

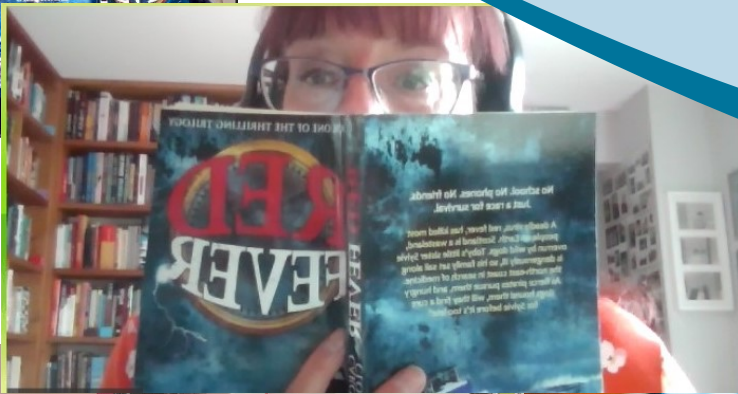
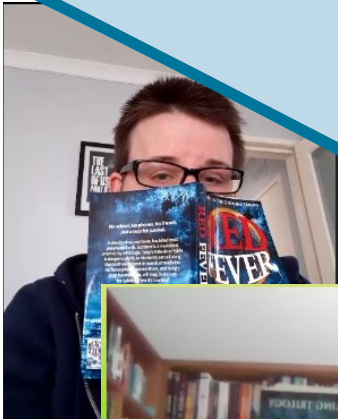
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RaPAL

2020 Special Edition



**RaPAL 100 Project
meets Lockdown**

Journal

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacies Network

Welcome

Research and Practice in Adult Literacies (RaPAL) is the only UK-wide organisation that focusses on the role of literacies in adult life. We promote effective and innovative practices in adult literacies teaching, learning and research; and support adult literacies practitioners and researchers. We enjoy engaging in debates that touch on English language and literacy, numeracy and digital skills across homes, communities and workplaces. Through our members, digital journals, conferences and fora, policy and advocacy work, we are active in Europe and have international links.

What we do

- Encourage collaborative and reflective research
- Publish a journal three times a year
- Create networks by organising events (including an annual conference) to contribute to national debate
- Believe in democratic practices in adult literacies
- Emphasise the importance of social context in literacies
- Critique current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill
- Campaign for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives

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Editorial Information

The editorial group for 2019-2020 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner-researchers: Gwyneth Allatt, Angela Cahill, Claire Collins, Vicky Duckworth, Sarah Freeman, Tara Furlong, Toni Lambe, Sue Lownsbrough, Jonathan Mann, Juliet McCaffery, Mary-Rose Puttick, Anne Reardon-James, Yvonne Spare and Rachel Stubbley.

RaPAL members are involved in the compilation of the journal as editors, reviewers and referees.

We are a friendly group – open to new members and new ideas. Please contact us with any contributions (views, comments, reports and articles) and do not be put off if you are new to the field or if you have not written for a publication before. The journal is written by and for all learners, tutors/teachers and researchers who want to ask questions about this field of work. It does not matter if the questions have been asked before. We want to reflect the many voices within adult literacies work and to encourage debate.

Why not join us?

Further information can be found at our website: www.rapal.org.uk

The RaPAL Journal is also available from various subscription services: EBSCO, LMInfo and Prenax. The RaPAL journal expresses a variety of views which do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial group. The RaPAL journal was designed by Image Printing Company, Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire



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Note from the Journal Coordinator

Yvonne Spare *Yvonne can be contacted on journal@rapal.org.uk*

Welcome to the second part of our double edition of the RaPAL Journal volume 100. This is the Journal in which we report further on our findings from the RaPAL 100 survey, which we are undertaking to celebrate our 100th edition in our 35th year and the 20th year since the Moser Report: *A Fresh Start*. At the date of publication, we had identified 85 sites offering adult literacies teaching and learning across all the regions of the UK. This edition looks at more of the themes emerging from the interviews and questionnaires we carried out, but also describes how the Covid-19 lockdown impacted on teaching and learning. At our recent annual editorial meeting we decided on titles for our next year's editions:

Volume 101 (Winter 2020) Practitioner Research (Currently in production)

Volume 102 (Spring 2021) Survey100 Project Report

Submission of first drafts by end January 2021.

Editing team: Gwyneth Allatt g.allatt@hud.ac.uk; Toni Lambe toni.elambe@gmail.com;
Jo Dixon sojoto1770@gmail.com.

Volume 103 (Summer 2021) Conference edition: 'Adult basic skills: building back better' from L&W English, Maths, ESOL annual conference

Submission of first drafts by end March 2021

Editing team to be decided. Enquiries to journal@rapal.org.uk

Volume 104 (Winter 2021) Open edition – suggestions welcome

Editing team to be decided. Enquiries to journal@rapal.org.uk

We are inviting submissions for articles for these forthcoming editions for 2021. We would particularly welcome longer academic articles suitable for peer-review and would ask you to contact us earlier than the deadlines above to allow discussion of your proposal. Any comments about this or other editions or ideas for future content can be sent to journal@rapal.org.uk. Don't worry if your ideas for an article do not fit one of our themes – there is space in all our Journals for items of interest to our readers. Don't forget that most Journal editions contain articles by new writers, including adult literacies learners. There are guidelines on our website on the [Write for Us](#) page and we offer as much support as you feel you need. We are also interested in hearing what you think about your Journal. There is a feedback section on the website so that you can comment on anything you have read in this or previous editions. Follow the link to our comments space at the bottom of the page, which needs the password that has been circulated with this edition. We look forward to hearing from you.

We hope you enjoy this edition of your RaPAL Journal.

We would like to reiterate that the articles we publish are not necessarily representative of the views or position of the membership body, and we do not advocate any given course of action in any given context. We do, of course, support freedom of speech and of academic liberty, and the pragmatic achievement of objectives as a negotiated consensus.

Editorial

Sarah Freeman and Toni Lambe

Sarah Freeman has worked as a teacher in adult literacy and ESOL since the 1970s and seen many changes in provision as she worked in community and adult learning venues, further education colleges, voluntary provision, schools and prisons. She was awarded a doctorate by Sheffield University for her research in 2018 and she has recently been leading the RaPAL 100 Project research across the UK.

Toni is currently a doctoral scholar with University College Dublin's School of Social Policy, Social Work, and Social Justice. She has over twenty years' experience in the adult literacy field in Ireland in various capacities including, tutoring, training, management, and organisation.

What has the RaPAL100 Project thrown up? It seemed easy to say one year ago that RaPAL would do a survey which gave us, as an organisation, an insight into what was already a rapidly changing world in further education. How had government-funded providers been coping with the rapid withdrawal of funds over ten years of austerity measures? And how were they adjusting to the never-ending alteration of exam regulations and Functional Skills exam content? Were lower level learners missing out? Did private, community and charity adult literacy organisations fare better, and by what means were they able to be effective? Our interviews and surveys fed back promising emerging facts which were first recorded in our journal 100(i). We include deeper studies of our data in this second part of the RaPAL 100 issues.

Then soon after we entered national lockdown in March 2020, we realised that the world of learning in adult education was undergoing an overnight transformation – a recourse to online learning. It was a coincidence that this occurred at the end of our survey period. We realised that by chance we had a survey in place that we could extend and do some tracking of these dramatic developments in our field. Many of those we had interviewed or who had responded to the survey or who had participated in a Rapallist discussion (our email discussion group) were willing to share more information about how rapidly they had to adapt themselves and then encourage students to adapt in lockdown conditions. In this journal some of these colleagues have also afforded us their time to recall their first-hand experiences.

The first four articles in this issue examine evidence-based insights into different aspects of adult literacy in early 2020. Firstly, Toni Lambe examines the use of volunteers using statistics gleaned from a great many responses to the project. She puts forward the point

that while the use of volunteers varies widely they are increasingly being brought back into literacy provision.

Sarah Freeman in a longitudinal commentary recognises a cyclical pattern in how phonics has been implemented in adult literacy learning and how the project has highlighted the new and sometimes key role phonics is now playing in various schemes.

Toni provides another key insight gained from the survey into the types of staffing employed, whether full-time, fractional, hourly-paid or volunteers. With over 50 providers accounted for, this gives a valuable, quantifiable and full graphic view of how literacy was populated by staff in early 2020.

The deepest study by Jo Dixon investigated project findings into what extent ESOL learners tended to be populating classes intended for fluent speakers of English. With replies coming from widely across UK we discovered a variety of factors that cause these learners to be placed in literacy and Functional Skills English classes and a variety of attitudes and responses to the issues. Jo's study will be rewarding to both Literacy and ESOL practitioners and researchers who want to have a greater overview of how others are or are not absorbing ESOL learners in their English departments.

The second half of our journal has unique insights from four RaPAL colleagues into the whirring and whizzing months between mid-March and the beginning of the Autumn term 2020 when the all change signal to online learning took place. We are deeply grateful to these individuals for providing us with their own unique stories and we have four quite different perspectives: from a WEA practitioner, from the literacy and numeracy development worker at Glasgow Women's Library, from an FE manager of the *Citizens' Literacy Project* in Glasgow and from a specialist technical advisor for a major UK-based awarding organisation. The drama and sometimes total panic-stations situations that seized the sector is portrayed distinctly in all of these articles.

Pauline Clarke says, 'By the end of the summer term I had delivered over 120 hours of Zoom classes, engaged in over 1300 email exchanges supporting learners, completed Level 1 City & Guilds Listening Exam resits via Zoom, written 35 individual written testimonials to support predicted grades, marked and given feedback to over 80 distance learning worksheets/packs sent out by post as well as uploading and converting over 1500 photographs of learners' work in order to provide the appropriate feedback to learners and evidence of formative assessment.' Apart from this she had to continually uptrain herself to be able to use the IT skills necessary.

Pauline's, like Donna Moore's and Diane Gardener's articles which follow all give us sensitive insights into what the learners had to cope with as well to access their learning, and how for some, compromises were made and variations on what they learnt before.

Donna: 'And so began a new way of literacy learning...'. Some learners had to learn how to use their mobile phone to access important messages not just from college but from support services which they had to be able to read to know how to survive. And Donna also

gives concrete examples of how she supported seven learners in particular during this time. There is no doubt as to why Donna's and indeed other providers' courses are very well

subscribed to this Autumn term after the amount of individual tailored literacy input that has been put in.

Diane: 'As adult educators we have a monumental responsibility to get it right for our students to ensure they can begin to take part in society and in life'. Diane draws more attention to the many varying efforts the college has put into both ensuring students can access learning from home and making the college Covid-safe for the Autumn term.

Lastly, Paul Sceeny whose work had taken him far and wide across the UK recalls how in March, 'little did I know that I'd just had my last face-to-face work meeting until – well I still don't know when...!'. Paul acknowledges the fact that practitioners, curriculum leads and managers were under considerable pressure but he also gives us a view of the scramble for practical, plausible and acceptable decisions that exam boards were facing.

We've been incredibly lucky to get these insights from four extremely busy people. We hope RaPAL readers will value them as much as we do and we welcome any further reports of UK literacy from the factory floor in 2020 and beyond.

Volunteers return to adult literacy in U.K.

Toni Lambe

Toni is currently a doctoral scholar with University College Dublin's School of Social Policy, Social Work, and Social Justice. She has over twenty years' experience in the adult literacy field in Ireland in various capacities including, tutoring, training, management, and organisation.

Introduction

I was there when it was about getting qualifications, introducing professionalism...now the Moser report criticism of Basic Skills has all come back. (Local Charity)

As reported in the Spring edition of the RaPAL Journal, early findings from the RaPAL 100 Project indicated that volunteer tutors were coming back into the system (Freeman, 2020: 16). Final results show that a large number of providers (over half of those who filled out the questionnaire, and 12 of 19 interviewees) employ volunteer tutors across a range of provision and in a variety of roles. A combined 48% from the questionnaires alone claimed that the ability to recruit volunteers was either 'very important' or 'essential/vital' to their provision.



Qualitative data from the RaPAL 100 questionnaire and interviews, provide some insight into the rationale behind increasing voluntary activity. While some of the increase in voluntary provision can be related to funding pressures, there are strong indications that there exists an ideological divide between those who embrace volunteer tutors and those who do not. Providers who are focused on successfully delivering accredited programmes with set syllabi, rarely employ volunteers. Those dedicated to responding to individual student needs show much more dependence on volunteer tutors. Based on the responses to the RaPAL 100 survey this article explores the benefits of employing volunteers within an adult literacy context.

Adult literacy in context

To provide context in relation to volunteers in adult literacy in the United Kingdom (UK), a brief outline of adult literacy development in the UK is provided, from the emancipatory work of the early days through to the recent pre-Covid-19 state-funded standardised model. Beginning with the Right to Read campaign in the mid-1970s, which was heavily reliant on volunteer activity and highly successful, it continues through Skills for Life in 2001, which brought funds and accountability but side-lined volunteers, and finishes with the current situation where funds are tight for certain programmes, and volunteer activity is increasing.

The UK is not necessarily the first country that comes to mind when thinking of mass adult literacy campaigns driven by concerns for social justice. Yet, the 1973 national literacy campaign A Right to Read, 'the first adult literacy campaign to take place in a Western European country' (Hamilton and Merrifield, 1991: 5), was just that. The campaign was instigated under pressure from the British Association of Settlements (BAS): an alliance of voluntary agencies who managed the political arm of the campaign, while the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was at the forefront of the public awareness element of the campaign (ibid). Similar to more well-known mass campaigns, like those of Cuba and Nicaragua, the campaign focused on training volunteers to provide one-to-one tuition outside formal learning environments. Over the three years of the campaign 75,000 volunteers were trained and 125,000 learners had been helped to improve their reading and writing (Moser, 1999: 39) (for further details see Hamilton, 1996; Jones and Charnley, 1978; Withnall, 1994).

Over the next twenty years adult literacy education, funded and led by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), could be viewed almost as a social movement maintaining its informal, student-centred, participatory ethos as promoted by participants in the original Right to Read campaign. In addition, volunteer tutors capable of responding to the needs of individual students remained central to provision. It wasn't until the early 1990s, when most provision moved into the further education (FE) system and funding began to be linked to outcomes through a national funding body, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), that an increasing emphasis on professionalisation foreshadowed the movement towards a reduction of the number of volunteers (Hamilton and Merrifield, 1991: 5). Skills for Life 2001, with funding for in-class support workers and professional qualifications for tutors, accelerated the trend.

Sweeping cuts to the adult literacy budget from 2010 onwards alongside funding linked to accreditation outcomes saw a narrowing of provision. FE colleges turned their focus towards supporting students to progress through Levels 1 and 2. In so doing the colleges were protecting their income stream. Funding linked to progression identified as accreditation within a predetermined time-frame can make providers very cautious in taking on students with more complex and extensive needs. In this scenario, those at the lowest levels become a risk not worth taking (Darville, 2011: 167) as they present a threat to funding. These students, mainly at Entry levels, are in general excluded from FE provision. However, being

invisible or outside FE provision does not mean the need is not there; official neglect does not make the issue disappear.

RaPAL 100

At the time of the RaPAL 100 research project, adult literacy provision in the UK appeared to be in the process of developing in three separate and distinct directions based on different philosophical and ideological perspectives. FE colleges, deeply embedded in the discourse of the market and working from a neoliberal philosophical orientation, were concentrating on achieving good results at Levels 1 and 2 thus ensuring they maintained their funding stream. FE colleges such as Bedford and large Adult Community providers, such as a city-wide service in Bristol, are two such examples of providers who hold on to their funding by getting good results at Levels 1 and 2 but engage few, if any, volunteers.

Providers driven by a more student-centred ethos, who believe that students are individuals with different needs and experiences, tend to be much more dependent on volunteer support. In this group are located schemes that are run as charities including the *Women's Library* in Glasgow, (see <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/>) and *Possibilities* also in Glasgow both dedicated to adapting the curriculum to the learner rather than obliging the learner to fit in with a readymade set of syllabi. Adult education run by Coventry City Council, widely regarded as a good example of meeting everyone's different needs, is also to be found in this group. Like the Glasgow approach, Coventry endeavours to provide classes tailored towards student needs, setting up new classes in response to changing needs.

The third group include Read Easy which takes the approach that there are sound 'economic reasons for improving adult literacy levels nationally', while also recognising that adult literacy students need to learn at their own pace. Read Easy is an entirely voluntary project which grew out of the twin realisations that funding cuts had decimated Entry Level literacy provision and not all students were ready or willing to work in a group (see <https://readeasy.org.uk/about-us/> for further details about the project). While the Read Easy approach matches a student with a volunteer who works with them on a one-to-one basis in a private space and at the student's own pace, the learning is structured and based on the Shannon Trusts 'Turning Pages' manuals <https://turningpages.shannontrust.org.uk/>. An experienced practitioner who has worked in the adult literacy field since 1992 reported that in her experience Read Easy is proving very effective with students who make visible progress.

In all these years of Skills for Life provision it was still hard to move people's reading on. Here with 30 minutes twice a week the readers have flexibility... Their learning is structured, and they start at Manual 1. They move on quickly and it works well. (Local Charity)

Role of Volunteer Tutors

Based on the responses to the RaPAL 100 Survey the chart below indicates the different roles undertaken by volunteer tutors across the different providers. In the majority of

instances volunteers worked as a classroom assistant where their contribution was seen as of great benefit to the students.

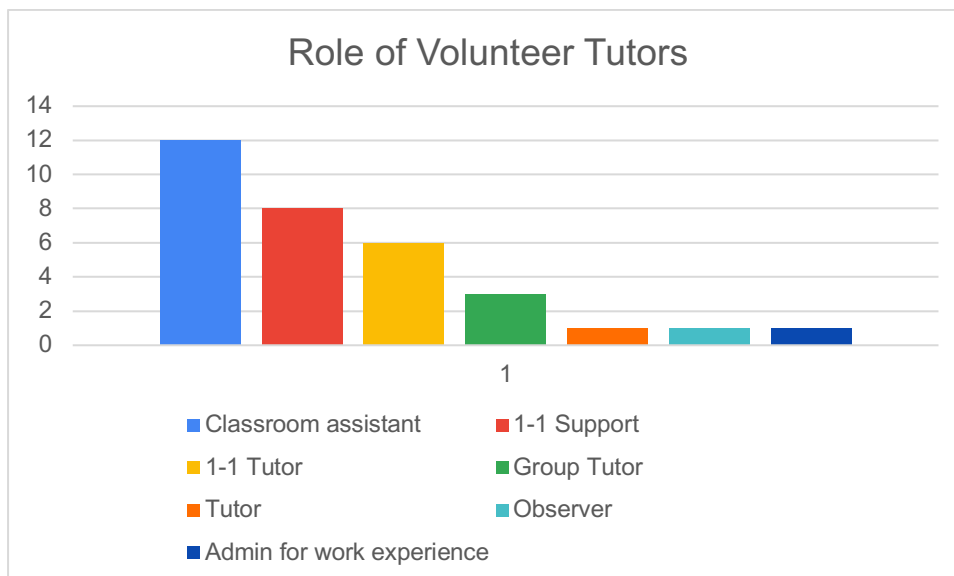
A good volunteer is absolutely invaluable in a class and my classes have certainly benefited from having another voice and another pair of hands. (Simon Fuller, Islington Adult Community Learning Service)

Other practitioners found that the support and backup provided to them, as tutors, by voluntary classroom assistants was a contributor factor to the effective delivery of their programme.

I have been teaching this Course for the first time...and experiencing various extra need issues and digital issues from students (some have also exhibited what could be termed challenging behaviour). I think I would have found teaching this course very stressful without support backup from my Class Assistant, who also has a lot of life skills and understanding behind her. (Amanda Derry, Community Adult Learning Tutor, Workers Education Association)

Volunteers were also reported as working as one-to-one support within groups where they provided necessary dedicated assistance to individual students to ensure they were able to keep up.

Without our volunteers, I think that some of the learners with additional needs would fall a little bit behind. They are an integral part of our service. (Jo Porrino, Adult Learning Manager, Derby Adult Learning Service)



The other main role of volunteer tutors was working on a one-to-one basis with an individual student. Historically, the one-to-one model was the dominant method of tutoring in adult literacy and is currently favoured by Read Easy, who at the time of interview reported 387 students in 26 groups (late 2018) and explained they ‘couldn’t

possibly deliver Read Easy without them' [volunteers]. (Ginny Williams–Ellis, Chief Executive). Other organisations who are oriented towards responding to student needs also reported being heavily dependent on volunteer tutors.

[Without volunteers the service] would not exist (Julia Olisa, Literacy tutor and service founder, Thames Reach)

This [volunteers] is key (Charity promoting independent Living)

Benefits of Volunteers

The employment of volunteers to provide adult literacy tuition is beneficial on a number of fronts. Firstly, it is inexpensive and the only feasible method of providing one-to-one tuition. In addition, volunteers allow for flexible scheduling opportunities, allowing students to fit their learning around their individual circumstances.

Someone will say I am working shifts, or I've got childcare or a friend can only look after my child on a Tuesday morning, I can only come on a Tuesday morning to a class. We have always run on those models and the challenges associated with it. (Large Adult Community Education Provider)

Volunteers also allow for individualised instruction which facilitates targeted needs-based provision. Based on findings from this research provision that employs volunteers tends not to be focused on accreditation as the primary goal, allowing students to progress at their own pace. As one charity-based interviewee explained

We have no time limit...[students] can attend for as long as they need the support. We do not offer qualifications; we measure success through one-to-one support and learner feedback that is recorded on paper and digitally. (Anonymous Charity)

Disadvantages

Despite the positive aspects of volunteer adult literacy provision noted above there remain those who question its efficacy in particular in relation to one-to-one provision. One of the main arguments put forward is that students with the weakest skills, who have already been failed by the education system, are assigned to the least well-trained tutors: volunteers. Proponents of this view point fail to recognise that one-to-one provision is focused on meeting individual student needs and given the 'spiky profile' of adult literacy students no pre-service training course could possibly prepare all volunteers for the wide range of issues they may encounter when tutoring.

Belzer's 2006 research with three tutor student dyads supports this position. She found that pre-service training had little impact on tutor practice (2006: 570) leading her to suggest that the need for support is at its greatest when the tutor/student relationship has become established and tutors are aware of the specific needs of

their student (ibid). Accounts from participants in the RaPAL 100 project suggest that providers who engage volunteer tutors to deliver one-to-one literacy tuition take a similar viewpoint.

Volunteers are provided with a one-day Initial Coach Training course before they begin coaching and provided with a Reading Coach Handbook. After they have been coaching for a few months, volunteers attend a second 'Consolidation Training' day, to support them to use additional resources and activities to provide reinforcement and variety in their reading sessions. Each group also has a Literacy Specialist on the Team who can provide specialist support and more specific advice when necessary. (Ginny Williams–Ellis, Chief Executive)

The Read Easy model, as indicated in the extract above, provides volunteer tutors with access to an expert whom they can approach for advice on issues related to their individual student. This approach eliminates the need to try and cover every possible angle at initial tutor training. Most other providers who contributed to the research report offered some initial tutor training, volunteer induction, and/or access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as reflected in the extracts below.

Volunteers have 'core training' and updating. (Adult/Community Education Provider)

They have a full induction and then they are welcome to do any CPD that we offer in the service. There will be an INSET day once a term with a programme of different courses, but they can choose. There is no expectation that they will do any. There is no specific literacy training: we would expect most of them to have Level 2. You [would] know from their application form whether their literacy skills were reasonable, and they are interviewed. (Jo Porrino, Adult Learning Manager, Derby Adult Learning Service)

Other participants highlighted how those who volunteer as adult literacy tutors are, in general, adults with wide ranging life experience. The extracts below from three participants in this research are illustrative.

My volunteer CA has been a manager within a work environment, a mechanic and has also helped within other community learning classes. She is a parent and has gained all relevant basic qualifications. (Amanda Derry, Community Adult Learning Tutor, Workers Education Association)

Volunteers are all qualified teachers. One has an additional dyslexia [qualification]. (Julia Olisa, Literacy tutor and Service Founder, Thames Reach)

Some are professionals; we have a retired Headteacher, a few other teachers, a woman who worked for the Open University, others are just ordinary people who want to do a little bit. (Jo Porrino, Adult Learning Manager, Derby Adult Learning Service)

Data from the RaPAL 100 research project calls into question the idea that volunteer adult literacy tutors are poorly trained and suggests the approach taken to training is compatible with the inclusive and student-centred ethos of this kind of provision. In addition, while there is at present no standardised qualification for voluntary adult literacy tutors it would be incorrect to suggest they were unqualified. Many participants have highlighted both the academic qualifications and the life experience that volunteers bring to their tutoring role.

Conclusion

The RaPAL 100 project highlights how volunteers are once again becoming a feature of adult literacy provision in the UK. Funding channelled through the FE sector has favoured those students with the strongest skills leaving provision for the those at Entry Level severely curtailed within FE. As a result, provision for the weaker student seems currently to rest with the Adult/Community Education sector, a number of charities including Thames Reach, Possibilities and the relatively recently formed Read Easy. These organisations focus on delivering student-centred, flexible, needs-driven education. Thus, they depend heavily on good quality volunteer input to provide the bespoke tuition required by this model.

Adults who require literacy support are not an homogenous group and one size was never going to fit all. The almost ubiquitous acceptance, at government level, of education as a driver of economic growth has served to disadvantage large swathes of the population: those whose literacy needs were not market related and those who needed individualised long-term support to reach their literacy goals. The RaPAL 100 project draws attention to the ways in which a number of groups refused to see literacy through the narrow lens of marketisation and employability and put the student at the centre of their provision. In doing so they drew heavily on a community of willing volunteers to support their fellow citizens in their pursuit of literacy.

It is a great sadness to find that all the good intentions of the Skills for Life programme rolled out in the early noughties have disappeared with the funding. Funding priorities and government austerity measures have all but eliminated state support for the weakest students. Without that support these lower level students will only be able to progress, that is learn to read, with volunteer support. In effect, the findings from RaPAL 100 suggest that there is an important divide between the levels. The higher levels are still served by the colleges and the exam results dependent funding system; the lower levels are supported by organisations outside the system who prop up adult literacy provision by providing high quality volunteer

input. Thus, it appears we have come full circle with, as in the 1970s, volunteers once again being called on to provide support to those who struggle the most.

However, it is worth reminding ourselves of the successes of the first Right to Read campaign and perhaps reflecting on the 'spikey' profile of adult literacy students. Some students require intense, flexible, needs-based tuition which by its nature is resource intensive. One-to-one tuition provided by volunteers is the only realistic way of addressing this need. Other students are ready to work in a group and progress apace. Possibly, rather than looking at this as a divide there could be some way of recognising both as part of a continuum of learning and valuable in their own right.

Epilogue

My concern, at this juncture, is that the economic impact of Covid-19 will see government falling back on old ideas and further limiting funding to only those projects with a labour market activation focus. My hope is that concerns for social justice combined with the qualities of resilience and inventiveness demonstrated by participants in this research will see the current green shoots of needs-driven adult literacy provision, supported by volunteers, take root in our communities.

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A brief story of phonics in adult literacy UK

Sarah Freeman

Sarah Freeman has worked as a teacher in adult literacy and ESOL since the 1970s and seen many changes in provision as she worked in community and adult learning venues, further education colleges, voluntary provision, schools and prisons. She was awarded a doctorate by Sheffield University for her research in 2018 and she has recently been leading the RaPAL 100 Project research across the UK.

This article - a personal review, historical review and literature review - was brought about by hearing about how phonics is being used in post-16 provision across the UK in our RaPAL 100 Survey. Findings, while not massive, were remarkably significant, particularly looked at in the light of the Odyssean adventures of phonics over the past 70 years.

A personal background

The idea of a study of phonics as the key to learning to read and write goes back centuries. However, there was a period from around the 1950s until late 1990s when the use of phonics instruction took a back seat.

At my South London primary school in the 50s I was taught using the whole word method which was already well established at the time. In the 70s I started to teach, both in adult education and primary schools. My short initial adult literacy training (1974) was a mini-introduction to phonics, but I observed that my very first one-to-one student in Leeds in the early seventies, an African man in his forties, was not able to connect with the basic phonic programme successfully. He would prefer to tackle real books which I borrowed from the city library.

From 1992 as I began to expand my teaching from adult literacy to teaching English language and then into teaching basic ESOL literacy, I became aware that I didn't have a clear idea about how to teach phonics in a systematic way. The only way I found to study this at the time was by doing a diploma in teaching students of all ages who have specific learning difficulties and learning from the expertise of dyslexia specialists. From thereon in I worked through phonics with my lower-level classes during a segment of our then 3-hour lessons, and I made every effort to apply the sounds to words that students were using in their everyday experiences. That is, I used them within the teaching materials that I made myself and in discussion in class.

Revival of systematic phonics instruction in the 21st century

The relationship between sounds and letters is the backbone of traditional phonics and it is not the place of this article to discuss the technique in more detail. However, it is the difference between phonics approaches and whole word approaches that have led to what were known in the US as '[The Reading Wars](#)'. I have not encountered so deep a divide between pro and anti-phonics theories in post-16 basic English classes. However, findings by reading experts have influenced the syllabi both in schools and in the field of adult literacy.

Practitioners like myself, who felt that a social practices approach was the most powerful way of engaging adults in reading, but that phonics played a part in learning to read, were

being addressed in the [Skills for Life Adult Core Curriculum](#) Here we were urged with reading and spelling to dip into a variety of techniques. For example,

use a variety of reading strategies to help decode an increasing range of unfamiliar words (DfES 2002:76)

Suggestions for use of phonics are included at every level for reading, and they are also referred to in the introduction to Spelling (ibid: 107 - 113)

In 2002 guidance was published in 'Access for All', to 'making the core curricula accessible' and this gave more detail to including phonics in delivering Skills for Life literacy classes. On page 87 it is acknowledged that phonics plays a part in how we read and on page 103 there is a section on the role of phonics in learning to read. This was possibly the most widely distributed programme that was ever issued in the UK adult literacy world and documented [success was acknowledged](#) in the number of adults engaged. But government directives gradually changed over the following decade with the advent of the Functional Skills qualifications and then the disappearance of mentions of the Skills for Life strategy.

Phonics as a systematic approach, already favoured by a few, began to become more noticed by literacy specialists after the first six or seven years of Skills for Life. In 2007 Maxine Burton led a team of eight researchers and teachers who worked with 40 learners on a phonics programme. The results published by the National Research and Development Council for adult literacy and numeracy ([NRDC](#)) were very encouraging to the researchers. They reported that, 'The learners (mainly Entry 1–3) made significant progress in reading, comprehension and spelling in a very short time... confidence in a range of language and literacy tasks also improved.'

Jump to 2014 and a significant select committee meeting that took place 11.02.2014. During this ['Business, Innovation and Skills' committee consultation](#) into the 2013 survey by the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) more training of teachers was advocated by leaders in the adult skills field. After listening to input from Helen Casey and David Hughes the committee heard Libby Coleman author of 'Yes, we can read' (2010). This is a phonics-based programme. Coleman told the committee that this book was suited to dyslexic and other non-readers working in a peer-to-peer setting: teaching volunteer members of the public to teach those who cannot read as part of peer-to-peer programmes.

'We are talking about people who are never going to go to classes or a group.'

In the past few years, papers, reports and resources have been published that promote the use of phonics in Functional Skills English classes. Likewise ESOL researchers have also been developing phonics materials to use with second language learners.

A comprehensive report ['Current Practice in Using a System of Phonics with Post-16 learners](#) by Gemma Moss, Sam Duncan, Sinead Harmey and Bernadita Muñoz-Chereau, was published by ETF and the Education Training Foundation in 2018

This report was followed by the [publication of a very important phonics resource](#) researched and written by Gemma Moss, Greg Brooks, John Brown, Maxine Burton, Claire Collins, Andy Convery, Sam Duncan, Tricia Millar, Bob Read and Irene Schwab.

The introduction is reassuring, for example, talking about the ‘toolkit’

- It is designed specifically for this age group
- Even basic phonic skills can be explored using words that derive from a post-16 learner’s rich spoken vocabulary and applied to reading and writing age-appropriate, high-interest text
- Post-16 phonics can give learners a new language with which to describe their reading and spelling. . .
- Some learners will already recognise phonics vocabulary and may be interested in what it all means. It is already in some learners’ ‘funds of knowledge’, often because their own children are being taught phonics in school
- Our learner-centred approach prepares learners for the very wide variety of words they are expected to read and spell as part of the Functional Skills English (FSE) subject content without advocating drill or rote memorisation.

The work that had been done by researchers 10 years previously was now being fulfilled within this comprehensive report. And at the same time the Functional Skills curriculum for English was [now including a phonics component](#) that was mandatory for students to complete.

Insights into phonics in 2020

It was noticed in the RaPAL 100 Project that the use of phonics has become more marked in adult literacy education in recent years. This was not a dramatic emerging fact, particularly in the light of the promotion of the teaching of phonics in post 16 literacy contexts over the last 20 years, which has been tracked in this article. However, on a search through the surveys it was noticed that phonics using the 2019 Toolkit was being included in FE Colleges in Islington, Bedford and Glasgow, widely recognised as playing an important part in enabling students to pass their exams. For example, Simon Fuller of Islington College, only a few months after publication said, ‘We offer some support classes, for example about half of my cohort of learners are dyslexic and native speakers, so I offer an extra hour after my regular class and call it a spelling group – we use the New Phonics toolkit from the ETF as a basis.’

Another wide-ranging use of phonics is through the organisation Read Easy. This organisation was set up by Ginny Williams Ellis in 2010 after being able to support learners with phonics schemes in prisons in Dorset. She told the RaPAL project interviewer,

It was then that I realised quite what the need is amongst the adult population for very basic literacy support and one-to-one literacy support and phonics-based literacy support. I was trying to find somewhere that people could go when they were released and that’s how I came to set up Read Easy because I discovered there wasn’t anything.

The group uses ‘*Turning Pages*’, a phonics scheme specifically designed to be used in one-to-one situations. The way in which this has been implemented has led to a very rapid expansion of Read Easy. At the time of the interview (February 2020) there were

approximately 900 volunteers across the country (and 46 groups as [on website](#) accessed 08.10.2020), employment of five part-time regional advisers and four freelance regional trainers.

AS, a literacy specialist with Read Easy, also commented on the success of the scheme in a telephone interview with RaPAL. Her enthusiasm for Read Easy was transparent:

...after working in paid work in colleges and universities working for Read Easy is so refreshing. Everybody's got something to offer.

She had worked in adult literacy roles since 1992 and seen many changes in provision, but she was convinced of the effectiveness of Read Easy over any other basic literacy classes, due to its structured materials, flexibility of times for learners, two one-to-one 30-minute sessions per week and the satisfaction for all in seeing learners move on quickly. AS has always considered phonics an important part of learning to read, 'Giving time and attention to phonics is the luxury for the readers.'

Conclusion from this short review

RaPAL 100 Project was intended to highlight significant developments in adult literacy now. The renewed use of phonics stood out in a few cases of both survey responses and interviews and prompted me to write this 'longitudinal' commentary. Phonics has most definitely found its way back into adult learning after many years of having a back seat or even being frowned upon in use in the curriculum. Perhaps the worry is that it will become too dominant in adult learning, nudging out the essential task of contextualising learners' experience of reading and writing in their own everyday experiences. The one-to-one schemes, for example, are insistent on the learners being mainly focussed on the ready-made materials.

However, while this commentary has avoided making observations about government support during recent years there is no doubt in my mind that the withdrawal of funding from adult education, and the focus on Level 1 and Level 2 Functional Skills English results in colleges and adult education, have led us to a turning point that begs the use of well organised adult literacy schemes that depend on volunteers to enable others to read.

We have in effect returned to the situation that was rolled out in the 1970s when volunteers like me were paired up with learners who had never had the luxury of a one-to-one teacher before. Now, in addition to those schemes, we also have excellent trainers and well researched materials to hand.

One of RaPAL's stated [purposes](#) is '[to] promote the dissemination of effective and innovative practices, activities and experiences in adult literacies teaching, learning and research'. The amount of research and activity that has gone into rolling out phonics in recent years deserves our full attention. The long and very detailed interview that was held with Ginny Williams-Ellis explaining how a successful set of materials combined with a highly organised network of support could be the answer for many people unable to access the very little provision left in local colleges and adult education centres, is proof in my thinking that there will always be a place for a well-run phonics-centred volunteer scheme. And in addition to this the [Phonics Toolkit](#) (2019) readily put into use in colleges is clearly a way

forward within the system itself, as long as it reminds us that being literate is more than just matching letter and sound correspondences.

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Some outputs from the research

Toni Lambe and Yvonne Spare

Toni is currently a doctoral scholar with University College Dublin's School of Social Policy, Social Work, and Social Justice. She has over twenty years' experience in the adult literacy field in Ireland in various capacities including, tutoring, training, management, and organisation.

Yvonne has taught adult literacies across a wide range of settings for many years, including teacher training and workplace learning, before moving on to become a researcher and consultant for various educational organisations. She is currently RaPAL Journal Coordinator.

Based on the premise 'a picture paints a thousand words' a number of graphs and charts representing the quantitative data from the staffing section of the RaPAL 100 Survey questionnaire are presented in this item. The first series of graphs represent replies to questions asking about the numbers of: full-time permanent paid staff; fractional permanent paid staff; hourly paid staff; and the number of volunteers. They provide a visual representation a comment made by one of our contributors in relation to full-time permanent paid staff:

...a lot less than there used to be! I know, historically, that adult literacy work has been precarious, but in my experience in college it was always very secure. We used to have many staff on full-time contracts, but now there are very few permanent staff at all and those that are there tend to be on part-time contracts. (Adult literacy and numeracy tutor with a large FE college)

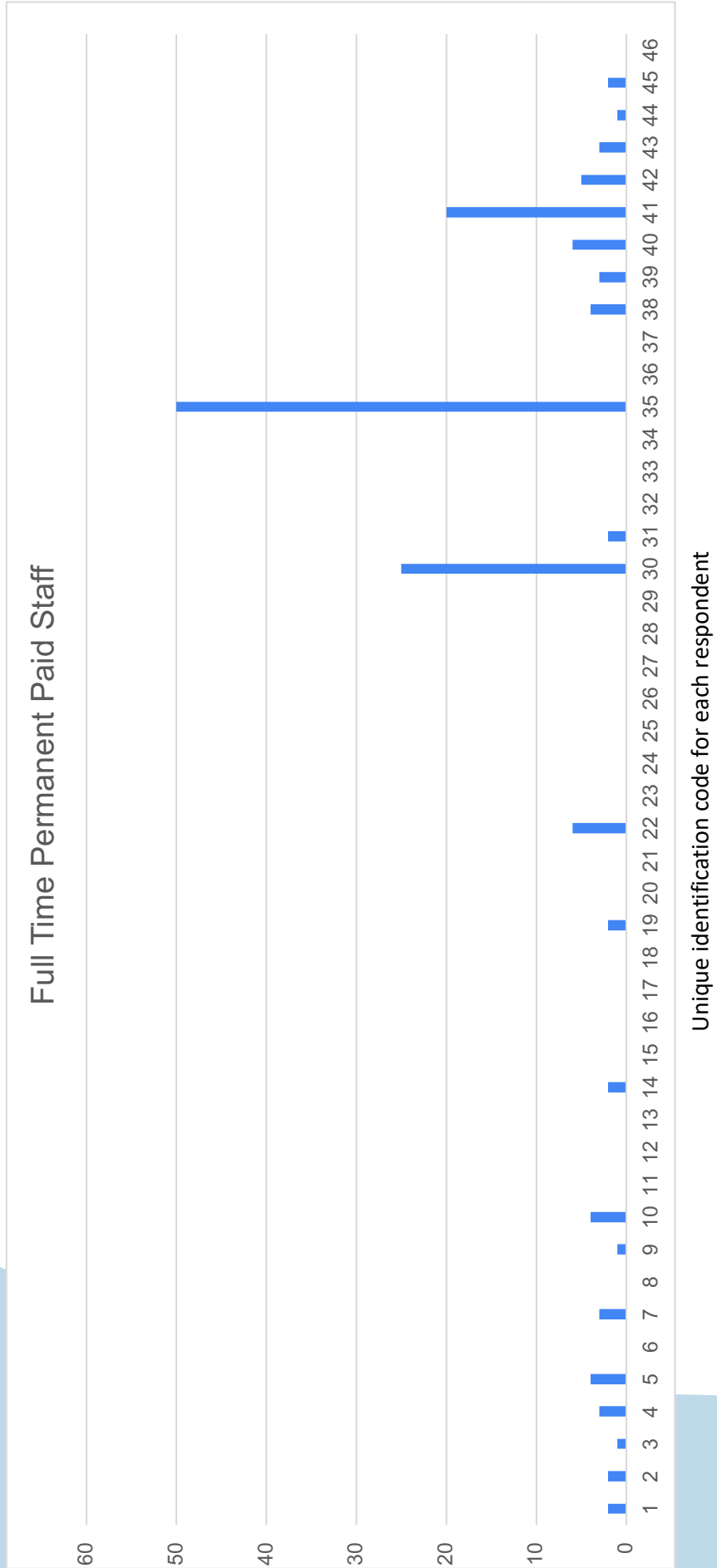
In *Graph 1* we see that of the forty-six respondents, twenty-four report having no full-time permanent paid staff. The highest number of full-time permanent paid staff reported is 50. This figure comes from an organisation identifying themselves as a local charity but as they completed the questionnaire anonymously and without providing contact details it has not been possible to verify these numbers. One of the regional colleges report having 25 full-time permanent paid staff spread across three campuses and an FE College with teacher-led one-to-one learning centres report 20. All others report having fewer than six paid members of staff who are full-time and permanent.

Graph 2 refers to the numbers of fractional permanent paid staff. Thirteen respondents either did not reply to this question or were unsure of the answer. This is unsurprising as where a tutor completed the questionnaire, they may not have the relevant information. Of those who did provide an answer to this question only three reported having ten or more fractional paid staff. An Adult Community Education Group reported 16, and two FE Colleges reported 10 and 12 apiece with all others reporting fewer than seven fractional paid staff.

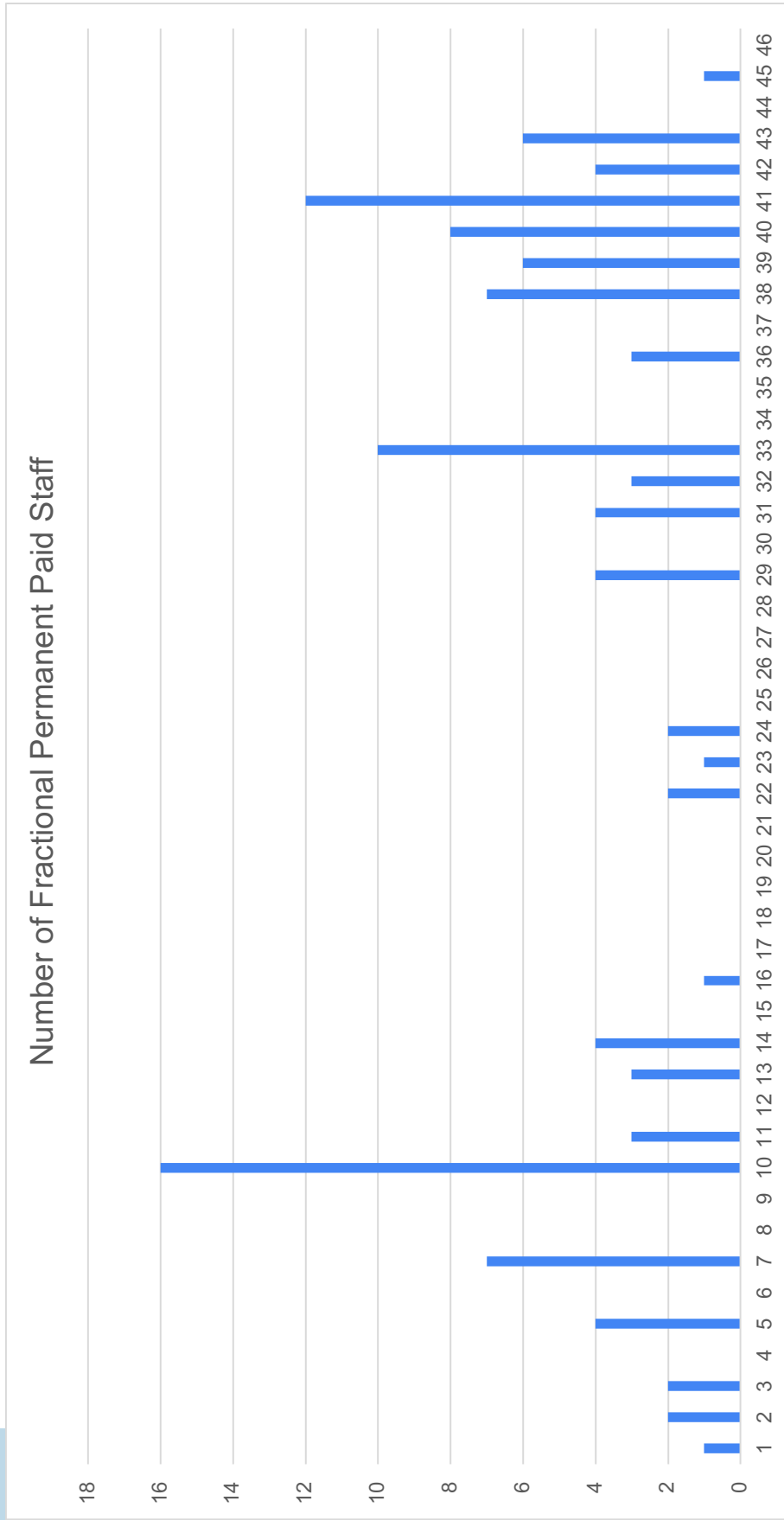
Graph 3 identifies the number of hourly paid staff. As in above a number of respondents either did not reply or were unsure of the answer, ten in total. Again, where it was a tutor filling out the questionnaire, they may not have the relevant information available to them. However, one manager from the Adult and Community Education sector reported that the reason she could not supply a figure was because 'a lot is delivered by subcontracted arrangements'.

The final graph in this series *Graph 4* shows that over half - 27 out of 46 respondents - report availing of the service of volunteers. Some would like to increase the number of volunteers while others consider the barriers prohibitive 'because of safeguarding and the need to get DBS checking etc.' (Adult Community Education Provider). Nevertheless, it does appear that volunteers are returning to adult literacy in UK in quite considerable numbers.

Graph 1

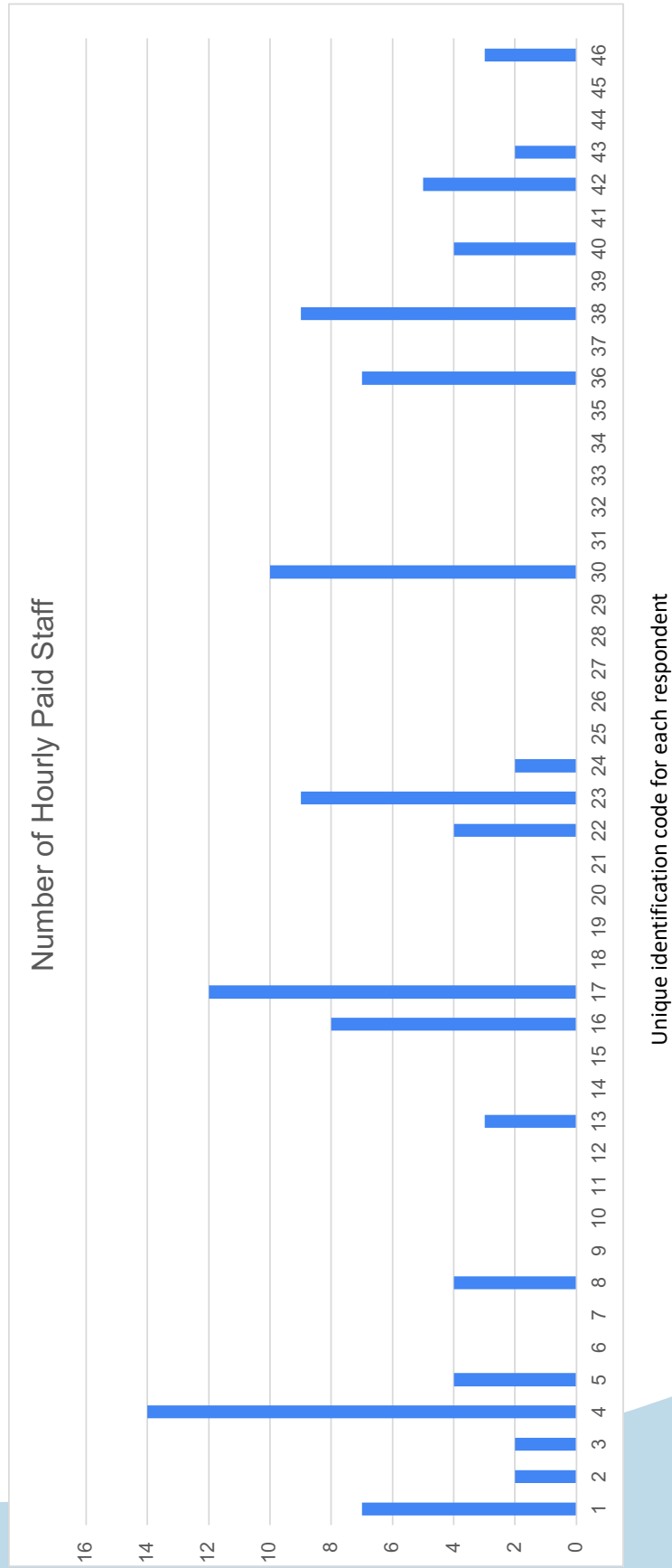


Graph 2

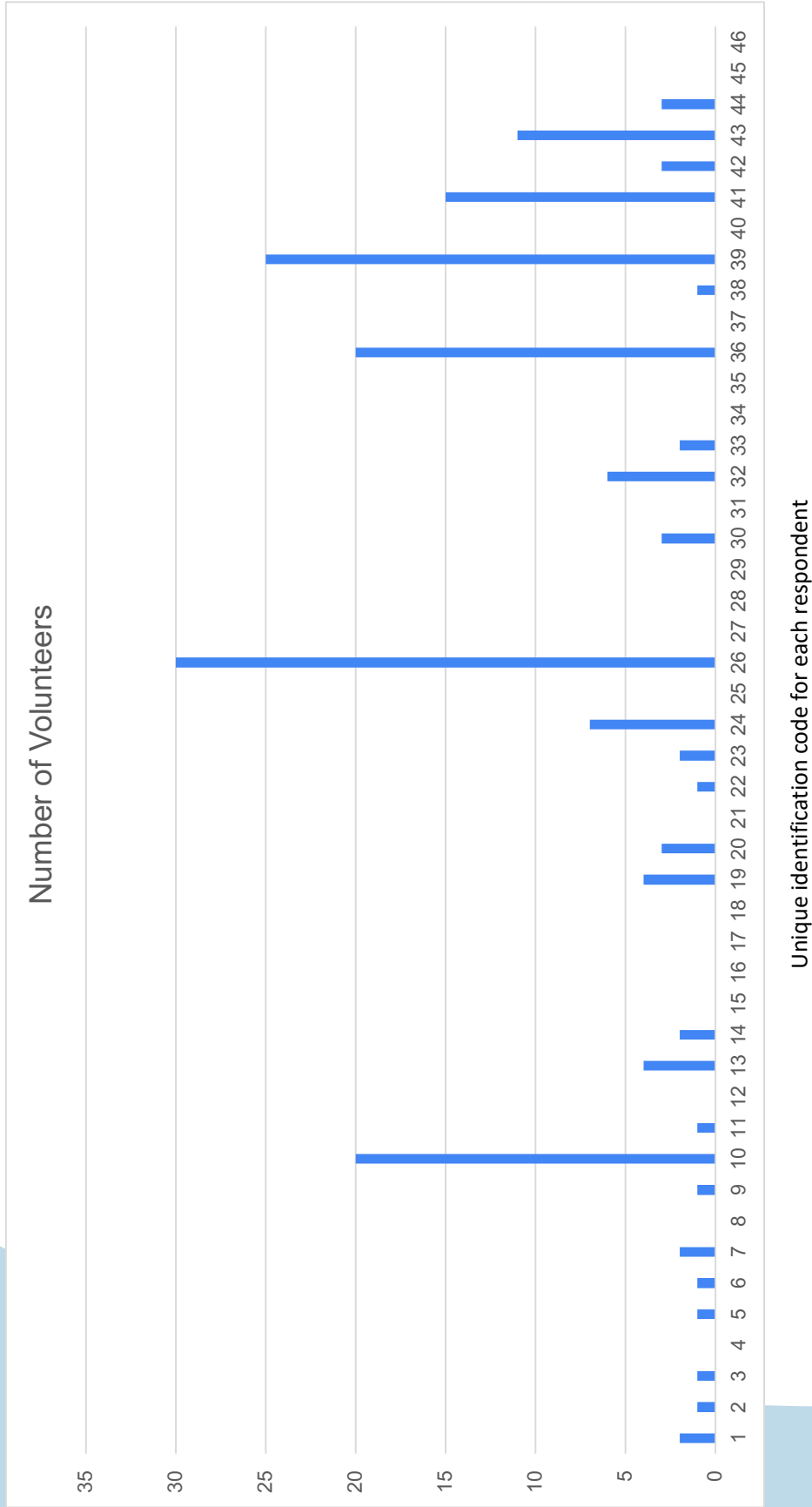


Unique identification code for each respondent

Graph 3



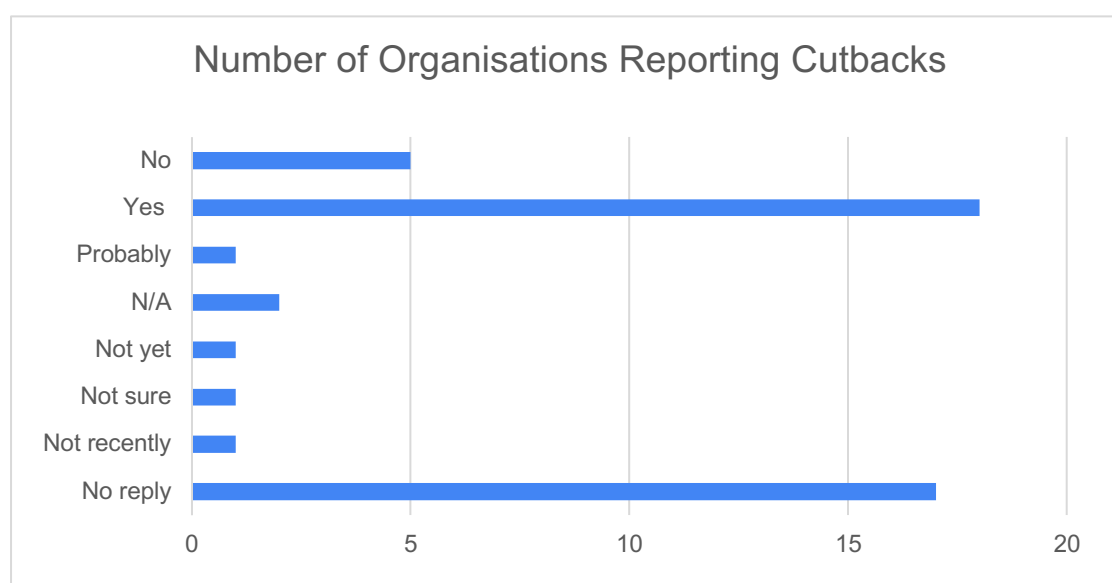
Graph 4



This second series of graphs, numbers 5 – 8 represent replies to questions asking about: whether organisations had experiences cutbacks; the importance of being able to recruit volunteer tutors; and the roles these tutors perform within the literacy service.

Graph 5 illustrates the responses to the question regarding recent cutbacks or other changes in staffing. 17 Interviewees gave no reply to this question. 7 responded most unambiguously in the negative, No [n=5], Not applicable [n=2]. 18 respondents report experiencing cutbacks in relation to staffing. Other responses, Not yet [n=1], Not sure [n=1], Not recently [n=1], and Probably [n=1], highlight perceived precarity of funding in the sector.

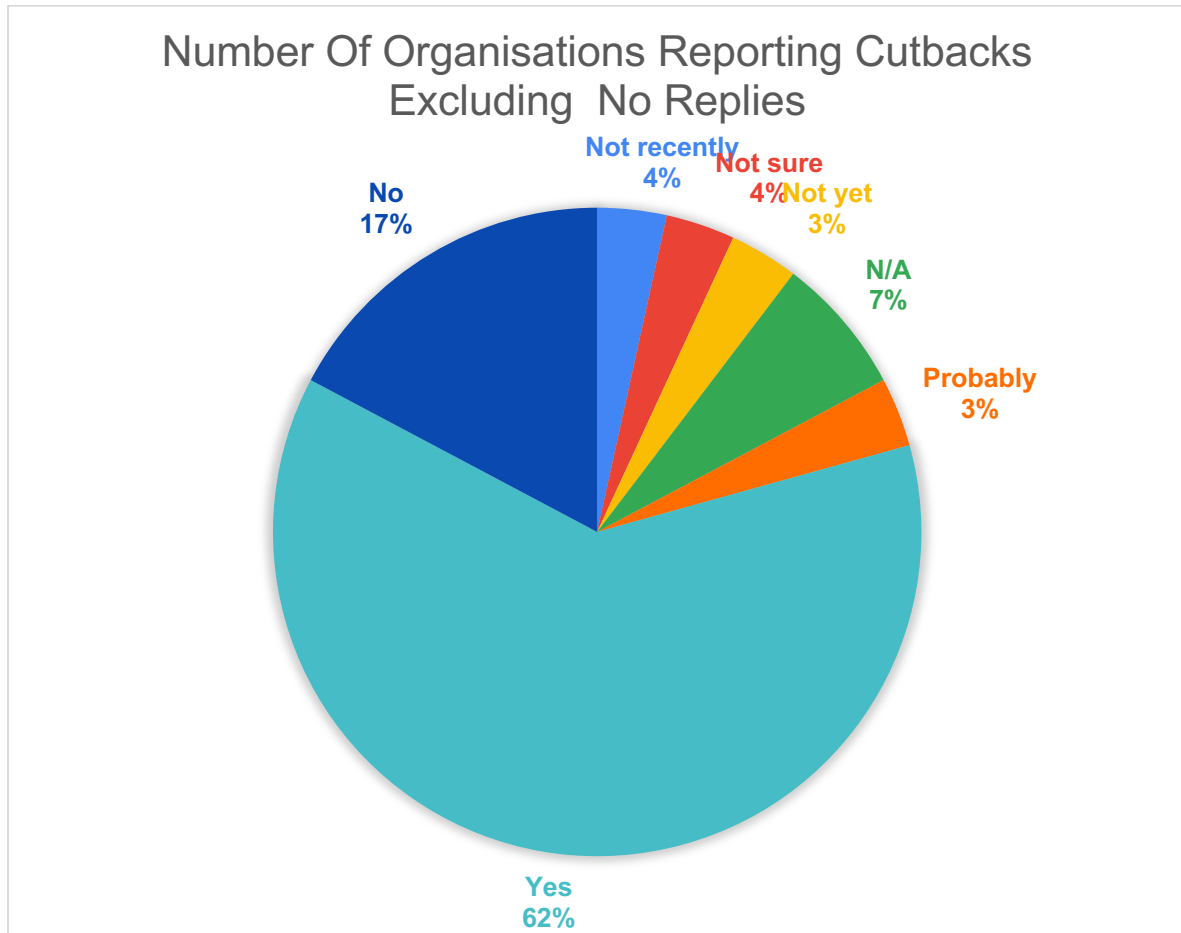
Graph 5



Stripping out the ‘no replies’ we see in *Graph 6* below, that of those who responded to the question relating to cutbacks a sizable 63% reported experiencing cutbacks in their provision. In the quote below Catherine Crerar an ALN and ESOL Practitioner from LEAD in Scotland gives her opinion on the threat posed by precarious funding:

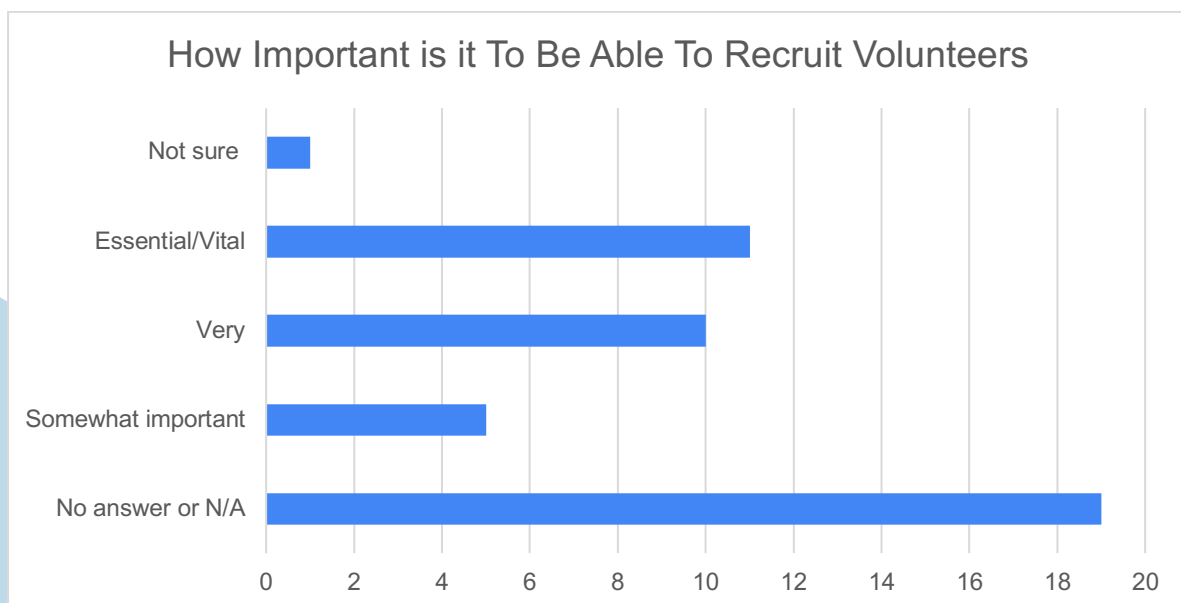
I know that over the years LEAD has had a thriving project in Inverclyde which has since closed as well as some involvement on a short-term basis in the Glasgow area. In both cases the loss of a project will result in a loss of provision, expertise and skill. This is a common issue in adult learning and is detrimental to the long-term sustainability of the service. As an ALN worker who has worked for many organisations I have noted these cutbacks everywhere over the years; initially with a short-term project being built up, learners, partners and volunteers all participating (which takes time to build up) for the whole thing to collapse once the funding ends. Now the threat seems to be to core funding that organisations provide and this means that the long-term damage to adult learning may be more difficult to reverse.

Graph 6



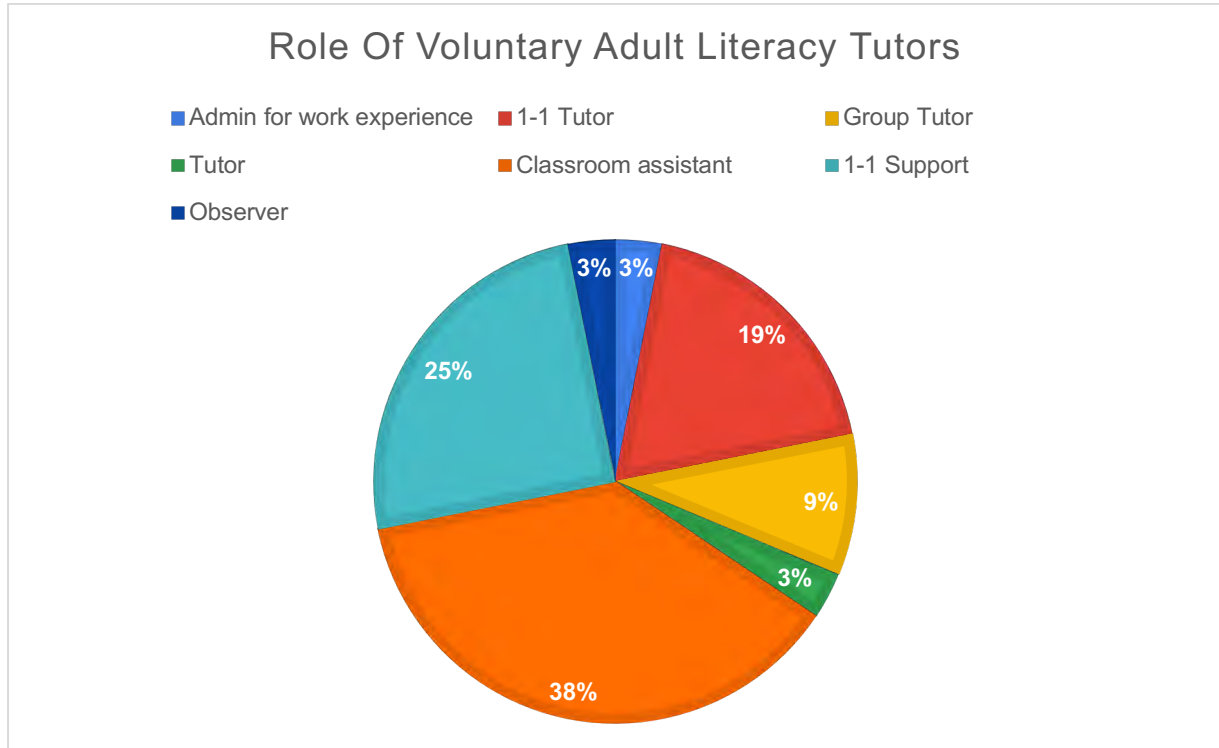
In *Graph 7* we see how respondents: close to half [n= 21], considered the ability to recruit volunteers either essential [n=11] or very important [n=10].

Graph 7



With volunteers coming back into the system it is interesting to note what roles they might be taking up. *Graph 8* indicates that the majority of volunteer tutors - 38% - operate as classroom assistants, with one-to-one support within classroom being their second main role at 25%. It is notable that in a small number of cases volunteers are operating as group tutors 9%.

Graph 8



ESOL learners in adult literacy provision

Jo Dixon

Jo has twenty years' experience as a part-time teacher of adult literacy and ESOL and a track record of integrating and innovating with new technologies. She is currently investigating digital inclusion with low literate ESOL learners for her PhD.

Introduction

The RaPAL 100 project team knew from our own experience and from our informal conversations with literacy practitioners in our networks that learners who speak languages other than English are often learning alongside monolingual native speakers of English in adult literacies, including Functional Skills English (FSE), provision. Some such learners are fluent users of English and therefore appropriately placed. However, some may be learners for whom ESOL classes could, in some respects, be more appropriate. We were interested to find out how this issue played out across the country with providers and practitioners beyond our own networks.

What we found was a very mixed picture. Many respondents did not identify 'ESOL' as a type of learner in their adult literacies provision who might be better off on other types of courses. Instead, some commented on other types of learner whose learning needs and aims could not be met through the standardised FSE courses that form the main adult literacies offer from many providers. These included learners whose emotional vulnerability made it hard for them to progress fast enough; learners wanting to improve their academic reading and writing; and learners with very low levels of reading and writing who require more intensive or longer-term support.

However, a significant minority of respondents identified 'ESOL' as a type of learner sometimes attending classes intended for fluent speakers of English and for whom the classes were not entirely appropriate. Their contributions illustrate a variety of factors that combine to cause these learners to be placed in literacy/FSE classes and a variety of attitudes and responses to the issue.

Background

Traditionally, ESOL learners have fallen into one of several broad categories, as defined by government, including established immigrant communities, asylum seekers, settled refugees, migrant workers, and people who come to the United Kingdom as partners and spouses (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 2000). Adult literacy, on the other hand has tended to be viewed as 'second chance' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2011) provision for adults who grew up in the UK but were failed by the school system, missed out on schooling or otherwise failed to learn to read and write.

Concern has sometimes been expressed about ESOL learners being placed in the same class as ‘basic skills’ or ‘adult literacy’ learners. In 2000, *Breaking the Language Barriers* (DfEE, 2000) reported that ‘in rural and other areas where there are few learners there is often a complete lack of suitable provision [for ESOL learners] or a tendency to put ESOL learners and basic skills learners in the same class, even though their needs are very different.’ (DfEE, 2000: 14). In 2005, a National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) report on literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision in rural England expressed a similar concern: the authors had found that ESOL learners were often ‘well educated/skilled in their country of origin’ and that they did not ‘have difficulty with learning per se’. They therefore had ‘very different needs’ and ‘placing them in mixed provision could be detrimental to their progress’ (Atkin et al, 2005: 9-10). Grief et al (2007: 24), also reported encountering ‘many learners in literacy classes who might have benefited from specialist teaching in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)’.

However, in a society increasingly characterised by ‘super-diversity’, or a ‘diversification of diversity’ (Vertovec, 2007: 1025), not all bilingual or multilingual learners, or learners originally from overseas, are unequivocally ‘ESOL learners’. Simpson, Cooke and Baynham’s research, commissioned in 2005 ‘in response to observations about the changing characteristics of learners in literacy classes’ (Simpson et al, 2008: 4), found that huge linguistic diversity in literacy classes, especially at and above Entry Level 3, existed even in areas with well-developed ESOL provision, and that bilingual and multilingual learners were not always placed in literacy classes due to a lack of alternatives or due to a lack of consideration for their learning needs: a number of factors, such as the learner’s aspirations for further study or career or the learner’s perception of who the classes are intended for, may be taken into account (Simpson et al, 2008).

The RaPAL 100 Project did not investigate in detail the complexities of placement of multilingual learners in ESOL versus literacy: the findings presented below focus mainly on what respondents perceive to be the *inappropriate* placement of ESOL learners in literacy classes and related issues that were brought up in the questionnaires and interviews.

The research by Simpson et al (2008) pre-dates changes to ESOL funding (the removal of automatic fee remission) in 2008. Whereas all eligible learners had previously been able to access free classes in adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL, since 2008 some learners have had to pay a contribution for their ESOL classes (up to 47.5% of their course fees in 2009/2010, which rose to 50% in 2010/2011). Aware that change was afoot, Simpson et al (2008) noted that these funding changes could exclude certain groups from ESOL provision. The authors stated that this could - but should not - impact on placement practices, which should always be made according to learning needs rather than financial issues. Ahead of the introduction of the changes, advice was also issued to providers that informed them of this in no uncertain terms:

It is important that the ability to pay does not influence which learning aim a learner is enrolled on to. Learners should be enrolled on to the most appropriate learning provision that supports their level of skills, needs and aspirations... we do not expect

to see ESOL learners being enrolled on to literacy provision but being taught ESOL. (Skills Funding Agency, 2010: 2)

and

The Skills Funding Agency's in-house or appointed auditors will look at a variety of evidence and documentation to gain assurance that literacy is being taught in literacy classes and ESOL in ESOL classes and that learners are following the correct provision according to their needs. (Skills Funding Agency, 2010: 3)

The research by Simpson et al (2008) also pre-dates the replacement of the Skills for Life Adult Literacy qualifications with Functional Skills English (FSE) qualifications which are now widely recognised and required for entry to certain types of work and vocational training.

Despite the existence and widespread use of separate ESOL Skills for Life qualifications, the use of FSE qualifications within ESOL departments is not uncommon, largely due to their being fully funded:

Funding eligibility remains a key driver for choosing fully funded FSE qualifications rather than ESOL qualifications, which are only fully funded for some learners. (Learning and Work Institute, 2020: 14)

In some institutions, all ESOL learners work towards FSE qualifications, while elsewhere ESOL qualifications are preferred at lower levels and FSE at Levels 1 and 2. It is generally felt that learners work more successfully towards FSE qualifications when taught by ESOL specialists and, at lower levels in particular, when taught separately from native speakers so that teaching and learning can focus appropriately and sufficiently on aspects of the language that ESOL learners tend to need to work on in different ways: grammar, vocabulary, idiomatic language and fluency (Learning and Work Institute, 2020: 6).

The RaPAL 100 Project did not specifically seek out responses from ESOL providers and the use of FSE qualifications within ESOL provision is beyond the scope of this article. However, the data does illuminate the issue of some ESOL learners accessing FSE provision aimed at fluent speakers of English and taught by literacy specialists, not ESOL specialists. The data suggests that, in some parts of the UK, the combined effect of funding changes and the popularity of FSE qualifications has resulted in some ESOL learners following courses which may not be the most appropriate from a pedagogical point of view, because they meet their needs in other ways.

RaPAL 100 Project findings

Participants in the RaPAL 100 Project were managers, practitioners and volunteers involved with adult literacies work (with some also being involved in ESOL) who chose to either complete a questionnaire in their own time or be interviewed by a member of the project team. The questions they were asked aimed to provide an overall picture of the adult literacies landscape in 2019, not to explore the conceptualisation of adult literacy versus

ESOL or related placement issues in particular. However, one question was designed to find out whether some types of learner were in adult literacies provision when some other form of provision might be more appropriate but was not available. 'ESOL' was mentioned more times than any other type of learner in adult literacies provision who might be better served by a different type of class.

Encouragingly, the majority of respondents answered 'no' or left the question blank, suggesting that they feel they have the right people on the right courses, and some answers reflected a recognition that speakers of other languages are not always ESOL learners and may be *appropriately* placed in classes with native speakers:

The population of [locality] has changed in the last 20 years with many migrants moving in. We have moved from a larger adult literacy programme to more ESOL provision. But with second generation migrants there is still a need for literacy, also some ESOL learners who have good speaking skills need literacy.

(Adult/Community Education Provider)

Some indicated that effective initial assessment and signposting procedures (within and between organisations) ensured that speakers of other languages were only in literacy classes if this was considered the most appropriate provision:

If following an initial assessment, (reading and writing), we feel an ESOL course is more appropriate for that learner, we refer them to the ESOL department, which we are a part of (ESOL, and adult English and maths). Similarly, learners who are assessed in the ESOL department are sometimes referred to adult English.

(FE College)

Others explained that they were able to cater to all needs through a well-developed range of provision:

We have worked hard to fill gaps over the last few years. We can, just about, cover most needs now. Basic Literacy and literacy support is tackled through Family Learning and Outreach. Supported Learning offer literacy to those with special needs on an individual need basis. We offer accredited ESOL classes from Pre-Entry to Level 1. We offer Functional Skills at Entry 3 and Level 1 and GCSE as our Level 2 qualification. (Adult/Community Education Provider)

Grant funding allows some flexibility so we can be responsive - other courses delivered include Literacy for ESOL learners.

(Adult/Community Education Provider)

However, the focus of the question, and therefore the focus of this article, is mainly on those ESOL learners who respondents perceive to be *inappropriately* placed in literacy classes. Of 48 questionnaire returns, 13 respondents - a significant minority - mentioned 'ESOL' as a type of learner who accessed their adult literacy provision but for whom a different type of course might be more appropriate. Some of the survey responses did not

elaborate (n=6), but the longer answers (n=7), and some of the interviews (n=4), present a very mixed picture of practices and problems.

From this small sample it is hard to draw strong conclusions, but our data reflects the 'complex and contested' nature of the distinction between literacy and ESOL described in earlier research (Simpson et al, 2008: 6), and offers additional insights into the difficulty of matching supply to demand. Furthermore, we show that cost has indeed become one factor that can cause some ESOL learners to be placed in literacy classes.

Higher level literacy/Functional Skills English classes can be appropriate for ESOL learners

While some providers offer both ESOL and literacy (Functional English) up to level 2, and one respondent, from a large Adult Community Education provider, mentioned specialist classes 'for fluent, confident second language speakers who can't read or write, because they don't fit the ESOL model', there seems to be widespread tendency for learners 'with ESOL needs' to be admitted to adult literacy classes at level 1 and above:

People who achieve ESOL, once we start getting towards the Entry 3 level, if their reading and writing skills are good, they can move into Functional Skills.

(Adult/Community Education provider)

Several respondents mentioned that they did not feel that this was inappropriate or in any way detrimental to learners' progress. One commented very positively on the inclusion of ESOL learners with native speakers in literacy classes:

Having a mixed class is also an opportunity to share, though, and can work really well. ESOL learners often have the metalanguage and learners with English as an expert language have the vocabulary (not always though!).

(FE College)

For some learners the qualification aim is the key deciding factor. The lack of recognition by employers and course providers of the ESOL Skills for Life qualifications makes them irrelevant for some ESOL learners:

Some students are sent over to ESOL and vice versa. It's like ping-pong. They might be better suited to ESOL sometimes, but they need a Functional Skills English or Maths qualification for their work.

(FE College)

One college lecturer said that over 50% of learners in a literacy class could be non-native speakers for whom ESOL might be more suitable from a pedagogical perspective, but who required the FSE qualification (rather than an ESOL qualification) for work.

Admitting ESOL learners to literacy classes can bring challenges. One respondent made brief mention of an attitudinal problem of mixing literacy and ESOL learners:

Occasional challenges have arisen in the past where the English cohort within a session has resented the ESOL group.

(Adult/Community Education provider)

The type of challenges more frequently reported, however, related to appropriate pedagogy and differentiation for learners with such a variety of needs. One lecturer at a large FE college explained that ESOL learners need more work on ‘vocabulary, particularly idiomatic language. They also need work on articles, past tenses and preposition use.’ In contrast, ‘Learners whose expert language is English tend to have more issues with spelling, structuring work and register.’

In Islington, ESOL is only offered up to Entry 3, so non-ESOL English classes are accessed by *all* potential Level 1 and Level 2 literacy and ESOL learners. The learners’ differing needs are addressed through additional classes: while ESOL learners and native speakers might work towards their functional skills qualification in a mixed class, they might also attend separate top-up classes depending on their learning needs:

We offer some support classes, for example about half of my cohort of learners are dyslexic and native speakers, so I offer an extra hour after my regular class and call it a spelling group... We also have a couple of things that we call grammar classes, aimed at higher level functional skills learners, for whom English is not their first language. They find that really helpful because they don’t get that grammar input in a functional skills class. We have a literacy and ESOL specialist who works with them towards their grammar.

(Simon Fuller, Islington Adult Community Learning Service)

Often it was up to the individual tutor to cope as well as they could with the variety of learners in their own classes. One felt they were successfully finding coping strategies in these situations:

In the same class I have people who are native speakers, people with high qualifications from abroad, and people with low qualifications from abroad. Seemingly they are at the same level but actually their needs are really diverse... We usually have a topic that we cover together in the first half through group work, pair work, some individual work which we discuss. In the second half they work on individual projects which might be differentiated or if it's the same task the expectation is differentiated.

(FE College)

The expertise of those supporting ESOL learners in classes with native speakers was mentioned. In some cases, the careful matching of volunteer or tutor expertise to learners’ needs was felt to be key to effective support. One interviewee explained how placement in one functional skills class or another might depend on who was teaching it and how well they were able to cater for ‘ESOL needs’, and some respondents mentioned tutors having dual specialisms, which would clearly be advantageous in these situations.

Supply and demand issues

In the existing literature, the issue of there being insufficient numbers of ESOL learners in the same place at the same time to run classes in some (particularly rural) areas had been noted. Our research found that this was still the case for some people:

We have some ESOL learners who attend accredited English courses, because the ESOL equivalent is not available in the area. If there were 'significant' numbers, we would offer ESOL courses.

(Adult/Community Education Provider)

However, we also uncovered different 'supply and demand' issues elsewhere. In areas where ESOL provision was already well-developed, but where demand outstrips supply, ESOL learners were sometimes also being slotted into adult literacy classes or even Functional Skills ICT rather than being turned away. One respondent explained the lengths she goes to in order to try to keep people learning even when the courses they really want, or need, are unavailable:

For a number of students, it would be better to go through ESOL first and then come to us... but ESOL is full so... we try to... put together a class where students have higher qualifications from abroad. It's really the language they need so instead of teaching them how to write a letter, which they already know in Polish or whatever language we can spend more time on the grammar and spelling side, so we do try to put them in the classes... However, if it's obvious that they don't understand and they can't put a sentence together, it's definitely ESOL. If they can't afford it, I often ask [family and community learning coordinator] if they can take them. And if they can't help, I put them in ICT...I just take people who can't be enrolled for English and I just tell them, through this you will learn and next year hopefully you can do... it seems to be working. I have somebody who can't go up to level 2, but rather than missing out a year I engage him in WebQuests. He's developing his language skills so hopefully next year he can come back and do level 2 English.

(FE College)

As hinted at in the quote above, family learning seems increasingly to be accessed by ESOL learners. Two other interviewees also commented on this:

We do family learning in lots and lots of primary schools, children's centres and family centres across the city and that's about engaging mums – 'teach the mum, reach the child' – mainly based on literacy and maths. The way it works now is that the school identify and recruit the parents and we go in and work with the parents, occasionally with the children coming in also for an activity. *What we are finding more and more is that the vast majority of these are really ESOL*, but we just give them a taster at the beginning. For this we have a number of double-qualified tutors in literacy and ESOL. Technically there isn't any funding for supporting ESOL in community learning.

(Adult/Community Education provider)

It's timely that you should come asking about literacy, because we have almost no family literacy going on at all... It's the first year family learning has been all ESOL. There were always the longer courses that were all about literacy, and we did the numeracy ones as well, but it was always predominantly literacy, and we couldn't fund ESOL for a long while, but that changed three or four years ago, and that's where the greatest demand is. At first, we just tried a few, but that's what the schools want, the early years settings want... the traditional family learning, where, you know, 'come along and find out about how your children learn maths', or just upskill yourself, just... the schools just don't seem to be interested. There's no demand... We work with WEA and they do the KUC [Keeping up with the Children] but *the majority of learners you would call ESOL learners... the learning aims for the parents will be more ESOL than literacy.*

(Adult/Community Education provider)

Work-based and employment-related work also seems to be more focused on ESOL than literacy. Not many respondents mentioned work-based or employment-related literacy learning, but those who did, indicated a growing demand for ESOL in this context too:

We also run ESOL classes out of the Job Shop. For a couple of years, I took referrals supposedly for English and Maths classes, but it ended up being only for ESOL and IT.

(Adult/Community Education provider)

Tesco - we wanted to do literacy, but it turned out that most of their students wanted ESOL. The Job Centre used to send us people but somehow this has died out. In previous years there were mandated students but... I don't know the reason.

(FE College)

Overall, demand for ESOL and for adult literacy/English for fluent/native speakers of English is variable, but in some parts of the country there seems to be a particularly strong demand for ESOL which sometimes results in ESOL learners (who require *language* rather than *literacy* education) accessing opportunities intended for learners who can already speak English sufficiently for their needs but who are not coming forward to take up the offer.

The cost to learners and providers of ESOL qualification aims

Ahead of the funding changes in 2008, many ESOL professionals feared that some potential learners would be excluded from ESOL. At the time there was much speculation as to what would happen to these learners. In our research, cost to learners emerged as one reason for considering placing ESOL learners in (or for ESOL learners themselves choosing) literacy/FSE classes:

Many learners with English as a second language do sign up for literacy classes when they would be better placed in an ESOL class, but they cannot afford the ESOL fees.

(Adult/Community Education

provider)

They might be better off in ESOL... should we take them to boost our numbers or turn them away knowing that they want ESOL but can't pay for it? (FE College)

This might be detrimental to learners' progress and success:

ESOL learners who take FS exams... do not always get the appropriate help and teaching they need to pass. (Adult/Community Education Provider)

Too few ESOL qualifications are fundable - ESOL learners really struggle with having to take FSE. (Adult/Community Education provider)

Published research indicates that some providers are offering fully funded FSE qualifications within their ESOL provision. In such cases, FSE is taught by ESOL specialists and classes consist entirely of non-native speakers, so their learning needs can be addressed more easily. This kind of FSE provision is deemed more appropriate for ESOL learners (Learning and Work Institute, 2020). Our research suggests that in some locations, however, ESOL learners are accessing non-ESOL FSE courses because of the removal of automatic fee remission in ESOL, despite recruiters knowing that this is not the most appropriate provision for them.

Adult literacy less appropriate for ESOL learners at Entry levels

Generally, adult literacy provision is felt to be less appropriate for ESOL learners whose speaking and listening skills are below Level 1. Often an ESOL qualification aim rather than FSE is preferred at entry levels (Learning and Work Institute, 2020) even if FSE is used at Levels 1 and 2. Where both literacy and ESOL are available, providers will usually try not to put ESOL learners with Entry Level spoken English into classes with native speakers:

There are some ESOL students studying Functional Skills; however, we do have an extensive ESOL provision and therefore this is minimal.

(Deborah Barton, Head of Adult Skills, West Suffolk College)

At Entry levels, the literacy needs of ESOL learners who still need to work on their speaking but who struggle especially with reading and writing despite attending ESOL classes are sometimes met through 'additional literacy' or 'literacy for ESOL learners' classes, rather than through placement in classes alongside monolingual adult literacy learners.

We run 2 X 16-week Additional Literacy courses at E2 and E3 and offer them as a supplementary class to learners on our main (ESOL) programme. This is a curriculum-level effort to meet the needs of our low-literacy learners. We also run a 16-week reading class at E1. (Third Sector ESOL Provider)

Adult literacy learners inappropriately placed in ESOL classes?

Previous research has established that not all speakers of other learners are suited to ESOL classes and that some could be appropriately placed in adult literacy depending on their learning needs. They may also self-refer to one type of provision or the other depending on who they perceive each type of provision to be for and the progression routes they perceive them to lead to (Simpson et al, 2008). Respondents in the RaPAL 100 Project recognised this 'grey area', as one respondent called it (Simon Fuller, Islington Adult Community Learning Service): Learners may 'ping pong' from one type of course to another depending on various factors.

While this article has primarily tried to illuminate the issue of ESOL learners inappropriately placed in adult literacy classes, it is interesting to note that one respondent described the opposite situation: learners who 'actually speak English as a main language (learners from some African countries)' sometimes end up in ESOL classes. These are learners from countries where a variety of English is widely spoken: for example, a migrant from a West African country such as Gambia, Sierra-Leone or Cameroon, for example, might speak an African language at home, but due to the variety of local languages also used in the region, and the status of English in education and business, may have started to use English as a lingua franca from a very young age. They may have been educated for a few years at primary level in English (or in another language such as French or Arabic) or not at all. They do not consider English their first or native language but speak English fluently, albeit with a non-British accent and with some non-standard turns of phrase and grammatical constructions. Other long-term residents who have picked up spoken English through a decade or more of living in the UK but who have not always studied formally can find themselves similarly stuck in entry level ESOL classes, having passed Level 1 speaking and listening but being unable to progress their reading and writing to a similar level. Commenting on the practice in her ESOL organisation of trying to support some such students through their ESOL classes, one respondent wrote

We make the decision to place them at the level of their reading and writing skills so that they can develop these skills. Teachers differentiate to the best of their ability but inevitably these learners are in a class with other learners with much smaller vocabularies in English who are also spending a lot of the lesson time developing their speaking and listening skills for exams. We have this problem also with the much greater number of learners amongst our cohort who have spiky profiles (higher S&L skills than literacy skills) often linked to very limited literacy in their first language... Some of these learners have been on college ESOL programmes but have not been allowed to progress because they cannot pass reading and writing exams (at a level that they can easily pass the S&L exam e.g. E1 or E2) ... teachers are faced with the problem of having to prepare some learners for a speaking and listening exam while others in the class may have already passed it or exceeded that level, and need to work on literacy. Our teachers work hard at differentiation and we are

supported in this by a large team of volunteer LSAs. It is a challenge though.

(Third Sector ESOL Provider)

Studying in a low level ESOL class among learners who are new arrivals to the UK and who understand little English may not always be appropriate for someone who has spoken English for many years, yet those with very low levels of literacy would not always be able to cope with an FSE qualification course, which seems increasingly to be the only type of 'adult literacy' course available.

National charity Read Easy provides volunteer-led one-to-one support in as many locations as possible to address the reduction in appropriate provision for beginner readers who want to work at their own pace and who require a structured programme to develop their reading as, increasingly, providers require learners to be able to work towards FSE qualifications. They have 'quite a lot of ESOL people coming', but they can only help them work on their literacy if they already have sufficient spoken English (Ginny Williams-Ellis, Chief Executive). This would seem to be an appropriate option for the learners described above. However, such volunteer-led provision is not available everywhere.

Conclusion

Although the RaPAL 100 Project did not set out to explore this issue in depth, the responses regarding literacy learners with ESOL needs, or ESOL learners with literacy needs, provide food for thought and suggest some interesting avenues for further research. As identified in earlier research by Simpson et al (2008), the distinction between 'adult literacy' and 'ESOL', as popularly understood, is inadequate. The issue has been complicated further in recent years by the relative popularity of FSE qualifications compared to ESOL Skills for Life qualifications. With funding disparities between ESOL and Functional Skills also playing a part in decision-making, decisions about who ends up on which type of course are far from straightforward.

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An ESOL tutor's experiences during lockdown

Pauline Clarke

Pauline Clarke qualified with a PGDE in Adult Literacy from the University of Bolton 2010, followed by a CELTA and a L5 Diploma ESOL. Since then she has worked within Adult, Community, Vocational and Further Education delivering basic and key skills, Functional Skills, Employability and ESOL to a wide range of adult and young learners from a diverse range of backgrounds, needs and behaviours.

I have been a part-time ESOL sessional tutor at WEA since November 2019, delivering ESOL and Entry Level Functional Maths for ESOL across various community venues in Greater Manchester. 'Traditional' face-to-face delivery came to a stop on Friday 20th March 2020. By the end of the summer term, four out of six face-to-face classes were delivered online via Zoom and the organisation's VLE platform.

The move to online engagement took place almost immediately. By the end of the summer term I had delivered over 120 hours of Zoom classes, engaged in over 1300 email exchanges supporting learners, completed Level 1 City & Guilds Listening Exam resits via Zoom, written 35 individual written testimonials to support predicted grades, marked and given feedback to over 80 distance learning worksheets and packs sent out by post as well as uploading and converting over 1500 photographs of learners' work in order to provide the appropriate feedback to learners and evidence of formative assessment. There was a whirlwind of activity in order to make the transition to online and I had to learn new digital skills and adapt my teaching incredibly quickly.

Engagement and delivery

There have been several layers of contact and engagement of learners: email, post, phone, VLE and Zoom online classes. Initially we had to email learners with links to websites and specific activities on the days when they should have face-to-face (F2F) classes and ask for photographic evidence or screenshots of their work for feedback. There are lots of useful ESOL websites for online and interactive learning which are both learner and teacher friendly e.g. ESOL Courses <https://www.esolcourses.com/> and ESOL NEXUS www.Britishcouncil.org. It has been more difficult with my Entry Level maths/ESOL students – they don't have F2F contact with me and the majority of online resources are geared towards children or GCSE maths. Most of the functional skills worksheets I use in class aren't really geared towards online learning and the link with exam boards means tutors need a password to access the resources to support the delivery of Functional Maths. Traditionally, there has been a cost involved for this and I have yet to be able to access some of these resources.

For the higher Level 1 language courses, digital learning on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) had been embedded within their Guided Learning Hours (GLH) so these learners were

already familiar with using this digital platform to support their work in class. Work and activities continued to be uploaded to the VLE whilst Zoom classes were being organised.

For lower level language learners, it has been difficult to try to get them engaged with the VLE as it is quite complicated in terms of content, access and ease of use, therefore access to online classes via Zoom has taken the place of F2F classes. For learners who have been unable to access digital class, the organisation has sent distance learning packs and worksheets out to non-online users and they have to take a photograph of their work and send it back to the tutor for feedback.

There was a lot of duplication of work which was also confusing for learners as it was available across all the different areas of engagement. As the classes progressed, so did the awareness and practical skills of both the tutor and learners. At first learners weren't comfortable using Zoom but now they use the whiteboard, chat and breakout room features with ease.

Access to learning

Some learners are extremely confident with using digital technologies to access F2F online learning and/or complete online activities and respond to emails. Others don't have access to the internet or a smartphone or struggle to engage with the technology. Out of a cohort of 68 learners across six classes, about 35% of these learners were engaging digitally throughout lockdown and this increased to nearly 40% during the summer as more learners joined the online classes with their friends and classmates. The majority of these learners were working at a higher language level; the lower levels learners, although confident with using Apps and digital content on their phone, continued to struggle with accessing Zoom and a VLE geared towards native language speakers or higher level ESOL.

Learners shaping their own learning

Learners who have been engaging digitally have also been feeding back what they are doing to improve their English, and this is being fully evaluated and recorded online. The engagement has become less teacher-led and they are being directed toward specific tasks and differentiation is more targeted and focussed. There is a 'minimum' requirement for learners to complete in an online class and then they are given options of activities and extended work to complete both synchronously and asynchronously. Within the online classes I have built in more tutorial/one-to-one feedback time so the learning can be more student centred rather than having a class of sixteen and general feedback.

Learners continue to bring specific questions to me about - not just about their 'taught' work but more holistically – CVs and job skills, seeking support for mental health awareness and how to support their children with homework. I would argue that part of any teaching role is to provide signposting and support for your learners but the intensity of the current situation has magnified my pastoral role and the level of trust and confidence I am able to offer whilst we are sat in our homes.

The effectiveness of online delivery and progression towards learning goals

This continues to be a work in progress as engagement was the primary focus throughout lockdown. There was a move away from exam assessment and with the announcement by City and Guilds to accept predicted grades this summer, the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and summative assessments were completed retrospectively, gathering evidence from classroom files. Initially, the key issue was to keep in touch with learners and try to monitor and evaluate feedback across the different strands of engagement: post/email/VLE/Zoom lessons. It was very patchy and difficult to manage at the beginning as class documents and paperwork were still in a file so the move to online delivery (adapting schemes of work and scanning in current classroom paperwork) was time-consuming. This summer has proved that having this information digitally meant it was easier to gather up-to-date evidence towards progression and learning goals. However, it has also proved that some learners can attend an online class, but it has been difficult to gather work from them, whether they have had a problem interacting with a particular activity or they haven't sent a copy of their work. In a classroom I can stand over them and physically take their work.

Challenges, Successes and Surprises

There are still technological challenges for a lot of learners. These include technology issues with live logging-on and difficulty in accessing online classes and activities on smartphones. For example, some activities require Flash. Some learners have both physical and mental health issues e.g. migraines, and the issue of caring has had a major impact - some have children sat on their lap whilst online! If there is a laptop or tablet, then the priority is the child's education.

In my Zoom classes out of 38 learners on the register there has been core engagement of 50% of learners compared to 95% -100% in their F2F classes. It has been difficult to support other learners outside of Zoom/VLEs due to General Data Protection Regulation rules (GDPR). Also, there are some key online resources and websites which we are not allowed to access as an organisation and different methods of engagement are inconsistent and difficult to monitor and evaluate. Marking and assessing work digitally has increased my workload significantly. When a learner sends files or photographs of their work, they have to be downloaded, put in the correct order and then converted to an editable document in order to feedback. The VLE supports this assessment process more effectively and there are 'blueprints' of resources available so a tutor is not starting from scratch. Currently, the aim is to simplify this for entry level language learners and develop their own set of online resources on the VLE. In the meantime, no matter how committed to the role, it is difficult to have the time to develop and adapt resources digitally as an hourly- paid tutor.

As ever in Community and Adult Education, the motivation and resilience of learners continues to inspire and amaze me. Learners are quick to adapt and will try new ways of learning and doing things outside of their comfort zone; they support each other outside of the classroom (WhatsApp groups); and they continue to share their knowledge and digital skills with their peers in a Zoom class e.g. sharing a website with their classmates.

The feedback from learners has been positive in that they have been able to continue with their learning under difficult circumstances. The key outcome has been peer support, flexible learning and the quality of the teaching.

Future provision

It has been confirmed that online classes will continue into the autumn term. The idea is that whoever has an email address or a smartphone is able to access online learning regardless of their level of literacy and access to data or Apps. Currently, learners who engaged at home no longer have this option and they are being encouraged to join online classes. Also, additional classes have been added to the timetable, increasing the intensity of Zoom classes. This should be easier for existing learners as they already have positive relationships with their classmates and peers, and have become used to the digital environment; however, I'm not sure how new learners will adapt to the intense Zoom classes.

Conclusion

I have had to include a measure of the blended learning approach, interaction online and F2F classroom learning to my teaching this year due to the inclusion of the VLE as part of higher level ESOL courses. However, the 'panicgogy' (Morris, 2020) of spring and summer 2020 has made this a reality across all my teaching and I have never had to develop so fast, both personally and professionally.

The teaching model for F2F learning can be adapted but planning, developing and constructing meaningful online learning is not just a click of a button. For every hour's delivery online, I have invested an additional two hours to support learning outcomes and evaluation. I continue to crave CPD opportunities to enhance my digital teaching skills. (Thank-you [https://www.futurelearn.com/courses "How to teach online: providing continuity for students"](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/How-to-teach-online-providing-continuity-for-students)).

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Literacy in lockdown

Donna Moore

Donna Moore is the adult literacy and numeracy development worker at Glasgow Women's Library (GWL). She joined GWL as a volunteer in 2010 – after 25 years in the soul-destroying world of company pensions. She has an M.Ed. in Community Learning and Development, an MLitt in Gender Studies, and is currently working on a creative writing PhD.

Literacy at Glasgow Women's Library

GWL <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/> is all about celebrating the lives, histories and achievements of women and supporting all women to achieve their full potential. We are a library, a museum, an archive of women's history; we hold all sorts of events and learning opportunities and we work with women in a creative and flexible way. Those who come to GWL range from the most vulnerable in society for whom our resources are vital, to those far better equipped with social and cultural capital. Our audiences span diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds, including those who feel the most remote from mainstream museums, arts and cultural organisations and other services. We feel very strongly about learning and development, and making our resources accessible and widely available to everyone.

We see literacy as being totally integrated into everything we do and we support women to get involved in all aspects of GWL's life, providing additional support where needed so that our learners are able to participate fully. For example, I support a learner who really struggles with reading and writing. She also volunteers with us, so she is supported to do that as well. One of her volunteer roles is to re-shelve books. This, of course, helps her with her alphabet. She also really loves hearing about the Suffragettes, so one of the things we are doing in our sessions is cataloguing a newspaper we have in our archives called '*Jus Suffragii*' (translated from Latin to English, '*The Right of Suffrage*', which is about the international suffrage movement in the 1910s. In one session, for example, we discussed these topics: when women in different countries got the vote, sex-trafficking, Excel spreadsheets, museum conservation, spelling, feminism, languages, the difference between hungry and Hungary and old cameras!

We are a small Additional Learning Needs (ALN) team - three of us, all working part-time, plus two volunteer tutors (although we are looking to train up a couple more). We work with women from all different backgrounds, cultures, ages, levels of ability - from women who are unable to read and write at all, to women who are, perhaps, going back to college after a long break and want support with writing essays etc. Women self-refer, but we also get referrals from all sorts of different organisations, working with women with mental health issues; women who've experienced rape, domestic abuse, trauma, etc.; refugees and asylum seekers; women who've been trafficked. Many of the women we work with are vulnerable, isolated and prefer one-to-one sessions. Everything we do is learner-led. We work with women doing whatever they want - whether that is writing a poem, doing a crossword, creating recipes, reading children's books, supporting them to visit an art gallery, writing a CV, applying for jobs, playing Scrabble, developing heritage walks or coming up with our own manifestos and quizzing politicians.

We support the women we work with to improve whatever aspect they want to focus on, to develop their confidence to allow them to progress and generally to feel better about themselves. When you lack confidence in your own abilities and worry that your lack of basic literacy skills will overshadow everything you do, it can put you off trying to do something that will improve your life and the lives of those around you. Even just stepping over the threshold and saying you need help can be a big thing for a lot of women. We want to make the learning we do as easy, supportive, flexible and creative as possible.

As well as one-to-one sessions, we run creative writing groups from time to time and we also have a small group called Conversation Cafe where women whose first language is not English get together with a couple of tutors and ... well, have conversations.

Literacy in lockdown

When lockdown started, my colleagues and I were really worried about our learners and how we would be able to provide support. How would we be able to keep our 'special ingredient'? More practically, how would we be able to continue working with learners when some of them did not have devices to work on, or the internet at home? Digital poverty is a real issue for some of our learners and some have never used technology at all. And, if we *could* do online learning, what resources would we use? GWL's library, archive and museum clearly would not be available to us, nor would the pieced together collection of games, books and ancient, much-photocopied paper-based resources. As a charity, we just do not have the funds for resources at the best of times, and this definitely was not the best of times!

For the first two or three weeks, we spent the time calling learners to check that they were OK, to tell them that we were still there, and that they were not on their own. This turned out to be invaluable. A couple of learners were struggling with the system, some are asylum seekers, or have health issues. For those, we signposted them to appropriate organisations and ensured that they were receiving relevant support.

In the third week, I discovered that one of the women I work with, who lives on her own with her young daughter, had received a shielding letter. Although she knew she should stay at home, she hadn't understood the whole thing. It was only when she said, 'Donna, what do I do, I don't have any food?' that I realised that she had not signed up for the food boxes the Scottish Government are providing to those who were shielding. We spent that initial three weeks mostly firefighting issues for our learners. We were concerned about not being able to work on literacy with them but a phone call of support, and someone to listen to you, is actually really important. So, if literacy and numeracy needed to be put on the back burner for a while as we chatted about their lives, concerns, frustrations and fears, then that was really valuable. Several of our learners struggle with their English and the phone is not ideal as a means of communication, but they appreciate a quick phone call from a friendly voice. Others have children or other caring commitments and no time for themselves, but are up for a chat every week.

Our next step was to put together documents to help us to support learners: free resources for learners, such as the British Council's ESOL resources, BBC Bitesize and free courses via FutureLearn and OpenLearn at different levels that they could sign up for. We also gave suggestions for those with children, to support with family learning and entertaining and educating the children while they were at home.

Individual achievements

And here are some examples of how we have been working with individual learners.

Learner A

Weekly Zoom sessions. This learner really struggles with dyslexia amongst other things. Before lockdown, in her sessions at GWL she had started reading a young adult novel called *Red Fever* by Caroline Clough. It is set in Scotland after a deadly virus has killed most people on Earth (oh, the irony!) The book, of course, was at GWL, so I bought two copies and she is now reading it to me on Zoom. We also play online wordsearch games and hangman using the whiteboard.

Learner B

Weekly Zoom sessions. This learner has a job where she needs to take minutes and her first language is not English. She struggles with listening, understanding and writing. I am reading Agnes Owens short stories to her very slowly and she is writing down what she hears. She types it up and sends it to me and in the following week's session we use the shared screen facility on Zoom to go over what she has written, talk about spelling, grammar and punctuation and edit the document while it is on screen. During the period of lockdown, we have also edited her CV, filled in a job application and in our last two sessions we have practised fake interviews to prepare her for the interview she has next week.

Learner C

Weekly Zoom sessions. This learner has no issues with reading and writing but struggles with lack of confidence where technology is concerned and our sessions at GWL centre around using her iPhone, iPad etc. We are talking through how to download and use apps on her iPad and are using Zoom to experiment and play with to give her more confidence in this area. She has just organised and hosted her own meeting on Zoom for a community organisation she volunteers for.

Learner D

Weekly/more frequent WhatsApp chats. This learner enjoys online courses and had signed up for a short OpenLearn course in forensic psychology. She was struggling with it - in terms of both content and motivation - so I signed up for the course too, and we now both have our certificates. *Mindhunter* here we come!

Learner E

Weekly Zoom sessions. I send her two creative writing exercises every week. She sends them to me and we go through them in our next Zoom session and talk about spelling and grammar as well as the stories and poems themselves.

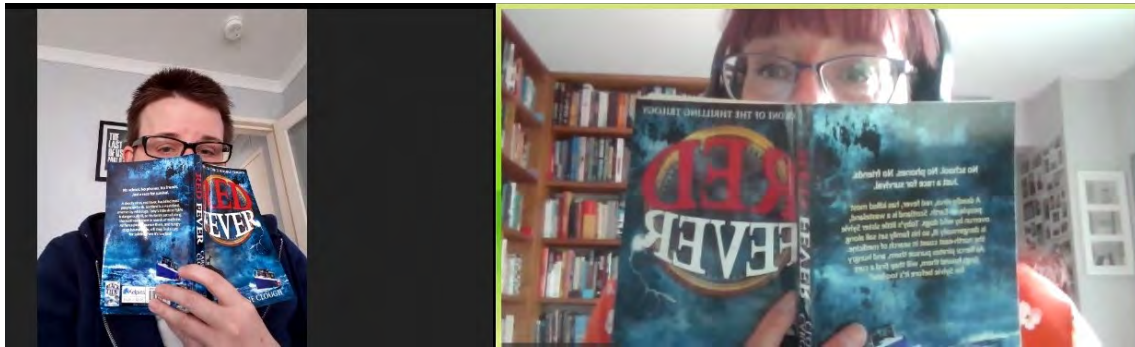
Learner F

Weekly Zoom sessions. We are working our way through the 100 most common words and she is reading them, copying them down and verbally giving me a sentence with the word in.

Learner G

Weekly Zoom sessions. This learner is in a wheelchair and is unable to physically interact with technology. Her literacy is at a very basic level so I have been using physical flashcards and showing them to her on the screen. She tells me what the letter is and gives me a word that begins with it. We play some online games with me at the controls. She has also made up a story which she dictated to me and then we read it back together.

We have supported learners to fill in forms to get accommodation or apply for benefits; we have talked about recipes and 'Black Lives Matter'; we have watched documentaries about women during times of war and films about Ancient Rome; we have listened to podcasts about pirates and an adaptation of Emma on Radio 4; we have read poetry and fiction and articles on Rosa Parks, elections in Poland and Doris Day.



Post-lockdown literacy

During lockdown we felt a bit lost and out on a limb. We knew that other literacy providers would be struggling with the same issues as we were and so reached out to RaPAL members and also to our local literacy network, with the support of GCVS – Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector. It's been good to share both struggles and successes with other providers, and maybe this will be the start of building new connections and ways of working.

It is, of course, very different doing learning by Zoom, but we have got to know learners in ways that we might not have if our learning had been the normal, in-person learning. I discovered that one of my learners has a grandmother in Nigeria who is 108; another was able to finally show me the cats she has been talking about since I first started working with her; another is a big fan of The Backstreet Boys.

As for myself and my ALN colleagues, we've been having weekly check-ins where we talk about our week, our learners and just have a little bit of the general chit-chat we would have had at GWL. And support from GWL's management, board and rest of the staff has been amazing. We are a really close team and we all miss the regular chats waiting for the kettle to boil, or the home-baking that appears as if by magic in the kitchen, or the football chat by the photocopier, but we are all in regular contact via Zoom meetings, phone calls and a WhatsApp group where we share all the fun things. One of my colleagues has just posted pictures of the three surprise kittens her cat just had. So, we are doing OK, and cautiously looking forward to re-opening GWL again soon.

But we have discovered that remote digital learning this way can be a really positive thing. It suits learners who work all week, those with medical issues that mean travelling is difficult for them, and the learners who need to get three buses to come to GWL. Several of our learners have said that they want to continue learning this way.

As mentioned above, our learners come to us via many different routes. At the start of lockdown, I was concerned that new learners would not find their way to us. I need not have worried. In the lockdown months, we have taken on six new learners and some of those new learners are referring others. I am reassured that we must be doing something right. The realisation that we can still do useful and helpful work with learners in these strange times, and that our special ingredient can still exist in a virtual space is a welcome one. So, even after things have returned to 'normal' and we can be in our lovely physical space again, the ALN team intend to continue to offer virtual learning as an option for all learners.

It is a joy and an honour to work with the women who come to us for help with their literacy and numeracy, and I am glad that even a worldwide pandemic has not managed to stop us.



Reflections of

Diane Gardner

Diane Gardner was a Senior Lecturer at City of Glasgow College when she created 'City Phonics' a completely fresh and structured approach to teaching adults how to read and write. Diane outlines how 'City Phonics' came about at <https://www.cla.co.uk/blog/further-education/city-phonics> and there is a small proof of concept demonstrator available at this YouTube demo video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bMP14MrJ-o&feature=youtu.be>. In August 2020 she started in a new role focussing exclusively on the 'Citizen Literacy' project.

Lockdown and subsequent restrictions resulted in all of our community and campus-based courses being halted until we could find a way that the majority of students could interact in some way with us. Slowly we began to find a variety of ways to firstly keep in touch with the students and then secondly continue their learning. At the beginning of restrictions, we were able to contact most of the students by phone or by email. However, maintaining continual contact was difficult with some groups whilst being relatively easy with others. Much depended on their digital literacy, Wi-Fi access etc. We used *Zoom* (for those who could access it), *WhatsApp*, mobile phone calls, and we reverted to handwritten letters when necessary.

Staff were rapidly upskilled for online teaching by the college so that we could begin to offer a blended learning approach for the students in our department across a wide range of subjects including, literacy, digital skills, volunteering and maths – from beginner level upwards, with ESOL students attending the majority of the courses. Some staff embraced this fully with others not being too sure. I was able to take one student through his final assessment on a *WhatsApp* call with a colleague joining us to verify the student's work. There are many other creative examples of staff going the extra mile to ensure their students achieved. Staff soon became adept at being able to evidence learning from all sorts of activities such as budgeting, paying bills, solving travel and childcare issues, benefit issues, dealing with COVID issues that the students found themselves involved with and lessons took on a different hue. The *Zoom* video conferencing system especially became the technology of choice that gave us an opportunity to catch up with each other (both staff and students), with no-one minding the occasional cat walking past the screen or a child needing a hug or to be fed.

As a Community and Widening Access department, challenges for us were significant, but by the end of the summer term the majority of our students who were due to achieve accredited qualifications did so, with some courses being altered to help students and staff deal and with the new challenges of the pandemic.

The end of the summer term arrived with its usual relief for staff who would usually leave with not much thought about the new term, but there was a lot of uncertainty and concern

in general and specifically about what they would be returning to.

Over the summer the college undertook massive physical and organisational changes on and off campus with the new two metre, social distancing rule strictly in place as well as temperature checks and hand sanitisers throughout the building. It was decided and agreed upon that none of our students would return to college until at least January 2021. Our management decided on an 'online as default' delivery policy, with a staff training programme to support the transition to a more blended learning approach.

In August, my new role started, focussing solely on the 'Citizen Literacy' project <https://citizenliteracy.com/>. August 1st saw me again beginning to use a variety of ways to keep in contact with my students. For example, in one beginners' literacy class every week I zoom, with five of them on one occasion. I phone two of them and I am trying to keep in touch by letter with the remaining two as well as posting the resources out to all the students. I am aware that the majority of them will not be able to use Microsoft Word yet in order to complete their worksheets. I have been able to build new relationships with some of my students' families in order to guide them on how to support their mother or sister, which has been a very positive outcome of this new situation.

My other beginners' literacy class has been delayed due to Wi-Fi restrictions with our Forensic Mental Health groups in Glasgow and whilst this may seem negative, the new restrictions have again resulted in positive outcomes for these students who have been able to maintain online contact with their family and friends, perhaps seeing their home or their parents' home for the first time in years. Their learning will begin soon and will be moulded around their needs as usual with an emphasis on building literacy, communication, and digital skills to best prepare them for their return to the community, once they are released from their secure accommodation.

It is indeed a strange time with our new Citizen Literacy prototype online tutor and student resources being launched today (Tuesday 29th September 2020). We have already received very positive feedback from the adult literacy sector. A big bonus is that we are helping to address students' textual literacy and digital literacy needs at the same time with these resources. The daughter of one of my community learning students (they are all beginner literacy students) emailed me on Saturday to say,

Mum loves the app. Once I showed her how to use it, she wouldn't let me have my laptop back!

As adult educators we have a monumental responsibility to get it right for our students to ensure they can begin to take part in society and in life, grabbing their opportunities just the same as we would. Following Freire's social practice approach, <https://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/>, I would hope that we are taking small steps towards that, in the Citizen Literacy project as well as in our Community and Widening Access courses.

Nicola Mactaggart is now our new 'Curriculum Head for Community and Widening Access', an onerous task and position which she has embraced and is already thriving. I have included the campus-based timetable for 20/21 and I am happy to report that staff are already teaching online and in some cases in person in our numerous community stakeholders such as Glasgow City Mission and the YWCA. Nicola has also taken note of the impact of the pandemic on students' health and wellbeing and has introduced a new course to support them through this.

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Life after CAG: will we ever look at qualifications in quite the same way again?

Paul Sceeny

Paul has over 20 years' experience within the arena of literacy, language, and numeracy, and currently works as a specialist technical advisor for a major UK-based awarding organisation. At various times he's been involved in qualification/assessment design, portfolio management, liaison with government and regulators, as well as working directly with providers across a range of settings. Originally from England, he relocated to north west Ireland a few years ago – giving him insight into the diverging approaches to LLN policy/practice across these islands. He writes here in a personal capacity.

Introduction

Like many of us, my professional and personal life changed abruptly last spring. Before then I would typically spend 3-4 days each week away from home, travelling throughout the UK and Ireland to facilitate support sessions and networks with literacy, numeracy and ESOL providers across a multitude of settings. When I landed back at City of Derry Airport on Friday 13 March after an enjoyable and rewarding day at NATECLA¹ East of England Conference, little did I know that I'd just had my last face-to-face work meeting until – well I still don't know when...!

The regular meetings with practitioners and managers continued in virtual form, and as lockdown kicked in those conversations quickly turned to whether and how learners might still be able to achieve the qualifications they had begun (or were about to begin) working towards. At first that simply involved reiterating and clarifying what was already permissible, but it soon became obvious that some more formal allowances and adaptations would be needed.

An unprecedented set of regulatory and other changes followed, affecting the qualifications systems in each of the jurisdictions across these islands; some of these arrangements were temporary and framed strictly as one-off solutions, whereas others are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Many of these adaptations and arrangements have brought back into focus what might have been considered to be settled assumptions about the role of practitioners (tutors, teachers or assessors) in determining qualification outcomes. That might be just a temporary phenomenon, made necessary as a one-off by extraordinary events, but on the other hand could there be an opportunity for a deeper reimagining of how learners' achievements should be measured and recognised?

¹ The National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults.

The drivers for adaptation

Depending on who I was speaking with, where they were based and the qualifications they worked with, the focus and tone of the early discussions about adaptations varied markedly. The six further education colleges in Northern Ireland had already started sketching out a possible blueprint for a temporary alternative assessment model for Essential Skills; Qualifications Wales had begun consulting with awarding bodies about disapplying part of Essential Skills Wales' normal assessment requirements. Meanwhile, discourse in England was tending to focus on the invigilation requirements for Functional Skills (FS) - made more stringent by the 2019 reforms - and the feasibility of completing the Speaking, Listening and Communicating (SLC) component of FS English remotely. We were able to confirm pretty quickly that this was possible (at least for the reformed qualifications – the regulatory position was less straightforward for legacy versions). Some settings had particular challenges. For example, Prison Education providers in England had abandoned all of their tutor delivery but were trying to put together in-cell learning packs.

Permission versus prescription

One of the challenges for awarding organisations was striking the right balance between *permission* and *prescription*. The potential for these to be conflated and misconstrued was brought home to me after flurry of headlines in the UK education press (e.g. Camden, 2020) in early April about the prospect of remote invigilation for Functional Skills exams. My own awarding organisation had planted the seed for this by indicating it had developed an interim solution that *potentially* could be used, but the story took on a life of its own with pronouncements on social media about learners being 'forced' to sit exams at home. I spent a chunk of the Easter weekend compiling a carefully worded Twitter thread (Sceney, 2020) which, as well as seeking to myth-bust, sent a gentle nudge to colleagues about the need to frame this with a little more care!

Enter CAG

Even by that weekend, the debate had been overtaken by events, since the Secretary of State for Education in England had announced a couple of days earlier that all Functional Skills learners due to attempt assessments in the summer of 2020 would receive a 'calculated result' (Williamson, 2020).

In this respect Functional Skills was unique (aside from GCE/GCSE) in being the only type of qualification in England where the use of grade estimation resulted from a ministerial direction. Similar approaches were then mandated by ministers/regulators in Northern Ireland and Wales for their respective Essential Skills suites; grade estimation was also used for the various ESOL qualifications regulated across England, Northern Ireland and Wales, although here the decision was only taken after consultation with NATECLA and other stakeholders.

The various algorithmic grade estimation models adopted for general qualifications across these islands have all faced considerable criticism, with last-minute or even retrospective

changes to results to rebalance in favour of practitioners' original professional judgements. The fallout from this fiasco has clearly still to play out fully, although it would be wrong to characterise this as *solely* a political or regulatory failure – especially given the extent to which all jurisdictions encountered a broadly similar set of issues around reliance on providers' historic performance alongside the centre assessment grade (CAG) recommendations submitted for current learners.

Before exploring these issues further, it is important to be clear that the estimation processes used for Functional/Essential Skills and ESOL qualifications were not the same as those used for general qualifications:

- there was only one grade boundary ('pass' or 'fail') to consider, so CAG judgements essentially boiled down to a 'yes' or 'no' decision and there was no 'ranking' of learners
- whilst all CAG submissions were subject to scrutiny by the awarding organisation (and in many cases were challenged), there was no automated 'non-human' process by which these were adjusted.

The quest for comparability

Nevertheless, the CAG process was extremely challenging for providers. It took many practitioners outside their comfort zone, placing considerable pressure on curriculum leads and heads of centres. It involved a certain amount of crystal ball gazing, for example estimating whether a learner *would* have ultimately been successful had their learning not been disrupted by Covid, and potentially if it had continued right up until the end of July. Centres' historic performance was still relevant, as awarding organisations would normally expect CAG submission pass rates to be broadly comparable unless there was a rationale for the discrepancy.

There was an added complication in the case of Functional Skills since this was the reformed qualifications' first year of operation and the legacy versions were still in the process of being phased out. Historic comparisons were therefore even more problematic than usual, leaving aside any cohort or other changes providers might also have had.

This is one of the key differences between general qualifications and the more flexible types of qualification that tend to be made available to adult learners. The former are assumed to have relatively stable cohorts, are assessed on only a limited number of occasions each year, and have at least a tacit role in 'sifting' learners. The latter are commonly made available on a 'when ready' basis, tend to be more criterion-based in focus, as well as typically having a much more varied and varying cohort. This dichotomy has softened to some extent with the shift, especially in England, towards adult learners accessing GCSE, but this also raises an interesting point since the process of setting grade boundaries for these qualifications typically involves comparing the performance of 16-year-olds (as the bulk of the cohort) with previous years.

For various reasons, general qualifications tend to be subject to more intensive media,

political and regulatory scrutiny than their vocational and technical counterparts. Narratives about ‘grade inflation’ and exams ‘getting easier’ regularly accompany the publication of results each summer. In turn, qualification regulators (and/or the government departments responsible for them) tend to frame their respective remits around objectives such as maintaining standards, ensuring comparable outcomes, maintaining public confidence (e.g. Ofqual, n.d.). It is less common to see references to learner experience or promoting the interests of learners.

That orthodoxy around ensuring comparable outcomes and consistency over time permeates throughout the assessment and qualifications industry, often for valid reasons as there can be a natural tendency for expectations to vary or become blurred over time if not monitored. The crucial point is ensuring these comparisons are valid, relevant and, ultimately, fair.

The extent to which this summer’s CAG process for general qualifications in England was skewed by political considerations, and especially the current UK Government’s fixation with tech/data solutions, is discussed by Laurie Clarke (Clarke, 2020). However, it is worth noting that algorithms systems were also used in other jurisdictions; not just in Northern Ireland and Wales, where qualification systems and regulatory arrangements are still closely aligned with England, but also in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.

Was this a case of groupthink? Did the received wisdom that results *must* remain aligned with previous years trump all other considerations (even though 2020 is ‘incomparable’ with previous years in almost every respect!)? Arguably the most unjust aspect of the grade estimation process for general qualifications was the profiling of providers’ cohorts from previous years. Again, this was not confined to England, and in all of the instances where it was used it only really began to unravel with the publication of results.

The focus on data and comparability was less rigidly deterministic for the qualifications more typically taken by adult learners, but even here there was maybe a little too much focus on (possibly spurious) data comparison. Quite a few of the follow-up conversations I had with curriculum leads over the summer involved offering reassurance in response to concerns about, for example, the prospect of results being overruled because of them having made a conscious decision to rebalance the use of Functional Skills versus GCSE.

Looking forward – is this more than just a blip?

Let us return to the question of how far the professional judgments of practitioners should be a key determinant, and especially whether the exceptional events of 2020 are anything more than a temporary blip. Whilst it is unlikely that CAG will be repeated, it has challenged and disrupted some of the prevalent thinking from recent years about the primacy of external assessment and perceptions that practitioners cannot be trusted to make accurate or reliable judgements.

Is there an opportunity to revisit or recalibrate some of that thinking? Or conversely, do tutors necessarily *want* to be more involved in making assessment decisions; are there advantages to being able to hand responsibility instead to an external examiner? It also perhaps reopens questions about different methods of assessment. Ministers might have fixed views about the unique validity of written exams (e.g. Williamson, 2020), but is there an opportunity to challenge the ‘exam factory’ mindset? Are there better, fairer and more inclusive ways of measuring learners’ capabilities? Here it would be worth recalling my earlier point about permission vs prescription: creating models of assessment that are clear about *what* but less rigid about *how*, is surely an appropriate direction of travel.

As well as helping to shape longer term thinking, these are immediately pertinent questions given the need for ongoing adaptations and adjustments to assessments as we continue to live with Covid. Let’s be radical!

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News from the sector

Tara Furlong

Tara is the Chair of RaPAL and can be contacted on webweaver@rapal.org.uk

We have virtual events, reading and TV outlined for you from across the sector this autumn. Enjoy!

'Space on a Page'

During lockdown, members created Space on a Page, an area to share experiences of rising to the challenge of adult literacy teaching and learning. As the pace picks back up this autumn, members are again sharing ideas and responses as we work through restrictions, risk assessments and mixed mode learning. RaPAL members are welcome to participate by emailing Tara on webweaver@rapal.org.uk.

PhD Colloquia

We're in the process of organising virtual PhD Colloquia where members can discuss their own research and/ or themes of particular interest. We have two lining up in early November and December, and a handful more in the new year. If you may be interested in participating, please email Tara on webweaver@rapal.org.uk.

Embedding maths and English in apprenticeships

The ETF have announced further free support for embedding maths and English in apprenticeships this autumn <https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/news/further-free-support-for-embedding-maths-and-english-in-apprenticeships-announced-for-autumn-2020/> We'd love to hear more about how this work is going, perhaps with an article for the RaPAL Journal!

Special issue on Literacy and numeracy: Global and comparative perspectives

UNESCO UIL's most recent edition of the International Review of Education is a special edition on literacy and numeracy. I particularly enjoyed the open access *Practice makes perfect: Practice engagement theory and the development of adult literacy and numeracy proficiency* by Stephen Reder, Britta Gauly and Clemens Lechner; and *Doing competence: On the performativity of literacy and numeracy from a post-structural viewpoint* by Lisanne Heilmann. More here <https://link.springer.com/journal/11159/volumes-and-issues/66-2>.

Literacy for life, work, lifelong learning and education for democracy

UNESCO just published *Literacy for life, work, lifelong learning and education for democracy* which '... provides a further review of progress achieved in education for democracy... (and) the intrinsic relationship of the subject to human rights and fundamental freedoms...'. It identifies that adult literacy has been hard hit by lockdown globally, and that women in particular are disadvantaged. Full report here <https://undocs.org/A/75/188>.

'Decolonising Literacy' with the British Association of Literacy in Development (BALID)

BALID and the UNESCO Chair are co-hosting a Brian Street Memorial Event on 18 November. This will be a virtual event where H el ene Bo ethius of ALEF (Adult Learning and

Empowerment Facilitators) will be sharing her experience of leading adult literacy programmes, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. ALEF works to,

‘... build capacity in local organizations already active in the countries, familiar with the culture and language, and understanding the life conditions of the people. Our contribution is to train the project staff on how to set up an adult education program, and to create course materials together, adapted to the needs of the people.’

More here <https://balid.org.uk/>

Adult basic skills: building back better

RaPAL’s annual autumn joint conference with the Learning and Work Institute, UCL Post-14 Centre, UCU and NATECLA is running online and free of charge this 4th November.

‘The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted inequalities in health, quality of work and labour market opportunities for individuals, families and communities. Basic skills levels are key in this. People have relied on literacy, numeracy, language and basic digital skills to access essential services online, stay connected, seek health advice or work from home. But those who don’t have the opportunity, the means or the skills to do this have been disadvantaged.

Around nine million adults in the UK are held back by low basic skills. Better basic skills are vital to our national response to coronavirus, supporting a skills-led recovery and building back better to create a more inclusive and fairer society.

This year’s conference will highlight how a focus on adult basic skills can enhance the employment and skills policy response to the pandemic. As providers experiment with new ways of engaging learners and offering provision online, the conference will consider what the ‘new normal’ means for adult learners, in terms of quality and access to provision.

We will explore what we know, and don’t know, about what works in adult basic skills, to help identify what more needs to be done.’

More here <https://learningandwork.org.uk/events-2/english-maths-and-esol-conference-2020/>. We hope to see you there!

C4’s ‘The Write Offs’

Contentious as ever, Channel 4 screened *The Write Offs* recently. For those of you that missed it, eight adult learners received intensive one-to-one tuition over four months, and participated in a number of filmed ‘challenges’. In an easily digestible if fleeting format, these helped viewers understand the hidden impacts and implications of low entry level literacy on adults’ day-to-day lives. Difficulties ranged from stroke damage and upset schooling, to dyslexia and SEND. Challenges and achievements included reading with children, travelling independently from a to b, shopping, cooking, reading aloud in public, performing on stage from a script... and perhaps most contentiously, a ‘spelling bee’.

Within the sector, there was disappointment at seeing learners categorised by school years, rather than adult literacy levels, and quite a limited conceptualisation of ‘literacy’. However,

all of the learners progressed in their confidence with the written word and it was heartening to see that the least confident learner had made the most progress. The programme made quite an impact on Twitter. Available to watch for free here <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-write-offs> (albeit with adverts). The programme highlights a desperate national need for adult literacy provision.

WRITING GUIDELINES

Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

We invite contributions from anyone involved in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL education to write and share ideas, practice and research with RaPAL readers. This can be writing from learners, ideas linking research and practice, comments about teaching, training or observations about policy. Our journal is now produced online and so we welcome articles, reviews, reports, commentaries, images or video that will stimulate interest and discussion.

The journal is published three times a year and represents an independent space, which allows critical reflection and comment linking research with practice in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL nationally and internationally.

The RaPAL network includes learners, managers, practitioners, researchers, tutors, teacher trainers, and librarians in adult, further and higher education in the UK. It also has an international membership that covers Ireland, Canada, USA, New Zealand, Australia, South America, Europe and Africa.

Guidelines for contributors

All contributions should be written in an accessible way for a wide and international readership.

- Writing should be readable, avoiding jargon. Where acronyms are used these should be clearly explained.
- Ethical guidelines should be followed particularly when writing about individuals or groups. Permission must be gained from those being represented and they should be represented fairly.
- We are interested in linking research and practice; you may have something you wish to contribute but are not sure it will fit. If this is the case, please contact the editors to discuss this.
- Writing should encourage debate and reflection, challenging dominant and taken for granted assumption about literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

We want to encourage new writers as well as those with experience and to cover a range of topics. We aim to have three different kinds of articles in the journal plus a reviews section; these are slightly different in length and focus. We welcome illustration and graphics for any of the sections and now have the facility to embed audio and video files into the journal. The journal has a different theme for each edition but we welcome general contributions too.

Below you will see more details about the different themes and topics:

1. Ideas for teaching

This section is for descriptive and reflective pieces on teaching and learning. It is a good place to have a first go at writing for publication and can be based on experiences of learners and teachers in a range of settings. Pieces can be up to 1,000 words long.

2. Developing Research and Practice

This section covers a range of contributions from research and practice. In terms of research this could be experience of practitioner research, of taking part in research projects, commenting on research findings or of trying out ideas from research in practice. In terms of practice this could be about trying out new ideas and pushing back boundaries. Contributions should include reflection and critique. Pieces for this section should be between 1,000 - 2,000 words long including references.

3. Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives

This section is for more sustained analytical pieces about research, practice or policy. The pieces will be up to 4,000 words long including references and will have refereed journal status. Although articles in this section are more theoretically and analytically developed they should nevertheless be clearly written for a general readership. Both empirical work and theoretical perspectives should be accessible and clearly explained. Writing for this section should:

- Relate to the practices of learning and teaching adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL
- Link to research by describing and analysing new research findings relating this and any critical discussion to existing research studies
- Provide critical informed analysis of the topic including reference to theoretical underpinning
- Write coherently and accessibly avoiding impenetrable language and assumed meanings. The piece should have a clear structure and layout using the Harvard referencing system and notes where applicable. All terminology should be explained, particularly for an international readership.

Reviews

Reviews and reports of books, articles and materials (including online materials) should be between 50 to 800 words long. They should clearly state the name of the piece being reviewed, the author, year of publication, name and location of publisher and cost. You should also include your name, a short 2 to 3 line biography and your contact details. You can write the review based on your experience of using the book, article or materials in your role as practitioner, teacher trainer, and researcher or as a student.

Submitting your work

1. If you are responding to a call for articles via the RaPAL email list or directly by an editor you will have been given the email address of the editor(s) for submitting your work, together with a deadline date and the theme of the journal.
2. If you are submitting a piece of work that you would like RaPAL to consider for publication that has not been written as a result of a call for articles, please send it to journal@rapal.org.uk in the first instance. The journal coordinator will then let you know what the next steps will be.
3. All contributions should have the name of the author(s), a title and contact email address and telephone number. You should also include a short 2 to 3 line biography. Sections, sub-sections and any images should be clearly indicated or labelled (further guidance on image size is on the website www.rapal.org.uk).
4. All referencing should follow the Harvard system.
5. Articles should be word processed in a sans serif font, double-spaced with clearly numbered pages.
6. The article should be sent to journal@rapal.org.uk

What happens next?

1. Editors are appointed for each edition of the journal. They review all contributions and will offer feedback, constructive comment and suggestions for developing the piece as appropriate.
2. Articles submitted for the third category 'Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives' will be peer-reviewed by an experienced academic, research or practitioner in the field in addition to being edited.
3. The editor(s) will let you know whether your article has been accepted and will send you a final copy before publication.

If you have any questions, please contact the journal coordinator by emailing journal@rapal.org.uk

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