

Literacy Matters

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



Literacy, justice and equality

Minister Charlie Flanagan talks about migrant integration, prison education services and plain English.

Also:

- Michael Duffy shares his story about returning to education
- How libraries are helping people improve their literacy skills
- The power of play for children and adults





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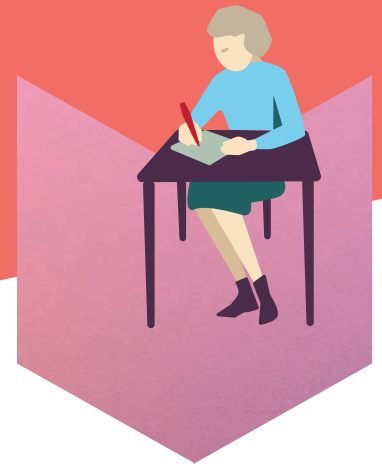
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On the cover:

Pictured at NALA's AGM with our new annual report are Carmel Bryan, a tutor at Kilkenny and Carlow ETB and Noel Phelan, a student from Kilkenny.

Welcome

to our latest edition
of Literacy Matters.



One of the best things about working in NALA is that we get to meet so many interesting students and hear their stories about returning to education.

On page four, Michael Duffy, a student from Cavan, talks about how getting a laptop as a present changed his life forever.

We were delighted to meet so many NALA members at our recent AGM in Portlaoise. Charlie Flanagan, Minister for Justice and Equality, was guest speaker at the event. On page six you can read why he thinks literacy skills are important for helping people feel part of society.

There was a great turnout at our Student Day in Galway in February, with 100 students coming together to share ideas and take part in workshops. You can read about the event, and find out more about our next Student Day, on page 16.

Libraries all over the country are supporting children, young people and adults to develop

literacy skills for life through the Right To Read programme. You can find out more about this great initiative on page 10.

We love sharing stories about exciting projects that are happening in ETB centres. On page 18 you can find out how a restoration project on an old Honda Civic helped learners to develop valuable life skills. On page 20, further education and training co-ordinator Michael Donohoe talks about how ETBs are helping migrants integrate into Irish society.

On page 22, Dipankar Biswas, a tutor and play therapist, tells parents how to help their child get the most out of playing.

On page 24 tutor Laura Roland talks about how technology helps students and tutors to learn from each other.

If you have a story for Literacy Matters please email Patrick Gleeson pgleeson@nala.ie

Best wishes from all the team
at NALA.



Michael Duffy meets President Michael D Higgins at a special event for students and tutors in Áras an Uachtaráin last year.

Don't give up

Michael Duffy went back to education to learn how to use a computer but he ended up changing his life.

When a friend gave Michael Duffy a laptop as a present he was delighted. But when Michael turned it on he says it was like looking into a space shuttle.

"I worked as a wood finisher for 30 years and I didn't know the first thing about computers. But the recession had hit and there was less work around. I knew I would have to plug into the modern world if I wanted to get by. I had always heard other people talking about things like YouTube and social media but I had no experience of using them," Michael says.

He decided to enrol in a computer class in his local education centre. That course involved

some writing work and that's when Michael knew it wasn't just computers he would need help with.

"I told the tutor about my literacy difficulties and she contacted Siobhan McEntee, who was the adult literacy organiser in Cavan," he says.

Siobhan arranged for Michael to start one-to-one literacy classes and he did these for six months before going on to start a Level 3 communications course.

"I read my first ever book for that class. We had to do a book review so I decided to try reading Niall Quinn's autobiography. I had

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without my tutor’s reassurance.”

Michael Duffy



never finished a book before, I wouldn’t even read the newspaper, but I was able to do it because of everything I had learned in my one-to-one classes. Now I love reading,” he says.

Michael went on to do a Level 4 course in communications.

“That was a big step up and it wasn’t easy. But, funnily enough, it is probably the class that I enjoyed most because I worked hard and got so much out of it. We had to do a research project and I did mine on the benefits of technology in everyday life, work and education. I’ll always remember the tutor saying we had to do a bibliography. I had never even heard of a bibliography before, never mind know how to write one. But I did it and I also did a PowerPoint presentation as part of that project.”

Michael is also very interested in the links between literacy skills and self-confidence.

“If a person has low literacy skills they can feel inadequate and might think that they don’t belong in society. I experienced this myself when I made the jump from one-to-one classes into the Level 3 group class. I told my tutor that I felt like I didn’t fit in there and it was only because of her reassurance and the reassurance from the rest of the group that I stuck with it. I wouldn’t be where I am today without that reassurance,” he says.

While he still does a bit of work as a wood finisher, Michael also volunteers with Sosad, an organisation helping those dealing with suicide.

“I work at their drop-in centre in Cavan. I had to do some training to become a volunteer and I wouldn’t have been able to do that if I hadn’t went back to education to improve my literacy skills,” he says.

As if he wasn’t busy enough, Michael also gives motivational talks to local community groups in Cavan and wants to write a book about his journey back to education.

“I want to reassure people that they will be able for it no matter how anxious they might feel. The first day I went into my local centre I climbed the steps towards the classroom and I was so nervous I could hear every one of them creaking. But the man that opened the door to me shook my hand and gave me reassurance that I could do it and I was flying after that.”

Literacy, justice and equality

Minister Charlie Flanagan talks about how literacy skills help people feel part of Irish society.



We were delighted to welcome Charlie Flanagan, Minister for Justice and Equality, to give the keynote address at our AGM in April. In his speech the Minister gave his thoughts on a wide range of literacy topics including migrant integration, prison education services and the importance of plain English in the legal profession and across government services.

“Our society is so complex that the thought of attempting to navigate everyday life with limited literacy skills is terrifying. The fact that so many people have to do so means that we must continue to help them,” the Minister said.

“During my early days in politics some people that came to see me in my constituency office used to need help with filling in forms. It took

me a while to realise that some of them had literacy difficulties and hadn’t actually left their glasses at home like they said. I realised that by telling me they forgot their glasses they were skillfully managing a situation that was extremely difficult, personal and sensitive for them.”

The number of people who still have these difficulties is considerable, he said. “As the economy continues to recover, we must continue to ensure that everybody’s quality of life improves and that everybody feels included in society.”

ESOL and integration

The Minister highlighted the role that ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) can play in helping migrants integrate into Irish society.

Charlie Flanagan, Minister for Justice and Equality and Inez Bailey, NALA CEO, launch our new annual report at our AGM.



deprivation, unemployment, low levels of educational achievement and substance misuse."

"I find it particularly sad that the first opportunity many people have to improve their literacy is while they are in prison. Staff in our prisons do very good work in delivering a flexible and relevant education service that is designed to cater for the complex needs of people in custody. The service covers everything from basic literacy to third level programmes and its aim is to help create a more positive future for people in custody which will reduce the chances of them re-offending."

The Minister gave several examples of people whose lives have been changed because of their engagement with prison education services.

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating and it is the personal stories that tell us the real value of the support services in our prisons. I was told recently about one man who learned to read and write while in prison. He worked his way up to the Leaving Certificate and has gone on to develop his advocacy skills. He is now running a number of anti-violence and mediation courses in his prison and has been offered a job in this area following his release.

"Every time he speaks in public or writes about his learning journey he thanks his first literacy tutor and attributes his success to the staff in the prison school.

"I know that there are some prisoners in Cork who decided to improve their literacy skills in order to participate in sports coaching programmes. I also heard about another person who took literacy classes in prison because he wanted to write his first Mother's Day card. He has since went on to do Level 2 modules in reading and writing and for him this is just the start of what will be a very exciting journey."

"According to the recent census, over 600,000 people in Ireland speak a foreign language in their homes. These figures certainly show the rich diversity in our population but they also show where supports continue to be needed. For migrants without proficiency in English, there is no question that access to English language education is an essential step towards integration here."

The causes of crime

The Minister said that while he is obliged to be tough on crime, he also wants to be tough on the causes of crime.

"I am acutely aware of the many societal issues that crime can be associated with such as economic

AGM

Pictured at our AGM are Lisa McEvoy, adult literacy organiser, Laois and Offaly ETB; Clodagh Fennelly, tutor; Marian O'Reilly, volunteer tutor; and Mary Sweeney, Laois County Councillor.



“For these people, and for so many others, becoming confident in their ability to read and write is a life-changing experience.”

A new report by the Irish Prison Service and Dublin City University looking at the literacy, numeracy and digital skills of people in custody is due to be published later this year.

“It will provide a useful benchmark and assist in planning for future education programmes in prisons,” the Minister said.

Drop the gobbledegook

“As a qualified solicitor I am a member of the profession that is probably most at fault when it comes to overly complicated and jargon-laden language. I am often guilty of it myself and I get a lot of stick for it at home where my daughter says to me ‘Dad, if you can’t say it in 50 seconds then don’t say it.’”

The Minister also said that the Government can do more to reduce the amount of jargon used in information presented to the public.

“The Government needs to provide information in a way people can understand and feel comfortable with.”

And although nobody knows for certain when the next general election will be, the Minister welcomed NALA’s plans to ask all political parties to include a commitment to literacy in their election manifestos.

NALA members can expect to hear more about that from us in the coming months and so can the political parties!

Think big to re-imagine literacy

Help us make Ireland do better.



Do you have thoughts about adult literacy in Ireland? Do you have ideas that could help people with literacy and numeracy needs?

Well, now is your chance to have your voice heard. We are asking all our members to help us create a vision for improving adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills over the next 10 years.

Your thoughts and suggestions will enable us to advocate and lobby on your behalf for improvements in the literacy service. Your ideas will help us seek the further investment that is necessary to do things differently.

To build our case for further investment in adult literacy, we have already started work on a scoping paper called 'Ireland can do better: A vision for improving lives through better adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills over the next 10 years'. This paper will be published in the coming months.

We are also setting up a task force of experts and stakeholders from several sectors across Irish society, including education, work, family, health, finance, consumer, community and sport.

By working together, and with the help of our members, we will create a better future for adults with literacy and numeracy needs.

Tell us your ideas

So whether you are a tutor, a student, an organisation that deals with the public or simply somebody with an interest in literacy, we would like you to think big about the following questions:

- ▶ What do you think is working well in the adult literacy service?
- ▶ What do you think could be improved in the adult literacy service?

Please email your ideas to NALA's policy officer Helen Ryan hryan@nala.ie

The Right to Read Programme



Libraries are supporting children, young people and adults to develop and maintain strong literacy skills for life.

The Right to Read programme is a national initiative that aims to greatly enhance literacy levels throughout the country. It places literacy at the heart of local authority plans so that it receives the priority it deserves in services such as libraries, sport and recreation and housing design.

A particular strength of the programme is its collaborative approach which involves local authority services, community organisations and education bodies working together to produce real outcomes for people in terms of improving literacy.

The role of libraries

Public libraries are taking a lead role in delivering the Right to Read programme. The experience of library staff in providing literacy activities in co-operation with other key agencies and offering accessible services is particularly valuable.

Public libraries provide a wide range of services in information, learning, creativity, culture and community activity, with reading and reader development as their main objective. With the roll out of the Right to Read programme this work is being further augmented with even more new and proven initiatives they will use to support literacy development.

Library staff have been providing excellent literacy supports for many years, but you can

expect to see even more events and activities over the coming years such as story time events, summer reading programmes, schools programmes, book festivals, family reading activities and local networks.

Local Literacy Action Plans and co-ordinators

As part of the Right to Read programme, each local authority is also developing a Local Literacy Action Plan to ensure help is at hand to identify and work with people who have difficulties with reading, writing, maths and technology. The programme will build on existing good practice and initiatives already underway.

While the County Librarian has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Right to Read programme for the local authority, there are also dedicated Right to Read co-ordinators within the library service. Currently there are 30 co-ordinators nationally who have responsibility for the implementation of the programme as well as ensuring it is delivered in a way that complements any existing literacy programmes.

County Carlow plan gets the plain English mark

Recently NALA worked with Carlow County Council and County Library to edit their impressive Local Literacy Action Plan in plain

English. It tells you about new and proven initiatives they will use to support literacy learning, as well as the organisations who are supporting their local Right to Read programme. It has 10 main goals focusing this year on improving the literacy skills of children and families. We were delighted to work on it and announce that it has been awarded our Plain English Mark!

The Right to Read programme is being managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development, Libraries Development in the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and local authorities. It is also one of the main themes of the National Public Library Strategy – Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities.

Recently, NALA was delighted to be invited to join the Right to Read steering group and is

looking forward to supporting this impressive initiative.

We can help you with the Right to Read programme

NALA has a long and very positive history of working with libraries, local authorities, education and training boards and local communities in developing innovative responses to adult literacy and numeracy issues.

We are delighted to support the Right to Read programme and would be happy to give support to anyone involved in the development and roll out of Local Literacy Action Plans. The services we can provide are outlined below.

For more information please email NALA's policy officer Helen Ryan hryan@nala.ie or phone her at **01 412 7919**.





How to deal with sensitive topics in the classroom

In a recent NALA workshop tutors explored some ways to handle delicate topics with students.

Tutors frequently have to deal with many sensitive topics that can arise in a class full of students with unique and often varied life experiences.

A sensitive topic is one that can be uncomfortable for students to discuss and sometimes they could feel upset about the need to do so. Such topics require a tutor to have a great deal of skill in order to deal with them sensitively and effectively, both for the benefit of individual students and the class as a whole.

At NALA's Tutors Forum in January we held a workshop exploring different kinds of sensitive topics. The workshop was facilitated by Helen

Ryan, NALA's policy officer, and Eilish Roche from Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

Tutors who took part in the workshop identified some of the most common sensitive topics that can arise in the classroom. These can be broadly grouped under five areas and can influence a student's attitude and behaviour, or how other students interact with that person. The five areas are:

1. Health (poor physical health, unfamiliar with self-care, mental health issues)
2. Addiction (substance abuse; mobile phone or technology addiction, gambling)



"A sensitive topic is one that can be uncomfortable for students to discuss and sometimes they could feel upset about the need to do so."

3. Financial (stress from debt, pressure meeting mortgage repayments, not enough money to get by or afford a computer or internet access to study at home.)
4. Personal (poor family relationships, custody issues, eviction or homelessness, trauma (many students might have moved to Ireland to escape a war in their home country. This is a very traumatic experience which will have an impact on how a student settles into a class and interacts with other people.)
5. Social media (students might not always realise that once they share information online then it's out there forever)

Tips for handling sensitive topics

The tutors in NALA's workshop explored and shared some very useful tips, methods and strategies for dealing with sensitive topics.

"By implementing some or all of these suggestions, in line with the boundaries required in their role as tutor, then tutors should be able to successfully deal with many of the sensitive issues that come up."

Joint agreement and contract

One of the things tutors can do is to discuss and agree a contract about sensitive issues with students. This contract would outline the approach that will be taken when any sensitive topics arise. It can be a class activity that everyone can be involved in. The students could type the contract and the tutor could print it and get everybody to sign it. The tutor can put the contract up on the wall so that it can be referred to when any sensitive topics are being discussed.

Traffic lights

This involves the tutor and students working together to identify sensitive topics as:

Green - this means everyone is ok with the discussion so far;

Amber - tutor is alert to where the topic is going; and

Red - it is time to stop the discussion on the topic.

Referrals

Tutors said that, depending on the nature of the topic in question, they sometimes refer students to external services such as therapists or other qualified professionals. They said it is important that all tutors are aware of and follow the agreed ETB procedure when making a referral.



HSE style guide a healthy sign

Do you ever spend time debating with a colleague about the need for a comma or wonder if a word takes a capital letter or not?

Have you been known to threaten murder over marathon paragraphs, the right type font and what size it needs to be?

And admit it: are you embarrassed by the mishmash of discordant writing styles and style choices that shriek from your work website?

If your answer to any, or all, of these questions is yes, then, no, you don't need sedatives or an anger management course. All you need is a style guide.

A growing number of government organisations and businesses have come to realise the importance of speaking with one clear voice. Among them is the HSE (Health Service Executive).

Working with NALA, the HSE has recently developed its own Plain English Guidelines for staff throughout the health service.

At the launch of the Communicating Clearly guidelines, HSE director general Tony O'Brien said they were for all staff, whether they are

Pictured at the launch of the HSE guidelines were (left to right): Michael Power, NALA student representative; Helen Ryan, NALA health literacy co-ordinator; Inez Bailey, NALA CEO; Norma Deasy, HSE campaigns manager; Clare McNally, NALA communications manager and Paul Connors, HSE national director for communications.

speaking or writing for patients, services users or colleagues. They are presented in a clear and easy-to-read manner with a suite of check lists to ensure that information is being communicated in plain English.

“If we all follow the guidelines we will improve communication with everyone who uses our services or works in the HSE.”

Mr O’Brien is absolutely right – and remember: he is working in a field where a lack of clarity can be, literally, lethal.

The same principles apply no matter what your business. Clear language helps you to raise the credibility level of the written material that you, and your colleagues, produce.

One thing you will all be able to agree on is that it looks unprofessional when different documents coming from one organisation use markedly different styles. Using different terms for the same things and providing information in different ways causes confusion.

The HSE accepted that, to be coherent, it needed to develop its own ‘tone’ – a tone that needs to be crystal clear. That ‘tone’, and the effectiveness of what it says, is part of the HSE’s identity.

A style guide is essential for setting that ‘tone’. It helps to produce a coherent voice from a cacophony of different writers from various, and even the same, sectors. It establishes ground rules for everybody to follow.

It means no more free-for-alls. No more arguments about various spellings. No more marathon sentences or elephantine paragraphs.

No ifs or buts.

The guidelines we developed with the HSE covers things like:

- ▶ the best way to format dates and numbers;
- ▶ how best to refer to job titles;
- ▶ where you should – and shouldn’t – use capital letters;
- ▶ how you punctuate bulleted lists (like this one);
- ▶ whether or not you punctuate abbreviations like AGM (you don’t);
- ▶ the maximum length of sentences;
- ▶ the maximum length of paragraphs;
- ▶ whether, given your business, you should ever use jargon or technical terms;
- ▶ which of the many kinds of abbreviations you will use (kg or kgs, l or ltrs, km or klm);
- ▶ which alternate spellings work best.

NALA’s Plain English service doesn’t just lay down rules. It helps organisations like the HSE to develop their own writing style — to find out what works best for them.

We give advice on the basics. Our experience of four decades of helping people to read and understand all kinds of written words in many different contexts has given us a unique insight into what works best and why.

For more information on our Plain English service, please contact communications@nala.ie





Students have their voices heard

It was great to see so many students at our Student Day in Galway.

Adult learners from all over Ireland came together to share ideas at our Student Day.

We were delighted that 100 students took the time to come along to our Student Day in Galway in February. David Leahy, chief executive of Galway Roscommon ETB was one of the guest speakers at the event where the theme was "Literacy in the different parts of your life".

Catherine Devlin, Michelle Johnston and Joe McDonagh, all members of NALA's student subcommittee, also inspired the audience by talking about their own journeys back to education.

You could hear a pin drop as Catherine told students about how she was assessed at a 6th class level when she returned to education but has since done Level 3 courses in English, maths and computers.

Michelle, a learner from Cavan and Monaghan ETB, told the audience that the support she has received from the staff there encouraged her to become an advocate for learning.

Joe, from Limerick and Clare ETB, delivered a great speech about returning to learning and told the audience not to let fear get in the way of achieving their goals.

“Adult education centres should have canteens and quiet study spaces just like universities.”



There were also five great workshops that students could take part in during the day. They were on health, distance learning, ESOL and technology. The technology workshop, which explored useful apps such as ‘Type and Speak’ and ‘Your Voice’ was delivered by Jude Holt, a learner from Laois and Offaly ETB and member of our student subcommittee. There was also a special workshop called Think Big, which encouraged the students to share ideas and opinions about improving the adult literacy service.

As well as an opportunity for learning new things, the workshops are a good opportunity for students to have their voice heard on issues that are affecting them.

Issues raised

In the health workshop, people said it was very stressful when they got complicated letters from hospitals because their literacy difficulties meant they found it difficult to understand them. They also said that a lack of flexibility around appointments and waiting lists added to their stress.

In the distance learning workshop learners said that they did not know enough about the phone support service available to them.

In the ESOL workshop students said that it was difficult to access classes because the

waiting lists are too long. They also felt that the courses were too short and there did not seem to be a clear progression path from one level to another.

In the Think Big workshop, students had some great ideas about how the literacy service could and should be improved. They said that adult education centres should have canteens and quiet study spaces just like universities and other further education centres.

We will try to address all of the issues that students raised with NALA and other stakeholders. We will also reply to these issues during our next Student Day.

Our next Student Day will take place on Saturday 9 June in the Ashling Hotel in Dublin. This event was due to happen in March but was cancelled because of the snow. If you already booked to attend in March then you don't need to book again. We will be in touch with you to make sure that you are still available for the new date in June. If you do not have a place booked already then please visit www.nala.ie/events to sign up.



Learning in the fast lane

A group of learners use their skills to transform a car and help a classmate live his dream.

There are loads of car refurbishment programmes on television and, at the Galway City Training Centre (CTC), learners are joining in on the delight of transforming old cars into creative works of art which ooze the vibrancy of youth.

With certified training and expert guidance, learners at the CTC got their daily fix of oil, petrol, grease and, of course, employment skills to further their progress toward a career in the motor trade.

Galway CTC is funded by Galway Roscommon ETB and provides training for early school

leavers. The centre is co-founded by the Government and the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

In 2017, learners decided to rebuild a Honda Civic car and, with the help of an instructor, the once basic model was completely transformed.

The project brought socially disadvantaged learners together to develop skills in mechanics, welding, car body repair and maintenance and teamwork. It also led to

Image left: The proud owner of the new-look Honda Civic with his classmates.

Image right: The Honda Civic before its makeover.



“The project helped learners to develop valuable life skills, including teamwork, commitment and resilience.”

improved attendance and helped learners to develop skills outside of the curriculum.

Learners planned the project themselves and worked together on the new design for the car. The project involved putting into practice all of the different mechanic skills they were learning. They also worked together to troubleshoot problems by examining any mistakes they made and understanding how the task could be completed differently.

Throughout, they had an instructor on hand to guide them, teach best practice and explain the problems caused by making mistakes or taking shortcuts.

Crucially, the project taught the learners to co-operate and showed them the advantages of committing to goals.

Literacy and numeracy support was provided by instructors as they helped learners calibrate tools used to measure electrical currents and to set the appropriate tightness on engine parts.

The project, which helped the learners achieve QQI certification, was also a useful lesson in the value of commitment and resilience when things didn't always go to plan. These life skills will help to encourage discouraged learners to persist when they encounter challenging tasks in the future. And most importantly of all, one learner got to fulfil his lifelong dream of owning a yellow Honda Civic!

What's happening in your centre?

We'd love to hear about interesting projects in your centre. To share your story please email Patrick Gleeson pgleeson@nala.ie



ESOL success through partnerships

Projects in Cavan and Monaghan show how ETBs are adapting to the changing profile of ESOL students.

Two new partnership projects, one in Cavan and another in Monaghan, are showing how ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teaching helps low-skilled migrant workers integrate into local communities.

Michael Donohoe, further education and training co-ordinator with Cavan and Monaghan ETB (CMETB), spoke at NALA's recent ESOL conference about the projects.

Michael said that they are in response to research among ESOL students and tutors which showed that there are clear benefits when ETBs and local organisations work in partnership.

Fostering shared communities in Cavan

A good example of this partnership approach is the 'Fostering shared communities' project in Cavan. This project is a collaboration under the PEACE IV Programme, an EU initiative designed to support peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties. The aim of the project is to work closely with low-skilled migrants in the area to provide

them with ESOL classes and opportunities for employment and integration into the local community.


It is aimed particularly at low-skilled migrant workers. "This has involved collaborating with Fáilte Isteach to provide conversational English classes and it has been a great success," said Michael.

An employability programme has also been set up in Cavan as part of the project.

This brings together locals and migrants from minority and marginalised communities so that they can share skills with each other.

"Migrants get the opportunity to learn about traditional Irish skills, such as basket weaving, and in return they share skills from their own countries."

Local businesses and employers are also involved and they offer advice and employment opportunities to migrants.

A photograph of two people, a man and a woman, standing indoors. The man on the left is wearing a red sweater over a collared shirt. The woman on the right is wearing a brown leather jacket over a teal top. They are both looking towards the camera. The background shows a wall with a light fixture and a coffee machine on a counter.

Michael Donohoe and Siobhan Duffy from Cavan and Monaghan ETB.

A world of work in Monaghan

The 'World of work' project in Monaghan is a collaborative project involving CMETB, Fáilte Isteach and Monaghan Integrated Development, a local development company.

"CMETB is working with Fáilte Isteach in Monaghan to provide English language assessments to migrants. We are doing the assessments at local Fáilte Isteach events which means that they are very informal and less intimidating for migrants," he said.

"This partnership with Fáilte Isteach also means that migrants still have the opportunity to practice their conversational English even if there is a waiting list for ESOL classes in the ETB."

CMETB are also working closely with Monaghan Integrated Development and Fáilte Isteach on a pilot employability skills programme that will start in September.

"We will offer classes in life coaching, CV preparation and interview skills," said Michael.

The programme will bring participants on visits to workplaces. It will also bring employers into the classroom to speak to ESOL learners about the job opportunities available in Monaghan.

ESOL is changing

Michael said that the partnership projects in Cavan and Monaghan show how ETBs are adapting to the changing profile of ESOL students.

"It's not uncommon anymore for migrants to have completed education in their home country at second and possibly even third level. However, they are still considered as low-skilled migrants because when they arrive in Ireland they are unable to use their qualifications due to their poor English language skills."

Michael highlighted several creative methods that ETBs can use to reach these migrants and tell them about the ESOL service that is available.

"They could look at advertising using posters or leaflets in different languages. Their current ESOL students could also play a huge part in spreading the word among family and friends to recruit other migrants," he said.

To find out more about Michael's research or about developing ESOL-related community partnerships in your area, please email michaeldonohoe@cmetb.ie

The power of play

When it comes to playing, parents should follow and not lead their child.



Everybody loves playing games and the good news is that doing so helps us to learn.

Dipankar Biswas, play therapist and tutor with Limerick and Clare ETB, says that play helps people develop vital linguistic, emotional and creative skills.

“Play stimulates the growth of the cerebral cortex which is the part of the brain responsible for higher thinking. Play can help children develop social skills because they learn how to share, negotiate and resolve conflicts. By playing, children also build their self-confidence because they will be constantly testing and exploring ideas and skills.”

It’s not uncommon for parents to want to know how their child can get the most out

of playing. Dipankar says that the best thing parents can do is to ‘follow and not lead’ their child at play.

“Through play, children are exploring the world around them at their own pace. A parent that is following their child’s play can contribute to this exploration and learning by talking to the child about what they are playing. This will increase the child’s awareness of the events and form impressionable memories which sets out the neural pathways on which future learning can happen more easily.”

However, when the parent ‘leads’ a child’s play activities instead of following, they are setting their own agenda, which may not be in line with the child’s abilities, interest or knowledge.

“This will distract the child from the subject it was pursuing or make it irrelevant as the

“We don’t stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.”

George Bernard Shaw



context of the subject has now changed and requires an ability or expertise it does not possess,” says Dipankar.

The impact of technology

These days, it’s not unusual for young children to have their own smartphones and computers but Dipankar stresses that excessive use can be harmful.

“Humans are social creatures and the developing brain needs interactions with other humans to learn and develop. Smartphones and other handheld devices interfere with bonding and parental attention.”

Dipankar is also keen to point out that adults shouldn’t underestimate the impact of play in their own lives.

“We are never too old to play and it is beneficial for people of all ages. Playing chess, completing puzzles or pursuing other fun activities that challenge the brain can help prevent memory problems and improve brain function. As George Bernard Shaw said ‘We don’t stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing’.”

The different kinds of play

Solitary or independent play

This type of play is important because it teaches children to keep themselves occupied and helps them become self-sufficient.

Parallel play

When children play side-by-side without actually playing with each other, they are engaging in parallel play. Despite having little social contact, parallel play teaches children to take turns, observe and respond to others and develop other social etiquettes.

Associative play

This is when children play separately from one another, but are involved with what the others are doing, talking to and engaging each other. This stage of play helps children develop a whole host of skills, including socialisation, problem solving, co-operation and language.

Co-operative play

This kind of play fosters important social skills that children will use during their entire life such as sharing, following instructions and taking turns.

Visit helpmykidlearn.ie to find out about all kinds of games and activities you can do with children.

Technology teamwork

Getting students to share what they know is a great way for everyone to learn.

It's not that long ago when the only thing connected to the internet was a computer. Now there are 8.4 billion things, from cars and fridges to oil rigs and coffee machines hooked up to the net. In fact, sometimes it can feel like the whole world is happening online.

Laura Roland is a development and resource worker at Clare Adult Basic Education service. She believes that digital literacy is something that is as important for tutors as it is for students.

"Tutors have to understand and know how to use new technology in the classroom. We also have to enable and support our learners to effectively and efficiently acquire and use the digital skills necessary for modern society," she says.

One of the reasons why technology is so exciting is that it is constantly changing and evolving. This can be a double-edged sword for tutors as sometimes it can feel like they are just getting used to using an app or a social media platform in the classroom and then it changes or something else takes over.

Laura says that tutors shouldn't let this worry them too much.

"The most important thing for tutors to remember is that technology is not there to take over. No matter how useful a website or an app is, it's still just one tool in a tutor's toolbox. The most important thing is still



Laura's apps of the month:

Duolingo is the world's most popular way to learn a language. It's 100% free, fun and science-based.

Grammarly will make sure your messages, documents, and social media posts are clear and free of grammar errors.

Vocabulary Builder is a free game for your Android phone or tablet that will help you learn new words.

Read Aloud is a plugin that can be added to Google Chrome giving you the option of having the web pages you visit read aloud to you.

how the tutor interacts with the students.”

Learn from each other

Laura believes that technology has made teaching more of a two-way process.

“The growing use of smartphones and social media means that a lot of learners are coming in to class with their own set of technology skills. Sometimes learners know more about things like iPads and YouTube than the tutor. This is a good thing as it gives those learners the opportunity to share their skills with the tutor and the rest of the class. This can be a very empowering thing for learners who are coming back into education.”

App of the month

Anyone who has ever tried to find literacy or learning apps online knows that there are lots of different options out there and it's hard to know which ones are good. Laura embraced this challenge and created an 'App of the month' project in her own centre.

“Every month we picked one app and the students were able to take part by using it to see if they thought it was useful. We put up posters around the centre describing the purpose of the app and explaining how other students could use it. This shows how tutors can turn finding out about new technology into a fun and interactive experience for learners,” says Laura.

Top tips for online safety



There are lots of simple things you can do to help you stay safe on the internet, says Caitriona Whelan, NALA's technology enhanced learning officer.

Check your privacy settings

Social media platforms have privacy settings that give you control over who can find you online. For example, you can decide if your social media posts are visible to your friends or to the public.

Be careful what you share

Content you share online can be passed on and seen by people you hadn't intended it for. This includes potential future employers who often scan social media to help them make hiring decisions.

Keep software up to date

Accept Windows, iPhone and other automatic updates as they will often include important security updates.

Use strong passwords

Use a combination of small letters, capital letters, numbers and other characters such as ! or * and never use a name or word. Don't share your password and never use the same password for many websites. Update your password regularly.

Use screen locks

Pressing CTRL+Alt+Delete on a PC will give you an option to lock your computer when you are away from it.

Be aware of suspicious messages or emails

A bank will never email you looking for your personal details such as a password and account details. Do not click on any links in an email unless you trust the sender of the email.

Keep a backup of your work

Use an external USB hard drive so you have a copy on a physical device. You could also keep a copy of data online using Dropbox, Microsoft OneDrive or Google Drive.

Be careful about what you install or download

To check if a website is safe to download from, visit transparencyreport.google.com/safe-browsing/search and type in the name of the website.

Delete old accounts

If you are not using a social media site or another online service any more then delete your account. Most websites offer an option to opt out or you can use the contact details to request your account be removed.

Stay informed

Find out about potential online dangers by using websites such as www.webwise.ie and www.common sense media.org

Win funding

for a literacy or numeracy project



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh



NALA has €2000 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, an organisation that sells used books online to raise money for leading literacy charities around the world. A portion of the revenue goes to the organisation that contributed the book or to one of their non-profit literacy partners.

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 for 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 €300 and the closing date for applications is 29 June 2018. Successful applicants will be told by 20 July 2018.

**Apply
now!**

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



Improving the lives of older people



Increasing the awareness of health literacy and removing barriers to lifelong learning will help people who are over 50.

New research by the Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative (HaPAI) shows that a better understanding of health literacy by nurses and doctors could improve the health and wellbeing of older people.

As part of their study, the HaPAI highlight recent findings from the European Health Literacy Survey (HLS-EU) which found that almost one-in-three older adults in Ireland have low health literacy. That means that these adults have difficulty accessing, understanding, evaluating and applying health information about healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion.

Also, worryingly, data from The Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing (TILDA) also showed that many older adults do not share sensitive health issues with their doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals.

The data used in the HaPAI's study is from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). SHARE is a survey of the health, socio-economic status and social and family networks of adults aged 50 and older, and their spouse or partner, in Europe.

Some of the findings are:

- › 24% of older people said that their doctor or nurse rarely or never explains the results of medical exams.
- › 26% said that their doctor or nurse rarely or never explains different treatment options.
- › 29% felt discouraged to talk about emotional, nervous or psychiatric problems such as stress, sadness, or anxiety.
- › 42% felt discouraged from talking about sensitive problems such as their sex life or incontinence.

The HaPAI outlines several steps that healthcare professionals can take to ensure older people feel more comfortable. These are:

Explain results and listen to opinions

Older people who said that their doctor or nurse explains medical exam results, and listens to their treatment preferences, were more likely to report feeling encouraged to talk about physical and social problems.

Support patients with lower cognition

Some people understand things quicker than others. It is important that a doctor or nurse takes this into account when they explain a patient's test results and the treatment options available to them.

Support patients with lower education

Patients with lower education were more likely to report feeling discouraged to discuss physical, social and emotional problems with their doctor or nurse. However, they said that they would feel encouraged to discuss these issues if their doctor or nurse communicated openly with them.

Barriers to lifelong learning

The HaPAI has also looked at the barriers that prevent older people from participating in lifelong learning. Previous studies have shown that there are many benefits to taking part in lifelong learning. These include better health and wellbeing, stronger family and community links, and better economic and financial wellbeing.

However, participation in lifelong learning in Ireland is consistently low and reduces with age. In 2016, information about participation in lifelong learning was collected about adults aged 55 and older using the HaPAI Age-friendly Cities and Counties Survey. As part of this survey, people were shown a list of barriers to lifelong learning and asked if they had experienced any of them.

Some of the barriers identified included access, cost, no available courses, family care and poor health. According to the HaPAI, some of these barriers show the enduring impact of low literacy, low self-esteem, feeling too old, and not placing any value on lifelong learning.

The HaPAI says that promoting a culture of value and interest in lifelong learning will increase the number of older adults who engage as they age.

The HaPAI is a research programme led by the Department of Health in association with the HSE, Age-Friendly Ireland and The Atlantic Philanthropies. This study was conducted by members of the HaPAI research team: Sarah Gibney, lead analyst; Tara Moore, research assistant; and Niamh Moran, research assistant. The full report will be available in June 2018 on www.hapai.net

Get involved in Literacy Awareness Week 2018

This year's National Adult Literacy Awareness Week (NALAW) will kick off at our conference celebrating International Literacy Day on 8 September.

It will run until 15 September in tandem with NALA's 'Take the first step' campaign and will raise awareness of the free services available nationwide.

Throughout the week there will be a series of events and promotional activities exploring a range of exciting topics including:

- › the impact of literacy in different parts of everyday life;
- › the demands of digital literacy; and
- › the critical literacy skills needed for citizens to take part in society.

The success of last year's NALAW was due in large part to the help and participation we got

"To help my kids I had to help myself first"
- Eamon, Kilkenny.

Need help with writing, spelling, maths or technology?

Take the first step and **phone 094 962 1456** to see how we can help.

It's free & confidential
take the first step.ie

Supported by your local Education and Training Board

etb SOLAS NALA

from students and 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

- › Take out a stand in your local shopping centre to raise awareness about literacy.
- › Tell us about students who are interested in sharing their stories in the media.
- › Put your name down to receive our promotional awareness week posters.

For more information please email Patrick Gleeson, NALA communications officer **pgleeson@nala.ie**.

Order your free posters

As part of our awareness campaign, every year we design and print posters for adult literacy services. Each poster has a contact number for the local service and includes the relevant ETB logo. These posters are free but the closing date for orders is 15 June 2018. To order posters please email Patrick Gleeson **pgleeson@nala.ie** with the phone number and ETB logo you would like to advertise.

Other news



A healthy appetite

NALA is delighted to be the health literacy partner for Healthy Appetite, an exciting new RTÉ One series. Each week, two of the country's top chefs compete to see who can reduce the naughty elements in their restaurant dishes and turn them into a healthy option. The show is on Wednesdays at 8.30pm on RTE 1 and you can catch previous episodes online on RTE player.



Healthy Appetite is presented by Pamela Flood.

- › Roisin Shorthall from Social Democrats
- › Tony McLoughlin from Fine Gael

We also have other political meetings planned over the coming months.

Getting ready for GDPR

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will be introduced on 25 May 2018. We have taken a number of steps to help us comply with the GDPR, including an audit of our current data management procedures. NALA staff are also being provided with GDPR training.

A new vision for literacy

One of NALA's objectives is to seek further investment in raising adult literacy levels in Ireland. To help us achieve this, we plan to create a vision for improving adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills over the next 10 years. To help us create our new vision, so far in 2018 we have consulted with tutors, students, employer organisations, partnership companies and community and voluntary organisations. We have met the following political representatives:

- › Aodhan O'Riordan and Jan O'Sullivan from Labour
- › Brid Smith from Solidarity – People Before Profit
- › Fiona O'Loughlin and Thomas Byrne from Fianna Fáil
- › Senator Lynn Ruane

Jonathan Swift Festival

We were delighted to receive a €2000 donation from Saint Patrick's Cathedral. It was raised at a benefit concert that was held last year as part of the Jonathan Swift Festival. The festival takes place every November, and celebrates his legacy as a writer, satirist, poet, and Dubliner of note. Last year, Saint Patrick's Cathedral used Jonathan Swift's 350th birthday celebrations as an opportunity to fundraise and provide a living legacy to address some of the key causes he worked to resolve. Glen Hansard very kindly agreed to take part in the concert to benefit five different causes in the locality. We would like to thank Saint Patrick's Cathedral for this generous donation and will make sure it goes towards supporting local literacy development work in Dublin.



Dates for the diary



Numeracy conference Wednesday 30 May

NALA's numeracy conference will focus on relating maths concepts to real life situations. World-renowned maths expert Merrilyn Goos will be the keynote speaker and there will also be a choice of practical workshops for tutors to attend.

To register visit nala.ie/events

International Literacy Day and awareness week

We will celebrate International Literacy Day on 8 September 2018 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. Throughout the week there will be a series of exciting events and activities promoting free ETB services nationwide and looking at the role of literacy skills in everyday life. To find out how you can get involved to help us raise awareness about adult literacy please email Patrick Gleeson pgleeson@nala.ie

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:

- › Wednesday 13 June (in Cork)
- › Wednesday 17 October (writing for the web)
- › Wednesday 21 November

To register visit nala.ie/events

Tel: 01 4127900
web: www.nala.ie
email: info@nala.ie

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



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh