

# Review

## Our year and our work, 2009

**Policy** Securing the support of policy makers and politicians for providing increased resources to adult literacy and numeracy services. **Participation** Making it easier for more adults to develop their literacy and numeracy through education and training programmes. **Practice** Making approaches to teaching and learning more effective. **Organisations** Persuading organisations to be fully accessible to people with literacy and numeracy difficulties. **Effectiveness** Strengthening NALA's effectiveness as an organisation.

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**Summary Annual Report 2009**



**NALA**

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Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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**Literacy learning websites:**

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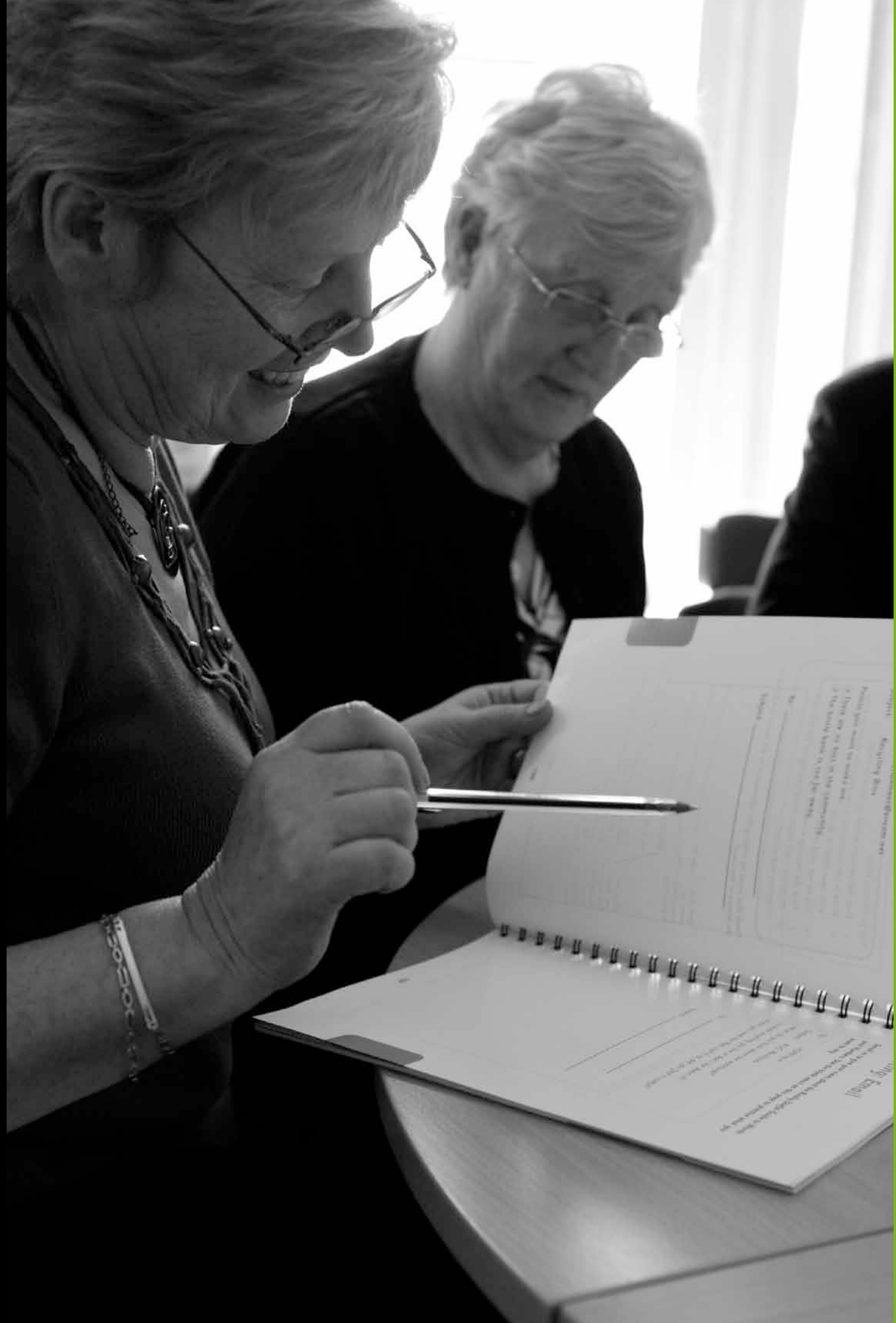
**Freephone support line:**

1800 20 20 65

**NALA**

1980-2010 Celebrating

30 years



# What is NALA

The National Adult Literacy Agency is an independent membership-based organisation committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs.

Since we were set up by volunteers in 1980, we have been a leading campaigning and lobbying force on adult literacy issues. We have been involved with training, policy making, national co-ordination, distance education, research and campaigns to raise awareness of the causes, extent and responses to adult literacy difficulties in Ireland.

In this summary annual report you will find details of all the work we have completed during 2009. You can view and download additional information on our accounts, organisation structure, staff and publications at [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie).

***'Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change'***

# Foreword



Despite the recession and reduction in public spending, there was brisk activity in NALA and success from our clear focus on achieving the objectives in our strategic plan. I have summarised our work under four main headings – **policy, participation, practice** and **organisations engaging with the public**, with a view to encouraging you to read on into the report.

## Policy

First among them in the policy area was our effort to persuade Government to refresh the adult literacy programme, which dates back to the 2000 White Paper on Adult Education *Learning for Life*. In fact, the ideas that formed the content of that programme date back to the late 1990s. In addition there has been no national review or evaluation of the most sustained period of development in adult literacy. This is further evidence of the critical importance of refreshing our strategy for the future.

During National Adult Literacy Awareness Week we held policy roundtables to bring this message to politicians, trade unions and employer bodies, NGOs, and other stakeholders and to seek their support in realising this goal. Whilst recognising the significant challenges to public finances, it is in the spirit of public sector reform that such improvements to programme activity should take place.

Discussions to secure this continued throughout the year with Minister Sean Haughey and his officials in the Department of Education and Science. Our international policy conference in November was addressed by the Director of Skills for Life Strategy in England outlining how they have updated their strategy to address the literacy issue over the last decade. Speaking at this conference, the Minister announced Ireland's participation in the Programme for the International Assessment for Adult Competencies (PIAAC), an international survey that will provide new statistics on the levels of adult literacy and numeracy in Ireland in 2013.

## **Participation**

The raising of awareness of adult literacy learning opportunities was a significant part of our work during the year. The continued support from An Post for national advertising throughout the year was a huge boost to our activities and resulted in a large volume of calls to our freephone number from people wishing to take up literacy learning opportunities as well as people wishing to become volunteers. This was further augmented by local direct mail campaigns in a number of VEC areas funded by An Post.

The broadcasting of *Written Off?* on RTÉ One, which featured a group of eight learners during May and June resulted in high audience ratings and triggered many people to seek out learning options, including through our Distance Learning Service. Indeed, during September some of these distance learners received their FETAC Level 2 awards directly from Minister Haughey.

Another group of learners took on the task of operating our stand at the Ploughing Championships this year. By their own account they attracted many people to their stand by offering to talk to passers by about their experiences of having literacy difficulties and returning to learning.

## **Practice**

To support literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners, the Agency hosted a number of themed events for adult literacy organisers, tutors, trainers, teachers and people working with families. All of these events were well attended and very positively evaluated.

The local student development fund and the student events provided by NALA were as popular as ever. They provided us with very important feedback on what the key issues are for adult learners, which we used in planning future work.

We published research capturing the integration of literacy in Level 5 programmes in Liberties College and in Newbridge Youth Training and Development Centre at Level 3 and 4. We presented the research at a joint IVEA/NALA conference with the aim of supporting others involved in education and training to learn about the benefits of integrating literacy. We also published two research reports that deal with the barriers to participation amongst men and older people which will be widely disseminated in 2010.

## **Organisations working with the public**

Throughout the year, NALA worked intensively with a number of organisations to make them more literacy friendly. Research evidence shows that organisations benefit from an understanding of the literacy issues their customers may face and can be more accessible to people if they examine their communications and embrace plain English.

How this plays out in the context of public health was a particular focus for us in 2009 in our partnership with MSD. With their support, we organised a series of discussions with health policy makers and practitioners, following an input from a leading international expert in the field, Rima Rudd from Harvard University. With funding from the HSE, we produced a health literacy audit tool to assist healthcare providers examine their practice and make improvements.

A further area we worked on, with the support of EBS, was financial literacy. The aim of our work was to highlight to the financial sector how they can change their practices to be more accessible to the

general public and to support people to build their financial literacy through dedicated resources such as the A-Z guide to Financial Terms. On a similar note, Minister John Gormley launched our A-Z guide to environmental terms in the Customs House during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week.

During the year the Agency's work was greatly enhanced by the involvement of a large number of people, organisations, departments and funders to whom I am most grateful. I would also like to pay tribute to the staff who, as always, gave 100% to NALA as indeed did our voluntary board, who travelled from all over Ireland to monthly meetings in Dublin to oversee the work. On a final and very sad note, my former colleague Carrie Walsh, who served as both an Executive member and staff member of NALA, passed away. A great contributor to adult literacy work in Ireland was lost. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her.



**Inez Bailey**  
Director, NALA

Fergus Murphy, CEO, EBS speaks to Inez Bailey at the launch of NALA's new literacy advisory service; Minister Sean Haughey presents a certificate to student Derek Ward; freephone operators Kevin O'Connor and Brenda Daly at the launch of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week with student Shirley McHugh and An Post Chief Executive, Donal Connell; all the students of Written off?



# Our key achievements in 2009 at a glance

## Policy

**Calling and building support** for a new adult literacy and numeracy strategy

**4.5 million secured** for Ireland's participation in new international literacy survey

**Progression of campaign** for paid learning leave and workplace basic education programmes

Cost benefit analysis of adult literacy **proves rapid return on investment**

## Participation

**One million people** tune in to watch our TV series 'Written Off?'

**65,000 homes** receive leaflets from An Post on local VEC literacy services

**7,600 people** ring the NALA freephone

**3,750 learning accounts** set up on [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie)

**Funding** for new TV series secured

**260 mentions** of literacy in the media – a 10% increase on 2008

## Practice

**500 literacy tutors**  
and organisers attend  
NALA conferences  
and seminars

NALA IVEA  
**joint conference**  
promotes benefits of  
integrating literacy

**900 students** supported  
through NALA Student  
Development Fund

**New research** highlights  
barriers to participation  
in adult literacy services

**50 computers** donated  
to adult literacy services

## Organisations

**New literacy  
advisory service**  
launched

**28** organisations pay  
for plain English service

NALA secures Ireland's  
participation in the  
**European Health  
Literacy Survey**

**135 entries** to  
Health Literacy Award

New research into  
financial literacy and  
**A-Z Guide to  
Financial literacy**

New **A-Z Guide to  
environmental terms**

# Policy

Since the 1980s, NALA has worked continuously in partnership with Government departments, education and training providers, tutors and learners to develop policies to meet the needs of people with literacy and numeracy difficulties. This year was a huge success as we secured support for a new adult literacy strategy and agreement for Ireland to participate in the next international adult literacy survey.

Bridie Daly at the NALA AGM



## **NALA gets support for refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy**

As part of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week in September, we held a number of meetings with politicians, employer and employee representatives and the community and voluntary sector. The purpose of the meetings was to secure agreement from attendees for a refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy.

Political spokespeople that attended the meetings included Ruairi Quinn, TD, Brian Hayes, TD, John O'Mahony, TD, Senator Fidelma Healy-Eames and a representative from Ulick Burke, TD. Industry and union groups included SIPTU, IMPACT, INTO, Congress Network, the Communications Workers Union and Chambers Ireland. The community and voluntary sector came out in force with members of Age Action Ireland, European Anti-Poverty Network, National Youth Council, Older Women's Network, Disability Federation Ireland, Pavee Point, Irish Traveller Movement and Social Justice Ireland all attending.

At each meeting NALA presented the review of adult literacy policy in Ireland, as well as the cost/ benefit analysis of adult literacy tuition. We emphasised that a refreshed adult literacy strategy should straddle education and training and take account of the broader contexts of adult literacy and numeracy development. The essential elements of a proposed refreshed strategy included:

1. Continued development of workplace basic education (WBE)
2. Integration of literacy into publicly funded education and training programmes
3. Distance learning at Levels 1 – 3
4. Implementation of numeracy strategy
5. Development of a family literacy implementation plan
6. ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) budget separated
7. More intensive literacy learning opportunities
8. Enhanced health literacy awareness and responses
9. Initiatives to promote literacy opportunities to increase participation
10. Monitoring and evaluation of all interventions

The three sessions reinforced interest from all stakeholders in working with NALA. They also provided useful suggestions for advancing joint advocacy work. Discussions focused on those most in need and the value of family literacy in tackling wider educational disadvantage and exploring the statutory basis for paid learning leave for employees with less than FETAC level 4 qualifications. The discussion with politicians recognised that advancing an integrated literacy approach is key to a range of policy areas, including vocational training and labour force development. Community and voluntary sector organisations identified a wider leadership issue in responding to evidence that societies that are more equal do better across a range of indicators. They believe that a refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy is a potential model for joined-up public policy responses to social exclusion.

Jim Dorgan, Economist speaks at NALA's AGM



## **Minister Haughey and NALA secure new international adult literacy survey**

NALA has been campaigning for a number of years to secure support for a new survey to update the information provided by the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey in 1997. Specifically we have been campaigning for Ireland to be included in the next OECD survey entitled Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). PIAAC builds on previous surveys and extends the ambitions of international adult assessment beyond the more traditional measures of literacy and numeracy. It will provide information on the skills individuals use at work and about themselves and their lives.

NALA met with Minister Sean Haughey, TD, twice this year to secure support for this new survey. We were delighted that he announced Ireland's participation in PIAAC at one of our conferences in November.

PIAAC will be the most comprehensive international survey of adult skills ever undertaken. It will measure the skills and competencies needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper.

We have no doubt that Ireland's participation in this survey will provide us with a wealth of information and provide an evidence base for future policy. The cost of this survey to Ireland is estimated at €4.5 million, jointly funded by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Results are due in 2013.

Minister Sean Haughey  
speaking at NALA's policy  
conference in November



## **New reports provide insights on adult literacy issue**

In an environment where organisations compete for budgets, our challenge is to present compelling arguments as to why adult literacy funding should be increased and give evidence of the value of this investment. In 2009, we published two significant reports:

- a review of Irish adult literacy policy, and
- a cost/benefit analysis of adult literacy training in Ireland.

James Dorgan completed both reports. He is an independent economist and policy analyst noted in this area for his work on the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science 'Report on Adult Literacy' in May 2006.

In the policy review, Dorgan identified problems with the national response to adult literacy in four key areas: policy objectives, resources, management and evaluation. He noted that the absence of evaluation of adult literacy interventions remains a significant systemic weakness and highlighted that there is an urgent need for a national adult literacy survey, which has now been secured.

The report on the cost/ benefit analysis of adult literacy concluded that there is a positive and rapid return on investment across the board; for participants, the companies they work for and the Exchequer. The annual income gain for a participant improving their literacy up one level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is €3,810. The Exchequer gains €1,531 a year. The cost/ benefit analysis found that literacy training increases employment by about 12% for each increase in NFQ level. At a national level, a country with a literacy rate 1% higher than the average will have a 2.5% higher than average GDP per capita. Other benefits identified included positive social impacts on health, social inclusion, children's literacy and school performance. The study concluded that literacy training generates large returns for participants, and that gains to the Exchequer offset costs of training, while the wider social gains are even more valuable.

### Policy briefs published

As part of our ongoing work in reviewing Irish policy and producing recommendations, we published a number of policy briefs on literacy. These include briefs on Family Literacy, Integrating Literacy, Distance Learning Services, Workplace Basic Education, Paid Learning Leave, Labour Market Activation, Plain English, Health Literacy and the NALA Literacy Advisory Service.

All our reports and policy briefs were used at conferences and meetings throughout the year to help advance policies aimed at supporting adults with literacy difficulties.

## Sharing our knowledge and expertise

As part of our objective to secure the support of policy makers to provide increased resources for adult literacy services, NALA held a national conference on November 18 entitled **'Raising Adult Literacy levels in Ireland'**. The purpose of the 2009 conference was to highlight to policy makers and decision makers:

- the impact of literacy difficulties to Irish socio-economic development,
- the value of addressing adult literacy issues, particularly during the current economic downturn, with reference to international practice, and
- the case for a refreshed adult literacy strategy in 2010.

Keynote speaker, John Landeryou, from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the UK set the context by presenting findings from the revised Skills for Life Strategy in England. He summarised the achievements of this strategy, highlighting that nearly 6 million adults took courses and over 2.8 million gained a national qualification in literacy, language or numeracy. The refined UK strategy from 2009 to 2011 has a new ambition to ensure that 390,000 people of working age achieve an entry level 3 or above qualification in numeracy, and 597,000 achieve a level 1 or above literacy qualification. He stressed the overall target by 2020 was to ensure that 95% of people of working age would have functional literacy and numeracy skills.

Professor John Monaghan of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) addressed delegates and highlighted the need for policy makers to achieve more in terms of breaking cycles of disadvantage. Based on the experience of the SVP, John outlined how there is a need for much greater focus on family-based literacy initiatives. He challenged policy makers to change their approach, otherwise the corrosive effect of adult literacy difficulties will continue to impact on future generations. He also called for greater collaboration between Government departments in tackling intergenerational literacy issues.

Inez Bailey, NALA's Director, used findings from NALA's cost/ benefit analysis to explain why a refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy was necessary now more than ever.

The conference was opened by Sean Haughey, TD, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, and was very well attended by representatives from Government departments, IVEA, FÁS, Forfás, unions and VEC adult literacy services.

John Stewart, NALA and John Landeryou from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the UK, at NALA's November policy conference; Attendees at NALA's AGM



# Participation

NALA research shows that there are a number of barriers to people participating in adult literacy learning, including the stigma that still exists about the issue. Throughout 2009 we worked to build greater awareness of the range of learning opportunities on offer and make it easier for people to take them up. In this time over one million people tuned in to watch our TV series 'Written Off?', 65,000 homes received leaflets from An Post on local literacy services and over 7,000 people rang the NALA freephone support line.

Ann Boyd and Thomas McMahon launch Written Off?



## **New TV series attracts over 1 million viewers**

NALA continued to break new ground in educational broadcasting by highlighting the impact that living with a literacy difficulty can have on an individual's life in 21st century Ireland. Following the success of 'Written Off?' in 2008, we secured funding from the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland and RTÉ Television for a second series in 2009. Six episodes of the new series were broadcast on Mondays at 7.30pm on RTÉ One last April and May, and were repeated on Thursday nights later in the summer. Average weekly viewing figures were an impressive 186,000 people per episode, representing 14.6% of the viewing public. This figure peaked at 211,000 for the first episode following an in-depth interview with participants of the series on the Ryan Tubridy radio show.

Similar to the format of the previous year, 'Written Off?' was a fly-on-the-wall documentary that followed the lives of eight adults as they tried to achieve something they had wanted to do for a long time – to read and write. Among the eight people featured in the series were Ann from Sligo, who hadn't been in a classroom in 40 years; 19 year old Peter from Bettystown, who had moved from job to job since leaving school early; and James from Kinnegad, who just wanted to be able to write his son's name on a Christmas card. At times the tuition and filming were difficult, but all eight made it to the last weekend and got the opportunity to graduate in front of family and friends in Dublin's City Hall. Six of the learners received the Level 2 Certificate in General Learning, while two others received three minor awards each.

James McCann from Kinnegad summed up how everyone was feeling at his graduation:

***"It's after giving me great confidence in myself. I am able to read books to my son now. I feel proud of myself. Those are the very words I'm using. I'm proud of myself. It's the beginning for all of us after this weekend."***



All the participants of the TV series Written off?

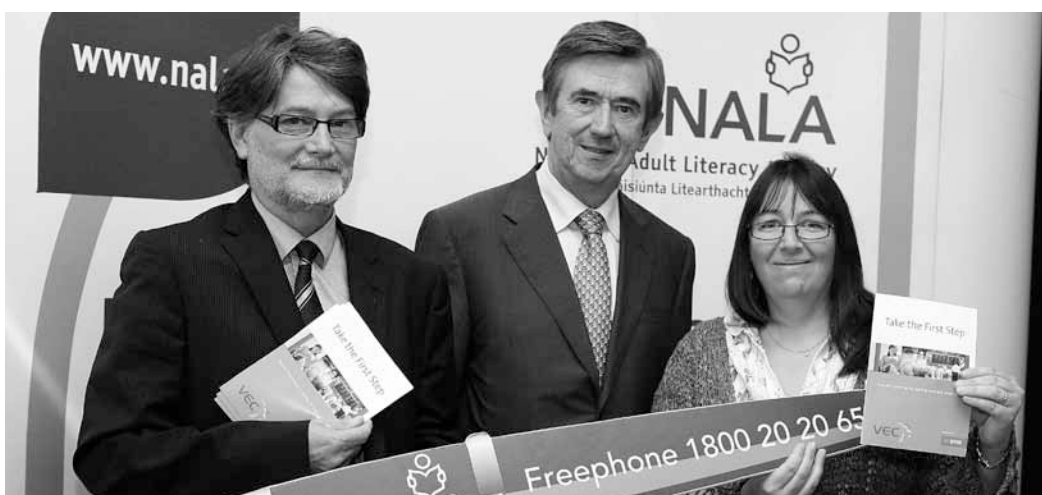
All over Ireland we know there are people who go to great lengths to hide their literacy difficulties. However, as documented in this series, this does not have to be the case. Given the massive viewership and subsequent calls received to the NALA freephone number we have no doubt that 'Written Off?' raised awareness of literacy in Ireland while also showing all the benefits there are in returning to learning.

### **Funding for new TV series secured**

Funding was secured from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and RTÉ for a new TV series in 2010 with a working title of 'Stuck for Words'. This six part documentary series will follow the lives of six learners and will be filmed during the first five months of 2010. Once again, we will be working with Animo TV and RTÉ. The provisional date and time for broadcast is from Monday May 10 at 7.30pm on RTÉ One.

### **Research with students**

Research conducted with the participants in Written off? showed that it had been a positive and in some cases 'life changing' experience. They reported that taking part in the programme had provided them with an impetus to continue improving their literacy skills and returning to education full-time or part-time. The findings from the research will inform any future work in this area and will support our Distance Learning Service.



Kieran Harrington and Alison Jones from Galway VEC with An Post Chief Executive, Donal Connell

## **An Post awareness campaign goes from strength to strength**

Taking the first steps on any difficult journey requires courage. For those who have difficulties reading or writing, the stigma attached can prove daunting and discouraging. However, since An Post developed and funded an advertising campaign encouraging those with literacy difficulties to take those first steps, we have recorded over 10,000 calls to our freephone support line. The calls are mainly from adults who have either seen the An Post advertisements on TV or heard them on radio and want to find out how they can improve their reading, writing or numeracy skills. NALA also received many calls from friends and family members who are ringing on behalf of an adult who has literacy difficulties and from people who want to volunteer as literacy tutors.

Ongoing feedback from adult literacy organisers nationwide has been very positive, with some citing the new advertisements as a great medium for removing the stigma and 'normalising' the literacy issue among the general public.

***"The ad said it's never too late to learn so I said I'd give it a try."*** Quote from caller.

### 65,000 home receive leaflets on local VEC literacy services

In 2009 the awareness campaign was augmented when An Post funded a series of local direct mail campaigns in areas of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford, Meath, Longford and Donegal. Developed in association with NALA, the awareness drive saw An Post staff delivering information leaflets on local VEC literacy services to over 65,000 homes across the country.

The campaign was launched to coincide with the start of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week in September, and has already resulted in over 200 new students in VEC adult literacy services. This represents an average increase of 19% on the same period last year for each of the 8 services taking part.

***“Callers said that it was useful to have the information leaflet in their house – it was picked up a number of times and discussed among family.”***

Quote from Adult Literacy Organiser.

### **Men lead increase in numbers contacting the National Adult Literacy Agency**

The number of inquiries to NALA rose by almost a quarter in the first six months of 2009, with most queries coming from men. NALA received 4,759 calls between January and June 2009, a 23% increase on the previous six-month period, when 3,867 were recorded. In total, we received 7,609 calls from people wanting information on how they can improve their basic skills. A driving factor for the increase in calls (at the beginning of the year) seemed to be the economic climate. People who came under particular pressure were those working in construction and manufacturing. Over 80% of callers felt that their reading and writing was holding them back and that if they could improve their literacy it would help them in their work, go for promotion or further training. While most callers initially said they wanted help reading or writing, about 30% of callers asked for help specifically with spelling and another 10% wanted help with maths.

## **Distance Learning Service recruits 16 new tutors to deal with demand**

Ireland's first e-learning site for Level 2 learners, [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie), continued to attract learners and tutors. Some 3,750 learning accounts were set up by the end of 2009, and interest grew from week to week.

Almost 500 learners also signed up to the Distance Learning Service during the year and 16 tutors were recruited to work with the learners from home. The Service also involved a Freephone Administrator and three Freephone Operators working from NALA's Dublin office.

NALA's accreditation team met twice in 2009. In May, 35 learners were approved to receive 174 minor awards and 22 major awards. These awards were presented by Minister Seán Haughey at a ceremony during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week. The December verification process approved 142 learners for 653 minor awards and 64 Level 2 Certificates in General Learning. Many of these learners and awards were achieved through a new blended learning collaboration with County Meath VEC. In 2010, 12 new [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) blended learning options will be available in other centres across the country.

### **Showcasing our work internationally**

NALA was honoured as one of the featured speakers during the Literacy Campaign at the 2009 Frankfurt Book Fair, showcasing our work in a presentation titled 'Distance Learning – Bridging a Gap for Basic Literacy Learners in Ireland' and in a follow-up workshop titled 'Distance Learning – The Evolution of Media in Literacy Learning in Ireland since 2000'. This event was attended by over 100 adult literacy experts and policy makers from over 20 countries.

Articles on NALA's Distance Learning Service were also published in *Reflect*, the NRDC's annual magazine, and the German *Alfa-Forum* magazine. NALA's Distance Learning Service was also listed on Unesco's UIL-LitBase on Effective Literacy Practices and the EU's Inventory of Outreach Strategies to Enable People to go One Step Up.

## Promoting literacy in the media

Communications play a key role in our work to raise awareness of the benefits of learning to adults with literacy difficulties. Indeed, students are vital in bringing to life the literacy issue and motivating others, in a similar position, to improve their own literacy. Throughout 2009 we issued press releases and worked with many students and journalists to set-up interviews and answer questions about adult literacy.

In total, there were 64 mentions of NALA and literacy recorded in Irish national papers. An additional 170 mentions were recorded in regional papers nationwide and over 30 similar mentions were recorded in trade and lifestyle magazines. This represents a 10% increase on coverage from 2008. Students and staff also appeared during the year on several radio and TV shows including RTÉ's 'The Mooney Show', 'The Tubridy Show', 'Drivetime', RTÉ TWO News and the TV3 Morning Show.

## New book captures personal stories of people with literacy difficulties

'School Days', 'A long way from home' and 'Celtic Education' are just some of the stories that feature in a new book that we launched in July 2009. Called 'Written Off?', and based on the TV series of the same name, the book captures the personal stories of 14 Irish people who recently came together to learn to read and write. The book is an inspiring collection of some of their childhood memories, thoughts and poems, and also contains contributions from three of Ireland's most prominent authors: Patricia Scanlon, Mary Stanley and Dermot Bolger. 'Written Off?' was produced by NALA in association with New Island and is available free of charge from NALA.

***"This book is a collection of the writings of 14 brave adults who made the decision to go back to education."***

Their work should be an inspiration to us all and show us what is possible when people put their thoughts and stories down on paper," said Patricia Scanlon.

## **National Adult Literacy Awareness Week highlights the benefits of learning**

National Adult Literacy Awareness Week was a huge success, with NALA organising a number of events to raise awareness of the literacy issue in Ireland. Once again, it ran during the last week of September to tie in with the re-opening of local VEC adult literacy services and RTÉ News was on hand to cover some of the events.

On Monday 21 September adult literacy organisers, tutors and students from around the country attended the official launch of Awareness Week in the GPO, where details of An Post's new awareness campaign were announced. The launch featured presentations from An Post and inspirational speeches from James McCann, star of 'Written Off?', Shirely McHugh, student, and Bernie McKevitt, Adult Literacy Organiser in Meath. RTÉ News covered the launch and interviewed Brenda Daly, one of NALA's freephone operators as well as a literacy student from the Dublin Adult Learning Centre.

An information morning on the topic of family literacy was held in the National Library of Ireland on Wednesday 23 September. The event aimed to raise awareness of the importance and the effectiveness of family literacy programmes and was well attended by people who work daily with children, parents and families. The informative session included presentations from a number of people involved in working in disadvantaged areas, delivering family learning programmes, and provided useful tips for people working with families who may have literacy difficulties. The first ever guide to family learning programmes in Ireland and an information DVD, both produced by the Clare Family Learning Project, were launched at the event by Mr Sean Haughey, TD, Minister for Lifelong Learning. Once again RTÉ News was there to interview two of the speakers at the event.



Joann Power and Lorraine Markham launch National Adult Literacy Awareness Week in the GPO; Bernie McKevitt receives new information leaflets from An Post; Mary Flanagan launches first ever guide to family learning programmes in Ireland.

That afternoon, Minister Haughey returned to award 34 learners with FETAC Certificates. This comprised 174 minor awards in the areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking, quantity and numbers, learning to learn and computer skills. It was a momentous occasion because in many cases, this was the first certificate the students had ever received.

Other events during the week included the launch of a new A-Z guide to environmental terms to help promote the benefits of using plain English in the Department of the Environment and local authorities. Entitled 'From Air Quality to Zero Emissions' this new guide aims to help people understand more about the words and concepts used daily in relation to the environment so that they can make more informed choices. Developed in association with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the A- Z guide contains over 100 explanations of common environmental terms and was launched by Mr John Gormley TD, Minister for the Environment, in the Custom House, Dublin. The guide is a free resource and is available online at [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie), in libraries, Citizen Information Centres and free from NALA.

NALA also held a series of roundtable meetings with politicians and policy makers to discuss the need for a refreshed adult literacy strategy outlined on page 10.

Shirley McHugh receives certificate from Minister Haughey.



## **Progressing literacy learning at work**

The National Skills Strategy made it clear that there are large numbers of employees who need to develop their skills if they are to be successful in the changing economy. However, it is often very difficult for people to manage their work-life balance without having to take on additional training in their own time. There is significant evidence to show that those with the lowest levels of previous attainment are the hardest to engage in continued education and training, but often are the people with the most training needs. Throughout the year, NALA continued to work to reduce barriers to training for people in the workforce with less than a Level 4 qualification.

### **Promoting paid learning leave**

In 2009 we developed a policy paper on paid learning leave and continued to work on promoting the paid release of workers with less than a Level 4 qualification who wish to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. The issue was raised and discussed during our roundtables with employers, trade unions and community and voluntary sector organisations during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week and was part of NALA's call for a refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy.

### **Workplace Basic Education Fund / FÁS Skills for Work**

NALA believes that workplace basic education (WBE) programmes play a critical role in addressing the skills of workers with less than a Level 4 qualification and should continue to be a Government priority. As part of this work, we sat on the national steering committee of the Workplace Basic Education Fund / FÁS Skills for Work. We progressed phase two of an apprenticeship project with FÁS which aims to develop a tool that can be used by tutors delivering apprenticeships to identify literacy and numeracy issues early on in the course.

### **WoLLNET project**

NALA is an advisory partner on an EU project funded through the Leonardo Da Vinci fund that involves partners from the UK, Germany, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Romania and Austria. The project aims to develop a toolkit that employers across Europe can adapt and use to measure the impact of basic education and training in the workplace. The project partners hope that if employers are able to see the impact of basic education and training on organisational performance they will be more likely to invest in it. The project started in December 2007 and will finish in February 2010.

## **Learners take centre stage at the National Ploughing Championships**

The National Ploughing Championships is one of Europe's largest agricultural events, with over 80 acres of exhibits. In 2009, learners Kevin O'Duffy, James McCann, Michael Power, Helen Walshe, Peggy Murphy, Alison Hickey and Breda Kavanagh operated our stand and worked tirelessly for three days during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week. Each of them has experience of going back to education as an adult and during the week they took the time to share their own experiences with thousands of visitors. Nearly 200,000 people attended the event in Athy and by all accounts not many got by the NALA stand without hearing about the literacy issue in Ireland and all the different learning opportunities available.

***"One question that I was constantly asked by the public was 'Is it hard to go back to education? Is the study difficult?'"***

They were relieved to know that you could learn one-to-one with a tutor and could work at your own pace – I think a lot of people left our stand really thinking seriously about attending literacy tuition," said Michael Power.

During the week, thousands of information leaflets and literacy workbooks were distributed to people who visited our stand. Not surprisingly there was a lot of interest in NALA's A-Z guide to financial terms and guide to the European Union. "I think everyone who visited our stand took a copy away with them," said Kevin O'Duffy.

We also took the opportunity to conduct personal interviews with over 300 people, asking them if they knew anyone with a literacy difficulty and if they had heard of NALA. Interestingly 66% knew of someone with a literacy difficulty and 57% had heard of the National Adult Literacy Agency.



Kevin O'Duffy and James McCann who both worked at NALA's ploughing championship stand above.

# Practice

Good practice in adult literacy starts with the needs and interests of individuals. It is concerned with personal development and building confidence as well as technical skills. In 2009 NALA continued its work to develop and promote best practice and we had a very busy year focused on themed conferences and seminars. We also placed a great emphasis on student development, new research, integrating literacy in education and training programmes, family literacy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Mandy Kennedy with one of NALA's new laptops



## 500 adult literacy providers attend NALA conferences and forums

In 2009 we held five dynamic conferences that encouraged adult literacy providers to further integrate the Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work into their practice. In total over 500 people attended the following events.

- a general **adult literacy conference** on social action called 'Literacy leading to change'. The aim of the conference was to help practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of how social action views of literacy, language and numeracy relate to learning. This in turn helps to develop all aspects of literacy practice, including organisation, technical skills, personal development and social action. There were 98 attendees.
- a **national forum for adult literacy organisers** called 'ICT as a new literacy'. Adult literacy organisers said they were delighted to be able to reflect on how ICT could be used to save time and money and how there are a lot of excellent resources available. 55 organisers from 21 of the 33 VECs attended.
- a **national forum for adult literacy tutors** called 'Literacy: Increasing opportunities for individuals and communities'. Participants were very happy with the event particularly in terms of the presentations and the opportunity to network. There were 170 participants.
- an **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) conference** called 'Developing Your Practice'. The conference looked at the wider issues of ESOL including techniques and methods for ESOL literacy classes, integrating technology into ESOL and theory and experience in relation to migrants in Ireland. There were 75 attendees.
- a **Family Literacy event** called 'Families, learning and change'. This event looked at families, learning and change and in particular ways of developing strategies for social change in communities and looking at ways of creating resources for literacy learning. There were 65 attendees.

In February we also organised a seminar called 'Exploring Curriculum'. The purpose of the seminar was to present a report on NALA's curriculum development project and to outline the main elements of an evolving model of curriculum development. Participants included VEC adult literacy organisers and tutors, as well as tutors and managers from other settings such as Traveller Education Centres, Youthreach and FÁS Community Training Centres.

Feedback from the participants was very helpful in the subsequent work to complete the writing of this resource. There were 64 attendees.

### Working in partnership

In terms of partnership, NALA and the IVEA developed a memo of understanding regarding our respective work in adult literacy. We are currently working together to explore the question of integrating literacy in further education and training.

At an international level, NALA provided the only Irish presentation to the UNESCO European preparatory conference for Confintea VI as well as inputs to the Irish delegation to Confintea VI in Brazil. We also contributed to the OECD research and work on vocational education and training (VET) in Ireland for the period 2007-2008 and directly to the European Commission on the EU Action Plan for Lifelong Learning.

Kathleen Cramer, Liz McSkeane and Dr Helen Casey at the joint NALA-IVEA Conference.



## **NALA highlights the benefits of integrating literacy in further education and training**

NALA's integrating literacy work aims to overcome literacy barriers to access, participation and success on adult and further education and training programme. In 2009, NALA and the IVEA established a joint committee on integrating literacy, the first task of which was to complete and promote a number of research projects on integrating literacy. The purpose of the research was to provide evidence of the benefits of integrating literacy into training and education programmes, and to share best practice.

### **Literacy-friendly further education and training research**

In January we carried out research on integrating literacy into further education courses at Level 5. It involved an exploration of the issues and opportunities involved in integrating literacy with vocational education courses at that level and in the formal setting of a further education college, namely Liberties College Dublin. The learning from this project will inform our policy development and other work in 2010. The final research report will be useful to policymakers and providers who are working to increase the quality and range of 'literacy-friendly' further education opportunities available to adults.

### **Living Literacy – a whole organisation approach to integrating literacy**

In December we published the final report of a research project carried out in cooperation with the winner of the 2007 NALA EBS ACE awards, the Newbridge Youth Training and Development Centre (NYTDC) in Co. Kildare. *Living literacy: a whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy in a vocational training setting* highlights the kinds of policies, procedures and practical strategies the centre uses to integrate literacy across its programmes and across the centre. The report also includes a description of integrated assessment tools and strategies developed and piloted as part of the project.

## Support and advice on integrating literacy

- We provided on-site staff development sessions in integrating literacy for the staff of nine education and training centres and organisations.
- At the request of FÁS Community Services, we mapped the tasks of the FÁS-NIACE initial assessment pack onto the literacy and numeracy levels of the National Framework of Qualifications. FÁS produced the pack as a resource for Community Training Centres.
- We published 'Guidelines for vocational and workplace trainers' for vocational trainers who deliver short, often once-off work-related courses.
- As part of our contribution to the work of the DES-IVEA-NALA Initial Assessment and Screening Committee in 2009, we produced guidelines on integrating literacy in the application phase of further education programmes.

Siobhan Carroll and Michael King, Liberties College at the joint NALA-IVEA Conference.



## **Promoting best practice at a joint NALA-IVEA Conference**

In December, NALA and the IVEA organised a joint conference on integrating literacy in further education and training. The conference presented the findings and insights from the research in integrating literacy as well as from the practice and experience of further education managers, teachers and students.

The keynote speaker was Dr Helen Casey, Co-Director of the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) in literacy and numeracy in England who outlined the findings from a major NRDC research project into embedding literacy. The research had found that further education and vocational training courses that embedded literacy achieved greater outcomes in terms of student persistence and achievement of qualifications - in both literacy and the vocational subject. Dr Elizabeth McSkeane and Kathleen Cramer reported on the NALA/ EBS 'Living Literacy' research project, conducted in Newbridge Youth Training Centre. In presenting her experience as an education and training centre manager, Kathleen encouraged other managers to use NALA's Integrating Literacy Guidelines as a framework for planning a literacy strategy and highlighted the importance of staff development, particularly through the NUI Maynooth Certificate Course in Integrating Literacy.

Dr Maggie Feeley and Ann Hegarty outlined the process and findings from the NALA/ Liberties College project. Michael King, Principal of Liberties College, spoke about the college's experience of addressing language and literacy issues as part of an inclusion policy and strategy. In that context, he outlined the rationale for and experience of collaborating on the NALA research project, indicating that the final report would be useful in informing the next phase of development of inclusive, literacy-friendly systems in the college. Siobhan Carroll, a student in Liberties College, spoke about her experience of returning to education. Her story illustrated the critical role played by community education centres that provide both non-formal, non-certified adult education programmes as well as certified programmes, in encouraging adults to return to education. It also illustrated the importance of inclusive, person-centred, literacy-aware practices in formal further education, particularly in the application and enrolment process.

## Over 900 students supported through development funds and student events

NALA is committed to involving adult literacy students in the work of the Agency through student sub-committees, special funds and information days. In 2009 we involved over 900 students in this way. Students' knowledge and skills are vital and we benefitted greatly from their feedback.

### Great demand for NALA Student Fund 2009

Some 842 students were directly involved in projects funded by the NALA Student Development Fund in 2009. Forty adult literacy centres successfully drew down the funding. The theme was 'Learning and change – sharing experiences' and centres usually received €650 from NALA.

Twenty-two centres went on educational trips away. Cultural, sports and heritage sites were the most popular trips. Six centres visited the Dáil and five went to the theatre. Eleven centres had in-house events, including drama workshops, events relating to student writings and taster workshops. One unusual workshop was on pyrography (burning designs onto wood) which was conducted by the National Learning Network in Portlaoise. Wordaid in Kilkenny organised a practical gardening course. Six centres had networking events and met up with other students – most of these events were with students in the same county but in different centres.

Due to budget constraints in many centres it was remarked that only for the NALA Student Development Fund such events would not have been possible.

Margaret Armstrong, ESOL tutor with students at Bunratty Castle; Two students at Blessington student day.



### Two Student Days in 2009

Eighty students, mainly from VEC adult literacy services, attended the NALA student days in Dublin and Cork. For a third of students it was their first time attending a NALA-organised student event. A student from the 'Written Off?' television series gave a talk at each event. Students at both events suggested there needed to be more voter education. In response NALA wrote to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Referendum Commission to highlight the importance of using plain English. Student issues were also raised at discussions with politicians and policy makers during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week.

### Student Sub-committee

There were three meetings of the 13-strong NALA student sub-committee in 2009. Members of the sub-committee ran the NALA stand at the Ploughing Championships, were actively involved in representing the Agency during Awareness Week, helped plan and run the student days and helped decide on applications to the NALA Student Development Fund. They also gave their opinion on other developments in the Agency.

## **New NALA research helps reduce barriers to adult literacy tuition**

In 2009, we published two new research reports, *Learning through life* a study of older people with literacy difficulties who do not engage with adult literacy services and a report called *Men and literacy*. The studies were commissioned as part of our objective to reduce known barriers to returning to education to gather information that will help deepen our understanding of how literacy issues affect adults in Ireland today. The research was conducted with two sections of the population that can be described as 'hard to reach': older people who have not engaged with adult literacy services and men with literacy difficulties.

From the information in these reports there are many lessons for the work of NALA in terms of policy, lobbying and supports for adults with literacy difficulties as well as for the VEC adult literacy service and other education and training providers. We look forward to developing responses to the conclusions and recommendations contained in these reports as well as discussing with members and wider stakeholders at research briefings in 2010 how best we can all improve delivery of learning and other services to adults with literacy difficulties.

## Helping to advance family literacy

The vital role played by parents in children's education at all stages is gaining recognition. As a result, there is a growing understanding of the need to support adults who wish to improve their own literacy skills and confidence, as well as those of their children. By encouraging both informal and formal learning and by giving support to learning at home, family literacy approaches help literacy and numeracy learning for all age groups.

### Research on Family Literacy

In 2009 we commissioned research to develop adult and children's literacy through understanding and supporting family literacy practices in the home. The aim of the research was to identify where, how and why learning takes place in the home. NALA contracted the School of Community Studies (NCI) to carry out this research project. In total 41 families participated. The research, to be concluded in 2010, will inform NALA's work into making approaches to adult and family literacy even more effective.

### Influencing national and international partners

- NALA attended an EU Family Learning Conference called 'Family Learning: Delivering a Learning Society'. This conference was organised through the European Family Learning Network (EFLN) as part of the Grundtvig 4 project. NALA has been involved as a partner in this project since 2006. Participants at the conference included family learning practitioners, school and pre-school teachers and parents' representatives from Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Romania, Scotland and England. The project partners in the Network met before during and after the conference to set up a European Family Learning Association, in which NALA will be actively involved.
- Inez Bailey was appointed to the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, and was nominated to the NESF working group on Child Literacy and Social Inclusion. Following the launch of their report on child literacy we issued a press release asking for greater emphasis on family learning programmes and community-led partnerships with schools. Inez was interviewed on RTÉ Radio's Drivetime programme where she discussed the report's key recommendation that there should be a national literacy policy framework.

## Reviewing our role in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

This year we also completed a review of our role in ESOL. The main recommendations from this review are that:

- NALA should continue to provide supports for practitioners working with ESOL students with literacy difficulties;
- NALA should lobby for a separate line of funding for all ESOL provision – both ESOL language and ESOL literacy, and;
- that the Department of Education and Science should develop a national language policy.

### Literature review on acquisition and development of literacy as a second language

As a result of recommendations in NALA's policy paper informing NALA's future direction in ESOL, we decided to focus on ESOL literacy, specifically literacy for ESOL students who do not read and write fluently in any language. One of the key recommendations from the paper is:

***More information is required to develop understanding and promote awareness of what ESOL literacy is and how it is connected to language acquisition.*** (p 10)

Prompted by this, NALA commissioned the LLU+ at London South Bank University to conduct a review of literature on the acquisition and development of literacy when it is a second language, and when the student does not have fluent literacy in any language. The findings of this literature review are available on our website.

### Tips for teaching ESOL to literacy students

In 2009, we put tips on teaching ESOL literacy students on our website. By ESOL literacy students we mean students who have literacy difficulties in their mother tongue and are now focusing on both language and literacy development in English.

Ifrah Ahmed and Anne Trinder from *Written Off?*





Fergus Murphy, CEO, EBS, Inez Bailey, Director, NALA, Minister Mary Hanafin and Teresa Gilligan, Adult Literacy Organiser and winner of the 2009 ACE Awards.

## **Supporting outstanding literacy projects**

The aim of the Adult Continuing Education (ACE) Awards is to help identify and support research into new approaches to adult literacy teaching and this year's winner is a great example of just that. 'A B Sea', County Galway VEC's project aimed at supporting early school leavers involved in the fishing industry is targeted directly at Ireland's fishermen to help support them in meeting the regulatory requirements of the EU Common Fisheries Policy.

As overall winners, Galway's 'A B Sea' project was awarded a €10,000 grant by EBS Building Society to further develop and publish their research, which identifies the specific literacy-based needs of the fishing community. Findings from the project will be shared with other adult literacy providers and will help to influence good practice across the adult literacy sector. It is hoped that the provision of the grant will ensure that VECs and other adult literacy groups in fishing towns around the country can read about the project and further develop their own practice.

## Computers for Learning

In February 2009, Perlico, a leading provider of telecoms, broadband and related services in the Irish market, donated 50 computers, valued at €15,000, to NALA especially for computer-based literacy initiatives. During 2009 we loaned the computers to students to support our distance learning work. More recently, we launched a new blended learning project where literacy centres can apply to use the computers in blended learning scenarios using [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) in 2010. We will work closely with these centres to research how basic literacy learners interact with and use ICT in improving their skills.

Student's Stephen Cullen, Mandy Kennedy and Anne Aherne help announce donation from Perlico.

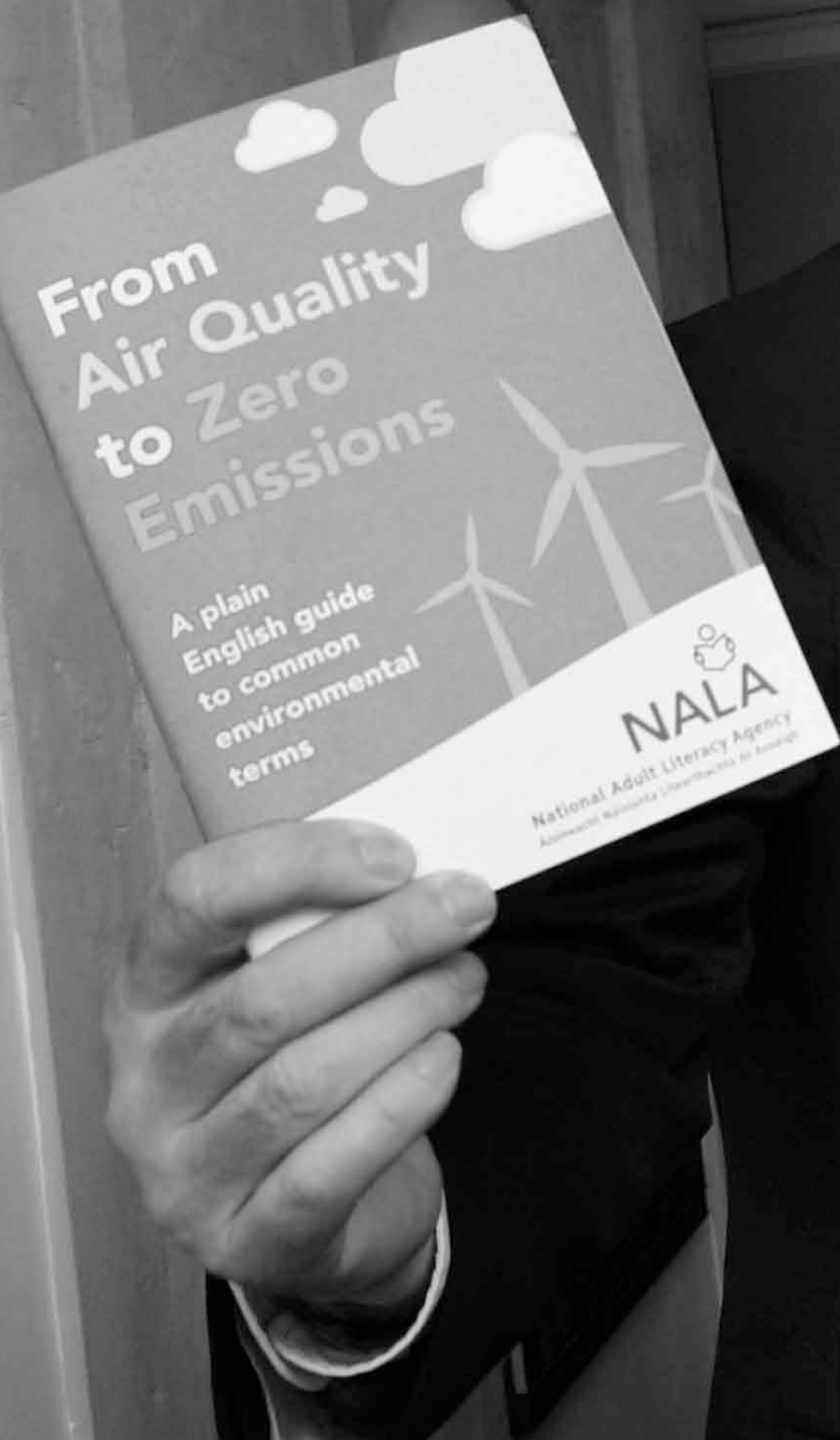


# Organisations

In the current economic climate, businesses and other organisations face particular challenges in ensuring that the public can fully understand their services and that staff can contribute effectively.

Having a literacy difficulty often prevents staff and potential customers from carrying out a range of everyday activities. Throughout 2009 NALA worked with a number of organisations to make them more accessible to people with literacy difficulties.

John Gormley, Minister for the Environment launches  
NALA's new guide to environmental terms.



## **Literacy and numeracy advisory service**

In March 2009, we launched our Literacy Advisory Service to help organisations take greater account of literacy issues – and respond appropriately – when dealing with customers and staff who may have literacy difficulties.

The service brings together our existing supports, such as plain English, literacy awareness training, integrating literacy into training and referral to workplace basic education programmes. In particular, it offers advice, information and support to help organisations:

- review their policies, practices and procedures,
- deliver effective training and development in a literacy aware way, and
- communicate effectively through awareness of literacy issues and using plain English.

The first resource produced by the service – and launched in late March – is a how-to guide to taking a ‘whole organisation’ approach to addressing literacy difficulties, titled *Right from the Start*.

Since the launch, a number of large organisations have requested copies of the guide and have expressed an interest in working with us.

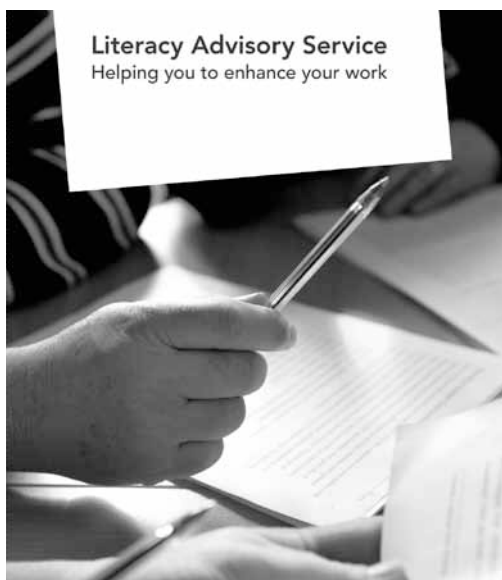
In autumn 2009, we provided a range of literacy awareness and plain English courses. This included three literacy awareness training workshops for staff in Galway County Council and a workshop on integrating literacy into training for staff at An Cosan. We also provided four courses to staff in the Department of Social and Family Affairs in Dublin, Longford and Sligo. These courses covered both literacy awareness and, in particular, plain English tips for communicating clearly with the public.

## New DVD explains why it makes good business sense to address literacy in the workplace

As part of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week, we produced a promotional DVD to encourage organisations to respond to the needs of adults with literacy difficulties. Often, lack of literacy awareness can lead organisations to communicate with the public, recruit and train staff and provide customer service in ways that make it hard for adults with literacy difficulties to engage with them fully, either as employees or as customers.

Presented by broadcaster and journalist Gavin Duffy, most recently from RTÉ1's Dragons' Den, the DVD introduces organisations to a number of literacy-friendly approaches and their benefits. The approaches include offering workplace basic education, using plain English for written information, arranging literacy awareness training for key customer service staff, integrating literacy into staff training and development and devising appropriate policies and procedures for the whole organisation.

Jim Aughney, Chairperson, Business Journalists Association of Ireland speaking at the launch of NALA's Literacy Advisory Service, and the front cover of the new Right from the Start guide.



## **Demand continues for plain English service**

Our plain English service continued to work with a number of organisations, mostly in the public sector, on their public information. Organisations that availed of our editing service include:

- Ombudsman for Children's Office,
- Road Safety Authority,
- Mental Health Commission,
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara,
- Communications Regulator,
- Merck Sharp & Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd,
- National Cancer Screening Service,
- Irish Hospice Foundation,
- Medical Council,
- Irish Council for Civil Liberties,
- Office for the Director of Public Prosecutions, and
- Competition Authority.

Aside from providing training to the Department of Social and Family Affairs, we held two open plain English training courses in spring 2009 and provided a half-day course specifically for the Ombudsman for Children's Office in May.

### **Increasing our expertise**

In June 2009, the Department of Education Development in Cork Institute of Technology was awarded a contract to review theories behind plain English and other information design guidelines.

We wanted to identify and assess the link between international plain English guidelines and how people interact with information – for example, how they read or scan pages, how they pick out key messages from sentences, how visuals aid understanding and why certain layouts are easy on the eye.

The research report, produced in late November 2009, traces the history of plain language from the 1930s onwards and looks into the psychological fields of cognitivism and behaviourism, among others, to explain why information is presented in particular ways. It also explores instructional design, usability and accessibility and makes a number of recommendations for further possible information guidelines.

We plan to use the report as a starting point for further research and include extracts on our website and in our training manuals in 2010.

### **The impact of a whole organisation approach to literacy**

A research project took place within a community-based organisation, the Fingal Centre, to explore the process and impact of integrating literacy into an organisation whose activities are implemented in a community setting. In the course of this project, the policies, procedures and general approach to service provision in the Centre were analysed from a literacy perspective. The evaluation report is due to be published in early 2010.



## **Literacy is the best remedy**

Many people who deal effectively with other aspects of their lives find health information difficult to obtain, understand or use. NALA seeks to make the Irish health service 'literacy-friendly', where both the skills of individuals and the literacy demands of the health service are analysed. We want to see a health service where literacy difficulties are not a barrier to access.

### **NALA/HSE Health literacy audit and health literacy DVD**

In 2009, as part of our ongoing work with the HSE, we produced a health literacy audit to help healthcare workers understand the literacy needs of patients better and offer guidance to make health care settings and practices more accessible. Alongside the audit, we produced a health literacy awareness DVD called 'Better health, better communication'. These resources are welcome additions for people working in healthcare settings.

### **NALA/MSD partnership promotes greater awareness of health literacy**

In February, NALA and MSD invited Dr Rima Rudd, a senior lecturer at the Harvard School of Public Health, to speak at three high-level roundtable meetings for people working in the health sector. Representatives from key healthcare administration organisations and academics came together to discuss the issue of health literacy in Ireland and agreed that a national policy on health literacy was urgently needed to address the matter. The representatives from the Irish Cancer Society, Arthritis Ireland, the Irish Heart Foundation, Debra Ireland and the St Vincent de Paul saw that their position afforded them the opportunity to drive forward the health literacy agenda in this country. They also agreed that literacy proofing of all healthcare communications is vital to ensure equity of care.

### **135 entries to Health Literacy Awards**

Alice Leahy, Director of TRUST, was the overall winner at the second Crystal Clear Health Literacy Awards in April which recognises excellence in health literacy. At the awards people working in the health care arena were commended for their efforts in communicating with patients in a clear and accessible way. Alice, who was appointed to the Irish Human Rights Commission in 2006, was awarded at a ceremony in Dublin, where six other organisations were recognised for their efforts to communicate clearly with the public.

Alice Leahy holds her Crystal Clear Health Literacy Award with Jennifer Lynch, NALA and Dr. Neil Boyle, Managing Director, MSD.



Some of the awards in various categories included: St. Mary's Hospital for the 'Lifestory Project,' designed to help those who find it difficult to communicate due to depression or dementia; Ana Liffey Drug Project for the *Duck, Dive and Survive* series of information leaflets; The Women's Health Council for the booklet *Menopause: A Guide*; St Michael's House for the *Live and Let Die* Bereavement and Loss Programme; the Irish Society for Quality and Safety in Healthcare for the *Let's Talk Medication Safety* educational booklet and the HSE Health Promotion Service for their *3-Week Menu Plan* for pre-school services. The Crystal Clear Awards are part of the MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative, which is a collaborative project between NALA and Merck Sharp and Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd.

Over 135 entries were received this year, each one focusing on health literacy.

## **NALA secures funding for European Health Literacy Survey**

In February, we met with Minister for Health, Mary Harney, TD, to discuss health literacy policy in Ireland and the need for Irish research in this area. We believe that Irish research into health literacy is necessary to develop an evidence base for addressing a number of key but unanswered questions in Ireland. Following this meeting, the Minister supported NALA's application to the Irish Lotto fund for €45,000 to enable Ireland's participation in the European Health Literacy Survey as a full partner. UCD agreed to manage this project for the Department and NALA has met and liaised with the Project Manager, Dr Gerardine Doyle, on a number of occasions to advance the project.

## Busting financial jargon

The NALA/ EBS Financial Literacy programme has been highly influential in tackling barriers to financial literacy and in addressing the issue of access to financial services for those with literacy difficulties. In 2009 we built on this work by conducting new research on how the use of jargon by banks and financial institutions can be a barrier to people accessing their services.

With banks and financial groups coming under scrutiny throughout the year, it was no surprise that this new research received extensive coverage in the media. It revealed that 89% of respondents would prefer if banks used less financial jargon and more plain English in their communications. The research, commissioned by NALA in partnership with the EBS Building Society, also found that over a fifth of respondents would switch financial institution if they provided their information in a more user-friendly manner.

We also updated our plain English guide to financial terms to make it more relevant to the current economic climate. 'Recession', 'credit crunch', 'guarantee' and 'subprime' are just some of the terms explained in this year's edition of the A-Z of financial terms. Developed under the NALA/ EBS Financial Literacy programme, the new guide is a fantastic resource that helps to explain the jargon used everyday about financial products and services. It was no surprise that it was one of our most requested books at the National Ploughing Championships in Athy.



# Effectiveness

Throughout 2009 NALA continued to review how it works and how it uses its resources.

## Strengthening NALA's effectiveness

### A review of our organisational structure and costs

Our main achievement in this area was the mid-term review of our strategic plan in early February 2009. Involving all staff, this assessed the changing social and economic landscape since we agreed our strategic plan and identified the challenges we face as an organisation. Emerging from this were a number of priority issues and proposals, particularly the need to adapt our advocacy initiatives and our aim to reduce costs. Since the mid-term review, we have continued to identify and implement ways of working more cost-effectively, including:

- moving towards more online publications rather than printed,
- where relevant, updating and repurposing existing content for resources rather than engaging authors to create new content from scratch, and
- reducing the volume of NALA publications held in storage to reduce fees

Other work under this project included developing a manual on organisational governance for members of our Executive Committee, updating our staff manual on day-to-day procedures, reviewing and updating job descriptions and, in March, completing a feasibility study into granting staff performance-based rewards. The study found that they were not feasible both from a financial and administration point of view.

### Develop and implement a 'balanced scorecard' as a way of assessing our work

From January to early April 2009 we developed a balanced scorecard for our operations. The balanced scorecard is a tool to keep score of an organisation's performance across four areas – meeting stakeholders' needs, using internal processes effectively, fulfilling financial requirements and applying learning – all while achieving strategic goals. For NALA, the scorecard is intended to help us record our progress, and ultimately, assess the effectiveness of our work until the end of 2010.

The scorecards have reinforced the value of our strategies in completing the work under our strategic plan by the end of 2010. They have also helped us to assess whether our efforts are meeting the needs of those

we work with – be they policy makers, literacy practitioners, project funders or our members – and identify our strengths and areas for improvement across the Agency.

### **Implement a staff and Executive Committee training and development programme**

Under this project, we organised a staff training day in late April and funded staff to attend specific courses for their work. Examples include an MA in Adult and Community Education (NUI, Maynooth), a Certificate in Personnel Practice (National College of Ireland) and an MA in Social Justice and Public Policy (Dublin City University, through All Hallows College).

In September 2009, our Executive Committee was briefed on our new governance manual, outlining NALA's structure and the roles and legal responsibilities of board members.

### **NALA improves benefits to members**

During the year we continued to develop benefits for members, such as discounts for NALA conferences and events, Irish publications in NALA's resource room and NALA publications, Literacy Awareness Training and Plain English services. Members have also been sent usernames and passwords for using the NALA website and can now renew their membership online. NALA continues to improve how we communicate with members and we began a small survey with student members in 2009 to inform our work.

### **Resource room**

Based in the Dublin office, the NALA resource room has continued to be widely used by all those involved in tutoring adults in various settings. These have included the VEC adult literacy schemes, senior traveller training centres, prison education, FÁS community training centres, the National Learning Network, VTOS centres, Youthreach centres, ESOL providers and many others. We have dealt with an average of 381 orders by post, fax, email and telephone so far this year. We also received 311 orders for free NALA resources.

## **NALA administration team**

2009 was a busy year for the NALA administration team as they provided support to all sections of the Agency. 6,507 telephone queries have been dealt with through the NALA main line number in 2009 and 150 customers have visited the NALA Dublin office seeking information and resource materials.

The administration team facilitated at many events throughout the year including:

- 2009 NALA AGM
- the NALA literacy policy conference
- Integrating literacy in further education and training conference
- launch of the Written Off? TV series
- 2009 ACE Awards
- launch of National Literacy Awareness Week
- family literacy information morning
- presentation of certificates to distance education learners
- launch of the Plain English Guide to Environmental Terms
- launch of NALA's Literacy Advisory Service

In addition, the administration team has played an active role in helping NALA development staff organise events such as Dublin and Cork student days, the Social Action Conference, Curriculum for Adult Literacy event, the Tutors' Forum, ALOs' Forum, NALA ESOL Conference and the Family Literacy Conference.

The administration staff spent a large part of the year on the initial work of a new NALA contacts database which aims to make the Agency's postal and email mailings more efficient, as well as contributing towards the redeveloped NALA website. The website now includes an online shop where anyone can purchase literacy materials and also offers soft copies of NALA resources.

# Structure and funding

NALA membership is open to all people and organisations interested and involved in adult literacy development. At our annual general meeting, members elect an Executive Committee, which makes sure that our aims are put into practice. The Executive Committee includes students and tutors, Adult Literacy Organisers and people involved in adult and further education and training.

NALA is a registered company with limited and charitable status. We receive a grant from the Department of Education and Science (DES) that enables us to staff a national and regional office. The DES also fund specific research and development work together with other Government departments, FÁS, Department of Social and Family Affairs, HSE and other state bodies, the European Union and the private sector.

**A copy of NALA's full audited accounts and further details of our organisation's structure, staff and executive committee, and all publications can be viewed or downloaded on [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie).**

# Values

## **1. Literacy as a human right and tool for change**

NALA believes that the option to develop literacy skills is a fundamental human right for adults with literacy needs.

NALA promotes inclusive policies and literacy practices across all organisations and their services. We are committed to using literacy to achieve and enhance equality and democracy.

## **2. Respect for equality and diversity**

NALA is committed to applying and promoting equality in all our work.

We will respect and recognise the grounds in equality legislation, together with issues relating to social class, citizenship status and education.

## **3. Involving people with literacy difficulties**

NALA is committed to involving people with literacy difficulties actively in all aspects of our work. We will ensure that their views and experiences give us further insights and are heard and considered by politicians, policy makers and society in general.

## **4. Learning and growth**

NALA values all learning whether through formal, informal or non-formal channels. NALA is committed, through ongoing critical analysis and reflection, to its growth as a learning organisation. We will continue to develop our expertise, evolve in line with changing circumstances and improve how we work.

## **5. Partnership**

We value effective, respectful and expressive collaboration within NALA. We place importance on consulting and co-operating with adult literacy students, practitioners, policy makers, our members and others who have an interest in our work. We value partnerships that are mutually supportive, offer co-ordinated responses to the adult literacy issue and help us achieve our goals effectively.

## **6. Transparency and quality**

We are committed to being open, honest and transparent in our work. We are committed to working cost effectively with respect for the environment and to communicating as clearly as possible.

# Acronyms and abbreviations

## **AGM**

Annual General Meeting

## **ALO**

Adult Literacy Organiser

## **DES**

Department of Education and Science

## **EBS**

EBS Building Society

## **ESOL**

English for Speakers of Other Languages

## **EU**

European Union

## **FÁS**

Foras Aiseanna Saothair – the national training and employment authority

## **FETAC**

Further Education Training Awards Council

## **Forfás**

Forfás is Ireland's national policy advisory body for enterprise and science

## **HSE**

Health Service Executive

## **ICT**

Information and Communications Technology

## **ICTU**

Irish Congress of Trade Unions – the organisation representing all trade unions around the country

## **IVEA**

Irish Vocational Education Association – an organisation representing Vocational Education Committees

## **NGO**

Non-governmental organisation

## **OECD**

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

## **NESF**

National Economic and Social Forum

## **NRDC**

National Research and Development Centre

## **MSD**

Merck Sharp and Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd.

## **PIACC**

Programme for the International Assessment for Adult Competencies

## **SIPTU**

Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union

## **VEC**

Vocational Education Committee – a committee that manages adult and further education at county or any level

## **VTOS**

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

**National Adult Literacy Agency**

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**NALA Cork**

Telephone (021) 427 8655  
Fax (021) 427 8665  
Email [mmurray@nala.ie](mailto:mmurray@nala.ie)

**NALA website:**

[www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

**Literacy learning websites:**

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

**Freephone support line:**

1800 20 20 65



# What's next

## Looking ahead to 2010

**Policy** Realise a refreshed strategy for adult literacy and numeracy building on the support gained from key stakeholders. **Participation** Increase the numbers of people engaged in the full range of tuition options from one-to-one to distance learning through our next TV series and advertising support from An Post. **Practice** Bring new and creative professional development opportunities to practitioners, drawing on international, national and local research and development. **Organisations** Showcase the benefits to business and all those communicating with the public of being literacy friendly. **Effectiveness** Strengthen our internal evaluation through the use of the Balance Scorecard system.

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[www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)



**NALA**

National Adult Literacy Agency  
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh