

National Adult Literacy Agency	
Minutes of board (Meeting in relation to the NALA submission to the 10 Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy)	
Date:	2 December 2020
Time:	5pm-7pm
Venue:	Virtually

Chairperson:	Margaret Kelly
Present (Charity Trustees):	Pat Ayton (PA), Kevin Kelly (KK), Ciaran Casey (CC), Maria O’Gorman (MOG)
In Attendance (Others):	Niamh O’Connor (NOC) Minute Taker Colleen Dube (CD) CEO Clare McNally (CMcN) NALA Communications Manager Helen Ryan (HR) NALA Policy Officer
Apologies:	Gwen Redmond (GR) Olive Phelan (OP)

Approval of the minutes of the meeting of the last board meeting	
N/A- will be reviewed at normal board meeting on the 9 th of December.	
Matters arising:	
None	
Declarations of conflicts of interest:	
None	

Issues of Principle

Literacy target

MK briefed the board on the issues of principle and the percentages outlined in the submission in relation to the reduction of individuals with unmet literacy needs, noting Japan is the best in the OECD PIAAC survey with 5% below level 2. CD noted it would be useful to use a reference such as Japan, as it is important to have measurable targets. KK commented that literacy should be viewed as a continuum rather than an absolute, and the mark of success should be based on the newest statistics at that time rather than what we are dealing with at present. CD added that particularly in relation to digital, there must be constant review and reflection. KK queried whether it is reasonable to have the same targets as other countries taking into account different languages, the phonetic natures of some languages, and how these can make literacy more challenging. MK noted that the School Literacy Strategy has targets, and Government will expect the Adult Strategy to also have targets. She queried whether the board would be happy to leave the literacy target as reducing from 18% down to 5% target, as per the current draft of the submission. MOG noted that it perhaps something more realistic would be preferable. HR added that a target of 7% was used in the skills group that they have benchmarked previously and the meeting agreed to show this target instead, ie. 18% reducing to 7%. CMcN queried whether they would be required to state that this is Level 1. MK noted that the OECD set out those below level 2 as not having the skills necessary for participation in a modern economy. .

Numeracy target

MK noted that in numeracy the submission states 25% who are less than level 2 and added that Japan is best at 8.2%. She noted that going to 10% may be ambitious here. HR suggested 12% but after further discussion of the digital target, it was agreed that the numeracy target should show a fall from 25% to 10%.

Digital target

MK explained the OECD PIAAC figures showed 42% as having less than L2 in digital skills, suggesting a reduction to 20% KK noted that engagement would be much easier and suggested using a lower figure. The growth in the use of digital skills in society in the next 10 years will generate an increased demand for training in this area, he said. CC agreed and recommended no higher than 10% and this was agreed. HR queried the language in this section and noted that NALA would normally use 'at level 1.' MK noted that 'at least level one' would be appropriate here. This includes the two categories identified in PIAAC as scoring at Level 1 and below Level 1.

Monetary details

MK introduced the next submission item for discussion. MK noted the figures of 7million and 50million outlined in the submission and sought feedback from the board. She noted that in relation to these figures, she had based them on unit costs from different programmes, however these were very variable. CC asked MK for the comparable figure for 2020 (Solas shows €27m for Adult Literacy in 2019, separately from ITABE and Community Education) added that he believed that a €7 million increase would be achievable in that context. KK noted that the real spend on adult literacy is likely to be much higher as a large amount of people receiving literacy support aren't on literacy programmes and more investment would be needed to meet that.

CD noted that there are literacy numeracy and digital elements happening throughout the system. However we aren't aware of the total cost. She further noted that we would need to qualify any figures used. She added that they do not seem to have enough information for an objective baseline. KK commented that the wording '*across the FET service*' is an issue as they need to highlight that this figure should be investment in the literacy service. MK stated that the literacy service is across the ETBs and NALA and a ballpark figure is needed here. HR suggested they reference the 2006 Oireachtas Report that stated the need for at least 100 million a year and additional funds for ancillary services It was agreed that, rather than putting figures in the NALA submission, we should highlight the Oireachtas report figures,

point out that costs have increased since then and that these figures did not provide for digital skills among the general population.

Workplace Literacy

HR noted that IBEC have stated that they are supportive of the State stepping in in relation to paid learning leave. She also noted that in the past some SMEs were reluctant to upskill employees as they would then be in the position to leave.

PA joined the meeting.

PA described to the board several examples of workplace literacy programmes. KK highlighted that big multinational companies are very in favour of releasing employees however small businesses can't afford to do this. HR noted that on page 19 of submission there is a piece on paid learning leave that will target SME's and further noted big wins could be achieved in the workplace if they were paid to release employees. MK indicated she had interpreted the reference to paid learning leave as meaning the employer would pay, not the State. HR clarified the submission was intended to signify the State would pay, but it would be targeted at SMEs only. She agreed that this needs to be clearer. CD commented that they need to note that release of employees for paid learning leave could be challenging for the SME sector and government intervention may be needed here.

NALA's role in the future

MK cited the reference in the report to the expansion of the DLS and Freephone service. This was not quantified or limited in any way, and was likely to ring alarm bells across the ETB system as encroaching on their role in direct provision of tuition. We should not alienate the sector on which delivery of the Strategy depends. She had suggested in her draft that while the Learn with NALA platform would be expanded to cater for independent learners and those using the ETB system, the distance learning phone service would be confined to students for whom the ETB service was either unavailable or unsuitable. However, this was not reflected in the current text. KK supported this argument, and also noted that the service Nala runs

is excellent and provides a service for learners who do not want to attend ETB services for various reasons. CMcN highlighted that NALA do not want to be construed as competitive and that they can work on the wording in this section. CD informed the board that in the DLS service they are seeing that there is a new profile of learners recently, and this may be related to Covid-19 or other contextual issues. She added that these learners are not quite ready to engage with Learn with NALA. She noted that there are identifiable gaps and NALA can support in these areas. HR noted that the DLS expansion is not necessarily more students but more hours for students. She agreed that this piece needs to be clearer.

Innovation Fund

HR explained the context in relation to this fund and noted that there is no funding available for experimental projects or ideas. MK indicated her fears that Solas would rush to project based activity which would lead to time based limited funding and an uncertain future. Rather, innovation was needed across the entire system, with a willingness to test new approaches and explore and document new forms of provision. CD noted that the wording 'flexible provision and funding' may be appropriate here.

Other issues:

Visiting Tutor:

KK mentioned the idea of the visiting tutor outlined in the submission. While he welcomed the idea of a flexible visiting service as proposed, he was concerned that (a) the word visiting had connotations of the visiting teacher for students with disabilities, and (b) he wanted the flexibility to employ full time staff who could engage in outreach, brokerage, forging partnerships, administration and tuition rather than being confined to a 22 hour tuition only week., He noted that some of this work is already being carried out by resource workers who have flexibility to go into the community and meet different groups. MK noted that the term visiting was used initially as they would be on the move. PA mentioned that in the Dublin area they do not have resource workers and it's the tutors who do this work. She added that this would not be their sole role.

Staffing structure

PA further noted that the staffing needs to be looked from an ETB perspective and they need to give ETB's an opportunity to build a staffing structure. KK agreed. KK highlighted that they need staff to be able to go out into community to recruit the learners to build the links with the hardest to reach learners. CD noted that this type of work is in relation to development of literacy within the community and added that they need to connect the various pieces in the submission at present. KK agreed with this. CD noted that amendments would be made to the provision section. KK emphasised that structure is needed and not additional work for existing staff. PA agreed that there would be huge added value if someone was hired on an all year round basis for development work. The importance of having a proper structure which would meet ETB strategic needs under the Strategy was stressed, rather than having add on ad hoc provision.

MK noted that they should avoid being too specific about what a new ETB structure will look like, as this was the remit of the ETBs, but agreed there was a need for a proper structure to be developed. KK noted that the message needs to be consistent across all submissions. CD noted that she will be attending several meetings with ETB representatives in the next two weeks. KK noted that in some ETB's it will be primarily the ALO's putting it together but most ETB's have approached the ALO's for input.

Digital Literacy

KK directed the board to the digital literacy paragraph on page 16 and noted that he did not think that this was a linear issue. KK added that people with literacy issues can join an IT class and work on both at the same time. HR noted that there was a concern that digital has taken off and that literacy and numeracy may be forgotten in the process. KK suggested reviewing this section and noted that there are also instances when an individual may have no literacy difficulties however due to their lack of digital skills they are as removed from society as anyone else.

Literacy Learning Guarantee

KK commented on the literacy learning guarantee on page 19 and queried whether the inclusion of digital skills needs to level four should be included in this section. KK added that this would need massive funding. MK said that what was intended was that:

(a) those with less than a Level 4 qualification would have access to literacy/numeracy and digital skills under the literacy guarantee.

(b) others, without an underlying literacy problem would have access to short bite size digital training to meet whatever their needs happened to be at the time. There was no quantification of level of qualification here. This would be free for pensioners, welfare recipients and dependants, and the low paid, but the rest could pay. CD highlighted that if government wants to deliver all their services digitally than this is needed.

PA queried whether the skills level required for an adult to engage in services digitally have been identified if government intends to deliver all services digitally. She noted that not everyone will need to be brought to a level 4. CC and CD agreed with this point.

Measurable goals and targets

PA directed the board to page 6 where it states '*strategy should have clear goals and measurable targets.*' PA queried how literacy levels will be measured and who will be measuring same in order to identify if goals have been reached. CMcN noted that this is to emphasise that government should have targets and robust systems in place. MK responded that it was envisaged that participation in the OECD PIAAC would continue to measure literacy levels at periodic intervals, but that the NALA submission also provided that the Learn with NALA platform would be developed to enable people to assess their own levels of literacy.

One to One Tuition – Volunteers

KK directed the board to page 22 in relation to recruitment and training of volunteers for one to one tuition, and suggested that this should be paid staff providing one to one tuition as opposed to volunteers. KK added that the logistics around managing volunteers is difficult. MK highlighted the risk in making the service unaffordable and suggested that perhaps they could expand on the resource workers role to enable them to provide this service. KK suggested *'enhanced one to one provision for those learners who have particular needs on a paid or volunteer basis.'* He noted that this appears throughout the document. HR noted that they can highlight that one to one support is very valuable and the logistics of providing same can be decided by government.

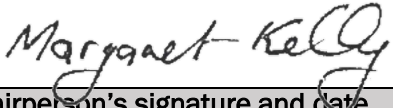
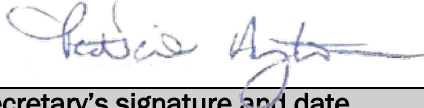
CD highlighted that this is only the start of the process and at this point they need to get broad principles in and ensure we have the essential elements in the document. She added that it needs to be ambitious and very clear.

MK reviewed the items that they had discussed throughout the item asked the board if there were any other issues that they would like to raise. The Board had no further questions or issues.

CC queried whether these issues would be discussed by the board at the next meeting. MK noted that there is a full agenda for the board meeting on the 9th and there may only be time for the board to highlight any major issues. CD noted she would be happy to speak to the board in general terms on the submission and can provide a cover note on same. PA noted it may be worth asking board members for their questions and comments in advance of the board meeting and these could be addressed at the meeting on the 9th. CD noted that a revised draft will be sent on Monday and board members can get in contact if they have any queries or concerns in relation to same.

Next Meeting	
Date:	9 December 2020
Time:	5.00pm (after OBGD presentation at 4.30)
Venue:	Virtually

Actions Arising From This Meeting:			
Item No.	Action	Person Applicable	Timeframe
	Revised version of submission to be sent to members ahead of board meeting on the 9 th of December.	HR/CMcN/CD	To be issued on Monday the 7 th of December

	
Chairperson's signature and date	Secretary's signature and date
MARGARET KELLY	PATRICIA AYTON
Chairperson's name (printed)	Secretary's signature and date

