

# ADULT LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS IN A CHANGING SECTOR

**7**  
**Priorities**  
**to Consider**

BUILD

develop

CONFIDENCE

LEARN

UPSKILL

NEEDS



# Foreword



George Bernard Shaw once concluded a letter to a friend as follows: "I'm sorry this letter is so long, I didn't have time to make it shorter". The authors of this publication have no need for a similar apology because much deliberation and consultation has resulted in a clear, concise, apposite and timely publication that achieves exactly what its authors set out to achieve.

It places literacy, in a contemporary sense, at the core of learning at all levels and concisely sets out the issues that need to be taken into account, in achieving that end.

Given the imminent establishment of both the ETBs and SOLAS, this publication could not be timelier. Hopefully, it will provide a set of sign posts that will inform the development of SOLAS and ETB further education and training strategies in the months and years that lie ahead.

On behalf of the IVEA, I congratulate all who contributed to the development of this valuable publication.



**Michael Moriarty**

**General Secretary, Irish Vocational  
Education Association**

# Glossary of Terms

<b>ALO</b>	Adult Literacy Organiser; responsible for the management of Adult Literacy Services within VECs
<b>ALOA</b>	Adult Literacy Organisers' Association; representative body for Adult Literacy Organisers employed, primarily by VECs, throughout Ireland to manage and operate Adult Literacy Services
<b>ALS</b>	Adult Literacy Services providing basic education and literacy education to adults as part of an integrated Adult Education Services within VECs
<b>CPD</b>	Continuous Professional Development involves the upskilling of staff in ways that ensure staff are informed and develop their skills. CPD can involve any relevant learning activity, whether formal and structured or informal and self-directed
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>ETBs</b>	Local Education and Training Boards as proposed by Government and to be established upon the amalgamation of FAS and VECs
<b>ESOL</b>	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is an educational program used to teach English to people whose first language is not English.. Traditionally VECs have had significant responsibility for providing ESOL in Ireland to a growing migrant population
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training; usually used to refer to the Further Education and Training sector that encompasses education and vocational training at levels 1-6
<b>FETAC</b>	The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) - the statutory awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. FETAC makes quality assured awards that are part of the National Framework of Qualifications(NFQ) from levels 1-6
<b>IBEC</b>	Irish Business and Employers Federation
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology; including computers, mobile and other everyday technologies
<b>ITABE</b>	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education is an intensive adult literacy programme operated by Adult Literacy Services in Ireland. Learners receive 84 hours of basic education over 14 weeks (6 hours per week) in a programme designed to improve their basic skills
<b>IVEA</b>	Irish Vocational Education Authority; the national representative association for Ireland's Vocational Education Committees (VECs), charged with protecting, promoting and enhancing the interests of vocational education and training in Ireland and now within a European context
<b>NALA</b>	National Adult Literacy Agency; an independent charity committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs
<b>NFQ</b>	The National Framework of Qualifications
<b>QQAI</b>	Qualifications and Quality Assurance Ireland (QQAI) is a soon to be established, single unified agency to assure the quality of qualifications and of learners' experience of education and training at all levels in Ireland. FETAC, HETAC, NOAI and IUQB will be amalgamated into one agency
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SOLAS</b>	The new further education and training authority SOLAS (Seirbhís Oideachais Leanunaigh agus Scileanna) to be established in 2013
<b>VEC</b>	There are currently 33 Vocational Education Committees in Ireland

# Context

The learning environment for adults in Ireland is changing at pace, driven by the current economic situation and by the need to have a functioning adult education and training sector that: activates our economy at a time of social and economic upheaval, narrows the distance from the labour market for adult learners, and helps to underpin a socially active citizenship.

The pending establishment of local Education and Training Boards (ETBs), designed to facilitate better coordination and delivery of education and training at a local level, provides a unique opportunity to better serve adult learners who have literacy difficulties. This document presents 7 key priorities for consideration for integrated adult literacy provision under ETBs. This document addresses those within ETBs (VEC Management), SOLAS and the Department of Education, tasked with establishing the structures in ETBs and planning for the delivery of services to adults with basic educational needs.

This document has been developed by the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA), on behalf of the Irish Vocational Education Authority (IVEA) and with the help and support of NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency). The priorities and strategies set out in this document reflect over 30 years' experience in providing basic education opportunities for adults within the VEC sector.



## What is Adult Literacy?

Adult literacy in Ireland is defined as including:

*"...listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. It also has personal, social and economic dimensions"*

- NALA



# Background

One in four Irish adults, or 25% of the population, has literacy difficulties, according to the most recent international adult literacy survey (IALS, 1997). Unemployed people, early school leavers, non-English speakers and older adults are most at risk of having literacy difficulties, the survey stated. The latest census statistics show over 383,800 adults have less than a level 4 qualification, of which 117,600 have primary level or no qualifications (Central Statistics Office, 2012).

Literacy difficulties impact on all aspects of an individual's life. Adults with literacy difficulties often find it difficult to: maintain or progress in employment, complete forms, help children with homework or play an active role in their community or in society. Literacy has a key role in combating long-term unemployment, improving access to further education and training opportunities, breaking the cycle of poverty while building and strengthening communities.

While many adult learners with literacy needs self-refer, typically those with low basic skills are among the most hard to reach learners with whom the FET sector works. Learners with low basic skills need to be engaged through active outreach strategies that are designed to seek out and connect with them.

Literacy services across the country design and deliver a wide range of programmes, accredited at levels 1–4 on the NFO and non-accredited programmes to meet the needs of adult learners. Additional initiatives include Family Learning, Skills for Work and Workplace Learning, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and ITABE (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education).

Through extensive consultation with members, and drawing on their expertise and experience, ALOA have identified 7 priorities for ETBs to consider.



ETBs should develop and implement an initial assessment framework for the FET sector to a common national standard with appropriate referral protocols that support learners' entry onto courses

**Strategies for ETBs to assist access to appropriate courses:**

- Provide information and supports in plain English, and in a range of formats, which empower learners to make informed choices regarding programmes, progression options and career paths
- ETBs should agree and implement a plan for RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) to support access and progression, and to recognise experiential learning
- Adult Education and Guidance services should be available to learners in every ETB, providing timely and accurate information about course choices and progression routes



# The engagement of adult learners with basic skills needs should be central to local area plans developed by ETBs

## Strategies to consider when planning at a local level:

- Increase the tuition time of intensive basic skills programmes (traditionally between 2 and 6 hours per week per learner) to allow adult learners build key skills in literacy, numeracy and IT; empowering learners to continue to progress on the NQF and gain accreditation under the QQAI (previously FETAC) where possible
- Maintain a small group approach with programmes designed to meet the needs of learners with literacy needs; integrating approaches such as Themed Learning, Family Literacy, Numeracy and Skills for Work
- Integrate flexible delivery modes which enable learners to engage with programmes at times and locations suitable to them e.g. community-based, online, distance and blended learning such as [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie)
- Develop and promote local outreach strategies and community-based learning
- Promote adult literacy programmes as part of an integrated promotional campaign to publicise the work of ETBs and strategically link with national adult literacy media campaigns such as those undertaken by NALA





In ETBs the development of literacy skills should be integral to teaching and learning at all levels



### **Strategies to support ETBs to integrate literacy development across all levels of education and training**

- Develop and implement an Integrated Literacy Policy to be referenced in ETB Education Plans. This policy should seek to embed the development of core competencies, seen as a foundation for re-skilling, up-skilling and enhanced participation in the labour market and wider society, in all further education and training
- Education and training programmes should integrate skills in areas such as learning to learn, personal development, critical thinking, language development, as well as technical literacy skills development
- Design and develop a literacy awareness pack that promotes and supports whole-centre literacy integration and provides a checklist of good practice
- Ensure that efforts are made across all further education and training in ETBs to remove literacy, numeracy and ICT barriers faced by learners
- Ensure the integration of specialised supports for learners with specific needs and difficulties to assist those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and others

# In ETBs strategies should be implemented to enhance literacy and digital skills through the use of ICT, blended learning and emerging technologies

## **Strategies to support the development of literacy and digital skills through ICT:**

- Develop and implement ICT policies in ETBs that support the integration of IT into teaching and learning at all levels of provision and in all learning contexts
- Promote self-directed learning and RPL through technology to staff and learners to increase their baseline IT skills. Blended learning approaches, such as the use of sites like [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) should be used with learners, especially those with low literacy skills
- Ensure that consistent ICT systems are maintained and utilised effectively across ETBs, making it easier to track learners as they move through the education system
- Provide appropriate ICT training for staff and publicise good practice across ETBs as a means of encouraging staff to integrate the use of digital and emerging technologies at all levels of the learning process



In ETBs innovative strategies should be implemented to ensure numeracy and maths are at the core of learning at all levels

**Strategies to promote and encourage maths and numeracy education in ETBs:**



- Implement a national publicity campaign promoting the importance of numeracy skills
- Promote awareness of numeracy and general skills development with short taster courses, e.g. Maths for Parents, Fun with Maths, Everyday Maths
- Engage in curriculum development to support the delivery of numeracy and maths programmes that are relevant to adults
- Integrate numeracy and everyday maths into courses at all levels using appropriate strategies and themes, such as financial and budgeting literacy
- Encourage staff to develop innovative methods of teaching numeracy through effective CPD strategies and the sharing of good practice
- Ensure that learners' needs are met by staff who are qualified and competent in teaching numeracy and maths

Set out a coherent staffing structure and career path in ETBs for staff working with adult learners and ensure that staff are appropriately skilled and qualified to respond to literacy needs at all levels

**Strategies to consider when determining staff structures in ETBs:**

- Establish a clear career path within the FET sector for all adult education staff
- Ensure staff delivering tuition at Levels 1-3 on the NFO are appropriately qualified, skilled and experienced in the education of adults with literacy difficulties
- Advocate for DES recognition of qualifications for staff teaching at Levels 1-3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFO)
- Provide 'Integrating Literacy' training for all teachers and tutors to build staff qualifications, skills and experience in integrating literacy into subject areas at Levels 4-6
- Ensure all staff in ETBs have access to, and participate in, Literacy Awareness Training



In ETBs programmes should be delivered ensuring basic skills development that results in increased employability and enhanced participation in further education

**Strategies to help learners with literacy difficulties improve their employability and prospects for progression to further education and training:**

- Time and opportunity to develop basic skills while achieving vocational awards through more intensive basic education programmes designed to truly engage learners
- Flexible part-time programmes that allow those in employment to up-skill and re-skill in a changing employment environment
- National training and awareness programme designed to deliver a wider understanding among referral agencies of the literacy needs of unemployed adults
- Increased cooperation between ETBs and employer bodies such as IBEC, Chamber of Commerce, trade unions and other relevant stakeholders on the design and delivery of learning programmes
- Greater links between ETB services in local areas to provide appropriate progression options and relevant learning support
- Local area plans that reflect the needs of unemployed adults, those who are under-employed or at risk of unemployment, and that are responsive to the needs of a changing economy and society



# The Process

Since the announcement of the amalgamation of VECs and the formation of SOLAS, ALOA has sought to positively and constructively input into the discussion on the positioning of adult literacy and basic skills development in an enhanced Further Education and Training Sector.

This document was developed by the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association on behalf of the Irish Vocational Education Association and with the help and support of the National Adult Literacy Agency. ALOA is a professional representative association for Adult Literacy Organisers and discussions on the themes represented here took place across its regional structures over a six-month period. The paper was significantly progressed at the annual Adult Literacy Organisers' Forum organised by NALA, held in March 2012, and with input from the IVEA Adult Literacy Forum.

Members of the Executive of ALOA, as authors of this document, wish to thank the members of the association for their constructive voice in the development of the vision represented here. The Association would also wish to acknowledge the support and input from the members of the IVEA Literacy Forum and the help and support received from NALA in facilitating the process; in particular at the ALO forum 2012.







## Suggested Reading

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# Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA)



ALOA is the professional representative body for Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs), managing adult literacy and basic education services throughout the Republic of Ireland as part of an integrated VEC Adult Education Service. The aims of the association include the promotion of a high quality adult literacy service and to secure recognition of the economic, social, and cultural context of adult literacy. The association represents the views of Adult Literacy Organisers and contributes to the development of Adult Basic Education policy through member representation on committees at national level.

The role of an ALO is multifaceted and involves supporting and managing students, volunteer and paid tutors, developing and implementing programmes, as well as managing finance, resources, premises and non-academic staff. The ALO is responsible for the quality of a diverse range of service provision and is also involved in drawing up policies with regard to Adult Basic Education at local level as part of integrated services within VECs. The ALO ensures that the educational needs of the student are met; from initial consultation, to organising appropriate tuition and identifying progression options, to the point of exit. Importantly, by working with colleagues from across the FET sector and linking with internal and external stakeholders, the ALO continues to ensure that options are available for adult learners with literacy difficulties who wish to return to education.

The ALOA supports its members in the delivery of a professional Adult Literacy Service and has made a hugely significant contribution to adult literacy since its establishment in 1998. This contribution is built on the commitment of its members to provide a high quality and professional literacy service in the Republic of Ireland.



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