

Report on NALA's Adult Literacy Learner Days in 2025

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National Adult Literacy Agency

Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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Thanks to:

- Adult Literacy Organisers and staff in centres who encouraged students to attend. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) really appreciates your help, and our Staff and Board know NALA could not do these days without you. A special thank you to Joan Slevin for helping NALA to organise the day in Athlone.
- NALA Staff who telephoned centres.
- NALA's Student Subcommittee who helped plan and make sure the days ran smoothly. Thanks especially to Catherine Devlin for chairing the days.
- The facilitators of the workshops. Students really appreciated your efforts.
- SOLAS, the state agency who provided funding to NALA for these days.

Acronyms used in this report

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETB	Education and Training Boards
MABS	Money Advice and Budgeting Service
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NLN	National Learning Network
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note: In this report we use the word learner and student interchangeably.

Introduction: NALA and students

This report shows what happened at the student days in 2025, or Adult Literacy Learner Days as we have been calling them for the last two years. The report will be of interest to students who attended, adult literacy staff and those involved in adult education more generally.

NALA is a registered charity and a membership-based organisation with 313 members. Our main activities are:

- Advocacy, policy and research
- Services for literacy learners
- Events and development programmes
- National Freephone advice, information, and referral service
- Learn with NALA distance learning and eLearning platform.
- Services for literacy and education practitioners
- Events, online training and resources
- Services for organisations
- Literacy awareness training and outreach
- Plain English editing and training



NALA has kept learners at the centre of our work since it was set up¹ by:

- Having learners on NALA's Board, and Student Subcommittee² of the Board.
- Holding two Adult Literacy Learner Days (student days) each year.
- Providing a fund until 2023 for local student events and to gather feedback.
- Having students lead awareness raising campaigns and speak at events.
- Contacting student members of NALA for their opinions.
- Linking with Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and other organisations like AONTAS about student involvement.

¹ At NALA's founding meeting (1979) people agreed NALA would be "a membership organisation, based on literacy students as much as on organisers or tutors". See NALA: A Living History, page 27.

² Students from around the country participate, meeting seven times a year.

Dublin and Athlone in 2025

Who are the Adult Literacy Learner Days for?

The Adult Literacy Learner Days are for adults who are improving their literacy, numeracy or digital skills, on courses that are pitched at, up to, and including Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 4 and not beyond Level 4.

How many students took part in the days?

In 2025, 171 students attended the NALA Adult Literacy Learner Days. See the appendix for where people who attended came from. Table 1 below shows the dates of the days and that 84 students attended in Dublin and 87 attended in Athlone.

Table 1. Where the Days were on and number of students taking part

Where:	Date:	Number students:	Venue:	Time:	Day:
Dublin	28-Feb-25	84	Ashling Hotel	9.30am – 3.30pm	Friday
Athlone	10-Apr-25	87	Shamrock Lodge Hotel	9.30am – 3.30pm	Thursday
Total both events		171			

What happened on the days?

NALA provided free tea, coffee and biscuits on arrival. After a welcome and introduction, two students gave short talks about their experience of going back to education. Then students went to a workshop for an hour and a half. We had lunch together. In the afternoon students went to a second workshop on a different topic. At each event there was time for questions and answers and NALA took a group photo. In Athlone there was an added element. Joan Slevin, Adult Literacy Organiser, rallied both the Westmeath Library and a Social Prescriber³ to do stands that students could visit. Joan also distributed seeds and potted sunflowers to attendees.

³ Social prescribers are funded under Sláintecare, the Government of Ireland's reform of healthcare. Doctors and public health nurses refer people to the prescriber. The prescriber meets the person and suggests organisations that might suit to help reduce isolation. Sometimes the prescriber might accompany the person to a group until they get settled in.

Group photos



Group photo of students attending the Adult Literacy Learner Day in Dublin on 28 February 2025.



Group photo of students attending the Adult Literacy Learner Day in Athlone on 10 April 2025.

Students talk about their experiences

Warm welcome from Catherine Devlin

Catherine Devlin chaired both days. Catherine is a student from Buncrana who attends classes with Donegal ETB. Catherine is also a Board member of NALA and the Chairperson of NALA's Student Subcommittee.



Catherine Devlin chaired both the Dublin and Athlone student days in 2025.

In Dublin, Eamon McAuliffe and Sarah Shaughnessy from NALA's Student Subcommittee gave short talks. In Athlone, Ann Hynes and Daniela Danila Berendie also gave short talks. Key points from these talks are below.



Eamon McAuliff, from Tralee, giving a talk at the Dublin Adult Literacy Learner Day in 2025.

The Learn with NALA phone tuition service suited Eamon

Eamon initially went back to learning with the National Learning Network in Tralee. He also got help with literacy from Tralee Adult Education Centre. Eamon's job involved travel and it was harder to attend class regularly. Eamon used the NALA phone tuition service. A tutor phoned him up once a week which he found useful. Eamon joined NALA's Student Subcommittee of the NALA Board in September 2023 after attending a NALA student day in Galway.



Sarah Shaughnessy said, "I feel my voice counts".

Sarah said "I feel my voice counts"

Sarah Shaughnessy went back to education to upskill for work. She had been raising children and caring for her father. Sarah did classes in Tuam, Co. Galway and attended

a Creative Writing Workshop that NALA organised in 2018. At that workshop, Margaret Murray from NALA asked her to join the Student Subcommittee. At a Subcommittee meeting, Sarah discussed how a leaflet for literacy was posted to her house. It had no phone number on it, only a QR code and a website address. Sarah brought this up at the Student Subcommittee, the minutes of which go to NALA's Board. Sarah now feels that her voice counts. She also chaired the NALA Tutors' Forum in 2024 and enjoyed talking to tutors and encouraged students to think about joining the Student Subcommittee.

“There is always something new for us to do”

Ann Hynes, a student from Athlone, spoke about how she was told she was better with her hands than her head. She complimented Joan Slevin, Adult Literacy Organiser in Athlone, who always has something new for people to do. Going back to education has enabled Ann to do many things and has changed her life.

“The centre has become a big part of my family”

Danni Danila Berendie, originally from Romania, went back to education 12 years ago in Athlone. This was when the Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator in her son's school organised a course for parents. She said, “The centre has become a big part of my family, and I now can't imagine my life without it.”



Danni Danila Berendie speaking in Athlone.

Workshops on well-being, artificial intelligence, driver theory and managing money

Students chose two of the four available workshops when booking the day.

We offered the following workshops in Dublin and Athlone:

“Well-being workshop” (most popular workshop in Athlone)

David McGrath, well-being facilitator with City of Dublin ETB facilitated this workshop which helped students manage their well-being and stress. David gave an overview of how our habits around sleep, work, exercise, food and screentime can have an impact on us.

“Artificial Intelligence” (AI) (most popular workshop in Dublin)

Ashling Johnston, An Cosán Digital Inclusion Team facilitated the workshop in Dublin and Marie Brazil, tutor with the Adult Education Service facilitated the one in Athlone.

Students heard what AI is and how they may already be using it. They talked to other students and identified where AI could help, and what people might need to watch out for.

“Driver Theory”

This workshop was facilitated by Eileen O’Flaherty, driver instructor and tutor with Kerry ETB. Eileen gave students tips to help with the driver theory test. Her focus was on everyone becoming safe road users, whether driving or not.

“Managing money”

Mary Mitchell, tutor, Adult Education Service, Blanchardstown facilitated this workshop. Mary looked at how we reach our money goals in terms of budgeting for needs and wants. She gave information about help available in the community, like the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS). This was to help people feel a little more empowered about managing their money.

Key findings of the days

These findings below are taken from five sources: registration sheets from the days; notes taken on questions and answers on the days; evaluation forms; feedback from facilitators and reviews of the days from NALA Student Subcommittee and Staff.

Table 2. Key findings from the Adult Literacy Learner Days in 2025

1	A great diversity of learners attended
2	Very high overall satisfaction rate with the days
3	High learner engagement
4	Workshops were a great success
5	Students liked receiving NALA resource books
6	Good links made on the days

1. A great diversity of learners attended

NALA was delighted that 24 younger students attended from the National Learning Networks (NLNs) in 2025. This was an increase of six students from 2024. There were students from five different NLNs attending the Dublin day.

We were also pleased that students with disabilities attended. There were two students from **WALK** in Dublin and seven students from **St. Hilda's Services** in Athlone. In Dublin a student said that the Government is not giving people enough money to go back to college. There are not enough supports for further education and training students.

We discussed the term “reasonable accommodation” and how it applies to students in further education and training.

In 2025, 18% of learners attending the days were English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners. This is a change from 2024 when we estimated that 41% were ESOL learners and in 2023 when 79% of learners attending the days were ESOL

learners.⁴ In one of the managing money workshops, students expressed their appreciation for learning about diverse financial priorities through peer interactions. Some students felt they needed to send money to their family in another country. Others felt pressure for their children attending birthday parties. Recent immigrants found it enlightening to discuss local financial resources, for example the MABS. These students were delighted to meet others and have a common ground to engage with their peers.

Five students who had previously been on NALA's Student Subcommittee also attended in 2025. It seems that NALA is creating a little community with these days!

2. Very high overall satisfaction rate with the days

126 evaluation forms were filled out by students on the days. There was overwhelming satisfaction with a 97% satisfaction rating in Dublin and 100% in Athlone. The 97% included people who said the day was good or excellent but does not include those who said it was okay. No one said the day was not good. Quotes below are from evaluation forms:

- ❖ I learned so much and I had a great day.
- ❖ I really appreciate what you're doing. It's informative and encouraging. Thank you.

3. High learner engagement

From talking to the attendees, students from NALA's Student Subcommittee thought there was a good atmosphere, and they had great interaction with them. People were friendly and enjoyed meeting new people. We had students taking courage and standing up and sharing how they enjoyed their learning. The quote below is from the evaluation form:

- ❖ Great day, I learnt so much and staff friendly and patient.

Students told NALA at the end of the days how much they enjoyed the days.

⁴ See NALA's 2024 Report on the Adult Literacy Learner Days. NALA promoted the days for ESOL literacy learners rather than all ESOL learners.

Facilitators also commented to NALA Staff that there was high learner engagement. Participants were very enthusiastic and eager to learn. They had plenty of questions and shared their experiences in small groups.

4. Workshops were a great success

Two of the 2025 workshop topics, driver theory and managing money, were suggested by feedback from the 2022 NALA Student Development Fund. Students had let NALA know that they struggled online and in-person with managing money and with issues relating to transport including the driver theory test.

The facilitators had about 30 people in each workshop. Students gave feedback on the days that they loved the workshops.

The facilitator of the AI workshop in Dublin said by the end there was a significant reduction in the number of people who felt overwhelmed by AI.

There was great satisfaction from students with the workshops. On the evaluation forms 52% of students said the workshops were the best part of the day. This was followed by meeting other students 28% and the speakers 20%.

5. Students like receiving NALA resource books

At both events students took NALA publications (and bags⁵) home. As one member of the Student Subcommittee said:

“This shows that students are interested in what NALA does.”

The Subcommittee also felt it was important that learners heard about NALA. Many people attending had not heard of NALA before.

6. Good links made on the days

During the questions part of the day, students talked about things going on around the country. Examples were students in WALK being supported to live independently and learn skills to deal with emotions and job skills. Students had a say in what was covered

⁵ In Athlone we had a new NALA tote bag for students.

in class, from buying stamps online, filling in a tax return to doing things online. Also, students played ukeleles at a wedding, and in a women's shed students improved their digital skills. One student recommended Learn with NALA for learning maths. Another recommended an online barista course.

The quotes below are from the evaluation forms:

- ❖ Looking here today was great to see what goes on in other counties.
- ❖ Interested in workshops on Revenue. What is necessary to know.
- ❖ Was good doing it. It will learn new things about things. Hope to come again near future.

At the event in Athlone, the managing money facilitator met with the editor of **Traveller Voice** magazine, a resource highlighting voices and learning from Travellers' experiences. NALA had invited staff from Involve Travellers to attend (as well as an ex-prisoner who will work with NALA as a learner ambassador). From this meeting, the facilitator is going to showcase the work and progress in Dublin 15 of Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group, in the Traveller Voice magazine.

23 people said on the evaluation form they were interested in joining NALA's Student Subcommittee. Two students who attended the days in 2025 came to the Subcommittee's May 2025 meeting and a third student will attend in August 2025.

Recommendations

1. Continue to hold these days in 2026. Adult literacy students enjoy meeting others from different centres. They get great value from the days and from the workshops, as shown by the evaluation forms.
2. NALA encourages local centres to put on workshops of a similar type locally or regionally. In 2017, NALA held workshops on “Getting the most out of your mobile phone” (beginners and advanced). Afterwards, students asked their local centres to run similar workshops, which they did, and they went well for the ETBs.
3. NALA must continue to keep up to date with what is relevant to students around the country. The topics covered in 2025 were largely generated from feedback NALA received through the 2022 NALA Student Development Fund. NALA will continue to recruit new members to its Student Subcommittee and listen to their views about the day.

Appendix: Who attended

The two tables below give more information on where students who attended came from.

Table 1. Show where students who attended in Dublin came from

ETB area and other organisations:	Adult literacy centres or other:	ESOL	Students:
City of Dublin (31 students)	Dublin Adult Learning Centre	2	9
	Cabra	0	1
	Coolock	0	4
	Klear	1	6
Dublin and Dun Laoghaire (7 students)	Ballymun	0	1
	Blanchardstown	1	1
	Dun Laoghaire	0	1
	Loughlinstown	0	1
	Lucan	1	2
Kerry	Tralee	0	1
Kildare and Wicklow	Wicklow	2	3
Waterford and Wexford	Gorey	0	7
An Cosán (5)	Tallaght	1	5
National Learning Network (20 students)	Ballyfermot	0	7
	Mullhuddard	3	7
	Navan	0	1
	Phibsboro	1	4
	Portlaoise	0	1
NALA	Current Student Subcommittee members (Buncrana, Tullamore, Cahir, Tralee, Portarlington, Tallaght and Tuam)	0	7
	Previously Student Subcommittee members (Tallaght, Loughlinstown, Cork city and Mullingar)	0	4
	Using Learn with NALA website	0	4
Walk (2)	Walkinstown	0	2
Unknown		0	5
	Total	12	84

Table 2. Show where students who attended in Athlone came from

ETB area and other organisations:	Adult literacy centres or other:	ESOL	Students:
City of Dublin	Parnell	0	1
Galway and Roscommon	Roscommon	0	1
Laois Offaly (13)	Tullamore	0	10
	Mountmellick	0	2
	Portlaoise	0	1
Longford and Westmeath (54)	Athlone	4	12
	Athlone St Hilda's	0	7
	Kilbeggan	0	6
	Longford	1	8
	Mullingar	9	21
National Learning Network (4)	Belhavel	2	3
	Navan	0	1
NALA (8)	Current Student Subcommittee members (Buncrana, Tullamore, Tralee, Portarlinton, Tallaght and Tuam)	0	6
	Previous Student Subcommittee	0	1
	Using Learn with NALA website	0	1
Unknown		3	6
	Total	19	87

About NALA

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

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