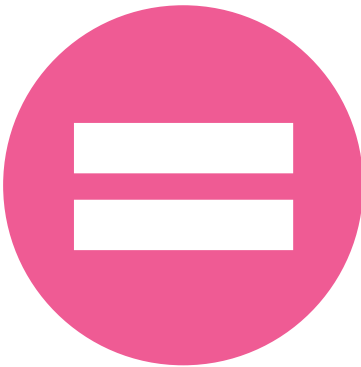


Literacy Matters



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



PLAIN 2015

The conference that had it all and achieved important outcomes for plain English.

Also:

- President Higgins highlights the risk of low literacy
- What PIAAC tells us about skills use at level 2
- Our pre-election submission to promote equality through basic education

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Welcome

Welcome to our winter edition of Literacy Matters.

As you will see in the following pages, it's been a busy time for us. It all kicked off in September when we hosted PLAIN 2015, an international plain language conference, in Dublin Castle. It was the first time the conference had been held in Ireland and it was a hugely successful event. Over 250 delegates and 70 speakers attended the conference, providing a unique opportunity to share knowledge and promote plain language. You can read all about it on page 12 to 15.

Hot on its heels was the launch event for National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2015. At this event, **President Michael D Higgins** spoke passionately about how inequality in literacy raises fundamental questions about the nature of our republic. If you missed the event, we recommend that you read an excerpt from his speech on page 6.

We have also been working on a research project to gather more information on the *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC). The findings are summarised on page 26, and will prove useful when considering the further education and training needs of people with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

There are lots more articles inside, including inspiring interviews with students and tutors, as well as tips on teaching and learning.

Remember, if you have a story you would like to share in the next edition of Literacy Matters, we would love to hear from you. Email us at media@nala.ie.

Best wishes from all the team at NALA.



PLAIN
2015

Delegates:

250
plus

Programme
contributors:

70



Shaun Dixon with Mary Roche Cleary, Adult Literacy Organiser, in Clonmel.

Shaun's second chance at education opens up a whole new world to him

A Clonmel man who struggled with reading and writing three years ago is now studying for his Junior Cert and keeping in touch with family and friends on Facebook.

Shaun Dixon's advice to others with literacy problems similar to his own is that it's never too late to give education a second chance.

"I would encourage anyone to give education another a chance, it's completely different to school and the tutors are so understanding," says Shaun who moved from England to Ireland eight years ago and now lives with his partner Corinna in Clonmel.

When Shaun was younger, he left school early at the age of 15 with very weak

“It’s so different to school, I look forward to it because I’m doing it for myself.”

reading and writing skills. “Anytime I had to write something or fill out a form I’d have to ask someone for help. Even when my kids asked me to help with their homework I would tell them to ask their mother. It was embarrassing,” says Shaun.

But three years ago all that changed when he enquired about courses at Tipperary Adult Education Centre. “It was after my grandson asked me to read something to him that I knew it was time I did something about my reading and writing. I wanted to be able to read to him. It was a person in the Social Welfare office that put me in contact with the local Adult Education Centre,” says Shaun.

“I won’t lie, I was terrified the first day I went to the centre. I think I stood outside it for a few minutes deciding whether I would go in or not but I knew I had to ‘bite the bullet’. But, when I met Mary Roche, she put me instantly at ease, and I started with a group of about five people who were all in the same boat as me,” says Shaun.

Since then Shaun’s literacy has gone from strength to strength. “Before now, I would have struggled with spelling, reading and writing but it’s all improved so much since I started here. My tutor, Pat Hoban, is so supportive. If any of us don’t understand anything, he takes the time to explain it in a different way to make sure we understand,” says Shaun.

“At the beginning, my tutor Pat asked me what I wanted to get out of this so I told

him that I wanted to get a qualification that is similar to the GCSE in England which I found out is like the Junior Cert in Ireland. So, that’s what I’m working towards. It’s so different to school, I look forward to it because I’m doing it for myself,” says Shaun.

Shaun also loves how so many other things have opened up to him since returning to education. “I never thought I would enjoy learning so much for myself. Now that my reading and writing has improved, I’ve also learnt how to use the computer and send emails. Now I talk to my family in the UK on Facebook which is great,” says Shaun.

“I would encourage anyone thinking about returning to education to give it a go,” says Shaun. “I’d take them by the hand and lead them in myself because once you’ve taken that first step it gets easier.”



President Higgins highlights the risk of low literacy

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

President Michael D Higgins

We were delighted when **President Michael D Higgins** agreed to launch National Adult Literacy Awareness Week in September. Over one hundred people attended the launch in the National Gallery of Ireland and were thrilled to hear the President speak so passionately about the importance of literacy to democracy and the values of our republic.

In his speech, the President said that literacy is a fundamental right and must be a priority for all who are concerned with human rights and equality. He said:

“As a republic and a democracy we have a duty to create an Ireland where citizenship is based on participation and rights, and where the value of a citizen, as carrier of those rights, is respected. A true republic must be built on principles and policies which recognise the common welfare, and which place the needs of community and public at the centre, rejecting the limitations of a narrow individualistic concept of citizenship.”

“We cannot claim to be such a place when some of our citizens are failed by a society which allows them to be deprived of that most basic of civil rights; the ability to communicate fully and to have an

effective voice in their communities and in their society. A culture which accepts that citizens will fall through the cracks, will drop out of its education system unable to read or write, will become disengaged and disenfranchised at an early age cannot call itself a true republic.”

“At the very heart of republicanism, in its original sense, lies the principle of participative citizenship, and the right of all citizens to be represented and to have their voice heard. We have a responsibility and a duty to enable all members of our society to receive the education that will allow them to become informed participative citizens. Indeed, if we are to become a true Republic, it is vital that we ensure that members of our society are equipped with the skills to question and challenge decisions made by individuals and institutions in positions of power and authority, ensuring such decisions are ethical, based on fairness and not on any privilege derived from wealth.”

The President went on to say that there can be no room, in such a vision of citizenship, for obstacles that hinder full participation due to literacy difficulties that leaves people vulnerable to prejudice, inequality, abuse or exclusion.





The President meeting Adult Literacy Organisers before the event.



Larry O'Dea, a student from Dublin Adult Learning Centre presents a book of student writing to the President.

He continued: "As we begin the process of commemorations around the centenary of 1916 is there any better way to honour the values of our republic, as articulated in the Proclamation, than by seeking a version of the State that meets our demands as a Republic and a deepening of democracy."

"Let us strive to eradicate illiteracy from our society, realising our shared obligation to ensure that no one is denied the important tool of citizenship that is literacy; and let us never forget that citizenship is more than about rights, it is about belonging; of being 'at home' in one's world without fear or shame. It is only through the envisioning of such a citizenship that we can craft together a future built on inclusion, a creative society, and a real Republic."

"Helping such fellow citizens of ours requires great skills, skills of the heart as well as skills of the head. I have admired so many who have given this task their empathy, their patience and their love."

The President commended literacy tutors in his speech

The event was a public seminar called, **'Learning and life chances: promoting equality through basic education'**. We organized the event to raise awareness of the social and economic benefits of helping people with low or no qualifications access education. We were delighted that Joe Little covered the event for the RTÉ SixOne News that evening. He interviewed the president and also visited Dublin Adult Learning Centre where he spoke to adults who had returned to education. The Irish Times also wrote an article about the President's speech the next day.



John Sweeney takes questions from the audience.

Learning and life chances: promoting equality through adult basic education

John Sweeney, Áine Lynch and Owen Metcalfe spoke at the launch of Awareness Week and provided great insight into how literacy effects the individual, the family and the economy. Here is a snapshot of what they said.

Why invest in adult basic education?

John Sweeney is an economist and social activist in Ireland. In his presentation, he spoke about why investing more in adult basic education isn't always an easy sell. "We are a third-level country and becoming a lot more so. Who wants to tell the story that 23% of those aged 16-64 in Ireland don't have a completed upper secondary education. While in the US, the figure is 10%. We much prefer to tell people that 51% of our young people have a third-level education, which is higher than the US at 45%," he said.

He also challenged the often made argument that the issue of low literacy skills is going to fade with time. "This is one of the big cop outs that our society has – that we are dealing with a legacy of older people who left school when completing upper secondary wasn't the norm," he said.

He explained that the PIAAC study shows that many of those in Ireland with very low literacy and numeracy levels have at least

20 years ahead of them before reaching the age of 65. 700,000 adults that are at or below level 1 numeracy have different levels of educational achievement. Almost a quarter of these adults (23%) have primary level education or less. Just over a quarter (27%) have less than an upper secondary. One half (50%) have a leaving certificate as well as some having post leaving and third level qualifications.

"The challenge is not fading away. The challenge is being replicated and fed with each cohort that comes out of the education system," said John.

So, how do we make the hard case that this is a priority for the nation, for the economy and for society if there is muted interest?

"There is clear evidence of social returns – it is so important for so many dimensions of wellbeing," John said. "It is also clear that the way in which participation in adult basic education leads to higher proficiency is that it changes people's practices. It leads to them doing more and doing different things. The build-up in proficiency occurs after programme participation. It takes time to be identified and establish itself," he said.

However, we need to seriously ramp up the effectiveness of interventions. "We

need to become a lot more forensic about when interventions work and why they have worked," he said.

He explained that the OECD have identified four fundamental characteristics of education programmes that achieve advances for their learners. They are:

- that they motivate individuals to take part;
- that they convey basic skills effectively;
- that they encourage persistence; and
- that the basic skills acquired are sustained through use and not lost through lack of use.

Literacy and health

Owen Metcalfe is the CEO of the **Institute of Public Health** and he spoke about the connection between health and literacy.

He said that while there are many factors that affect a person's health, there is considerable international evidence that education is strongly linked to health. People with lower levels of education are more likely to die at a younger age and are at an increased risk of poorer health throughout their life than those with more education. Since there are still a substantial number of people not completing second level education, this is a cause for concern.

In the US, an additional year of education was found to improve the probability of reporting good health. Also, better educated women are more likely to take measures to protect their health, for example by taking regular cervical screening tests. Another study in Sweden found that an additional year of schooling reduced the risk of bad health by 18%.

Owen said that our approach to health must have an inbuilt mechanism that has 'proportionate universalism'. "We do want everyone to get better, but we want those that are more disadvantaged to be the target of the greater access to resources that will help to support them, to close the inequality gap," he explained.

He also said that 'Healthy Ireland's' policy document presents an opportunity to address inequalities in health. "They (the Government) have said clearly that they want to reduce health inequalities in Ireland and they want to include in their programme greater progress in literacy. This is a promising opportunity," he said.

Literacy and family

Áine Lynch, CEO of the **National Parents Council** spoke about the importance of parental involvement in children's education. She discussed how research shows that parent's involvement in children's education in the early years and primary education, has more of an impact in educational outcomes for children than anything the school does. "So, whatever the school does, if the parents are not doing their bit in the home, it will have less of an impact," she said.

However, it is not always clear what parents need to do at home. A lot of people associate learning in the home with 'helping with the homework', which can be quite stressful for all parents. Áine explained that it is even more important that education is valued in the home and that the child knows that. For example, talking about school and learning, and creating a learning environment in the home.

She went on to explain that parents who have difficulty around literacy have an increased barrier around those areas. "For example, how do you create a learning environment in the home when you never grew up with one?" she said.

"If we can give all parents the supports they need to be able to do this, to have communications with schools, to have communications with their children, to set the right environments within the home, we know that will make a positive impact for children," she said.

"We need to create an education system that supports all parents to be able to give these supports to their children," she said.



Michael Power and Kevin O'Duffy in their campervan at the National Ploughing Championships.

Crowds, cows, campervans and craic

– all in a day's work at the National Ploughing Championships

Anyone who has ever attended the National Ploughing Championships knows it can take hours getting in and out of the event. So, this year, our team of learners decided to stay in campervans to save time getting to and from our stand. They all said it was very cold but given the size of the campervan they had no choice but to keep cosy. Olive, Liz and Michael made the dinners while Tony and Noel threw wellies at Kevin for snoring during the night!

As always the crowds were mammoth with an estimated 280,000 attending the three day event. We like to think that our stand was the loudest and most colourful, attracting anyone walking by to have a chat with us.

Our team know that often people go to great lengths to hide their literacy difficulties from their friends and family. They have all

lived with the stigma and know how scary it can be to go back to education as adults. So, there is nobody better placed to meet the public and motivate others in a similar position, to take that first step back into adult education. It's a unique opportunity to meet the general public and tell them about the literacy issue and the free ETB services around the country.

Once again, the team were very popular with the media and did a great interview with Morning Ireland about why we attend the event. It was repeated on RTÉ radio during the week and many people have mentioned hearing it.

We'd like to thank everyone who worked with us during the three days and who visited our stand. We hope to see you all again next year...we just might pack more blankets and ear plugs!

The day we met a princess



Amy McArdle, Princess Laurentien and Senator Van Turnhout at Leinster House.

It's not every day you get to meet royalty, so you can imagine how excited we were when we met Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, at an early morning briefing in Leinster House. The briefing was organised by Senator Jillian van Turnhout as part of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week in September.

"We had heard Princess Laurentien was in Dublin for another event, and we thought it would be a great opportunity to have her meet and brief Irish politicians in Leinster House. The Princess is the UNESCO Special Envoy on Literacy for Development and is at the forefront of literacy development both in the Netherlands and across Europe. We knew she would have serious clout when it comes to getting politicians into a room," said Aoife O'Driscoll, Policy Officer, NALA.

And, she did! With the help of Senator Jillian van Turnhout, the Dutch Embassy and a Dutch Literacy Organisation, Princess Laurentien met politicians from different

political parties and brought them up to speed on current literacy issues in Europe.

"It was really great to have the princess meet politicians. She was so approachable and knowledgeable that I think it made a big impact on the politicians who attended. Also, while she was able to discuss the need for a pan-European approach to improving literacy levels in Europe, we were also able to provide them with the local context and reasons for supporting literacy development in Ireland," said Aoife.

We would like to thank Senator Jillian van Turnhout for making this event happen. We have no doubt that the briefing with politicians will help us with our pre-election submission calling on all political parties to prioritise people with weak literacy and numeracy skills.

"Princess Laurentien has been committed to literacy for years, based on the conviction that literacy is a basic human right and a precondition for a healthy, strong and durable society."

Aoife O'Driscoll, NALA Policy Officer

PLAIN 2015: The conference that had it all and achieved important outcomes for plain English

On 17 September, top plain language experts from around the world and people new to plain language gathered to the opening of PLAIN's 2015 conference in Dublin Castle. There was a palatable air of excitement – and, the conference did not disappoint.

The theme for this 10th PLAIN conference was **Clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness** – a theme that reflects the importance of communicating clearly in all aspects of business and life. PLAIN is a volunteer, nonprofit organisation of plain language advocates, professionals, and organisations committed to plain language. Its growing network includes members from over 20 countries. Both PLAIN and NALA (through its Plain English Editing and Training Service) work to improve the quality of organisations' print and online communications. Clear communication benefits all involved, including people with literacy needs.

PLAIN 2015 gave delegates and contributors an opportunity to discuss plain language and to push the discussion of plain language forward. In particular, it allowed for discussion of the benefits of plain language and how should it develop – while keeping a keen focus on readers' expectations, needs and wants.

Some of the conference outcomes for plain English

The conference programme – featured on www.plain2015.ie – has made a valuable contribution to plain language. It had something for all sectors, but particularly for the social and community, financial, health, legal and technology sectors.

1. Keynotes:

- Emily O'Reilly, European Ombudsman
- Dr Richard Murray, Chief Medical Officer at MSD
- David Marsh, Production Editor of the Guardian
- David Berman, UN Special Advisor Web Accessibility (sponsored by QQI)
- Colm Kincaid, Head of the Consumer Protection Division, Central Bank of Ireland



International speakers David Marsh and David Berman with the event coordinator Claire O’Riordan from NALA.

“This conference hosted by NALA had the best programme of all previous nine conferences.”

Neil James, Executive Director of the Plain English Foundation in Australia

As to which keynote was the best depended on what you were looking for, but all were mentioned as valuable in the evaluations. However, the audience was in stitches at David Marsh’s highly entertaining but informative session on style guides. David Berman also delivered an inspirational presentation about the importance of accessible websites. Emily O’Reilly’s presentation was peppered with practical examples of the value of using plain language – and its challenges. While Colm Kincaid gave a very honest account of the issues and opportunities of using plain language in explaining financial matters. Dr Richard Murray gave us a greater insight into the challenges of health literacy and relaying clear and relevant information to patients.

2. Media coverage

The next significant impact of PLAIN 2015 was the way it raised the public profile of plain language through the media. The media coverage includes interviews in The Irish Times, The Sunday Times, Marian Finucane Show and several trade magazines.

3. Building important support for plain language

The support from sponsors and supporters of the conference will continue to help to build the profile and reputation of plain English initiatives. There were **25 sponsors and partners** in all. Leading sponsors include: FBD Trust; MSD; The Plain English Foundation (Australia); Mason Hayes & Curran; and PLAIN. Other significant Irish sponsors included EirGrid; QQI and the Office of the Ombudsman – all of whom have used NALA’s Plain English Service. The National Disability Authority was also a valued conference partner as well as An Post and Red Dog Design.

In terms of important supporters, we were pleased that David Feeney, Principal Officer at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, could contribute to the programme. David spoke about the Department’s work done to date and future plans to promote plain language in the public sector. We were also very pleased with the support from Emily O’Reilly, European Ombudsman, and Peter Tyndall, Ireland’s Ombudsman.

The conference in numbers:

Delegates:

250
plus

Days:

2
full days
(18-19 Sept)

Continents represented:

5

Programme contributors:

70

Sponsors and partners:

25

Countries represented:

18

100

positive evaluations received

Number of engagements:

1

(our congratulations to Kathryn Catonia and Brian from the USA, who got engaged at the conference)



Over 250 delegates attended the conference



Dr Deborah Bosley, PLAIN President.

Who attended from Ireland?

The conference had a wide range of attendees. Irish delegates came from organisations such as:

- Office of the Ombudsman (sponsor)
- Office of the Director of Public Prosecution
- Office of Information Commissioner
- Garda Ombudsman Office
- Government departments including Department of Public Expenditure, Department of Revenue, Department of Health and Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
- Regulatory bodies including HIQA, CORU and PSI
- Other bodies such as QQI (sponsor), EirGrid (sponsor), Teagasc and the National Teachers' Organisation
- Legal firms/bodies such as Mason Hayes & Curran, Matteson and Arthur Cox
- Technology firms such as Microsoft, Ammenon and SAP
- Financial institutions such as AIB and Ulster bank

- Health bodies such as HSE, hospitals (St James's and St Pat's) and other health bodies (examples: Irish Cancer Society, Central Remedial Clinic, Irish Poison Centre)
- Others including County Councils (Dublin, Longford and Fingal), some libraries and universities

Thank you

NALA thank all of the conference sponsors and partners, the conference contributors – in particular the keynotes, delegates and users of our Plain English Editing and Training Service. We would like to pay a special thanks to Mai Olden and her team in Conference Partners who did an excellent job supporting the delivery of this conference.

Finally, we thank PLAIN for giving us the opportunity to host this important conference for Ireland, for NALA, for people who care about clear communication and for vulnerable people, including people with literacy difficulties.

You can download presentations from the conference at www.plain2015.ie or watch some of the keynote speakers on the NALA youtube channel.

Spirits high at Plain English Awards



Inclusion Ireland and Cope Foundation awarded for clear communications

There was great excitement when the winners of Ireland's first ever Plain English Awards were announced at a gala dinner on Friday 18 September. Over 150 people attended the event which was organised as part of the PLAIN 2015 Conference. Ruth Scott, 2FM DJ was fantastic as our MC for the night and got everyone in high spirits in the Jameson Distillery (no pun intended!).

The aim of the Plain English Awards is to reward organisations that communicate clearly in plain English. Over **seventy** organisations entered the competition and an independent panel of plain English experts judged the entries. In the end there were two winners:

- **Inclusion Ireland** for their booklet 'Sexual Assault Support and Information' (Category: Use of plain English in a document), and
- **The Cope Foundation** for their website www.cope-foundation.ie (Category: Use of plain English on a website).

The judges were very impressed with how Inclusion Ireland used visuals in its document to explain a difficult subject and meet the information needs of survivors of sexual abuse. They were also impressed with how The Cope Foundation communicated directly to the intended reader throughout its website in a language that was easy to read and understand.

David Leland, chairperson of Cope's advocacy working group said:

"Plain English makes information easier to understand for people with intellectual disabilities. We have a right to information so that we can live our lives to the full. Now our website is accessible and easy to use. Cope Foundation puts us first. I have a visual impairment and my screen reader can find the information I need easily and I can understand what is happening in the Cope Foundation. It is great that NALA can see how well our website works too."

Speaking about the awards, Inez Bailey, Director, National Adult Literacy Agency said:

"We were delighted to get so many entries from organisations around the country as everyone benefits from clear information, written in plain English. We would like to congratulate Inclusion Ireland and The Cope Foundation. They have won this award for thinking of the people who use their service and putting them first."

Other shortlisted entrants that were highly commended by the judges included:

- **Alzheimer Society of Ireland** for their booklet 'I have dementia, first steps after diagnosis';
- **Longford County Council** for their 'Safety Statement';
- **HSE** for their website www.breastfeeding.ie; and
- **KARE** for their website www.kare.ie.



Representatives from Inclusion Ireland accept their award from Declan Black, Mason Hayes & Curran (pictured left).



Lynda Harris accepts her award from Christine Mowatt and Neil James.

The Plain English Awards were sponsored by leading law firm Mason Hayes & Curran. Commenting on the sponsorship, Declan Black, Managing Partner at Mason Hayes & Curran said:

“We hope that our support of this award contributes to the promotion of plain language in everyday communications. One of our key objectives at Mason Hayes & Curran is to ensure that our legal advice is clear and accurate and we understand that this is not easy, particularly when complex issues are being explained, so we congratulate the winners on a job well done.”

Another winner on the night was Lynda Harris. She was presented with the **Christine Mowatt Plain Language Achievement Award** for outstanding contribution to plain language by PLAIN. Lynda is the CEO of the plain language consultancy Write. Her win recognises her work on advancing plain language and representing the plain language profession with the highest integrity and skill.

“Lynda has significantly advanced the plain language profession through her company’s work, especially her applied research into the business benefits of plain language in organisations,” said Deborah Bosley, President of PLAIN.

Learning how to teach maths

NALA launches a new framework for meeting the professional development needs of numeracy tutors

According to the last international adult literacy survey in Ireland, one in four adults find it difficult to do basic maths. This can have significant consequences for them as individuals in terms of getting employment, career progression, earning potential and participation in further education and training. There is also the loss of this individual's full potential to our society.

With this knowledge, it is important to ensure that there is a sufficient quality supply of adult numeracy tuition options for people in their local community. However, adult numeracy is a neglected area relative to adult literacy. Against this challenging backdrop, NALA brought together a working group to develop a framework for continuing professional development (CPD) for adult numeracy tutors.

The group included numeracy experts and representatives of management from the main adult education providers and funder. Together, we worked to develop a new framework which we hope will be key to the development of much needed on-going professional development in adult numeracy.

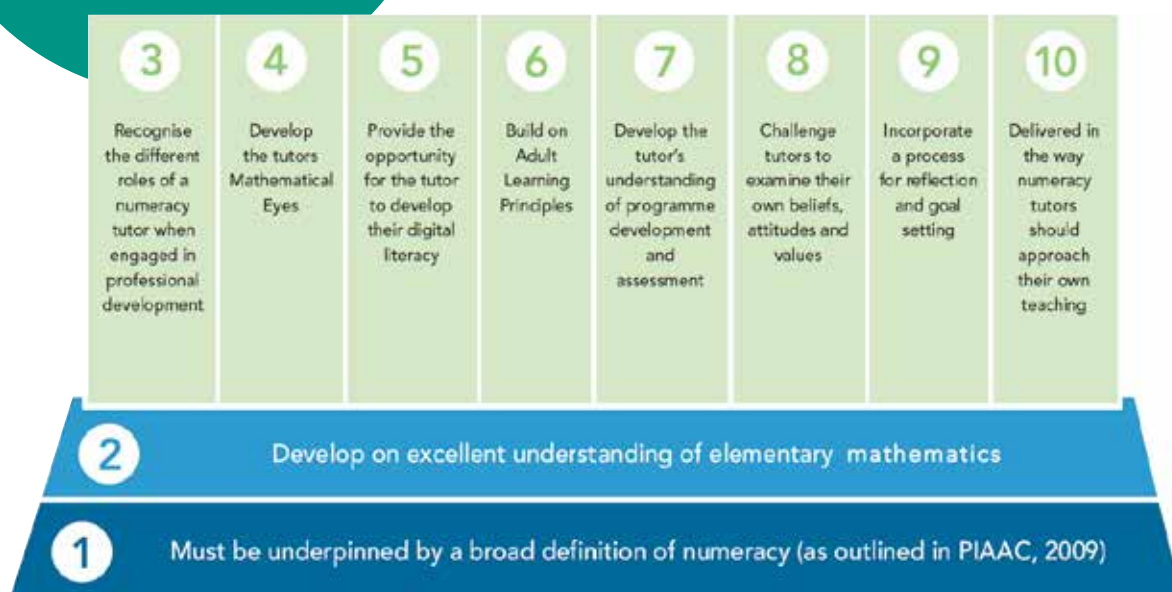
Teaching adult numeracy is a complex, multi-disciplinary process which requires that tutors develop the specialised knowledge, skills and competence to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners. The new framework has 10 core components that are illustrated in the diagram on the next page.

Speaking about the new framework, Jan O'Sullivan, Minister for Education and Skills said:

"In order for adult learners to be able to gain the skills they need, it follows that those who teach them should be competent and confident not only in their subject itself but also in teaching their subject. They need qualifications and training to enable them to give their learners the highest quality learning experience they can. This Framework is crystal clear in its intentions to improve the teaching and learning of numeracy in Ireland. It sets out 10 components it considers vital for ensuring that professional development (whether in terms of formal qualifications or non-accredited training) shapes tutors who are not only

10

Core Components of Professional Development for Adult Numeracy Tutors in Further education



competent and confident, but who are able to give learners the support they deserve.”

So what next?

It is hoped that the Framework will make a significant contribution to informing the type of CPD that needs to be put in place to meet both the needs of adult numeracy tutors and any future legislative requirement.

The next stage is that NALA will disseminate the Framework to all relevant stakeholders. We would encourage all agencies and providers to use the Framework in designing qualifications and training for current and future tutors of adult numeracy.

We look forward to working with all the relevant partners to bring its core components to fruition.

You can download the Framework for free at www.nala.ie



Cavan students get a 'real appetite for learning'

Sharon Leavey and Stephen McGaughran from Cavan would encourage anyone to give education a second chance and are full of praise for their tutors and fellow students at Cavan Adult Education Centre.

"They've built up my confidence so much and given me a real appetite for learning," says Sharon (45), who moved from Dublin to Cavan 14 years ago and now lives in Lakeview.

When Sharon was younger, she dropped out of school early and never got a formal qualification. After rearing her daughter, she thought that chance had passed her by. But three years ago all that changed when she enquired about courses at Cavan Adult Education Centre. "I was nervous at first but when I met Siobhan McEntee, she put me instantly at ease, it was like having a chat with an old friend and she suggested that I start on a Level 3 course."

Since then Sharon has never looked back and is already signed up to do Level 4 next year, which is the equivalent of a Leaving Certificate. "You're there because you want to be, not because you have to be. You know that your main goal is to do well – just for yourself," says Sharon.

"I used to be brutal at spelling but I've come on really well. It's not like school, you learn at your own pace so it stays with you. Don't get me wrong, you have to work hard but now that I've done Level 3 I'm proud of myself and I want to do much more," she says.

Sharon also loves the social aspect to going back to education. "I didn't know that many people in Cavan before I started coming here but now I've made so many friends that I can meet up with. The people in my group are lovely, there's teenagers, people in their 60s and 70s, and from different cultures as well. It's a real mix, we all help each other out and have a really good laugh too," says Sharon.



Stephen and Sharon holding their most recent certificates.

Stephen McGaughran (35) is from Mullahoran and he first went to Cavan Adult Education Centre about five years ago. While he was very nervous at the beginning he can't recommend it enough now. "I knew I needed to get out and start doing something again so when I saw an ad in the local paper I got in touch with them. At first you're nervous meeting people, you're afraid to open your mouth at the beginning, in case someone would look down at you. But the tutors and other students are just great. They put you instantly at ease. Everyone is there together, to learn at their own pace and nobody is left behind," says Stephen.

To date, Stephen has completed Level 3 courses in Communications, Computers, Writing and Spelling, Personal Effectiveness, Internet Skills, Maths, Occupational First Aid, Health and Safety. Stephen is signed up this term to go on to do Level 4 courses. "Writing was a problem for me at the beginning, it wasn't great and it was a bit all over the place but I've big time improved on it. Our tutor, Margaret O'Reilly, helped us so much that I even wrote a story at the end of last term. Maths was also difficult at Level 3, especially Algebra, but I passed that and sure there's always great old banter in class too!" says Stephen.

Making the connection: some ideas for blended learning

Alison Jones is Deputy Director of Galway Adult Basic Education Service and has a wealth of experience tutoring and supporting adults learn. In this article she tells us why it is important to encourage learners to use technology and gives us tips on her favourite websites and apps.

Why do you think blended learning has a role in Adult Basic Education?

How many of us have looked up how to do something on YouTube or Google? Encouraging learners to do just this and to take on tasks using technology is going to bring benefits, and not just simply by being able to do the task, but also in boosting confidence levels and self-esteem. Of course it will also aid progress in reading, writing and how to source information. Many learners do in fact make great gains in using computers anyway; as one learner recently said at the International Literacy Day: "I would have given up my spelling class were it not for the computers... and spell check. Computers was an exciting prospect and definitely gave me confidence."

With technology interwoven into so many daily tasks, it has to be a tool that is embraced. We must reflect the new trends and developments we see in society in our classrooms. Let's consider this as blended learning, with a healthy balance to be struck between traditional classroom methods and using modern technologies to carry out everyday tasks.

The title of this article is 'Making the Connection.' What ideas or projects have you developed in Galway?

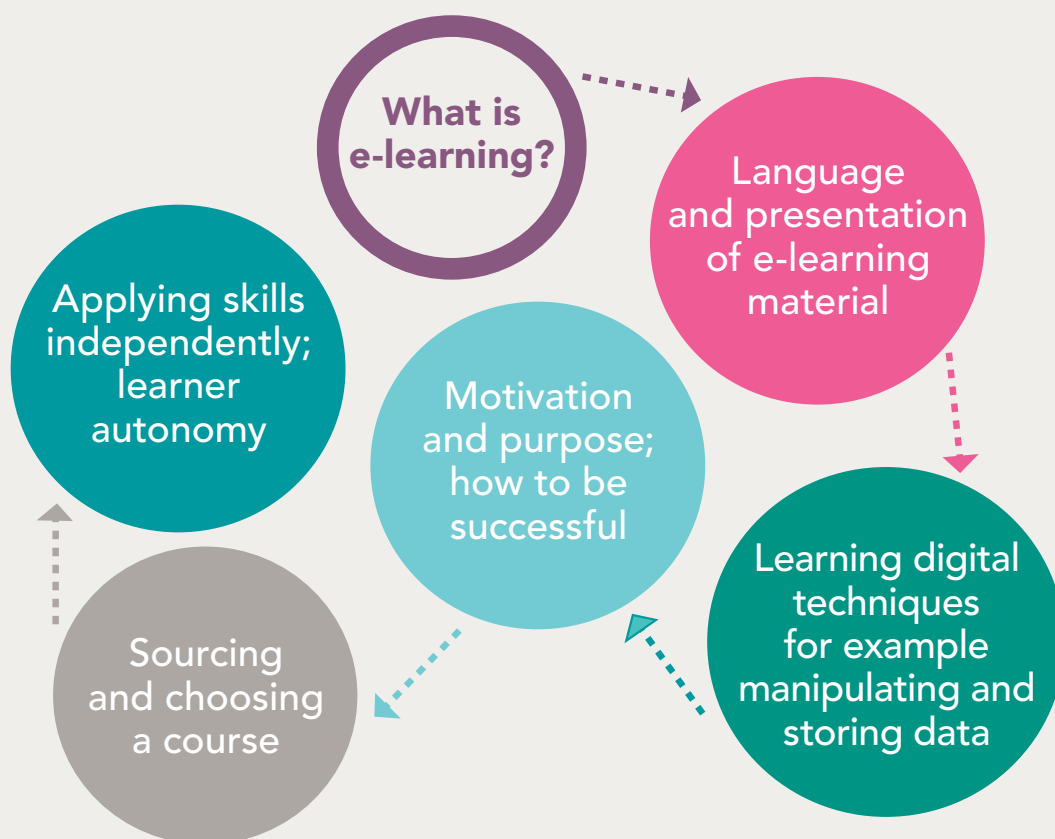
We have two new projects to tell you about. The first one is a newly developed course

called '**Log on to E-Learn**' and the second is a **Book Creator project**. Both involve learners making the connection between learning and technology.

Log on to E-Learn:

Some learners in County Galway, who have access to a computer room in a nearby centre, wanted to undertake an online course, but lacked the confidence and the knowledge to do this. So, our aim was to introduce students to the concept and practice of online learning through a four week introductory course called '**Log on to E-Learn**'. This course was a mixture of instructor led and online teaching and introduced learners to the language of online learning, how materials are presented, how to download and upload documents, different types of assignments, how to stay motivated and finally what courses are out there. Sample online tasks were a feature of the course and learners also logged on at various times when they were away from the computer room, something they enjoyed immensely.

So far '**Log On to E-Learn**' has been run in Galway City (pilot) and Portumna with another one planned for Clifden. Interestingly, students said that physically coming in to a centre was of key importance, as a sense of community and class support was a big positive in the experience. We still need the human contact! So now the plan is that



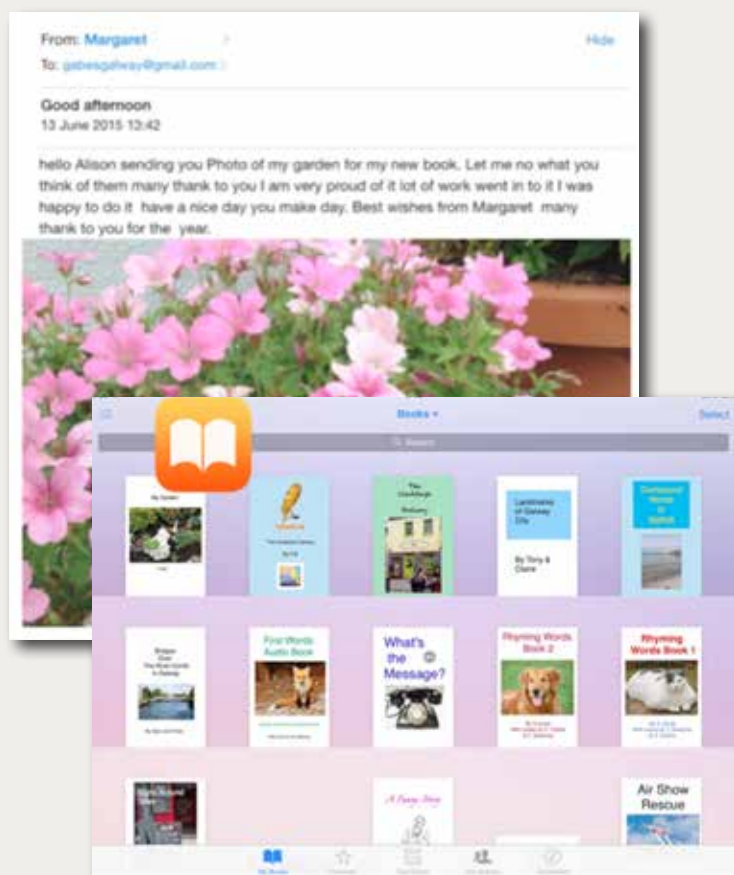
students register at their local centre and access the computers together as a group at certain times of the week. It is a model that can be followed in any rural area where there is an available computer room perhaps.

Book Creator Project

This project was popular in both one to one classes and the ITABE programmes in Galway Adult Basic Education Service (GABES). Learners were encouraged to write about their hobbies or interests in the **iPad Book Creator app**. They could then email related photos or short videos directly to the iPads for inclusion in the book.

Here is an example by a learner called Margaret who wrote about her garden. She emailed her photos to the email address on the iPad, and inserted them in to her book in class.

The **Book Creator app** also allows learners to add in audio and Margaret narrated her book as well. Once completed, the book was sent to iBooks for reading, to be shared if desired.



As an extra step, we recently combined several books and printed a copy for demonstration purposes. It is full of stories and worksheets by both tutors and learners.



**What other ideas do you have?
Can you recommend any particular programmes or websites?**

Try this: 'What's the Story?' www.gabes.ie



A voluntary tutor in Galway City very generously developed a web-based programme for us called **'What's the Story?'** This site works on smartboards and on iPads as well as computers and many groups in Galway City and County have enjoyed using it as a group activity in the classroom. There are numerous stories already loaded on to the site. Learners read the description to get clues about the content of the story and then choose a difficulty level, as shown in the photo. Now they can proceed by clicking on the gaps, typing in words to complete the story. There is a dictionary, the Dolch list and a hint button to help. The activity helps with

spelling, grammar, vocabulary and syntax as well as providing an entertaining story.

The site is available for everyone to use and can be accessed by visiting www.gabes.ie (look for the link on the left). Incidentally, if anyone wants their own story to be used on the site, email me (Alison.jones@gretb.ie) and I will upload it!

Do you have any other new projects planned for the year ahead?

I have several in mind which are in the development stage, but I have been particularly looking at an app called **'Whatsapp'**. This is an instant messaging app that mimics conversation and is easier and much more user friendly than email and texting. It is fast, expressive and very versatile and an ideal way of staying in touch. It could be used as an excellent tool for adult basic education.



Alison Jones can be contacted at Alison.jones@gretb.ie

Inside Crumlin Adult Literacy Service

Gwen Redmond is an experienced adult literacy trainer and tutor at Crumlin Adult Learning Service for the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb). Here she tells us about the different tuition models they use, the importance they place on planning lessons and the benefits of students learning from each other.

What are the options for adults returning to education at your centre?

The Adult Literacy Service in Crumlin provides tuition in reading, writing, spelling, numeracy, ICT and ESOL through a variety of accredited and non-accredited courses. Our target group is all those who wish to improve their skills whether for their personal or work lives. When an individual arrives at the service we have an initial discussion with them about their prior experiences in education, what they feel they missed out on and what their current needs are.

The CDETb has developed an assessment process called **The Progress Framework** which includes materials to aid our assessment. This really helps us hone in on the learners' strengths and also where they might need to do some work. It really helps us define the levels their skills are at. Having discovered their needs, we then discuss their availability and what classes would suit them.

How do you decide what tuition model suits the learner best?

As anyone working in literacy education knows, learners often have particular needs which are best worked on in the one-to-one format. Working in one-to-one is not only determined by the level the student is working at, although the vast majority might be working on reading and writing skills at levels one and two, but it is also determined

by the confidence of the learner. Sometimes past experiences have had such an impact that returning to learning can be a fearful experience. Some people request one-to-one for a short period, just to build their confidence around the skills they already have before beginning group work.

If a learner is ready to start in a group immediately, we offer a minimum of two hours per week usually in a reading and writing module at level two or a communications module at level three. These classes can be supplemented, depending on the time available and interests of the learner, with numeracy, spelling and computer classes. If the learner can commit to a minimum of six hours per week, we can offer them a place on one of our Intensive tuition in adult basic education (ITABE) programmes, which we use for level two intensive learning, or an intensive programme at level three. Again both consist of core modules in communications, maths and computers, and depending on the group's needs, other modules are also available.

Deciding which model of delivery suits the learner best is determined by their own availability and how much time they have to commit to intensive learning. Also, as we know literacy learners can have spiky profiles. A person might have good reading and writing skills in which case a level three

(or even four) communications group might suit them. However, they may want to join a beginners group for computers and or maths. The intensive programmes tend not to work so well for learners with 'spiky' profiles as all modules are delivered at the same level.

What are the benefits of each type of tuition?

We are lucky in Crumlin to have a large group of volunteers; some have given many years to the service, so we have a lot of very experienced tutors. The benefit of one-to-one is that, for the learner, it is a safe, non-threatening return to learning. It is a very learner centred experience for the individual. It often restores the confidence lost over the years.

The benefits of the intensive programmes are twofold; one is that intensive learning speeds up the learning process. This is not only due to the increased attendance hours, but in Crumlin the tutors on these programmes spend a lot of time planning so that the learning is integrated throughout the modules. So for instance, the learner might do reading and writing in their numeracy classes also, and spend time in computer classes typing and formatting writing pieces they've been working on in their writing modules. Their new literacy skills are being reinforced throughout the intensive programme. The other benefit of the intensive programme, as opposed to the standalone modules, is that you are working with the same group all the time. As we know, the benefits of learning are not only related to skills acquisition, but also to the support and learning that happens amongst group members.

Collaborative learning is really important; it teaches the learner that they have the capability to learn from each other without tutor support at times. This is very important for individuals, and the ethos of literacy education itself, that learners become reflective about their own learning, appreciate all the skills and learning they

already have, and in turn share this with their group. Another benefit of the intensive programmes is that for learners who hope to study at Further Education colleges, it prepares them for the expectations of studying full-time at levels four and five.

Are there any drawbacks of each type of tuition?

If the individual only has two hours per week to give, the learning can be slow. It used to be the case that the learner was working for quite long periods of time in one-to-one, but with the development of the level two awards, (and we have some great modules written by the CDET), we can now move people into groups sooner allowing them to work on a level two programme. For some reason, maybe it's the collaborative learning, but the learning always seems to intensify in a group.

Once the learner has the time to commit to the increased attendance hours, and the associated work needed at home, it is difficult to see too many drawbacks to intensive learning programmes. As any of us as adults know, sometimes we can just take on too much, and become overloaded and occasionally we see that happen with our learners. However, for the vast majority of learners, once they have the time to give to an intensive programme, it is an excellent option.





Berni Brady, Director AONTAS and Dr Sarah Gibney, PIAAC Researcher at our seminar for policy makers, tutors and researchers.

What PIAAC tells us about skills use, workplace skills and social participation at level 2

Over the summer we worked on a research project to gather more information on PIAAC – the OECD survey that examined literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology rich environments (PSTRE). We wanted to drill down on the data and find out more about participants at or below level 2.

Here's what we learned:

Everyday skills use:

- The data shows that people at level 1 or lower use literacy, numeracy and PSTRE to a lesser extent than those at level 2. Adults who have not worked in the last

five years use their skills less than those who have and younger adults tend to have higher proficiency levels than older adults. Skills use declines as people get older and women tend to use their everyday reading and writing skills more often than men.



“Further investment in education and training including widening access to adult education and training programmes can result in considerable economic and social returns for society as a whole”

Tina Byrne, Research Officer, NALA

Skills use in the workplace:

- The data shows that adults with level 2 proficiency report that they have the workplace skills they need compared with adults at or below level 1. Workers who have higher scores in literacy, numeracy and PSTRE are more likely to be employed and to earn more than those who score at the lower end of the scale. Compared with adults at level 2, significantly more adults who are at or below level 1 PSTRE, numeracy and literacy report that a lack of ICT skills affects their careers.

Social inclusion:

- The data clearly shows that the impact of skills goes beyond employment or potential earning ability. Skills can impact on health, involvement in society, engagement in political processes and involvement in wider activities such as volunteering. The data shows that across all proficiencies more adults with level 1 compared with level 2 have poorer social wellbeing outcomes; less trust, less perceived influence on the government, less volunteering, a greater perception that other people take advantage and an increased likelihood of reporting being in poor health.

So what can we do with this information?

We can use this information to consider responses to the further education and training needs of this cohort of the population. The findings have implications at a policy level, specifically in terms of the age of sample, the decline in skills use as people get older and the lack of skills use by the long term unemployed.

“Good literacy, numeracy and PSTRE skills are essential to understand social, political and economic issues. The retention and development of these skills enable an individual to feel that they can fully take part in society and gain a better understanding of the complexities of social, political and economic issues. Further investment in education and training including widening access to adult education and training programmes can result in considerable economic and social returns for society as a whole,” said Tina Byrne, Research Officer, NALA.

The research was funded by the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL). Projects are being funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme across 27 European countries to promote adult learning, especially among those with low or no qualifications. The Irish project is coordinated by AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation.

Team teaching in Kenmare

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Learners

Team teaching involves a group of two or more teachers working together to support the same group of learners. The team-teaching approach can improve the quality of teaching as various experts approach the same topic from different angles. It also allows for more interaction between teachers and students. In this article adult literacy organiser Maggie O'Sullivan Graham and literacy tutor Paula Tiller discuss how they delivered a personal development and literacy course using team teaching in Kenmare.

Can you tell us about the course you developed?

Our course ran for an ITABE group, with learners at QQI Level 2. They had all been in the literacy service for some time, having engaged with one to one tuition and groups prior to ITABE. For these learners, confidence and self-efficacy was an issue. They lacked skills in the area of self-management, and were interested in improving so we decided to make this the thematic focus of their ITABE programme.

We looked around for a well-respected framework to use, and chose Steven Covey's "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" as a starting point. Originally published in 1989, it has now sold over 25 million copies. The original book, though, is written in very dense language, with a lot of the jargon of management training. However the content is really

interesting. It helps readers to view things, and themselves, objectively. Each chapter is dedicated to one of the habits, and they build on each other in sequence.

The first three relate to self-mastery:

- 1 **Be Proactive** - have a can do attitude
- 2 **Begin with the End in Mind** – visualise what you want so you can plan how to get there
- 3 **Put First Things First** – how to prioritise

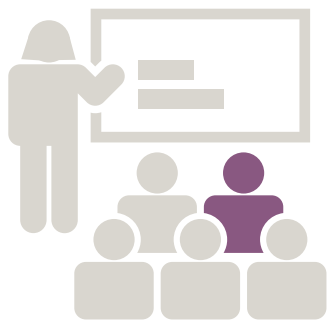
The next three are about working with others:

- 4 **Think Win-Win** – how to find a solution that works for everyone
- 5 **Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood** – active, empathic listening
- 6 **Synergize** – how to work productively with others

The final habit is about continuous improvement:

- 7 **Sharpen the Saw** – take care of yourself.

So our first job was to adapt the material for our learners. We drew on a number of supplementary texts – the author's son, Sean Covey, has published "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens" which was very useful. We decided that our group would delve into each habit for two weeks and work on the content for that two week period. ITABE is delivered over 14 weeks so that worked out neatly!



To quote Da Vinci, “one can have no greater mastery than mastery over oneself”

How did you integrate literacy into the course?

We had literacy goals and we looked at what QOI modules we could deliver via this coursework. We chose Reading, Writing and Setting Learning Goals. We drew up a matrix of the learning outcomes of these modules, and looked creatively at how they could be met using the Seven Habits material. We drew up course plans and lesson plans by putting these activities in sequence. In practice, this meant that at the start of the week, in their Reading class, the learners read about that fortnight's habit. They did reading comprehension activities relating to that habit, like quizzes and role plays. Two days later, in their writing class, they would write some text about that habit and what it meant, and work through that with their writing tutor, learning things like sentence structure and punctuation along the way. Then the following day in their Personal Development class they would discuss how that particular habit could be useful to them and change things in their own life.

What were the benefits to team teaching?

Working with an integrated team approach created important benefits for learners. They had the opportunity to consolidate their learning through handling the same content in different ways; so they were able to read about it, write about it, talk about it, and act on it. This allowed a depth of learning, aiding understanding of potentially complex ideas. This approach had the added benefit of supporting learners' different learning styles. Furthermore, the

impact of absence was reduced as the concepts were being worked on all week.

The team approach was a significant help to tutors as well. There was plenty of scope for joint development of ideas and materials which meant that they weren't working in a vacuum. Materials could be shared and adapted to suit the teaching focus, for example reading, writing or personal development. Regular team meetings and shared online tutor journaling allowed for a flexible and responsive approach. For example, if learners had found a particular area difficult to grasp, another tutor could pick up the material and approach it in a different way.

Did you get any feedback from learners?

Outcomes for learners were even better than we hoped, with most learners achieving three QOI level 2 minor awards. One went on to take his driver theory test and another set up his own business - and both of these gave credit to the course for boosting their motivation and helping them achieve their long-held goal. Two more are in further study courses.

In our view, this course gave the learners the skills, the vocabulary and the space to examine their own skills in self-mastery and take steps to improve. They then used these skills to improve their literacy, and in other areas of their lives where they felt a need.

To quote Da Vinci, “one can have no greater mastery than mastery over oneself”.

Other news



Would you like free books?

Better World Books has offered NALA six pallets of books for our members. Each pallet has a mix of 500 second hand, fiction and non-fiction books.

So, if you would like to set-up or restock a library, apply online at <http://bit.ly/1MBrYYx> by **Thursday 31 December**.

We can only offer delivery of individual pallets so you might want to group together with another centre and share the books.

It's first come, first served so apply today!



John has got a new job

We are delighted, although also sad, to tell you that John Stewart has taken up a new role as Manager with the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS). For the last 15 years John was National Adult Literacy Coordinator with NALA. In that time he has made a huge contribution to literacy in Ireland. In recent years, John worked to ensure that the literacy and numeracy strategy was enshrined in law in 2013.

We wish John well in his new role, but we will miss him.

Writeon.ie level 1 learning content

We have recently updated our www.writeon.ie website with **level 1** learning content. There are **12 subjects** available in the areas of **words, numbers and technology**.

If you have any feedback on this new content, please email distance@nala.ie.





Returning to Education: What an experience!

Going back to education was a great experience for me, because I was away from learning and understanding for a long number of years. What stood to me was my way of thinking, my self-belief and also my willpower to learn.

From the first time I went back to present, I never looked back – only forward. I have a great gift of knowledge. When I was given the chance I took it and I am glad.

I am back in education three years now. On the 27th of November 2014 with the good understanding of my first tutor, Mary, I received a component certificate at level 2 in writing. I was so proud of myself and my teacher for being so successful. I worked so hard studying through the night because I am a full-time carer. I need my own space to study. Learning was never a problem to me. The first day I went back to education was the happiest day of my life. It was great for me and my family.

FETAC, which it was called then, gave me a great chance to prove that I could start afresh.

Tuam is my home town. I will continue learning. I have a new tutor now with a good understanding and knowledge. This suits me perfect. I get on very well with Norrie.

Don Kerman June 2015.

Since Don wrote this piece he has also successfully completed a level 2 component certificate in reading and is currently working towards full accreditation at level 2.



General election 2016

Get involved – talk to your local elected representative about literacy



Promoting equality through basic education

In the run up to the upcoming General Election, NALA has been busy meeting with representatives of the main political parties as they prepare their election manifestos.

We believe that parties should promise to promote equality in Ireland through basic education.

Unmet adult literacy and numeracy needs have devastating consequences for individuals, communities and the economy. People at the lowest literacy and numeracy levels often have no or low qualifications, earn less income, have poorer health and are more likely to be unemployed. These people are caught in a 'low-skills trap', which contributes to high unemployment and threatens growth and competitiveness.

While unemployment rates are falling generally, those with low qualifications or skills remain particularly vulnerable. Early school leavers are over three times more likely to be unemployed than their counterparts with higher qualifications.

- We believe that we can promote equality in our education and training system by making sure that all adults can achieve a basic education. By targeting people caught in a 'low skills trap', we can tackle some of the inequality of the current system and wider society.
- We believe that all unemployed people with no or low qualifications should have access to an intensive basic education course leading to a level 3 qualification.
- We believe that all adults with less than a level 4 qualification should have access to an intensive basic education course that enables them to move at least one level up.

Our education system is seen as one of the finest in the world, serving most people well. We believe that in Ireland, access to education and training should be fair. We also believe that it is important to target initiatives at groups who would benefit most and who are at risk of being left behind.

We believe that literacy is a human right and a tool for change that enables people to participate more fully in society.

We encourage you to raise these issues with your public representatives.



NALA

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