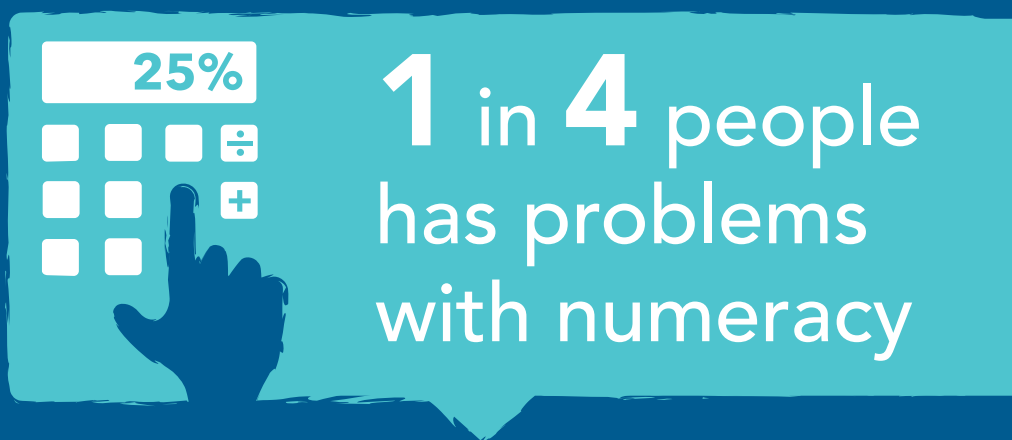


Raising adult literacy and numeracy levels and working towards a more inclusive society

Strategic Plan 2014 – 2016



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaiqh



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Summary

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. This strategic plan sets out how we aim to provide solutions to improve outcomes for adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties and highlight the value of improved literacy and numeracy skills to Ireland's social and economic development. We will achieve this by working with three groups of people: policy makers, practitioners and the general public, including learners.



Our plan has three main objectives.

Objective 1

Support implementation of policy

NALA will work with a range of policy makers concerned with the implementation of Government policy. This will include those responsible for the Further Education and Training Strategy, National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for Children and Young People, Pathways to Work, Healthy Ireland – the new Department of Health framework, and Putting People First, as well as the Public Libraries Strategy.

Objective 2

Improve quality of teaching, learning and information provision

NALA will work with the range of practitioners concerned with the policies listed in Objective 1. We will provide support to improve the quality of teaching and learning. These will include supplying relevant learning content and information on new and proven teaching and learning approaches and methods.

Objective 3

Build awareness of literacy and numeracy

NALA will work with the general public, including learners, to build awareness of the importance of having strong literacy and numeracy skills to more effectively manage their employment, health and family and community life.

We hope you enjoy reading this plan. Please note that there is a glossary of important terms on page 20.

Introduction

This strategic plan sets out how we aim to improve outcomes for adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties in Ireland from 2014 to 2016. We developed the plan following a review of our work, an evaluation of related research and consultations with students, our members and other key players in adult literacy.

About the National Adult Literacy Agency

NALA is an independent organisation that:

- **is the voice of adults wishing to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and**
- **is committed to raising adult literacy and numeracy levels.**

We are a member-based organisation. Our members are individuals and organisations interested and involved in adult literacy. At our annual general meeting, members elect an Executive Committee that oversees our work.

We are a limited company with charitable status. We receive a grant from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) via SOLAS that enables us to staff our office in Dublin. The DES, along with other Government Departments, State Bodies, the European Union and the private sector, also funds specific research and development work. NALA complies with the Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations.



Our track record

Since we were established over 30 years ago, we have increased awareness of the adult literacy and numeracy issue in Ireland, and we have secured a policy response to the issue from the State. Since 1997, we have been a dedicated force behind:

- the 30-fold increase in adult literacy funding, which has been maintained in very difficult economic circumstances; and
- the 10-fold increase in the number of adults involved in adult literacy services.

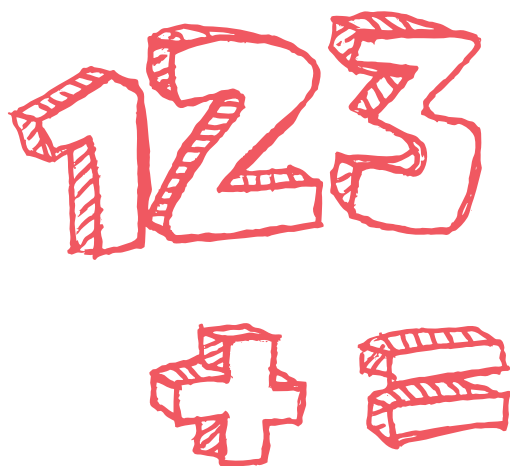
Over this time, we have brought many innovations to the field of adult literacy and numeracy and developed the organisation as an expert resource. Our recent achievements include:

- securing representation for adult learners on the new Education and Training Boards;
- lobbying successfully for a national adult literacy and numeracy strategy as part of the legislation behind SOLAS;
- securing the first Government policy commitment to health literacy;
- providing a way to recognise prior learning at Levels 2 and 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications;
- delivering an information campaign and resource www.helpmykidlearn.ie aimed at helping parents support their children's learning; and
- being rated in the top 16 EU-wide projects for increasing adult learning using television to raise awareness of adult literacy issues and to support literacy learning.¹

What we stand for

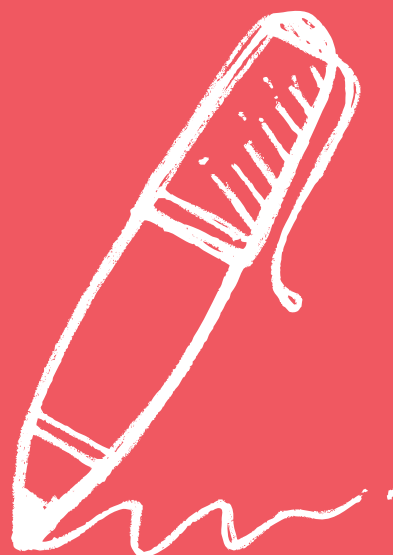
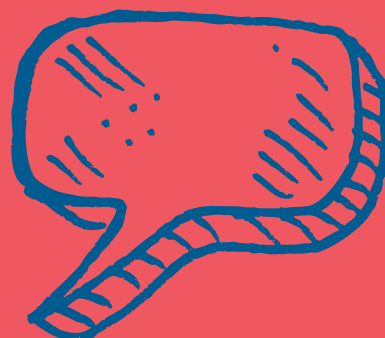
We stand for:

- Literacy as a human right and a tool for change
- Respect for equality and diversity
- Involving people with literacy and numeracy difficulties in our work
- Learning, growth and innovation
- Partnership
- Transparency and quality
- Efficiency and effectiveness



¹ European Union (2012) Strategies for improving participation in and awareness of adult learning. LUXEMBOURG: Publications office of the European Union.

What we mean by 'literacy'



Literacy involves:

- › **listening,**
- › **speaking,**
- › **reading,**
- › **writing,**
- › **numeracy, and**
- › **using everyday technology to communicate and handle information.²**

Literacy also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situations, to explore new possibilities and to initiate change.

The definition of literacy is changing as the concept of 'literacies' becomes more widely understood. This concept recognises that people use different skills for various real-life situations, for example using a computer, reading workplace instructions or understanding a payslip.

If a person needs to develop confidence and skill in particular aspects of literacy, it does not mean that they have difficulty with all of the basics. Equally, if a person has a qualification, it does not always mean that they have high levels of literacy. Many adults who have not practised their literacy for a number of years lose confidence and skills.

2 National Adult Literacy Agency (2012) Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work.
DUBLIN: National Adult Literacy Agency.

Our vision for people with literacy and numeracy difficulties in Ireland



We want Ireland to be a place where:

- adult literacy is a valued right,
- everyone can develop their literacy and numeracy, and
- individuals can take part more fully in society.

Challenges to achieving our vision

There are three main challenges to achieving our vision.

1 Extent of literacy and numeracy difficulties

The 2012 Adult Skills Survey³ highlighted the extent of literacy and numeracy difficulties among Irish adults. According to this survey, **one in six Irish adults has a significant literacy difficulty** and **one in four has low numeracy skills**. Overall, Ireland's ranking in literacy and numeracy is poor in comparison to other countries surveyed.

The Adult Skills Survey confirmed what previous research has shown - people with literacy and numeracy difficulties are more likely to be unemployed and poorly qualified.⁴ Indeed, a report published by NALA and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) states that men and women with literacy difficulties are more likely to be long-term unemployed and to benefit more from training than those without literacy needs.⁵

3 Central Statistics Office (2013) PIAAC 2012 Survey Results for Ireland from the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. DUBLIN: Stationery Office.

4 FÁS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (2009) National Skills Bulletin 2009. DUBLIN: FÁS.

5 Kelly, E. et al (2012) Literacy, numeracy and activation among the unemployed, Research Series no 25. DUBLIN: Economic and Social Research Institute and National Adult Literacy Agency.

The Adult Skills Survey also showed there was a large wage difference between people who scored the highest and the lowest in the survey. Finally, the Adult Skills Survey showed that people who had lower literacy and numeracy skills were less likely to trust others or to become involved in their community.⁶

The EU High Level Working Group of Experts on Literacy Final Report (2012) states that:

- the labour market requires ever higher literacy skills (by 2020, about 35% of jobs will require high-level qualifications. This compares with 29% of jobs in 2014);
- social and civic participation are more literacy-dependent in the digital world;
- the population is ageing and their literacy skills, including digital literacy skills, need updating; and
- poverty and low literacy are locked in a vicious circle, each fuelling the other.

National and European policies have been developed to raise adult literacy and numeracy levels. In Ireland, the **National Skills Strategy (2007)** promotes a vision of Ireland in 2020 based on a well-educated and highly skilled population. The European Union's Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training (known as ET2020) set a target that:

“all learners attain an adequate level of basic skills, especially in reading, mathematics and science.”

They state that co-operation on basic skills should be a priority in putting ET2020 in place.



6 OECD (2013) OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills. OECD Publishing.

2 Changing policy and funding environment

Despite a small decrease in the number of people who are unemployed, forecasts for economic growth in Ireland are conservative. This means that we face a huge challenge in helping more people return to work. It also increases pressure on people who may need greater and more targeted literacy and numeracy support to take part in society and to improve their chances of employment. Finally, the adult literacy services and the wider further education and training system are also challenged by increasing demand for places.

3 Limited participation in adult learning

According to the OECD, countries whose population have higher levels of participation in organised adult learning activities have higher literacy and numeracy skills.⁷ Ireland is below the EU average participation rate in adult learning. We have 7% of those aged 25 - 64 participating in education and training.⁸ People with literacy and numeracy difficulties are less likely to take part in education and training and those with few or no qualifications have also benefitted least from investment in training.⁹

It is essential to fill this gap with targeted and flexible learning opportunities for people who wish to develop their literacy and numeracy. NALA believes Government and employers should pledge that every citizen without a Leaving Certificate qualification (or good literacy and numeracy skills) is offered a training programme and would be supported to develop their skills. This is a view shared by the National Economic and Social Council and recommended in their recent review of further education and training and the unemployed.¹⁰

There are significant gains to individuals, their families and communities if they can develop their literacy and numeracy. For example, for adults taking part in intensive adult literacy tuition, moving from one level on the National Framework of Qualifications to the next increases earnings by almost w4,000 a year.¹¹ According to research carried out by the UK's National Literacy Trust,¹² those with improved literacy are more likely to own their own home and get involved in local issues.

7 OECD (2013) OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills. OECD Publishing.

8 Cedefop (2013) Spotlight on VET Ireland. THESSALONIKI: Cedefop

9 FÁS (2009) Irish Labour Market Review 2008. DUBLIN: FÁS.

10 Sweeney, J., (2013) A strategic review of further education and training and the unemployed. DUBLIN: National Economic and Social Council

11 National Adult Literacy Agency (2009) A cost benefit analysis of adult literacy training. DUBLIN. National Adult Literacy Agency.

12 Dugdale, G. and Clark, C. (2008) Literacy Changes Lives: An Advocacy Resource. LONDON: National Literacy Trust.

Our strategic plan: our response to the challenges

In this plan, we outline:

- › our mission,
- › our objectives and actions,
- › how we will achieve our objectives, and
- › how we will implement and evaluate this plan.

Our mission

Our mission is to be the voice of adult literacy and numeracy in Ireland and, with our partners, influence policy and practice to support people in developing their literacy and numeracy.

Our objectives and actions

We have three objectives. Each has a set of five actions. Below is a summary of the objectives. This is followed by more detailed information on each objective.

Objective 1

Support implementation of policy

NALA will work with a range of **policy makers** concerned with the implementation of Government policy. This will include those responsible for the Further Education and Training Strategy, National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for Children and Young People, Pathways to Work, Healthy Ireland – the new Department of Health framework, and Putting People First, as well as the Public Libraries Strategy.

Objective 2

Improve quality of teaching, learning and information provision

NALA will work with the range of **practitioners** concerned with the policies listed in Objective 1. We will provide supports to improve the quality of teaching and learning. These will include supplying relevant learning content and information on new and proven teaching and learning approaches and methods.

Objective 3

Build awareness of literacy and numeracy

NALA will work with the general **public, including learners**, to build awareness of the importance of having strong literacy and numeracy skills to more effectively manage their employment, health and family and community life.

Objective 1

Support implementation of policy

NALA will work with a range of policy makers concerned with the implementation of Government policy. These include those responsible for the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for Children and Young People, Pathways to Work, Healthy Ireland and Putting People First, as well as the Public Libraries Strategy.¹³

Why NALA wants to do this

The above policies provide significant opportunities to support adults who wish to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

These opportunities will arise from:

- › changes to the further education and training system,
- › helping parents to support their children's learning, and
- › helping the public to better use their local authority and library service.

NALA will contribute to the roll out of national policies to make the most of these opportunities and to help reach the key targets outlined in the following paragraphs.

We know from the 2012 Adult Skills Survey that 18% of the adult population is at the lowest level of literacy, a decrease of 4% since the last survey in 1997. The survey showed that people with low literacy levels were more likely to be unemployed and in poor health. **The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion** (2007) has a target to reduce the number of adults with significant literacy difficulties to between 10% and 15% of the adult population by 2016.

In 2007, the **National Skills Strategy** set a target of up-skilling 70,000 people from levels 1 and 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to level 3 and a further 260,000 up to NFQ levels 4 and 5 by 2020.¹⁴ The National Skills Bulletin¹⁵ states that 17% of the labour force has a lower secondary or below qualification. The target for 2020 is that this will have fallen to 7%. The up-skilling of those at Levels 1 - 3 to Levels 4 and 5 is the most challenging target in the National Skills Strategy.

13 Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2013) Opportunities for All – The Public Library as a Catalyst for Economic, Social and Cultural Development. DUBLIN: Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

14 Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2007) Tomorrow's Skills –Towards a National Skills Strategy. DUBLIN: Forfás.

15 Skills and Market Research Unit in FÁS (2013) National Skills Bulletin 2013. DUBLIN: Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

Of the 4% of the adult population who participated in adult learning in 2012, three quarters were in third level education programmes.¹⁶ People with the lowest educational qualifications were least represented among participants. The new adult literacy and numeracy strategy will lead to more and improved learning opportunities.

Actions

- 1 Work with SOLAS to contribute to the Further Education and Training Strategy, including the national adult literacy and numeracy strategy, and its implementation through the development of briefing papers.
- 2 Work with key stakeholders involved in the education of children to identify and influence ways to help parents support their children's learning.
- 3 Work with the Department of Social Protection and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in designing labour market activation measures which will help unemployed people deal with literacy and numeracy issues.
- 4 Develop and implement a health literacy action plan to build health literacy in Ireland.
- 5 Roll out a literacy and numeracy friendly programme across a number of local authorities to improve their communications.

Outcome

Important policies affecting people with literacy and numeracy difficulties are strongly influenced by relevant research evidence and this drives improvements in the availability and quality of learning opportunities.



¹⁶ Skills and Labour Market Research Unit of FÁS (2013) Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply – Trends in Education and Training Outputs 2013. DUBLIN: Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

Objective 2

Improve quality of teaching, learning and information provision

NALA will work with the range of **practitioners** concerned with the policies identified in Objective 1. We will provide supports to improve the quality of teaching and learning. These include supplying relevant learning materials and information on new and existing effective teaching and learning approaches.

Why NALA wants to do this

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) review of adult literacy services makes 32 recommendations.¹⁷ A key recommendation from the review of adult literacy services is that the Department works with Education and Training Boards Ireland and relevant stakeholders (such as NALA and Waterford Institute of Technology) to develop a **national approach and strategy to continuous professional development across the service**. This will mean that priority areas for professional development are addressed. This will in turn improve practice.

Together with our partners, NALA is well placed to guide the development of new approaches to help students overcome barriers so they can access, participate and succeed in adult and further education and training. We need to strengthen our agreement with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) to integrate literacy across all their education and training programmes and take note of the recent Chief Inspector's Report and its Youthreach evaluation findings.¹⁸ We also plan to work with the Education and Training Boards to increase learning opportunities using www.writeon.ie.

NALA will also continue to support organisations to be more accessible to people with literacy and numeracy difficulties. By providing our plain English training and editing services to staff, organisations will be better placed to enable more people to access information and entitlements and to better use their services. Without these approaches, organisations may be losing current and potential customers.

17 Department of Education and Skills (2013) Review of ALCES funded Adult Literacy Provision. DUBLIN: Department of Education and Skills.

18 Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012. DUBLIN: Department of Education and Skills.

Actions

- 1 Provide practitioner events and resources to facilitate the integration of literacy and numeracy across further education and training.
- 2 Supply professional development events to meet the needs of literacy and numeracy tutors, including volunteers and organisers.
- 3 Provide training to practitioners who want to use writeon.ie as a tool for blended learning and for the recognition of prior learning.
- 4 Provide a plain English information, editing and training service to those providing information to the general public.
- 5 Conduct research to help improve teaching and learning.

Outcome

Practitioners use their improved knowledge and skills to inform practice decisions and develop services to the public.



Objective 3

Build awareness of literacy and numeracy

NALA will work with the general **public, including learners**, to build awareness of the importance of having strong literacy and numeracy skills to more effectively manage their employment, health, family and community life.

Why NALA wants to do this

We want to encourage adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties to take up learning opportunities. Learners need flexible and blended learning options if they wish to move through the National Framework of Qualifications from levels 1, 2 or 3.

We have developed a distance learning service and intend to further explore technologies such as the web, digital broadcasting and telecommunications to increase learning opportunities.

We will continue to raise awareness of the literacy and numeracy issue and the learning options available through national advertising campaigns and through other media work. We will do this with the help of students and parents. Students have been crucial in ensuring that we hear, consider and communicate their views. We also want to gather the views of parents who wish to support their children's learning. Parental involvement is recognised as being a key factor in the success of their children's learning.¹⁹

In Ireland there is growing awareness of, and interest in using, plain English. The more the public demand that information is provided in plain English, the more likely business and other information providers will use it in their communication with customers.

¹⁹ OECD (2013) Parental Involvement in Selected PISA Countries and Economies OECD 2012. OECD.

Actions

- 1 Promote awareness of available learning opportunities.
- 2 Work with adult learners to gather their views and support them to contribute to the organisation of learning options.
- 3 Promote awareness of the importance of involving parents in their children's learning and encourage the use of the website www.helpmykidlearn.ie
- 4 Run awareness campaigns aimed at developing the public's health literacy and financial literacy.
- 5 Build a campaign to secure the public's support for the greater use of plain English in communications with the public.

Outcome

There will be widespread public recognition of the importance of strong literacy and numeracy skills and increased use of plain English in society.



Literacy
Numeracy

How we will achieve these objectives

We will achieve these objectives by:

- 1 making sure our governance and our administrative and technological systems are in line with national and international standards;
- 2 having strong management systems and processes;
- 3 building our membership;
- 4 participating in, and developing, relevant networks that make efficient use of resources;
- 5 finding and developing further sources of funding; and
- 6 developing an innovation process.

Our four strategies are:

1 Partnership

2 Being the voice of adult literacy

3 Advocacy

4 Research

1 Partnership

We will work with:

- › adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties;
- › people wishing to return to learning;
- › the general public;
- › education and training providers and related professional associations (Education and Training Boards, ALOA, AEOA and Skillnets);
- › organisations dealing with the public; and
- › policy makers including the DES, and other stakeholders such as SOLAS, ETBI, QQI, AONTAS, INOU and other non-governmental organisations.

2 Voice of adult literacy

We will make sure that the views and experience of adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties are:

- reflected in our work, and
- considered by politicians, policy makers and public bodies.

3 Advocacy

We will work to:

- persuade policy makers to increase funding for adult literacy and numeracy,
- support education and training providers to improve and develop their teaching and learning practice,
- encourage people with literacy and numeracy difficulties to develop their skills, and
- help organisations to be aware of adult literacy and numeracy issues and respond appropriately.

4 Research

We will:

- be a driving force in adult literacy and numeracy research,
- commission relevant research and share findings with key stakeholders, and
- use research evidence to develop our policy proposals and to advise organisations on adult literacy and numeracy issues.

How we will implement and evaluate this plan

We will:

- develop yearly work plans,
- evaluate our progress each month using a specially developed evaluation tool called a 'balanced scorecard',
- deliver monthly progress reports to our Board, and
- publish yearly reviews of our progress in our Annual Report.



Glossary of terms

AEOA

Adult Education Officers' Association

ALOA

Adult Literacy Organisers' Association

AONTAS

The national adult learning organisation

Advocacy

Actively supporting or arguing for a cause, idea or policy, which may involve raising awareness, recommending particular action and, or, speaking up for individuals' rights.

Balanced scorecard

A system that measures how well an organisation performs across four areas—financial performance, customer satisfaction, internal operations and learning and growth—to help it break down its strategy into actions

Blended learning

This refers to a mixing of different teaching and learning techniques. For example, a blended learning approach can combine face-to-face tuition with computer based learning

Continuous Professional Development

This is the way members of professional associations maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge and skills and develop the personal qualities required in their professional lives

DES

Department of Education and Skills

Designing

Creating in a skilled manner

Distance learning

Distance Learning occurs when learners and tutors are separated by either space or time. For example, a student can follow an online computer programme from their home while their tutor is in another location

DSP

Department of Social Protection

Equality

A state of being equal or equivalent

ETBI (Education and Training Boards Ireland)

The national representative association for Ireland's sixteen Education and Training Boards

Evaluation

A process of studying something carefully and measuring its features against certain standards to see what is good or needs to be improved

Framework

A model or system used to organise information or to plan, develop or decide something

Implement

Put something into place, for example carrying out the recommendations in this plan

Integration of literacy and numeracy

Designing and delivering education and training programmes in a way that develops the course-related language, literacy and numeracy as part of the core subject

INOUE

Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed

Learning opportunities

The range of literacy learning options, including individual and group tutoring, workplace literacy programmes and distance education, among others

Level (1 – 10) qualification

One of the 10 levels of qualifications a person can get in Ireland

Mission

An aim of a group, an organisation or a person

Numeracy

A lifeskill that involves the competent use of everyday mathematical skills and the confidence to manage the mathematical demands of real-life situations

Objectives

Planned results to be achieved within a stated period in the future

Outcome

It means what happened or the result of something

Partnership

Two or more people or groups working together on an activity or to reach a particular goal

Plain English

Plain English is a way of presenting information that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it

Policy

A course of action adopted or proposed by an organisation or person

Putting People First

An Irish Government plan to improve Local Government

QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

A process used to evaluate skills and knowledge acquired outside the classroom for the purpose of recognising competence against a given set of standards

SOLAS

The new Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland

Skillnets

A government initiative that supports and works with businesses in Ireland to address their skill needs

Stakeholder

A person or group with an interest (a stake) in the actions or policies of an organisation, which means that they may affect the actions or policies and or be affected by them

Strategic

Something that forms part of or relates to a long-term plan to achieve an aim

Vision

In this plan, a mental picture of something positive in the future

Voice

In this plan, it means taking account of the views and experiences of adults with literacy difficulties



National Adult Literacy Agency

Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Ranelagh
Dublin 6

Telephone (01) 412 7900
Fax (01) 497 6038
Email info@nala.ie

NALA website:
www.nala.ie

Literacy learning websites:
www.writeon.ie
www.helpmykidlearn.ie
www.simplyput.ie

Freephone support line:
1800 20 20 65



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh