

## National Adult Literacy Agency

**Board Meeting**  
**Wednesday 11 December 2019**  
**12:00 – 14:00**

Present: Mary Bambrick (MB), Chairperson, Noel Phelan (NP), Anna Touhy Halligan (ATH), Louise Canavan (LC), Liz O'Sullivan (LOS), Lee Mitchel (LM), Sinead Ryan (SR), David Heylin (DH), Michael Duffy (MD).

Apologies: Kevin Kelly (KK), Marie O'Gorman (MO'G), Olive Phelan (OP), Hazel Cryan (HC), Pat Ayton (PA).

In Attendance: Inez Bailey (IB).

Minute Taker: Miriam Johnston (MJ).

<b>Decisions taken at the meeting:</b>
The minutes of the September and October meetings were approved for publication.
The Protected Disclosures Policy was approved.
The recent round of accreditation was approved.
Policies and Procedures in relation to the development of staff were approved.
IB was authorised to submit the Annual Funding Allocation Request to SOLAS.

1. **Declaration of any conflict of interest** – none.

2. **Previous minutes and matters arising.**

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted. The correct version of the minutes with redactions was noted and the redacted minutes were approved for publication. The minutes of the September meeting were approved for publication.

- Waterford has been chosen as the venue for the 2020 AGM.
- MJ explained that the reference to the Chairman of the Audit and Finance Sub-committee in the Protected Disclosures Policy was to afford NALA and the maker of a disclosure an opportunity to have an internal appeal if the maker of a disclosure was not satisfied with the way the disclosure was handled in the first instance. The policy as presented to the Board at the previous meeting was approved subject to clarification of this matter in the policy.
- MJ confirmed that all members of the Board had supplied completed RBO forms. The RBO unit is struggling to deal with the volume of applications and the update on the Companies Registration Office website suggested that it might be weeks before the forms are processed.
- IB explained that the requested report on the extent of 1:1 provision was still outstanding because she was awaiting data which she expected to have shortly.

3. **Reports from all Sub-committees:**

a. **Student Sub-committee**

The draft minutes of the most recent meeting of the Sub-committee were circulated at the meeting. MD raised a matter that had been discussed at the meeting of the Sub-committee – the situation where a recipient of Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit wishes to engage in voluntary work or training. IB explained that to get either of these payments a person must be available for and looking for work. If a person wants to do voluntary work they must first get the permission of their Case Officer at their INTREO office. Similarly, if a person wishes to do a training course, the course must be approved by the Case Officer and it should form part of their DEASP Personal Progression Plan. It was noted that some Case Officers do not allow recipients to attend literacy classes. MD intends to pass on this information at the next meeting of the Sub-committee.

**b. Audit and Finance Sub-committee**

DH discussed the management accounts for November. The accounts still showed a surplus, in line with the forecast for the end of November. It was expected that there would be a big expenditure in December. It was noted that grants due from MSD and Better World Books had not yet been received but it was expected that they would be made before the end of the year. The Board was informed that Barr Pomeroy would carry out an internal audit on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of December. Mazars had taken over the statutory external audit and intended to carry out the audit in January.

DH informed the Board that SOLAS had requested that NALA submit the Annual Funding Allocation Request on or before 13 December. In previous years this Request had been made in January. There was a discussion in relation to the amount to be requested and it was agreed that an additional €150,000 should be requested for 2020.

DH gave an update on the recruitment process for the position of Finance and Support Services Manager. Interviews had taken place on the previous day. There was some discussion about the process of taking up references before a formal offer had been made. IB assured the Board that permission would be obtained from the candidates, that no candidate would be expected to obtain a reference from their current employer and that the Staff and Policy Sub-committee had been satisfied with the process when the matter had been discussed at its meeting earlier that day. It was hoped to have the position filled before Christmas.

**c. Staff and Policy Sub-committee**

MB informed the Board that Michelle Sodan had joined the Sub-committee but would not be joining the Board. The Sub-committee had discussed the recruitment of a Finance and Support Services Manager but there was nothing further to add to the account that DH had given.

There was an update on the CITO project. the position had been offered to the candidate who had been ranked second in the competition and this candidate was available to start in January. Other matters that had been discussed at the meeting were some contracts that were ending, some staff on sick leave and research which was being done into a new performance management system.

### **Education, Training and Assessment Sub-committee**

IB briefed the Board on the most recent meeting of the Sub-committee. The most recent round of accreditation, which would be the final one on the current system, had been very strong with awards for 674 learners. The sub-committee recommended that the Board approve the round and the Board did so.

There had been a discussion in relating to the updating of WriteOn. There was an acknowledgement of the difficulty of transferring old material to the new site. The Board was told that all content will not be available when the site goes live. The recommendation of the Sub-committee had been that the content be released on a phased basis so that bugs can be identified and fixed in the remaining content. The launch of the new site is due to take place at the end of January.

In relation to the QQI re-engagement project, QQI had reverted with three queries. It appeared from subsequent conversations that they were satisfied in relation to two of the queries but not in relation to the third. IB informed the Board that she was to meet QQI on Thursday 12 December in an effort to complete the process.

#### **4. Budget 2020 Submission and Implementation Plan for Strategy 2020-22**

A question was raised about the likely date of publication of the FET Strategy. IB said we had no date but had been assured that literacy and numeracy will be mentioned throughout the strategy.

NALA will be asked to submit a plan which will be considered by the Active Inclusion Unit. The founding legislation requires SOLAS to have a Literacy and Numeracy strategy and it was felt that SOLAS had an enhanced understanding of literacy and fully embraced the area.

IB informed the Board that the Strategic Plan had gone for printing. Work had been done, in conjunction with O'Brien Governance Design, on the Implementation Plan. A good skeleton of a three year plan had been produced and further work was needed to produce a more detailed plan for 2020. There was a certain amount of work which would have to be carried over and some work which always needs to be done. The actions under Part 1 of the Strategic Plan were fairly specific but those under Part 11 and 111 needed more detail. There is to be an effort to enhance collaborative work between the teams. At the moment it appeared that there were ten major projects with the other projects being subsidiary and their achievement dependant on the major projects. In light of the accelerated need for the Annual Funding Allocation Request IB had prioritised it and the Board authorised her to submit the Request.

#### **5. Policies and Procedures relating to the development of staff**

MB presented the policy and explained the changes that had been recommended by the Staff and Policy Sub-committee. She advised that it was likely that the policy would need to be revised in 2020 when the improved appraisal system had been developed. The Board approved the policy as presented.

## **6. CEO's Report**

The Coyle evaluation of the 'Take the first Step' campaign indicates good results for a relatively small media spend.

NALA provided help to about 300 individuals who phoned as a result of the campaign. It was agreed that this was a very small number in comparison to the numbers of phone calls that were received ten years ago. It was agreed that the emphasis needs to change to convincing people of the value of improving their literacy and numeracy skills.

There was a discussion about the An Post Book Awards where Veronica, a learner from City of Dublin ETB, shared her story via a video. MB was thanked for her help with the event. It was noted that there is no guarantee that sponsorship from An Post will continue into the future.

MD made the point that the ETBs could make more use of the literacy ambassadors who had been trained by NALA. In the ensuing discussion it was agreed that it was likely that there would be more demand for such ambassadors with the increased emphasis on regional and local service in ETBs.

It was noted that three separate reports will be launched by SOLAS in the new year. There was a discussion about the CITO project and it was reported that Ireland was getting very good data and that most organisations that were approached to help with the project agreed and that they had stayed with the project subsequently. It was felt that this demonstrated belief in the project and in the organisation.

IB reported on NALA's presentations to the Oireachtas Committees on Education and Travellers. It was hoped that a meeting with the Minister for Education would take place in the new year.

## **7. End of year report**

The end of year report was circulated at the meeting. The Board noted that most of the actions had been completed with some more expected to be completed before the end of Q1 2020. The Plain English Accredited Training project had not been completed as the plain English service had been too busy to engage in that project. It was agreed that special attention would be paid to estimating the resources required for the implementation of the new Strategic Plan so that NALA does not take on more work than it can handle.

IB also pointed out that there can be a time lag between work being done and the anticipated outcome. An example is the Well Now project which was delivered by NALA as a pilot project in 2017 and is now being taken up by Local Development Companies.

In general IB reported that the situation with SOLAS, ETBI, sponsors and relevant Government departments were all good and that it was intended to focus more on those relationships in 2020.

The Board acknowledged the work of the staff of NALA in delivering the Strategic Plan 2017-19.

## **8. AGM and Board members status for 2020 AGM and membership**

MB asked members to go through the list which had been included in the Board pack. It was explained that although all Board members step down before the AGM

it usually happened that members who had served on the Board and who were eligible and willing to put themselves forward were re-elected. It was useful to know which of the existing members did not intend to stand again. KK had indicated that he would not be running again, NP confirmed that he would not be running again and MB indicated that she would not be eligible to run again. LM indicated that he would be prepared to run again. MB asked the other members to let her know their intentions as soon as possible. She reminded those members who intended to run again to remember that they needed to be in membership to be eligible and that they would be contacted by a member of staff in that regard.

MB said that it would be desirable that the Board would have a tutor as a member. It was noted that the Tutors' Forum may provide an opportunity to encourage tutors to put themselves forward for election. MD felt, in the interest of diversity, that it would be good to have a board member from one of the minority groups in Ireland. Reference was made to previous years when the Board had used its power to co-opt additional members to gain expertise in particular areas.

**9. Private Members**

Not requested.

**10. Google analytics**

Noted.

**11. Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 5 February 2020.

MB wished the Board and staff of NALA a Happy Christmas.

**Please note: All sensitive and personal matters will be removed from NALA's Board minutes before publishing.**

<b>Actions from the meeting:</b>
Inform MB of intention to stand for re-election – Board members