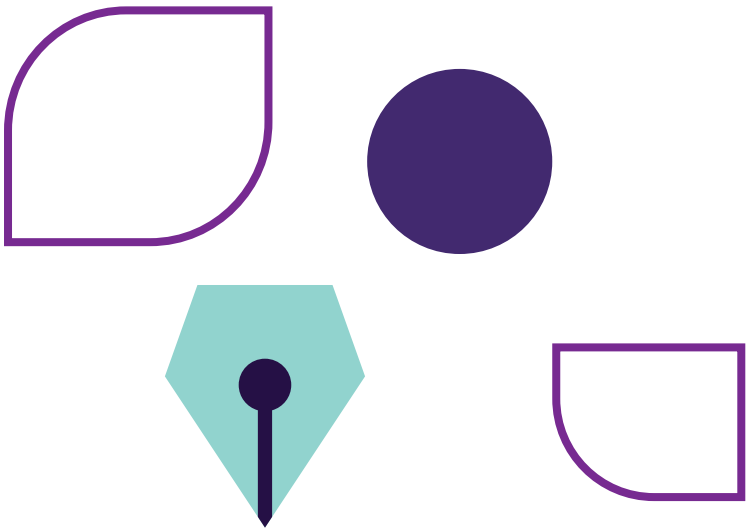
Making it happen

Five steps to becoming a literacy friendly organisation



NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh



Published by:
National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Ranelagh
Dublin 6
D06 YF65

© National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) 2023. Updated 2026.

ISBN 978-1907171-61-1

Contents

Section 1	Introduction	4
Section 2	Becoming literacy friendly	5
	Step 1: Hold initial review and planning session	6
	Step 2: Carry out a literacy audit	7
	Step 3: Develop action plans	8
	Step 4: Implement action plans	9
	Step 5: Monitor and evaluate actions	11
Appendices		12
	Appendix 1: Literacy friendly quality standards	12
	Appendix 2: Literacy audit tool	13
	Appendix 3: Training and development options	16

Visit **nala.ie/literacy-awareness** or scan the QR (Quick Response) code to find out more about our literacy awareness services.

Scan on your phone

We use the term organisation(s) throughout this guide. We use it to refer to **businesses, services, workplaces and anywhere that engages with the public**.

Section 1 Introduction

A literacy friendly organisation **includes and respects its staff and its customers**. It encourages commitment in all parts of the organisation and among all staff to **remove literacy related barriers to access, participation and achievement.**

NALA has developed 10 literacy friendly standards in four areas:



Communications



Staff awareness and responding sensitively



Policies and procedures

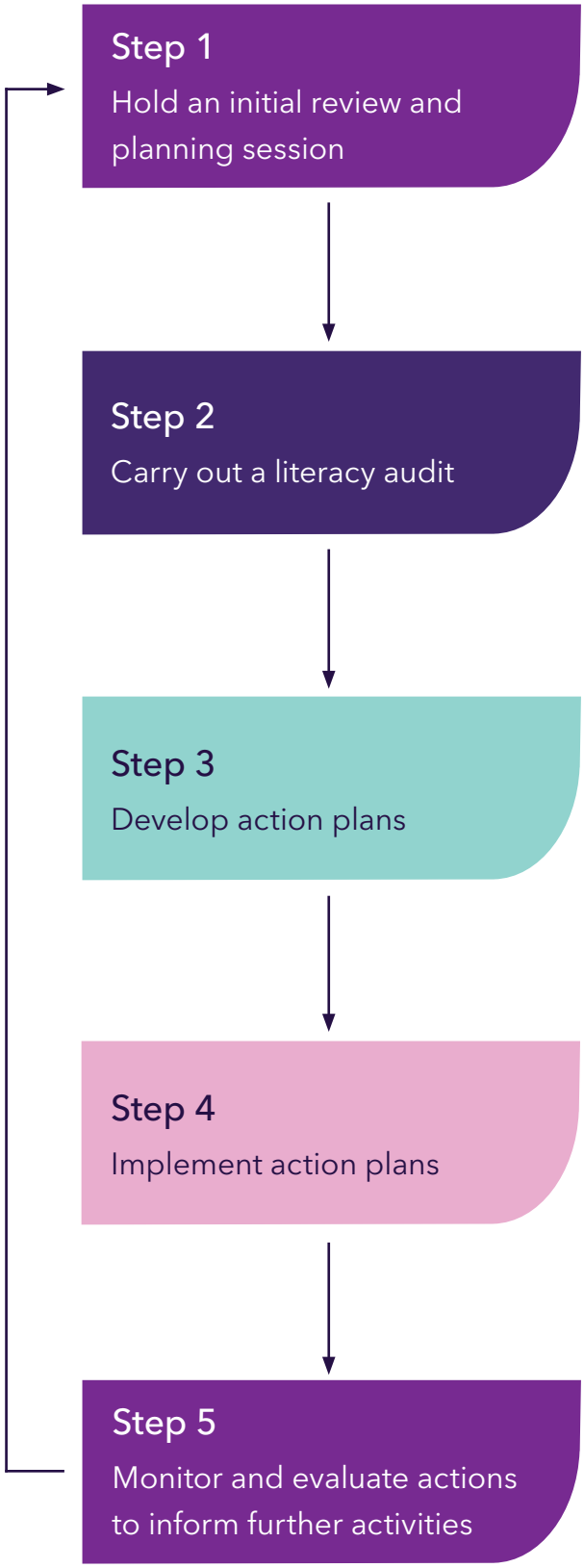


Evaluating and improving

Becoming a literacy friendly organisation involves a commitment to analysing current policies and practices and action planning. It also involves implementing action plans and reviewing the effectiveness of actions. We have five steps to help you to do this.

Section 2 Becoming literacy friendly

Five steps to becoming a literacy friendly organisation



Step 1 Hold an initial review and planning session

Step 1 is an **initial review and planning session**.

This session can help you to reflect on:

- the existing level of literacy awareness in your organisation;
- the mission, values and targets of your organisation and how becoming literacy aware can help to achieve those; and
- good practice guidelines.

Identify stakeholders in the organisation

In most organisations, it is important to **involve**:

- representatives of all key sections and, if applicable, trade union members;
- people who have an in-depth, practical knowledge of how their section works;
- people in positions of responsibility who are able to make decisions;
- people who want to be involved; and especially,
- people who are willing to promote literacy awareness in their area. These people may later become 'literacy champions' to help other parts of the organisation adopt the approach.

Step 2 Carry out a literacy audit

This step will probably be the most extensive of the five steps.

At this stage, it is essential to look at what you already have in place. It is very likely that at least some of what your organisation does already supports people who have literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs. It is good to identify this, as existing good practice is an excellent starting point. The audit will also help you to clarify the precise areas where small changes could make a big difference.

You should focus on your organisation's:

- communication methods;
- staff awareness and training;
- policies and procedures; and
- evaluating and improving systems.



Key point

Make sure that the individuals who analyse and make judgements about each area really do have a deep, practical knowledge of how things actually happen on the ground and not only how they should happen.

If your team represents all areas, one or two team members could consult colleagues in the wider organisation to examine each area and bring their findings back to the whole team.

When you have carried out the detailed literacy audit, the range of actions you could take to make your organisation more literacy friendly will be clearer. The detailed information generated from the audit provides the basis for Step 3.

Step 3 Develop action plans

Deciding on actions

As with all action planning, try to keep actions **SMART** - **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and with a clear **T**imeframe. Make sure you note:

- what to do and who will do it;
- when the action will be done; and
- most importantly, how your team will know the action has been done and measure its impact on the organisation.



Communications

When looking at your **communications**, consider what you can do to make them more literacy friendly. You communications can include forms, plans, letters, emails, manuals, signs, notices, minutes, policies and procedures and verbal communication.



Staff awareness and responding sensitively

When looking at **staff awareness and responding sensitively**, think about what you can do to support and encourage staff to be more literacy aware and use literacy friendly practices.

You may also have staff who have literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs and think about how you can support them. Bear in mind also, how you can advertise, design, deliver and evaluate staff training in a way that allows those with these needs to benefit.



Policies and procedures

When looking at your **policies and procedures**, reflect on any barriers that your current ways of working may pose to customers or staff with literacy needs. What can you do to reduce or provide alternatives to the reading and writing demands of doing business with or working in your organisation?



Evaluating and improving

Think about **monitoring and evaluation** right from the start. This will help you clarify what results you want to achieve from taking the actions.

Setting indicators: The action-planning stage is also the time to set indicators of progress towards completing the action. This will help the team to clarify what a completed plan will look like in reality and how best to monitor and evaluate the plans.

Step 4 Implement action plans

You have drawn up plans, decided who is responsible for each stage and developed indicators to show progress. Now is the time to put those plans into practice.

If you have identified several actions, you may need to prioritise. If so, you might find it useful to start with just one of the areas.



Communications

Making your written information as reader friendly as possible involves both the language you use and the way you present the text. A very useful technique as a start is to present the most important documents – for the staff and for the public - in plain English. Appendix 3 has details on where to find out more about plain English.

While it is often necessary to have information in writing, it is worth investigating if you could also communicate verbally alongside written communication or instead of it. For example, it is often necessary to update health and safety procedures in writing, but for some staff the opportunity to go through them in person as well makes it more likely that they will understand and follow a procedure.



Staff awareness and responding sensitively

Working through this process could spark the interest of staff in focused literacy support activities, including:

- general literacy awareness training;
- dedicated adult literacy tuition; and
- training for trainers to support participants on their courses who may have literacy needs.

One outcome of literacy awareness is that some of your staff might identify that they want to improve their reading or writing or your human resources department may become aware of this need. You can find more information in Appendix 4 on the available supports for staff who want to improve their literacy skills.



Staff awareness and responding sensitively

Other staff training takes the 'integrating literacy' approach, which is a key feature of the literacy friendly strategy that some organisations have adopted. It involves identifying training needs and planning, delivering and evaluating staff training in a way that takes account of unmet literacy, numeracy or digital literacy needs.

Even if you are not currently aware of any staff members having literacy, numeracy or digital literacy needs, it is always possible that these issues may arise. By working through these steps, you will be well prepared to anticipate any such needs if and as they occur.



Policies and procedures

Before starting to make changes to a well-established policy or procedure, it may be useful to take part in a literacy awareness briefing. This will help to establish the rationale for any change and to encourage and motivate people.

Sometimes subtle barriers can be embedded in policies and procedures. For example, a job specification might demand a certain qualification simply because that is the custom, rather than its being a requirement for the job. It is not always easy to see these barriers in operation; their potential effects are even less visible. This makes the analysis in Step 2, and the resulting action plans, very important.



Evaluating and improving

You will have thought about **monitoring and evaluation** at the start of the process. This will help you to clarify the results you want to achieve from taking the actions.

Step 5 Monitor and evaluate actions

Your action plan should include a statement about how your team will monitor and evaluate how the plan is implemented.

One option is to set up a monitoring committee, which could involve some or all of the team. The committee would check progress of the plans regularly.

Another option is to weave the monitoring of the action plans into the existing processes in your organisation, such as management meetings, general staff meetings or quality assurance procedures. If you put literacy action plans on the agenda, then literacy friendly activities and their monitoring will be more easily embedded into the work of the organisation rather than 'bolted on' as a separate issue for only a few people.

Evaluation is a key stage in all your organisation's activities – it is important to see whether the actions you are taking are having the desired effect, and gather evidence to support this. You can use a mix of verbal and written methods to gather evidence: along with traditional surveys and checklists. Try using face-to-face or telephone interviews, pictorial diaries, focus groups and role-plays.



Key point

Monitoring and evaluation are an important part of the process, right from the beginning. Be sure to keep track from the start that anything that is supposed to happen does happen.

Find out how it is working out while it is still in progress, rather than weeks or months later when it may be difficult to correct any problems. Learning from experience can be supported by monitoring and evaluation at all stages in the five-step process.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Literacy friendly quality standards

NALA has developed 10 literacy friendly standards:

Communications	
1.	Our staff use **plain English** when **speaking** with people.
2.	We use **plain English** in our **written information**.
3.	We **check** that people **understand** what we have told them.
4.	The **layout** of our office and reception is **clear**.
Staff awareness and responding sensitively	
5.	Our staff are **aware** of literacy friendly work practices.
6.	Our staff **respond sensitively** to the literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs of people.
Policies and procedures	
7.	We have a **literacy friendly policy**.
8.	We have **specific ways** to help people find and use important information and instructions.
9.	We **support our staff** to improve their own literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.
Evaluating and improving	
10.	We regularly **evaluate** and continually **improve** our literacy friendly service.

Appendix 2: Literacy audit tool

Here are ten literacy friendly quality standards with space for you to fill in examples.



Communications

	Standard	Delivering it in practice
1.	Our staff use **plain English** when **speaking** with people.	
2.	We use **plain English** in our **written information**.	
3.	We **check** that people **understand** what we have told them.	
4.	The **layout** of our office and reception is **clear**.	

Staff awareness and responding sensitively

	Standard	Delivering it in practice
5.	Our staff are **aware** of literacy friendly work practices.	
6.	Our staff **respond sensitively** to the literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs of people.	

Policies and procedures

	Standard	Delivering it in practice
7.	We have a **literacy friendly policy**.	

Policies and procedures

	Standard	Delivering it in practice
8.	We have **specific ways** to help people find and use important information and instructions.	
9.	We **support our staff** to improve their own literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.	

Evaluating and improving

	Standard	Delivering it in practice
10.	We regularly **evaluate** and continually **improve** our literacy friendly service.	

Appendix 3: Training and resources for organisations

NALA offers a range of supports to organisations. We provide resources about literacy and literacy related topics. For more information visit the website pages below or contact us by email at **info@nala.ie** or by phone at **01 412 7900**.

Plain English

NALA provides a plain English service. This includes:

- Plain English editing and training
- Plain English mark for your documents
- Plain English tips and resources

More information: **nala.ie/plain-english**

Literacy awareness and becoming literacy friendly

NALA provides supports on literacy awareness and how your organisation can become more literacy friendly. These include:

- customised training for your organisation
- webinars and **self-directed online courses**

More information: **nala.ie/literacy-awareness**

Health literacy

NALA provides supports and resources to organisations and healthcare professionals on health literacy. These include:

- customised training for your organisation
- webinars and a **Cancer Health Literacy online course**

More information: **nala.ie/health-literacy**

Adult Literacy for Life online courses

Awareness coures have also been created by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, as part of the Adult Literacy for Life strategy. These cover plain language, literacy and health literacy.

More information: **adultliteracyforlife.ie/aware**

Appendix 4: Supports for staff who want to improve their literacy skills

If a member of staff would like to improve their reading, writing, numeracy or digital skills, they can access free and confidential support.

Freephone 1 800 20 20 65 and we can tell you about all the supports available.

NALA supports for adult learners

NALA provides a range of supports and services for adults to improve their reading, writing, maths and digital skills. These include:

- free workbooks and learning resources
- free online learning and phone tutoring services through **learnwithnala.ie**

Learn with NALA learners have the option of working towards getting a certificate from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

More information: **nala.ie/supports-for-adult-learners**

Local adult literacy services

There are more than 100 adult literacy centres across Ireland through the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and community education centres. The centres provide:

- free and confidential tuition
- support one-to-one with a trained tutor or in a small group

The local Adult Literacy Organiser will discuss the learner's needs and help find a suitable tutor.

Find a local centre: **nala.ie/find-a-centre**

Notes



The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a charity and membership based organisation. We work to support adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy 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. We also provide online learning courses and a tutoring service to adults. We lobby for further investment to improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Ranelagh, Dublin 6
D06 YF65

Phone: 01 412 7900

Freephone: 1 800 20 20 65

Websites:
nala.ie
learnwithnala.ie

Email: info@nala.ie

Company Registration Number: 342807
CHY (Charity) Number: 8506
Registered Charity Number: 20020965

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Arna chomhchistiú ag an Aontas Eorpach
Co-Funded by the European Union

SOLAS learning works

ALL Adult Literacy for Life

Adult Literacy is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union.