

The BELFAST Programme



Welcome to this presentation about the BELFAST Programme.

My name is Arthur McKeown.

I work as a Volunteer at the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre.

In the next 30 minutes I want to provide some information about the programme we have developed to help Build English Language For A Successful Transition – the BELFAST Programme for adult foreign nationals – and how it can help them to move into employability: jobs, better jobs and promotion in the workplace.

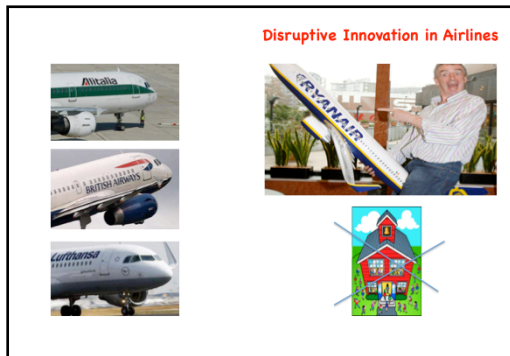
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A starting point:

All organisations, regardless of the sector within which they carry out their activities, need to be aware of changes going on in the wider environment.

Consider how Kodak, long established as a leader in photography, failed to notice the Fujitsu's development of digital cameras; this failure had a catastrophic effect on their business.



Consider also how the flag flying airlines - Alitalia, British Airways, Lufthansa – have been challenged by the arrival of low-cost airlines such as Ryanair and easyJet, who provide a no-frills service at very competitive prices.

So too there are disruptions and changes taking place in the world of language teaching.

In this presentation I want to identify some of the changes, innovations and opportunities that are emerging in the world of English language teaching and how these can help us to provide an innovative business model to help foreign nationals who need English language skills for their employability in Ireland.

What is described here is not a traditional language school; rather, it is an innovative business model that helps mature adults who are ready, willing and able to take considerable responsibility for their own autonomous learning to make use of Personal Learning Plans, meetups and resources provided in a SACbox so that they can become more successful when using English - and so are better able to enter the workforce.

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Introduction

- **Objectives**
 - To describe a successful model for enhancing employability in local areas and communities
- **Overview**
 - A description of the BELFAST Programme – its genesis, current status and options for further development
- **Outcomes**
 - To help you decide if / how you can adapt the model for use in your area
 - To specify some processes, resources and action points.

I use this slide to provide an introduction to what follows.

My aim is to describe and then debate and discuss a model that has proved to be successful in helping to enhance employability in the Belfast area, based on work previously done in County Cavan.

I want to describe the BELFAST Programme, where it is at present and some options we are identifying for further development.

By the time you have listened to this presentation, I hope you will be able to make a well-informed decision about options that are appropriate for addressing issues in helping foreign nationals in your area to acquire the English language skills that will improve their employability.

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In the next couple of slides I want to describe where the idea for the BELFAST Programme originated.

One evening some months ago I noticed this sign outside a church on the Woodstock Road in Belfast – free English classes for an hour and a half per week.

Soon afterwards I became aware that embraceni.org provides a regularly refreshed list of similar free English classes available in Belfast and beyond.

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Soon afterwards, in Dublin, I saw this display of highly reputable self-study material in Eason, O'Connell Street.

These books are written by Raymond Murphy and have been used by learners of English for over three decades.

The important feature is that they are designed for self study and are available at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels – suitable for a very broad range of learners of English who want to check and improve the accuracy and fluency with which they use important areas of English grammar.

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Now I want to go one to deal with the nature of the need for English language among foreign nationals in local communities in Ireland.

I also want to say a little bit about my own story and the contribution that I think I can make in this area, describing some of the projects in which I have been involved in the past.

I want to tell you about the format, content and processes being used in the current delivery of the Belfast programme.

A major part of this presentation recognises the value of contributions made by a range of different volunteers, who bring not only teaching and facilitation skills but also a wide range of other qualifications, networks and experience that has proved to be invaluable as we work together to devise and develop the elements in the BELFAST Programme.

In the final section I want to open up the time we spend together for some discussion and action planning that can be considered in the particular areas where individuals work and are able to perceive a need for some sort of version of this BELFAST Programme.

My final point here is that anything we consider needs to be simple and sufficient for its purpose, and we must be wary of over engineering any solutions that may emerge.

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The Need

- Migrants
- Demos, 2014
- *The Economist*



In the next three slides I will say something about the perceived needs of migrants and foreign nationals, referring briefly to a think tank report from a year ago and a more recent article in *The Economist* magazine.

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Migrants

- Numbers?
- Why are they here?
- What do they want to do?

• A successful transition



Building English Language For A Successful Transition

The demographic profile of the people of Ireland has changed a lot in the last decade and a half.

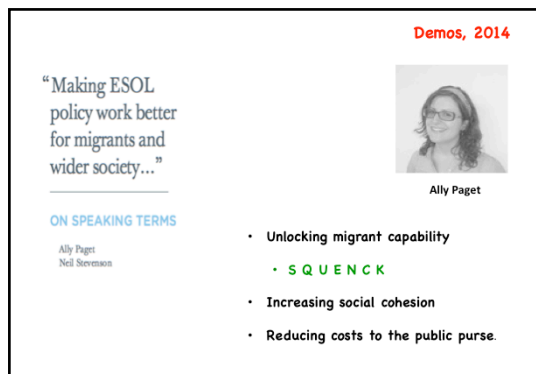
Ireland is now home for people like Anna from Lithuania, who lives in Cavan town, and Mary Ma from China who runs her own shop in Ballyamesduff.

More recently, people from Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere in Africa and Asia have come to Ireland.

None of these people is here for an extended holiday; they want to make a successful transition for themselves and their families here in Ireland.

In response to the challenges and opportunities presented, we have developed the BELFAST Programme – Building English Language For A Successful Transition.

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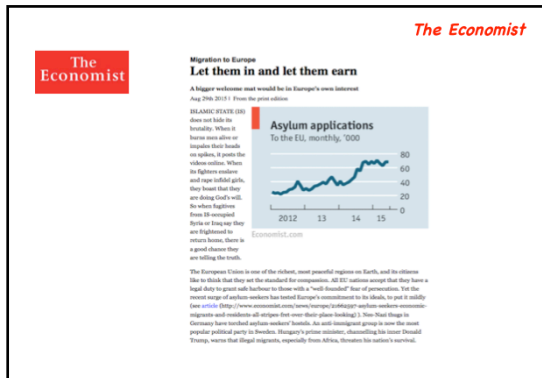
In August 2014, while watching the BBC *Newsnight* programme, I became aware of a think tank document produced by Demos.

It provided a review of policy relating to the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and the potential impact of a significant reduction in funding in England to provide language programmes and courses for migrants.

The three key points from this document that had an impact on our thinking as we seek to develop the BELFAST Programme are:

- Improving communication skills in English can help to unlock migrant capability, so that they can enter the workforce, pay taxes and contribute more to their local community as they are better able to make use of qualifications, skills, knowledge, experience and contacts that they have.
- Improved communication skills in English can also help to increase social cohesion

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The Economist magazine in late August 2015 described some of the harrowing experiences migrants were having as they sought to cross the Mediterranean and get into Europe.

The magazine commended the idea that Europe should be more welcoming, on the understanding that in slow time many of the individuals would be able to enter the workforce and gradually integrate with the local communities where they settled.

Such a policy would have considerable benefit for the local economies that were able to integrate such people into their communities.

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- Teaching English as a Foreign Language
- Teaching management
- Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre

My Story



I now want to say something briefly about my own background in TEFL Teaching English as a Foreign Language, to explain some of the perspectives and processes being adopted in the BELFAST Programme, and about other assets that have led to the volunteering work being done by myself and others at the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre.

The image here is of some of the ladies who attended Beginner English language classes in the school I was director in Tripoli, Libya for four years from 1979 to 1983.

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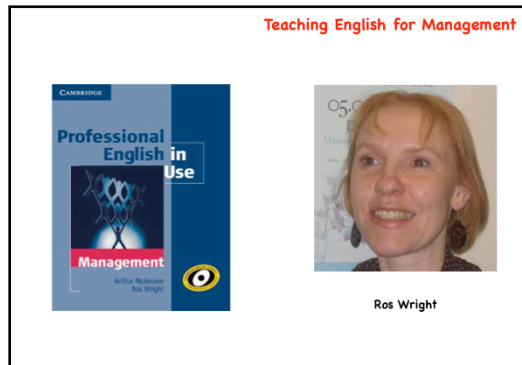
I use this slide to summarise the 15 years I spent in teaching English as a foreign language.

I worked for two years teaching pharmaceutical English in Sweden; I worked for three years with firemen in Kuwait; and I was for four years director of a large language school in Tripoli, Libya.

Since returning to Belfast in 1990 with my family I have had considerable experience, working for the Open University and the University of Ulster, in teaching native speaker managers and aspiring managers on a range of programmes from certificate to Masters level, with participants from small, medium and large organisations in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

I also have had a considerable amount of interest in the use of online resources to complement teaching in which I have been involved. In the last couple of years I have made effective use of some MOOCs – massive open online courses - that are available for free from some of the most prestigious universities and colleges around the world.

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My particular interest in recent years has been the vocabulary of different areas of management, leading to the publication of *Professional English in Use Management* which I co-authored with Ros Wright.

All of this has had a beneficial effect on the development of resources that can be considered for use in various elements of the BELFAST Programme.

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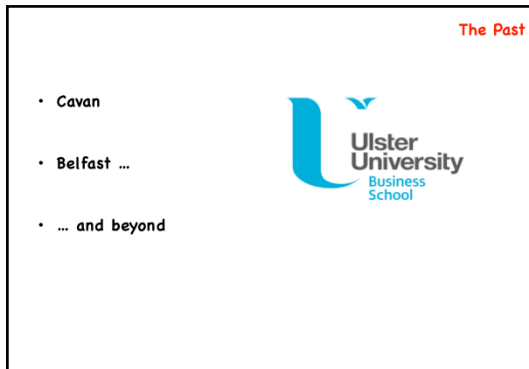
In 2014 I met Tim O'Malley, who was working at the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre.

He was a student in one of the programmes to which I contributed in the University of Ulster. I used as a case study, and exemplar for the module assignment, examples drawn from work I was doing for the University in providing English for Employability in Cavan.

Tim and a few of his study buddies ganged up on me after the class to challenge me with the opportunity of practising what I had been preaching. They asked if I might be willing and able to provide a similar English for Employability option closer to home if they could identify a group of potential participants and any necessary resources in Belfast.

I accepted the challenge with enthusiasm, got some support and endorsement from my line manager to run a pilot in Donegall Street – and the BELFAST Programme was off to a flying start!

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The next three slides give a flavour of some of the developments in the BELFAST Programme and where there may be opportunities for further work.

Much of what has been done is rooted in the teaching I had been doing in the University of Ulster and, in particular, in my interest in digital disruption – how the Internet, social media and the range of tools available online can reconfigure the ways in which different organisations respond to the needs of their customers and other stakeholders.

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About five years ago, as part of the portfolio of courses in which I was involved for the University of Ulster, I contributed to a certificate in management practice, mainly for managers in the construction industry.

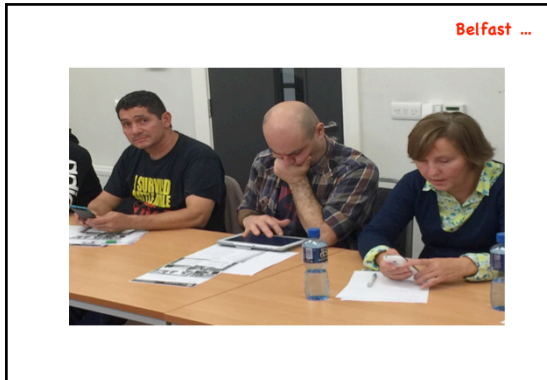
Dympna McCarron, then manager of the Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre, got to know about my background in English language teaching and during one of my visits to Cavan asked if we might be able to do anything for the foreign nationals in and around the town.

This led to the provision, six times over the next few years, of the Cambridge Business English Certificate.

Participants came from many different countries: for example, Paula from Brazil got a job and now a supervisory job at the sandpaper factory in Cootehill; Gosia from Poland is working at the Slieve Russell Hotel in Ballyconnell; Alex from Lithuania is working in Aldi on the Dublin Road; and Ewa, also from Poland, has had promotion in her work in reception at the Radisson Blu Hotel just outside the town.

The University of Ulster has had the benefit of such programmes as a result of the 'pipeline' created, whereby some participants in the English for Employability programme have then gone on to complete successfully the Certificate in Management Practice and the Advanced Diploma in Management Practice; and there is a substantial group now seeking to enrol for the BSc in Management Practice offered by the University.

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What we are doing in Belfast is somewhat different from what was provided in County Cavan:

- We are providing a separate programme for Beginners and Absolute Beginners
- We are not preparing participants for any form of examination
- * What we offer is not accredited – though this is of course emerging as an important option as we seek to consolidate what has been done so far and consider how we may be able to provide a ‘pipeline’ into vocational training and courses in

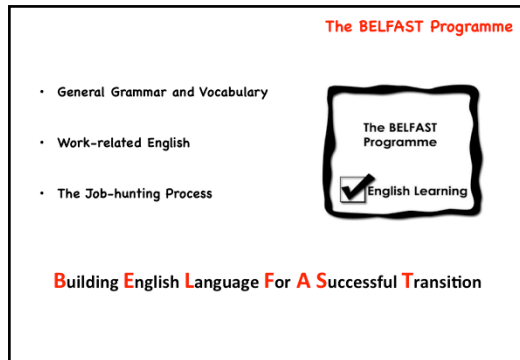
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Opportunities are also emerging to disseminate the practices followed in the delivery of the BELFAST Programme in other places.

For example, a similar group is now running in Magherafelt. And through contacts of various Volunteers there may be opportunities in the near future to start groups in Ballymena and Enniskillen.

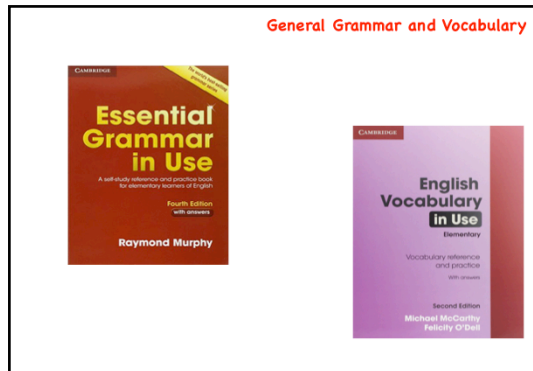
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In the next section I want to go on to describe in more detail the three principal elements provided by the BELFAST Programme:

- * What we are doing to help people to improve their accuracy and fluency in using *English grammar and vocabulary* for general purposes
- * What we are doing to help people with the specialist language, especially vocabulary, that relates to jobs for which they may be able to apply in *particular sectors*: for example, hospitality, construction, nursing.
- * What we are doing to help foreign nationals understand *the job-hunting process* in Belfast and beyond, so that they understand media through which they may hear about available job opportunities, requirements for application forms and CV and how they might best respond to questions they are likely to be asked at an interview.

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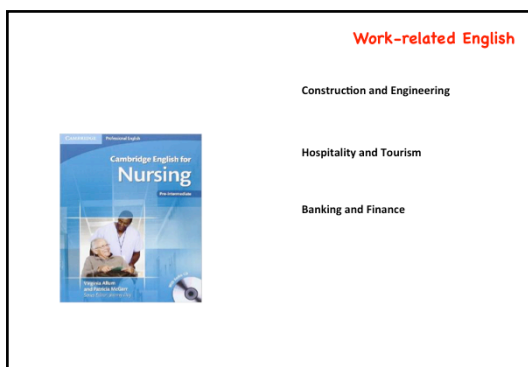


We make substantial use of two instruments that can help individuals to improve their grammar and vocabulary in English.

Essential Grammar in Use by Raymond Murphy is available for autonomous learning and self study. In particular, it contains a substantial study guide as an appendix, which each individual can use to diagnose areas of weakness in their grammar and then make use of the related units in the book to revise and practise the most relevant areas of grammar. Books in this series are also available at intermediate and advanced levels.

English Vocabulary in Use by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell adopts a similar approach in helping individuals to acquire and use vocabulary for a range of general topics; for example, the vocabulary needed to talk about food, fashion and a range of different sports. Again, books in this series are also available at intermediate and advanced levels.

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A substantial catalogue of attractive and ‘Learner friendly’ material is available to help individuals with the particular language, especially vocabulary, required for different sectors in which they may be seeking employment.

For example, nursing, construction and engineering, hospitality and tourism, banking and finance.

At the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre we can sometimes identify facilitators and volunteers with the necessary skills, background and credibility to help individual foreign nationals work with others on such material.

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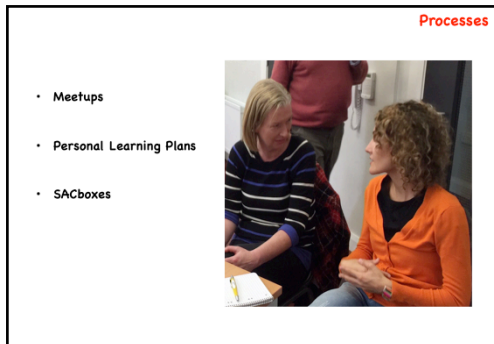
The Job-hunting Process

- Where are the jobs?
- Writing a CV
OR
Filling in an application form
- Writing the covering letter
- Preparing responses to interview questions
- ... and some moral support ...

The third element in the BELFAST Programme is the help that can be provided for foreign nationals so that they can understand the job-hunting process in Belfast.

Any one group using this material may include individuals who are seeking jobs in different sectors of the economy. They may nevertheless need to be aware of how they can understand key stages in the job-hunting process. This can provide a considerable amount of motivation and peer support.

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The next three slides comment on the processes used in the delivery of the BELFAST Programme.

- * *Meetups* are used to provide opportunities for structured practice of oral English and can provide a considerable amount of motivation as Learners make progress through the system towards employability.
- * *Personal Learning Plans* provide each individual, above the level of Beginner, with a programme of work for self study and autonomous learning for each four weeks and can be used to measure progress.
- * *SACboxes* are our attempt at making English language learning practice material available in convenient locations for use by participants on the BELFAST Programme.

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Meetups, based loosely on the model at www.meetup.com, are intended to provide opportunities for individuals to practise the listening and speaking skills they are acquiring and enhancing through the private study they do of English grammar and vocabulary, plus other elements identified in their individual Personal Learning Plan.

Each meetup lasts for two hours, including a 10 minute break in the middle:


- The brief *Welcomes and introductions* stage is intended to provide a comfortable environment, especially for any individuals who are attending for the first time.
- The *Language point* normally takes about 10 minutes and is intended to provide a brief exercise to refresh, review or revise an important area in grammar or vocabulary; this is often a valuable starting point for new Volunteers who are able to practise introducing a language point and helping Learners to improve the accuracy and fluency with which they use it when communicating in English.
- *TalkAbouts* are intended to provide individuals with opportunities to speak with one or two other people (supported, where necessary, by one of the volunteer teachers or facilitators) on general topics such as football, food or fashion. Such interactions last for about 10 minutes; after 10 minutes each individual changes their partner and talks on a different topic to a different person. Topics have been chosen that are of interest to adult learners of English and, where possible, may often have value in helping them to understand how to get benefit from living in Belfast; for example, guidance on getting the best value out of a mobile phone contract, opening a bank account, dealing with housing or other accommodation issues.
- The *Break* has an important role to play in the socialising of the group. Individuals are actively encouraged to make contact with people they have not met before and with whom they do not share a language in common, so that, even over a cup of coffee or similar, they have to communicate in English.
- The *Special Interest Groups* provide 45 minutes of focus on different areas of language; for example, a grammar clinic, a series of activities on reading skills, a session on making effective use of apps and online resources. They are normally led by Volunteers with a particular interest in the topic.
- The *Conclusion* is a brief session in which all those attending come together again. Before people leave opportunities are taken to make people aware of forthcoming events in the wider community that may be of interest to them; for example, events related to Hallowe'en, the local Christmas markets or St Patrick's Day.

Everyone is encouraged to make use of a simple TakeAway Sheet to record any new language, grammar points, expressions or vocabulary that they encounter during the session.

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Personal Learning Plans

- Diagnostic grammar language test
- Communication skills programme
 - Listening
 - Speaking
 - Reading
 - Writing
- Sector specific activities



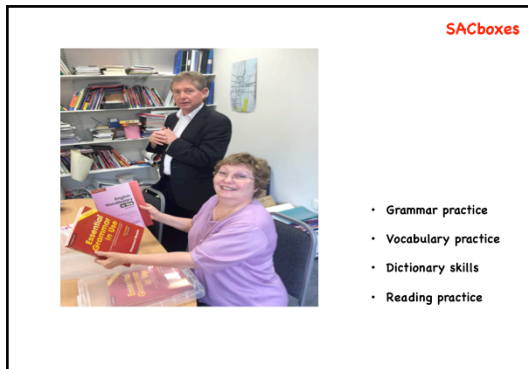
Personal Learning Plans lie at the heart of what is provided in the BELFAST Programme.

Each individual, assuming they are not a Beginner (for which a different service is provided), is given an opportunity to get a plan of work that can guide their self study and autonomous learning over each four-week period.

- A *diagnostic grammar and language test* is used to provide a starting point, so that they can identify areas of grammar and vocabulary on which they can focus their attention during the four-week period.
- In discussion with a suitably experienced Volunteer, activities are identified that can help with the development of relevant *language and communication skills*. For example, podcasts and similar can be used to enhance listening skills; short passages, with relevant related exercises and activities, can be used to enhance reading skills; other individuals may be encouraged to complete a series of short exercises and activities to enhance their ability to use a monolingual English dictionary (rather than depend on the instant translation facility available on their mobile device).
- Where appropriate, some *sector specific activities* can be used to help an individual acquire the language that they need to have if they are to get a job, or better job or promotion, in the sector where they wish to work.

Their Personal Learning Plan is reviewed and discussed with each individual Learner by a suitably experienced Volunteer at the end of each four week period and a revised Plan for the next four week period is created.

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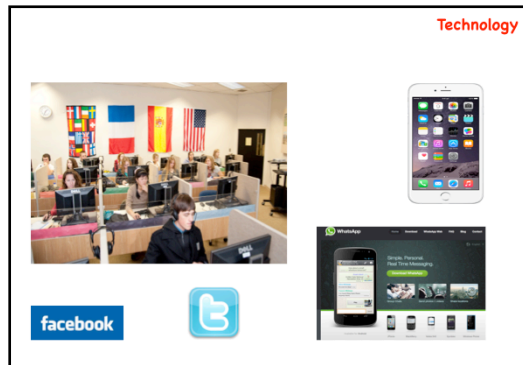
A SACbox is a compendium of resources for self study that an individual can use in a local coffee shop, community centre or church hall.

Its purpose is to reduce or do away with the need for individual Learners to spend money on expensive books and related resources as they seek to improve their communication skills in English.

Typically, such resources include:

- Books for grammar and vocabulary practice
- Resources for the development of dictionary skills
- Activities and exercises that can help individuals to develop reading skills.

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The BELFAST Programme encourages Learners to make appropriate use of apps and online resources that can be accessed on a mobile device or telephone, generally at no or low cost.

Information and guidance is given to identify particular resources that can be of value to different learners with different needs, so that each individual can get the benefit of resources that have in the past only been available through a sophisticated language lab.

In particular, we have been able to make considerable use of WhatsApp to build a virtual community of English language learners in Belfast.

We are also seeking to do more to develop Twitter, Facebook and similar resources for the benefit of our Learners.

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- TEFL Academy, International House etc.
- 10 > 20 > 30 minute slots > autonomous lessons
- Building capacity – locally, nationally and internationally



Volunteers

The last major part of my presentation deals with how we have been able to identify, recruit and manage a team of Volunteers who can support the work done through the BELFAST Programme.

- I will describe some of the organisations with whom we have been able to develop effective working relationships.
- I will also describe the nature of the contributions made by individual volunteers as they grow in confidence within the organisation.
- Finally, I want to make some observations on how this process has helped to build capacity locally, nationally and internationally as we seek to give individual Volunteers opportunities to develop, both as English language teachers and in other areas.

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The BELFAST Programme has depended for its success to date on the enthusiasm and commitment of a team of Volunteers who have been able to contribute in many different ways.

International House Belfast and the TEFL Academy provide different types of initial teacher training for aspiring English teachers in Belfast. We have been able to establish effective working relationship with both organisations, so that individuals who complete the training courses can get further practical teaching experience by volunteering with us and can, in this way, become part of a community of like-minded individuals who share an interest in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

- After the initial enquiry by the potential Volunteer, a short briefing is provided on the nature of our activities and an opportunity is taken to identify areas of particular interest to a potential Volunteer.
- They are invited to observe the processes at work at a meetup and then encouraged to consider how they can contribute elements of a class or Special Interest Group.
- As they grow in confidence they can be encouraged given opportunities to take responsibility for responsibility for leading a group.

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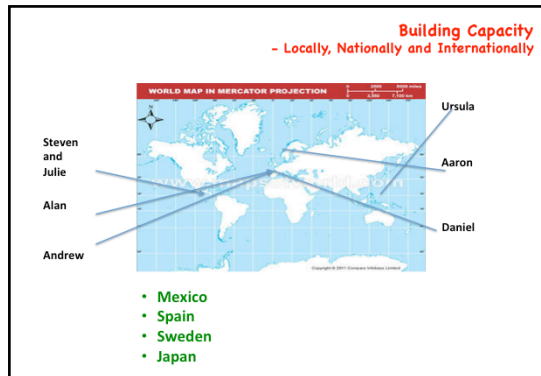


Volunteers can provide support for the BELFAST Programme in other ways, from facilitating meetups or the delivery of slots of various duration in the different groups.

Different individuals in the recent past have been able to contribute:

- Brochures and flyers that can be used to promote our activities
- Management of the use of the SACboxes in the local community
- The development of our Twitter presence and other uses of social media, especially helping us to make links with other Facebook communities in Belfast who share our interests.

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Volunteers who have worked on the BELFAST Programme in recent months are now working fully employed as English language teachers on three different continents:

- Ursula is teaching Business English in Japan
- Aaron is working at a community college in Sweden
- Stephen and Julie are working in a language school in Mexico
- Alan, Andrew and Daniel are working at language schools into different parts of Spain.

We hope that this map will get populated further, as more of our Volunteers seek and find employment as English language teachers around the world.

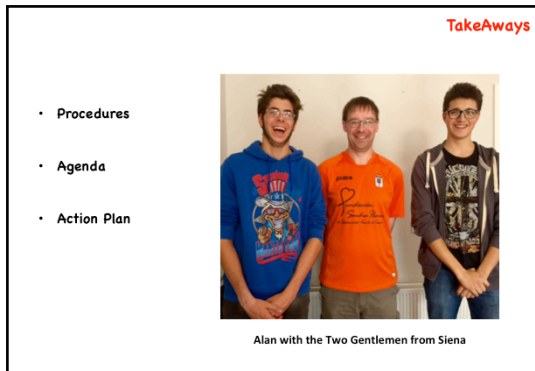
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Options for Action - ACTIVITY			
Programme	Funding	Promotion	Delivery
*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*
Beneficiaries	Competitors	USP	Action!
*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*

The purpose of this slide is to provide a participative activity in which small groups can think about how any of the lessons learned through the design, documentation and delivery of the BELFAST Programme to date might provide a basis for useful activity in other areas of the country, especially action that can enhance the employability of foreign nationals with whom individuals and organisations come in contact.

- What can be provided as employability enhancing programmes and activities?
- How might they be funded?
- How might they be promoted?
- What options are there for delivery, either face-to-face or enhanced by the use of appropriate technology?
- Who are likely to be the beneficiary groups and what characteristics do they have?
- What is already provided by local colleges, private language schools or other organisations in the local area?
- What can be identified as the unique selling point that will attract both Learners and Volunteers to get involved in any services that are provided?
- Are there any specific points for action that can be identified and taken?

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As I seek to move towards a conclusion, I mention that we have in place draft procedures to describe how we deliver

- Meetups
- SACboxes
- Personal Learning Plans.

These can be made available if they are likely to be of interest.

- We have also developed a compendium of AGENDAS that can be used for use in the meetups; again, these can be made available to anyone who is interested.

Finally, I mention that we do have our own action plan for development; but this is very flexible and has to accommodate occasional opportunities such as that presented by the arrival, at short notice, of two IT Volunteers from Siena in Italy who came to Belfast for 4 weeks in July and contributed to the development of our use of social media.

As part of our own action plan for development we would very much welcome an opportunity to work with other groups elsewhere in Ireland who share our commitment and interest in making a difference to the employability of foreign nationals.

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As I conclude, I challenge you with the opportunity to think about how the BELFAST Programme may be able to help you with any opportunities to enhance employability in your region.

Thank you.

Any questions?