

# Literacy and Empowerment

## NALA's Policy on Learners' Development



**National Adult Literacy Agency**  
An Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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Published by

National Adult Literacy Agency  
76 Lower Gardiner Street,  
Dublin 1.



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ISBN 1-871737-42-7

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## Introduction: purpose of this policy

We in the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) have produced this learners' development policy to guide NALA's activities to meet the needs of learners within our existing resources and responsibilities. The Executive Committee of NALA has adopted this policy and a learners' development plan, complete with: actions, timeframes, budgets and performance indicators, will accompany this policy. In developing this policy we have reviewed our existing work in the area of learners' development and have considered what more we could do to promote it.

This policy outlines:

- NALA's understanding of learners' development,
- What work we have done to enhance learners' development, and
- Our future plans for learners' development.

The needs of learners have always been central to the work of NALA. Learners have directly contributed to the Agency through their membership of the Executive and other committees since the Agency's foundation. We aim to make sure that, through this policy, learners stay central to all future developments in the adult literacy work.

Developing this policy document involved consultation within NALA about learners' development. Ideas for the policy were discussed with learners at the Regional Learners' Forums in 2004. We welcome feedback on the document.

The terms literacy and adult basic education are interchangeably used and in this policy both mean the same thing. Adult basic education is often the preferred term used when learners are involved in a project for example the Quality Framework.

### **Margaret Murray**

Regional Development Worker

October 2004.



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# 1. Background

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a non-profit membership organisation, concerned with national co-ordination, training and policy development in adult literacy work in Ireland. Since we were established in 1980, we have campaigned for recognition of the adult literacy problem in Ireland and for appropriate responses.

## International research

A turning point for literacy provision in Ireland came in 1997, when the Department of Education and Science and the Education Research Centre published the *International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS): Results for Ireland*<sup>1</sup>. This survey measured literacy on five levels, from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Level 1 indicates a level of literacy skills where a person may, for example, have difficulty identifying the correct amount of medicine to give a child, from information on a medicine package. At level 2, a person can complete only straightforward tasks based on material that is simple and clearly laid out. Level 3 is the minimum level of skill in developed countries. In the survey, Ireland scored unfavourably compared with other countries. It had a rating of 25% (or 500,000) adults aged between 16–64 at level 1. In Sweden, the figure was 7%, in Britain, 21%<sup>2</sup>. After the results were published, adult literacy became more important to Irish governments.

## The Irish Government's response

The Department of Education and Science's budget for adult literacy in 1997, prior to the IALS survey, was €1.1 million<sup>3</sup>. By the year 2000 this increased to €11.25 million. In that same year the Government published the first *White Paper on Adult Education*<sup>4</sup>. This contained a range of proposals and targets under the first ever National Adult Literacy Programme, which gave priority to those with the lowest levels of literacy. These proposals were to be addressed within the timeframe of the Government's National Development Plan 2000–2006. In 2004, the adult literacy budget from the Department of Education and Science stands at €18.45million<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Morgan M., B. Hickey, T. Kellaghan, A. Cronin and D. Millar (1997) *International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland*, Educational Research Centre, Dublin

<sup>2</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (1997) *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society. Further Results from the International Adult Literacy Survey*, OECD, Canada

<sup>3</sup> NALA (2002) *Literacy Awareness Training Pack*, NALA, Dublin

<sup>4</sup> Government of Ireland (2000) *Learning for Life White Paper on Adult Education*, Government Stationary Office, Dublin

<sup>5</sup> Government of Ireland (2003) *Budget Estimates 2004*, Department of Education and Science, Dublin

## NALA initiatives

NALA has played a key role, alongside Vocational Education Committee's (VECs)<sup>6</sup> adult literacy services and other organisations, in developing new programmes for tuition. These include:

- Workplace basic education,
- The Return to Learning Programme,
- Family-learning programmes,
- Integrating literacy into vocational training,
- English for Speakers of Other Languages,
- The Back to Education Initiative,
- Television and radio programmes on literacy, and
- A website, [www.literacytools.ie](http://www.literacytools.ie), geared to independent learners.

We provide television and radio programmes for adults who wish to develop literacy skills at home. The Department of Education and Science provides the main funding for the programmes and RTE radio and television broadcasts them. In 2003, we launched the fourth television series of *READ WRITE NOW*. On average, 155,000 people tuned into the programmes each week. Each series over 7,000 people called the NALA free telephone support line, to order the learner workbook that comes with the series. Also for each series VECs and other educational groups received a further 18,000 learner workbooks.

We have worked to produce a recognised third level qualification for adult literacy practitioners. Since 1995, we have been working with the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) to develop courses. Two are now in place – a national certificate and a national diploma in literacy development. These courses offer tutors and Adult Literacy Organisers the opportunity to boost their skills and obtain accreditation for the knowledge and skills they have already gathered during their years of work. Practitioners designed the courses in partnership with WIT and NALA.

Aside from developing new forms of tuition and accrediting literacy practitioners' knowledge, we have worked on two long-term projects: the *Evolving Quality Framework* – a self evaluation tool for adult basic education sites and *Mapping the Learning Journey* – a tool to aid the teaching and learning process.

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<sup>6</sup> There are thirty-three VECs in the country: one in each county, with additional VECs in city areas. VECs are established in accordance with the provisions of the Vocational Education Act 1930 and Amendments. They provide a range of education, training and support services. These include second level, adult, community and second chance education, post-leaving cert programmes, prison education and Traveller education. VECs also provide a variety of EU funded and co-operative training programmes.

The *Evolving Quality Framework* has been developed over the last five years and its purpose is to assist adult basic education sites to evaluate their service and improve it for learners. Schemes can see what standard of service they are giving by finding out what is already working well and what needs to be improved. They then make changes, promote them and check that they have improved quality in the scheme. The Framework helps schemes to plan for the future by highlighting areas they consider important and working to improve their service in those areas. Implementing the Quality Framework was one of the key points in the Government's National Adult Literacy Programme.

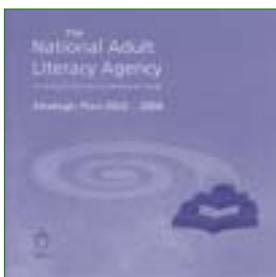
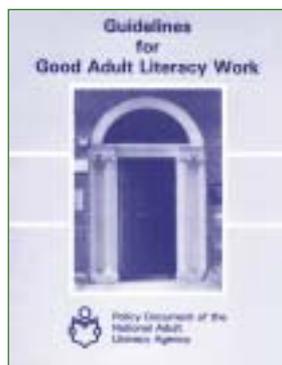
In 2000, we began working on *Mapping the Learning Journey* for adult literacy education in Ireland. Assessment tells how well a person can do something at a given point in time. It identifies, describes and demonstrates evidence of learning. Most adult literacy services do this in an informal way in that organisers discuss with learners how they are getting on and tutors and learners review how the learner is doing. *Mapping the Learning Journey* is intended to support and manage this and it can be implemented in a flexible manner to meet the needs of particular learners and schemes.

Another NALA initiative is National Literacy Awareness Week, which takes place each year in September. This gives us an opportunity to highlight the issue of literacy and to promote the adult literacy service. We also host conferences on particular themes, for example, health and literacy and workplace-basic education.

### Existing NALA policy

Three documents outline NALA's principles on learners. These are:

- *The Evolving Quality Framework User Guide* (2002)<sup>7</sup>,
- *The NALA Constitution* (1999)<sup>8</sup> and
- *Guidelines for Good Literacy Work* (1991)<sup>9</sup>.



<sup>7</sup> NALA (2002) *NALA Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education User Guide*, NALA, Dublin (also available on NALA's homepage [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie))

<sup>8</sup> NALA (1999) *Constitution of The National Adult Literacy Agency*, NALA, Dublin

<sup>9</sup> NALA (1991) *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work*, NALA, Dublin. Currently being updated, forthcoming in 2005.

The *Evolving Quality Framework User Guide* is a practical step-by-step guide that supports the continuous improvement of quality in adult basic education under the Quality Framework (see above). Learners are members of evaluation teams in the Quality Framework. Five guiding principles in the Quality Framework set out the main values that underpin adult basic education. These are:

- The learner's right to attend on a voluntary basis and to set their own goals,
- An ethical code of confidentiality, respect and trust will inform all aspects of the organisation,
- Cultural differences will be respected at all levels of the organisation,
- Particular attention will be paid to creating and maintaining an atmosphere of social interaction, informality, and enjoyment within the organisation, and
- Learners will be enabled to participate in all aspects of the organisation, including evaluation of the scheme.

One of the objectives of NALA as outlined in the Agency's *Constitution* is "to encourage the involvement of learners in all aspects of planning, organisation and research." The Constitution also states, "The inclusion of adult literacy learners should be facilitated in every possible way."

*Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work* outlines what is needed for good literacy provision and describes some issues facing literacy workers. According to the document, good literacy provision is based on the following requirements:

- The adult status of learners is key.
- Adult students need to become active rather than passive learners.
- Students have the right to learn and also the right to choose how to learn.
- Learning is a lifelong process.
- Adult literacy provision needs to establish links with other existing educational activities.
- Adult literacy provision also needs to initiate new developments in continuing education.



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## 2. Context

### Who are the learners?

Within NALA when we refer to a 'learner', we mean:

- An adult who gets literacy tuition in a scheme or programme,
- A young person, aged under 18 years, who left school early and who is getting literacy tuition in a programme, and
- A person undertaking distance education in literacy by means of the television, radio or Internet.

In NALA, we tend to use 'learner' more than 'student' because whereas 'student' is sometimes linked to formal education in second and third level, 'learner' is linked more to the idea of lifelong learning.

### Who provides adult literacy tuition?

The VECs are the main service providers of adult literacy tuition in Ireland and are funded by the Department of Education and Science. About 135 VEC adult literacy services throughout the country offer literacy tuition. Learners typically receive two hours' tuition per week, which is the same as two weeks' full-time education per year. Tutors trained and funded by the VEC carry out this literacy work. NALA provides further training to tutors. About 70 per cent of tuition takes place in a group setting; the rest is one-to-one between the tutor and the learner. Voluntary tutors carry out one-to-one work. NALA is the national referral agency for the VEC adult literacy services, so if members of the public ring us, we refer them to their local VEC.

Each VEC employs at least one Adult Literacy Organiser, who is responsible for training tutors, recruiting learners, matching tutors and learners and managing the VEC adult literacy service. The service depends heavily on voluntary tutors who make up three quarters of the total of 5,629 trained tutors. The service is free of charge to learners. Following the publication of the White Paper in 2000, adult literacy service resources have increased. This has meant an increase in the number of learners participating in VEC adult literacy services and a greater choice for learners in the ways they access tuition. In 1997, VEC adult literacy services had about 5,000 learners. In December 2000, this figure jumped to 17,150<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Education and Science (December 2000 – December 2003) *National Adult Literacy Returns from VECs*, Department of Education and Science, Dublin. (These figures include the number of people participating in the Return to Education Programme and the Work Based Education programmes but not people participating in the Back To Education Initiative).

The figures for December 2003 show that there were 31,579 learners. 48% of these learners were in the 25–44 year age group, with 16% in the 24 years or under age group. 21% were in the 45–64 years age group and 15% were 65 years or over. Of the total number of learners accessing tuition in the VEC schemes, 41% are men and 59% are women. A significant development over recent years is the increase in the number of English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) learners. The number of ESOL learners is 5,947 (or 19%) of the 31,579 learners in VEC schemes in December 2003. The first available figures for ESOL learners were from June 2002 when they numbered 13% of the total number of learners in that year. A large part of the work done in adult literacy services today is teaching ESOL.

Aside from VECs, literacy tuition takes place in:

- Traveller Training Centres,
- Youthreach projects,
- Prisons,
- Vocational Training Opportunities Schemes (VTOS),
- FÁS Community Training Centres, and
- Community education settings.

Throughout this document the term adult literacy service refers both to the VECs' adult literacy services and other sites where literacy tuition takes place.

Although there has been a significant increase in the numbers of learners involved in the adult literacy service, there are still many potential learners in Ireland. Many people with literacy difficulties are not at present using the adult literacy service. Considering that some 500,000 Irish adults aged 16 to 64 years have literacy difficulties, those involved in the adult literacy service represent only a small proportion of those who need support. We are not suggesting that the remainder of people should be in provision or assuming that people are not doing things themselves to improve their skills, however we believe that some people are unaware of the learning opportunities available to them. It is important to encourage people to take up these opportunities.



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### 3. What is “learners’ development” and why is it important?

To explore what we mean by learners’ development, it is worth first looking at:

- Our definition of literacy, and
- What we mean by a learner-centred approach.

#### Definition of literacy

Our definition of literacy recognises that literacy is about more than the technical skills of communication. Our Strategic Plan states:

*“Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. It also encompasses aspects of personal development – social, economic, emotional – and is concerned with improving self-esteem and building confidence. It goes far beyond the mere technical skills of communication. The underlying aim of good literacy practice is to enable people to understand and reflect critically on their life circumstances with a view to exploring new possibilities and initiating constructive change”<sup>11</sup>.*

#### Learner-centred approaches to literacy

All good literacy tuition starts with the needs of the individual. This is the learner-centred, or learner-directed, approach. With this approach, adults are motivated to learn to satisfy different needs and interests in their day-to-day lives. What adults want to learn is likely to be related to their daily lives or work, so these are often appropriate starting points for organising learning activities.

The teaching methods that adult learners have found most useful are those that respect their prior knowledge and experience. Learners benefit from actively planning, analyzing and applying their learning and in this way, often wish to be self-directing. The role of the tutor then is to engage in a process of inquiry, analysis and decision-making with learners rather than to transmit knowledge to them and then measure how they absorb it. Individual differences among adult learners increase with age and experience. So, adult-learning programmes must allow for differences in style, time, place and pace of learning<sup>12</sup>.

What the individual learner wants to achieve through tuition is central. In the beginning the learner may not be sure where to start or what they want out of the experience. However, they should play as active a role as they wish in deciding what to learn. In this way, broad aims may later become more focused. Where the learner would like to begin is where the tutor starts.

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<sup>11</sup> NALA (2002) *Strategic Plan 2002–2006*, NALA, Dublin

<sup>12</sup> Knowles, Malcolm (1978) *The Adult Learner: a Neglected Species*, Gulf Publishing Company, Houston, USA Knowles, Malcolm (1980) *The Modern Practice of Adult Education. From Pedagogy to Andragogy*, Follet Publishing Company, Chicago, USA

In keeping with the learner-centred approach, learners' development is about learners taking more control of their own learning and their involvement in the adult literacy service or project. It recognises the parts of literacy work that are concerned with learners' confidence and participation in making decisions and is also about learners engaging in wider society. Some of the work of learners' development involves the personal development of the learner. Other parts of this work are concerned with learners' voices being heard in wider societal issues.

## Empowerment – the core ingredient

The core ingredient of learners' development is empowerment. At the root of the term empowerment is the idea of power. Williams (1994) describes how power can operate in different ways<sup>13</sup>. NALA's understanding of power reflects two of Williams' observations. The first of these is 'power within'. This refers to self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. Individuals can recognise through analysing their experience how power operates in their lives, and gain the confidence to act to influence and change this. The second observation is about 'power with'. This involves people organising with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals. When we refer to empowerment, we have these two ideas of power in mind. One person cannot empower another. However, they can facilitate empowerment.

Merrifield (2001)<sup>14</sup> considers what is progressive involvement of learners. The following are different parts of progressive involvement:

- Consulting learners
- Creating communities of learners
- Learners' rights
- Learners as advocates and
- Learners as leaders – not just case studies.

Learners' development is about empowering learners and recognising what is progressive involvement of learners. Learners' development can happen in literacy tuition or in other situations that allow learners to reflect and to organise together based on shared circumstances. When tutors use learner-centred approaches and the Quality Framework guiding principles with learners, they can stimulate learners' development. Learners' development is important because it recognises the full range of needs and wishes of learners. Confidence and understanding how things work in society can contribute to a person's quality of life. Tutors and Adult Literacy Organisers have a key role to play in promoting learners' development. We in NALA in turn have a role to support these actors in the adult literacy service.



<sup>13</sup> Williams S., J. Seed and A. Mwau (1994) *Oxford Gender Training Manual*, Oxfam, Oxford, England

<sup>14</sup> Merrifield Juliet (2001) *Listening to Learners: Consultation with Learners about Adult Literacy Education in Scotland*, Scottish Executive, Scotland.

## 4. Our work to enhance learners' development

NALA's mission statement is "to ensure all adults with literacy difficulties have access to a range of high quality learning opportunities". All our work has an effect on learners. In 1983, the then chairperson of NALA recognised the importance of learners' participation: "It is recommended that the responsibility and maturity of students be acknowledged by providing them with opportunities for participation in the organisation of basic education programmes and in the development of courses"<sup>15</sup>.

NALA's role in relation to the adult literacy service has evolved over time and the Agency carried out different activities at different times depending on needs and developments. For example NALA did initial tutor training when the Agency was first set up and then moved away from that work to train trainers so that initial tutor training is now done at local level. In a parallel fashion NALA organised a lot of learners' development events at the initial stages of the literacy movement but as capacity in local literacy schemes increased, these activities were expected to happen at local level. NALA supported this work through the learner subsidies. At this point there is an increasing demand for more learners' development activities especially as literacy schemes and their staff are very stretched.



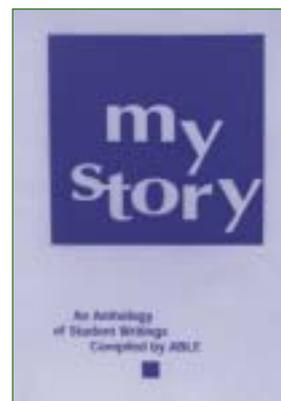
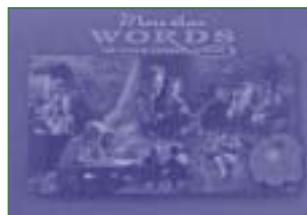
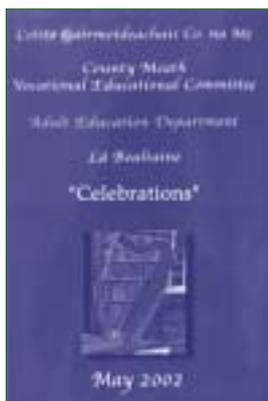
<sup>15</sup> Kennedy, John (15th September 1983) *National Adult Literacy Agency Specific Recommendations* (Press Statement given Dublin Institute of Adult Education, now the Dublin Adult Learning Centre at the launch of a national publicity campaign on literacy), NALA, Dublin

Early NALA initiatives in the mid-to late 1980s involved national meetings and writing weekends for learners. The first national meeting of learners was held in June 1986 and was attended by over 60 learners. In May 1988, learners from the north of England addressed another meeting, about learners' involvement in adult literacy work<sup>16</sup>. Both these events were organised by the NALA's learner sub-committee. In 1988, we hosted our first live-in writing weekend in Navan, Co. Meath and in 1990 we held one in Greystones, Co. Wicklow. The weekends provided an opportunity for learners to write creatively and to meet other learners. NALA has also published learners' writings<sup>17</sup>. In 1989, NALA presented a workshop at the European Basic Education/Literacy Network in France specifically on the perspective of learners. Of the many European countries that participated in the conference, Ireland was the only country to send learners to take a workshop<sup>18</sup>.

On an ongoing basis we consult learners about initiatives such as materials, policy development and approaches to assessment. We are committed to providing opportunities for feedback from learners about all aspects of the Agency's work, as this feedback strengthens our work.

More specifically, we have taken a number of other actions to enhance learners' development, including:

- Involving learners in the Quality Framework,
- Funding learners' development through learner subsidies,
- Providing literacy awareness training,
- Including learners on the Executive of NALA and involving them in committees,
- Holding learners' forums, and
- Encouraging learners to become involved in events and with the media.



<sup>16</sup> NALA (Summer 1988) *NALA News (No. 7)*, NALA, Dublin

<sup>17</sup> NALA (1987) *Changing the Times – Never Too Late*, NALA, Dublin

NALA (September 1998) *NALA Journal*, NALA, Dublin

NALA (June 2000) *NALA Journal*, NALA, Dublin

<sup>18</sup> NALA (1989–1990) *Annual Report*, NALA, Dublin

## **Involving learners in the Quality Framework**

NALA funds the involvement of learners and volunteer tutors in the Quality Framework Evaluation Teams. Learners bring a vital perspective to the evaluation process since they are the clients of the schemes. Their participation represents in a real way, the fifth guiding principle of the Quality Framework. Since the beginning of the Quality Framework in 1998, learners have been actively involved in refining, implementing and mainstreaming it.

Involvement in the Quality Framework gives learners an opportunity to see the larger picture of the work of the scheme they are attending. Positive outcomes for learners and future learners are becoming apparent. For example, learners said that their involvement in the Quality Framework increased their self-confidence. They also said they were now looking forward to the next set of Quality Framework meetings instead of being apprehensive about them. Communication within the schemes has improved and learners' voices are now heard more strongly. A significant development is that the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)<sup>19</sup> has endorsed the Quality Framework as a means by which schemes can achieve their quality assurance for courses.



<sup>19</sup> FETAC is the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. It gives people the opportunity to gain recognition for learning in education or training centres, in the work place and in the community.

## Funding for learners' development

On an ongoing basis, NALA has funding available for learners' development, known as learner subsidies. VEC adult literacy services can apply each year for funding to support work with learners. The following is a list of themes and years that the funding has been available:

- Joint training events in the regions (1993)
- Learning to learn (1994/95)
- Networking (1996)
- Learning in practice (1997)
- Developing or establishing student committees (1998)
- Defining quality in adult basic education from a students' perspective (1999)
- Personal development training for students (2000/01)
- Introducing learners to the Quality Framework and outlining their role in the process (2002) and
- Committee skills, public speaking and personal development (2003).

Funding has enabled learners to take part in writing weekends, produce newsletters, photographic collections and reports. There has been a focus on schemes setting up learners' committees. In 1998 a resolution was passed at the NALA Annual General Meeting that a student forum should be established. The funding available that year through the learner subsidies reflected the resolution. Schemes benefit greatly from learners becoming more active and taking part in decision-making. Committees can feedback issues to scheme managers. There are also greater opportunities in recent years than there ever was before for learners to be represented at local and regional level. For example the VEC (Amendment) Act of 2001 allows for students as defined by the *Education Act (1998)*<sup>20</sup> to sit on Vocational Education Committees. In some VEC adult literacy services, learners are members of representative groups set up to manage schemes. For schemes undertaking the Quality Framework, learners' involvement is often brought to the fore. From the applications for the learner subsidies in 2004 we know that of the thirty-two schemes that applied for funding, seven had learners' committees. It appears there are difficulties with the process of setting up learner committees. Some schemes have set up committees, which, have since waned. Perhaps there are lessons to be shared between schemes and lessons from the experience of other groups in the community and voluntary sector.



<sup>20</sup> *The Education Act (1998)* defines "student" in relation to a school, meaning a person enrolled at the school and in relation to a centre for education, means a person registered as a student in that centre.

### Providing literacy awareness training

We provide training for learners who are interested in becoming part of a literacy awareness training team. This training team is usually made up of a facilitator or trainer and a learner. The training for learners helps to build confidence and skills so learners can speak in public about their experiences. The training teams then provide literacy awareness training to groups on request. FÁS placement officers and supervisors, workers in employment centres of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and personnel from companies such as Aer Lingus and the ESB have undertaken Literacy Awareness Training. When learners speak in public they can really bring the message across to others about what it is like to have literacy difficulties in Ireland today.

### Including learners in the activities of the Executive and sub-committees

The Executive Committee of NALA makes efforts to be as inclusive as possible. Learners have been represented on the Executive and on sub-committees of the Executive since the foundation of the Agency. New serving Executive members receive an induction pack and take part in training. We have learned that new members have a better experience when they understand the role of the Executive before they take up their positions. Learners also participate in sub-committees of NALA, bringing a learners' perspective to ongoing work and new developments.

### Holding regional learners' forums

We hosted four regional forums for learners in 2002 and five in 2003. The purpose of these is to provide opportunities for learners to:

- Share experiences,
- Share ideas about the work they are involved in, and
- Discuss new initiatives.

Feedback from the forums suggests that learners found sharing their experiences with other learners important<sup>21</sup>. The evaluation of the Roscommon Learners' Forum, held in June 2003, shows the issues that learners were interested in. For example, learners would like to become more aware of specific services that are available to them, such as the Adult Education Guidance Service. Learners acknowledged that they are sometimes reluctant to ask their tutor or Adult Literacy Organiser about options available to them. Learners made suggestions about how to remove the sense of "learning behind closed doors". All the learners present wanted more such events<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> NALA (2002) *Summary Evaluation of three Learners' Forums held in Dublin, Mullingar and Cork*, NALA, Dublin

<sup>22</sup> NALA (2003) *Evaluation of Roscommon Learner Forum*, NALA, Dublin

## Encouraging learners to become involved in events and with the media

NALA encourages learners to speak at conferences and other public events such as International Literacy Day. Learners usually describe their literacy difficulties and their decision to return to learning. They often explain how improving their literacy skills has enhanced their family, work or social lives. They often speak of the role of the VEC adult literacy services, other programmes and the role of NALA.

By speaking at these events, learners can motivate other people to take the step forward to develop their literacy skills. They can also motivate potential tutors to get involved as well as raising general awareness about literacy issues.

Learners have been encouraged to deal with the media, often acting as spokespersons or champions for the literacy issue. The four television series of *READ WRITE NOW* have included profiles of thirty-six learners. Learners participating in the series have had an impact on breaking the stigma associated with having literacy difficulties and have encouraged and supported new learners.



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## 5. NALA's future plans for learners' development

We plan to continue our existing work and to further support learners' development in the following ways:

- Sharing good practice,
- Developing new initiatives, and
- Highlighting learners' development within NALA.

Eighteen action points are listed below.

### Sharing good practice

1. We will *inform* all VEC adult literacy services and other adult basic education sites that we wish to a) **share information about what learners' are involved in** and b) **showcase learners' development work at conferences and other forums**. We will *invite* VEC adult literacy services and other adult basic education sites to email, telephone or write short reports to us about *what is working well* in relation to learners' development. We will *share* information collected with literacy schemes through mailings and articles in the NALA Journal and NALA Tutors' Bulletin.
2. We will enhance the *learners' development section of the NALA website, www.nala.ie*, to stimulate ideas, discussion and share successful practice. We will target tutors to assist learners to use this section of the website.
3. At the Regional Learners' Forums we will *review current information sharing methods that NALA uses*. We will make improvements if necessary to create more effective ways of sharing good practice with learners.
4. We will post on our website a page of tips for setting up *learners' committees* that will reflect lessons learned from adult literacy services and from the wider community and voluntary sector.



## Developing new initiatives

5. We will develop further *materials* to support learners' development.
6. We will revive our support for *learners' writings* by hosting writing weekends and workshops or a national writing weekend and publishing learners' writings.
7. We will explore the possibility of expanding learner subsidies beyond the VEC adult literacy services so that they are available in the different sites where literacy takes place.
8. We will review existing research about *target groups who are under represented* in adult basic education and in adult literacy work in Ireland<sup>23</sup>. We will then write up a tips list for reaching out to people in under represented groups. We will make this available to those involved in literacy work and post it on our website.
9. Learner issues will feature in Regional reports from NALA staff.

## Promoting empowerment and active citizenship:

10. We will organise *courses for learners* that promote active citizenship. For example "Who makes decisions and where in Ireland?"
11. Provide *information* through the website, NALA news and Regional Learners' Forums about *opportunities for learners to take part in decision making*, within NALA, provider bodies and wider society.



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<sup>23</sup> For example: NALA (1998) Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Services, NALA, Dublin  
AONTAS (2000) Men on the Move, AONTAS, Dublin  
AONTAS (2000) Gender Equality and Lifelong Learning, AONTAS, Dublin

## Highlighting learners' development within NALA

12. We will put learners' development on the *agenda of staff meetings four times a year*. That way, we can share knowledge among ourselves in a more structured way and have one person document it at meetings.
13. We will attempt to ensure that we adopt plain English in NALA publications. This will make NALA publications more accessible to learners and other members of the Agency.
14. We will regularly refer to a checklist that has been developed to help us make sure we consider the *principles of the Quality Framework* when we work. There is a culture within NALA of members of staff tutoring in the adult literacy service outside of their working hours. This contributes to the Agency keeping in touch with direct literacy work.
15. We will *review the involvement of learners in all aspects of NALA* (the Executive, sub-committees, membership and Annual General Meetings). We will do this by contracting an independent evaluator.
16. We will invite learners to take part in training on group-work and facilitation skills. This will *support learners to understand group dynamics, develop skills for organising groups, set agendas and chair learners' meetings*.
17. We will make sure that *learners have opportunities to comment on the Agency's work*. This will be done by always providing adequate time for evaluation at learners' events and other NALA events. We will also invite learners to telephone staff with comments if they wish after events. Staff will document feedback received from learners directly and through literacy practitioners and other interested parties. Staff in NALA will welcome and respond to suggestions about making it easier for learners to give feedback.
18. We will carry out initial *research into learners' development in an international context*. This will inform our future actions.



## List of abbreviations

<b>NALA</b>	National Adult Literacy Agency (also referred to as the Agency)
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>VECs</b>	Vocational Education Committees
<b>VTOS</b>	Vocational Training Opportunities Schemes
<b>FÁS</b>	Foras Áiseanna Saothair (National Training and Employment Authority)
<b>RTÉ</b>	Radio Telefís Éireann (Irish public service broadcasting organisation)
<b>WIT</b>	Waterford Institute of Technology



