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Further Education Centre
The Neale Road
Ballinrobe
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Initial Assessment Policy Youthreach Ballinrobe

Introduction

Youthreach caters for learners aged 15-20 years of age, who for various reasons have left mainstream education. It is inevitable that such Learners will have varying emotional and learning needs. A thorough initial assessment is crucial in identifying these needs so as to develop a learning plan that will aim to address these needs and help them during their progress in the centre.

Aims and Objectives

- To use the information gained in the initial interview with the Learner to assess their underlying needs.
- To gather information from the Learner's previous school
- To assess literacy and numeracy in the first month of the Learner's time in the Centre.
- To assess Learner's ability to partake in classes
- Monitor Learner's progress informally as they integrate with other learners and how they integrate in their various classes.
- Create a positive learning environment for each Learner as they set goals for the future.

Initial Interview

When a student presents themselves for interview, it is important to attain as much information from this process as possible. This should include:

- Why they have left school?
- What certification have they achieved so far?
- Have they any Specific Learning Needs and if so, what supports have they had so far?
- Has the Learner been assessed formally and if so, are those reports available?
- Are there any other agencies such as the Social Services involved? (JLO Reports, Probation Reports)
- What difficulties had they with school?
- What is their motivation for coming to Youthreach?





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Following this initial interview, the next step in our assessment should be to contact the relevant agencies involved with the Learner so far, such as the Principal of the previous school, Social Worker and Probation Officer.

The Forming Stage

When Learners start in the Centre, we take them through the following steps in order for teachers to get a fuller picture of the Learner's strengths and needs:

- Learner's literacy and numeracy skills are assessed during the induction phase into the programme. This is achieved both formally and informally.
- The Schonnel Graded Reading and Spelling tests are carried out and a reading and spelling age is calculated from the results.
- Learners presenting with difficulties from the said results are further assessed by Wrat4 (Wide Range Achievement Test). This is an approved test when applying for Reasonable Accommodations to the State Exams Commission for Junior Cert and Leaving Cert Applied learners. (Started in the academic year 2011-2012)
- A number of Learners may have psychological reports. If the Learner has not a copy of this available to them at home, we will contact their previous school to ask for the information to be passed on to us. Firstly, we must get the permission of the parent/Guardian to access this information. When they grant permission, information is passed from previous schools to Youthreach.
- During this Initial Assessment period, teachers observe the work of the Learner in their classroom and informally assess their literacy and numeracy skills.



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- Applications for Reasonable Accommodations are made to the Department of Education and Skills if a Learner is in need of assistance to carry out their Junior Cert or Leaving Cert Applied examinations. This may take the form of a reader, scribe, spelling and grammar exemption or the use of a word processor.
- All trainees meet and form a relationship with the centre counsellor. The counsellor assesses the student's personal, social and emotional needs. Feedback is given to the centre Co-ordinator and staff where appropriate

Individual Learning Plans

Since September 2011, some learners with severe literacy and numeracy difficulties will have a Learning plan set out for them. This was something we introduced as part of our Centre Development Plan. This allows the Learner to set their own goals and discuss strategies they could use to meet their goals. Initial assessment results are recorded in their learning plan. This enables the Learner to see where they may need to improve and also areas where they have strengths. It is important that the learning plan is positive and Learners will be encouraged to achieve their goals throughout their time in the Centre. The learning plan is reviewed regularly to monitor progress made.

Conclusion

Our initial assessment procedures have grown in the last number of years. It is important that every teacher assesses the Learner in their own classroom environment. With the combination of both formal literacy and numeracy testing along with the informal assessment in each classroom, a comprehensive picture of the Learner's strengths and needs are recognised.