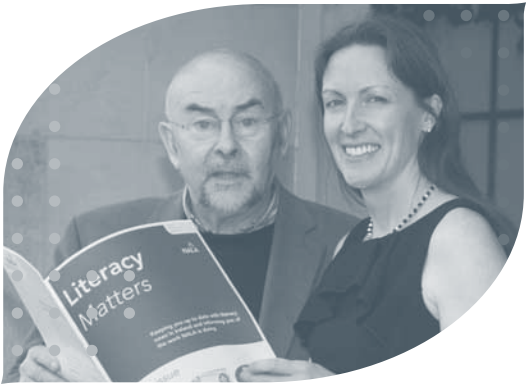




# Literacy *Matters*

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

## *In this issue*



Literacy skills to be made  
a national priority

Page 5



Don't miss  
'A Story With Me In It'

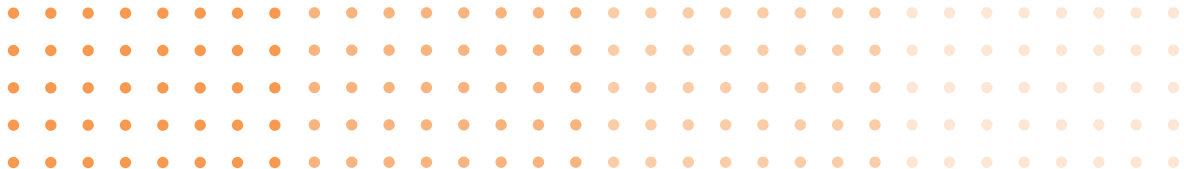
Page 8



Minister for Health  
commends leaders in  
health literacy

Page 14

*Plus lots more inside*



# Contents



Welcome	3
Partnership is key to success	4
Our policy priorities explained	6
Interview with Gretta Vaughan	7
A Story with Me in it	8
Resourcing ALOs in a time of change	10
New review of International Adult Literacy Policies	13
Winners at National Health Literacy Awards announced	14
NALA’s student development work under the microscope	16
Students in the media	17
Writeon update	18
NALA research and policy work	20
Basic skills for the fishing industry	21
Learning Corner	22



Meet NALA's new chairperson

Page 7



Resourcing ALOs in a time of change

Page 10



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Page 23



# Welcome

Hello and welcome to the May edition of Literacy Matters. Much has happened since our last edition, most notably the change of Government and new ministerial appointments in the Department of Education and Skills.

We were delighted that in his first week in office, Minister Ruairí Quinn gave so generously of his time at our AGM in March and spoke passionately about the literacy issue in Ireland. We were also pleased that the new Minister of State for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon addressed the Adult Literacy Organisers at their conference in Galway. We look forward to working with him in the future. Our work with other providers and agencies is a priority for us and you can read more about recent activity on this front on page 4.

NALA also had its own elections. Gretta Vaughan is now our new Chairperson. We have no doubt her many years of experience in adult literacy will greatly help us in our work. Gretta speaks to us on page 7.

Finally, this month sees the launch of 'A Story with Me in it' – our eleventh TV series in collaboration with RTÉ. It explores the lives of six people who face challenges with their literacy. As part of the programme, each participant is paired with a well known author to help them write their life story. Along the way, the series tackles the stigma associated with having difficulties with reading and writing. We are confident that it will be a huge hit with audiences around the country.

We hope you enjoy this edition. As always we welcome your feedback. You can email us at [info@nala.ie](mailto:info@nala.ie).



## Dates for your diary



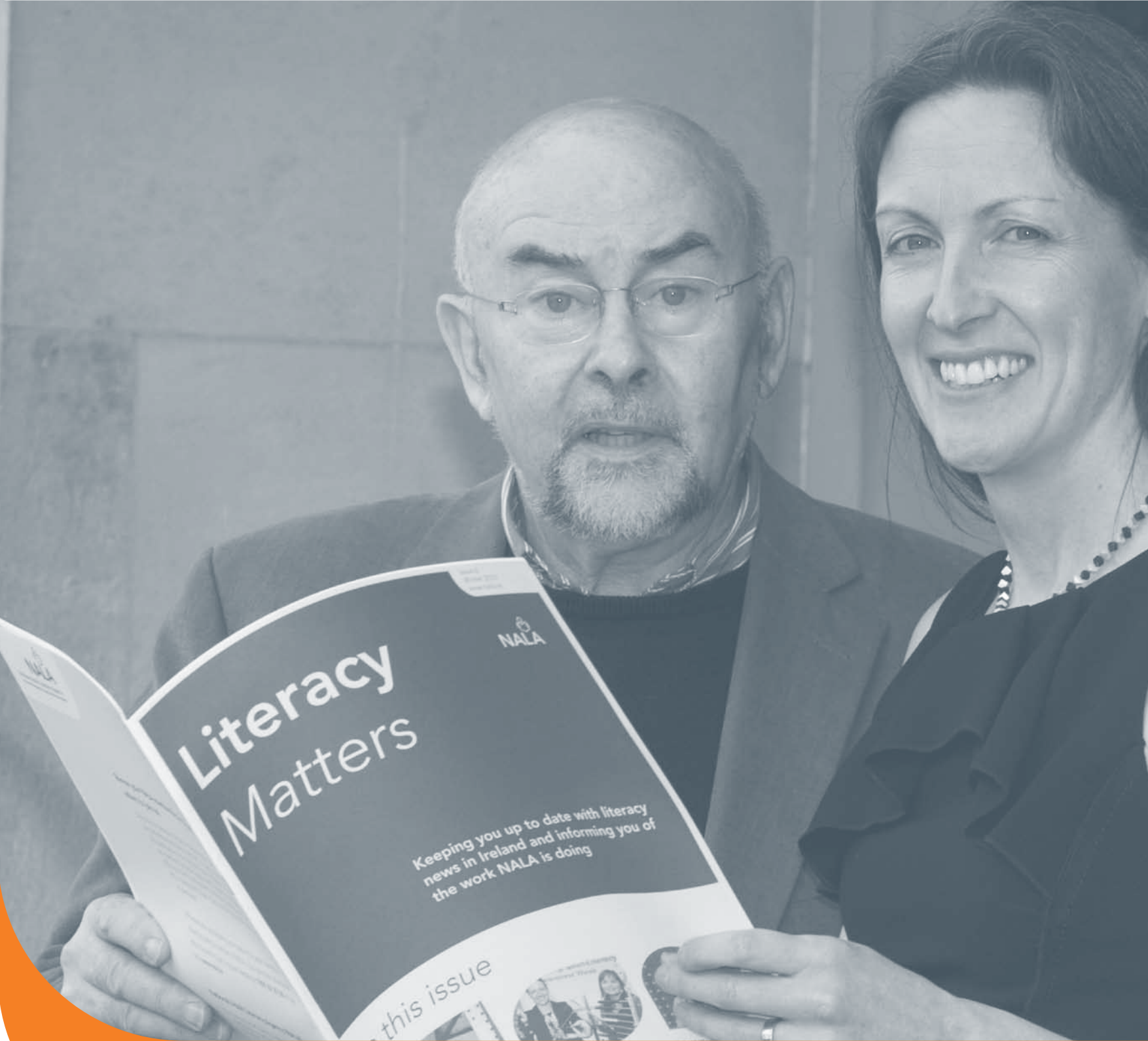
# Partnership is key to success

In January, NALA published its new strategic plan for the period 2011-2013. Our vision is that Ireland is a place where adult literacy is a valued right and where everyone can develop their literacy and take part more fully in society. The plan sets out our role as the voice of adult literacy in Ireland and with our partners, we want to influence policy and practice to support people in developing their literacy.

The first objective of our plan focuses on existing adult literacy policy and its full implementation. The second relates to the roll out of a plan to integrate literacy across further education and training programmes in Ireland. And the third objective underpinning both these objectives focuses on our continued advocacy work. We intend to achieve each of our three objectives by

using the strategies of partnership, the voices of people experiencing literacy issues, advocacy and research.

A great starting point to move our plan forward came in the form of a pre election campaign which focused on three messages:





- 1) integrating literacy and numeracy development into all publicly funded education and training
- 2) family literacy provides a win-win scenario for policy makers
- 3) flexible high quality adult education and training provision

NALA made contact with all of the political parties and awaited the publication of their election manifestoes. When published the relevant parts were published on our website and distributed to members.

With the formation of the new government came a new programme for government. We were delighted to see a strong commitment to adult literacy in two distinct areas of the document. Under *Labour Market Policy*, literacy and basic workplace skills are a national priority, with literacy training incorporated into wider variety of further education and training. Under *Lifelong Learning*, the government will address the widespread and persistent problem of adult literacy through the integration of literacy in vocational training and through community education. They will also expand training options for jobseekers across the VEC, further and higher education sectors to facilitate upskilling of the labour force. Literacy is to be made a national cause with the involvement of families and communities in programmes to strengthen literacy. This will be brought together in the publication of a national literacy strategy for children and young people.

These commitments were reiterated by Minister Ruairí Quinn when he addressed members at our recent AGM.

## Literacy skills to be made a national priority

On Saturday 26 March, Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn addressed delegates at NALA’s AGM in Dublin. Speaking at the event he reiterated the Government’s commitment to address adult literacy.

“For many people, attending a literacy class or a one-to-one session is not enough. People are looking for a variety of offerings and the latest research, reflected in the work of the OECD and the European Union Framework for Key Competencies, indicates we need a variety of skills. But if we accept that good levels of literacy achievement, in the broadest sense, are essential to a person’s development overall, it makes sense that we seek to integrate literacy, or what we can term core skills and key competencies, into the programmes that are available. We should try to make core skills and key competencies available flexibly, whether that is stand-alone, part of a part-time programme or part of a full-time programme. We have made progress on these fronts – in both the part-time and full-time programmes.

So, in terms of the Government’s position on adult literacy – it is recognised as a priority area within a broader suite of provision targeting the low qualified and the low skilled. We recognise that unemployment affects those with low skills more seriously than it might other groups. We recognise that into the future, for the jobs of tomorrow, people are going to require higher levels of skills and we need to focus on the low qualified and the low skilled if we are to succeed in that regard. We recognise the value of adult basic education for families, communities and for our country.”

*Excerpt from Minister Quinn’s speech.*



Minister for Education, Ruairí Quinn and Inez Bailey at the NALA AGM




# Our policy priorities explained

We believe that three initiatives can make a critical difference in tackling the adult literacy and numeracy challenge. They involve new thinking rather than new funding. They contribute to the reform agenda in public services, and are either cost neutral or involve minimal resourcing. These are integrating literacy, family literacy and flexible provision.

### 1. Integrating literacy and numeracy development into all publicly funded education and training

Integrating literacy means designing and delivering education and training programmes in a way that also develops literacy and numeracy at the same time. This will produce the “double duty dollar” effect, where the state pays for vocational training, but gets a second return – improved literacy and numeracy levels. International evidence clearly indicates the efficacy of the integrating literacy approach. Adopting an integrated approach is cost neutral, but it involves the prioritisation of continuous professional development and training budgets.


*What is required: The Department of Education and Skills and relevant providers deliver on the integration of literacy across further education and training programmes.*



### 2. Family literacy provides a win-win scenario to policy makers

Literacy standards in primary schools have not changed in 30 years. Two thirds of pupils in the most disadvantaged schools had results in the lowest 20% of national standardised tests, and performance declined as pupils progressed through the school. Family literacy programmes improve the literacy practices of parents and other family members and has a very significant knock on effect on school performance of children. This offers opportunities to break inter-generational cycles of under-achievement.


*What is required: Family literacy programmes are in place for all DEIS schools, involving the VEC adult literacy services.*



### 3. Flexible high quality adult education and training provision

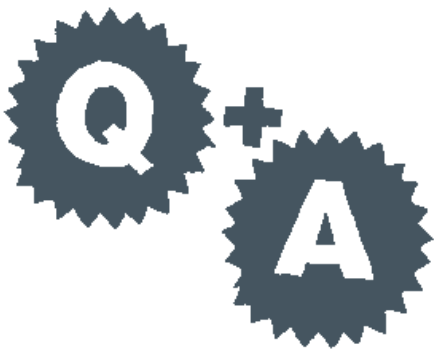
In spite of the expansion of adult literacy learning opportunities, less than 10% of adults with literacy needs are accessing literacy tuition. Critically, the typical literacy learner receives only 2 hours provision per week. It is essential to respond with targeted and flexible learning opportunities for people who wish to develop their literacy and numeracy. This means providing adult literacy and numeracy services across a wider range of settings, including the workplace, and by different modes, including distance and blended learning, intensive options and at weekends.

*What is required: Extend the range of quality learning opportunities prioritising people with less than a Level 4 qualification (below Leaving Certificate), within current resources.*



**Why not visit us on facebook and tell us what you think?**  
<http://www.facebook.com/nalaireland>





# The NALA interview

Gretta Vaughan from Limerick was elected Chairperson of NALA at our AGM in March. Gretta has worked in the sector for 25 years as an Adult Literacy Organiser in County Limerick. She brings a wealth of experience to her new role and here she tells us about her priorities as Chairperson.

## Q. What are your main priorities as Chairperson of NALA?

A. That the organisation continues to reflect the wishes of its membership as expressed through its democratic structure.

That we see an increase over the next few years in the numbers of learners and others joining the organisation as individual members thus ensuring they have a voice. The NALA student sub committee is currently going from strength to strength and it would be great to see learning networks being developed in literacy schemes throughout the country that would link in with that sub committee.



Gretta Vaughan, Chairperson, NALA

## Q. What do you think are the most important issues facing adult literacy in Ireland today?

- A. Even though the extent and type of provision have changed dramatically over the years the essential issues remain the same:
- » Ensuring that the learner-centred and learner-directed ethos are maintained,
  - » That front line practitioners are supported and listened to,
  - » That the increasingly bureaucratic nature of the system does not subvert the essence of what literacy provision is about, that is to say, supporting the learning and teaching environment of people with expressed literacy needs rather than the system putting its own needs first.

## Q. Who or what do you draw inspiration from?

A. What inspires me is the notion that life is short and I would like to think that in my journey through that I managed to make some kind of worthwhile contribution and in the process made life a bit easier for some of my fellow travellers.

### The NALA Executive

Gretta Vaughan, Chairperson  
Pat Ayton, Vice Chairperson  
Marian O’ Reilly, Honorary Treasurer

### Members

Pat Hallinan  
Paddy Naughton  
Nonnie Mc Gee  
Jane Smith  
Peggy Murphy  
Kevin O’ Duffy  
Breda Kavanagh  
Eimear Brophy  
Cora Rafter  
Cathy Powell



# Don't miss 'A Story with Me in it'

Monday at 7.30pm on RTÉ One

A Story with Me in it is our latest documentary series which teams up well known Irish authors Dermot Bolger, Sheila O' Flanagan, Alice Taylor, Peter Sheridan, Louis De Paor and Marita Conlon McKenna, with six adults who have struggled with writing throughout their lives.



Dermot Bolger helps Joe Begley remember the Dublin of their youth.



Alice Taylor works with Eileen Sheehan from Moyross, who writes about leaving school at 12, and the adventures that followed.



Sheila O' Flanagan works with Catherine Delaney from Portlaoise on a story about how running away at 15 lead to her proudest moment, the birth of her grandson, almost 25 years later.

Each programme focuses on one person's story, and the challenges they face to write that story down. With the help of a writer, they look back over their lives and re-examine the past. They visit places that evoke strong memories, and learn how to turn those thoughts and feelings into words on a page. With the stories complete, the learners must present them to the writer, and then to a tougher audience - their own families and friends.

It's an emotional journey for all of the participants and one that we believe will have a huge impact on people watching around the country.

One such participant is Susan Coyle, a 24 year old from Rathmines. Because she had dyslexia, she struggled at primary school and after a disastrous transition into second level, she ended up leaving after 1<sup>st</sup> year. After that, things weren't much better because she was unable to get work due to her age and because of her literacy issues.

She's a lovely, warm, chatty person and her main motivation for doing the TV programme and improving her literacy is so that she could help her seven year old daughter Nicole with her schoolwork. With the help and encouragement of Marita Conlon McKenna (author of Under the Hawthorn Tree), Susan writes a children's story that she reads to her daughter at the end of the episode.

There are five other fantastic authors and participants. **Alice Taylor** works with Eileen Sheehan from Moyross, who writes about leaving school at 12, and the adventures that followed. **Peter Sheridan** helps Paul Hughes from Blanchardstown whose vivid memory of killing a goose for Christmas shocks his grandson. **Sheila O' Flanagan** works with Catherine Delaney from Portlaoise on a story about how running away at 15 led to her proudest moment, the birth of her grandson, almost 25 years later. **Dermot Bolger** helps Joe Begley remember the Dublin of their youth. **Louis de Paor** encourages Eoin O' Turaisc from Connemara as he pens a poem for his Father.

While the declining rate of literacy levels in schools has been all over the media recently this is really a positive story and shows that there are always ways for people to get back into education. The link with the authors also emphasises that everyone has the right to read and to be read. The series starts on Monday 16th May at 7.30pm on RTÉ One.





Louis de Paor encourages Eoin O’ Turaisc from Connemara as he pens a poem for his Father.



Peter Sheridan helps Paul Hughes from Blanchardstown whose vivid memory of killing a goose for Christmas shocks his grandson.



Marita Conlon McKenna and Susan Coyle from Rathmines create a children’s story that’s easy for Susan to read to her daughter Nicole.

# Do you have a story to tell – why not share it?

We are organising a national story writing campaign to tie-in with the TV series. The aim of the campaign is to promote literacy and encourage literacy students to write a story or poem.

All you have to do is log onto [www.astorywithme.ie](http://www.astorywithme.ie) and send us your story or poem. All submitted stories will be read in advance by a team in NALA to ensure the content adheres to agreed terms and conditions. Once cleared, it will appear on the website for other people to read and recommend. While not a competition, outstanding stories, or those with the highest recommendations will be promoted by NALA.

This is great opportunity to showcase student writing so please send us your stories.



# Resourcing ALOs in a time of change

## Adult Literacy Organisers' Forum Galway, 14 and 15 April 2011

The 2011 Adult Literacy Organisers' Forum took place in The Carlton Hotel in Galway on 14th and 15th April 2011 and 59 ALOs attended. The theme for the forum was 'Resourcing ALOs in a time of change: Partnership, accreditation and student care'. The theme and programme were selected and developed by a team of ALOs and NALA staff.

### Day 1

Inez Bailey, director of NALA chaired day one of the forum and was delighted to welcome the Minister for Training and Skills at the Department of Education and Skills, Ciaran Cannon, who opened the forum. Minister Cannon said that in terms of the Government's position on adult literacy, it is recognised as a priority area within a broader suite of provision targeting the low qualified and the low skilled. He also said that the new Programme for Government contains commitments in relation to the improvement of adult literacy levels in two key areas. As part of its Labour Market Policy, the Government will make literacy and basic workplace skills a national priority, with literacy training incorporated into a wider variety of further education and training programmes. The Government will also address the widespread and persistent problem of adult literacy through the integration of literacy in vocational training and through community education under its lifelong learning policy.

Minister Cannon also launched a literature review of international adult literature policies, commissioned by NALA and carried out by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC), Institute of Education, London. The literature review focuses on research from 1990 to date and identifies specific policy developments and interventions from eight countries aimed at people with literacy and basic skills needs.

Maggie Feeley, literacy researcher and volunteer tutor gave a presentation on learning care. She discussed the danger of skills route being over-emphasised. She looked at how Paulo Freire in 'Pedagogy of the Heart', supported the drive for high productivity but suggested the benefits should be used to create a better system for all. Care marks a shift from neo-liberal, competitive model to solidarity and collective ethos, more concerned with diverse learning styles and the importance of well-being, justice and equality. She went on to outline how learning care describes the attitudes, emotions and actions, both paid and unpaid, that dynamically influence individuals and groups in learning literacy. We don't have boxes to tick for this but learners tell us this is important.

Maggie gave us her 'good' example of care in action when she spoke of a DEIS school where disadvantaged parents were able to say that they were happy with the school's interaction with them and made to feel very welcome at all times. They felt they had been well cared for!

Siobhan Magee, Further Education Support Officer with the Further Education Support Service and Martina Needham, Basic Education Co-ordinator with Co. Donegal VEC presented on an overview of the Common Awards System (CAS) and the relevant award structures at level 3. This included comparing the CAS with the previous award structures.



Maggie Feeley addressing the conference



Mary Mc Dermott, City of Dublin VEC with other Adult Literacy Organisers at the Forum.



Brid Connolly, Adult and Community Education Department, NUI Maynooth discussed balancing social practice and accreditation.

Brid outlined the case for accreditation including that fact that it marks certain life stages. For example, The Leaving Certificate recognises a person has attained a standard of skills and it helps us to develop beyond our expectations. Indeed, it may set standards that we would not have set ourselves.

She discussed the case against accreditation including an example of the baker who intuitively knows what to do and does a good job, but may not pass a test on it all. She outlined how accreditation is highly individualised, that it is about testing, rather than practice and that it changes education from being to having. The bureaucratisation involved can demand many resources.

Accreditation or not?

If it adds unnecessary stress, pressure and worry then it is probably not worth it. However, if it presents a challenge, then it is probably worth it.

Day 2

The second day of the ALO forum was chaired by Senator Fidelma Healy Eames, who took time out from her busy Seanad election campaign to give a brief background about herself and her interest in education. The Senator also highlighted the importance of making sure that ‘literacy is kept on the table at all levels’.

Helen Smith, personal and professional training consultant, spoke about the importance of staying passionate about the job, even though this may be difficult at times. This seemed to strike a chord with many members of the audience who felt that their role as Adult Literacy Organiser had evolved over the years with ever increasing demands. Helen spoke about the importance of looking after oneself and cautioned against the danger of getting burnt out in our profession.

Brendan Teeling, assistant director of the Library Council highlighted the value of creating and strengthening reading habits from an early age and spoke about the high numbers of people accessing the libraries. Brendan ended by talking about the new e-learning facility, a joint venture with FAS and the libraries.

Anne O’Keeffe, CEO Laois VEC and member of IVEA Task Group on Integrating Literacy spoke on effective partnership and integration of adult literacy services. She highlighted the need for partnership and collaboration especially in a time of reduced funding and resources. She spoke about the benefits of integrating literacy into other subject areas but emphasised that the students’ needs must be met at all times. She said that the Literacy Service is often called upon for literacy support for students attending other courses, when in many cases the level of the course is clearly too high for the learner.

John Buttery, co-ordinator of Social Programmes, Paul Partnership in Limerick again echoed the need for effective partnership. John gave a powerpoint presentation on partnership work and the need for all partners to evaluate project outcomes.

The conference came to a close with a question and answer session featuring a panel who included Colin Cummins (ALOA), Seamus Hempenstall (Department of Education and Skills), Inez Bailey (Director, NALA) and contributors to the morning session. Among the many questions posed to the panel was one directed to Seamus Hempenstall which asked whether or not funding was linked to student numbers. Mr Hempenstall assured the group that it is quality not quantity that the department requires.

Article written by Paul Carroll, Adult Literacy Organiser, Co. Dublin VEC and Kathleen Bennett, Adult Literacy Organiser, Laois VEC Adult Learning Centre.



ALOs at the Forum



Minister Ciaran Cannon addressed ALO Forum



Kieran Harrington, the Minister and acting CEO with City of Galway VEC, Tomás Mac Phaidín.





# Ever thought about what you should do with your used books?

## Why not send them to Better World Books.

This year NALA was delighted to become a chosen partner charity in Ireland for Better World Books.

Better World Books sells books online to raise money for leading literacy charities around the world. These charities then use the money to build schools, start libraries, provide scholarships and support learning around the world.

### So how does it work?

What is so brilliant is that every book they collect, whether from a partner (such as libraries, universities, corporations and community book collections) or from individuals, Better World Books will make every effort to sell the book and donate a portion of that sale to support literacy.

If you want to be a Better World Books partner, please write to [library@betterworldbooks.co.uk](mailto:library@betterworldbooks.co.uk). As an individual you can also send books, just email [info@betterworldbooks.co.uk](mailto:info@betterworldbooks.co.uk).

You see, when you purchase a book at [www.betterworldbooks.co.uk](http://www.betterworldbooks.co.uk), a portion of the revenue goes to the organisation that contributed the book, and to a non-profit literacy partner like NALA.

In addition to helping literacy, that book just avoided becoming landfill.

And Better World Books offers the opportunity to offset the carbon emissions from shipping your order. Every purchase you offset at [www.betterworldbooks.co.uk](http://www.betterworldbooks.co.uk) contributes to a tree being planted with the help of Tree Appeal.

The partnership with Better World Books is great news for NALA and everyone involved in literacy in Ireland. So if you can't donate why not buy your books from them and make a difference with your purchase? By using the code BWB4NALA on the checkout page, you can get 10% off two books purchased as well as supporting our partnership.

Since its founding in the US in 2003 the company has raised \$9.5 million globally for its non-profit literacy, library and college partners and diverted more than 70 million pounds of books from landfills. The company opened its UK operation in 2008 located in Scotland and has re-used or recycled over 1.5 million books in the UK so far, raising over £240,000 for local libraries and to promote global literacy.

It makes sense doesn't it? Every time they sell a book, one of their partner charities benefit. We look forward to working with them to support book reuse and adult literacy projects around the country.



  
**BetterWorldBooks.co.uk**

# New review of International Adult Literacy Policies

In the current environment, ways to address the adult literacy challenge need to be rooted in an evidence base and stay within current resourcing levels. In this context, the NRDC, Institute Of Education, London, carried out a literature review of international adult literacy policy for NALA.

The literature review focuses on research from 1990 to date and identifies specific policy developments and interventions aimed at people with literacy and basic skill needs from eight countries. As well as providing these national perspectives, the review addresses cross-cutting themes, before identifying key messages for adult literacy policy development in Ireland.

The following is a short selected summary of the findings, but the review is recommended reading for anyone interested in developing or implementing adult literacy policies.

The full literature review is available at <http://www.nala.ie/publications/literature-review-international-adult-literacy-policies>

## Policy approach

A clear lesson from countries around the world is that the field of adult literacy is an area of market failure. A strategic vision of adult literacy provision as a state-funded public service is required to meet the needs of modern knowledge societies. Policy documents and skills strategies at both national and European level highlight the growing importance of good adult literacy to economic, social and personal well-being.

There is limited evidence available of adult literacy initiatives producing meaningful short-term employment or earnings gains for learners. However, there is clear evidence that such initiatives do lead to improved employability skills, improved health, increased social capital and greater civic engagement.

## Country Analysis

In the US, the state of Massachusetts has been particularly successful at improving adult literacy provision. However, countries which have not maintained policy momentum have experienced significant stagnation of their adult literacy sectors. Canada and Australia are cited as examples. Some nations, such as England, have primarily emphasised upskilling and the potential for adult literacy provision to improve human capital. The Nordic countries, Scotland and New Zealand have placed emphasis on using adult literacy policy to encourage the mutually reinforcing development of human and social capital. Many adult literacy researchers argue that, particularly for disadvantaged learners, initiatives must strive to improve the latter if they want to improve the former.

## Some Key Findings

- » In all countries for which there is evidence, media campaigns are particularly important for attracting more disadvantaged participants and increasing participation.
- » Nordic countries have been particularly successful at creating a culture of adult learning which encourages high levels of participation by removing barriers to learning.
- » The review found evidence of very strong impacts produced by the embedding of adult literacy provision within Vocational Education and Training. In the UK, learners on fully embedded courses were 86% more likely to achieve literacy qualifications and 46% more likely to achieve numeracy qualifications, compared to those on non-embedded courses. Embedding literacy and numeracy also helped to improve vocational qualification rates.
- » Cross-country evidence suggests that short literacy courses, including in the workplace, lead to improved self-confidence and social engagement for learners. However, such courses do not tend to be long enough to yield quantifiable literacy gains for most participants. Research in the US suggests that the most successful courses in terms of producing such gains involve more than 100 hours of coursework.
- » Research has found that children experience long-term academic benefits when their parents participate in family literacy programmes which improve parents' ability to support their children's cognitive and non-cognitive development.

# Fourth annual Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards acknowledge leaders promoting clearer communications



Topical health areas of stroke, suicide, heart health, physical activity and ear care prevailed as category winners at the 2011 annual Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards in Dublin on Monday 9 May. Winners were chosen in their respective categories because of the clear and accessible way in which they communicated important health messages.

Selected from over 100 entries by a high profile judging panel the winning entries were;

- » **The Irish Heart Foundation’s F.A.S.T stroke awareness campaign** - The Irish Heart Foundation used the acronym F.A.S.T (Face, Arms, Speech and Time to call 999) to help people remember the main warning signs of stroke and act by calling the emergency services. This campaign sought to tackle the frightening lack of awareness around Ireland’s third biggest killer.
- » **The Irish Examiner’s ‘Let’s Talk Suicide’ campaign** - The Irish Examiner sought to put a human face on the national crisis that suicide now represents in their ‘Let’s Talk Suicide’ campaign. The campaign booklet focused on interviews with people affected by suicide giving them an opportunity to tell their stories and share their pain, frustration and hope with input from key support groups and associations involved in suicide prevention and suicide advice, support and information.
- » **The HSE Dublin North East’s ‘Be Active After School Activity Programme’** – This initiative comprises a 30 week structured activity programme which introduces

parents and children aged 7-8 years to a variety of activities to sustain positive physical activity habits as children grow up. There are currently 1,200 children participating in the programme with 300 parent leaders and 130 teacher leaders volunteering their time to facilitate the sessions.

- » **The HSE South Cardiac Rehabilitation Working Group’s ‘Take Heart’ programme** – This programme comprises a booklet titled ‘Take Heart’ which is used by patients before, during and after they have a heart operation. The booklet helps patients understand their diagnosis and make appropriate choices regarding their lifestyle following heart surgery.
- » **The Health Centre, Athenry, Galway’s ear care and ear wax information programme** – This programme comprises an information leaflet about ear care which is one of the reasons why people visit a GP or a practice nurse. Using Plain English, the leaflet provides information in an easy to understand and engaging way and following distribution of the leaflet, the practice carried out an audit which showed a reduction in the number of patients coming back for repeat ear related appointments.



Pictured were Emer Smyth, Be Active After School Activity Programme, HSE North East, Dr Nazih Eldin, Head of Health Promotion, HSE North East and Eileen McEvoy, Be Active After School Activity Programme HSE North East.



Speaking at the awards ceremony, Inez Bailey, Director of NALA said ‘Around 1 in 4 adults in Ireland will have difficulty fully understanding information presented to them in health care settings. Health literacy includes the ability to understand instructions on medication packs and bottles, appointment slips, medical education materials, doctor’s directions and consent forms, and the ability to negotiate complex health care systems. It requires a complex group of reading, listening, analytical, and decision-making skills, and the ability to apply these skills to health situations. As part of NALA’s work to advance health literacy, the MSD Crystal Clear awards play a pivotal role in highlighting the good practice amongst health practitioners in this area.’

Ms Ciara O’Rourke, External Affairs Director, MSD and member of the judging panel said, ‘Research shows that many people struggle to read, understand and make important decisions in a healthcare environment. Since the Crystal Clear Health Literacy Awards were first launched in 2008, we have received over 450 entries from receptionists in GP surgeries, nurses, hospital catering managers, pharmacists, doctors and patient advocates who are all intent on making health communications clearer to those reading them and trying to understand them. All of these communications initiatives are endeavouring to put the patient first and enabling them to make more informed decisions about their health.’

Also speaking at the awards ceremony Dr Gerardine Doyle from UCD Business School and Chairperson of the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards Judging Panel said ‘I am delighted to see the new entries

each year highlight the inspiring efforts being made by health professionals from all parts of the service to improve the health literacy of their patient group. We all play an important part in improving health literacy by communicating more clearly and making information and services more accessible to the general public. The judges were impressed by the novel approach all of those shortlisted took to incorporate health literacy into their daily work. Even the smallest changes can make the biggest difference and we hope that this good work will continue to develop amongst all those working and communicating in the healthcare sector. For the future we need to develop national goals and strategies that will improve health literacy in the Irish population.’

Further information on health literacy and the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards can be found at [www.healthliteracy.ie](http://www.healthliteracy.ie).



Winner, John O’Mahony of The Examiner’s ‘Let’s Talk Suicide’ campaign and the Minister for Health, Dr James Reilly.



# ESOL Conference 2011

The impact of social and personal factors on language and literacy acquisition: Motivation, engagement, learner identities and aspirations

Thursday 9 June 2011

All Hallows College, Grace Park Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9

### Keynote speakers:

- » Jane Allemanno, Teacher educator, Institute of Education, University of London
- » Dr Lorna Carson, Lecturer in Applied Linguistics, Trinity College Dublin
- » Dee Doyle, ESOL and Socialisation Tutor with the Adult Refugee Programme, Co. Dublin VEC

### 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?

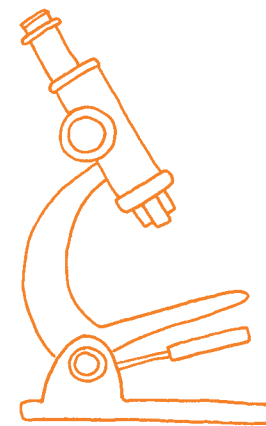
This is an event to highlight the wider issues in ESOL, including the impact of social and personal factors on language and literacy acquisition and the benefits of learner autonomy to ESOL students.

### Cost

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

You can download a booking form on <http://www.nala.ie/news/nala-esol-conference-2011> or call 01 4127918 for more information.

# NALA's student development work under the microscope



This aspect of our work has never before been subject to such an external review process. It was timely in that it was done while we were preparing our new strategic plan and looking for evidence of our effectiveness and greater clarity on priority actions for our future work with students.

## What did the impact study involve?

The research was conducted by an external consultant, Dr Wendy Cox. It was intensive and involved interviews with NALA staff and an Executive member, surveying a sample of adult literacy organisers and students on the NALA Student Sub-Committee, group discussions with members of this committee, case studies, observation of student sub-committee meetings and detailed study of our relevant reports, minutes and documents. This process was very useful in providing greater levels of objectivity in that students and others participating in the research were more open about critiquing our work when speaking to an external researcher.

## What the study found

The overall findings from the research were positive and impact was looked at on 3 different groups of people – the students themselves; the local VEC adult literacy services; NALA and its thinking and policy-making processes. In Dr. Cox's own words the findings:

- » 'demonstrate the impressive quantity and quality of NALA's student development work during the period. They also show the consistent way NALA has put its guiding principles into practice, particularly in relation to the Student Subcommittee and its responsibilities.'

Dr. Cox's findings on the impact of specific areas of our student development work were also mainly positive but had of course suggestions for improvement.

### 1. Students' representation on NALA's Executive Committee

*Impact:* From the information available it seems that there are benefits for NALA to have student representation at this level. A way to collect more evidence of the 'specific difference their presence makes' would be useful.

### 2. NALA's Student Sub-Committee

*Impact:* Sub-Committee Members have achieved 'excellent results as a group' raising student issues and feeding them back to NALA. They are now primed to take on more responsibility.

### 3. NALA Student Development Days and other special events for students

*Impact:* Successful in terms of confidence building and creating space for students to meet other students, NALA and other national and local organisations. Many local benefits were also identified. More is needed on promoting students' rights and identifying their issues at these events.

### 4. NALA Student Development Fund

*Impact:* Increased students confidence and awareness of literacy related issues. Also provides valuable information to NALA. More longer term impacts of this fund need to be gauged.

### 5. NALA's support for student involvement in the Evolving Quality Framework (EQF) for Adult Basic Education

*Impact:* Positive impact on VEC adult literacy local services, as well as on those students involved in the EQF, from the information available.

### 6. Student involvement in NALA's promotion and lobbying work

*Impact:* Good, particularly the student staffing of the NALA stand at the Ploughing Championships and direct lobbying.

From the report we have developed priority actions. These will help us determine future student development activity and plans. These include:

- » an in-house evaluation of students' contribution on NALA's Executive.
- » further support of the NALA's Student Sub-Committee's development and activities.
- » support of more student-led work.
- » continued provision of the Student Development Fund where direct student feedback will be facilitated and encouraged.
- » better tracking and recording of our student development work and evidence of impact,
- » identifying and linking in more with other structures for learner feedback and representation, including AONTAS and FETAC processes.

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the impact study. You can download Dr. Cox's report at <http://www.nala.ie/publications/external-impact-study-nala%E2%80%99s-student-development-work>

We welcome any comments or responses to the report and to this article. Email Claire O'Riordan at [coriordan@nala.ie](mailto:coriordan@nala.ie) or call Claire on 01 412 7922

# Students in the media

Well done to all the learners who shared their stories with the media this Spring and helped raise awareness of literacy services in Ireland.



Olive Phelan was interviewed at her home by ARTE TV, a French TV channel.

Special thanks to PJ Byrne who spoke at length to journalist Marie Kierans for a feature in the Irish Daily Mirror. The 27 year old Wexford man left school at the age of 15 when he secured a job during the building boom. He explained: “There were lots of jobs out there and I couldn’t wait to get out of school. When I was 13 I ended up going to a street festival instead of the entrance exam for secondary school, that’s where my priorities were at the time.”

However circumstances changed in 2006. “The boom was coming to an end and I was looking for a career change,” he said. “I knew I had to address my literacy problem and that I needed to retrain.” He admitted that taking that first crucial step wasn’t easy. He said he was very nervous and since that first phone call he hasn’t looked back. He is now attending the Waterford Institute of Technology and studying for a higher certificate in Community Education and Development.

Chris Potts from Dublin shared his story on the Daily Show and Spirit FM. Ten years ago he decided to go back to education to improve his literacy skills. He arranged to do one-to-one tuition in the adult literacy centre in Dun Laoghaire VEC but within two months was getting frustrated that he wasn’t improving. He felt like he had a real block to learning as he couldn’t hear or see the difference between certain words. For example, ‘there’ and ‘where’ sounded and looked exactly the same to him so he couldn’t read or write them properly.

It was only when he was doing a computer course in the same centre that things started to change for him. He had just told the tutor how much he enjoyed painting and photography, and she said he was probably a visual learner. She showed him how to make words three dimensional on the computer and then everything just clicked for him. His tutor also started spelling out words with plasticine on the table and again he found it much easier to see and understand the words.

From that moment on, Chris says not only did his literacy improve dramatically, but his confidence also went from strength to strength. For the first time ever he started telling family and friends about his difficulty and it was like a huge burden had been lifted from him. There was no shame or stigma anymore. Also, the more people he told, the more people told him that they had similar problems reading and writing.

That was ten years ago and now he’s actually a literacy tutor himself. He’s been tutoring a student for three years and he says he loves it – he said he can relate best to students because he knows how hard it is to take that first step.

Also, well done to Bridie Daly for her interview on the Ryan Tubridy radio show and Olive Phelan who did an interview with the Irish Daily Mirror and French TV station ARTE TV. Thanks also to all the learners and tutors in the Dublin Adult Learning Centre in Mountjoy Square who allowed the reporter and cameraman from ARTE TV to film them in April.





# Writeon update

www.writeon.ie  
– a tutor’s perspective



Elaine Clifford



Tom O'Mara



Learning in Co. Meath VEC

NALA’s Distance Learning Co-Ordinator, Tom O’ Mara talked to two tutors, Elaine Clifford and Elizabeth Crossan about their experience in using the site with learners. Elaine tutors with Kerry Education Service and is also a NALA Distance Learning Tutor. Elizabeth works as a tutor with County Meath VEC and has used [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) in blended learning contexts with learners.

**TOM:** Firstly, can you describe the first time you used [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) – who your learners were and how it worked?

**ELAINE:** I attended one of your training sessions in Cork and immediately set myself up with an account. I found the site easy to use but there was lots of decisions and information to provide initially, for example, ‘What major or minor awards did I want to study?’ Once I chose a particular award and

learning began, I enjoyed my e-learning experience much more.

The first time I used [writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) website with a learner was extremely challenging. The learner was studying Computer Literacy at Level 3. He was a migrant, had excellent spoken English but sometimes he did not understand the ‘language’ used in the various sections. However, the learner found the website fantastic; it provided him with an opportunity to learn

at his own pace and he enjoyed the freedom to repeat the various learning sections as many times as he wanted to.

I advised the learner to make notes when he was using the website and to highlight any words/phrases that he was unsure of.

**ELIZABETH:** The first time I used [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) was in early 2009. The learners involved wanted to improve their literacy and numeracy

skills, get a qualification and up-skill in the area of technology. The learners were a group of men and women with low literacy levels who were taking part in an ITABE (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education) programme.

Blended learning was integrated into the classroom situation in two stages beginning with tutor-led learning activities followed by writeon.ie assessment. Firstly, the learners followed instructions in class, carried out practical tasks and sought clarification as and when necessary. Secondly, when they had sufficient practice, understanding and expertise in the various subjects, they went on to [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie), got a password and did the self-paced assessments for the ‘using technology’ and ‘computer skills’ modules.

If the assessments highlighted that there were areas that needed further attention, then the learner was given one-to-one reinforcement by me before attempting the assessments again. When the learner had successfully completed their assessments they input their own information into an online form, which they printed off and signed, and this was later sent to NALA on their behalf.

**TOM:** Did you see any advantages to using writeon.ie with learners?

**ELIZABETH:** Yes, I could see that [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) provided numerous advantages for learners. The most significant one was that the assessment was self-paced – the learner could do it at their own speed, in their own time, and independently because sound was built into the program which meant they could use headphones if they encountered any words on the screen that were new to them. The learners enjoyed being tested about their new IT awareness and [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) provided immediate and private feedback about their knowledge.

Also, if the assessment highlighted gaps in knowledge, then the learner could do an in-depth assessment of a particular topic. This was good for confidence building for the learner, and provided further positive reinforcement of skills learned.

**ELAINE:** Yes, for example, learners had an opportunity to obtain a

recognised qualification from the comfort of their own homes and without any expense.

**TOM:** What are the differences for both you and learners in using writeon.ie versus tuition over the phone or one to one?

**ELAINE:** For learners, I think there are a number of differences. Firstly, I would say writeon.ie is not for all learners. For those using the website on their own, without support, a good level of literacy and IT skills are essential.

For the learners using the site, they enjoy having control over their own learning and viewing their progress online. They enjoy seeing the various minor awards which make up a major award. This gives them encouragement to complete more than one minor award and work towards a major award.

From a tutor’s perspective I would strongly recommend writeon.ie as a teaching resource to validate learning. It is a dream to use with learners working towards FETAC certification and completes all administration tasks required for various minor/major awards. I believe that writeon.ie compliments all types of learning situations– telephone support, one to one, and/ or group tutoring.

**TOM:** How did your learners find using the site?

**ELIZABETH:** The learners found using the site was very enjoyable and were delighted to get immediate feedback. At other times, they found it frustrating when they did not get a question correct and had to complete all the questions in a topic again before they could re-take the post-assessment. However, this did teach them to slow down, look for assistance if necessary

and reflect before committing themselves during the post-assessment. From my point of view, as the tutor, extra reinforcement for learners is no harm as it helps with memory and cognitive processes.

**TOM:** What would you say to people considering using writeon.ie in the future?

**ELAINE:** Writeon.ie is a fun, free, and a fruitful way of learning. For learners and tutors - I would say give it a go and try out this innovative learning experience – you won’t regret it. Make sure you read the Need help? section of the website before you set up a learning account as this provides invaluable information about the various awards you can study towards.

For tutors in particular, use it as a teaching resource to validate learning. Use it as an aid to preparing your own lesson plans. Use it a fun way to introduce ICT to a group of literacy learners.

**ELIZABETH:** With writeon.ie available on the internet, and growing to include more core modules, it is a very good interactive assessment tool that I would recommend to both tutors and learners. The assessment involves various activities from answering questions to doing crosswords and offers experiences for learners which help focus attention, and provides opportunities for reasoning and solving problems. Finally, writeon.ie provides a worthwhile practical tool to help learners achieve their goals to become confident, self-directed independent learners.

**Call us on Freephone 1800 20 20 65 or email [distance@nala.ie](mailto:distance@nala.ie) for more information on [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie).**

- » [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) contains over 8,000 interactive exercises.
- » You can apply for 12 Level 2 and 11 Level 3 minor awards through [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie).
- » At the start of May 2011, there were 13,770 learning accounts set up on [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie).
- » By the end of January 2011, 417 learners had received 1,938 minor awards at levels 2 and 3.
- » So far, 42 different local literacy centres have used [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) to support accreditation of learners in blended learning contexts.



# Update from the NALA research team

During the lifetime of our last strategic plan 2007-2010 NALA completed research into identifying and reducing barriers to participation in adult literacy and numeracy tuition. This resulted in the publication of a briefing paper that summarised the research findings and recommendations and provided top tips on how to reduce barriers to participation in literacy tuition. Alongside this we also carried out research in the area of family literacy. As part of the research process we consulted with parents, practitioners and learners to explore their views on family literacy and to present their recommendations on how to improve family literacy policy and practice. Recommendations from the research were included in our submission to the national literacy strategy *‘Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People: A draft plan to improve literacy and numeracy in schools.’*

We will shortly be producing a Briefing Paper on the family literacy research findings and based on the recommendations from the research we will be developing a family literacy page on [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) website. We will keep you updated on developments in relation to this.

## New research projects

Our current strategic plan 2011 – 2013 has identified integrating literacy as a core theme that will inform our research work. For example objective 2 of the Strategic Plan 2010 – 2013 identifies the need to develop better literacy and numeracy learning opportunities through:

- » An integrated learning approach, and
- » Other effective methods such as distance and blended learning.

To support this objective NALA needs to know more about where, when, and how integrating literacy takes place in adult education and training in Ireland. This will be the focus of our new research projects and will help us to identify and document learning and training situations where integrating literacy happens.

The new strategic plan also places a strong emphasis on working in collaboration with our partners – literacy learners, practitioners, the DES, the IVEA, AONTAS and FÁS. The first step in the consultation process will be to inform our partners of our research work and to invite them to participate in the process. This research process is about to begin, so expect to hear from us over the coming weeks. We look forward to working with you all in the future and to sharing with you the findings from our studies.

All of our research reports are available to download free from the NALA website.

## A message from Helen Ryan, Policy Officer, NALA

Literacy and numeracy are essential lifelong learning throughout life events. We need these basic skills in all walks of life – work, family, health, education, citizenship, community, consumer and personal fulfilment.

Our new Strategic Plan has an objective to ensure that national adult literacy policy priorities are implemented. We will do this by carrying out a campaign highlighting what adult literacy means for wider social and economic development in Ireland to persuade politicians and policy makers to invest adequate resources.

As part of this campaign we are currently engaging in a process with key stakeholders to discuss their approach to the issue of adult literacy. This involves:

1. Engaging with and building solidarity with key stakeholders;
2. Charting the development of their policy and practice in adult literacy; and
3. Documenting and publishing these findings.



Helen Ryan

We are meeting with employer organisations, trade unions, community and voluntary organisations, public sector and research bodies about how their organisation deals with adult literacy. Some questions that we are discussing with them include:

- » Is adult literacy considered and referred to in your organisations policies?
- » What literacy-friendly policies do you have in your organisation?
- » How do you deliver your services to take into account adults with literacy needs?
- » How do you ensure people with literacy needs access your services fully?
- » Do you encourage people to engage in learning?

Following discussions with stakeholders we will collate organisations’ approaches to adult literacy which will highlight the issue from different angles.



# Basic skills for the fishing industry

Audrey Byrne and Teresa Gilligan from West Galway Adult Learning Centre recently completed research on the specific educational needs of the fishing community. The research was funded by EBS Building Society through the ACE Awards.



The aim of this research was to identify the specific literacy-based needs of the fishing community. Once these needs were established, two pilot programmes were delivered and evaluated and the information collected was used in the development of a fishing-related certificate in general learning programme to comply with FETAC Level 2. Called **A B Sea**, the programme was designed to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence of the participants to a level that would enable them to progress to the mainstream courses they are required to complete.

Historically, fishing was a community venture, with entire families, including children of school going age, involved in the work in many different capacities. As a result, a high value was placed on practical skills, with less importance placed on formal education. While the majority of people involved in the fishing industry do not experience any literacy difficulties, experience shows that due to early school leaving, some reached adulthood without adequate literacy and numeracy skills for the increasingly high standard that is now required. It is envisaged that A B-Sea would also contribute to the development of a more positive attitude towards education and learning in the community.

The research brought to light a number of issues:

- » A need for themed literacy courses for people working in the fishing industry to be established.
- » The programme should include a comprehensive section on computer literacy and technology in the fishing industry, as these were areas identified by the research as beneficial both personally and professionally.
- » Careful marketing of a programme aimed at fishermen is vital. Focussing on skills based learning rather than literacy problems would address the social stigma of attending literacy classes while increasing motivation to attend.

- » It is recommended that the already well established partnership between the VEC and BIM be extended to include the AB-Sea Programme. While the programme can be offered as a full FETAC certificate at level 2, it also has the potential to be run as a support service alongside general fishing related training modules. This would enable the literacy practitioner to provide support and assistance to fishermen who are attending training courses. This would eliminate the difficulties of seeking help by visiting a local adult literacy centre, as the AB-Sea programme would be offered on-site in tandem with other training, such as Safety at Sea, VHF Radio License, etc. Offering the service in such a way also maximizes the potential for recruitment of students who would benefit most from the programme.
- » Given the genuine need identified for the AB-Sea programme, it is recommended that Resource staff in Adult Learning Schemes in coastal areas should dedicate specific time to continual research and development of materials for the fishing industry, to enable fishermen to keep up to-date with increasing skills demanded by the industry.
- » The programme should be delivered as an Intensive course, such as the Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education Programme (ITABE) which allows for six hours tuition per week. This will help to maintain motivation and enthusiasm as well as earlier progression to other fishing related courses.
- » The success of the pilot programme in providing a deeper level of understanding of the educational needs and interests of the participants highlights the need for student input in determining authentic learning opportunities and course content. Participants expressed positive feedback in relation to being consulted about their own learning. The development of a student's forum would provide a space for their voices to be heard and would greatly enhance the provision of a positive, authentic and relevant adult literacy service within each unique community.

You can read the full research report at <http://www.nala.ie/publications/ab-sea-basic-skills-fishing-industry>



# Learning Corner

## Filling in forms

Do you like filling out forms? Lots of people don't! The most important thing when filling out a form is to write **CLEARLY**. Forms often ask you to use **BLOCK CAPITALS**. This means using **CAPITALS** and not joining any letters.

If there are boxes on the form, put one letter or number in each box.

### Top 5 tips for form filling:

- 1. Take two copies of the form, if you can. Use one to practise.
- 2. Always read the instructions before filling out a form.
- 3. Use a blue or black biro.
- 4. Write clearly and slowly.
- 5. Write your signature in your own handwriting style.

### Writing your name or signature

Your signature is your name written in your own handwriting. Your signature should always be in your own unique style.

Never use block capitals to write your signature.

Write your signature here:

## Word Puzzle

Read the clues and find the answer from the letters in the word 'signature'.

S	I	G	N	A	T	U	R	E
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

**Hint:** The number after the clue tells you how many letters are in the answer.

- 1. A hot drink made with leaves in boiling water. (3)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. We inhale this. (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. A strong desire or impulse. (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Looks after patients. (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. A series of railway carriages or wagons. (5)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6. A large solitary cat with a yellow-brown coat striped with black. (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Can you make any more words?

### Answers:

1. Tea; 2. Air; 3. Urge; 4. Nurse; 5. Train; 6. Tiger

## Word Puzzle: Anagrams

An anagram is a word formed by rearranging the letters given.

Unscramble the letters to find these capital cities. A clue is given for each city.

### The first one is done for you.

Clues	Anagram	Answer
1. The Big Apple	enw royk	New York
2. The city of love	ripas	_____
3. Where you'll find Big Ben	onolnd	_____
4. The Irish capital	bundil	_____
5. Rhymes with Mussels	lessbrus	_____
6. City of windmills	madstrema	_____

### Answers:

1. New York; 2. Paris; 3. London; 4. Dublin; 5. Brussels 6. Amsterdam



# Have you seen our facebook page?

Facebook is a great way to know what's going on in NALA and what's being said about literacy in Ireland and abroad. You can ask us questions or comment on developments in the sector. It's perfect for keeping in touch and only takes a minute.

Come join us at <http://www.facebook.com/nalaireland>





## Simply Put.

## There are times when plain English works best

### Writing and design tips to make your documents easy to read

1. Think of the person you are writing to and why.
2. Be personal - don't be afraid to use 'we' for your organisation and 'you' for the reader.
3. Keep it simple and define any essential jargon and abbreviations.
4. Use a clear font such as Arial or Verdana and use 12 point as standard.
5. Keep sentences to an average of 15 to 20 words.

More tips at [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie)