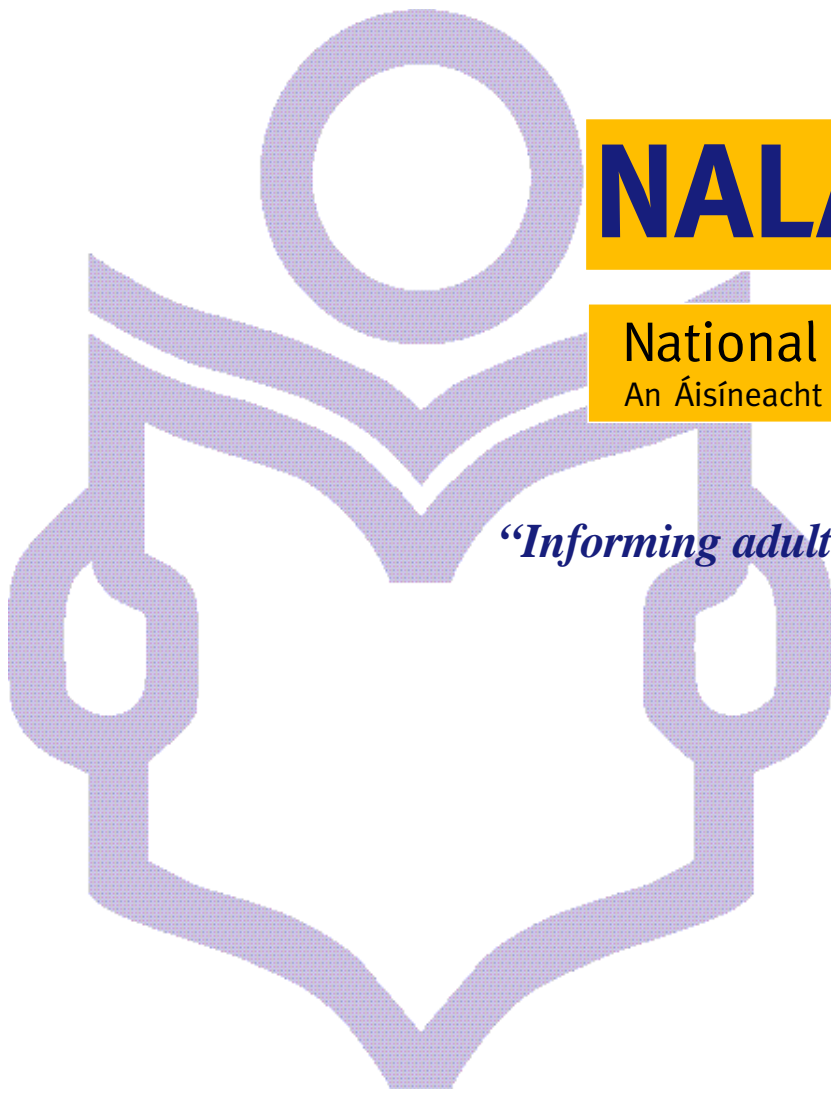


NALA Journal

National Adult Literacy Agency
An Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Spring/Summer 2002

“Informing adult literacy provision in Ireland”



Quality Framework



Assessment

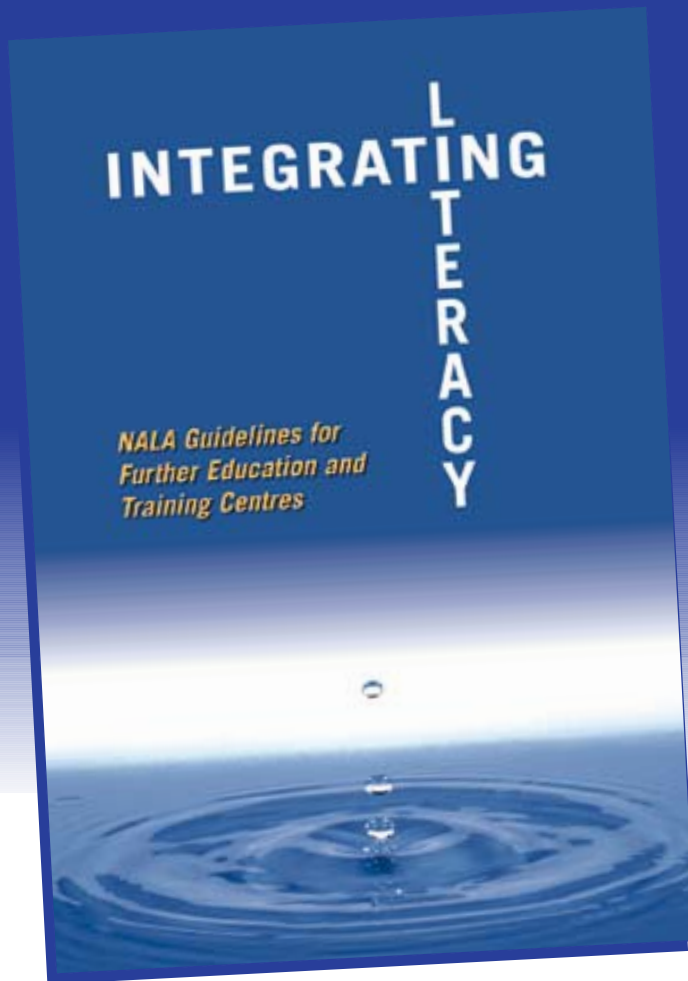


Workplace Literacy

ESOL



Integrating Literacy



NALA Guidelines for Further Education and Training Centres

The NALA Integrating Literacy Guidelines outline the key elements of an integrated approach to literacy within Further Education and Training. They are offered as a guide to centres as they work towards an integrated, whole-centre response to the literacy needs of their learners.

The Guidelines are offered in the belief that

- No young person or adult should be, or feel, excluded from Further Education and Training because of a literacy difficulty.
- Effective literacy support should be built into all Further Education and Training programmes.
- The most effective literacy support is based on an integrated, whole-centre approach.

*For more information contact NALA on tel:
01 855 4332 or email: literacy@nala.ie*

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Editor:

Tommy Byrne

Contributors:

Mary Carroll, Fergus Dolan, Maire Dolan, Esther Hoad, Gemma Lynch, Jenny Lynch, Liz McSkeane, Patricia McCarthy, Bláthnaid Ní Chinnéide, Claire O’Riordan and Rhonda Smith.

Editorial enquiries to
01 809 9195 or
email tbyrne@nala.ie
NALA, 76 Lower Gardiner Street,
Dublin 1.

Views

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Draft Assessment Framework being tested

Major progress has taken place in the development of the Draft Assessment Framework for Adult Basic Education (ABE). Stage 2 'Testing' of a four-stage process is now complete. You may remember last year NALA commissioned an assessment research team managed by Juliet Merrifield (Learning From Experience Trust, UK). This team has been working on the development of a national Assessment Framework for use in literacy learning settings.

Stages of development

The four main stages in the development of the Draft Assessment Framework for ABE are:

Stage 1: Benchmark international best practice, consult with practitioners, Tutors and Learners, and draw up draft framework.

Stage 2: Test draft framework

Stage 3: Development appropriate training materials for practitioners

Stage 4: Make the completed framework available to all literacy learning settings.

It is important to remember that

this Assessment Framework is part of the NALA Evolving Quality Framework. As such, it is intended that the Assessment Framework will enhance the quality service already being provided by Literacy Organisers and Tutors in a variety of settings nationwide.

What happened in Stage 1

Stage 1 of the research has just been completed. Three main developments happened during Stage 1.

- A report called "Issues and Opportunities in Assessment" was produced by the research team. This report was based on a review of adult education theory and international best practice in adult literacy assessment. This report can be viewed on the NALA website www.nala.ie.
- A very successful Assessment Seminar was held on 29th June 2001 in Dublin. This seminar was attended by over 200 Adult Literacy Organisers, Tutors and Learners. Guest speakers included, Brenda Bell and Beth Bingman from the University of Tennessee, USA and Ursula Coleman and Olga Mc Donogh of the NALA assessment research team.
- A selection of Tutors, learners and Organisers were consulted and a draft framework has been developed, produced and distributed. The production of the draft framework marked the end of stage 1. The report on the draft framework is called "Mapping the Learning Journey". This report can also be viewed on the NALA website www.nala.ie.



Article compiled by
Gemma Lynch,
NALA Research Officer.


*“Stage 2: Test
draft framework
Stage 3:
Development
appropriate
training
materials for
practitioners”*



Stage 2

So what did Stage 2 involve? Stage 2 involved testing the framework in real-life situations with Organisers, Tutors and learners. This took place in a number of VEC Adult Literacy Schemes, FÁS Community Training Workshops and Senior Traveller Training Centres. Testing the Draft Framework is very important to ensure a high quality, user-friendly assessment tool be produced. It is important for us to know what works and what needs to be changed before finalising the framework and making it available to all literacy settings.

By the end of Stage 3 we aim to have a high quality user friendly national Assessment Framework for use in adult literacy learning opportunities. The final stage, Stage 4, will involve making the NALA Assessment Framework available to all who wish to use it.

For further information about ABE Assessment please contact Gemma Lynch, Research Officer, 01-809 9192 or email glynch@nala.ie 

Tackling literacy as barrier to health

NALA has undertaken to research the issues affecting health literacy in Ireland. The purpose of this study is to create a set of practical guidelines for health professionals engaged in health promotion that will ensure that the barriers caused by health literacy difficulties are minimised. People with low levels of literacy skills may find it difficult to read medicine bottles, health promotional material is inaccessible to them and they cannot follow signage in health centres or hospitals. A new venture to tackle the issue of poor literacy skills as a barrier to accessing health services was officially launched late last year by NALA.

The NALA research involved collecting qualitative research from two sectors, patient groups and health practitioners. The patient groups comprised learners from literacy schemes conducted across the country. Over 80 adult literacy learners took part in the study. They are representative of the age groups targeted in the National Health strategy document. Eight groups of literacy learners met with the researcher. These groups comprised mothers, fathers, grandparents, young men, young



*Article compiled by
Patricia McCarthy,
Health & Literacy Researcher.*



Owain Kirby / Illustration Works Inc. / Clemson University, Institute of Family & Neighbourhood Life, USA

women and older people. The groups were from the east west and midlands of Ireland. Each group meeting was lively and informative as the individuals shared their various experiences of health care and the impact on them of managing their health issues when they also struggle with literacy difficulties.

The stakeholders comprise of civil servants and health professionals such as hospital clinicians, nurses and doctors, hospital pharmacists, commercial pharmacists, public health nurses, nurse managers, nurse practitioners and general practitioners.

The main issues affecting health literacy

- The main issues affecting health literacy emerging from the meetings with patient groups were low levels of self esteem, management of chronic illness and embarrassment. Particular issues for young people especially men were the lack or absence of knowledge about other available health services and the large variety of print media such as leaflets. The use of medical/scientific language was found to be very off putting for this group.
- One example of this was a mother who was unaware that there was an asthma nurse available in her local hospital. She has a six-year-old child who suffers from asthma. Inability to read the posters in the out patient ward or see the relevance of leaflets in a display stand all impacted

negatively in this instance. Another woman was very unclear as to the details of her surgery. She was unaware of what she had signed when asked to sign the consent form.

- Research with stakeholders, has been a mixture of group and individual meetings. As listed above, a broad range of health professionals have contributed to this study. Their concern at learning the level of low literacy among their patient group and its impact on health care and promotion was clear at all the meetings. 25% of the adult population have literacy difficulties. They have identified barriers to the effective delivery of health promotion and care as low self-esteem of the patient group, numbers of patients requiring attention, patient not revealing the difficulty of low literacy and lack of awareness among health professionals. All were open to the idea that this topic is included in their undergraduate training as well as in continuous professional development training.

Providing practical guidelines

The conclusions from this study will provide a range of practical guidelines to those involved in health promotion. Leaflets for example, need to include English as well as medical jargon.

The words of one of the patient contributors to this study challenged the group to describe his occupation when he said, “ I am a transparent window

“To create a set of practical guidelines for health professionals engaged in health promotion that will ensure that the barriers caused by health literacy difficulties are minimised.”

“There is a valuable lesson in this – people need to understand that good health is the most important human asset”

engineer". This means a window cleaner.

Health staff need to have a model of best practice that ensures that patients with literacy difficulties understand the information being given to them. This is particularly important in relation to chronic illness. This will lead to a greater likelihood of patients hearing the vital information as it relates to them. The NALA study has shown that where the health professional has the opportunity to take time with the patient and explain a particular treatment, this patient is more likely to take the literature and incorporate it into their treatment regime. These are but some of the ideas that will be included in the completed study.

In conclusion one of the health professionals summed up the focus of this study when she said, "There is a valuable lesson in this for all involved in health promotion to ensure that the importance of good health as one of the most important human assets is truly understood"

The Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health and Children, is financing the study. For further information about the Health & Literacy Project please contact Jennie Lynch NALA Development Worker tel. 021-431 7012 or email jlynch@nala.ie



Rolling out the adult literacy Quality Framework

The NALA Evolving Quality Framework, which the Agency has been working on for some time, is now being mainstreamed. The Framework will assist ABE sites plan, self-evaluate and enhance accountability structures and processes. The mainstreaming follows initial piloting of this new system to guide and monitor quality standards in adult basic education (ABE). The impetus for the development of the NALA Evolving Quality Framework came as a result of research in the late 90's. This found that there was inconsistency in standards of practice within Adult Literacy Schemes throughout Ireland. In this article we outline the key parts of the implementation plan for the Quality Framework.

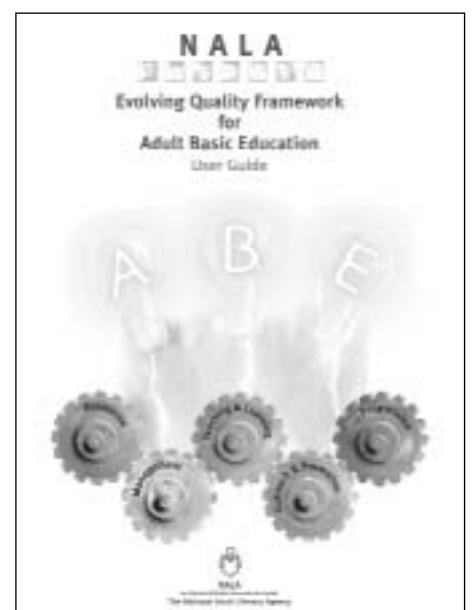
Rationale for its development

The NALA Quality Framework was developed in response to adult literacy scheme users demand for, and entitlement to, improved quality standards. Tutors, Learners, VEC Adult Education Organisers (AEO) and Chief Executive Officers (CEO) described, in a research project, what they considered to be the key



Article compiled by Claire O'Riordan
NALA, Quality Framework
Co-ordinator.

“Assist ABE sites plan, self-evaluate and enhance accountability.”



parts of a suitable Quality Framework for ABE. A draft Quality Framework was drawn up based on their views. After the successful piloting of the Framework in 35 adult literacy schemes it was revised and developed to make it more streamlined and user friendly.

Key parts of the Revised NALA Evolving Quality Framework

The key parts of the NALA Quality Framework are its:

- Guiding Principles;
- Quality Areas;
- Statements of Quality.

Guiding Principles

At the heart of the NALA Quality Framework are its 5 guiding principles or the values of the Framework. The guiding principles are as follows:

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

Quality Areas

The framework identifies five Quality Areas involved in running an ABE service;

- Resources
- Outreach and promotion
- Management
- Teaching & Learning
- Progression.

Within each area there are a number of statements of quality. These statements of quality (18 in all) are the standards a scheme wants to achieve. Each statement describes a key element of a quality ABE programme. For example, a quality scheme in relation to assessment will:

- Assess the Learner's needs and level of literacy during an initial interview and/or in the course of the first few tuition sessions, as appropriate;
- Ensure that Tutors engage in ongoing assessment with their Learners;
- Refer Learners with specific needs for an appropriate professional assessment.

If all the statements are put together there is a sense of how an ideal programme might be described.

Statements of quality

The Statements of Quality are closely informed by the guiding principles of the Framework without them the essence of quality in ABE is lost.

Its purpose

The Quality Framework can be used for all or a combination of the following:

- As a tool for self-evaluation for ABE sites

“The framework has 5 Quality Areas; Resources, Management, Teaching & Learning, Outreach & Promotion and Progression.”

Quality Areas	Statements of Quality
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional learner support - Resources for teaching and learning - Premises - Tutor support (new) - Scheme funding
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management and planning - Welcome and initial contact - Internal communication (new) - Programme evaluation - Staff training and development
Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learner-tutor relationship - Range of tuition options - Learning and development - Assessment
Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance and progression - Learner accreditation
Outreach and Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Links with other groups - Sensitive and creative promotional strategies

- As a tool for planning
- For accountability purposes.

How to implement it

To implement the Quality Framework at scheme level an Evaluation Team needs to be formed. This team will ideally consist of representatives from each of the stakeholder groups:

- Learners;
- Tutors;
- Management.

It is recommended that teams meet at least once a month to work on a particular aspect of the Framework. It is also recommended that teams avail of a trained **NALA Quality Framework Facilitator** during the initial stages of working and the on-going support of an advisor when they are more familiar with the process.

Recent survey research of schemes showed that there was

widespread support of the Quality Framework in principle. Having said this the respondents reported that they were already over-stretched and lacked the time and resources to effectively implement the Quality Framework.

What happens now?

NALA have developed an implementation plan for the Quality Framework. It is expected that the implementation of the Quality Framework across adult literacy schemes will take five years (up to the end of 2006). The plan aims to plot a way forward to the implementation of the Framework in a way that meets the needs of ABE sites using the Quality Framework and those who intend to use it, within the budget available to us. The plan will be reviewed on an annual basis. The main features of the plan for 2002 are summarised overleaf.

“It is expected that the implementation of the Quality Framework across adult literacy schemes will take five years (up to the end of 2006).”

**Key features of the plan
Direct funding to implement
the Quality Framework**

Schemes selected to participate in the Quality Framework will receive a dedicated Quality Framework budget to implement the Framework in their scheme. This will be mainly used to pay evaluation team members and to pay for a NALA trained Quality Framework Facilitator.

**Development of a
comprehensive Quality
Framework User Guide -**

NALA have developed a

comprehensive, user-friendly Quality Framework User Guide to assist evaluation schemes implement the Quality Framework. The Guide contains: several examples of how to work through each quality statement; work and information sheets and a glossary of key terms.

NALA Regional Staff

NALA regional staff will support schemes participating in the Quality Framework as required. This will mainly be provided through telephone support and scheme visits.

What are the main events / activities in implementing the Quality Framework in 2002?

Key dates in 2002	Months
Draft plan and application form issued	Feb
Return of application forms for participation in the Quality Framework	March
Schemes successful in their application informed	April
Quality Framework pack, list of Quality Framework Facilitators sent to schemes	April
Phase 1 of mainstreaming (a minimum of 5 meetings over the period April – December inclusive)	April – December
Initial report on the Quality Framework submitted to AEO/EO/CEO	After 2-3 scheme meetings
Further development of the Quality Framework resources	Summer 2002
Research project commence to explore the needs of ABE providers other than ALS	Summer 2002
Final evaluation report due from schemes for submission to AEO/CEO/EO as appropriate	December 2002
Written report from participating schemes to NALA detailing their spending on the Quality Framework in phase 1	December 15th 2002.

The implementation plan of the Quality Framework aims to plot a way forward that meets the needs of ABE sites using the Framework and those who intend to use it, within the budget available to us.

NALA's agency work

All of NALA's work will support the implementation of the Quality Framework. An example of this is the NALA Training Calendar which will accommodate some of the training needs of participants on the Quality Framework. In addition the PR unit will, in conjunction with the NALA Quality Framework Co-ordinator, provide relevant up to date information on developments on the Quality Framework. This will include a regularly updated Q&A section on the Quality Framework on the NALA website.

Development and Evaluation

NALA will develop and monitor the development of the Quality Framework over time to ensure that it remains relevant to all users. The Quality Framework process will be revised annually to keep the Framework current.

The NALA Quality Framework will provide a quality assurance model for adult literacy schemes and potentially for other sites where ABE is delivered.

The implementation plan for the Quality Framework is now available on the NALA website www.nala.ie in the 'Publications' section under 'Research Publications'. For further information about the NALA Quality Framework contact Claire O'Riordan, Quality Framework Co-ordinator tel. 01-809 919 or email coriordan@nala.ie



Cost of poor basic education not recognised by business – latest research

Business does not recognise the cost of low levels of basic education among their staff. This is according to a preliminary report of the most recent Irish research carried out by the NALA. This report is titled 'Policy Strategy & Guidelines for Irish Employers on Workplace Basic Education' and is part of the Agency's workplace basic education strategy. The research points out that business management are not fully aware of the impact of low levels of basic education among an estimated 450,000 in the workforce with low literacy skills. In addition the employers are often not equipped to recognise and deal with the issue when it arises. This results in negative effects on productivity and economic viability of a business. In contrast to this other recent NALA research has shown the beneficial effects of workplace basic education training. Particularly its contribution to alleviating skills



Article compiled by
Tommy Byrne,
NALA Public Relations Officer

“This results in negative effects on productivity and economic viability of a business.”



gaps, increasing staff motivation and bolstering staff retention.

Preliminary results of the NALA research show that there is almost a complete lack of awareness of this complex issue among employers. Specific information gaps point to a lack of knowledge of the detrimental effect on human resource development and businesses productivity. In practice the research asserts that staff with poor basic education are not being identified or assisted. This means these workers are unable:

- To improve their skills;
- Apply for new positions and fill employment gaps;
- Adapt to new practices;
- Perform their role to optimum level.


In contrast to the attitudes of management, workplace basic education results in benefits to human resource management. This was highlighted in a recent report published by NALA titled 'The Return to Learning Initiative' which examined workplace basic education programmes in five local authorities. Specifically this training can improve communications, boost staff motivation and staff retention and may even benefit staff health. These basic education programmes can also offer practical skills such as computers, English, numeracy, job orientation and also increase self-esteem and improve self-confidence.

Speaking about this preliminary report Agency Director Inez Bailey said, "This research shows that the majority of businesses are

not aware of the basic education issue. This is because they do not make a link between low levels of basic education and staff management and development. This needs to change through a national awareness programme and the greater involvement of business in providing workplace basic education programmes to employees."

The 'Policy Strategy & Guidelines for Irish Employers on Workplace Basic Training' report was commissioned by NALA as part of their workplace basic education strategy. In the context of many changes in the Irish economy there are greater demands on employees to adapt and progress. This in turn is putting the spotlight on the 440,000 people now in the workforce with low levels of basic education. The Agency's activities in workplace basic education include:

- Supporting the establishment of workplace basic education programmes;
- Providing workplace basic education training for adult literacy practitioners;
- Working with employer organisations, unions and Government to forward the agreed strategy;
- Carrying out research on workplace basic education.

This report will be available on the NALA website www.nala.ie in the summer of 2002. For further information on Workplace Basic Education contact Helen Ryan, NALA Development Worker tel. (01) 809 9197 or email hryan@nala.ie 

“Workplace basic education can improve communications, boost staff motivation and staff retention and may even benefit staff health.”

South Tipperary reflect on workplace basic skills initiative

The expansion of workplace basic education would have a major impact on the economic development of Ireland. Such programmes provide major benefits to employers including filling skills gaps, increased staff motivation and staff retention. In addition the benefits to employees include additional practical skills such as computers, English, numeracy, job orientation and increased self-esteem. The 'Return to Learning Initiative' which focuses on Local Authority workers is the first major step in the development of workplace basic education in Ireland.

Initially the 'Return to Learning Initiative' was piloted in five Local Authority areas Mayo, Meath, Offaly, Tipperary South and South Dublin in 2001. Twenty-five adult literacy groups were established across the five Local Authority areas. A total of one hundred and forty participants registered for Return to Learning

courses and, of those, one hundred and twenty participants completed the courses. Below is an insight to the experience of Tipperary South of the 'Return to Learning Initiative'.

Background to Project in South Tipperary

The Government White Paper "Learning for Life" identified that literacy must be a continuous activity to maintain skills. The Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group (LANPAG) identified the need for Workplace Literacy and with the Department of Education and NALA the Framework Document for the Return to Learning Project was developed. South Tipperary County Council was chosen as a Pilot Site.

NALA and LANPAG developed the Return to Learning Initiative jointly. It is implemented through the work of local Vocational Education Committee (VEC) adult literacy schemes. In addition the Initiative was co-funded by the Department of Education and Science and LANPAG.

Aim of Project

The aim of the Project was to assist staff with literacy problems and to create a safe and supportive learning environment for them.

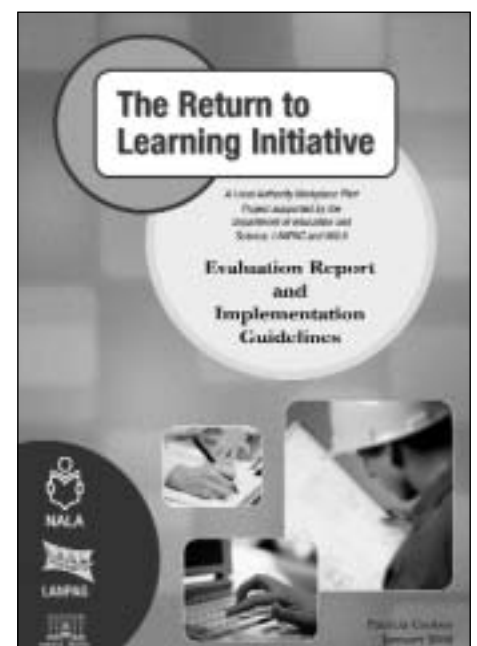
Methodology

The role-out of the Project as a pilot initiative in the Local Authority involved quite a degree



Article compiled by
Mary Carroll, Partnership Facilitator,
Tipperary South Riding

"The first major step in the development of workplace basic education in Ireland."



of risk taking. No such Project had been attempted in the past and there were a lot of “doubting Thomas” who really doubted if the Project would ever get off the ground.

The first step was to link up with the V.E.C. Adult Education Organiser and identify who the Co-Ordinator for the Project would be in South Tipperary. When this was established, it was important to get buy-in from the Partnership Committee and the Management Team in the Local Authority and they were very supportive and endorsed the Project whole-heartedly.

Following this, Information/awareness sessions were provided for all staff, flyers were sent in the post, posters were circulated and placed in canteens. A general Information/awareness day was held for all supervisors and this proved very successful in that many were aware of the need for the programme on the ground and were instrumental in telling people about the Project and encouraging their participation. It was the supervisors who encouraged informal meetings between the Co-Ordinator and the workers to talk about the Project and this process helped to build up trust and credibility for the Project.

At these meetings, participants came forward and in one instance five participants came forward but in other cases, people availed of the confidential mobile phone number which was provided on a business card to each participant. Eighteen participants came forward and worked at four

different locations throughout the County. Classes were held twice weekly for most students for two hour intervals and there was a greater degree of openness with fellow workers at the course progressed. This was due in part to the level of enjoyment that students got from the course and it was also an indication of how their self-confidence and self-esteem increased.

Benefit of Workplace Literacy

When the eighty hour module was completed, all of the participants were invited to lunch and to a short award ceremony in the Local Authority. On the day, all of the participants spoke on how the Project benefited them. Some said; “for the first time, they had sent postcards on their holidays”. Others were able to “help out their children with homework”. For others “spelling was much improved”.

It is obvious that there was a great degree of personal development for these people who participated on the Return to Learning Project and this will certainly enhance their chances for promotional opportunities.

National roll out announced


The national ‘Return to Learning Initiative’ was announced in February 2002 by the Minister of the Environment & Local Government, Noel Dempsey, TD. This involves a national roll out of the programme by providing workplace literacy programmes to all local authorities. A fund is available to support the programme and all local authorities are being

“The Project was a great success in Tipperary and we were very privileged to be chosen as a pilot site.”

offered assistance and funding to establish a workplace literacy programme. The Initiative is particularly valuable to those people who were not best served by the education system while at school. Through the Return to Learning Initiative they now have a chance the redress that educational imbalance. It is estimated that 7,000 Local Authority workers could boost their literacy skills in this new national initiative.

Conclusion from Tipperary South

For future reference, we will consider running a sixty hour rather than an eighty hour module so that the tar spreading season in the Local Authority does not clash with the class. The Project was a great success in Tipperary and we were very privileged to be chosen as a pilot site. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our County Manager, Mr. Ned Gleeson, the Management Team, the Partnership Committee and particularly the Area Engineers, all of whom contributed to the success of this Project.

The evaluation report with implementation guideline for the Return to Learning Initiative can be viewed on the NALA website www.nala.ie in the 'Publications' section under the 'Research Publications' heading. 

Addressing the literacy needs of Community Employment Workers

In the best traditions of adult literacy tuition, the origins of the Return to Education programmes were needs driven. In 1998 a NALA report¹ identified the need for work-based literacy programmes to enhance the access and participation of people with literacy difficulties. Meanwhile, FÁS - the national training authority – had also identified this problem in a significant proportion of Community Employment workers as being a barrier to their progression to employment in the mainstream labour market.

The Return to Education programmes were established as an initiative to meet the basic education needs of participants on CE schemes. Three agencies have been involved in the national implementation of the programmes: FÁS, NALA and the Vocational Education Committees



*Article compiled by
Ester Hoad, FÁS/VEC Return to
Education Co-ordinator, Leitrim*



¹ Bailey, I and Coleman, U., 1998. Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Schemes. Dublin: National Adult literacy Agency.

(VECs). Since 1998 when the first programmes were instigated², NALA have been fulfilling a support role. NALA now plans to adopt a reduced support role in relation to the initiative.

NALA co-ordinator meetings

An induction/training day for co-ordinators was held by NALA in Dublin on February 2nd 2001. This was an occasion for programme co-ordinators from across Ireland to meet. Roles and responsibilities were defined and the NALA Implementation Guide³ was thoroughly explained. Leitrim's programme was the 31st to be set up nationwide so there was a wealth of experience to draw upon from the previous three years. Of particular value was to discover which implementation methods had proved to be most successful in other areas.

Two meetings for the northwest region subsequently took place at the NALA office in Longford Town. At the first meeting the completion and purpose of the FÁS Evaluation Questionnaire was thoroughly explained. The second meeting focussed more on co-ordinators experiences and the completion of programme reports.

Support received by co-ordinator from FÁS, VEC and NALA

Contact was frequent at the onset, in particular with FÁS and NALA as initial queries were clarified. This lessened as the programme

became established. Throughout the 30-week programme, weekly meetings were held between the Adult Literacy Organiser, the second tutor and myself. These hour-long meetings served to keep the ALO up to date with progress on a regular basis. In my experience, any contact with FÁS, NALA and the VEC with regard to the Return to Education programme was at all times positive.

Introducing the Programme in County Leitrim

FÁS held an information day in Carrick on Shannon for CE supervisors from all over the county. Mary Toher, NALA Development Worker, explained the background, purpose, aims and objectives of the programme. Following this, as programme co-ordinator, I visited CE schemes throughout the county over a period of 4 weeks. These visits took the form of an introductory talk to present and clarify the programme to CE workers. Eleven CE workers agreed to join the programme. The first session took place on Tuesday, February 13th 2001.

What the Programme offers

The programme offers 270 hours of intensive basic literacy tuition to CE workers. Participants are released from their CE schemes for 9 hours a week to attend the programme over a period of 30 weeks. In County Leitrim these 9 hours were divided into three mornings a week:

“In the best traditions of adult literacy tuition, the origins were needs driven.”

2 Ryan, H., 2001. From Practice to Policy – Influencing National Decision Making. NALA Journal: Dublin.

3 Conboy, P., 2000. Implementation Guide for NALA/FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programmes. National Adult Literacy Agency: Dublin.

- Literacy, Numeracy and Groupwork on Tuesday and Thursday,
- Computer Tuition on Wednesday.

Each student was interviewed at the recruitment stage. This established the core information for initial assessment. We conducted continuous assessment and review of progress at all stages of the programme.

Was it all worthwhile?

At the end of the 30 weeks, the thrust of the feedback from those consulted – participants, CE supervisors and Tutors – is that in terms of relevance and value the Return to Education programme is a worthwhile initiative.

- Students who completed the programme went up at least one literacy level during the 30 weeks⁴. This is significant given the relatively short time span of the programme.
- Because of this improvement, students were able to participate in different and varied areas of work in their current CE schemes.
- Improved self-confidence through group exercises led to students applying to do other educational courses in order to advance their future employment chances.
- Nine of the ten students remaining at the end of the 30 weeks undertook an

accredited exam in one or more of the following: NCVA Communications and Computers, Pitmans English for Office Skills and Essential Word-processing, Database and Spreadsheets. Mock exams were conducted during the programme for students sitting exams at the end.

- Support from CE supervisors involved with the programme was enthusiastic.
- On the final day of the programme Mr John Blunnie, CEO County Leitrim VEC, presented all the students with a Certificate. This was a great boost to many who had never received an award of any kind previously.

What About Accreditation?

Participants are offered access to accreditation as an option for their work on the Return to Education programme.

It cannot be overemphasised that accreditation should be just that – an option rather than a requirement of the programme. The majority of adults return to learning loaded with negative learning experiences. Any attempt to insist that the student sits an exam merely serves to reinforce previous resistance towards learning in general. Invariably the student will quit the class.

In Leitrim however, all students except one who completed the

“All changes witnessed in students as a result of attending the programme were positive and served to enhance the students’ lives in general.”

“Return to Education programmes – an initiative to meet the basic education needs of participants on CE schemes.”

⁴ LEAP Literacy Scheme, 2000. Guide to Literacy Levels. Leitrim Education for Adults Programme: Carrick on Shannon.

programme undertook at least one exam. Those submitting portfolios for NCVA took great pride in looking back over their achievements during the 30 weeks.

Student Attendance on the programme

The programme began in February with 11 students. A level 1 student who was already receiving one to one tuition within our literacy scheme, LEAP (Leitrim Education for Adults Programme), joined the programme during the 6th week. Unfortunately he had difficulties in adjusting to a group setting and only attended 3 sessions. Another student (level 1) joined the programme in late March. By contrast, this was a tremendous success. The student

received encouragement to join from a fellow CE worker who was already on the programme. The lowest attendances were in the months of July and August. These are traditionally holiday months. Perhaps in the future it would be prudent to run the programme over a 30-week period that avoids these months.

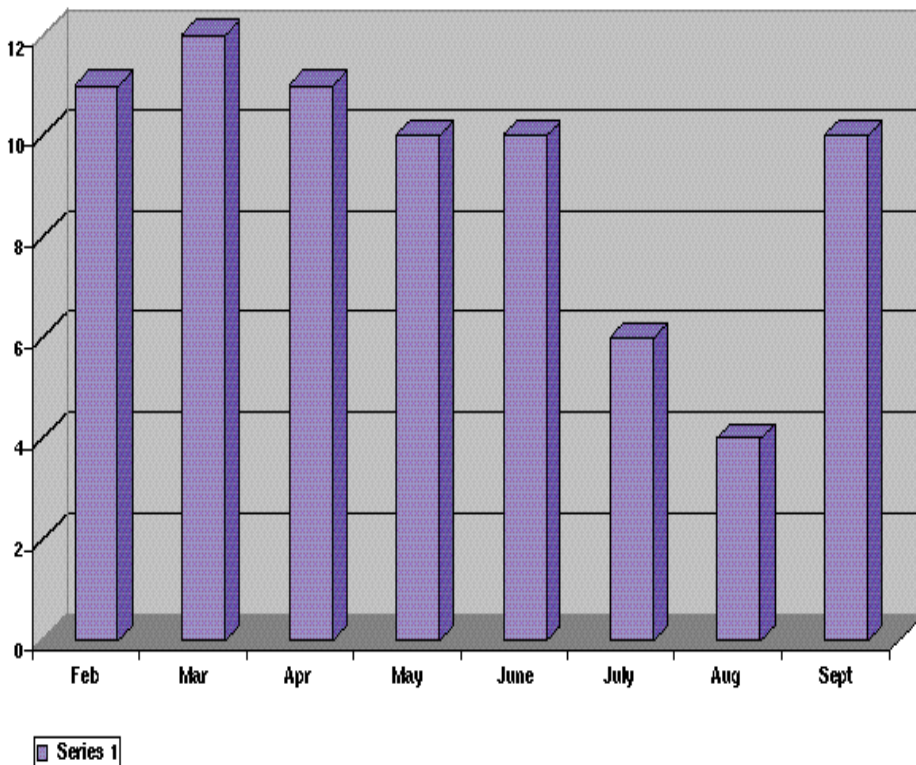
Why did some students leave?

One student left in mid-May. The reason he gave was that he had, “too many commitments in his life”.

Another student from the core group had a baby in early April. She is keen and motivated and plans to return to adult literacy learning as soon as possible.

“Programmes offer 270 hours of intensive basic literacy tuition to CE workers.”

Return to Education Programme 2001 Average Attendance



“In terms of relevance and value the Return to Education programme is a worthwhile initiative.”

And finally...

All changes witnessed in students as a result of attending the programme were positive and served to enhance the students' lives in general. This was reflected in the student writings compiled during the programme for a Return to Education Newsletter. They were eager to have their experiences about the programme 'heard' in such a way as to encourage other potential students to return to learning⁶. These were people unused to 'having a voice' and who gained in self confidence as the programme advanced.

Recommendations for the future

- The group setting seems to serve individuals favourably in their own learning. Solidarity is apparent - one student supporting another as well as the holistic support of the group.
- Serious consideration needs to be taken to avoid running the programme during the holiday months of July and August⁵ if consistent attendance is to be maintained.
- A 'roll-over' system should operate for students at lower literacy levels to be accommodated on a subsequent Return to Education programme. This would ensure a natural continuation in the initial progress made

on the first 30 weeks. It could also enhance their chances of future employment.


- If the needs arose, as they sometimes did, the Adult Literacy Organisator always made herself available to meet us at any time. This access to support and guidance was integral to the running of the programme. All programmes should be similarly supported.

Recommended Reading:

Bailey, I and Coleman, U., 1998. *Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Schemes*. Dublin: National Adult literacy Agency.

Conboy, P., 2000. *Implementation Guide for NALA/FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programmes*. National Adult Literacy Agency: Dublin.

LEAP Literacy Scheme, 2000. *Guide to Literacy Levels*. Leitrim Education for Adults Programme: Carrick on Shannon.

Ryan, H., 2001. *From Practice to Policy – Influencing National Decision Making*. NALA Journal: Dublin. 

“Accreditation is an option for participants, not a requirement.”

“One student was encouraged to join by a fellow CE worker who was already on the programme.”

⁶ The students themselves decided this Newsletter should be distributed amongst participants only. With their permission it is available to all potential students.

⁵ see Attendance Graph

Workplace basic education – Irish context

What is workplace basic education?

Workplace basic education programmes are an innovative way of improving adult basic education skills while in the workplace. A programme may include literacy, numeracy, communication skills, computer skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving and report writing. They are usually offered on site with at least part of the instruction provided during paid working hours. These programmes exist throughout the industrialised world and are now being developed in Ireland. It is only now with the recognition of the extent of the adult basic education problem and the responses required that movement on this issue is occurring.

National Context

The Task Force on Lifelong Learning was established by the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and met in early 2000. This Task Force involves two Government departments, Education & Science and Enterprise, Trade & Employment and this is positive for the future

development of workplace basic education programmes.

The Task Force created two sub groups to look at access and barriers to workplace learning and these groups produced reports. The Task Force group are currently meeting to agree and produce an overall report. Resources from the National Training Fund will implement the priorities in this report. NALA have worked to raise the issue of workplace basic education within this group and hope that it will be prioritised and then resourced.

The consequences of poor basic skills in the workplace

Using the OECD figures and knowing that the majority of Irish adults are in the workforce, we can roughly estimate there are approximately 450,000 adults in the workplace with poor basic education skills. Many employers who have encountered basic education difficulties with their employees have contacted the local service and the learner may be attending a scheme. However currently adults can only access 2 to 4 hours tuition per week, which is equivalent to two full time study weeks per annum. Therefore the potential for learner progress is severely affected by this situation, and in a recent report the majority of learners sampled requested additional tuition time¹. The Moser Report states that “a learner would need many years to get to a threshold basic skills level. In the USA, the research shows that between 550-600 hours of instruction are needed to



Article compiled by
Helen Ryan, Development
Worker, NALA

“Advance the development of workplace basic education programmes by detailing approaches and implementation plan for the development of workplace basic education programmes.”

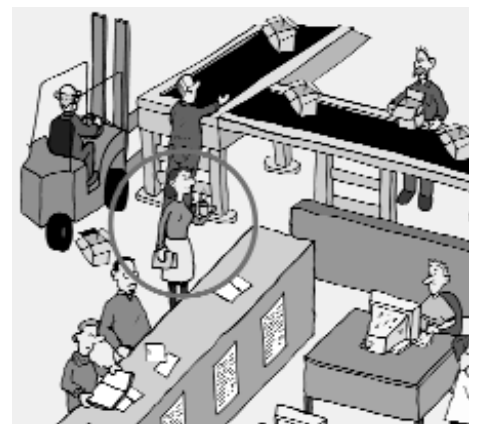


Illustration by Paul Frances


1 Bailey, I. and Coleman, U. (1998) *Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Schemes*, NALA, Ireland

become fully literate and numerate”².

Therefore the need for more intensive basic education programmes is evident, enabling employees to access more than 2 hours tuition per week and in the workplace.

NALA 's Workplace Basic education Strategy

With no major developments by government on this issue, in Spring 2001 NALA developed a Workplace Basic Education Strategy in consultation with key stakeholders including Department of Education and Science, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, employer organisations, unions and practitioners. Following on from the publication of this strategy we established a Workplace Basic Education Strategy Group in October 2001. The group consists of representatives from Government Departments (DES, DETE), employers (CIF, IBEC, ISME, SFA), unions (ITUT, SIPTU, UNISON), NALA, practitioners (AEOA, ALOA, IVEA) and Learners. We aim to advance the development of workplace basic education programmes by agreeing and presenting to relevant government departments a strategy document, detailing approaches and implementation plan for the development of workplace basic education programmes.

For further information on Workplace Basic education contact Helen Ryan, NALA Development Worker tel. (01) 809 9197 or email hryan@nala.ie 

Supporting our newest citizens

In the past few years there has been an increase in the number of non-nationals settling in Ireland. In many cases, because of financial hardship or legal restrictions asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers are unable to attend evening classes, schools or Post Leaving Certificate Colleges. In order to help them better integrate and contribute to Irish society, adult literacy schemes are providing ‘English for Speakers of Other Languages’ (ESOL) classes for them. Literacy is a civil right and anybody with a literacy difficulty has free access to the literacy service, resources permitting. The White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life (2000) states that for refugees, asylum seekers and other non-EU nationals there should be “free access to adult literacy, English language and mother culture supports” (page 174).

What is ESOL?

ESOL has much more in common with adult literacy than it does with TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). ESOL is about “survival” English that impacts on daily life. It’s about being able to fill-out a form, read a bus/train timetable or read the directions on



Fergus Dolan,
NALA ESOL Project Co-ordinator.



Laubach Literacy Action, USA.

² The report of the working group chaired by Sir Claus Moser (1999), *Improving literacy and numeracy: A fresh start*, Department for Education and Employment, UK, page 31

a food/medicine packet. It's about being able to help your child with their homework, getting more responsibility/a promotion at work or getting your business done in the Post Office. If one hasn't got the reading, writing or oral skills for these tasks, then everyday situations are much more daunting and it is almost impossible to fully participate in society. TEFL, on the other hand tends to concentrate on grammar, the arts, current affairs and so on and is generally geared to people visiting the country. Also, TEFL assumes a level of literacy while ESOL does not.

What is NALA doing?

One of the most recent challenges facing Ireland's V.E.C. adult literacy schemes is how they can best serve the adult basic educational needs (reading, writing and oral skills) of the people from non-English speaking countries living here. NALA has started to address the issue by providing one-day ESOL and Literacy training courses in Dublin (4 days), Cork, Athlone and Kilkenny for adult literacy schemes. These courses, designed and delivered by Genevieve Halkett from SPIRASI with NALA's assistance in development, are aimed at building on the literacy experience and approach to develop suitable ESOL tuition methods. NALA have, in conjunction with Genevieve Halkett, also developed innovative, practical material that can be used for teaching asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers with learner background facts and figures, country profiles and ideas on how Tutors can develop their own materials.

Policy guidelines and supports

As teaching ESOL to non-nationals is a relatively new area for most Irish adult literacy schemes, many literacy practitioners feel that they are unsure of how to deal with areas such as assessment, provision, participation, training and accreditation in relation to ESOL. To assist Organisers and Tutors in this area, NALA are in the process of looking at ESOL policy guidelines and supports for literacy practitioners dealing with adults whose first language is not English. The idea of developing these guidelines and supports came from a resolution that was carried at the 2001 NALA A.G.M. In order to first establish what is happening on the ground in the Irish adult literacy service, NALA sent out a questionnaire to all adult literacy Organisers.

ESOL Executive Working Group

NALA has also established an ESOL Executive Working Group, with members from various organisations working in this area to look at these issues and to develop policy guidelines and supports. Two further resolutions passed at the NALA A.G.M., which this Executive Working Group are working on are:

- An audit of ESOL provision within the literacy service;
- to draw up a discussion document and put forward proposals to the Department of Education and Science.

The audit examined what literacy schemes are doing at present in

“Literacy is a civil right and anybody with a literacy difficulty has free access to the literacy service, resources permitting.”

relation to ESOL classes for non-nationals.

The first task of this ESOL Working Group was to look at the responses to the Adult Literacy Organisers questionnaire under the following headings:

- Provision;
- Participation;
- Information on ESOL Tutors;
- Assessment and accreditation;
- Support.

ALO's Questionnaire

A questionnaire requesting information on the areas outlined above was sent to every literacy scheme (125) in November 2001. The cut-off date for responses to this questionnaire (to be used in the audit) was the end of January 2002. By this date we received 59 (47%) responses with a good representation from all over the country.

The vast majority of respondents (83%) reported provision of ESOL classes for asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. Of the classes currently up and running, 61% are group classes with 37% in 1:1 classes. The majority of respondents (73%) feel that there is not currently enough ESOL provision available.

According to the ALOs who responded to the questionnaire, the biggest issues that should be taken into consideration by literacy schemes when planning and managing an ESOL class are the cultural backgrounds of the participants and their language background and levels.

The main reasons why learners attend ESOL classes are:

- to improve their English;
- to integrate better;
- for work;
- for day-to-day living.

The most common reasons for leaving classes are:

- work commitments;
- moving-on;
- lack of child-care facilities.

Assessment and accreditation

The respondents stated that most of the ESOL learners are assessed in the same way as adult literacy learners, i.e. by informal interview. On the subject of accreditation, 98% of ESOL courses are not currently being accredited, so this is an area that would need to be looked at in more detail, as accreditation may be a very important issue for many ESOL learners. The exceptions operating with the other 2% is to give the learners a Certificate of Attendance, indicating their level of competence. Another suggestion being worked on is an adaptation of the FETAC Foundation Language (English) modules. The next area that we looked at was ESOL training.

Training

By February 2002, 32% of the ESOL Tutors had done ESOL training, 68% of ESOL Tutors are also literacy Tutors and 32% have a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) qualification or have worked as a TEFL teacher. NALA has put on ESOL training in Dublin, Cork, Athlone, Kilkenny and Dublin (2). The feedback from the training has been very positive.

“Providing resources, training, policy guidelines and supports for literacy practitioners working with adults whose first language is not English.”

Support


As well as more ESOL training there is need for more money to be set aside for ESOL classes. 94% of the money for the ESOL classes comes from the literacy budget. The other 6% is made up of money from the Adult Literacy Scheme together with local community groups/partnership. The vast majority of Organisers (96%) feel that there is a need for more resources for ESOL in the form of materials, budget and training. 88% of Tutors are paid for the ESOL classes, 12% volunteer Tutors. Literacy scheme premises are used for classes in 76% of cases; the other 24% consists of using local schools, hostels, factories and community centres. There is also a strong feeling (87%) among ALO that there is a need for anti racist/cultural awareness training for staff and learners alike in schemes.

Conclusion

The Adult Literacy Schemes (with limited resources and supports) are trying to meet the ESOL needs of people from non-English speaking countries that have settled here in the last few years. NALA are supporting the literacy schemes in this area. We are providing ESOL training and materials and we hope to update and develop this training and material as we learn more from our training feedback and experiences in this area. We have carried out an audit of ESOL provision in Irish literacy schemes which we completed in April 2002 so that we could get a

snapshot of what is currently happening in the service.

The Executive Working Group from NALA are also putting together policy guidelines and supports for literacy practitioners working with adults whose first language is not English, which, after a consultation process, we hope to have ready by autumn 2002. Here, we will be making recommendations on a broad range of issues in the ESOL area to the NALA Executive, the Department of Education and Science, the VEC's, so that future provision of ESOL in adult literacy schemes can be better delivered to more learners. Finally, we will be doing a discussion document with proposals for the Department of Education and Science, also in the autumn of 2002.

For more information about the NALA ESOL project contact Fergus Dolan tel. 01 809 9191 or email fdolan@nala.ie. 

“Future provision of ESOL in adult literacy schemes can be better delivered to more learners.”

Read Write Now

– another ‘string to the bow’?

Seasoned literacy practitioners who are accustomed to the learner-centred approach of good literacy practice may wonder, how can a series of television programmes take the place of the individual care and attention which Tutors and Organisers give their learners?

The answer, of course, is that it can't. No amount of technology can replace the human contact which creates an effective learning situation. However, feed-back on the second Read Write Now TV series suggests that the broadcast media can help people with reading and writing difficulties in important ways that complement the existing literacy service.

Aims and target group

This 12-week series of adult literacy TV programmes and accompanying handbook, is part of the Literacy through the Airwaves project. This began in September 2000, when the first TV series was transmitted and it continued last year, with a 10-week RTE radio series. The project aims to reach those people who have not yet looked for help with their reading and writing; people who may be isolated, geographically or in other ways; people who believe that they

are alone in finding reading or writing difficult.

Read Write Now is a teaching programme which covers a range of literacy skills including spelling, form-filling and word-building. It also sets out to reassure people that help is available and to encourage them to come forward.

Participant feedback

Here are some comments gathered from people who agreed to be interviewed for the series evaluation:

- It's good to know that other people have the same problem – it makes all the difference.
- I'm making more of an effort now when I have to write something and I'm noticing things, how words are put together.
- I think it's marvellous – I wish I'd had this years ago.

Series format and approach

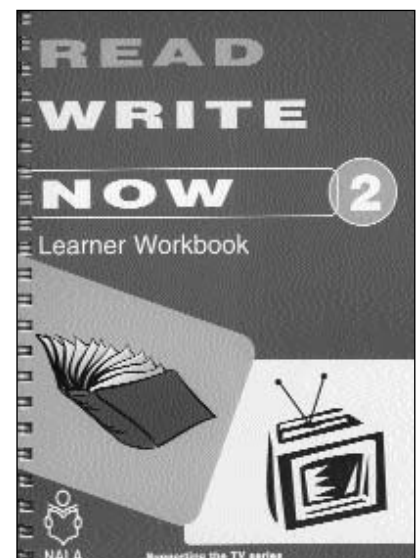
This second TV series follows the format which was used successfully in Read Write Now 1 (see Grummell, 2001). There are three elements to every programme:

- Documentary: each week, a learner tells their own story, how they started their journey towards improving their reading and writing and the difference this has made to their lives.
- Soap: a mini-drama is played out each week with characters who become familiar to the audience, as they go about daily life tasks and solve every-day problems.
- Lesson: the learning points are presented with reference to the



Article compiled by
Liz McSkeane,
Read Write Now Evaluator.

“Broadcast media can help people with reading and writing difficulties in important ways that complement the existing literacy service”



work-book and the drama, making use of visual aids and voice-over.

One of the cornerstones of good literacy practice is that reading and writing skills should be dealt with in a meaningful context. This principle is followed in the Read Write Now series. Skills are covered in the context of everyday topics which include First Aid, Cooking, Decorating and Accommodation. This integrated approach ensures that the elements of reading and writing contained in the series are considered not in isolation, but are interwoven with real-life situations.

This is also in keeping with what we know about how people learn. According to the principles of 'situated learning' (see Resnick et al), the context in which learning happens is not just background, it is an integral part of the learning itself. This idea supports what literacy practitioners have always known intuitively: that it is by no means certain that skills which are learned in isolation will automatically transfer to real situations, as they are needed. To be really effective, learning needs be contextualised.

Participant responses

Reactions to these key elements of the series have been very positive. Most people favoured the integrated approach and as well as improving specific literacy skills, many said that they had also gained other information related to the programme topics. The 'learner's story' was almost universally acclaimed: learners, Tutors and also general viewers found this section both informative

and genuinely moving. Reactions to the drama were mostly positive but mixed. Some people had the mistaken impression that characters in the drama were literacy students and this may have coloured their views. The organisation and presentation of the learning points contained in each programme were also found to be clear and helpful.

The general relevance of the series content to individuals was of course determined by the current level and skill of the learner. Preliminary results from the evaluation interviews and questionnaires suggest that about two thirds of those who were following the series found the level and pace suitable or very suitable for them. Of the remaining third, some found it too easy, others found it too difficult. The target audience is therefore fairly broad: literacy learners who are not complete beginners, who have some skills and may be thought of as 'improvers' at different stages.

Because people come to literacy work with such a varied range of existing skills and needs, the range of knowledge and skills which evaluation participants said that they had learned from the programmes, is also very wide. However, from preliminary analysis the most frequently-mentioned areas of learning were spelling and word-building. These two elements of literacy work seem to have been interesting and relevant for a broad range of learners, from relative beginners through to people who have specific gaps in their skills.

“Aims to reach those people who have not yet looked for help with their reading and writing or people who may be isolated.”

Furthermore, many people were able to give examples of things which they were now able to do in their daily lives which they had not been able to do before: write cheques, fill in forms, read advertisements. In addition, a very frequently-mentioned gain was the sense of improved confidence and the reduction in the feeling of isolation which they had experienced as a result of their difficulty with reading and writing. Given that the aim of literacy work is not merely to gain technical skills but also, to develop the personal and social confidence to use those skills appropriately, this increased personal confidence may be considered as a major outcome.

Range of use

In the course of the evaluation it has emerged that the Read Write Now materials have been a much-used resource in literacy centres. Tutors have made very positive comments, in particular about the workbook. The programmes and workbook have also been used by other audiences: people with disabilities, some schools and special schools and groups working with non-nationals whose first language is not English. Although the materials were not devised especially with the needs of these other audiences in mind, it is worth noting that the usefulness and application appears to be wider than originally anticipated.

According to the ratings, the series was also of interest to the general TV viewer. Read Write Now 1 attracted audiences of upwards of 155,000. Viewing figures for this series were almost 50% higher,


peaking in Programme 6 with an audience of 300,000.

Although a TV series and support materials will not, and is not intended to replace the existing literacy service, there are things which the broadcast media can do to support and complement it.

This series provided an introduction to literacy work for people who either had not known that help was there, or had not yet looked for it. It provided teaching in a range of skills from which learners could select, as they needed. It provided a valuable resource for literacy schemes and other groups. And it provided an opportunity for the general public to become aware of literacy issues. Perhaps a useful way to think of literacy offered through the broadcast media is that it should be, not the only instrument for delivering and guiding literacy practice but rather an addition, another string to the bow.

For further information on Read Write Now and other Literacy Through the Media initiatives contact Helen Ryan, NALA Development Worker tel. (01) 809 9197 or email hryan@nala.ie

References

- Grummel, B.** (2001) Read Write Now TV Project: Evaluation Report Dublin: National Adult Literacy Agency
- Resnick, L.B.** et al (Eds) (1991) Perspectives on Socially-shared Cognition Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association 

“Not only an instrument for delivering and guiding literacy practice but rather an addition, another string to the bow.”

New guidelines for integrating literacy

In the field of Further Education and Training, literacy development is increasingly seen as a crucial element of quality provision. The YOUTHREACH 2000 document, for example, highlights the need for all providers of YOUTHREACH to develop a comprehensive literacy strategy. Providers of Post-Leaving Cert and VTOS programmes are increasingly building literacy support and tuition into their programmes, as are training agencies such as Teagasc.

NALA welcomes these policies and initiatives and is working to help ensure that they are implemented in a way which reflects and applies the core values of adult literacy work. This is specifically outlined in the NALA Quality Framework (see article page 4) which aims to boost quality literacy provision. Significantly decreased numbers of young people and adults with serious literacy difficulties. To aid this in the summer of 2002, NALA will publish "Integrating Literacy – Guidelines for Further Education and Training

Programmes." We hope that these Guidelines will encourage and help Further Education and Training centres in working towards integrating literacy development into their programmes.

Who are the Integrating Literacy Guidelines for?

The Guidelines are intended to apply across the full range of Further Education and Training programmes. These include, for example:

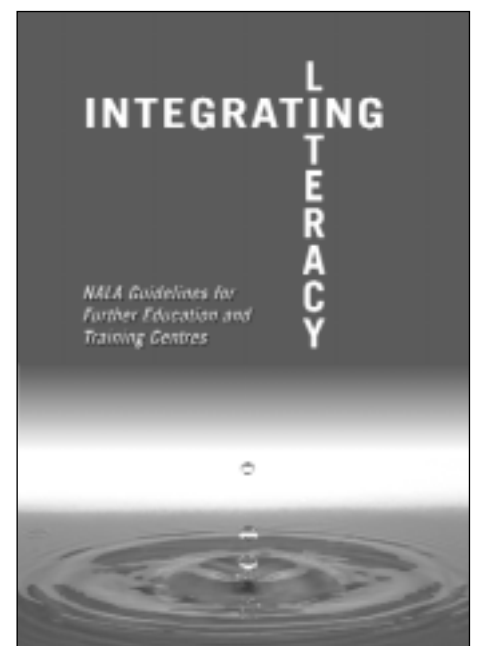
- Adult and Community Education centres;
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara;
- CERT;
- Community Employment Projects;
- Community Development groups;
- Department of Justice Training Centres;
- FAS Community Training Workshops;
- FAS Training Centres;
- Post-Leaving Cert Colleges;
- Senior Traveller Training Centres;
- Teagasc;
- VEC YOUTHREACH Centres;
- Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.

Some of these Further Education and Training programmes were specifically developed to address the needs of people who left school with no qualifications and often with poor literacy skills. They include literacy development as a core aim and in many cases employ a literacy tutor as a key member of staff. Frequent,



Article compiled by
Blathnaid Ni Chinneide,
NALA Literacy Integration Co-ordinator

“Encourage and help Further Education and Training centres in working towards integrating literacy.”



consistent access to such specialist tuition is crucial in enabling those with basic literacy needs to make significant progress. In an integrated service it is complemented by a systematic partnership between literacy tutor and other staff, providing daily opportunities for the learner to acquire and practice literacy skills in the context of their core programme.

The need to integrate literacy support applies not just in these settings, but across the entire range of Further Education and Training programmes. Participants in programmes in any setting and at any level may have difficulties with some of the literacy requirements of their course:

- *Spelling difficulties* can cause problems with coursework and assessment systems;
- Particular *reading skills* are needed to deal with text books, instructions, exam terminology;
- Particular *writing skills* may be needed to deal with the specific requirements of the course and of its assessment system;
- *Numeracy skills* are often needed for the course and for the occupation for which learners are studying or training;
- *Verbal communication skills* – one-to-one and in group – are needed for effective and comfortable participation in most courses and occupations.

A difficulty in any of these areas does not mean that a person lacks aptitude and ability in their chosen course. On the contrary, it indicates a need for building literacy-awareness into core teaching and training practice and for providing participants with course-related literacy support.

Why integrate literacy?

NALA believes that:

- No young person or adult should be, or feel, excluded from Further Education and Training programmes because of a literacy difficulty;
- Effective literacy support, specifically tailored to the needs and interests of the individual, the demands of the course and the requirements of the job, should be built into all Further Education and Training programmes;
- The most effective literacy support is based on an integrated, whole-centre approach.

Integrating literacy into Further Education and Training programmes is beneficial to both learners and providers. It helps to:

- Combat exclusion by ensuring equal access to and opportunities within Further Education and Training for young people and adults with literacy difficulties.
- Increase the effectiveness of skills training and subject-teaching by ensuring that teaching methods respect the learning styles of those who are not comfortable with text-based methods. At the same time, learners are helped to

“Integrating literacy will reduce exclusion, develop more effective literacy support and introduce a ‘whole-centre’ approach to literacy provision.”

develop the reading/writing/number skills necessary for the course, its accreditation system and the occupation for which they are training or studying;

- Increase the effectiveness of separate literacy tuition within a centre by providing a meaningful context, relevant materials and daily opportunities for application and practice;
- Enable progression from the course by helping learners develop the literacy skills necessary for their next step in education, training or work. Identifying and addressing literacy needs may also help learners make appropriate choices and transfers between courses available in the centre;
- Increase retention rates by ensuring that people with literacy difficulties are respected and supported in the programme, from induction through to progression.

We hope that the Guidelines will be helpful to training centres, FE colleges, community education groups and other providers, in developing a whole-centre approach to literacy. For more information about the Guidelines for Integrating Literacy contact Bláthnaid Ní Chinnéide on 01 – 809 9190 or bnichinneide@nala.ie



Event examines 'Models of Family Literacy'

'However you do the calculation, there is no child in an OECD country who, between the ages of 5 and 18 spends more than 20% of its waking hours in a classroom. Once you have allowed for weekends, holidays and time before and after school each day, you can't get that figure any higher. Fully three-quarters of a child's waking hours are not under the direction of a teacher. To a greater or lesser extent, if they are under the direction of anyone at all, they are **under the direction of parents.**' John Abbott 'The open mind lecture' on RTE (Nov 18th and 25th 2001)

Anyone in the area of literacy will appreciate the importance of this statement by John Abbott, President of the 21st Learning Initiative. In 2000 we set up our first Family Learning Programme in Carlow, with the Moving On Programme: Young Mothers and Employment Project. Always on the lookout for new materials and insights I was delighted to attend a very interesting seminar on the Models of Family Literacy, in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin.



Article compiled by
Rhonda Smith,
Adult Literacy Organiser, Carlow.



Literacy at Work', ABC Canada,
January 2002.

The speakers

The speakers on the day included Sian Welby (Basic Skills Agency UK), Maura Grant (Breaking the Cycle) and Ann O’Gara (Home School Liaison).

Sian Welby is the assistant Director of Family Literacy at the Basic Skills Agency in the UK and she talked about the Agency’s most recent projects including:

- 12-hour ‘Keeping up with the Children’ workshops (recruit 12 – 15 parents of children in primary or secondary schools);
- ‘Dads and Lads’ courses (17 programmes currently being run in England);
- Superdad Scheme;
- ‘National Reading Campaign’ targeting reluctant male readers;
- Skills for life;
- Literacy and Numeracy workshops;
- One off events;
- Training and development for family literacy;
- 1 day training;
- 20 hour accredited Family Literacy and Numeracy;
- On-line training;
- Pacesetter ICT and pioneer programmes;
- Early Start (programme for young mothers);
- Baby Talk – for families with children 0 – 12mths;
- Small Talk – for families with children 1 – 2yr;
- Talk Together – for families with children 2 – 3yr;
- First Step (supporting parents with literacy or numeracy skills needed through the early years and childcare field)

The Basic Skills Agency has been running Family Programmes since 1993. Their aim is to raise the standards in literacy and numeracy through development and dissemination.

Maura Grant is currently co-ordinator of the Breaking the Cycle Pilot Project, a post she has held since its initiation. Breaking the Cycle is a scheme whereby national schools in disadvantaged areas get extra resources in order to tackle disadvantage at an early age.

Maura Grant has a special interest in the use of music and the arts to help children who have learning difficulties and are experiencing disadvantage.

Maura was discussing ‘Pathways to Learning’ a summer project set up to help child development using the multiple intelligence theory. She discussed how she managed to get children to attend and what they did while there. She was enthusiastic about her project, which showed throughout her talk. She even had us try out some singing that she does on her project, though I don’t hold out much hope for us as singers.

Ann O’Gara is the National Co-ordinator for the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme. The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme was established in 1990 with the appointment of 30 teachers as liaison coordinators in 55 primary schools in large designated areas of urban disadvantage.

“Examining the Basic Skills Agency (UK) Family Literacy, Breaking the Cycle and Home School Liaison programmes.”



Aims

The aims of the liaison scheme are:

- 1 To maximise active participation of the children in the scheme schools in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure;
- 2 To promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children;
- 3 To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills;
- 4 To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning;
- 5 To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally.

The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme is a preventative strategy, which is targeted at pupils who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of background characteristics, which tend to affect adversely pupil attainment and school retention. The scheme is concerned with establishing partnership between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning. It focuses directly on the relevant adults in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits

for the children themselves.

The three speakers were excellent, with all of them showing incredible insight into and enthusiasm for their subject area. Although they all had different approaches and modes of delivery they all agreed that the use of music, fun and games was very important in attracting and holding the interest of learners of all ages both children and adults.

Learning Development


A child's learning development begins the moment they are born. The importance of interacting with a baby even at this early stage is vital to this development. The most obvious people for a baby to interact with are the parents or the prime caregivers. Thus the parents become the prime educators of their children. Teaching them confidence in speech, movement and undertaking tasks. This is done as part of play activities, which facilitate learning. The involvement of parents must continue after the child has started school, as true learning involves far more than is covered in schools. A parent's support of school delivered learning is vital; conversely a school must support the parent as the prime educator.

'Evidence confirms what many people have always intuitively thought; learning involves far more than schooling. People are quick to recognise that many successful public figures were either school failures or removed themselves from formal schooling at an early date. Conversely many successful people in school seemed to have disappeared

“Parents are the prime educators of their children teaching them confidence in speech, movement and undertaking tasks.”



Speakers at the 'Models of Family Literacy' seminar were L to R: Maura Grant, Sian Welby & Ann O'Gara

without a trace. Why? Not surprisingly, long-term studies, such as exist, show that the greatest predictors of success at University level (I know of no research over a longer period of time) are: 1) the quantity and quality of the discussion in the child's home before entering school; 2) the amount of independent reading regardless of subject matter which the child did for itself; 3) the clarity of value systems as understood and practised; 4) strong positive peer group pressure; and 5) the primary school. Still further down the list is the secondary school. Formal schooling is only part of what fires up the inquisitiveness in a child's mind.' (John Abbott 'Learning to go with the Grain of the Brain' 1999). All these ideas helped to reinforce the vitally important role parents play in their children's learning and development. Everyone I spoke to on the day said it was a highly informative and enjoyable seminar. 

NALA Resource Website

In August 2001 we were awarded €19,680 from the Department of Enterprise's CAIT fund to finance an ICT literacy project. We ran a successful training course in integrating literacy into ICT last October (see article in Journal 2001). We have begun working on the second part of this project: a literacy resource website. When we sent a questionnaire to literacy Tutors in a wide number of settings last year training and resources were identified as being barriers to developing ICT and literacy initiatives.

This website which will have the domain name www.literacytools.ie will include worksheets on different topics. Topics will include: health, the workplace, family learning, hobbies and on the road. Tutors were commissioned to write worksheets in these topics. Literacy material such as the Read Write Now 1 and 2 series will also be included in the website.

Exciting features

Tutors and independent learners will be able to print these worksheets or save them in their hard-drive. However this website will have **interactive worksheets**. Most packages call themselves interactive but do not truly interact; they simply tell the



Article compiled by
Jennie Lynch,
NALA Development Worker.

*“Providing
literacy tuition
worksheets and
support packs
on the net.”*



learner whether they have answered the question correctly. Learners will be able to fill in some worksheets and cloze tests “on line” and get their results straightaway. They will also enjoy a feature where the computer will call out text that they have written on screen. A third interactive feature will include a facility where a learner can read text on screen and if they get stuck on a word they can click on an icon and the computer will pronounce the word for them.

Learners and Tutors will be able to track their progress by logging in and getting a password. We will also include a search option which means that people can look for a specific topic. We also intend having a review of materials section and a links to similar international resource sites.


Problem of lack of access to ICT

Lack of access to the internet for low income learners is a major problem. Literacy practitioners should have access to new technology. Tutors need access to resources and because they are available on the internet they are available to people for the cost of a phonecall. This project, like the TV projects will -accommodate learners who choose not to use their local literacy scheme, or learners who cannot use their local scheme because of childminding or access restraints.

Website starts pilot in the summer 2002

We hope to have the literacy resources website ready in May

2002 and we will pilot it from August to February 2003 in Adult Literacy Schemes and other basic education settings. After this evaluation we will make changes called for by learners and practitioners and nationally launch the website. Like all new developments learners and Tutors need support in adapting to new technology. Future developments with this resource page may involve producing a manual or training in how to fully utilise this website. Evaluation of this site will also help us to develop a strategic five year ICT plan.

For more information please watch the NALA website www.nala.ie or contact Project Co-ordinator, Jennifer Lynch in the Cork office at 021 4317012 or jlynch@nala.ie 

“Lack of access to the internet for low income learners is a major problem.”

New research into 15 year olds' skills gives good and bad news

A recent literacy study of 15-year olds has opened debate on the social and economic development of Ireland. The future success of Ireland is very much dependent on current 15 year olds' skills. These are the future adult workforce. These people, to be employable and to sustain economic stability, will have to be very literate and highly skilled. This fact has been borne out in recent times with reported shortages in the employment sector in terms of a skilled workforce.

If children of 15 years today are experiencing moderate to severe literacy difficulties there is a very real chance that they will lose out on educational and employment opportunities in the future. This in turn means that Irish society and our economy will also lose out. A further implication of neglecting the literacy needs of young people as they arise is that

demands will be placed on an already stretched and under-resourced adult literacy service in coming years.

Understanding the literacy issue in Ireland

There has never been a comprehensive study of the adult literacy issue in Ireland. It is therefore very difficult to develop an adequately clear profile of adult literacy learners in Ireland. The best information we have available to us at present in helping us to understand the nature and scope of adult literacy problems in Ireland are international studies which include an Irish dimension.

To date, Ireland has been involved in two major international literacy surveys. The first was the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1997. The latest is the Programme for international Student Assessment (PISA), 2001. This was again carried out by the OECD.

The Adult Story

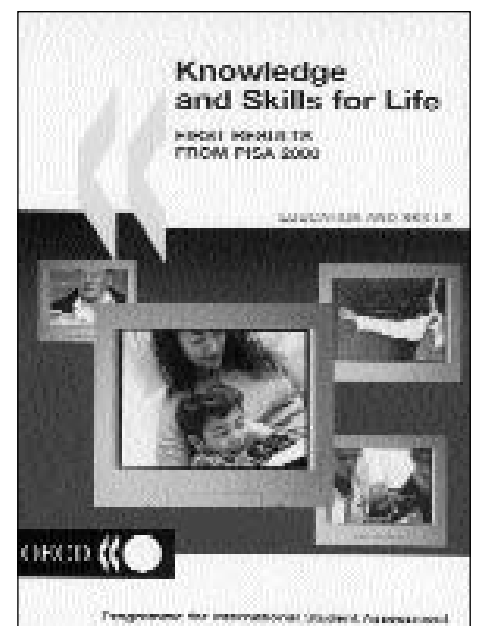
IALS found that a quarter of Irish adults scored at the lowest level. This means that these adults experienced serious difficulties with everyday reading and writing. Whilst 22,700 of these are attending tuition through VEC Literacy Schemes this still only represents 4% of those who need support.

300,000 adults have been tuning in regularly to the most recent Read, Write, Now TV literacy series. The levels of literacy required in today's society are higher than 40 years ago. At that time the Primary Cert had currency. Nowadays



Article compiled by
Gemma Lynch,
NALA Research Officer.

“15 year olds’ skills, to be employable ... will have to be very literate and highly skilled.”



education and knowledge levels are much higher and literacy is the key to both areas. The IALS has been the yardstick upon which adult literacy levels have been measured.

The 15-year old's story

The most recent OECD research, PISA, examined the literacy skills of 15-year olds. At face value the results of PISA are good news for Ireland. Indeed, Ireland is rated sixth in a table of 32 countries by PISA. However, this study also highlighted that 1 in 10 Irish school-leavers leave school with serious literacy difficulties.

PISA failed to include the 15% of Irish 15-year olds who are early school leavers. As problems with literacy have been identified as one of the main causes of early school leaving, PISA appears to have missed a vital target group. On a related note, 10% of Irish children leaving primary school experience serious literacy difficulties.

If a culture of literacy is not present in the home, children's literacy skills will not be improved and may even decline. This is why NALA believe family literacy projects are so important. The continuation of these issues do not bode well for the future of literacy in Ireland or the social and economic development of this country.

What did PISA look at anyway?

PISA was aimed at giving us a picture of the knowledge and skills of 15-year olds in 32

countries, including Ireland. It examined students in literacy, mathematics and science. The survey places Ireland 5th best for literacy and 16th best for maths. However, there are still 10% presenting at the equivalent of IALS Level 2 or below. At this level students have difficulty merging 2 pieces of information together. For example, they may be able to look up a cinema listing in the newspaper to time a film. They may not be able to time a bus to get them to the cinema in time to see the film. In addition, to repeat what was said earlier, PISA did not include the 15% of Irish 15-year olds who had left school or were in training programmes.

Students sat pencil and paper assessments in their schools. In addition, students and their principals answered questionnaires about themselves and their schools. This allowed PISA to identify the factors which may be associated with performance.

This international survey involved 265,000 students and was first conducted in 2000. The aim is to repeat the survey every three years. The Irish part of PISA was co-ordinated by the Department of Education and Science on behalf of the OECD.

Conclusions which may be drawn

It is an inaccuracy to say that people with literacy difficulties have no literacy skills at all. However, their level of difficulty can mean that filling in forms or following instructions can be very difficult.

“PISA failed to include the 15% of Irish 15-year olds who are early school leavers.”


“There needs to be systematic and significant linkages between the primary, secondary and further education sectors if the literacy issue is to be tackled comprehensively.”

The adult literacy service has expanded in recent years and the situation has improved somewhat. However, speaking at NALA's International Literacy Day conference last October, Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern admitted "...we have a lot left to do....".

Speaking about the issue, Director of NALA, Inez Bailey said "There needs to be a more holistic approach to tackling the literacy issue. To commit a majority of resources to one sector has not been and will not be effective. There needs to be systematic and significant linkages between the primary, secondary and further education sectors if the literacy issue is to be tackled comprehensively"

In short, the 15-year olds experiencing literacy difficulties today will become the focus of attention for the adult literacy service in the future.

For more information

Check out the PISA website at www.pisa.oecd.org. Copies of the report may be purchased from the Educational Research Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. 

Adult Literacy Tutors gather for national event

The role of Tutors, particularly those who are volunteers, is crucial to the success of the Literacy Service. Much is expected of these Tutors, who are drawn from a wide section of Irish society. NALA is highly aware of this and is constantly working towards relieving these pressures. Organising events for networking, information gathering, learning and enjoyment is one of the ways the Agency is doing this. Chief among these events is the National Tutor's Forum.

At the beginning of this year the Adult Literacy Tutors from around the country gathered to attend this Forum in Dublin. It was an informative, stimulating and enjoyable day. It was hosted by NALA and was the second annual such event. It was attended by approximately 250 Tutors, which included both paid and voluntary personnel.

Background

This is a relatively new event. It came about as a result of



Article compiled by
Marie Dolan,
Adult Literacy Tutor, Offaly.

"The role of Tutors, particularly those who are volunteers, is crucial to the success of the Literacy Service."



A workshop at the Adult Literacy Tutors Forum

consultation and research completed by NALA into the needs of Literacy Tutors. Tutors were keen to have a platform that would allow them the opportunity to meet and network with colleagues. This year's Forum took the format of a conference whereby there were presentations from nominated speakers in the morning session followed by a series of workshops in the afternoon.

The aims of the Tutors' Forum are to:

- Acknowledge the contribution of Tutors to the literacy service
- Examine the needs of Tutors
- Identify and address how Tutors can be supported

Welcoming Address

John Stewart, National Literacy Co-ordinator with NALA chaired the event. He began by welcoming everyone and commented on how pleased he was at the large turnout. He paid tribute to the work being done by adult literacy Tutors, in particular, the volunteers. He acknowledged the fact that some of the paid Tutors continue to do voluntary work. He reminded Tutors of the purpose of the Forum and not to miss out on the opportunity to share and exchange ideas and experiences with those from other Schemes. He outlined the programme for the day and then introduced the guest speaker, Peter Sheridan.

Guest Speaker - Peter Sheridan

Peter Sheridan (Film Director and Author) is probably best known nationally as the director of the film "Borstal Boy". In the literacy field he is also well known for his

contribution to the "Open Door" series of books. He talked about growing up in the inner city. He provided much anecdotal evidence to recall many of the events that took place in the area during his childhood and his early adult life. He said that he felt he wanted to be a writer from about the age of fifteen or sixteen. At first he wrote about the events of his own early experiences. His logic for this was "looking backwards to go forwards".

He remarked on the perception in society that people who were unable to read and write were disadvantaged. He never saw it that way. There were very colourful people, with humour and culture, in his community and school.

He went into theatre without any formal training and explained that he learned to direct plays from observing people in the kitchen of his own home. He and his local community put together the first play from their own personal and family experiences.

Peter Sheridan was most entertaining and enjoyable. His raconteur style, which was stimulating, grabbed the attention of all. As a literacy tutor, it was inspirational and heartening to hear how he succeeded in enabling some of the people in his community to grow, develop and reach their potential. He achieved this through literacy and drama, which is interesting since one of the recent initiatives, is to pursue literacy through the learner's interest or work, for example, literacy and photography or literacy and farming.

● *Acknowledge the contribution of Tutors to the literacy service*

● *Examine their needs*

● *Support Tutors*

Director of NALA - Inez Bailey

Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, spoke on a number of topics including the current developments in Adult Literacy. She stated that literacy is about giving communities a voice and the right that everyone has of access to educational services. Therefore, the literacy movement must translate its commitment and passion into empowering and policy.

She alluded to the Adult Literacy survey carried out by the OECD in 1997, which highlighted the scale of the literacy problem in Ireland. There have been profound changes since then. Some of the significant developments are as follows:

- The establishment, in 1997, of the National Adult Learning Council (NALC);
- The Green Paper on Education in 1997;
- The White Paper on Education in 2000 in which Adult Literacy and Further Education were a top priority;
- The Quality Framework;
- The proposed Assessment Framework;
- The Adult Guidance Service;
- The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) aimed at those with less than second level education;
- The Return to Education Programme – a Partnership programme set up by FÁS/NALA/VEC;
- Workplace literacy – a Partnership set up by NALA with Local Authorities and VEC.

While funding has increased considerably in recent years it is still less than equal to other sectors in education. This year's allocation is €16.41m. It was a mere €1.27 million in 1997. It is imperative that Government continues to invest in Adult Literacy because there has been a noticeable expansion in services in areas where funds have been made available.

Nationally, the statistics show that the learner population has increased by almost 400%. There are:

- 19,000 learners in Literacy Schemes throughout the country (5,000 in 1997);
- 60% women, 40% men (the literacy area of Adult Education has a better gender balance than any other area of Adult Education);
- 70% of learners in group tuition;
- 4,000 voluntary Tutors;
- 1,100 paid Tutors.

The Director referred to the success of the Read Write Now television programmes. The average ratings for the first series were 155,000 and this doubled for the second series. It demonstrates that there is a need for such a programme. Also, it may be a lifeline for some people who are unable to leave their homes for a variety of reasons. The records show that there has been a greater uptake in tuition since the second series. This most likely reflects the time it takes a learner to build up the courage to come forward for tuition.

The Director concluded by stating that, in this election year, NALA will continue to build links with political parties. She implored

“People who were unable to read and write are very colourful people, with humour and culture, in their community and school.”



Director and writer Peter Sheridan speaking at the National Adult Literacy Tutors Forum

Tutors to lobby their politicians to support the local scheme and its Tutors.

The Director's presentation was very informative. She expressed satisfaction with recent developments and the success of the new programmes that have been introduced. She was positive about the future and was passionate about the importance of delivering a service that meets the needs of the learners.

CHL Consulting - Michael Counihan - Training Needs Analysis

Michael Counihan gave the results of the survey carried out by his company (CHL Consulting). The objectives of this survey were:

- To assess the training needs of literacy Tutors;
- To recommend approaches for meeting those needs;
- To outline an implementation training plan.

This was the first such survey to be carried out among both the paid and voluntary Tutors. It was undertaken in September 2001 and was a postal survey to which 7% replied. This is an average return for a postal survey. In addition to identifying the training needs of Tutors it was an in-depth study of the status of Tutors. Some interesting information and statistics have been revealed by the study.

The main issues were:

- Growth and development of the literacy service;
- Maintenance of volunteering;
- High tutor turnover rate (most less than 5 years);

- Variation between VECs and other Schemes, such as, in their support for in-service training;
- Need for standardisation in relation to the above;
- Greater support for in-service training;
- Difficulties with location, access, timing and materials.

The work related information in respect of both voluntary and paid Tutors was also interesting. For example:

- 21% of literacy Tutors are paid
- 95% of paid Tutors are women in the 45+ age category;
- Volunteers are older than paid Tutors;
- Most Tutors are working for less than 5 years;
- Almost 100% of volunteers are working < 5 hours per week;
- Paid Tutors are also working limited hours.

The high level of educational qualifications among all Tutors is also worth noting

- Primary degree - 50%;
- Post graduate degree - 10%;
- Diploma/Certificate - 26%;
- NCVA/City&Guilds - 14%.

The current situation is that 50% of paid Tutors and 20% of volunteers are pursuing further relevant education. The most popular training being the teaching of IT, Numeracy, Spelling or Dyslexia. Of the tutor population 48% attended training in the past three years. This indicates that Tutors take their role seriously and have the desire to up-date their skills to levels of

“This opportunity for Adult Literacy Tutors to interact will be very beneficial in the coming year.”



Some of the participants at the National Tutors Forum

best practice. The key requirements mentioned under training needs were:

- Updating literacy teaching methods;
- Diagnosis of literacy needs;
- Learner progress and assessment;
- Knowledge of literacy issues;
- Awareness of foreign cultures.

CHL Consulting is now in the final stages of their analysis. When completed the full result of the survey will be published.

Workshops

There were seven workshops in the afternoon. Tutors had nominated in advance the workshop they wanted to attend. Each workshop was attended by a NALA representative as well as a facilitator. The range of workshops on offer was as follows:

- Assessment;
- Dyslexia;
- Numeracy;
- Tutor Boundaries;
- Career Paths;
- Tutoring Skills;
- IT and Literacy.

Basic Education Tutors' Association (BETA)

A presentation by BETA, the newly formed Tutors' Association, was the final item on the programme. The Committee addressed the audience and informed them of the aims of the Association, which are:

- To act as a tutor representative body;
- To put a value on the

experience, training and qualifications of Tutors;


- To promote networking among Tutors;
- To enable Tutors to support each other.

The committee outlined the benefits of being a member and encouraged Tutors to join the association. As an organisation, BETA is aiming towards membership of the TUI. This recognition will be a means by which Tutors will be in a position to negotiate with the Department of Education and Science (DES).

Conclusion

Overall this was a very successful event. The format for the day was appropriate. However, in future fora I would like to see time allowed to give feedback from each workshop to the entire audience. The topics covered in the workshops would have been of interest to the majority of Tutors.

The presentations in the morning session were very informative. Tutors were brought up-to-date on current developments at national level. The survey on the Training Needs Analysis revealed some interesting facts. The guest speaker, Peter Sheridan's presentation, was refreshing and enlightening.

One of the most important aspects of the day was the opportunity it offered for Tutors to network with each other. A variety of ideas were exchanged and many useful tips were passed on. The outcome of these interactions will be very beneficial in our work with our learners in the coming year. 

“One of the most important aspects of the day was the opportunity it offered for Tutors to network with each other.”

Argument for Phonological instruction in Adult Education Programmes

The first part of this article attempts to describe some of the research on the importance of phonology in the acquisition of literacy and some of the terminology used in relation to it.

The second part of the article seeks to give practical ideas on how a phonemic awareness and phonology can be integrated into adult literacy instruction.

Skilled Reading

The two main components of reading are word recognition and language comprehension. We read to understand. The more fluently we

are able to read, the more processing capacity is left to spend on comprehending what we are reading.

At the heart of skilled reading lies rapid word recognition. It is a very complex process. Fluent readers use spelling patterns, word patterns, context, background knowledge and knowledge of syntax and semantics, among other things, when reading.¹ How exactly the brain processes the information is unclear. However, while educational psychologists may not agree on the exact means by which people learn to read, they do agree that phonological processing is central to acquiring the skill of reading.²

What is Phonological Processing?

The phonological processes are those, which the brain uses among other things to convert sound into print and print into sound.

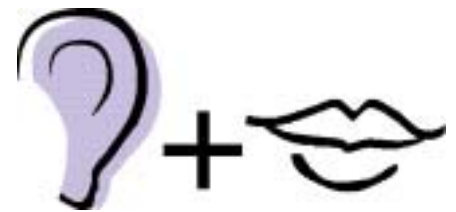
The Importance of Phonological Awareness

Phonological Awareness is simply the ability to hear that a stream of speech is made up of individual sounds. The ability to segment words into separate sounds is called phonemic awareness and it is recognised as an important predictor of learning to read in virtually every written language that has been studied.³



Article compiled by
Columba O'Connor,
Tutor Dublin Adult Learning Centre.

“Phonological Awareness is simply the ability to hear that a stream of speech is made up of individual sounds.”



PH **ON** **ICS**

1 Colin Harrison: Methods of Teaching Reading. Key issues in Research and Implications for practice 1998 The Scottish office of the Education and Industry Department

2 Richard L. Venezky, Banu Oney, John Sabatini, Richa Jain, Teaching Adults to Read and Write: A Research Synthesis, University of Delaware March 1 1998 (available on the Internet)

3 Usha Goswami, The relationship between phonological awareness and orthographic representation in different orthographies Ch. 8, Learning to Read and Write: A Cross Linguistic Perspective. Eds. Margaret Harris & Giyo Hatano.

Understanding the Writing System

Clearly, readers and spellers need to be exposed to print in order to recognise words and learn the conventions of the written language. However, they also need to understand that English writing is fundamentally an alphabetic code, which requires the learner to understand sound-letter correspondence. The fact that there are many irregularities and inconsistencies in English spelling does not negate this basic truth. In order to read (decode) and write (encode) a literate person needs to understand what letters (graphemes) are likely to be associated with particular speech sounds (phonemes).

The Alphabetic Principle

The discovery of the fundamental nature of the written English is known as the Alphabetic Principle. It underpins the development of literacy.⁴ It is something that needs to be explicitly brought to the attention of the person learning to read.

In *Children's Reading Problems*, the authors concluded that any child's skill with sound would play a significant role in

determining his/her ability to read. The most obvious and consistent difficulty that poor readers had was with sounds and therefore all children should be explicitly taught them.⁵

Phonics

There is a growing consensus that phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondence should be explicitly taught to all children.⁶ Phonics is defined as a method of teaching reading "by the practice of associating particular letters or sequences of letters with particular sounds".⁷ It is a method with many detractors, but the basic concept of direct teaching of phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondence is gaining acknowledgement as an essential element, in both the Irish Primary School Curriculum for English⁸ and the National Literacy Strategy in the United Kingdom.⁹

Letter-sound correspondence does not have to be taught through a strict phonics programme. It can be incorporated into real and meaningful reading. The crucial point is, as put by one expert "if we want children to know something, we would be advised to teach it explicitly".¹⁰

*“Converting
sound into print
and print into
sound.”*

4 Brian Byrne *The Foundation of Literacy, The Child's Acquisition of the Alphabetic Principle* pg.2 Psychology Press 1998

5 Peter Bryant and Lynette Bradley *Children's Reading Problems* pg. 153, Blackwell Publishers Limited reprint 1996

6 Facts on Research on the teaching of phonics, www.heinemann.com/info/08894f2.html

7 A student's Dictionary of Language and Linguistics by R L Trask)

8 Primary School Curriculum English Language Teacher Guidelines 56 -69 Government of Ireland 1999

9 Teaching of Phonics Office for Standards in Education Reference number HMI 329, 2001 (available www.ofsted.gov.uk/public/docs01/phonrecep/teachofphonics.htm).

10 Brian Byrne *The Foundation of Literacy, The Child's Acquisition of the Alphabetic Principle* pg.144 Psychology Press 1998

What relevance does this have to adults?

Research on literacy acquisition in adults is limited. However, in a research synthesis of the literature on the acquisition of reading and writing conducted by the University of Delaware,¹¹ the authors concluded “ a high percentage of the low literacy adults who have been tested for their reading skills have what researchers call a core phonological deficit. In its simplest form, this is an inability - or low ability- to segment words into separate sounds. ...without an ability to quickly segment sounds within spoken words, breaking the (alphabetic) code becomes a struggle that is beyond the reach of many adults.”

The authors also concluded that, “the best results for low-level readers at every age appear to come with intensive basic skills instruction, but instruction that is embedded within a meaningful context with plenty of opportunities to apply what is learned.”¹²


Reading practice is extremely important. Not alone does it improve reading skill, it supports comprehension, spelling and vocabulary.¹³

These conclusions were echoed by an earlier study from the learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh.¹⁴

The authors of this study concluded that both children and adults “must learn how their writing system works, which requires knowledge of the sounds of spoken language (phonology) and their connection to print.”

A further study, which compares the spelling development of adult literacy learners with classroom children, concluded that the developmental spelling pattern of the child and adult learners was very similar.¹⁵ There were some differences noted, particularly that adults had a tendency to part from the phonics of the word in their spellings. This was particularly the case with word endings, either deleting them altogether or substituting them with other endings and with omitting parts of multi-syllabic words. These findings were replicated in a number of other studies cited.

Conclusion

It would therefore appear that research into the acquisition of reading and writing by adults suggests the ability to hear separate meaningless speech sounds (phonemes) as a crucial step to literacy. The explicitly teaching of letter-sound correspondence as necessary that a meaningful context provides the most productive means of learning lots of practical reading experience improves the learners facility with words. 

“...without an ability to quickly segment sounds within spoken words, breaking the (alphabetic) code becomes a struggle that is beyond the reach of many adults.”

11 Richard L. Venezky, Banu Oney, John Sabatini,, Richa Jain, Teaching Adults to Read and Write: A Research Synthesis, University of Delaware March 1 1998 (available on the Internet) p.5

12 ibid p.7

13 Learning to Read Literacy Acquisition by Children and Adults Charles Perfetti & Maureen Marron Learning and Research and Development (available on the Internet)

14 Learning to Read Literacy Acquisition by Children and Adults Charles Perfetti & Maureen Marron Learning and Research and Development (available on the Internet)

15 A Study of the Spelling Development of Adult Literacy Learners Compared with That of Classroom Children N Viise, Journal of Literacy Research Volume 28, Number 4, 1996

The second part of this article will appear in the Autumn 2002 edition of NALA Journal.

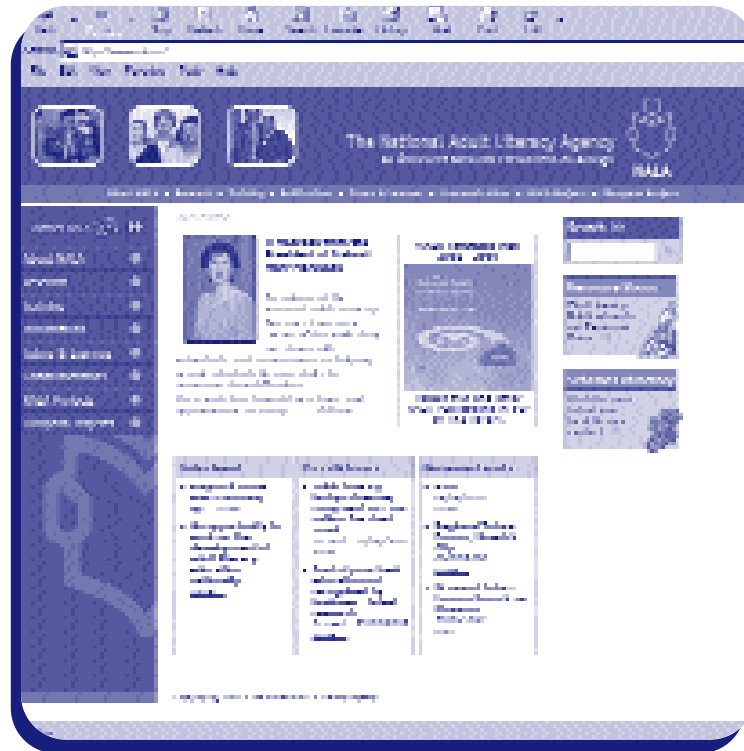
Glossary

- **ABE** – Adult Basic Education - refers to the development of competence in adult skills that are need to full take part in society such as literacy numeracy and communications
- **ADM** - Area Development Management – a statutory organisation set up by the Department of An Taoiseach which funds and oversees local development projects
- **AEOA** - Adult Education Organisers Association
- **ALOA** - Adult Literacy Organisers Association
- **Basic Skills Unit** – Unit within the British Department of Education & science which is devoted to basic education
- **BETA** - Basic Education Tutors Association - represents salaried Adult Literacy Tutors
- **BSA** - Basic Skills Agency – organisation for the support and development of ABE in England & Wales
- **CE** - Community Employment – FAS employment training programmes in operation through out Ireland
- **CEEEOA** - Chief Executive & Education Officers Association representing CEOs & EOs in VECs
- **CEO** – Chief Executive Officer – the most senior management position in a VEC
- **CIF** – Construction Industry Federation - employer representative body
- **CTW** - Community Training Workshops – training unit, in different centres around Ireland, providing vocational and ABE skills to early school leavers over 18 years of age
- **CWC** - Community Workers Co-op
- **Dental Health Foundation** – Government funded organisations promoting better dental health
- **DES** – Department of Education & Science
- **DETE** – Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment
- **EEOI** - Education Equality Initiative
- **Educational Disadvantage Committee** – Government committee to examine and devise solutions to tackle the issue of educational disadvantage
- **EO** – Education Officer – the senior education staff member in a VEC
- **ESOL** – English for speakers of other languages
- **FÁS** – The Irish national employment training agency
- **FSAI** - Food Safety Authority of Ireland – statutory body establish top over see the improvement of food safety
- **IBEC** – Irish Business Employers Confederation - employer representative body
- **ICCPE** - Irish Centre for Continuing Pharmaceutical Education
- **ICT** – Information & Communications Technology
- **ICTU** – Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- **ISC** - Information Society Commission – which is devising a strategy for development of ICT in Irish society
- **ISME** – Irish Small & Medium Enterprises - employer representative body
- **ITUT** – Irish Trade Union trust
- **IVEA** – Irish Vocational Education Association representing Vocational Education Committees
- **Library Council** – Organisations for the development of libraries
- **Literacy Implementation Group** – committee established to oversee the implementation of the adult programmes of the White Paper
- **NALC** - National Adult Learning Council – statutory body established to oversee the implementation of the White Paper
- **NAPS** - National Anti-Poverty Strategy – government medium term plan to tackle poverty
- **NDP** – National Development Plan - government medium term plan for economic and social development
- **NQAI** - National Qualifications Authority of Ireland – Government funded body which manages qualifications at national level
- **NTDI** - National Training and Development Institutes – Independent education organisation which provides courses in different centres around Ireland for people with disabilities
- **SFA** – Small Firm Association - employer representative body
- **SIPTU** – Services, Industrial, Professional & Technical Union
- **Traveller Training Workshops** – local organisations providing vocational training for adult Travellers
- **UNISON** – UK union representing unions in the public sector
- **VEC** - Vocational Education Committees – managing adult and further education at County level
- **VTOS** - Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme
- **VTSU** – Vocational Training Unit
- **Western Health Board** – public health services operation and management organisation for the western region
- **White Paper** - Government policy document outlining the plan for the future of adult education
- **WIT** - Waterford Institute of Technology – a third level educational institute
- **Youthreach** – refers to local training units, in different centres around Ireland, providing vocational and basic skills to early school leavers under 18 years of age

The NALA Website

www.nala.ie

Providing a vast array of information on our work and developments in adult literacy



Get the latest on issues such as:

- NALA publications including research reports
- Health & literacy
- Workplace literacy
- Adult literacy assessment
- The NALA Quality Framework
- Literacy through the media
- Adult literacy research
- NALA in-service training
- ESOL
- Adult literacy events & seminars
- Information for media on adult literacy

For more information contact Tommy Byrne at tbyrne@nala.ie or phone 00 353 (0)1 809 9195

Major NALA events

Autumn 2002



National Literacy Awareness Week

September 9th to 15th

Theme: Health & Literacy

International Literacy Day

12th October

Theme: Workplace Literacy



For more information about these events contact
Tommy Byrne on 00 353 (0)1 809 9195 or email tbyrne@nala.ie

Jobs in Adult Literacy at Waterford Institute of Technology

Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), in partnership with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), is continuing to develop an educational framework for adult literacy providers. In conjunction with NALA, the WIT Adult Literacy Centre is providing accredited courses for Adult Literacy Organisers and Tutors. The Centre is strengthening its support team and invites applications from suitably qualified applicants for the posts of :



Waterford

1. Assistant Lecturer in Adult Literacy/Adult Numeracy (E.P.T)

The successful candidates will deliver modules on the National Certificate and Diploma courses on campus and in other locations. It is desirable that candidates have:

- Honours primary degree in Adult Education or related area
- Familiarity with contemporary issues of relevance to the development of Adult Literacy provision in Ireland
- Commitment to facilitating learners to apply theoretical knowledge to work practice.

Remuneration will be in accordance with the Assistant Lecturer's Scale.

For a job description and application form for both positions contact
Caroline Corcoran, Personnel Office, WIT, Waterford.
Email ccorcoran@wit.ie or telephone 00 353 (0)51-302050

Completed application forms should be returned to the above by 17th June, 2002

The NALA Resource Centre

Providing a vast range of adult literacy resources for tuition and learning

Lifelines



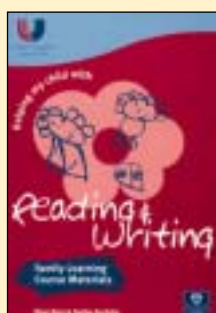
This is aimed at pre-Junior Certificate level learners to build their capacity in reading and writing. It includes a collection of photocopiable worksheets and photographs based on everyday life themes. Published by: City of Limerick V.E.C. Price: €25.00

Connections – Basic Skills in Reading



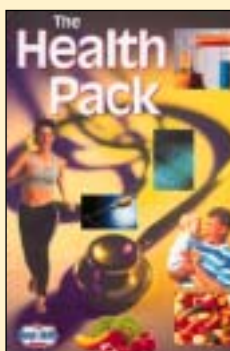
Provides passages from well-known works of popular and classical literature as well as present-day magazines. Suitable for people at FETAC Level 1. Published by Steck-Vaughn, USA Price: €33.75

Helping my Child with Reading & Writing – Family Learning Course Materials.



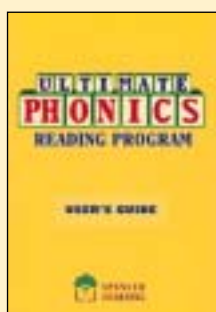
This aims to raise awareness among parents of the methods and approaches involved in teaching children to read and write in schools. Published by: London Language & Literacy Unit, UK Price: €36.50

The Health Pack



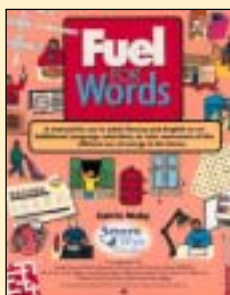
This pack has been designed to provide teaching ideas and resources for tutors who are interested in using health issues as a theme to develop basic communication skills. The emphasis of the pack is primarily on skills development. Published by: Basic Skills Agency, London Price: €22.90

Ultimate Phonics Reading Programme – CD & manual



Ultimate Phonics is a complete, self-teaching, interactive multimedia reading programme that can be used to learn to read with phonics. Published by Spencer Learning, USA Price: €109.00

Fuel for Words



This manual was developed to raise awareness among ESOL students of the need for efficient use of energy in the home, to promote benefits to the household economy, comfort and health. Published by: Severn Wye Energy Agency, UK Price: £36.60



For more information about the above publications and any NALA adult literacy resources phone 00 353 (0)1 855 4332 or email resources@nala.ie.