

Literacy Matters



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

In this issue



'A story with me in it'
is back on RTÉ

Page 4



Roma Families Learning
Project in Clare

Page 6



Students lobby
for learning

Page 9

Plus lots more inside



Contents



Welcome	3
‘A story with me in it’ is back on RTÉ ONE!	4
The story of the Roma families learning project in Clare	6
Professional qualifications for the adult literacy service – a research paper	8
Students lobby for learning	9
What is NALA doing in 2012?	10
SOLAS made easy	11
New campaign to support parents support children’s literacy	12
€500 grant available from NALA and Better World Books	13
Time to talk to doctors	14
Integrating literacy at North Wall CTC	15
Literacy research update	16
Why plain English makes sense	18
What is Twitter?	19
Tutor’s corner – teaching numeracy	20
Students take centre stage in Dublin	22

Welcome

This Literacy Matters comes to you at a time of the biggest reform of the further education and training sector, and literacy and numeracy are centre stage. Literacy and numeracy are seen as necessary components for learning for life and employability for life. While change brings great opportunity for the sector, it also makes some people anxious about what these changes will mean for them.

Tutors are particularly concerned about their future. Read more about their concerns in a very interesting article from Eilis Roche, Adult Literacy Organiser in Cork (page 8). In this time of change, learners are tutors' best allies. If learners are given the space to speak, they will praise tutors' work and want to see them happily settled within their workplace.

Learners' voices need to be at the table where decisions are now being made about the further education and training sector. New structures at local level namely the LETBs should have a seat for an adult learner, similar to that which exists for other learners in higher education. NALA is striving to achieve this and would welcome the support of members in making this happen.

In this edition, we also have interesting articles, such as the great work being done on the Roma Families Learning Project in Clare (page 6) and the participants in our first episode of our 2012 TV programme A Story with Me in it (page 4). Remember to tune into RTÉ ONE on Monday 30 April for the first episode!

We hope you enjoy this edition and please contact us if you have news that you would like us to include in our next edition. You can email us at media@nala.ie



Inez Bailey,
Director

Dates for your diary



A story with me in it is back!



After last year’s success, ‘A story with me in it’ is back on our screens this April with six new participants from around the country.

Similar to last year, each programme will focus on one person’s story, and the challenges they face to write that story down. With the help of a writer, they will have to look back over their lives and re-examine the past. They will visit places that evoke strong memories, and learn how to turn thoughts and emotions into words on a page. With the stories complete, the learners at the end of the show must read them aloud to the writer and then to a tougher audience - their own families and friends.

A story with me in it is a fresh, honest, often moving and insightful look at how people cope with having to learn the basic skills many of us take for granted. There are six episodes in total and you can watch them every Monday at 7.30pm on RTÉ One from the 30 April.

In this article you can read about this year’s participants. We thank them wholeheartedly for sharing their stories with the nation and have no doubt that they will encourage many people watching to improve their literacy and maybe even write a story.

We also thank the writers, Belinda McKeon, Dermot Healy, Kate Thompson, Sarah Webb, Colin Bateman and Kate Kerrigan, for giving so generously of their time. The writer/ learner relationship has proven to be very rewarding and challenging for both. It creates a thorough record, in a very powerful way, of what it means to live with literacy difficulties.

Episode 1: Monday 30 April

Writer Kate Thompson, once of Glenroe and Fair City, who recently revealed her ongoing treatment for cancer, teams up with Noel Phelan from Kilkenny to write his story. Noel’s health too has affected his life dramatically and in what turns out to be an emotional journey for them both, Noel writes a powerful letter to his daughters who are away in New Zealand – something he has never done before.

Noel says he got through life not being really able to read and write on a wing and a prayer. If somebody handed him a form he handed it straight back – and said “no, I can’t”. Like many people, work always got in the way of Noel returning to education. When he could no longer work he thought it was the perfect time to apply himself to learning.

Noel watched last year’s programme and motivated by what he saw, he took down the number for NALA when it appeared on the programme. He signed up for distance learning with NALA and initially was tutored through Skype. The tutor suggested that he may benefit more from attending classes in Word Aid in Kilkenny and now he attends every Tuesday for two hours and finds them brilliant.

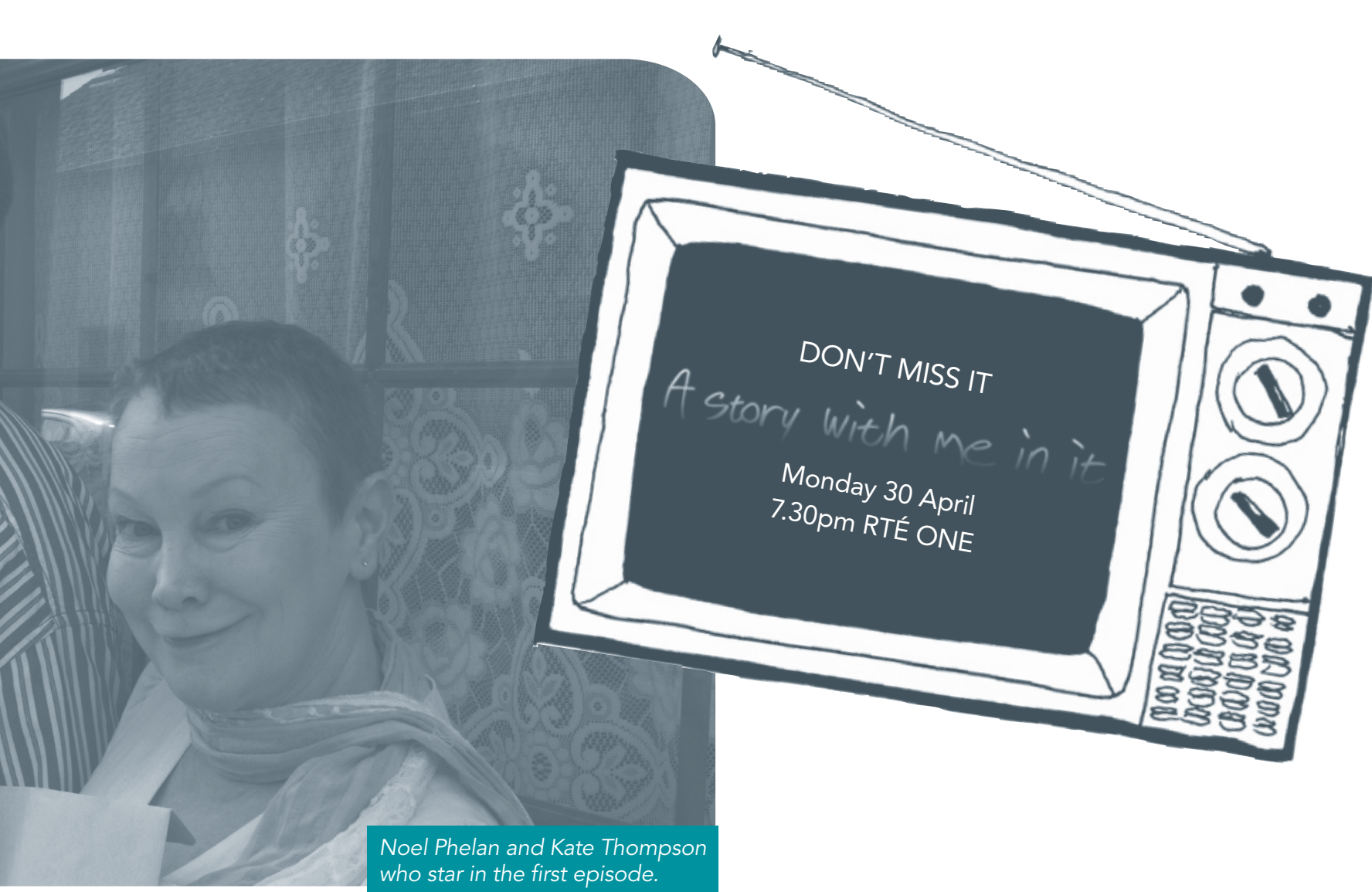
Noel describes his literacy difficulties as like being in a fog which is now lifting.

Episode 2: Monday 7 May

Kate Kerrigan and Paula Lynch Ahearn from Tallaght write about the most important people in Paula’s life, her mother and her children, and how they inspire her. Paula and Kate bond as mothers who have faced crises in their lives and together they write about what it means to be a mother.

Paula attends An Cosan Centre in Tallaght on Tuesdays for the Basic English Class. She finds her tutor Deirdre brilliant and says she can go to her with anything- for instance if she needs help filling in a form she can pop into Deirdre’s office- Deirdre won’t do it for her, but will help Paula do it herself. She describes the process of returning to education as stepping stones and approaches it by saying that she will try anything that is given to her.





Noel Phelan and Kate Thompson who star in the first episode.

Episode 3: Monday 14 May

One of Ireland’s leading writers Dermot Healy works with Paddy Joe Donellan, a farmer in East Galway. Paddy tells the story of what it was like to grow up in rural Ireland in the 1950s, growing up on the farm. Dermot helps him to craft his story into a rich illustration of an Ireland that is almost forgotten.

Paddy Joe says he was thinking about doing a course in the centre in Loughrea for a long time but had to pluck up the courage to sign up. He says he was always interested in reading books, but there are lots of bigger words that he didn’t understand. When he came to the centre his tutor Jasmin gave him a dictionary to use - he says he can ask her anything - but he bought his own as he wanted to have one at home. He says he didn’t really write until he started attending the classes, and has now written a letter to his sister that lives in America.

Episode 4: Monday 21 May

Colin Bateman teams up with Larry Regan from Trim, Co. Meath to write a story.

Larry lives in Trim with his three children. He has been doing courses for about six years, computers, maths, cooking. He prefers doing courses that he can apply to his day to day life.

He first went to the centre to learn about computers as the children were working on them in school. He says the kids were starting to pass him out.

He says his reading and writing wasn’t that weak but it was good to refresh these skills. He says he is now fairly confident using a computer and can look up about horse racing, which is his passion. Larry is currently doing Personal and Interpersonal Skills, FETAC level three, for which his tutor is Michael. Over the years Larry has completed maths, food and cookery, computers, communications and preparation for work.

Episode 5: Monday 28 May

Winner of the Bord Gáis Irish Book of the Year, Belinda McKeon works with Kay Mooney to write a story about Kay’s life growing up in inner city Dublin.

Kay is married to Paddy. They have five children, the eldest son is forty-two and the youngest are twin boys aged 29. Kay and Paddy have nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Kay has been attending BEST since 2008. Over the years she attempted to return to education twice but work or family commitments always got in the way. She attends a computer class on Wednesday morning in which she is

learning to use a laptop. On Thursday mornings she does English and she also attends spelling classes.

Episode 6: Monday 4 June

Young adult writer Sarah Webb and 18 year old Nicole O’Toole from Lucan together work on a letter to Nicole’s unborn son. As a young mother coming to terms with this change in her life writing the letter becomes a way for her to come to terms with this change.

Nicole fell behind at secondary school and her literacy suffered. She joined the Youthreach in Ballyfermot and that has made a huge difference to her. She finds spelling and grammar difficult but this has improved since she joined Youthreach and she’s working towards passing her exams. Her plan is to do a college course in healthcare and she hopes to start a course in Liberty College after the baby is born.

A story with me in it was produced by Animo with assistance from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland’s Sound and Vision Fund & in Partnership with the National Adult Literacy Agency.



“Never give up – build up

Family event for the launch of the booklet ‘Helping children do well at school’ Ennis Community College.



Two years ago, the Clare Family Learning Project received an email from the IVEA. A Turkish agency was looking for educational partners interested in supporting families with special needs. It was part of a new EU funded project, aimed at sharing knowledge and expertise. The term ‘special needs’ refers in this instance to families whose children do not attend school regularly, specifically the Roma community in Turkey. Knowing that the Roma community needed support in Ennis, Mary Flanagan set about making the connections. Here she talks to Literacy Matters about the impact of the project, what she’s learned and her advice on reaching out to the Roma community.



Partners in RoFaL project outside National Education Directorate, Aydın, Turkey.

What made you get involved in the project?

Over the last decade there has been a large increase in the numbers of Roma families living in County Clare. For example, there are 54 out of 150 children from Czech/Slovak background in Ennis Educate Together National School. Unfortunately we know that regular attendance for some of these children is an issue. There are a lot of people working very hard here to support Roma pupils and their parents – but with the language and cultural barriers it’s difficult to make an impact. Like a lot of Irish parents, some parents are reluctant to come to the school or engage with teachers. We thought this project might help us improve outcomes and also learn from a different perspective, having Turkish partners who are also working with Roma families.

How did you get started?

The EU project is called ‘Comenius Regio’ and runs for two years. It needs to have a VEC hosting a local area in Ireland while ‘twinning’ with another area in a different country. We submitted a detailed plan of action that included Ennis Educate Together National School, the Home School Community Liaison teacher and School Completion Project in Ennis Community College, and Clare Immigrant Support Centre in Ennis – all of us had been working individually with the Roma Community but we knew if we worked together we could have a stronger, multiplier effect. At the same time our Turkish partner Aydın Education Directorate, submitted the main application as overall lead partner. Word that our application was successful arrived early in September 2010 and we started work immediately by organising monthly meetings with our local partners. We visited Aydın in December 2010 and September 2011, while the Turkish group visited Ennis in May 2011. They will have their final visit in May 2012.

What work have you done to date?

The first thing we did was develop a parent questionnaire. We are lucky to have a qualified Czech speaker who tutors with the family learning project. She was able to translate questionnaires and give good suggestions on how to phrase things to suit the Czech and Slovak parents. Some of the parents do not want to self identify themselves as Roma. The tutor is qualified in Horticulture and had spent time on a gardening project with the Roma community as part of the

trust and keep trying"

Clare Family Learning Project work. She had built up great trust with them. It was because of this that she was able to support the Home School teachers in primary and second level on home visits to the Roma parents. She was able to get very good feedback for the teachers and project on many family issues.

What did you learn from the questionnaire?

From the replies we learnt that parents had the same aspirations for their children as Irish people – they want them to do well in school and get meaningful work. They also said that they wanted to speak English better and raised the point that they have poor English reading and writing skills. There was a disconnect between these aspirations and school attendance. Because of this and our work with the Turkish agency, we developed a bilingual booklet called ‘Helping your children to do well in school’ and translated it into Czech/ English and Slovak/ English. We also got the children in Ennis Educate Together National School and Community College to illustrate it. We launched this at an event for parents and pupils. (It is available to download on the homepage of www.clarefamilylearning.org)

What was the impact of the event?

It was a great event. The children’s 72 pieces of art work were on display for the evening and this looked very impressive. The County Library also attended and displayed a range of materials they have available for parents and children in both English and other languages. Patricia Murray, Home School Community Liaison Teacher with Ennis Community College helped Junior Certificate students prepare speeches on living in Ireland, what students liked about school, and their hopes for their future. This was said in both English and their own language- Czech or Slovak. Parents mentioned afterwards that they really appreciated that their home language was included in the event. Young children listened especially when they heard their home language being spoken. These older pupils acted as role models for the younger children.

The parents all welcomed the booklet as a great support to them and their children. They were especially delighted to see the importance of their own languages acknowledged in this dual language publication. Some parents spoke from the floor to thank the group for the evening. I think the main impact of the event was that the Roma families know we are here to support them and this allowed us to build up good relationships. Parent classes were promoted during the evening to start the following week.

What has this happened since then?

Working together with our local partners, we now have a community translator for the Czech and Slovak Roma community. His name is Joseph and he’s almost like a community representative. He came back with more feedback on how we could support this group. Basically they wanted three things:

- » **Cookery classes that could lead to getting catering jobs,**
- » **fitness and nutrition classes, and**
- » **a place where they could meet as a community and play music together.**

So that’s what we have done. We have 19 enrolled in the fitness and nutrition class. Six men and two girls in the evening Cookery class – in fact they are progressing onto an ITABE course after Easter. There are another six attending a morning cookery class with some Irish in the class. And we are integrating literacy tuition to support a food and safety certificate.

As for the music sessions, the very natural skills of playing music, singing and dancing are being passed onto the next generation and it is a lot of fun. We provide a room in the adult education centre in Ennis where they gather in family groups on a Saturday morning. The men and boys play instruments and the women and girls dance. They thoroughly enjoy the experience and appreciate that we have provided them with the space. Children are supported with activities if they want to take a break from dancing. In total there are 10 mums and 12 dads coming in to us, 15 under tens and 5 teenage boys learning guitar from the older generation. We provide tutors to lead the group.

A baby and toddler group for parents has been organised in Educate Together National School, as there is a high proportion of pupils from Czech Republic and Slovakia. This helps young parents get used to coming into school, learning from other parents who have older children in school, and build up a good relationship with the teachers and principal. It also gives them an opportunity to speak English and learn about the school system in Ireland.

Why do you think your project has been so successful?

The success is really down to the community representative – the Turkish group used this type of strategy and it has proved invaluable to us. We also discovered that some of the Roma community in Clare don’t really self-identify and do not want to be known as Roma. They are first and foremost Czech and Slovak, so we needed to be sensitive to that.

Prior to the project beginning, the schools and the other organisations were working independently, now with the project we have had a number of added value outcomes that we didn’t expect or plan. A new booklet has been developed using the same format as the one used in the project, to explain about educational supports available to students at school. A Czech Roma student was placed on work experience in the adult education centre. A community translator has been funded from other sources, and supports for the Roma community in Ennis have knitted together as a result. Members of the project team have discovered the various talents amongst the Roma community and have learned about their interest in progressing in Ireland.

It’s important never to give up, building up trust is key and to keep trying. The parents are so appreciative, they want to learn more and give their children a better chance. They’ve told us that this is the first time people have had an interest in them. And it filters down – already anecdotally we have heard that there is better attendance at school.

Mary Flanagan can be contact on mflanagan@clarevec.ie



Professional qualifications for the adult literacy service

by Eilis Roche, Adult Literacy Organiser, Co Cork VEC

The further education sector is undergoing significant change at present. Proposals for change include the amalgamation of the VECs, the formation of SOLAS and the integration of FÁS with the further education sector of the VECs. Potential changes to required qualifications for adult literacy tutors are a topical subject and the current financial state of the country has added to the general air of uncertainty.



Last year, as an adult literacy organiser in Co Cork VEC, I carried out research into the implications of these changes for adult literacy tutors and uncovered some interesting findings about job security, support for continuous professional development and uncertainty about the future. The aim of the research was to investigate the response of adult literacy tutors to proposed changes to qualification criteria and to assess any implications for adult literacy tutors and the further education sector. It was conducted through focus groups and questionnaires with adult literacy tutors throughout Ireland.

Poor communication and job security causing stress among literacy tutors

Overall, poor communication was identified as the principle cause of tutors’ distress and the research concluded that improved communication had potential to allay fears and restore confidence among tutors.

The research found that additional vulnerability is being experienced due to lack of job security. 80% of all tutors who responded to the questionnaire work on a part-time basis. Tutors expressed feelings of insecurity about working conditions and uncertainty of working within temporary contracts. Many had financial concerns and they made the point that their wages are now vital for their families’ financial well-being.

Three quarters of respondents were of the view that adult literacy tutors should have a third level qualification. Of the quarter of respondents who said that a third level qualification was not necessary for adult literacy tutors, they proposed that qualifications are very valuable but that, on their own, they are not sufficient to ensure the quality of literacy provision. The experience versus qualifications debate was the main argument for not supporting the criteria of third level qualifications for literacy tutors and they highlighted the need to value experience on an equal footing with qualifications. Many acknowledged that professionalising the service is a positive development but there was concern about making the literacy service too academic. In the light of these opinions, these tutors are not actually opposed to qualifications, they are just concerned that the qualifications are meaningful to literacy.

To receive a full copy of the research please email eilishroche@gmail.com

Commitment to continuous professional development and ethos of work

On a positive note, there was evidence in the responses of an enormous pride in tutors’ work and a strong belief that their work is worthwhile and valuable to learners and the wider community. The research also identified tutors’ strong commitment to their own continuous professional development and it demonstrated the value they themselves place on qualifications specific to literacy. However, they were fearful that the literacy qualifications they have achieved may now be insufficient to meet with the new criteria and that their time, money and effort may have been wasted.

Throughout the research process, there has been a recurring theme of tutors being fearful that the ethos which has guided literacy work, and which places the learner at the centre of literacy practice, would be compromised. With many primary and second level teachers now out of work, there are fears that teachers will be given the jobs in the literacy service. Such a development would not be welcomed by tutors or by stakeholders because mainstream education has already failed adult literacy learners and traditional teaching methods are not always appropriate for literacy learners. One of the challenges facing literacy practitioners is not to allow the demands of educational policy to restrict the learner centred philosophy which underpins literacy provision in Ireland.

Recommendations

Adult literacy practice in Ireland takes pride in adhering to a social practices view of literacy. The philosophical underpinnings of literacy uphold the learner-centred ethos and advocate a holistic and respectful approach. This study has highlighted considerable unrest among part-time tutors who are trained to practise within that holistic ethos. There is a contradiction evident that cannot be ignored. Tutors cannot be expected to adhere to such lofty principles as learner-centredness, unconditional positive regard and mutual respect when they, themselves, believe they are not being properly informed and feel they are unsupported and unappreciated.

There is an onus on policy makers to acknowledge the fears being experienced by staff in the literacy service and to take steps to communicate with them how literacy will be accommodated within the new landscape of further education in Ireland.

Lobby for Learning Day

On 24 February AONTAS and NALA held a joint event called ‘SOLAS - serving adult learners’. The roundtable event brought together 30 adult learners from all over Ireland to meet with a panel of key decision makers in further education.

Over the morning these learners shared their learning experiences and suggestions for change with members of the Implementation Group for SOLAS, the new training and education authority which replaces FÁS. These are:

- » Minister for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon,
- » Paul O’Toole, Director General of FÁS, and
- » Fiona Hartley, CEO of Co Wicklow VEC.

The event focused on three key questions:

1. What adults need to access training and education;
2. What adults need to stay with a course; and
3. What adults need to progress onto further education and employment.

Three issues that were raised by the learners were the need for:

- » clear, up-to-date information;
- » guidance in making course choices; and
- » a flexible system which enhances skills and access to the labour market.

Responding to the discussion, Minister for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon said: ‘While we know that massive changes need to occur, we are now well on the way to making SOLAS happen. We are tapping into the collective wisdom of both the VEC sector and FÁS - taking the best out of both sectors and creating a new entity. This wisdom, combined with new ideas, will help us respond to the challenges ahead and develop further education and training.’

The event was a great success with the Minister and others requesting that a similar event be held as the new systems emerge.



Judith Keane is a learner who participated in the event. She lives in a rural community in Mayo and left school at 16. She went back to education as an adult and achieved a qualification in Care for the Elderly and a FETAC Award in Childcare. Unfortunately she was unable to work in the caring profession as she developed back problems. She decided to retrain and studied FETAC Level 3 Maths on www.writeon.ie, NALA’s distance learning website. Judith was very interested in expressing her experiences of returning to education as an adult. She spoke about childcare concerns and the lack of guidance she experienced.

We asked Judith a few questions about her experience at the event.

Do you feel that the ‘Learners’ Voice’ was heard at this event?

Absolutely, I felt that Minister Cannon and Paul O’Toole really heard us and their responses were interesting and informed. It was great to be part of an event with so many learners at different levels and yet experiencing many of the same issues. Inez Bailey really captured the ‘advice’ given by the learners there and Fiona Hartley gave such concrete next steps for the panel to take away and implement, that I felt we had really made a difference.

What were the most useful points you heard the learners make to the panel?

That it is difficult for adults to return to education, especially those with literacy difficulties, so all services such as FÁS, Department of Social Protection and the VECs, should meet them where they are – adults with responsibilities, career and life goals and who want a say in how, where and when they learn.

It is not always easy to access information on courses, entitlements, jobs etc, especially for literacy learners. Paul O’Toole mentioned information was on the website and I know that FÁS offices have computers that print out job details, but this is simply not accessible for a lot of learners. Please think of your potential audience when publishing information. From what I heard around the tables, if most of these learners weren’t motivated and self starters, they would never have progressed.

What did you think of the ‘clinic’ style approach?

The round table set up was very helpful, everyone got their say, but also heard and respected each other’s views. When the panelists moved round the tables, I thought I would get bored, but in fact the group got more at ease and I felt put their ideas across in a better, more joined up way.

What do you think the next steps should be?

The Minister and Paul O’Toole both remarked how much they had learned at the event and that they would like to undertake the same consultation process in a year. I feel that is a great step forward for learner involvement and would love to hear whether advice was taken. Also we could give SOLAS great feedback a year on, on how they are progressing. I especially hope that the panel accepted our idea of a learner sitting on the SOLAS board.

What is NALA doing in 2012?



by Helen Ryan,
Policy Officer,
NALA

It's been a busy start to 2012 as we have continued to work with policy makers to help meet the needs of people with literacy difficulties. This has included:

- » meetings with key government Departments and politicians,
- » inputs to the SOLAS Action Plan Consultation process, and
- » Lobbying for learning day with AONTAS.

NALA's views on what SOLAS should do

This year the new authority for further education and training called SOLAS will be set up. In January we made a submission to the SOLAS Action Plan Consultation process. We highlighted the need for a new adult literacy and numeracy strategy which would ensure the development of the adult literacy service, as well as the integration of literacy and numeracy across all further education and training programmes. Read our full submission on our website www.nala.ie. We also attended the consultation meeting on 27 March with the other 150 organisations who made submissions.

Seeking an adult literacy and numeracy strategy

There is currently no national adult literacy strategy. NALA believes we need one, in particular to complement the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020.

The Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education published a Report last December on the Heads of the Education and Training Boards Bill, 2011. A key recommendation in the report is that

"a national adult literacy strategy should be developed and published as a matter of top priority."

This is a very positive endorsement for our call and we continue to lobby for a refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy in our submissions and meetings.

Partnership with VECs

NALA is working with the IVEA and the VEC sector to support the integrating of language, literacy and numeracy into VEC programmes. All new programmes at Level 4 have this as an objective, and a similar approach is being applied to Level 5 programmes.

Local Education and Training Boards (LET)

Local Education and Training Boards (LET) will replace VECs later this year. In January we wrote to Ruairi Quinn, Minister for Education and Skills to request that:

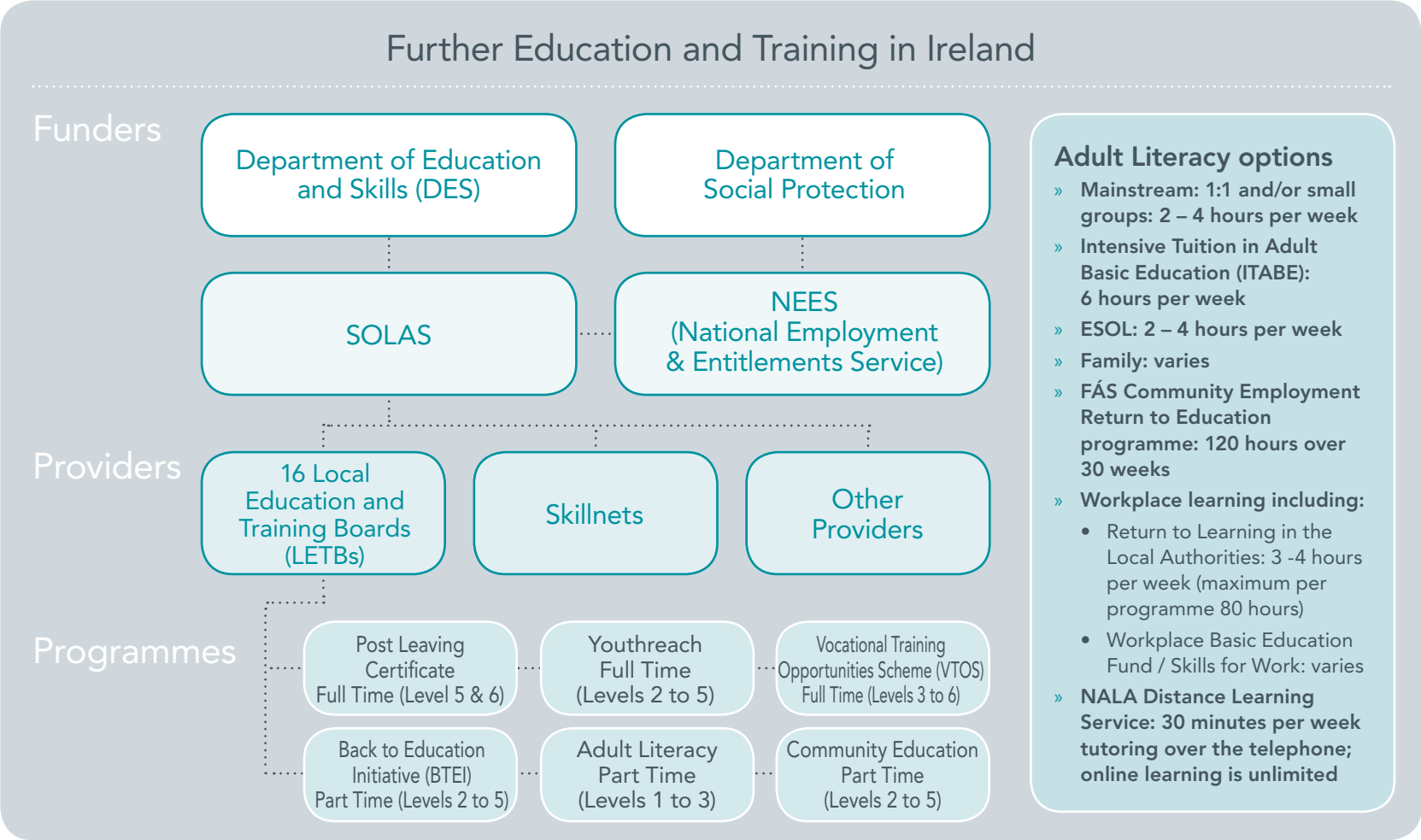
- » an adult learner have a seat on LET Boards, and
- » NALA be named as a nominating body for the community seats on the boards.

This was raised by TDs at the Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education and we await the next stage of the Bill to see what has been amended.

Family Literacy Campaign

NALA was given a specific role in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People – read more about it on page 12.

SOLAS made easy



Since 2011 there have been key changes taking place in the further education and training (FET) sector in Ireland. They include three key organisational changes:

1. Creating a new authority called **SOLAS** to be responsible for the co-ordination and funding of further education and training (more below).
2. VECs and FÁS training centres are being reformed into 16 new Local education and Training Boards (LETBs), which will be responsible for delivery of FET at local level.
3. FÁS will be disbanded.

As part of the change, FÁS Training Division will transfer to the VECs and those VECs will report to the new authority SOLAS for FET. Alongside this change, FÁS Employment Services are transferring to the Department of Social Protection (DSP) as part of the establishment of the National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES).

SOLAS – the new FET authority – what is its role?

SOLAS will bring FET into one sector and will ensure delivery of a quality, modern, relevant further education and training service to learners and jobseekers.

SOLAS will be a body under the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The role of SOLAS for the FET sector will be like the role of the HEA (Higher Education Authority) for the higher education sector and it will be staffed mostly by former FÁS head office staff.

SOLAS will enter into annual service level agreements with VECs / LETBs, Skillnets and other bodies to deliver specific FET programmes under a specific budget. A service level agreement is a formal contract which defines the level of service to be delivered.

What will these changes mean?

These changes to the FET sector aim to have three key impacts.

1. There will be a clearer, learner-centered focus on the needs of jobseekers and other learners.
2. There will be a greater focus on providing the new skills required by the new jobs in today's economy.
3. There will be significant modernising of course provision and delivery. For example, expanding the online, blended and evening provision of FET courses.

SOLAS consultation meeting

In March the Department of Education held a consultation meeting attended by most of the 160 organisations and individuals who had made submissions to the SOLAS Consultation Process.

Some key themes raised at the event included:

- » Learner centeredness – places the learner at the centre of the learning programme
- » Guidance and the importance of the first point of contact
- » Provision and the need for basic skills to be integrated into all programmes.
- » Learner consultation and representation on LETBs and SOLAS
- » Supporting and managing staff
- » Need for an Information Management System

The feedback from the consultation process will feed into the final SOLAS Action Plan. Legislation to establish SOLAS is planned to be finalised by the end of this year.

New campaign to support parents and the wider community, support children’s literacy and numeracy development

The national strategy ‘Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life’, includes a range of actions to enable parents and communities to support children’s learning. It recognises that parents who are engaged in their child’s learning have a significant positive impact on a child’s educational achievement, especially in literacy and numeracy.

As part of this strategy, the Department of Education and Skills asked the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) to support a national public information campaign highlighting the role that parents and communities can play in improving children’s literacy and numeracy, using media, online resources and celebrity endorsements.

To achieve this, NALA will develop a simple website that will bring together relevant information for parents and the wider community to support children’s literacy and numeracy development.

At the moment there is a dizzying amount of resources for parents in different formats and numerous locations. The greatest difficulty is sifting through this information and finding the most relevant, age appropriate resources quickly. There is also differing levels of understanding of this issue amongst parents and so there will be a layered approach to support behind this campaign.

Based on the highly successful UK campaign, www.wordsforlife.org.uk, this new website will showcase the best Irish and international content that already exists around this topic. It will be categorised and searchable according to a child’s age.

The site will provide fun activities that parents can do with their children to develop their literacy and numeracy. It will include general information, milestones to look out for, fun activities and useful tips.

It will be simple in design and functionality, with information no more than three clicks away. It will also include audio and video content to support parents with literacy difficulties. Links to other sites providing more detailed specific information on topics will also be a feature.

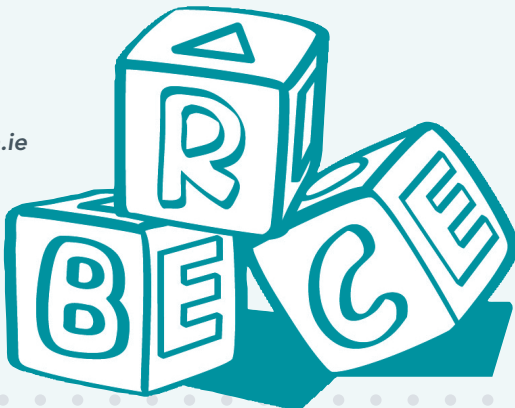
It will be a place where people can see that supporting a child’s literacy and numeracy development is a natural, easy and fun activity that can be integrated into any part of their day. It will include data capture and sharing functionality so that people can share the idea with their friends and family who might also benefit from this.

This website will be used as the cornerstone resource from which NALA will promote a national awareness raising campaign highlighting the role of parents and communities in supporting children’s literacy and numeracy development. Each activity will direct people back to the website where they can get further information or resources. It will be promoted across a number of platforms over a number of years. This will include annual targeted PR campaigns, use of traditional and social media and celebrity endorsements.

It is hoped that the website will primarily meet the needs of parents and guardians. However, it will also be of use to teachers and well as other practitioners working with children and families. There are already a wide range of statutory and voluntary groups at community level supporting the literacy and numeracy development of children or adults. This campaign aims to work with and support all those efforts by providing a single reference point for parents and guardians to better understand their role in their children’s literacy and numeracy development and how to best fulfil it. For some parents, this will be achieved through raising their awareness of the importance of home literacy and numeracy development. For others it will be providing new and exciting ideas to try with their family. Some parents may decide to embark on a more extensive learning process and link in with the community based family literacy and numeracy initiatives available.

NALA has started an extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders already interacting with parents to both initially inform and help promote the campaign. Initial discussions have already taken place and so far feedback has been very positive with many organisations wanting to support our campaign.

If you have any thoughts or would like to be involved please contact media@nala.ie





€500 grant available from NALA and Better World Books

Through our partnership with Better World Books, we are delighted to offer our members funding to support a local literacy project or initiative in Ireland. All you have to do is tell us what you would like to use the funding for and provide us with feedback on how it is making an impact – it’s that simple. It can be used to fund new resources, training or any initiative that support adults or family literacy.

Just last year NALA became Better World Books chosen charity partner in Ireland and so far, they have raised €500. We will use this to support local literacy projects. And this is only the beginning – the more books people buy from Better World Books, the more funding that will become available to support local projects, so start spreading the word!

In case you don’t know, Better World Books sells used books online to raise money for leading literacy charities around the world. Their website is called www.betterworldbooks.co.uk. A portion of the revenue goes to the organisation that contributed the book, and or to one of the non-profit literacy partners.

Since its founding in the US in 2003 the company has raised \$11.6 million for its non-profit literacy, library and college partners and diverted more than 78 million books from landfills. The company opened its UK operation in 2008 located in Scotland and said it has re-used or recycled over 4 million books in the UK so far, raising over £450,000 for local literacy charities. Whilst they have long standing relationships working with libraries and other large organisations, they also like to hear from other people with spare books too. So contact us now on pr@nala.ie telling us about a project you think would benefit from this funding, or call us on (01) 412 7909 for more information. The closing date for expressions of interest is the 30 May 2012. There are some basic terms and conditions that you can read about on www.nala.ie.

Help generate funding for a literacy initiative—start collecting books today!

A corporate book drive allows community members or employees to donate their gently used books to raise money for literacy. The programme is easy to put in place, costs nothing and will help generate funding for a literacy initiative!

What supplies and support does Better World Books provide?

Better World Books makes it easy to run a Corporate Book Drive. At no cost, they provide collection boxes and shipping cartons. Their representatives will support you during the drive and arrange the shipping of the supplies to you and the books to them.

HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

- Email nala@betterworldbooks.co.uk with the following information;
1. **Date to start and end your corporate collection** (the information below must be provided no later than 2 weeks before the start of the drive to get everything in place)
 2. **Number of sites you would like to collect books**
 3. **Contact person for each site** (phone, email and address).
 4. **Main contact person for the entire collection**
 5. **Charity you would like to support** (National Adult Literacy Agency)
 6. **Supplies needed for each location**
 - a. Collection Bins (396 x 301 x 722mm cardboard boxes for collecting books-pictured)
 - b. Shipping Boxes (each box holds about 30 books, these also may be ordered on the client portal once total books collected are known).

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

1. Better World Books will create a tracking system for your books.
2. Each of the site contacts will receive access to the Better World Books client portal <http://rufis.betterworldbooks.com/> where they can order more supplies and ship their full shipping boxes.
3. Better World Books will send out your supplies, these take about 3 days to arrive. If they haven’t arrived in this time please email uklogistics@betterworldbooks.co.uk.

YOU’VE COLLECTED ALL OF YOUR BOOKS, AND PACKED THEM IN SHIPPING BOXES, WHAT NOW?

1. You can arrange collections automatically through the Portal. Click on **Ship My Books** on the left-hand menu. If you have fewer than 25 boxes use the **UPS** option, if you have more use the **Freight** option. The generated labels must be printed on plain paper and taped to the boxes.
 - a. For UPS collections; use the **Schedule Pickup** in the client portal and choose the day you would like them collected. Remember to keep them as near to the door as possible to make it easy for the drivers.
 - b. For Freight, you will be contacted by our logistics team within 24 hours, alternatively you can contact directly at uklogistics@betterworldbooks.co.uk or (0)1383 841 437.



New booklet available to help people understand health information

Have you ever left a consultation with your GP without getting all the answers to all your questions or understanding your treatment plan? If you answered ‘yes’ to these questions you are not alone. Many people who deal effectively with other aspects of their lives find health information difficult to obtain, understand or use. Recently, a new booklet called ‘Time to Talk’ was launched to help people to build a better relationship with their GP, nurse or other healthcare provider and ensure that they better understand the health information being given to them.

‘Time to Talk’ was launched as part of the MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative. This initiative aims to raise awareness of health literacy and help improve communications around health issues. Health literacy involves a person having the skills to understand basic health information whether they receive it in writing, in person or over the phone. It also involves a person having the knowledge to understand their treatment options

and make informed decisions about their own health. Recent research conducted by the EU Health Literacy survey shows that four out of 10 people in Ireland have low health literacy.

Dr Brendan Clune, a GP with a special interest in health literacy and contributor to the ‘Time to Talk’ booklet says: “It is very important to prepare for your GP’s appointment to make sure you leave the surgery feeling happy that you fully understand the information given to you. Your GP and other members of your practice team always aim to give you the information in a way that you understand but sometimes you may need them to give you more information. The ‘Time to Talk’ booklet can help by giving you a simple guide on how to prepare for your GP appointments to make the best use of this time”.

The ‘Time to Talk’ booklet is available free to download on www.healthliteracy.ie. It suggests you follow five simple steps to help you get the most out of your doctor’s visits as follows:



- Step 1** Prepare a plan for your visit.
- Step 2** Talk about your health concerns.
- Step 3** Ask questions during your visit to help you understand.
- Step 4** Problem-solve with your doctor.
- Step 5** Before you leave, go over what you have talked about and what you will do.

1. EU Health Literacy Survey - Irish Results Notable Findings Report 2011

Integrating literacy at North Wall CTC

North Wall Community Training Centre (CTC) is a FÁS funded provider of training options to early school leavers. The Centre is situated in an area of educational disadvantage. The Centre Manager, Trevor Moore, talks to Literacy Matters about how they have taken a whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy.



Trevor Moore, North Wall CTC Centre Manager

“36.6% of the population of the North Inner City have no formal or primary education only, while for 43.8% of the population education ended before the age of 15”.

(The Process of Partnership in Tackling Poverty in Inner City Dublin, DICP, 2008)

Many of our learners have literacy and numeracy issues. As a centre team we have come together to respond to these issues as best we can. Our aim is to try and reduce unnecessary literacy barriers to learning, to provide all our young people the opportunity to learn on their chosen training course. At the same time, we use their chosen course as a medium for developing skills and confidence in language, literacy and numeracy.

North Wall CTC has developed a strategy for integrating literacy and numeracy into all of our training programmes. An important part of this strategy is staff development. In 2011, funded by FÁS, four of our vocational instructors completed the NALA-NUIM Certificate in Integrating Literacy, and NALA made a related support visit to the centre.

The integration skills that staff have developed have been put into practice in the classroom. Our courses include a variety of teaching and learning methods; they do not rely solely on reading and writing. At the beginning of each course learners are helped to identify their preferred learning style. We use a mix of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic methods in the vocational subjects and in developing literacy and numeracy. In a recent Maths session, for example, learners explored the concept of fractions by using plasticine – cutting it into separate chunks and combining them in ways to represent a variety of fractions. It proved to be a popular and fun way of learning the maths involved and particularly appealed to kinaesthetic learners.

As well as the specific literacy and numeracy tuition available to our learners, literacy and numeracy skills are integrated into their other subjects. Course terminology can be confusing for learners at first, so learners in all subjects spend time on getting to know the key terminology. For example, they make

a glossary of the new or unfamiliar key words associated with each new topic. The instructors and learners make posters of these and display them on the wall, often including illustrations to make them as clear as possible. The words don’t just stay there on display: the instructors make sure that the learners have lots of opportunities to hear, understand, say, read and write the new terminology. Methods include classroom discussions, quizzes, wordsearches, cloze exercises, games and other focused activities. Sometimes learners carry out these tasks (or games as they perceive them) in pairs or in groups to encourage collaboration. The words displayed are changed according to learners’ needs and as new course topics are introduced.

Various methods are used to integrate support for writing and spelling in the different subjects. For example, instructors have designed templates where much of the text is already there and learners can insert key words, phrases or paragraphs related to the topic they are studying. The idea is that with practice, learners can progress to using templates that have less built-in support, and eventually to writing independently.

We encourage learners to keep their own personal dictionaries. This allows them to store explanations of words and phrases which they found difficult to understand, or which they would like to learn to spell. This is a very useful reference for learners both during and after their training programme. An example of an entry from a North Wall learner’s personal dictionary is: **“Search Engine: is a page designed to search for information on the net”.**

An example from a ‘key word’ worksheet in the Retail Sales course is a ‘fill in the missing letters’ task: **“It is an offence to sell a s _ _ v _ _ t to a person under 18”.**

When the learner fills in the key word, solvent, it helps reinforce a key point from the Retail Sales course at the same time as helping them understand and write the particular word.

Our Communications module has also been updated to integrate literacy support and development into the various assignments. For example, learners select and use pictures from newspapers and magazines to communicate on particular topics, and they use these as the basis of written assignments.

At North Wall CTC we have seen the benefits of integrating literacy into all our training programmes. Courses are now more effective as by reducing literacy barriers, the core content can now be learned more efficiently. Learner’s confidence levels have increased which leads to greater motivation to learn.

As a Community Training Centre we have taken a whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy. This has included the input of management, staff and learners. It has been a rewarding process with the central aim of making our training programmes more effective for our learners.



Research update

by Tina Byrne, Research Officer, NALA

Research is a key element of NALA’s work and we are committed to the use of research in building on our previous work and promoting the use of evidence based practice. This update provides information on the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and on NALA’s research work for 2012. NALA’s research is available to download free from our website www.nala.ie or you can email tbyrne@nala.ie for more information.

Introduction to the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

What is PIAAC?

PIAAC is the most comprehensive international survey of adult literacy skills ever undertaken. It is a collaboration between governments, an international consortium of organisations and the OECD. PIAAC is linked with two international surveys for adult skills, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) 1997 and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) Survey 2003. However, PIAAC extends the scope of these two surveys to include skills relevant to the digital age, particularly in the areas of literacy, and problem solving.

What does PIAAC assess?

PIAAC was developed in the context of changes in the demand for skills particularly in knowledge based societies. The skills assessed in PIAAC are literacy, numeracy reading component measures and problem solving in technology-rich environments. Technological change, particularly the increasing use of ICT together with changes in the structure of employment away from manual labour towards jobs involving the use of IT requires a different set of skills than before. Policy makers want to understand these skills and the ways they are developed and maintained.

1. This information comes from the adult literacy returns 2010 provided to the Department of Education and Skills by the 33 local Vocational Education Committees.



How is PIAAC delivered?

A sample of 5,000 adults was identified in each participating country to take part in the survey. In Ireland the survey was carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). They interviewed adults aged between 16-65 years in their homes assessing their literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills. PIAAC is a computer based assessment; however those who are unable to use a computer will be able to take a pencil and paper assessment instead.

What will PIAAC tell us?

By assessing the core skills possessed by adults in participating countries PIAAC will provide information on skills that people use at work and in their everyday lives. It will also provide information on their characteristics, such as, age and gender, their educational and training backgrounds, how they use literacy, numeracy and technology skills in their everyday lives and their employment history and the social aspects of their lives. The information collected in PIAAC is designed to answer important policy questions about the relationships between different parts of the population, how skills are learned and the decline of skills across age groups.

When will the results for PIAAC be published?

The results from PIAAC will be published in 2013. More detailed information on PIAAC is available from the OECD website.

NALA research projects in 2012

Our Strategic Plan 2011 – 2013 identifies integrating literacy as a core theme informing our research work. 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 work towards achieving this objective NALA will research the following areas this year;

- » Health literacy,
- » Numeracy,
- » Innovative practice, and
- » Blended learning.

Health literacy

The purpose of this research is to carry out a health literacy audit to assess the readability of hospice materials for the general public in a large selection of Irish hospices. It will assess if the written material will be understood by the general public and if such materials are meeting international best practice. We will access the written materials using two readability measures:

- » The Simple Measure of Gobbledygook (SMOG), and
- » the National Adult Literacy Agency’s (NALA) plain English guidelines.

We know from recent European health literacy survey findings that 39% of Irish adults in Ireland have inadequate or problematic health literacy. About 18% of Irish people have difficulty understanding leaflets that accompany medicines, with those with lesser education indicating greater difficulty. Low levels of health literacy results in:

- » poorer health,
- » poor quality of self-care and self management of disease,
- » ineffective use of the health service, and
- » a decreased ability to advocate for oneself in the healthcare arena.

We know from the 1997 adult literacy survey that older Irish adults (55-65) are more likely to struggle with everyday literacy tasks.

NALA working with its partner the Irish Hospice Foundation, will invite hospices across Ireland to take part in the health literacy audit. The results of the audit will be published in autumn 2012.

Numeracy

The purpose of the numeracy research is to carry out a survey to identify training needs and requirements among tutors providing numeracy tuition to adult learners in a number of settings nationally. It will involve analysis of a survey, carried out with the cooperation with the IVEA VEC adult literacy forum, to identify training needs and requirements amongst tutors providing numeracy tuition as part of basic education programmes. Our preferred research approach is collaborative and consultation with our partners, including the IVEA and VECs, will be an integral part of the research process. The context for the research is the changing teaching and learning environment. We are also mindful of the possible implications for numeracy tuition arising from the findings from PIAAC which has a focus on numeracy in the information age. The survey is a joint research initiative between NALA and the Institute of Technology Tallaght. The timeline for the project is April – Sept 2012.

Innovative practice

NALA in partnership with the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) proposes to carry out an exploration of current teaching and learning practice in adult literacy and numeracy provision. The purpose of the research is to describe and detail teaching and learning practice based on the Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work and the professional development/training practitioners have received. The specific theme to be explored will be literacy as social practice and will examine the delivery of literacy and numeracy in traditional and blended learning contexts.

Blended learning

In 2012 NALA will carry out a blended learning evaluation project with ESOL learners evaluating the use of www.writeon.ie as a part of traditional face-to-face centre based tuition. Participating organisations were invited to take part in an evaluation of this blended learning approach to document how the literacy centres worked with www.writeon.ie and NALA to deliver blended learning opportunities to adult literacy learners. The purpose of this research will be to document how the literacy centre works with the National Adult Literacy Agency to deliver blended learning opportunities.

Blended learning means creatively mixing learning resources and media in different learning settings to offer diverse learning solutions and opportunities. In many ways, adult literacy tutors have probably already been practising blended learning for years - using materials from everyday life, going on field trips, study visits, agreeing non-classroom based projects – all these tasks and activities use blended learning approaches. A blended learning approach to teaching and learning can be of great benefit in allowing learners to learn outside of traditional and time constrictive learning settings. Blended learning approaches using www.writeon.ie also offer advantages to tutors and centres by providing free complementary support to learners outside of class time. It also provides a route to accreditation that minimises impact on tutor and administrator time, thereby allowing centres to divert more resources to learning support. It is envisaged that the research will begin in September 2012 and be completed in early 2013.

Some interesting figures on participation on adult literacy in 2010

- » In 2010 the total number of learners in the Vocational Education Committee’s (VEC’s) Adult Literacy Service (ALS) was 54,741.
- » Almost 60% of learners were women
- » Nearly 75% of learners had less than a Leaving Certificate or FETAC level 4 qualifications.
- » Over 23% of learners were employed and 41% reported their status as unemployed
- » Almost 50% of learners were aged between 25-44 years.





Plain English
Approved by NALA

Why plain English makes sense

Extract from Plenary paper
'The building blocks on Wessel's website:
the Amsterdam challenge' taken from
Clarity 59 May 2008
Christine Mowat
President, Wordsmith Associates Communications
Consultants Ltd.
Past Chair, PLAIN

Many outside our field have incorrectly guessed that plain language is a dumbing down process, a reaching for the lowest common denominator. Or that it is a puerile re-clothing of complex specialist languages in dull and meagre, but understandable, language.

But plain language, as most of you know, has nothing in common with those assumptions.

Plain language is an intellectual pursuit

Plain language is not anti-intellectual. On the contrary, it is an intellectual pursuit that eliminates linguistic arrogance or reader-distancing and condescending language. When we plain-language specialists work with arcane and difficult theoretical science or complex law, our re-writing may involve strenuous intellectual effort.

Some have called us translators as we advocate a kind of de-programming of institutionalized, bureaucratic, foggy, long-winded, evasive, circuitous, or other types of poor writing.

Indeed, when we immerse ourselves in the intricacies of a subject matter's intellectual activity to re-write a document in plain language, we open doors to new learning. As partners with our clients, we open wide the doors to their clients, customers, citizens, and public audiences.

But we are far more than translators. After 27 years, what has surprised me most about my field is the deeper learning that happens to a plain-language re-writer—and often for the original writers, too. I think back to the example of Australian judges who rewrote a piece of legislation and underneath all the legalese, they found mistakes in law. When we discover ambiguities in drafts we are working on and probe for answers, astonishingly, clients will say, "I don't know what that means. It could mean A, B, or C. I guess we'll have to decide what it should mean and then rewrite it!"



Plain language specialists are language activists

Plain-language specialists are restless intellectuals and disruptive thinkers. We need to be so because we sometimes face complacency or even hostility. Some lawyers cleave to their traditional legalese. Some scientists claim their disciplines are too complex to be shared. We are, in fact, language activists and leaders who use the building blocks of plain-language principles to change the language of governments, the law, disciplines, professions, and trades. Among other things, plain language is a robust idea encompassing democratic ideals, respect for community, and innovation. We make the language of governments accessible to the owners of governments, the people.



What we do requires a co-operative struggle

Plain language is a publicly initiated and reinforced intellectual activity, and it represents an on-going process to give knowledge to readers and listeners alike. Plain language promotes a civil tongue. For all these reasons, we cannot ignore the continuing challenges we face. They persist because there are some who denigrate all public interventions—to change legislation and countless other documents—and they do that denigrating in the name of “traditional intellectual standards”.

Such people see us as

1. **challengers venturing outside our “proper” sphere of intellectual activity,**
2. **upstarts who are critical of corporate, financial, or government language and aim for unnecessary or faddish change,**
3. **mediocre writers who are swimming in the demeaning cultural mainstream, lowering the levels of public language.**

And what have we done about these critics of plain language? Well, we have held firmly to our pluralistic and communicative values and gone on about our work. And we have:

- » **rewritten hundreds of thousands of documents around the world,**
- » **instructed hundreds of thousands of workshop participants in plain-language writing,**
- » **tested readability and comprehension levels,**
- » **written plain-language style guides for clients or taught others to do so,**
- » **published books, articles, and manuals,**
- » **conducted plain-language audits on organisations,**
- » **researched numerous aspects of our multidisciplinary field,**
- » **shared our plain language successes and failures,**
- » **joined plain-language organisations,**
- » **participated in plain-language e-mail discussion groups,**
- » **rewritten bylaws, legislation, rules of court, and constitutions,**
- » **constantly tested readers’ reactions to our new versions of writing, and**
- » **attended conferences.**

We have continued, with clients and each other, co-creating and expanding our plain language field.

And guess what? Despite some opposition, our building blocks have created a very fine entity in the world.

For information on NALA’s plain English service contact Claire O’Riordain on **01 4127922** or check out our website **www.simplyput.ie**



What is Twitter?

“The fastest, simplest way to stay close to everything you care about”

Twitter is an online social networking service. It allows you to send and read messages of up to 140 characters, about the same length as a mobile phone text, which are called “tweets”. Twitter is simple to use and read on your computer, iPad or computer even for those without much computer experience. All you need to start with Twitter is to open your account and then find your friends or people you would like to stay in contact with. It doesn’t cost anything and you can use it anytime, even from your phone! According to forecasts Twitter will have 500 million users by the end of 2012; this is more than half the number of the 800 million users Facebook currently has. Twitter users send messages four times more often than Facebook users and are also more likely to access information on the move according to a recent study. The ease of use of Twitter as well as the number of people it connects together has turned it into a powerful social force as seen in the “Arab Spring” uprisings.

What you can use Twitter for?

You can use Twitter for supporting learning and development. You can use it as a way for students and teachers to continue the learning outside the classroom.

- » **You can share information, thoughts, and ideas with other students or teachers - send them links to articles, resources or tools that you found and you think might be interesting to them which they can read and/or forward (“retweet”).**
- » **You can share learning and teaching ideas within your community.**
- » **You can get the message quickly to a large group of people.**
- » **You can discuss your problems with others and get advice, tips and guidelines quickly from those who have experienced similar situations so you won’t be on your own!**
- » **You can create a discussion forum for any topic you like!**
- » **It is a very good way to invite people to the events you organise.**
- » **You can send announcements and reminders efficiently.**
- » **You can send links to photos or videos and create a gallery.**
- » **You can increase public awareness of important issues in your community**
- » **You can inspire others or get inspirations from others.**

Since it is a social media service it should be interactive and fun!

Teaching Numeracy

Every adult uses mathematics and comes up with ways to solve their own everyday mathematics problems. However, most people underestimate their mathematical abilities because they think what they do is just common sense.

When writing materials for numeracy teaching the challenge is to identify ‘contexts’ that have meaning to the individual student and to identify the mathematics an individual might use in his or her everyday life.

Numeracy: Posing real world problems

Remember, as with all areas of learning, numeracy is not value free. Therefore the context of the worksheet or learning material needs to be culturally appropriate and inclusive.

The way we pose a particular problem will influence the way that students respond.

Consider these two examples, where the same situation is put in two different ways.
For example, a worksheet might ask the student to do the following:

$3 + 4 =$

In this activity you are asking the student to add 3 and 4. The focus is on giving practice in the skill of addition (not on how well the learner can write the numbers, for example). So it might help if the worksheet included the numbers 0 – 9.



EXAMPLE 1

Consider how adult learners might respond to the following problem:

‘You have gone out for pizza with two of your friends and you are going to share the cost. Let’s say the pizza cost €18.20. How would you and your friends pay for it?’

There are many real life or ‘real world’ answers to this question. Some people might do an approximate calculation. Some might work it out precisely. Some might make a rough estimate to a convenient current note and get one person to pay the extra. One might say that they would take their turn to pay the full bill, because that is the custom within the group.

The benefit of this way of posing the problem is that it allows students to solve relevant problems in a range of ways available to them in their everyday lives.

EXAMPLE 2

The question could also be posed in the following way:

‘Three friends went out for a pizza and shared the cost equally. The total cost of the pizza was €18.20. How much did each person pay?’

This question is not a real life problem but a mathematical problem. Adults often recognise these problems as ‘school mathematics’ and respond accordingly, by providing an exact answer. Some adult learners are interested in this mathematics and want to master it. Others will want to avoid ‘school mathematics’ altogether and focus on the ‘real world’ mathematics such as that in Example 1. Tutors need to develop materials to suit both types of learner.

Be clear about the focus of the numeracy worksheet. Tutors also need to be clear about what they are asking the students to do and what the focus and learning objective of the worksheet is.

That will help the student to form the shape of the number – in this case, 7. They will still have to do the calculation and select the correct answer, but are freed from the pressure of remembering how they should write the number 7.

Visuals and graphics in numeracy materials

Using graphics and visuals is an excellent way of building numeracy skills, especially number sense. The use of photographs, for example, could be a starting point for students talking about and building such skills. Questions such as “how big is the building?” or “how many people are in the photograph?” encourage learners to use their own strategies for working out an answer. Simple pictures - for instance, tomatoes on a vine or children in a playground - can be used as a starting point for developing number skills. Visuals are not value free; they need to be inclusive and culturally appropriate.

Developing your mathematical eyes

Developing your mathematical eyes allows you to see the different types of mathematics that you do everyday. It also helps you understand that mathematics is more than the skills and formulae you might have learnt at school. To help you develop your mathematical eyes, it is useful to think about the 5 mathematical themes in the table below.

Quantity and number	Notice all the things that relate to number in everyday life, for example, prices, car registration numbers, bus numbers and telephone numbers.
Space and shape	Notice all the different shapes that make up our everyday world, for example rectangular windows, round wheels, square tiles, spherical balls, boxes, and pipes (cylinders).
Data handling and chance	Notice all the information around you and how you can interpret it, for example, notice the price of petrol going up or down. You might look at sports results and place bets. You might follow the results of a survey. You often see information presented in charts, tables and graphs.
Patterns and relationships	Notice the patterns that surround us in our daily lives, for example road markings, window panes, railings, tiles and floor coverings.
Problem solving	Notice the range of everyday problems you solve such as getting to work on time. To do this you have to estimate how long the journey will take. You also have to take into account how heavy the traffic will be. You have to allow enough time for other jobs like taking children to school or getting petrol.

Numeracy and ESOL

It’s important to ensure there is a shared understanding of the meaning of words and symbols used in numeracy.

Mathematical concepts are common to many languages and cultures, but they are learned and expressed through particular languages. For example, whereas ‘3 + 3 = 6’ may be widely understood, the English expression ‘three plus three equals six’ is not. Many words used in maths are borrowed from everyday language. These words tend to be ambiguous: they have one meaning in mathematics and another meaning in everyday language. Examples include the words ‘mean’, ‘natural’, ‘power’, ‘difference’ and ‘take away’.

NALA and the Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) present:

Building tutor confidence in teaching mathematics in adult basic education

Wednesday 23 May
Institute of Technology Tallaght
9.30 am to 3.30 pm

- 9.30 am Registration and coffee/tea
- 10.00 am Welcome and opening remarks
Terry Maguire, Head of Lifelong Learning, IT Tallaght
- 10.10 am Integrating a critical dimension into maths teaching and learning
Aileen Ackland, University of Aberdeen, Scotland
- 10.45 am Questions and Answers
- 11.00 am Morning workshops
- 2.15 pm Afternoon workshops

Each workshop will be repeated 3 times throughout the day and participants will be able to attend 3 different workshops.

Workshops

1. Strategies for teaching addition, subtraction, multiplication and division (at Levels 1 & 2)
2. Strategies for teaching area and volume
3. Strategies for teaching algebra
4. Strategies for teaching fractions
5. GeoGebra: How to use this free software tool
6. Strategies for teaching co-ordinate geometry
7. Strategies for teaching logs and indices
8. Real world numeracy teaching needs real world assessment strategies

Remember:

- » Different countries have different conventions for writing mathematics. There are conventions around the way we use symbols. For example, in Ireland the sum ‘seven multiplied by four’ is symbolised as 7 x 4. In other countries the same sum would be written as 7.4.
- » The same or similar words may have different meanings in different countries. For example, the American ‘ton’ weight is a different unit of measurement to the European ‘metric tonne’.
- » Languages also differ in how they write numbers greater than a thousand and in how they write decimals. The number ‘twenty thousand five hundred and sixty’ would be written as 20,560 in Ireland but as 20.560 in most non-English speaking countries.
- » Although in Ireland ‘nine point four’ is written as 9.4, in many countries the decimal point is replaced by a comma: 9,4.
- » Another common difference is the method of writing long division.



Students take cent

We had a fun and very successful adult literacy student event in the Gibson Hotel, Dublin on the 25 February. There were 110 happy attendees and the overall opinion from them was “It was a great learning day”.

The day kicked off with a welcome to new students and a catch up with old friends. Michael Power, chairperson of the student committee outlined the new SOLAS and LETBs set up, which students found very helpful. Students were really encouraged by the update Michael gave on the lobbying event that NALA students attended the day before where they were consulted about the new SOLAS organisation. They were also impressed when Michael explained that Minister Ciaran Cannon and the head of FÁS really listened to student ideas and that NALA students are lobbying for a student representative on the SOLAS board.

Eileen Sheehan a student from Limerick told her story of how she had hidden her literacy difficulties for years and how much she had overcome to now have written a story with Alice Taylor for the ‘A story with me in it’ programme. She brought the house down with her sense of humour, but also brought a few tears to the eyes of many who identified with her struggles.

Bernie O Driscoll from Special Olympics Ireland (SOI), was our invited speaker. More and more literacy students are using social media such as Facebook to meet and talk to friends, keep in touch with family members abroad and some of the NALA Student Sub-Committee use the NALA student Facebook page Take the first step, to give advice to other students who are nervous about returning to education and even some potential tutors. Bernie was invited to tell everyone how SOI use their Facebook to communicate with their supporters, promote their athletes and to spread the news about their work.

This left the students with a real appetite, both for more learning and lunch! After a mix and a mingle at lunch, the group broke into workshops, all facilitated by members of the NALA Student Sub committee.

The themes were:

- 1. Introduction to Facebook and how we use it to speak to other students,
- 2. Get your voice heard in Europe, and
- 3. How working in a student committee can help get your voice heard.



re stage in Dublin



The workshops were the most enjoyable part of the the day. Students recognised that if literacy students had progressed so far, that they too could go far. Feedback from the workshops ranged from one person at the Facebook workshop saying their workshop was “Excellent, those students gave me confidence” to a quote from a student in the European workshop who said “It was very beneficial”. Overall quotes from the day included “I don’t think you can improve on the day”, and the NALA committee were delighted and proud.



CALLING ALL TUTORS!

This year, with so many changes happening in the Education sector, it is vital that tutors have a say in how the service develops. BETA (Basic Education Tutors’ Association) was set up 10 years ago by tutors, for tutors. Every year, tutors volunteer their time to organise and attend gatherings to share information and support and to make representations on nationally significant issues like the development of SOLAS.

If you would like to be part of a vibrant community of Adult and Further Education tutors, join BETA now. Simply email Carmel Scott at carmel@not2.be and you will be sent a link to BETA’s online application form. If you are on Facebook, you will receive the link to BETA’s page. You will also get an invitation to join BETA’s Google group where you can access information and updates.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Simply Put.

Writing and design tips to make your documents easy to read

There are times when plain English works best

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