



**ALOA's Submission to the Consultation Process for
the 10-Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital
Literacy Strategy**

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Abbreviations

ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
ALOA	Adult Literacy Organisers' Association
BTEI	Back to Education and Training Initiative
CEFA	Community Education Facilitators Association
CID	Contract of indefinite duration
CITO	Check-In Take-Off
CPD	Continual Professional Development
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity to Schools
ETB	Education and Training Board
FET	Further Education and Training
FETCH	Further Education and Training Course Hub
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HSCL	Home-School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
NAC	National Advisory Council
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning

Introduction

The Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA) welcomes the opportunity to present in this consultation process. It has provided us with an occasion to reflect on our practice, to acknowledge what works well, and to share, once again, best practice among ourselves. It has also afforded us an opportunity to reflect on what could be improved upon. Among us we have the combined expertise of 60 ALOs across 16 ETBs, who have been providing literacy, numeracy and digital literacy educational opportunities to adults for decades. We are delighted at the prospect of sharing our expertise, and we look forward with enthusiasm to the challenges of the coming decade.

This submission outlines the work and reach of ALOA, the role that ALOA plays in the continual professional development of its members, and its contributions to education policy through the National Advisory Council (NAC). We discuss some of the current practices within ETB adult literacy services and we treat of important issues in adult literacy including critical literacy and the role of one-to-one tuition. We also discuss the challenges we face and provide recommendations to be included in the new strategy.

Throughout this document we will use the word 'literacy' to mean 'literacies' in the broadest sense, to include reading, writing, spelling, speaking and listening, numeracy and an ability to navigate the digital world, as well as a critical competence in all of those spheres.

ALOA

ALOA is the professional representative body for Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs), who manage adult literacy and basic education services throughout the Republic of Ireland as part of an integrated Education and Training Board (ETB) Adult Education Service. ALOA, founded in 1998, is a national organisation comprising six regions, each with two regional representatives who sit on the national executive. ALOA has currently 60 members from all regions of the country, who among them cater to the literacy needs of tens of thousands of adults.

ALOA provides valuable professional development to its members, convening and hosting conferences with a blend of academic input, input from An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS) about the current state of literacy around the country and the direction SOLAS wishes to take, practical training and sharing of our own expertise and innovations in praxis. It also affords an opportunity for ALOs to look to and discuss international research and practice.

Most recently, in 2019, ALOA, with its sister organisation Community Education Facilitators' Association (CEFA), convened a conference with the support of SOLAS and ETBI, which considered non-formal and informal learning from policy to practice, and the ways in which we might value and evaluate the impact of both on people's lives.

Also at the 2019 conference, Michael Kenny of NUI Maynooth's Department of Adult and Community Education discussed definitions of formal and informal learning and how they interplay. The homework or reading around a topic that we do when we are studying that topic in a formal course is an example of such interplay and something encouraged within literacy services. He also made suggestions about how we might capture achievements of short-course formal education or informal learning with badges similar to "Top Fan" badges on social media. Roisin Doherty of SOLAS presented on how SOLAS envisaged the respective roles of formal and informal learning in the 2020-2024 FET strategy.

In the long questionnaire below, we reference the essential non-formal aspects of learning occurring within the adult literacy services.

Learning from International Experience

The 2019 ALOA/CEF conference also heard from Mai Timmi, from the Ministry of Education and Research in Estonia, about how the Estonian government had invested in an extensive and creative TV promotion campaign to destigmatise adult education and to encourage adults to engage in lifelong learning opportunities available in that country. In our response to the consultation document, we reference the Estonian experience in our suggestions for how we might promote adult literacy opportunities for adults in Ireland.

The National Advisory Committee

The chair and vice-chair of ALOA occupy two seats on the 10-person National Advisory Committee (NAC), which was set up as part of the SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy (FET) Strategy 2014-2019. The NAC informs and oversees the implementation of the FET Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. ALOA contributes to the NAC by responding to and providing feedback for many draft guidelines both when they are initially reported to the NAC and on an ongoing basis. ALOA also is part of the process of approving final versions.

ALOA has responded to and given feedback on the following policy documents and initiatives which have come before the NAC:

- ESOL initial assessment (ALOs delivered presentations here)
- ESOL Report final version
- Family Learning Guidelines Report
- Feedback on requests to the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) in relation to literacy inputs
- Response to National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) initiatives, including Check-In Take-Off (CITO) an international educational self-assessment project
- The annual national literacy awareness campaign
- Feedback to initiatives from the then SOLAS Active Inclusion Unit
- Feedback on the Learner Charter
- Feedback and review of Inclusion of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities Report
- Feedback and review of Numeracy Report.

In addition to giving feedback, we have provided input into or helped to create the following:

- Input into the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) broad standards working group
- Helped to design and fed into the NAC work plan for literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- Fed into the SOLAS Further Education and Training (FET) strategy draft documents.

In addition to responding to and contributing to policy papers and reports, ALOs have also led initiatives and presented them to the NAC. An ALO from CMETB and former vice-chair of ALOA led the recent ESOL research and report, supported by ALOs across the country. Moreover, ALOs head up the Support to Apprentices initiative, which has led to the development of a sub-group of the NAC called the 'Support to Apprentices Group'. This sub-group meets four times per year to co-ordinate best practice for literacy and numeracy supports to apprentices. It also provides a forum for sharing resources across the country. The group recommended that literacy and numeracy supports be established in every Training Centre, with a resource worker appointed in each centre. A password protected portal for the Support to Apprentices Group was established on the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) library, and funding is available through ETBI to produce materials. It was produced with ETBI and ALOs, Adult Basic Education (ABE) numeracy tutors and resource workers, in collaboration with instructors from the individual trades.

What is working well in adult literacy services

As managers of the local ETB literacy services, in line with the FET Strategy 2020-2024, ALOs ensure that a wide range of high-quality learning options are available to adults who wish to become more literate, numerate and/or more digitally skilled. The options available to adults include one-to-one and small group classes, which allow for learning which is designed to address the specific needs and learning desires of the individuals in question.

Literacy is the most basic of requirements in order to have an education. It is enshrined in Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights '[Everyone has the right to education.](#)' However some adults find it harder to take the first step to engage. ALOA's members play a key role in reaching those who need most support through creating informal and welcoming spaces and meeting the learner wherever they are at on their learning path. This approach makes it easier for the tentative, shy learner, who may otherwise be scared off, to (re)engage. The work of ALOs is integral to helping learners get (re)started on their learning journey.

ALOs recognise that it is important to meet people where they are at, both in the stage they occupy in their learning journey, and where they reside or work. Therefore, in addition to providing in-house classes across the country, ALOs work with other stakeholders including Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), to offer educational opportunities to adults in community settings, family resource centres, community hubs, libraries, addiction rehabilitation centres, homeless support services, disability services, Health Service Executive (HSE), Tusla, Traveller advocacy groups, migrant support groups (ESOL literacy), accommodation centres, and across Further Education and Training (FET) settings.

Recommendations

With adequate resourcing, we could improve upon these relationships. The creation of a role of outreach worker, working directly to the ALO, would be an invaluable resource. We also recommend that staff in statutory agencies who are working directly with marginalised groups or individuals be required to undertake literacy awareness training. We further recommend a review of the DEASP/ETB protocol to include a recognition that those whose literacy is at or below level 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) are not labour-market ready and should be given the time and

space to pursue and consolidate their learning. All participation in adult education should remain voluntary, with no financial penalties for non-engagement. Any protocol between statutory agencies and the ETBs should take cognisance of the fact that a person may take time before they engage, or may engage in a non-threatening course such as flower arranging before beginning to work on their literacies. This is an important part of their learning path and needs time and space. An ETB-DEASP protocol needs to recognise that the adult literacy service and the individual in question are best placed to make the determination about where their engagement should begin and how it should progress. ALOs understand that progress can be, and at times needs to be, horizontal as well as vertical.

ALOs Supporting FET

In addition to meeting the literacy needs of people whose skills register at levels 1 to 4 on the NFQ, ALOs recognise that people on degree courses and people pursuing apprenticeships have literacy needs too. Nationally, adult literacy services are providing literacy, numeracy and digital skills support to individuals in further and higher education. Moreover, we are providing in-house, tailored educational support to FET training centres. For example, the work that is happening in GRETB to integrate literacy into the Training Centres can be explored on ALOA's website by clicking [here](#).

Adapting to change

Always flexible and dynamic in how we work, ALOA's members rose to the challenges posed by the closing of centres in March 2020 due to the pandemic. We supported our staff to change their modes of teaching overnight. Adult literacy services around the country adapted to reach their students using WhatsApp and Zoom, but also for those adversely affected by the digital divide, we used the postal service to send out learning material and followed up with phone tutorials. A list of the innovative ways ALOs engaged with and continue to engage with their students since the pandemic began can be found [here](#).

Some ETBs developed websites or adapted websites already in use as a teaching conduit. Several literacy services created YouTube channels to deliver tutorials to their students who had the requisite literacy and digital skills to access them. CMETB literacy service joined with their colleagues in community education to create [this](#) channel of short lessons in everything from how to add in Excel

to how to make a face mask. Clare Family Learning created an online tutorial of ideas for home-schooling, which can be found by following the link [here](#). Most of these resources are available on the [ALOA website](#), which acts, among other things, as a repository for ALOs to share materials and ideas with their colleagues nationwide.

ALOA supports innovation and development of literacy services by providing a forum for colleagues from across the country to network with each other and to exchange ideas. Two examples of this happened between Donegal ETB and City of Dublin ETB (CDETB). The ALO in CDETB worked with her tutors to create an educational magazine which was posted to all students in her service. The tutors then called the students over several weeks to help them to work on the exercises in [this](#) magazine. She shared this with her ALOA colleagues, one of whom, an ALO in Donegal ETB, created a similar document tailored for the Donegal context.

In another exchange between the two literacy services, Donegal shared their comprehensive critical literacy teaching and learning tool with Dublin where it will be used both for its original purpose, but also to inform a CPD course for tutors on imbedding critical literacy. ALOA facilitates these regular and fruitful exchanges.

Whole-of-life benefits of learning

There is strong evidence in the academic literature on adult education for wider benefits of learning, beyond the bare acquisition of literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Hammond & Feinstein (2006) found that “Adults who participated in adult education during their thirties tended to enjoy positive transformations in their health and well-being more than their counterparts who had not taken a course” (p. vi). Feinstein, Budge, & Duckworth (2008) found that even relatively short courses in adult education can have positive effects on an individual, including behavioural and attitudinal changes which translated into more civic engagement and healthier living. Furthermore, they found that these changes were “greater for educationally disadvantaged adults” (p.18). They identified further positive social changes: racial tolerance increased by approximately 75% in those who had taken up three to ten leisure courses, and even engagement in fewer leisure courses saw a significant increase in sport and exercise. Furthermore, participation in adult education increased the likelihood of voting.

Feinstein et al (2008) found that participating in just one or two unaccredited courses increased the likelihood of smoking cessation by a factor of one eighth. Moreover, in their research into the

interconnectedness of confidence, social capital and adult literacy education, Tett & Maclachlan (2007) found that learners who participated in adult literacy education experienced an increase in self-confidence interwoven with an improvement in social and communicative skills and that adult literacy education increased social participation and social capital. Similarly, Desjardins & Fuller (2007) underscore the social and civic benefits of adult basic education.

We also know of wider benefits of learning from our own professional experience, observing and listening to our students. Adult literacy learners in Ireland attest that their experiences in adult literacy services have improved their family life as well as their own personal development (National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), 2020). Such testimony can be found [here](#) from a woman called Margaret O'Donovan who attended her local adult literacy service in Ennistymon, Co. Clare, initially to do a Parents Plus programme. She speaks of how anxious she was before going, and of how she was put at her ease. She learned there to help her daughter with her homework, which improved her relationship with her daughter. She states that the service became like a family to her. She also continued with her education to do levels 5 and 6 certificates in Childcare, a sector in which she is now employed.

Wide and complex benefits of adult learning cannot be measured by our current quantitative reporting mechanisms. An indication of the success of the ALND Strategy will be an increase in civic engagement, improved health outcomes for marginalised groups and an increase in voter participation within those groups.

The broad benefits of learning that pertain to personal development and confidence-building could be measured by a distance-travelled tool similar to the *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* created under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2022, and presented at the ALOA/CEFA conference in Sligo in 2019. The tool, details of which can be found [here](#) and [here](#), measures the following five skills:

1. Literacy and numeracy confidence
2. Confidence, goal setting and self-efficacy
3. Communication skills
4. Connection with others
5. General work readiness

It is not envisaged that such a tool would be instituted in every class with every learner. Rather it might be used as a part of qualitative research with samples of learners from across the country. Such research might be undertaken by an independent party, practiced in qualitative research and familiar with the sector; for example, academics researching in the area of adult education in Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) or NUI Maynooth might be approached.

One-to-one Tuition

Adult literacy provision began with one-to-one tuition, and it continues to be a valued part of the work of adult literacy services. In 2020, ALOA surveyed its members to get a snapshot of one-to-one provision across ETBs. There were 47 responses, which revealed that all but one literacy service was offering one-to-one tuition. There were multiple reasons why one-to-one provision was presented to a student. A student may need to build confidence before entering a group class. A greater proficiency in one area of literacy than another, the so-called “spiky profile” makes it hard to find a group that will adequately address a learner’s needs. There are also issues of timetabling and of individual specific literacy needs, perhaps brought about by a work or study scenario. People with specific learning difficulties might require individual attention for at least part of their learning process with us.

ALOs differed in whom they delegated one-to-one tuition to. It was not only delivered by volunteer tutors, as was historically the case, but also by resource workers, paid tutors and in one case by the ALO. In the vast majority of cases, volunteers completed an initial tutor training course prior to working with a student.

Although the lengths of time between reviews of one-to-one progress varied, reviews were undertaken. One aspect of such a review can be assessing with the learner their readiness or indeed the appropriateness of moving to group tuition. ALOs saw benefits to moving to group tuition, however some reported a reluctance by students to leave their one-to-one provision.

Benefits and challenges of both options were noted. Benefits included that it helps to build confidence and it reduces the barriers to returning to learning for those with low levels of confidence. It also provides an opportunity for bespoke learning for the student for a period of time, before they move to a more generalised class. The challenges included a reluctance on the part of students to

move on and a lack of peer support for students. The challenges were around the recruitment of volunteers, attrition rates with volunteer tutors and the resources needed for initial training and on-going support of tutors.

One-to-one tuition remains an option across the country, but it would benefit from better resourcing, perhaps a resource worker role either to deliver the one-to-one tuition or to supervise those who are doing it. The area of one-to-one tuition would repay further research.

Critical Literacy

Regardless of the mode of tuition, critical literacy is essential to any democracy. The ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, being able to establish the veracity of what we read and to know where to check facts are fundamental skills that allow us to make sound choices, both as consumers of news and producers of it when we post or repost on social media. Furthermore, gaining an understanding of basic scientific principles helps us to wade through the misinformation and disinformation that we encounter daily on social media platforms.

Developing our critical thinking, reading and writing skills allows us to examine representations of groups, individuals or organisations in the media, in literature, film, songs and the visuals. Such appraisals can help us to understand how individuals or groups might be marginalised, or discriminated against in life as they may be in art.

A critical voice allows us to question the social and political structures that lead to marginalisation and exclusion. Personal transformation is an important element of adult learning; however, empowering students to challenge the political, artistic and social decisions made by others that directly or indirectly affect them or those they care about is also a vital part of what adult literacy services should offer. ALOA recognises the importance of critical thinking skills; its up-coming 2021 conference will include a seminar on critical literacy teaching.

Challenges and recommendations

ETB adult literacy services are delivering a wide and varied range of high-quality literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tuition options to tens of thousands of adults in Ireland. We do so across platforms, with multiple partners in the statutory, charitable, community spheres. We also work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to reach as many adults as possible in the most appropriate ways and settings for those individuals and groups as we can within current budgetary and staffing restrictions, and with the protocols currently in place. However, we could do this more efficiently with more resourcing in the following areas:

- Capital resourcing to provide sufficient and appropriate spaces for adult learning
- Significant increase in administration staffing, increase number of ALOs and Literacy Resource Workers nationally to deal with the much increased administrative burden we carry
- Clear definitions of the resource worker role
- The maintenance of adult literacy as an expertise, and a continued recognition of adult literacy organisers as the people with that expertise
- Protocols with other statutory agencies need to be reviewed and we would welcome a role in that review process.
- Ring-fenced funding for ETBs for advertising and promotion to include a fund for hiring advertising consultants
- National promotion of our services by ETBI
- A review of the registration process for students to reduce the barrier to participation presented by SOLAS's Learner Detail Form

Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy:

Long Questionnaire

Thank you for deciding to take part in this public consultation. Please read the information below, fill out the questionnaire overleaf, and return by email to ALND@SOLAS.ie.

What we want to hear your views on:

What you think are the challenges and opportunities for Ireland in relation to adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

How you think we can create an environment where all adults in Ireland have the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully take part in society.

About this Questionnaire

This questionnaire contains 5 sections, with questions grouped around 5 different themes. You can type your answers into the box provided after each question. The boxes below the questions will expand as you type so your answers can be as long or short as you like. Before starting we will ask if you are responding as a private individual or on behalf of an organisation, and your organisation's name, if applicable.

Once you have completed this questionnaire please send to ALND@solas.ie.

Response to Questionnaire

Long Questionnaire

Basic Information

Are you responding to this questionnaire as an individual (providing your own personal views) or as an organisation (providing the views of your organisation)? **Please mark your answer with an 'X'.**

Individual, providing my own personal views ☐

Organisation, providing the views of my organisation ☒

If you are responding to this questionnaire on behalf of your organisation, please **state the name of your organisation** below. If you are responding as an individual, please move on to Question 1 below.

ALOA - Adult Literacy Organisers' Association

Please Note: Submissions that do not include an organisation name will be treated as individual submissions.

Question 1.1

Which aspects of **literacy** should the Adult Literacy Numeracy and Digital Strategy emphasise most?

The Strategy should reflect current practice in that our approach must be student/learner centred. The emphasis must be broad and encompass all elements of Adult Literacy. We embrace a holistic approach to the needs of the learner, valuing the need for both accredited and unaccredited provision; both options must provide skills for learning and for living.

- The strategy must be comprehensive to facilitate ALOs to focus on and to meet the particular literacy needs that present in each student. The needs are wide and varied, but include: reading, writing, listening, speaking, spelling and grammar.

- Socially embedded literacy practice that addresses the expressed needs of the individual
- The incremental nature of literacy skills acquisition. Improvement/success must be appreciated in context, depth, fluency etc. on a lateral basis, before upward progression can be successfully maintained.
- The Strategy should facilitate Literacy services to be able to support a learner up to and including Level 3 and learners at other, higher levels whose literacy may need extra support.
- Both learning at levels 1-3 and literacy needs at higher levels.

All aspects of literacy are essential and should be emphasised. The Strategy should facilitate the development of effective literacy skills by allowing for:

- Standalone literacy classes as well as integrated classes.
- Variety in provision and enhanced flexible delivery modes, to meet local needs in terms on one-to-one tuition, group tuition, or both.
- Due attention to oral language skills, which develop confidence in own agency and 'voice'.
- An appreciation of formative rather than summative learning.
- Learners to attend accredited or non-accredited courses.

The strategy needs to maintain the philosophy and ethos of the service, which is learner-centred, voluntary and respectful of the adult status of the learners.

Question 1.2

Which aspects of **numeracy** should the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy emphasise most?

Those with literacy needs are not necessarily those with numeracy needs. Numeracy skills are far more beneficial to learners than accreditation in this area. Accreditation often doesn't meet learners' needs for numeracy in everyday life.

The Strategy should provide for:

- An agreed broad definition of numeracy, which must include a strong focus on numeracy as it pertains to the everyday tasks and challenges that students face.
- The specific needs of the learner, whether they be helping a child with homework, or obtaining an accreditation for work or further study.
- The continuation of our integrated delivery in numeracy, which provides for active participation in society and maths in the real world.
- The continuation of standalone numeracy provision.
- Numeracy integrated with other literacies, e.g. online banking or comparing products such as mobile phone data packages.
- Practical Maths for everyday life, e.g. money, decimals, measuring, timing, etc.
- Maths for Excel to allow learners to do a budget.
- Targeted approach and supports for apprentices and others.
- Maths integrated in other classes, e.g. quilt making, tiling, cookery.
- Ability to use more than one tutor in a class, e.g. one for cookery, one for Maths.
- Help for parents and grandparents with homework.
- Facilities and staff to allow running of practical classes such as tiling, woodwork or cookery, which include numeracy.

Question 1.3

Which aspects of **digital literacy** should the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy emphasise most?

Digital literacy needs have been brought sharply to the fore in 2020 and will remain an essential skill in everyday life, regardless of whatever public health circumstance we may face in the future.

The Strategy should emphasise:

- The development of broad technology skills to include confidence-building and creating an understanding of the benefits and disadvantages of engagement in a digital world.
- Developing current accessible learning opportunities to those who most need to develop.
- Develop the capacity to adapt in an ever-upgrading world of software and systems.
- A recognition that digital skills are required in so many everyday activities apart from online, e.g. Self Service Check-outs, ATM-style machines replacing tellers in banks.
- Accessible for all digital literacy to meet needs of those with most need.
- Digital literacy for active citizenship.
- Embedding digital literacy in Literacy and Numeracy – Technology Enhanced Learning to provide a digital presence to reflect social practice.
- Fluency in IT – using it in every aspect of life as needed with confidence.
- Blended Learning (as opposed to Online Learning) to facilitate a seamless move between modes and the use of phone technology to support learning.
- Bring Your Own Device policies will facilitate learners using own device, bringing familiarity and greater opportunity to practice and develop skills outside the classroom.
- Higher order skills in order to be digitally literate.
- The incremental nature of digital literacy skill acquisition.
- Being safe and responsible online.
- Grant schemes or device loan schemes for students with limited access to technology.
- Practical applicable skills that keep pace with rapid developing technology.
- The ability to solve problems and do real world tasks, e.g. online learning, shopping, banking, form filling, etc.

Question 1.4

Which aspects of adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, as a whole, should the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy emphasise most?

- There must be a continued strong and clear focus in adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in supporting students in addressing their everyday needs.
- The continued development of the 'whole person', taking into account the reality of lifelong learning. Creating a pathway for every learner recognising the diversity of past educational experiences.
- Teaching and building confidence in students to complete those everyday tasks that they may struggle with. This may be achieved through successfully combining individual/group needs with curricular learning outcomes.
- Building strong literacy, numeracy and digital skills and competence in students to empower students and support them to achieve progression in FET.
- Building strong literacy, numeracy and digital skills and competence in students in their own personal goals to participate in society, community, family and work.
- The Strategy should include the new and evolving literacies and provide ongoing relevant supports in these.
- A strategic approach should be detailed for Levels 1-4 to facilitate progression from Functional to Interactive, Critical Literacy to Transversal and Critical Thinking Skills.
- Develop 'softer' access routes to employment for those that have an interest in progressing to specific areas such as Healthcare or Childcare but who need to develop skills at levels 3-4 before embarking on levels 5-6 modules.
- Integrating and embedding Literacy across FET consistently & effectively in all FET settings in a structured manner.

The Strategy must recognise the importance of Family Learning in Literacy and support:

- Intergenerational learning: grandparents bringing children to school and needing support with homework.
- Early intervention through family learning.

The Strategy must recognise that proficiency in literacy as a whole:

- Acts as a protection against precarious work, under-employment and unemployment.
- It is a right for all and opportunities to improve literacy skills should be available to all.
- Addresses inequalities, allows individuals to respond to external pressures and change.
- Promote the development of transversal skills for future learning and employment opportunities.
- Builds confidence in students that contributes to greater and more effective participation in all spheres of their lives (community, wider society, employment, education).
- Fosters independence.

Theme 2: Improving awareness and access to information and supports

Description:

It can be daunting for a person to decide to take that first step to seek assistance with reading, writing, maths or technology. In some cases, this can be due to perceived stigma, or embarrassment, which can prevent some people from seeking information, help and support.

We would like to know your views on how we can make it easier for people to take the first step and to seek information, help and support.

Question 2.1

In your view, what are the main obstacles that prevent or delay adults from seeking help, information or support for literacy, numeracy or digital literacy?

There are many obstacles which may prevent or delay adults from seeking help, information or support for literacy, numeracy or digital literacy, some are listed below:

- Negative associations with the “school” experience and environment in the past, or a lengthy absence from learning.
- Perceptions of traditional schooling models being applied to Adult Learning, which may be reinforced by the use of schools as venues.
- Lack of affordable childcare.
- The cost of transport or the absence of transport can be a difficulty, especially in rural areas.
- Emotional issues, anxiety, stress, fear, mental and physical health issues can all be barriers.
- There may be embarrassment in asking for help or stigma associated with low levels of literacy skills.
- Fear of failure.
- There may be coping mechanisms that people have developed that are shielding them, but perhaps also holding them back in some way.
- Individuals may think they are the only ones experiencing such issues in relation to literacy: many experience a fear of being judged.

- There are organisational, personal, motivational, information and guidance barriers (SOLAS, 2017).
- Time commitments can be an issue.
- Time for study is an issue for people who are working. In particular, zero-hour contract workers often have irregular hours, which mean they cannot commit to a regular class.
- The PLSS online system is cumbersome for registration, especially for short courses. The institutional aspects of provision can be off-putting: e.g. requirements around General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) literature, policies.
- The basic education service has become more formal, which can make it less accessible.
- A comprehensive ETBI national promotion campaign for ETB adult literacy services is needed to raise awareness of what we do: this is also covered in later points.

Question 2.2

In your view what works best to encourage adults to take the first step to build their literacy, numeracy and digital literacy?

ALOs already word hard to encourage adults to take the first step to build their literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. However, there are more steps which could be taken to enhance this work.

What currently works well:

- A recognition that the first step is by far the most difficult: we need approachable staff and to not rely on emails or voicemail to contact learners.
- Reassuring people that they can start at any level and we will find the level that is right for them.
- Providing one-to-one learning for beginners to help new learners to engage.
- Personal stories from past learners are really effective: adults can associate with them, they are relatable and reduce the notion that “I’m the only one”. Stories of the literacy difficulties that people overcome are inspiring. We need to ensure a continued emphasis on the immense value of life experience.
- Where possible we integrate literacy with themed courses that cater to the various interests that adults may have, e.g. horticulture: this is already widely practiced.
- Taster sessions are often used as a welcoming non-threatening space. We have strong links with Community Education so learners can be referred in through that route.
- Flexible timetabling, which includes day and evening availability.

What would benefit from review and change:

- All of the elements identified in 2.1 must be addressed to ensure that adults are more comfortable in approaching our services and seeking some assistance. This must include funding and help with transport and childcare for learners to remove practical barriers to learning.
- A welcoming adult education centre is a great incentive. These should be local centres with which they can identify with friendly accessible staff – bright and welcoming building; modern and well-equipped, professional and not school like, e.g. tables, canteens, etc. See Tuam & Headford Centres in GRETB as examples of good practice of achieving high quality, modern, warm, bright, professional, technologically equipped centres with low H&S risks in a cost effective manner through medium term lease with no capital investment. Visits welcomed.
- Employers should encourage learners to upskill and to this end we need unaccredited Skills for Work options. Such courses should be designed around the needs of the employees.
- We need easily accessible information about provision of the literacy service in general.
- The profile of ETB literacy services could be raised by more national campaigns like ‘Take the First Step’ – regional and local relevance of people that they recognise.
- We want to be able to deliver according to learner need, not for certification: to have true learner-centred provision.
- Strong referral networks from other parts of the ETB, other agencies, and the community, are very important.
- We offer supportive and caring learning environment, but would like the resources to offer more.
- When working with learners with special needs, we need the opportunity to build good relationships between coordinators, tutors, and on other side carers, day centre staff.
- Qualified staff needed within FET to access special educational needs (SEN) and best ways to support these learners.
- We strongly believe that participation in learning should not come at a cost to the learner: financial support to participate could be offered in the form of bus fares/ parking costs/ access to occasional childcare.
- Emphasis on the social aspect of learning as this is very important e.g. the chat with the tea/coffee.
- Lastly, but very importantly, we need to be able to continue offer a choice of one-to-one or group interaction, so there is something for everyone.

Question 2.3

In your view, how should adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy be encouraged, developed and promoted during the 10-year strategy?

We already successfully promote elements of our services. This could be improved by ensuring the following steps are taken:

- Promotion must stress that it is never too late to learn something new and upskill. It should reassure that there will be no pressure, no tests, no exams. It is taking part that really counts.
- Integrating literacy should be strengthened throughout FET based on good practices, such as the apprenticeship supports. We should promote the change as 'becoming' literate in an ever changing society, using a capability approach.
- Strong links with the community, local NGOs and other statutory agencies, which help to promote the service.
- Taster courses are often used as an introduction to the service. Taster courses should not just be short courses; there need to be options from these as a stepping stone.
- Themed areas for employment.
- Meaningful educational pathways to progression for learners.
- Decoupled literacy, numeracy and digital literacy promotion, which reassures learners they will get help in the area that interests them.

What would help in the next ten years:

- ETBI should increase its advertising to raise ETB Adult Literacy Service visibility so people know what we do and where to go.
- The literacy service will need to have sufficient resources, ahead of increased demand, to recruit and/or upskill suitably qualified/experienced staff to work within the adult literacy service.
- Tutors/staff from other areas of FET should be trained in literacy tuition to make them transferable to the literacy service to meet expected increased demands.
- We need time and resources to further build our links with employers and in partnership with other agencies e.g. family resource centres, libraries and area partnerships.

Question 2.4

What practical steps need to be taken to ensure more adults are aware of the available supports and services for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy?

There are many practical steps which could be taken to ensure more adults are aware of the available supports and services for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. However potential learners are often hard to reach.

We need a media strategy that understands how to reach the people we are trying to reach, e.g. where will they see, read or hear our message. We need a media campaign of highly-visible advertisements which are short and to the point.

- As ETBs are local, there should be a national approach to branding, to increase visibility. This visibility should create brand awareness of what ALOs are doing in centres that display the ETB logos.
- Specific promotion should take place at key times of the year, e.g. August/September and December/January.
- There should be dedicated staff for outreach and relationship building.
- 'Learner support available' should be included as a by-line on other course advertising, e.g. on hairdressing courses.
- There is a targeted promotion opportunity for NALA's national campaign with a weekly spotlight on individual and local provision showing locations of centres with explanation of how accessible the service is: this needs to be ongoing throughout the year.
- FET staff in colleges, community training centres and training centres often integrate literacy. This needs to be encouraged. There should be 'Integrating literacy' training for all FET staff, and checks to see that it is being done.
- Events that showcase what we do, and exhibitions of work at the end of a year, would raise awareness of the range and scope of the service.
- Existing television programmes such as Operation Transformation could be used for Health Literacy and to promote our service.
- We run many community-based programmes, but need the resources to run more, as well as more creative courses and more networked courses with targeted agencies.
- The services need to be threat-free and volitional. People should not feel they have to attend for fear of losing social welfare payments.

Question 2.5

What practical steps could be taken to ensure more adults avail of services and supports for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy?

There are many practical steps could be taken to ensure more adults avail of services and supports for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

- A “referral” from DEASP can be interpreted as a negative thing. Instead it could be promoted as something positive, an opportunity, and should there should be no threat of financial loss for non-engagement.

What we currently do:

- Continue to offer taster courses to allow adults to try out what we have to offer.
- Target demographics/geographical areas.
- We already provide good customer care: we need to always ensure we look after our students and listen to them.
- Recruit students as ambassadors – “if you like what we do, tell others; if not, tell us.”
- Maintain and strengthen our local networks with community and other groups to promote the literacy services.
- Emphasise the difference between Adult Education Classes and ‘school’ – tutor facilitation, class size, room styles and technology.
- Encourage the “bring a friend” approach. We should remember that some advertising is indirect: if you know someone who needs us, we are here to help.

What we recommend:

- We should provide humans to speak to rather than Further Education and Training Course Hub (FETCH) online, as that is an unhelpful environment for literacy learners.
- All services should be able to ensure initial assessment of learners to determine if they are at suitable level for the course chosen.
- There should be a diversion path for those with significant basic skills needs to do pre-course learning in stand-alone literacy service prior to proceeding to their chosen learning path in FET.
- There should be more support for learners with childcare or for learners who have to travel.

- It would help to be able to offer digital devices for learners.
- A national strategy should let us develop joined-up thinking between agencies/ bodies, which will require consultation with both agencies when drawing up protocols.
- Literacy needs to be a priority for other Government departments. DEASP and other agencies have access to potential groups of learners, they should be aware of what we do, and be able to refer to us.
- We need good, clear signage in plain English. We need to highlight where adults can access the service easily.
- We could advertise by inclusion of adult literacy services on Open Day programmes in Further Education Colleges and other FET centres.
- To further support learners, we could develop a mentoring programme or buddy system within the service with a sufficient increase in resources.

Question 2.6

Let us know any other views you may have about improving awareness of services and supports for adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

There are a variety of other ways in which awareness of literacy provision can be improved:

- More emphasis on the importance of integrating literacy training for all teachers/tutors/instructors and resource workers.
- Literacy awareness training for all frontline staff and for other agencies and bodies.
- Delivering Equality of opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Home-School Liaison posts in schools should be backfilled. The linkages they facilitate(d) with families in need of literacy services were invaluable in recruiting to family learning classes.
- Strong national focus on the value and ramifications of family learning on future learners' lives and the impact on their families and communities. It is a two-for-one approach where learners come to help their children and learn for themselves.
- The implementation of the family literacy research guidelines for ETBs (NALA, 2020) needs to be supported nationally now.
- National and local promotion campaigns showing the range of people participating in returning to literacy development opportunities.

- It is normal that people have gaps in their education and can return to address those: those at higher levels of decision-making need to recognise that learners may have a “spiky” profile.
- Recognition and promotion of ETB adult literacy services as the primary provider of adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tuition.
- Dedicated, warm adult appropriate spaces/buildings.

Theme 3: Bridging the digital divide

Description

The digital divide is the gap between ‘the haves and the have-nots’ in an increasingly technology-dependent society. As more aspects of society become dependent on digital resources (digital resources are digital devices and services such as internet connectivity), there is pressure on individuals to have these resources and be able to use them.

Many people in Ireland have excellent digital skills but nearly half of the Irish population score at or below the most basic level of Digital Literacy. The Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy needs to promote and support adult literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and ‘digital inclusion’ to close this gap.

Question 3.1

In your view, how does the digital divide impact on individuals and communities, particularly those with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs?

The ‘Digital Divide’ needs to be qualified. The divide is not only a digital poverty issue; it includes access to broadband in rural areas and the fact that some people’s living environments are not conducive to learning, particularly in situations where people do not have homes or in situations of overcrowding, as well as in households with addiction issues or domestic violence. These issues require significant funding in the areas of homelessness, drugs rehabilitation and social work. It will also require the rapid rollout of rural broadband. The digital divide has a broad impact on individuals and communities. It can increase marginalisation, even for those with higher education qualifications who may have unmet literacy needs. The impacts of the digital divide include:

- Fear, stigma, feelings of helplessness, shyness, frustration, anger, added stress.
- Fear of being online is very real for many. Some have privacy fears; fear of being overwhelmed by all the new language, fears about scams.
- Vulnerable people can be taken advantage of online.

- Digital communications are distanced and remote, compounding the isolation and exclusion element for individuals and communities, which can affect mental health.
- People get left behind because they see the digital divide as a gap that is just too big to be bridged.
- Limited participation in the digital world reduces a person's independence and control of everyday interactions and access to services. Examples of practical exclusion are banking vs online banking, shopping vs online shopping, meeting GP in person vs online medical consultations, social welfare interactions by phone or digitally become impersonal; public, herd registration, motor tax, driver theory test, Government and tax services.
- Access to good broadband is not universal, so even people with good digital skills are excluded because of poor services. Access to broadband and devices can be expensive and, in many cases, prohibitively so.
- Lack of access and digital skills limit employment and promotion prospects.
- Access and skills needs are barriers to parents when needing to access children's school platforms.
- Parents also worry about their children going on devices and stress because they fear online exposure of their children.
- Exclusion from online and blended learning options for adult learners without access to broadband, requisite digital or literacy skills or devices.
- Communities also affected in that the fabric of everyday interactions is changing and many people are not in a position to adapt as a result of lack of broadband access, devices or skills, which impacts on people with low educational levels, particular groups and socio-economic groups disproportionately.
- The SOLAS Learner Detail Form is a barrier for learners with specific short-term and drop-in needs.

Question 3.2

What steps should be taken to help bridge the digital divide in Ireland?

A key step is to provide affordable, high speed and with adequate coverage broadband access, particularly in rural areas. In addition, literacy services would benefit from increased resources for:

- Access to a wide range of ICT devices in class, personally and in the community – fit for purpose and need.
- More classes – more learning – more practice – more often.
- Staffed digital skills hubs in centres and in outreach communities – a drop-in facility where staff can help student with specific issues with IT, devices, online activity, etc. These are provided in some literacy services, but could be rolled out nationally with adequate funding.
- An increase the provision of specific, one-to-one tuition to focus on specific need, for example, smart phones or FaceTime.
- A scheme to fund switching to smartphones and access to affordable devices.
- Access to laptops, iPads or tablets for disadvantaged students (Affordable devices for all).
- Instilling confidence in adults to navigate the communications protocols for digital literacy – they are used to seeing people face-to-face and rely on that type of interaction.
- Mobile broadband schemes for adults engaging in digital literacy.
- We could further collaborate with libraries and other community organisations. We have much in common with them, in that we are all trying to reach out to the same cohort of adults and families.
- Designated low-threshold entry courses to improve skills.
- Clear messaging about what you are going to get when you ‘sign up for’ anything.
- Flyers in the phone shop – accessible advertising of courses.
- Digital Drop-in events to lower barriers and make access less fearful.
- Drop-in sessions for help with setting up a tablet, etc. Corporate sponsorship - vouchers to get people online.
- Local community based initiatives with targeted provision to disadvantaged groups.

- Enough time for learners to gain knowledge and confidence in the new skills: longer courses or ongoing support.
- Accessing courses with an online application process e.g. FETCH can be difficult, if not impossible.
- 'Bring your own device' initiatives - many adults already have a device, but are embarrassed to say they cannot use it.

Question 3.3

Please provide details of any innovative projects you are aware of, that aim to bridge the digital divide.

Innovative digital literacy projects offered by ETBs include:

- Mayo-Sligo-Leitrim ETB had a short programme to help people to get set up online to search for courses and other online activities. They used all device types to make sure everyone who needed to get access could get it.
- Donegal ETB repackaged and marketed the Using Technology (M2T10) and Computer Skills (M2T11) modules to make them more relevant to new technologies and online needs of learners.
- Some ETBs are setting up remote services and drop in TEL Hubs for students and prospective students.
- Some ETBs are advising students of mobile broadband offers that would give them some extra capacity.
- Devices are available to learners through government scheme.
- Smartphone courses and advertising in phone shops.
- DEASP/ ETB Short Digital Skills Courses (Carlow).
- Hug a Book – ETB/DEIS Schools (Kilkenny).
- Get Connected course designed by Kildare-Wicklow ETB with both tutor resources [here](#) and student resources [here](#) . This course is now used in some ETBs as part of the introduction to lower level courses.
- Progression from Get Connected to 'Using Technology' QQI L2.

Theme 4 - Priorities and actions

Description

When complete, the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy will set out the priorities for Ireland over the next 10 years and the actions we need to take to achieve these.

We need to ensure that we create an environment where all adults in Ireland have the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully take part in society.

We want to hear about your ideas on what priorities the new Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy should focus on and the types of actions you think should be taken during the strategy.

Question 4.1

In your view, what specific actions should the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy contain to encourage, develop and promote adult **literacy**?

ETB Adult Literacy Services have a long and successful history of encouraging, developing and promoting adult literacy.

What works currently:

- Provision of short community-based initiatives e.g. taster courses with local promotion.
- Awareness campaigns targeting stigma reduction.
- Referral protocols for all statutory providers.
- Decoupled literacy, numeracy and digital literacy promotion.
- Specific targeted promotional strategies for specified cohort groups.
- The phased development of literacy skills in adult literacy services – e.g. engagement, development and progression in which placement is matched to the learners' skill set and current needs with accreditation offered from development stage onward and non-accredited offered in engagement stage.
- Work-based courses.
- Provision both of stand-alone and integrated literacy tuition.
- The phased development of literacy skills in adult literacy services – e.g. engagement, development and progression in which placement is matched to the learners' skill set

and current needs with accreditation offered from development stage onward where appropriate.

Resourcing is a key issue for literacy services. With increased resources we could reach many more people. We recommend the strategy action the following in order to allow us to do more to encourage, develop and promote adult literacy:

- Offer adult literacy tutors the improved terms and conditions granted to Back to Education and Training Initiative tutors. This will be necessary if we are to maintain expertise.
- Provide parity of structures and supports for the adult literacy services across the ETBs including appropriate levels of staffing in the following roles in all ETBs: ALO, resource workers, tutors, ancillary staff. Posts of responsibility are needed to encourage staff to take on extra duties beyond the normal adult literacy tutoring work.
- Mandate agencies working with adults with unmet literacy needs to undertake literacy awareness training to improve interagency awareness of the services. This training will facilitate appropriate referral to literacy learning and ongoing support subsequently.
- Urgently review referral protocols between statutory agencies and between literacy services and Job Path agencies to recognise that students working at levels 1 and 2 on the NFQ are not labour-market ready.
- Create a role of student support worker in each FET centre to help support all FET students with their literacy needs, HSCL Coordinator in all schools to support families in accessing literacy supports from the local ETB Literacy Service.
- Create a post of family learning coordinator in each area where DEIS schools are located to be the main link person.
- Create a special education needs role to support learners with learning difficulties / intellectual disabilities.
- In addition, dedicated staff are required for all of the various projects under the literacy services' remit to include staff for digital, health, family literacy, numeracy.
- Create a national policy, uniformly applied in ETBs, that takes consideration of staff-to-population ratios and that clearly delineates the role of ALO and the role of resource worker.
- Literacy staff should, as a matter of policy, be involved in all programme planning and budgeting of the adult literacy services.
- ALO, resource worker and tutor roles need to be recruited for as potentially offering promotion, not always as 'entry level' as at present. Entry to a position needs to be at the years of experience a person has to date. This will encourage the retention of experience

within the service, and invite those whose experience is elsewhere, e.g. in supportive administration or teaching roles, to contribute to its development.

- Upskilling for existing staff and high-quality training for newly recruited tutors to meet the evolving IT demands of society.
- Additionally, more administration staff and more upskilling of existing administration is needed to meet existing administrative demands.
- Significant investment in staffing, both administrative staff and for teaching and development staff.
- Funding for additional IT equipment, broadband and IT.
- CPD for staff as we meet evolving digital needs.
- National campaigns in both Irish and English should be both about reducing stigma and promoting the ETBs as the primary providers of adult literacy tuition.
- Government funded development of Irish speaking and written materials, possibly through NALA.
- ETBs could make use of the skills of media students through competitions for media students to create content for advertising through social media and national TV/radio platforms. This content showcases skills already in use and illustrates how the literacy services provide an opportunity to build on these skills.
- Ring-fenced, additional funding to the ETBs and ETBI to develop their media presence.
- People need to be allocated adequate time, perhaps years, to learn. DEASP referring them to Job Path is not conducive to learners' progress.

Question 4.2

In your view, what specific actions should the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy contain to encourage, develop and promote **numeracy** for adults?

The points in 4.1 re staffing, CPD, IT resources and ring-fenced funding for national and local advertising including funding to employ the services of consultants in advertising apply to this question.

In addition, we believe that the profile of numeracy provision could be raised in the following ways:

- Advertising in the two recent referendums recruited the services of GAA members for promotion; that platform could be harnessed for promotion of adult basic education services.
- Both national and local advertising needs to include targeted promotional strategies for specific types and levels of numeracy.
- Numeracy provision in adult literacy services starts at basic arithmetic, time-telling and basic measurements and continues up to maths for apprenticeships.
- Promotion at a national level should emphasise the breadth of numeracy provision in adult literacy services. It needs to make explicit that adult literacy services will support people on apprenticeship courses as well as people who need help with everyday numeracy and everyone in between.
- Specific cohorts should be targeted in advertising.
- Nationally, both non-accredited and accredited numeracy and maths programmes should be promoted.
- ETBs provide tuition in the workplace. Employers should be incentivised to release their employees for numeracy and maths tuition.

Standards and qualifications need to be developed as follows:

- QQI modules in numeracy and maths need revision. For example, level 4 mathematics does not equip adults who progress to apprenticeship with the branches of maths that they need.
- When considering the broad standards for QQI, it should be recognised that maths at levels 4 and 5 needs to be much broader to include areas of maths necessary for further study.
- New components need to be developed, specifically designed to provide a foundation in the maths needed for apprenticeship.

- The gap between levels needs to be bridged, perhaps by new QQI modules to bridge that divide.
- A national numeracy and maths CPD programme for tutors should be developed, to meet the demands of these new maths components as well as to develop numeracy tuition at lower levels, to integrate maths into other classes.
- Relaxing the need for accreditation in numeracy will make it easier to provide the kinds of courses that are less daunting than embarking on a year-long accredited programme.
- ETB literacy services are providing numeracy supports in Colleges of Further Education and in the Training Centres. The need for accreditation statistics for these support courses needs to be relaxed. While they are supporting adults to get accreditation in other courses the support courses themselves are not accredited.

Question 4.3

In your view, what specific actions should the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy contain to encourage, develop and promote **digital literacy** for adults?

There are several specific actions which need to be taken to promote and encourage digital literacy for adults.

What currently works:

- Bespoke IT classes for adults across the country, including classes on how to use smart phones, tablets and other small devices, how to do banking online, how to use social media and email.
- Unaccredited bespoke courses designed to meet the needs of the learners in getting started with technology.
- Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), which involves using and integrating technology into a variety of classes and settings to give learners confidence in using technology both as a tool and as a learning goal in itself.
- Flexible timing and duration of courses to give everyone time to develop at their own pace.
- Local advertising which promotes bespoke courses for the local context devised with local partners, for example, the innovative Clifden-on-Line programme, which helps older people to set up PayPal accounts, online banking, and to shop online.
- Provision of accredited IT courses up to and including level 4 on the NFQ for those who wish to get accreditation.

What we recommend:

- Updating all QQI component specifications, to be written in broad terms. Components should not lead to specific learning outcomes that will quickly become outdated. Build in flexibility to respond to the rapidly changing technology, software and social media.
- All promotional campaigns highlight that ETB literacy services are the primary providers of IT tuition to adults.
- Fund ETBs to work with television producers to provide IT classes online similar to gardening programmes or cookery programmes. For example, a step-by-step guide to using a particular app each week that can be recorded and replayed on TV would be a useful supplement to the courses offered by ETB adult literacy services.

Question 4.4

How can we create an environment where all adults in Ireland have the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully take part in society?

Further to points listed above that demonstrate the good work being done, and how we provide an appropriate learning environment, we list some noteworthy points below. In addition to the work being done, we also make recommendations on how other agencies can support adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

What currently works:

- Creating a welcoming, adult appropriate, modern and professional learning space.
- Staff are appropriately trained and empathetic to literacy learners accessing the service.
- Providing high-quality classes that people want to attend.
- Using IT classes as a gateway for students to work on other literacies. People are less likely to feel embarrassed about poor digital skills than poor literacy and numeracy skills, so when they approach for digital skills classes the opportunity then arises to address literacy and numeracy skills.

What we recommend:

- Supporting ETBs to use IT classes as a gateway by providing more devices and by building flexibility into budgets to buy devices pertinent to the students' needs, rather than what can be obtained through procurement.

- HSCL Coordinator should be encouraged to support families to access digital literacy supports from the local ETB Literacy Service. This is essential for Family Learning opportunities.
- There should be a strong focus on critical and media literacies in all areas of literacy.
- Write critical media literacy into all QQI modules. Low levels of critical and media literacies can leave the vulnerable even more vulnerable to manipulation through misinformation and disinformation, to phishing and other online scams and to invasion of their privacy by large tech companies.
- Government should consider a high-quality, high-impact media campaign modelling IT skills as a normal part of everyday life. Consideration should be given to the Estonian government's work on this.
- Women and girls should be represented in at least half of any campaign and recognition given to the role of women in technology.
- Upskilling of ETB staff to keep abreast of changes in technology, software and the digital sphere.
- Upskilling will be needed to teach these technologies to people with intellectual disabilities.

Question 4.5

In your view, what specific approaches should be put in place to meet the needs of certain groups?

These groups could include:

- Adults who face additional barriers related to disability and the lack of accessible content or assistive technology.
- Adults who are digitally excluded.
- Adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs.

All FET centres need to have appropriate access for people with mobility issues. To achieve this, they will need greater building adaptations funding.

What currently works:

- We provide courses that are in accessible buildings and locations, where possible.
- We provide culturally appropriate classes.

- We provide literacy support to adults who do not have English as their first language and who may not have literacy in their first language.
- We provide equipment and supports to all students including those relevant to those with additional needs.
- We have highly-trained staff with years of expertise.
- We provide devices.
- We work with small class sizes.
- We provide learner-centred classes.
- We provide community-based tuition.
- We provide night classes for people who are working.
- We use local radio can be used in rural areas to help those who have difficulty accessing classes.

What we recommend:

- CPD in Universal Design in Learning (UDL) for globally accessible content.
- Specific funding ETB Literacy Services to provide assistive technology.
- Technology grants for adult students to combat digital exclusion will also be needed.
- Funding and training for ETBs latest teaching and learning technologies with appropriate CPD for tutors to build confidence in using new technologies will be needed.
- An emphasis on “It’s never too late” so that those with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy need to know that there is always a place and a starting point in our services for them.
- SOLAS’s Learner Detail Form needs to be revised with a more appropriate form that reflects the nature of the applicants. One size does not fit all. In ETBs the FET Services cater for students from unaccredited courses along with QQI Level 1 to Level 6 and beyond. The depth of detail sought needs to be examined, and revised versions created where less is requested from those on lower levels, to remove this as a barrier to those with literacy needs from accessing education.
- Also improved public transport in local areas would help people to become less isolated from in-person classes.
- All advertising should contain images of people diverse in age, ethnicity, gender and ability reflecting those in marginalised groups and those with disabilities.

- Consideration should be given to creating a new role of community champions. Community champions could work as a link between communities and education. It would be a paid role that does not have a high-competency expectation and with accessible entry requirements. It should be inclusive of people with disabilities and people in marginalised groups and accessible and low entry requirement entry point.
- Colleges/universities with departments for adult education for example WIT or NUI Maynooth, might consider a course to prepare learner advocates or mentors for their role.

Question 4.6

In your view, what outreach strategies work best to engage adults and communities in need of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy support?

The ETBs have a long and proud history of outreach to communities.

What currently works:

- Working with community groups, community education groups, Tús, Community Employment Schemes.
- Bringing our classrooms to the local communities. Many adults, particularly in rural areas, do not have the means (financially or physically) to travel long distances to a FET centre.
- Asking our students how they heard about us and analysing the feedback.
- Community gardens and accessing literacy through horticulture and growing.
- Themed Literacy classes that are less threatening, e.g. kayaking.
- HSCL links for kayaking, health and beauty, cookery as a springboard for literacy.
- Linking with trusted individuals.
- Word of mouth which spreads because of the excellence of provision already in place.
- Short outreach/taster sessions.
- Strong referral networks.
- Community research.

- Community facilities that are learner-friendly.
- Outreach workers.
- Linking with key people in the community as well as organisations.

What we recommend:

- Time and other resources to make inroads in geographical areas less receptive to educational supports.
- A national advertising campaign, using a multi-media approach aimed at promoting the work of the ETB literacy services. This should normalise and destigmatise adult learning.
- Flexibility in registration criteria to remove barriers for taster programmes.
- ETBs need to be linked in with national strategies, such as a broadcaster, for example Operation Transformation, home-school hubs, and a 'public-service-like' offering with various ETB links and resources available on that. These should highlight what is available locally.
- Themes in programmes such as Fair City that include how to access the literacy supports. These should emphasise the absence of exams and tests, and avoid patronising clichés. This has already been done with other issues, such as with Jack Charlton and dementia.
- Subject-centred CPD for FET staff as provided in education centres nationally for primary and second level teachers. We have huge amounts of CPD on how to use databases, and management information systems, but not on core basic skills and subject areas.

Question 4.7

In your view, what approaches to interagency partnerships work best when meeting the needs of adults and communities in greatest need of literacy, numeracy or digital literacy supports?

Collaboration between agencies needs to improve. There needs to be an understanding that the ETB adult literacy services are best placed to assess learners' needs and that people who are working at levels 1 and 2 on the NFQ are not job-ready. They need to be given the time and space to learn. In addition, we believe that interagency co-operation could be improved by the following:

- Interagency work needs to be structured by government and not dependent on *ad hoc* local relationships.

- A greater understanding of the time it takes to engage and build relationships to develop links.
- Creating a post of literacy-liaison staff member (a literacy ambassador) to promote literacy awareness training, support agencies/organisations and government departments in relation to literacy issues.
- A recognition among agencies working with people with unmet literacy needs that participation itself is a valuable outcome and there are wider benefits of learning that are personally and societally valuable, but not dependent upon accreditation.

ALOA needs to be recognised as a valued community of expertise, and the ETBs as the primary providers of ALND. Engaging those with unmet literacy needs is a specialised skill, and the decision about where to place students is arrived at between students and the adult literacy services. This can take a huge amount of work on the part of the individual. It may require a number of attempts before successfully engaging learners.

Question 4.8

Please provide details of any innovative practices you are aware of that encourage and promote Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy.

ETB adult literacy services are constantly innovating to meet the changing needs of individuals, communities and the demands of the prevailing economic and political climates. We have reached and tutored our students by post, on the phone, via email, WhatsApp, Zoom and through content on our websites during the spring lockdown due to Covid-19.

We innovate constantly to provide bespoke classes for our students. Some examples include:

- Themed literacy: for example, we integrate literacy into horticulture, childcare, woodwork, furniture restoration, relaxation, beauty, hairdressing, sewing, cookery, art and crafts, money management, banking, farming IT, driver theory preparation and retail skills.
- My Baby & Me (Sligo) initiative that has spread nationally.
- EU projects, e.g. Roma Families Learning, successfully used Community Champion to engage learners after numerous attempts.
- Kayaking for Traveller dads in DEIS Band 1 school has had hugely positive ripples in the community with numerous classes now started.
- Digital Family Literacy project with Trinity College Dublin, into which ETBs fed information about their family learning courses. Digital needs of families during COVID-19 survey, creating a course now to support parents in how to access the school digital platform for homework/communication.

Theme 5: Measuring success

Description

When we will need to know if we have achieved the priorities and actions of the strategy. In other words, we need to know what success will look like and how to measure it.

We would like to know how you think we should measure and track our progress towards the aims of the new Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy.

Question 5.1

How will we know if we have done a good job in reaching the ambition where all adults in Ireland have the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully take part in society?

We can measure against various societal, economic and educational yardsticks:

Societal:

- When soft skills are measured through a Wealth Model, the total extent of an individual's and the community's accumulated assets and resources, especially participation in public life, such that it reflects more fully the make-up of society, we have a higher turnout for voting and other civic expression.
- When we see overall better health and improved well-being as a result of inclusion.
- When all adults show greater involvement in ongoing CPD/learning for life, not just in their education. Key to this is improved digital citizenship capacity of the population.
- When the literacy service can meet the needs of newer literacies rather than meeting needs of traditional literacies, that would indicate success. Social practice is embedded in this approach.
- When there will be raised community, employer, national awareness of the existence and the benefits of improving literacy as well as where to access the supports.

Economic:

- When employers see fewer gaps in skills among employees, leading to reduced unemployment.
- This will contribute to breaking the cycle of intergenerational unemployment, and an increased average household income, with less dependence on social welfare.

Educational:

- There will be improved retention in school, as a result of greater parental engagement.
- There will be increased footfall and participation of learners due to successful campaigns for those still in need of literacy support.
- We will be better able to measure qualitative feedback from learners, and offer more suitable progression in education.
- Local and international research will attest to progress, e.g., we should see an improvement in OECD survey results.
- Improved levels of retention and completion in FET programmes.

Overall:

- The type of work we do in 10 years' time (such as seeking support at a higher level) needs to have changed due to the effects of this strategy.

Question 5.2

Please share your thoughts on ways you think we should measure and track our progress towards the aims of the new Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy.

We need to look at different aspects of success to properly measure it.

Participation:

- More flexibility within literacy services
- In communities we should see increased inclusion, further diversity in those participating and we should be meeting harder to reach groups.
- People would know where to go: the ETB centre is as familiar as the library. We need to be on the map.
- Increased participation in innovative and creative flexible provision.
- Progress could perhaps be tracked by measuring engagement and attendance at classes.
- Using a “distanced travelled” tool with a representative sample of people in a government sponsored survey. Qualitative as well as quantitative measures which evaluate the wider benefits of learning are required in order to properly track progress.

- Also a government driven survey similar to the Programme for the assessment of Adult Competencies PIAAC (PIAAC). We should not wait for another international survey.
- Feedback from agencies outside the ETBs, such as NALA, SEN organisations and other community groups.

Learning outcomes:

Progress can also be tracked by:

- QQI modules attained.
- Work experience employment.
- Participation in local community.
- An increase in active citizenship.
- Expansion of the Adult Literacy Service and further integration in remainder of FET sector.

Follow-up with students:

- Exit assessment/interview could be undertaken by learners. Resources will need to be developed to organise the generation and collation of this information.
- Follow-up research could be carried out on people after they have left the service, to track progression.

Wealth model:

- Aside from qualifications, there needs to be greater appreciation of the Wealth Model with regard to learning outcomes. Wider benefits of learning should be recognised, particularly in digital, critical and media literacies, which have a profound impact on adults' lives in all spheres, regardless of whether a qualification is attached.
- The Strategy must facilitate ETBs to gather and compile the testimonials and positive feedback from students annually and report on that alongside our SPA targets.

Government/ ETBI responsibility:

- There could be scope to develop a measuring tool for the elements of the strategy that government delivers, e.g.: Staffing Infrastructure, Wi-Fi capabilities in communities, etc.

- Investment in advertising – pop ups as an advert through key words – these could be more readily available through sponsored links for our services (trackable too) through Google engagement.

QQI:

- QQI modules are not always fit for purpose in the adult literacy context for many learners. They need to be revised to take cognisance of the complex needs of adult learners. In the development of the Broad Standards for QQI, there needs to be a recognition that adult learners in ABE do not fit into a 'mainstream' structure. Mainstream education for adults does not allow for the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, personal development and the confidence to engage in the learning process in a healthy way.
- The strategy should include the development of new QQI modules and the updating of existing modules. In particular, the IT and ESOL modules need immediate updating. Modules should reflect current societal needs. Reviews of the relevance of modules should happen frequently.
- The emphasis on accreditation urgently needs to be reviewed. There should be core recognition of the importance of unaccredited learning, which can provide more flexible and dynamism to meet evolving needs. For example, literacy services run courses on Citizenship and Managing Money, which are uncertified. There is a need for measures of achievement other than QQI.

Question 5.3

Please provide any other suggested actions that you believe are needed to measure success in achieving the priorities and actions of the strategy.

Evaluation of success needs to recognise the broad needs of literacy learners, and the range of progress they can experience. If our learners could be in main-stream they would already be there: they do not fit readily into the mainstream. The work that adult literacy services do may take a long time, and may require many false-starts. Its evaluation requires a sensitive approach, during engagement, immediately after, and in the longer-term. We need an agreed learner evaluation tool. This can be an open-ended piece of research for the ETBs, ETBI and SOLAS or an independent academic institution.

Final Comments

If you have any other comments or views on the development of the new 10-Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy please provide these below.

Valuing literacy expertise

- We must see ALOA as a valuable resource and source of expertise to be engaged with in all aspects of the development of adult literacy provision. It deserves recognition and its expertise should be called upon at each stage of developing and implementing this strategy.

Valuing and promoting staff

- Terms and conditions for literacy tutors need to be brought into line with other FET programmes. Opportunities for literacy tutors must be more than part-time and *ad hoc*.
- Recruitment to ALO/Resource Worker/Tutor needs to allow for career progression, not to 'entry-level' posts as at present. The current recruitment routes offer no incentive to experienced people coming from other roles, to develop their expertise within the adult literacy service, and it does not encourage 'good' tutors to stay. We then have to repeatedly train and educate new people, and the delicate, sensitive ethos of the service is being diluted.
- The adult literacy services need to be supported by a robust staff training and CPD.
- ETBs have been offering a huge range of CPD to their staff via webinar, and Zoom to help their staff meet the needs of people in need of ALND tuition in a pandemic. e.g. two of our ALOs have just delivered Literacy Awareness Training by webinar.
- The caring work of literacy staff is essential to the learning experience (Feeley, 2007; 2014; Lynch 2012; Redmond, 2015; Duckworth & Smith, 2018). The informal nature of the literacy service allows for a non-threatening access point into education. It must be retained and prized, practically as well as theoretically.
- There is a visible commitment to CPD as evidenced by the huge uptake of training by adult literacy staff in 2020. There is now a more solid foundation than ever before to increase confidence, capacity and effectiveness in the delivery of literacy programmes of all kinds.
- Significant increase in number of ALOS, Resource Workers and Tutors is needed immediately to allow for expansion of the current service and to allow resourced time for engaging learners, developing relationships and programmes.

National promotion of ETB Adult Literacy Services as the primary providers of Adult Basic Education in Ireland

- Put the spotlight on ETB Adult Literacy Services. We must recognise the Adult Literacy Service as a 'brand' within the ETBs – it is the public face of who we are. We have local access points and an ethos of putting the learner first.

Emerging and familiar needs

- The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the opportunities to engage in different yet meaningful ways with our students and other stakeholders.
- Assistive technologies are emerging as a new way of working with literacy learners. We need proper training in their use. There is a collective responsibility to address this.
- Students themselves are the best advertisement for the service; we can promote short videos on social media.
- Maths needs to be included more in general learning, as well as in specific maths courses. As with language learners, literacy learners can have a spiky learning profile; we need to be able to name and value their skills, while addressing needs.
- A large promotional campaign is needed to show that we are all great at numbers. We use them every day with money, timing, temperature, estimating, etc. The European Union have a good project involving the University of Limerick in which can be accessed [here](#).

Safeguarding for the future

Working with adults with unmet literacy numeracy and digital needs in the present is vitally important. However, we need to address the issues that cause people to reach adulthood without having these basic needs met. Homelessness, addiction in the individual or in the home, mental health issues, physical health issues, domestic violence and poverty all play significant roles in determining educational outcomes.

Adult literacy education takes place in a broader context of people's needs. Many learners with literacy needs are also victims of the housing crisis, struggling to study in poor quality, insecure or over-crowded housing. Drug rehabilitation services have long been underfunded, and this has an impact on the health of affected literacy learners. Many also struggle with mental health difficulties. This area of medical provision continues to be woefully underfunded, with many of our learners suffering as a result. Legislation is needed in the area of domestic violence. Literacy needs therefore do not exist in a vacuum but in a broader context of marginalisation. Without government policy and funding to support structural societal change, then this strategy is unlikely to succeed.

The pilot initiative to provide free school books to some DEIS schools should be rolled out to all DEIS primary schools as recommended by Barnardos in its 2020 report [Back to School](#). If we

continue to throw water overboard without plugging the gaping holes in the bottom of the ship, it is difficult to foresee an Ireland where unmet adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs are things of the past.

Finally, there is a strong Adult Literacy Service in ETBs with an incredibly dedicated and professionally caring staff. Many of the staff are over-worked and often under recognised for the hugely important role they have within the FET sector. While literacy posts are not as financially rewarding as posts in other FET services and do not have a teaching calendar, staff are here as they understand the value of this work and it is hugely rewarding in many ways. If any service is willing and able to adapt, to grow and to impact the lives of more learners, it is the Adult Basic Education Service. ALOA is committed to working closely to develop an implementable, ambitious but achievable strategy, and to support its members along with the broader service to adapt and grow. ALOA fully supports a cross-departmental approach to the ALND strategy and appreciates this opportunity to have our voice heard.

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End.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your views and ideas will help us to build a strong 10-year strategy for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy in Ireland. This strategy will be developed over the coming months.

Please send your completed questionnaire to ALND@solas.ie.



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