

National Adult Literacy Agency	
Minutes of the board	
Date:	21 st of October 2020
Time:	17:00 – 19:00
Venue:	Virtual

Chairperson:	Margaret Kelly
Present (Charity Trustees):	Margaret Kelly (MK), Chairperson, Gwen Redmond (GR) Ciaran Casey (CC), Pat Ayton (PA), Hazel Cryan (HC), Marie O’Gorman (MO’G), Kevin Kelly (KK), Lee Mitchell (LM)
Quorum:	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
In Attendance (Others):	Paul Cahill (PC) Clare McNally (CMcN) Elaine Cohalan (EC) Minute Taker: Niamh O’Connor (NOC)
Apologies:	Marie O’Gorman (MO’G), Michael Duffy (MD) Olive Phelan (OL) Anna Touhy Halligan (ATH)

Approval of the minutes of the meeting of 2 September 2020
The minutes of the previous meeting on 2 September 2020 were adopted and all redactions approved.
Matters arising:
Margaret Kelly welcomed the board and gave an introduction as the new Chairperson. She asked members and staff to introduce themselves.
Declarations of conflicts of interest:
None
Review of Membership
MK commented that the ETA and Student Subcommittee had the appropriate number of members. She noted that if she stayed on the Audit and Finance committee they would also have the required amount of board members. She further noted that the staff and policy committee required another member and asked the board if there were any volunteers. She requested that any board members who may be interested notify her within

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a week and noted if there was no interest from the board that they would then begin the process of co-opting. She added that ideally they would co-opt one member with a finance background and one member with a policy background. PA noted that she would touch base with a few people this week who might serve in the policy role, and get back to Margaret next week.

PC commented on the position of Honorary Treasurer and asked CC whether he was still interested in the role. CC noted that he is currently seeking approval from work and that he will notify them once this has been completed.

MK referred to literature from other jurisdictions and noted that the idea of an individual holding the position of Chairperson and Treasurer was not ideal. However, it was best to remain flexible on this where necessary. The board agreed. She noted that DH is willing to stay on the Audit and Finance Committee as Chairperson.

MK also noted that there were a lot of supplementary papers for this meeting and going forward they will only be sending supplementary documentation late if it is an issue of substance. She added that as an oral update of the subcommittee meetings is given at the board meetings, NALA will not be rushing to get the most recent subcommittee minutes done for the board meetings going forward.

Student Subcommittee report

It was noted that there has been no Student Subcommittee meeting since the last board meeting.

Audit and Finance Subcommittee report

The draft minutes of the meeting of the Subcommittee on 14th of October 2020 were taken as read.

PC gave update on the last meeting and informed the board that they received a presentation by the auditors on the audit plan and noted that the auditors are doing additional work in relation to COVID-19 going concern alterations. He noted that a good proportion of the surplus of €87,000 in the financial statements relates to projects started late. He further noted that the main cause for concern at present is the decision on what can be done with the student fund and commented that all other expenditure should be in line with forecast.

PA queried when the student fund needs to be spent by, CMC confirmed that it should be spent by the end of year and they are currently waiting to hear from Solas on what they can do about this.

Staff and Policy Subcommittee report

NOC gave an update on the last meeting of the staff and policy subcommittee, noting PC's proposal to recruit an accounts assistant before the end of the year. The minutes of the meeting on 14th of October 2020 were taken as read. New staff included; the CEO who will be starting on the 9th November, three part time professional development staff (for the Marking Progress Guidelines) and two research assistants (for the CITO project.) It was not possible to get a suitable candidate for the eLearning Officer post. Other options will be

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explored to address the current needs in this area, and the possibility of recruiting for the position will be reviewed in the New Year.

Education Training and Assessment subcommittee report

PA gave an update on the last meeting of the ETA held on the 21st of September and noted the new member. MK noted EC was to give an update on free 3G for education providers. EC informed the board that she has researched this but has yet to receive any clarity. She has recently been told to contact the Department of Education and Skills for information. She further noted that the Learn with NALA numbers are going very well. The minutes of the meeting on 21st of September 2020 were taken as read.

External Authentication Procedure

EC updated the Board on this document and noted that the document has been updated to reflect Learn with NALA and recommendations from QQI. She noted that the internal verification process is carried out by the DLS tutors, and tutors in centres may also assess. EC noted that the work that comes in is reviewed and JB carries out the internal verification administrative role, ensuring documentation is complete and carries out random sampling.

PA further noted that the Subcommittee took on board what came out of re-engagement process with QQI and amended the policy to reflect that.

CC queried whether the external verification would take place in Ranelagh as outlined in the policy taking into account COVID-19. EC noted that they could still technically conduct some in Ranelagh, and that they did carry out some in August when restrictions were more flexible. MK stated that it might be best to amend the policy to reflect both options (either in Ranelagh or by electronic means should this prove necessary due to Covid-19) and PA agreed with same. MK queried whether two external verifiers was enough in light of COVID-19. EC explained that as the platform is currently in the developing stages, she believed they would be comfortable with two covering the work load. She noted that if the external verifiers were to get sick they had the option of moving processing to a new date, as QQI provides certification six times per year.

The board approved the policy subject to the amendment discussed above.

CRA Minute Template

NOC updated the board on this document and noted the points that were discussed around digital signatures at the Staff and Policy meeting. She confirmed that the digital signature's will only be used while the board meetings are being held virtually and prior written approval will be received from the Secretary and Chairperson before placing the signature on same.

The board approved the use of the template going forward and the procedure for signing the minutes.

CEO's Report

CMcN gave an update on the 10 Year Strategy for Literacy, Numeracy and Digital skills and noted she attended this meeting together with combination of representatives. She informed the board that there were many representatives at the meeting including; representatives from Aontas, Citizens Information and government departments, with the exception of the

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Department of Health, noting that they had commented that they would like to see that department attend in future.

CMcN informed the board that this was the first meeting. A background paper and two consultation templates (a long one and a short one) were being prepared. She noted that NALA is currently working with Solas now in order to finesse these documents and that the Plain English team and Helen Ryan have been involved in this stage. She expects these documents will issue in early November, but the time being allowed for responses is not yet clear. She informed the board that NALA will also be asked to join the Solas technical group which will involve more strategic development. She noted that the most important thing at present is to encourage as many organisation as possible to put in submissions in particular, ETB's, Students, Tutors, so as many voices as possible can be heard.

KK noted that it hasn't yet been identified how ALOA will fit into the working group, and encouraged NALA to keep them in mind, highlighting that it's important that ALOA have a voice in this project. CMcN confirmed that she will note this.

MK commented it is important that the board contribute to the NALA submission, as the strategy will shape the next ten years. The board discussed the possibility of convening a board meeting in advance of the next board meeting in order to discuss same. CMcN noted that she will ask Helen Ryan to share everything that has been compiled to date and she would think the week of the 9th of November would be preferable as the new CEO will have started at this point. The board agreed that the matter is important enough to warrant a special board meeting.

CMcN noted that as soon as she gets the dates she will revert to the board. PA confirmed that it would be useful to get an outline and documentation from NALA when it is ready so that the Board can contribute to the process. MK advised the board that in the meantime she would recommend that members read the July report 'Literacy for Life' She also noted she would circulate some notes she had made herself on the key points in other OECD/EU literacy reports. CMcN confirmed she will include all relevant documentation in a pack for all members.

EC asked the board if there were any other questions on the CEO report. She updated the board on a number of matters that have happened since the report, including the communication NALA has had with the Department for Rural and Community Development. This communication was in relation to the national broadband scheme and Learn with NALA. She also noted that NALA will be launching the numeracy report that was done over 2019 and 2020 in partnership with UL and UCC on numeracy levels 1-3 in FET. This report is currently being finalised with Solas. She further noted that the CEO would usually sign this and asked MK would she like to do it if there was no CEO present at the time. MK confirmed she would sign if the CEO was not in place when the signature was needed.

2021 Board dates for noting

MK noted the last board meeting for this year will be on the 9th of December 2020.

She informed the board that changes were made to the original board schedule after the subcommittee meetings as they had noted that the AGM date would not be convenient due to St. Patricks Day and also taking into account Easter holidays.

The board approved the dates for 2021. The board further approved that whilst the meetings are held virtually a time of 5pm is suitable and when physical meetings take place in the future they will revert to the original time of 1-3pm.

CRA Annual Report

NOC introduced the document to the board. MK outlined her suggested change to the section 'Details of the selection process your charity has in place in deciding who will benefit from the service' noting that it is important to reference the ETB's in this section. The board approved this change.

KK queried the large surplus in accordance with the financial section of the report. PC informed the board that the figures are based on the accounts and also the Charities SORP, which requires them to make adjustments and defer expenditure and noted that some expenditure was also capitalised. He further informed the board that the surplus does not equate to the cash received and should be more closely aligned in time. He also noted that they would've received cash from Solas in relation to this that wouldn't necessarily be recognised and added that there was income coming into the SORP accounts from 2018.

KK asked if there was any way this could be recognised on the form. PC stated that it could not be recognised as the CRA is aligned with the Charities SORP and these would be the appropriate figures in this sense.

PA queried the sections reading 'Adult Education' and NOC noted that this was the only option in relation to dropdowns from the CRA and agreed that this wasn't ideal. PA also queried the section in relation to the 1-9 Volunteers. NOC noted that there was one volunteer in 2019 with the DLS service.

The report was approved by the board.

Working from Home Protocol

MK introduced the document and noted that the main costs at this stage are in relation to the flu injection and well-being training for staff and noted that at most this would be around €13,000. She updated the board on the issues that were discussed at the staff and policy meeting, in particular the distinctions between the staff who are contracted to work in the NALA office and the staff contracted to work from home.

KK noted a typo on page 6 in section 3.2.2 'as an expense.' He further noted a typo in the GDPR section of the policy 'the appropriate sharepoint link.'

KK asked the management why NALA opted to use GotoMeetings and not Zoom. EC explained that at the time NALA already had a corporate account with GotoMeetings as they used it for webinars, and Zoom was much more expensive and they did not have a use for ten licenses. She noted that NALA mostly use Microsoft Teams for internal communications. KK noted that society is very familiar with zoom and that in particular it is more familiar to people with reduced digital skills.

KK commented on the phone expenses section of the policy and queried how comfortable staff would be with submitting their phone bills. EC agreed that this was a good point and noted that one of those options had been removed in the updated version of policy as there was a softphone application that would enable staff to use their own phone as their office phone. KK suggested a tick the box section in relation to phone usage bands for staff for example €10-20, €20-30 etc to encourage trust in staff. EC confirmed she would be happy to make that amendment.

PC informed the board that incidental phone calls would be covered by the working from home allowance and only one or two staff members would be submitting phone bills. He

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noted that one of these staff members who recently submitted phone bills was just asked to present their normal phone bill and a phone bill reflecting the NALA calls, noting the difference in same. KK agreed with this approach and noted that it is important to be mindful of the staff engagement feedback. MK clarified that an amendment would be made to the phone expenses section on page 7 to 'phone bills paid on the basis of vouched expenses.'

CC referred to the Staff and Policy subcommittee minutes in relation to section 3.1 of the policy and the €3.20 working from home allowance. He queried whether this is a tax benefit. EC explained that there are NALA staff who are contracted to work from home and facilitated to get the tax benefit. She noted that this doesn't impact on gross pay but impacts on bottom line tax and they claim it is as an expense. PC added that NALA are proposing to pay staff €3.20 of an allowance in addition to their salary and noted that Revenue are proposing that if employers don't pay the €3.20 then staff can claim it from revenue themselves.

The policy was approved subject to the above amendments and edits

OBGD Presentation

NOC informed the board that OBGD would be presenting at the next board meeting and explained the proposed format for the meeting. She noted that subcommittee members who are co-opted will also be welcome to attend the presentation as they contributed to the findings of these reports.

MK mentioned it would be preferable to have a few slides.

NOC advised that preferably OBGD would present at the beginning of the meeting and the board meeting would commence straight after. PA mentioned the possibility of lengthening the overall time for the meeting in that case. LM noted that it would better to start earlier rather than end the meeting later.

NOC noted that dependant on the agenda this would be done and MK added that the consultation on the 10 year strategy may also need to be taken into account in relation to the agenda.

Private members

The management team and NOC left the meeting.

The remuneration package for the new CEO was approved by the board.

Any other business (AOB):

None.

Next Meeting

Date: 9th of December 2020

Time: 4.30pm (Starting early to allow for OBGD presentation)

Venue: Virtually

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Actions Arising From This Meeting:			
Item No.	Action	Person Applicable	Timeframe
1.	Review co-option of 2 additional board members.	MK/NOC/PC	Next few weeks
2.	CMcN to revert to board with documentation and dates for consultation on 10 year strategy. It may be necessary to have a special board meeting on NALA's submission to the 10 year strategy, but a smaller group (mainly staff and policy subcommittee) will meet first to bring a draft to an advanced stage. Any member of the board or subcommittees will be free to join this, if they wish to do so.	CMcN/Board/MK	Next few weeks

	
9/12/2020	9/12/2020
Chairperson's signature and date	Secretary's signature and date
MARGARET KELLY	PATRICIA AYTON
Chairperson's name (printed)	Secretary's signature and date

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