

# Literacy Matters

Keeping you up to date with literacy  
news in Ireland and informing you of  
the work NALA is doing

## *In this issue*



**Introducing...**  
NALA's Executive  
Committee

Page 4



**Crystal Clear MSD Health  
Literacy Awards 2009**

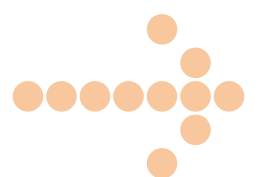
Page 8



**Becoming 'Literacy friendly'**

Page 10

## *Plus lots more inside*



# Contents

- 3 Editor's Comment
- 4 Introducing NALA's Executive Committee
- 7 Perlico makes significant IT donation to the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
- 8 Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009
- 10 Why become a literacy-friendly organisation?
- 12 New service aims to cut corporate jargon and help businesses meet the needs of customers and staff
- 13 Adult literacy training leads to range of economic and social gains
- 15 'Looking at the Workplace through Mathematical Eyes'
- 16 Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work
- 17 New UK strategy to address adult literacy and numeracy: Skills for Life: Changing lives
- 18 A balancing act – learning from the balanced scorecard
- 20 Learning for democracy
- 23 NALA ESOL Conference 2009
- 24 Noticeboard
- 25 How students can get involved...
- 26 Writing your first book. An interview with Brid Connolly, Maynooth University
- 28 Galway fishing project wins ACE Awards
- 31 WoLLNET project



Inez Bailey, 2009 AGM



Jim Dorgan, 2009 AGM

## Workplace Basic Education Conference 28 February 2008



**NALA**  
National Adult Literacy Agency  
Aonacht Náisiúnta Liteartha de Aosigh

## President meets 2008 *Written Off?* students 02 December 2007



**NALA**  
National Adult Literacy Agency  
Aonacht Náisiúnta Liteartha de Aosigh

## Family Literacy Development Day 04 June 2008



**NALA**  
National Adult Literacy Agency  
Aonacht Náisiúnta Liteartha de Aosigh

# Editor's Comment

Welcome to NALA's third edition of *Literacy Matters*. Inside this edition we introduce you to the participants of *Written Off?* and showcase some of the stories they contributed to a very special *Written Off?* version of the *Open Door Series*. In addition, we feature the successful nominees from both the *Crystal Clear Health Literacy Awards* and the *Adults Continuing Education Awards*. We also talk to Jim Dorgan, an economist who has analysed the cost-benefit ratio of literacy training and Brid Connolly, author of a new book about literacy in the community. On top of this we discuss literacy matters in Ireland and help keep you up to date about NALA's news, upcoming events and ongoing work.

We hope that you find the articles interesting, informative and thought provoking and as always we would be delighted to hear about any ideas or topics which you think would interest our readers. We will also consider including any articles that you may want to submit for our next edition which will be published in the Autumn of 2009.

Emma Ramsey,  
Communications Officer, NALA



2008 ACE Awards



Enjoying a NALA event

NALA Tutors' Forum 2008  
26 January 2008

NALA  
National Adult Literacy Agency  
Aonacht Náisiúnaí Litearthachta de Árasaigh

ESOL Conference 2008  
12 June 2008

NALA  
National Adult Literacy Agency  
Aonacht Náisiúnaí Litearthachta de Árasaigh

National Adult Literacy Awareness Week (NALAW) 2008  
22 – 26 September 2008

NALA  
National Adult Literacy Agency  
Aonacht Náisiúnaí Litearthachta de Árasaigh





# Introducing...

## NALA's Executive Committee

In 1980 NALA drew up a constitution, establishing an Executive Committee to further the aims of the literacy movement. Each year the NALA Annual General Meeting (AGM) elects an Executive Committee. Nominations to the Executive Committee election are open to any member of NALA. The members then elect the Executive Committee through a democratic vote. The role of the Executive Committee is to ensure that NALA's aims are put into practice. The Executive Committee includes students and tutors, Adult Literacy Organisers and people involved in adult and further education and training.

"As a member of the Executive I am proud and humbled when I see that NALA, by putting in place so many wonderful supports, has changed people's lives forever. NALA is a wonderful organisation which helps the many people with literacy difficulties who have had the courage to come forward and participate in the courses available."

Councillor Eddie Staunton



### Councillor Eddie Staunton

Cllr Eddie Staunton is a farmer and has been a member of Mayo Co Council since 1981. He is a member of the Association of City and County councils representing Mayo County Council at a national level. He is also a member of the following committees:

- Mayo VEC
- IVEA
- HSE

Eddie became involved in NALA when he was selected by the members of the Mayo VEC to represent them on the Executive.



### Bridie Daly

Bridie Daly is currently a student on Career Paths, a course for those with dyslexia who are looking to improve their career opportunities. She is a proud mother of three daughters and grandmother of five grandchildren. As well as taking her grandchildren to the playground, she delights in being able to read with them at the library. She feels that she missed out on this opportunity with her own daughters due to her literacy difficulties.

She was urged by two fellow students to become involved with NALA through the Student Sub Committee back in 2005.



### Kevin O'Duffy

Kevin is a fitter/welder by trade, but at the moment he is concentrating on farming full-time. It was this involvement with farming and the many forms he was bombarded with that prompted Kevin to seek help with his own literacy difficulty.

He first got involved with NALA back in 2004 through the student sub-committee and his main interest in adult literacy lies with student issues. Kevin has spoken at many NALA events and has told his story many times through TV and press. Recently he joined NALA at the National Ploughing Championships to share his experiences with people who may be thinking of taking that first step to improve their own literacy.

"After realising that there are so many adults with literacy problems I wanted to join an organisation to help those people – NALA is that organisation."





**Pat Ayton**

Pat Ayton is Adult Literacy Organiser with City of Dublin VEC based in Coláiste Dhulaigh, Coolock (a suburb on the northside of Dublin) with responsibility for adult literacy provision for the greater Coolock/Darndale area. Pat was appointed ALO in 1991 and since then she has been involved in NALA in a variety of ways. She has served on the NALA Executive in the past and actively participates in student, tutor and ALO events.

Pat’s interest in adult literacy began in 1980 when she became aware of adults having literacy difficulties. She became involved in the service on completion of the Initial Tutor Training Course for Volunteers and this involvement has continued to date.

“I consider adult literacy to be a ‘Right’ – or to put it another way, every adult has the right to be satisfied with their level of literacy and, if not, to have access to a service that will encourage and support them in their effort to improve their literacy and/or numeracy skills. Literacy is a right not a privilege.”  
Pat Ayton



**Michael Power**

Michael Power currently works with young adults with intellectual difficulties. Prior to this he worked in a glass factory for 20 years as both a glass cutter and a crane driver. Michael has two children and it was his desire to help them with their school work that prompted him to return to education. However he found that improving his skills not only helped his children, but also improved his ability to play in his local brass band!

Michael first got involved with NALA in 2004 when his local literacy service nominated him for a place on the NALA Student Sub Committee. In 2007 Michael was successfully nominated by the members of NALA to take on the demanding role of Chair.

“I am passionate about my work and have found my niche in life helping people improve their literacy skills, many of whom are dyslexic.”  
Carmel Scott



**Marian O'Reilly**

Marian O'Reilly's involvement in NALA began as a volunteer tutor with Laois Adult Literacy Scheme over 20 years ago. As an advocacy organisation it continues to speak out for adults with literacy difficulties, while providing opportunities for members to network and advance their own learning. As a group tutor, it has provided Marian with such an opportunity.

Marian enjoys music, swimming, travel and Mountmellick embroidery. More importantly, she appreciates meeting learners, family, colleagues, friends and neighbours who inspire her and keep her grounded.

“Words in all forms and languages fascinate me, reading, writing, speaking, listening, singing and sign language. Someone once said to me “If you can read a book, you’ll never be lonely”. I like to encourage adults to read whatever they enjoy. ”  
Marian O'Reilly



**Carmel Scott**

Carmel Scott has been an Adult Literacy Tutor since 1999, having completed an MA in Linguistics in UCD. Her studies in Linguistics have been of enormous benefit in her work with Adult Literacy students. She has also completed the WIT/NALA Diploma. Carmel tutors and coordinates an ITABE group, facilitates Return to Learning courses for Dublin City Council, facilitates spelling/writing classes in the Community and works with drug addicts in a methadone clinic. She has attended many NALA events over the years and have encourages her students to do so too.

Carmel is Treasurer of the Basic Education Tutors’ Association (BETA) and is their representative on the NALA Executive Committee.

“Being involved in the NALA Executive is an important opportunity for me to speak out for students with literacy difficulties. I enjoy meeting other students and most importantly helping them to do something about their literacy”  
Michael Power



“I have enjoyed my time with NALA, especially meeting people from all over the country and from all walks of life. I have learned much about literacy in general and have an overall view of literacy matters in Ireland.”

Breda Kavanagh

“I continue to enjoy seeing the fruits of improved literacy through our excellent adult literacy service in our VEC and in the lives of adult learners that I meet in my work.”

Eileen Condon

“I believe in the right of everyone to be able to read and write. I want to help students to become active in their learning – and being involved with KLEAR and NALA gives me the opportunity to engage with them and encourage them to take part – not just in the classes, but in the life of the literacy service.”

Peggy Murphy



Breda Kavanagh

Breda is a literacy student who has been involved with NALA since 2005. She represents students on the Student Committee and the National Executive Committee of NALA. She first became involved with NALA by attending student days organised by NALA. She attends literacy courses and will tell students in her classes about NALA and about upcoming events that may be of interest to them.

She loves learning and working in groups. Breda is in an ITABE group and has just completed a FETAC Visual Arts Practice Module which she really enjoyed.



Frances Killeen

Frances Killeen is the Adult Education Officer with County Louth Vocational Education Committee. Having joined the Executive Committee in 2007 she was appointed Honorary Secretary at the 2009 NALA AGM.

Prior to joining Co. Louth VEC Frances worked as an Educational Development Officer with Co. Dublin VEC. She has experience in co-ordinating workplace educational programmes aimed at helping employees improve their reading, writing and numeracy skills and she also has worked as a volunteer literacy tutor providing 1:1 tuition in a VEC Adult Literacy Scheme.



Gretta Vaughan

Gretta Vaughan has worked as an Adult Literacy Organiser with Co. Limerick VEC since 1985, prior to which she was involved in Remedial Education at second level with City of Waterford VEC. Gretta has co-operated with NALA since the mid eighties on projects such as:

- the development of a job description for ALOs;
- piloting of NALA /WIT accreditation route for schemes and ALO's; and
- the development of the Initial Tutor training pack.

Along with other ALOs she worked in conjunction with NALA in structuring the Regional Networks of ALOs and the formation of the Adult Literacy Organisers Association. Gretta became an Ordinary member of the Executive in 2006 and is currently serving second term as Vice-Chair on the NALA Executive.



Bernadette Cogan

Bernadette Cogan is a librarian and currently working in the Central Library Ilac Centre. Her interest in adult literacy developed when working in Donaghmede library after making contact with the KLEAR scheme. Most recently she organised a block loan of books and audio resources for the participants in the *Written Off?* programme.

Bernadette is a trained mentor and has supported Dublin City Council staff undertaking a return to learning course at the National College of Ireland. She also developed an after school computer literacy programme for children and care workers in An Cosán Tallaght. Bernadette has been a member of the NALA Executive since 2008.





### Councillor Mary Kelly

Cllr Mary Kelly is an elected member of Ballina Town Council. She is on numerous community committees and works closely with her local Youth Club and also works full time. Mary lives in a large Local Authority estate of about 800 residents. In her area many students leave school early – she enjoys working with the younger children through homework classes to encourage them to stay in education.

Mary became involved with NALA through her involvement with the local VEC in Mayo.



### Peggy Murphy

Peggy Murphy is retired from the workforce and now engaged in adult education in KLEAR. She is a member of the KLEAR management group and helps the literacy service as a student co-ordinator. She is a student participant on the Evolving Quality Framework project, assists in tutor training and welcomes new students during Open Week.

Peggy joined NALA as a member soon after starting classes. She was first elected as a student representative on the NALA Executive in 2001 and has recently been re-elected. She is also a member of the Student Sub-Committee and is on the working group for NALA's TV series *Written Off?*. Peggy felt that after many years' experience as union representative she was in a perfect position to put the student view forward.



## Perlico makes significant IT donation to the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

Perlico, the leading alternative provider of the best value telecoms, broadband and related services in the Irish market, and a wholly owned subsidiary of Vodafone Ireland, has donated 50 computers to the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) specifically for computer based literacy initiatives. Perlico's donation of IT equipment is the first of its kind to an Irish organisation dedicated to adult literacy and reflects the company's commitment to driving e-learning and further education.

The computers donated by Perlico will be used to broaden and strengthen NALA's distance education service and support adults and families with literacy difficulties who do not have access to computers or the internet.



### Eileen Condon

Eileen Condon is the Adult Education Officer for South Tipperary VEC. Before this she was the ALO in Waterford City VEC and South Tipperary VEC. Eileen first became involved with NALA, as a practitioner in adult literacy work, where she found the support invaluable. She is now involved on the executive and acts as a link to other Adult Education Officers regarding the work of NALA. Eileen first became involved in Workplace Literacy as a tutor when she lived in New York.



Michael Power, Inez Bailey and Jim Dorgan at NALA's 2009 AGM



Stephen Cullen (*Written Off?* student), Mandy Kennedy (student), Anne Ahearne (*Written Off?* student) and Kevin O'Duffy (student)

Perlico's General Manager Paul Woods said: "We are delighted to make our donation to this worthy cause – one that lies close to our heart as an Internet Service Provider. It's essential to promote lifelong education to ensure a skilled workforce, an essential component in fostering our economy's competitiveness. The participants of NALA's distance education programme should be congratulated on their decision to return to education. This requires determination and considerable courage. Access to computers and broadband facilitates the development of IT skills and provides access to information on all subject areas. Perlico would like to wish all of the participants of NALA's distance education programme every success in the future."

# Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009

Alice Leahy, Director of TRUST, was the first 'Overall Winner' at the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009 for her life's work in combating social exclusion and providing medical related services for people who are homeless. Alice, who was appointed to the Irish Human Rights Commission in 2006, was awarded at a ceremony in Dublin. Six other organisations were also recognised for their efforts to communicate clearly with the public. Alice won the prestigious overall award for her impressive work with the charity TRUST, a non-judgmental, befriending, social and health service for people who are homeless, which she co-founded in 1975.



*"Alice's work embodies the ethos of health literacy," said Dr. Gerardine Doyle, UCD Business Schools and chairperson of the Crystal Clear Awards judging panel. "She empowers those who are sleeping on the streets of Dublin, who have varying literacy levels, to access the services they need. The judges felt her willingness to communicate in non-conventional ways through personal contact, paintings, poems, uplifting magazines and books is inspirational and we honour her for her ongoing dedication to a person-centred model of care."*

The Crystal Clear Awards are part of the MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative, which is a collaborative project between the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and Merck Sharp & Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd. Over 135 entries were received this year, each one focusing on health literacy, which is a person's ability to make sound health decisions in the context of everyday life.

Dublin, Tuesday, 21st April: Alice Leahy, Director of TRUST, celebrates with fellow award winners, Evelyn Mooney, St. Mary's Hospital, Lucy Walsh, St. Michael's House, Sile Reynolds, St. Michael's House, Laura Wyness, The Women's Health Council, Dr. Ciara Kelly, The Sunday Independent and Tony Duffin, Director, Ana Liffey Drug Project. Alice Leahy was the first Overall Winner at the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009 yesterday for her life's work in combating social exclusion and providing medical related services for people who are homeless.



Dublin, Tuesday, 21st April: Alice Leahy, Director of TRUST, celebrates with Jennifer Lynch, Projects Coordinator, National Adult Literacy Agency and Dr. Neil Boyle, Managing Director, Merck Sharp & Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd, after being announced the first 'Overall Winner' at the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009 yesterday for her life's work in combating social exclusion and providing medical related services for people who are homeless.



# Crystal Clear Winners:

## Literacy Innovation in a Hospital Setting

**Evelyn Mooney, Therapeutic Activity Nurse, St. Mary's Hospital: 'Lifestory Project'**

The Lifestory project was developed in 2006 for residents of St. Mary's Hospital who had difficulty communicating due to conditions, such as dementia, depression and difficulties seeing and hearing. Evelyn compiled life stories of twelve residents using photographs, mementos and a detailed questionnaire. The resulting 'lifestory' was placed beside the resident's bed and could be viewed by their families and staff. The residents felt that this allowed them to communicate their identity rather than focus solely on their disability.

## Literacy Innovation in Health Promotion

**Laura Wyness, Senior Researcher, The Women's Health Council (WHC): 'Menopause: A Guide'**

Laura Wyness created 'Menopause: A Guide' as a direct response to research conducted by the Women's Health Council in 2008 that showed there was a lack of quality easy to read information on the menopause for Irish women. The booklet, which was prepared and published in collaboration with the HSE Health Promotions Unit, seeks to provide information about the menopause including symptoms, how to manage these symptoms and how to look after your health after the menopause. It aimed to communicate this information in a clear and direct way, using plain English guidelines, clear font and colour coded tabs. The booklet has benefited women by improving their knowledge of the menopause and by raising awareness of other potentially relevant organisations to them.

## Literacy Innovation in a Community/Social/Primary Care Setting

**Síle Reynolds, Senior Occupational Therapist and Lucy Walsh, Senior Psychologist, St Michael's House: 'Live and Let Die'**

Lucy Walsh and Síle Reynolds developed the 'Live and Let Die' Bereavement and Loss Programme to provide people with an intellectual disability with the knowledge, skills and supports necessary to understand what is happening when a loved one dies and to cope more effectively with their grief. The innovative project has five components, each addressing an identified area of need, including staff training, a 3 dimensional model graveyard and a book for families and carers that offers guidelines on how to support a person with an intellectual disability through the loss of a loved one. The book is colour coded and divided into easily accessible information for the reader on how to help a person before, during and after the death of a loved one.

## Consumer Health Media Award

**Dr. Ciara Kelly, The Sunday Independent: 'Specialist Centres for Cancer Care – Proximity is no substitute for survival'**

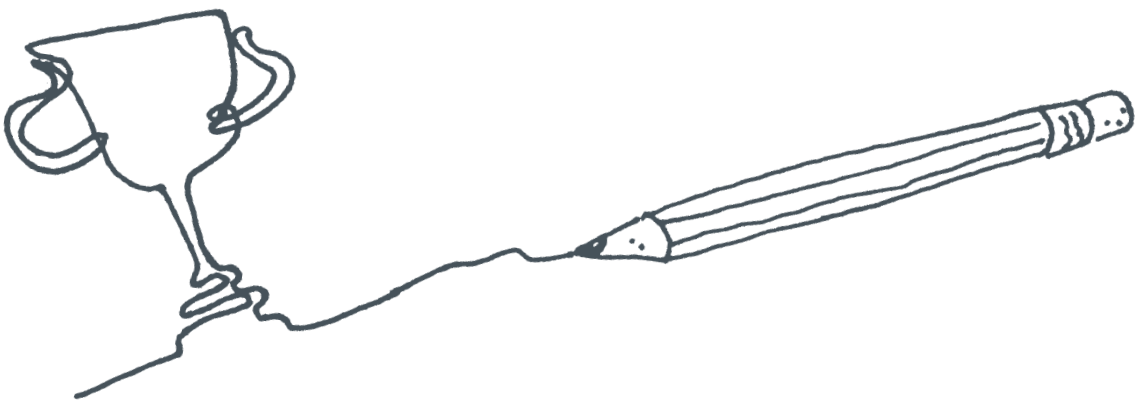
Dr. Kelly's article, published in the Sunday Independent, explains the rationale of centralised cancer care to the public, an issue which has caused a great deal of confusion.

Following a protest at the proposed removal of cancer treatments from Sligo General Hospital, Dr. Kelly addresses the lack of clear communication and why the health system was actually better off losing local cancer services in the area, in favour of large specialist centres. The simple language and explanation offered by Dr. Kelly helped to promote greater understanding amongst those in Sligo affected by the closure.

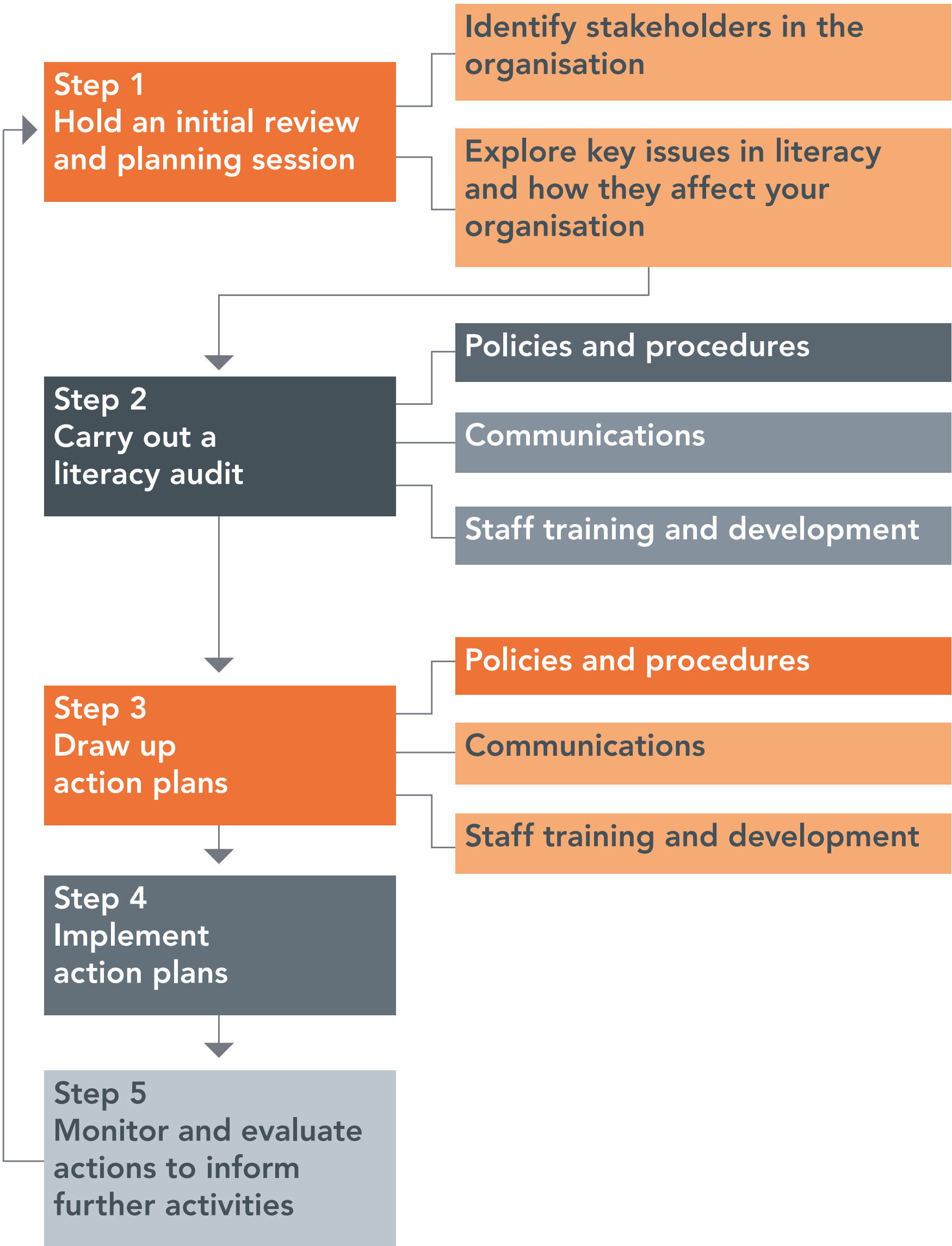
## Special Bursary for New Initiatives

**Tony Duffin, Director, Ana Liffey Drug Project (ALDP): 'Duck, Dive and Survive'**

The 'Duck, Dive and Survive' series consists of two, clearly written leaflets promoting essential Ana Liffey Drug Project (ALDP) services – the Peer Support Group and the Outreach Service. The leaflets focus on harm reduction, what services and support groups are available and other helpful phone numbers. These were developed using clear information and attractive graphic design. With the special bursary of €3000, ALDP plan on establishing a free text messaging service that will provide essential information to service users, in order to help reduce risky drug taking behaviour and reduce the chances of infection, transmission of blood borne viruses and overdose.



# Five steps to being a literacy-friendly organisation:



# Why become a literacy-friendly organisation?



Most people’s literacy abilities include strengths and weaknesses – at a simple level, someone may be an able reader but not as skilled at spelling or using numbers, for example. We can use reading and writing at many levels, from the most basic tasks to the much more complex demands of the changing workplace and modern society. Changes inside and outside work mean that all of us, at different stages in our lives and in response to different situations, could have ‘literacy’ needs.

However, for some people, literacy difficulties may mean they do not take advantage of some opportunities. Sometimes, very experienced staff hesitate to go for promotion, as they feel their reading or writing skills would be inadequate. Similarly, customers may appear to ignore letters or make misinformed decisions because the language used by the organisation is too complicated.

As observed by Fergus Murphy, CEO of EBS at the launch of the Literacy Advisory Service, “If people don’t know what we are talking about, how can we sell to them in a responsible manner?” In the current economic climate, therefore, businesses and other organisations face particular pressures to ensure that the public can fully understand and access their services and that staff can contribute effectively.

By taking steps to address literacy issues, however, organisations can generate a number of benefits. For example, employees may see improved performance and increased morale. Customers receive more efficient service and find it easier to communicate with the organisation. Taken together these results help the organisation develop a more committed workforce, reduce staff turnover and improve the quality of its work and its reputation.

## The process of becoming literacy-friendly

We recommend that organisations follow five steps to address literacy issues adequately.

### Step 1: Hold an initial review and planning session

The purpose of this step is to help an organisation reflect on their existing level of literacy awareness and how addressing literacy fits in with its values and can help it to achieve its mission and targets.

### Step 2: Carry out a literacy audit

This step aims to help the organisation identify existing good practice (which could already benefit adults with literacy difficulties) and any gaps.

Useful starting points are the organisation’s overall policies and procedures, its communications methods (inside and outside the organisation) and staff training and development activities.

### Step 3: Develop action plans

This aims to help the organisation prioritise its actions and set clear goals. Sometimes, a gradual approach may garner better support from staff, be more likely to lead to longer-term success and be more feasible in the current climate.

### Step 4: Implement action plans

This step involves the organisation taking concrete steps such as setting up a pilot to roll out the approach in one area and set up systems to monitor and evaluate progress.

### Step 5: Monitor and evaluate actions

This enables the organisation to identify what it has learnt from Steps 3 and 4 and what future actions could be useful.

For more information on becoming a literacy-friendly organisation, contact us for a copy of our guide Right from the Start, which was launched with our service in March.





# New service aims to cut corporate jargon and help businesses meet the needs of customers and staff

NALA's Literacy Advisory Service aims to help organisations remove literacy-related barriers to customers accessing their services by getting rid of gobbledygook and using plain English. The new service also provides information on how to respond to the needs of staff who may have difficulties with reading or writing. This includes advice on workplace basic education (WBE) programmes, recruitment and training policies.

In the current economic climate businesses and other organisations face particular challenges in ensuring that the public can fully understand their services and that staff can contribute effectively. One step in the right direction is to use plain English. Plain English can help organisations become more efficient because clearer information is more likely to save time, money and possible frustration that might otherwise be involved in clarifying misunderstandings.

Another step is to integrate literacy training in the workplace. Sometimes, very experienced staff are reluctant to go for promotion as they feel their reading or writing skills would be inadequate. This is a wasted opportunity and could be easily tackled through options such as workplace basic education (WBE) programmes and literacy-aware training and human resource policies.



Minister Sean Haughey TD., Inez Bailey (NALA), Fergus Murphy (EBS) and Jim Aughney (Business Journalists Assoc. of Ireland)

## NALA's Literacy Advisory Service offers support in the following areas:

### Plain English

This means presenting information in a way that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it. It involves using straightforward words, defining any essential jargon and using direct sentences and clear design to help the reader find and understand your message clearly.

### Integrating literacy into staff training and development

This means offering training in a literacy-friendly manner so that all staff, regardless of their literacy skills, can take part fully. It includes advertising and promoting training appropriately and designing, delivering and evaluating training using a range of teaching and consultation methods.

### Dedicated literacy intuition

This means arranging specific literacy and numeracy programmes for any employees who may need assistance with reading, writing or using numbers. Courses can include not only literacy and numeracy but also communication skills, computer skills and report writing, among others.

### Literacy awareness

This means understanding not only the size and range of issues related to adult literacy but recognising and being prepared for the challenges that literacy difficulties may present.

# Adult literacy training leads to a range of economic and social gains

A report, titled **A cost benefit analysis of adult literacy training**, revealed that literacy training can produce substantial economic and employment gains for trainees, financial benefits for the Government and additional benefits for society. For trainees at work, the annual income gain from improving their literacy up one level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is estimated at about €3,800 while the annual gain to the Government is about €1,500 in terms of reduced social welfare benefits and increased tax repayments. These gains compare with an estimated cost of €4,000 to raise the average trainee by one level in the NFQ.



A cost benefit analysis of adult literacy training report

These findings are based on the results achieved by the Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programme currently being implemented by the country’s VECs and international research.

For those not at work, training improves the chances of gaining employment. In the typical ITABE class, where only a minority are employed, the income gains from those at work and those who gain employment, are larger than costs of the training to the Government, thus producing a net gain to the economy.

Indeed, by themselves the increased tax and reduced social welfare benefits from the higher employment and incomes resulting from the training, are enough to remunerate the Government’s investment in the training.

## We spoke to Jim, who carried out the research, about his experience in adult literacy and his research findings



**Q** Jim, the experience of working for the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the adult literacy report must have been an interesting.

**J** Yes, very interesting. I was working with Dr Elizabeth McSkeane who is an educationalist and she complemented my contribution as a policy analyst.

Two other things: the first is the interest in the subject shown by the members of the Committee. Oireachtas Committees are at their best – in my experience – when they focus on small areas of policy. Because then there are no party issues and it’s possible to make a lot of progress – as in that case.

The other thing was the contribution in written and oral form by dozens of people and organisations involved in literacy training. In fact, we did a standalone synthesis of all the views expressed in these contributions. It is a presentation of an impressive range of ideas and commitment.

**Q** What do you think particularly influenced the Joint Committee to arrive at their very strong conclusions?

**J** I’d say the main thing was the OECD survey in 1995, which showed that Ireland had a severe problem in comparison with other countries. Coupled with an understanding of how literacy problems impact on individuals in work and life generally, this gave rise to concern among Committee members and prompted the strong conclusions. Underlying all this were the submissions, both written and oral, which the Joint Committee invited and received from those involved in literacy training, AONTAS, IVEA, the VECs, individual trainers and of course NALA. These brought home to members the extent and depth of the problem and also what might be done about it.

**Q** Turning to your recent work with NALA, you developed a cost benefit analysis for adult literacy. What were the main challenges in developing this work?

**J** The main problem is that there is comparatively little original research on the economic aspects of literacy in Ireland. There is some on education, but not much on literacy. Fortunately, we have an evaluation of the ITABE Pilot by Terry McCann of Co. Dublin VEC. This gives us some basis for estimating the amount of progress expected from the intensive training provided by ITABE. We also have one very good analysis of the OECD data by Denny, Harmon and O’Sullivan at the Geary Institute in UCD. This indicates what sort of income increases can be expected from a given improvement in literacy. Dr Orla Doyle of the Geary Institute also contributed an analysis of the effects of literacy on employment, which I applied through a cost benefit analysis. We are fortunate to have that work here and it seems that the results are reasonably in line with research in other countries. However, we need more evaluation of literacy training outcomes, especially in the VECs and of workplace training. In addition, we need something on impacts of literacy in the social area: health, crime, intergenerational impacts, and so on. We have practically no research on this at all here and can only suppose that what has been found for other countries in these areas might apply here too – not a satisfactory state of affairs.

**Q** What were the results of your research?

**J** The important thing is that increasing your literacy by one NFQ level increases income by 28% if you are working. If you are not working then it increases the chances of employment by 12% – and this applies to people whether they are formally unemployed or whether they are not in the labour force (e.g. homemakers).

Taking the outcomes from the ITABE pilot study, this means that for a working trainee, the annual income gain is almost equal to the cost of the training to the Government (which is about €1,050 per trainee in the ITABE programme). Increased income means higher taxes and lower social welfare benefits. These represent benefits to the Government and they amount to about one third of the Government’s expenditure.

Only a minority of the ITABE trainees are working. Yet, the income gains are so strong for this group (and also for those not working who start working as a result of the training), that in total they are equal to about half the cost of the training per year – again a very big return.

If we look at what the Government gets out of this training (i.e. extra tax and reduced benefits) the financial benefits work out at about 17% of its investment per year – not bad when you consider the Government pays about 5% for its money these days.

Obviously, all this is based on assumptions and simplification and there are data problems. But making all due allowance for that, the evidence is strong that literacy training yields good economic benefits.

**Q** Given the current financial and social upheaval, did you find that adult literacy programmes have any tangible impact on employment?

**J** Yes. This is the one bit of primary research that it was possible to do and as I said, Dr Orla Doyle contributed to it. It is based on the OECD data for Ireland. Literacy difficulties do have an impact on employment. In terms of the sample of trainees in the ITABE programme, it works out at about 4% of those not employed (who are the majority).

This is not a large number of persons but since these trainees are going from nearly zero income, the impact on the economic results of the training is quite large.

**Q** Does adult literacy provide measurable economic benefits at national level, for example to the Exchequer, and the economy?

**J** Economic output is usually measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is the value of all goods and products sold inside a single country. Therefore, after a person’s tax is taken away, any increases in income from literacy training add to GDP. How much the Government can save or make compared to how much it spends on literacy training is always important. Most Government spending doesn’t do this, otherwise there would be no need for income tax! The other area is the impact of literacy on social aspects of life like health and so on. As I mentioned already, we have very little data on this for Ireland, and so we haven’t been able to measure the costs. However, it seems likely that there is an impact. Other countries have found literacy impacts in the areas of health and crime.

**Q** How do you think NALA could build an economic case for increasing investment in adult literacy?

**J** Well, the report does look at the data and methodology problems and the recommendation is that these problems should be fixed. I would say that another national study like the one produced by the OECD in 1995 should be carried out – preferably as part of an international survey. We need to figure out where we are a decade and a half after the OECD survey. The other thing is to improve the data available through surveys over time – longitudinal surveys – in which samples are followed from childhood to adulthood. These have a lot of explanatory power. We also need more evaluation of the different types of literacy training programmes in Ireland. The findings in this report are based on the ITABE programme. But they may not apply to other literacy training programmes.



# 'Looking at the Workplace through Mathematical Eyes'

Joint research project on behalf of NALA and ITT, Dublin  
Presented by: John J. Keogh, under the supervision of Dr. Terry Maguire, Head of Lifelong Learning ITT, Dublin and Professor John O'Donoghue, University of Limerick.

The project, entitled 'Looking at the Workplace through Mathematical Eyes', will shadow up to 4 workplaces to identify the mathematics / numeracy skills that are stated (or not) as being required by the employer and those actually used, however unconsciously, as part of the job. 'Mathematical Eyes' perceive more than quantity and number sense. They observe problem solving in action, involving comprehension, reasoning and logic. Awareness of space, measurement and capacity, points to geometry, while situation modelling exploits the power of algebra to generalise. The ever-present need to interpret and communicate numeric information, graphically represented, is a crucial skill, rooted in the disciplines of statistics and chance.

The research presents the possibility to show people that they are well accomplished in skills that are invisible to them and perhaps encourage them to access further learning. Identifying mathematical skills and aligning them with NFQ levels 1-4/5, will help to explain how school mathematics seem not to be connected with workplace mathematics.

Having completed a first draft of the customary Literature Review, we are now in the process of designing the field research methods that will provide sufficient range and depth of information for future analysis. We hope to develop a sense of how the participants assess their own mathematical abilities to provide a contrast with the numeracy skills in action we observe. We would be delighted to hear from employers who can appreciate the value of this project to their commercial interests and the development of their staff, especially in these challenging times.



## New publication – Prison Education Service Maths FETAC Level 3.

This book has been developed over several years by teachers in the prison education service in Ireland. It is built on the needs, interests and skills of our students. Maths teachers pooled their materials and expertise, with the support of the Prison In-Service Committee and Kevin Warner, Co-Ordinator of Education, Irish Prison Service. It was edited and compiled for publication by Brendan O'Hara and Catherine Byrne who are teachers in CDVEC Education Centre in Wheatfield Prison.

We understand that many who attend maths classes in prisons and perhaps in other adult education settings often have far greater skills than they themselves realise; as teachers our task, in part, is to show them how much they already know. We take what they see as common sense and "mathematicise" it in this book.

Most adults who return to learning have skills with numbers but may not call it maths; we aim to show them that their skills regarding money, construction and trades, DIY, time, shapes, health and fitness, food, drink, art, and music are also maths skills. Our approach at times is "Maths by Stealth" as often the maths confidence of our students is so low that they believe if they can do it, then it can't be real maths. Thus at times students complete these tasks as if they are just puzzles, only to realise that it is part of the math's curriculum for FETAC level 3. Certification is important for our students, for many reasons, and so we have successfully submitted this material for some years for FETAC certification, and modified it as necessary.

This book is just one approach to this module: other centres may have worksheets more appropriate for their particular students' needs. We welcome feedback from both teachers and students anywhere at [maths.feedback@gmail.com](mailto:maths.feedback@gmail.com). We hope that both teachers and students enjoy using it because we believe that maths is fun.

The publication is available from the CDVEC Education Unit, Wheatfield, Dublin 22.

# Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work

NALA's first policy document: Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work was published in 1985. It was revised in 1991 and rewritten in 2005.

In 2009 our theme explores the link between literacy and change.

This includes personal change, community development and social action. The theme arises in particular from NALA's definition of literacy which states: 'Literacy increases the opportunity for individual and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change.'

As part of its strategic plan NALA is working to bring its Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work (NALA 2005) to the attention of everyone involved in adult and family literacy issues. We want to encourage people to read the Guidelines and apply them to their work and their understanding of adult and family literacy.

The guidelines set out and explore the essential features of good adult literacy work and discusses the core values which underpin adult literacy and numeracy education in Ireland.

Each year we are choosing a theme from the Guidelines for NALA events and for the NALA Journal. The theme relates to the tutors' forum, national and regional student events, a national conference, the ALOs' forum, the Family Literacy day and the ESOL conference.

Last year the theme was literacy as a social practice.

In the Guidelines, we discuss this in more detail:

*"This statement expresses the view that adult education should involve a process which can lead to social change, as well as personal development. Adult learners bring a wide range of life experiences to their learning. Good adult literacy work builds on this experience and on the learners' connections with family, work and community. It is vital that learners' experiences and views are brought into the learning process..."*

*"As learners develop their confidence and their literacy, they may wish to explore the social context of their educational experience. This may include the causes and effects of their difficulties with literacy. The social and political context is a topic for study and debate, sometimes leading to action within communities. Literacy learning can be part of this social and political engagement."*

*(Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work p15 – 16).*

The events and Journal articles give participants and readers a chance to consider the themes in relation to their own work and experience.

We hope that Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work and the linked events and publications help to build deeper understanding of adult and family literacy issues and practice.

# New UK strategy to address adult literacy and numeracy: Skills for Life: Changing lives

The UK Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) have published a new strategy document to address adult literacy and numeracy for the estimated 5.2 million adults (16%) in England that have literacy skills below level 1. The Skills for Life survey also reported 6.8 million people (21%) with numeracy skills below entry level 3. They have set themselves an “ambition to become a world leader in skills by 2020” and the strategy outlines a vision to achieve this.

## Skills for Life: Changing lives

The publication of *Skills for Life: Changing lives* is a refreshed strategy and it focuses on 3 central themes:

1. Focusing Skills for Life on employability;
2. Raising demand for literacy, language and particularly numeracy skills among individuals and employers; and
3. Delivering flexible and responsive Skills for Life provision.

## Interesting points from the document

- In 2009-10 total Government funding for adult literacy, language and numeracy provision will exceed £1 billion GBP.
- Skills for Life provision is delivered through a range of different routes, including Train to Gain, Jobcentre Plus, mainstream further education provision, learndirect and through the Offender Learning and Skills Service.
- There will be an increase in the focus on numeracy provision.
- Train to Gain supports employers to invest in the skills of their employees through government funding, quality-assured impartial advice from sector skills brokers and a range of other supports including a contribution to wage costs for working time spent training for businesses with under 50 full-time equivalent staff.
- Skills accounts are being created.
- There will be an entitlement through legislation of free literacy and numeracy courses for adults. A statutory right for ‘time to train’ for employees is going through the legislative process and is due in 2010.
- There are many initiatives in adult literacy and numeracy that work across government departments. For example the Armed Forces have built a Service-wide Skills for Life programme for their workforce tailored to the needs and demands of Service life. In addition Skills for Life provision for the spouses of Armed Forces personnel is being delivered by Learning and Skills Council.

## What is Skills for Life?

Skills for Life is a national Government strategy that was launched by the British Government in 2001 and since then over 5.7 million learners have taken training courses and 2.8 million achieved qualifications. The strategy aims to improve significantly the literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT), and language (ESOL) skills of adults in England. A Skills for Life Strategy Unit, based in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), is responsible for the overall delivery of the strategy. For more information, visit [www.dcsf.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/readwriteplus).

The *Skills for Life: Changing lives* document is available to download at: [www.dius.gov.uk/reports\\_and\\_publications.aspx](http://www.dius.gov.uk/reports_and_publications.aspx)



# A balancing act

## Learning from the balanced scorecard

In spring 2009, we began developing a balanced scorecard to measure our work and its impact. Our strategic plan commits us to developing a scorecard to help us enhance the effectiveness of the organisation. But what is a balanced scorecard and how can it help NALA?

The balanced scorecard was originally developed by Kaplan and Norton in 1992 to counter the trend at the time of measuring an organisation’s success just in terms of profits. Believing that financial measures alone were too unreliable, they developed the balanced scorecard to measure an organisation’s effectiveness across four perspectives:

- customer satisfaction (its ability to meet customers’ needs, or in NALA’s case, how well we serve our funders, members, service users and literacy providers and students, among others)
- finance (its profitability – or for NALA, how well we use our funding),
- internal processes (how it carries out its day-to-day work), and
- learning and growth (what skills or knowledge staff may need to develop to do their best to contribute to the organisation’s goals).

As a result, the scorecard enables an organisation to develop a ‘balanced’ view of its work and, ultimately, ensure that its day-to-day operations truly help achieve the organisation’s strategic goals. Because of this wide-ranging focus, the scorecard has grown in popularity among public sector and voluntary organisations.

The balanced scorecard is most effective when it is tailored to an organisation’s individual needs. So between January and March 2009, a small team within NALA worked with consultancy Excitant to devise a scorecard for the Agency.

Through a series of workshops, we drafted charts (known as strategy maps) to show the relationship between our four strategies of partnership, advocacy, research and voice and the four perspectives of the balanced scorecard.

These draft charts broke down the steps involved in using each strategy for our projects (the internal processes), any skills we need to follow these steps (learning and growth), how we use our funding (finance) and the effect of our work on those to whom it is targeted (our customers).

The diagram across shows how these perspectives are linked: the arrows on the left show the link between skills and processes, processes and impact on those we work with and so on. The arrows on the right show where we look to assess if anything needs to be changed to help us become more effective. For example, if we are not having the impact we expect, we might first look at our processes. If they’re acceptable, we might then look at our skills.

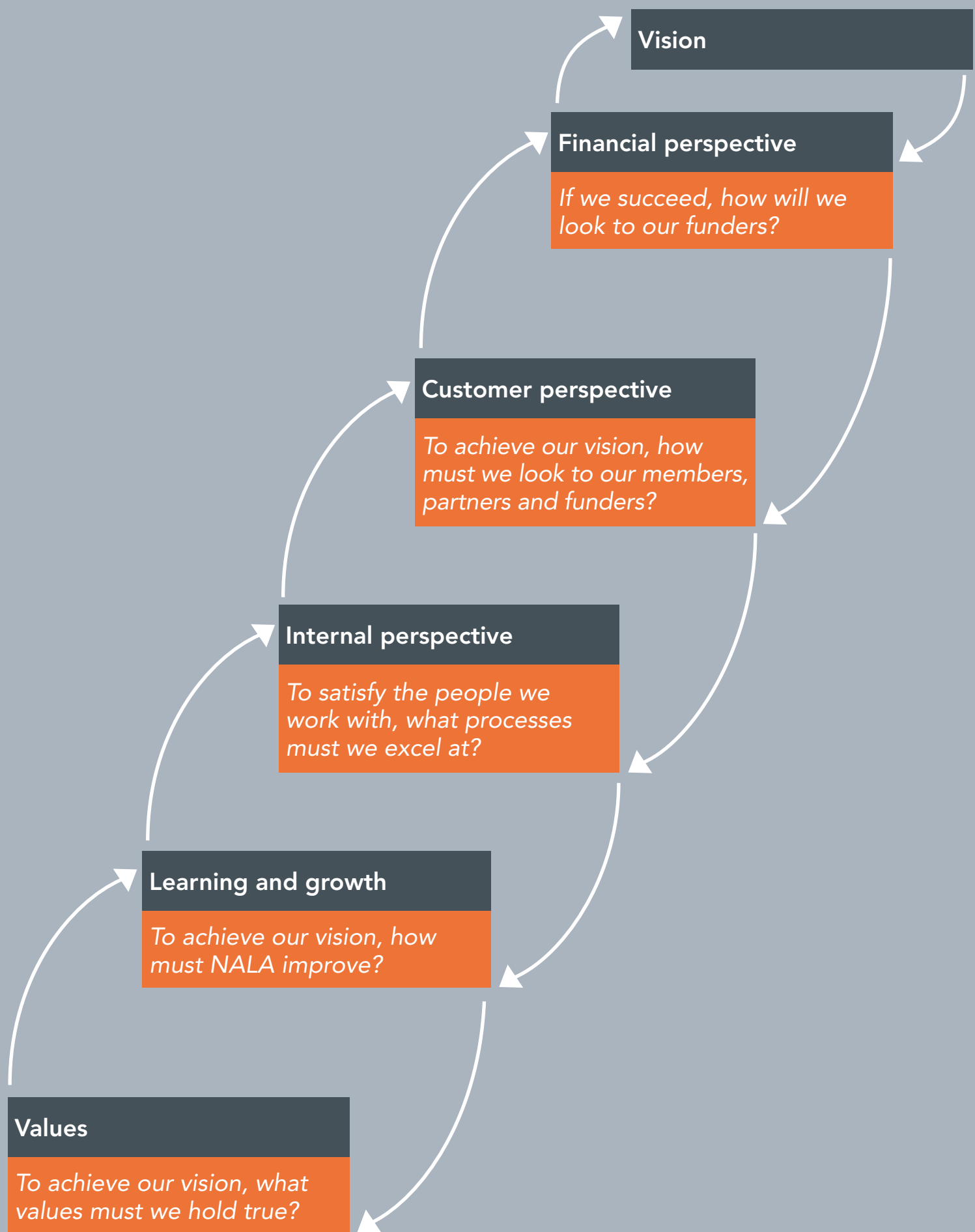
The information in these maps was then put into a worksheet – or scorecard – that we will use to score:

- whether projects are being completed on time, using the agreed steps,
- how well we are using our budgets,
- how well our efforts are meeting the needs of those we work with, and
- the level of knowledge and skill we have to carry out our work.

A workshop in early April introduced all staff to the strategy maps and the first draft of the scorecard. A second staff workshop will involve agreeing the steps to apply our strategies across our projects and reviewing the values that underpin our work. We plan to finalise our scorecard in May and start using it to monitor performance from early June.



# Cause and effect framework



# Learning for democracy

In terms of adult education's potential for stimulating learning for democracy, we seem to have gone backwards rather than forwards in recent years. For instance, the 1975 Alexander Report on adult education in Scotland contains the following passage – hardly something you could imagine reading in the official policy documents of today:

*Society is now less certain about the values it should uphold and tolerates a wide range. Individual freedom to question the value of established practices and institutions and to propose new forms is part of our democratic heritage. To maintain this freedom, resources should not be put at the disposal only of those who conform but ought reasonably to be made available to all for explicit educational purposes. The motives of those who provide education need not necessarily be identified with the motives of those for whom it is provided.*

It was in an attempt to revive this way of thinking about our work that led a group of us at Edinburgh University to circulate an 'Open letter: Whatever happened to learning for democracy?' in late 2006. This reads as below:

*We see our work in community-based education as part of a broader democratic process. This is about enabling people to demand social justice and equality for themselves and others. There is now an historic opportunity to renew democracy in Scotland, and yet we are beginning to feel a profound sense of disappointment about the way in which both our own work and the lives of people in communities are being managed, regulated and controlled.*

*Community learning is being tied into state policy rather than policy being informed by democratic learning. Despite much good practice on the ground, there is a systematic and debilitating reductionism at work in the policy agenda: lifelong learning is largely reduced to instrumental and economic terms, to learning for a living rather than learning for life; community development is largely reduced to delivering the community to policy through pseudo-democratic forms of participation and partnership; working with young people is largely reduced to surveillance and preparation for employment. There can be no vision of a different kind Scotland in this systematic reduction of democratic purpose to managerial procedure.*

*This is not the way to activate citizens for democratic renewal or enthuse them about the possibilities of democratic life. Moreover, there is a real danger of a new kind of democratic deficit developing. The real threat to Scotland's new democracy comes not from apathy but from cynicism.*

*What is required, in the first instance, is a much more open, democratic and imaginative dialogue and debate about what kind of society we want to live in, and how we can begin to build it in Scotland today. Education and learning in communities can contribute to making this vision a reality, and they are a rich resource for tackling significant problems in society. Ordinary people need the opportunity to have their say, to be listened to and to talk back to the state. This is essentially a democratic process. It cannot simply be managed and measured; it has to be nurtured and cultivated in communities. It requires faith and trust in the people, and a valuing of genuinely democratic dialogue and debate.*

To cut a long story short, this seemed to strike a sympathetic chord (or did it hit a raw nerve?) with many colleagues throughout Scotland – as well as further afield, as responses from Canada, South Africa and New Zealand indicated. This culminated in a meeting in the new Scottish Parliament and the formation of various working groups to take matters forward. A key outcome, conceived in terms of what Noam Chomsky once called the 'threat of a good example', is a laminated wall-chart, published in 2008, which contains Ten Propositions (statements of principle) and Ten Proposals (statements for action) about Learning for Democracy.



Adult education and lifelong learning have a crucial part to play in the always unfinished business of democratic citizenship. This was well expressed in what might now seem a rather obscure little book by Harold Shearman called, quite simply, *Adult Education for Democracy*. This was published in the UK by the Workers’ Education Association (WEA) in 1944, the year before the end of the Second World War, but obviously thinking ahead to the post-war era of reconstruction and the hope of building a new society. The question is: In what ways, if any, does this account still speak to us today?

Democracy implies the formation of social judgement on the basis of informed discussion. It requires that men and women shall decide on particular issues, not as a result of passing moods or casual opinions, but in the light of a philosophy of life. Such a philosophy, if it is to be anything more than the repetition of slogans, must be formed as the result of much reflection on the problems of social organisation in general and on the aims and purposes of society. Knowledge is essential; but it must be mixed with experience; and the pooling and comparison of experience in the light of new knowledge, in a group with common interests but bringing varied contributions to be drawn from daily life, is the essence of democratic Adult Education.

# Ten propositions – democracy is about:

- 1

Freedom – Human flourishing is achieved through freedom to act individually and collectively, only constrained by due consideration for others.
- 2

Equality – All people are of the same moral worth and are obliged to mind the equality of others.
- 3

Justice – Justice and democracy are interdependent. An unjust society is an undemocratic society, and an undemocratic society breeds injustice.
- 4

Solidarity – Shared aims and values arise from the pursuit of common purposes and mutually supportive ways of living.
- 5

Diversity – Dialogue between different cultures and identities can enrich society and help to build a common culture.
- 6

Accountability – The state is accountable to its citizens for providing the policy framework within which judgements about common good are made and contested. Those who hold power are answerable to the people.
- 7

Dialogue – Democracy requires dialogue and the possibility of dissent. This means learning to argue, articulate beliefs, deliberate and come to collective decisions concerning what constitutes the good society.
- 8

Responsibility – Consistency and coherence between private and public behaviour are essential to the quality of democratic life.
- 9

Participation – Democracy is something to be negotiated from below rather than handed down from above. Citizens require the opportunity to talk back to the state.
- 10

Sustainability – A commitment to the environment and to future generations requires determined opposition to those forces which are wasteful and destructive.



# Ten proposals – Learning for democracy means:

- 1 Taking sides – Educational workers are not merely enablers or facilitators. The claim to neutrality can reinforce and legitimise existing power relations. Practitioners need to be clear about what they stand for – and against.
- 2 Acting in solidarity – Practitioners should proactively seek opportunities to engage in a critical and committed way with communities and social movements for progressive social change.
- 3 Taking risks – Critical and creative learning is necessarily unpredictable and open-ended. Exploring official problem definitions and challenging taken for granted ways of thinking can be a liberating process.
- 4 Developing political literacy – Politics needs to be made more educational and education made more political. Learning to analyse, argue, co-operate, and take action on issues that matter requires a systematic educational process.
- 5 Working at the grassroots – Democracy lives through ordinary people's actions; it does not depend on state sanction. Practitioners should be in everyday contact with people on their own ground and on their own terms.
- 6 Listening to dissenting voices – Activating democracy is a process of creating spaces in which different interests are expressed and voices heard. Dissent should be valued rather than suppressed.
- 7 Cultivating awkwardness – Democracy is not necessarily best served by the conformist citizen. This means that the educational task is to create situations in which people can confront their circumstances, reflect critically on their experience and take action.
- 8 Educating for social change – Collective action can bring about progressive change. Learning for democracy can contribute to this process by linking personal experience with wider political explanations and processes.
- 9 Exploring alternatives – Learning for democracy can provide people with the opportunity to see that the status quo is not inevitable – that 'another world is possible'.
- 10 Exposing the power of language – The words used to describe the world influence how people think and act. Learning for democracy involves exploring how language frames attitudes, beliefs and values.

## For more information contact:

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# NALA ESOL Conference 2009

## Developing your Practice



**Thursday 11 June 2009**  
National College of Ireland,  
Mayor Street, IFSC, Dublin 1

### **Keynote speakers:**

- Helen Sunderland, Head of ESOL, Assistant Director, Language and Literacy Unit (LLU+), London South Bank University
- Vera Sheridan, Lecturer and Academic Coordinator, School of Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University

### **Who should attend?**

- ESOL practitioners
- VEC Adult Literacy Organisers and Centre Managers
- Policy makers

### **What is ESOL?**

ESOL stands for English for Speakers of Other Languages. In an adult basic education context, ESOL means providing literacy and language support for students whose first language is not English.

### **What is the event about?**

This is an event to highlight the wider issues of ESOL and literacy and will include presentations on learning literacy in a second language and citizenship and identity in multicultural societies.

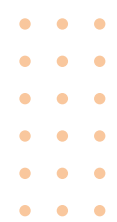
There will also be a wide number of workshops (12) available on topics ranging from 'integrating technology into the ESOL classroom' to 'teaching writing to learners who do not have the Roman alphabet'.

### **Cost**

The cost of attending this event is €30 to NALA members and €60 to non-members

For more information please go to **[www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)** or contact Margaret Maher in NALA at **[mmaher@nala.ie](mailto:mmaher@nala.ie)**





# Noticeboard

## NALA Student Members' Media Awareness and Training Day

A highlight of 2008 for nine of NALA's student members was the media awareness and training day held in August. The training was provided by DHR Communications in Dublin and was found to be very useful by all the participants. For the first half of the day, participants were given an overview of the Irish media industry. Participants then watched and gave feedback on a number of particularly successful television interviews. In the afternoon participants were put through their paces in mock interviews before moving on to the highlight of the day which were professionally recorded television-style interviews. Everyone was impressed with the enthusiasm shown by participants in telling their own stories about their return to learning.

## Better health, Better communication: A health literacy DVD

Enclosed in your magazine is a copy of the new NALA/HSE health literacy awareness DVD. It is 8 minutes long and includes interviews with adult students and health practitioners. It offers an insight into health literacy and how it can impact on everyone. Up to now we have been using US awareness resources. This DVD can be used as part of any awareness session and again reinforces the point that adult literacy impacts on all aspects of people's lives. We will make the DVD available on our website shortly. We hope to launch this DVD and our health literacy audit with the HSE in the near future.

## What is IRAACE?

IRAACE is a network for those engaged in or interested in research into adult and community education fields. This includes those working in adult basic education, vocational and community education, further and higher education.

### IRAACE will support people to:

- Explore common issues in adult and community education research
- Share knowledge, experiences and research resources with one another
- Identify major challenges in adult and community education research
- Explore opportunities for collaboration and partnerships to address the challenges
- Identify and publicise funding opportunities for research projects
- Situate the research in the broader context of education policy in Ireland
- Develop links with researchers in other countries

For more information please email: [iraace@gmail.com](mailto:iraace@gmail.com)

# How students can get involved...



Events in the student calendar:

Dublin  
Saturday  
**13**  
June

Cork  
Saturday  
**20**  
June

For more information call  
NALA on **01 855 4332**

## Who are students?

- An adult who gets literacy tuition in a scheme or programme;
- A young person, aged under 18 years, who left school early and who is getting literacy tuition in a programme; and
- A person undertaking distance education in literacy by means of the television, radio or Internet.

## Student sub-committee

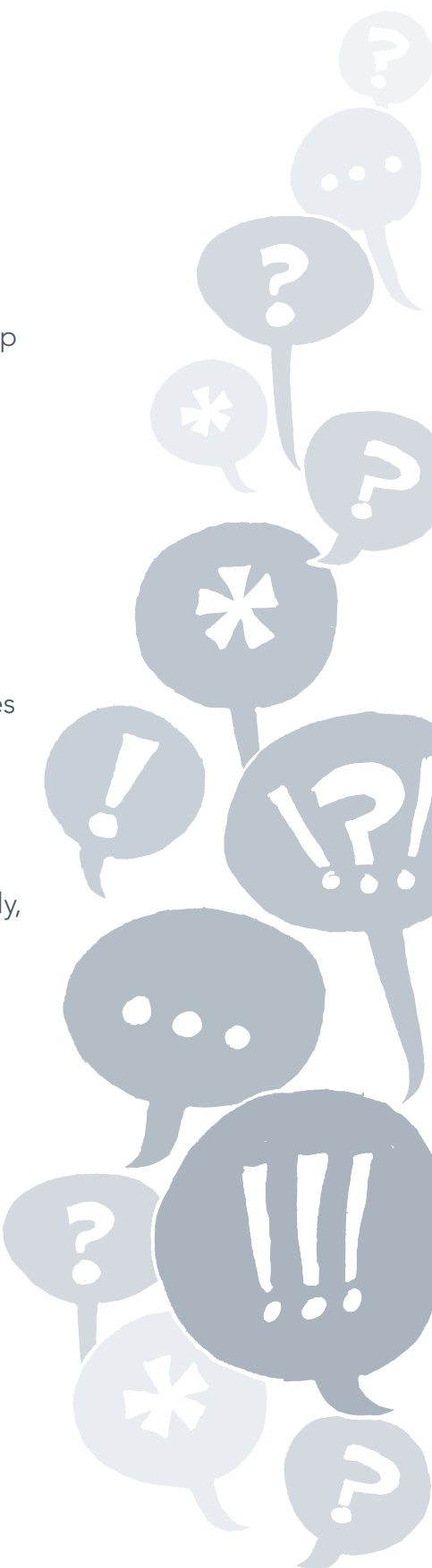
The student sub-committee of NALA’s Board gives students a platform to develop their voice, role and viewpoint and to communicate directly to the board or staff any particular issues or concerns.

The Committee is now in its 4th year and is going from strength to strength. Currently, there are seven students, one VEC Adult Literacy Organiser and one NALA staff member on the Committee. The Committee meets 6 times a year to discuss a variety of topical issues about the experiences of returning to learning as an adult. These issues inform a variety of NALA’s work with students being represented on the NALA Executive and on our media advisory group which advises on the ‘Written Off’ television series. The committee is a good mix of students from urban and rural backgrounds who bring a wide range of experiences to the meetings.

## Student Representatives

NALA’s definition of literacy is a broad one that recognises that literacy is about more than reading, writing and numeracy. Our work with students focuses on building confidence and participation. Literacy students speak at conferences and other public events in order to explain the nature and impact of their literacy difficulties and how they made their decision to return to learning. They often describe how improving their literacy has enhanced their family, work or social lives.

Students have an important role in relation to the media, often acting as spokespersons or champions for the literacy issue. In fact some of the students are now media veterans having notched up appearances on a variety of television programmes and in national newspapers. Following on from the great success at last year’s National Ploughing Championships in Kilkenny, some students will again help to staff a NALA information stand at this year’s championships which will be held in Athy in September. We’re looking forward to it already...



# Writing your first book

## An interview with Brid Connolly, Maynooth University

**Q** When did you write your first book?

**BC** This is my first solo book. I have edited collections, such as *Radical Learning for Liberation 1 and 2*, and *Women and Education in Ireland 1 and 2*.

I wrote more casually all during my life, but never thought I would have the application to sit down and write a major project like a book, until my fifties. I think that it is important to keep challenging ourselves and not to think that it might be too late, or that we might be getting too old.

**Q** Where do you get your information or ideas for your books?

**BC** The idea for the book came from my experience as a learner and a tutor. The sources for groupwork were developed in other areas, such as the workplace, community development, therapy, family studies and even sport. I felt that adult education could benefit from these other studies but that it should develop groupwork specifically for adult learning.

What I tried to do was to review groupwork in other areas and to engage with my own experience of adult learning.

**Q** How long does it take you to write a book?

**BC** It took about 3 years all told, but the final product was one year of concentrated effort.

**Q** What is your work schedule like when you're writing?

**BC** I tried to write for about 3 hours a day, five days a week.

**Q** How do books get published?

**BC** I made a proposal to many publishers and the Open University Press followed it up. They needed a full outline of the book and a sample chapter. They sent this to three reviewers, who came back with really positive feedback, plus very useful suggestions which then became part of the contract that I signed.

Otherwise, books can be published in a variety of ways. In my workplace, we set up a small publishers, as it was not possible to have some of our writing published by a commercial publisher. They look for profits, but we were looking to get the ideas out into the adult learning community. In addition, in these days of the internet, it is possible to reduce costs, by publishing e-books and articles, which the reader can print off.

**Q** What do you like to do when you're not writing?

**BC** I love reading, and this is my idea of heaven, to be totally immersed in a book, so that time and place are totally transformed. I also work in the Department of Adult and Community Education, in the education of adult educators, at post-grad level. I also work with other groups of mature students, for example, the BA in community studies, a modular part time degree delivered in Maynooth and Kilkenny Outreach Campus.

**Q** What surprising things did you learn while writing your book?

**BC** I was really surprised that I could do it! I think that I believed that writers were a different type of people, with some kind of power that I did not have. But I found out that if you just put one word in front of the other, you eventually have a piece of written work.

I was also surprised by the creative process. I could fight with myself for an hour or more, doing housework, or playing games, or any other kinds of distractions. But when I managed to overcome the distractions, and got into the writing, I could get lost in it, so that a few hours could pass, and I did not notice.

Further, when I read over what I had written during that time, I was often surprised with what I wrote. It would not always be familiar to me. In other words, that creative process helped me to come up with new stuff, stuff that I had not thought about before, and only came up because I was totally in the zone.



**Q** Do you have any suggestions to help our readers become a better writer? If so, what are they?

**BC** I would say the most important thing for a writer is reading, but reading purposefully to see how other people write as well as what they say. Look at how they introduce the article or chapter or paragraph, look at how they shape the piece, and ask yourself:

- Why they prioritized certain points?
- If you were doing it, what would you think was more important?

The second thing is re-writing. Get all your points down first, and then go back and re-write with more detail. Then, back again to improve it. Think of it like measuring and re-measuring wood before you cut it, or tacking

material before you sew, rather than thinking that you are an idiot because you don't get it right first time. The third thing is consistent practice. If you don't practice often, you lose the skill. It's just like anything (except riding a bike, I think!!!), you forget how to do it, if there is a big gap between stints, and you have to relearn again. But it's not necessary to write big stuff, it's great to keep a journal, write a bit every day in your diary, and you have a lot of writing done in a few minutes a day. And the pen is a great memory stick, record the little things in your life which may not be important at the time, but are an irreplaceable treasure in the future.

"... If there is a common bond that links all adult learners, it is around some idea of improvement, development, enhancement or advancement. Adult learning is about attaining new knowledge, of course, but that process is about new perspectives, too: changing ourselves in some way. As we set out on the learning journey, we are in a state of flux: we will never be the same again. We aspire towards a being a better self, developing our potential, challenging ourselves. If we consider the stages of development that mark the early years of our lives, from communicating with our parents to playing with friends, we perceive these as essential to our being. Adult learning is of the same order: adult learning helps us to become the person we can be. But adult learning is more than the incremental stages of personal development. Developing our potential is a commitment to become more fully human. Becoming more human includes the adult concern with our attitudes, values and beliefs, in addition to learning more, getting qualifications, developing new skills. Newly developed knowledge challenges our foundational values and beliefs. New knowledge illuminates old knowledge. A brief review of human history shows that – in spite of huge retrogressive leaps through war, conflict, and the abuse of power – we are trying to make the world a better place to live in. We are outraged at injustice. We have created and we support institutions that attempt to redress injustice, such as the legal system and the educational system. Democracy, though imperfect, is an example of the desire to create a system that draws on human intelligences and ethical codes to replace blind obedience to an authoritarian leader. So also are the freedoms that are commonplace in the modern world, including the freedom to think for ourselves, freedom to be different, freedom of belief, underpinned by the system of rights in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. And we all share in the benefits of these rights. Thus, being an adult learner links us to the huge process of human, community and social development, even if we play just a tiny role in the overall endeavour. ..."

6.

Extract from *Adult Learning in Groups* by Brid Connolly

# Galway fishing project wins ACE Awards

For the second year running EBS Building Society is supporting the awards with a generous donation of €20,000 in research grants for the winning entries.



Fergus Murphy (EBS),  
Inez Bailey (NALA),  
Minister Mary Hanafin,  
Theresa Gilligan  
(A B Sea, Galway)

A diverse range of projects supporting adult basic education, from across the country, were nominated for the awards. All projects focused on new and innovative approaches used to help adults improve their literacy and numeracy skills through ICT; sport; photography and family literacy. Five literacy projects received €2000 after being shortlisted by a panel of judges including Claudia Carroll (author), Ted Fleming (NUIM), Rob Marks (QUB), Kerry Lawless (NALA), Eibhlin Carr (EBS) and Dr Anne Jordan (WIT).

Claudia Carroll, bestselling author of *I Never Fancied Him Anyway* and actress said: "I am delighted to be involved with the 2008 ACE Awards. As a member of the judging panel it has been a real eye opener for me into the ideas and methods being delivered in the area of adult literacy tuition throughout the country. I am very proud to be announcing the five final projects that have been short-listed for this prestigious award and believe they represent the diversity and high-quality of the entries we received. I wish the participants the very best of luck in the final selection process and look forward to seeing what they do with the research grant that they have been awarded."

The winning project from Galway, **A B Sea**, was given €10,000 to further develop and publish their research which identifies the specific literacy-based needs of the fishing community. Findings from the project will be shared with other adult literacy practitioners and will help to influence good practice across the adult literacy sector.

The requirement by fishermen to complete courses which meet the standards set down by the International Maritime Organisation before they can legally engage in fishing can pose a series of challenges for those with literacy and numeracy difficulties. While the majority of people involved in the fishing industry do not have any literacy difficulties, experience shows that due to early school leaving, some people reached adulthood without the literacy and numeracy skills now required within the industry. Historically, fishing was a community venture, with entire families involved in the work in many different capacities. As a result, a high value was placed on practical skills, with less importance on formal education. Findings from Galway's *A B Sea* research show the need to develop a specific programme that would address the educational needs of early school leavers involved in fishing.

The winning Galway project is targeted directly at Ireland's fishermen to help support them in meeting the regulatory requirements of the impending EU Common Fisheries Policy. Another reason put forward in the Galway research for developing a specific course for fishermen is to address the gender imbalance in adult education in western coastal areas by encouraging greater male participation. It was also found that extra challenges exist for some fishermen in the Gaeltacht areas, where Irish is their first language.

# The four shortlisted nominees:



Minister Hanafin presents award to City of Cork Traveller Literacy Scheme

## City of Cork Traveller Literacy Scheme

The research carried out by the City of Cork Travellers’ Literacy Scheme targeted the 33 Vocational Educational Committees in the Republic of Ireland. A questionnaire was issued which looked at strategies used to promote educational opportunities within the Traveller community and specific educational courses that are aimed at Travellers. The research also sought to determine possible barriers to Travellers participating in local adult education and literacy opportunities. The results highlighted that:

- a high number of VECs interact with Traveller groups on a regular basis;
- a lack of awareness of Traveller culture within the centres that responded;
- adult education services were marketed to ALL adults;
- there is a need for cultural awareness training for staff within some VECs; and
- more resources are needed for Traveller education, particularly to facilitate Traveller men with craft skills to teach fellow Travellers in an educational setting.

It is recommended that further research could identify barriers to participation in adult education, determine how these barriers can be eradicated, and what support would be necessary to facilitate Traveller participation in the educational system.

## Fatima Literacy Project

The aim of this research project was to show the benefits of an intergenerational approach to literacy tuition. The research methodologies included carrying out an initial literacy review and relied on mainly quantitative methods, such surveys and focus groups (separate groups of both adults and children) which built on the results of the original surveys.

The findings of both the survey and focus groups showed that the majority of those surveyed saw the responsibility for education as resting with both the parents and the school.

The research explored the experience and effectiveness of the Fatima Literacy Project *Reading Buddy* system. The *Reading Buddy* programme was introduced to promote an intergenerational approach to community literacy in the area. Research has shown that this type of system is effective in improving the literacy skills of both the adult and the young person. It encourages parental involvement in their children’s education while also working on the parents’ own literacy skills. The project is unique in terms of the high level of involvement in the case of both the parents and the young people. The content of the service is tailored to meet the needs of the young person and reading material is sourced which is appropriate to the individual. The research found that the initiative has successfully highlighted the issue of literacy, reading and education in the local community and that it has been successful in involving children, young people and parents.



Minister Hanafin presents award to the Fatima Literacy Project

Continued overleaf 







Minister Hanafin presents award to Dublin Library Learning Bus

### Library Learning Bus

The aim of this research was to create a tool to assess the initial computer and general literacy skills of participants of *The Learning Bus*. This project was predominately an observational study of participants on a basic computer course run through the library.

The course included an introduction to:

- computers
- basic word,
- internet and
- using email.

The conclusions of the study found that the basic skills of participants at the end of the course had improved. It was found that most of the students worked well under supervision. However some of the participants subsequently found it difficult to work independently. Some of the students also lacked confidence in asking tutor for help. An interesting outcome of the research was that the students who relied most heavily on tutor support in class had the most positive learning outcomes and developments. The research concluded that similar organisations and other library branches would benefit from delivering these programs and that the approach is easily transferable to other settings.

### Soilse Maynooth NUI Return to Learning Course

The research carried out by Soilse was an exploratory study of the Return to Learning Course, with a focus on the application of functional context literacy. Through work on the programme, it became clear that the literacy needs of recovering drug addicts have been neglected.

The Return to Learning course was established to address the needs of these individuals and to aid their progression to further education. The research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches, including focus groups as well as providing a socio-economic profile of each of the course participants. The research found that the benefits for the participants included:

- an increase in confidence and self belief; and
- increased support from the team structure of the course.

Challenges included how to structure assignments, sourcing information, and how to support participants to become familiar with material that may be covered in further education. The group as a whole benefited from the course, with the majority of participants currently participating in third level education.



Minister Hanafin presents award to Soilse Maynooth NUI Return to Learning Course

# WoLLNET project

The WoLLNET project aims to research and develop a Workplace Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) Training Impact Evaluation Toolkit. It will be an online assessment tool used within companies. The project is co-ordinated by Skills for Work Ltd (UK) and NALA is an advisory partner, along with Germany, Romania, Austria, and the Czech Republic.

## Toolkit development & trialling

Trial One Toolkit development was completed last month. Version One of the Toolkit was demonstrated at a briefing at the Institute of Education in London with some major national UK employers and one small company. The briefing included an overview of how the trial will be conducted and the evaluation theory that underpins the Toolkit. Most of the day was spent assisting participants to get some hands-on practice, from setting up a basic survey through to authoring and responding to the special question types. Feedback from the briefing was that Trial participants were impressed at the functionality that the Toolkit offers and believe that training departments will find it useful, especially in the current economic climate.

They also had some insight into the breadth and depth of the Toolkit and the commitment that will be needed to gather data for robust evaluation reporting, especially at Levels 3 and 4.

Each advisory partner will be shown the Toolkit at our partner meeting in Germany in April. Then NALA will hold a consultation meeting with relevant employers, trade unions and other interested parties before the summer to give feedback into the development of the Toolkit.

## Education Facts

- Almost one in five secondary school students does not complete the Leaving Certificate.
- An additional 300,000 employees with third-level qualifications will be required in Ireland in the period up to 2010.
- By 2015, 45% of all jobs in Ireland will be for third-level graduates.
- In a typical year, 35% of Irish people engage in some form of work-related education or training. This ranks Ireland 8th in the EU (2003).
- Ireland is ranked 7th in the EU for participation in lifelong learning (2003).
- Less than half of all employees (48%) have participated in employer-sponsored training in the past two years

Source: National Workplace Survey (2004)

## Workforce Facts

- Between 2004 and 2010, Ireland will need approximately 420,000 additional workers, with 150,000 of these required from outside the State.
- The number of young people entering the workforce is falling as a result of the decrease in the national birth rate.
- The workforce is ageing: By 2015, 40% of our workers will be aged 45 or older.
- Irish workers generally retire at an older age than their EU counterparts. Of those members of the population aged 55 to 64, 47% are still in the workforce today, compared to 39% across the EU as a whole.
- Female participation in the workforce is 20% below that of men.
- Women on average earn 19% less than men, well below the EU average.
- The workforce-participation rate of mothers has increased, with 47.8% classified as 'economically active' in 2003.
- As many as 75% of the working-age population of people with disabilities in Ireland are unemployed.

Source: National Workplace Survey (2004)



National Adult Literacy Agency  
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Come  
join us...

NALA is an independent, member-based organisation committed to making sure people with literacy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs.



#### Members are encouraged to:

- Be a part of NALA's campaign to ensure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and access learning opportunities that meet their needs
- Make and vote on suggestions about NALA's work and direction (at NALA's Annual General Meeting)
- Send two delegates (group membership) or an individual to vote in person at general meetings (associate and overseas group members do not have this entitlement)
- Vote new members onto NALA's Committee and have the opportunity to put forward a representative for election on to NALA's Executive Committee.

#### Members are entitled to:

- Hear first about events, new publications and be given first preference with bookings
- Receive discounts for NALA publications, conferences and events
- Be sent a complimentary copy of certain NALA resources
- Be kept up to date on key policy decisions relating to the direction and work of NALA
- Receive NALA's Annual Report, Journal and Newsletter and information on developments in literacy.

Members also have access to an exclusive member's area on [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie).

#### Here members are able to:

- Access member-only information and news
- Discuss literacy issues with other members in a private forum
- Take part in member-only online surveys and polls
- Book events online before the general public and benefit from a 50% discount
- Take advantage of exclusive member discounts on specific resources
- Gain access to and share literacy resources with other members.

For more information about becoming a member of NALA call our freephone 1800 20 20 65 or log onto [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

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