

# Literacy Matters



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

## *In this issue*



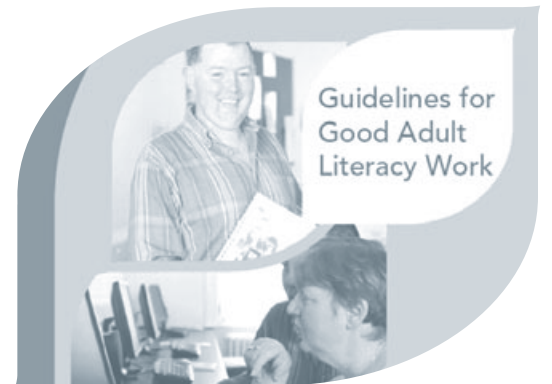
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# Welcome

It has been a busy time since the last edition of Literacy Matters, with the launch two new studies we commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to carry out for us.

The first report looks at access, participation and the impact of training for people who are unemployed, and who reported that they had a literacy or numeracy difficulty. It confirmed our view that these individuals are more likely to move into long-term unemployment. It also found that when these individuals do receive training, they are almost three times more likely to exit unemployment than those without literacy or numeracy difficulties.

Our second report focused on literacy and numeracy difficulties amongst people who are employed. As you know, these individuals often hide their problem especially in the workplace where they fear ridicule or worse. Improving these skills benefits the individual in terms of increased earnings. This is an important motivational message to get into workplaces all over Ireland. In addition, it is clear that continued Government support for the Workplace Basic Education Fund is critical in order to increase literacy and numeracy skills amongst employees so that they can develop in their career and increase their earning potential.

You can read about both these reports on page 6.

We also launched our new website for parents on International Literacy Day, 8 September 2012.

We developed this website to provide parents with ideas and information on how they can support their children's literacy and numeracy. All our research shows that parents know how important their role is in helping their children learn but very often they are stuck for time or easy access to resources. Help My Kid Learn is designed to support parents with fun activities and tips that can be integrated into any part of their day. You can read all about it and how you can help us promote it in the next two pages.

There are lots more stories inside, keeping you up to date with literacy and numeracy news in Ireland and abroad. We hope you enjoy this edition and please contact us if you have news that you would like us to include in our next edition. You can email us at [media@nala.ie](mailto:media@nala.ie)



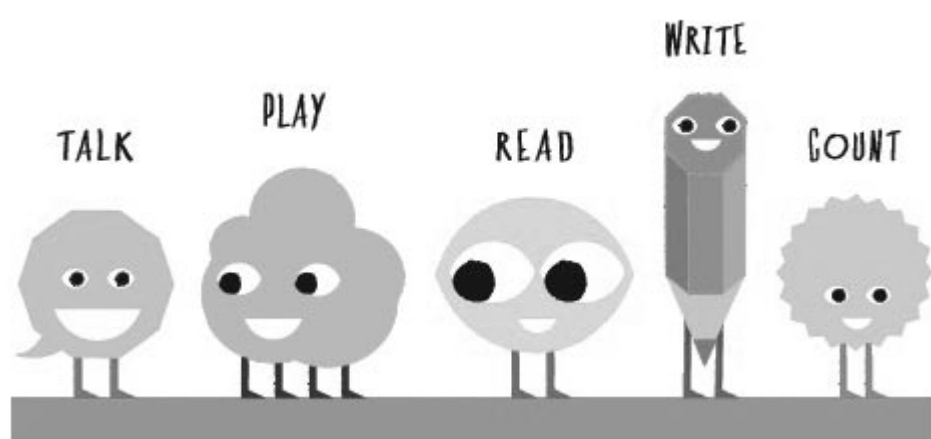
Inez Bailey,  
Director



*Inez Bailey, Director, NALA, Mayor Cathal King and Daniel Sellers, Numeracy Expert at the launch of NALA's new Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work.*



# Help My Kid Learn



*Cian, Sean and Fergus Dolan (holding baby Hannah Daly) with Margaret Murray and her two children Shane and Ellen, at the launch.*

On Friday 7 September, on the eve of International Literacy Day, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D. launched our new website called Help My Kid Learn.

The purpose of the website is to provide fun activities that parents can do with their children to improve their reading, writing and maths skills. It highlights the way children learn as part of their everyday lives and especially the positive things that children learn at home from their families.

The website can be used by anyone caring for children. We use 'parent' on the website to keep it easy but we mean all guardians, family members and childminders of children aged 0-12 years.

## What's on the website?

Help My Kid Learn mixes the old with the new, from card games and hopscotch that help practice maths, to children's e-books and apps for reading and pleasure.

Information on the website is organised into 5 main competencies or areas of learning: **Talk**, **Play**, **Read**, **Write** and **Count**. Each area has a colour.

It also includes audio and video content to support parents with literacy difficulties and links to others websites providing more detailed information on specific topics.



A new website packed full of ideas to help your child learn every day. Just enter your child’s age and find lots of fun reading, writing and maths activities they can do at home.

All a person has to do is enter their child’s age and they will be presented with lots of ideas for helping children with talking, playing, reading, writing and counting.

Play is one of the most effective ways children learn and the site is packed full of fun activities that support children’s literacy and numeracy. As well as these fun activities, there are also top tips, a section on ages and stages and information on how you can build the activities into your day.

Check out the homepage, there is a nice short video telling you about the website.

Why was the website developed?

The national strategy ‘Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life’ (Department of Education and Skills 2011), includes a range of actions to enable parents and communities to support children’s learning. They recognise that parents who are engaged in their child’s learning have a significant positive impact on a child’s educational achievement, especially in literacy and numeracy.

As part of this strategy, we were asked to highlight the role that parents and communities can play in improving children’s literacy and numeracy, using media and online resources.

Before starting this work we did research and spoke to parents and many people who work with parents and families. During this research we noticed that there is a dizzying amount of resources for parents, in different formats and numerous locations. The greatest difficulty for a parent was sifting through this information and finding the most relevant, age appropriate resources, quickly.

Following this research, we decided to develop a simple website that brings together relevant information for parents. Our objective was to help parents, who are usually rushed off their feet, with lots of practical ideas they can build into their daily routine, milestones to look out for and useful tips. It also had to be simple in design and functionality, with information no more than three clicks away.

There are already a wide range of statutory and voluntary groups at community level supporting the literacy and numeracy development of children and adults. This website aims to work with and support all those efforts by providing a single reference point for parents and guardians to better understand their role in their children’s literacy and numeracy development.

How many people are using the website?

There has been 8,000 visits to the website in the first two months. On average, people spend four minutes looking at activities on the site. It is interesting that almost 1 in 5, or 20% of visitors to the website, look at it from their mobile ‘smart’ phone.

The site will be reviewed and added to on an on-going basis and we are asking that parents leave comments and rate the activities so that it can be continuously improved according to their needs.

What can you as a member do?

- As an individual member of NALA we would like you to:
- » Look at [www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie) and let us know what you think. You can do this by rating the activities as you go along or sending a comment from the website.
  - » If you like the website let your family and friends know about it. You can share the idea with your friends and family easily from the website.
  - » You can also sign-up for monthly email updates with top tips on supporting a child’s literacy and numeracy.

- As a group or corporate member of NALA we would like you to:
- » Mention [www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie) in your own newsletter and website.
  - » Use other opportunities you might have to let more parents know about it.

So log on and have a look around [www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie)

You can contact Margaret Murray in NALA if you would like further information about the website. Email: [mmurray@nala.ie](mailto:mmurray@nala.ie)

[helpmykidlearn.ie](http://helpmykidlearn.ie)





# Two New Research

NALA believes evidenced based research is vital to the development of literacy policy and practice in Ireland. This year we commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to carry out two studies to help us learn more about people with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

## Literacy, Numeracy and Activation among the Unemployed

Little is known about the experiences of unemployed people with literacy and numeracy difficulties in Ireland, particularly with respect to the nature and effectiveness of any assistance that such individuals received through the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP). NEAP is Ireland’s main activation policy for assisting the unemployed to reintegrate back into the labour market.

Our first report looked at access, participation and the impact of training for people who are unemployed and who reported that they had literacy and or numeracy difficulties. It put a spotlight on literacy and numeracy as an issue in the context of unemployment and confirm our view that literacy and numeracy needs are not taken into consideration in a systematic way in activation measures.

### Key Findings

1. Unemployed individuals with literacy and numeracy difficulties are more likely to become long-term unemployed.
2. However, such individuals are not more likely to be in receipt of government-sponsored training under the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP).
3. The research also shows that when those with literacy and numeracy difficulties do receive training that they benefit by much more than average - they are almost three times more likely to exit unemployment than those without these difficulties.

### Key Recommendations

- We made several recommendations based on the findings of the study. These include the need to:
- » Adopt a clear policy approach to addressing the needs of unemployed people with literacy and numeracy difficulties in the context of new Further Education and Training (FET) structures and systems.
  - » Adopt a policy to ensure scarce resources for training interventions follow those who are most likely to benefit, including people with literacy and numeracy difficulties and with low educational attainment.
  - » Ensure the system of eligibility is simplified by allowing anyone who is identified (through profiling) as having literacy and numeracy difficulties and low education attainment, immediate access to an education and training programme.



*“It is well established in research that people with weak literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed. Therefore it should follow that this issue is an important consideration in labour market policy and, in particular, activation policy. However, this has not always been the case and we are concerned that unemployed adults with literacy needs and those with low educational attainment are not being adequately prioritised for labour market activation. This research puts forward an argument for this to be changed,”* said Inez Bailey, Director, National Adult Literacy Agency.

The report was launched by Joan Burton TD, Minister for Social Protection, in June.

This study utilised data from the Department of Social Protection/ESRI Profiling Project, which collected information on unemployed individuals between September 2006 and June 2008.

# Reports



Dr Marie Griffin, CEO County Dublin VEC, Minister Ciarán Cannon, T.D., Dr Elish Regan, ESRI and Inez Bailey, Director, NALA.

## Literacy and Numeracy Difficulties in the Irish Workplace: Impact on Earnings and Training Expenditures

The importance of literacy and numeracy in the modern workplace has drawn considerable attention from policy makers and researchers in recent years. The focus has been primarily on the acquisition of these skills during formal schooling and how to improve our school system to ensure better outcomes in this area. There has been far less concern with those already in work who have not attained the requisite levels of literacy and numeracy in their initial education. This is despite the ample international research which details the obstacles people with literacy and numeracy issues will face throughout their lives and in particular in their careers.

Our second report focused on literacy and numeracy difficulties amongst people who are employed. It was launched by Ciarán Cannon TD, Minister of State for Training and Skills, in September.

### Key Findings

1. Those with a Junior Certificate were 4 times more likely to indicate that they had literacy training needs than those surveyed overall and slightly more than 4 times more likely to indicate a numeracy training need. People with no formal education were over three times more likely to indicate literacy and numeracy training needs.
2. Those employed in the wholesale and retail, transport and other services sectors reported the highest incidence of numeracy difficulties, while workers in the transport sector recorded the highest rate of literacy skill gaps.
3. Literacy difficulties were found to reduce an individual's earnings by 4.6 per cent. The wage discount was larger for females (6.3 per cent) than for male employees (4.3 per cent), which is a noteworthy finding given that a slightly higher proportion of males reported having literacy difficulties.

4. The study found that most employers who had staff with literacy and or numeracy difficulties did not invest in training to address these skills gaps. Employers were more likely to respond to skill gaps in the areas of management or foreign languages.

### Key Recommendations

NALA made several recommendations based on the findings of the study, these include:

- » The forthcoming SOLAS Implementation Plan should outline how the literacy and numeracy needs of employees and their employers will be addressed.
- » The Workplace Basic Education Fund should be maintained and developed as the key response to raising literacy and numeracy levels in the workplace. Development should take account of the findings in this report regarding the greater vulnerability to risk of certain groups and employment sectors.
- » A dedicated awareness raising campaign involving all key stakeholders should be rolled out. This should be aimed at employees and employers and highlight the prevalence of literacy and numeracy issues in the workplace in an attempt to reduce the stigma attached to this area. This would also highlight the options and benefits of returning to learning.

### Conclusion

NALA will use the findings in these very valuable reports to advocate for policies and practices which meet the needs of people with literacy and or numeracy difficulties who are unemployed or in the workplace.

You can view and download both these documents in the NALA Research section in [www.nala.ie/resources](http://www.nala.ie/resources)





# Tallaght steals the show

## National Adult Literacy

There’s no doubt that Tallaght stole the show during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2012. During the week a number of events were held that highlighted how integrating literacy-friendly policies can positively affect a local community, showcasing all the great work being done in the area. Here are some highlights.



*Antoinette O’Leary and Tanya Johnson, two students from An Cosán, spoke passionately about going back to education and the confidence it has given them to try new things.*

*“It’s very important to have community education centres like An Cosán to help people adapt, prepare and get more involved in their communities and initiate change,” said Minister Pat Rabbitte.*

### An Cosán – empowering adult learners

An Cosán took centre stage at an event that focused on the importance of working on adult literacy in a community education setting. Attending the event, Pat Rabbitte, T.D. Minister for Communications, Energy & Natural Resources said he wasn’t surprised Tallaght was chosen to highlight how integrating literacy-friendly policies can positively affect local communities as there was so much great work being done in the area. He commended An Cosán saying, ‘they were not only an outstanding community education centre in Tallaght but possibly the best community education centre in the country’.





# during Awareness Week



Minister of State for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon, T.D. with Marian Lynch, Skills for Work National Co-ordinator in County Dublin VEC.

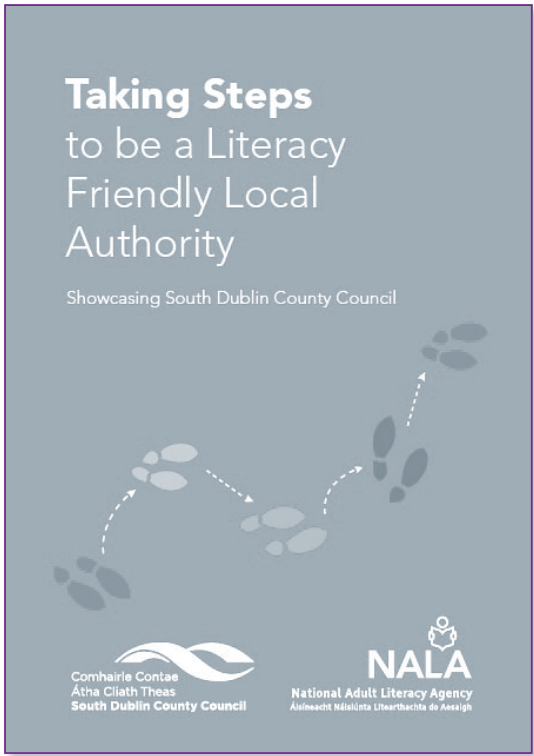
## County Dublin VEC – skills for work

Minister of State for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon, T.D. launched the new ESRI NALA research report on the impact of literacy difficulties in the Irish workplace at an event hosted by County Dublin VEC in Tallaght. Many people travelled to the event as it focused on the training needs of people in employment who have literacy and numeracy difficulties and what is needed to support their progression.



## Institute of Technology Tallaght – using maths eyes

NALA, the Institute of Technology Tallaght and South Dublin County Council held a 'Maths Eyes' trail for parents and children in Sean Walshe Park. During the trail, all the participants tried to develop their 'Maths eyes' by seeing shapes, patterns, numbers and angles that they come across. A Maths trail is a bit like a treasure hunt, but all the questions are connected to patterns, shapes, numbers, counting, measurements and drawing.



## South Dublin County Council – becoming literacy friendly

The new Mayor for South Dublin, Cathál King launched a short report outlining the approach and lessons from South Dublin County Council's (SDCC) Literacy Audit. SDCC is the first Irish local authority to set out to become 'literacy friendly' using NALA's Right from the Start approach.



# ACT NOW

## EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy



The EU Commissioner for Education asked Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands to chair a group of European experts in the field of literacy. Their goal was to examine how to support literacy throughout lifelong learning, based on common success factors in literacy programmes and policy initiatives, and to make proposals for improving literacy among both school students and adults. This is the first time that literacy has been reviewed at EU level and has come about because of an increased emphasis on the importance of education and training to the future of Europe.

The definition of literacy used in the report is broad and largely related to the OECD PISA study. There are four main chapters in the report. The first chapter deals with the facts about literacy in European society. Chapter 2 outlines the context needed for solutions in this area and the importance of cooperation as an underpinning approach to all solutions. The next chapter deals with the preconditions for success with chapter 4 breaking down solutions identified through key ages. The report concludes with recommendations to policy makers and proposals for actions to be taken by different actors in the education sector and society as a whole. Amongst the solutions identified in the Adolescents section, is the Irish National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy which aims to ensure that the literacy curriculum and reading materials are relevant for boys. Irish practice relating to adult literacy is particularly noted in the report covering areas relating to workplace literacy and the involvement of volunteers.

In terms of recommendations, there is a lot of emphasis placed on the creation of a literate environment. This can be achieved through a family focus on literacy development as well as enhancing the role of libraries in the local community. The report talks about the need to develop a society wide engagement in literacy, built from public awareness raising campaigns at local and national level. The need to raise the level of literacy teaching and provide more reading support is a further overarching recommendation, closely tied to the need to adopt a literacy curriculum. A number of recommendations relate to the importance of closing the social, gender and digital gaps which exist as well as the importance of supporting migrants and members of other minority groups.

Adult specific recommendations include the importance of monitoring adult literacy levels and practices, the importance of communicating the need for adult literacy development, the need to strengthen the adult literacy teaching profession and ensure access to broad and varied learning opportunities. Clearly outlining why and how this report urges all in Europe to ACT NOW.

You can read the full report here <http://ec.europa.eu/education/literacy/sources/index.htm>

# Get a free copy of Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work

## A must read for all adult literacy tutors

If you are involved in adult literacy and numeracy tutoring and are a member of NALA, contact us now to get your free copy of our new Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work.

Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work is a key reference for those working in teaching and learning in the area of adult literacy. It offers a comprehensive explanation of what adult literacy work is about and where it came from.

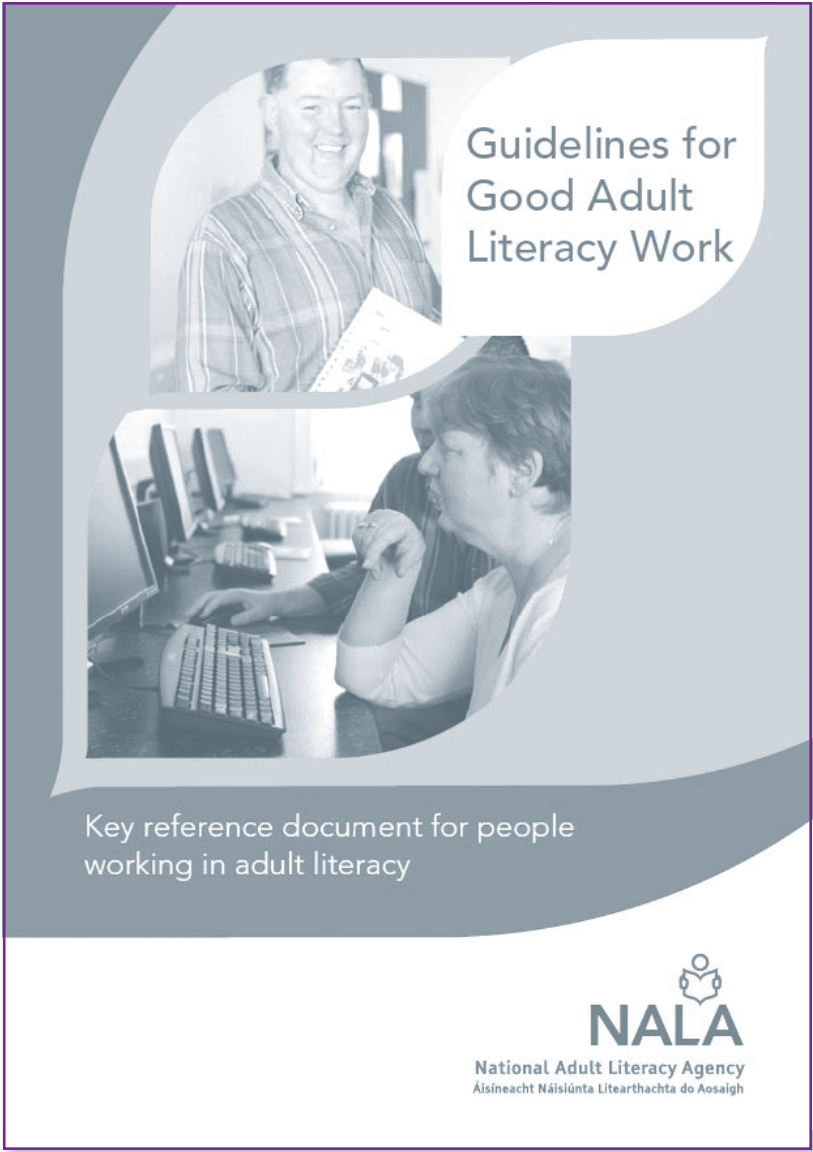
This is the fourth edition of the Guidelines, which has been updated and re-launched at a historic and critical time in the area of adult learning. While there is a unified voice on the importance of the adult learner being at the centre of their learning experience, there remain concerns about how to fully realise this. To that end, the Guidelines provide the rationale as to why we do literacy work the way we do, as well as how we put that philosophy into practice.

The Guidelines have been refreshed so as to situate adult literacy work in the new environment of further education and training. This, we believe, provides the best method of ensuring a good quality teaching and learning experience and positive outcomes for both the student and tutor.

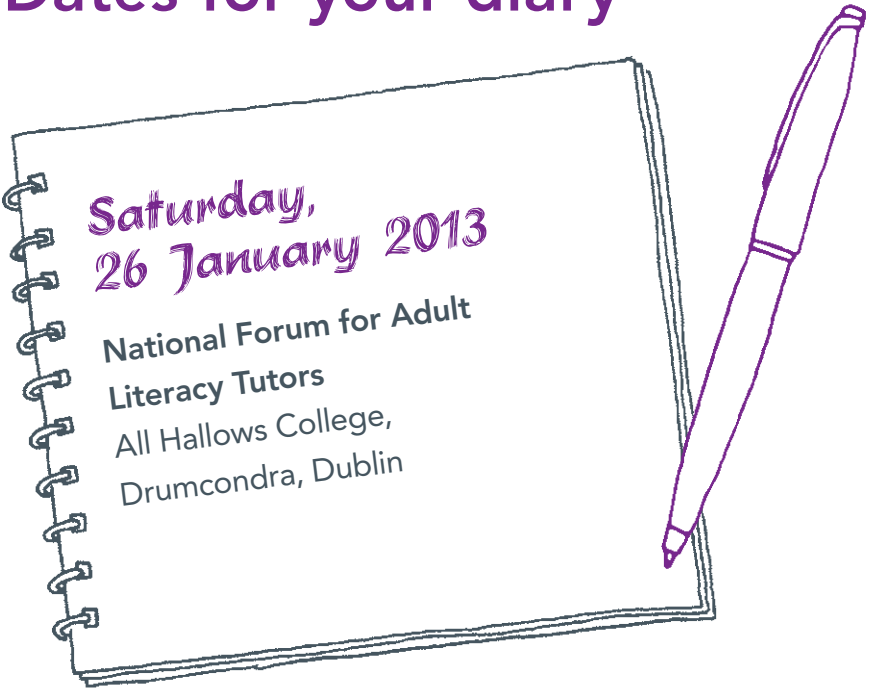
The new Guidelines sets out and explores the philosophy, principles and approaches which underpin good adult literacy work. It also outlines the facilities, tuition options and management styles necessary for effective adult literacy development. In this edition we felt it was important to reiterate our view that adult literacy work is about human development; enabling people to live full and meaningful lives and contribute towards the enrichment of the communities in which we all live. While it affects economic development and employment, literacy is primarily concerned with the rights of individuals, families and communities: it is about their right to have a voice in society; to continue and extend their education; to read and to be read.

Standing true to the core values is also important at a time when the adult literacy movement in Ireland has increasingly moved into the mainstream of the education system. This has followed the International Adult Literacy Survey in 1997, and the subsequent increase in State funding for adult literacy provision. The shift 'from the margins' to the centre, from adult literacy 'movement' to adult literacy 'service', has brought with it increased opportunities and new challenges for adult literacy providers, tutors, students and NALA.

If you are a NALA member, order your free copy of Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. Call us on (01) 412 7918 or email [info@nala.ie](mailto:info@nala.ie)



## Dates for your diary





# Are there still 1 in 4 adults with literacy difficulties in Ireland?

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey has been carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in Ireland to find out about literacy and numeracy levels in Ireland.

PIAAC follows on from the International Adult Literacy Survey, or IALS, which was carried out in Ireland in 1995. The 5 levels used are essentially the same as IALS, the methodology is similar and, in some areas, 60% of the content is common to both surveys.

The PIAAC results for reading literacy will be directly comparable with IALS, but the results for numeracy and problem solving are new elements which are not directly comparable to IALS. However there will be some link between quantitative literacy in IALS and numeracy in PIAAC. We will also be able to compare the profile of people with literacy difficulties in terms of age, gender, and educational background. This means we can measure progress in Ireland’s adult literacy levels since 1995. It is organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to assess the level and distribution of adult skills in a consistent way across 27 countries.

## What does PIAAC cover?

The survey measures the skills and competencies needed for individuals to participate in society and contribute to the economy. Four types of competencies are measured:

- » literacy
- » numeracy
- » assessment of reading components
- » problem-solving in technology-rich environments

PIAAC will identify what activities adults do in their daily lives, such as reading, finding information, and using computers and technology, and explore their education, work experience and use of key work skills on the job. There will be specific information on poor readers.



## What has happened to date?

The CSO completed the fieldwork for the survey in Ireland between August and March 2012. This involved direct household assessments of 5,983 individuals between the ages of 16 and 65. The survey involved a basic skills assessment and a computer based test. 30% of participants chose to do a pen and paper test. The response rate of 72% was the third highest among the participating countries. The same survey is being repeated in the other 26 countries. The data is currently being analysed at national and international levels.

## When are the results available?

The international report of the results will be published on the 2 October 2013. This is likely to be a landmark report and will contain a rich mine of information for all those interested in adult literacy and numeracy. The report will have a specific focus on literacy and will outline the distribution of adult skills measured by PIAAC, broken down according to age, gender, educational attainment, occupation and socio-economic status. It will also provide cross country comparisons of levels, and will describe structural inequalities of adult skills. The report will also look at two other areas of particular interest, the use of skills by workers, and on adult learning practices.

Over the following two years, the information will be analysed across a number of thematic areas and at least 6 reports will be published covering:

- » Skills and labour market outcomes
- » Digital Literacy, problem solving and using ICT
- » An examination of the population at the lower levels (i.e. Level 1 and 2)
- » The use of skills in the Workplace
- » Trends in proficiency
- » Skill mismatches



# There are times when plain English works best

We hope you enjoyed reading plain English advocate Chris Mowatt’s article in our last edition of Literacy Matters. Since then our Plain English Editing and Training team have continued its work to support organisations to use plain English and be more accessible to people with literacy difficulties.

While plain English helps all of us by providing quick and easy access to information, it is particularly helpful for the 1 in 4 Irish adults who have literacy difficulties. You might also be interested to learn that writing web content in plain English improves its readability by 25%.

- Other recent interesting facts on plain English include:
- » **The 13 October 2012 marks the second anniversary of the US Plain Language Act of 2010. This Act effectively ruled that government public documents be written in plain English. In January 2012, the US introduced the Plain Language Regulations Act which now means that regulations also have to be written in plain English.**
  - » **This year The Central Bank’s Consumer Protection Code now requires that all the firms and business it regulates uses plain English. That is good news for you and me. That means we can expect clearer information in areas such as insurance and legal terms and conditions from financial institutions. About time!**
  - » **NALA, as the national leaders in plain English training and editing, this year alone, has worked with the Health Service Executive, the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman, MSD, Electric Ireland, AIB, Abbot Pharmaceutical and many others. We have helped them improve the way they communicate with you as a member of the general public. We have also maintained and developed our plain English website [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie).**

- We ask you and your friends to:
- » **Visit [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie) and use its free resources,**
  - » **Use our editing and training service (as a member of NALA you automatically get a 5% discount), and**
  - » **Tell us about organisations that are communicating in plain English and those who could do with our editing and training support.**

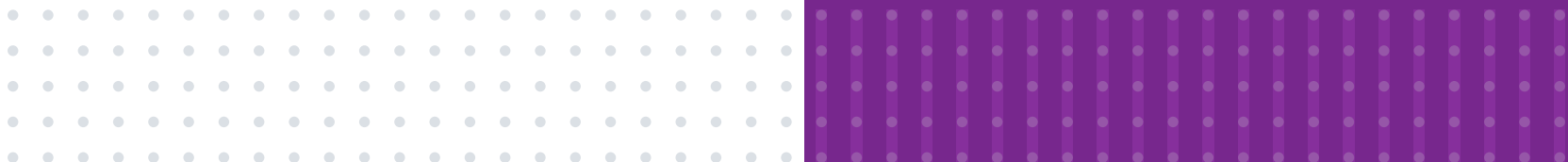
For further information on plain English contact our Plain English Team at [coriordan@nala.ie](mailto:coriordan@nala.ie). We look forward to hearing from you.

## Policy implications

The PIAAC data will directly assess adult skills. This is obviously better than trying to judge skill levels based on educational attainment. As the OECD points out, a certificate or diploma earned many years before is not particularly precise in describing someone’s competencies today.

The PIAAC data will be made available to researchers and should lead to a proliferation of research in the adult learning field. This data will help us understand the importance of skills development and maintenance, and how those skills are used every day. It will also inform us about the loss of skills over time (deskilling). PIAAC is vitally important because it will help governments better understand how effective adult learning systems are as well as how they can nurture these skills. It will be hugely valuable for the Department of Education and Skills, to the new authority for further education and training SOLAS, and to adult literacy providers and practitioners. The comparison of adult literacy levels between 2013 (PIAAC) and 1995 (IALS) will allow us to evaluate national adult literacy and learning policies and targets in a new light.

The publication of the results of IALS in 1997 informed the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) which contained a national adult literacy programme. IALS was the catalyst for increased investment in adult literacy services in Ireland between 2000 and 2009. The PIAAC results will undoubtedly provide a new impetus in addressing Ireland’s adult literacy challenge. It will certainly inform us about the extent of adult literacy and numeracy difficulties among Ireland’s working population. It may even accelerate the development of a national strategy for adult literacy and numeracy development.





# Integrating literacy with vocational learning



## Community Based Training

In the last issue of Literacy Matters, Trevor Moore described how learners in North Wall Community Training Centre (CTC) are integrating literacy, numeracy and vocational learning. Trevor reported that they were helped in this by the skills their instructors developed on the 2011 NALA-NUIM Certificate Course in Integrating Literacy.

Since then, with support from NALA, FÁS has continued to promote an integrating literacy strategy within its Community Based Training services. As part of this, they have again funded the NALA-NUIM course for staff in the country's 39 CTCs.

Two course groups have formed, one in Nenagh and one in Dublin. There are 34 participants, representing 16 centres. The groups include 29 instructors and teachers, 4 centre managers and 1 FÁS project officer. Their 16-day course started in September and will finish in April 2013.

As part of the course, each participant will complete an action research project in their centre, putting the integrated approach into practice with their learners and colleagues. At the time of writing, both groups have completed the first four days, and several of the smaller assignments that build towards their award. We wish the participants every success, and we look forward to learning how they and their learners develop integrated approaches to meet their own particular needs.

## National Learning Network

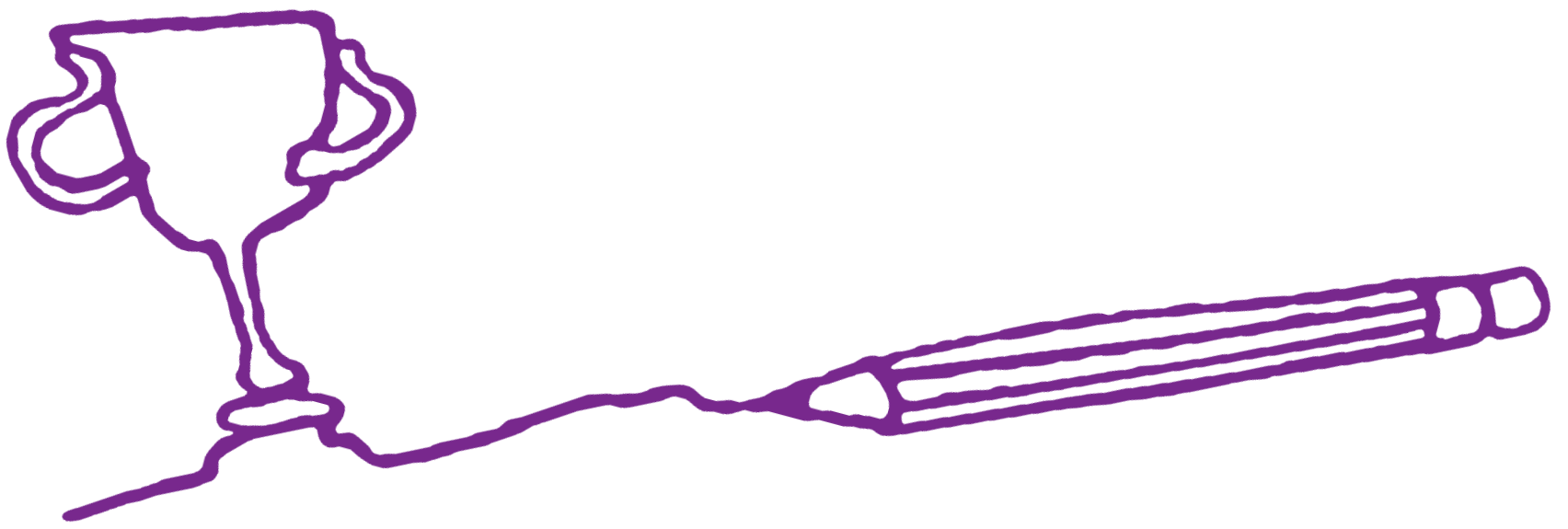
In September, NALA facilitated a one-day workshop for National Learning Network (NLN) staff, on integrating literacy with subject teaching and learning. 13 staff took part, representing 5 NLN centres and a range of subject areas. They shared examples from their current good practice and explored additional ideas for literacy-friendly subject teaching. Participants reported that they found the workshop useful, and each identified some practical methods that they found particularly relevant to their learners and subject.

## NALA-IVEA Working Group on Integrating Literacy

The IVEA and NALA are also cooperating through a joint Working Group to advance the integration of language, literacy and numeracy with all teaching and learning in further education and training (FET).

- » **The VEC sector is adopting an integrating literacy policy and has prioritised literacy and numeracy development in all new accredited programmes at levels 4-6 of the National Framework of Qualifications.**
- » **NALA and the IVEA have also proposed that SOLAS develop a national strategy to integrate language, literacy and numeracy support and development in FET and has outlined key elements needed to implement this.**





# EU Health Literacy Project Wins Prestigious European Health Award

## Call for entries to Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2013

A new call for entries has been announced for the annual Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2013, which were established to recognise and reward excellence in health literacy in the Irish healthcare sector. The launch of the awards marks the excellent news that the European Health Literacy Survey (HLS-EU) has won the European Health Award at the European Health Forum Gastein 2012, against very tough competition from six other European research studies.

The Crystal Clear Awards is Ireland’s flagship health literacy event and an opportunity to showcase all the work being done around the country to help patients make more informed decisions about their own health. With our new online entry form it couldn’t be easier to enter - see for yourself by visiting [www.healthliteracy.ie](http://www.healthliteracy.ie). The Irish findings of the EU survey revealed that four out of 10 people (almost 39%) in Ireland have inadequate or problematic health literacy. The EU survey marked the first time that health literacy levels have ever been measured in Ireland or any other European member state. The survey was carried out by University College Dublin as the principal investigator for Ireland and funded by the EU Commission and the Department of Health.

Commenting on the win, Dr Gerardine Doyle, Principal Investigator for Ireland and Chairperson of the Crystal Clear Awards said: *“On behalf of the research consortium of the European Health Literacy Survey I am delighted to express our gratitude for receiving the European Health Award 2012 which acknowledges the societal impact of our work. Ireland is not alone in its health literacy problem – nearly every second person across the eight participating European Countries was shown to have low or problematic health literacy. This prestigious award motivates us to continue efforts to overcome the health literacy challenge in Europe.”*

Health literacy involves a person having the skills to understand basic health information, whether they receive it in writing, in person or over the phone. It also involves a person having the knowledge to understand their treatment options and make informed decisions about their own health. *“The Crystal Clear awards - a joint MSD/ NALA Health Literacy Initiative - have continued to grow and gain momentum since their launch in 2007. Over the past six years, winners were chosen in their respective categories because of their innovative ways in which they have improved patient communication across the healthcare sector. The EU Survey has helped us understand the*

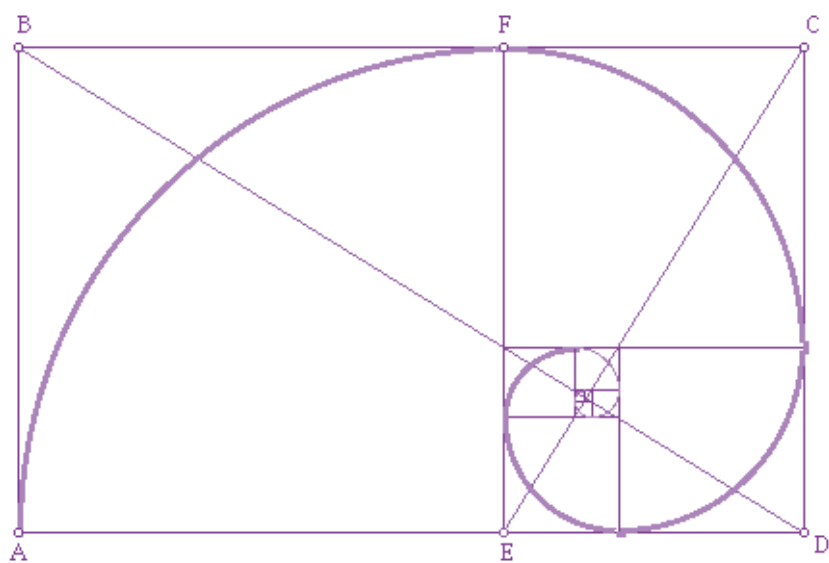
*extent of the health literacy problem in Ireland. The awards provide a fantastic platform on which to share best practice and get recognition for people working in the healthcare sector to encourage a better informed and empowered patient in Ireland,”* commented Ms Ciara O’Rourke, judge and External Affairs Director, MSD.

The Crystal Clear awards are open to anyone working in the healthcare sector; whether they are a receptionist in a GP surgery, a pharmacist, a doctor, a nurse, a patient advocate or a Practice Manager. Entries can be made online, or by post using the downloadable application form, on [www.healthliteracy.ie](http://www.healthliteracy.ie) and must be received no later than 12.00 noon on Friday 1 February 2013.



# Numeracy in The Fibonacci Sequence

The Fibonacci Sequence and Golden Ratio can be used to integrate numeracy across the curriculum into computing, literacy and photography and also to have some fun with maths.



The Golden Ratio is one of the names given to a unique mathematical proportion, and a particular spiral shape, which recurs over and over again in nature. It centres on a 'magic' number which, expressed as a fraction is 1.6180339... (represented by the Greek letter phi). Its significance has fascinated mathematicians, scientists, architects and artists for thousands of years.

A golden rectangle is formed using a length to width ratio of 1: 0.6180339. This ratio was widely used by the ancient Greeks (and still is used) in architecture and is regarded as the most harmonious proportion (pleasing to the eye).

If you form a sequence of golden rectangles within each other and then connect the centres of the resulting squares, you get a spiral shape. This is one of a family of mathematically derived spirals which are found in countless examples throughout the universe.

The spiral illustrated opposite is often known as the Fibonacci spiral, named after the 12th century Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci. However the significance of the ratio was known to many previous civilizations including the Egyptian pyramid builders, the Pythagoreans.

The curves of plants and shells are among many examples of designs based on this equation.

Kilkenny VTOS teachers Leanne Butler Davis (computer teacher), Niamh Dowling (maths teacher) and Brock Butler (art teacher) work closely as a team with the students in VTOS Kilkenny on integrating and using the Fibonacci Sequence and Golden ratio. In the computing classes the students researched Fibonacci and his principles and uses in nature, photography and art. They used the internet for research, designing and editing documents in their graphic communications classes and going out on field trips to take photographs of nature which represent how the Fibonacci sequence and spirals are represented naturally.

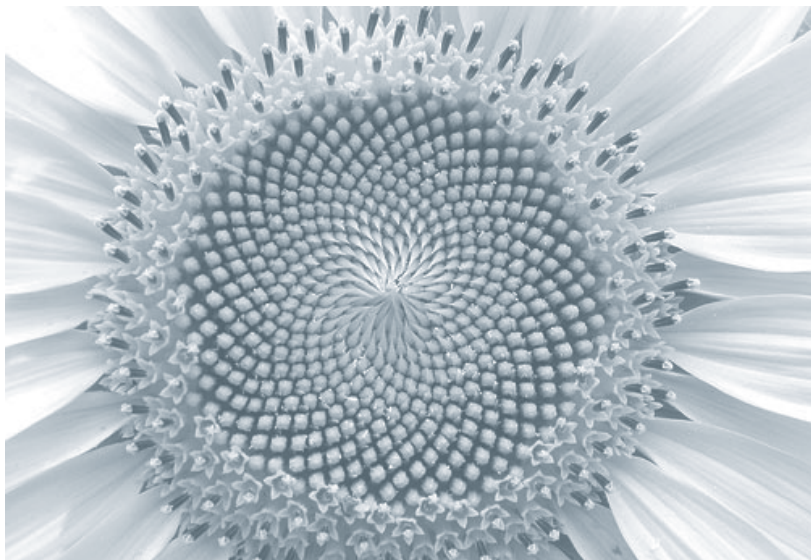
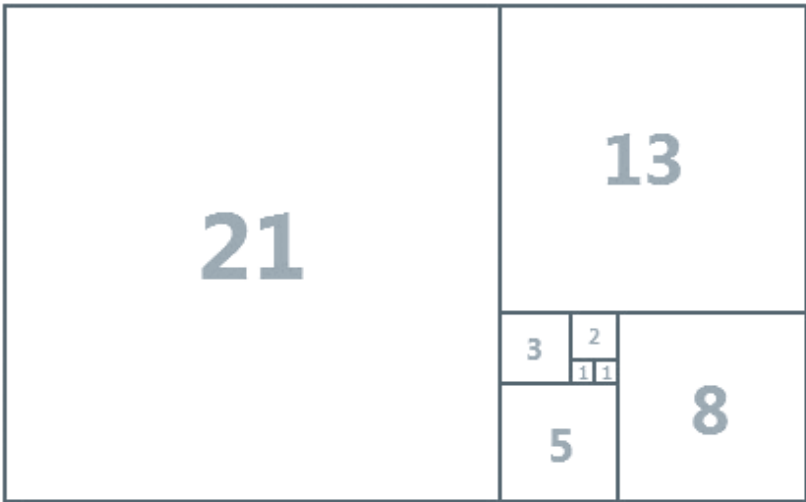
In the Visual Arts Practice course students were introduced to shape, form and colour, put together an exhibition of work on Egyptology inspired by the Golden rectangle and went on a trip to a Tutankhamen exhibition in Dublin.

In the maths classes, they looked at where numbers come from and why numbers are in the shape they are. Using mathematical equipment, they graphically represent the golden spiral, rationalising fractions to represent the golden mean and studied Fibonacci and the anatomy.

## Fibonacci numbers

Fibonacci wrote about the following problem in his book 'Liber abaci': A man put a pair of rabbits in a place surrounded by walls on all sides. How many pairs of rabbits can be produced from that pair in a year if it is supposed that every month each pair begets a new pair, which from the second month on becomes productive?

# nature: and the Golden Ratio



It was this problem that led Fibonacci to the introduction of the Fibonacci Numbers and the Fibonacci sequence which is what he remains famous for to this day. The sequence is 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34,55...This sequence shows that each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers. It is a sequence that is seen and used in many different areas of mathematics and science. The sequence is an example of a recursive sequence (that is, sequences where one term is used to find the next term, and so on). The Fibonacci Sequence defines the curvature of naturally occurring spirals, such as snail shells and even the pattern of seeds in flowering plants.

### Fibonacci Sequence

In the Fibonacci Sequence (0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,...), each term is the sum of the two previous terms (for instance,  $2+3=5$ ,  $3+5=8$ ,...). As you go farther and farther to the right in this sequence, the ratio of a term to the one before it will get closer and closer to the Golden Ratio.

With the Fibonacci Sequence, start with a square and add a square of the same size to form a new rectangle. Continue adding squares whose sides are the length of the longer side of the rectangle; the longer side will always be a successive Fibonacci number. Eventually the large rectangle formed will look like a Golden Rectangle – the longer you continue, the closer it will be.

### Fibonacci in nature

Think about a pine cone. Have you ever noticed that the petals kind of spiral up in two directions? Well, the number of petals it takes to get once around is almost always a Fibonacci number.

A great number of flowers also demonstrate Fibonacci sequences. Check a few and count their petals. A few more things to explore are the rotations of the pods of sunflower blooms, pineapples etc.

The teachers and students in VTOS Kilkenny used the Fibonacci Sequence and Golden Ratio to embed numeracy into many subjects. The students researched the Fibonacci sequence in nature and photographed it and also designed and edited documents using MS Word or Publisher to create documents with images and text. They submitted many of these documents as part of their assessment portfolios for FETAC Level 3 modules in Graphic Communications, Computer literacy and the Internet.

Using nature and the Fibonacci sequence as their inspiration in VTOS Kilkenny, the tutors and students sparked enthusiasm and interest in mathematics and also succeeded in integrating numeracy as a subject across the curriculum and showed how they could make maths 'real' and fun.

Thanks to Leanne Butler Davis, VTOS Kilkenny.





# Practical and topical for students and tutors

There are numerous ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) websites which ESOL students and tutors may find useful for different tasks. NALA has selected a small number of sites which are practical, comprehensive, up to date and easy to use. We have outlined below the benefits of these sites to both students and tutors and how they can be used.

## BBC Learning English

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/)

The BBC Learning English site is an excellent self-study site with audio, video, lesson plans and worksheets. It's particularly good for pronunciation, idiomatic English and day to day English for the workplace. It has up to date news and sports stories with reports from around the world on a broad range of subjects. There is a weekly online cartoon soap opera with plenty of ideas for using it in the classroom and a lot of good grammar explanations and exercises. It's also strong on real world English and there are plenty of exercises showing students how to use it in the correct context. Tasks reinforce good learning strategies for listening with good pre-task exercises. There are also student and teacher blogs, crosswords and quizzes.

The material on this site would mainly suit intermediate to advanced students. The site is aimed at both ESOL students and practitioners.

## British Council: Teaching English and Learn English

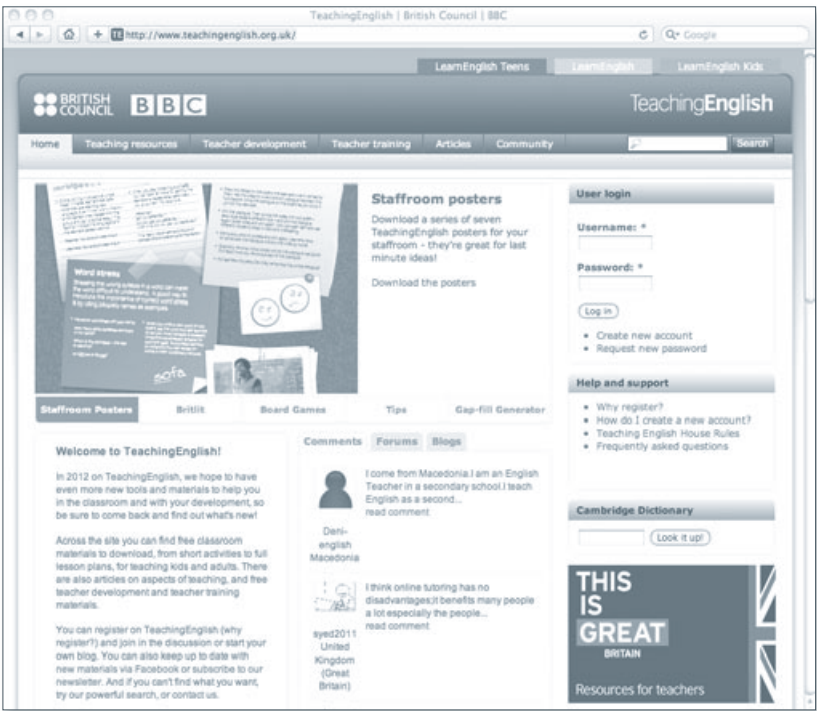
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/>

The British Council: Teaching English and Learn English site is a huge resource which is full of worksheets, lesson plans, resources and tips for all aspects of ESOL. There is an automatic gap-fill exercise generator which is easy to create and print off. There are a large range of articles on listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, vocabulary, games and teaching resources. A 'most read this month' list shows which articles or activities are most popular and they are broken down into speaking, listening, writing and so on. In the tools for teachers section there is a flashcard maker and a phonemic chart. There are also blogs, forums, networks and video discussions as well as articles on methodologies and literature.

On the 'Learn English' section of the site there's a lot of work and business English as well as video content with 'real world English' and plenty of listening activities and exercises.

There is also a 'Word on the Street' series (drama, reports and interviews from around the UK) and a mini soap opera 'Big City, Small World': <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kazakhstan-english-mobile-big-city-small-world.htm> which gives learners a good audio experience of everyday English conversations (UK) and scripts that can be printed off too.

The site is aimed at ESOL practitioners and students at levels from intermediate to advanced.



# ESOL websites

## Island Voices - Guthan nan Eilean

<http://guthan.wordpress.com/about/>

The Island Voices - Guthan nan Eilean site holds over 150 online ESOL listening recordings (including authentic speech interviews) and 75 video clips all CEFR-referenced. CERF is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. There are transcripts with all the video clips and they are listed by theme and language content in 4 online PDF catalogues. The videos are accompanied by links to full transcripts for each clip, as well as catalogues for each collection which list topic, level and language content of the films. The documentary clips give a plain language introduction to a topic or event and are complemented with more challenging authentic speech interviews. The project is bilingual (English and Scots Gaelic) and aims to collect slices of life and work in the Hebrides, primarily for language learners.

The material is Scottish, and therefore perhaps not immediately applicable for all learners or settings. But it is nonetheless interesting from a comparative point of view and offers plenty of interesting snapshots of island life. It is most suitable for ESOL students and tutors and the levels range from intermediate to advanced.

## London Online

[www.talent.ac.uk/londononline/welcome/home/index.htm](http://www.talent.ac.uk/londononline/welcome/home/index.htm)

The London Online site has plenty of excellent virtual activities on it. Shopping at the market is a good one for low levels. Students can operate a lift and put the right change in a shopkeeper’s hand. There’s also a great section on work and jobs with vocabulary for the supermarket, cooking at home and health and safety. The themes, such as friends, food and drink, neighbourhood and shopping are very topical and there are virtual activities on every theme covered. There are teachers’ notes accompanying each unit and background information on the London Online project.

The site is aimed at ESOL students and practitioners at beginner and intermediate levels.

## One Stop English: ESOL

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/esol/>

The One Stop English: ESOL site contains a lot of tutor resources and advice. It has a comprehensive selection of resources for all skills and all levels. There is a range of beginner lesson plans and tips for teaching grammar as well as a comprehensive ESOL support section with a piece on how to integrate IT into ESOL classes. There are plenty of ESOL tips for practitioners on everything from setting targets to working with absolute beginner ESOL students and from choosing the right material to cultural issues. Students and practitioners need to register to use the site, but it’s free.

The site is aimed at ESOL practitioners and students and ideal for beginners and intermediate students.

## NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) Write On

[www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie)

The NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) Write On site is a free online e-learning site that offers learning and accreditation options in reading, writing, numeracy, communications, computers, digital media and personal development. The site offers accreditation in 24 awards at Levels 2 and 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications in Ireland. Students can study at their own time and their own pace. The site offers students personalised learning plans so that they only study what they need to.

There are hundreds of free resources in the form of videos and downloadable worksheets at [resources.writeon.ie](http://resources.writeon.ie) to complement the interactive content.

The site can be used in blended learning contexts to support centre based study and is designed for people who want to improve their basic literacy skills. It is also suited to ESOL learners who want to work on their own or learners who want to combine using Write On with other learning activities or situations such as working with a tutor.

The site covers many levels, from beginner (Level 2) up to intermediate and advanced readers and writers (levels 3 and 4).

The above mentioned sites are practical and fun for both ESOL students and teachers. They are also easy to use and adaptable. There are numerous tips, ideas, resources and activities that practitioners and students can use directly or can tailor for their own ESOL teaching or learning. The sites mentioned are also strong on ‘real world English’ and cover all levels of ESOL.

**Note:** In this document the term ‘ESOL practitioners’ covers those coordinating, designing, training or teaching on ESOL programmes. The term ‘ESOL’ also covers ESL, EFL and so on.





# NALA's Student Development Committee

National Ploughing Championships, New Ross, Co Wexford  
25 -27 September 2012



Members of the NALA student subcommittee, Olive Phelan, Kevin O'Duffy, Michael Power and Bridie Daly manning the NALA student stand at this year's ploughing championship.

The NALA student committee took a stand at the ploughing championship in New Ross this year. The committee look forward to this event every year as it gives them the opportunity to promote the work that NALA does with adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties. While the event is always very hard work, the committee feel it is really worthwhile as they get the chance to speak directly to members of public who may wish to return to education, but who may need a little encouragement to make that first step.

This year's ploughing was not as well attended as previous years, however the committee spoke to many people who support NALA's work. They spoke to over 400 families who had questions about literacy and were particularly pleased by the amount of potential literacy learners who approached them for advice and guidance about how to get back into education.

The main themes that the committee were promoting this year were:

- » **NALA's distance learning service and FETAC accredited learning website [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie). The flexibility of this provision, the fact that it is free and widely geographically accessible was of particular interest to many rural families.**
- » **[www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie) – NALA's new family learning website, with fun yet educational activities for parents to do with their children. This new, kid friendly website was what attracted younger kids to the NALA stand. There was great interest also from some of the family learning centres who were attending or that had stands at the event.**

- » **Membership of NALA. Many passers-by wished to support NALA's work without receiving any NALA resources and publications, so the Student Committee have brought back ideas for a new NALA membership category – watch this space!**
- » **Volunteer tutors. Perhaps due to the economic downturn, there were many ploughing attendees who were interested in 'giving back' by volunteering as tutors. The committee gave out the contact details of the relevant local literacy schemes.**
- » **Wexford VEC. As the local service provider, Wexford VEC had provided publicity material, course lists and most importantly a student! Anthony McGee, a local farmer came along to help 'man' the stand. Having Anthony on our stand seemed to double the visitors! Thanks to all in Wexford VEC.**

As always the ploughing was mucky and hard work, however, the NALA student committee always feel that their time there is so well spent, as they get many adults, often for the first time, admitting to literacy difficulties. The face to face support that the committee provide each year at the ploughing is vital and this is the second year that the committee heard the success stories of people they had spoken to and encouraged at last year's ploughing.



# NALA student committee's European work

## The Eur-Alpha project 2009-2012

### EUR-ALPHA: A European network for adult literacy and numeracy

This European community funded project was set up, based on the ideals listed in the final manifesto 'Claiming the right to literacy'. These were that:

- » **The development of literacy and basic skills for adults is an essential element in building a European knowledge society.**
- » **It is fundamental that adults wishing to have access to quality literacy training which takes their needs into account and is based on their active participation, be able to do so near their home.**
- » **By literacy we mean the acquisition of the basic skills needed to develop active citizen participation, for adults who have not received schooling or for adults who, despite several years of schooling, cannot read or write, and understand a simple text linked to their everyday life in any language.**

16 partner organisations including the Literacy Development Centre from Waterford Institute of Technology and the National Adult Literacy Agency, representing 12 countries set up the EUR-ALPHA network in 2009.

The final conference was 'Literacy Learning – its place in Europe' and covered the issues and concerns of learners and tutors. It took place on the 4 September 2012 in Bonn, Germany. Literacy learners from across Europe got together to launch their action plan to empower themselves, demanding respect and equality with other Further Education and Training learners and tutors.



Michael Power spoke on behalf of learners at the EUR-ALPHA event in Bonn, Germany

European speakers addressed the students at the Bonn conference - the first was Ulrike Hanemann, from the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, who gave an international perspective. She covered the barriers that prevented countries improving literacy levels and spoke about the urgent need to take action, suggesting that there was a need for innovative approaches to literacy development i.e. inter-generational or programmes focusing on women only and that the way to promote change was to lobby policy makers. She concluded that literacy is a condition for economic participation and development and enhances peoples' self worth helping them to lead meaningful lives.

The next speaker was Martina Ni-Cheallaigh, from the European Commission. She added her voice to the concerns already brought forward by students, that the adult problem with literacy is a 'silenced problem' due to lack of data and evidence. She noted that in reality many students finish school without qualification / reading problems at 15 and concentrated on the ripple effect on literacy learners in the Labour market. She highlighted the need for different qualifications such as those in Information and Communication Technology and Digital skills as well as reading and writing skills.

The 80 learners who were at the closing event of the project then acted out scenes that had happened in their everyday life that had prompted them to address their literacy problems by returning to education. These thoughts and their demands for rights are captured in the Literacy learners manifesto 'Claiming the right to literacy' which can be downloaded here – [http://www.eur-alpha.eu/IMG/pdf/manifesto\\_ukbat2.pdf](http://www.eur-alpha.eu/IMG/pdf/manifesto_ukbat2.pdf)

The dramatic pieces summed up the students wishes and the conclusion of the Eur-Alpha project:

- » **We want to be in touch with all European learners**
- » **We want funding for literacy in Europe**
- » **We want to learn: Literacy as empowering resource to deal with life**
- » **We want a minister for our cause**
- » **We want to participate**

The final speaker was Michael Power, Chair of the NALA student development committee who had the honour of closing the event. Based on feedback gathered from all the learners throughout the 3 years of the project he explained how everyone had grown in confidence and how proud all the learners were of their hard work. He thanked everyone who had been involved in this successful project and finished by stating that one of the most important outcomes had been the lifelong friendships made by literacy learners across Europe.



# 5 Literacy Projects receive Better World Books funding

Through our partnership with Better World Books, five literacy projects in Ireland were awarded funding from the Better World Books grant this summer. They include:

**St. Michael’s House**, who provide services for people with intellectual disabilities. They received €500 to purchase their first iPad for Ballymun Library. It will be used as a demonstrative device to educate parents, carers and teachers on the benefits that iPads can have as a way of enhancing lives of both children and adults with a non-verbal disability.

**Tubbercurry, (Sligo VEC)** received €300 to set up a small library for their adult literacy students. The aim of this project is to encourage reading skills and as a pathway to joining the town library.

**Limerick Youth Service** was awarded €200 to support learner programmes and activities throughout the summer months.

**Skibbereen Community and Family Resource Centre** received €150 to purchase educational resources such as lego and k’nex to support their family literacy programmes.

**County Kildare VEC** received €150 towards their One Town One Book Project to be held in October.

Better World Books sells used books online to raise money for leading literacy charities around the world. Their website is called <http://www.betterworldbooks.co.uk/>. A portion of the revenue goes to the organisation that contributed the book, and/ or to one of the non-profit literacy partners. It was only last year that NALA became Better World Books chosen charity partner in Ireland and so far, they have raised €1,300 which we have given to the above literacy projects. And this is only the beginning – the more books people buy from Better World Books, the more funding that will become available to support local projects, so start spreading the word.

**Do you have a project that would benefit from funding?**

All you have to do is tell us what you would like to use the funding for and provide us with feedback on how it is making an impact – it’s that simple. It can be used to fund new resources, training or any initiative that support adults or family literacy. Send an email now to [media@nala.ie](mailto:media@nala.ie) or call 01 4127909 for more details. **Closing date is 31 December 2012.**



Olive Phelan

## Speaking up for adult learners

Congratulations to Olive Phelan for addressing the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection on the 24 of October. Olive made a strong case for amending the proposed Education and Training Boards Bill to include a dedicated seat for adult learner representation on these boards, which will provide services previously delivered by VECs and FÁS Training.

You can watch her on the Oireachtas website here - <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=22023&&CatID=127>. Olive speaks at 21 minutes into the piece.

NALA is encouraged by the response Olive received and anticipate that an appropriate amendment will be proposed.



# Thanks to everyone who got involved in National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2012



Kevin O'Duffy and Bridie Daly promoting NALA, Offaly and Mullingar VECs on the Tom Dunne show at the ploughing.

Thanks to everyone who helped make a great National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2012. Throughout the week, literacy in Ireland and the VEC adult literacy services were the talking point in both print and broadcast media. There were articles in the Irish Times, Irish Independent and Examiner, as well as lots of coverage in the regional papers about local VEC adult literacy services.

Inez Bailey spoke to Matt Cooper on The Last Word about literacy difficulties in the Irish workforce and the new NALA ESRI report. Students Kevin O'Duffy and Bridie Daly also spoke to Tom Dunne on his morning show with Newstalk, live from the National Ploughing Championships.

Thanks to everyone who organised events, stuck up posters and raised awareness in their local area.



Bridie Daly, Kevin O'Duffy and Olive Phelan stuck in mud at the Ploughing Championships.



## 1,000 Calls and 250 Texts

The An Post 'Take the first step' campaign has been a huge success again in Autumn.

During the month of September we received approximately 1,000 calls to our Freephone and an additional 250 texts to our Freetext service.

From an overall view of the calls during September the operators noticed many people specifically asking for help with spellings and maths.

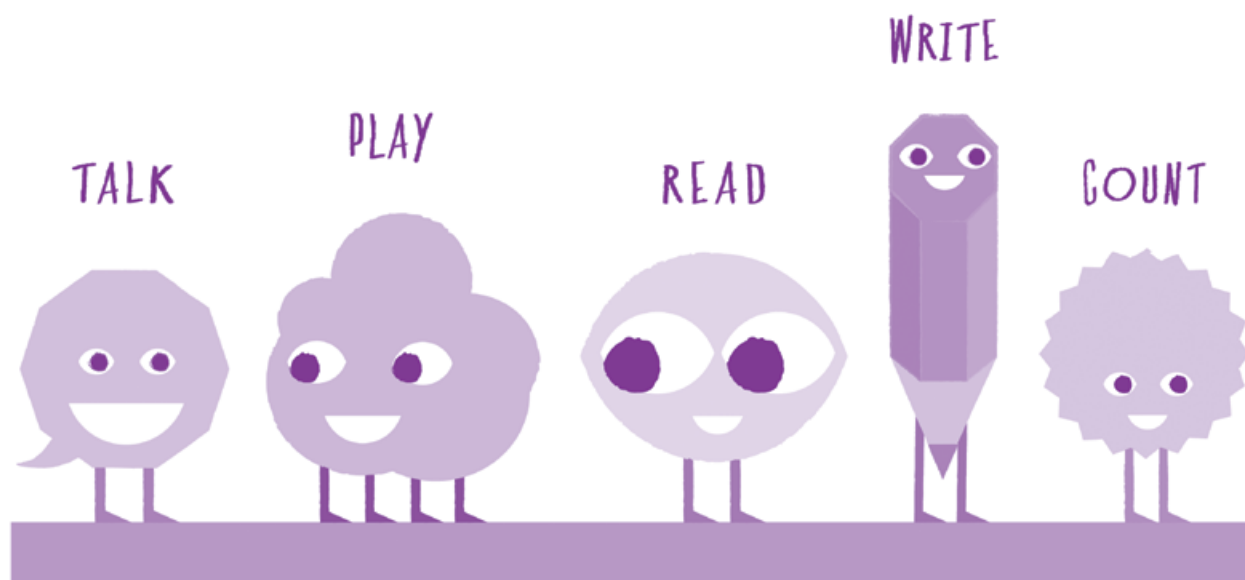
Here's a sample of some of our calls:

- ☘ A caller said they always wanted to improve their reading and writing. They tried a class a few years ago but gave up. They now have three children in school and wants to understand what they are doing and to make sure the same thing doesn't happen to them.
- ☘ A mother rang for her son. She knows he has problems writing and he is avoiding promotion and volunteering for positions of responsibility.
- ☘ A caller has been ill and can't get out to a class. He misses the interest and help it gave him. He was delighted to learn about Distance Learning and has signed on for it.
- ☘ A caller is training to be a Carer and needs to be able to write and spell better for shopping lists and collecting things from the chemist for people.
- ☘ A caller is trying to do a FETAC Level 5 course. She can understand the course content but is struggling with writing reports and spelling. She is delighted with the writeon.ie site and will also do Distance Learning.



# Help My Kid Learn

A website packed full of ideas to help your child learn every day.



Children learn every day. From the moment they are born they start to soak up things like a sponge – at home, out and about, even at bedtime.

Help My Kid Learn provides you with lots of simple ideas that you can build into your day to help them learn more.

It mixes the old with the new, from card games and hopscotch that help practice maths, to children's e-books and apps for reading and pleasure.

Just enter your child's age and find lots of fun reading, writing and maths activities you can do together.

[helpmykidlearn.ie](http://helpmykidlearn.ie)

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

Tel: +353 1 4127900  
Web: [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

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