

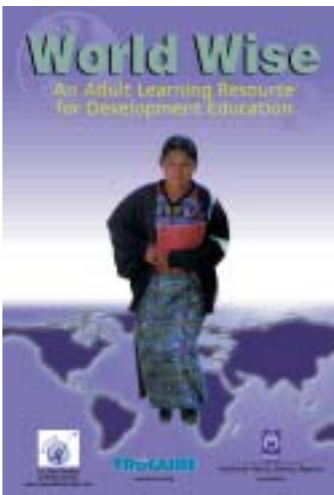
**NALA**

**Journal**

**National Adult Literacy Agency**  
An Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

**Winter 2003**

*Informing adult literacy provision in Ireland*



**New development education resources**



**National Literacy Awareness Week**



**Family literacy in action**



**aFourth TV series on air**



**ReadWriteNow 4**  
Learner Workbook  
Supporting the TV Series

**NALA**

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**service**

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### Contact:

Clodagh McCarthy

Plain English Project Worker

Tel.: (01) 855 4332, or (01) 809 9194 direct

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The Board and staff of **NALA** wish all our readers a very Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.  
*Go raibh dóchas and síocháin agaibh gach uile lá.*

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# Distance learning through radio

## Introduction

The use of radio to learn has many benefits and huge potential. NALA's first distance education project for adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties was through the medium of radio. In the last five years, we have been involved in eight distance education projects, four on radio and four on TV. The Radio element of this I will explore below.

## Background

Literacy through the media began in 1998 when NALA developed a pilot project, "Literacy Through the Airwaves", in partnership with Tipp FM, Community Radio Castlebar, and Co. Tipperary and Mayo VECs. The Department of Education and Science (DES) sponsored the project, and the Independent Radio and Television Commission (IRTC) gave £5,000 towards radio costs. This project aimed to develop literacy tuition through local radio in Tipperary on two specific radio frequencies in Clonmel and Nenagh (allocated by the IRTC), and in Mayo on Community Radio Castlebar (CRC). The programmes were broadcast from January to June 1999.

In 2000 NALA began work on two radio series for broadcast on a national radio station, RTÉ Radio 1, funded by DES. The "Read Write Now" radio literacy series was broadcast on Tuesdays at 11.10 pm (from March 2001) and the "Time 4 Learning" radio numeracy series was broadcast on Thursdays at 8.30 pm (from October 2001). Both series aimed to develop and deliver a distance learning programme in adult basic education which would help adults improve their reading/writing and numeracy skills in the privacy of their own homes. Both series consisted of a series of 10 radio programmes of a half hour each supported by a printed study pack. During this time the national freephone support line took orders for packs. The support line was staffed by trained literacy tutors who took calls from learners, .

## Radio series supports

Dedicated learner packs were written to go with each series. They consisted of a workbook and a support book. NALA commissioned trained adult literacy tutors to write these workbooks. They were edited and printed through NALA and were free to learners. In Tipperary and Mayo these packs could be ordered by ringing a local number at a certain time. For the national series they were available from the NALA freephone tutor support line. The freephone was staffed by experienced tutors who could help with any queries about the learning in the programmes and learner pack. It was a free and confidential service. The freephone line was open Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm.



Article compiled by  
Helen Ryan,  
Development Worker, NALA

*The motivation of the target audience was that they were learning to improve reading and writing skills in the comfort of their own home, in an entertaining way.*

Outside of these hours there was an answering machine service.

### Target audience

The primary target audience were adults who had difficulties with reading, writing and maths and were not participating in a learning group. The secondary target group were learners who were in a learning group, such as VEC Adult Literacy programmes, Community Training Workshops, Traveller Training Centres and so on. Although the audience came from a wide variety of socio-economic groups, some characteristics identified were that learners:

- were often from marginalised communities;
- had possibly negative previous experiences and beliefs about learning;
- preferred an informal learning style;
- had limited and imbalanced typical learning skills; and
- had probably no experience of open learning.

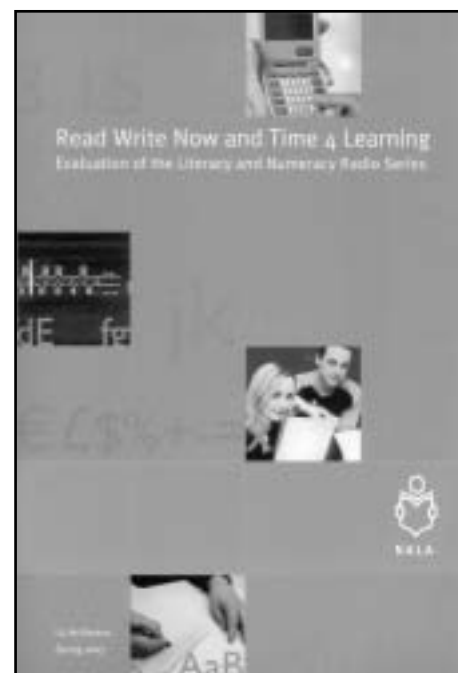
The motivation of the target audience was that they were learning to improve reading and writing skills in the comfort of their own home, in an entertaining way.

### Design, format and structure of the radio programmes

The programmes were designed based on the idea that learners have a set of worksheets in front of them while listening to the radio programme. This meant they could follow the learning in the workbook page by page. Each

programme consisted of a recording of a simulated tutor and student one-to-one session, based on the worksheets. The idea was that the learner was meant to feel like they were eavesdropping on a learning session. This design meant that a learner workbook had to be written for the series and sent to learners prior to them listening to the programme. A promotional campaign raised awareness about the series and learners were encouraged to ring in to get their workbook sent to them.

The programmes for Literacy Through the Airwaves were designed and recorded by each area, with 18 programmes in Tipperary and 12 programmes in Mayo. Each programme was an hour's duration, simulating a one-to-one tuition class with a tutor and learner, using the material from the learner workbook. Learning from this experience, we made some changes to the structure of the programme when we began work with RTÉ. We worked with one producer for both "Read Write Now" and "Time 4 Learning" and this continuity was important. The producer worked in conjunction with ourselves in creating a format that maximised the learner's attention span. The programmes were 30 minutes duration and we broke up the learning with "entertainment" interludes. We had three learning points each week, with a tutor and learner in a one-to-one learning class, separated by a "light relief" slot. The light relief included a poem being read, a song, a story being recalled, old radio footage, tutor's



Read Write Now and Time 4 Learning radio literacy and numeracy series evaluation report

tips, learners' stories or whatever was linked to the learning that week.

In general, feedback from learners was very positive in relation to the design and structure of the radio programmes. The interactive approach was well received and suited the medium of radio.

### Learning through radio

When using the radio to learn, the listener is mostly using their aural skills. They could therefore have materials in front of them while listening to the radio programme, which meant they could follow the learning. This interactive approach moulded the structure of the programme, influencing how the tutor and student one-to-one class was simulated and recorded for broadcast. This method of learning facilitated more basic learners, who could follow the learning on the radio with the corresponding worksheets in front of them. The evaluation report showed that adults who followed the series found some material useful and relevant to them. Useful material included:

- word building;
- spelling;
- use of capital and small letters;
- using the euro; and
- reading the time, in particular the 24-hour clock.

Learners found the programmes clear and easy to follow, giving practical and useful information.

### From radio to television

"Literacy through the Airwaves" radio project was the first distance

education medium, and this experience helped us in making further radio series and the television series. From the successful outcomes of this project, the television series "Read Write Now" came about. Television presented different challenges in the design, format and structure, as the learning could be presented visually. The role of the workbook and the target group had to be reconsidered. Using the medium of radio allowed us to reflect and analyse the best method of developing a series for television. But that's another story!

### Broadcasting on community radio stations

In 2002 and 2003, NALA and the Community Radio Forum (CRF) considered the possibility of local community radio stations broadcasting the "Read Write Now" and "Time 4 Learning" series. We met and agreed to pilot this in a number of areas, in partnership with the local VEC Adult Literacy Service. In May 2003, four local stations broadcast the "Read Write Now" series.

These were:

- Raidi local VEC Adult Literacy ServInishowen Community Radio, Co. Donegal;
- NEAR FM, Dublin 17; and
- Community Radio Castlebar, Co. Mayo.

Lessons from this pilot were documented for future development. These four stations are planning to broadcast the "Time 4 Learning" series in January 2004. We hope that other local community radio stations


*Radio as a means of learning has worked for some adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties.*

will broadcast both series in the future, giving learners in these areas an opportunity to tune in and learn.

### The future

Radio as a means of learning has worked for some adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties. It allows for learning in private, in the comfort of your own surroundings and facilitates. NALA continue to work with DES, RTÉ, CRF and local radio to promote and develop the use of radio as a learning tool. For more information contact Helen Ryan, at 01-809 91907; email hryan@nala.ie

### References

McSkeane, L. “‘Read Write Now’ and ‘Time 4 Learning’ Evaluation of the Literacy and Numeracy Radio Series’ 2003. Dublin: National Adult Literacy Agency. 

# Another chapter in using TV for literacy learning

Now in its fourth season, ‘Read Write Now’ has established itself as a popular and highly successful educational series on RTÉ television. It has made a significant contribution to RTÉ’s schedule. It has also shown that television can be a valuable resource for those who want to develop their literacy skills.

### The first steps

When NALA first approached me about the possibility of a television series early in 1999, I was excited but a little sceptical. I was confident that television could be used to promote an awareness and understanding of literacy, but could television be effectively used to teach literacy skills?

Planning for the series began early in 1999 when Inez Bailey of NALA let me know that the Further Education section of the Department of Education and Science was interested in a television series on literacy. The Department had increased its investment in adult literacy services significantly and was in a position to provide the necessary funding. This was an opportunity



Article compiled by John McMahon,  
Editor, Educational Programmes,  
RTÉ Television

*Television can be a valuable resource to develop their literacy skills. One programme had 192,000 viewers.*

not to be missed. I had had an interest in using radio and television to promote literacy for many years. Earlier projects were modest and involved providing support for tutors and raising public awareness of literacy issues. This project was to be different as it involved not just a series of programmes but comprehensive support and referral services that would be made available by NALA and the Vocational Education Committees.

The Department sought proposals from a number of television companies for the development of a series of adult literacy tuition programmes. The selection committee from the Department of Education, NALA and RTÉ decided to ask AV Edge Ltd to produce the programmes. AV Edge has won the contract to produce each series since then. An editorial group was set up to oversee the project. This group was made up of representatives from the department of Education, NALA, RTÉ, AV Edge, VECs and users.

The Department and NALA suggested that a late night transmission time would be most suitable because their research had shown that adults can best participate when children are in bed and household tasks completed.

We reviewed this decision after the first series, and the programmes were moved to the 7.30pm slot on RTÉ 1, with a repeat late at night.

### Can TV teach?

Television is a powerful

communications medium and many claims are made about how it can influence the ways that people think and behave. Its major advantages are that almost everyone has access to it and that it costs very little to use. This makes television a very suitable way of reaching large numbers of people who may be interested in adult literacy services.

The conventional wisdom about television is that it can be used as a powerful motivational tool but that it has limited value as a means of direct teaching.

From the beginning, NALA wanted the programme to teach literacy skills as well as raise awareness. This challenge was faced, and met, by the production company. The approach has been developed over the four years of the series. The programmes have achieved a successful blend of interesting personal stories and clearly defined learning points.

### The programmes

For the first series, each programme included short dramas based around a theme such as going to a concert, booking a holiday or applying for a job. There was no presenter on camera, and the programme items were linked by a voice-over.

Each year brought some changes in the programme format as feedback from viewers and learners was taken into account. For the second series, the dramas were dropped and more real-life interviews and material were included. The major developments in the third series were the

*I was confident that television could be used to promote an awareness and understanding of literacy, but could television be effectively used to teach literacy skills?*



Read Write Now 4 learner pack which accompanies the TV series

introduction of Derek Mooney and Teri Garvey as presenters and Ian Robertson as an expert commentator. The fourth series retains these components but arranges them in a different way, with Derek presenting the programme and Ian and Teri sharing the expert input.

In producing the programmes, AV Edge has worked very closely with NALA in researching the content. The learning points for each programme are identified and prepared in consultation with NALA. This ensures that the learning points meet the needs of learners and are closely related to the content of the workbooks.

A freephone number is included in the programmes. Viewers can order the free workbook and discuss their literacy requirements with the literacy tutors who answer calls. They can also get information about literacy courses in their own areas.

### **Audience reactions**

Reaction to the first series was very positive, with an average audience of 136,000 for the series. One programme had 192,000 viewers. Audience figures for the later series are at much the same level. It's not always the same people who view the programmes, of course, so the number of people who see the programmes over the run of the series is much more. While these figures give some idea of the number of people who watched the programmes, comments from individuals give a much richer understanding of the impact the programmes have.

*'I watched the programme and learned two things – now I have decided to go to a place to learn to read and write.'*

*'It explained everything just the way I needed it explained.'*

*'You have thrown me a lifeline with this series.'*

*'I couldn't believe such a programme existed – it was brilliant.'*

Less enthusiastic comments have also helped to shape future series.

*'It was too basic but thought the 24-hour clock tip was great.'*

*'I thought it was interesting but there was too much carrying on between the learning.'*

*'Should definitely be a follow up – not fair to take people so far and then leave them.'*

### **Research and evaluation**

A critical contribution to the development of 'Read Write Now' is the detailed evaluation that is carried out on each series. The information gathered by this research has had a considerable influence on how the series has developed. The research collects information from individual learners and those who take part in group learning. This helps to make sure that the programmes address the real needs of the learners.

### **The partnership**

A partnership that involves four very different organisations – the Department of Education and

*The learning points meet the needs of learners and are closely related to the content of the workbooks.*



Derek Mooney, presenter, during filming of Read Write Now 4

Science, NALA, AV Edge and RTÉ – demands a lot of flexibility and understanding from all those involved. From the very early stages different views and approaches were discussed openly and agreement was eventually reached. At this stage all involved are aware of the demands and constraints on the others and the approach is highly co-operative.

### Conclusion

From a television viewpoint, four years is a long time for a series. On the other hand, 'Read Write Now' is now established and the brand is easily recognised.

The project has been successful both in raising public awareness about literacy and in developing literacy skills. It has also developed a partnership between the various organisations that will continue to work together.



# Read Write Now: Reaching learners who are hard to reach

Although TV programmes cannot replace face-to-face tutoring, they can support it and also provide a bridge to literacy work for people who have not yet taken the step of seeking help.

Seasoned literacy practitioners who are accustomed to the learner-centred approach of good literacy practice may wonder how a series of television or radio programmes can take the place of the individual care and attention which tutors and organisers give their learners.

The answer, of course, is that it can't. No amount of technology can replace the human contact which creates an effective learning situation. However, feedback on the now long-standing "Literacy through the Airwaves" project suggests that the broadcast media can help people with reading and writing difficulties in important ways that complement the existing literacy service.



*Article compiled by  
Liz McSkeane,  
Read Write Now Evaluator*

The project began in September 2000 when the first TV series was transmitted. It continued in 2001, with a 10-week RTÉ radio series. A second TV series was broadcast in the same year, and “Read Write Now 3” was developed and transmitted from October–December, 2002. The fourth TV series is currently being broadcast. Each of the 12-week TV series is accompanied by a learner workbook which provides an additional resource for people working alone at home or for those working in centres and other groups.

### Aims and target group

The project aims to reach:

- people who have not yet looked for help with their reading and writing;
- people who may be isolated, geographically or in other ways hard to reach; and
- people who believe that they are alone in finding reading or writing difficult.

‘Read Write Now’ is essentially a teaching programme which covers a range of literacy skills including spelling, form-filling and word-building. The third and fourth series have also included a strong emphasis on the learning process itself and covered topics such as memory, planning and motivation.

The target group for the ‘Read Write Now’ project has always been somewhat complex.

Reading, writing and numeracy encompass a very varied set of knowledge and skills. As well as this, literacy work is very

individualised, which makes it difficult to target adult literacy learning for any large group such as a television audience. For these reasons, the target group for the project has always been quite broadly defined as people at the improver stage, rather than those who are near or complete beginners.

Over the years there has been some progression in the level of difficulty of the programmes. For example, in 2002, people agreed that ‘Read Write Now 3’ was at a higher level than the first two series.

Nevertheless, learners noted a wide variety of levels which could cater for people at different stages. There was general agreement that in relation to the target group ‘Read Write Now 3’ catered very well for learners at the more advanced stage in this category but that in every programme and chapter of the book there was material which could be relevant to people at a more basic stage.

### Series Format and Approach

The ‘Literacy through the Airwaves’ project has in some respects evolved over the years in response to feedback from learners and tutors. For example, the presentation style of ‘Read Write Now 3’ and ‘Read Write Now 4’ differs from that of the first two series in that the more recent series have two presenters, whereas in series one and two the learning content was presented by voiceover and graphics. As well as this, these more recent series include a strong emphasis on learning-to-learn content which is situated in external locations such as a driving school, a gym and a

*The broadcast media can help people with reading and writing difficulties in important ways that complement the existing literacy service.*

college. The overall effect of these innovations is to create more of a documentary-style programme than the format of the two previous series did.

One of the cornerstones of good literacy practice is that reading and writing skills should be dealt with in a meaningful context. This principle has been followed in all of the 'Read Write Now' programmes. Skills are covered in the context of everyday topics. This integrated approach ensures that the elements of reading and writing contained in the series are considered not in isolation, but interwoven with real-life situations.

This is also in keeping with what we know about how people learn. According to the principles of situated learning (see Resnick, 1991), the context in which learning happens is not just background, it is an integral part of the learning itself. This idea supports what literacy practitioners have always known intuitively: that it is by no means certain that skills which are learned in isolation will automatically transfer to real situations, as they are needed. To be really effective, learning needs to be contextualised. This is an integral part of the 'Read Write Now' approach.

### Participant responses

Reactions to the key elements of series 2 and 3 have been very positive. Most people favoured the integrated approach and, as well as improving specific literacy skills, many said that they had also gained other information related to the programme topics.

The learner's story, where an individual learner explains how they became involved in learning as an adult, was almost universally acclaimed in all of the series broadcast so far: learners, tutors and also general viewers found this section both informative and genuinely moving.

Here are some comments gathered from people who agreed to be interviewed for the series evaluations:

- "It's good to know that other people have the same problem — it makes all the difference."
- "I'm making more of an effort now when I have to write something and I'm noticing things, how words are put together."
- "I think it's marvellous — I wish I'd had this years ago."

Because people come to literacy work with such a varied range of existing skills and needs, the range of knowledge and skills which evaluation participants said that they had learned from the programmes was very varied. The most frequently mentioned areas of learning were spelling and word-building. These two elements of literacy work seem to have been interesting and relevant for a broad range of learners, from relative beginners through to people who have specific gaps in their skills. Adding prefixes, suffixes and paying attention to word endings are all word-building skills which were of particular interest to many viewers of both 'Read Write Now 2' and 'Read Write Now 3' who were at different stages.

*It seems, therefore, that the telephone really does have potential to facilitate learning in specific literacy and numeracy items.*

Furthermore, many people were able to give examples of things which they were now able to do in their daily lives which they had not been able to do before: write cheques, fill in forms and read advertisements. In addition, a very frequently mentioned gain was the sense of improved confidence and the reduction in the feeling of isolation which they had experienced as a result of their difficulty with reading and writing. Given that the aim of literacy work is not merely to gain technical skills, but also to develop the personal and social confidence to use those skills appropriately, this increased personal confidence may be considered as a major outcome.

The learning process, or learning-to-learn content, was covered in each programme of series 3. Feedback on the learning-to-learn content of the programme was generally very positive. People were encouraged by the concept of learning styles and ways of learning. The theory of multiple intelligences struck some people as being a positive approach to the notion of intelligence. It also offered an explanation for some of their past difficulties in learning. Exploring the learning process also gives people a realistic indication of how learning works and the kind of effort which is needed to make real progress, an area which has been revisited and enhanced in the current series.

### Range of use

In the course of the evaluations of series 2 and 3, it emerged that the 'Read Write Now' materials— that is, the series video and

accompanying workbooks — have been a much-used resource in literacy centres. Tutors have made very positive comments, in particular about the workbook. The programmes and workbook have also been used by other audiences, such as:

- people with disabilities;
- some schools and special schools; and
- groups working with non-nationals whose first language is not English.

Although the materials were not devised especially with the needs of these other audiences in mind, it is worth noting that the usefulness and application appears to be wider than originally anticipated.

### Use of the telephone support line

Telephone support for the third series involved a more structured system of tutoring or mentoring than before. It involved regular contact calls initiated by the tutors rather than by the learner. Once contact had been established, one of the first tasks of the telephone tutor was to establish the needs of the learners. Comments from learners indicated that the help of the telephone tutor really did enable them to learn specific literacy and numeracy points which they had previously found too difficult or else had never encountered. This was valuable support for people working at home on their own.

Almost everyone who received tutoring by telephone mentioned spelling as being a problem. For



Read Write Now 3TV literacy series evaluation report

some people this was the only real difficulty they had. In some cases there were gaps in learners' phonic knowledge which could be remedied fairly easily. Word-building skills such as adding prefixes and suffixes and, especially, breaking up words, were particularly noted as areas where the tutors' help was valuable.

It is interesting that not all of the learning which people achieved was directly related to the learning points or the topics covered in the series. Some people asked the telephone tutor for help in tasks arising from their daily lives such as form filling and writing Christmas cards. It seems, therefore, that the telephone really does have potential to facilitate learning in specific literacy and numeracy items, as well as helping people to work on particular tasks. For learners working at the very broad stage of improvers, quite a lot of literacy work can be done over the telephone.

Although 'Read Write Now' allows learners privacy, the disadvantage of this is the isolation which people can experience as a result of the lack of social contact with other learners and with tutors. The telephone tutors provided a point of contact with the outside world and were a source of guidance, information and encouragement. They also answered particular questions about detailed reading and writing points. Many people said that the telephone support was the encouragement they needed to continue with their

learning and to follow the process to the end.

Although a TV series and support materials will not and is not intended to replace the existing literacy service, there are things which the broadcast media can do to support and complement it. This series provided an introduction to literacy work for people who either had not known that help was there, or had not yet looked for it. It provided:


- teaching in a range of skills from which learners could select, as they needed;
- a valuable resource for literacy schemes and other groups; and
- an opportunity for the general public to become aware of literacy issues.

Literacy offered through the broadcast media is not the only instrument for delivering and guiding literacy practice. Rather, it is an addition, another way of reaching the people who have so far been difficult to reach.

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# Learning together: co-operative approach to family literacy

Over the last decade there has been a growing interest in family literacy. Adults and children learn together at many different stages in their lives. Family literacy programmes recognise and give support to the ways in which children and adults learn from and with each other. In May 2003 Jenny Derbyshire started working with NALA as Family Literacy Policy Worker. At present she is consulting with various people involved in family literacy work. Over the next few months Jenny and the NALA Family Literacy Working Group will write NALA policy and guidelines for the development of family literacy work. This is a key part of comprehensive and wide-ranging provision for adult literacy and basic education.

It is important to remember that NALA's definition of literacy is very broad. It includes numeracy and aspects of personal and community development. The concept of family is also broad and inclusive. The word "family" describes a caring relationship between generations. It includes children, parents, grandparents, child-minders, aunts, uncles, foster parents, brothers and sisters. In

general, the term family literacy is used to refer to:

- the uses of literacy within families and communities, especially activities which involve two or more generations; and
- education programmes which offer support to families in developing their literacy.

Family literacy programmes are creative and wide-ranging. They involve formal and informal learning and build on literacy practices within a family or community. They include a range of age groups and focus on both the child and the adult as learners.

A number of aspects of family literacy are important in the ongoing policy discussions, including:

- learning together;
- understanding school learning;
- recognising learning;
- existing literacy projects; and
- co-operation in local areas.

## Learning together

"I learned that I am the first teacher of my children, to walk, talk and hold things".

This comment by a parent taking part in a family literacy course was chosen as a theme to illustrate the meaning of family literacy in the Co. Dublin VEC 'Staff Handbook for Family Learning'. It expresses a key point about NALA's approach to family learning, which is that any programmes or courses should recognise and take account of the learning that adults and children naturally engage in together.



*Article compiled by  
Jenny Derbyshire,  
Family Literacy Policy Worker,  
NALA*

In every family children learn elements of basic literacy and numeracy. This learning still happens even if the adults struggle with their own literacy.

A lot of learning happens as a natural part of family life. Children learn “to walk, talk and hold things”. They also learn about the meaning of pictures, logos, adverts, music and how we communicate through speaking and listening. They pick up their early literacy from the adults who care for them. Children learn at home with parents or foster parents, with grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and other carers. After they start school, children still develop much of their literacy at home and in their community. And adults learn from their children, especially in the families of new speakers of English, but also in areas of learning such as information technology, where the children are often more at ease than the adults. Family learning has many dimensions and works in a number of directions.

As family literacy programmes expand and develop, it is vital to keep at the forefront of our thinking the awareness that adults are the natural teachers of children. In this way we will continue to support parents and carers. Denny Taylor, an American researcher and educator, originally used the term family literacy to describe the home activities of parents and children. She later returned to the topic in order to reinforce an approach that respects difference:

- between school and home literacies; and
- between the ways different families learn.

The book ‘Many Families, Many Literacies’ builds on the voices, views and experiences of tutors and learners in many contexts. All are concerned that the learning that takes place between generations should be supported, even if it is different from the kind of learning children need to be able to undertake in a school environment.

In Ireland, family learning projects are building on the skills that families have and helping them to develop in ways that they decide they need themselves. The sessions described in the ‘Family Literacy Resource Guide’, produced by the Co. Clare Family Learning Project, help learners to recognise how children and adults learn together. The photo pack helps parents and carers see the kinds of learning situations their children experience alongside them everyday. Tutors in many different family literacy projects are working with adults to see how children and adults learn in the family context and to help them understand how this learning can be encouraged and developed. Family literacy and learning projects around the country are helping parents and carers understand the importance of the informal teaching that they do without knowing it. These programmes give parents and other family members the chance to realise their key role in their children’s learning.

*Family literacy programmes are creative and wide-ranging. They involve formal and informal learning and build on literacy practices within a family or community.*

## Understanding school learning

Of course, children do need to understand how to learn in school. The adults in their lives also need to understand what is involved in supporting the children with their school work, even if the adults hated school and cannot read themselves. For this reason, some family literacy programmes focus on helping parents and other carers to support children's school learning, through homework and after school clubs, or through courses that explain particular aspects of the school curriculum.

These courses are also an important and useful part of family learning support. If adults gain more confidence in understanding what the children are being expected to do in school, they are better able to give their children support when they need it. Often schools do not realise how difficult it can be for a parent who is not confident about their own reading and writing, or who had bad experiences in school themselves, to help their children or talk to the school teacher if difficulties arise. School-based teachers may need to become more aware of the many informal ways in which literacy is used in the home. Learning can happen in many directions if we listen to each other.

An item in the 'Read Write Now 4 Learner Workbook' describes how children and adults can work together on their literacy. Maria is a helper in a Homework Club. She is also an adult literacy learner:

*"Maria finds that helping the children with their writing and*

*spelling helps her as well. Before she got the job she never looked at books, but now she has to. She always brings a dictionary with her and if the children ask her to spell a word she makes a game of it to see who can find the word quickest in the dictionary."* (p.53)

## Recognising learning

An interesting development for the adults attending some school-based programmes is the decision to continue their own studies. The parents or carers taking part realise that, as well as supporting the young people who are doing particular courses at school, they can also do the courses themselves and gain certificates. Home-school-community liaison tutors sometimes run "Maths for Fun" programmes with primary or secondary school parents and children. In some places the adults involved have decided to continue working on their maths and gain a Junior Certificate. In this way family learning activities can encourage the adults to pursue their own educational development. Reports on The Basic Skills Agency's family literacy programmes in the UK have noted that they often become access courses, especially for women, leading on to further study ('Family Literacy Works', p. xiv, 80). Similar developments are clearly happening here.

Adults taking part in family learning programmes do not have to pursue school-curriculum courses in order to gain certificates. The FETAC structure makes it possible for learners to gain certificates at Foundation

*We need to build links and partnerships to bring together school perspectives and approaches from adult literacy work and community education.*

Level and Level 1 in courses related to family learning. The FETAC approach makes it possible to recognise and build on informal learning. The NCVA/ FETAC Foundation level module in Communications can be based on family learning. Many groups also extend their introductory family literacy courses to include the FETAC/NCVA Child Development and Play module at Foundation Level. Some of the Education Co-ordinators working with the Area Partnerships have been developing an Early Reading Support module at Levels 1 and 2. They hope this will answer the need for certification for parents taking part in some of the 'Read to Succeed' programmes which they have been running for several years.

### What's happening out there?

In this article I have talked about the importance of recognising the difference between school literacy and home literacy, and I have referred to the various family literacy projects that are running here at present. Some of the kinds of family learning activities that I have discovered or heard about since I took up this work with NALA in May this year include:

- programmes that combine family learning elements and aspects of parenting. This may involve units on nutrition and behaviour, as well as topics such as emergent literacy, reading to small children, environmental print and homework support;
- programmes that focus on how children and adults learn and the role of parents and other

carers in understanding and helping children's learning;

- courses that focus on maths and number skills;
- NCVA/ FETAC modules;
- Homework Clubs and After School Clubs;
- courses that give parents information to help them support their children's learning at school at both primary and second level;
- programmes with particular groups such as Travellers, ESOL learners or parents who are in prison;
- projects that include joint parent and child learning sessions, including courses based on computers or art and craft activities;
- home visits;
- programmes initiated by schools which involve parents, such as paired reading; and
- training and support for parents of children at second-level who need help with reading.

I have also encountered courses on reading to babies and young children. These include:

- 'Read to Succeed' courses;
- shorter 'What's the Story?' courses, often in conjunction with primary schools; and
- the 'Storysacks' approach, sometimes run through local libraries.

And I've also discovered programmes that help fathers engage with their children's learning, especially their sons. Some of these use sport as a topic, others often focus on computer-based learning.

## A co-operative approach

A key issue in family learning involves finding ways of developing partnerships and co-operative projects in local areas. Schools, libraries, community development projects, family resource centres, and many other groups have an important role in this aspect of education, which crosses many boundaries. We need to build links and partnerships to bring together school perspectives, adult literacy and community education approaches to the benefit of the children and adults whose learning and development we hope to support. This is a way of working which can be complicated, but is vital if family literacy work is to develop effectively.

These and other topics will be addressed by the NALA working group and I'm sure will be the focus of future articles. One important point I have not talked about here is training for tutors who would like to work in this area of adult basic education. That would take a whole article to itself. All I can say is – we're working on it!

The Working Group will meet from October 2003 to April 2004. Following this series of meetings, NALA will produce a document on policy and guidelines for the development of family learning. Watch this space..... For more information, contact Jenny Derbyshire, Family Literacy Policy Worker. (087) 810n4452 or e-mail [valleylodge4@eircom.net](mailto:valleylodge4@eircom.net).

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A family gets down to some series reading

# Book seeks to liberate legal process from jargon

Plain English should replace “legalese” in legislation and all aspects of the legal process including the courts, the president of the Law Society said yesterday.

Mr Ken Murphy was speaking as *A Plain English Guide to Legal Terms* was published by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). The book has been produced to mark National Literacy Awareness Week, which runs until Sunday. The theme is literacy and the legal justice system. The guide contains explanations for 1,400 terms.

The inclusion of such terms as in *pari delicto* and “emolument” indicated, said Ms Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, that even the most literate members of society could have difficulty with legal jargon.

It was hoped the guide would make the language of the Irish legal system more accessible. “Literacy is broader than just

reading and writing. It’s about being able to take part on an equal footing. When people don’t understand what is going on in a legal environment they are very vulnerable in that situation”,

NALA had a demand for such a publication through its Plain English Service from both members of the legal profession and the public.

Not understanding the language in legal documents and setting, she continued, conferred a “lack of ownership” among citizens of their legal system. “I hate using the word but it really is a process of disempowerment,” Ms Bailey said.

Mr Murphy said the use of legalese by the legal profession was often unconscious. “When challenged they may say that legal concepts are complex, and legalese is necessary for both accuracy and clarity. But this publication shows it is not.”

Mr Patrick O’Connor, editor of the book and former president of the Law Society, agreed that changes in the way the legal justice system expressed itself were necessary.

*A Plain English Guide to Legal Terms* is available from NALA at a not-for-profit price of €20, at 01-855 4332.

## Legalese: Would you understand?

*Duces tecum*: Type of witness summons which requires a person to appear before a court with specified documents



Article compiled by  
Kitty Holland, journalist,  
*The Irish Times*\*



*In pari delicto:* If two parties are equally to blame for a situation a court could refuse to provide a remedy to either of them because they are in pari delicto

*Guardian ad litem:* A person who has authority to manage the person or property of a child or a person under mental disability for the purposes of a legal action

*Emolument:* Wages, benefits or profits received as compensation for holding office of employment. \*This article has been reproduced by kind permission of The Irish Times © 2003.



# A chance to become World Wise for literacy learners

World Wise is a new and innovative adult literacy resource, written from a development education perspective, which was recently produced through the combined efforts of Co. Clare Reading and Writing Scheme, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and Trócaire.

## What is development education?

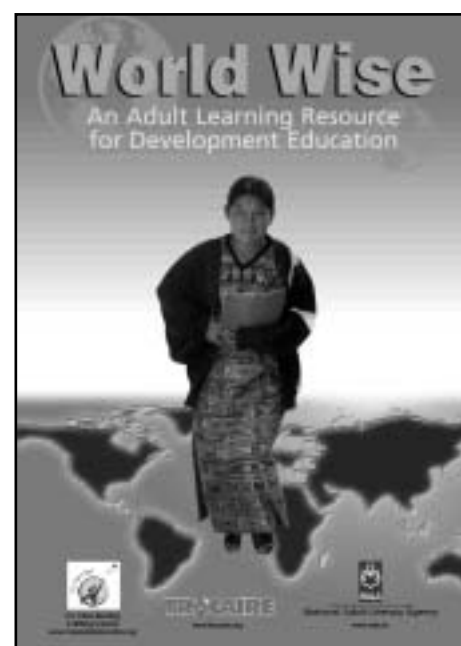
Development education is about challenging people's perceptions and ways of thinking that can lead to a blind acceptance of injustice in our world. It seeks to offer people the tools to reflect on development issues and provides them with the opportunity to become active participants in creating a more just world.

## Why an adult learning resource for development education?

This resource was the brainchild of Co. Clare Reading and Writing Scheme following a visit from Trócaire during Lent 2002. During this visit there was much discussion around the availability



Article compiled by Eithne Brennan, PRO, Trócaire



World Wise development education pack for adult learners

of suitable development education resources for the adult learner. At that time Trócaire were producing education material for students at primary and secondary school levels only. In Ennis this material was being adapted for use with adult literacy students. However, while the content was interesting in itself, it was addressing a different audience and therefore had limited possibilities. Thus the idea to develop an adult learning resource for development education was conceived.

One year later, World Wise was launched on International Adult Literacy Day, 18 October 2003. While Co. Clare Reading and Writing Scheme initiated the project and wrote the core material, it was through the support and efforts of NALA, Trócaire and the many literacy schemes and tutors throughout the country who piloted the resource that this work finally came to fruition.

This project also received funding from the Development Education Unit of DCI (Development Co-operation Ireland). The project met with one of their key objectives: to integrate and support the delivery of development education in selected areas in the formal and non-formal education sector. One of these areas is the adult education sector.

### About World Wise

The resource materials included in World Wise were devised for adult literacy and basic education classes. The material can be adapted to suit different learner needs, interests and levels of

literacy. Using a themed literacy approach, the pack aims to:

- introduce adult literacy learners to development education themes and issues;
- present these themes in a way that stimulates the imagination and encourages discussion and debate;
- provide opportunities for improving reading and writing skills; and
- invite participants to consider how they can contribute to creating a more just and equal world.

World Wise is made up of four units. Development issues are explored through the use of stories, poems, words and pictures. Stories, poems, works and pictures are ways of telling and ways of seeing. But they are also ways of not telling and not seeing, because no story is the whole story, no single poem captures 'the thing itself', and no single viewer can see 'the big picture'. This pack is intended as a starting point from which the learners are encouraged to explore a number of themes from their own perspectives and those of others.

The central focus of each unit is the Trócaire photo. These reflect the work of Trócaire in Rwanda, Somalia, India and Colombia and are contrasted with photographs from Ireland. The photographs are supported by imaginative and challenging activities which stimulate the participants and facilitate learning.

### Why become 'World Wise'?

World Wise has been welcomed as



The World Wise pack examines the life of a Rwandan farmer

*This pack is intended as a starting point from which the learners are encouraged to explore a number of themes from their own perspectives and those of others.*


an innovative and unique adult education resource. During the piloting phase of this project the feedback from tutors and participants was always positive and encouraging. We hope that the finished product does justice to their invaluable input and advice.

World Wise was launched by Fr Peter McVerry, who is well known for his work with the homeless and marginalized in Dublin.

Drawing on his own experience, Fr McVerry remarked that “due to poor literacy, hundreds of thousands of Irish people cannot exercise their rights as citizens in this country. Their poor literacy skills hold them back. These individuals cannot realise their potential and our society cannot benefit from their skills. [World Wise] will not only enable learners to improve their reading and writing skills, but it will expose them to a wider world

where people are also working to break the cycle of low literacy levels and to exercise their rights.”

Trócaire’s Director, Justin Kilcullen, added that “One of the most significant developments in a learner’s life is to write his or her name. With this gesture, they can claim their place in the world. What’s more, they can make a contribution to highlighting global injustice.”

It is our hope that World Wise will not only be used as a resource to improve literacy skills but that it will allow people throughout Ireland to recognise that they too can become active participants in creating a more just and equal world. To order copies of World Wise contact NALA on 01 855 4332 or email: [literacy@nala.ie](mailto:literacy@nala.ie) . For more information, contact Fergus Dolan, Training Officer, at 01-809 9191; email [fdolan@nala.ie](mailto:fdolan@nala.ie). 

*Development education is about challenging people’s perceptions and ways of thinking that can lead to a blind acceptance of injustice in our world.*



Authors of the “World Wise” pack Moira Green Adult Literacy Tutor and Pauline Murphy, Adult Literacy Tutor from Co. Clare Reading and Writing Scheme.

# Using the internet for literacy learning and tuition

– [www.literacytools.ie](http://www.literacytools.ie)

NALA recognises that there is huge potential in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) – computers and the internet to you and me – as a learning and tuition tool. With that in mind we are happy to say that our first resource website, [www.literacytools.ie](http://www.literacytools.ie), is up and running. This website is the product of two years' labour and much consultation. This is NALA's first attempt to produce software and it was a great learning experience. We learned that this work is very time-consuming and testing is the key word. Every feature was tested on different browsers.

## The background to the website

In April 2001 literacy practitioners responded to a questionnaire regarding the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in literacy. The majority of respondents said that Irish resources were needed if they were to fully embrace ICT.

We started to develop this literacy resource site in 2002 with part of a €19,000 Community Application Integrating Technology (CAIT) grant. We chose to develop a website as it would be accessible to a wide audience and easy to update. We commissioned seven literacy tutors from a wide range of backgrounds to design worksheets for us. We were inspired by other learning websites for learners, including the BBC/Basic Skills Agency's website, [skillswise.co.uk](http://skillswise.co.uk).

## The website's users

We designed the site for independent learners primarily, and we recognise that this site is not for beginners in ICT. It is designed for a learner who is familiar with computers and the website and wants to use this medium as a learning tool. The NALA freephone number is available to people with queries during the daytime, and e-mail is also being used as a means of contacting us. So far we have received feedback from as far away as Canada and the USA.

We expect tutors to use the site as a valuable resource tool. They can use this site to introduce learners to the web. Also, they can use it to teach basic computer skills by teaching students to:

- use a mouse to highlight text;
- click and drag while completing games;
- navigate through the site; and
- use a printer to access exercises.

Most of the exercises are meant to be printed off. They deal with



Article compiled by  
Jennie Lynch,  
Development Worker, NALA

*We designed the website so that it meets recognised worldwide disability-friendly guidelines.*



[www.literacytools.ie](http://www.literacytools.ie) website home page

topics such as looking for work, health, driving, farming and music. We hope to commission more worksheets that will be categorised into skills as well as topics.

### Features of the site

We made some of the site's worksheets interactive so learners would get instant feedback if they wished. We expect this feature to be very popular with tutors and learners. We also designed the website so that it meets recognised worldwide disability-friendly guidelines. This means that the site was designed so that it is accessible to as many people as possible, including those using disability aids such as screen readers.


In September 2002 we employed Janet Kehelly to start an evaluation process of the site. Janet interviewed 24 learners and 10 tutors over a six-month period. Their recommendations were taken on board and greatly added to the usability of the site. Following feedback from learners in the summer, we also included the following features:

- games;
- interactive worksheets;
- a tour of the site which explains its features;
- sound capacity; and
- printable worksheets based on living in Ireland (health, farming, employment).

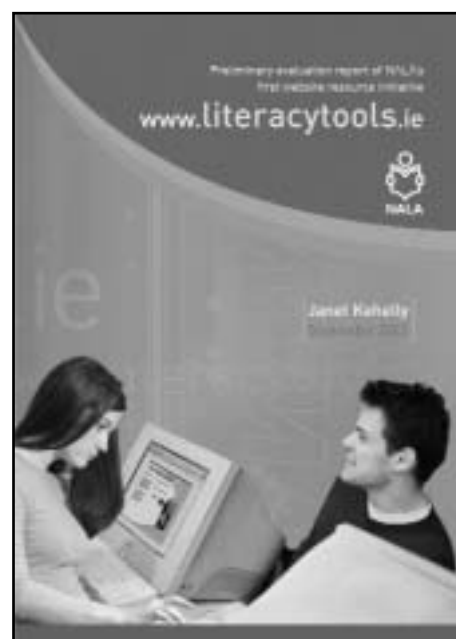
### Further evaluation

We haven't stopped evaluating. Starting in November 2003, we have asked more literacy venues

to get involved in assessing the site. We will be working with the UCC Psychology Department, who have designed a questionnaire whose results should make the site more user friendly. Following this evaluation, we will launch the site with national advertising in January or February 2004.

Janet Kehelly's evaluation of [literacytools.ie](http://literacytools.ie) will be sent to literacy schemes in the coming weeks. As well as documenting the feedback we received, it also documents recent ICT initiatives NALA has undertaken and puts forward how this website should be developed. 

*We will launch the site with national advertising in January or February 2004.*



# NALA embraces the campaign for plain English

Have you ever read the terms and conditions attached to a website or a loan agreement? If you've tried, your eyes probably glazed over. You probably clicked OK or signed on the dotted line without finishing reading. You may have assumed that there wouldn't be anything in the terms and conditions that you'd disagree with. After all, a reputable company wouldn't try to trick their customers.

But why do terms and conditions have to be unclear? And what does 'terms and conditions' mean, anyway? These are the sort of questions that inspired Chrissie Maher to establish Plain English Campaign. The Campaign promotes clear communication through publications, publicity and training. It also campaigns to do away with 'gobbledygook and legalese'.

**Chrissie Maher says "end gobbledygook" and sets up Plain English Campaign.**

The roots of Plain English Campaign were planted in the early seventies. Chrissie Maher experienced problems with literacy herself. An employer helped her improve her reading and writing by paying for a course. Chrissie then went on to help others. Many people she knew couldn't understand government forms. So, they couldn't get financial assistance from the government even though they qualified.

To combat these incomprehensible forms and the British government's unwillingness to do anything about it, Chrissie got involved in setting up a community newspaper, the 'Tuebrook Bugle'. She went on to set up an adult literacy paper called the 'Liverpool Times' and the Salford Forms Market, a project in Greater Manchester where people could get help filling out government forms.

Plain English Campaign began in England in 1979 when Chrissie, her daughter Carol and a group of students shredded incomprehensible government forms and publications in Parliament Square in London. Their publicity stunt was a pointed response to the British civil service, which was reluctant to adopt plain English forms. A team including Chrissie had developed these forms at the request of Professor David Donnison, chairman of the Supplementary Benefits Commission.

**Is your publication crystal clear or a pile of tripe?**

The next year, Plain English Campaign continued its high-



*Article compiled by  
Elizabeth O'Shea,  
Plain English Consultant, NALA*

*For people with  
low literacy  
levels, poor  
writing is a  
barrier to  
understanding.*

profile approach to poor English by creating the Plain English Campaign Awards. Organisations that produced clear communications won trophies. Organisations that produced gobbledygook won a bag of tripe. Today, unclear, confusing, jargon-filled publications win a Golden Bull award.

### **Plain English Campaign proves that clear communication pays.**

After constant pressure from Plain English Campaign, the British government set up a review of its public forms and publications in 1981. The review team created a lot of change: they got rid of over 36,000 outdated or useless forms. They rewrote and redesigned over 58,000 other forms. Initially, they estimated that the review saved the British Government £15 million. Now, the overall savings are estimated at £250 million. In part, this money has been saved because there are:

- fewer forms;
- fewer enquiries from the public because they can understand the forms; and
- lower administration needs because there are fewer incorrectly filled out forms to send back to people.

Plain English Campaign next broadened its activities by targeting banks, insurance companies, health organisations, legal publications and labels on medicines.

### **A Crystal Mark guarantees that your publication is clear.**

In 1990, the Campaign launched an official seal of approval, the

Crystal Mark. The Crystal Mark is an incentive to encourage clear communication. Organisations send documents to the Campaign for review. If the documents are written as clearly as possible, they receive the Crystal Mark. So far, the Campaign has awarded a Crystal Mark to over 4,000 documents in the UK, the Republic of Ireland, the USA, Australia, Denmark, New Zealand and South Africa.

### **Plain English has come to the Republic of Ireland.**

For people with low literacy levels, poor writing is a barrier to understanding. So it's no surprise that NALA wanted to bring plain English to the Republic of Ireland. Most of NALA's plain English work has been done on a part-time basis. But recent funding by the Department of Social and Family Affairs has enabled NALA to engage a Plain English Project Worker and freelance plain English editors.

Clodagh McCarthy is NALA's Plain English Project Worker. She told me why NALA began developing plain English services.

“NALA recognised that while adult literacy schemes play an invaluable role in improving literacy levels in Ireland, organisations that produce written material for the public need to take responsibility for making sure that all people — including those with literacy difficulties — can read and understand it,” Clodagh explained.

“Literacy is not just about communication skills; it's also

*Plain English makes it more likely that someone will actually read the material you have gone to the trouble to prepare.*

about using those skills in everyday life to access and understand your rights and responsibilities. So, by raising awareness of plain English and getting organisations to think about how they present their information, we hope to remove the ‘gobbledygook’ that tends to alienate and intimidate people, especially those with low levels of literacy.”

### **NALA has adopted a practical and educational approach to plain English.**

There are a number of strands to NALA’s plain English campaign. First, there is the editing service. Organisations submit their documents to Clodagh, and a plain English editor reviews them for clarity, flow, meaning and design. Clodagh explained what kind of organisations take advantage of the plain service.

“We have had queries from quite a few organisations, mainly in the public sector,” she replied. “We have had a steady flow of queries from organisations such as the Irish Cancer Society, the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority and the Personal Injuries Assessment Board. In the past, we have worked with the Euro Changeover Board of Ireland and the Dental Health Foundation, to name but two.”

NALA is also campaigning to promote plain English. This year’s National Literacy Awareness Week focused on clearly communicating legal information. The themes for the week were:

- plain English in the legal and justice system;

- helping people to understand their rights and to access the legal system; and
- the relationship between low levels of literacy and crime.

Poor literacy skills make it difficult for people to interact with our legal and justice system. But unclear forms, laws and other documents only compound the difficulty, creating another barrier to access.

The campaign included events, publications, media activity and a seminar for people working with the law. One publication launched during the week was NALA’s ‘A Plain English Guide to Legal Terms’. The guide explains legal terms to non-lawyers.

Training events like those during National Literacy Awareness Week are key to NALA’s campaign to make public communication clear. And training is an important part of Clodagh McCarthy’s plain English work. “I’m making presentations at conferences and have started to offer interactive workshops at conferences where people can learn some of the main plain English techniques and apply them to their everyday work,” she reports.

### **What’s it like to write with plain English?**

Sheila O’Kelly is one of the plain English editors working with Clodagh. Sheila has worked extensively as an editor, both freelance and as a subeditor with the Irish Times. She told me what she saw as the benefits of applying plain English.

## *Ten tips for clearer writing*

*Think of your audience, not yourself.*

*Use short sentences.*

*Be careful with jargon.*

*Use active verbs mainly, not passive ones.*

*Don’t underline.*

“Plain English focuses on the audience. The material looks better because it is well designed and it reads better because it has been well edited. This makes it more likely that someone will actually read the material you have gone to the trouble to prepare. More people will read plain English because the text is simply and clearly written. Jargon is either cut out or explained and this makes the information more useful to more people.”

I asked Sheila if there were any disadvantages to using plain English. “For the reader, no. For the writer it may take a little longer to really think about what they are writing while focusing on the reader. It can take time to get out of the habit of using clichés and jargon.”

Clodagh agrees with Sheila’s assessment. “I think plain English is a step forward. As a form of communication, and used by the right people, it’s a valuable tool to help people understand sometimes complicated information. From an organisation’s point of view, it helps to save time and money because people will be more likely to understand written material the first time they read it. However, some organisations might see one disadvantage in using plain English — explaining complicated concepts in simpler language can make documents longer, which can mean higher printing costs. But plain English is worth it!”

### **NALA plans to expand plain English training activities.**

NALA plans to set up a plain English training programme in the

New Year. The programme will train writers within organisations so they can apply plain English principles to all their writing and design. In addition, NALA’s service will work with more public sector organisations and move into the commercial sector.

Clodagh elaborated on these plans. “To do this, we will continue to raise awareness of plain English and the service we offer, by contributing to industry journals as well as continuing to make presentations. Over time, we also hope to source funding and link up with other organisations on joint projects. We also hope to promote the use of plain English at industry-level — for example, we hope to look at the Finance industry in the future because it’s rife with jargon!”

### **How far can plain English go?**

The expanded plain English service is likely to have many clients in Ireland. According to Plain English Campaign, quite a lot of Irish companies have applied for and received the Crystal Mark for at least one document. The list includes companies such as Irish Life, Quinn Direct and Bank of Ireland.

In fact, every type of communication can be improved with plain English. Although some groups here, such as the legal profession, are being careful of implementing change, it is likely to happen in the future.

And there are international examples that will help inspire this change. For example, the ‘Los Angeles Times’ recently reported

*Use lower case bold for emphasis.*

*Put complex information into bullet points.*

*Use everyday words. Write small numbers in words.*

*Make your writing personal.*

*- contributed by Sheila O’Kelly*



Clodagh McCarthy with Mary Coughlan, TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, launching the new Plain English Service.

on a project in California to make jury instructions clear. In 1996, the Commission on the Jury System, part of the Judicial Council of California, found that instructions to juries were “on occasion, simply impenetrable to the ordinary juror.” They set up a task force to revise instructions for civil cases.

The new jury instructions will use active verbs, short sentences and give examples to explain concepts. For example, the instruction ‘Failure of recollection is common. Innocent misrecollection is not uncommon’ will become “People often forget things or make mistakes in what they in what they remember.”

It means that jurors can focus on guilt, innocence and responsibility instead of on deciphering old fashioned language. This approach recognises that the way people speak and write today is different than it was 50 or 100 years ago, when some of these instructions were created. It’s plainly better!



# The Prison Adult Literacy Survey: results and implications

The low literacy level of prisoners has been recognised as a major issue for Irish prisons for some time. In fact, the Irish prison Service has been at the forefront of providing literacy support for prisoners compared to many other countries. International research shows that offenders are less likely to re-offend if employed and that access to employment opportunities is widened if appropriate levels of basic skills are attained. To date there has not been a comprehensive study of literacy in prisons. This was recently addressed through the publication of the ‘Prison Adult Literacy Survey’, which is a comprehensive research study into the literacy levels of prisoners.

This study examines the literacy levels among the prison population in Ireland. The survey, which was funded by the Department of Justice and Law Reform, was carried out in Irish prisons in May 2001. It used materials based on the International Adult Literacy



*Article compiled by  
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Further Development  
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Education & Science*



*Mark Morgan,  
Education Department,  
St Patrick's College, Drumcondra*

Survey, which had been used in a study of the general population of Ireland and other countries beginning in 1995.

### **Aims of the survey**

The Prison Adult Literacy Survey had a number of aims. Firstly, from the perspective of the Prison Education Service, there was a need to know how prisoners compared with the general population with regard to literacy skills. The need for this information has become more urgent in the context of the Government's White Paper on Adult Education and the top priority that report affords to adult literacy, since more accurate statistics are crucial in planning the most appropriate kind of courses for prisoners. A second aim of the study was to examine the extent to which literacy problems and factors associated with such problems might be associated with the development of anti-social behaviours that result in people eventually serving prison sentences. With this in mind, information was sought on the nature of the offences for which respondents had been sentenced. A third aim of the study was to extend the research base and knowledge regarding the prison population, in line with earlier studies of background characteristics.

The results of the study show that a significant number of prisoners have virtually no literacy skills and even by traditional and outdated standards would be considered illiterate. There are also a large number of prisoners who have limited skills of a kind that would enable them to meet the challenges of modern living.

This latter group seemed also to have very little involvement or commitment to school even during those years of compulsory schooling. A third group of prisoners have rather good literacy skills and seem able to cope even with complex materials.

The research findings show that, in comparison with the general population, there is a much higher percentage of people at International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) Level 1 or lower within the prison system.

For example, in the general population, approximately 25% of people scored at Level 1 or below. In the Irish prison population, 52% of respondents scored at this level. This is particularly alarming given the age profile of the prison population (39.2% aged under 25) and the fact that younger people performed better in the general IALS survey: there were approximately 17% of people aged between 16 and 25 at Level 1 as opposed to 41% of people aged between 56 and 65.

Another striking finding was that there was a strong relationship between poor literacy skills and certain kinds of crime but not others. Violent offenders and property offenders tended to have major problems of literacy. In contrast, those in prison for sex offences and for serious drug offences tended to have much better literacy scores. It is also interesting that young males tended to have relatively poor literacy scores.

### **The study's main findings**

The results of the study emphasise

*We recommend that the Prison Education Service gives top priority to those prisoners with the weakest literacy skills.*

the link between anti-social behaviour and educational disadvantage as manifested in the low literacy level of so many prisoners. In the context of existing studies on this topic, there is no suggestion that the relationship is a simple causal one, that is, that low literacy levels are responsible for all anti-social behaviour. However, there is a considerable body of evidence showing that poor literacy skills restrict a range of life-choices (particularly employment), and thus become a pre-disposing factor in criminal activities. In this regard, we draw attention to the parallel with serious drug misuse, where studies have shown that people with the most serious drug problems are much less likely than others to have acquired qualifications. While there may not be a simple direct relationship with educational failure, poor literacy skills may be an important contributory factor in both cases.

### **The survey's main recommendations**

Based on the results of the survey, a number of recommendations are put forward, including a refocusing of prison education services, in the context of the valuable work that is already being done. Specifically, we recommend that the Prison Education Service gives top priority to those prisoners with the weakest literacy skills. We also recommend that the Prison Education Service introduce a standardised initial screening procedure for literacy as part of the Assessment Framework being developed with the National Adult Literacy Agency. It should also

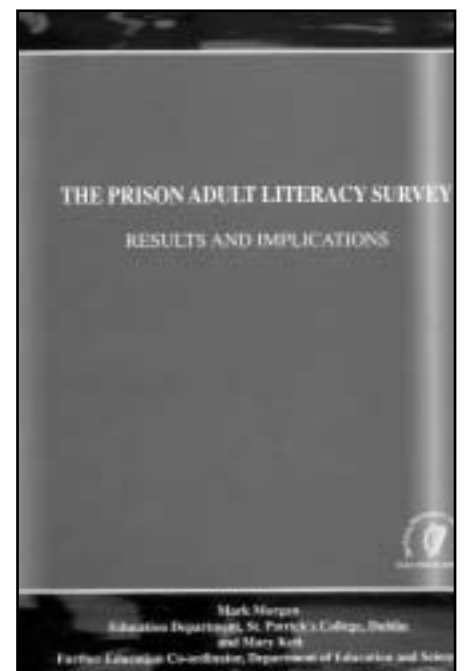
promote the implementation of 'Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons'. Other recommendations include peer tutor training programmes, innovative Information and Communications Technology programmes to attract those most disaffected, and strengthening the link between in-prison provision and education available to prisoners on release.

Suggestions are also made with regard to how addressing educational disadvantage could help prevent anti-social behaviour and crime. In particular, we recommend that the link between educational programmes and those seeking to prevent anti-social behaviour should be made explicit, so that broadly based and comprehensive initiatives can address the social, economic and educational disadvantage that lies behind these problems. Longitudinal studies that show the positive impact of intensive pre-school programmes and other initiatives involving parents, including family literacy programmes, are highlighted. We also draw attention to some approaches to prevention that are not especially helpful. Prevention methods that take simplistic shock tactic approaches have been shown to be quite ineffective, despite their popular appeal.

### **Outcomes of the research**

The research should assist prison educators to access more people in custody with literacy difficulties. There are many existing examples to hand of good practice in relation to literacy work in Irish prisons, and prison teachers have been to

*The report makes suggestions about how addressing educational disadvantage could help prevent anti-social behaviour and crime.*




The Prison Adult Literacy Survey

the forefront of many initiatives and innovations in adult literacy practice in Ireland, particularly in the areas of publishing and materials development. There are also some current developments, which complement the research project and aim to enhance practice. First, the 'Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons', which predates the current research, was written by a number of prison educators and provides a framework for the planning and development of literacy work in prisons. Based on an internal review of current practice, the Guidelines suggest that each Prison Education Unit should devise an agreed set of teaching and learning objectives for literacy provision. The Guidelines suggest a ten-point checklist for quality programmes that refers to the scale of need at local level, specific targets and recruitment strategies, learning programmes and accreditation and training for staff. Secondly, an initiative to devise an accredited training programme for prison literacy teachers is currently underway, in conjunction with the National Adult Literacy Agency.

It is hoped that this research study will contribute to the development and enhancement of good practice in adult literacy provision in prisons.

## References

**Morgan, M, and Kett, M.** *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey: Results and Implications.* 2003. Dublin: Irish Prison Service. 

# The Whole-centre approach to literacy

An ongoing feature of NALA's work is to place literacy in all types of vocational and employment related training. One such example of this is the Agency's Integrating Literacy Project. In simple terms, this involves trainers and teachers from disciplines other than literacy having literacy as a major part of their instructional agenda. This year, 2003, is the third year of a three-year strategy that has as its core aim the development of an integrated, whole-centre, high-quality literacy service for trainees in FÁS sponsored Community Training Workshops and FÁS/Department of Justice Workshops.

## Literacy development in Workshops – not a new idea

Not that literacy development in workshops is a new idea. Far from it. Literacy has been an integral and core element of the learning offered in workshops since they were set up in the mid-seventies. Literacy tutors, seconded to workshops by VECs on a dedicated-hours basis, have done,



Article compiled by  
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Support Unit, FÁS

and continue to do, tremendous work. However, in recent years it became increasingly obvious that a more radical approach was required. Literacy skills were identified as an essential component in the effort to promote progression to mainstream training, education and higher certification.

The review of Youthreach and the subsequent YR2K Report, published by the National Co-ordinators in 2000, provided a major impetus to extending literacy skills provision in workshops. Around the same time, in response to feedback from the ground and influenced by the changing needs of the world of work and by the concept of life-long learning, FÁS engaged in a major review of the factors which prevent some people from gaining a secure career in the jobs market. Not surprisingly, literacy was identified as a core skill. An in-depth examination, involving FÁS, CTWs and NALA, of the various approaches adopted by some workshops led to the conclusion that an integrated, whole-centre approach, offered the best opportunity for success.

The basic idea was to continue, and in fact further develop, the literacy tutor system and to bolster and support it by integrating literacy skill development into every learning activity of the workshop. The aim is to embed the whole-centre literacy standards and guidelines in the FÁS community training centre policy and practice nationally, regionally and locally.

### **Integrating Literacy Development Worker**

One of the first moves was to contract with NALA for the secondment of an Integrating Literacy Development Worker who would work across all:

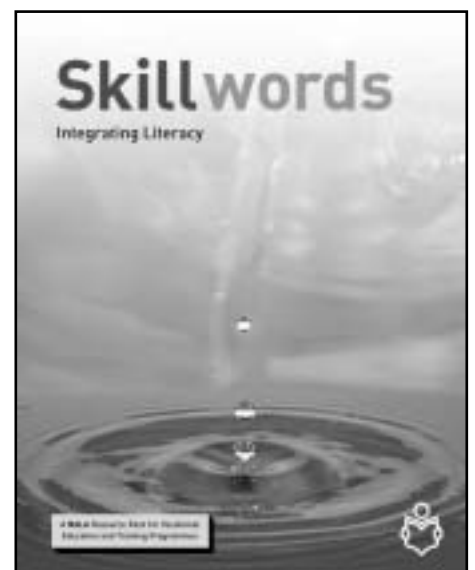
- FÁS community training centres, and
- all four strands of Youthreach, which include:
- Community Training Workshops;
- FÁS and Department of Justice workshops;
- VEC Youthreach Centres; and
- Senior Traveller Training Centres supported by the Department of Education and Science.

The person selected by NALA, Blathnaid Ní Chinnéide, has proved to be the key to the mighty success of the venture so far. Without her experience and commitment we would not have achieved the level or rate of progress that has been made. Another key step was to embark on a training programme for centre instructors. NALA and NUI Maynooth put together a 16-day Integrating Literacy course for instructors. This leads to accreditation at NUI certificate level. To date, staff from over 55 centres across all four strands have successfully participated.

### **Consultation and planning**

Across FÁS Community Training Centres, year one of the strategy focused on consultation with the stakeholders. This involved a series of regional seminars primarily with centre managers,

*The aim is to embed the whole-centre literacy standards and guidelines in the FÁS community training centre policy and practice nationally, regionally and locally.*



'Skill Words' literacy integration resources

instructors, clerical staff, VEC literacy tutors and FÁS management and staff working with the centres. The process:

- engaged with the participants' views and concerns about the literacy initiative;
- identified current practice in literacy provision in the workshop; and
- explored with workshop personnel questions such as:
  - what would a high-quality, integrated literacy service for workshop trainees look like;
  - what are the obstacles to its development; and
  - what are the systems that need to be in place to support its development.

Centres were then encouraged to develop a three-year strategic plan for literacy development for their trainees.

### **Integrating Literacy courses blossom**

The Integration Co-ordinator was available to course participants to give advice or run in-house training sessions as required. Centres were asked to nominate members of staff to the Integrating Literacy training courses held in regional venues to facilitate participants. Successive courses were offered in Dublin, Kilkenny, Killaloe, Clonmel, Portlaoise and back in Dublin again. These courses, in addition to instructor training, soon blossomed into creative centres for the development of a wide and varied range of teaching material for use in all kinds of settings. In the process, instructors adapted traditional vocational training

modules to match and expand the literacy skills of their trainees.

### **NALA's 'Guidelines on Integrating Literacy'**

Instructors came back for refresher days long after graduation and graciously agreed to have the material adapted so that it could be published as a resource pack, making it available as learning material right across the training centre spectrum and anywhere where literacy skill development is pursued in an integrated manner. In addition, the views of centre personnel contributed significantly to the development and publication in 2002 of NALA's 'Guidelines on Integrating Literacy', which outlines standards for whole-centre literacy provision.

### **'Skillwords' integrating literacy resource pack**

In 2003 NALA produced the 'Skillwords' integrating literacy resource pack. It is intended as a companion to the NALA 'Guidelines on Integrating Literacy'. The pack is aimed at tutors, trainers and learners working in areas like woodworking, catering and horticulture. The worksheets can be photocopied and used as examples for trainers who want to produce additional worksheets to respond to their specific needs. It is designed as a starter pack, and the ringbound format means additional customised material can easily be added. Due to its popularity the pack is on its second print run. It has already been distributed to:

- FÁS Community Training Centres;

*Courses blossomed into creative centres for the development of a wide and varied range of teaching material for use in all kinds of settings.*



An illustration from Skill Words on the names of woodwork tools

- VEC Youthreach Centres;
- Senior Traveller Training Centres; and
- adult literacy schemes.

The pack is available from the NALA Resource Room on 01 855 4332 or by email: [literacy@nala.ie](mailto:literacy@nala.ie).

### **FÁS Community Training Centres in the vanguard of meeting trainee needs**

Once again, FÁS sponsored workshops (as they were called until recently) are in the vanguard of innovation in relation to meeting the needs of their trainees. Some centres are already using the Guidelines to review their programme and to revise their literacy strategies. On an individual basis, instructors have reported that they draw heavily on the Integrating Literacy training and they continue to refer to the guidelines to support their programme planning.

The strategy for integrating literacy has provided a structure and a context for the focus that Community Training Centres have traditionally had on the promotion and development of literacy skills for their trainees. Its success highlights just what can be achieved through an inter-agency and multi-agency approach. Centre managers and staff are to be complimented for their courage and vision in embracing the integrated, whole-centre approach to literacy.

For more information contact Blathnaid Ní Chinnéide, Integration Co-ordinator, at 01-809 9190; email [bnichinneide@nala.ie](mailto:bnichinneide@nala.ie)



# Tutor comments on Mapping the Learning Journey

## **Background information**

Assessment was identified by our NALA members and in policy as the top priority for research. Up to now there was no single nationally endorsed assessment framework and methodology for assessing literacy levels within VEC Adult Literacy Schemes. However, after much consultation and testing, we have produced 'Mapping the Learning Journey', an assessment framework for literacy and numeracy.

## **Tutor responds to the assessment framework**

We had the opportunity in spring 2003 to interview Fionnaigh Connaughton, a tutor with the Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC). Fionnaigh and her learners had worked with us testing the NALA assessment framework from February to May 2002. They had also agreed to advise us on the final developments of the framework from February to May 2003. In



*Article compiled by  
Gemma Lynch,  
Research Officer, NALA*

fact, a whole team of tutors and learners from around the country have been working on this research project with us since 2001.

Tutors and learners who tested and developed the draft assessment framework came from:

- VEC Adult Literacy Schemes;
- FÁS Community Training Workshops;
- Youthreach Centres;
- Senior Traveller Training Centres; and
- Merchants Quay Ireland.

We are very grateful to these tutors and learners for giving their time to work with us on this project. NALA are also grateful to Senior Management in the VECs, FÁS and Merchants Quay Ireland for their continued support throughout this project. This research project was funded by the Department of Education and Science. What follows below is the interview with Fionnaigh Connaughton, VEC Adult Literacy Tutor, DALC. At the end of this article we have added an update on the framework along with feedback from the testing of the framework. You will also find contact details for Gemma Lynch, NALA Research Officer, in case you want to know more about this project.

### **Feedback from the DALC test group**

We asked Fionnaigh to tell us what it was like for her and her learners to use the assessment framework during the project.

**Q** What were your first thoughts when you were asked to develop the NALA assessment framework for literacy and numeracy?

**A** When I was asked to be involved in the pilot (test) of the NALA assessment framework in February 2002, I remember feeling that assessment can be a dirty word in adult basic education and can conjure up images of tests, results, standards and fear.

**Q** How did you feel after you had a chance to read over the framework?

**A** On glancing over the draft framework, I realised how sensitive the document was to the principles of adult education. It seemed broad enough to encompass the individual learners' goals and experience. The framework includes various cornerstones of learning to show if a learner is progressing. Not only do these cornerstones show improvement in literacy skills, but also how independently these skills can be carried out in a range of settings. At this early stage it all seemed very workable to me.

**Q** What happened at the first training session in February 2002?

**A** During the initial three days' training in February, about forty tutors from around the country met with a view to implementing and testing the framework in practice. Lots of ideas were bandied around, ideas about levels, about how it

*“I remember feeling that assessment can be a dirty word in adult basic education and can conjure up images of tests, results, standards and fear.”*

might best suit our learners and our own unique ideas about what is assessment anyway.

Q How did you feel by the end of the first training session?

A In these few days it seemed the whole idea of assessment was a minefield of issues. For example, how best to approach this with your learner. With these questions going around in my head, I went back to my scheme to see if it would work.

Q What happened when you and your learners started testing the framework back in DALC?

A I planned classes as normal, both in my groups and one-to-ones. One learner told me how she felt more confident about signing her own name at work. So we put this down as progress. We used the assessment sheets we were given very fluidly, writing on the margins. Liz McSkeane, researcher on the assessment framework, visited our centre to give us support and guidance.

Q What did you learn at training day two, in May 2002?

A In May the pilot group met again for the next stage in the process. We found we had similar problems in deciding what skills equals the bottom level and what skills equals the top level. We found that assessment had two dimensions:

- how difficult the literacy task was, and
- how well your particular learner carried it out.

In order to make the framework standard, we needed to be talking the same language. Once this was clarified, it seemed easier to work with.

Q After the team had made the changes suggested by the tutors and learners who tested the framework, a small meeting was held. How did that go?

A We had another meeting again after the summer and it seemed the framework was taking shape. After all, the idea behind it was to help teaching and learning.

Q After working so closely with the framework, developing local support structures and advising on training needs over 2003, what are the main points you have taken away about the assessment framework?

A The purpose is not to frighten learners or tutors with tests, nor to take the creative edge from learning. The main benefit of the framework will be to improve practice, by supporting tutors and learners. I hope the assessment will be user friendly and not too time consuming, particularly for volunteer tutors. The best thing about the framework is that it gives you a guide on the things to be mindful of when looking at a learner's progress. Also, it gives you ideas for setting learning goals with your learner.

### Feedback on the draft assessment framework

The main feedback from those who tested the framework was a validation of the framework as a

*“The best thing about the framework is that it gives you a guide on the things to be mindful of when looking at a learners’ progress.”*

valuable tool that aids learners and tutors to discuss and make a note of progress. In all, the framework was piloted in 13 adult basic education sites throughout Ireland. Suggestions for further development of the framework from tutors and learners included:

- adding more examples to explain elements;
- working with a design team to make the framework more user-friendly and visually appealing;
- including samples of learners' work to show how progress can be assessed using the framework;
- providing guidelines on the use of the framework and how to introduce it to tutors and learners; and
- continuing further development of the framework around:
  - numeracy;
  - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL);
  - information and communications technology (ICT); and
  - visual literacy.

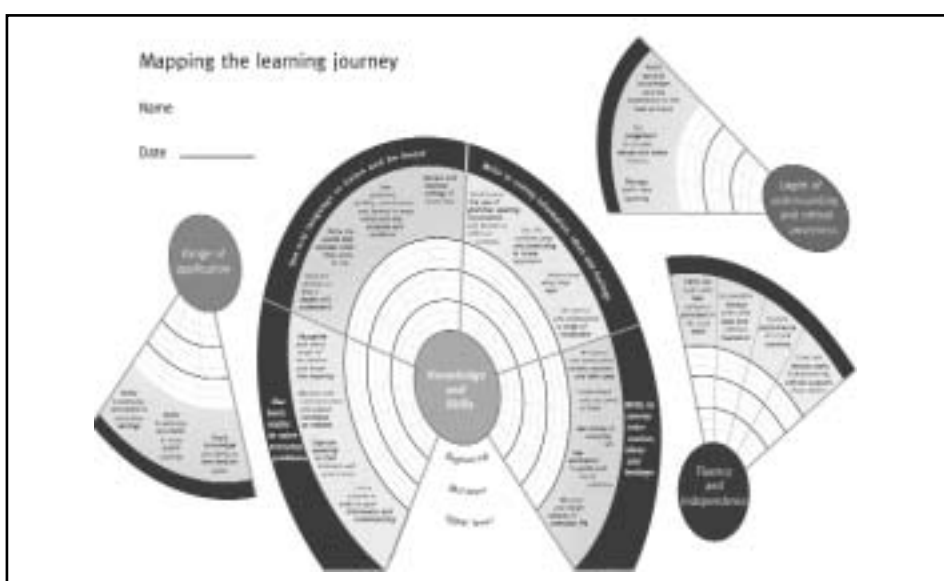
In the development stage of the assessment framework project (February 2003 to May 2003), NALA worked with a greater number of tutors and learners in a wide variety of adult basic education settings in order to address these issues and develop appropriate local supports and training opportunities.

### Final development of the NALA assessment framework for literacy and numeracy.

NALA and a larger number of adult basic education sites worked

on the final development of the assessment framework from February to May 2003. We developed a comprehensive training pack to support the mainstreaming process. We continued to consult with key stakeholders, including Senior VEC Management and the Department of Education and Science.

We increased the number and diversity of learners and tutors we consulted during the development stage by bringing on board seven new sites. This was in order to get as many views as possible to input into the final development of the framework. The overall number of sites we were consulting with on the development of the framework was brought from 13 to 20. Throughout this project our overall aim has been to develop a visually appealing, user-friendly tool to help tutors and learners manage the teaching and learning process.



'Mapping the Learning Journey'

## How do I find out more about this?

Watch out for up-dates on our work by checking out:

- the NALA web page – [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)
- the NALA Journal
- the NALA Tutors Bulletin
- the NALA Newsletter, and
- various NALA events from September 2003 – June 2004.

For more information, contact Gemma Lynch, NALA Research Officer (01) 8099192 or e-mail: [gemma@nala.ie](mailto:gemma@nala.ie).



# Delighting the learner: update on the NALA Quality Framework

## Phase 2 of mainstreaming

2003 is the second phase of mainstreaming the Quality Framework. In phase 1 (2002) approximately 60 schemes implemented the Framework. The enthusiasm and interest generated by the Quality Framework in 2002 was such that the majority of applications for involvement in the Framework in 2003 were sent in well in advance of the closing date. In 2003 80 of the 135 VEC adult literacy schemes applied for Quality Framework funding.

## Launch of the 'Quality Framework User Guide for Adult Basic Education'

Interest in phase 2 of the Quality Framework for ABE was greatly enhanced by the launch of the 'Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education User Guide' in 2002. According to Rosemary McGill, County Co-ordinator of Literacy Services for County Dublin VEC, almost 200 people attended the launch of the Evolving Quality Framework for ABE User Guide on 13 September 2002 in Dublin. Claire O'Riordan, the Quality Framework Co-ordinator, welcomed everyone to the formal launch of the



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*In 2003 80 VEC  
adult literacy  
schemes applied  
for Quality  
Framework  
funding.*

framework. Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, described how the project had involved working with partners in Belgium, England and Northern Ireland.

In the initial stage of the project, views were sought from participants, practitioners and managers. They were asked what constitutes a good quality local literacy service and their input contributed to the drafting of a framework. It was recognised that the framework would need to change if it was to remain relevant and useful. Consequently, it was agreed to call the model an evolving framework. In the second year of the project, the model was piloted in 35 VEC adult literacy schemes. Feedback from the pilot led to refining of the framework and phase 1 of the national implementation of the revised model.

### Formal launch

The Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Síle De Valera, formally launched the framework. She commended the work done by all those involved in the pilot phase and welcomed the framework as a valuable tool for literacy schemes. She reiterated the government's commitment to adult literacy under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS).

### Local perspective on implementation

Eileen Curtis, the Adult Education Organiser for Kilkenny, gave a local perspective on the implementation of the framework. She explained that they had

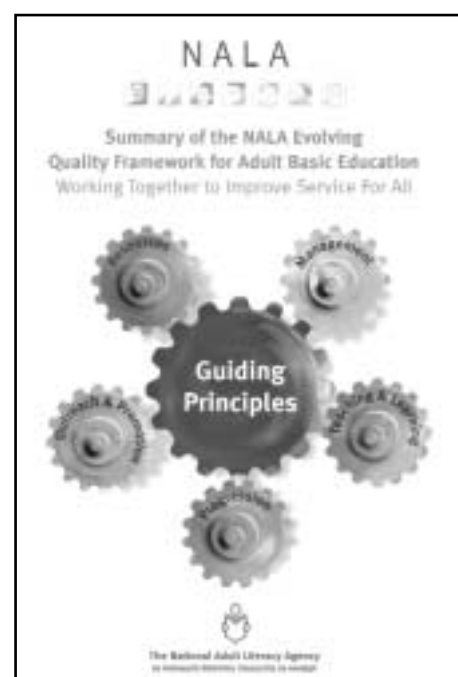
established a team representing a cross-section of interests, including of course learners, to work through the guide. Having had a few sessions with one of the NALA facilitators, the team was now meeting regularly with a view to addressing one aspect of the framework per term. She commended the role of the facilitator. She emphasised that the process becomes easier as the quality team gains experience. She did, however, stress the importance of simplifying some of the terminology used in order for it to be accessible to all. Indeed, NALA have revised the guidelines in order to clarify the terms and the process.

### Massachusetts experience

One of the highlights of the event was the presentation by John Comings, Director of the National Center (sic) for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Harvard University, Graduate School of Education. He gave an outline of research and approaches they have used in Massachusetts. He explained that they began focusing on quality in 1987. Starting with a basic definition of good practice, they have been seeking to refine their understanding of quality over the 15 years since. The Massachusetts experience confirms what most of us have already realised — that the pursuit of excellence is a continuous process. The improvement in the quality of their provision led to an increase in:

- statutory funding;
- demand for services;
- average hours of instruction; and
- public support.

*In the initial stage, a range of views were sought on what constitutes a good quality local literacy service.*



NALA Evolving Quality Framework summary document

Their research verified what many practitioners know from experience, but there were also a few surprises. Persistence of the adult learner is more likely where there is a specific person supporting their return to learning. Factors usually considered as deterrents, such as single parent status and negative school experience, do not discourage adult learners once they have re-entered the educational system. Goal-setting and assisting learners to identify likely barriers and strategies for overcoming them can help learners stay the course. Building self-efficacy was seen as crucial. It comprises the following four elements.

**Mastery:** learners must accomplish something and receive regular feedback about their success.

**Vicarious experiences:** learners benefit if they have contact with others like them who have tried and been successful.

**Social persuasion:** frequent encouragement and reinforcement convinces learners that all the effort will pay off.

**Emotional states:** learners and practitioners must acknowledge the psychological challenge of learning (such as nervousness, frustration, fear of failure) and of reassuring learners that this is part of the process.

The research indicated that metacognition is also essential for adult learners; that is, demystifying the task and process and helping the student to understand what is going on. For example, some students think that in order to read something correctly, you have to remember everything you have

read. The group process can also be another success factor where the cohort of learners has a mix of learning styles. In this case, learning styles are described as:

- instrumental where the learners prefer the teacher to be didactic and give answers);
- socialising where the learners seek affirmation from the group); and
- self-authoring where the learners like to analyse and work things out for themselves.

The age of learners may influence their preferred learning style. Those under 30 years of age appear to prefer more intensive courses in order to make swift progress. This preference is probably related to career ambitions. Those over 30 are more likely to opt for slower progress with an element of self-study. Comings was very reassuring on the issue of student drop-out. If learners leave, this should not necessarily be regarded as a failure. If they are told that they are welcome to re-apply, they are more likely to do so. The most persistent learners are those who have some previous experience, however little, of further study.

In Massachusetts they found that for the 55% of the student population with intermediate skills, there is evidence of improved income as their skills improve, especially in the case of learners from ethnic minorities. However, this is less apparent for foundation and advanced level students. He also had some interesting observations in relation to staffing. While much of their

*The  
Massachusetts  
experience  
confirms what  
most of us  
already realise  
— that the  
pursuit of  
excellence is a  
continuous  
process.*

provision is delivered by part-time and voluntary tutors, they do have significant numbers of full-time staff. Where at least one of these is involved in a programme, there is evidence that this has a positive impact on student completion rates.

Rosemary felt that there is much we can learn from Massachusetts. She says "It could be argued that there may be some cultural differences in the response of learners in the States to learners here. However, much of what has emerged from the Harvard research would appear to have universal significance for the design of a quality adult literacy service. For example, we should recognise the need for:

- an induction process which acknowledges the psychological demands of learning as well as the practical difficulties;
- a system of support and guidance for learners throughout their programme;
- individual learning plans that are negotiated and enable the learner to identify specific goals;
- regular progress reviews to provide positive feedback;
- reassurance to learners that if they drop out, they will be welcome to return (and will, if possible, be put at the top of any waiting list); and
- the involvement of full-time staff to assist with continuity and co-ordination of provision.

Adult basic education in Ireland would benefit hugely from a national centre equivalent to the Massachusetts centre. Research

supports the development of a culture of quality and reflective practice. It also provides compelling evidence of the benefits of adult literacy and the need for resourcing it appropriately."

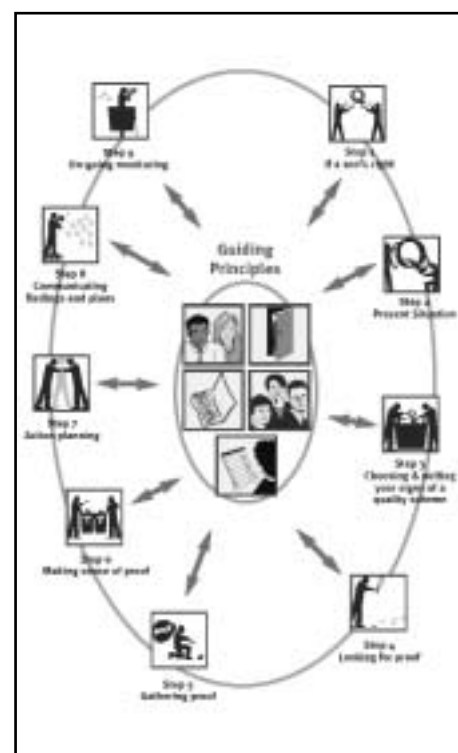
### Quality is a journey and not a destination

According to Rosemary McGill, County Dublin VEC has nine literacy schemes. Eight are area-based and one is countywide, based in the Parish of the Travelling People. Many of the schemes have already embarked on the fairly daunting task of working through the Quality Framework for ABE. At a county level, we have an adult basic education network where adult education organisers, adult literacy organisers and county co-ordinators meet regularly to discuss issues of best practice. We are approaching the issue of quality on a thematic basis. Working groups have been focusing on five interlocking themes:

- health and safety;
- inter-agency working;
- staff development;
- needs and curriculum for the adult learner; and
- special target groups such as travellers and learners from ethnic minorities.

In the case of learners from ethnic minorities, we have recently begun looking at the issue of equality assurance as part of quality assurance. This includes the drafting of a template for equality proofing. The county network meets once a term with

*Persistence of the adult learner is more likely where there is a specific person supporting their return to learning.*



Guiding Principles and 9-step process for Evolving Quality Framework

the Senior Management Team of the VEC in order to contribute to the strategic development of policies and practices across the organisation.

### **Initial results of the phase 1 evaluation**

The evaluation report of phase 1 of mainstreaming 2002 will be available in December. It has shown that, overall, the Quality Framework is a useful tool for self-evaluation and for promoting continuous improvement and planning in ABE. Participating VEC schemes highlighted many benefits of using the Quality Framework. These include:

- increased understanding of quality and the Quality Framework evaluation process;
- effective team-working and participation by all stakeholders;
- greater sense of ownership;
- bigger-picture thinking and strategic planning;
- promoting networking, and
- improved quality.

Some early but specific improvements in VEC scheme practices as a result of the Quality Framework include:

- increased collaborative work;
- networking and pooling of resources and information across and between schemes; and
- the development of:
  - detailed funding applications;
  - a promotional scheme video; and
  - a resource room.

**The evaluation report also highlights valuable ways of**

### **improving and developing the Quality Framework for ABE to further enhance and support continuous improvement in ABE.**

Progress to date by sites using the Quality Framework this year has been very encouraging. The majority of the 80 VEC schemes who received DES funding to use the Quality Framework are working very effectively in improving quality in and between schemes. Some are late starting but plan to start this side of Christmas. Users of the framework are now more familiar with the evaluation process and are working through the elements of quality with increasing confidence and speed. NALA Regional staff support schemes use the Quality Framework by answering questions and providing advice to schemes on the Framework. Feedback on Quality Framework facilitators has also been overwhelmingly positive.

### **Linking the Quality Framework to the Department of Education and Science (DES) evolving accountability reporting system**

The potential of the Quality Framework to inform the future development of the DES evolving reporting system is high. Work has begun on looking at possible means of linking both systems. Linking the Quality Framework and the DES reporting system would involve identifying key meaningful indicators of quality from the Quality Framework (a mainly qualitative system) at local

*Being committed to quality means signing up to a continuous cycle of evaluation, planning and delivery.*

level that can be adequately used for national accountability requirements (currently primarily a quantitative system) as a basis for national development. Using an organic approach to developing the DES reporting system for ABE would benefit all stakeholders. Discussions with the DES and other key stakeholders will continue to ascertain how best to achieve a win-win situation for all.

A new International Exchange Group on quality in ABE, of which NALA is a member, is also very interested in how the Quality Framework for ABE could be linked with the DES system.

### **FETAC and the Quality Framework for ABE**

The Quality Framework for ABE is in its second year of mainstreaming and is quite a well developed quality assurance system. Consequently, the ABE section is primed to meet Further Education Training and Awards Council's emerging quality assurance requirements for the further education and training sector. Providers will be required to submit their Quality Assurance system to FETAC for approval. NALA have been involved in the consultation process around the development of the FETAC Draft Quality Assurance Descriptor. It is expected that VEC literacy schemes who use the Quality Framework for ABE will comply readily with FETAC's quality assurance requirements.


A number of VEC adult literacy schemes will pilot the Draft FETAC Descriptor before Christmas. This will affirm the

work they are doing and possibly highlight some gaps that need to be addressed. The FETAC Draft Descriptor will be mainstreamed in 2004.

For the future, we plan to:

- continue to liaise with our international partners on quality and ABE;
- get more ABE sites involved in the Quality Framework;
- evaluate phase 2 of mainstreaming;
- update the Quality Framework; and
- continue working with DES on linking the Quality Framework to their evolving accountability reporting system.

Finally, Rosemary wants to point out that there is no doubt that being committed to quality means signing up to a continuous cycle of evaluation, planning and delivery. The Quality framework for ABE is tremendously helpful for this process. However, for ABE to be part of the continuum of lifelong learning, quality needs to be addressed at all levels of the adult education sector and the educational system as a whole. It needs to involve all who participate, from learners to practitioners to managers to chief executives. It needs to take place in the context of strategic planning and to be underpinned by equality assurance. Furthermore, quality should reach beyond the notion of "fitness for purpose" towards the aspiration of "delighting the learner". For all of us committed to ABE, this will mean a long journey but may the road rise with us.

If you require any further information on the NALA Quality Framework contact Claire O’Riordan, NALA Quality Framework Co-ordinator @ 01 809 9193 or email [coriordan@nala.ie](mailto:coriordan@nala.ie) 

# NALA’s dynamic training: programme adapts to needs of practitioners

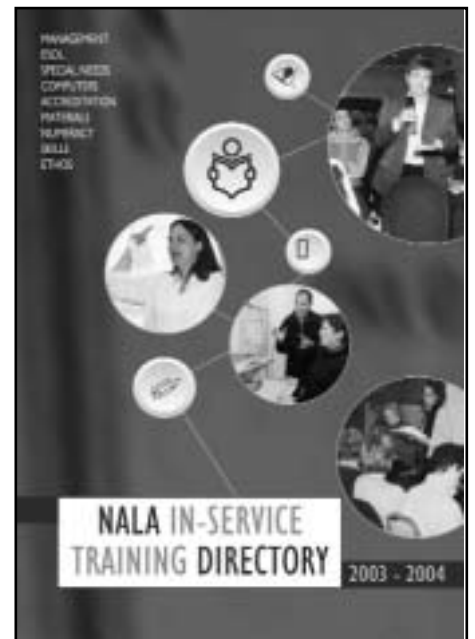
Since its establishment in 1980, the Agency has identified and responded to the training needs of literacy workers. Over the years NALA has continually expanded its programme of in-service training events for tutors and organisers. The quality of the training is particularly high which is due in no small way to the excellent panel of trainers. Their experience, skills and commitment make a significant contribution to the continuing success of NALA’s training programme. This article will look at the most recent developments in training that NALA are providing throughout the country. In particular, it will focus on new training events and developments.

## What does NALA offer?

Adult literacy practitioners are in constant need of training to update their skills. This helps them keep abreast of new developments and look at new ways of approaching adult literacy practice. NALA produces a Training Calendar wallchart and an In-Service Training Directory for the academic year detailing:



*Fergus Dolan,  
Training Co-ordinator, NALA*



The NALA in service training directory

40 different one-day non-accredited workshops/training courses, and 11 single certificate modules from the NALA/WIT National Certificate in Literacy Development.

These courses are aimed at:

- adult literacy practitioners in adult literacy schemes;
- community training workshops;
- Youthreach training centres;
- senior traveller training centres;
- the Prison Education Service; and
- other adult learning settings.

### What kind of courses are available?

The courses cover a range of areas, from tutor development and specific learning difficulties to intercultural awareness. Below I'll highlight a few of the courses by giving you a brief outline of them and why we're making them available to adult literacy practitioners.

### The Reflective Practitioner

The Reflective Practitioner workshop looks at what it is to be a reflective practitioner. It examines how to be conscious of the decisions we make and the approaches we take in everyday practice, and considers theories about what it means to be reflective, which can help us learn from past experiences.

By reflecting on these, we can develop new approaches to dealing with everyday tuition matters as they occur. Reflective practice can be a problem-solving technique. It can also help us to

reflect on things when they go well so that we can understand why and how this happened. Then we can learn from it and repeat this success in other projects.

### Evaluation of workshops and courses

The half-day evaluation workshop looks at:

- what evaluations are?;
- new development techniques;
- new ideas in evaluation;
- how to get the information that is needed from the course or workshop evaluation; and
- how and why we evaluate, the types of evaluation, and their benefits.

Following this workshop, NALA will draw up guidelines on evaluation and will redesign the NALA in-service evaluation form.

### Emotional Intelligence

On 25 November 2003 we hosted a seminar on multiple intelligences. This included a presentation and workshop on understanding emotional intelligence as a means to effective learning support. The presentation explored:

- the origins of the term 'multiple intelligences';
- how it can be useful in describing desirable skills and qualities in tutors;
- how different aspects of the learning-teaching process can be informed by the use of emotional intelligence; and
- how training in emotional intelligence can be integrated into training programmes for new and existing tutors.



The NALA Training Calendar Wallchart

### Specific Learning Difficulties

The course introduces: language processing and its components and learning channels and styles.

Participants will gain an understanding of specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and Asperger's Syndrome. Case studies, strategies and interventions will be introduced and used during the course.

### Literacy Awareness Training (LAT)

Literacy awareness is about ensuring that organisations are aware of the scale and range of issues related to adult literacy. It is not just about being informed, but also about being prepared for the challenges which low literacy levels present.

LAT is aimed at personnel who, in the course of their work, may be dealing with people who have problems in reading and writing. It is a course designed to help staff that deal with the general public recognise problems they may be encountering on a daily basis, such as the inability to:

- fill out forms;
- check numbers in directories; and
- sign forms.

This training is usually a one-day workshop, but it can also be provided as a half day or evening session. It is offered on a national basis by NALA, as well as by local VEC literacy services.


### NALA In-service Training Directory

In a new departure, we published a NALA In-service Training Directory in October 2003. This Directory outlines a range of training courses available to VEC adult literacy schemes and basic education services as a support for quality literacy provision. It facilitates adult literacy and basic education managers in meeting the in-service training needs of literacy practitioners. The Directory complements other training supports, including the NALA In-service Training Calendar/Wall-chart and the NALA/WIT Accreditation Project.

Courses can be arranged for individual literacy schemes, VEC adult literacy services or on a group or regional basis.

The costs of these courses vary, and we will respond individually with costs to each enquiry. NALA has an in-service training budget, which can be used to fund in-service courses, in full or in part, as resources permit.

I hope this article has given you a flavour of some of the new training opportunities that NALA have on offer. I hope to see you soon at some of our training events.

For more information, contact Fergus Dolan, Training Officer, at 01-809 9191; email [fdolan@nala.ie](mailto:fdolan@nala.ie) For a complete guide to NALA's in-service and accredited training, visit our website on [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie). Click Training and then NALA In-service Training Calendar. 



Adult Literacy Practitioners training

# Obair Bhreacadh sa Ghaeltacht

## Aiseanna seolta ag Joe O'Toole, Seanadóir Bhreacadh

Bunaíodh Breacadh sa bhliain 2000 mar thacaíocht don chóras aosoideachais sa Ghaeltacht. Tá sé de chúram ar Bhreacadh *cúrsaí traenála* agus *áiseanna teagaisc* a fhorbairt i nGaeilge. Is é sprioc na gCoistí Gairmoideachais agus na gComhlachtaí Páirtíochta, a bhunaigh Breacadh, go ndéanfaí freastal den scoth ar fhoghlaimoirí fásta na Gaeltachta ina dteanga dhúchais. Is iad Nóirín Ní Ghrádaigh, Bainisteoir Bhreacadh agus Nóilín Ní Iarnáin, Eagarthóir Bhreacadh, atá fostaithe chun an obair sin a chur i gcrích.

An Seanadóir Joe O'Toole, a sheol leabhar ríomhaireachta Bhreacadh Bunús na Ríomhaireachta thíos ina cheantar dúchais féin sa Daingean ar an 4 Deireadh Fómhair. Ba í Nóilín Ní Iarnáin, Eagarthóir Bhreacadh a chuir an leabhar seo i dtoll a chéile. Tá an leabhar bunaithe ar smaointí a d'éirigh as ábhar teagaisc de chuid Suffolk County Council agus de chuid Choiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Dhún na nGall. Clúdaíonn an leabhar seo a bhfuil ag teastáil le Gradam FETAC, i Litearthacht na Ríomhaireachta sa

bhunmhodúl a bhaint amach. Bhí an t-ádh ar fhoireann Bhreacadh gur éirigh le cúigear ó *Training Matters* i Suffolk freastal ar an seoladh.

Ba é an Seanadóir O'Toole freisin a sheol an leabhar saothair ón gCeann go Peann sa Daingean ar an 4 Deireadh Fómhair. Tá an leabhar seo dírithe ar chainteoirí dúchais Gaeilge ar mhaith leo feabhas a chur ar léamh agus ar scríobh na Gaeilge. Ba iad Aoife Ní Chonchúir agus Úna Nic Gabhann a chuir an leabhar seo le chéile. Tá an leabhar saothair seo scríofa i gcanúint na Mumhan.

## Séala na hEorpa

Bhronn Coimisiún na hEorpa agus Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann 'Séala na hEorpa' ar Bhreacadh ar an 26 Meán Fómhair 2003. Bronntar an gradam seo gach bliain ar líon teoranta tograí i ngach ballstát den Aontas Eorpach 'as éifeachtacht, nuálacht agus cruthaitheacht i dteagasc agus i bhfoghlaím teangacha'.

## Traenáil

Tá aitheantas faighte ag cúrsa traenála do theagascóirí deonacha Bhreacadh ó Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Phort Láirge/NALA mar mhodúl dá Teastas Náisiúnta i bhForbairt Litearthachta. Le linn na tréimhse 2001-2003 traenáladh 43 duine mar theagascóirí deonacha sa Ghaeltacht.

## Nuachtán Bhreacadh

I mí Meithimh seo caite seoladh Nuachtán Bhreacadh. Is scéalta nuachta agus spóirt, scéalta ó na Gaeltachtaí agus faoi na réalta



Article compiled by  
Nóilín Ní Iarnáin,  
Eagarthóir Bhreacadh

móra scannán agus ceoil chomh maith lena lán eile atá sa nuachtán. Is í Nóilín Ní Iarnáin, Eagarthóir Bhreacadh atá ina hEagarthóir ar an nuachtán. Foilseofar an chéad eagrán eile den nuachtán i mí Dheireadh Fómhair seo chugainn.

Pacáiste Acmhainne don Fhoghlaim Teaghlaigh. Is é Ionad Foghlama Teaghlaigh an Chláir a chuir an pacáiste seo le chéile, agus is i gcomhar le Breacadh a cuireadh an leagan Gaeilge ar fáil. Tá an cúrsa seo féiliúnach do thuismitheoirí ag a bhfuil páistí óga 0-6 bliain d'aois. Tá sé dírithe ar scileanna litearthachta agus ar scileanna uimhearthachta an pháiste a chothú.

### Lá na dTeagascóirí Deonacha

Tugadh an 43 teagascóirí dheonacha litearthachta atá traenála ag Breacadh le chéile ar an 11 Deireadh Fómhair 2003 i

gContae na Gaillimhe. Ba é príomhchuspóir an lae tacaíocht a thabhairt do na teagascóirí agus deis a thabhairt dóibh an traenáil agus an t-ábhar atá fós de dhíth orthu a chur in iúl d'fhoireann Bhreacadh. Chuir Breacadh cúrsaí gairide féinteagaisc sa ríomhaireacht agus i scríobh na NuaGhaeilge le chéile agus seoladh na háiseanna sin ag Lá na dTeagascóirí.

### Breacadh – Acmhainn Aosoideachais don Gaeltacht

Breacadh, founded in 2000, under the auspices of the VECs and the Partnership Companies is responsible for providing training courses and developing teaching resources in Irish to further adult literacy in the Gaeltacht areas. Breacadh was a recipient of 'The European Label for Innovation in Language Teaching and Learning' which was presented by the



Sue Nicholson, Training Matters; Myles Cole, Training Matters; John Kennedy, AEO, Seirbhís Oideachais Chiarraí; Jocelyn Davies, Training Matters; Lorraine Noble, Training Matters; Jane Hore, Comhairleoir Contae de chuid Suffolk.

European Commission and The Linguistics Institute of Ireland on 26 September 2003.


**Training:** During 2000 – 2003, 43 voluntary tutors from different Gaeltacht areas were trained by Breacadh. This year's Open Day for Tutors was held on 11 October. Breacadh's Tutor Training Course is recognised by Waterford Institute of Technology/NALA as a module in its National Certificate in Literacy Development.

**Launches:** Nuachtán Bhreacadh, a twenty page up-to-date newspaper for adult literacy learners was launched on the 9 June 2003. The next edition will be published in October.

Pacáiste Acmhainne don Fhoghlaim Teaghlaigh, a Family Learning Resource Pack, was also launched in June. Breacadh, courtesy of the Clare Family Learning Project, translated this pack into Irish. The pack was designed for practitioners who would like to expand their work with parents.

Senator Joe O'Toole returned to his native Dingle on 4 October to launch two new books - Bunús na Ríomhaireachta and ón gCeann go Peann - for adult learners in the Gaeltacht. The computer manual was designed to help adult learners achieve the FETAC Award in Computer Literacy at foundation level. *Ón gCeann go Peann* is a workbook to aid native Irish speakers improve their reading and writing skills in Irish. Present at the book launch were representatives from Suffolk

County Council's highly acclaimed Training Matters whose work, *A First Look at Computers*, was the inspiration for the computer manual. Breacadh gratefully acknowledges the support of Training Matters and their kind permission to reproduce illustrations.

A list of the most frequently used words in spoken Irish is due to be published before the end of the year. 

# Workplace basic education: a competitive edge for companies

Staff motivation, productivity and ultimately competitiveness can be undermined if employees have low levels of literacy. With an estimated 450,000 Irish adults in the workplace with poor literacy skills this is critical issue for employers. A recent seminar, facilitated by NALA, examined how employers could establish and benefit from Workplace Basic Education (WBE) programmes.

## What is Workplace Basic Education?

WBE programmes focus on boosting literacy and numeracy skills of staff to make them more effective workers. These programmes can also offer other practical skills such as computers and communications. They may also include job orientation aspects and inputs on increasing self-esteem and improving self-confidence.

Chris James, Executive Director of the Cleaning Industry National Training Organisation in the UK shared his experience at the seminar of how WBE works in practice. “We have found in

research that 80% of problems at work are due to basic skills deficiency, misunderstanding and failures of communication, while 19% of problems relate to job specific skills. As a result, basic skills are essential to perform a wide range of activities safely and effectively within the workplace”.

There are many reasons why it is important to provide WBE to low skilled workers. These include:

- new quality standards and greater demand for accuracy;
- the introduction of new technology and ICT;
- new health and safety and hygiene regulations;
- new paperwork demands on workers at all levels;
- new ways of working such as quality circles, continuous improvement teams;
- the introduction of new qualifications; and
- development of learning-to-learn skills.

It is also important to remember that skills fade with time – if we are not using certain skills on a daily basis, we forget 80% of these skills on average within two years.

Recent research carried out by NALA found that employers:

- had little awareness of the impact of low levels of literacy among staff;
- did not recognise low literacy skills, as those affected are adept at hiding it;
- were often unaware of the number of adults with poor literacy skills; and



*Article compiled by  
Patricia Callan,  
Assistant Director,  
Small Firms Association*

- would consider initiating a WBE programme.

### What are the benefits?

Speaking at the seminar, Ann Heraty, CEO of Computer Placements Ltd, stated that “we should learn from the experience of the last upturn in the economy when there were many labour shortages. I am convinced that by supporting those in work who have low levels of literacy we could address some of these inevitable shortages, which will arise during the next economic upturn. Workplace Basic Education programmes would allow these staff to upskill to fill vacancies now and in the future.”

Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, lists the following amongst the benefits of WBE programmes to employers:

- increased quality and output;
- increased profitability;
- better team performance;
- increased ability to handle training on the job and quicker training results;
- increased retention of employees;
- improved labour-management relations;
- better health and safety record; and
- organisational flexibility.

There are also very significant and perhaps more intangible benefits to employees who participate in the WBE programme and their families including:

- increased self-confidence, with spin-offs in terms of

communication and interaction with others;

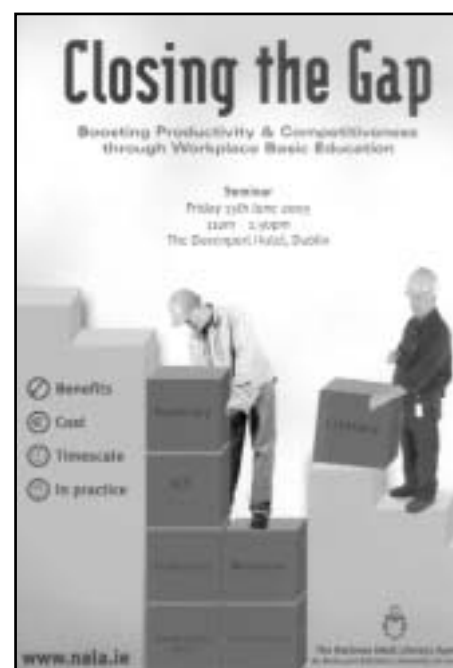
- literacy skill development, such as form-filling, letter-writing and newspaper reading;
- greater familiarity with computers and development of computer skills;
- positive influence on home and family lives such as being able to assist children with homework and communicate with them on technology; and
- re-awakening of an interest in learning, and desire to continue to learn.

Bernard Geoghegan, Assistant Production Manager of Cavan-based light engineering company, Pauwels Trafo, who ran a WBE programme in 2001, comments that “the morale of the group involved and their immediate workmates lifted as a result of the programme. They saw that the company was spending some of the training budget on the bottom end of the ladder, rather than on quality control staff or supervisors which was normally the case.”

### What are the costs?

In Britain, a survey undertaken by Gallup in 2002 suggested that on average employees with poor literacy skills cost a company employing more than 50 employees, €330,000 every year. So the question might really be, “can you afford not to invest in WBE?”

WBE programmes cost approximately €12,000 for a 30 week (120 hours) programme for one group (7-8 participants). These costs include:



'Closing the Gap', conference on Workplace Basic Education

- preparation and planning time (prior to programme commencement), including initial meetings with management; unions, where appropriate; workers; steering group meetings; promotional work; direct recruitment; selection and assessment of group; curriculum development;
- course co-ordinator hours;
- tutoring hours;
- travel time and expenses for the co-ordinator and tutors;
- materials, such as books and other necessary learning materials;
- evaluation of the programme; and
- other costs such as room hire and administration.

Additional costs include time off for attendance, replacement personnel and cost of bonus incentives, if provided.

Pauwels Trafo ran a 10-week WBE programme for 12 of its employees in 2001. Taking into account the fee for the tutors and the down time for the workers, the overall cost was €12,700. "This was good value when you consider that it would take between €3,200 and €3,800 to train a new employee and turnover in all industries was very high at that time", comments Bernard Geoghegan, Assistant Production Manager.

One of the key recommendations of the recently published WBE strategy document, which the SFA participated in, is the establishment of a dedicated WBE fund of €3 million by government

over a three year period. This fund would assist, in particular, smaller employers, who may not have the necessary funds/resources to establish a programme by themselves.

### What is the timescale involved?

Preparation/planning time:  
8 weeks x 10 hours (80 hours)

Programme:  
30 weeks x 4 hours (120 hours)

### Checklist for implementation of WBE programmes

- Select a trained professional service to develop a programme.
- Adopt a partnership model of working that includes all relevant stakeholders and providers.
- Undertake a comprehensive training needs analysis at the outset, which fully recognises the needs of both employers and employees.
- Agree objectives amongst all partners (employers, funders, employees and providers) at the outset and maintain throughout.
- Allow adequate time for development and design of programmes.
- Ensure that course content is adaptable, relevant and reflects the real needs of employees.
- Make provision for an effective promotional campaign within the company to attract appropriate employees.
- Appoint an existing staff member as a liaison person in the workplace.
- Be aware that effective promotion with employees can



Literacy skills for construction

take a significant amount of time.

- Be aware of the sensitivities that employees can feel.
- Support voluntary participation.
- Hold the programme on company premises, if suitable and where possible.
- Ensure tutors and co-ordinators are well trained to adapt to the workplace environment and use relevant and up-to-date materials and methodologies appropriate to the course and students.
- Develop support structures for participants where possible, e.g. attend course on work time or part work time; allow payment for travel where necessary; allow for additional one-to-one tuition where necessary; suggest supervisor interest and encouragement.
- Ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation throughout the programme through the development of appropriate research and evaluation. Offer FETAC accreditation as an option.
- Inform participants of further learning opportunities available both within the workplace and in their local Adult Learning Centre.

## Conclusion

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the more qualified employees are, the more investment in training employers give them. It is now time for companies to realise the substantial benefits that can be reaped from investing at the lower skilled end of the labour market.

WBE programmes can be delivered through the 33 VECs, providing local adult literacy services throughout Ireland. Trained and experienced group literacy tutors, will co-ordinate WBE programmes in your company, or for a group of smaller companies, operating in the local area, by conducting or supporting an initial training needs analysis; designing a basic education programme; publicising and recruiting participants; and delivering and evaluating the programme. For more information, contact Helen Ryan, at 01-809 91907 email [hryan@nala.ie](mailto:hryan@nala.ie).



# Phonics: integration into adult literacy programmes

The focus of this article is phonology and its importance in literacy instruction. Having said that, the importance of phonology does not in any way detract from the importance of all the other aspects of literacy tuition.

I am not suggesting teaching systematic phonics programmes, or indeed that phonics is more important than any other aspect of learning. I am simply advocating the use of another extremely important and underused strategy in facilitating adults to learn. As space is limited, I will only touch briefly on how a tutor might go about integrating phonics.

## What the student needs to know

You do not need to confound your student with terminology. All the student needs to know is that the alphabet is divided into letters called consonants and letters called vowels, and that a syllable is the beat of a word.

## What the tutor needs to clarify for the student

The tutor needs to clarify:

- how words are pronounced;
- how to break words up into separate syllables; and
- how to break words up into separate phonemes.

A particularly helpful way to split words up is by onset and rime. The onset of a word is the part of a syllable before the vowel and the rime is the remainder. For example:

Word	Onset	Rime
Bold	b	old
Plank	pl	ank
Sprain	spr	ain

Onsets and rimes are useful on a number of fronts.

- They are easier to hear.
- It is easier to find out which letters your student cannot hear.
- They help build spelling patterns.
- The student can create real and unknown words from them.
- They help the student make analogies from one word to another.

Below is the order in which I find out what sounds a student knows. As I will explain later, each student starts in a different place. However, if I had a student with very basic skills, I would want to ensure that every student understood letter-sound correspondence in the order below.

## What order is helpful?

This cannot be an exhaustive list, but in a nutshell, I find the following order helpful to students: (see Graph on page 55)

I begin with initial consonants because they are so consistent. You do need to point out that C and G have more than one sound.

C almost always makes an /s/



Article compiled by  
Columba O'Connor,  
Dublin Adult Learning Centre



A popular phonics publication  
Alpha to Omega

<b>Initial consonants</b>	<b>b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, qu, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z</b>
<b>Consonant combinations Sounding like single consonants</b>	<b>ph, kn, mn, gn, pn, wr, ps</b>
<b>Consonant digraphs</b>	<b>ch, sh, th, wh</b>
<b>Consonant blends</b>	<b>bl, br, cl, cr, dr, fl, fr, gr, pl, pr, sc, sk sl, sm, sn, sp, squ, st, str, sw,</b>
<b>Long and short vowel sounds</b>	<b>a, e, i, o, u</b>
<b>Common combinations making long sounds</b>	<b>ai, ee, ea, igh, oa</b>
<b>Vowel digraphs</b>	<b>au, aw, oi, oy</b>
<b>inflected endings</b>	<b>ing, ed, s, es, er, est</b>
<b>Suffixes and prefixes</b>	<b>ation, al, ly, y, il, un, im, ment, ful, etc.</b>

sound only when followed by i, e or y. Otherwise, C makes a /k/ sound.

G may make the sound of /j/ when followed by i, e or y.

I then move to consonant combinations that make the same sound as single consonants. Ph is explained as another (less common) way of writing /f/, wr /r/, kn, mn, gn /n/ and ps /s/. It is easier for a student to read an unfamiliar word starting with these combinations if they are forewarned. It also gives students a better chance of being able to find a word in the dictionary if they know that, for example, a word beginning with an /f/ sound may begin with ph.

Then I introduce the consonant combinations with their own distinct sounds, which are called digraphs. These are ch, th, sh and

wh. Obviously ch can also sound like a /k/, and in many dialects 'th' often sounds more like '/d/'. Once a student is aware of these pitfalls, the language becomes easier to negotiate.

Many students find pl, pr and bl, br particularly difficult to hear. This is also true of three-letter consonant combinations such as 'str'. It is worth pronouncing every sound in those words very clearly to assist the student in hearing them and spelling them.

Vowels are obviously the most difficult and I tend not to go through every combination, as some are relatively rare and confusing. I start with the long and short vowel sounds; for example, the difference between man:mane, pet:pete, pin:pine, con:cone, cub:cube. I also look at other common spellings of the long sounds of vowels, for

*Phonics is an extremely important and underused strategy in facilitating adults to learn*

example: main, peat, night and loan.

The sounds of 'au' and 'aw' as in Paw and Paul and 'oi' and 'oy' as in boil and boy are also useful to learn.

I then concentrate on inflected endings: -ing, -ed, -s and the letter -y at the end of words sounding like 'ee' as in happy or 'i' as in fry.

When a student has grasped all of this, I move on to common endings such as '-tion', '-ician', '-ble' and '-dge', and Greek and Latin suffixes and prefixes.

### Where to begin with your student

The most important thing you need to know is how much your student already knows. I have listed the order in which I teach sounds, but where you begin depends on how good your student is. The vast majority of my students know the letter associated with most initial word sounds. Many are unaware that 'ph' should just be read as an 'f' or that 'c' can make two different sounds depending on the letter that follows it.

With a beginning student, language experience is still the place to start. You simply do the language experience and point out that the letters represent sounds, pick one or two examples, and move on. The following week, you pick another consonant, and so on.

If I have a student whose skills are basic, I will concentrate more

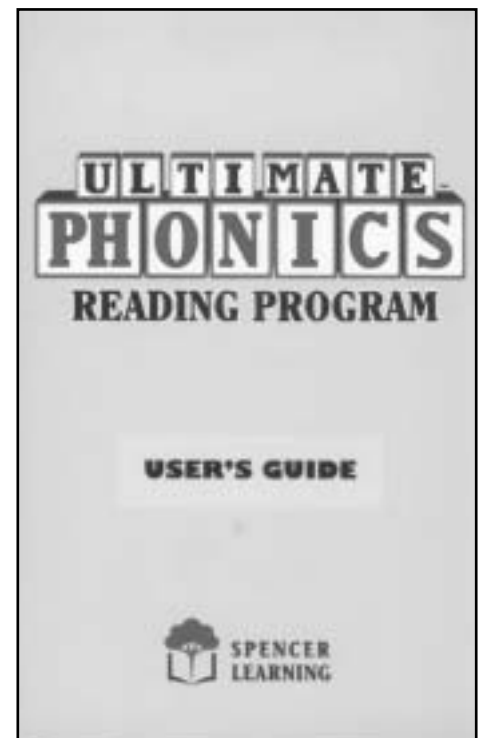
heavily on letter-sound correspondence using simple text, or pieces of text I have written myself, to illustrate either a particular beginning or a word pattern. I include a comprehension exercise, which poses questions both about the text itself and the teaching point.

For students who are confused about word endings, I spend time on breaking words down into syllables and noting the same patterns cropping up again and again. When students leave out 'ed' or an 's' in an ending, I ask them to read out what they have written, and check if the ending is there. I try to get the student to listen out for the sound at the end of the word and know that often the word sounds as if it ends in /t/, but it actually ends in 'ed'.

With a more advanced student, you can choose any piece of writing or a newspaper article. Pick a couple of words which illustrate whatever point you are trying to teach. You can give a general comprehension exercise together with one or two questions on the spelling pattern you are concentrating on. You can make up crosswords with particular patterns or get the student to write a limerick. Thus your student practises reading, writing and comprehension.


In the Dublin Adult Learning Centre, we run a phonics spelling programme. Only students who are doing other classes attend, on the basis that phonics is only part of the answer to improving literacy. The vast majority of students enjoy the spelling

*The most important thing you need to know is how much your student already knows.*



Ultimate Phonics software pack

programmes, because they learn about how the language works.

Explicitly teaching letter-sound correspondences allows students to see how certain combinations are more likely than others. In my experience I have found that students learn to make educated guesses and develop a sense of control of their own learning. 

# NALA literacy and the legal & justice system campaign

## Context for the legal & justice system campaign

In recent years the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has recognised that low levels of literacy can be a barrier to the Irish legal and justice system. This has come about through anecdotal evidence and through approaches from major legal organisations including the Law Society and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Considering that there are an estimated half a million Irish adults (OECD International Adult Literacy Survey, 1997) with low literacy levels, this issue should be of concern to organisations and individuals in the legal and justice system.

## Objective of the campaign

To raise awareness about this issue NALA chose the theme of 'literacy and the legal and justice



*Article compiled by  
Tommy Byrne,  
Public Relations Officer, NALA*

system' for their September 2003 National Literacy Awareness Week (NLAW) campaign. The intention of this campaign was to assist people who work in the legal and justice system deal more effectively and sensitively with members of the public who have poor literacy skills.

### Preparation & planning

From the outset NALA sought the support and input of nearly 20 major legal and justice organisations. These included professional bodies, statutory organisations, service providers and special interest groups (see list below). The ultimate aim of this activity was to produce a practical and relevant plan for the literacy and legal and justice system campaign. From these discussions the Agency identified the following activities for the campaign:

- organising a **major conference** on the issue
- organising a **range of events** in conjunction with **major legal and justice organisations**
- producing and distributing a range of **printed support material**
- obtaining coverage in the **media**
- tapping into the **communications networks of major legal and justice organisations** particularly in relation to newsletters, events and websites; and
- supporting activity in the **126 VEC Adult Literacy Schemes** around the country.

### Printed promotional material

A range of effective printed promotional material was produced and distributed for the campaign. Foremost of these was '**A Plain English Guide to Legal Terms**'. It comprises over 60 pages, with over 1,400 words explained and it was produced in conjunction with the Law Society. It was launched at an event in the Law Society hosted by Ken Murphy, Director General of the Law Society. Also present was NALA Director Inez Bailey who outlined the agencies plan for the week. John Dennehy, Secretary General, Department of Education and Science did the official launch. Approximately 1,000 copies of the guide have been distributed to date.

Other publications produced and distributed included:

- a **colour post card** with brief information on **how to support clients with low literacy levels**;
- a **poster** about the campaign; and
- a programme for the national conference.

Thousands of copies were distributed and about 300 legal and justice organisations and practitioners were particularly targeted.

### Events with major legal and justice organisations

A range of events were organised for the campaign, which were both well attended and were important networking events for communicating the adult literacy message. These organisations we worked with included:



Celebrating NLAW in Waterford were Nicola McCarthy VEC Adult Literacy Organiser Co. Waterford, Seamus Ryan, Deputy Lord Mayor Waterford City Council, 'costume character Joe', Margaret Murray NALA and Joanne Geraghty VEC Adult Literacy Organiser Waterford City.

- **The Irish Prison Service** – The launch of two recent publications on literacy and prison at Wheatfield Prison on Tuesday September 23rd. This included a speech by Sean Aylward, Director of the Irish Prison Service with a presentation from NALA and Dr. Mark Morgan, Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College of Education, co-author of the research.
- **Office of the Director of Public Prosecution** - The launch of two 'literacy friendly' booklets. This included speeches from James Hamilton, Director of Public Prosecutions and Donal Egan BL, Chairman of Victim Support. In addition NALA, outlined its plain English service at this event.

A national conference on 'Literacy and the legal & justice system', the keynote speaker was Matthias Kelly, Chair of the Bar Council England & Wales. At this event NALA put its work in the legal and justice area into context. This event took place at the Bar Council, Saturday September 27th and the attendees were welcomed by Conor Maguire, Chairman of the Bar Council.

### Activity around the country

A wide range of activity took place across the country during the campaign. These activities were initiated by the 126 local VEC Adult Literacy Schemes and with the support of NALA. Their intention was to engage with local people from the legal and justice system for example Gardai,

solicitors, the courts and legal advice centres. Some examples of these activities include:

- Cork – a half day seminar on plain English and literacy awareness
- Waterford – a range of events and media coverage including street theatre
- Galway - open day and an evening event
- Offaly – an event for people in the legal and justice system
- Donegal – a promotional mailing campaign to solicitors

### Media coverage

Overall the campaign received substantial coverage in the media. This was initiated by a public endorsement by Mr Michael McDowell TD, Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform resulting in coverage in the Irish Times, the Sunday Business Post, Law Society Gazette and Bar Review.

The start of the campaign received coverage on all local radio and newspapers. This was boosted by the launch of 'A Plain English Guide to Legal Terms', which achieved coverage in the main national newspapers and major radio programmes. The campaign wound up with coverage of the national conference 'Literacy and the Legal & Justice system' on RTE 6.1 News and in the Irish Times.

### Follow-up

NALA is now following up the campaign with the legal and justice organisations that supported the campaign. In

particular the Agency is offering Literacy Awareness Training (LAT) and a plain English service, which includes advice, editing and training.

### Legal and justice organisations who supported the campaign

- Citizens Information Centres
- Dept of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
- Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)
- Gardai
- Irish Association of Law Teachers (IALT)
- Irish Prisons Service
- Law Society
- Legal Aid Board
- Money Advice & Budgeting Service
- National Crime Council
- National Disability Authority
- Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
- Reception & Integration Agency
- The Bar Council
- The Courts Service
- Victim Support

For more information contact Tommy Byrne, NALA PRO, on 01 809 9195 or email [tbyrne@nala.ie](mailto:tbyrne@nala.ie).



Michael McDowell TD, Minister of Justice, Equality & Law reform with Inez Bailey, NALA Director announcing to the media plans for National Literacy Awareness Week 2003

The NALA Literacy, Learning and Tuition website

**www.literacytools.ie**

to be launched in early 2004.

You are welcome to try this free website and provide feedback.



**The website contains:**

- exercises to do online and to print out;
- games;
- resources for tutors



**The website also explains how to:**

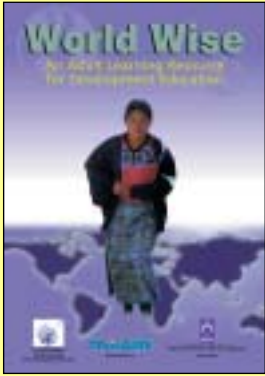
- use email;
- use passwords; and
- search for information on the web

Enquiries to Jennie Lynch, email [jlynch@nala.ie](mailto:jlynch@nala.ie)

# NEW publications & resources

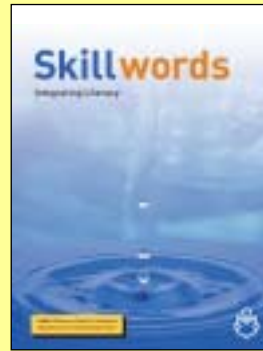
*produced by NALA*

## 'World Wise' – A Development Education Resource for Adult Learning



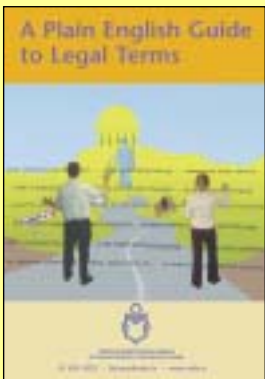
It aims to make the basic link between individuals and communities, no matter where they live and how different their lives are. The pack uses activities and reflections and it was written for adult basic education providers. It was produced through the combined efforts of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Trocaire and Co Clare VEC Adult Literacy Scheme. The cost is €10.00 each plus €3.00 post & packing.

## 'Skillwords' Resource Pack – supporting the integration of literacy into vocational training



The National Adult Literacy Agency 'Skillwords' pack provides a set of materials to support the integration of literacy into areas of vocational training. It is primarily intended to be used by tutors, trainers and learners working in areas such as woodworking, catering and horticulture. The cost is €20.00 each plus €6.00 post & packing.

## A Plain English Guide to Legal Terms



This comprises over 60 pages with over 1,400 words explained. The content was based on a number of highly regarded sources. The Guide was commissioned by NALA and it was produced in conjunction with the Law Society. The legal content of the guide was edited by Patrick O'Connor, B.C.L., LL.B., who was President of the Law Society of Ireland in 1999. The cost is €7.50 each plus €3.00 post & packing.

## 'Paving the Way' ESOL Resource Pack



About 13% of the total 28,000 people taking part in VEC Adult Literacy Schemes are taking part in ESOL ('English for Speakers of Other Languages') classes. In response to this, NALA has published an ESOL resource pack 'Paving the Way'.

This publication includes:

- background facts and figures about students;
- methods and materials for teaching ESOL;
- how to develop your own material; and
- country profiles and intercultural resources.

The cost is €10.00 each plus €3.00 post & packing.



**For more information and to order these publications contact NALA on 01 855 4332 or email: [literacy@nala.ie](mailto:literacy@nala.ie). These publications are also available from the NALA Resource Room at 76 Lr. Gardiner St., Dublin 1.**