

ACCESS 2000 LTD

PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN THE WORKPLACE
Evaluation Report

Maeve O'Grady

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Contents

Introduction to the Evaluation Report

ACCESS 2000 Ltd

The Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace Course

Data from Participants

Section 1: The Course Modules

Section 2: The Course Overall

Section 3: Participants' motives, supports received, and evaluation.

Tutors' Evaluations of the Course

The Organisation's Evaluation

Findings

References

Appendix 1: Evaluation Form for Participants

Appendix 2: Questions for Tutors

Appendix 3: Questions for the ACCESS 2000 Co-ordinator and the Voluntary Management Committee

Introduction

This evaluation has been commissioned by ACCESS 2000 to enable the organization assess the extent to which the aims and objectives of the Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace course have been achieved. It will inform the ongoing reflective practice of the organization.

The evaluation was carried out towards the end of the course in May 2009 by surveying participants, tutors, the organization's co-ordinator and voluntary management committee, and assessing the extent to which the course objectives were achieved. Participants were invited to make their opinions known either through a questionnaire, group discussion, or individual discussion with the researcher. The questionnaire was designed to identify the extent to which participants achieved their own aims and well as the course aims, and identify the role of the methodology and supports that assisted them in the process. All fourteen participants present on the day filled out a form anonymously (see Appendix 1). The four course tutors were interviewed separately and provided with a set of open-ended questions to judge the process and address the self-evaluation requirements of being a FETAC Quality-Assured provider. The organization's co-ordinator and management committee were interviewed to enable the type of self-evaluation required as an AONTAS quality-assured Women's Community Education provider.

This report describes the organization's role as a community education provider. It identifies the principles in community education that are deemed essential in achieving positive outcomes for marginalized women. A description of the course is provided, along with the needs that were analysed, the means of analyzing the needs, and a profile of the type of woman for whom it was designed. The outreach and recruitment strategy that enabled the participants hear about the course and find out more about it is also considered.

Participants' Evaluation

The participants evaluated each of the four modules in the course, and a table represents the number of participants who rated the different aspects of the module as either excellent, good, fair or poor. Underneath each table is a description of these findings.

The second section of the evaluation by the participants asked them to review the outcomes of the overall course for them. The elements they were asked to comment on were taken from the aims in the Training Specification submitted to FÁS.

The final section asked participants to select or state their reasons for coming on the course, whether these hopes were realized or not, and the supports they needed to enable their participation, and they were asked to identify positive and negative aspects of the course.

Tutors' Evaluation

There were three sections to be examined: the extent to which the tutors were inducted sufficiently into the course, the tutor's methodology and relationship with the learners, including how they elicited feedback from the participants, and any recommendations for change they would make. The questions posed to the tutors are in Appendix 2.

ACCESS 2000 Co-ordinator and Voluntary Management Committee

The Co-ordinator and Voluntary Management Committee were invited to comment on how they saw the course in relationship to the mission of the organization. The set of questions are in Appendix 3.

Access 2000 Ltd

Access 2000 Ltd is a community development organization whose aim is the delivery of community education and training programmes as a means for women to develop progression routes into further education and ultimately employment. By this means, the organization is an educational resource for the women of Wexford. (Annual Report 2007) It is managed by a Voluntary Management Committee that is representative of the local community, and is core-funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It has undergone two quality assurance processes: FETAC, in order to be an approved provider of FETAC courses, and the AONTAS Quality Assurance Framework for Women's Community Education.

The organization supports groups such as the Traveller Network, the Equality for Women Measure Multicultural Group, women with eating disorders, and has been the lead agency in the Equality for Women Measure steering group in 2007. It has formed links with other community-based organizations such as the West Wexford, Southend, Clonard/ Coolcotts Community Development Projects (CDPs), Ferns Diocesan Youth Services (FDYS), state agencies such as FÁS, the HSE, the Wexford VEC, and Home-School Liaison Officers in Wexford schools.

ACCESS 2000 prioritises women who need educational programmes delivered in a friendly and supportive way. Meeting the needs of such participants is supported through the principle of reflective practice, in order to continually evaluate the learning and accreditation needs of local women, and the educational processes used by the organization.

Community Education

Community Education is provided by different types of organisations, from the statutory-based Vocational Education Committees (VECs), to women's community education projects that evolved as a result of the gaps in provision by the state. The state model is ideal for the individual who has sufficient confidence to undertake its programmes, and who has a range of supports behind her/him that enables participation. It excludes women:

- Who have spent time out of the workforce looking after families
- Who may have lost confidence in their learning abilities
- Whose learning skills may not be 'academic'.

Provision by community-based projects is therefore underpinned by a model of social justice, working for change for particular marginalised groups in society. In this model, the structures can be held responsible for excluding women learners. This structural approach results in an adult being able to consider that they may have potential, provided the circumstances (the provision) suit them.

Community Education Methodology

Community education embraces all three domains of learning, intellectual, physical and emotional (thinking, doing and feeling). It is a holistic approach to education that requires a skilled facilitator using a wide range of methods to facilitate the process of learning (Garavan et al, 1995 cited in Casey 2003).

It is the elements in the methodology that are crucial in enabling women participate. It starts with outreach work, using community-based networks that result in a face-to-face meeting. This non-threatening approach enables a learner to trust the people that will be involved in provision, that they are people she can talk to and be heard. Her own needs, such as time constraints, lack of confidence, are taken into account and accepted as perfectly normal. She doesn't have to be the 'ideal' student that was the norm in her previous experiences of primary and secondary, and even further, education. Consultation is the next element that ensures the programme is delivered to suit the group of learners. This involves a range of strategies but is there to ensure that the programme starts and continues in an appropriate manner. This enables the participants to move rapidly from expecting 'power-over' them, to working in a co-operative manner within the group, and between the group and their tutor/facilitator, a 'power-with' manner (Starhawk 1990). The eventual outcome of such dialogue is the learner having 'power-to' do more than she thought possible at the outset.

A standard level of ability is not presumed at the outset. The flexibility of provision is also essential in ensuring participation. The provider, having met the learners, can organise the best possible timetable. Lastly, the organisation as a whole reflects on its mission and how well things are going for participants, overseeing and ensuring good practice. Previous research has shown that when a provider takes time to get to know the group, especially at the information and application stage, higher rates of retention result (Deane, Lally and O'Grady 2003).

The Course

The course is titled Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace. This is the name of a FETAC single module (Level 5) and is here combined with Communication Skills and Work Experience (both at FETAC Level 5) and two information technology modules: Introduction to I.T. Skills, and Databases, both at FETAC Level 4. Having two FETAC Level 4 modules enables them to be combined and count as one FETAC Level 5 module, under the ‘two-up’ rule.

The course aim is to develop core skills enabling a return to work, progression to a Higher Certificate, and /or provide I.T. skills to enhance employability.

These aims will be achieved through core skills development in:

- Taking initiative
- Taking responsibility for one’s own learning and progress
- Problem solving ability
- Communications
- Presentation skills
- Sourcing and organising information effectively
- Understanding health & safety issues
- Providing practical work experience
- Computer skills

Increasing awareness of community development and community education is also an intention of the course. (Training Specification document)

The Needs Analysis for the Course

The course was designed to build on previous courses in I.T. and a Personal and Interpersonal Skills Course (FETAC Level 4) held in 2007 and be a response to the expressed wishes of participants in ACCESS 2000 programmes. An anonymous survey was undertaken of 131 women who had participated in previous programmes and 34 responded. The purpose of the survey was to assess the level and type of demand for a further accredited course. Of those who responded, 16 had undertaken pre-development, unaccredited courses, 15 had participated in a FETAC-certified course, and 3 had participated in a HETAC-certified course. 27 stated that certification was very important to them for two reasons – it gave

a sense of achievement, and it was important for their employment prospects. Many also stated that they valued the learning, whether certified or not.

The Personal and Interpersonal Skills Course in 2007 had been evaluated, and progression needs identified. The short nature of this course was insufficient to achieve the desired personal and skills development. (Course Evaluation p.10), and the need for a 'well-defined progression route' was evident.

The learners that were identified as having the ability to benefit from the course were early school-leavers, women out of the workforce for a period of time, having the ability to learn from a variety of media, and with a basic of knowledge of I.T. skills. No other previous experience or learning would be required. The women targeted were those experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation within the RAPID areas of Wexford, both urban and rural. Disadvantage and marginalisation includes the experiences of parenting alone, early school-leaving, dependent on low incomes or on social welfare, living in rural isolation, or coming from diverse cultures. What was required from the women was their commitment to coming on the course to return to employment, either in a voluntary or paid capacity (p.6 interim evaluation).

The training approach selected emphasises a learner-centred approach in order that learners are empowered to take increasing levels of responsibility for their own learning, with the help and support of their tutors.

The organisation had run a Personal Effectiveness course before, but that didn't include computer training. Arising from the evaluation of that course, I.T. skills was added into it. To allow for the fact that some of the prospective students already had a FETAC Level 4 I.T. skills module, and that the remainder may not have done this, an additional I.T./Computer Module at Level 4 was included so that participants could get two Level 4 I.T. modules, which is equivalent to, or makes up one at Level 5. Many of the previous participants of ACCESS 2000 courses had four FETAC Level 4 modules, and needed another to complete a full certificate at Level 4. Those who are coming in without any prior FETAC modules will do four on this course, and the hope is that they will be able to complete a further four modules to achieve the full FETAC certificate.

The picture is emerging of an organisation able to identify and outreach to women who need access to certified learning programmes. By providing four modules on each programme, a woman who is returning to education is given tasters of different disciplinary areas along with essential core skills; and a woman who already has done some modules gets the opportunity to complete a full FETAC certificate.

The Course Tutors

The tutors were selected on the basis of their previous experience of adult and community education. A major piece of research in 1994 on community education found that while the sector employs people on the basis of their reputation, i.e. their ability to work with adult learners in the most appropriate and creative fashion, they are highly qualified in their own areas of knowledge, but that these qualifications

are not deemed to determine quality in the way they relate to learners (Kelly 1994). The tutors were known to the organisation for their qualities in working with this type of group.

The ACCESS 2000 personnel consisted of Marian Donegan who provided the I.T. modules, and Margaret Cullen who supervised the Work Experience module and is development worker and course co-ordinator. The external tutors were Rachel Tucker, who delivered the Communications module, and Rosarii Curran, who was the tutor for the Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace module.

The supports

The organisation arranged the following supports for participants:

- One-to-one contact with tutors
- Mentor support
- Information and guidance
- Career advice and guidance services provided by the Adult Education Guidance Service of Co. Wexford VEC.
- Employment Guidance Officer with Wexford Area Partnership. (Interim evaluation, p 6-7).

Selection and Induction of Participants

An information day was held, and the requirements of the course were explained. This included the course content, the FETAC levels on offer, the attendance requirements, and the requirements of FAS and FETAC. FÁS provided training allowances and travel and lunch allowances. There was no childcare support available. The participants were informed about the FÁS allowances on the first day of the course, not on the information day, which helped recruit learners who are motivated by more than the allowances.

The Participant Profile

16 women started in the group and 16 completed. They are aged between 26 and 62. Some of the women are married, some single, some have young children. Three are grandmothers. Many of the participants had left school early and were living on social welfare. (Interim Evaluation, p8)

Data from Participants

The participants were asked their opinions on each of the modules in relation to module content, resources and equipment, exercises and assessments. They were asked to reflect on their experiences of each module tutor in relation to the teaching method, their approachability, their friendliness, the materials provided, the degree of support provided by the tutor, how motivated they were by the tutor, and the tutor's ability to provide feedback and show interest in the student.

The learners were then asked to identify what had changed for them as a result of their participation on the course. They were given a list of the skills and attributes from which they could select. These were based on the course objectives.

The next section in the survey provided a range of statements about changes in attitudes, skills and knowledge about the personal, the interpersonal, and wider society. Participants could select any statement that they agreed with that accurately reflected what other aspects had changed. This section relates to the objective in the course document of: “.. increasing awareness of community development and community education.”

The final section in the survey of participants asked them to identify their objectives for doing the course (more than one option could be selected), identify the supports that they used, identify the positive aspects of the course, and the aspects of the course that were difficult, and recommend any changes.

This survey was carried out on the 3rd March 2009, with 14 of the 16 participants. Most of the group were completing their fourth module, some had completed three and were about to start the fourth, and a small number had completed two modules at that point.

Section 1

Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace Module

Each number in the column indicates how many students provided that rating

	1 = excellent	2 = good	3 = fair	4 = poor
Module:				
- Content	11	3		
- Resources & Equipment	8	5	1	
- Exercises & assessments	9	4	1	
Premises & facilities		5	6	2
Tutor:				
- Methodology	12	2		
- Approachability	13	1		
- Friendliness	13	1		
- Handouts	11	2	1	
- Supportive	11	3		
- Motivating	12	2		
- Providing feedback, showing interest in student	13	1		

All of the participants rated the module content as either good or excellent. There was more of a spread in the rating of the resources and equipment aspect, with 8 rating it excellent, 5 rating it good, and 1 rating it fair. A similar spread was evident for the Exercises and Assessments rating.

Premises and facilities were less favourably rated, with 5 finding them good, 6 fair, and 2 rating them poor. The facilities in the building are not ideal at the moment, and planning permission is being made for a substantial extension, to remove any of the existing problems with premises and facilities.

The rating of the tutor was very high, with only one person rating the Handouts as fair.

Communications Skills Module

	1 = excellent	2 = good	3 = fair	4 = poor
Module:				
- Content	8	6		
- Resources & Equipment	8	5	1	
- Exercises & assessments	9	3	2	
Premises & facilities		6	6	2
Tutor:				
- Methodology	11	1	2	
- Approachability	10	2	2	
- Friendliness	11	3		
- Handouts	10	3	1	
- Supportive	8	5	1	
- Motivating	9	3	2	
- Providing feedback, showing interest in student	9	2	3	

The module content received the highest satisfaction ratings, with all selecting either Excellent or Good. The resources and equipment achieved an excellent rating from 8, good from 5, and fair from 1. The exercises and assessments were rated excellent by 9, good by 3, and 2 rated them fair.

Premises and facilities again received a lower rating, with 6 saying they were good, 6 saying fair, and 2 saying they were poor.

The tutor was rated highest on her methodology: 11 saying excellent, 1 saying good, and 2 saying fair; Approachability rating was 10 Excellent, 2 good, and 2 fair. Friendliness was rated 11 excellent, and 3 good. The Handouts were rated excellent by 10, good by 3, and fair by 1; How supportive she is was rated excellent by 8, good by 5, and fair by 1; How motivating she is was rated excellent by 9, good by 3, and fair by 2. Her ability to provide feedback and show interest in the student was rated excellent by 9, good by 2, and fair by 3.

I.T. Skills Modules

8 of the group had completed the IT Skills Modules

	1 = excellent	2 = good	3 = fair	4 = poor
Module:				
- Content	7	1		
- Resources & Equipment	2	2	4	
- Exercises & assessments	5	2	1	
Premises & facilities		2	3	3
Tutor:				
- Methodology	8			
- Approachability	8			
- Friendliness	8			
- Handouts	7	1		
- Supportive	8			
- Motivating	8			
- Providing feedback, showing interest in student	8			

The module content was rated excellent by 7, and good by 1; the resources and equipment were rated excellent by 2, good by 2, and fair by 4. This relates to the problem of congestion in the I.T. room, as described previously. Exercises and assessments were rated excellent by 5, good by 2, and fair by 1. The Premises and facilities were, as expected, rated good by 2, fair by 3, and poor by 3.

The methodology of the tutor, her approachability, friendliness, ability to provide feedback and show interest in the student, how she motivated them, and supported them – all were rated excellent by all respondents. The Handouts were rated excellent by 7, and good by 1.

Work Experience Module

9 students were involved in this module (and not all elements were required to be filled in)

	1 = excellent	2 = good	3 = fair	4 = poor
Module:				
- Content	6	3		
- Resources & Equipment	4	2	1	
- Exercises & assessments	5	3	1	
Premises & facilities	2	2	2	2
Tutor:				
- Methodology	6	3		
- Approachability	9			
- Friendliness	9			
- Handouts	7	2		
- Supportive	6	3		
- Motivating	7	2		
- Providing feedback, showing interest in student	9			

The module content was rated excellent by 6, and good by 3; the resources and equipment for it were rated excellent by 4, good by 2, and fair by 1; and exercises and assessments were rated excellent by 5, good by 3, and fair by 1. Premises and facilities were evenly rated with 2 each rating excellent, good, fair and poor. This question is more confusing in the context of work experience that takes place off-site.

The tutor's methodology was rated excellent by 6, and good by 3; approachability, friendliness, ability to provide feedback and show interest in the student were all rated excellent. Handouts were rated excellent by 7 and good by 2, her supportiveness was rated excellent by 6 and good by 3, and her ability to motivate was rated excellent by 7 and good by 2.

Summary

The tutors were very favourably rated by the learners, showing that the care and attention in selecting experienced learner-centred tutors was evident.

A more uneven rating for handouts, exercises and assessment is to be expected: it is very difficult to suit everyone in a group, but the overall good rating shows that the variety of methods and materials developed and employed by tutors were appropriate for this group.

The premises and facilities issue, as discussed above, is being addressed. It is interesting to note the high levels of satisfaction in these ratings that resulted in spite of such small premises.

Section 2: The Course Overall

The first question in this section asked participants to select options that reflected improvements as an outcome of the course. All indicated that four areas had improved, as follows:

- Understanding Health & Safety issues
- Using a computer
- Communication
- Taking responsibility for my own learning and progress

13 of the 14 also selected : Taking initiative

12 of the 14 selected: Presentation *and* Gaining work experience

11 selected: Problem solving *and* Sourcing and organising information effectively

This is a good reflection of the fact that the aims and objectives of the course were achievable. The latter attributes (problem-solving and sourcing and organising information effectively) are the more advanced cognitive skills that will be acquired as a result of more time and effort in certified programmes. The work experience objective and rating indicates the fact that some were only starting on it. The Presentation skills are still something that a couple of learners have concerns about.

In light of the fact that the course involves more than skills development for work, and looking to assess the ‘softer’ outcomes in relation to personal development and community development, the participants were invited to select statements that they agreed reflected other changes in their attitudes, skills and knowledge.

In relation to Personal Development, 13 agreed with the statement that “I have grown in self-confidence and self-belief”; 11 agreed with “I have become more skilled because of this course”, and 9 agreed with “I have thought more deeply about what I believe and how I do things”. Self-confidence and self-belief can be fragile, and many women lose a sense of confidence and agency as a result of doing the private, unseen work of society. The fact that three women did not indicate that they feel they have become more skilled because of the course could indicate a need for more opportunity to articulate their skills, and they may be relying on certified and external sources of validation. If they proceed to job interviews without the ability to see themselves as skilled, they may present to an employer as ‘lacking’. The fact that one person out of the 14 did not indicate that they felt more self-confident could indicate a need for a different type of support for that person for issues and problems that cannot be addressed by community education.

In relation to Interpersonal Development, 12 agreed with “I have a better understanding of how groups work.” 11 agreed with “I have a greater appreciation of different types of people in groups”, and 10 agreed with “I now act more effectively in groups”. The ability to work in groups and feel an entitled member of a group is fundamental to progression and development of many different types. Success in this area takes longer to achieve, given that many learners spend years isolated from such supportive groups where their voice is heard and they feel equal to other members.

In relation to Wider Society, all agreed with “I believe that with others, I can take action and make a difference”, 6 agreed with “My ability to work effectively in community has been improved” and 4 agreed with “I have a greater understanding of appropriate ways of working for the development of the community.” The first statement is an indication that the sense of agency of participants has improved substantially, and that each feels that action can be taken as a member of a group. This contradicts the model of the individualised actor that most members of communities do not relate to, and transforms ideas of what can be possible. The second and third statements are interesting outcomes, in that the course content did not have any explicit community development orientation, yet the experience of observing the behaviour of people in this organisation, and relating to it, has influenced some of the participants. The community sector is a growing employer, with a pathway from voluntary work to paid work that is accessible for many women in marginalised communities.

Section 3: Participants' motives, supports received, and evaluation.

1. Motives and objectives for doing the course

The need for 'Skills for Work' was indicated by 7, 'Improve confidence' by 6, Personal Learning progression/third level preparation' – 5; 'social interaction/group participation' by 4, and 1 each selected 'find a career direction ' and 'community involvement'.

Women living in marginalised communities naturally have a range of different needs. For a woman who is older, perhaps she does not see it feasible that she will become employable. She therefore will select 'community involvement' or 'social interaction/group participation' as her primary motive. It can reflect her deep lack of her belief in her abilities in relation to the workforce or formal learning opportunities. She may be carrying an image of the normalised ideal worker – male, young, white, better-educated. At this point, she is not taking herself seriously as a lifelong learner, but is enjoying the social interaction.

The most-chosen objectives were 'Skills for Work', closely followed by 'Improve confidence' and 'Personal learning progression/third level preparation'. The course is specifically aimed at women with such objectives, yet had the ability to encompass its provision to include those who did not name these objectives.

When asked if the course had met their objectives, all responded positively. Two added a negative: one respondent stated that she has always found it difficult to participate in groups and now understands that her difficulty in participating in groups and communicating her ideas can be improved upon; a second respondent stated that she felt the workload was pointless and unnecessarily time consuming.

Positive outcomes were identified as follows:

- Increased levels of self-confidence was mentioned by 7 respondents. One, for example, stated "*I am also gaining the confidence in my own abilities to return to work.*"
- A clearer view of their future direction was mentioned by 3 respondents, for example, "*The work experience has given me a better idea of what I want to work at*".
- Enjoyment in learning was mentioned: "*I now know I have a brain, and I love learning.*"
- Learning something new with each tutor was mentioned by one respondent.
- Specific skills gained were communications, speaking in a group, and group dynamics,
- Greater understanding of the self was evident: "*It made me more aware of what I need to do on a personal level in order to achieve my goals.*"

And perhaps most significantly: *“A new way of learning, and it gave me no fear of the classroom.”*

2. Supports

The group surveyed were invited to select the supports that were important to ensuring their participation, as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| - The timetabling of the course | 6 |
| - Having family support for childcare/transport | 4 |
| - Encouragement from staff | 4 |
| - The FÁS Training Allowance | 2 |
| - Support from the group | 2 |
| - Being local | 1 |

The timetabling of the course was the most important factor enabling participation, closely followed by family support for social care or transport. Staff encouragement kept four of the group going when they found themselves in difficulty, and group support was valued by two others. The FÁS training allowance was essential to two members, and the location was essential for one.

3. Positive aspects of the course for participants

The preferred aspects of the course identified by participants were:

- the Work Placement Module (identified by 4)
- the tutors and Margaret (identified 4);
- the I.T. Skills module (identified by 3)

The following items were identified by 2 participants each time:

- Communications module
- The group
- Timetabling

The remaining elements were identified by one person in each case:

- Small class size
- Getting the coursework done

- Just being able to go to the course every day.

4. Aspects of the course that were identified as difficult by number of participants:

The Communications module	4 (specifically, the oral presentation)
The assignment workload	3
Trying to remember facts	1
'Pointless' course content	1
Group dynamics difficulty	1
Overlap of coursework	1

Some participants do not yet feel confident in doing presentations, as is to be expected. For three participants surveyed, the assignment workload proved to be more than they expected. One woman had difficulty with the need to remember facts, one had difficulty when she perceived some course content as 'pointless', one had difficulty participating in a group or coping with group dynamics, and one was concerned about an overlap in coursework.

5. Changes recommended by the participants

Do the IT Skills module first	9
Expand the IT module	1
Lessen the 80 hours workplacement requirement	1
Cost of being on workplacement (lunch, transport)	1
Start coursework in class	1

The major of participants identified the desirability of doing the I.T. Skills module first. This, however, had to be managed in view of the small number of computers and the size of the training room available. The remaining recommendations reflect difficulties or perceptions of just one person in each case, as do the last four difficulties identified in the previous section. The last remark 'start coursework in class' might be significant for some participants. While it may not be appropriate for a tutor to devote class time to participants' coursework, it might be useful to check in with a group of learners once the programme is underway to find out are they able to find time at home for the coursework. They may then become more aware that the premises might be made available to them for an extra hour after a session in cases where the learner may not otherwise have time or space for the coursework. It is a feature of programme

delivery that information about the course provided in the early weeks may not be absorbed, and that some statements need to be repeated, or if a person isn't anticipating a particular need at the start, they may not listen actively to the list of supports that can be available to them.

It is evident from the above survey that participants, as a group, had the necessary supports, and derived great enjoyment and achievement from their learning. The process, content and methodology suited most of the learners, with the remainder now able to identify elements that would be an additional support to them in the future.

Tutors' evaluations of the course

The questions posed to tutors are based on the FETAC self-evaluation checklist which the organisation is required to complete as part of a self-evaluation process required for quality assurance. Not all of the questions will be applicable to each module.

In-House tutor: Marian Donegan, I.T. Skills Modules

Marian has been involved in teaching I.T. to adults for about fifteen years, since the Horizon Programme based in the FDYS in the early 1990s. She was very familiar with the course, having been involved in designing it and submitting it to FÁS for approval. Marian carries out two evaluations in the modules, one mid-way and one at the end. She provides ten minutes for group discussion at the start of each session to enable the learning from the previous week to be reviewed, and ten minutes at the end of the session to review and clarify what was covered. Opening and closing discussions are possible because of the small number in the class, (ten people) limited by the space constraints. This number also means that people get individual attention.

Communications regarding the progress for the group was straightforward as Marian is on-site when the other tutors are running their classes. The smaller number enables Marian get to know her students well. She was available to them outside of their scheduled class times.

“First, giving them proper exercises and manuals that were really detailed and easy to follow, then if they wanted anything to do at home they were given exercises and I corrected them. We are always available not just on the training days, they can come in, and get extra attention, or stay at the end of the class. “

Marian describes her strategy when starting work with a group:

“From years of experience, I'd be conscious of their abilities in learning, maybe they have been out of the learning environment for a while, so the pace is slow, instructive, step one two and three before going on to number four. They are given a mock exam before the real exam, they are really prepared for exams. I don't even use the word exam, I say, an exercise, the final exercise. “

In considering problems or constraints, Marian identified that because the computers are located in the kitchen of the premises, there can be interruptions.

Margaret Cullen - Course Coordinator and Work Experience Module Tutor

Margaret has worked in the organisation since November 2006 as development worker, and prepared the course application document with Marian Donegan. Feedback on the general progress of the course for

learners was elicited through a mid-term evaluation, and Margaret was available in the premises on an ad-hoc basis for any learner needing a chat, and checked in frequently with the group. She comments that a lot of information can be picked up by being around after each session as learners use the kitchen, access the internet or just chatting.

Margaret, as the course coordinator, arranged planning meetings before the course with the Communications and I.T. tutor to check for overlaps in the modules. Meetings with tutors were held once a month helped identify if a learner was struggling or having difficulties in a module. Supports for learners were identified through one to one meetings with learners on an ongoing basis, or checking in with the group. Flexibility around deadlines for submissions was negotiated for some learners.

For Margaret, the strategy of being friendly and open, encouraging, and questioning, to hear the experiences of the learners, ensuring that the process is good, and valuing everyone contribution, are all essential aspects of responding to the needs of this type of group. The most important resource for the group were the tutors themselves, and their ability to work appropriately with the group and meet their needs.

The constraints in the programme were the premises – a planning application had been refused for a second training room, and a revised application was submitted, but not in time for the course. Another concern would be for the participants who identify, during the course, that a different pathway is desired for them. For example, a learner who, through her work experience, discovered she would like to do Childcare. On the other hand, that learner still has credits to take forward towards a later FETAC Childcare award.

The administration requirement of the programme is heavy in addition to coordination of the course. The nature of the support work as tutor and coordinator is draining because learners are divulging their difficulties, and it can take considerable effort to keep self-esteem levels up and help women overcome negative ideas about their abilities. This type of support is crucial in enabling women overcome the challenges of participating and succeeding in formal educational programmes.

External Tutor: Rosarii Curran - Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace Module

Rosarii had not worked with the organisation before this module, but was familiar with their work. The development worker provided Rosarii with an induction to the organisation. She was given the overview of the module along with the other modules, and met the other tutors and discussed proposed assignments, exercises and resources. Meetings were held on a monthly basis subsequent to starting the course, which she said *“was very useful, particularly with different people. If you had anyone with emotional problems, it was good.”* The learners were given a general overview of the course modules, and then each module individually.

During the module, Rosarii elicited feedback on an ongoing basis through questions and answers, as well as reviewing and checking progress with work completed. She distributed and collected evaluation sheets

at the end of the module. Rosarii identifies her delivery style as facilitative and approachable. She encouraged participation through discussion, brainstorming, questions and answers.

Rosarii states that the environment in the organisation was supportive to learners and herself as tutor. She also had access to a data projector and flip chart for classes, and photocopying and printing for materials. Her only criticism is the lack of space and the limited access to the PCs for the learners.

In considering the demands of FETAC certification, Rosarii considers that the fact that modules are going towards a full FETAC certificate gives learners something to aim towards, which is motivating for women who have either been out of the workforce for a while, or who had no prior opportunities for education. *“One lady said to me, “It’s great to come into school and not be afraid.” Rosarii adapted the assessment exercise: “I had them design their own business instead of using the Workplace. This woman designed her own organic stall and really got into it. And said she would really like to do it. Some of them designed organisations, and really let their imaginations run away with them.”*

Rosarii identified a very important element that she observed: *“These women’s courses, fantastic friendships are made on them. They don’t evaluate this, they don’t evaluate the social element of it”*. It is this very ability of a community provider that can ensure the more intangible aspects of the course are in place.

Rosarii considered the constraints: *“The size is the big problem, the women have to go out the door and around to get at the kitchen if they can’t go through the meeting room.”*

This tutor’s style is flexible: *“I adapt to the style of the people in the room, their background and knowledge, not scaring them with big words but wanting them to be familiar with big words. ..I start off the session with self-assessment and talk about their best qualities, and always start most modules with that. Other than getting them to settle down, it builds their self-esteem and gets them to recognise who they are.”* The unconditional positive regard that this tutor holds for the group is evident: *“They were a great bunch of women”* and reflects a humanistic approach that engages learners at the level of their desire to grow and become more than who they are.

External Tutor Rachel Tucker – Communications module

Rachel has previously delivered a FETAC Communications module in the premises, and three FETAC I.T. modules. For this course, she was supplied with the FETAC module name and code number, and sourced the relevant information and generated the teaching materials. She did not feel any further briefing was necessary, as she teaches this module on a regular basis. She did meet with the other course tutors once before the course started in order to assess if there was any overlap between the modules and assessment methods.

Rachel considers that the learners were given the information about the module and the course, but she also explained the contents of the module, and related this module to where it fits in with all FETAC Level 5 certificates.

Rachel's teaching approach is to use a variety of different methods, keep lectures relatively short and intersperse them with group activities. These group activities give the learners opportunities for discussion and raising questions; rounds of questions and answers also provide her with a sense of understanding as the course progressed. Written work was given and received, and Rachel provided them with written feedback on their work on a formative basis, prior to assessment. Her delivery style is expressed as follows:

"I would think my delivery style for this particular group was quite informal initially; and I provided initially a great deal of time for class and small group discussion in order to make the group feel at ease in returning to learning, so they didn't feel foolish asking questions in front of a larger group. Once I felt we had reached that stage that everybody felt confident of their place in the class, as we approached assessment, I changed the structure of the class slightly to be more focused and goal-oriented towards achieving the assessment and the knowledge and criteria they needed."

In reply to the question as to the learners receiving the supports they needed:

"In relation to my own module, from a teaching point of view yes, they were all provided with support documentation, a variety of information about web-based supports on improving writing skills; in fairness because I was only coming in to teach my module and leave, I wasn't aware of supports they received out of my class time. The students commented that they were able to use the computers to type up reports and they felt happy that they were able to put everything together, outside of class time."

The tutor reviewed the relationship between the course, the participants, and the organisation, as follows:

"The point of the course was to get these women back into education and for many it was their first time back. The atmosphere of trust that has been developed and maintained within the organisation is excellent. It is a very positive place for people to come and feel secure when they embark on this type of programme, which can be quite daunting for people who have been out of the arena for twenty years or more. It is obvious how much the participants enjoyed not just the course but actually coming to the centre. A lot of them will genuinely have a void and will be looking for additional training when the course is finished. Education, if it is done right, is addictive, and people do want to come back for more if it is enjoyable and made relevant."

The necessary resources were perceived to be in place and available. The availability of the development worker ensured that any significant news relating to the participants was passed on. However, the tutor identified the desirability of having a mid-programme meeting with all of the tutors. She also made the

same criticism of the I.T. facilities as others, and stated that it would have been desirable for participants to do the I.T. modules first, in order to give those learners who needed it, the ability to use the internet.

General module comments:

According to the tutors, there were no learners availing of either the appeals mechanism or exemptions.

Summary of Tutors' Review

The fact that all of the participants who started were able to finish the course is testament to the quality of the approach and methodology of the tutors. The ability of the organisation to ensure that supports were available on an ongoing basis ensured participation. Supports included the selection of tutors who were interested and skilled in supporting this type of participant, and in understanding their needs as learners. These tutors have the ability to judge the pace and process correctly, and use each module to mix the tasks of challenging learners and consolidating their strengths in a way that builds learners' confidence and self-esteem levels and gives them a good sense of achievement.

The Organisation's Views

Pauline Ennis – Coordinator of ACCESS 2000 (Wexford) Ltd.

One challenge that Pauline identified was the need to take care in choosing modules for women. When returning to education, a particular motivator is that a module is relevant to a woman's life. In addition, women always want to do computers – it is seen as essential as basic literacy in the contemporary workplace.

Pauline had led the organisation through the AONTAS Quality Assurance Framework for Women's Community Education process – this involved a substantial commitment of time from the organisation, undertaking workshops and residential. The organisation had also become a FETAC Quality Assured provider, giving participants and stakeholders confidence in their ability to analyse needs and respond appropriately.

The appeal of FETAC programmes is that the modules can be flexible enough to suit community education programmes. The Learning Outcomes are 'rooted in personal development', according to Pauline. As such, they are compatible with the values and history of the organisation. There are concerns, however, about the demands of FETAC and FÁS on a community education project, and it can be difficult reconciling the different aims of all of these stakeholders. The danger is that most of the capacity of the organisation is taken up with running organisationally-demanding programmes and that the unaccredited programmes that empower women and enable them to aspire to certified programmes may be squeezed out. The fact that 14 of the participants on the course had done an uncertified course or one FETAC module with ACCESS 2000 prior to this programme indicates that an important pathway exists and needs resourcing and valuing. Only two participants on the programme came straight in without any pre-development work in the organisation. The predevelopment programmes enable the most marginalised to make a start – certified programmes don't.

Pauline states that what achieves success in this programme is the process, the way of delivery. It provides evidence that a community education organisation is competent to benefit women learners. It enables the employment of a part-time development worker to coordinate it.

Pauline expressed the desire for a longitudinal tracking exercise to be carried out, enabling the longer-term outcomes of such programmes to be evaluated. Do women get jobs out of it? What type of jobs do they get? Women with family commitments need family-friendly work, and need to be able to be at home during school holidays. Does such work exist?

The Management Committee

Six members of the voluntary management committee filled out a questionnaire. In response to the question, what was the aim of the committee in deciding to offer the course, they said that it was the response to a needs analysis and requests from women, and it was central to the mission and ethos of the organisation to offer 'the chance of advancement using community education principles'. They considered that their aims have been achieved, with the retention rate a key indicator of learner satisfaction. The fact that participants have a new sense of direction, and new possibilities they are considering is also satisfying. One member considered that helping women back into education and building up their confidence is achieved through the supports given by the tutors and the development worker. The course addresses barriers to participation by being in a non-threatening environment, being timetabled to suit the participants, having a training allowance which can be used towards childcare expenses, and using suitable learner-centred methodologies in the delivery. The constraints were those identified by others in the survey: the size of the training rooms and the recommendation to run the IT skills module at the beginning of the course.

Findings

A very high level of satisfaction with the course was identified by the participants. The elements that ensure quality provision were in place and availed of – learner supports, tutor briefings, interim evaluations, tutor methodologies.

The outcomes for the participants are as follows:

1. A sense of achievement that comes from being able to complete the course requirements, however challenging they are perceived to be at the time.
2. A discovery of their own potential as learners. The learners are making very positive statements about their new-found learning abilities. This is the key to considering future pathways. A feature of employability in the contemporary workplace is the flexible worker, who can understand what is required, or who can anticipate change and react appropriately. Lifelong learning is seen as the key to ensuring this attribute (Longworth & Davies 1996). The participants will be able to adapt to meet the changing needs of employers.
3. Core skills of communication and teamwork have been acquired. Again, they are basic to being employable in today's challenging workplace. When put together with the ability to organise information and material that is an outcome of FETAC certified programmes, these participants are now feeling more confident about the workplace.

The desirability of starting the course with the I.T. skills module was identified. This had been the intention of the provider, with the hope that the new computer training room would have been built in time for the start of the course, which didn't transpire.

The organization has the difficult task of keeping pathways to such courses open. There is a close relationship between the informal, unaccredited developmental courses and the desire to progress to nationally-certified and recognised courses for employability. Being 'enjoyable, and made relevant', in the words of tutor Rachel Tucker, are key to both. One provides a feeder route to the other. A great deal of commitment throughout the organization is required to enable the staff and tutors respond to the emotional and learning needs of participants.

The course evaluation has shown that this community provider has the capacity to design and deliver a course at the level appropriate to the needs of targeted groups of women learners, through consultation, outreach, support, and the appointment of tutors who understand and are skilled in the processes involved. Any difficulties, such as the environment for the I.T. training, are known and being addressed, yet do not appear to have interfered or limited in any way, the successful outcomes that were identified by the participants. The new sense of possibilities in their learning abilities, in achieving qualifications and in

becoming employable even in adverse economic conditions, that is articulated by the participants is tangible, and will ensure that the participants are well-placed to build on this achievement, as conditions allow.

The researcher chose to include the words of participants and tutors as much as possible to reflect the experience of the course both from the point of view of participants and the thinking that tutors on the course have done to ensure such satisfactory outcomes. Both extracts and outcomes are a testament to good practice in women's community education.

References

AONTAS (2004) *Community Education 2004*, Dublin

Casey, G. (2003) *The Principles and Practice of Women's Community Education*, Waterford Institute of Technology

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Kelly, Mary B (1994) *Can You Credit It: Implications of Accreditation for Learners and Groups in the Community Sector*, Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin.

Longworth, N. and Davies, W. K. (1996) *Lifelong Learning*, London, Kogan Page.

Starhawk (1990) *Dreaming the dark: Magic, sex, and politics*, London, Mandala

ACCESS 2000 Documents

Annual Report 2007

Personal and Interpersonal Skills Course Evaluation 2007

Personal Effectiveness Interim Evaluation

Training Specification for the course

Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace Course: Evaluation Form

March 2009

Your feedback and evaluation of the course is appreciated, and will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Section 1: Course Modules

Please rate each of the elements in the different modules by putting a number in each box for each item. 1 – Excellent, 2 – Good, 3 = Fair, 4 = Poor

	Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace	Communication Skills	IT Skills	Work Experience
Module Content				
Module resources and equipment				
Premises/facilities				
Teaching methods				
Approachability of tutor				
Friendliness of tutor				
Module handouts				
Module exercises and assessments				
Support for participating in module				
Motivation from tutor				
Feedback/interest of tutor				

Section 2: The Course overall

Please identify what areas you have improved as a result of the course (tick where applicable):

Taking initiative	
Taking responsibility for my own learning and progress	
Problem solving	
Communication	
Presentation	
Sourcing and organising information effectively	
Understanding Health & Safety issues	
Gaining work experience	
Using a computer	

Please circle any of the statements below that reflect the kind of change you have experienced:

	Attitudes	Skills	Knowledge
Personal	I have grown in self-confidence and self-belief	I have become more skilled because of this course	I have thought more deeply about what I believe and how I do things
Interpersonal	I have a greater appreciation of different types of people in groups	I now act more effectively in groups	I have a better understanding of how groups work
Wider Society	I believe that with others, I can take action and make a difference	My ability to work effectively in community has been improved	I have a greater understanding of appropriate ways of working for the development of the community

Section 3

1. What did you hope to get out of the course?

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Did the course meet your objectives? **Yes / No (circle one)**

If yes, in what way:

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If no, in what way:

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2. What supports enabled you to get onto the course and participate on the course?

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3. What aspects of the course did you find worked well for you?

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4. What aspects of the course were difficult?

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5. What aspects of the course would you like to see done differently or changed?

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6. If there are any other comments you would like to make about the course, please do so here:

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Thank you for your time.

Maeve O'Grady

External Evaluator

These questions are based on the FETAC self-evaluation checklist which the organisation is required to complete as part of a self-evaluation process required for quality assurance. Not all of the questions will be applicable to each module.

A. Induction

1. Have you worked with the organisation before? How were you briefed about the organisation?
2. Did you get information relevant to the module and the course that you required?
3. Do you think that the learners were given the information about the module or the course that they required?

B. During the Course/module:

4. In what ways did you elicit feedback from the learners?
5. Did you have the opportunity to meet with the other tutors on the course?
6. Have any learners availed of the appeals mechanism?
7. Have any learners availed of exemptions from part of the module?
8. Do you think that the learners received the supports they needed?
9. Can you describe how your delivery style was appropriate for this group of learners?
10. Were the resources necessary for successful achievement by learners on the module allocated to and maintained on the programme?

C: Reviewing the Course:

11. Have you any feedback and suggestions for the improvement of the programme?

Appendix 3: Questions for the ACCESS 2000 Co-ordinator and Voluntary Management Committee

1. What is the relationship between the course and the mission of the organisation?
2. What barriers for women does the course or organisation address?
3. What's working well in the course from your point of view?
4. What's difficult?
5. What would you like to see done differently or changed?