



NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Literacy Matters

Keeping you up to date with literacy news in Ireland and informing you of the work NALA is doing



Championing health literacy

Haven Pharmacy awarded Crystal Clear pharmacy mark for all branches.

Also:

- NALA's response to the Adult Literacy For Life Strategy
- NALA's Tutoring Service and Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board students share their stories

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On the cover

Clare McNally, NALA Communications Manager, presents Daragh Connolly, Chairperson of Haven Pharmacy and pharmacist in Dungarvan, with the Crystal Clear award for all Haven Pharmacies. Read more on page 16.

The views expressed in Literacy Matters are not necessarily the views of NALA.

In this edition

Literacy Matters: Winter 2021

We hope you are keeping safe and thank you for your continued support. For this edition of Literacy Matters we wanted to share some inspiring stories from adult literacy and numeracy students and an update on our work.

The new 10-year Strategy for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy 'Adult Literacy for Life' was launched on International Literacy Day. Read our response on page 4.

We have an update on Linda Waldron's story on page 8. Linda has just started a course with Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board.

On page 11 we share an update on some of the fantastic projects in adult education centres that have been funded by NALA's Student Development Fund.

Haven Pharmacy Group have become the first pharmacy group to receive the Crystal Clear award for all their branches. Read more on page 16.

We have recently launched a new Professional Development course and resource for tutors on Preparing Learning Materials. Find out more on page 31.

We continue to provide support if you or anyone you know would like to brush up on reading, writing, numbers or technology. Call us on Freephone **1 800 20 20 65** or text **LEARN** to **50050**.

Best wishes from all the team at NALA



Adult Literacy For Life

Significant funding and strategic implementation will be needed to improve literacy levels, writes National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) CEO, Colleen Dube.

Imagine not being able to read a medicine label or help your child with homework. Unfortunately, that's the reality for half a million adults in Ireland. Even more have low levels of numeracy and digital literacy. People often ask how this can be in the land of Saints and Scholars and there are many reasons. The primary reason is that the Irish education system has failed these adults. Either by letting them leave too early or not making returning accessible or affordable.

This failure has a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities. People with the lowest literacy levels earn less income and are more likely to be unemployed. But the impact goes far beyond earnings and employment.

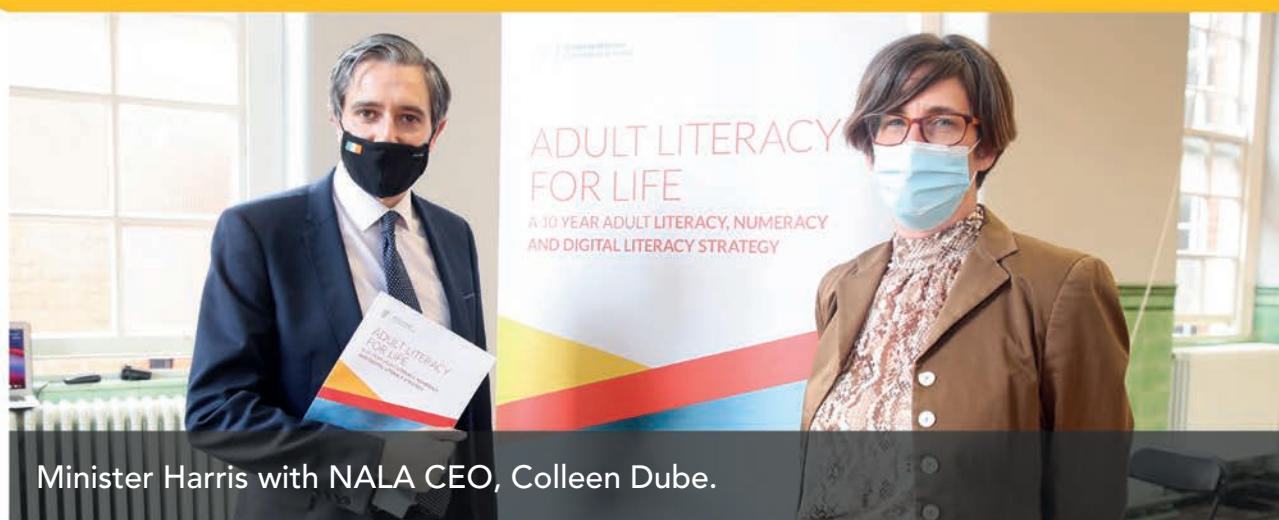
"Adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills are part of the solution to creating a more equal society and changing lives for the better."

Colleen Dube

Individuals with literacy difficulties are more likely to report poor health, to believe that they have little impact on political processes, are less likely to vote and understand public information. This was most apparent during the pandemic for those who struggled to understand public health messaging, keep in touch with family online and identify fake news.

The Government's new **10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 'Adult Literacy For Life'**

promises to change all this. They've set ambitious targets to ensure that everyone has the necessary skills to fully participate in society and realise their potential. The Strategy contains all the essential elements for lasting impact. The link between literacy and disadvantage is clear but significant funding, a robust implementation plan and measurable targets will be needed to achieve its ambitions.



Minister Harris with NALA CEO, Colleen Dube.

Many whom the education system failed first time round are fearful and embarrassed and lack confidence to return to learning. They will need to be encouraged, supported and provided with learning opportunities tailored to their needs – whenever and wherever they need it – be it in their family, their local community or in their workplace. Over 10 years the Strategy will need to strategically plan and significantly increase the provision of literacy learning opportunities, access points and providers.

Many people may be preoccupied with the CAO process recently but we must not forget that over 300,000 adults in Ireland do not have any formal education equivalent to the Leaving Certificate and almost 900,000 people have no formal education beyond school level.

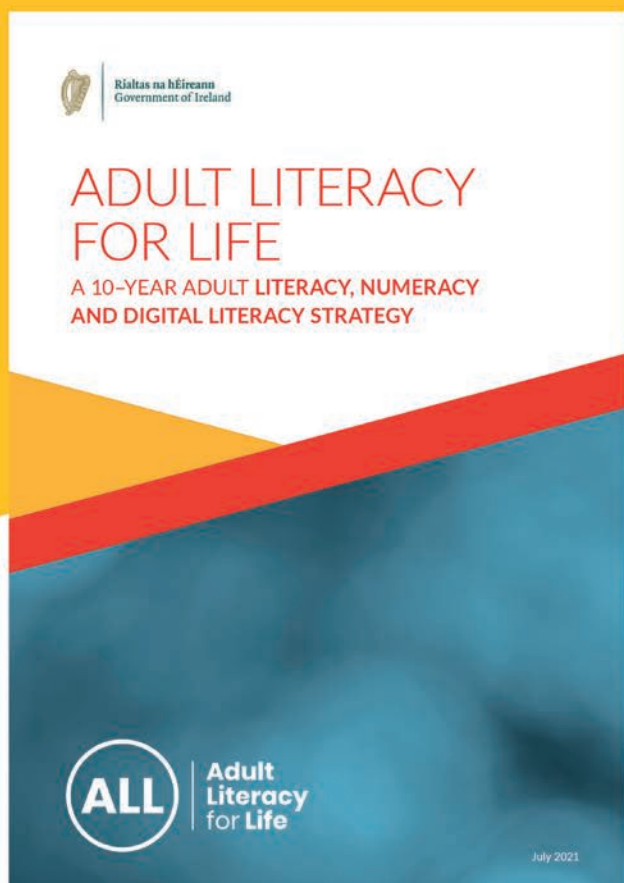
Skills development can be more relevant and effective if linked to work. Employers also have an important role in training their staff; but some, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, will need public assistance to provide such training.

Furthest behind first

Equally, there are many barriers to participation in adult education such as childcare, technology and transport which will need to be considered like the approaches taken for students in further and higher education. People with already-high levels of literacy and numeracy skills tend to participate the most in adult education, while those with lower levels of skills participate less – and often much less. They must be prioritised and incentivised to improve their skills otherwise they risk being trapped in a situation in which they rarely benefit from adult learning, and their skills remain weak or deteriorate over time.

Plain language

Finally, literacy difficulties often prevent people from carrying out a range of everyday activities many of us take for granted. Therefore, it is just as important that we ensure that all organisations dealing with the public use appropriate approaches such as using plain English to make information and services more accessible.



The new Strategy should be commended for setting out for the first time a cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-society approach to addressing this. This means a whole range of local services will need to work together to ensure that literacy needs can be identified quickly and that the right supports and services are provided straight away.

We welcome this multi-stakeholder approach but the Strategy will require a detailed implementation plan to drive change. All activity must be monitored and evaluated across the various levels of the Strategy. This means developing indicators and setting measurable targets, along with a robust reporting process, to monitor progress.

After all, both citizens and governments benefit from effective and understandable communications: citizens are more likely to exercise their rights and meet their obligations and governments are more likely to make better use of their resources.

Literacy is a right

Literacy is a fundamental right and must be a priority for all who are concerned with human rights and equality. Low literacy costs individuals in terms of lower life chances and the economy in terms of increased costs. High literacy, numeracy and digital skills allows citizens to make constructive choices, self-advocate and ultimately respond to external pressures and change. We welcome the publication of the Government's new 10-year Strategy and the collaborations to date and look forward to contributing to its implementation.

Adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills are part of the solution to creating a more equal society and changing lives for the better. If we want to close the nation's literacy gap we need to be innovative and ambitious. And we will need significant funding to achieve this.

Find out more at adultliteracyforlife.ie



Learn with NALA

"I signed up to improve my language skills. I can learn when it suits me and the website is easy to use. The course strengthened my motivation and gave me a greater challenge to do."

NALA learner

We know that it can be hard to find the time to do a course. That's the great thing about Learn with NALA.

Do you have access to a computer and would you like to brush up on your reading, writing, maths or technology from the comfort of your home? You can learn online for free and at your own pace with our eLearning website **Learn with NALA**.

You can learn how to use computers, get better at maths, help your child with homework, improve your spelling or write a CV. And if you get stuck, we have tutors on the phone who can help

Ring us on our Freephone **1 800 20 20 65** to find out more about Learn with NALA or if you need help signing up.

We can also give you information about your local adult literacy centre run by the 16 Education and Training Boards around the country.

Visit **learnwithnala.ie** to start learning today.



The next step

In our last edition of Literacy Matters we shared the inspiring story of Linda Waldron, who returned to learning with NALA's Tutoring Service. Linda hasn't looked back since and has just started a course with her local Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board centre.

"NALA gave me the confidence. They gave me the boost through the literacy with them and the reading and writing. It made me want to go further and keep updating my skills all the time."

Linda has recently started a course at Portlaoise Adult Education Centre, based in the Further Education and Training Centre in Portlaoise and part of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (ETB).

"NALA gave me the confidence. It made me want to go further and keep updating my skills all the time."

Linda Waldron

"Now I'm in Portlaoise doing literacy and digital skills and I absolutely love it. I found out about it through the Education and Training Board (ETB) and I contacted them and they put me on a part-time evening course."

Taking the opportunity

"It's absolutely brilliant. We are learning all about homophones and confusing words, synonyms and antonyms and all that. I'm going to keep on getting as much education as I can and take the opportunity to take them on board. It's free education too."

"I got a grant there through the ETB so I got a lovely laptop and I'm doing self learning off YouTube about grammar, full stops, question marks and punctuation. I'm writing them all down into a notebook and going through them so that's really good."



There to help

Linda really enjoys the environment of the centre and commends the support she has received from her tutor since she started.

"You have someone there to show you what your mistakes are and they're there to help you. It's brilliant. My tutor Catherine is absolutely lovely. She has a great way at expressing things like she's telling a story. It's so interesting.

"I'm sorry I didn't pay attention in school and do it earlier because I absolutely love it. So I reach out to young teenagers and young adults to stay in school because believe me they will regret it.

"Before when I was working I wanted to leave school and now that I'm working I want to go back to education. I work in the social welfare office in Tullamore and the ladies and the gents are absolutely fantastic support around my literacy."

"I was nervous but I put that behind me. I put myself first and it was the best thing I ever did."

Linda Waldron

Linda continues to be an ambassador for adult literacy, encouraging people who might need support with reading, writing, maths or technology to return to education.

"It feels fantastic. When you open a book, you're able to read a word and it makes sense to you. Before it didn't. I was nervous but I put that behind me. I put myself first and it was the best thing I ever did. I tell people that are in the same boat as me to pick up the phone and make that first step. It's the best decision they will ever make."

For information on free adult literacy courses near you, Freephone NALA on
1 800 20 20 65

Literacy for Life



To celebrate International Literacy Day NALA hosted a range of webinars throughout September.

Unmet literacy needs put everyone at risk

Journalist Fintan O'Toole joined NALA CEO Colleen Dube and adult literacy ambassador Catherine Devlin for a discussion on how literacy is a gateway to participation in society. They discussed how literacy is a fundamental right and must be a priority for all who are concerned with human rights and equality.

The move to put all services online

In this webinar we discussed how we can meet the challenge of ensuring all citizens can access public services and are not denied their rights. We were joined by Michael Power, adult literacy ambassador, Barry Lowry, the Irish Government's Chief Information Officer, Sarah Winters from Content Design London and Sean Driver, NALA Plain English Editor and Trainer.

Health literacy matters

In this webinar we spoke about the need to build stronger health literacy for a healthier society. You can read more about our discussion on page 20.

Managing money in an online world

In this webinar we heard from those delivering financial information and services to the public about the challenges they face in making information understandable, accessible and safe. We were joined by Chris Carthy, adult literacy ambassador, Mike Gogan, Head of Customer Language at AIB, Grainne Griffin, Director of Communications at the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and Colleen Dube, NALA CEO.

You can watch back the Literacy for Life webinar series at:
nala.ie/literacy-for-life-september-webinars/

Student Development Fund

NALA's Student Development Fund awards funding for 51 projects around the country.

NALA's Student Development Fund is a grant for centres that support students to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills to pay for a non-tuition group activity outside the classroom. Centres who receive the funding also gather student feedback on a topic set by NALA. This year the topic was students' experience of learning during the pandemic and how they would like to learn in the future. This feedback informs NALA's work and we share the feedback with other organisations like the Adult Literacy Organisers Association and our funders.

NALA's small organisations members (operating in a local area) and large organisation members (operating on a county wide or national basis) can apply for the fund. In 2021, centres could apply for funding for technology to enhance learning for students and they could also apply for more than the usual limit of €650.

2021 Submissions

A range of exciting applications for the fund were submitted to NALA and 51 projects were funded. These included:

- A pottery workshop for students
- Two electronic pens and two iPads
- A new TV for use for intercultural events for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students
- Developing a phonics app
- 10 Samsung tablets
- Vegetable trugs and equipment for growing vegetables
- A reptile zoo visiting a centre plus a quiz and BBQ
- Barista training for eight Youthreach students
- A trip to the Burren

You can take a look at some of these fantastic activities on the next page.

What centres said



"The fund allows the learners to engage in something new. They gain invaluable knowledge in many skills...team building, organising the event, budgeting."

Listowel Adult Basic Education Centre arranged for groups of learners to visit a local organic gardener to learn how to set herbs and vegetables.

Navan Adult Education Centre organised two trips for ESOL students, one to Newgrange and another to the Collins Barracks Museum.



"We are putting more emphasis on gathering the learners' stories using their own words and voice and the fund helped us to do this ...the equipment has allowed us to widen the scope of this project."

South Dublin County Partnership purchased a Zoom H8 Track Recorder for use with their podcast and Learner Voice Sessions.





"The students got to experience a workshop style environment and enjoyed the hands on experience."

Youthreach Lisnamult in Roscommon Town completed Barista training.

Kilkenny Adult Literacy and Basic Education visited the Butler Gallery, took part in workshop and did a follow up activity at home.



Cavan Adult Education Centre purchased 10 Tablets to support learners to become more comfortable using technology.

Nenagh Community Training Centre bought a bookcase, books and online subscription for their new handmade tree book shelf.



Finding your path

Demi Lewis went back to education to complete her Leaving Certificate (Major QQI Level 4 award in Employment skills) with Portlaoise Youthreach at Portlaoise Further Education and Training (FET) Centre, part of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board, after leaving school at the age of 17. Four years on, that decision to return to learning has led Demi to a career in childcare.

"I didn't go through with school as it wasn't for me...unfortunately I just didn't finish it out. So that's when I thought I would go to Youthreach and get my Leaving Certificate. I really wanted it, but just at that time it wasn't really for me doing it in school. I was like I'll try it out and see how I get on and now I have the Leaving Cert."



While she was attending Youthreach Demi got the opportunity to do the part-time Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 4 module in childcare with the adult literacy service at Portlaoise FET Centre. This helped her build her skills even further.

"While I was in Youthreach I got offered to apply to the QQI Level 4 in childcare. I felt like I needed a lot of help but once I had the help and understanding, I flew through it. Trying to understand words that I wouldn't know, I think that's where my confidence wasn't strong. If I was in a group and they asked me a questions I'd panic. My confidence wasn't big at all but I came out the end being qualified in Level 4."

Demi highlighted how learning about something she was passionate about helped her to stay motivated while doing the course.

"I thought that it was much easier to actually do the work and stay focused, to go back and do it that way. I've always thought I'd do childcare because I've always liked minding children.

"When the course was offered to me I said I'll try it and see how I go. Then I did it and I actually passed. Then I did a childcare QQI Level 5. I did three modules with community education in the evenings and then I moved onto the Back To Education Initiative (BTEI) funded evening childcare course to complete my major award. We also did a QQI Level 5 Special Needs Assistance (SNA) so now I'm going to be doing my QQI Level 6."

Building confidence

"Throughout the courses you would have had to stand up and do a presentation. It wouldn't have been the ideal thing for me. I'd panic, I'd put myself in such a state and I wouldn't have been able to do it. But I have built up my confidence massively, how to communicate with others, being less nervous about talking out loud and things like that."

For Demi, the supportive environment created by her tutors was vital.

"Go out there and do something that's really what you want to do...don't let anything set you back."

Demi Lewis

"It was very important to be able to communicate with tutors and feel comfortable to ask questions. It's a big part to have your tutor there to make you feel comfortable and relaxed. The tutors have helped me a lot throughout."

Demi wants anyone considering returning to learning to think about the opportunities it can lead to in the future.

"I would say not to be nervous and it's a great confidence boost. It's great to actually get yourself out there, even have a little go at it. Go out there and actually do something that's really what you want to do. It also sets you up for long term achievement...to go into something that you really want to study and have an interest in. Just don't let anything set you back. You can come over your fears of being nervous and not having the confidence, because I have."

Haven Pharmacy group achieves health literacy quality mark for all branches

The Haven Pharmacy group is the first group to have all 49 branches receive the Crystal Clear health literacy quality mark.

In September, NALA presented Haven Pharmacy with an award for being the first pharmacy group to have all their pharmacies achieve the Crystal Clear mark.

The Crystal Clear mark recognises the critical role pharmacies play in helping people understand their health issues and the steps they need to take to improve their health. The mark is awarded to pharmacies where there is evidence of, and commitment to, providing a literacy friendly service.

This award celebrates the 49 Haven pharmacies all over Ireland who are engaging with customers in a literacy friendly way.

A Crystal Clear pharmacy benefits how customers better understand health information and take their medicine correctly.

Daragh Connolly, Chairperson of Haven Pharmacy and pharmacist in Dungarvan said: "We are delighted that Haven is the first pharmacy group to have all their pharmacies awarded the Crystal Clear mark."



Clare McNally and Helen Ryan from NALA with Daragh Connolly from Haven.

"Our pharmacies have found great benefits from applying for the mark, in particular how staff are now more aware of literacy needs and how to respond sensitively to customers. We can be more responsive and inclusive to the communities we serve every day. Staff are using plain English, avoiding jargon and confusing terms and going over medication and dosage to ensure the customer is clear."

"We can be more responsive and inclusive to the communities we serve every day."

Daragh Connolly

New call for applications

There is currently an open call under the Crystal Clear Pharmacy Programme.

There are seven remaining counties who do not have a Crystal Clear pharmacy yet and so we particularly welcome applications from Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Monaghan, Roscommon, Sligo and Wicklow.

The Crystal Clear Pharmacy Programme, Ireland's first health literacy quality mark for pharmacies, was launched in 2015 by NALA, the Irish Pharmacy Union and MSD and supported by Healthy Ireland.

To date 105 pharmacies in 19 counties have been awarded the mark.

Pharmacies who wish to participate in the Crystal Clear Programme can complete the online audit:

nala.ie/health-literacy/crystal-clear-mark/

A passion for science

Linda Harte made a decision during the pandemic to return to education to follow her passion for science. Having struggled with maths during school, the NALA Tutoring Service supported her to prepare for the entrance exam for UCD and leave maths anxiety behind.

"When I was doing my Leaving Certificate a family member was very sick. It turned everything upside down. So when I did go back I'd missed out on loads of stuff, especially maths. I just got overwhelmed with maths and I gave up on it. I failed maths in the Leaving Cert but I managed to pass everything else. I left school in 1992, so nearly 30 years ago.

"At the time I wanted to do nursing, but it was like something kept stopping me. I just started working then. When I had the two kids, then at 29 I went back and I did dental nursing and I got a job with the HSE.

"I always had that in my head from before that I was just stupid at maths. That put me off ever pursuing science because I thought there's a lot of maths in science and I'll never be able for that."

"Even though I loved science, it was just the maths that put me off. I had awful maths anxiety."

Life's too short

During the pandemic Linda realised she really wanted to pursue her passion for science but she was concerned her difficulties with maths would stop her. That's when she got in touch with NALA.

"Last year we were redeployed to go out and do the swabbing. Just listening to people's stories, one minute somebody's there and the next minute they're gone. Then my father died in the November and it just made me realise that life's too short. I made a choice then. The only thing that was holding me back with the science was that I was so bad at maths and that's when I contacted NALA."



Back to basics

After contacting NALA Linda began to work on her maths using YouTube videos and the Learn with NALA website. She also worked with her NALA tutor and found that taking the work step by step really helped her to get through it.

"I started doing it on my own watching the YouTube videos. I got through it and then I had my tutor Ann Marie for the harder stuff. We really went back to basics. Instead of thinking about trigonometry, I just said I had to go right back and just practise.

"If you didn't understand something, Ann Marie just went 'Right we'll start again, go back and do you see where I'm getting that number from?' She was really patient and comfortable doing it where you didn't feel pressure. In the evening I was enjoying the homework sheets Ann Marie sent me, trying to work out the maths instead of sitting and looking at the television."

Linda applied to the access to SEAM (Access to science, engineering, agriculture and medicine) course with UCD and worked on preparing for the maths entrance exam with her NALA tutor and her lecturer in UCD.

"There's a lot more to going back to college than just studying. It's given me that feeling that I want to learn more, one thing leads onto another."

Linda Harte

"I applied to do the course and you had to do a maths test for admission. I just kept thinking I'm not going to pass. But they gave you lectures on the topics that they were going to be testing. I was dealing with Ann Marie and the lecturer in UCD over Zoom and I passed it, I couldn't believe that."

A new direction

Linda has now started the course with UCD and is hoping to go on to do the science course next year.

"I know it will be hard but I want to try and do my best now to make sure I get it. I would love to do something in science as well. It's made me a lot more confident. There's a lot more to going back to college than just studying, all the social aspect of it and making new friends. It's given me that feeling that I want to learn more, one thing leads onto another."

Health Literacy Matters

In September, NALA held a webinar where we discussed why we need to build stronger health literacy for a healthier society.

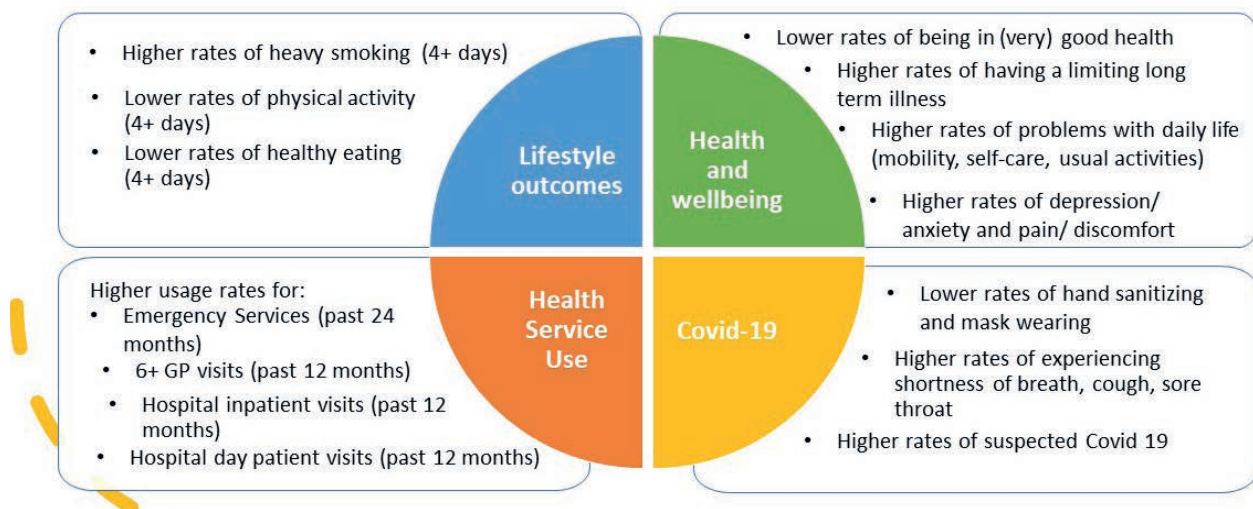
In the last 18 months we have been bombarded with a lot of health information. It's been hard to keep on top of the amount of new information we hear every day about COVID-19, the restrictions and protections.

In September, NALA held a **webinar on why Health Literacy Matters** where we discussed how for those with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs it can be especially difficult to understand and act on public health information.

New health literacy statistics

Lucy Bruton from the Department of Health presented on preliminary findings from Ireland from a new International Health Literacy Survey (2021), due to be published later this year. The new survey shows that **28%** of the Irish population have 'limited' health literacy (problematic and inadequate combined) and may need help to improve their health literacy level. The areas that need most improvement are finding and evaluating information.

Those with lower levels of General Health Literacy display...



"Let the patient sit back, process, ask questions, then move onto the next little bit of information."

**Michael Duffy,
Adult Literacy Ambassador**

Engaging with health services

Michael Duffy, an adult literacy ambassador, shared some of his experiences of dealing with health services. Michael spoke about how he dealt with many doctors and how it can be intimidating sitting across a desk and hearing medical jargon.

He says it can be hard to "break down complicated words they're coming out with ... prognosis, terminal, negative ... if you have literacy difficulties, it's very hard to understand those things."

So, Michael suggests that health staff "just take the time, just think you are not talking to your own peers ... you're just talking to an ordinary person ... just talk in plain language." He also says "let the patient sit back, process, ask questions, then move onto the next little bit of information."



Delivering literacy friendly health services

Professor Fergus Shanahan, emeritus professor of medicine at University College Cork and author of 'The Language of Illness', spoke about the ways in which language may act as a barrier in illness, and practical ways to break down these barriers. Professor Shanahan began with challenging the definition of health literacy and the need to include motivation in that. He raised the issue of the social determinants of health. He spoke about how health services and systems should look at themselves and how they deliver their services – "the system has to use plain language". He also spoke about the need to give a little bit more time from the healthcare provider and "how a doctor or healthcare provider interacts with the patient, the words they use should connect people, not separate them."

You can watch back the webinar at:
[youtube.com/watch?v=3XtmW18Gfog](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XtmW18Gfog)

40 years of NALA

A new edition of 'A Living History' has been published to celebrate NALA's 40th anniversary.

The year 2020 was the 40th anniversary of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). To mark the occasion NALA has published an updated edition of our publication 'A Living History' which captures how NALA has adapted and developed as an organisation since we were founded in 1980.

In the foreword for the publication, President of Ireland and NALA patron Michael D. Higgins highlights literacy as a vital part of citizenship.

"NALA has played such an important role in ensuring that we address this lack of basic competencies and literacy challenges, that we create lifelong learning opportunities, and avoid instilling a culture which accepts as inevitable that citizens will fall 'through the cracks', dropping out of its education system unable to read or write, becoming disengaged and disenfranchised at an early age."

"For 40 years, NALA has worked, with enormous dedication and commitment, to ensure that people with unmet literacy needs can access the learning supports they need."

President Higgins

Pioneering volunteers

"Organisations such as NALA, its workers, volunteers and I remain in admiration of many of these early volunteer pioneers, many of whom have passed on. Those who continue their work as advocates and practitioners are critical to the achievement of active citizenship.

"For 40 years, NALA has worked, with enormous dedication and commitment, to ensure that people with unmet literacy needs can access the learning supports they need, and to advance adult literacy policy through informed advocacy and through sustained engagement with government departments and relevant organisations."



"NALA has played an active role in campaigning for change and investment, and has maintained its independence as a strong voice for learners."

**Margaret Kelly,
NALA Chairperson**

Realising potential

President Higgins also commends adult literacy learners who have taken the step to return to education.

"Most of all, NALA's story is about the thousands of adults who have been instilled with the confidence and self-esteem that has resulted from their engagement with services provided by NALA, who discover the emancipation that is made possible in the unlocking of their own latent talents and gifts."

Partnerships

NALA Chairperson Margaret Kelly highlights how continued partnerships has helped NALA to continue to adapt to the needs of learners over the last 40 years.

"Throughout this time, NALA has played an active role in campaigning for change and investment, and has maintained its independence as a strong voice for learners."

"It has also forged close links with agencies beyond the education and training field, particularly in the health and welfare sectors, with media, with public agencies and in the political sphere, to achieve a realisation that literacy is everyone's concern and demands a whole of Government response. We are on the cusp of a new enthralling phase, as a National Adult Literacy Numeracy and Digital Strategy emerges. Watch this space!"

'A Living History' will be published shortly on NALA's website:

nala.ie/publications

Taking a pause

The use of pause procedures can help students make learning more enjoyable and productive, writes Tony Sweeney.

I worked for Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (ETB) for close to 20 years. I taught numeracy as well as Junior and Leaving Certificate mathematics. I also taught IT, ESOL and literacy in English. At present I give workshops in mathematics through visual and animation mediums to teachers in adult education, ETBs and primary schools.

From my experience, students in adult education will generally have little knowledge of taking notes and organising information. This puts an added pressure on their ability to absorb information from classroom lessons and to maintain concentration on the subject matter. This problem will grow even greater if students progress further in education and are faced with education by didactic lecture.*

* A teaching method that focuses on teachers giving lessons to students.

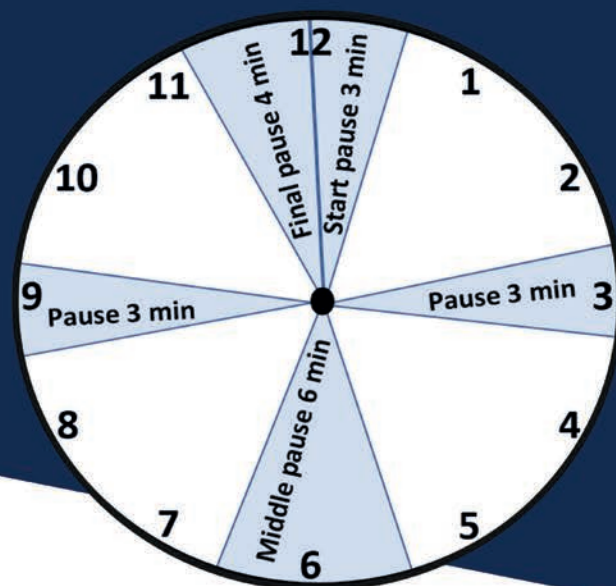
"The use of pause procedures can be an effective response to students' difficulties."

Tony Sweeney

The use of pause procedures can be an effective response to students' difficulties. In *Tools for Teaching*, Gross Davis states that student attention during lectures tends to wane after approximately 10 – 15 minutes. Stuart and Rutherford reported in the *Lancet* in 1978 that if pauses are incorporated in lessons every 10 - 15 minutes, attention remains high. Students are given a break of about 3 minutes from tuition and asked to write up bullet points of the material covered in the preceding period.

Encouraging collaboration

Pause procedures allow students the freedom to collaborate in pairs and with the teacher to summarise the main points of tuition and in the process weed out any difficulties. "Students learn better when they have opportunities to speak or write about their learning. We cannot ignore the fact that whoever is doing the talking is doing the learning" (Doyle, 2011).



Suggested pause procedures in one hour class

Image: Tony Sweeney

Having at least one longer pause (6 minutes), in the middle of the lesson, with something substantial to break the students' concentration may result in recall being more arduous and realistic. A longer pause can be an opportunity to add an extra bit of colour to the lesson by using an amusing story or a short video clip of a practical example, thus creating a positive and relaxing atmosphere in the classroom. "It may be good to remind ourselves that people think better when they are happy" (McCullough, 2017).

Setting the scene

Instead of rushing directly into the lesson, teachers can use an introductory pause which prepares the ground for what will be contained in the lesson. Sztabnik (2015) says that if a lesson does not start off strongly by activating prior knowledge, creating anticipation, or establishing goals, student interest wanes, and you have to do some heavy lifting to get it back.

In a final pause, students are given 4 minutes to reflect back over the lesson and check their notes with the teacher for accuracy. An added benefit of this procedure is that students will be left with a concise, accurate account for revision purposes.

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Facts Matter

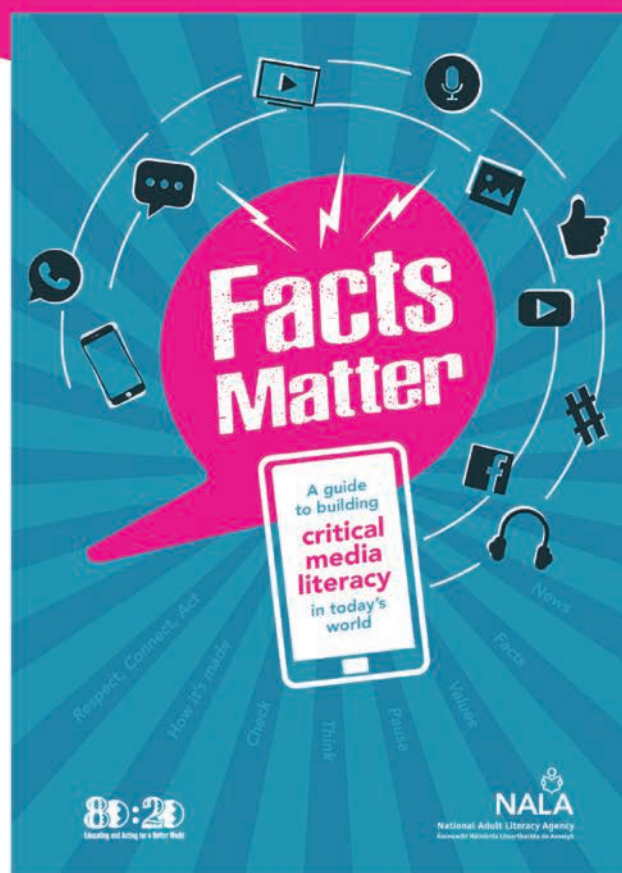
New tutor guide for supporting adults to think critically and check facts.

NALA and 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World have published **Facts Matter**, Ireland's first guide for adult literacy tutors on building critical media literacy for adults.

What is Facts Matter?

Facts Matter is an introductory guide for tutors who wish to build their students' knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence in critical thinking, media and digital literacy. The guide also supports tutors to engage with what it means to live in an increasingly unequal world and to invite students to question and challenge this.

NALA and 80:20 developed the guide with input from workshops with adult literacy tutors and practitioners in early 2020 and online webinars in June 2020. These were vital test spaces for looking at real world challenges that were happening around us as they developed the activities in this guide.



The guide consists of 10 sessions that look at:

- 1 Definitions
- 2 My digital world
- 3 Values matter
- 4 What's in the news
- 5 How it's made
- 6 Breaking down tactics and techniques
- 7 Press pause
- 8 Get the facts
- 9 Thinking smart and checking bias
- 10 Respect, Connect, Act

The guide gives an outline of each session, along with handouts, worksheets and lists of resources..

Irish Aid supported the development of this guide.



Facts Matter webinar

In September, we launched the new resource with a webinar that discussed how so much information is available at our fingertips right now, but a lot can be false or misleading. We talked about the skills we need to work out if what we are reading or hearing is true or false and about taking the time to find reliable and accurate information, question it and ask yourself 'what can I do?'

Adult literacy ambassador Catherine spoke about why facts matter for us all. She highlighted that it's not easy to know the difference between the fake page and the real page.

"I would double check everything. Read it 3 or 4 times."

Orla Ryan, journalist from TheJournal.ie, identified some reasons why people share misinformation such as our biases, group think, fear, fatigue, trying to be helpful or wanting to be part of the conversation.

Orla highlighted some things you can do:

- Ask what or who is the source?
- Read more than the headline
- Check the details and the date of an event
- Ask yourself, how does it make you feel?

She said: "If something doesn't sound right it's probably not right."

Joan Fitzpatrick, tutor from Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board spoke about her role "to support learners to develop the skills that will enable personal development and meaningful engagement in social action." Joan talked about how reading the news online is a different kind of reading experience and how you need to ask what is the purpose of this piece of information.

Find out more about the Facts Matter guide and watch back the webinar at nala.ie/facts-matter

Pump up the Volume!

Managing new technology tools is a vital part of communicating in a digital age, writes Aoife Fitzsimons, Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Co-ordinator and Alison Jones, Adult Literacy Organiser, Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (ETB).

Have you ever wondered what life would be like without your smartphone?

What is communication in a world as fast paced as life in the 21st century?

In the last 18 months the world has changed, and so has education. It has undergone a massive digital transformation. Our reliance on all things digital has highlighted a digital divide.

"Our job is not to prepare students for something. Our job is to help students prepare themselves for anything. In other words, when we empower our students, they are able to own their learning forever."

A.J. Juliani

Learners now need to become fully confident and active digital citizens, learning how to communicate effectively in a digital age and a digital environment. Learners' voices need to be heard, loud and clear, proud and confident.

This means more than ever learners need to be part of the narrative to shape how education is changing and to become architects of their own learning.

For this to happen, all of us need to know how to manage new technology tools, be safe in their use and be excited to use them.



Digital storytelling

So how do we 'pump up the volume' and make sure that learners can express their voices through digital technologies?

The first step of engaging with new technology is to find a way that we can express ourselves meaningfully and in a way that can be fun and make us feel inspired and empowered.

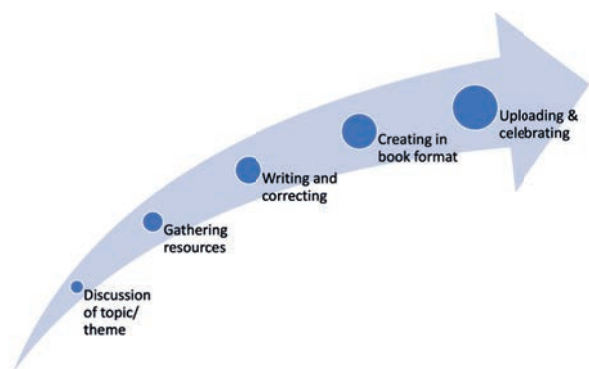
Telling a personal story is empowering, it can be an anecdote, a joke, an opinion or more personal information like who you are and where you come from, what you think and how you want to see the world.

Consider storytelling in a digital world. Our earliest instincts around learning are based on storytelling. We know this from our rich oral and written history, ancient cave paintings and symbols (the emojis of the past!). People told other people stories - people taught other people using human stories.

This is how we have always learned and how we communicate, so it's appropriate to start refocusing efforts on learners and their unique voice. Story based learning is engaging because stories evoke empathy. Empathy creates personal meaning and it's personal meaning that drives engagement - and this is the power of the learner voice.

The starting point is collaboration with our learners to build confidence and to learn how to articulate voices in this digital environment using audio, text, images, videos, emojis and having fun and learning new life skills along the way.

And whatever you want to do with technology, remember - there's an app for that! But a caveat here. Technology itself won't solve the issue, it is how we manage and use it to enhance our life experiences that counts. We have a goal in mind: we want our learners to think big, to be empowered and take control over the choices that they make on how they learn and when they learn.



In the beginning, I felt very cold even in the summer because the weather was much cooler than India. I felt very cold so I didn't go anywhere, but as time passed, I felt better.

My son was 3 years old when we came here so he didn't understand the English language and he faced many problems in school. He is still learning the English language.



Hot weather in the Indian countryside



Cool weather in the Irish countryside

ESOL Book Creator Project

Above is one example of a live project that involved ESOL students in online storytelling. They began by discussing a topic, then gathered resources such as photos, then wrote and proofed their stories, used the Book Creator app to turn them into audio visual books and finally launched them as videos on YouTube to share with families and friends.

So, what's the result when you empower your students to own their learning?

Here are 5 possibilities (AJ Juliani):

- 1 They fall in love with learning by finding joy in pursuing their passions and geeky interests. In the process, they learn how to research, curate and communicate.
- 2 They embrace a maker mindset as they work through a design process and launch their work to the world.
- 3 They develop iterative thinking, viewing mistakes as a chance to learn. This is learning how to learn.
- 4 They become autonomous learners.
- 5 They become architects of their own learning, engaging in creative expression.

Add your ideas

Check out this padlet to add your ideas to the art of storytelling!

Open the camera on your smartphone and hold in front of the QR code to go to the Padlet.



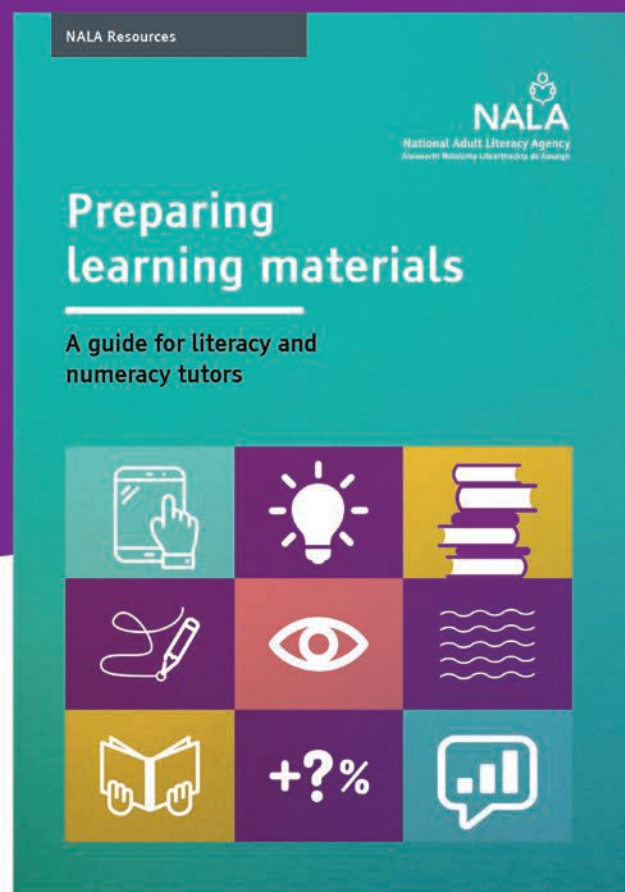
Preparing Learning Materials

A new guide and online Professional Development course for adult literacy tutors.

NALA has a new guide and Professional Development course on Preparing Learning Materials for adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tutors.

The guide gives guidelines and practical ideas for creating, writing and designing learning materials for adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy work. We hope the guide will help tutors to:

- Understand the purpose and context for developing learning materials,
- Explore the types of learning materials and how best to use them,
- Be able to design relevant and engaging materials for students, and
- Design and format learning materials using plain English guidelines.



Our new Preparing Learning Materials online course is now live on learnwithnala.ie in the **Tutor Courses** section.

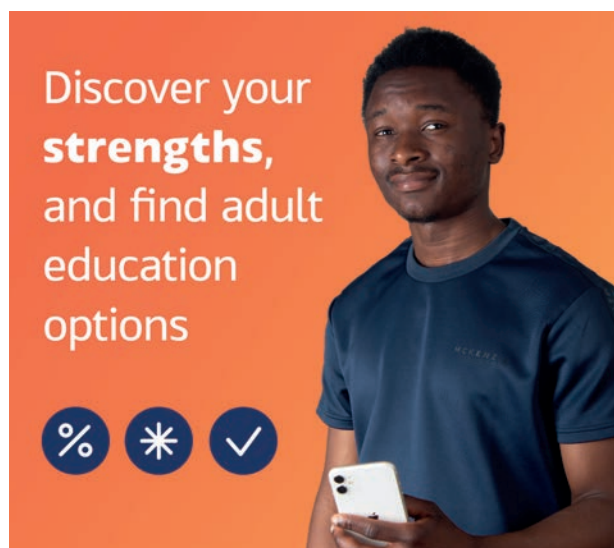
This course is designed to help adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tutors to prepare and design learning materials.

It looks at the context for developing materials as well as how to plan, design, format and write learning materials. You will receive a NALA Professional Development certificate on successful completion of this course.

You can find out more about the guide and course here:

nala.ie/preparing-learning-materials/

The CITO Skills Checker Tool



A new online self-assessment tool allows adults to identify their existing skills and learning goals.

The Erasmus+ Check-In Take-Off (CITO) project was launched in 2019. NALA's partners in the project include Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), the Ministry for Education and Employment – DRLLE for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (Malta) and Fønix AS (Norway).

Over the last two years, we have been working on the development of an online experience that supports adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital needs.

Self assessment tool

In 2020, the prototype for the Check In, Take Off web application (CITO Skills Checker) was completed.

The CITO Skills Checker is an easy-to-use online self-assessment application, which allows adults to explore their learning goals, recognise their existing skills and identify skills that can be developed.

Relevant online and local learning opportunities are suggested so that adults can go on to improve their skills, learn new ones and achieve their learning goal.

The CITO Skills Checker allows adults to explore their learning goals, recognise their existing skills and identify skills that can be developed.



Testing the tool

The CITO Skills Checker was tested with learners and organisations across Malta, Ireland, and Norway. Over 400 learners took part in the testing, which involved using the CITO Skills Checker, completing a user experience survey, and having the opportunity to take part in a focus group. The findings from this field research helped inform and guide our final phase of development.

In Ireland, the following organisations took part in this research phase; Keelings, An Cosán, Louth Leadership Partnership, DEASP - North East Division, NALA's Tutoring Service, Galway and Roscommon ETB, Waterford and Wexford ETB, Longford and Westmeath ETB, Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB, and Donegal ETB.

We are now in an exciting position to be able to share the Irish version of the CITO Skills Checker.

You can access the CITO Skills Checker by going to **skillschecker.ie**

We have also recently developed the CITO Communications Toolkit, which has been designed to help organisations to promote and engage with the CITO Skills Checker.

You can download the Communications Toolkit by going to the CITO Project website **citoproject.eu**

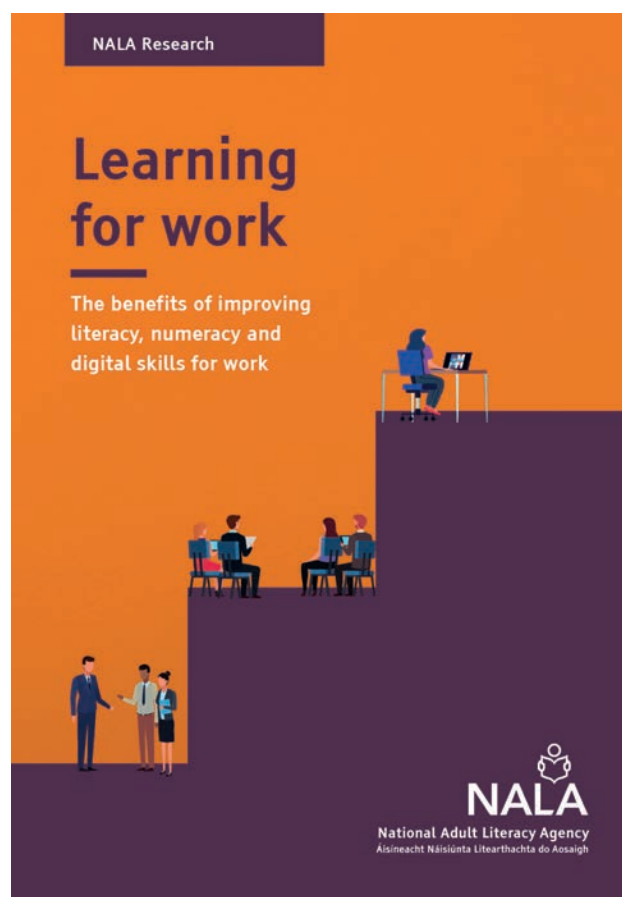
The final phase of the CITO project will involve the testing and refinement of the CITO Communications Toolkit, as well as an evaluation of the project as a whole. In February 2022, a final conference will be held to showcase the CITO project results.

Learning for work

New NALA report shows the benefits of workplace basic education to employees and employers.

Every year brings new technology and working practices, which increase business potential in many ways – improved efficiency, better customer service and more. However, every year small and large businesses struggle to get staff to apply these new technologies and working practices. So why do otherwise diligent employees have problems with change?

A new research report from NALA suggests that one reason is low literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Findings from the research show that a lack of confidence in these basic skills prevent adults from taking on new responsibilities, applying for a promotion or taking up a training opportunity at work. This research went on to show that when the same adults returned to education and improved their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, they reported an increase in confidence and opportunities, particularly in the workplace.



In NALA's report '**Learning for work**', **59%** of participants reported that their literacy or numeracy needs stopped them from going for a job they wanted.

Most respondents, **85%**, reported that they had turned down jobs or the chance to take part in training offered in the work place as highlighted by NALA CEO, Colleen Dube:

"Low literacy, numeracy or digital skills hold people back from fulfilling their full potential. This is a loss to the individual and a loss to the employer. This research provides evidence of the concrete benefits of taking part in lifelong learning to the individual."

"Engaging in learning enhances employees' sense of confidence, ambition and interaction in and outside work. Employers experience increased worker satisfaction, productivity and retention. It is a win-win for employees and employers," says Colleen.

What employers say

The research showed that employees who upskill for their jobs are more adept and confident when using new technology in the workplace. They attribute this to their participation in adult learning, such as taking part in the Skills for Work (SfW) programme. SfW is a free part-time education and training initiative provided by the Education and Training Board's (ETB) adult literacy services

Improved confidence

The research also showed that the training had a knock-on effect on employees' confidence and personal lives with many of them using their newly learned skills with their family at home, as Colleen continues:

"The most important take-away from this research is that all these basic skills are 'learnable' and improving them can have a hugely positive impact on employees and employers."

"Getting help with the spellings really helped me and I became a lot more confident about the work. They offered me a full-time job and now I'm working in the office as part of the sales team."

Laura*, aged 57

"By taking a few simple steps companies can help employees and, in the process, help their business too."

"There are many free options available. Individuals can use NALA's Tutoring Service or online platform Learn with NALA; and employers can use the free State funded Skills for Work Programme with their local ETB. Taking action on basic skills is simply another way of maximising your employees' contribution to your company."

Read more about the report:
nala.ie/learning-for-work-research-report/

*Name has been changed

Clear writing lessons from Europe

Impactful ideas shared at a conference for International Plain Language Day, writes NALA's Plain English Co-ordinator Claire O'Riordan.

Since 2005, NALA has done a lot to promote and support the use of plain English in and across government departments and elsewhere. Much of this has been achieved through our editing and training service. This evidence of impact was shown in the Programme for Government's commitment to plain language and the high number of references to plain English (and related areas) in the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy.

But, while we are national leaders in plain English, we think it is important to keep learning and sharing. In this article, I share just a few of the many highlights from the Clear writing for Europe conference, hosted by the European Commission's Directorate - General for Translation.

1 Why readers are the true judges of clarity.

At the conference we heard that while readability checkers and tests are still important to help determine if text is clear, readers are the true judges of quality and more user testing of our text is important.

For example, the municipality of the Hague in the Netherlands is working with people in adult literacy centres to test how clear government information is.

Recently, this work focused on how well people understood icons used during the pandemic. The image below is a stage in a theatre with curtains and some people saw that at a glance, however, others didn't. Adding a musical notation to the icon helped them see that theatres were open again for business.



Before testing



After testing

The message for us?

To encourage clients to check more with readers as they are the true judges of clarity.

"Clear writing and communicating and writing is part of our mission as public servants."

**Emily O'Reilly,
European Ombudsman**

2 Why brain studies matter to clear writing.

Plain language expert, Cheryl Stevens, was a keynote speaker at the conference. Cheryl spoke about how we can use brain studies – neuroscience – to help us write even more clearly for readers.

Brain studies show, for example, that where readers find information easy to read they tend to trust it and see it as reliable. These studies also show that readers' evaluate information emotionally. When they feel ease of reading they feel they have enough information to do a task. However, if they feel (experience) the reading as difficult, they will be overwhelmed as they feel they don't have the information they need or want. They are frustrated and will likely dump this kind of information overnight.

The message for us?

It is not enough for us to write and send information, we need to focus more on the analytical thinking and be even more empathic. For example, if you write: 'Take two pills two times a day' this is not enough. You need to spell out exactly when pills have to be taken. Is it two pills in the morning, or one in the morning and one in the evening?

3 Why a softly, softly approach to changing overly complex writing to plain language has merit.

While legislation and education around plain language are both important so too is the EU Commission's Writing Team's 'soft diplomacy' approach to bringing about a plain language writing culture. The EU's soft diplomacy approach involves:

- showing writers before and after examples of their writing after it has been edited using plain language guidelines,
- providing a plain language style guide to about 16,000 writers across all EU institutions and subscribers are active participants in keeping it up to date, and
- using a fun approach.

All in all the conference was inspirational and will help us improve our thinking and practice in terms of evaluating text, writing it and promoting its use across organisations.

Watch our recent webinars

NALA has hosted a range of webinars over the last few months that you might find useful.

Literacy in the workplace is everybody's business

This webinar explored literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs in the workplace, and what supports employers can offer. It also provided information on education opportunities such as the 'Skills for Work' programme.

Health literacy workshop

In this online workshop for healthcare workers we shared information on health literacy, numeracy and digital literacy and delivering a literacy friendly service. We also shared practical tips and ideas on communicating more effectively.

Maths Week series

To mark Maths Week 2021 we hosted a webinar series for adult literacy and numeracy tutors. The webinars covered interesting topics for maths teaching including practical approaches to teaching geometry, financial mathematics and overcoming maths anxiety.

Student webinar series

In October, we held a Student webinar series for adults improving their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. These covered well-being, being wise online, public speaking, creative writing and digital learning.



All webinars are available to watch back on the NALA YouTube channel: [**youtube.com/nalairreland**](https://www.youtube.com/nalairreland)

Dates for your diary

Upcoming NALA webinars and training.

Family learning webinar series

22 - 26 November 2021

NALA is hosting a webinar series on Family Learning for adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tutors. These will range from outdoor projects, intercultural learning, learning online, growing family learning and arts projects.

Online plain English training

Join us in 2022

Do you want to ensure you are communicating as clearly and effectively as possible? Join one of our open plain English training sessions taking place throughout 2022 where we will share tips on how to develop clear materials.

For more information on upcoming webinars, training and events please visit our website: nala.ie/news-and-events

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The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a charity and membership based organisation. We work to support adults with unmet literacy and numeracy needs to take part fully in society and to have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. NALA does this by raising awareness of the importance of literacy, doing research and sharing good practice, providing online learning courses, providing a tutoring service and by lobbying for further investment to improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Message for NALA Members

If you have any queries about your membership or would like to update how you hear from us, please contact Margaret Murray, NALA Student and Membership Officer, at mmurray@nala.ie or call **01 412 7928**.

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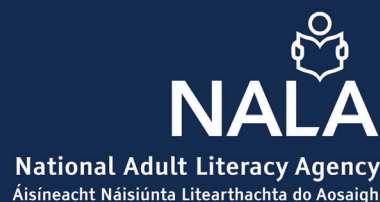
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