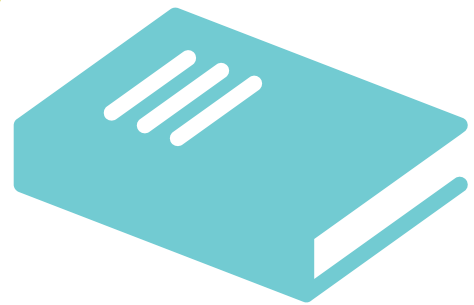
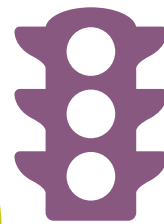




Literacy Matters

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



New Survey

New OECD Adult Skills Survey:
A new survey shows that 1 in 6 Irish adults are at or below level 1 on a five level literacy scale.

Also:

- Major plain English conference coming to Ireland
- We are looking for students to become Learner Ambassadors
- Distance Learning – filling the gaps in a time of recession

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Welcome

In 2008 we lobbied the Department of Education and Science, the Minister for Lifelong Learning and party political spokespersons for a way to measure and evidence progress in adult literacy levels. What we got was a commitment to participate in an international adult skills survey that would assess the literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills of Irish people. Five years later, we have the results.

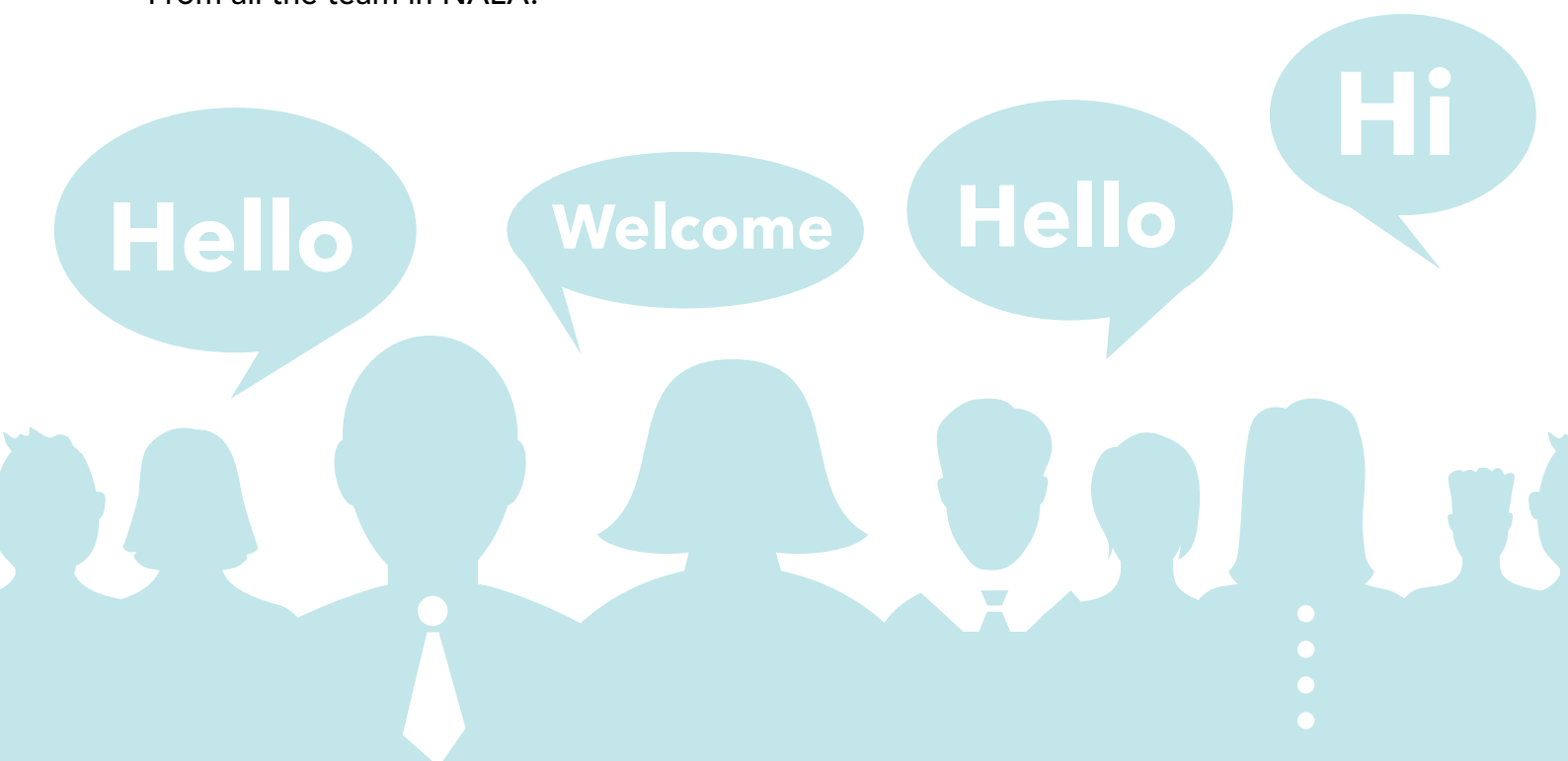
In this edition of Literacy Matters, you can read all about the new Adults Skills Survey for Ireland. No previous assessments have been this broad so understanding this survey is a must for anyone involved in literacy provision. We discuss the findings and how they compare with the results of the last international survey in 1995. We also look at what we can learn from other, better performing countries in this survey as well as OECD recommendations we could implement in the future.

You might also be interested to know that we will host the eleventh Plain Language Association International (PLAIN) Conference in Dublin in 2015. Previous conference locations include Sydney, Sweden, the Netherlands and Vancouver. The conference theme is 'Clearer communications, greater efficiency and effectiveness'. As hosts of the PLAIN Conference, we hope to put a greater spotlight on plain English and its benefits to everyone.

We hope you enjoy reading this and other literacy news in Ireland.

Remember, if you have any topics that you would like us to discuss in our next edition, please email us at media@nala.ie. We would be delighted to hear from you.

From all the team in NALA.



The results of the OECD Adult Skills Survey



For the OECD Adult Skills Survey the Central Statistics Office interviewed almost 6,000 people aged 16 – 65 in Ireland and assessed their literacy, numeracy and ability to use technology to solve problems and accomplish tasks.



The results found that almost 18% or 1 in 6 Irish adults are at or below level 1, the lowest level on a five level literacy scale.

At this level a person may be unable to read and understand basic text. This is a 4% improvement from the last survey of adult literacy that took place in 1995. It places Ireland 17th out of 24 countries surveyed to date.

For the first time ever, we have levels for adult numeracy.



The survey shows that 25% or 1 in 4 Irish adults are at or below level 1 for numeracy.

At this level a person may be unable to do a simple maths calculation, for example adding up prices correctly. This places Ireland even further down the international rankings at 19th place.



42% of Irish adults score at or below level 1 on using technology to solve problems and accomplish tasks, for example using the internet to get information.

The impact

If there is one central message emerging from this survey, it is that what people know and what they can do with what they know has a major impact on their life chances.

The survey shows us that people with the lowest skill levels also have low educational attainment, earn less income and are more likely to be unemployed.

But the impact of skills goes far beyond earnings and employment. In all countries, individuals with literacy difficulties are more likely to report poor health, to believe that they have little impact on political processes, and not to participate in volunteer activities. In most countries, they are also less likely to trust others.

Taken together, the results emphasise the importance of literacy and numeracy skills in people's participation in the labour market, education and training, and in social and civic life.

Literacy levels and age

While older adults generally have lower literacy levels than their younger counterparts, the gap between generations varies considerably across countries. To some extent this may reflect differences in the quality of education, but it may also reflect the opportunities available to pursue further training over a lifetime.

Participation in adult education and training is now common in many countries, but this survey indicates major differences across countries. Countries showing higher levels of participation in organised adult learning activities also demonstrate higher literacy and numeracy skills. For example, participation rates in adult education exceed 60% in the higher performing countries of Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Key findings



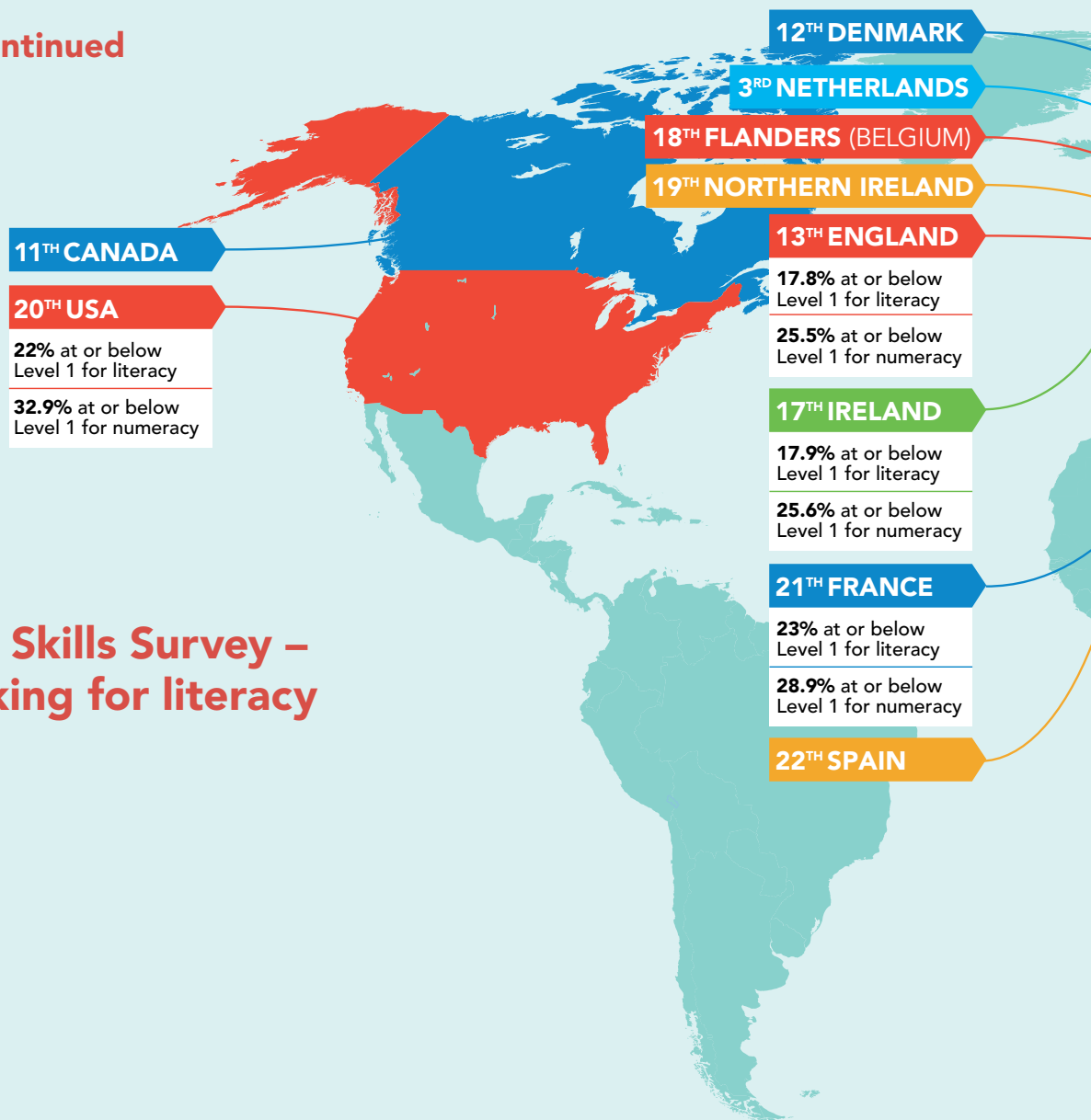
Literacy

- 17.9% (521,552) of Irish adults are at or below level 1. This compares with 22% in the last International Adult Literacy Survey in 1995.
- Ireland rates 17th out of 24 countries.
- Japan (6.1%) and Finland (10.6%) had the lowest proportions of adults at or below level 1 in this survey.
- Men and women score much the same on their literacy ratings.
- Adults aged 25 – 34 have the highest literacy mean score in Ireland while adults aged 55 – 65 have the lowest mean score.



Key findings continued

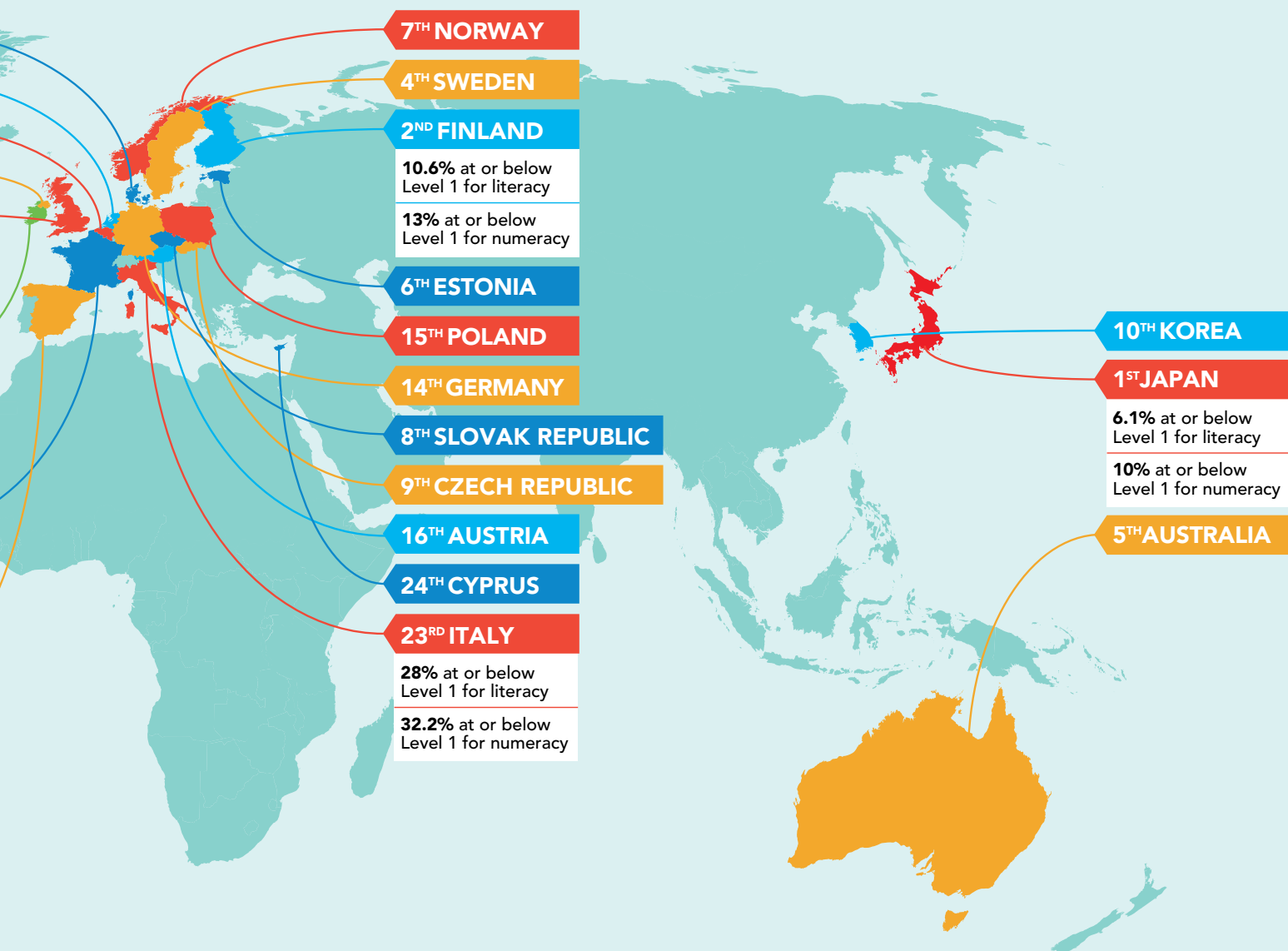
OECD Adult Skills Survey – country ranking for literacy



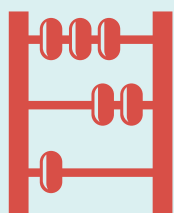
Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments (PS-TRE)

- Just over two-fifths (42%) of Irish adults score at or below level 1 (29.5% at level 1, 12.6% below level 1) on the problem solving scale
- Ireland is in a group with six other countries with a similar proportion at this level, including Finland (39.9%), Estonia (42.8%) and Sweden (43.9%)
- Japan scored the highest on problem solving with 27.3% of adults at or below level 1
- Males score higher than females by 6 points
- The highest problem solving mean score in Ireland is achieved by those in the 20 – 24 age group, while the lowest is achieved by those aged 60 – 65





Numeracy



- Just over 25% (754,015) of Irish adults score at or below level 1 for numeracy compared to an average of just over 20% for participating countries
- Ireland rates 19th out of 24 countries – Poland (23.5%); England (25.5%); and Northern Ireland (26.6%)
- Japan is the only country to have less than 10% of adults at or below level 1 on the numeracy scale
- Males score higher than females by 12 points
- Adults aged 25 – 34 have the highest numeracy mean score in Ireland while adults aged 55 – 65 have the lowest mean score
- About 23% (22.9%) of those aged 16 – 24 are at level 1 compared to 18.5% of those aged 25 – 34 and 36.4% of those aged 55 – 65

What did people say?

"Our improving literacy skills are to be warmly welcomed, however, Ireland needs to build on these improvements and further concentrate on our weaker numeracy skills which are so vital for employability."

Una Halligan,
*Chairwoman, Expert
Group on Future
Skills Needs.*

"I am encouraged that this survey shows we are making progress on reducing the number of adults with low literacy levels. However, our overall performance on literacy, but particularly numeracy, is not as strong as I would have liked. We must drive forward the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in our schools and focus strongly on literacy, numeracy and ICT in lifelong learning. Further progress is also required to equip adults to engage with technology to solve problems."

Ruairí Quinn, *Minister for Education and Skills*

"The literacy, numeracy and ICT skills that were good enough in the past will not be good enough in the future. I believe we are firmly on the right path in reforming how core skills are taught and learned in schools. In addition, the fundamental reform programme we have undertaken in the further education and training sector allows us to deal with these challenges in an integrated and coherent way. SOLAS and the ETBs, in developing and implementing our Further Education and Training Strategy, will bring a renewed focus to the fostering of key skills in the adult population."

Ciarán Cannon, *Minister for Training and Skills*

"It is hard to imagine that this ancient island of saints and scholars should have descended to a state where more than half a million adults can barely keep pace with some of the lowest levels of literacy worldwide."

Irish Examiner

What can we learn from other countries?



So now that we have the results, what can we learn from other high performing countries?

Perhaps most important in the context of public policy, the literacy skills measured in this survey are 'learnable'. That is, countries can shape the level and distribution of these skills in their populations through the quality and equality of learning opportunities both in formal educational institutions and in the workplace.

In most countries, adults with already-high levels of literacy and numeracy skills tend to participate the most in adult education, while those with lower levels of skills participate less – and often much less. In all countries except Norway, participation rates in job-related education and training are at least twice as high among adults who attained at least Level 4 in literacy than they are among those who attained at most Level 1.

Higher levels of literacy and numeracy facilitate learning. This means that people with greater proficiency are more likely to have higher levels of education and to be in jobs that demand ongoing training. They may also have the motivation and engagement with work that encourage individuals to learn or their employers to support them. All this can create a virtuous cycle for adults with high skills – and a vicious cycle for those with low skills.

Low-skilled adults risk being trapped in a situation in which they rarely benefit from adult learning, and their skills remain weak or deteriorate over time – which makes it even harder for these individuals to participate in learning activities.

This presents a significant policy challenge for countries such as Canada, England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United States, where many adults are at or below Level 1 on the literacy and numeracy scales.

Helping low-skilled adults to break this vicious cycle is crucial. Many countries offer subsidised adult literacy and numeracy programmes, designed to upgrade the skills of low-skilled adults.

In addition, policies may aim specifically to increase the participation of low-skilled adults in adult learning, for example through targeted subsidies. Results from the Survey of Adult Skills suggest that Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have been most successful in extending opportunities for adult learning to those adults who score at or below Level 1.

Using skills, particularly outside of work, improves literacy levels

Adults who engage more often in literacy and numeracy related activities and use ICTs more both at and outside of work show higher skills in literacy, numeracy and problem solving. Interestingly engaging in literacy related activities outside of work has an even stronger relationship with the skills assessed than engaging in the corresponding activities at work. While reading often helps to develop and maintain reading skills, having better reading skills is also likely to result in greater enjoyment of reading and in turn reading more frequently.

Taken from OECD Skills Outlook 2013.

Key points for policy – what does the OECD recommend we do?

The impressive progress that some countries have made in improving the skills of their population over generations shows what can be achieved. These countries have established systems that combine high quality initial education with opportunities for the entire population to continue to develop reading and writing skills after initial education is completed. Here are eight OECD recommendations of what we can do.



1. Make lifelong learning opportunities accessible to all.

While countries cannot change the past, policies designed to provide high-quality lifelong opportunities for learning can help to ensure that the adults of the future maintain their skills. Since individuals with poor skills are unlikely to get involved in education and training on their own initiative and tend to receive less employer-sponsored training, second-chance options can offer them a way out of the low-skills trap.

2. Make sure all children have a strong start in education.

Initial education can do much to make sure that all school-leavers, regardless of their background, have the skills and attitudes necessary to be successful in modern societies. Investing in high-quality early childhood education and initial schooling, particularly for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, has proved to be an efficient strategy to ensure that all children start strong and become effective learners.

3. Develop links between the world of learning and the world of work.

Skills development can be more relevant and effective if the world of learning and the world of work are linked. Learning in the workplace allows young people to develop “hard” skills on modern equipment, and “soft” skills, such as teamwork, communication and negotiation, through real-world experience.

4. Provide training for workers.

Employers have an important role in training their staff; but some, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, might need public assistance to provide such training.

5. Allow workers to adapt their learning to their lives.

Programmes to improve adult skills need to be relevant to users and flexible in how they are delivered. Distance learning and the open educational resources approach have allowed users to adapt their learning to their lives.



6. Identify those most at risk of poor skills proficiency.

The most disadvantaged adults need to be offered and encouraged, to improve their skills. This means identifying low-skilled adults who require support, particularly foreign-language immigrants, older adults and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and providing them with learning opportunities tailored to their needs.

7. Provide easy-to-find information about adult education activities.

Less-educated individuals tend to be less aware of education and training opportunities, and may find the available information confusing. A combination of easily searchable, up-to-date online information and personal guidance and counselling services to help individuals identify the appropriate programmes has often made a real difference.

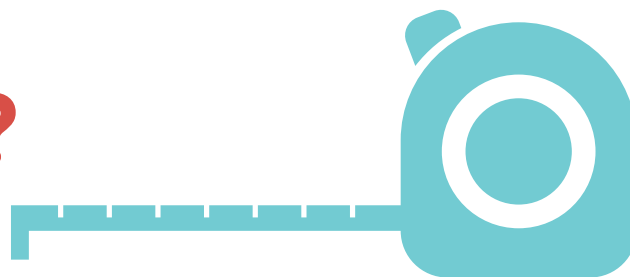
8. Recognise and certify skills proficiency.

Adults will participate in continued education and training opportunities if they provide recognition and certification of competencies. Having transparent standards in a framework of national qualifications, and reliable assessment procedures help adults certify their skills. Recognising what they have learned before ('prior learning') can also reduce the time needed to obtain a certain qualification.



*Taken from OECD Skills Outlook 2013.
Read the full report here:
www.skills.oecd.org/skillsoutlook.html*

How healthy are your skills?



Despite more people going to school and college it appears we are not maintaining our literacy and numeracy skills into adulthood. Why is this?

One of the reasons lies in how we think about the skills we learn in school. We imagine they are learnt for life. The reality is that these skills can be developed or lost throughout our lives.

For example, every year we receive about 7,000 calls to our Freephone support line from people who need help improving their reading, writing, spelling or maths skills. Some will have left school confident about their literacy and numeracy but find that as the years go by they get out of practice.

Literacy is like a muscle. You need to use it regularly or your skills weaken. For example, if a person left school early and didn't have to read or write much in their work, they could easily get out of practice and lose confidence in their ability to use those skills.

We need to think about our literacy skills the same way we think about our health and fitness.

If you left education a long time ago and do not use literacy and numeracy skills daily, for example in your job, then you may be at risk. For those who are not working and reading is not a daily activity, the situation could be even worse. But it is clear that everyone of us can improve.

We all need to read and understand information to make informed decisions which are life changing. This can be very difficult, particularly when it comes to understanding complex areas such as financial or health matters, for example buying health insurance or paying into a pension. If you make mistakes in these matters, it can cost you and have serious consequences.

So why not check your skills and think about actions you can take to make them healthier?

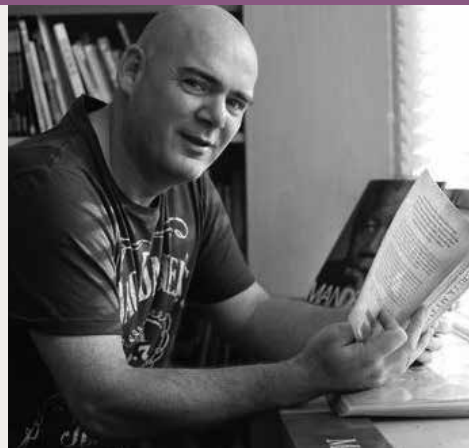
Try and read for pleasure everyday and check out the range of free books and other resources in your local library. If you are a parent, take the opportunity to refresh your literacy and numeracy skills as your children learn.

www.helpmykidlearn.ie is packed full of fun ideas for learning with your child. Think about the skills that are needed in your workplace and look for training opportunities.

There are lots of free online learning courses. Two great examples are www.writeon.ie and www.coursera.org. And of course there is always the option of returning to learning, with many free courses available during the day and night in every part of Ireland through the Education and Training Boards.

Fran O'Neill

Big thanks to Fran O'Neill from Cavan, who spoke to Katherine Donnelly in the Irish Independent recently about his journey back to education. Here you can read the interview that appeared in the paper.



"It's all about believing in yourself"

Like many people assessed in the Adult Skills Survey, Fran had difficulty with basic maths as he dropped out of school before sitting his Inter Cert.

He was only 15, but in those days there was plenty of work available. But after the economic crash, he found himself unemployed and realised that with his skills, "I was going to be sitting at home; there was no prospect of getting a decent, paid job".

Fran O'Neill dropped out of school over 25 years ago before sitting his Inter Cert.

By now Fran (42) and his wife and four children were living in County Cavan, having moved from Dublin to Ballyjamesduff about nine years ago.

With a little encouragement, Fran began to think about building up his literacy skills and, after an online search, came across the National Adult Literacy Agency writeon.ie website.

Fran said he "didn't know where to start" and so started on a level two programme, which he quickly completed before moving on to the level three.

"I loved it," said Fran, adding that while he had no problem with the reading and writing, maths was a sticking point.

Enthused by his return to education, he contacted Cavan VEC [now Cavan and Monaghan ETB] and sat the Junior Cert.

At that stage, Fran's longer term goal was to do the Leaving Cert, but he has already surpassed his own expectations.

After a further year at Cavan VEC, last month, Fran started on a one-year, pre-university liberal arts programme in Plunket College, Whitehall, Dublin, leaving home every morning at 6.30 am to travel to the capital.

Although he finds the step up in study level a challenge, Fran describes the experience as "incredible". He realised, he said, that "it's all about believing in yourself".

He now hopes to enter Trinity College Dublin next year to study psychology, through the university's access programme for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This article appeared in the Irish Independent on Wednesday 9 October.



Inez Bailey, Director, NALA

Skills are gained and lost throughout life, not 'banked' once in school

If there was one thing NALA could change, it would be for Government and employers to pledge that every citizen without a Leaving Certificate qualification or good literacy and numeracy skills would be offered a training programme and be supported to develop their skills.

"...we need ways for people to check the health of their literacy and numeracy skills..."

The soon to be established Further Education and Training Authority, SOLAS, will develop an Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and this should prioritise all citizens without good literacy and numeracy skills. The providers of our education and training system cannot assume that literacy and numeracy skills are firstly fully banked in school and secondly are up to date when we return to learning. They need to change how they deliver their programmes and provide adult learners with opportunities to develop these skills alongside their subject and vocational areas.

Secondly, it is vital that employers act on the findings of the Adult Skills Survey and invest in the upskilling of workers. It is important that literacy and numeracy, once thought of only in the context of schooling, is now understood as an integral part of labour force development and is built into all staff development programmes. This will provide a cost effective opportunity for employers to support their employees wherever they are on the skills continuum and to be confident of the return on their investment.

Finally, it is important that the public understand the importance of developing skills throughout life, to help them make informed decisions about participation in learning.

It is clear that individuals, who regularly develop and maintain their skills, will be more employable, better paid and have better health – three real and motivational benefits. Similar to health promotion campaigns that encourage us to measure our waists, we need ways for people to check the health of their literacy and numeracy skills and take appropriate action to get in better skills shape.

The Adult Skills Survey challenges how we think about skills. It provides strong evidence that participation in mainstream education alone does not produce strong literacy and numeracy skills for life. The highly skilled were three times more likely to participate in further learning. The results show that at any one time people's skills exist along a continuum from weak to strong. They also show that while skills are influenced by educational attainment, they are also influenced by factors such as skills used in work and day to day living. Skills are developed and maintained throughout life and are not banked once during formal education.

The Government, education and training providers, employers and individuals all have a part to play to make mass adult education a reality in Ireland, especially for those who have benefitted least from educational opportunity to date. It is fair and progressive and is what the high performing countries in this survey are doing well.

We are looking for students to become Learner Ambassadors



A Learner Ambassador is a student who shares their story about the benefits of returning to education with people in their community. This in turn often encourages other adults to take up a learning opportunity. We are now looking for students who would like to become local Learner Ambassadors.

Under a new EU Adult Learning project, coordinated by the Department of Education and Skills, we will provide free training for students to become Learner Ambassadors and help them do small presentations in their community or speak to local media.

It will be a great opportunity for students to meet other students from different parts of Ireland, in a fun and relaxed environment, and learn a few new skills too.

How will the project work?

Each Learner Ambassador will be invited to attend a free day-long briefing session and workshops about the project. This will be an opportunity to meet and network with other students.

Each Learner Ambassador will also receive presentation skills training on how to promote education within groups, associations or networks they are involved in.

Following this training day, each Learner Ambassador will identify and complete two or more presentations in their local community with another Learner Ambassador.

And they won't be alone because at each step of the process there will be a dedicated project coordinator in NALA who will guide the Learner Ambassador through the process and help them complete the presentations.

Why are Learner Ambassadors important?

As you know, sometimes people are not able to see the benefits to returning to learning. They had a negative experience of school in the past and associate returning to learning with that experience. There is also a stigma attached to low literacy and basic skills. Often people feel too embarrassed to return to learning and go to great extremes to hide their difficulties from their friends and family.

However, this does not have to be the case and who better to encourage others to return to education than those who faced the same challenges and fears themselves.

Students are vital in bringing to life the benefits of returning to education. By becoming Learner Ambassadors they will have a unique opportunity to encourage other people who may be thinking about doing a course to take that first step into their local Education and Training Board.

How much will it cost?

There is no cost involved in becoming a Learner Ambassador. Travel, training and expenses will be agreed beforehand with each Learner Ambassador and this will be paid by the project.

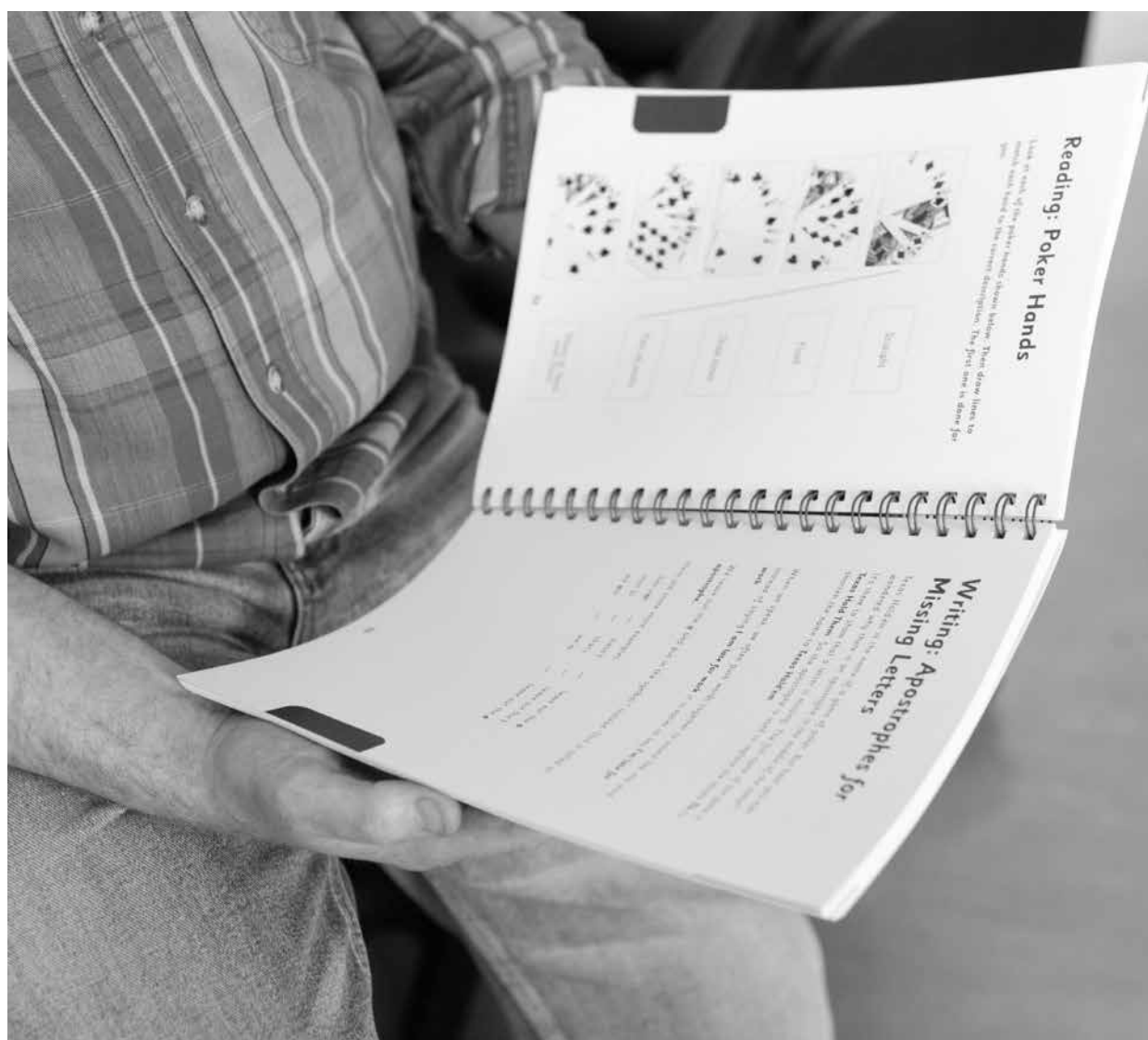
Do you know someone who could make a good Learner Ambassador?

NALA is now seeking to recruit Learner Ambassadors and would like to have representatives from all corners of Ireland.

If you would like to nominate a student or put yourself forward to become a Learner Ambassador, we would be delighted to hear from you. Just email Margaret at mmurray@nala.ie or call 01 412 7928 for more information.

About the EU Adult Learning Project

The European Agenda for Adult Learning (2012 – 2014) encourages countries to promote adult learning, in particular offering lower qualified adults a 'second chance' to go 'one step up' in their qualification level. In Ireland, the European Agenda for Adult Learning is being coordinated by the Department of Education and Skills.





Major international plain English conference coming to Ireland in 2015

Its host... NALA and the Plain Language Association InterNational (PLAIN)

NALA is delighted to announce that it will host the eleventh Plain Language Association InterNational (PLAIN) Conference in Dublin in 2015. This year will also mark 35 years of NALA and 12 years of NALA's Plain English Editing and Training Service.

This conference will be the first international plain English conference held in Ireland. Previous PLAIN conferences were held in Sweden, the Netherlands and Sydney. The most recent PLAIN Conference was held this year in Vancouver Canada.

We were represented at this conference by Clodagh McCarthy, who managed NALA's plain English service for ten years. Clodagh is currently working as a writer and editor for the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

Why we bid for PLAIN 2015

This year is our tenth year campaigning for plain English and delivering a plain English editing and training service to a wide range of sectors. While we have made significant progress in raising awareness of the value of using plain English, we are still behind other countries such as the US and Sweden who have legislated for the use of plain language for public documents.

We hope that the conference will raise greater support for our plain English campaigning work and the benefits of plain language to clear communication, greater efficiency and effectiveness.

The theme of the 2015 conference is 'Clearer Communication, greater efficiency and effectiveness.' As hosts of PLAIN 2015, our main hopes are to:

- put a greater spotlight on plain English and its benefits to social justice and efficiency and effectiveness;
- attract plain English experts, high level decision makers and knowledge seekers to deliver a vibrant conference;

- showcase examples of the effectiveness of plain English;
- generate debate about how best to put best practice in place;
- create more plain English champions; and
- create new and valuable plain English resources for the public and for communication specialists.

Global drive to adopt plain English

Globally, there is a drive to adopt plain English (language). Ireland is part of this drive and has achieved a lot. The healthcare sector in particular is embracing plain English, and striving to model best practice in clear communications. The use of plain language is also an increasingly important part of our Government's Public Service Reform agenda, and is very significant in the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code. It makes sense to use plain English.

Despite these developments, we still lag behind many countries in terms of legislative provision to use plain language in all documents for the public.



Thank you for your continued support. For more information on plain English and to follow our work in preparing for PLAIN 2015, please keep an eye on our plain English website

www.simplyput.ie

Why are we telling you now about PLAIN 2015?

Quite simply, we need your help. Hosting PLAIN will be a challenge. We need to get as many delegates to attend and to get political and social support. We also need sponsorship.

Seeking sponsors

We thank our sponsors of our projects to date, but now we are asking for sponsorship support for PLAIN 2015. In return, we offer you recognition of your sponsorship on our programme, on the conference and other websites and publications. The Conference will run over three days.

Between now and 2015, we will work to secure sponsors. So far, Fáilte Ireland has given some funding towards the conference and MSD and the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman kindly wrote letters in support of our bid to host PLAIN. We are very grateful to them for these supports.

If you are in a position to support this conference, or think your employer could resource some of its costs as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility remit, please contact Claire O'Riordan at coriordan@nala.ie or telephone 01 4127922 to discuss.



What is blended learning?

By Tom O'Mara,
Distance Learning
Co-Ordinator, NALA



Blended learning is about facilitating learning using a variety of approaches that suit the needs and capabilities of learners and providers. It may or may not involve computers. It is simply a way of creatively matching different approaches to learners, content and contexts.

That sounds like what tutors do already?

Yes, adult literacy tutors should already be experts at doing this. As adult education is learner-centred and as every learner is an individual, tutors have to come up with different content and techniques. For example, a tutor working with a learner who likes hurling or football may use the sports section of a local paper to help the learner improve their reading. But equally, that same tutor could be explaining how skype works for the learner who wants to stay in touch with their daughter who has emigrated to the Australian outback.

And tutors probably also move things around, sit at different desks, chat while standing and having a cup of tea, or pop into the local library with learners. This is the essence of blending – finding out what a learner wants to learn, figuring out how they learn and then coming up with learning opportunities that blend different approaches and experiences to keep that learner engaged and learning.

Does it have to involve online learning?

No. It all depends on the learner. Some people like to learn online, some don't. I believe that online learning can be of tremendous use to most people, but this is something to negotiate with learners.

However, good tutors should be aware of how online learning can be of benefit to both them and their learners. For instance, if you have limited time to be with a learner and the learner is keen to do more, you could assign online homework or additional learning activities for them to do before the next time you meet them. Why spend valuable time in a one-to-one session drilling punctuation or grammar, when this could be more effectively done at home or in a library? When you next meet the learner, you can then focus on how they can use the knowledge they have learned.

Where can I learn more?

NALA run Blended Learning training sessions at various times in conjunction with www.writeon.ie training. Talk to your Adult Literacy Organiser or Manager to see if there is one happening soon.

Meanwhile, you could do worse than spend 20 minutes watching Salman Khan, creator of Khan Academy, on http://www.ted.com/talks/salman_khan_let_s_use_video_to_reinvent_education.html.

Tutors' Corner

a new area on our website for tutors



We developed a new area on our website for tutors at www.nala.ie/tutors. It's packed full of new and proven teaching, training and reference material. It also has hundreds of free downloadable worksheets. So, if you are a tutor or someone who is supporting a person with literacy difficulties, then this section is for you. We hope you like it.

Recommended websites, apps and resources to support learning.

Essential information, videos and resources for teaching reading, writing, maths and more.

ESOL

Family literacy information

Workplace Basic Education

Integrating literacy into further education and vocational learning

More resources from the NALA bookshop

Latest videos, upcoming training, conferences and professional development courses.

Choose from thousands of teaching and learning resources. You can search them by subject, level or FETAC award. They are free to download and print.

Find an adult literacy centre anywhere in Ireland

Information on distance learning and writeon.ie



Better World Books raises more money for local literacy projects

Once again, we are delighted to tell our readers that four of our members were successful in getting a total of €1,900 from Better World Books this summer. They were:

- An Daingean received €500 to fund family literacy and numeracy resources.
- Killarney Adult Literacy & Basic Education Centre received €500 to support a Six Book Challenge.
- Waterford City Adult Literacy service was awarded €400 for a variety of family literacy tutor packs, including lego, storybags and lots more.
- Cork City Library was given €500 to part fund creative writing workshops facilitated by a published author.

Better World Books sells used books online to raise money for leading literacy charities around the world. Their website is <http://www.betterworldbooks.co.uk/> and so far they have raised €5,000 in Ireland which we have given to 14 local literacy projects.

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 adult or family literacy projects.

You must be a member of NALA to apply and the maximum amount available per application is €500.

Send an email now to media@nala.ie or call 01 4127909 for more details.

Closing date for this round of funding is 30 December 2013.



The ESOL question

By Fergus Dolan
Literacies Development
Officer, NALA



**Are we short changing immigrants in Ireland whose first language is not English?
Is Ireland moving in the direction of ghettos for immigrants and children of
immigrants being marginalised from Irish society and from better jobs?**

In 2008 an Irish government report called for a national English language policy and framework for legally resident adult immigrants. The report was commissioned by the Office of the Minister for Integration (now at the Department of Justice and Equality in the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration), with the Department of Education and Science (now the Department of Education and Skills).

At the time, Irish society had seen a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants entering the country over the previous decade. The ability of immigrants to speak English was seen as key to their integration into society.

However, when Horwath Consulting Ireland carried out the research for the report in 2007, the economy was still doing well and the state's finances appeared to be in a healthy state.

Unfortunately, 5 years after the report was finalised, the recommendations have not been implemented.

What did the report recommend?

- 5,000 additional publicly funding places be provided by the VEC (now ETB) sector.
- 200 hours of English language tuition is required for a beginner to reach A2 level of competence. (This number of hours is taken as the best estimate of English Language competence for attainment of A2 or National Framework of Qualifications level 3).

Long term benefits

The report concluded that the acquisition of language skills has positive long-term benefits for immigrants:

- English language competence by parents can lead to improved educational opportunities for 'second generation' immigrants.
- There is a potential for higher earnings for those immigrants with a reasonable command of English.
- Enhanced language skills leads to improved job opportunities.

Are these recommendations still valid?

These recommendations and conclusions are still valid and relevant. If immigrants are to properly take part in civil society in Ireland and join the labour market, then they need to be able to read, write and speak English.

It's time to put in place a national English language policy and framework for legally resident adult immigrants and to provide sufficient English language classes so that immigrants can enhance their skills and take a fuller part in society.

You can read the full Horwath report here:

**[http://www.education.ie/en/
Publications/Policy-Reports/horwath_
final_report.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/horwath_final_report.pdf)**

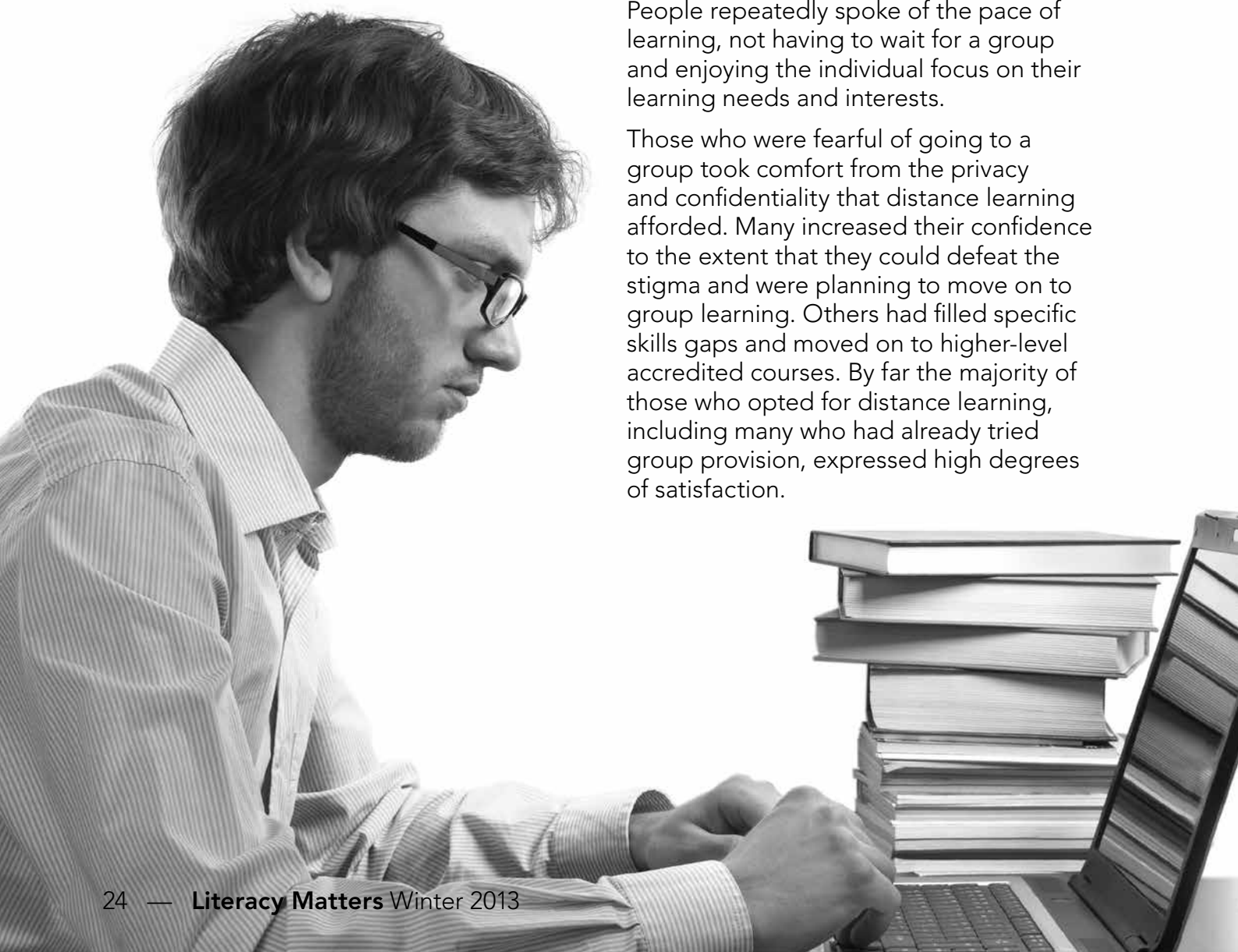
Distance Learning – filling the gaps in a time of recession

Recently we published an important evaluation of our Distance Learning Service in which we carried out in-depth interviews with many learners to see what is working well and what might be improved. Here are some things we learned.

In our evaluation we found that some people missed being with other learners in a group and others could not routinely make space for learning in their lives at that moment in time.

Nevertheless, distance learning emerged from the findings as a highly effective, time and cost efficient way of learning literacy, numeracy and digital skills. People repeatedly spoke of the pace of learning, not having to wait for a group and enjoying the individual focus on their learning needs and interests.

Those who were fearful of going to a group took comfort from the privacy and confidentiality that distance learning afforded. Many increased their confidence to the extent that they could defeat the stigma and were planning to move on to group learning. Others had filled specific skills gaps and moved on to higher-level accredited courses. By far the majority of those who opted for distance learning, including many who had already tried group provision, expressed high degrees of satisfaction.





Not all learners who had internet access had been introduced to www.writeon.ie and this may be an area that merits more attention. Those who had conquered the use of digital literacies in texts, emails, internet and social networks felt included in their own and their children's world. They had been equipped with the literacy tools of the future. Most significantly for many distance learning users, they are able to access free, online accreditation at Level 2 and 3 and the impact of this was transformative.

The recessionary context featured in much of the data and we found that distance learning helped people feel less vulnerable to redundancy and more prepared to compete for employment opportunities. Digital literacies were also high on the agenda of those who saw ICTs as key to economic development, writing accurate business emails and professional quotes for contracts.

Others were motivated to become distance learners to support their children, learn English as a second language or satisfy a lifelong yearning to learn something previously denied to them.

Whatever the specific context of individual learners, it emerged clearly from the data that distance learning is successfully filling gaps in a number of ways. Firstly it is responding to those who have particular literacy, numeracy and IT issues that they want to tackle without committing to a full course of study. Distance learning is able to customise learning to match precise and individualised needs and it is providing the chance of accreditation that not all centres offer. This is the lure for both individual and blended learners.

Distance learning is also providing an option for those who are unable or unwilling to attend local programmes because of care responsibilities, the absence or cost of transport to classes or their own deeply-felt lack of readiness for public learning.

Finally, in line with national and EU policy, distance learning is contributing to filling the literacy, numeracy and ICT skills gaps in Irish society. At a time when the struggle to emerge from recession is focussing attention on building strength, increasing basic skills capital is an intelligent immediate and long-term investment.

Read the full report here
www.nala.ie/resources/nala-distance-learning-service-evaluation-2012

National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2013

Thanks to everyone for helping us celebrate National Adult Literacy Awareness Week at the end of September. The aim of the week was to raise awareness of the literacy issue in Ireland and hundreds of you put up posters and sent out press releases. We were delighted this year with the turnout at our events, some of which were so oversubscribed, we had to change to a larger venue at the last minute. Here's a quick recap of what went on.

Monday 23 September

William Thorn, Senior Analyst in the OECD presented on the forthcoming Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) – what we are now calling the Adult Skills Survey. Richard Curran, business journalist with the Irish Independent chaired the event that included inputs from Paul O'Toole, Director General of FÁS and Rosemarie McGill, representing the ETBI.



William Thorn, Senior Analyst in the OECD with Inez Bailey, Director of NALA

Tuesday 24 September

We went to Google Learning and Development Centre to talk about problem solving in technology-rich environments – another core component of the Adult Skills Survey. William Thorn spoke again and explained the importance and relevance of the survey to adult literacy tutors and people working in the technology sector ahead of the results being announced on 8 October.



Wednesday 25 September

We took the opportunity to go to the Dáil to speak to Senators and TDs about the adult literacy issue in Ireland and how they could support our work.



Thursday seminar for health sector

This seminar provided a wealth of information for people working in the health sector and showed the relationship between literacy, adult skills, health and well-being.



Dr. Austin O'Carroll, General Practitioner working in the inner city, Dr. Gerardine Doyle, Senior Lecturer, UCD Business School and Fidelma Browne, Head of Public Communications, HSE all spoke at our Health Literacy event.

Lots of you took us up on our offer to get bespoke posters designed with local information on literacy services.

The poster features a close-up of a man's face on the right. On the left, there is a list of questions in colored boxes: 'Would you like to improve your reading, writing, spelling or maths skills?'. Below this, there are two columns of text. The left column is titled 'Would you like to:' and lists five bullet points. The right column is titled 'How do I find out more?' and provides contact information. At the bottom, it says 'National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2013' and '23 - 27 September'. The NALA logo is in the bottom right corner.

Would you like to improve your reading, writing, spelling or maths skills?

- Learn at your own pace.
- Classes are free.

Would you like to:

- Be more confident reading and writing
- Improve your spelling
- Learn how to fill out forms or write letters
- Help your children with homework
- Improve and learn new maths skills

How do I find out more?

Freephone 1800 20 20 65
Freetext LEARN to 50050

We will tell you about the courses in your area and other options available to you.

NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency

National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2013
23 - 27 September

An Post advertising campaign

An Post once again kindly agreed to sponsor the TV advertising campaign 'Take the first step' during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week. We received 750 calls and texts and referred lots of callers to ETB Adult Literacy Services nationwide.





Other News

New sponsorship with 3M

3M is a science-based technology company that produces thousands of products - from health care and highway safety to office products, abrasives and adhesives. In fact, you probably use one of their products everyday and don't even know it.

Here's a clue... back in 1968 one of their scientists invented very useful notepaper. The Post-it!

Recently 3M in Ireland got in touch to tell us they'd like to support literacy work in some way as they provide libraries with many products. To mark the launch of one of their new self check-in kiosks for libraries, they have agreed to donate a percentage of every sale to NALA. Great news for us and even better news for readers, as similar to our other sponsorships we will make sure that all funds that we receive will go directly to local literacy projects in Ireland. Hooray!



Pictured at the launch of the new library kiosk in the National Library of Ireland was Paul Knowles, General Manager, 3M Ireland; Aisling Murphy, Key Account Manager, 3M Ireland; and Clare McNally, NALA.

Nominate your project for the AONTAS STAR Awards – only a few weeks left

The call for nominations for the 2014 STAR Awards are open. The STAR Awards are about recognising and celebrating the invaluable collaborative work undertaken by adult learning initiatives in our communities. In the current climate it's even more important that we continue to showcase the value of the sector in responding to the needs of individuals, communities, society and the economy.

Five awards in total will be granted to adult learning projects based within the island of Ireland - four regional awards (Leinster, Munster, Connaught, Ulster) and one nationwide award.

It's easy to nominate a project - just fill out the online nomination form at www.adultlearnersfestival.com/starawards/ nominate and press submit. You have until the 18 November at 5pm to get your nomination in. So if you know of any great and innovative adult learning projects why not nominate them for a STAR Award today! And remember even if you nominated your project before you can nominate again unless you were one of the fantastic winning projects in 2013. For more information and FAQs check out www.adultlearnersfestival.com.

We won a European Award



We were delighted to hear that our online learning website www.writeon.ie won a European VITA Award in October. The VITA Awards recognise innovative learning projects in all educational fields.

Board of SOLAS appointed

The Government has approved the membership of the board of SOLAS, the new authority that will be responsible for developing Ireland's further education and training system.

SOLAS will be responsible, in partnership with the 16 new Education and Training Boards, for the integration, co-ordination and funding of the wide range of training and further education programmes around the country.

The board will be chaired by Pat Delaney who worked previously with IBEC and is a former director of the Small Firms' Association.

The other members are: SOLAS CEO-designate, Paul O'Toole; Bernadette Brady, Director, Aontas; Paul O'Sullivan, DIT; Sean Burke, CEO, Limerick and Clare ETB; Cathriona Hallahan, M.D. Microsoft Ireland; David Barrett, founder of MBCS, an Enterprise Ireland supported export company; Liz Cassidy, consultant and business coach; Patricia Carey, former President Skerry's Business College, Cork; Darragh J Loftus, Executive Partner-Manager at VMware, a cloud computing company; Kenneth Whyte, Principal, Presentation Brothers College, Cork; Cecilia Munro, Principal, Dun Laoghaire College of Further Education and William Egenton, Managing Director, Dromone Engineering, Oldcastle, Co Meath. No fee will be paid to the chairperson or board members of SOLAS.

The establishment of SOLAS will also bring about the dissolution of FÁS. One of its first tasks will be to devise a strategy for the development of a unified further education and training sector.

We wish all the new board members well in their work.

Research update

During the summer we launched a new research report about adult numeracy tuition in Ireland. The improvement of the quality and quantity of adult numeracy teaching is a key concern of NALA and the reason we conducted this research with the Institute of Technology Tallaght.

The report presents information on the profile of the tutors, including age, gender and contractual status. It examines the qualifications, teaching practices and how much professional development they undertake. This publication is timely, in so far as Ireland is going through the most extensive reform of Further Education and Training in the history of the state. From the debate which will come from this report, it is hoped that we will see action on the continuous professional development of numeracy tutors resulting in improved outcomes for adult learners. You can download the report at

www.nala.ie/resources/doing-maths-training-needs-numeracy-tutors-2013-and-beyond

Case studies on reading strategies

We are about to embark on phase two of our case study research aimed at identifying and documenting practice in adult literacy in Ireland and would like to invite you and your colleagues to participate in the research. The focus of this phase of the research is to examine reading strategies used when working with adults with literacy difficulties. **This is an opportunity to showcase your work to the wider adult literacy field. If you and your scheme would like to participate in this research please contact tbyrne@nala.ie for further information.**

In November we will publish case studies documenting teaching practice in numeracy programmes. See www.nala.ie for more details.

Come join us and support our work

There are lots of benefits to being a member of NALA

Free membership

We have a free membership offer for students, tutors and members of the public with an interest in literacy.

Benefits:

- Support our work and be kept informed of our activities
- We send you an e-zine every month, keeping you up to date with literacy news in Ireland
- You get one vote at our AGM

Individual membership: €25

This is perfect for individual students, tutors and members of the public with an interest in literacy who wish to get involved in our work and attend our events.

Benefits:

- You get one vote at our AGM
- You have the opportunity to run for election to the NALA Executive
- You receive the NALA Annual Report, two Literacy Matters magazines and an e-zine every month
- You are consulted on the strategic plan for NALA
- You receive a 50 % discount for NALA conferences and events
- You can buy books from the NALA online bookstore

Small organisations: €50

This is for Adult Literacy Centres, Youthreach, National Learning Networks, Community Training Centres, community projects and city libraries. You get all the benefits of individual membership plus:

Benefits:

- You get two votes at our AGM
- You get free promotional material (posters for National Adult Literacy Awareness Week and public relations support)
- You get one application to the NALA student development fund
- You get access to FETAC accreditation through the NALA Distance Learning Service www.writeon.ie for students in your centre
- You can apply to the NALA Better World Books Fund (up to €500)


Large organisation: €150

This is for Education and Training Boards, County libraries, large non-profit organisations and corporate members. You get all the benefits of a small organisation plus:

Benefits:

- You receive NALA Annual Report, two Literacy Matters magazine and an e-zine every month
- You are consulted on the strategic plan for NALA
- You receive a 50 % discount for NALA conferences and events
- You can buy books from the NALA online bookstore
- You get two applications to the NALA student development fund
- You receive 5 % discount for NALA Literacy Awareness Training
- You receive 5 % discount on NALA Plain English editing and training services

NALA operates a 'Rolling year' membership – if you join, your membership year will run from the date NALA receives payment from you to the same date the following year.



**Simply
Put.**

There are times when plain English works best

Writing and design tips to make your documents easy to read

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

For more tips on plain English and for information on our plain English editing (including our Plain English Mark) and training service, please visit

www.simplyput.ie



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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

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