



NALA Strategic Plan 2017-2019



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Literacy for living and learning

“At the very heart of republicanism, in its original sense, lies the principle of participative citizenship, and the right of all citizens to be represented and to have their voice heard. We have a responsibility and a duty to enable all members of our society to receive the education that will allow them to become informed participative citizens.”

President Michael D Higgins from his speech at the launch of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2015.

www.nala.ie

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Summary

This strategic plan sets out how we aim to improve outcomes for adults with literacy difficulties in Ireland from 2017-2019. We developed the plan following a review of our work and consultations with adult literacy students, our members and other key players in adult literacy and further afield.

Our strategic objectives for the next three years are to:

Objective 1

build awareness of the importance of literacy for a more inclusive Ireland;



Objective 2

lead innovation in the teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and basic digital skills; and



Objective 3

seek further investment in raising adult literacy and numeracy levels in Ireland.



About NALA

NALA stands for the National Adult Literacy Agency. We are a charity. We are a membership organisation. We exist to support people with literacy and numeracy difficulties so that they can take part fully in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. We are committed to literacy and numeracy development as a human right. We want to ensure that no adult is left behind. We do this by:



Lobbying for further investment to raise adult literacy levels



Facilitating people to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills to participate in society



Engaging with and responding to the needs of our members



Working with education providers, particularly the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), to identify and share best practice in the teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills



Helping to make learning and courses more accessible to people with literacy and numeracy needs



Supporting organisations and services to be aware of the literacy issue and to communicate clearly



Conducting research into literacy needs and best practice teaching and learning

NALA believes in supporting people with literacy and numeracy needs to be their own agents of learning, change and choice.

Our vision

Our vision is an Ireland where adult literacy is a valued right, where everyone can develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and where individuals can take part fully in society.

Our mission

Our mission is to advocate for literacy as a right and to collaborate with our partners to influence policy and practice to support the development of literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Our values

Literacy is a human right

Equality

Collaboration

Support

Innovation

Transparency

Quality and best practice

Context for our work

What we mean by literacy

Literacy means reading, writing, working with numbers, listening and speaking, and using everyday technology to connect with others. These skills enable us to take an active part in life and to be equal members of society. They influence our ability to receive and understand information and to realise our potential.

Why literacy matters

Literacy enables people to take part in a meaningful way in society. It opens up opportunity, enriches life experience and promotes equality.

People with good literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills are more likely to be employed, to earn better incomes and to have better health and a longer life¹. Literacy influences our trust in others, our willingness to volunteer and our belief about the contribution we can make to the political process².

The challenge

In the 2012 OECD Adult Skills Survey, the Central Statistics Office interviewed 6,000 people aged 16 – 65 in Ireland and assessed their literacy, numeracy and ability to use technology to solve problems and accomplish tasks.

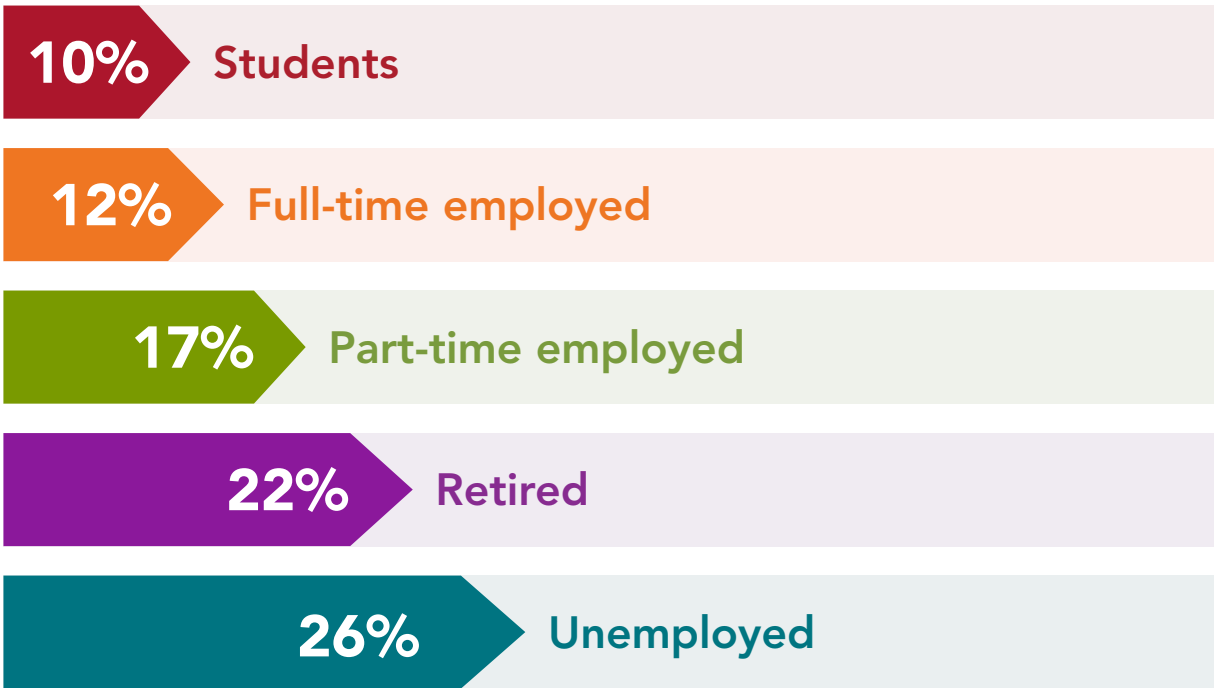
The survey found that almost 18% or 1 in 6 Irish adults are at or below level 1, the lowest level on a five level literacy scale. This means that many struggle when reading a magazine, filling in a form, sending an email, reading a text message, helping their children with school work or reading them a bedtime story.

The survey showed that 25% or 1 in 4 Irish adults are at or below level 1 for numeracy. At this level a person may be unable to do a simple maths calculation, for example adding up prices.

The survey also showed that 42% of Irish adults score at or below level 1 on using technology to solve problems and accomplish tasks. Technology is part of everyday life. For example, most people now use a smart phone. Technology affects how we communicate, how we access services, how we work and the types of information that we use and rely on. It can make our lives easier and more connected.

According to the OECD (2016)³, being able to use a computer is necessary for every aspect of life.

Percentage of people in Ireland at or below level one literacy*



(Source: PIACC 2012: Survey Results for Ireland)⁴

*Being at level 1 literacy indicates that the person may be unable to understand basic written information.

There is a clear link between literacy and equality. People with the lowest skill levels have low educational attainment, earn less income and are more likely to be long-term unemployed. They also risk being trapped in a situation in which they rarely benefit from adult learning, and their skills remain weak or deteriorate over time.

Countries with greater levels of participation in adult learning show higher literacy and numeracy levels⁵. Ireland is below the EU average for participation by adults in lifelong learning⁶. Adults with the least educational attainment, such as early school leavers, are less likely to take part in adult learning opportunities. To date, this pattern has been resistant to policy solutions.

To encourage more people to get involved in learning opportunities, we need to adopt new and creative policy measures. The 'EU Skills Agenda'⁷ proposal encourages countries to prioritise adults with the least education, offering them an assessment and a customised learning programme, as well as a chance to get recognition for their achievements. Ireland needs more investment and greater political will to realise the infrastructure necessary to achieve higher participation in adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills learning.

An integrated approach

Government, educators and employers have a role to play in offering support and providing access to flexible, high quality training options for people who want to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. NALA believes that social policies on health, education, employment and active citizenship, must be integrated and not separate.

The work of NALA

During 2014 to 2016, NALA worked with a range of stakeholders to apply national policies to help adults improve their literacy and numeracy skills. These policies included:

- ➔ Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-2019⁸;
- ➔ Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020⁹;
- ➔ Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025¹⁰;
- ➔ Pathways to Work 2016-2020¹¹; and
- ➔ Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government¹².



NALA's work included:

- ➔ research to help improve teaching and learning. We work with our colleagues in SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to support their work;
- ➔ providing training to our distance learning tutors and distance learning opportunities for learners;
- ➔ a plain English information, editing and training service for public and private organisations which give information to the general public;
- ➔ promoting awareness about literacy and learning opportunities for adults and families using a variety of media;
- ➔ helping many organisations to become more literacy friendly through audits, training and awards;
- ➔ gathering the views of adult learners and sharing these with educators, policy makers and Government. These views also informed our way of working; and
- ➔ increasing our membership to 1,132 in 2016.

Our track record – our key achievements from 2014 to 2016

Tutors and professionals	2014	2015	2016
Tutors attending our professional development events	550	460	518
Tutors receiving training on how to use www.writeon.ie	160	160	84
Learners and students	2014	2015	2016
Learners supported to get QQI minor awards through distance learning	1,260	1,000	1,075
Number of Level 2 minor awards	4,700	3,600	3,461
Number of Level 3 minor awards	970	890	700
Students taking part in learning activities funded by our Student Development Fund	1,200	1,600	1,600
People using www.helpmykidlearn.ie	100,000	130,000	147,000
People following www.facebook.com/helpmykidlearn.ie	12,000	19,000	19,214
Plain English	2014	2015	2016
People attending our plain English training	600	600	700
Organisations using our plain English editing service	70	100	90
People signing our petition for the use of plain English	1,200	5,000	-
Delegates attending PLAIN 2015 - an international conference we hosted for the Plain Language Association International	-	250 from 18 countries	-
Awareness raising	2014	2015	2016
Weekly TV viewers of the Family Project (2014)	140,000	-	-
Calls to NALA freephone	4,682	1,575	1,075
National media coverage	Over the last three years NALA's work was covered in the media over 540 times		

Our stakeholders

NALA works and collaborates with many stakeholders

National Strategy	Stakeholder
Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SOLAS• Department of Education and Skills• Education and Training Boards and their staff• Education and Training Boards Ireland• Quality and Qualifications Ireland• Adult Literacy Organisers Association• Adult Education Officers Association• Tutors• Students• People with literacy or numeracy needs
Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools and teachers• Home School Liaison Coordinators / TUSLA• Department of Education and Skills• National Parents Council• Parents
Pathways to Work 2016-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Social Protection (DSP)• Front line staff and case managers in 13 DSP divisions
Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Health• Health Service Executive• Hospitals• General Practitioners (GPs)• Irish College of General Practitioners• Pharmacies• Irish Pharmacy Union• Health Information and Quality Authority• Health media

Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Authorities• Local Community Development Committee• Local Development Companies• Libraries
European Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education and Services for People with Autism• European Literacy Policy Network• European Platform for Adult Learning in Europe• European Agenda Adult Learning• European Basic Skills Network

Consultation to inform this plan

We developed this strategic plan following a review of our work and extensive consultation with people involved in, or interested in, adult literacy. We consulted with learners, academics, tutors, teachers, advocates, adult literacy organisers, policy makers, members, the NALA team and the NALA Board. There were four main themes in the feedback that will inform our work over the next few years:

1. Support national policy

- ➔ Support the implementation of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019; National Skills Strategy 2025: Ireland's Future¹³ and Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020.
- ➔ Use our research to inform policy and practice relating to literacy skills development in education, training and employment.

2. Work for learners

- ➔ Support learners with an emphasis on learning strategies, literacy for employment, health literacy and basic digital literacy.
- ➔ Strengthen the work we do in advocating on behalf of learners and supporting literacy and lifelong learning.
- ➔ Develop innovative ways of supporting literacy development at all stages of someone's life.

3. Support adult literacy practitioners

- ➔ Support continuous professional development for those working in adult literacy, particularly the ETBs as the main provider of literacy tuition, and also those involved in volunteering to support learners.

4. Partnering

- ➔ Create alliances and cultivate relationships with stakeholders so that our work informs policy and responds to the needs of the learner.

Our strategic objectives 2017-2019



Over the next three years,
we will work to:



Objective 1



Build awareness of the importance of literacy for a more inclusive Ireland

To achieve this, we will:

- use research to show why literacy matters to Irish society;
- work with our colleagues in the ETBs to make sure that learning experiences are accessible and enjoyable for all learners;
- support the ETBs to promote their service as the primary access point for adults;
- involve 'champions of learning' to encourage greater engagement in and enjoyment of lifelong learning; and
- support organisations such as education and training services, health services, local authorities, libraries, private services, utilities, public bodies and charities to provide literacy-friendly services.



We will know that we are making progress on this objective when we see:

- ➔ NALA research and resources being used to inform policy and practice;
- ➔ more people volunteering to support literacy and numeracy development;
- ➔ more organisations using plain English in their communications with the public;
- ➔ more organisations taking part in NALA audits and awards; and
- ➔ greater appreciation of the power of literacy and numeracy skills development in contributing to personal and community development and societal good.

Objective 2



Lead innovation in the teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and basic digital skills

To achieve this, we will:

- ➔ work with SOLAS and the ETBs to implement the adult literacy and numeracy strategy as set out in the FET Strategy 2014-2019;
- ➔ support SOLAS in agreed aspects of work, such as, the Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy, the Learner Forum and the FET Framework for Workforce Development.
- ➔ create self-directed, peer, blended, distance and eLearning programmes and supports that help people with literacy and numeracy needs to use everyday technology and digital media;
- ➔ provide continuous professional development (CPD) for tutors and other professionals involved in supporting literacy and lifelong learning in line with the FET Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019¹⁵; and
- ➔ provide opportunities for those interested in literacy and numeracy to gather, discuss and share best practice.

We will know that we are making progress on this objective when we see:

- ➔ stronger partnership working with SOLAS, the ETBs and other relevant organisations;
- ➔ strengthened infrastructure to support adult literacy skills development and participation;
- ➔ more people returning to and enjoying literacy and numeracy learning;
- ➔ more tutors attending NALA events, learning new ways to teach and develop their practice; and
- ➔ more people using www.helpmykidlearn.ie and www.writeon.ie.

Objective 3



Seek further investment in raising adult literacy levels in Ireland

To achieve this, we will:

- deepen appreciation by politicians and policy-makers of how improving literacy and numeracy skills can impact positively on Irish society;
- make the case, to politicians and policy-makers, for increased long-term funding for literacy, numeracy and digital skills;
- collaborate with organisations which can help us achieve lifelong learning policy and practice in line with the targets set out in the National Skills Strategy 2025; and
- define and support the measurement of the positive effect of literacy strategies and initiatives.



We will know that we are making progress on this objective when:

- a greater value is placed on literacy through increased investment and support;
- our strategic alliances and partnerships are influencing positive change;
- better ways to monitor and measure the impact of literacy strategies and initiatives are in place;
- more employers are supporting and investing in literacy and numeracy development for their staff; and
- more people access literacy and numeracy supports.

Our way of working in NALA

We will continue to strengthen our organisational capacity to deliver our strategic objectives.

To do this, we will:

- measure the contribution, effectiveness and efficiency of our work;
- promote NALA as a trusted advocate for literacy, numeracy and lifelong learning;
- develop staff core competencies through continuous professional development;
- make sure that our systems work to implement our strategic priorities;
- use social media, digital developments, online resources and IT advancements in all aspects of our work including listening to the learner, tracking, measuring and monitoring our work;
- expand our work into areas like health and employment where literacy makes a difference;
- work collaboratively;
- maintain financial sustainability; and
- continue to expand NALA's membership, serving our members and engaging members in our work.

Conclusion

NALA wants to use this strategic plan to help us achieve our vision and mission. We will:

1. Build awareness of the importance of literacy for a more inclusive Ireland – we want to encourage everyone to do something.
2. Lead innovation in the teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and basic digital skills – we know we can do better.
3. Seek further investment in raising adult literacy and numeracy levels in Ireland – we want our politicians to do more.

Our vision is an Ireland where adult literacy is a valued right, where everyone can develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and individuals can participate fully in society.

A word of thanks

We thank everyone who contributed to the development of this strategic plan. We listened to your views and, as far as possible, included them in the plan.

Glossary of acronyms and terms

Advocate

A person or organisation that actively supports or argues for a cause, idea or policy, which may involve raising awareness, recommending particular action and, or, speaking up for individuals' rights

Assessment

A guide to knowing what stage a learner is at when they start tuition and how well they are progressing

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

Collaborate

Work together with other people or groups on an activity or to reach a particular goal

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

Digital Skills

Life-skills that involve the knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to use a range of digital devices and technology such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers and the confidence to use these skills in everyday situations

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

eLearning (Electronic Learning)

Learning involving the use of a computer or electronic device, for example a mobile phone

Equality

A state of being equal or equivalent

EU Skills Agenda

An initiative of the EU Commission which aims to improve the skill level of people in the member states

Evaluate

Study something carefully and measure its features against certain standards to see what is good or needs to be improved

Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019

An Irish Government plan to provide high quality, integrated further education and training opportunities for learners and students

Healthy Ireland

An Irish Government plan to improve health and wellbeing

Implement

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

Learner Forum (also known as the National Adult Learner Forum)

A forum to allow learners to express their views and influence national further education and training policy

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

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life

An Irish Government plan to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people

Mission

An aim of a group, an organisation or a person

National Skills Strategy 2025

An Irish Government plan to improve the education and training sector to ensure that all learners and students have the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy

Numeracy

A life-skill 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

Partnership

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

Pathways to Work

An Irish Government plan to increase the opportunities and support for people who are unemployed

Peer Learning

Students learning with and from each other as fellow learners

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

Quality

A way of saying how good or bad something is

Self-directed Learning

A process where the learner takes the initiative to pursue a learning opportunity and the responsibility for completing their learning

SOLAS

The Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland

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

Student Development Fund

A fund from which NALA makes grants for student development activities

TUSLA

The Irish Government agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children and families

Vision

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

Workforce Development Strategy

A plan, as part of the FET Strategy 2014-2019, which aims to improve Ireland's economic stability by focusing on people

www.helpmykidlearn.ie

This website brings together relevant information for parents and the wider community to support children's literacy and numeracy development

www.writeon.ie

This website provides free, online courses for people wanting to improve their literacy, numeracy, computer and other skills and gain a QQI qualification



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NALA website:
www.nala.ie

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

Plain English website:
www.simplyput.ie

Freephone support line:
1800 20 20 65



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