to reinforce learning at home if access is available”.

(Local Authority Development Worker)

“It supports and encourages autonomous learning”.

(Local Authority Adult Literacies Strategy Co-ordinator)

“It fosters a sense of independence.”

(Local Authority Development Officer – Literacy and Numeracy)

Some felt that this meant that learners took more control over their own learning – introducing learner autonomy. Others felt that it was very important that online learning was used as just one method, along with a range of other approaches.

Many respondents said that online and online blended learning develops confidence and self-esteem among learners. As well as building confidence among learners who prefer using a keyboard to forming letters in handwriting, online learning gives learners the privacy to work at their own pace. Confidence can also develop as a result of developing IT skills – giving the learner confidence to get involved with activities such as helping children / grandchildren with their homework, staying in touch with friends and family by email, and performing tasks such as online shopping.

“The feeling of being disadvantaged is reduced because they can now use the internet like everyone else”.

(Local Authority Literacies Worker)

It was also stated by respondents that using online resources helps learners to develop both literacies and ICT skills and that these:

“...can make a positive and ongoing difference both to their learning and life prospects”

(Voluntary Organisation Literacies Worker)

Respondents highlighted examples such as using the internet in job searches and using the DWP websites for information on benefit entitlements.

Several respondents said that greater use of online and online blended learning potentially offers accessibility to those who would otherwise not have full participation – this is particularly the case for those living in isolated geographical areas. A small number also mentioned that online and online blended learning could make learning easier for disabled people or those with special learning needs:

“In cyber-space no-one knows:- you're dyslexic / you have tardive dyskenesia / you have the DT's / you are left-handed / all of the above provided you can work a computer.”

(NHS Project Co-ordinator)

“Online and particularly interactive sites help students with learning difficulties focus more on tasks and makes it easier to practice. Sites with verbal feedback praise or gentle correction help reinforce the lessons.”

(Local Authority Group Tutor)

“Adults with specific learning difficulties often find a keyboard easier to use than forming letters in handwriting. This gives them increased self esteem as they can produce printed work they are rightly proud of.”

(Local Authority Development Worker)

Earlier, many survey respondents mentioned that they did not know whether online and online blended learning would work with disabled people. This shows that there are relatively low levels of awareness about the potential benefits that online learning could bring to this group.

3.3.4 Positive impacts for tutors / adult literacy staff

Of the 179 people responding to the survey, 95 (53%) highlighted positive impacts that they felt online and online blended learning have for tutors and adult literacies staff.

Many respondents said that online and online blended learning can provide a wide range of resources and ideas for tutors. Staff and tutors have a wider range of quality resources to access. There is less work required from tutors to prepare resources for lessons and less duplication of work to design interesting materials (so less ‘reinventing the wheel’). It was also stated that given the variety of resources it is easier for tutors to tailor to individual needs and abilities without excessive workload. Tutors also felt they were able to access a bank of resources at a low (or no) cost.

“The positive impact is that a wealth of resources, which we cannot afford to buy, can sometimes be found on the internet for free – as well as a wealth of ideas”.

(Local Authority Tutor)

Some respondents said that online and online blended learning make it easier to tutor a class containing learners at different levels.

“It’s easier to manage a mixed group of learners working at different topics or different levels of the same topic. Students work at their own pace and get rapid feedback.”

(Local Authority Tutor)

“In a group setting following individual ILPs, the tutor’s time can be freed up if one or more learners are working independently on the computer for part of the session.”

(Local Authority Group Tutor)

Respondents also felt that online and online blended learning helped them deal with motivational issues – and that the variety of resources made it easier to deal with the repetitive nature of some learning.

“Literacies learners often need to repeat the same skill over and over. Incorporating online learning into the ILP renews motivation all-round.”

(ALN Project Co-ordinator and Tutor)

It was also stated that a move towards more online and online blended learning has the potential to be a stimulus for the way adult literacies teaching is provided.

“Blended learning challenges us as tutors to reflect on our individual teaching style. It encourages us to move out of our comfort zone and try new ideas and approaches to learning and teaching. It is an approach which is developmental, exciting and reflective and one which enables us to view our craft more holistically.”

(Further Education College ALN Tutor)

3.3.5 Negative impacts for adult literacy learners

Respondents were asked whether there are negative impacts of online and online blended learning for adult literacy learners. A frequent response was that online learning can lead to too much isolated learning and less human contact. The negative impact from this was perceived as a lack of interaction with the tutor and other learners, and the potential for learners to become distracted working on their own or lose focus. One respondent said that when a learner is working online the tutor cannot give immediate positive feedback, and can’t ensure that the learner is not experiencing too many de-motivating ‘failures’ or setbacks in their learning. Many respondents felt that the liaison between tutor and learners remained critical to success in online and online blended learning approaches.

There were also concerns that the lack of ICT skills and / or fear of technology can be another barrier that the learner needs to overcome – hampering their confidence as they take forward their literacies learning. Respondents also stated that additional time is required to develop the learners ICT skills. Some respondents were concerned that there is the potential for ICT becoming the focus, rather than literacies learning.

“(Online learning can result in) spending too much time focusing on the use of the computer rather than the literacy learning being at the centre”

(Local Authority Tutor)

Some respondents said that the material currently available for online learning is “too rigid” and not always flexible enough for the learners’ needs.

Many respondents said that technical problems interrupting learning and issues with things like login passwords can be frustrating and distracting for learners. There were also concerns that learners who don’t have access to ICT equipment at home will get frustrated at not being able to participate in the same way as other learners.

“The current procedures of individual learner log in codes are a barrier to learning. The codes are complex and often cause frustration resulting in many learners feeling they do not have the level of skills to even access the computers which then results in a lowering of general confidence in their abilities.”

(Community Learning and Development Worker)

3.3.6 Negative impacts for tutors and adult literacy staff

Respondents considered the potential negative impacts of online and online blended learning for tutors and adult literacy staff. A key issue for respondents was that tutors require to have sufficient IT skills – which required additional training. It was also stated that tutors need ongoing training as well as ongoing technical support in providing online and online blended learning. Several respondents were concerned that the required training and support would mean additional costs and would be time consuming for providers.

Some respondents felt that the use of online learning can make it more difficult for tutors to provide the required one to one support – and check if learners are experiencing and problems or difficulties. It was stated that this could lead to a reduction in awareness of learners’ needs.

Another concern for some respondents was the time it could take tutors to identify the appropriate online resources for the level / ability / interests of the learner particularly given the range of materials that are potential available. One respondent said:

“I find it can be very easy to spend too much time looking for support ideas”

(Local Authority Development Worker)

Some respondents stated that online resources should not be the complete focus and that there was a danger of viewing online and online blended learning as a “quick fix” reducing the time learners need support.

3.3.7 Evidence about impact

In our survey, we asked respondents whether they were aware of any evaluation reports on the impact of online or online blended learning initiative in their area. Of the 93 people who responded to this question, only four stated that they were aware of evaluation reports. Of these:

- one pointed to wider research into ICT and adult literacies;
- one referred to an online survey being undertaken to gather feedback from learners;
- one provided a copy of an evaluation of online and online blended learning with all college students (not literacies learners); and
- one referred to an evaluation report published by Learning Connections.

It is evident that there is not a current bank of knowledge within adult literacies workers relating to the impact or effectiveness of online and online blended learning in Scotland. Learning Connections has undertaken some research and evaluation studies more generally on use of ICT, which do draw out some lessons in relation to online and blended learning. But there has been little evaluation or review at a local level – perhaps reflecting the fact that this approach is relatively new.

3.4 Successes and Challenges

3.4.1 Factors that can make online and online blended learning a success

Respondents identified factors which help make online and online blended learning a success. A common response was that resources should be fun and user friendly. Websites should be easy to find / access and materials should be relevant and “grown up” in content. Respondents also said that content should be interactive, colourful and help multisensory learning.

Several respondents said that removing practical barriers is important to making online and online blended learning a success. For example, one person said that it would be helpful to:

“Remove passwords, usernames, logins and other barriers that prevent some learners from even trying”

(Local Authority Community Learning and Development Worker)

Many people stressed the need for tutors to receive adequate training and technical support. Many respondents were clear that it is important to have a careful and coordinated balance between online and other resources. It was also stated that there should be flexibility in how much online working is used in order to guarantee a learner-centred approach.

Some respondents emphasised that both the learner and the tutor need to be committed to using online materials if it is to be successful. Several people highlighted the importance clear planning and a well designed curriculum. There needs to be a clear purpose to the use of online learning – with clear aims and instructions for the learner.

3.4.2 Problems with using online and online blended learning

The respondents were asked if they thought there were any problems with using online and online blended learning with any of their adult literacies learners. Sixty-three respondents (35% of total) identified problems.

The main difficulty raised was learners' lack of confidence and ICT skills. Some were concerned that learners can be overwhelmed (and so demotivated) by online learning. As well as fear of technology it was stated that for those with poor levels of literacy and numeracy the keyboard represents a challenge.

Many respondents raised general issues relating to problems accessing ICT equipment and websites. The need for training and support was also perceived as a barrier and several people raised the issue of the cost of delivering online and online blended learning.

A number of respondents said that they have experienced difficulties with elderly and disabled learners. There are physical barriers for learners with eyesight problems, arthritis, coordination problems, epilepsy, dyslexia and other conditions. One respondent said that they have particular difficulties using online resources with ESOL learners at a basic level.

Others raised the issue of offenders in secure institutions who are not permitted to use the internet.

More generally, a couple of respondents raised concerns about ‘over confidence’ in learners and learners who are good with online resources preferring to do more use of the computer, and less written work.

“If a person is good at using the computer they will do less written work when they may need to.”

(Local Authority Community Learning and Development Worker)

3.5 Gaps and Support Requirements

3.5.1 Gaps in the online and online blended learning opportunities that are available

Respondents were asked whether they felt there are any gaps in the online and online blended learning opportunities that are currently available for adult literacies learners in Scotland. A majority of those responding to this question (60%) said that there are gaps in online and online blended learning opportunities.

Table 3.13: Do you think there are any gaps in the online and blended learning opportunities that are currently available for adult literacies learners in Scotland?

	No.	%
Yes	44	60
No	29	40
Total	73	100
<i>No response</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>-</i>

Respondents felt that there was a need for more relevant resources for adult learners, since many are aimed at children and young people. Some respondents felt that it would be helpful to have more online resources that are linked to the workplace. Others felt that resources should contain more Scottish-focused content.

One respondent said that they would like to see more interactive programmes for people at the initial stages of learning to read:

“where the learner could work independently in listening and interacting through exercises in phoneme / grapheme correspondence”

(Local Authority Adult Literacy and Numeracy Worker)

Ideally, respondents felt it would be helpful if programmes could give learners critical feedback on their work.

Respondents said that there are barriers to online learning for many learners as a result of difficulties accessing ICT equipment (and venues where ICT is available). The main reason given for this was the cost of buying equipment and software and ongoing costs.

“Software is so expensive as the accompanying cost of licenses is prohibitive and prevents us from purchasing all but the cheapest. Surely something can be done about this, to make Adult Learning / Literacies resources as cheap as other educational material?”

(Local Authority Community Learning Worker)

It was also stated that since ICT is fast moving and complex it can be difficult to maintain and keep up to date with the changing technology.

Many survey respondents said that learners were not accessing online learning due to the limited training and experience that tutors and adult literacies staff have in relation to online and online blended learning. Some felt that a lack of confidence with ICT among tutors may be restricting the use of online and online blended learning. A small number mentioned that although they felt there were gaps, they were not sure what they were. Others pointed to the need for tutors to have more time to review the resources available, and work out what would be useful to their learners.

“I am not experienced enough to identify the gaps but it is a new approach and so there must be gaps.”

(Voluntary Sector Tutor Organiser)

Overall, this suggests that the assessment of gaps in this field was not informed by a clear understanding of exactly what is available for all respondents.

3.5.2 Support requirements

Respondents were asked what type of support would be useful to help them or their team to use online and online blended learning effectively. A total of 67 (37%) of respondents identified support needs. Many responses related to more effective networking (both online and offline) and sharing of good practice between people working in adult literacies. Several respondents said that they would like a ‘bank’ of useful websites and online resources, and a

contents guide outlining how the resources can be used. Some of the respondents stressed the need for this to be kept up to date with the latest resources as they became available – and one person suggested that it would be helpful for practitioners to receive a monthly email updating them on new resources that had come online. It was also felt that there should be wider sharing of examples of good practice using online and online blended learning although respondents did not suggest how they would prefer this to be done. But one respondent said:

“I think the current networking and sites like Adult Literacies Online provide adequate support.”

(Local Authority Community Education Worker)

A significant proportion of the respondents said that they would like to see more training for tutors and staff on using online resources – and support materials for using resources. Some respondents said that as well as training in the use of online resources they would like training in developing websites and creating online materials – this would enable them to establish online resources directly relevant to the groups they are working with. One respondent also suggested that a platform could be created to allow for the development of very locally relevant learning packages. One respondent said that they would like to see SQA accredited online courses.

Many respondents repeated what had been said about limited access to ICT equipment and the internet. It was argued that there is a need for more ICT equipment and technical support and funding for literacies providers that “reflects the reality of IT in 2009”. One respondent said that there is a particular need for more IT equipment and support in remote locations. Overall, it is clear that there is a need for more support for people working in adult literacies to effectively use online and online blended learning approaches. The focus of this support should be on tutor training in use of existing online resources and creation of new online resources directly relevant to local needs and priorities.

3.6 Summary

- 179 people responded to the survey. Most were employed by a local authority, but staff from further education, the voluntary and private sector and other public bodies also responded.
- Most (88%) respondents said that the learners they work with use the internet or intranet for their adult literacies learning. About a third used the internet or intranet with almost all learners, a third with over half, a quarter with less than half, and the remainder not at all.
- Access to the internet is still an issue. The main reasons for not using the internet or intranet were that learners didn't have access, there were no suitable resources or sites, or that tutors didn't have access.
- The most common ways of using the internet / intranet with adult literacies learners were:
 - directing learners to specific resources to supplement activities in face to face sessions;
 - encouraging learners to use the internet / intranet themselves to find out more; and
 - using the internet in individual and group sessions.
- Only a limited number of respondents had created their own online resources.
- Tutors directed adult literacies learners both to adult literacies sites, and general websites which could be used to develop literacies skills. By far the most commonly used resource was BBC Skillswise.
- Positive impacts of using the internet / intranet with adult literacies include:
 - increased concentration and willingness to learn due to fun and variety offered;
 - supporting independent and autonomous learning;
 - developing literacies and ICT skills simultaneously;
 - increasing accessibility of literacies learning, particularly in remote areas;
 - providing access to a wide range of resources and ideas for tutors; and
 - enabling learners to study at different paces within the same class.

- Potentially negative impacts and barriers include:
 - isolation and lack of interaction with the tutor and other learners;
 - loss of focus – ICT could become the focus, not literacies;
 - frustrations and fears of ICT; and
 - tutor skills.

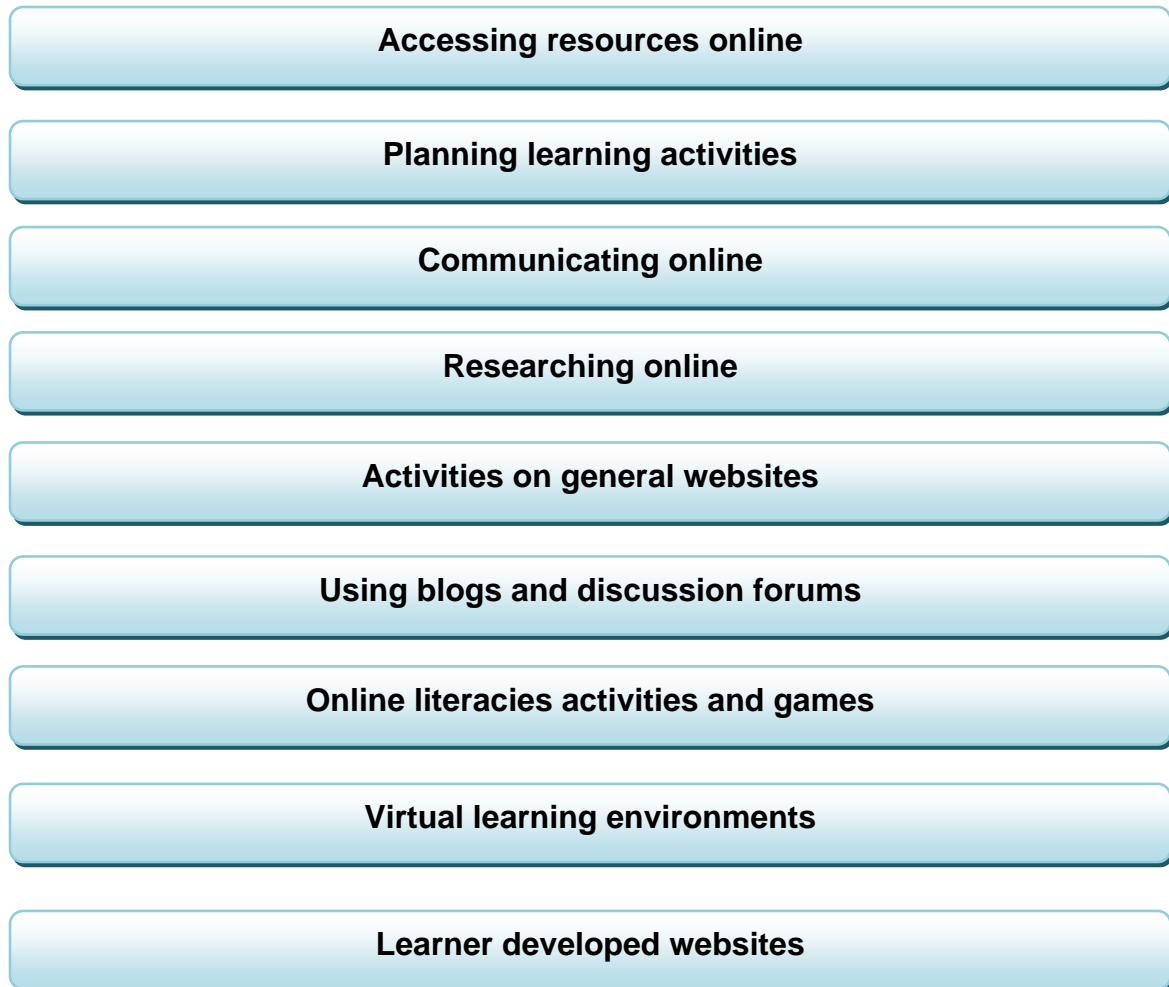
- Key success factors for online and online blended learning include:
 - grown up content (many sites are for children);
 - removing practical and technical barriers;
 - good training and support for tutors;
 - retaining a learner centred approach; and
 - using online learning as just one element of the learning process.

- Survey respondents would like to see:
 - more resources relevant to adults and the workplace;
 - more resources with interactive and critical feedback;
 - more networking opportunities and skills development for tutors;
 - regular updates on new resources; and
 - a central bank of useful websites and resources, and a guide on using these.

4. Spectrum of Online and Online Blended Learning

4.1 Introduction

Through existing research, our survey and wider scoping work we have identified a wide range of examples of how online and online blended learning is currently being used. From this, we have developed a spectrum of online and online blended learning approaches.



4.2 Examples of Online and Online Blended Learning

Examples of how these approaches have been used are set out below. More detailed examples of the use of online and online blended learning are set out in Appendix Two.

4.2.1 Accessing resources online

Accessing online resources and then using these offline with learners was not included in our definition of 'online learning'. Nevertheless, many survey respondents told us that this was something that they regularly did. In addition, when we approached people from a number of the successful and pilot approaches identified in the survey, we found that what was described as 'online learning' was in fact using resources found online in an offline environment.

Practicing

In East Ayrshire, a Youth Literacy Support Worker printed off online job application forms and worked with learners to practice filling them out on a written basis before moving on to applying online.

4.2.2 Planning learning activities

A minority of survey respondents mention that they make learning plans online. Others assess learning styles using online programmes.

Online learning style assessment

Aberlour Child Care Trust has worked through learning style assessments like [VARK](#) online with learners. This guide to learning styles provides users with an assessment of how they like to receive and give out information.

4.2.3 Communicating online

There are many examples of adult literacies learners using the internet to communicate – either with tutors, peers, or friends and family.

Tutor support

In South Lanarkshire, an adult literacies tutor has communicated with learners by email. This has achieved a social practice approach to learning - people using the written word in a real situation.

Peer support

In Clackmannanshire, adult literacies tutors have set up email accounts for literacies learners. This is to encourage peer support and exchange of messages about learning experiences.

Communication with family

In one local authority area, a CLD worker supported a learner with learning difficulties to email her family in Australia. The tutor supported the learner to compose her emails before she went onto the computer. And she printed off emails in large font. This worked well as her confidence in her literacies ability has been paired with her desire to communicate with her family. She is able to produce work she is proud of, and the learning is directly relevant to her personal goals – giving a real focus to learning.

4.2.4 Researching online

There are many examples of adult literacies learners using the internet to research interests.

“I think learners are taking on advanced skills like skimming and scanning. Learners are often terrified of the library but now can ‘Google’ to get some information, make another approach. This is a terrific battery of skills – finding the information, scanning information, decoding, deciding what is relevant.”⁴

Searching for Information

As part of the Laptops and Literacies Project, East Lothian Literacies Partnership supported learners to use the internet to find information about their interests. For example, one learner researched asbestos in the home before writing to the local authority about a health and safety issue. Other learners used English language sites and BBC Skillswise. The tutors felt that using the internet helped to develop ICT skills, and added variety to the total learning experience. As learners acquired skills in ICT it also increased their self esteem.

⁴ Innovations in ICT and Literacies, Learning Connections, 2006/07 (p59)

Numeracy Web Quests

In Dumfries and Galloway young men aged 15 to 17 took part in a web quest to develop their numeracy skills. The men were training to gain a construction apprenticeship, an important part of which related to numeracy. The tutors developed a web quest. A [web quest](#) is an inquiry oriented lesson format in which most or all of the information that learners work with comes from the web⁵. Essentially it is an online challenge requiring learners to work through a series of questions and topics, researching topics through information on the internet. The key feature of a webquest is that learners access sites that have been pre-determined by the tutor who developed the task. This avoids learners searching randomly for suitable sites and means they go directly to the most useful website locations.

The students enjoyed the activities but thought that they were slightly too long. But much of the enjoyment appeared to stem from the novelty of the approach. The learners emphasised that they would like to retain a mix of different learning approaches, with online learning included as an element of this⁶.

Learning focused on interests

In Angus, the Youth Literacies team supports young people to search on the internet for information that interests them – such as rapper biographies, film statistics and games.

Learning focused on interests

In one local authority area, an adult literacies tutor was working with a beginner reader and resources were becoming a bit limited. The tutor then supported the learner to look up his hobbies online – “he was fascinated”. He is now looking at doing an introduction to computing course.

⁵ WebQuest.org

⁶ Adapted from ‘Can ICT help make the teaching of numeracy more vocationally oriented?, Case Study, Learning Connections’

Learning focused on interests

In Clackmannanshire, a literacies student learned how to use a pc, set up an e mail account, send and receive e mail and use search engines. The tutor then showed her how to log onto the Council's homepage. This opened up a world of great interest to her - public art in Clackmannanshire. She explored the history of a stained glass window, based on archaeological discoveries, she looked at symbolism, illustration, local history and burial rites – all through Google searches and the Council home page. This provided a huge range of data for learning and writing comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and much more.

4.2.5 Literacies activities on general websites

There are many examples of adult literacies learners using general websites to develop their literacies skills.

Introducing People to the Internet

The Workers Educational Association (WEA) works with many learners have very limited literacy and ICT skills. Learning how to shop and book holidays on the internet gives them real life skills which they really value. WEA can then introduce other learning activities when confidence increases.

Adapting Sites for Literacies Learning

In a Glasgow College, staff used online learning to follow up a paper based activity, to enhance learners' literacies skills. As a follow up to an activity around the Yellow Pages, learners were asked to access Yell.com online and to carry out searches. This worked well because it was an extension of what the learners had been working on. The aims, instructions and context were all clear to the learners.

4.2.6 Using blogs and discussion forums

Creating online blogs and discussion forums is a popular way of encouraging literacies learning online.

A Blended Approach to Numeracy – Blogging and Face to Face Support

A tutor at Clydebank College produced course materials online through setting up a blog. The tutor set up four separate blog sites, for four classes of learners working towards numeracy core skills modules. The blogs included interactive course materials and links to wider resources. The tutor used these blogs within the class, and encouraged students to use these in their own time. Learners were extremely positive about the approach, and it increased learner motivation and helped to develop new ICT skills. Although the learners actively used the materials and links online, they rarely used the opportunity to post comments unless prompted by the tutor. This approach was so successful that the tutor has continued this, and can't imagine going back to teaching without the blog. The blogs can be accessed at⁷:

<http://www.sqanumeracy.blogspot.com/>

Using Blogs and Forums

In Glasgow, the North West Writers' Group brings together five adult literacies projects supported by Anniesland College. To help learners from the projects to stay in touch and share experiences, Anniesland College used its Virtual Learning Environment. This was originally designed for all College students to be able to access materials online, and submit assignments. In this case, the system was used to allow learners access to the Blackboard System which provided a forum for learners to share views and post reflective comments about their learning experience. Learners received individual and group support to use this system. This helped to develop both tutor and students skills in using online learning.

The tutors and learners then drew together information about the learning experiences to create a book and CD of learner stories. Learners shared views through the Virtual Learning Environment about what should be included. The final publication was a collection of reflective personal learning experiences. Learners and tutors gained confidence through the process, and are currently working to record learner experiences through podcasts (audio postings), vodkasts (video postings) and blogs (written postings).^{8,9}

⁷ Adapted from Blogging For Numeracy, Case Study, Learning Connections

⁸ Our Journey: A Report to Learning Connections, North West Writers' Group, 2007

⁹ Developing the Use of ICT with Adult Literacies Learners, Learning Connections, 2008

Online learning forum

As part of the 2004/05 Innovations in ICT initiative Shetland College created an online community learning forum. This provided a virtual opportunity for learners to enhance their learning experience, share views, and participate in other online forums. It was developed because although previous attempts to use online learning had been relatively successful, there were some issues of isolation and limited peer interaction.

Although the forum was originally targeted at adult literacies learners only, it subsequently had to be relaunched to include all adult learners. This encouraged higher uptake and use of the forum, and reduced any stigma.¹⁰

4.2.7 Online literacies activities and games

There is a wealth of online resources designed specifically for literacies learners. These are used regularly by many adult literacies learners and tutors across the country.

Introducing variety

In East Lothian, an ALN Tutor supported students to work on their times tables online. Using games and straightforward tests to reinforce offline learning proved very popular with students with learning disabilities (who had various degree of disability). It aided memory and kept up enthusiasm, relieving the monotony of constant repetition of work.

Building skills levels

In Scottish Borders, a Workplace Literacies tutor has used BBC Skillswise to support learners to improve mental maths skills. These have been very successful as learners can do maths quizzes and games online. They generally start at a level with no time limit, or with multiple choice, and move on to quick fire quizzes.

¹⁰ Evaluation of Innovations in ICT and Literacies Programme, Learning Connections, 2007

Impact of online learning

In one area, a learner with poor reading and writing skills sought assistance from the adult literacies team. He had never read a book or a newspaper in his life and had always relied on others to read, explain and respond to correspondence. Once he had progressed to recognising letters of the alphabet and sounding out short words, the tutor asked him if he would like to try some work on the computer. He was very nervous and explained that he had never used a computer in his life. They accessed BBC Skillswise and he quickly learned to use the mouse to play a spelling game. He was hooked! From then on, at each learning session, as well as learning to read short stories and completing writing exercises, he couldn't wait to try spelling, syllable work etc. on BBC Skillswise. He very quickly became more confident on the computer and learned how to access the internet by himself. He managed to purchase his own computer and registered as a student on an introductory computing class. He also joined a job club and learned how to job search and complete job application forms. He is now in permanent employment as a delivery driver. He has less time to attend lessons but has increased his confidence and improved his lifestyle immeasurably.

4.2.8 Online courses and virtual learning environments

In many cases, dedicated websites provide online adult literacies courses that learners can work through at their own pace. In some cases, dedicated virtual learning environments have been developed by local voluntary organisations, or the Council. In others, adult literacies learners are accessing national resources – like the Learn Direct bank of Learning Bytes.

Across Scotland, many Adult Literacies Partnerships are beginning to consolidate online materials in one place, through creating a single website or virtual learning environment to access online learning opportunities. Importantly, only isolated examples of this came out in our survey, suggesting that the approach is at its early stages and awareness of this type of activity is relatively low at the moment. Learning Connections' online learning support programme is working to assist Adult Literacies Partnerships to develop this type of activity in the future.

Dedicated online learning site

CLAN (City Literacy and Numeracy) Edinburgh has developed a 'Log on For Learning' project. The site provides online resources for adult literacies learners. Developing the site involved converting many paper based resources into online courses. Once the site had been launched, CLAN then focused on integrating it into learning plans through a blended learning approach. www.clanlearn.org

Online modules

In Highland, Apex works with offenders and young people at risk to enhance employability. It supports learners to work through Learn Direct Learning Bytes, which include online courses on numeracy and literacy. Learners register with a Learn Direct learning centre, and get a username and password. They can then access a vast bank of Learning Bytes, on extremely varied topics. Some Learning Bytes are free, and others are available for a small charge. Apex is a branded partner of Learn Direct and has access to over 600 Learning Bytes on a variety of different subjects. Learners access the Learning Bytes on a weekly basis, and also attend weekly face to face, email or telephone support sessions with their tutor.

Online course resources

In Fife, literacies workers supported eight learners experiencing homelessness. Having access to online resources meant that learners could miss some face to face classes and still catch up. There was a great appetite for learning.

GLOW Scotland

GLOW is a national intranet for online learning for school pupils, parents and teachers. It is not focused on adult literacies, but was raised by one survey respondent as an interesting example of how a national intranet has been established. It has online interactive activities and resources for young people, parents, teachers and other support workers.

4.2.9 Learner developed websites

Our review of existing literature identified some concerns from researchers that adult literacies online materials often produce general content which does not relate to the learner's interests and everyday life. There can be benefits from learners being involved in defining their online learning experience. One way of doing this is through involving learners in setting up and maintaining websites. In this way, learning can be about the process as well as the content.

Learner led websites

In the Western Isles, learners were supported to create two new websites – an online learner forum and an information site for learners. Learners were supported to:

- decide what they needed from these sites;
- agree the site structure – including web templates;
- agree site content – including taking photographs and scripting the text;
- upload site content – text, logos, photographs and downloads;
- optimise the site position on Google and other search engines; and
- update site content.

The learners were supported to set up a [Skype](#) account, allowing them to receive support from IT consultants through online telephone calls and by instant messenger. The learners enjoyed the process and found it satisfying, as well as helping to develop both literacies and technology skills. They plan to further develop the Learner Forum site, adding features such as blogs and podcasts. The sites are available at:

www.wilearnersforum.co.uk

www.wilearningshop.co.uk

4.3 Summary

- Online and online blended learning is currently being used in Scotland in a variety of ways.
- The approaches used are best described as a spectrum, ranging from simply accessing resources and communicating online, to working through adult literacies courses online.
- Currently, most tutors and learners are using the internet and intranet to:
 - communicate
 - research
 - adapt general websites for literacies use
 - access blogs and forums; and
 - access banks of activities and games.
- There are fewer examples of dedicated online adult literacies courses, virtual learning environments and learner led websites.
- There is evidence that tutors are working with learners to develop individualised online and online blended learning arrangements for each learner. This is perhaps reflective of the strong focus on the social practice model for literacies learning in Scotland, which is based on the principle that adult literacies learning should be relevant to the learner's everyday life.

5. Key Findings and Conclusions

5.1 Context

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland Report highlighted the important role that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could play in supporting adult literacies. This includes a wide range of approaches – including online and online blended learning. Learning Connections has worked to take this agenda forward across Scotland. Using ICT in adult literacies learning is one of eight priority development areas for Learning Connections. Promoting and supporting online and online blended learning forms an important part of this.

5.2 Terminology

The terminology used to describe how ICT can be used to support learning is sometimes confusing. A wide range of terms – including e-learning, virtual learning, online learning, web based learning and online blended learning – are used to describe different types of learning. Throughout this research, we have defined **online learning** as a learning experience using either the internet or an intranet system. This could include using websites, blogs, wikis, discussion groups, virtual learning environments and online learning courses.

Blended learning is slightly more difficult to define, and people do use it to mean different things. Often it is used simply to describe using more than one type of learning approach. In the context of ICT, it is often used to refer specifically to learning which combines online learning with other learning approaches. For clarity and consistency, throughout this report the term '**online blended learning**' has been used to specifically mean a mix of online learning with other learning approaches – including face to face tutor support, email, or telephone support.

From the survey of people working in adult literacies, it was clear that there remained some confusion about the meaning of these terms. Often, online learning and learning using some element of ICT were confused.

Conclusion: There is confusion about the terminology used to describe online and online blended learning. There is a need for the adult literacies field in Scotland to agree, use consistently and publicise simple definitions for both of these terms. This would help to raise awareness of the approaches and their meaning.

5.3 Current Use of Online and Online Blended Learning

It is clear that many adult literacies learners are using online and online blended learning approaches. Most (88%) of our survey respondents said that the learners they work with use the internet / intranet for their adult literacies learning. And of these, two thirds said that over half of their learners use the internet or intranet. But it is important to highlight that it is likely that staff using online and online blended learning would have been more inclined to answer the survey. This survey may therefore slightly over-represent the use of online and online blended learning approaches in Scotland. The way in which online and online blended learning approaches were used also varied.

Conclusion: Most adult literacies workers are supporting their learners to use the internet or intranet in some way for their adult literacies learning.

We developed a spectrum of online and online blended learning approaches currently used in Scotland. This includes:

- accessing resources online;
- planning learning activities;
- communicating online;
- researching online;
- activities on general websites;
- using blogs and discussion forums;
- online literacies activities and games;
- online literacies courses;
- virtual learning environments; and
- learner developed websites.

Although there are examples at all levels, our survey found that in most cases adult literacies learners are using the internet to communicate, research, use general websites, blogs / discussion forums and one off activities and games. There are fewer examples of online literacies courses (that the learner works through on an ongoing basis within an online learning environment), virtual learning environments and learner developed websites. There were very few examples of purchasing commercially developed online or online blended learning systems.

Some people working in adult literacies had developed new online learning opportunities – including blogs and discussion forums. But generally tutors and other adult literacies

professionals were accessing the materials that were already available online and could be used immediately, rather than developing new online materials. Although examples exist of tutors developing their own learning resources in an online environment, such developments were not yet widespread. Technologies such as virtual learning environments are only just beginning to be used in a limited number of areas, and the idea of developing custom made online resources tailored to the Scottish scene has still to be widely considered.

Conclusion: Currently, most online and online blended learning with adult literacies learners focuses on using the internet to communicate, research, use general websites, blogs, discussion forums and one off activities and games.

There is less evidence of adult literacies workers developing new online resources for their learners.

Most survey respondents were using the internet or intranet by:

- directing learners to specific resources to supplement activities in face to face sessions;
- encouraging learners to use the internet / intranet themselves to find out more; and
- using the internet in individual and group sessions.

Online blended learning has generally consisted of learners going online as part of their face to face sessions with the tutor physically on hand to provide support. Online blended learning using email, video or phone support at a distance, does not appear to be commonly used.

Tutors directed adult literacies learners both to adult literacies sites, and general websites which could be used to develop literacies skills. Using general websites to develop literacies skills – for example improving numeracy through comparing prices on different sites – was seen as an important way of ensuring online learning was tailored to the individual learner's interests. Where survey respondents gave examples of approaches they felt had been successful, these were often examples of the internet stimulating an interest in the learner, such as researching holidays online while also developing literacy and numeracy skills.

Conclusion: Developing adult literacy and numeracy skills through using general websites relevant to learners' interests was seen as an important way of connecting learning to real life activity.

Learners also used the internet to access games, activities and tasks which were specifically designed to support the development of literacy and numeracy skills. By far the most commonly used adult literacy resource was BBC Skillswise. Beyond this there was little commonality in the resources used – each individual used very different online resources. A vast range of resources was identified.

Conclusion: BBC Skillswise was by far the most commonly used online learning resource for adult literacies learning.

5.4 Impact of Online and Online Blended Learning

It is clear that online and online blended learning can bring many benefits for both adult literacies learners and tutors. For learners, our survey found that online learning could help to increase concentration, introduce fun and variety, increase accessibility (particularly in remote areas) and support independent and autonomous learning. Survey respondents also suggested that online learning could enable learners to develop literacies and ICT skills simultaneously.

For tutors, online and online blended learning opens up access to a wide range of resources and ideas, and helps with managing learners at different levels, and with different learning styles and paces within the one class. It can also provide a significant opportunity to engage with more learners in rural and remote areas.

This is consistent with wider research, which has found that online and blended learning can make learning more accessible, attract new learners, enhance learner motivation and offer flexibility in learning in a cost effective way. Research has also found that online and online blended learning can help to situate learning in real life.

Conclusion: Online and online blended learning can have very positive impacts for both learners and tutors, particularly in making learning fun, accessible, flexible and encouraging more independent learning.

There were varied views about the appropriateness of online and online blended learning for different individuals and groups. Generally, most survey respondents felt that online and online blended learning can work well with most groups – but that this is very dependent on individual skills and confidence. There were varied views about how well online and online blended learning worked with disabled people, with many unsure of whether it was a useful

learning approach. Some mentioned potential physical barriers. However, others highlighted the potential benefits of online and online blended learning for disabled people, emphasising that the anonymity offered by online learning can increase confidence and reduce the barriers that disabled people can face.

Online and online blended learning was seen to fit best with the elements of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework that relate to using ICT and learning through research. It was seen as less appropriate for developing softer skills such as listening, resolving conflict and co-operating. Some respondents mentioned the need for online resources that can help to develop these skills. Given that many people pointed to using the internet as a tool for communication, there may be potential for further development and recognition of the role that online and online blended learning could play in developing softer skills.

Conclusion: Online and online blended learning is seen primarily as a way of building ICT and research skills. It is currently less well used to develop softer skills – many of which are interpersonal.

It is important to note that our survey, and wider research, has found that there are potentially negative impacts of online and online blended learning. Although independent learning was identified as a potential benefit, there are concerns that too much online learning could lead to isolation and a lack of interaction with tutors and other learners. Here, the importance of using a blended approach to online learning becomes apparent.

Research consistently states that technology in itself does not facilitate learning. The tutor-learner relationship remains critical, in agreeing the role and extent of online learning, individualising learning opportunities and supporting learners to access these.

There are also some concerns that online and online blended learning could lead to a loss of focus, with ICT becoming the focus rather than literacies. Again this is backed up by research which suggests that sometimes the technical process of accessing resources can become more important than actually using the resources to develop literacies skills. Coupled with this, some learners can experience frustrations and fears of ICT, which can put them off an online learning approach. Tutor skills and confidence play a key role in supporting learners to access online learning opportunities in a simple and accessible way. This means that it is vital that tutors have the support that they need to develop their skills and confidence in this area.

Online and online blended learning is at its early stages in the adult literacies field in Scotland. This means that the potential future impact of online and online blended learning could be far greater. But there is currently a very limited evidence base about the real impact of online and online blended learning approaches in Scotland.

Conclusion: Using online learning along with other learning opportunities is important to ensure that learners do not become isolated and are supported to access the learning opportunities best suited to them. Tutor and peer support remains vital.

5.5 Barriers to Using Online and Online Blended Learning

For those not using online learning, access to the internet remains a considerable issue. The main reasons for not using the internet or intranet often related to access, either for the learner or for the tutor. A number of survey respondents mentioned that gaining access to the internet was a priority for them, but they had been unable to influence their organisation or access the resources required to put access arrangements in place. Related to this, even those who did have access to the internet found that there could be practical and technical barriers to accessing the resources they needed.

Conclusion: Access to the internet, both for learners and tutors, does remain a barrier to online and online blended learning approaches.

Another reason for not using online learning was that there were no suitable resources or sites. Even those who did use online learning approaches mentioned that there were issues with accessing grown up resources. Many online resources are designed for children and young people, and are therefore not well suited to adults. Few respondents were developing their own online learning resources, designed to be suitable for adults.

Conclusion: Online resources need to be suitable to the learner. There is an issue that many online resources have been designed for young people, and are not suitable for or directly relevant to adults.

5.6 Gaps and Support Needs

This baseline study has found that there is not a current bank of knowledge within the adult literacies field in Scotland relating to the impact or effectiveness of online and online blended learning. It is important that as new activities develop in this area, these are monitored and evaluated effectively, and lessons learned for future activities.

Conclusion: The bank of evidence about the impact of online and online blended learning approaches with adult literacies learners needs to be strengthened, to help inform future activities in this area.

There is also some need for national support to help adult literacies learners and workers to use online and online blended learning approaches effectively. Survey respondents would like to see:

- more resources relevant to adults and the workplace;
- more resources with interactive and critical feedback;
- more networking opportunities and skills development for tutors;
- more information about good practice in online and online blended learning;
- regular updates on new resources; and
- a central bank of useful websites and resources along with a guide on using these.

As this approach develops, it is likely that the range of online resources will increase. There is a need for a co-ordinated approach, as many adult literacies workers would like more support and advice about accessing the most useful resources. Few are yet at the stage of developing their own resources. But where this has happened, developments are relatively isolated with limited awareness across the authority of these approaches. As more local resources develop, there is a need for a co-ordinated approach to avoid any duplication of effort.

Conclusion: There is a continued need for support to adult literacies staff to develop online and online blended learning approaches in Scotland, particularly in skills development and resource development, co-ordination and distribution.

5.7 Updating the Baseline

This report provides a baseline of how online and online blended learning approaches are being used in the adult literacies field in Scotland. When undertaking this study, we identified a number of issues that should be taken into account when updating the baseline in the future.

It is clear that there is a lot happening in the adult literacies field in Scotland, and a substantial amount of research and consultation is taking place. We encountered some issues accessing a database of people and organisations involved in adult literacies at a local level. Barriers may include research fatigue, the fragmented nature of use of online and online blended learning approaches, or challenges maintaining a list of all of those involved in adult literacies work at a local level.

Developing a baseline does involve getting to as wide an audience as possible, to ensure that all activity is captured. When updating the baseline it may be useful to dedicate time to liaising with a key contact in each local authority area in advance – to consult on the best way of gathering information about online and online blended approaches, raise awareness of the work, and gain buy in from key contacts at a local level. It may also be worth considering a case study approach – exploring in depth how online and blended learning is used in a small number of local authority areas. This could help to get under the surface and gather a depth, rather than a breadth, of information about the use of online and online blended learning.

Conclusion: When updating the baseline, adult literacies workers should be involved in developing the methodology. A case study approach should also be considered.

Appendix One
List of Resources Used

Online Literacies Activities	Web Address	Comments
BBC Skillswise	www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise	Improving English and maths
BBC Raw	www.bbc.co.uk/raw	A guide to developing better reading and writing skills
BBC Cbeebies	www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies	Children's BBC
BBC Bitesize	www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize	Resources for school pupils
BBC Key Skills	www.bbc.co.uk/keyskills	Older site with adult literacy exercises
BBC Scotland Learning	http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/learning/	Resources for young people
Adult Literacies Online	www.aloscotland.com	Learning Connections' resource site
English Banana	www.englishbanana.com	English and drama resources
Maths is Fun	www.mathsisfun.com	Numeracy exercises
Adult Basic Skills Resource Centre	www.skillsworkshop.org/	Literacy, numeracy and ESOL resources
Maths Drill.com	www.mathsdrill.com	Numeracy exercises
Wordsearch Factory	http://www.kidsdomain.com/down/pc/wordsearchfactory.html	Generate word searches
New Headway Esol	http://www.oup.com/elt/catalogue/teachersites/headway/?cc=gb	Resources for teachers and students
ESOL Community Sites	http://www.communitiesol.org.uk/	ESOL teaching resources
The Language Project	http://www.languageproject.co.uk/	Includes some free exercises
One Stop English	http://www.onestopenglish.com/	Lesson plans and resources
Skilled To Go	http://www.offt.gov.uk/oft_at_work/partnership_working/consumer-alliance/resources/toolkitfront/	Learning Resources developed by the Office of Fair Trading
Sheppard Software	www.sheppardsoftware.com/math.htm	Maths activities
CLAN Online	www.clanonline.co.uk	Adult literacies resources
Get Online and Learn	www.getonlineandlearn.org.uk	West Lothian's online learning centre
Woodlands Junior School Website	www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk	Maths and literacies zones
SEN Teacher	www.senteacher.org	Resources for students with special needs
Spell Zone	www.spellzone.com	Spelling exercises
NLN Materials	www.nln.ac.uk/materials	Numeracy and literacy exercises
Many Things	http://www.manythings.org	Interesting Things for ESL Students

Literacy Net	http://literacynet.org/	American literacy site
Cambridge English Language Teaching	http://uk.cambridge.org/elt/inuse/	Resources for English Language Teaching
English Page	http://www.englishpage.com	Online English exercises
Edict	http://www.edict.com.hk/vlc/common	Online English exercises
Better English	http://www.better-english.com	Business English lessons online
Mansion Ingles	http://www.mansioningles.com	Spanish English site
ESOL Online Learning	http://www.citycol.com/esol/saccess/front.html	Manchester College site
English Test	http://english-test.net/about.php	Online English tests
Using English	www.usingenglish.com	Resources for English as a 2nd Language
Primary Resources	www.primaryresources.co.uk	Lesson plans for primary teachers
ICT Games	www.ictgames.com	Literacy and numeracy exercises
Learning Time	http://www.teachingtime.co.uk/	Learning to tell the time
OWL	http://owl.english.purdue.edu/	Online writing lab
Puzzlemaker	http://www.puzzle-maker.com/	Makes crosswords and word searches
ESOL Scotland	http://www.esolscotland.com/index.cfm	National ESOL website with resources
Target Skills for Work	http://www.targetskills.net/products.htm	Online resource packages for sale
Spelling it Right	http://www.spelling.hemscott.net/	Online spelling resources
Eclipse Crossword	http://www.eclipsecrossword.com/	Create crosswords online
Mrs Perkins	http://www.mrsperkins.com/dolch.htm	Guidance on Dolch words
ESL Writing Wizard	http://www.writingwizard.longcountdown.com/multi-word-handwriting-worksheet-maker.html	Practice worksheets
British Council	http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/	Online resources for adults and young people
AAAMath	http://www.aaamath.com/	Online numeracy exercises
Dave's ESL Cafe	http://www.eslcafe.com/	Internet meeting place for students and teachers of ESL
Read Write Plus	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/readwriteplus/	Toolkits and publications
Free Rice	www.freerice.com	English and maths questions
The Blue Book of Grammar	http://www.grammarbook.com/english_rules.asp	Rules, quizzes, videos etc
Literacy Kent	http://literacy.kent.edu/Midwest/Materials/ndakota/spelling/toc.html	Spelling resources

The Math Worksheet Site	http://themathworksheetsite.com	Online maths worksheets
ARKS	http://homepages.ed.ac.uk/calarks/arks/materials.html	Downloadable files on numeracy and English
Worksheet Works	http://www.worksheetworks.com/sitemap.html	Maths and English exercises
Channel 4 - Homework Learning and Teaching Scotland	www.channel4.com/homework	Games, worksheets and help with school work
Chalkface	http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/aboutlts/index.asp	Advice and resources for staff
SQA Academy	http://www.sqaacademy.com/moodle/	Worksheets and lesson plans
Learning Edge	http://www.thelearningedge.co.uk/	Support for working towards formal qualifications
Ayr College VLE	http://vle.ayrcoll.ac.uk/	Bespoke course development
NIACE	http://www.niace.org.uk/	College virtual learning environment
Parapal Online	http://www.parapal-online.co.uk/	Promoting adult learning
		Interactive English exercises
Computer Skills		
BBC Dancemat	http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing/	Typing practice
senselang typing site	http://sense-lang.org/typing/	Typing practice
ECDL	http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.5829	European Computer Driving Licence
BBC Computer Tutor	www.bbc.co.uk/computertutor	Guide to using a computer
Home and Learn	www.homeandlearn.co.uk	Computer exercises
BBC Webwise	http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/	Guide to using the internet
Wider Skills		
Flickr, photobox and other photography related sites	http://www.flickr.com/	Photo sharing sites
Money Saving Expert	http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/	Site to help save money
Learndirect Learning Bytes	http://www.learningbytescatalogue.com/	Online modules on wide range of topics
Oatridge Learning Site	http://learn.oatridge.ac.uk/moodle/	Site for all students at the university
Money Made Clear	www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk	Financial literacies
SCRAN	http://www.scran.ac.uk/	Online Learning - Museums

Open University Open Learn	http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=2865	Online Learning Courses - general
BBC Parenting	www.bbc.co.uk/parenting	Parenting site
Parent Zone	www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk	Parenting site
Tony Buzan Mind Maps	www.buzanworld.com	Mind mapping
Digital Fife	http://www.digitalfife.com/Index.asp?ID=147	Online skills development
Ambleside Primary School	http://www.amblesideprimary.com	Lesson plans
DVLA Driving Theory	http://www.dsa.gov.uk/mockpaper/theoryintro.htm	Mock driving theory tests
Reading		
Sandstone Press (www.sandstonepress.com)	www.sandstonepress.com	In conjunction with their Vista Series of books and the Ideas packs (resources and discussion points)
Wikipedia	www.wikipedia.org	Online information
BBC World Service	http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/	International news
macmillan english	http://www.macmillanenglish.com/	Information on teaching English
Cambridge On-Line Dictionary	http://dictionary.cambridge.org/	Online dictionary
Mitchell Library on-Line	http://www.mitchelllibrary.org/virtualmitchell/	Library site
Virtual Thesaurus	www.Virtualthesaurus.com	Online thesaurus
Oxford University Press	http://www.oup.co.uk/	Online journals and resources
lazybeescripts	http://www.lazybeescripts.co.uk/	Bookstore of scripts for plays and pantomimes
ESL Flashcards	http://www.eslflashcards.com/	Free printable flashcards
How Stuff Works	http://www.howstuffworks.com	General knowledge website
General		
Google Topics		
Gmail		
Google (or Cuil or similar search engines)		
Google images		
Young Scot		
Orange		

Learning Connections webpage
Glasgow's Learning
www.s1jobs.co.uk
forthvalleyjobs.co.uk
goodmoves.org
jobs.ac.uk
myspace
facebook
Ebay
www.hotmail.co.uk
http://qax.org/driving/quiz1
http://www.sitesforteachers.com
CoPAL
Shopping sites
Jeeves
DWP Website
Job Centre Plus
NHS resources online
Holiday, recipe and email sites
Motherwell College Core Skills Resources
PBL Mousing
PC Passwords (Projects Resource site)
DFES website

Appendix Two Examples of Current Activity

This appendix sets out examples of current online and online blended learning activity with adult literacies learners in Scotland. The examples were identified through our survey of people working in the adult literacies field. From a long list of 44 examples identified by survey respondents as successful or pilot approaches to online or online blended learning activity, we developed seven detailed practice profiles.

These examples were selected to provide examples of different uses of online and online blended learning:

- learning through everyday websites;
- using dedicated literacies resources;
- developing new online learning opportunities; and
- developing new online learning courses.

More information about the process of selecting these practice profiles is included in Chapter One.

Profile 1: Learning Through Everyday Websites - Aberdeen

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Overview

Reachout – a project run by WEA - supports learners in Aberdeen City develop their literacy and numeracy skills. During their ten week programmes learners have a key role in planning day trips and residential visits for the group, using the internet.

The issues

The group includes learners with learning difficulties, substance misuse problems, physical disabilities and mental health problems. Their literacy skills, confidence and experience of the internet vary greatly. Some people have never used a computer before.

The aim is to develop a range of skills – literacy and numeracy (which is at the heart of the work), confidence, budgeting and working with others.

Some of the learners feel very disconnected from society, and traditional skills – like reading and writing. Using online and online blended learning is an opportunity for them to learn in a new way that they do not associate with previous learning experiences.

How the internet is used

The group is given a budget, and a time for the trip – the rest is up to them. Generally working in pairs they find out about different elements of the trip. For example, they have used search engines to find out about possible canoeing activities in the Aberdeen area. They price accommodation and transport by searching bus company websites to get prices and availability, look up youth hostels and buy equipment online.

Reachout takes a situational approach to learning to make sure the learning is relevant to real life. Sometimes the learning is a bit exaggerated – for example, looking at more bus companies than is needed. But generally it helps learners develop life skills. Planning the tips is an important way of putting the learners in control, and helps them develop practical skills - including literacy and numeracy.

Impact

For learners with low confidence, working online is more comfortable than making phone calls. It allows them to find things out and build their skills without doing anything they would be unsure about.

Some of the learners are dyslexic – for them learning online seems much less pressurised. They don't have to worry about handing something in and getting it marked. It is also possible to watch and learn from other people's mistakes quickly, then move on.

Learning online is something people can do independently in their own time.

"There is so much information online that is relevant to people and what they are doing. Because we use the internet for practical tasks, learners can do more outside the group, once they have the basic skills and confidence. As a tutor I am always finding new things online and it is just the same for the learners".

An additional benefit is the savings the learners can make. Many of the learners do not have much money, but shopping online means they can get better deals. They have been using price comparison sites and ebay for things like walking boots for the residential.

"Working online gives the learners a good opportunity to work together. The best thing about planning the trip online is the way that people can learn together and build trust. It is a very mixed group – people have different skills and really help each other. It is great to see someone with substance misuse support another learner with learning difficulties working on the same computer".

Some learners even support each other outside the group with tasks like Christmas shopping.

Challenges

There aren't really any big challenges with using the internet to plan a trip like this. The learners have needed a bit of support in learning how to use search engines effectively. To begin with, they were getting lots and lots of results that weren't useful. The project worker printed off the Google guidelines on search terms and spoke with learners about this. This really helped them get the most from their work.

Lessons learnt

Staff involved in this project learned lessons along the way, and offer the following advice to others setting up this kind of activity:

- It is important to make the learning fun and relevant to people's lives. There is so much online that the learning can really be tailored to a learner's own ambitions.
- Don't set major tasks for people. It is better to take small steps that are relevant. Using the internet to plan a trip allows people to focus on the task – they are almost learning without knowing they are learning.
- The tutor should be prepared to provide a fair bit of support to make sure learners get the best from using search engines. Giving some initial guidance around search terms really helps learners get the information they need, quickly.

"You need to be prepared to go with the flow, if you are serious about putting the students in control. Sometimes they make decisions the tutors might not have made!"

What next?

The group are just about to begin planning their next trip. The tutors at WEA will continue to use their online approach to planning the group trips. They also plan to integrate online and online blended learning in to more programmes, where appropriate. It is seen as an empowering approach to learning.

Profile 2: Using Online Literacies Resources - BBC Skillswise

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North Ayrshire CLASP - Margaret Muir, 01294 602711

margaret.muir@btinternet.com

Overview

BBC Skillswise was by far the most commonly used online resource identified in our survey. It is used in different ways by different organisations.

Using BBC Skillswise at Aberlour Child Care Trust

Aberlour Child Care Trust is a Scottish charity working with children, young people and their families. In Glasgow, a Literacies Worker has supported parents to develop their literacies skills using BBC Skillswise. Within the literacies group, some of the learners have been supported to use BBC Skillswise. The Literacy Worker had heard about BBC Skillswise through general publicity. She had used BBC Skillswise in a previous job, and knew it was useful. She tried it out herself first to make sure that it was appropriate for the learners, and to identify useful resources.

The learners use BBC Skillswise on their own at group sessions. The tutor is available to provide face to face support as required. Normally, the Literacy Worker suggests a broad area of work related to the learner's identified learning goals, and the learner chooses the topic within this that they are most interested in. BBC Skillswise is often used in conjunction with offline learning and paper based materials. For example, one learner used the BBC Skillswise writing resources to learn how to plan an essay by creating an outline. Other paper based resources were also used, along with face to face support from the tutor.

Although there are computers in each residential unit, learners do not tend to use these to continue learning activities such as using BBC Skillswise. The residents have a very busy programme in the units, and their children are there with them. The Literacy Worker also

feels that learning is not an activity that comes naturally to this client group, and it works best with tutor support.

The resources used online enhance the work being done in the group. The BBC Skillswise resources are very easy to use, and the colourful design is attractive to learners. Once learners have used BBC Skillswise they seem to be more confident and interested in using other software – such as Word or Publisher.

Using BBC Skillswise also makes the process easier for tutors. The ready made materials reduce the workload in developing materials for learners, and they also challenge tutors' own skills in supporting learners. But staff have found that the biggest challenge is that there is not enough equipment – although there is a plan to address this in the longer term. The Literacy Worker has also found that learners need plenty time to use BBC Skillswise - learners can't be rushed if they are to make the most of it.

Using BBC Skillswise at East Renfrewshire Council

The East Renfrewshire Council Adult Literacies team work with learners to improve their literacy and numeracy. They use BBC Skillswise with a range of individuals and also with a regular Supported Learners Group. The resource can be easily used with a range of learners.

For example, the Development worker has been working with a woman who had a stroke over 27 years ago. Her physical disability means that although she can spell her name, she can't write it. One of the things she really wanted to be able to do was write a shopping list. Using BBC Skillswise really helped with this. BBC Skillswise has a shopping exercise, which was used to support the learner to relearn the shapes of letters - she can now recognise ten letters. Working online has also overcome the physical barrier the learner had, as pressing the keys is much easier for her. This resource has also been used with a supported learners group, which meets once a week. It is used alongside other sites to look at issues like budgeting.

Support is still provided to the learners using the resource. The Development Worker usually works with 4 learners at the group, and tries to keep them working in groups as much as possible – this is quite easy with the resource, and they often work in pairs. This also allows the Development Worker to match the learners depending on their skills and interests.

Not much preparation is needed with the resource. But the Development Worker regularly goes on line for half an hour or so to check what new resources are available from the site. Then they are always there when needed. Once you build up familiarity with the site and the materials available it is easy to find what you want.

The computer seems to hold people's interest in a way that paper based resources don't:

"I don't know why – it just seems to be more of a draw. Only two learners have ever said they don't want to use the resource. I think it is because you get an immediate answer and can see your own achievement straight away. When the learner makes a mistake they can just move on".

"It is the sense of achievement the learners get from using resources online - the feedback is instant. It is very constructive. If they haven't done well, they find out and can progress straight away. But they can see the results immediately."

For tutors, BBC Skills wise makes it easier to develop learning opportunities as there is a real range of resources that are reliable, and easily accessible. They are very practical, and focus on day to day issues for the learners. The only drawback is if someone does not have very basic IT skills – this might take a bit of time to establish. But on the whole, there are more positives than negatives.

Using BBC Skillswise at North Ayrshire CLASP

North Ayrshire CLASP (Community Led Action and Support Project) is a voluntary organisation providing a wide range of community support services to residents living in North Ayrshire. As well as delivering literacies support, CLASP provides services in relation to community health, welfare and money advice, community development, and a jobs club. The range of activities provided through CLASP mean that literacies staff are able to provide integrated literacies support directing learners to other CLASP opportunities.

The games and activities available on the BBC Skillswise website have been used with learners in North Ayrshire in a flexible way as appropriate to the needs of the learner. The online work is used to complement the paper-based activities that learners have been working on.

For example one learner was having significant difficulty with numbers (and very poor recall of what she was learning). The learner had also just started a job working in a shop and was having difficulty. This learner has worked with the BBC Skillswise cash register game where you have to add, subtract and take out the correct change. This was a tailored approach for the individual and it has proven really helpful.

Another learner who lacked very basic literacies skills and (although keen) was unable to use a computer ended up getting a lot from BBC Skillswise. This learner had problems breaking words down into syllables. They started using the BBC Skillswise games which relate to syllables and:

“It was like a revelation to him. He seemed to come on so quickly.”

(Tutor)

For this learner BBC Skillswise was used to complement paper-based reading. The learner was working through a book of short stories. He would read the stories at home, see how far he could get, and highlight words he didn't understand. The tutor would then work with him on the words and the syllables.

“Skillswise meant I could learn syllables and learn different ways of building words. It was fun and showed you different things. The syllable games started with small words but got progressively longer – so you were learning bigger words that you wouldn't have thought you could use.”

(Learner)

The introduction of online learning has meant that learners have been able to concentrate for longer during lessons. Where learners have been getting tired or losing concentration with a particular activity they have then moved on to online activities.

“It meant that I was able to learn more each lesson”

(Learner)

Learners have also gained confidence in using ICT and have been able to go on to achieve other positive outcomes. Initially, the tutor would turn on the PC and load up the BBC Skillswise page but as the learners gain a bit of confidence they are then encouraged to turn on PC, enter password, find website – so they were gradually picking up computing skills.

One literacies learner has been using the ICT skills they have learned to help find employment. This person has also been attending the job club at CLASP and having picked up computer skills has been able to do job searches independently. The client goes to the job club, logs into the site, navigates through the job search page and prints off vacancies of interest.

“I would never have been confident enough to do this – and now I don’t have to ask other people to help me.”

(Learner)

This learner was able to find employment as a delivery driver. This client has improved their lifestyle immeasurably – has signed up for a computing course, is using the local library, and contacting friends and family by email.

Profile 3: Developing Online Learning Opportunities – West Lothian Blogging

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Overview

The West Lothian Adult Basic Education (ABE) team works with anyone who can set goals to improve their literacy or numeracy skills. It has launched an online book club with a group of 12 learners. Following a short training session, learners were supported to post blogs about the books they had read, sharing views and experiences.

How it started

In 2008, the Adult Basic Education team supported learners to participate in the 'Six Book Challenge'. This was a national scheme, introduced by the Reading Agency. Many learners were interested in this, with people of all levels getting involved.

At the time, the ABE team also ran a book club. The aim was to encourage learners to meet to choose new books and discuss the books they had read. But for some people, it was difficult to meet face to face. Issues of transport, timing, parenting, jobs, other commitments and confidence all played a role.

"It can be very difficult walking through the door to the Learning Centre"

(Learner)

Earlier in the year, one of the team members had been to a Learning Connections training session where the concept of an online blogging site was mentioned briefly. With this in mind, the ABE team suggested that they could set up an online book club for learners. There was a high level of interest in this, with 12 learners keen to sign up.

What was done

One of the ABE team members took the lead on setting up a website to allow learners to share their views through blogging. Although she was fairly confident in using IT, she had

never set up a website before. But she found the process really easy – setting it up through Google. The team was very happy with the end result:

“It looks very professional and it is great that you can personalise it for your own organisation. For example, a learner told us that a pale coloured background would be easiest for him, and we could change the colour with a click of the button.”

(Tutor)

The tutors then ran two training sessions for learners. A total of 12 people attended, ranging in age from early 20s to late 60s. All already had contact with the ABE team through other learning opportunities, and they all had a range of literacies needs. The tutors worked with the learners to set up the technology needed to post a blog on the site. This involved setting up Google Mail accounts, inviting the learner to become part of the online group, and discussing how to write a book review. Each learner was given a diary to record their views on the books they read, to help them with writing their review.

Individuals were then encouraged to read, write reviews and post blogs independently. But the ABE team was keen that learners received the support that they needed to do so. The tutors maintained regular telephone, email and face to face contact with learners to provide ongoing support. Support was also provided through blogs on the website.

Between September and early December, 9 of the 12 learners posted blogs. A total of 27 postings were made about 16 books – an average of three postings each.

“One guy started reading his first ever book and got so involved that he missed lunch. Now he’s just finished reading a 500 page book and has put his review online”

(Learner)

Outcomes

At the time of this profile - in December 2008 - the ABE team was in the process of assessing learner experiences and outcomes. This had proven difficult to do as a group, due to the range of other commitments that learners had. The tutors were exploring how to gather feedback on an individual basis. The feedback from one learner is below.

A Learner's Story

"I never used to go out much, just look after my family. I was in my own comfort zone. One day my daughter said I should do something for myself... get a life. But how do you do that? So I started volunteering and they asked me to do a course. I came to ABE and when I first came I never spoke. I found it really interesting how clever people are at using different strategies to hide that they can't read or write. One man managed to hide it from his wife and daughter. He'd just say he was too busy. Sometimes people only admit they have a problem to help their family.

I joined FAGE (Friends of Adult Basic Education) and through this and the voluntary work I learned how to think of what you 'can do'. This made me just try new things. When I first started on the computer I thought I could never do it. But I just tried it and I think it's the best thing I've done, coming here. My daughter in law helped set my computer up. The first time I couldn't get in, but I just shut it down and tried again and it worked.

Now I go on and read more on the internet and I email friends in New Zealand, and talk on Skype. I'm much more confident now. At first I didn't want to say to anyone but now my granddaughter had a book review to do and I could help her. At first I wasn't sure what to write, but the diary really helped. I look at what the others have said. It's interesting to know what everyone thinks about their books."

Lessons learnt

Staff and learners involved in this project would give the following advice to others:

- Don't try to set up lots of Google Mail accounts at the one time – it makes it more difficult as it thinks you are going to send spam emails.
- Hold training sessions at the beginning. These went very well and helped people to understand both the technology and how to write a book review.
- Encourage people to write anything first, then focus on making the reviews more critical. Getting the confidence to take that first step of posting something can be difficult.
- Provide ongoing support. It was easier because these learners all had regular contact with tutors as part of other activities. It is important that people don't feel abandoned.

What next?

The ABE team is currently holding sessions with learners to support them with the language to use when writing a book review, focusing on making the reviews more critical. The team is also gathering feedback on learner experiences to inform the future direction of the book club. It is likely that in early 2009 the team will hold a session for new learners who want to join the online book club.

Profile 4: Developing Online Learning Courses – Digital Fife

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Overview

Digital Fife helps empower community groups (and build stronger communities) in Fife through website development and online blended learning. Digital Fife, in partnership with Learndirect Scotland and Lauder College, has developed a suite of online learning modules designed to be of interest and meet the needs of local groups. The modules fit with the literacies target group and are available to tutors working with literacies learners. The project is funded through Fife Council.

What it's about

The project supports a wide range of community organisations to use ICT to strengthen their work – and is focused on what ICT can do for groups and not the learning of computer skills for their own sake.

Within this context Digital Fife provides free ICT training and has developed 26 online courses. The content of the courses is focused on community development and making use of ICT. They are grouped in three categories: courses for community groups; courses in basic computing; and courses in using the internet.

The online courses are fully accessible. Text and colour can be changed and every course can be listened to in audio as well as read. This makes them particularly helpful for work with literacies learners.

The modules are delivered in a supportive way – there's no reason why individuals or groups can't access them. Learners receive a certificate of achievement, listing all the sections of the module that they have studied and passed.

How Digital Fife is used

Digital Fife's online resources can be used flexibly by groups and individuals. The resources can be used with groups as they grow, helping them develop as an organisation and reap the benefits of 'digital inclusion' – improved literacies outcomes can be achieved alongside this activity. Alternatively, the courses can be used specifically with literacies learners either in group or one-to-one settings.

The courses were recently used as part of a learning programme for eight learners who were experiencing homelessness. The learners found the computing and internet content interesting and there was a great appetite for learning. The approach was particularly helpful for this group as learners were able to miss some set group class time but still catch up – and remain part of the learning experience. Another benefit came from the fact that the courses could be delivered in a relatively short time span. The achievement of an online certificate and the fact that learners could work through something from start to finish was satisfying for the learners.

Impact

The Digital Fife suite of courses has helped literacies learners with confidence. The modules are 'official' and do not look any different from other online courses.

As well as being a helpful tool in literacies learning, the modules provide valuable information on computing and internet use. Learners are more confident in using ICT and can move on to further achievements in their lives.

The use of online resources has helped with some learners' attention span. The resources are far more tailored to the interests of the learners and can be used more flexibly.

Challenges

To access the courses learners are required to register online, establishing a user name and password. This can be an initial barrier for some. Some learners have also had difficulties navigating between pages. Tutors need to watch out for these problems and provide the required support.

Lessons learnt

They have found that literacies learners have a real appetite for online learning. Well designed online resources can be fun, interesting and relevant to learners' lives.

Literacies learners can benefit greatly from resources that are focused on other issues (here computing and internet use) and are professional and official in presentation.

Quality online resources are helpful as they can be tailored accordingly and used in a flexible way with the learners. Flexible approaches have been one way of helping literacies learners' attention span during sessions.

Profile 5: Developing Online Learning Courses – North Lanarkshire

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Overview

The North Lanarkshire ALN Partnership received funding from Learning Connections to help develop an online learning resource for learners and tutors in their area. The partners chose to build a Moodle website. Moodle is a free software package which establishes a virtual learning environment (VLE) where learners can access resources, undertake online courses, and communicate with tutors (and potentially take part in discussion groups with other learners). The resources and courses on the Moodle site can be made available to small groups or to large numbers of learners.

How the Moodle site will be used

The North Lanarkshire Big Plus Moodle site is still in development – and will be a constantly evolving resource. The initial development of the site has seen the ALN team building the site as a ‘repository’ of relevant online literacy and numeracy resources. Tutors will be able to use the resources they feel are most appropriate and relevant for the groups and individuals they are working with.

Tutors in North Lanarkshire are well aware of the range of interactive resources that are out there – and there is no sense that there is a lack of online materials. But a key advantage of the Moodle site is that tutors will be able to tailor materials so that they are relevant to the local area and to the interests of the learners. Interesting and relevant materials can be grouped together – for learners to dip into, or as online courses to work through.

Learners will have their own password to access the Moodle site. Tutors will be able to direct them to resources within a group learning environment – or learners will be able to access the materials in their own time, within the relevant section of the site.

In addition to providing a suite of resources, Moodle has the potential to provide short courses for distance learning. This means that learners can undertake courses in their own time and at a location of their choosing (home, work etc). Where distance learning is

appropriate for an individual there will be email contact with tutors – as well as the required level of one-to-one support.

The team is excited that Moodle will offer a new and flexible way of working. For example, it will be possible for learners to ‘drop in’ on group sessions, sit down at a computer and work on their own course materials. While a tutor would be there to provide support, there would not be the same need to prepare new materials and design a lesson plan.

Challenges

Developing the Moodle site has been a new area of work for the ALN team. Finding the time to build up the resource has had to compete with other priorities – not least the ongoing programme of literacy and numeracy provision and other issues such as restructuring at the local authority.

The development of the site has been taken forward by a (four person) Moodle Group which has had to learn about the approach and has essentially been ‘self-taught’.

While it is straightforward enough to upload Word documents to the site it is a more time-consuming and specialist process to establish interactive resources – and ‘Moodle-ise’ interactive materials. The team have had a Moodle specialist involved to help them post more complex interactive resources on the site.

Lessons learnt

The team feels that there are advantages in using your budget to fund Moodle training early in the process. Undertaking formal training as a ‘first step’ should make the development process quicker and more efficient (rather than learning from your mistakes as you go along).

In terms of driving the process forward (and not being distracted by other priorities) there may be advantages from having one officer with lead responsibility for the development of the site. Rather than sharing the burden across several people, one lead officer would drive a programme for development – and consult others on direction and content.

The team would also recommend having a Moodle specialist on board to help ‘Moodle-ise’ more technically complex interactive resources.

What next?

The North Lanarkshire Big Plus Moodle site is live and available for use – but the team is keen to continue increasing the range of materials available through the site. Once there are enough materials on the site they will publicise and promote its use among literacies tutors and learners in the area.

As the use of Moodle (or similar) online learning sites increases across ALN Partnerships there may be scope for greater sharing of materials – and potential for sharing administrative or technical support.