

Literacy Matters

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



Tutors lead the way

A creative writing initiative in Laois and a personal development project in Kerry help students to reach their full potential

Also:

- A student from Clare ETB talks about returning to education
- Help us raise awareness this September
- New report on referred learners

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Welcome

Welcome to our latest edition of Literacy Matters.

It is always a great pleasure to share the inspiring stories of the people we meet and this issue kicks off with one such story. On page four, Ann Nicholas talks about the drive and determination that saw her return to education so she could improve her literacy skills and get a healthcare qualification.

In adult education centres all over the country there are tutors involved in fascinating projects that help people improve their literacy and numeracy skills. You can see a great example of one of these projects on page 10 where Denise Dunne, a tutor from Laois and Offaly ETB, talks about a local creative writing and artwork initiative. Also, as part of our report from this year's Tutors' Forum on page 14, you can find out about the positive impact a personal development course has had for students in Kerry.

On page 18 you can read about our report on the challenges and specific teaching strategies that tutors use to motivate and support people who have been referred to their education service. On page 22 we take a look at a report outlining how organisations can save time and money by using plain English. Also, on page 27, we give a snapshot of our new strategic plan and outline our objectives for the next three years.

The input and feedback we get from literacy students and tutors is vital in helping us shape our work. With this in mind, we are already starting to plan this year's awareness week and, on page 30, you can read about the many ways you can get involved.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Literacy Matters and we would be delighted to hear from you if you have a story that you would like to share in the next edition. To get in touch please just send an email to media@nala.ie.

Best wishes from all the team at NALA.



Nothing is impossible

Ann Nicholas, a student from Clare ETB, talks about what inspired her to return to education.

You can achieve anything if you want it enough says Ann Nicholas and the Limerick woman knows from personal experience what she is talking about. Returning to education five years ago not only enabled her to improve her reading and writing skills, it also gave her the confidence to do lots of things she wouldn't have dreamed of before. Over the last few months Ann has presented at NALA's Family Learning conference, been interviewed on Clare FM and she has also just been elected to serve on NALA's board. That's good going for someone who left school at 13!

"I was young when I left school but everybody was in Limerick in those times," says Ann. "After I left I started working in a factory where I just lied and said I was 16. That's how it was then for kids from big families, you just got a very basic education then you had to start working. I didn't really know how to read or write very well and I was always embarrassed if I ever had to fill in any forms."

Ann got married, had three children and moved to London for a while where she worked in catering. When she returned to Ireland she was able to get a job doing home help which involved caring for people in their own homes. Ann loved the work but after a few years caregivers were required to have a qualification in healthcare. To

help her prepare for her healthcare course, Ann went to an adult education centre to improve her reading and writing skills.

Returning to education as an adult wasn't easy but Ann was very determined to make it work.

"I went into an induction evening in Shannon adult education centre. I was a bit embarrassed because my reading and writing were bad and I was very nervous when I went in there first. I found the learning very strange and hard at the beginning but I soon got used to it. I was working at the same time but the tutors made it very easy for me, they gave me so much help. They showed me how to use the computer and soon I was writing my essays on it. It was a really enjoyable experience and I met lots of people in class that I am still great friends with to this day."

Ann got on so well with her new classmates that she became a group leader on a new digital learning project. The project involved a number of students

"I met lots of people in class that I am still great friends with to this day."



Margot Walsh, tutor,
and Ann Nicholas at
NALA's AGM in Dublin.



communicating and sharing information on Facebook to complete a group assignment.

"We could reply to each other or post a message at any time so we had complete control ourselves which was great. It also meant we could easily give each other feedback on our work and I found that there wasn't any stress or worry involved with this type of learning. In fact it was really enjoyable and I believe this kind of alternative learning should be introduced in schools across the country. It gave a great sense of achievement and was a huge boost to our confidence to be able to use Facebook to help us learn," she says.

Ann continued to progress and she went on to achieve the Level 5 qualification in healthcare she needed for her job.

"The experience was a lot easier than I thought it was going to be and so much of that is down to the tutors," says Ann.

Margot Walsh, from Clare Adult Basic Education Service, is one of Ann's tutors

and she believes that the life experience students bring to a classroom is a crucial part of adult education.

"All our learners are an asset to our service," she says. "A lot of the learning that takes place in the classes comes from the learners themselves, from their past experiences and it makes it a richer environment to learn in."

Of course, for many people taking that first step back into a learning environment can be very daunting and this is a feeling that Ann knows only too well. However, she has this advice for people who are thinking about going back to education.

"I would advise anybody that's thinking of doing it to just take the first step and go into their local adult education centre. I had been out of education for years and years and until I went down to the centre I used to think that I was no good. But now I am computer literate and I have four distinctions and four merits in healthcare. So if I can do it then so can you."



John Walshe speaking to members at our AGM.

Educating the media

John Walshe talks about how we need to change the way we look at further education and training.

John Walshe was special adviser to Ruairi Quinn, Minister for Education and Skills from 2011 to 2014. Prior to that, he was involved in educational journalism for four decades, mostly with the Irish Independent. We were delighted when he agreed to give the keynote address at our AGM and talk about his observations over the years – especially how education is reported in the media in Ireland.

“You could say that education is deeply engrained in our psyche and mindset, and the way we think. And generally that’s very good. But unfortunately, sometimes we tend to look at education as a hierarchy – with universities on the very top. And subconsciously we think that only the brightest and the best get to university and

get professional qualifications. However, I believe that we should look upon education and training as a continuum that people can dip in and out of all through their life,” said John.

“Education systems throughout the world have one thing in common. Young people are staying in education much longer than they used to. Participation rates are much higher than they used to be. In Ireland the Leaving Certificate is taken by about 90% of the school population which is a very high finishing rate. It has become a high status and high pressurised exam. Any young person will tell you that they feel under pressure in the run up to the exam and during the exam itself.”

“I have yet to meet anyone who doesn’t have views on education.”

John Walshe

“In Ireland we do things differently, we rely much more on a terminal written examination. Other countries have more use of practical tests, orals and portfolios or some element of continuous assessment. We don’t, we rely almost entirely on a written final examination. Which is a marathon writing session for students.”

“But we do something else differently in Ireland as well. We give it an extraordinary amount of media coverage – in fact no other country in the world gives it quite the same media coverage. We devote acres of space to analysis of the questions, the reaction of teachers and students, and if the reaction is very strong it will get on the front page of newspapers or television – the coverage is extraordinary by international standards.”

“There’s even greater media intensity and coverage when the exam results come out in August when the grades are then converted into points for entry to higher education.”

“And it’s interesting to note the way the question has changed in what we ask students. We used to ask ‘how did you get on?’ which allowed you to talk about the subjects you did well in. But nowadays you wouldn’t get away with that, as students are only asked one question ‘how many points did you get?’”

“This in my view, adds to what you could call the academic snobbery around education,” says John.

“I don’t think we value vocational training, apprenticeships or skills training enough in this country. For example, if we look at the World Skills Competition which

is held every two years. They are very competitive with people from all over the world competing in very skilled areas like electrical engineering, aircraft maintenance, craft design, welding and so forth. Irish apprentices traditionally do very well in the competition but I don’t think they are honoured sufficiently by Irish society and indeed the Irish media and by the political establishment when they come home.”

“The 44th competition will be held in Abu Dhabi next October and there are two things I would like to see. Firstly that our trainees do well at the competition and secondly I would really like to see them greeted at the Irish airport by the President who would congratulate them for what they have done for Ireland. Because they really are ambassadors for this country and I think they should be honoured as such.”

“It’s not easy to make a decision to take a different route through further education and training because there’s pressure from peers, parents and schools, and pressure from the media that favours the points system and college route. If that is to change we need to change the way we look at further education and training.”

We couldn’t agree more.



Making the case for more funding



NALA is seeking further investment to raise adult literacy, numeracy and digital levels in Ireland.

President Michael D Higgins put it best when he said: “A culture which accepts that citizens will drop out of its education system unable to read or write cannot call itself a true republic.”

We’ve always known that there is a clear link between literacy and equality. Literacy is much more than just the skill to read and write. It’s about having the confidence and opportunities to participate fully in society.

We also know that adults with low or no qualifications, such as early school leavers, are less likely to take part in adult learning opportunities. To date, this pattern has been resistant to policy solutions. Therefore, to encourage more people to get involved in learning opportunities, we believe that we need to adopt new and creative policy measures.

New policy

According to A New Skills Agenda for Europe (2016), Europe faces a basic skills challenge. It proposes that countries prioritise adults with the least education, offering them an assessment and a customised learning programme, as well as a chance to get recognition for their achievements and progress further.

To do this, Ireland needs greater political will and more investment to put in place the structures necessary to achieve higher literacy, numeracy and digital levels in the adult population.

We need an integrated approach where Government, educators, employers and the community all have a role to play in:

1. raising awareness,
2. offering support, and
3. providing access to flexible, high quality literacy, numeracy and digital learning opportunities.

That’s why in our new strategic plan one of our core objectives is to seek further investment in raising adult literacy, numeracy and digital levels in Ireland.

To achieve this, one of the first things we’ll need to do is to show politicians and policy-makers how improving literacy,

“ A culture which accepts that citizens will drop out of its education system unable to read or write cannot call itself a true republic.”

President Michael D Higgins

numeracy and digital skills can impact positively on Irish society. Because literacy impacts on all areas of our lives – family, work, health and community – there is a need for joined up thinking where policies on health, education, employment and active citizenship are integrated and not separate.

But we can't work alone. This is a national issue that affects everyone. We want to engage and collaborate with organisations which can help us achieve greater awareness and investment in adult literacy. Together we hope to make the case, to politicians and policy-makers, for increased long-term funding for adult literacy.

Over the coming months expect to hear more about our plans to seek support and further investment in raising adult literacy levels. We've already started compiling Irish and international research to make the case and we will meet with politicians and policy makers on it.

We also intend to set up a national expert group on adult literacy to look to the future and suggest new and innovative ways of addressing the issue. We will consult with our members and the public through an online survey and focus groups.

Look out for more details in the coming months but in the meantime if you have any suggestions or comments we'd love to hear from you. Please email Helen Ryan at hryan@nala.ie or phone at 01 412 7900.

NALA Strategic plan 2017 - 2019

Objective

3

**In our new
strategic
plan we will:**

**Seek further
investment in
raising adult
literacy and
numeracy levels
in Ireland.**





Ellen Momo shows her children the book she wrote on the course.

Window of Opportunity

Laois tutors use creative writing and art to help local parents connect with their inner artist.

We all have a creative streak in us and a recent initiative involving tutors from Laois and Offaly ETB enabled local parents to explore and discover the writer and artist in themselves.

The collaborative family learning project was run in association with the home school community liaison officer in Scoil Bhríde in Knockmay and the literacy service in Portlaoise Further Education and Training Centre at Laois and Offaly ETB. As part of the project, eight parents produced a book featuring a story they wrote in creative writing classes and illustrations they created in art classes. The writing classes were taught by literacy tutor Denise Dunne and the art classes were taught by tutor Mary Delaney.

“The women who took part, some of whom have dyslexia, really enjoyed challenging themselves and exploring the ideas that

bubbled to the surface of their minds in the workshops,” says Denise Dunne. “They enjoyed being able to express their values, opinions and ideas with the rest of the group. They weren’t afraid or intimidated by the project.”

Although all of the women who took part were able to read very well, the writing workshops provided an ideal opportunity in a fun environment to brush up on their grammar, spelling and punctuation skills.

“I have been involved with teaching literacy for over 30 years and people don’t learn unless they are enjoying what they are doing,” says Denise.

“The arts, whether it be creative writing, drawing or something else, are a fantastic device for teaching new skills that can improve literacy.”



Denise Dunne and Mary Delaney, tutors from Laois and Offaly ETB with Michelle de Forge (centre), director, Dunamaise Arts Centre.

“The arts, whether it be creative writing, drawing or something else, are a fantastic device for teaching new skills that can improve literacy.”

As producing a book was the end goal of the project, some of the new skills that the women learned included editing and proof reading their own work.

Denise says that it was great to see the women improving the skills they already had while also learning some new ones that they were able to put into practice with their own kids. “All of them said that what they were doing in the workshops gave them a lot more confidence to help their kids with their homework,” says Denise.

At the end of the project copies of the women’s books were given to Scoil Bhríde and copies were also given to the county library.

An exhibition of the parents’ work, called Window of Opportunity, was also held in Dunamaise Arts Centre throughout the month of March. Denise says it was great to see the reaction of the women’s families.

“The women’s partners were so proud of them and their kids were delighted because they feature as characters in the stories. The children read to their class from the books their mothers wrote so the project has really created a love of books and reading.”

To maintain their interest in books and reading, Denise followed up the writing and art project with a book and film club.

“It’s another fun way of improving grammar, spelling and punctuation,” says Denise. “I give out weekly worksheets with questions about the books and we get together to discuss them. We’re currently reading *Lying in Wait* by Liz Nugent and we have previously read bestsellers such as *The Girl on the Train* and *Unravelling Oliver*.”

Congratulations to all of the women and tutors who took part in this great project!

Companies and organisations that use plain English are honoured



Winners show that clear communication benefits everyone, including people with literacy difficulties.

There was great excitement when the winners of the Plain English Awards were announced at a ceremony in Dublin last February.

EirGrid, the state-owned company that manage the supply of electricity across Ireland, were crowned the overall national winner. The company is responsible for the country's transmission grid and has its fair share of technical jargon to contend with.

"We're absolutely delighted to win the award because we put a lot of effort into translating our technical language into plain English. The recognition that the award brings shows our effort has been worthwhile. I think in the future it just inspires us to keep going with the plain English momentum in the organisation," said Valerie Hedin, EirGrid's communications manager.

NALA developed the Plain English Awards to reward organisations that communicate clearly in plain English. Over fifty organisations entered the competition and an independent panel of plain English experts judged the entries.

The winners were announced by the well-known RTÉ broadcaster and journalist John Murray at an awards ceremony in the Law Society of Ireland.

Category winners include: Director of Public Prosecutions, Down Syndrome Ireland, Irish Lung Fibrosis Association, Pavee Point and the Marie Keating Foundation, Taxback.com, Bord Gais and the Heartbeat Trust. The independent judges were very impressed with how all the winners communicated directly to the intended reader through language that was easy to read and understand.

"We developed these awards as we want to create a public preference for organisations that choose to communicate in plain English. We were delighted to get so many entries and we would like to congratulate the winners for thinking of the people who use their service and putting them first," said Inez Bailey, CEO, NALA.

The Plain English Awards are organised by NALA and sponsored by leading law firm Mason Hayes & Curran.



Plain English Award winner Rosemary Steen from EirGrid (front), with Declan Black, managing partner, Mason Hayes & Curran, and Inez Bailey, CEO, NALA.

Winners

Organisation: EirGrid
Document: Have your say - how we develop the electricity grid, and how you can influence our plans
Category: Energy and overall winner

Organisation: Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
Document: Going to court as a witness
Category: Information for the public

Organisation: Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre and the Marie Keating Foundation
Document: Be Breast Cancer Aware
Category: Health information for the public

Organisation: Taxback.com
Document: Guide to the PAYE tax system
Category: Finance

Organisation: Down Syndrome Ireland
Document: Employment letter and survey
Category: Health-Patient tools and resources

Organisation: Irish Lung Fibrosis Association
Document: National Patient Charter
Category: Patient information leaflets

Organisation: The Heartbeat Trust
Document: Poster about the main symptoms of heart failure
Category: Health posters and bookmarks

Organisation: Bord Gais
Document: Tone of Voice Resource
Category: Internal resources

A meeting of minds at NALA's Tutors' Forum



Our National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors in January was an action packed affair attended by almost 100 tutors. The theme of the forum was 'Literacy and numeracy in health and finance' and the event kicked off with the launch of two new research reports from NALA.

The first report, 'Meeting the challenge' focuses on strategies for motivating adult learners and you can read more about this on page 18. The second report, 'Making it go further' is part of a series of case studies and action-learning projects that describe a range of literacy and numeracy practices and programmes across Ireland. Both reports are available on NALA's website.

Financial literacy was also the subject of Daniels Sellers presentation. Daniel, a literacy and numeracy consultant from the UK, spoke to tutors about the importance of integrating a practical approach to teaching numeracy which takes into account a learner's everyday experiences.

Fergal Finnegan, a lecturer in adult and community education in Maynooth University and also a literacy tutor, explored the limitations of a purely functional view of literacy.

"Literacy can often be reduced down to a specific set of skills held by an individual," he said. "But that can ignore the fact that literacy is also a very complex set of social practices. There are a lot of dimensions to literacy and as Paolo Freire said, when we learn to read the word we are also reading the world."

Fergal emphasised that nobody who comes to literacy learning is a blank slate.

"They bring their own experiences and are part of their own community and culture. It's important to see this personal and social experience as a resource that can help tutors engage with learners," he said.

Maggie O'Sullivan Graham, a literacy and education organiser and tutor Paula Tiller, both from Kerry ETB, got an interesting discussion going about the positive impact personal development courses can have for both tutors and learners.

Maggie spoke about a personal development programme they developed in Kerry which is based around the principles in the best-selling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

"We adapted it to make it accessible for literacy learners so it takes them through

Maggie O’Sullivan Graham, literacy and education organiser and Paula Tiller, tutor, Kerry ETB.



Tipperary ETB tutors Philip Burke, Liam Ryan and Finbar O’Shea.

really big personal development concepts but in a really accessible way. We have developed crosswords, writing and reading exercises that enable learners to improve their own personal development skills. We have had learners come back and tell us that it’s life changing for them because they suddenly feel like they are in control of their lives,” she said.

Maggie also had this advice for tutors who would like to start teaching personal development skills: “Go and do a personal development course yourself. It will change your life and introduce you to the concepts that you can then use in your own classes. We will also be happy to share our course plan with you so you can integrate it into your own teaching.”

After the morning session, tutors took part in a range of interactive health and numeracy themed workshops. One of the workshops, delivered by Anne O’Mahony, a tutor with Cork ETB, looked at how tutors tell their own stories and why this matters.

Speaking about the inspiration for her workshop, Anne said that somebody asked

her to describe what her job was without actually saying that she was a literacy tutor. It made her remember a person who told her that before taking her classes they never thought that they would be able to go online to do things like check the weather forecast.

“I realised then that that’s my story - I have a job that helps people to change their minds about what they are able to do. This means a lot more than simply saying I am a literacy tutor. This is important because if you have the power to be able change your own story then you have the skills to help somebody else change theirs.”



Watch a video of the event at www.youtube.com/nalairland

PLSS - the way forward

A new initiative between SOLAS and the ETBI aims to help us improve the services we offer to learners.

A new online system has been designed to collect and share important information on Further Education and Training (FET) courses and course participants. It is called the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) and is currently being implemented across the FET sector.

The main purpose of the PLSS is to bring together in one place everything there is to know about FET courses and participants. That way, it will be easier to see what works well in FET, what doesn't and where improvements can be made to support learners.

How does the PLSS work?

There are three core components that make up the PLSS. They are:

1. a national programme database;
2. a national course calendar scheduling system; and
3. a national learner database.

1. National programme database

The national programme database brings up-to-date information on all FET courses together in one place for the first time.

This allows both FET providers to promote their courses and the public to get information about the courses that are on offer through www.fetchcourses.ie. For example, the public can get information on post-leaving cert courses, traineeships and back to education initiatives. These opportunities are all delivered by a

network of further education and training providers across 26 counties, SOLAS eCollege and writeon.ie, NALA's distance learning service.

2. National course calendar scheduling system

The national course calendar scheduling system allows a variety of stakeholders, including the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and Education and Training Boards (ETBs), to refer people to FET courses.

Once a person has been referred to a FET course, the provider of that course will contact the person. For example, NALA has received a number of referrals to our Distance Learning Service through the PLSS. These individuals are now learners with our Distance Learning Service.

3. National learner database

The national learner database allows FET providers to input and track what courses learners sign-up to and do, for example from enrolment to completion, to getting a qualification and progressing to further study.

The information gathered on this database will provide a national overview and no doubt a fascinating insight into how people engage with the FET sector. In the future this data will be used to inform the recruitment processes to FET courses and the future strategic direction of the FET sector.

What's the benefit of the PLSS?

The main benefit of the PLSS is that it allows everyone in the FET sector – learners, providers and stakeholders, to share and exchange information easily.

To ensure this happens, PLSS stakeholders such as SOLAS, ETBs, Department of Education and Skills (DES), the DSP, NALA and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) are required to share and exchange information about courses and learners.

This will help to ensure the most relevant and best possible service is offered to people who wish to return to education. It will also provide important evidence for investment in the FET sector.

How will the PLSS benefit adult education centres?

Fiona Maloney, PLSS coordinator with the ETBI, says that the reporting element of the PLSS will help adult education centres improve the services they offer to learners.

“PLSS is a data repository that holds information beneficial for self-evaluation purposes. The system enables course providers to produce reports looking at key areas including rates of application, retention and certification,” she says.

How does the PLSS affect an individual's personal information?

Only data that is required for the fulfilment of SOLAS's mandate under the Further Education and Training Act 2013 will be collected in PLSS. Although data will be collected about individual learners participating in FET programmes, it will only be used for statistical purposes and reported and published exclusively in such a way as to protect an individual's identity.

The PLSS is a joint initiative between SOLAS and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI).

The PLSS is a one-stop-shop for learners, course providers and stakeholders to share and exchange information. It has three main benefits.

1. It allows learners and others to search for information on all FET courses.
2. It allows a variety of stakeholders to refer learners to FET courses.
3. It allows the FET sector to record information on what courses learners do.

“ The main purpose of the PLSS is to bring together in one place everything there is to know about FET courses and participants.”



Meeting the challenge: strategies for motivating reluctant learners



New report captures how referred learners benefit from engaging with experienced ETB tutors.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) recently launched a new research report called ‘Meeting the challenge: strategies for motivating reluctant learners.’ The report provides a fascinating insight into the challenges and specific teaching strategies that ETB adult literacy tutors use to motivate and support people who have been referred to their education service.

“All learners will experience ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ in their education journey. However, those referred by the DSP and other services to attend education and training courses may be more reluctant to participate fully in the learning process. Indeed, often these participants may be resistant to learning. This new research report captures how participants have benefited from engaging with experienced ETB tutors who can boost motivation at a very critical time,” said Tina Byrne, NALA’s research officer.

Past educational experiences

Sorcha Moran from Castlebar Basic Education Centre at Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB was one of the tutors who took part in the case study research. Sorcha, like many of the tutors who took part in the research, spoke about how past educational experiences have an effect in

the classroom. Learners often remark: ‘If you are told often enough that you’re no good at something, or that you’re slow, then you begin to believe it and it stays with you all your life’.

Sorcha has heard this so many times that she now introduces this topic on the first day. The learners reflect on past educational experiences and create a space for considering that maybe they were not the problem, but it might have been their situation or circumstances, or that the system did not suit their learning style. That gives them the confidence to try it again in the knowledge that they are not stupid.

Learner goals

Elaine Clifford is an adult literacy tutor who works at the Killarney Adult Literacy and Basic Education Centre in Kerry ETB. In the report she identified how the lack of a clear learning goal was one of the main barriers to referred learners engaging fully in the education process.

Elaine says she strives to make the learners feel as comfortable as possible when they start on one of their programmes. Her view is that as learners have not made the decision to return to education, understandably there is a general



Tina Byrne, NALA's research officer, was one of the authors of 'Meeting the challenge'.

reluctance and often resistance to engage fully in the programme. Importantly, in the Active Employment Skills programme she runs, there is a session facilitated by personnel from the local Adult Guidance Service (AGS). According to Elaine the inclusion of these sessions in the overall programme is absolutely necessary, because so many of the learners do not have a clear learning goal or plan.

Mairéad O'Riordan, a freelance adult education tutor affiliated to Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB also mentioned the importance of 'Learner Goals' and managing the different needs and expectations among the group.

'One person might want to learn how to multiply, while another will want to do

something more complex,' says Mairéad. One solution is to come up with a list of topics that everyone in the class agrees to. For example, one week she will concentrate on teaching multiplication and another week the focus will be on learning fractions.

Mairéad finds this group approach more successful than teaching learners individually or in isolation. She believes that asking people what they want to do is the key to success. She will check in with them about what they want to do, what they liked, what they did not like and what they felt about each of the lessons on the various topics and subjects.

To learn more about the teaching practices used by experienced tutors from ETB Adult Literacy Services in Mayo, Kerry, Dublin, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford you can download the full report for free at [/www.nala.ie/resources/meeting-challenge-strategies-motivating-learners-adult-education-ireland](http://www.nala.ie/resources/meeting-challenge-strategies-motivating-learners-adult-education-ireland)

We would like to thank all the ETB adult literacy tutors who took part in this research for their time and generosity in sharing their experience. We have no doubt that other tutors will find their experience and suggestions invaluable when working with their learners.

"If you are told often enough that you're no good at something, or that you're slow, then you begin to believe it and it stays with you all your life."



A group shot of some of the students who were at the event in Thurles.

Students take centre stage



There was lots of discussion and ideas shared at our Student Days.

Over 200 people attended our Student Days in Thurles and Dublin. The theme of both days was “Using technology that suits you” and this was chosen based on suggestions NALA received from students in 2016. Students were able to choose from a selection of useful workshops focusing on how they could get the most out of their smartphones. There was also a workshop providing tips on how students can deal with dyslexia. Another workshop on creative writing proved to be very popular and students enjoyed the opportunity to tell their own stories about returning to education.

There were several guest speakers at both events including Fionuala McGeever, chief executive of Tipperary ETB, who spoke about the importance of students preparing for their classes so they can get the most out of them. Liz Corkish, a student attending Bray Adult Literacy Service and member of NALA’s student subcommittee, spoke about her own

experience of returning to education. Liz also spoke about the importance of students coming together to ensure their voice is heard.

Another student, Eamon Delaney from Killenaule Adult Education Centre, told the students about taking part in some radio and television interviews for NALA’s ‘Take the first step’ awareness campaign last year. In Thurles, John Buckley, a local student from Coláiste Éile, told the group how returning to education had a huge positive impact on his life.

“It’s given me the confidence to look at life in a completely different way,” he said.

Group discussions

There were two roundtable group discussions held during the days and these proved to be very popular with students as it gave them an opportunity to share their opinions and thoughts with each other.

John Buckley and Eamon Delaney shared their personal experiences in Thurles.



“It’s given me the confidence to look at life in a completely different way.”

John Buckley

Students were asked how improving their literacy has helped them in different areas of their lives. Here are some of their answers:

“Literacy helps you to keep up with your kids’ homework.”

“Before learning to read and write I felt I was outside my family - even with my own brothers and sisters. But now that I’ve learned those things, I’ve got more confidence to take part.”

“I’m able to fill out forms by myself now.”

“Literacy opens up your social circle and friendships.”

“I’ve learned how to deal with conflict and cope with confrontational situations.”

“I’m no longer embarrassed when I’m talking to people.”

“Improving my literacy has made me more aware of what I want in life.”

“I’m now able to understand prescriptions the doctor gives me for my children.”

Students were asked questions about their learning. Here are some of the answers from Thurles:

- 100% said they felt they were progressing in their learning.
- 75% said they had a representative they can talk to in their centre.
- 75% said they would do more hours tuition if it was available.
- 51% said they would do classes over the summer if they were available.
- 100% felt they can raise issues in their centre.
- 30% said they get offered to do awards or work towards getting accreditation.

A more detailed report on NALA’s Student Days will be available soon on www.nala.ie

Declan Black,
managing partner
at Mason Hayes &
Curran, launching the
booklet at our Plain
English Awards.



Plain
English
and the
law

If you want to stay out of court – use plain English!

New booklet shows how unclear communication can lead to costly legal cases.

In February, we launched a new booklet called 'Plain English and the law: the legal consequences of clear and unclear communication'.

We developed the booklet with Mason Hayes & Curran because we wanted to provide evidence of how plain English can save companies time and money by avoiding unnecessary legal costs.

Giving people information in a language they understand enables them to make informed choices, access their entitlements and meet their legal opportunities. Not only does it make good business sense but it's fair.

The booklet presents 'lessons' from three Irish legal cases where the interpretation of language was central to the outcome of the court case.



Cautionary tales

Justice Peter Kelly, president of the High Court, wrote the foreword for the booklet in which he says: "The case studies in this book are cautionary tales. Having spent 20 years as a judge of the High Court and the Court of Appeal I have seen many instances where the use of plain English would have avoided litigation. This book provides an opportunity to promote the use of plain English particularly in the business world. One would expect the business community to be fully supportive of the plain English movement if for no other reason than that it will save money."

At the launch of the booklet, Declan Black, managing partner at Mason Hayes & Curran said: "We often see that poorly written communications lead to misunderstanding and disputes. The stories in the book are just the tip of the iceberg because they are based on decided cases. Every day, businesses settle cases or deal with regulatory issues which could have been avoided if communication was clear, accurate and in plain English. Our ambition for lawyers in Mason Hayes & Curran is that they are always clear, accurate and, where possible, brief! We hope that this booklet, developed in conjunction with NALA, will show the benefit of this approach for all types of organisations."

A lesson for landlords and tenants

As clear as mud: the Bewley's rent review case.

This case was about a 35 year lease over the site of the Bewley's Café on Grafton street in Dublin. The tenant, Bewley's Café, and the landlord, Ickendel Limited, disputed the sections of their lease that dealt with 'rent review' and in particular the expression or clause referring to "preceding period".

The tenant's view was that the level of rent could go up or down after each rent review

" Giving people information in a language they understand enables them to make informed choices, access their entitlements and meet their legal opportunities."

but that the amount could not fall below the rate it was first set at in 1987 (£168,000). But the landlord took a very different view. The landlord interpreted the clause as providing for an "upwards only" rent review mechanism. Having an upwards only rent review mechanism in a lease means that the rent can either stay the same or go up after each review period but that it could not be reduced.

The case went to the High Court where it was found in favour of the tenant, and then the decision was appealed to the Supreme Court who ended up finding in favour of the landlord. That is, that the rent review clause was actually an upwards only rent review clause.

This judgment makes it clear that it is important that documents are clearly drafted to accurately reflect what is intended by both parties. If the lease had been drafted so that it was clear how the rent review mechanism was to work, then the parties would not have ended up in dispute. This would have avoided the hassle, time and costs of going to court.

The case, in both courts, remains a lesson in the importance of clear written communication.

Win funding for a literacy or numeracy project

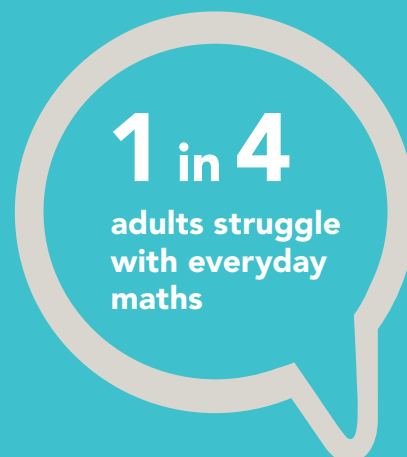
NALA has €5000 available to support projects that will improve the skills of people with literacy and numeracy difficulties. This funding has come from our partnership with Better World Books as well as from our success in MetLife Foundation's Inclusion Plus competition.

We would like to share this with our members and we are delighted to invite you to apply for funding to support a suitable literacy or numeracy project. The funding can be used to fund new resources or any initiative that supports adult or family literacy or numeracy.

Projects will be chosen based on the benefits they will bring for people with literacy and numeracy difficulties. The most you can apply for is €500 and the closing date for applications is 30 June 2017. Successful applicants will be told by 14 July 2017.

Apply now!

To apply for the funding please fill out an online application form by visiting the following link www.bit.ly/nalaproject



We are looking for students to become Learner Ambassadors



A Learner Ambassador is a student who shares their story about the benefits of returning to education with people in their community and by doing so often motivates others to take up a learning opportunity.

Do you know any students who would like to become local Learner Ambassadors? NALA will provide **free training** to any students who are interested and we will help them do small presentations in their community or speak to local media. It will be a great opportunity for students to meet other students from different parts of Ireland, in a fun and relaxed environment, and learn a few new skills at the same time.

How will the project work?

Each Learner Ambassador will be invited to attend a free day-long briefing session and workshops about the project. This will be an opportunity to meet and network with other students. Each Learner Ambassador will also receive presentation skills training on how to promote education within groups, associations or networks they are involved in. Following this training day, each Learner Ambassador will identify and complete two or more presentations in their local community with another Learner Ambassador. And they won't be alone because at each step of the process there will be a dedicated project coordinator in NALA who will guide the Learner

Ambassador through the process and help them complete the presentations.

Why are Learner Ambassadors important?

Students are vital in bringing to life the benefits of returning to education. There is nobody better placed to encourage others to return to education than those who faced the same challenges and fears themselves. By becoming Learner Ambassadors they will have a unique opportunity to encourage other people who may be thinking about doing a course to take that first step into their local Education and Training Board.

How much will it cost?

There is no cost involved in becoming a Learner Ambassador. Travel, training and expenses will be agreed beforehand with each Learner Ambassador and this will be paid by the project. If you would like to nominate a student or put yourself forward to become a Learner Ambassador, we would be delighted to hear from you. Just email Patrick at pgleeson@nala.ie or call 01 412 7916 for more information.

Health literacy and numeracy – how we can do better

Health literacy and numeracy in Ireland

Health literacy and numeracy has two elements:

- Health services communicate clearly and take account of a person's health literacy and numeracy needs.
- People understand health information correctly and can make an informed decision.

Why is this important?

The EU Health Literacy Survey (2012) showed that 4 in 10 Irish adults had limited health literacy.

Limited health literacy and numeracy could mean:

- I don't fully understand my condition and treatment.
- I might make a mistake when taking medicines.
- I am more at risk of going to hospital.
- I might visit the emergency department more frequently.
- I am less likely to go for screening.
- I could die younger.

Health literacy and numeracy is everybody's business.

Having strong health literacy and numeracy means...

- I am more confident to ask questions.
- I understand how to manage chronic health conditions.
- I make sound health decisions.
- I can follow medicine instructions.
- I give informed consent to treatment.
- I find my way around health services.

Delivering a literacy friendly health service means...

- You provide a quality service where the person fully understands their condition and what they need to do.
- You are more effective and efficient.
- You have fewer misunderstandings and complaints.
- You save time and money.

Page 1 **Ireland can do better**

Health literacy and numeracy tips

Tips for the public

- I am prepared for meeting with health service providers.** I think about any concerns beforehand and write my questions down.
- I ask questions.** When I don't understand a medical term or concept, I ask for it to be explained to me more simply.
- I check that I understand what has been said to me.** I repeat back to the healthcare provider what I think they said and what I must do.
- I make sure I know the answers to these 3 questions before I leave the meeting:**
 1. What is my main problem?
 2. What do I need to do?
 3. Why is it important for me to do this?(Taken from Ask Me 3 Campaign: www.askme3.com)

Tips for the service

- Communicate using plain English and follow design standards.** See www.simplyput.ie for advice.
- Give clear, easy to follow verbal information.** Explain any medical terminology.
- Check that people understand what you have said.** Ask people to repeat back to you:
 1. What is their main problem?
 2. What do they need to do?
 3. Why is it important they need to do this?(Taken from Ask me 3 Campaign: www.askme3.com)
- The layout and signage is clear and easy to follow.** There is a map and floor plan at the main door. There are clear direction signs.
- All staff are aware of literacy and numeracy issues and how to respond appropriately and sensitively.** For example, staff offer help with reading information and or filling in a form.

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National Adult Literacy Agency
Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Ranelagh, Dublin 6
D06 YF65

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Tel: 01 412 7900
www.nala.ie
@nalairland

In the last issue of Literacy Matters, we showed you an infographic highlighting how Ireland is currently doing regarding adult literacy and numeracy. That document is a key part of the advocacy work that we do to put literacy on the political agenda.

As part of our ongoing advocacy process, we have produced another infographic which looks specifically at how Ireland is doing regarding health literacy and numeracy. Like the previous infographic, we will be using this document to inform politicians and policy makers of why we need to recognise and address health literacy.

Helen Ryan, NALA's policy officer, says that health literacy and numeracy needs must be taken into account so health services can deliver the most effective and efficient service to the public.

"It is essential that health services communicate clearly and take account of possible health literacy and numeracy needs. Research has shown that people who are better informed about their health have more effective consultations with their healthcare provider, are more likely to take their medication correctly and as a result have improved health outcomes," says Helen.

Planning for the future

NALA recently published our new Strategic Plan 2017-2019. The plan sets out how we aim to improve outcomes for adults with literacy difficulties in Ireland over the next three years. We developed the

plan following a review of our work and consultations with adult literacy students, our members and other key players in adult literacy and further afield.

Our strategic objectives 2017-2019



Over the next three years, we will work to:

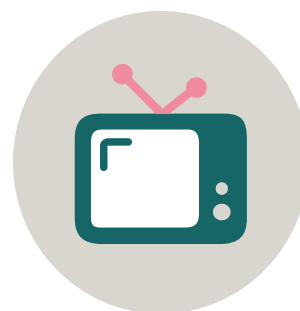


To download a copy of our strategic plan please visit www.nala.ie



The learners who took part in our Written Off TV series.

Using TV to shine a light on literacy



Do you have ideas for a new TV series?

Since 2000, NALA has been using television to highlight literacy issues, outline supports that are available and motivate people to return to education. During this time we have developed 14 primetime TV series with our broadcast partner RTÉ, funded through the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. In total, that's 61 hours of programmes about literacy – not bad if we say so ourselves!

We are now, once again, getting our ducks in a row and planning a new TV series.

We want to tell the Irish public about what literacy means today and how it has changed to reflect the skills needed to participate fully in society. For example, using everyday technology like smartphones and Google to communicate and handle information. Having strong literacy and numeracy skills are crucial to a

person's ability to develop as an individual and to live a satisfying and a rewarding life. We want to make the public more aware of the challenges experienced by those with poor literacy skills, and those with no or low qualifications.

We also want to highlight that people don't just learn these skills once in life in primary or secondary school education. The skills we have are developed and maintained throughout life – if we don't keep learning new skills our old ones won't serve us in the future.

We plan to focus on the benefits of further education and training, as well as make the case, for increased long-term funding for literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Most importantly, we want to motivate and encourage adults to take up a learning

opportunity, either in their local ETB or through self-directed learning.

We will keep you informed of our plans but in the meantime, if you have any

suggestions or recommendations on our approach please send us an email to media@nala.ie by June 2017. We'd be delighted to hear from you.

NALA TV series over the years

2000 – 2004

Read Write Now
(5 series)

Read Write Now was a TV series for adults who wanted to brush up on their reading and writing skills in the comfort of their own home. Each episode covered tips for reading and writing and learners telling their own stories. Viewers could ring NALA to get a workbook and follow the course content in the programme.

2006 – 2007

The Really Useful Guide to Words and Numbers
(2 series)

This programme aimed to give the viewer basic skills so that they can better communicate and function within modern Irish society. Tasks such as planning a trip on the internet, sending text messages and understanding household bills were tackled. The series also featured learner profiles and workbooks for viewers to use.

2008 – 2009

Written off?
(2 series)

This was a fly-on-the-wall, eight part television series that followed 11 people from very different backgrounds as they embarked on a six weekend course where they mixed classwork with personal development challenges. The course allowed the participants to apply their new found skills in a variety of different contexts and develop their sense of confidence.

2010

Stuck for Words
(1 series)

'Stuck for Words' was a personal transformation series that focused on the journey of individuals who had difficulty with reading and writing. It was a fresh, honest, often moving and insightful look at how people coped with having to learn the basic skills many of us take for granted.

2011 – 2012

A story with me in it
(2 series)

This documentary series teamed up well known Irish writers Dermot Bolger, Sheila O' Flanagan, Alice Taylor, Peter Sheridan, Louis De Paor and Marita Conlon McKenna, with six adults who had struggled with literacy throughout their lives. With the help of a writer, they looked back over their lives and learned how to turn thoughts and emotions into words on a page.

2013 – 2014

The Family Project
(2 series)

This TV series followed families as they worked with celebrity mentors to improve their own family learning situations. By working together and being open to learning new things, the families achieved results they could never have imagined. The series showed families how learning new skills, making small changes and pushing themselves to try new things could change their lives and inspire their futures.

All the TV series were broadcast on RTÉ One and attracted average weekly audiences of 200,000 viewers.

Literacy Awareness Week 2017



Last year's 'Take the first step' awareness campaign was successful because of your help. We would love for you to get involved again this year.

This year's National Adult Literacy Awareness Week will start on 8 September, which is International Literacy Day, and run until 15 September.

Why literacy matters

The theme of this year's awareness week will be 'Why literacy matters'. Throughout the week there will be a series of events and promotional activities highlighting the vital role literacy has in the following areas:

- education;
- health;
- family;
- workplace; and
- the local community.

The success of last year's awareness week was due in large part to the help and participation we got from tutors in ETB adult literacy centres all over the country and we would love for you to get involved again this year.

How you can get help

Here are just some of the ways you can get involved in helping us show why literacy matters.

- Take out a stand in your local shopping centre to raise awareness about literacy.
- Put forward students to take part in our Learner Ambassador Programme.
- Tell us about students who are interested in sharing their stories on social media.
- Put your name down to receive our promotional awareness week posters.
- Ask us for some help with writing press releases for local media.
- Write a letter to your local TD advocating for increased adult education resources.

If you would like to do any of these, or if you have any different events or ideas that you would like our help with, then please email Patrick Gleeson, NALA communications officer pgleeson@nala.ie

Together we can make this year's awareness week the most successful yet!



In the media

There was a lot of coverage of adult literacy and further education over the last few months.

- The importance of healthcare professionals using plain English was covered in the health supplement in the Irish Times.
- In February, we announced the winners of NALA's Plain English Awards and it was covered in the Irish Times, Irish Examiner and The Herald. The awards were also covered by Today FM news and some of the winners featured on RTÉ Radio's Drivetime show. NALA's Clare McNally was also interviewed on Kildare FM and Radio Kerry about the Plain English Awards.
- Ann Nicholas, a learner from Clare Adult Basic Education Service, shared her inspirational story about returning to education to achieve a Level 5 qualification in healthcare on Clare FM in February.
- World Book Day was very popular in the media again in March and Inez Bailey, CEO, NALA, was interviewed on Newstalk about the importance of parents reading with their children everyday.
- In April, Eamon Delaney from Kilkenny appeared on Newstalk's Drive show to talk about how returning to education enabled him to help his children with their homework.

Do you have interesting student stories to share?

We are always on the lookout for students who could feature in some of our publications or on social media to promote adult learning. If you or a student you know has a good story to tell about improving their literacy or numeracy, then we would love to hear from you. Please email Patrick Gleeson pgleeson@nala.ie with any suggestions.

New staff and board members



Elaine Mullen



Caitríona Whelan

We are delighted to welcome Elaine Mullen and Caitríona Whelan to the NALA team. Elaine is our new office manager and Caitríona is our new technology-enhanced learning (TEL) officer.

We would also like to welcome the following people who were successfully elected to NALA's board at the AGM:

- Trevor Moore (re-elected as chairperson)
- Nuala Glanton (elected as vice chairperson)
- Sonia Weafer (re-elected as honorary secretary)
- Students Ann Nicholas, Maria O'Gorman, Lee Mitchell and Olive Phelan (all elected as members)

We would like to thank Laura Foley and Edwin O'Hora, who recently retired from our board, for giving their time so generously over the last number of years.

We would also like to welcome Pat Ayton, an inspiring adult literacy organiser with a wealth of experience who was recently co-opted onto the NALA board.

Dates for your diary

NALA numeracy conference 2017

Tuesday 30 May 2017

Location: Trinity College Dublin

We are co-hosting a numeracy conference on Tuesday 30 May with Trinity College Dublin. The conference will focus on relating maths concepts to real life situations. There will be a number of speakers covering technology, the flipped maths classroom and working with parents to support their children's maths learning. There will be a choice of eight workshops and each participant will be able to attend two.

Register for our events at www.nala.ie/events



Plain English Training

Plain English is a style of writing and layout that the intended reader can understand after a single reading. It will help you clarify what you're trying to say and, as a result, help your reader get your message exactly as you intended.

We will hold plain English training on:

Monday 12 June (Dublin)

Tuesday 19 September (Cork)

Wednesday 15 November (Dublin)

International Literacy Day and awareness week

On 8 September 2017 we will celebrate International Literacy Day with a very special event that will be announced soon. Our National Adult Literacy Awareness Week will also start on 8 September and will run until 15 September. The theme of this year's week will be 'Why literacy matters' and there are loads of ways that you can get involved to help us raise awareness about adult literacy. For more details please email pgleeson@nala.ie



NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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