APPLIED BASIC SKILLS IN NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR DRUG PREVENTION IN PRISONS

FINAL REPORT TO EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DRAFT to BSA

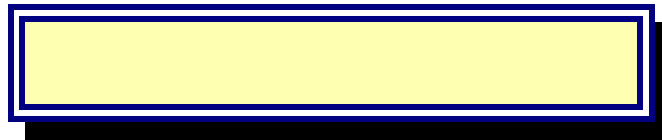## June 2004

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INTRODUCTION

PROJECT AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The ABSINT project was concerned with developing training modules and teaching materials, using multimedia and new technologies, to help young offenders with poor basic skills who are marginalised by drug and alcohol misuse. The project aimed to address the needs of participants that have low levels of literacy and numeracy on health/drug rehabilitation/prevention programmes in prisons by:

a) training staff to teach basic skills using new approaches for drug prevention programs;
b) involving young offenders in the development of curriculum materials; and
c) utilising multimedia technology in programmes.

The project aimed to improve basic skills provision and integration into specific drug prevention and generalist health programmes containing information on drug awareness by addressing those barriers to learning accessibility on drug programmes caused through poor basic skills. The use of multimedia technology aimed to bring a fresh approach to language and literacy training, using information on drug prevention issues to provide a stimulating and involving context that would also enhance learning.

The main project objectives were to:

▪ design and develop basic skills training modules/materials to address barriers to learning on drug prevention elements of health and specific drug rehabilitation programmes, including new training materials, and to use new technologies in the context of drug misuse for use within prisons within the participating partner states;
▪ design and develop basic skills training materials and methodologies to up

skill tutors and mentors in correctional institutions in the use of ICT and to use an integrative learner approach for drug prevention programmes;

- initiate an interactive curriculum development that involves young people in the development of materials (use of their own voices and life experiences to enhance the curriculum aims);
- audit existing practices and build on projects that are already operating within the same field, rather than reinventing the wheel;
- prepare and develop material in consultation with collaborative partners and experts in the field of drug prevention programmes and basic skills;
- use multimedia technology to bring a fresh approach to basic skills education, incorporating drug prevention issues and content to provide a stimulating and involving context;
- utilise the partnership network, to cross-assess the relevance of content within the training modules and teaching materials to be developed;
- exert influence on those resources used in existing drug prevention programmes through the training of workers within this field in order to a) avoid mutual exclusion; and b) enhance motivation and stimulation of staff development activities in the acquiring of new competencies with the introduction of new technologies;
- identify, select and recruit appropriate staff within the prisons who will be trained in the use of the new materials, delivery methodology and supplementary technology;
- train relevant staff and practitioners nominated in each member state in the use of training materials and multimedia resources via directed training inputs;
- trial training and teaching materials with up to 80 young people in prisons and community groups from 4 participating countries (4 prisons – 20 candidates from each prison);
- evaluate the material, training and piloting stages, together with an external evaluation of the project.

The resulting new training and technology model would be used in future basic skills and drug prevention programmes for further dissemination to education and social partners at national and transnational levels.

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EARLIER WORK

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The project aimed to build on an earlier European project, funded through DG XXII, called **Connect** or ' **Basic Skills and New Technologies for Young Offenders**'. This project included 4 countries, England, Ireland, France and Belgium with prisons in each of these countries. One prison involved in the Connect project, Amiens Prison in France, also participated in ABSINT.

The main aim of the Connect project was to also develop teaching materials using multi-media to teach young offenders. In this case, an existing product,

The New Reading Disk,[1] was used. The materials were trialed with a number of students in the participating prisons. The main outcome of the project was the production of a CD-ROM - a new version of existing software produced for Basic Skills learners in the UK that had been adapted for prisons. Each country contributed to the CD-ROM, producing materials in the working languages of the project - English, French and Flemish. The project was particularly successful, given the limited timescale.   The CD-ROM had a multi-national theme, which enabled prisoners to communicate with one another, through a variety of stories and pictures, across 4 different countries.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Basic Skills Agency, London, **Lead Partner**;

Direction Régionale des Services Pénitentiaires, France, with specific reference to Amiens prison;

County Cork Vocational Education Committee, Ireland, with specific reference to Fort Mitchell Prison, Spike Island, Co. Cork;

Feltham Young Offenders Institution, Middlesex, England

Cardiff Prison, Wales

Institute of Education, London: responsible for technical advice for development of software and evaluation;

Illumina Digital Ltd: responsible for development of software and provision of technical support;

National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland: national development agency for literacy in the Republic of Ireland.

STEERING AND WORKING GROUP MEETINGS HELD

 26 March 2002, London
 22 May 2002, Lille
16-17 June 2002, Cork
 17 September 2002, Cardiff

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[1] *The New Reading Disk*, Cambridge Training and Development.

 6-7 December 2002, Amiens
30-31 January 2003,   London
 25-6 September 2003, London
 16 March 2004, London

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PARTICIPATION

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Partners in Cardiff Prison and Feltham Young Offenders Institution endeavoured to produce materials. However, staff changes outside the control of the project made it difficult for these partners to complete their respective work and materials to a satisfactory level.

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BASIC SKILLS AND YOUNG OFFENDERS

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The lack of basic skills has been identified as a key factor in disadvantage, higher levels of unemployment and social exclusion. This linkage has been demonstrated across a number of Member States within the EU.[2] Numerous studies point to the connection between prisoners and low basic skills: literacy levels of prisoners are generally considered to be lower than that of the general population, but few if any comparative international studies exist at present.[3] The three member states involved in this project are all addressing the issue of literacy levels of prisoners in various ways, against a backdrop of changing attitudes towards adult literacy and basic skills provision in the general population.

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[2] Basic Skills Agency, London, *European Social Exclusion Project* 1999

[3] UNESCO *Basic Education in Prisons* 1995

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INTERNATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SURVEY

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In recent years, international research commissioned by the OECD[4] has strengthened the view that problems of adult literacy are not marginal in industrialised countries. The survey completed in a number of phases by that organisation calls into question the ability of large sections of the adult population to use written information, to carry out elementary mathematical operations and to solve simple problems.

Two of the countries involved in this project published results from the OECD survey: both found that significant percentages of their populations were only functioning at the lowest level (Level 1), meaning that they were able to perform, at best, only the simplest of literacy tasks. The scores were as follows:

COUNTRY	% OF POPULATION AT LEVEL 1
England, Wales and Scotland	*22-23*
Ireland	*25.*

Although a participant in the International Adult Literacy Survey, France did not publish the results. However, research carried out by Alain Bentolila on male army conscripts between 1990 and 1995 showed that approximately 60% of young people presenting with no school certification had difficulties with reading and writing.[5]

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IVQ – INFORMATION ET VIE QUOTIDIENNE

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This French national survey was developed in response to France's dissatisfaction with some methodological aspects of the IALS survey[6].

The survey is a performance test carried out by way of a household survey and assesses literacy and numeracy with a primary focus on literacy. Two pilot tests were implemented in December 2000 and April 2002 and a more comprehensive survey (target group 7000 responses) is due to be carried out in 2004. The

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[4] OECD *Literacy skills for the knowledge society* 1997, Paris

[5] Ministere de la Justice: Direction de l'administration penitentiaire, Paris, 1997, *La Lutte contre l'Illettrisme au Milieu Carceral*

[6] OECD, 2000

survey organisers stress that they prefer to use the term 'adults with reading difficulties' rather than the French term 'illettré' (functionally illiterate). At the present stage of analysis, an estimate of between 10 and 14% of the adult population aged between 18 and 65 have reading difficulties. If the target group is restricted to adults who have learnt to read in French, the statistic is 7-10%. Men have often more difficulty than women – between 7-12% of women have problems, as opposed to 11-16% of men. Older people also have more difficulty.[7]

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FOCUS ON BASIC SKILLS LEVELS

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The publication of the IALS survey statistics provoked a debate both, internationally, and within the individual countries concerned on the impact of low literacy levels. The survey's publication also produced radical changes in policies in a number of countries concerning basic skills provision.   These changes have also had an impact on prison education.

Both basic skills provision and prison education vary widely in member states: there are only broad trends, and provision in individual countries relates far more to the specific traditions and systems of those countries rather than pan European trends and policies.   In relation to the participating member states in this project, prison education systems are more developed in some countries than others. Ireland and France have well-developed systems, relying on statutory education providers in partnerships with others, both statutory and voluntary. In the U.K. the prison education system's aim is to address the offending behaviour of inmates, by improving employability and thus reduce the likelihood of re-offending upon release.   Even the terminology is problematic: England and Wales use the term 'basic skills'; Ireland uses the term 'literacy', in France the term 'illettrisme' is used (as opposed to 'analphabete').

Some common threads can however be detected. Whereas there is no common definition of literacy at European level that is relevant to this project, looking across the definitions it is clear that a requirement for adequate literacy to cope with the requirements of social, personal and vocational life is found in all. The need for adequate speaking and listening and numeracy skills is found in most definitions. In some of the definitions, basic skills are defined as including broader skills or attributes, such as self-esteem and confidence. The common core of these definitions is the need for adequate literacy.[8]

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[7] http://www.anlci.gouv.fr Communiqué: Premiers résultats de l'enquête sur l'information et la vie quotidienne de 2002.

[8] Basic Skills Agency, London, *Basic Skills and Social Exclusion,* 1999.

In France, the prison service has designed a screening assessment tool that is used with all new committals in prisons throughout the country. This system is linked to a database to enable the individual prisoner to be 'tracked' during his stay in the system. It operates on six levels, with Level One referring to adults who have completed a university doctorate. Level Six refers to adults over 16 who have received five years of compulsory education but have no formal certification.   This level six is subdivided in a further six levels, with the first level representing those with no literacy skills. The French team working on the ABSINT project focussed most often on students who were operating in 'Family D, E and F. These levels represent a range of learners, from those who can identify specific information in simple texts to those who only have difficulty with literary texts and are nearly ready to complete the equivalent of lower secondary certification (CFG -"Certificat de Formation Générale").

Within the literacy service in Ireland, the assessment at present by literacy tutors of their learners' needs is non-formal, and their programme is built around their own aspirations, goals and interests, in keeping with adult education principles. Other than the use of the national certification framework, there is no consistent national objective mechanism for assessing levels of attainment. However, currently within the national framework, the lowest level of certification is Junior Certificate or FETAC Foundation which both demand fairly high levels of literacy (Junior Certificate is the public examination taken at the end of lower secondary education, usually when students are 15).   The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has recently published proposals to develop a ten-level framework, with two levels of accreditation available below the current Foundation Level.

In terms of the levels used for the purposes of IALS, it could be argued that FETAC Foundation Level Communications require learners to be competent at IALS Level One and to be making some progress toward Level Two. (Competence at Level Three is usually seen as desirable in western industrialized countries.) The Irish team working on this project focussed on students who were operating at FETAC Foundation Level or equivalent.

PRISON EDUCATION

Education as a human right is enshrined in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted in 1950.

In 1990 the Council of Europe published a report, Education in Prison, [9] essentially advocating an adult education orientation and a wide curriculum for work in prisons. This report has been very influential in the development of prison education, as well as generating a professional association, the European Prison Educators' Association.

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[9] Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1990, *Education in Prison*

The Council of Europe's essential recommendations are as follows:

- All prisoners should have access to education, which is envisaged as consisting of classroom subjects, vocational education, creative and cultural activities, physical education and sports, social education and library facilities;

- Education for prisoners should be like the education provided for similar age groups in the outside world;

- Education should have no less a status than work within the prison regime and prisoners should not lose out financially or otherwise by taking part in education;

- Development programmes should be provided to ensure that prison educators adopt appropriate adult education methods;

- Special attention should be given to those prisoners with particular difficulties and especially those with reading and writing problems.

A report on prison education from the UNESCO World Conference on Adult Education in 1997 emphasised the wide disparity in provision between countries, even at European level. The EPEA has served as a unifying force in the last 10 years, with a number of conference reports contributing to the general debate on good practice in prison education.

BASIC SKILLS AND ICT

USING ICT IN BASIC SKILLS IN PRISON EDUCATION

The value of context-specific, learner-centred material is well recognised in basic skills education, particularly for adults who have been failed by conventional educational systems. With the availability of digital resources, and the widespread use of such resources in homes around the globe, comes the realisation that the definition of literacy has broadened from reading and writing to include technological competence. Literacy does not just involve the written

and spoken, but the visual. Carvin (2000)[10] suggests that 'the spectre of illiteracy can be overcome only cultivating a broad spectrum of skills'. He suggests that in order to address literacy issues we must go beyond helping someone learn to read and write, and concentrate on developing literacies such as:

Technological literacy: the ability to use common ICT tools including hardware, software and Internet tools like search engines.
Information literacy: the skills to ascertain the veracity, reliability, bias, timeliness, and context of information.
Adaptive literacy: the willingness to learn new tools and to apply previous ICT learning to new situations.

The world-wide movement to embrace digital technologies and promote social inclusions is reflected in this European Commission definition:

Digital literacy is one of the essential skills and competences needed to take an active part in the knowledge society and the new media culture. Digital literacy concentrates on the acquisition of capabilities and skills related to new technologies, which are required in a growing number of daily life activities. Digital literacy also relates to media literacy and social competence, as they have in common objectives such as active citizenship and the responsible use of ICT.

(European Commission, eLearning Programme, 2004)

Young people, particularly those marginalized and in danger of re-offending will only be attracted to education through innovative pedagogic methods and the skills they acquire need to be embedded within a wider context ; these literacy skills need to be integrated with the skills required in all aspects of life and in particular skills promoting health and education about drugs.

Generally, 'computer literacy' has acquired a 'skills' connotation, implying competency with a few of today's computer applications, such as word processing and e-mail. Literacy is too modest a goal in the presence of rapid change, because it lacks the necessary 'staying power'. As the technology changes by leaps and bounds, existing skills become antiquated and there is no migration path to new skills. A better solution is for the individual to plan to adapt to changes in the technology. This involves learning sufficient foundational material to enable one to acquire new skills independently after one's formal education is complete.

(Committee on Information Technology Literacy, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, 1999)

Therefore not only is the nature of literacies changing, but so is the curriculum to include context specific teaching.

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[10] Carvin, A., 2000, More than just access. *EDUCAUSE Review*, November/December

REDEFINING LITERACIES: WHAT IMPACT WOULD IT HAVE ON PEDAGOGY?

In order to harness the power of the technological revolution, educators have had to look closely at their pedagogical methodologies, examining not just *how* but *what* they teach. This reassessment of teaching methodology is an immense task that requires an understanding of the importance of equipping learners with skills that promote not only written and spoken literacy, but also visual literacy.

Digital texts are multimodal, incorporating text, pictures, sound, and video. Whilst we have experience of teaching each of these things on their own, we know less about how to teach new multimodal forms of expression in which these various modes interrelate and work together. Recent research indicates that the very curriculum structure of our schools may well be standing in the way of the development of effective teaching in this area – it may be that adult learning could take a lead in this area. In a series of studies, supported by the NRDC and ESF[11], Mellar and Kambouri (2004) [12]have been looking into a number of different classrooms across England.

BASIC SKILLS LEARNERS: ENTRY LEVELS?

One of the problems facing educators in prisons is the problem of very low levels of literacy their students have. This is a difficult population to teach not only because of their personal histories of disaffection and failure in school but also because as they dropped out early they have a very low threshold of patience in learning situations. Whilst motivation levels are high in anticipation of new gadgets, using technology which is old or failing (or indeed new to teachers) can also have adverse effects.

Moreover teaching ICT skills in isolation from literacy skills can cause problems for those with low literacy who find that these literacy issues block their way in ICT. Mellar et al (2004)[13] observing basic skills learners working with ICT in order to improve their literacy and numeracy as well as their ICT skills have shown that

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[11] NRDC is the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy in England.

ESF is the European Social Fund

[12] Mellar, H. and Kambouri, M. (2004) 'Learning and teaching adult basic skills with digital technology: research from the UK' in Brown, A.J. and David, N.E. (eds) *Digital technologies, communities and education: World Yearbook 2004* Routledge Falmer, London.

[13] Mellar, H., Kambouri, M., Sanderson, M. and Pavlou, V. (2004*): ICT and adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL.* NRDC Report (full report on NRDC website shortly).

it is possible and useful to develop these skills side by side. Yet they caution that often tutors are not sufficiently demanding of learners in terms of ICT skills and progress can be slow.

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MEDIA AUTHORING

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Media authoring allows the integration of different digital media elements — text, graphics, sound, animation and video — into learner-centred applications (Neo and Neo, 1997).[14]
Today, vast digital realms have opened up that are waiting to be exploited by learners and there is a plethora of easy to use, functional tools available to help learners orchestrate their own digital learning. Examples of media authoring tools include game design tools like Stagecast (http://www.stagecast.com), world creation programmes like Adobe Atmosphere (http://www.adobe.com/products/atmosphere/main.html), visual learning tools like Inspiration (http://www.inspiration.com/home.cfm), simulation design tools like Agent Sheets (http://agentsheets.com/), and digital media production suites such as those on offer from Apple (http://education.apple.com/education/ilife).

Allowing learners access to the authoring process generates a range of important learning outcomes. Once confined by the pages of textbooks, learners suddenly have modular, extensible, interactive, and flexible tools at their disposal. The value in this is enormous. Media authoring projects, such as BECTA's Digital Video pilot scheme, have found that allowing students to author their own learning experiences has a positive effect on learner engagement and behaviour. Media authoring enhances learning because it increases engagement with curriculum, supports a range of learning styles, and motivates and engages a wider range of pupils than traditional teaching methods, and in doing so provides greater access to the curriculum (Reid et al., 2002).[15] Further, the use of media authoring tools, stimulates and supports the development of other skills, such as problem solving, negotiation, creative thinking, reasoning, concept retention, self-critique and risk-taking' (Reid et al., 2002). Other projects, such as Squeak (http://www.squeakland.org/), a free' media authoring tool' that allows learners to construct dynamic simulations of real—world phenomena, has combated learner resistance to mathematics learning, while seeing benefits from collaborative work and peer mentoring.

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[14] Neo, K. and Neo, M (1997), *The Multimedia Mosiac: Multimedia on the PC*, Selangor, Malaysia, Federal Publications, Sdn. Bhd.

[15] Reid, M., Burn, A. and Parker, D., (2002), Evaluation Report of the Becta Digital Video Pilot Project.

ONE SOLUTION? WEB-AUTHORING

ABSINT is an innovative pilot project that looked at how web-authoring technology could be used within the prison context to encourage the development of a wide range of basic skills competencies through the theme of health education. It took a sound pedagogical idea—using web authoring for education[16]—and applied it not only to basic skills learning but also to health and drugs education. The result was a testimony to the value of forward thinking. The project motivated tutors and learners, and demonstrated how important, powerful, and inspiring authoring tools could be.

The rationale for using web-authoring tools for health and drugs education was simple. Project partners were looking for ways to motivate and challenge learners who hadn't been successful in traditional learning contexts. Technology was seen as a non-judgemental, unbiased instrument that learners could use to tell stories that were important to them, and, in doing so, allow them to dismantle some barriers to drug rehabilitation. The idea was to create tools that would allow prisons to extend the work already being completed in the area of health education, from a decidedly innovative multidisciplinary pedagogical standpoint. This multidisciplinary educational approach—ICT, literacy, and drugs and health education—had thus far been untried and would carry with it significant benefits and possibilities for lessons learned.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS

There is little doubt that web authoring could facilitate the development of written literacy skills. Producing content for web pages requires learners to engage with many of the basic procedures of writing: developing a framework to present ideas, learning the importance of understanding one's audience, and building strategies to bring together diverse ideas generated from research and personal experience. However, there are many other anticipated benefits, as discussed below. A recent report [17]reviewing the curriculum in prison education in Ireland reiterated these points. Some of the learners' views at the Dochas Centre in Dublin, are included for illustration here;

> **Visual literacy**: Authoring would allow learners to give a visual presence to their stories, and illustrate that pictures could be as powerful as words. Learners would become confident using multiple communication channels

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[16] Web authoring has gained credibility as an educational tool. Consider, ThinkQuest an international website building competition in which 25,000 students have competed worldwide.

[17] Curriculum Review Group, 2003, *Prison Education in Ireland: a review of the curriculum*, Dublin, Prison Education Service, Dublin

(visual and audio) and along the way would be able to document their stories in a way that they hadn't been able to previously.

"*I use my own personal photographs on the computers …it's so exciting! Working on a photograph can make such a difference. I would never have believed you could do so much…*"

Independent learning: Learners would benefit from a greater level of learning independence then they had previously experienced. They would take charge of what they wanted to learn and author their own learning experiences, rather than being led through learning by tutors. An additional advantage of web authoring was its asynchronous nature. Learners could choose to learn when it suited them: 'for some, computers and interactive multimedia provide an alternative route into education... the flexibility of access promised by digital technologies is a major attraction' (Mellar and Kambouri, 2004).

Technological competence: From an ICT competence standpoint, learners would be equipped with skills that could transfer to the workplace, web page creation, design, production, project management etc. and this is extremely crucial to this group, as this learner reveals:

" *I did not have any exposure to computers before coming into prison. I feel proud of myself after finishing two modules in ECDL. It will help me provide for myself when I am released.*"

Confidence: Because learners would be authoring their own stories through web pages they would be able to interrogate, test, and challenge assumptions they had about drugs. Further, because they could 'hide' behind a shield of anonymity (after all, they would be 'talking' to a computer rather than a person), which wasn't possible during face-to-face interactions, it was felt that developing websites would be somewhat liberating: learners could try out strategies and ideas that they previously may have been reluctant to propose. Authoring would be a valuable tool, not just for individual learners attempting to understand or resolve their own problems, but also for the entire learning community. Having learners talk about drugs using their own voices would give the project a level of credibility that couldn't be achieved by a teacher standing at the front of a classroom.

Self-critique: Learners can work through ideas in an unstructured way, without being shackled by the confines of formal learning. This would permit reflection in the midst of creativity, permitting ideas to be edited in a creative and spontaneous way (Salmon, 2002).

Writing: Learners could structure their thoughts and make them available in a way that they hadn't been able to previously. Subject material could be reworked in a way that classroom conversation could not. It would be possible to rewind, to look over to review thoughts, concepts and ideas (Salmon, 2002). [18]

Motivation: Learners would be motivated by the opportunity to learn about cutting edge technologies. Also, the exploration of 'imaginary', virtual worlds of their own creation would lead to new insights.

Visual learning: Learners would be producing and digesting information in a non-linear way (hyperlinks) and at the same time would benefit from creating and receiving visual stimuli. This would translate into information-rich, self-directed learning (Farrel and Moore, 2000).[19]

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ICT IN THE PRISON CONTEXT

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Prisons are not just isolated socially, in a sense they are isolated digitally. Prisons do not have Internet connections, most don't benefit from the latest equipment or technological advances, and many have limited network capacity between what computers they do have. Unsurprisingly tutors' ICT skills are limited in many cases and tutors are tentative about integrating technology into lessons, both because of a lack of knowledge and availability of continuous professional development and an already heavy workload. Yet young offenders need to be part of the digital world and they need to learn skills that are transferable to the world outside prison walls.

Few examples of media authoring exist within the prison context. In a previous project funded by the EU which was part of the CONNECT series, an authoring tool used to promote literacy was adapted (see report by Kambouri,M. and Kett,M. 1999[20]).

While ICT has been used successfully in prison environments, robust media authoring environments such as web-authoring or animation tools are fairly new. This study piloted a number of tools and, in doing so, took an important step towards realising how media authoring tools could practically be implemented in prisons.

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[18] Salmon, G (2002) 'Mirror, Mirror, on My Screen…Exploring Online Reflections', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 33, 379-391

[19] Farrel, I H. and Moore, D.M. (2000) 'The Effects of Navigation and learning: an empirical study.' *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*, 9, 281-311

[20] Kambouri, M. and Kett, M., 1999, Connect Project Final Report, Basic Skills Agency

ABSINT PROJECT'S PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

FRANCE

France was one of the last European countries to officially recognise the problem of basic skills: an official report on the subject was not published until 1984, 10 years after the UK. The Agence de Lutte contre l'Illettrisme (ANLCI) has a brief to co-ordinate work at national and regional levels. The Agency also has a policy and research role. A specific term "illettrisme" has been employed to distinguish literacy work from projects in developing countries and literacy work with immigrants.

The most recent (2003) definition for 'illettrisme' (as opposed to 'illiteracy' or 'analphabetisme') reads:
"… the term 'functional illiteracy' is applicable to situations where a person of over sixteen years of age who has received a formal school education cannot read and understand texts relating to everyday life and cannot write in order to convey simple information. For some individuals, these reading and writing difficulties may be combined to varying degrees with an insufficient mastery of other basic competences such as oral communication, logical reasoning, comprehension and use of numbers, sense of space and time etc. Despite these difficulties, people with literacy difficulties have acquired experience, culture and a bank of competences without relying on reading and writing. Some may have integrated into social and professional life, but the balance is precarious and the risk of marginalisation is constant. Others are in situations of social exclusion, where basic skills difficulties are combined with other factors."[21]
In relation to prisons, education as a basic right is enshrined in the French penal code. Documents also make reference to the Council of Europe recommendations and the United Nations declarations on Education in Prison.[22] As the majority of prisoners in France have not completed primary education (60%) basic skills provision is prioritised, particularly for young offenders. Results obtained between '95-'96 from the national screening procedure showed that 39% of those screened had basic skills difficulties (as opposed to 20% amongst

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[21] ANLCI, 2003, *Lutter ensemble contre l'illettrisme: Cadre national de référence.*

[22] Direction de l'enseignement scolaire, Direction de l'Administration pénitentiaire, Actes du colloque: enseignement en prison, 3/4 décembre, 2001.

army recruits). Of this 39%, half (20% of the total sample) have great difficulty in reading individual words or sentences (as opposed to 8.5% of army recruits).[23]

Education in French prisons is organised on a regional basis, attached to the regional offices of the Prison Service. Teachers are appointed on a full-time basis from the public education sector, with some teachers providing part-time service for the terminal school examination courses (Baccalaureate). Voluntary groups also work on specific education projects within the prisons, usually in conjunction with the statutory education service.

The Prison Education Service emphasises the importance of the French definition of the word 'illiteracy' – the inability to ' read simple words or sentences' and feels that there is a need to reduce the level of dependency, even within prisons. Education does not have equal status with work in French prisons and therefore those who attend classes are not paid. As a result there is a difficulty in getting people to come to classes. There is an issue about motivating people in prisons who have a learning need and who work. This is regarded as an educational challenge and the incorporation of technology is regarded as important in the learning process as it engages individuals. The French Prison Education Service is therefore keen to develop new technologies and feels that dialogue must be initiated with prisoners and their engagement into the educational process monitored accordingly.

IRELAND

Ireland's results in the IALS survey compared unfavourably with all other countries except Poland. These statistics provoked a national debate on literacy levels that resulted in hugely increased provision for adult literacy. An Adult Literacy Development Fund has been established by the Department of Education and Science for a range of pilot actions, testing models and innovatory approaches to inform future practice in the area.
Adult Literacy Schemes provide learner centred tuition on an individual and/or group basis to adults with reading and writing difficulties, who in the majority of cases are experiencing varying levels of disadvantage. This service is provided free of charge and is available in most cases during the day and in the evening. This service is resourced mainly by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) or Local Education Authorities.

A White Paper on Adult Education (2000) has made adult literacy its top priority, and budgets have been increased accordingly. Despite this increase, 3% of those estimated to have low literacy skills participate in basic skills provision.

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[23] Ministere de la Justice: Direction de l'administration penitentiaire, Paris, 1997, *La Lutte contre l'Illettrisme au Milieu Carceral*

RESEARCH ON PRISONERS' LITERACY LEVELS

The Irish Prison Service published a research study[24] on literacy levels of prisoners in September 2003. The study aimed to establish how prisoners compared with the general population with regard to literacy skills. The results showed that a significant number of prisoners had virtually no literacy skills and even by traditional and outdated standards would be considered 'illiterate'. In comparison with the general population, there is a much higher percentage of people at IALS Level 1 or lower within the prison system.

For example, with the general Irish population approximately 25% of people scored at Level 1 or below, whereas with the Irish prison population 52% of respondents scored at this level. The results of the study emphasise the link between anti-social behaviour and educational disadvantage as manifested in the low literacy level of so many prisoners.

IRISH PRISON EDUCATION: ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Vocational Education Committees also provide education in Irish prisons. This service is provided in partnership with the Department of Justice. The programme does not include vocational training, which is administered separately by the prison regime. Successive policy statements and initiatives have placed emphasis on the crucial role education can play in the management and rehabilitation of prisoners. All these reports, including those produced by the Prison Education Service, explicitly acknowledge the existence of a major literacy problem within the prison system and list basic education as a priority area of work.

The main objectives of the Prison Education Service are to develop an Education service based on the principles and ideas outlined in the Council of Europe' report 'Education in Prisons':

- To widen access to and increase participation in education among those in custody
- Ensure that those with basic education needs are prioritised
- Support a multidisciplinary and partnership approach within the prison system to assure positive sentence management for those in custody.[25]

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[24] Morgan, M. and Kett, M., *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey: Results and Implications*, Irish Prison Service, 2003

[25] *Prison Education in Ireland: a review of the curriculum*, 2003, Curriculum Review Group, Prison Education Service, Dublin.

Most emphasis is placed on engaging with the prisoner in addressing directly his educational needs. This student-centred approach means that school applicants are interviewed individually and a programme is devised with their active co-operation, based on length of sentence, literacy level, subject preferences and personal goals. Students are encouraged to work on areas that directly motivate them.

The general 'basket' of choices that prisoners are offered revolves around the following subject areas:
- Basic Education: Literacy and Numeracy and ICT;
- Health and Physical Education;
- General Studies, leading to certification where appropriate;
- Creative Activities, including Music, Drama, Art, Pottery and Crafts;

Literacy tuition is integrated into the context of this broader curriculum wherever possible.

The Prison Education Service has recently completed a policy document on literacy that seeks to take account of the new developments at community level and the results of the research on prisoners' literacy levels.[26]

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ENGLAND

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Following the OECD survey and the Moser Report's publication in 1999 the British Government launched a national strategy, Skills for Life, for England. [27] Skills for Life aims to address:

- Inconsistent and often poor standards of teaching and learning;

- Implementing a proper system of teacher training and development;

- Uncoordinated and inadequate public funding for provision.

Extra funding has been committed to support the implementation of a number of the Moser Report's recommendations. Priority groups include:
- Unemployed people and benefit claimants;
- Prisoners and their supervisors in the community;
- Public sector employees;
- Low skilled people in employment;

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[26] *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work in Prisons*, 2001, Prison Education Service, Dublin

[27] Department of for Education and Employment, 2000, *Skills for Life: The National strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills*

- Those at risk of social exclusion.

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The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has established a set of National Standards, which will provide a framework for all adult literacy and numeracy courses. The Standards explain in detail what is expected in literacy and in numeracy at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2. These are broadly equivalent to the attainment expected of an average seven-year-old, an average 11-year-old and GCSE [28] grades A-C respectively.

WALES

The National Assembly for Wales published its National Basic Skills Strategy, in conjunction with the Basic Skills Agency, in 2001. The strategy addresses the basic skills needs of both children and adults and focuses on four key measures:

- Continuous promotion of the importance of basic skills;
- Action plans locally and nationally;
- Effective improvement programmes;
- Literacy and numeracy qualifications for young people and adults.

The strategy is based on effective partnerships between government, education bodies and training providers, business and the voluntary sector.

Action plans for adults include:
- The development of self-help, self-access materials for adults with basic skills needs and who are not motivated to join formal courses or programmes;
- Greater involvement of employers and trade unions;
- New programmes for basic skills provision, in a range of learning settings, including prisons;
- The development of a basic skills core curriculum for adults in Wales by 2003;
- New threshold qualifications which signify that an individual has competent literacy and numeracy skills;

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[28] National examination taken at 16 years of age

> THESE QUALIFICATIONS ARE COMBINED WITH A KEY SKILLS CERTIFICATE IN BASIC ICT, TO PROVIDE A NEW 3-STRAND QUALIFICATION, THE WALES TRIPARTITE AWARD.
>
> **PRISON EDUCATION IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

The Prison Service is now working in partnership with the Department of Education to combat low levels of literacy and numeracy as part of the National Skills for Life Strategy in England and the Welsh Basic Skills Strategy. The partnership, supported by a Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit, will have a lead role in working with all key agencies. The publication 'Improving Prisoners' Learning and Skills - A New Strategic Approach' highlights the need for 'lasting improvement in prisoners' learning and skills'. Most prisoners have very low levels of educational attainment and surveys suggest that only one in ten prisoners has a job to go to on leaving prison. The report adds that poor levels of education and skills clearly contribute to the problem. Many prisoners' literacy and numeracy skills are so poor that up to 90% of all jobs may be closed to them. The partnership has highlighted the following priority areas to improve standards of literacy and numeracy among prisoners:

- Building capacity in prisons so that as many as possible of the 135,000 men and women committed annually have the opportunity to learn, including those who serve short sentences of six months or less;
- Motivating more prisoners to improve their educational attainments, to gain the skills needed for today's workplace and to support their social re-integration;
- Improving the links between prisons, education providers and resettlement agencies, so that prisoners can make an effective transition to resettlement by promptly moving into a job or a suitable programme of education or training on release.

DRUG PREVENTION

REVIEW OF INITIATIVES

The latest report[29] from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) outlines that treatment and harm-reduction measures that are standard in the community are largely unavailable to drug users in prison. However, innovations in penal policy are also paving the way for alternatives to prison for drug users, diverting them to semi-compulsory treatment or community service on the assumption that their needs are better met in this way. Such alternatives avoid young drug users coming into contact with criminals inside prison. However, scientific evidence of their effectiveness is still largely absent. Acute overcrowding in prisons also drives the need for alternatives.

Drug use among young people has risen steadily in the 15 EU Member States over the last decade. Despite some signs of stabilisation among mainstream young people in some western European countries, there is no evidence of a significant overall reduction, especially among those most at risk. Statistics for drug misuse are, of course, far higher amongst prison populations throughout Europe than in the general population.[30]

It is increasingly recognised that drug and alcohol problems are intertwined and that patterns of drug taking among young people have diversified. As well as investing in general drug-prevention work in schools and communities, EU countries are beginning to promote projects targeting those most vulnerable to drug and alcohol problems. Such projects aim to prevent substance use problems by strengthening self-esteem and problem-solving abilities and by helping people deal effectively with risks, such as living in a drug-using environment. Drug prevalence among the young is often higher in particular localities, such as deprived areas of inner cities.

A recent report [31] summarising the main findings of research in Ireland and abroad relating to drug use prevention examines approaches and strategies for preventing use and misuse. The prevalence of experimental substance use amongst young people throughout Europe is underlined. The report stresses the need for broadly based programmes focusing on the experimental drug use that is not uncommon among young people from all social backgrounds. The evidence reviewed shows that fear based messages are not appropriate in programmes and stresses that the indications are that this is quite ineffective in preventing subsequent experimentation. Instead there should be investment in approaches that emphasise personal and social development, stress social skills and enhance decision-making. The report lays emphasis on the fact that

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[29] http://www.emcdda.org

[30] Dillon, Lucy, Dublin, 2001, *Drug Use Among Prisoners: An exploratory study*, The Health Research Board.

[31] Morgan, M., 2001, *Drug Use Prevention: An Overview of Research*, Government of Ireland.

participants should be **actively involved** rather than the **passive recipients of information.** Citing the European database EDDRA[32] the report stresses that one of the main conclusions from these evaluations of drug prevention programmes is that teaching and learning methods that are overly directive are less successful than those in which **learners play an active role.**

The scope of the ABSINT project did not include an evaluation of the actual effectiveness of the materials produced in relation to drug prevention. The primary focus of the project was on the production of accessible information involving young people themselves. Morgan outlines that while information in itself is not sufficient to change behaviour it is a necessary component of broader based programmes that are holistic in nature. There is no suggestion that young people should be kept ignorant of the facts relating to drugs. Rather these facts should be part of an overall strategy and should be credible and age-related.

HEALTH EDUCATION IN PRISONS

IRELAND

In Irish prison education, the prisoners' needs, environment and personal history determine the Health Education component of the curriculum. Programmes focus on the prisoners' lifestyles outside, in the past and for the future, and their present heath and well-being. For many in prison, the lack of fundamental information around the area of health is part of a general need for basic education and much of the material generally available about health care does not connect with prisoners because it is not presented in an accessible way. A lot of this material available form the health services is aimed at a segment of society that has a more structured and healthy lifestyle than many prisoners. However, for teachers working in this area, as with other areas of the curriculum the transient nature of the prison population adds to the difficulty of presenting a comprehensive health education programme, which requires long-term commitment.[33]

Within Fort Mitchell prison, there are a number of courses that focus on drugs issues. There are two groups on drug awareness that run for 10 weeks and are confidential. This gives the young offenders the opportunity to discuss the kind of drugs they use and any alcohol or gambling problems. The focus is on drugs and

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[32] The EMCDDA have collated over 240 demand reduction activities at their website
(http://www.emcdda.org)

[33] Curriculum Review Group, 2003, *Prison Education in Ireland: a review of the curriculum*, Dublin, Prison Education Service.

their effects and how the individual is viewed in a social context. A counsellor visits the prison once a month to discuss possible treatment of any drugs problems and individual support is also available. In addition, there is a Health Education group that meets one morning a week over 5 weeks, which explores issues such as emotions and sex education. An external counsellor also attends the prison to discuss more sensitive health issues, such as those suffering from AIDS and Hepatitis C. The prison also has a health leaflet that is given to new arrivals at the prison. In addition to the health education courses, there are life skills, peer education and physical education courses.

A post-release project supports mothers in and outside prison. The National Vocational Training Agency for Ireland offers a course to people in the local community. The course takes place in a converted factory within a disadvantaged area of Cork. A teacher from the prison visits the community once a week as part-of this post-release work.

France

In 1994, a new law was passed which handed responsibility for prison health issues to the Ministry of Health. There are many extreme health issues that need to be considered, such as HIV/Aids and Hepatitis C, for example. The relationship between service providers is complex, but the main focus is the service to the client, i.e. the young offenders.

In Amiens, the Health and Education Team use questionnaires during the initial meeting with the young offenders to elicit their views on a number of issues such as health and hygiene. Drugs and drug prevention issues are normally discussed at a later date.

The ABSINT project provided a good opportunity to link in broader health issues, rather than focussing on 'drug prevention'. The main focus of project activity was a multi-disciplinary team which addressed the issues of drug prevention and information with the young offenders. While health education is part of the official education curriculum, it is difficult for education authorities to make time for it within the constraints imposed by the institution.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Initial discussions centred on the production of health education materials suitable for young offenders with basic skills difficulties using new multimedia materials. It was decided to commission the production of new software to facilitate the production of such materials with the learners themselves. One suggestion was to produce a CD-ROM that would form the basis of future work in this area.

Initial ideas on the content of the CD-ROM were that the project might not produce a 'targeted' product, but a product that incorporated a positive health theme that would be accessed predominantly by those with poor basic skills. The partnership also agreed that the material must be appropriate and pitched at the right level of basic skills. There was also a need to ensure that the material was simple enough for the students to understand the wider drugs and health issues. It was important to address the conflicting ideas of improving reading and writing using the student's own life stories (as in Connect) and introducing interesting subject matter and the need to address the problem of drugs and health within this.

It was felt preferable to place an emphasis on health promotion rather than drug prevention as well as focussing on basic skills instruction.   Initial suggestions centred on using some kind of European theme, possibly in a cartoon format. "Families" or "characters" were suggested, possibly using a soap opera format and specific characters who could demonstrate particular kinds of addiction or substances. Material from popular culture (music, magazines) could be used to make the material attractive and relevant to young people. Teachers collected materials relating to drug prevention used in their respective countries, as well as liasing with other agencies involved in drug prevention programmes within the prisons to ensure that the material presented reinforced and supported approaches already being used.

Animation and writing workshops already current in Amiens prison were expanded. The focus was on information that was accessible but non-judgmental and not childish. It was agreed that story lines around specific substances relevant to the young people's experience could be developed (tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, ecstasy, prescription drugs, heroin and cocaine.

In Fort Mitchell, all of the learners were enthusiastic about the project and wanted to talk about their own stories. They discussed the positive and negative aspects of drug taking and how people have changed their attitudes to smoking, drinking etc and about self-control. They suggested a scenario of a good or bad person, in a particular setting such as a 'rave', with a number of alternative routes they can take. The idea was to provide information depending on what direction the learner takes.

The project team discussed the issues relating to organising drug dependence programmes with marginalised young people on a number of occasions. It was acknowledged that presenting information in itself would not counteract or remedy the problem of drug dependence, but that objective information that is accessible and meaningful to young people is a necessary prerequisite for initiating other work. In this sense, the project made a valuable contribution to health education work in both prisons that completed work. It was decided that the materials would not be used to teach literacy but that they should simply be **accessible** to those who have literacy difficulties.
Other basic skills were reinforced and taught through this project: research skills, using websites, linking information etc.

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SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

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Although a variety of media authoring tools were used successfully during the project, there were three project-specific tools that were designed for the project. The *Skillsbuilder* web-authoring tool allowed users to create their own web pages, the *Skillsbuilder* animation tool helped users design basic animations, and *Skillsnet*, an extranet which was used by project participant for project communications and collaborations.

Summary of software developed:

> ***Extranet*** – essentially a closed network, using the Internet to communicate between different sites. Learners could only access the site through the tutors and the site was password protected. The tool could be used by teaching staff to communicate with other partners and to publish project materials.
>
> ***Skills Builder Tool*** – an authoring tool that could work on stand-alone or network machines. Materials could be published on the Extranet
> The aim of this tool was to allow anyone that has no knowledge of HTML and the web to build a microsite. Pages can be built on any platform that supports Java, including Windows, Macintosh

and Unix. No extra software was needed to be installed. The tool enabled items on a page to be dragged and dropped. It is possible to incorporate images into the Skills Builder Tool and create links with words and pictures ('hotlinks'). When material was saved, it was 'live' on the extranet.

Animation Tool – enables user/tutors to create different characters and storylines. Designed to enable full scale animations, with different backgrounds and photographs to be scanned in. Materials then to be shared on the Extranet.

The software was initially given to partners in September 2002 (*Skillsbuilder*). It was agreed that partners would produce sample pieces of work, which could be used by the software developers. These were to be posted on the Extranet for others to view. However there were delays in the production of the Animation Tool and this resulted in considerable restraints on the project, as partners were unwilling to proceed with materials development until the total software package was available. The Animation tool was eventually demonstrated in December 2002 but at this stage it was judged inadequate and referred back to the software developers for further editing. The final product was not circulated until spring 2003.

Extreme dissatisfaction with the animation tool was expressed when it was initially demonstrated. Although the Software Company did agree to make some minor changes these were not deemed to be adequate and this software was not used during the project. At the training meeting held in London in January 2003, practitioners requested further changes. Some minor amendments were made. In the final event, the Animation Tool was deemed to be inadequate and was not used to produce materials. These delays and difficulties resulted in a smaller range of material being produced.

TUTOR TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

Many prison educators lack ICT skills. Many are self taught and come from varying educational backgrounds. Those participating in the project made a specific effort to understand the technology and use it adequately. This was part of the understanding for joining a technology led intervention study. Training for the specific software used was to be provided by the contracted designers of the tools.

Practitioners had different levels of skills and experience in relation to ICT. In this regard it would have been useful to conduct an audit of ICT skills prior to commencement in order to ascertain a base line of entry skills of the tutors. As people had varying levels of skill, this hindered the gelling of the group and the progress of the project at times.

Three training sessions were organised to demonstrate the software products and initiate development of microsites. A further training session was organised around the development of a user guide for *Skillsbuilder*. The most productive training session took place when a member of the software development team visited Fort Mitchell prison in Cork and worked intensively with teaching staff to address on-going technical difficulties. Some of these technical difficulties were resolved in this way. However those practitioners who requested training felt that this was insufficient. It was difficult to assess this, as the on-going technical issues relating to the software posed other barriers for teachers.

The French team did not organise such a visit as they had sufficient level of IT expertise. Regular communication was maintained with the software developers to address technical difficulties encountered.

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COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARTNERS: THE EXTRANET

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This was an interesting facility which is used by media designers but not often by educators. An extranet is a space on the web reserved for particular groups of users who need to communicate and upload information to be shared only by the members of the group. It is therefore a forum of discussion but which privileges those who belong to it and can access it through individual passwords. This facility permits exchange of information in terms of resources which would have been difficult to access otherwise, for example through other means such as email because of restricted capacity. Moreover the technology used was appropriate for the medium of communication.

The Extranet was easy to use and could have provided a useful tool for communication between partners. It was not however used very extensively. The main reason for this was the communication difficulties caused by language barriers. Partners did post completed work on the Extranet but there were a series of difficulties in getting data on line and there were other technical difficulties relating to the software not functioning on all systems.

USE OF SKILLSBUILDER

The *Skillsbuilder* website tool is a java-based website development product that allows novice computer users to build web pages. The tool does not require any knowledge of html (the scripting language web pages are built in). Using a basic interface that is divided into two sections -- a tools section and a layout section-- users click and create content that they save to their hard drive or upload to an intranet. Users can also incorporate into their web pages animations they have designed using the *Skillsbuilder* animation tool.

Both centres used the *Skillsbuilder* website tool. It was deemed to be useful and attractive and opened successfully the concept of a web page. Its use enabled students to acquire a computer logic. They learned how to navigate between pages and to connect them logically. However technical difficulties reduced its use: learners were discouraged and demotivated by snags contained in the software. Resolving such difficulties requires patience and focus and this is very difficult for young people in these situations. The use of such software requires the management of a mass of information in a short time to create a web page. This management required assistance and instructions from teaching staff. This is particularly difficult for staff in a mixed ability group situation where demands are being posed from all sides at once.

In relation to literacy teaching, *Skillsbuilder* could not be considered to be a teaching tool: students found it attractive however, particularly because they would not have access to such software at home - the "magic of the screens and the visual effects are stimulating" but fatigue can set in very quickly with this audience.

USE OF ANIMATION TOOL

This was a tool designed for schools which the company offered to adapt for this project. Users access the animation tool either through a menu item in the web authoring tool or use the animation tool as a standalone application. By dragging and dropping a variety of stock characters and sounds into a layout frame that contains backgrounds (day, night, Ireland, park) of their choice, learners create animated scenarios relevant to their lives and, in particular, to issues around drugs education.

The animation tool was not used by project partners to produce any materials. It was deemed to be not at a sufficiently advanced stage of development and posed too many technical difficulties for users. The range of options it offered for developing story lines were extremely limited. The evaluation conducted concluded that it needed to be made more robust, offering additional audio and visual content, more animation functionality and improved possibilities for user-generated and edited content.

OVERVIEW OF SOFTWARE

The final consensus was that the software developed specifically for the project was not developed to a sufficiently high standard to consider them appropriate for more widespread use. Tutors and learners had the perception that the *Skillsbuilder* tools did not compete with existing authoring tools already in the market and that are available for free or shareware download. This perception, along with the fact that there are usability and instructional support issues, was a serious barrier to permitting teachers and learners to generate relevant and interesting learning content.

The three areas needing attention before tutors and learners could adopt the tools into learning environments were identified as:

- Usability issues
  These issues were outlined in an evaluation of the software conducted by the Institute of Education.

- Instructional support
  A brief 'getting started' document (more comprehensive than that which was created) was needed, as well as improved help files, the creation of user manuals and the development of a knowledge base of more advanced activities.
- Increased opportunities for user generated content needed to be developed
  Templates needed to be provided giving the user sample layouts and showing them possibilities for web page layout and website development

TRANSNATIONALITY

Partners found this aspect of the project extremely useful, despite language difficulties. The working language of the project was English, but a considerable amount of interpretation had to be provided by the Project Manager and the Project Evaluator.

Visits took place to Fort Mitchell Prison in Ireland (June 2002) and Amiens Prison in France (December 2002). Partners were able to see the education facilities in each case and meet other prison staff, including the Governors of each prison.

In the case of Fort Mitchell an opportunity to discuss the education programme with learners was provided.

Contact with other partners from different countries facilitated a broadening of professional expertise and awareness of alternative approaches. Several partners commented that an alternative approach whereby study visits were organised to partner countries and institutions, enabling a more extended period of teacher exchange and team work, would have been more productive.

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN PRISON

CASE STUDY ONE: IRELAND

Fort Mitchell Prison
Fort Mitchell, near Cork City, is a closed prison for men aged 16-24 years old. The total prison population is 102. The main activity of the prison is education and a broad curriculum is offered to the young offenders.

The main focus of project activity was the use of *Skillsbuilder* with students by teaching staff.   Initial work involved a group of twelve students and eventually six were selected to participate in the project. One extra microsite was assembled by a teacher (representing anonymous stories from mothers of prisoners who were attending the community based support centre).   Students were selected on the basis of interest, capability, availability, co-operation and knowledge. Initially the project generated a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement amongst the students. They were particularly interested in communicating with learners in other countries.

The narrative approach is a strong 'entry point' for many in Irish prison education so staff chose to go down the route of basing each individual microsite on narrative which was thematically structured around one type of drug use. This is also a tried and trusted method in basic education in Ireland and it was used to facilitate work in the early stages.

Students were asked to write of or relate their experiences of drug use and abuse as an entry point to the subject. The resultant stories acted as spring boards into basic web design projects

The group used was of mixed ability, with some students being at higher levels of literacy than others. The more advanced students attended regularly whereas those with weaker literacy skills only attended once. The students were slow to engage with the software or express an understanding of its use despite being frequently informed about its purpose. However they did enjoy observing the microsites becoming more complete and engaged well with the subject matter. They willingly shared stories and enjoyed the comical images available on the library CD-ROM.

Initially, they were more interested in the communication aspect (that is sharing information with other young people and other prisons) than they were in learning new skills through *SkillsBuilder*. They were interested in ICT but mainly for the task and entertainment based exercises they could engage with on computers. They were also interested in what ICT can teach them to do in a tangible sense.

Working with the educationally disadvantaged means teaching students with a low attention span, poor thinking skills, weak concentration and little patience for problem solving. Students do not invariably possess all or even one of these traits, but nonetheless do not appear to have the stamina or perseverance to troubleshoot user problems. However, the health information generated as a result of the project was of interest to many students and discussion of their experiences of using and seeing others use drugs was always lively.

Six microsites were completed, each one on a different substance. In each case, primary health information was presented, in language that was accessible to students with basic skills difficulties. Both fact and misinformation were outlined, supplemented and illustrated by material, clip art and images sourced by teaching staff on the Internet and assembled for students' use on the library CD-ROM. Only material from web sites containing accurate and balanced information was used. In this way, teachers supervised students' access to and use of material obtained on the Internet. Personal stories illustrating the consequences of substance abuse were also included.

A quiz format was used to test readers' understanding of and engagement with the material presented. The situations presented related to students' experiences and life situations. While the scenarios related experiences that were attractive or familiar to young people with a history of substance abuse, the negative consequences of such abuse were also outlined.

Sample extracts from microsites:

Short-Term Drinking
Alcohol makes you drunk within five or ten minutes of drinking and this
can last for many hours depending on the dose and how quickly you
take it.
The more you eat beforehand the less drunk you will get
Drinking can make you happy, sad or angry
After two drinks most people feel relaxed
After another two drinks you can become messy, sloppy and you may
fall around the place or slur your words
If a drinker has any more than this they tend to see double and stagger
If you drink far too much you can lose balance and 'conk out'
Drinking coffee or eating after drinking does not sober you up

Ecstasy…Is It Addictive?

Ecstasy isn't physically addictive, but a psychological
dependence (when you feel that you cannot do without
something) can occur. With frequent use tolerance can
build up so that more has to be used to get the same effect.
On stopping it, some people feel depressed and tired, but
this eases with time.

COMPUTER LITERACY

Basic literacy students are as apprehensive about using a computer keyboard as
they are about, reading or writing and the students did have difficulty engaging
with the software. This was partly accounted for by the on-going technical
difficulties encountered but also related to their lack of familiarity with the Internet
and their inability to relate the building of web sites to their own experience. The
web-authoring tool did sometimes present significant challenges for the basic skill
user. Teachers found that a high level of mediation was required at most times
and the users did not seem capable of using the application without help.
Students required not only a knowledge of how the web-authoring tool itself
works but also a good working knowledge of other ancillary programs to use it
effectively. It appeared that to use Skillsbuilder to good effect students needed
pre-existing degree of computer literacy.

Technical Difficulties
The client group engages and learns best when they can see an immediate and
practical application for their efforts. They need to see the point of exercises they
take part in. When students were trained in the use of *Skillsbuilder* there was an
initial interest, which soon faded, when students realised how problematic and
difficult the tools were to use. For this reason the project did not have a
significant impact on the students. Teachers trained students to use each tool to
the best of their abilities but this was not enough to bring about effective and
successful use of the tools by learners.

Relevance of the Internet
Many students do not have any knowledge of using the World Wide Web and
Internet applications in general. The concept of an intangible entity that exists in
cyberspace is difficult to grasp when the learner has experienced little or no
Internet use. Students were nonplussed by the material at first, mildly impressed
by it when their efforts bore some fruit and completely frustrated by it when they
did not. It was uncertain whether they could see the point or make any
connections with possible uses of *Skillsbuilder* because they had little or no
experience of the Internet or web-browsers and were not able to complete and
experience the process of interacting with the Internet for themselves.

ICT Infrastructure

Students attending basic skills classes did not have adequate ICT infrastructure present in the room and therefore could not use the tool in an infused manner. Skillsbuilder was taught as a bolt-on course in an ICT room during a timetabled ICT class. They could only make use of the tool in an artificial sense in ICT class if the tutor had time to devote to individual students.

Part of the difficulties experienced related to the hardware infrastructure available to support development activities, as adequate separate facilities for ICT classes within the basic skills classroom did not exist. Access to PCs meant cancelling other ICT classes organised for students who were not basic skills learners. In this case, the prison's ICT infrastructure did not meet the demands of the project.

In January 2004, Fort Mitchell was closed, pending the outcome of an industrial relations dispute. This issue seriously affected the ability of education staff at the prison to complete work relating to the project. Despite these difficulties, six microsites were completed. The Education Staff at Fort Mitchell are to be commended for their perseverance and commitment to the project in very difficult working conditions.

CASE STUDY TWO: AMIENS PRISON

In France, the main focus of project activity was the multi-disciplinary team project addressing the issue of drug prevention and information with young people.

Partners involved included:
- Prison administration.
- The Department of Education.
- Probation services
- Justice Official and Public Magistrates' Office
- Prison Medical Services
- Psychology Services
- Community based addiction support group
- Theatre and music groups
- Théâtre du Sagittaire: help in creating short plays.

The project has demonstrated a very positive example of how **multi-disciplinary** work can take place in a prison environment. Those involved with the prison education service included the prison administration, the prison medical services, prison psychology services, drug prevention agencies (external), probation services, the public magistrate's office and community based arts and music groups. Until this project there was no onus on services to work on a team basis. The partnership approach meant that everyone's expertise was utilised.

Monthly meetings involving partners listed were held throughout the project. Medical and psychological services supplied background information on substance issues, ensuring accuracy and approaches that conformed with current drug prevention policies within the French prison service. The French team also underlined the crucial importance of prison security staff's involvement to the success of the venture.

There had been relatively little work on **health education** in the prison before this project began. Health education is on the official education curriculum but it is difficult to make time for it within the constraints of the institution. Work was based on the collection of personal accounts of addiction. This was the starting point to initiate debate with the young people. The project helped to correct however '**mis-information'** held by the students: for example they have a very negative view of alcohol but not of cannabis. Care was taken not to give the impression of condoning substance abuse or glamorise drugs
.
The prison medical service used the project to simplify existing questionnaires used with new committals, which were deemed to be inaccessible to those with basic skills needs. This made an important contribution to developing this service: prior to this point many questionnaires would be returned incomplete, because the reading level made them inaccessible to many prisoners.

A significant number of young people participated in the project in Amiens: 45 attended 77 sessions. While the majority were at similar educational levels (see section on Basic skills) there was a very broad range in terms of maturity and levels of expectation. The majority of students were serving an average of two-month sentences and were aged between 16 and 17.   Consequently the project partners had to contend with the phenomenon of 'turnover' (constant changes in the prison population) as well as other disruptions inevitable in a prison environment, and organised work based on five-week intervals.

Some workshops were set up to allow young offenders to share ideas about projects and to discuss the young offenders' views on drugs, based on their own experiences. The education staff worked closely in conjunction with the prison health authorities to provide accurate information. The initial discussions generated by the materials were positive. Teachers were surprised how candid some of the students were when describing their stories. This became in some cases almost a therapeutic experience, but students were supported throughout the process and there were structures in place to provide guidance and access to counselling services if necessary.

After this discussion phase, the workshop then moved to production. Working with the teachers, the young offenders developed their ideas using a variety

of media – including computer software, drama, producing posters, slide shows, cartoons, writing their own life experiences, stories, brochures and games. These various approaches to production of materials are described below.

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FAQ (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

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The students prepared a range of questions relating to 'Cannabis and the Law' and 'Alcohol and the Law'.   These were prepared during a brainstorming session, which gave very interesting results. The questions were then submitted to the Public Prosecutor's office and subsequently two visits by a magistrate to the prison were arranged, during which a question and answer session took place.

Despite the fact that this official is the person responsible for sentencing the young people, the sessions were not acrimonious.   The prisoners responded positively to the fact that an official was prepared to communicate with them in this way. They were able to compare the legal situation in relation to two drugs, one of which is legal and the other illegal.

The FAQ's were developed using *Skills Builder* software; the young offenders included those answers they felt to be most relevant.

Members of the prison medical and psychological services, as well as addiction support groups, delivered other information sessions. The group sessions with the psychiatrist were also very useful: this was the first time this approach was used by the service and resulted in a very open communication process.

Vocabulary encountered during these sessions was consolidated by follow up work using freeware software to create crosswords and other word games.

Cartoons
The students created cartoons based on the subject 'cannabis'. Each student started by writing his own scenario following the rules of narrative construction. Then they moved on to develop the storyboard (a tricky stage where the written word is transformed into a drawing and where ellipsis and innuendo predominate). Finally, they created the cartoon itself. Alternative software which enables the user to draw a cartoon using the computer was employed. A decision was made not to use the Animation Tool for this work because it was considered to be too limited and did not allow the young people to transcribe their ideas into multi-media format. While the cartoons

created are static, the process did allow participants to express their views on drugs.

Information
This production was entitled 'Do you have a drug problem?'
The psychological service used the ABSINT project to improve one of its aids used by the medical service during the initial interview on committal to prison. The questionnaire relates to drug dependency and needed to be reformulated to make it accessible to people with literacy difficulties
This work was undertaken with the young people themselves. The software used was *Neobook*. The questions were simplified and rewritten to enable them to be accessible to people with basic skills difficulties.
A user-friendly interface was chosen with different GIF images making the final product attractive.

Theatre
In class, students wrote several scenarios based on the subject 'alcohol' in order to create a play. This dramatic writing was key to the production. Students knew in advance that certain scenarios would be excluded (this would be decided by vote and with the agreement of the theatre group).
After discussion with the drama group the genre of la *commedia dell'arte* was selected. This is a dramatic genre that allows its actors complete anonymity through wearing a mask (such anonymity is compulsory when working with young prisoners).
The theatre group and the students then worked on transforming the scenarios to suit this genre of representation.
Two short plays were created, but only one, *les vieux [the old people]*, was filmed. This was achieved with the help of the video workshop and equipment of Amiens Prison.

Music
This was a very time consuming project but one which was also very interesting for those people taking part.
The students started by writing the words of the song. The subject was 'cannabis leads to prison'. Each student had to write a short piece in the style of a verse of rap. The most relevant pieces were chosen to be part of the song.

"Eh, petit frère te mets pas dans la galère
Shit, Tralala ne goûte jamais à ça
Pas de shit, sinon ta vie passe vite
Ne te fais pas prendre avec du shit
Sinon direction le tribunal
Et là-bas, tout est banal

Une barrette sur toi
Et tant pis pour toi
De toutes façons, tu fais ce que tu veux
Tu réfléchiras en devenant plus vieux
Une incarcération et après tu fais très attention

Petit frère accroche-toi, bats-toi, jette-ça
Et quand demain tu seras dehors, repense à ces jours sans joie
Fais tout ce qu'il faut pour pas revenir là"

"Look, mate, don't get involved
Just don't even try it
Don't do hash otherwise life will pass too quickly
Don't get caught up in this hash
Otherwise you'll be heading straight for the court
And there everything is boring
Get caught with a couple of grams of hash on you
Tough luck
But anyway you can do what you want
But you'll look back as you grow old
Get banged up once and you'll think again

Mate, come here, fight against it, throw that away
And when you're outside tomorrow think back to these days with regret
Do everything you can not to end up like that"[34]

The music group then organised the recording within the classroom. Some of the young offenders handled the mixing, others the arrangement and, of course, some of them sang. A CD of the final song, entitled '*A cause du shit'* (All down to hash) was given to those prisoners who took part.
Afterwards, a video clip was filmed to illustrate this rap song.
The head of the prison's video workshop came to show the young offenders how to make a clip and how to use the necessary equipment. The students worked on the video clip (within the constraints imposed by the prison environment).
Many of the young offenders filmed (used the video camera), some of them created the graphics used in the clip, some of them took care of the lighting, and others acted.
The final result was put together by the head of the video workshop because of strict restrictions governing the equipment.

At Amiens, there is now a plan to develop a project on communicable diseases.
Teaching staff from Amiens have already presented findings from the project to a seminar on health education.

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[34] Extract from "A cause du shit" produced in Amiens Prison

The team involved are intent in pursuing the partnership after the project's completion and there are plans to develop in the work in other young offenders' institutions and remand prisons in northern France (Loos, Lez, Lille and Valenciennes).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In general terms there were successful outcomes to the ABSINT project. Both partners who completed work devised new approaches to the development of materials with the target group, taking account of their basic skills needs. In each case, there was a significant shift in partners' practice and expertise. Irish partners developed ICT skills and tried new multimedia software with students. French partners developed new approaches to working in a multi-disciplinary way with other professionals within the prison service. In this sense, the project will act as a template for future work in the area of health education.

Both partners who completed materials are to be commended for their commitment to work in this project. Prison education presents formidable challenges for practitioners. The working environment is complex and problem focused. New projects, which involve change in working practice, therefore pose particular challenges. Technologies are not easy to integrate in public institutions with this high degree of restrictions for security purposes. For example teachers may need to commit hours of work at home for the use of the Internet. Despite these constraints, both partners achieved change and completed development activities. This is not to underestimate or ignore the difficulties and frustrations encountered. The lessons learnt are outlined below in the form of positive recommendations for future work.

LEARNING WITH ICT

1. New technologies can enhance and render more effective, learning in prisons. Students are given new opportunities but are also better prepared to face the world outside prison on release.

2. Multimedia software gives learners the opportunity to use a variety of literacies. This takes the pressure off 'basic skills' and promotes learning through a variety of talents.

3. Despite the difficulties experienced in terms of software development, the project has not been without merit in that it has been a valuable teaching and learning experience. It will inform similar projects in the future about how best to proceed with the implementation of new technologies in basic skills education with marginalized young people.

4. Practitioners had different levels of skills and experience in relation to ICT. In this regard it would have been useful to conduct an audit of ICT skills prior to commencement in order to ascertain a base line of entry skills of the tutors. As people had varying levels of skill, this hindered the gelling of the group and the progress of the project at times.

5. The development of new web authoring and animation software is rigorous and requires the prerequisites of infrastructure, training and software development prior to commencement. An extended preparatory phase is necessary to address these issues.

6. There were difficulties relating to access to hardware for some basic skills teachers. In some cases it would have been easier to use the software if computers had been available in basic skills classrooms, rather than having to use computer classrooms. This issue has wider implications for teaching methodologies.

7. Such materials are heavily reliant on teachers' ability to see the potential of the materials and develop them. Teachers need time to confidently master and use all the processes (beyond training).

> **EDUCATION IN PRISONS**

8. The project demonstrated that the active involvement of young offenders could make a real difference to the scope of health education programmes.

9. Multi-disciplinary approaches involving all stakeholders are essential to promote a holistic approach to work with the client group.

10. Careful preparation (as in Amiens) is necessary before the involvement of outside officials.

11. Specific difficulties relate to development work of this nature undertaken in prison environments. Access to prisoners and rapid turnover are two such issues. Learning programmes developed should be short and materials organised in self-contained units.

12. The challenges of working with the particular target group should not be underestimated. Mixed ability groups pose further difficulties for the work. Students need to be constantly motivated and supported by teachers to achieve successful outcomes.

13. Students with basic skills difficulties need a high degree of mediation by the teacher to be able to use such multi-media tools. A pre-existing degree of computer literacy is needed for students to use such software successfully.

14. Prisoners were not allowed Internet access in the prisons involved in the project. This had implications for their involvement in the development of materials and placed considerable extra burdens on teaching staff. This understandable regulation in relation to the Internet in prisons should be taken into consideration in the planning of such projects.

15. As students in prison do not have access to the Internet, internal networks or intranets might help in this regard.

16. Despite these difficulties, software of this kind offers huge potential if it is properly tested before use.

SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT AND USE

17. Software should be trialed to a sufficient standard before being disseminated to partners.   The difficulties encountered with the software meant that meetings organized to develop materials were not so productive as would otherwise have been the case: most time was taken up with dealing with technical difficulties.

18. Comprehensive manuals should be produced at this early stage.

19. Training should be offered before project activity proper begins with students. Teachers need to practice and reinforce the skills needed to use the software in order to maximize its potential within the classroom setting.

20. Lesson planning needs to be carefully thought out and altered to accommodate the new technology.

PARTNERSHIP

21. Exchanges between practitioners represent one of the most useful aspects of such projects and offer practitioners a real opportunity to extend and improve practice based on insights from peers. Possibilities for more extended practitioner exchanges between different Member States should be considered for projects. Study visits (rather than meetings) could be organized.

22. Projects of this kind illustrate the need for co-operation between practitioners from different Member States. Networks such as the European Prison Educators' Association should be actively promoted and fostered.

23. Ongoing co-operation is possible through the EPEA website and its discussion forum: http://www.epea.org

24. Language barriers between practitioners in different Member States pose real difficulties in the practical operation of such projects. This issue should be taken into consideration during the project application phase. Supports to aid exchange are one option that should be considered.

25. Projects of this kind offer the possibility for developing multi-disciplinary approaches within prisons, essential in order to promote a holistic approach to work with this client group.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

26. The original project aims in terms of development of new software were over-ambitious, given the time frame and funding available.

27. The work involved is time consuming and labour intensive for teachers. This should be taken into consideration in drawing up project proposals.

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT EVALUATION

This is a report of project participants' feedback on key outcomes of the ABSINT project.

APPROPRIATENESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TRAINING

Participants were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the training provided to them through this project and to highlight any issues/ suggestions or positive outcomes.

In general, training during the project was viewed as helpful but insufficient. According to the Irish partners: 'Training was too basic and too late to have a significant impact on tutors and benefit learners participating in the project.' The French participants concurred: 'Teachers and tutors had no training as the French team had a satisfactory IT skills level from the start which enabled us to take the *Skillsbuilder* software on board very quickly. Consequently, the training proposed did not help us from the point of view of understanding the operation of the software and the "web page" logic.'

Lack of time and early phase training prevented tutors from using the authoring tools to their potential, particularly in the context of the teaching environment. Further, the fact that tools themselves were unfinished prevented tutors from using them: there were too many technical problems encountered when using them with students.

However, these technical issues facilitated an interesting and unanticipated learning outcome. The technical problems tutors faced while using the tool helped "up skill" their ICT skills: 'We had never used web design or animation applications before so this was a new learning experience for us. We encountered so many problems in using the software that our skills had to improve in order to overcome these.' (Irish partners)

Both partners highlighted the value of "peer training". Discussions held between partners during project meetings generated many ideas that were explored during the project. Partners indicated that more opportunities to interact with each other would have been motivating and beneficial, both in terms of information exchange and distribution of knowledge.

There was a general consensus that training would have been more effective if:

1. It had been more comprehensive
2. It had been delivered prior to use of the tool
3. The tool had been debugged properly prior to use with students.
4. The local ICT infrastructure had been adequately addressed.

Finally, partners highlighted the need for assessment of ICT skill level prior to project initiation. Participants felt that it would have been useful to evaluate the ICT skills of all teachers prior to starting the project (possibly as a condition for participation in the project). In particular the project could have benefited from a practical assessment of tutors' computer skills and their knowledge of the web and web authoring. "We found that since people had varying levels of skill, this hindered not only the gelling of the group but the progress of the project at times, and some participants were left behind," reported the Irish team. This was clearly the issue with the English team who failed to bring on board a team with sufficient skills in ICT who could implement the project.

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EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EXTRANET:
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN
PARTNERS

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The *Extranet* had the potential to be a useful focal point for the project, as, in theory, it provided tutors with a forum for discussion, information distribution and knowledge exchange. Participants used the Extranet to put showcase work and for messages (tips, jokes and web links to make pages, etc.) Amiens colleagues found the tool particularly useful when they were communicating with the Ministry of Justice: 'We were happy to give them the address of the site and our passwords so that they could see the progress of the general work carried out under the ABSINT project.'

The *Extranet* was considered aesthetically pleasing in terms of layout and design and offered a good base level of functionality; however, in practical terms its functionality was limited because participants had difficulty uploading completed projects. 'It was very hard to put documents on line…so we asked the designers to provide us with direct access to the "FTP" server. It should be noted that the tutors in Amiens were unable to use their ADSL lines because of compatibility problems with their hardware and the documents were put on line using another ADSL line.

Partners felt that the *Extranet* would have been more useful if students themselves had had access to the Extranet and had been capable of uploading their *Skillsbuilder* and *Animator* projects themselves. 'In hindsight, it would have been easier to motivate students who were initially excited about linking in with other countries if they had real access to an *Extranet* and could use it in a meaningful manner.' (Irish partners)

The language barrier was an obstacle to fully understanding what partners thought of the materials and how best to use them. While translations took place it was still difficult to know what their true impressions of the software were and what they would fundamentally change if given the choice. The group was not cohesive and didn't communicate via the *Extranet* to discuss the project as planned. However partners felt that while these aspects of working with each other were an obstacle to getting the most from that partnership yet this did not obstruct their work on the project.

The visits and steering groups were very useful and informative- they allowed partners to engage in a comparative discussion of different experiences and perceptions of prison education. It was also very interesting for everyone involved to visit other prisons and gain first hand experience of prison regimes in other countries.

> ### EFFECTIVENESS OF *SKILLSBUILDER* WEB AUTHORING TOOL

PRODUCT DESIGN

Participants felt that the design of the *Skillsbuilder* web authoring tool – the interface, buttons, layout, graphics, images – did not present a barrier to the target audience's use of the tool: 'The 'palette' aspect of the *Skillsbuilder* tool was very user friendly and attractive to the eye'. (Irish partners)

However, French partners pointed out that while 'the tool had fairly big, self-explanatory button[s], very attractive colours' it ought to have suited a sophisticated teenage audience but at the 'same time these features gave away the fact that the software was initially designed for children'.

Partners said that learners connected with the fact that it was possible to design their own website using pictures and words. 'It is not necessarily the software as such which pleased the learners but rather the fact of producing something in the style of a Web site: they learned the ins and outs of the Internet pages which they can browse outside'. (France). However, partners also pointed out that while

designing web pages appealed to learners in theory, in practice it was difficult to navigate the program successfully because a substantial amount of ICT prior knowledge was required.

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TECHNICAL ISSUES

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Technical issues were major obstacles to learners' effective use of the tool. Both tutors and learners had to deal with considerable technical issues while using the *Skillsbuilder* web authoring tool. Partners felt that at least some of the issues could have been 'quickly and easily resolved' if they had been aware of potential issues: 'we could have worked around with prior knowledge' (Irish partners).

Technical issues identified by partners include:

- When linking pages one could not include apostrophes in the page titles.

- The 'working page' size was not the same as the 'tested' HTML page size. This meant that the user had to approximate the online page size when using the 'working page' size.

- *Skillsbuilder* did not provide a directory of pre existing sites so one had to remember the exact title of each site to recall them.

- Keyboard commands did not work.

- Inputting text was really problematic. Text frames opened without being called up.

- Spaces were not permitted in filenames to be uploaded, a fact of which the designers did not seem to be aware.

- One could not remove the 'grid' or 'snap' functions and save the change after the page had been closed during the construction of a new site.

- *Skillsbuilder* had an extremely poor selection of fonts.

- An imported picture could not be too large or it would not appear on the construction page when uploaded.

- Students and teachers alike required a good degree of prior, general knowledge of ICT in order to be effective when using the tool.

- The technical issues were extremely frustrating to tutors and students alike. Practitioners used a combination of trial and error, telephone calls and e-mails to the designers and information obtained at meetings regarding the project to attempt to resolve them. 'The designer visited our centre in order to attempt to resolve a number of basic problems. We noted that she herself had to spend quite some time identifying the cause of these technical issues in order to solve or work around them.' (Irish partners)

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

Irish partners felt that usability of the software packages was lacking: 'While there were help files, they weren't comprehensive enough. We received typed documents at a later date and these proved to be more helpful but were never incorporated into the "Help" files in the software itself.'

While there needs to be basic training on how to use software, partners felt that more detailed, specific training needed to be provided: both in the advanced use of the authoring tools and in the logic and theory behind how the tools should be used. Interestingly, teachers and tutors in Amiens felt that one of the key benefits of the authoring tools was to encourage them to transfer their ICT skills and apply them to other types of multimedia (cartoons, music, etc.)

Help files also needed to be tailored to a basic skills audience. In some cases programme help files were too advanced for learners' reading levels. Further, it should be recognised that face-to-face help needed to be considered: learners didn't necessarily require '"electronic" help but... time also to be reassured, supervised, assisted, by another human being!'

Providing support to multiple learners was also challenging and is something that needed to be considered prior to project initiation, particularly considering the fact that students will be at different stages depending on their skill sets and technical capacities: 'It is very hard for a tutor to listen to and support several students at the same time, knowing that they are working on different projects.' (French partners)

In addition, consideration should also be given to the management of content and to how tutors will best be able to support how learners deal with that content: ' The use of such software requires the management of a mass of information in a

short time to create a web page. This management required assistance, instructions and testing etc.'

Partners emphasized that successful ICT projects require adequate ICT infrastructure and sufficient training. 'We spent an excessive amount of hours trying to understand and resolve problems presented by the tools. Our own lack of training in how the tool worked and what it couldn't do meant a lot of time was wasted where additional instructional support would have been more beneficial and cost effective.' (Irish partners)

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TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Despite technical problems, there were many positive outcomes from learners' use of the authoring tools. Learners were interested in using the authoring tools because they were not something to which they normally had access. However, partners pointed out that boredom is an inevitable consideration. 'Weariness can come very quickly - hence the idea that the supports and tools must be varied with this audience so that they are not sent off towards a possibility of endless, cumulative failures...' (France).

Partners pointed out that these learners engage and learn best when they can see an immediate and practical application for their efforts: they need to see the point of exercises they take part in. 'When students were trained in the use of *Skillsbuilder* and the Animator there was an initial interest, which soon faded, when students realised how problematic and difficult the tools were to use,' said Irish partners. 'We didn't feel that the project had a significant impact on our students. We trained students to use each tool to the best of our abilities but this was not enough to bring about effective and successful use of the tools by learners. Many learners soon lost interest and frequently abandoned the project. Occasionally tutors were successful in enticing them back to complete further work.'

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

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French partners felt that the project allowed the development of an interactive student-centred curriculum. Because students are in prison for very short periods—two months on average—an adaptive and responsive curriculum is required. "Co-education" and "co-training" are essential. Serious discussions emerged from work students had completed during the project. They discussed their worries and concerns both during teaching sessions and outside of teaching hours: 'These periods of interaction among the students were very important from

the point of view of socialising, listening to others, increasing know-how and transferring knowledge as a socialistic act.'

Irish partners indicated that students became more aware of web design and Internet use, improved their knowledge of general ICT and they encountered information regarding drugs, drug use and the effects of drug abuse when building micro-sites.

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TEACHING WITH *SKILLSBUILDER*

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Both partners identified a variety of learning issues faced by students and teachers whilst they were using the tools.

1. **Lack of knowledge of world wide web**
   The first and most immediate issue, Irish partners felt there learners faced, was that many students did not have any knowledge of using the World Wide Web and Internet applications in general. 'The concept of an intangible entity that exists in cyberspace is difficult to grasp when the learner has experienced little or no internet use.'

2. **Limited ICT infrastructure**
   Another issue that arose for Irish partners was that because of limited ICT infrastructure *Skillsbuilder* was not used as a 'free-form' learning tool, but was taught as a bolt-on course in an ICT room during a timetabled ICT class. Students attending basic skills classes did not have adequate ICT infrastructure present in the room and therefore could not use the tool in an infused manner. They could only make use of the tool in an artificial sense in ICT class if the tutor had time to devote to individual students.

3. **Limited tutor time**

 'We selected students who were somewhat familiar with ICT and we worked with them on a one-to-one basis usually. There was a high level of mediation involved because students were unable to use the application independently. *Skillsbuilde*r presented new challenges to the teacher and the student.

Another challenge for learners was that the quantity of material required to construct learner-centred materials encouraged concentration, critical analysis and expressions skills. However this also necessitated having someone there to assist them through it. 'This management required assistance, instructions and testing etc…. They had to be patient and focused to carry out this work: this is far from easy for many students!' (French partners)

Even though tutor time was limited, it was essential in several cases in order to give learners the confidence they needed to progress. 'Basic literacy and Foundation level students are as apprehensive about using a computer keyboard as they are about, reading or writing. However when a student saw that a teacher would mediate and scaffold their use of *Skillsbuilder* it seemed that all apprehension would dissolve.' (Irish partners).

4. Technical issues

Technical difficulties were a considerable barrier to learners' positive perceptions. Teachers and tutors pointed out that learners doubted their skills when they ran into technical problems. 'Students spent some time coming to understand the application and its uses and once they were able to move on from this point there were many technical issues to be faced. It was difficult to sustain student interest and many did not return to complete the work they had begun.' (Irish partners)

5. Tutor perception of *Skillsbuilder* as a web authoring tool
Initially tutors were not confident in the *Skillsbuilder* tool and so they were unable to incorporate it into their teaching practices.

Technical problems were a barrier to integration despite efforts to create personal accounts of their experiences relating to drugs (Ireland) and their questions about facts and information (France). Certainly they felt that web authoring was in principle a good idea in basic literacy teaching although some were expecting to find it an inappropriate tool to use with these students with only basic literacy skills.

Confidence was however gained when at the end of the project

the Irish team declared a positive ending:

"Skillsbuilder worked quite well eventually and we enjoyed using it towards the end of the project. Another positive aspect of the project was the lively discussions held at meetings regarding the project's focus. These conversations proved enlightening and provided new perspectives on what we as participants were trying to achieve. Moreover, the project's steering committee was generally supportive of our efforts to engage with the work."

The French team felt *Skillsbuilder* enabled students to acquire a computer logic; they learned how to navigate between pages and to connect them logically.

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SKILLSBUILDER

LEARNERS WERE INITIALLY INTERESTED IN THE WEB AUTHORING TOOL, IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THEY ARE INTERESTED IN WHAT ICT CAN TEACH THEM TO DO IN A TANGIBLE SENSE. 'MANY STUDENTS IN A PRISON EDUCATION SETTING ARE WILLING TO TRY OUT NEW EDUCATIONAL TASKS UNTIL THEY DISCOVER THEY ARE NOT INTERESTED OR IT IS TOO DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO CONTINUE WITH. THEY WERE SOMEWHAT CONFUSED AND BORED BY IT AT TIMES AND ONE OR TWO BEGAN TO SEE IT AS A CHORE TO COME AND ENGAGE WITH IT.' (IRISH PARTNERS). THE PARTNERS ALSO INDICATED THAT STUDENTS TRIED OUT SKILLSBUILDER BECAUSE THEY FELT AN OBLIGATION TO DO SO:

' *We often felt that some of our students completed the project as a favour to the teacher rather that out of a personal interest in the project.* ' (Irish Partners) *'It was a tool brought by the teacher; they know that they have to try to succeed, out of habit.'* (French partners).

But both partners agreed the subject matter and the peer learning opportunities were highly motivating. 'The health information generated as a result of the project was of interest to many students and discussion of their experiences of using and seeing others use drugs was always lively.' (Irish partners). These motivations far outweighed the extrinsic motivation potential offered by the *Skillsbuilder* tool: 'They were more interested in the communication aspect (that is sharing information with other young people and other prisons) than they were in learning new skills through *Skillsbuilder* .' (Irish partners).

EVALUATION OF THE ANIMATION TOOL

Partners rejected the proposed tool for the following reasons:
The Animation tool was not used because it was felt to be underdeveloped, cumbersome, unsophisticated, impractical, facile, and unappealing to the tutors

and students. There were not enough backdrops or characters, some of the backdrops were attractive but there were not nearly enough props or objects to use in scenarios. The characters' mobility was poor and there were not enough character types. Adding one's own backdrops and characters was not possible. The possible length of the animations was far too short and the scenes could not be edited. The Animation tool was felt to be far too ambitious: any computer application that enabled animation needed to be more flexible, practical and sophisticated than was the case.

Students did not interact with the *Animator* other than to attempt to create short animations that were extremely limited. They had little or no input into the application's design and while they were responsible for generating scenarios for the Animation tool their efforts were frustrated by the program's limited capability.

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SUCCESSFUL TARGETING OF PILOT GROUP

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When asked whether they felt the project met its goal in developing an interactive curriculum that involves young people in the development of materials, partners were clear that in principle they could see the benefits to this group but in practice a younger audience was targeted by software designers.

A lot of support was needed. While students, for their part, provided anecdotal information, experience and class time, teachers researched, sourced graphic and scientific material and they were responsible for completing the finished sites. However, it is worth noting that curriculum development takes time and patience. As the Irish partners say:" If we had resolved all outstanding and unforeseen user issues and had been in a position to introduce the program in other classroom contexts, over a longer period of time we may have had more results".

Although in principle *Skillsbuilder* provided students with opportunities for much more interaction, their efforts were frustrated by technical issues, their limited interest, sometimes irregular attendance, lack of application and inconsistency when using the tool. Initially, through discussion groups, students were able to have a minor input into *Skillsbuilder*'s development through practitioners, who brought knowledge of their needs to the table when consulting on its design and development.

Partners felt *Skillsbuilder* would suit a Foundation Level (IRL)/Level 6 E/F(FR) learning audience if it were more highly developed, 'glitch' free, fully understood and practical. The user would have to be able to engage with and experience the full extent of its use in order for it to be relevant.

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TEACHERS AND MENTORS

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Literacy teachers did not often include health education as part of the curriculum and this was new to some, but the project re-enforced belief in the ever growing importance of using ICT in the modern era to diversify and develop basic skills education. Teaching students about the basics of web design and using *Skillsbuilder* to create materials for other publications which could be distributed to other prisons were offered as examples of outcomes.

An Irish teacher's account of the impact:

The project didn't necessarily alter the way I taught in a practical, structural sense because it disrupted regular classes and did present many difficult challenges to my teaching practice because of the level of mediation required. In some ways it did not change my approach to teaching because we used and built on the learners' personal experience as a catalyst for the construction of a site, in the same way we would use learners' experience to write basic readers or prose for a school produced magazine. The personal experience of learners is also used in the context of F.E.T.A.C. portfolios (material presented for accreditation through the National Qualifications Framework) so in that regard the same principle applied. It was hard to integrate the tools with pre-existing curricula and classes for reasons already stated so it did not become a part of my regular teaching routine. Skillsbuilder and Animation tool classes were extraordinary or extra-curricular in this respect.

I endeavour to 'scaffold' learning and create independent adult learners and the materials and tools used were not always conducive to this approach. As a priority, I also aspire to ensuring that my students acquire basic skills in my class and any materials used to achieve this cannot and should not present obstacles to this goal. Unfortunately, Skillsbuilder did just this at times during the project. Learners tended to be 'spoonfed' when learning to work with the materials and tools and this was not the outcome I would have wished for. The idea of teaching and learning is that learners engage in a process of learning supported by the teacher and acquire a skill that they are then, hopefully, able to demonstrate for themselves. This did not occur when using Skillsbuilder."

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CURRICULUM

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In Ireland it had been hoped initially that it would be possible to have a broader multi-disciplinary team working on the project and interest was strong in the beginning from teachers. However, as the project progressed it was hard to maintain the motivation of both students and teachers, since sourcing materials was difficult –the plan for materials to be downloaded and brought into prison did not prove feasible - and the *Skillsbuilder* program had too many flaws in it to keep students interested. Thus the potential for learning and developing new materials narrowed and some people's interest waned dramatically. In a normal school setting the project may have had far more success and interactive possibilities. It could have had implications for the curriculum, but in fact it became an 'add-on'.

In France on the other hand the project was timetabled and formed an integral part of the curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS BY PARTNERS

- Projects should have clear achievable aims, if necessary by going through a longer preparatory phase to redefine original aims.
- For example, the *Animator* was too much to take on within the confines of this project and more concentrated investment of time, energy and money in *Skillsbuilder,* and the resources needed to use it, may have yielded a better and more sophisticated web authoring tool which could have been used to greater effect.
- However, a successful Animation tool where students could create scenarios and music and voices would have been an exciting development for them and a source of interest. Learning should be made fun and being restricted to typing and clipart did not engage students for sufficiently long periods.
- *S*imilar projects based in prisons should seek to engage a stable prison population (many of the participating prisoners had short term sentences).
- Ways of engaging learners early on in the project should be developed, not only when software was "ready", by creating activities and adopting a "hands on" approach.
- Make space and time to incorporate a complex project such as this into the existing curriculum. It would be important to be aware that some curriculum classes may need to be adapted or ever suffer in order to facilitate the completion of targets for such projects.
- Provide opportunities to link with students from other countries. It would have been interesting for instance to have been able to develop a very basic bi-lingual story/exercise.
- However the multicultural aspect of the project was achieved through meeting practitioners and co-ordinators from other countries which helped a reflexion on practice and curriculum with young offenders.

- Teacher exchanges would have ameliorated the project's chances of success.