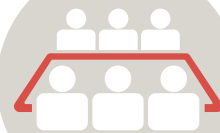


# Literacy Matters

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



It's more than just learning to read and write ...

## New Campaign

Read about our new campaign and petition calling for all public information to be written in plain English.

## Also:

- We talk to people at Bray Adult Learning Centre
- How iPads can help teaching and learning
- Ideas for teaching maths

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# Welcome

In this edition of Literacy Matters we talk to Liz Corkish, a student at Bray Adult Learning Centre, about her journey back to education. She knows when someone has literacy difficulties because she hid her own for so many years. Thankfully those days are behind her and Liz has some good advice for people providing information to the public. You can read her story on page four.

We also need your help to convince the Irish Government to use plain English when communicating with the public. In September we launched a petition asking the Taoiseach to ensure that all public information is written in plain English. We know that both citizens and governments benefit from clear information. You can read about our campaign and how to get involved on page 10.

We hope you enjoy reading these and other articles, like how iPads can improve teaching and learning, and making maths fun. There's also information about a new grant available from Better World Books that you might like to apply for. And with the end of the year nearly in sight, we have included information on events to look forward to in the New Year.

In the meantime, we wish you and your family a happy Christmas.

**From all the team in NALA.**



Liz Corkish at Bray  
Adult Learning Centre

## “For me it’s more than just learning to read and write”

Liz Corkish from Wicklow knows when people can’t read or write. “I can see the signs, the things people do to avoid a situation, like filling out a form, because I’ve been there. I always had an excuse. If I was handed a form I’d say ‘I don’t have my glasses, I’ll get back to you’. But my heart used to skip a beat,” says Liz.

Liz grew up in a very busy household in Rathnew, County Wicklow. She was the third eldest of seven sisters and three brothers. Her parents had a farm so there was always work to do.

Like many people with poor literacy skills, Liz left school in the mid-1960s when she was only 12. Classes were very large back then and she feels that she ‘just got left behind’.

It never stopped her working though, taking jobs from washing dishes to waitressing to child minding. She even worked in Cadbury’s factory in Liverpool when she travelled there with her husband-to-be Terry in her twenties. “I remember it cost 10 pence to get the ferry over and back from Merseyside,” she says.



“ I can see the signs, the things people do to avoid a situation, like filling out a form, because I’ve been there.”

While Liz was happy to work, she was always afraid of being asked to read or write. “My head would nearly go down and hit my feet I’d be so ashamed,” says Liz.

She worked for 24 years in the Alpaco Foil factory in Rathnew, starting as a packer and working her way up to supervisor. But while she had the ability and experience to go further in her career she felt she couldn’t go for promotions. “Other staff told me I could do management jobs but I couldn’t put pen to paper,” says Liz.

When the factory closed and she saw the An Post advertisement on television she rang the NALA number. “1800 20 20 65. I still know the number off by heart. I thought about it for a long time and I remember being in my sitting room, seeing that ad, shaking and thinking ‘will I ring that number?’” says Liz.

“Thankfully I did. I was given the option of a centre in Wicklow but I took the Bray number instead because I didn’t want anyone to recognise me. I was so nervous going there the first day but then I met Niamh Maguire and she takes the fear out of you. She’s a great one for encouraging you and knows exactly what you want,” says Liz.

“I started in one-to-one classes with my tutor Joan and she was brilliant. After about two terms she encouraged me to join a class. I was worried about who I was going to meet and I was thinking ‘they won’t be as bad as me’ but it worked out great. It’s given me more confidence and we have a good laugh together too.”

Since then Liz has never looked back and has gone from strength to strength with Bray Adult Learning Centre, getting FETAC awards at Level 2, 3 and 4. This year she will be concentrating on learning IT skills like graphics and excel.

“For me it’s more than just learning to read and write. When I see people on Primetime I can understand what they’re saying, the words they are using. I can lift up a paper and read it now. I listen to lots of current affairs too. I love Vincent Browne and Marian Finucan,” she says.

And Liz has some good advice for people providing information. “Bankers or doctors should ask you do you need a hand with filling out a form. Not just leave it with you. Recently I got my eyes tested and I was given a card to read. Five years ago I would have got up and run out. What does someone do if they can’t read the card?” says Liz.

Recently Liz became a Learner Ambassador and has started sharing her story with groups of people and on radio in the hope that it will encourage others to return to education.

“A guy came up to me after a talk and said he’d love to be able to do what I’ve done. I told him he could. I’d encourage anyone to lift up the phone – then you’re one step ahead,” says Liz.

# Supporting each other learn



Niamh Maguire, Adult Literacy Organiser, Bray

Niamh Maguire has over 12 years experience working in the area of adult basic education in Bray, County Wicklow. While she has seen many changes in the technology they use over the years, the basics of adult learning remain the same. Here Niamh talks about this and the benefits of students supporting each other in group classes, and tutors working together.

## What are the biggest changes you have seen over the years?

One of the biggest changes I've seen in the service is the use of technology; both by our tutors and our students. When I started in 2002 we had a very slow dial up internet connection available in the office, there was one computer class per week and the only computers in the Centre were located in the computer room. We still have a dedicated computer room but there are laptops available in every room and access to technology is a must for all our classes. We purchased a set of iPads two years ago and they are in constant demand. Now many students who come to the Centre are using tablets and smart phones and are on Facebook and Twitter. We really need to keep our skills and resources up to date to fully support our learners.

I've also seen a huge change in the attitude of students coming to our centre. The sense of embarrassment about taking a literacy class has reduced. While it still takes a lot of courage to come forward, there is much less stigma and shame about returning to learning. The NALA television programmes and publicity campaigns have had a huge

influence on attitudes and generated a wider understanding and support for those who return to learning.

## Is there a typical student?

We work with a wide range of students; students come from varied and mixed backgrounds, age groups, countries, educational and life experiences. It's difficult to think of a typical student. What most of our students have in common is the desire to return to education to remove a barrier in their lives – whether it's literacy, maths, IT or language skills. Their goals might be different but they share the experience of returning to basic education as an adult.

## Have there been cutbacks?

There have been some cutbacks but we have managed to continue to provide a quality service for our students and to ensure that the service continues to develop.

## Do you have any fears for the future of the service?

We are currently going through a time of enormous change in the ETB sector and of course that brings great opportunity. I see



a chance to further develop the service by expanding delivery options for students at Levels 1-3 and by supporting literacy and learning support needs across Further Education and Training (FET) provision. Understandably in a time of recession there is a focus on direct labour market provision but I'm heartened to see that the new FET plan supports provision at Levels 1-3 as active inclusion and as a measure for learners who need long term educational supports to fully participate in both economy and society.

### **What has improved in your opinion over the years?**

The range of options offered by adult literacy services has increased and improved. In particular the intensive tuition options under ITABE and other funding really helps learners to consolidate skills over a number of hours per week and supports progression.

### **What more could be done to support the service?**

I would like to see a better staffing structure put in place for tutors and staff working in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) service as part of an overarching structure for ETB adult education services.

### **Do you have any top tips for tutors?**

I would advise tutors to spend time on building the group dynamic where possible. The sense of support from others in the group and the building of trust can really promote meaningful adult learning. I think that the basics of adult learning remain the same; engage your students with resources that match their needs and interests and ensure that learning materials are at the right level.

I also see the benefits for tutors in adult education working cooperatively. Our tutors share resources, ideas and any training they have received and also work together in

developing course plans and assessments. This provides great support for each other and shares the strengths and skills of our tutoring team.

### **Are there any styles or ways of teaching that you find work well?**

I think learners need the opportunity to build skill and confidence in class and to be challenged appropriately. Many tutors have taken on board the idea of problem solving approaches to adult basic education teaching and learning. I believe this supports independent learning and relates learning to real life situations. For example many of our Level 2 programmes are based around organising an event in the Centre such as a coffee morning or a visit to somewhere in our local community such as the library. This allows students to apply their new learning to a range of tasks rather than using a set of worksheets.

### **What would you like to see change or happen in the sector?**

I would like to see more supports for adult learners in the FET sector. I'd like to see adult learners working at Levels 1-3 have greater access to grants and allowances that help ease financial barriers to learning such as childcare and transport. I would also like to see adult learners across the FET sector have wider access to learning supports such as assistive technology and educational psychological services.

**Bray Adult Learning Centre is part of Kildare and Wicklow ETB. They offer part time classes to adults in reading, writing, spelling, IT, communications, maths and much more. See [www.kwetb.ie](http://www.kwetb.ie) or check out [www.facebook.com/brayadullearning](https://www.facebook.com/brayadullearning)**

# How iPads can improve teaching and learning



**Galway Adult Basic Education Service recently tested the effect of using iPads in group classes. They found there were lots of benefits including improved literacy skills, better understanding of technology and increased participation in classes. Here Kieran Harrington, Centre Director of the Galway Adult Basic Education Service explains how using iPads helped students learn to read and read to learn.**

## What was the iPads project?

We had used iPads in 1:1 classes and it turned out to be very successful. So we proposed to introduce iPads into group classes, with each student having an iPad to work with. We tested it with a few groups. There was one Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) group, one English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) group and one special needs group. We were careful that the use of the iPad should be built into the curriculum and not be used as a diversion (in the way that sometimes videos are used by teachers). We also wanted to answer certain questions. For example: Would it be difficult for special needs learners? Would it improve core literacy skills? Would it affect handwriting skills?

## Where did you get the idea?

Alison Jones is an Adult Literacy Organiser for Galway and Roscommon ETB. She had originally bought an iPad for herself and when she saw its potential she started using them in 1:1 classes. We also did research and saw that they were being used in the United States in group situations, and of course here in secondary schools. Alison visited a secondary school in Claremorris and saw that they were being used mainly as a replacement for textbooks. We

decided to use them differently and use Apps and other online tools.

## How did you set it up?

Alison did research on Apps and what could be used on the iPads. In effect, a coordinator of the project was needed, someone who would timetable the use of the iPads, troubleshoot and maintain them, keep up to date with new Apps and technology and mentor the tutors. For example, we provided a lot of workshops for tutors. There were regular reviews with the staff that were using them to share ideas.

## Was there any funding for the iPads?

We applied to the CEO for funding, accompanying the application with a research document (research into uses in other countries, potential, rationale), and we received funding for 10 additional iPads.

Most literacy services should have a budget for at least 10 iPads (it depends on their priorities), and in fact, many have iPads. The rationale presented to the CEO included our curriculum plan, that is, the CEO did not want us buying technology for the sake of it and then discarding it afterwards when the novelty wore off.





### What did you find?

There were lots of benefits including increased communication skills, increased literacy skills, a sense of belonging and self-worth, better understanding of technology and not feeling marginalised. Attendance also improved. There was increased participation in classes, learner autonomy, as well as bonding of the class group and collaborative learning. But above all, the learners put the iPad to use for themselves in a coherent way. They took notes, recorded interviews, blogged, wrote stories and made books.

### What were the big revelations?

The iPads had far more potential than we realised initially. There was a particularly strong impact as far as special needs are concerned. Some tutors had objected that the special needs groups would find it difficult to manually operate and care for the iPad, but this was not the case. There were no accidents, no damage, learning was retained, and in one case, one of the special needs students who never communicated in the classroom began to talk and open up. Another important revelation was the preference of the students for the iPad over the PC or laptop which were used previously. iPads allow everybody to stay in a group and don't present spatial difficulties (for example, you don't have to operate one apparatus (the mouse) to make a change in another). It's one-stop shopping, so to speak.

### Where there any difficulties?

There was some tutor resistance but this has more to do with the acceptance of change and the acceptance of new technology. But now 90% of our staff use the iPad.

The fear over handwriting skills is really not an issue as there is a time and a place for different writing skills, and in fact more and more people will need to develop writing skills for technology. There is also the possibility of handwriting on the iPad, of course.

### Would you recommend other adult literacy centres to run this project?

Without a doubt – some others have already started to use them. iPads are now part of most curricula in the centre and also part of the tutor training we deliver to volunteers. We also give a course in iPads and mobile technologies to non-literacy students as we see this as part of the technology remit of literacies.

**You can read more about this project in The Adult Learner 2014 journal produced by Aontas. You can download it here [http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/the\\_adult\\_learner\\_journal\\_2014.pdf](http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/the_adult_learner_journal_2014.pdf)**

**For more information on Galway Adult Basic Education Service go to [www.gabes.ie](http://www.gabes.ie)**

# Please – no more jargon, small print or gobbledegook!

## New petition asks the Government to provide information in plain English

You may have heard on the news that we launched a petition in September.

Our petition asks the Taoiseach to ensure that all public information produced by Government and its agencies is written in plain English.

Plain English is a style of writing and presenting information that helps the reader to understand it the first time they read it.

Our recent research found that almost 95% of Irish adults are in favour of plain English. About half of them (48%) find official documents, including information from the Government difficult to understand. They

also find jargon, terms and conditions, and financial information challenging.<sup>1</sup>

We want people to sign the petition to help us raise this important issue with the Government and promote the use of plain English in Government information to the public.

We plan to use this petition to ask the Taoiseach to ensure that all public information is written in plain English.

With your support, we know we can achieve this.

**You can sign our petition on [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)**

“ Plain English encourages individuals to engage with public services and make informed decisions when doing so. Using plain English can save the public sector time, money and possible frustration by having to make repeated requests for information.” Inez Bailey,  
Director, National Adult Literacy Agency

1. The 2014 research was commissioned by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and carried out by Empathy Research.



Karen O'Leary, Chief Executive, National Consumer Agency; Peter Tyndall, Ombudsman; and Inez Bailey, Director, National Adult Literacy Agency at the launch on Monday 22 September.

## Can you help us get more signatures?

We need help getting as many signatures as possible on our petition. Can you ask your family and friends to please sign our petition?

## Why should I sign this petition?

1. It's only fair. Plain English gives us information in a language we can understand and helps us to make informed choices. It is particularly important to provide information in plain English for people with literacy difficulties.
2. Plain English makes good business sense. Clearer information is shown to improve public sector performance, reduce mistakes and lead to fewer complaints and repeated questions.

There's nothing to lose and a lot to gain!



# Jargon: What's out in the UK

Britain's civil servants have been banned from using the jargon that has kept the comedy writers from 'Yes Minister' to the 'Thick of it' in gags for years.

Officials can no long 'drive' anything out (unless it is cattle) or 'foster' (unless it is children).

'Tackling' is also banned (unless playing rugby or football) while the 'key' should always be in the lock.



Here are some words that are banned:

- **Slimming down** (processes don't diet)
- **Agenda** (unless it is for a meeting)
- **Commit or pledge** (we're either doing something or we're not)
- **Deliver** (pizzas, post and services are delivered – not abstract concepts like 'improvements' or 'priorities')
- **Deploy** (unless it is military or software)
- **Dialogue** (we speak to people)
- **Key** (unless it unlocks something. A subject or thing isn't 'key' – it's probably 'important')
- **Progress** (as a verb – what are you actually doing?)
- **Promote** (unless you are talking about an ad campaign or some other marketing promotion)
- **Strengthening** (unless it's strengthening bridges or other structures)
- **Transforming** (what are you actually doing to change it?)
- **Going forward** (unlikely we are giving travel directions)

## Before and after being edited in plain English

Before:	After:
Title to property in the goods shall remain vested in the Company (notwithstanding the delivery of the same to the Customer) until the price of the Goods comprised in the contract and all other money due from the Customer to the Company on any other account has been paid in full.	We will own the goods until you have finished paying for them.
I declare that the foregoing particulars are correct and I hereby authorise the company to make whatever enquiries it considers necessary to process this application.	The above details are correct. The company may check any of my details to process this form.

## The longer your sentence, the less your readers will understand

Long sentences aren't just difficult for people who struggle with reading or have dyslexia. They are also a problem for everyone.

This is partly because people tend to scan, not read. In fact, most people only read around 25% of what's on a page. This means it's important to get information across quickly.

The longer your sentences, the less your readers will understand, according to research by the **American Press Institute**.

The study shows that:

- When the average sentence length in a piece was fewer than eight words long, readers understood 100 percent of the story.
- Even at 14 words, they could comprehend more than 90 percent of the information.
- But move up to 43 word sentences, and comprehension dropped below 10 percent.

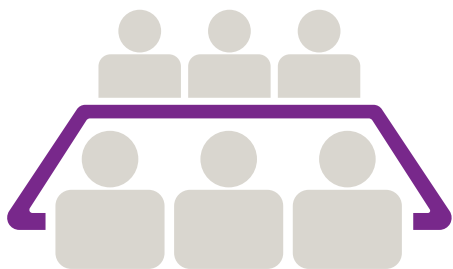
**Bottom line:** To improve understanding, break sentences up or condense them.

# Learner representatives are now on the Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

Last year we successfully campaigned to get legislation to have learners represented on the new Education and Training Boards (ETBs). This means learners will be able to take part in decisions that affect them and can make sure their views are heard.

In June this year we were asked by Ruairi Quinn TD, the Minister for Education and Skills, to nominate learners for each of the 16 ETBs. We nominated one man and one woman, who lived in the ETB area to each of the 16 ETBs. AONTAS, the national adult learning organisation, also nominated learner representatives. It was then up to Board members in each ETB to select one learner representative out of the four nominees.

Each of the 16 ETBs in Ireland has now chosen a learner representative for their board. This is a great achievement for learners, tutors, and all those working in the area of adult education. It means that learners will be able to guide and inform the ETBs and give them further insights into issues that affect them. Each learner representative will be on the board for five years. Here are their names.



ETB	Learner Representative
Cavan and Monaghan	Kathleen McGuirke
City of Dublin	Vincent Gaffney
Cork	Biddy Mc Donagh
Donegal	Gabriel O'Donnell
Dublin and Dun Laoghaire	Olive Phelan
	Eithne Dunne*
Galway and Roscommon	Nora Fahy
Kerry	Maria O'Gorman
Kildare and Wicklow	Laura Burke
Kilkenny and Carlow	Alice Bennett
	Gerard Brophy*
Laois and Offaly	Maura Brophy
Limerick and Clare	Mary Margaret Vallence
Longford and Westmeath	James O'Keefe
Louth and Meath	Sallyanne Alexander
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim	Paul Ainsworth
Tipperary	Liam Aherne
	Michael Power*
	Anna Touhy Halligan*
Waterford and Wexford	AONTAS representative

\* These are people AONTAS and NALA nominated who were elected as community representatives on the boards.



“ It is important to keep issues we hear about on the agenda of ETBs. There are resource issues and money is scarce and we do not want literacy to go on the back burner. Adult education needs to be kept at the forefront.”

## Thank you

We would like to thank all those who helped us find learner representatives. Adult literacy centres played a huge role by encouraging learners to put their names forward and we really appreciate this. We would also like to thank student members of NALA who allowed us to nominate them.

For anyone who put their name forward and were not selected, we will do our best to keep you in touch with what is happening. We believe there will be other opportunities for participation in the new ETBs.

## ‘Being on a Board’ training day

As many learners know, it’s never easy joining a group or organisation when you don’t know anyone. Jim Morrison wasn’t lying when he sang, ‘People are strange, when you’re a stranger’.

So you can imagine how scary it might be attending an ETB meeting for the first time, especially if you have never been on a board before. With this in mind, we held a training day about ‘Being on a Board’ in August. The training was for all students that we had nominated to the ETBs and for students on our Student Sub-committee.

The learners made some good points on the day. These include:

- As a learner representative you are there on behalf of other people so it is important to speak up for them. You are the voice for the people you are representing, not just a voice for your own point of view.

- It is important to let people know at board meetings if you do not understand what is being said. You should never be afraid to say this.
- It is very important to prepare for meetings.
- It might be good to make people aware of any difficulties you have, for example literacy difficulties. It is better to let people know at the beginning rather than six months later.
- You should try to make a contribution to all parts of the ETB, not just the areas you know about or are interested in.

## Bringing change

Naturally, learners were concerned that they might not be listened to at board meetings but in general everyone believes that the learner representatives have a great opportunity to bring about change. As one learner representative said:

“It is important to keep issues we hear about on the agenda of ETBs. There are resource issues and money is scarce and we do not want literacy to go on the back burner. Adult education needs to be kept at the forefront.”

We wish all the learner and community representatives the best of luck in their new roles and be assured we will do everything we can to support you along the way.

**Contact Margaret Murray in NALA at [mmurray@nala.ie](mailto:mmurray@nala.ie) for more information.**

# Better World Books grant

## Better World Books raises more money for local literacy projects

Once again, we are delighted to tell our readers that Better World Books has raised €3,000 this year for local literacy projects.

Better World Books sells used books online to raise money for leading literacy charities around the world. Their website is called [www.betterworldbooks.co.uk](http://www.betterworldbooks.co.uk) and so far they have raised €5,000 in Ireland which NALA has 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 can be used to fund new resources, training or any initiative that supports 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](mailto:media@nala.ie) or call Clare 01 412 7909 for more details.

Closing date for this round of funding is 31 December 2014.

# “It’s the best thing I’ve ever done”

When Maura Brophy from Portlaoise left school in fifth year she thought education wasn’t for her. But all that changed when she went to the Portlaoise Further Education Centre five years ago.

In September, Maura spoke to Claire O’Brien on Midlands 103 radio about her personal experience of returning to education and about recently becoming a Learner Ambassador.

“I was the oldest of seven and back then money was tight. Me and school weren’t exactly great friends so I got a job waitressing for six months to bring in an extra few pounds to the family. After that I got a job in the Tretorn tennis-ball factory and was there for 18 years,” says Maura.

But as her family were getting older she thought about education again.

“There was a family learning programme that was on when my young lad was in school, that involved parents and children, so I went down to that and decided that I would start a course.”

“First day back I was very nervous. I thought I’m not going to be good at this or good at that. But in my first course I made a load of new friends and my confidence grew so I’ve been there every year for the last five years. I went back and did Computers and Junior Cert maths, which I got a B in. And I did Digital Media and Communications this year. I’ve also done Level 4 Maths and now I’m going on to my Junior Cert English, please God.”

“I enjoy it now, as you feel like you’re not the only one going back to education. You’re meeting other adults that are in the same boat. I look forward to going, I mean



Maura Brophy at her desk preparing work.

it’s not like the days when you were terrified to go to school,” says Maura.

Maura is also able to help her kids with homework.

“It’s made a lot of difference because my young lad is doing the same maths as I was doing this year so if he got stuck on the maths I was able to help him. Or if I got stuck on my maths he was able to help me. So it’s absolutely brilliant to be able to do that,” she says.

Recently Maura became a Learner Ambassador as part of an EU programme for the Department of Education and Skills.

“As a Learner Ambassador I will share my personal story and hopefully encourage others to return to education because there’s lots of help out there, especially in the Laois and Offaly ETB.”

“It’s the best thing I’ve ever done. I’d even say that everyone in my class who I started with, that everyone’s lives have been transformed by going back to education,” says Maura.

We thank Maura for sharing her story on Midlands radio and we have no doubt that as a Learner Ambassador she will inspire many people to return to education.

**You can listen to a podcast of the interview with Maura Brophy on the 10 September on <http://www.midlandsradio.fm/podcasts>**

# Learner Ambassadors take centre stage

Earlier this year we asked adult learners around Ireland to become Learner Ambassadors in their local community. We were delighted when 80 people decided to give it a go.

In case you don't know, a Learner Ambassador is a student who gives talks about the benefits of returning to education.

By sharing their personal story with members of their community the Learner Ambassador can encourage 'hard to reach' adults to take up a learning opportunity. They can also promote local education services like nobody else!

During the year, we provided training and support to ensure that everyone involved had the skills they needed to give public talks. This included presentation skills training in small groups. The feedback we got from learners was amazing with some saying it was the best training they ever did.

"Today has been inspiring. It has been another learning curve on how people have come from backgrounds where they were

never given opportunities because of the education system, and have now all become butterflies who have learned to fly. It's great." Quote from Learner.

## 80 Ambassadors trained

Since we started the project over 80 people have been trained as Learner Ambassadors and so far half of them have given a whopping 80 talks!

These talks have taken place all over the country – from Men's Sheds to Job Fairs to community and voluntary organisations. The list is long. Some Ambassadors have even started doing media interviews. And we are glad to say that more talks are still being arranged.

## Making a difference

"We always knew that adult learners have huge passion and influence when talking about the benefits of returning to education. They know the barriers that exist for people but can explain through first-hand experience the enormous gains that can be made to a person's confidence and basic skills. Now, by getting a little training they have the unique ability to motivate others, in a similar position, to do the same," says Margaret Murray, Project Coordinator.

One of the most positive outcomes from the project is that some adult education services have got new student enquiries.



## Here are two emails we received:

Dear Margaret,

I hope this finds you well. Ros Rice (Learner Ambassador) asked me to send you an email as a follow up to the radio programme that she and I did on 17 September with Galway Bay FM.

The piece went very well and it had an impact immediately. I had new appointments made before I even got back to the office. We also reached some hard to reach students, including one who heard us on the radio two years ago and who was too nervous the first time round to call, but she identified with Ros very much and called in this time. This student is now in a group class here and flourishing.

The radio piece was then repeated on Saturday and we had more fresh interest on the Monday when we came back, with eight enquiries in one day. I think the radio programme has made an excellent impact as not only has it brought new students into the centre, but has given us much needed publicity around the city, with many people mentioning that they heard the interview and were very impressed with Ros' story. I think it proved again that radio is an excellent medium for publicising adult literacy.

Do get in touch again if you have any other questions,

Alison Jones  
*Deputy Centre Director, Galway Adult Basic Education Service*

Hi Margaret,

Just in relation to my last talk in Ballyfermot, two of the thirteen have made enquiries with me in reference to the possibility of starting a level 4 or 5 in my place. Just thought I would share that with you, great news I thought. Keith, Learner Ambassador.

## Congratulations and thanks

We would like to congratulate everyone for making this project such a success. We would especially like to thank all the learners for getting involved and sharing their story and all the staff in education centres around the country for helping us with this project. We hope that Learner Ambassadors continue to give talks and are a good support to you in the future.

**The project was funded by the European Agenda for Adult Learning (2012 – 2014). It funds countries to promote adult learning, in particular offering lower qualified adults a chance to improve their education.**

# The numeracy challenge

by John O'Driscoll, numeracy tutor and trainer, Tipperary

For adult and further education tutors the challenge of teaching numeracy and mathematics cannot be underestimated. Too often the emphasis is on 'calculation' and 'application' and less so on 'inspiration' and 'exploration.'

However, one advantage of working in the adult education sector is that it allows us to deal with the subject of 'Numbers' in depth. What a FETAC module may lack in breadth it more than compensates for in depth. Take the example of the Level 3 module 'Application of Number and Functional Maths'.

'Numbers' will be covered twice with different emphases. Application of Number takes on measurement while Functional Maths approaches Algebra. This offers learners and tutors lots of opportunity to creatively explore the fundamental topics in maths (without the burden of large school texts). It is ideal for those in adult education.

Likewise with Level 2 modules. Quantity and Number modules can fit together neatly with Quantitative Problem Solving modules. This provides the space and time to combine the essential numeracy skills and different teaching approaches that learners find relevant, interesting and fun.

When teaching, I find what always works well is the element of surprise. For example, Magic squares are always good fun.

## What are magic squares?

8	1	6
3	5	7
4	9	2

Magic Squares are square grids with a special arrangement of numbers in them. These numbers are special because every row, column and diagonal adds up to the same number. So for the example above, 15 is the magic number. Could you work this out just from knowing that the square uses the numbers from 1 to 9?

Also, the two numbers that are opposite each other across the centre number will add up to the same number. So in the square above,  $8 + 2 = 10$ ,  $6 + 4 = 10$ ,  $1 + 9 = 10$  and  $3 + 7 = 10$ . Why is this?

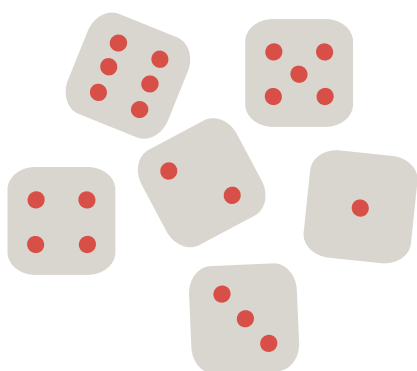
If you'd like to find out more about how to make up your own magic squares, and the mathematics behind it all, check out this website <http://nrich.maths.org/2476>.



## Friendly competition

Students also thrive on a bit of friendly competition. I use Math Dice – five six-sided die and one twelve-sided die.

One person throws the twelve sided die and then the five six-sided dice are thrown. Who will be the first to reach the total number on the big dice using the most number of smaller dice – just adding and subtracting. The visual aspect of dice is very helpful. You can buy Magic dice on Amazon.



## Playing cards

Playing cards are great for teaching with fun. For example, try the game 'Fraction reduce'.

- Get a bundle of playing cards and take out the picture cards (king, queen, jack)
- Divide the cards between two or more players
- Each player takes turns placing a card face up on a table
- When 2 cards produce a proper fraction that can be reduced the person who spots it first wins the cards on the table. For example, if a four of hearts is followed by an eight of spades – well that reduces to one-half.

Casting out nines is also a lovely exercise where students can check their maths skills. Again I have a hand-out on my blog on this simple but amazing pattern of number behaviour.

## Sharing ideas

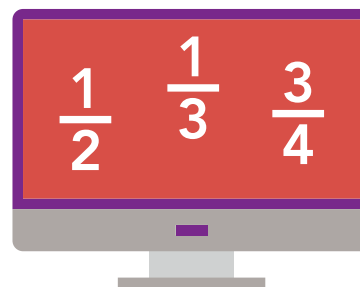
Maths Weeks this year was a great opportunity to meet and share ideas and challenges with fellow tutors in the further education sector.

During the week, Linda Murphy and I from Tipperary ETB offered a workshop entitled **A Sense of Number and Fractions in Action**. We discussed effective approaches for aiding numeracy fluency, as well as various strategies for dealing with fractions, decimals and percentages. This included visuals, games and interesting online 'build-your-own' resources.

On my blog you will find examples of the online interactive videos we discussed.

My overarching philosophy of teaching maths is that it must include activities that lead to exploration, inspiration, surprise and fun. Then the possibilities are endless!

**You can check my blog on <http://www.experimath.blogspot.ie> or please join our community on Google+ - *FractionWatch*.**



# Literacy policy update

by John Stewart, National Coordinator, NALA

The first national strategy for Further Education and Training was launched in May this year. It was prepared by SOLAS, the new authority for further education and training in Ireland. We actively contributed to the SOLAS development processes for the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-2019, including one-to-one and group consultations. We also helped organise SOLAS consultations with learners in January 2014. We were a member of the SOLAS FET Advisory Group, which supported the development of the strategy.

One of the five strategic goals of the new strategy deals with 'Active Inclusion'. This means that the new strategy supports the active inclusion of people of all abilities in society especially people with literacy difficulties. For example, the strategy will support:

- awareness raising campaigns;
- broader access routes to education including distance and blended learning; and
- research to identify best practice models in relation to integrating literacy and numeracy within FET provision.

A plan is now being written to implement the new strategy and we have been asked to take part in a 'Strategy Implementation Advisory Committee'.

The strategy will be used from 2014 to 2019 and it provides the context for our collaboration with a range of partners. As the statutory (main) education and training

provider at regional level, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will be central to the delivery of the strategy.

## Working with our partners

NALA and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) cooperated this year on promoting training for integrating literacy and blended learning. This involved NALA and 5 ETBs cooperating on giving 13 training sessions that were attended by nearly 300 ETB staff. This included adult literacy tutors and organisers, Youthreach and PLC teachers. The cooperation was very successful and will be repeated in 2015 when the ETBI send out expressions of interest in training to each ETB.

The FET strategy identifies the unemployed as a priority group for literacy development, and this has brought NALA and the Department of Social Protection (DSP) closer together. Currently there is very strong collaboration with the DSP Dublin North division. For example, we gave literacy awareness training to 45 staff. The training helped case officers and other staff to be aware of the literacy needs among the people they serve. They are also better equipped to refer those who want help to appropriate local and national services. We hope to do this training in more DSP regions.

It is exciting times and we look forward to continuing to work with governmental, national and local organisations to implement the new strategy.

# Why not try on new shoes, like those of your student?

by Sorcha Moran, Numeracy tutor and trainer with Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB



Ever find that when you get a new pair of shoes that you feel revived, refreshed, and can take on the world again? Well, my challenge to you today, is to try on new shoes - those of your student!

We are all experts at what we teach, so we can do things by using shortcuts and 'rules'. In maths, 'rules' are simply shortcuts that always work, for example,  $-- = +$ . If we start our teaching with the 'rules' we are missing a whole chunk of basic understanding. Our students struggle on trying to memorise these 'rules' and how to use them, instead of understanding the core concepts that the rule came from in the first place.

We all learn, understand and remember by linking new information to what we already know. This is the key thing to remember when developing your classwork. Does each particular student already have the facts, skills and understanding to allow them to efficiently learn what you are trying to teach? If not, they may learn-off how to use this new skill, but they will inevitably run into problems again when trying to deal with this topic at a more complicated level.

I encourage you, when you are creating your next lesson plan, to go back to the basics

- right back to the beginning. If students are finding fractions difficult, do they fully understand what a fraction actually is other than how it looks?

## Why do fractions even exist?

Allow them to build the jigsaw piece-by-piece and make all those connections that are so important. Get creative and let them learn through discovery rather than being told what to do. Organise your lesson so that no step in the understanding process is left out. In a jigsaw, you cannot connect an edge piece to the centre piece – the same for learning, each piece needs to be put in place in order to be able to fit the next piece in properly.

So, again, my challenge to you is to take a step out of your own shoes.

Forget all the knowledge you have built up. Place yourself in your student's space and discover these facts afresh one by one. Feel the self-confidence grow as you discover more and more, and get that pep in your step as you start to link all this new knowledge together. Feel confident to tackle more difficult problems. Feel the joy of learning!

# 165 students attend our two student days



Lee, Ann and Judith at our Student Day in Dublin.



Kevin and Michael at the Ploughing Championships.

The NALA Student Days in 2014 were a great success. These days are a chance for literacy students throughout Ireland to meet each other and raise issues with our Student sub-committee.

60 students came to our event in Cork and over 100 attended our event in Dublin. At each event students attended workshops on storytelling, numeracy, debating and using online courses. After the workshops NALA's Student sub-committee gave an update on new developments in the education sector and listened to issues that affect learners.

The feedback from both events was very positive. Students enjoyed the workshops and the chance to learn about the work of the Student sub-committee.

Most of all students were relieved to know that they were not the only ones who had literacy difficulties. They also said it

was inspiring to see how lots of people have improved their lives by going back to education.

In Cork, students voiced their fears over services being cut and how important it was that they made their voice heard on these and other issues. They asked NALA to keep putting pressure on the Government to keep focus on literacy services. After the Cork day, the Student sub-committee asked and received more guidance from NALA about how to respond and bring these issues from a local to a national level.

Thanks to everyone who helped organise the Student Days and make them so enjoyable. And thanks to everyone who came– we couldn't have them without you!

# National Ploughing Championships

## Three days, nine students and 270,000 people

They say it's the Electric Picnic for farmers and we were there with the best of them for three days in September.

Even though it was our fifth year to go, the size of the event and the crowds surprised us. It's Europe's largest outdoor event and this year over 270,000 people attended.

As always, it was students who made the biggest impact working at our stand – stopping people and telling them about literacy and their own journey back to education.

While we may not have spoken to everyone at the event, there were very few who got by without talking to us. As always, it's a great opportunity to meet people and tell them about learning opportunities in Ireland.

A huge thank you to everyone who helped us during the three days. Not to name names, they were Kevin O'Duffy, Noel Phelan, Tony Moloney, Dermot O'Brien, Richard Mac Cormack, Maura Brophy, Caroline Carroll, Valerie Moody, Michael Power and Anne O'Neill.



Team NALA at the Ploughing Championships – we all got our hair done especially for the event!

# Have you tried our Distance Learning Service?



The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has been offering a Distance Learning Service since 2000.

It is designed to fit learning around your needs and your life. You decide what, where and when you want to learn.

## How does it work?

You can study online by yourself or work with a tutor over the phone.

Or you can do a combination of these to suit your lifestyle.

## Work with a tutor over the phone

- We can work with you over the telephone, through the post or on the internet. Just call 1800 20 20 65.
- Everything is free.
- You decide what to study. There is no set course.
- We call when it suits you – you just tell us when. There is no class schedule.
- Normally we make one call per week for up to 30 minutes.
- We keep working with you until you meet your goals.
- 7 days a week, early morning to late evening.

## Work online by yourself

If you can use a computer and have access to the internet, you can work on your own by using our website called [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie).

## To get started, here's what you need to do:

1. Go to [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie).
2. Click on 'I would like a new password'.
3. Write down the password or print it. Use this password every time you log onto the website.
4. Fill in some other details such as your name, username, date of birth, so we can find your password if you lose it.
5. If you forget your password ring us on 1800 20 20 65 and we can find it for you.
6. Select the level you would like to work at. Start at Level 2 if you have never used the website before.
7. Choose a subject you would like to study.
8. Start learning – it's that simple.
9. And if you want a qualification you can complete a final test when you feel ready.





## What type of qualification can I get?

You can get a national QQI qualification. QQI is responsible for further education and training in Ireland. Our website [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) allows you to work towards 12 national QQI awards at Level 2 and 14 national QQI awards at Level 3. Level 3 is the equivalent of a Junior Cert.

### Level 2 qualifications:

Award Code	Award Title	Credits
M2C01	Reading	5
M2C02	Writing	5
M2C03	Listening and Speaking	5
M2L12	Personal Decision Making	5
M2L13	Setting Learning Goals	5
M2N05	Quantity and Number	10
M2N06	Pattern and Relationship	5
M2N07	Shape and Space	5
M2N08	Data Handling	5
M2N09	Quantitative Problem Solving	5
M2T10	Using Technology	5
M2T11	Computer Skills	5

### Level 3 qualifications:

Award Code	Award Title	Credits
3N0880	Communications	10
3N0929	Mathematics	10
3N0928	Application of Numbers	5
3N0930	Functional Mathematics	5
3N0881	Computer Literacy	10
3N0931	Internet Skills	10
3N0552	Digital Media	10
3N0896	Career Preparation	10
3N0532	Health and Safety Awareness	10
3N0565	Personal Effectiveness	10
3N0564	Personal and Interpersonal Skills	10
3N0921	Managing Personal Finances	10
3N0553	Self Advocacy	10
3N0585	Event Participation	5

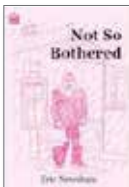


## New books



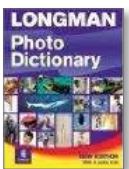
### Car Mechanic

The first title in the new On The Job series features James, a successful young car mechanic who is a great role model for aspiring young engineers. The On The Job series of readers and tutor resources is designed to help learners aged 14+ into work, into training and in their personal development. **Price: €6.85**



### Not so bothered

A day out shopping ends in disaster. Eric gives a vivid yet amusing account of his eventful journey home and reflects on his feelings of helplessness. An adult beginner reader. **Price: €5.55**



### Photo dictionary

Uses full colour photographs and diagrams. Presents information in a clear way. Each page devoted to one topic. The photographs are numbered and the key to the numbers is on the same page. Also comes with a CD Rom.

**Price: €30.55**

You can buy these books in our resource room by contacting Sandra Peel on 01 4127903 or emailing [speel@nala.ie](mailto:speel@nala.ie).

Or you can buy them online at [www.nala.ie/resources](http://www.nala.ie/resources).

## NALA research



We have launched 3 new research reports this year. They are:

- Read all about it: Case studies of teaching reading in Ireland;
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): Blended Learning Project Report; and
- What really counts: Case studies of adult numeracy practice in Ireland.

These reports focus on different teaching practices, teaching strategies and the use of technology as part of a blended learning approach. The reports are intended to be a resource to tutors working in the area of adult literacy. They provide ideas and tips about teaching and learning activities and resources. The research will also inform training workshops and seminars that we offer to adult literacy tutors.

You can download the reports on [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

## Recommended websites

### ESOL Materials Ireland

This site contains authentic ESOL and literacy materials specifically designed with the learner's needs in mind. It is essentially a resource bank for ESOL materials.



<http://www.esolmaterialsireland.com/>

### NALA's Tutors corner

If you are a tutor or someone who is supporting a person with literacy difficulties, then this area is for you. It's packed full of teaching, training and reference material. It also has hundreds of free downloadable worksheets.



<https://www.nala.ie/tutors>

### How to spell

This is a nice, easy introduction in how to spell. Most of the lessons include a video and exercise.



<http://www.howtospell.co.uk/spelling.php>

## Recommended maths apps

### Think 3D

Think 3D presents several different three-dimensional shapes for learners to build onto, paint different colours and generally to manipulate and become familiar with.



### Tap blocks

Tap Tap Blocks shows a three-dimensional cube. Learners can rotate and manipulate the cube to get a feel for the shape, to count its faces, edges and corners.



### Protractor 1st

Protractor 1st allows students to identify and change angles. They can type in a number of degrees and see the angle against the protractor scale.



Available on iTunes or the Android store.

# Other news

## Health Literacy Advisory Panel

The Health Literacy Advisory Panel have met three times this year. We are working together, along with other stakeholders, to make the Irish health service more literacy-friendly.

Members of the Health Literacy Panel include:

- HSE Health Promotion and Improvement and Social Inclusion Units
- Irish Cancer Society
- Irish Hospice Foundation
- Temple Street Children's University Hospital
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- Merck, Sharp and Dohme (MSD)

So far this year we have delivered training and workshops on health literacy. These aim to raise awareness about health literacy with healthcare professionals and explore how they can deliver a more literacy-friendly service. We have also worked with two organisations to do literacy audits and develop action plans.



## Working Together

NALA and the Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA) have set up a small group to ensure good communications between the two organisations. Both organisations share similar aims and want to improve the status of adult literacy provision within the Further Education and Training sector. We believe that it is in our best interests to continue to work together to ensure a learner-centred, quality adult literacy service. The new group will meet three times a year and it will share information about policy, national initiatives and research. We look forward to keeping you up to date with our plans.

## QQI review awards

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for looking after the ten-level National Framework of Qualifications. They set standards for awards and validate education and training programmes in the Further Education and Training sector, including in the ETBs.

Currently the QQI is reviewing the awards that are available at Level 1, 2 and 3. These awards are usually provided by Adult Basic Education centres, organisations working with people with a disability and our Distance Learning Service. QQI want to find out what is being offered and if necessary improve the effectiveness and quality of awards at this level.

They asked a range of stakeholders to be involved in this review, including NALA, AONTAS, the ETBs and Further Education and Support Services (FESS). We have given them an initial paper outlining our views on awards at Level 1, 2 and 3– what works and what could be improved.

We believe offering good awards at Level 1, 2 and 3 is very important to learners, as often it can be their very first qualification and stepping stone to further education. All members of the review endorsed this view and stressed the value of the awards to Irish society.

## Research

In September we organised a seminar called, 'The causes and effects of poor adult literacy and numeracy in Ireland – opportunities for academic research'. Our aim was to discuss the role of academia and research institutions in carrying out research in the area of adult literacy and numeracy in Ireland. The event was well attended and we are exploring opportunities for future research collaboration with St. Patrick's Drumcondra and Trinity College Dublin.

If you require further information on NALA research please contact Tina Byrne at [tbyrne@nala.ie](mailto:tbyrne@nala.ie)

## Plain English in Europe

Claire O'Riordan, NALA's Plain English Coordinator, is just back from two conferences on plain language in Europe. Our very own Emily O'Reilly, European Ombudsman, was the keynote speaker at the IC-Clarity Conference in Antwerp (11-13 November). And, Catherine Day, Secretary General of the EU Commission, was the keynote speaker at the EC Clear Writing Conference (14 November). Claire identified three highlights from the conferences:

- The US Plain Writing Act 2010 along with report cards for different government departments are beginning to improve the quality of the US Government's communication with the public;
- new research from the Plain Language Foundation in Australia shows us that plain English templates for documents are urgently needed; and
- plain language courses are increasingly being provided in companies and at third level institutions.



# Dates for your diary

## National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors

**Saturday 31 January**

The 2015 National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors will take place on Saturday 31 January in The Ashling Hotel, Parkgate Street, Dublin.

The event is free for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL tutors and it's an ideal opportunity to get together, network and exchange information and ideas.

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## NALA Annual General Meeting

**Saturday 21 March**

We are holding our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Dublin this year. This event is a must for our members to find out about our work and plans for 2015. It is also an opportunity to elect members to our board and make decisions about our work.

We would love to see you there.

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## Student Days Saturday 7 March in Cork Saturday 25 April in Dublin

These days are a great opportunity for students to meet each other, learn new skills and find out about issues that affect them.

Watch NALA's website for further information.

## PLAIN Conference September 2015

NALA will host the next Plain Language Association International (PLAIN) Conference. It will take place in Dublin Castle in September 2015.

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