**Integrating language, literacy and numeracy into ETB further education and training courses**

**ETBI**

Revised edition, 2016

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**Foreword to revised edition**

Since the first edition of this paper was published, the further education and training (FET) sector in Ireland has been restructured: SOLAS has been established as the Further Education and Training Authority; Education and Training Boards (ETBs) have been established in place of the former VECs, and Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI) in place of the former IVEA. The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 (SOLAS 2014) contains a commitment to integrating literacy and numeracy across all further education and training.

ETBI and NALA have produced this revised edition in light of those changes. The document is substantially the same as the original. Most of the updates relate to the names of organisations, and we have included some additional references. We have made some minor changes to wording or layout in some other parts of the document (such as in the title).

**Integrating language, literacy and numeracy into ETB further education and training courses**

**A note on terminology**

In this document, we use ‘integrating **literacy**’ as short for ‘integrating **language, literacy and numeracy**’. We use the term ‘language’ to refer to the key words, phrases, concepts and types of verbal communication that learners need to use on their course. We use the words ‘**skill**’ and ‘**competence**’ to refer to the capacity to apply knowledge and skill to solve real problems.

**Purpose**

This paper aims to:

* define ‘integrating literacy’ in the context of further education and training (FET) programmes
* identify its implications for learners, providers, tutors and teachers, and all involved in FET, particularly at levels 4 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
* suggest practical steps that ETBs could take to integrate literacy into their FET programmes
* support ETBs in systematically adopting the integration of language, literacy and numeracy in the design, promotion and delivery of FET.

**Why integrate literacy?**

International research indicates that

* adults develop language, literacy and numeracy best in the context of using them as part of broader real-life activities and practices; and
* further education and training (FET) programmes that embed language, literacy and numeracy support and development in the vocational content, in

the context of a whole organisation approach, are more effective than those offering such support as a separate element only.

In the USA, Dr Thomas G Sticht’s research provides a rich source of evidence that embedding literacy and numeracy in adult education and training delivers improved learning outcomes (Sticht 1983; 1985; 1987; 1997; 2007). In Australia, in the mid-1990s the government introduced a policy to integrate literacy into all accredited vocational education and training offered within the national training system(Commonwealth of Australia 2000). In 2011, the Queensland VET Development Centre reported that

Research by state and national vocational training bodies indicates that any LLN (language, literacy and numeracy) associated with vocational training is best delivered within the context of that training wherever possible. This is because all vocational learners will be developing LLN skills as they take on vocational competence. (p5)

In New Zealand, the government’s Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan 2008–2012 proposed a significant increase in the amount of explicit literacy and numeracy teaching that is embedded into vocational and workplace training. This was based on a thorough review of research on literacy and on adult learning, which confirmed the effectiveness of integrating or embedding literacy in vocational and workplace training(TEC 2008; 2009; Alkema & Rean 2013). Noting that embedded practice varies across the sector, with some education and training organisations at a ‘mature’ stage of practice and many at either a ‘partial’ or ‘emergent’ stage, the New Zealand Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Strategy 2015–2019 commits to ensuring **‘**full and effective embedded literacy and numeracy in foundation education’ (TEC 2015, p8).

In the UK, research by the National Research and Development Centre for adult

literacy and numeracy (NRDC) identified positive effects of ‘embedding’ language, literacy and numeracy into vocational programmes in a range of settings. When vocational teachers embedded language, literacy and numeracy into their courses, and literacy staff cooperated with vocational staff to support learners’ course-related literacy development, the research found the following improved outcomes:

* Higher retention rates
* A higher proportion of learners achieving vocational qualifications
* A higher proportion of learners achieving language, literacy and numeracy qualifications
* Students reported that they are better prepared for future job roles.

(Casey et al, 2006)

In Ireland, NALA research with a youth training and development centre (McSkeane 2009) and with a further education college (Hegarty and Feeley 2009) identified procedures for, and benefits from, integrating literacy in those settings. While one size does not fit all (Leach et al 2010; DES 2015, p 83), the research found similar core procedures as underpinning an effective whole organisation approach. These included a strategic approach to staff development in integrating literacy; enabling cooperation between literacy and vocational staff centred on learners’ course-related literacy needs; and developing literacy-friendly resources and procedures for all stages of the programme.

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 notes the need for further research on integrating literacy in the Irish context (SOLAS 2014, p 28).

**Defining literacy**

Until relatively recently, literacy was generally understood to refer to the ability to read and write competently, in fairly predictable contexts. Similarly, numeracy was

understood to refer to the capacity to undertake quite basic computational tasks. Today, however, this view of literacy and numeracy cannot embrace the complex and changing set of competences that adults now need to enable them live productive and fulfilling lives – in the family, in the community or in the work place. Now, it is more appropriate to think of ‘multiple literacies’, recognising that different contexts pose different literacy challenges, that technology is oftentimes a critical factor underlying these challenges and that these literacies now involve the application of information and communication technology. The traditional processes of learning that shaped our schools are changing so quickly that we are all learning again how to learn. Such change demands that we reconsider not only the teaching and learning of language, literacy and numeracy but the place of such skills and competences in the wider educational process[[1]](#footnote-1).

Central to the integrating literacy approach is recognition that the particular language, literacy and numeracy demands of different subjects and courses, at different levels, will vary, and in each case will require explicit analysis and a tailored approach. Given the commitment of ETBs to implementing best practice in all matters relevant to enhancing learner outcomes, ETBs are committed to putting in place feasible plans to integrate literacy into their FET programmes.

# National Policy

The national policy to integrate literacy into all publicly funded education and training programmes, in so far as possible, was first adopted on foot of the

publication of *Tomorrow’s Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy* (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2007). This recognised literacy, numeracy and

ICT as fundamental skills that should be deliberately embedded in publicly funded education and training (p 93). It placed responsibility on the relevant

Government departments for ensuring that these skills are acquired and explicitly assessed at all levels of the education and training system (p 101).

The *National Skills Strategy 2015-2025* has set new targets for adult literacy and numeracy, with reference to Ireland’s performance in the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (CSO 2013). The National Skills Strategy targets for adult **literacy** are to decrease the percentage of adults scoring at or below PIAAC Level 1from17.5% to 12%, and increase the percentage of those scoring at levels 3-5 from 44.5% to 50% . For adult **numeracy**, the targets are to decrease the percentage of adults scoring at or below Level 1 from 25.6% to 17%, and increase the percentage of those scoring at levels 3-5 from 36.3% to 45%.

*The Programme for Government 2011* committed the Government to addressing ‘the widespread and persistent problem of adult literacy through integrating literacy in vocational training and through community education.’

(Deparment of An Taoiseach 2011, in Department of Education and Skills 2013, p82).

*Literacy And Numeracy For Learning And Life - The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES July 2011*)* includes a commitment to integrating literacy and numeracy into all teaching in early childhood education, first and second level education and

education in Youthreach centres. It also commits to building the capacity of all teachers to support the literacy and numeracy competences of their students.

The Department of Education and Skills *Adult Literacy Review* (January 2013) concluded, in relation to integrating literacy, that:

Research supports the integration of literacy and numeracy into broader learning opportunities as a way of supporting more adults to address their basic skills needs. Existing good practice in Ireland in relation to the integration of literacy should be identified and disseminated (DES 2013, p 85).

**What does integrating literacy entail for FET providers?**

For the purposes of this paper, integrating literacy into FET programmes is understood to include the following elements:

* FET programmes are delivered in a way that allows language, literacy and numeracy to be developed **as part of and at the same time as** the learner is acquiring vocational skills, knowledge and competences.
* Integrating literacy involves FET tutors and teachers adopting particular teaching and learning **methodologies** and working in **partnership** with literacy support and development staff.
* It requires a **whole-organisation approach** on the part of a provider, to ensure that:
  + course tutors and teachers can deliver their courses in a literacy-aware manner;
  + course tutors and teachers are aware of the literacy and numeracy skills their learners need to complete their course successfully **and** to be competent in the job or role for which they are preparing;
  + literacy support staff are also aware of the specific language, literacy and numeracy embedded in the vocational courses, so that they can assist students to develop those skills;
  + the provider’s systems enable **a working partnership** between vocational staff and literacy and numeracy staff; and
  + language, literacy and numeracy support and development is integrated into **all phases** of the FET programme – from recruitment and induction through to progression.

**Integrating literacy into course design** is understood to mean that those involved in designing a FET programme:

* identify the literacy and numeracy skills that are essentialto completing the course successfully and to succeeding in the job or roles for which learners are preparing, so that on completing the course the learners have acquired the essential skills;
* eliminate any unnecessary literacy demands that may be a barrier to learning and to fair assessment;
* recommend teaching methods that help learners develop the relevant literacy skills as part of the core content of the FET programme; and
* recommend a flexible working partnership between FET teachers and literacy staff in planning appropriate responses to learners’ course-related literacy needs.

In practical terms, for the FET tutor or teacher, integrating literacy involves using a range of methods that take account of the different learning styles and life experiences present in the teaching group – methods that enable each learner to use their existing literacy and learning strengths to engage with the course content. Course tutors and teachers also use the course content as a medium for teaching

and learning the new language, literacy and numeracy skills essential to mastering the vocational content of the course. This does not mean that the vocational tutor or teacher has to take sole or principal responsibility for students’ literacy development. Where required, literacy and numeracy support staff should be available to provide expert tuition to learners and guidance to course tutors and teachers in addressing course-related and job-related literacy and numeracy development needs.

# Benefits for learners

Integrating literacy and numeracy support and development into FET programmes will make the core content of the course more accessible to more students. It will lead to more successful learning outcomes for all who have the ability to engage with the course content, concepts and skills, and the interest, motivation and aptitude for the role (in family, community or workplace) for which the course is preparing them. Integrating literacy into the design and delivery of FET programmes maximizes the potential for learners to participate, persist and

succeed on the core vocational programme **and** it increases their skills and confidence in literacy. Integrating literacy:

* reduces unnecessary literacy barriers to learners acquiring subject specific skills;
* enables learners to improve their course-specific and role-specific literacy and numeracy in a meaningful context, and
* gives learners the skills and confidence necessary to complete courses, gain qualifications and progress in further education, training and employment.

Integrating literacy into FET programmes does not entail assuming that everyone who applies for a course at a particular level will, automatically, be able to deal

with the literacy and numeracy requirements of the course, nor does it mean that a learner’s literacy needs can be ignored. Rather, it means that course designers and teachers work together to identify the literacy skills that their course involves, and adjust methods and materials accordingly, in order to

* remove unnecessary literacy barriers to participation, learning and achievement in the course content, and
* help learners develop the essential language, literacy and numeracy.

# Benefits for FET teachers and for literacy support staff

Integrating literacy into FET programmes also delivers benefits for tutors and teachers:

* Because the language, literacy and numeracy of courses is carefully analysed in advance and because the course programmes specifically address these issues, the teaching more appropriately matches the learners’ needs. Consequently, the teaching is more effective and rewarding.
* Where vocational tutors and teachers are more acutely aware of the literacy challenges facing their learners, they are able to tailor their teaching accordingly, thus avoiding unnecessary misunderstandings with students. The tutors and teachers can also use the technical course content to help their learners to improve their literacy skills. Again this should result in improved teaching and learning outcomes and, by implication, more rewarding professional experiences for staff.
* Where specialist literacy support is provided to learners, those providing the support know exactly what literacy and numeracy skills are relevant to a particular course. This means that the support is highly relevant to learners’ needs and to the needs of the tutors and teachers. This should make the work

of the vocational tutors and teachers and of the literacy support staff more productive and rewarding.

* From the perspective of those providing specialist literacy supports, there should also be improved professional outcomes as they will now be more centrally involved in the delivery of the FET service. They will be working as part of a professional team in the delivery of a holistic FET programme tailored to meet the unique needs of individual learners – a development that sits well with the ethos of ETB literacy services.

**Who is responsible for integrating literacy?**

In summary, integrating literacy is the responsibility of the whole system, provider and centre. Those who design FET programmes must incorporate literacy integration in a manner that those delivering the programmes can understand and implement. The course tutors and teachers have responsibility for integrating relevant literacy into their class teaching as well as for liaising with literacy support staff to maximise the integrated approach. The literacy support tutor has responsibility for liaising with the vocational learners and teachers, and with those

managing the FET programmes, to become familiar with the course-related literacy demands and to jointly plan how to support students with those. Ultimately, providers have responsibility for managing the FET programmes in a way that facilitates integrating literacy into all such programmes. In particular, providers need to build ‘integrating literacy’ into their FET policies and plans, to monitor regularly the extent to which these are implemented as intended, and to ensure that all staff involved in FET programmes are provided with training appropriate to their role in integrating literacy.

**How might literacy be integrated into ETB FET programmes[[2]](#footnote-2)?**

Attempts to integrate literacy must take a tripartite whole-centre approach involving learners, staff and management. Such an approach should be underpinned by the following principles:

* The teaching and learning of literacy is intrinsic to all subjects, courses and programmes.
* The teaching and learning of literacy is contextualised to each subject area.
* The teaching and learning of literacy is grounded in a whole-centre, collaborative and explicit approach.
* The teaching and learning of literacy is grounded in initial, diagnostic assessment that identifies learners' skills and needs and is supported by on-going assessment and evaluation.
* The teaching and learning of literacy is for all learners, not just those identified as having a literacy deficit.
* The teaching and learning of literacy is driven by a differentiated view of learning that takes into account different learning styles and involves a Plain English and language awareness approach.
* The teaching and learning of literacy is a dynamic process that draws on and feeds into current educational research and practice.

The following **policies and practices** can assist in implementing integrating literacy into FET programmes:

* Develop a whole-centre or whole-provider literacy awareness programme.
* Identify and assess individual learners’ literacy needs.
* Identify the literacy demands of each course and subject area.
* Develop student induction courses that facilitate each of the above.
* Embed literacy in course planning and delivery.
* Provide effective evaluation and summative assessment.
* Implement effective literacy teaching and learning practices.
* Develop appropriate teaching materials and resources.
* Provide appropriate continuous professional development for all relevant staff around integrating literacy into FET programmes.

To implement the above objectives, **ETBs may undertake the following actions**:

* Develop an Integrating Literacy Policy to be referenced in the ETB’s Education Plans.
* Design and develop a literacy awareness pack that promotes and supports whole-centre literacy integration and provides a checklist of good practice. The pack could focus on the following areas:
  1. The literacy-proofing of websites, administration forms, posters, student notices, timetables, maps, etc.
  2. The role of administration, reception and other ‘frontline’ staff in recognising signs of literacy difficulties and responding appropriately
  3. Exploring learners’ literacy skills and needs during induction and ongoing assessment processes
  4. The development of course literacy audits
  5. Identifying the range of literacy skills that learners require to succeed in further education and training
* Design, develop and deliver a professional development programme to equip tutors and teachers with the practical skills and theoretical knowledge required to integrate literacy into their specialist subject areas. Such training would enable teachers to:
  1. identify the literacy demands of the subjects and courses they teach;
  2. identify their learners’ literacy strengths and weaknesses in relation to those; and
  3. develop teaching and learning strategies, practices and materials that take account of both (a) and (b).
* Investigate and document how each of the following can help in matching learners’ literacy skills with course requirements and so further integrate literacy support: recruitment, application, interview, enrolment, initial assessment, induction, study skills and progression routes.
* Develop and deliver a professional development programme for principals and managers of FET colleges and centres to support them in leading a whole centre approach to integrating language, literacy and numeracy across their programmes.
* Integrating literacy into FET programmes will require a review and revision of professional development programmes for all staff, in order to incorporate modules on integrating literacy into professional development programmes.

**Concluding Remarks**

Integrating literacy into FET programmes can improve outcomes for learners, tutors, teachers and coordinators, provided the process is managed correctly. In an ETB context, this will involve adopting a whole-provider approach to the literacy integration process. It will require strategic upskilling of FET teachers, those delivering literacy supports to learners and those managing and coordinating programmes. Progress in integrating literacy and numeracy into ETB FET programmes will be contingent on all involved having a clear understanding of

what the integration process entails and having the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to implement it.

As acknowledged above, integrating literacy into FET does not assume that all applying to participate in a particular course should be admitted automatically, irrespective of the level of their language, literacy or numeracy skills. Providers retain the right to make their course admission decisions on the basis of the capacity of individual applicants to complete courses successfully. Core skills, including language, literacy and numeracy, are inevitably relevant to determining that capacity. On the other hand, the core skills identified as needed for any particular course should relate realistically to those required in the role for which the course is setting out to prepare learners.

As well as improving access, persistence and achievement for learners, integrating literacy into FET programmes is both timely and relevant in the current context of further education and training development. It can reinforce the interdependencies and collegiality of staff working to shared organisational goals and processes. The whole-organisation approach to literacy can be a concrete

example of the connectivity of different services within an ETB to support educational outcomes. It is important to recognise that integrating literacy into FET programmes is not something that can be achieved in a short period of time. Rather it involves a process that will take time to evolve and each ETB will need to manage the process to suit its own particular circumstances.

**Support** for integrating language, literacy and numeracy into FET programmes, in terms of **professional development**, is available from ETB Adult Literacy Services and from NALA.

Finally, see **Appendices 1 and 2 below** for guidance in relation to:

* a whole-centre or whole-college approach to integrating literacy, and
* integrating literacy into subject teaching and learning.

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**Appendix 1: A whole-centre or whole-college approach to integrating literacy**

**Note:**

In what follows, we mean ‘**literacy**’ to include **language, reading, writing, numeracy and communication technolog**y (ICT). The term ‘**language’** refers to key words, concepts and types of verbal communication that learners need to develop in order to successfully complete their course or programme.

* Adopt a **policy** to integrate literacy support and development with programme design and delivery. Develop a **strategy** to implement the policy. Allocate **resources**, if necessary by prioritising within existing resources.
* Designate a **coordinator** from among senior staff. Form a **cross-curricular team** of teachers who volunteer towork together to develop, lead and evaluate an action plan to integrate literacy development with programme design and delivery.
* **Prioritise** **Professional Development** (PD)for management and staff on how to integrate literacy support and development with the teaching of each subject and with other centre activities, such as promotion, recruitment, induction and progression.
* Ensure that the integrating literacy team includes **literacy staff** who have a particular interest in integrating literacy support and development within each subject.
* Design staff **timetables** that enable **communication and teamwork** between subject teachers and literacy staff, focused on the literacy involved in the main courses and in the jobs or roles to which they relate.
* Plan to provide learners with access, if required, to **additional course-related literacy and numeracy tuition** and to resources for self-directed literacy learning.
* Ensure that learners with specific learning difficulties have access to appropriate supports, such as **assistive technologies** for learning.
* Review and revise if necessary the **centre or college materials and publications** such as thoseused in promotion, registration and induction. See [www.simplyput.ie.](http://www.simplyput.ie/)
* Produce **centre or college templates** for **course delivery plans** to help teachers identify the most important literacy and numeracy **objectives** embedded in theirsubject and to plan the main **teaching and learning strategies** for theseas part of content learning.
* Integrate literacy and numeracy development with the teaching and learning of **induction** topics. This will help achieve the goals of induction and will also give learners and teachers some early indicators of literacy and numeracy strengths and needs.
* Build links with employers to identify the specific literacy and numeracy demands of **work placements** and to plan how to help learners with these.
* Support teachers and learners to identify and overcome any literacy barriers to fair **assessment for certification** in each subject area.  **For example,** enable teachers to:
  + draw on the full **range of assessment methods** and media permitted by the awarding body;
  + **teach** the particular **reading strategies** learners will need to fully understand the assessment **briefs** and examination **questions**;
  + produce **templates for assessment briefs** to help learners experience a consistent user-friendly format across the curriculum.
* Explicitly **evaluate t**he integrated literacy strategy as part of overall programme evaluation.
* When planning the programme for the following year or cycle, consider the kinds of literacy support that your centre can now offer learners within each course. (The centre’s capacity to support learners with the literacy demands of their courses should increase from year to year.) Considering your current capacity will help you to determine the literacy and numeracy skills that learners may need on **entry** to the particular programme.
* Consider providing **access,** **transition** or **preparatory programmes** for your main courses – perhaps in cooperation with other centres - to help learners develop and sustain the relevant literacy and numeracy skills.

**Appendix 2:**  **Integrating language, literacy and numeracy into subject teaching and learning**

* Review your course to identify the key **language and concepts** involved and the main **reading, writing, numeracy** and **ICT** demands.Identify which of these are **essential** to the subject-learning and to the real-life role to which the course relates. Build these into the **objectives** of your course**.**
* **Cooperate** with literacy and learning support colleagues to identify the language, literacy and numeracy demands of your course and to plan how to jointly assist learners with those.
* From your experience of teaching this subject, identify the **critical** **topics, tasks** and **times** on the coursethat present significant literacy challenges.Plan **workshops** and other activitiesto assist your group with these.
* Plan to integrate relevant introductory literacy tasks with the **early topics and activities** on your course. This will introduce learners to the integrated methods they will be using and will give some early indicators of course-related literacy strengths and needs.
* Use **a range of methods** to engage the different literacy strengths and learning preferences that exist within any adult group.

* Include a **planned and explicit focus** on the particular language, literacy and numeracy required in the main topics and activities in each session. Also be alert to the **unplanned literacy opportunities** and challenges that may arise.
* Systematically support learners to developthe **language and concepts** relevant to the subject. Provide plenty of **varied purposeful opportunities** for learners to **hear, use, read and write the key language** or terminology.
* **Explicitly teach**, on a whole-class basis within the main subject, the essential **course-related literacy activities** as they arise – for example, strategies for note-taking or for reading course texts.
* **Review** course text books, handouts to ensure they are clearly laid out and easy to use. Eliminate unnecessary jargon. Keep essential course-related terminology.
* Use methods designed to give structured support to learners as they build skill and confidence in the **reading, writing, numeracy** and **ICT** inherent in the subject.
* **Pre-teach** key terms used in the texts learners are required to read. Develop course glossaries learners can refer to - or facilitate learners to create them. Discuss with the group how **the process of reading** differs according to texts and purposes. **Be specific** about the steps they should take when reading the particular course materials. **Demonstrate** and provide **guided practice**.
* Provide **templates** for and **models** of **writing** tasks. Facilitate group and individual **activitie**s before beginning writing tasks, to generate and structure content. Share **strategies** for spelling and other technical aspects of writing. Provide proofreading **checklists**.
* Progressively decrease the structured supports as the course proceeds and the learners’ skills develop.
* Eliminate any unnecessary literacy obstacles to fair assessment in the the subject:
* draw from the full range of **assessment methods and media** allowed by the awarding body;
* write **assessment briefs** that are reader-friendly and include specific information on what you expect learners to do;
* **pre-teach** the language and reading strategies learners need to fully understand the assessment briefs.
* **Evaluate** the integrated literacy strategies with your learners and colleagues.

**Resources**

Further Education Support Service [resource lists on integrating literacy](http://www.fess.ie/resource-library/thematic-specific-resources#literacy)

NALA Videos on integrating literacy in FET: [Post Leaving Cert](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WpuWEyplCc&list=PLnE6Lf6LJD_Vimjarp8GYcU9qiM5p0rc1), [Apprenticeship](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_20KD3ii80&list=PLnE6Lf6LJD_WcG7dcqWHil8-c2QsPS2zo) and [Community Training Centres](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op6rHfS20Tc&list=PLnE6Lf6LJD_UngzHOgpLgVy3yEsIv8fFj)

1. This definition of integrating literacy is adapted from the one used by Michael King, then Chair of the CDVEC Working Group on Integrating Literacy, in his foreword to the Report for the CDVEC Board of Studies, February 2011: *Integrating Literacy in CDVEC FE and Adult Education Centres.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. City of Dublin VEC (now ETB), in February 2011, adopted a report from its Board of Studies entitled *Integrating Literacy in CDVEC FE and Adult Education Centres.* This section draws heavily on that report. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)