

# Review

## Our year and our work, 2010

**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 our effectiveness as an organisation.

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**Summary Annual Report 2010**



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



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President Mary McAleese and Dr Martin McAleese talk to students Ann Boyd and Michael Power at NALA's 30th birthday reception in Áras an Uachtaráin.



# What is NALA

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent organisation that:

- is the voice of adults wishing to improve their literacy skills; and
- is committed to raising adult literacy levels.

We are a member-based organisation. Our members are individuals and organisations interested and involved in adult literacy. At our annual general meeting, members elect an Executive Committee, which oversees our work.

We are a limited company with charitable status. We receive a grant from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) that enables us to staff offices in Dublin and Cork. The DES, along with other Government departments, State bodies, the European Union and the private sector, also funds specific research and development work.

## What is this review?

This is a summary annual report of work we did during 2010. You may view and download additional information on our accounts, structure, staff and publications at [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie).

# Overview



The work of NALA throughout 2010 focused on maximising opportunities in a minimal environment. We drew inspiration from the past and kicked off a year of 30th birthday celebrations, woven through our ongoing work.

A screening of the film *Precious* was our first event. This told the story of a young girl struggling in a broken home with poor literacy.

Despite her situation, *Precious*, the name of the film's heroine, battled on with the hope that improving her literacy would enable her to improve her life. For those of us working in the field of adult literacy, and our invited guests from a range of community and voluntary organisations, it was a stark reminder of the importance of literacy in people's lives. While literacy may not be the most pressing need of people who are experiencing hardship, having strong literacy is essential for people to take control of their lives and be independent. The film screening strengthened awareness and action around literacy among organisations working with people in difficulties.

Our birthday celebrations hit their high point with a reception hosted by our patron, President Mary McAleese. The president graciously received 200 guests in Áras an Uachtárain, among them former chairpersons, executive members and staff as well as student and tutor representatives from every Vocational Education Committee (VEC). This was an opportunity for both the President and those involved in NALA today to thank these people and recognise their hard work in the past. It also provided a forum to outline our current messages and keep a wide audience aware of the challenges ahead.





NALA staff on International Literacy Day.

We concluded our celebratory events at our International Literacy Day conference which was addressed by Brigid McManus, Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and a host of other international speakers. Our new advertisements commissioned by An Post were also shown at the event with Barney Whelan, Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs, addressing the audience about the ongoing support that An Post will provide to broadcast the ads over the next few years. Minister Seán Haughey, Minister for Lifelong Learning, gave the closing speech and met with many of the students present from all over Ireland.

During the year we were successful in our bid to gain funding from the Labour Market Activation Fund, one of 26 projects selected from over 350 applicants. This funding enabled us to further develop our existing learning website, [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie). It helped us to provide FETAC Level 3 awards and encourage people who are unemployed and with no qualifications to give the programme a go.

A focus on the unemployed also prompted us to seek a meeting with Minister Éamon Ó Cuív, Minister for Social Protection, to discuss the future of the Return to Education programme. This programme provides basic education support to people on Community Education (CE) schemes. The Minister assured us that the needs of people who are unemployed and have literacy difficulties would be fully met.

We also met Minister Seán Haughey and officials from the Further Education Section of the DES on a number of occasions to outline our views on how best to raise adult literacy levels. Chief among these was the integration of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum in vocational education and training. This work was also advanced with the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) through the setting up of a special working group and building on a joint conference on the topic in late 2009. In a period of uncertainty for the DES in terms of budget and the VECs and FÁS in terms of organisational restructuring, change in a specific area like literacy was very challenging. While the climate of no new developments was difficult to work within, all parties remained committed to the ideal and continued to work to realise it. We were delighted that adult literacy budgets, including those for family and workplace projects, survived the Budget relatively intact.

In the area of literacy practice, the year was very busy with a wide variety of practitioner and student development events. These covered family literacy, numeracy and overcoming barriers to participation, drawing from recent research that we carried out or commissioned. Research at local level also received a boost with the Educational Building Society (EBS) giving a grant to literacy development work being carried out by Youthreach in County Wicklow VEC.

Outside of education and training, health literacy was a focus of attention with the joint publication of the health literacy audit by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and ourselves. The audit, which was the culmination of many years work, has already been used in a number of healthcare settings and we plan to build on these in 2011. A national health literacy conference and the Crystal Clear Awards which we ran in association with Merck Sharpe & Dohme (MSD) helped to raise awareness of health literacy.



Our plain English service bucked the trend and grew during 2010. It received funding from the European Year of Social Inclusion to provide training for organisations working to build social inclusion by making their message more accessible. We also launched a separate website, [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie), to draw together all our plain English resources in one place.

In 2010 we were pleased with the outcome of our publicity work which saw over 7,000 calls to our freephone and almost 10,000 users on [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie). Press coverage, both national and regional, was constant throughout the year and was particularly high during National Literacy Awareness Week as a result of our survey of the public's numeracy skills. We gave interviews to high-profile media programmes including RTÉ's *Morning Ireland* and *The Afternoon Show*.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all our staff for their continued dedication and innovation. Our Executive also worked hard during the year, meeting on 10 occasions and contributing specifically to the review of our work over the last three years and the creation of our new strategic plan. Thank you to them, especially to our chairperson, Michael Power, and all our members who participated in our work during the year. I am also grateful to Seamus Hempenstall and his colleagues in the Further Education Section of the DES for their ongoing support. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Jenny Derbyshire and Margaret Maher, esteemed colleagues who retired during the year and who will be missed.



**Inez Bailey**  
Director, NALA

**“ 2010 saw over 7,000 calls to our freephone and almost 10,000 users on [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) ”**

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# Our key achievements

## Policy

- 1. Published policy briefing papers for our discussions with Ministers and civil servants
- 2. Set up a working group with the IVEA on integrating literacy into other subjects
- 3. Contributed as a member of important national policy groups

## Participation

- 1. Launched major new TV advertising campaign with An Post
- 2. Some 200,617 people each week watched our tenth TV series. Funding for new TV series 2011 secured
- 3. 7,000 calls to our freephone

## Practice

- 1. 600 people attend our conferences
- 2. Over 800 students shared their views with us on a range of topics
- 3. Designed Real World Maths programmes and resources for FÁS and Community Training Centres

## Organisations

- 1. 500 people a month using our new plain English website
- 2. 39 organisations pay for plain English service (up 11 on last year)
- 3. 19 plain English group courses delivered to 12 organisations

4. Made submissions to policy makers and documents

5. First FETAC registered provider of recognition of prior learning at Level 2

6. Met with politicians to outline necessary developments for extending adult literacy learning opportunities

4. 9,450 accounts set up on our e-learning site [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie)

5. Launched major new distance learning project, *Write On 4 Work*, for the unemployed

6. New research on numeracy published

7. 250 mentions of adult literacy in the media

4. Developed and shared new guidelines on how to reduce barriers to participation in learning

5. New research on family literacy published

6. Financial literacy website launched

4. 80 delegates took part in our half-day plain English seminar

5. Two new pieces of research on what organisations can do to support people with literacy difficulties

6. Health Literacy Audits carried out in a range of health settings

# Policy



Securing the support  
of policy makers  
and politicians for  
providing increased  
resources to adult  
literacy and numeracy  
services



For 30 years, we have worked with government departments, education and training providers, adult literacy tutors and students to develop policies to meet the needs of people with literacy difficulties. Our policy work in 2010 involved:

- discussions with Ministers;
- working with officials in the Department of Education and Skills;
- advocating for greater literacy integration;
- developing new guidelines; and
- sharing and developing our expertise.

## Discussions with Ministers

We met and had discussions with both the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Mr Seán Haughey, and the Minister for Social Protection, Mr Éamon Ó Cuív during 2010. The focus of these discussions was on how to make sure that adults with literacy difficulties can continue to address their learning needs. Minister Haughey spoke at a number of our events throughout the year, most notably our International Adult Literacy Day and the launch of our new plain English website, [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie). The priority for discussion with Minister Ó Cuív was the continuation of support for adults with literacy needs within unemployment and community support programmes.



L – R: Minister for Lifelong Learning, Mr Seán Haughey and student, Kevin O'Duffy, speaking at NALA's International Literacy Day conference in September.

# Working with officials in the Department of Education and Skills (DES)

We also met Minister Seán Haughey and officials from the Further Education Section of the DES a number of times to outline our views on how best to raise adult literacy levels. Our top message was the need to integrate literacy and numeracy across the curriculum in vocational education and training.

**“ Our top message was the need to integrate literacy and numeracy across the curriculum in vocational education and training. ”**

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## Advocating for greater literacy integration

In 2010, we continued to advocate strongly for improved adult literacy policy, particularly the integration of literacy into all publicly-funded education and training. We continued our ongoing co-operation with the VEC sector. We worked with the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), which represents VECs, to advance a strategy to support integrating literacy across programmes for adults. We provided briefings and contributed to dialogue with three key groups – the IVEA-VEC Adult Literacy Forum, the IVEA-NALA Integrating Literacy Group, and the Intensive Tuition Adult Basic Education (ITABE) National Advisory Group.

## Developing new guidelines

We also worked with the Department of Education and Skills and the IVEA to develop guidelines for screening and initial assessment of literacy needs in the recruitment phase of further education courses. These guidelines are intended for VEC providers of further education programmes for adults. They state that there must be a range of approaches to cater for all contexts. We also held bilateral meetings with FÁS about supporting literacy integration in its programmes.

## Sharing and developing our expertise

### Participation in important policy groups

Our director, Inez Bailey, sits on a range of policy groups including:

- the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs; and
- the Upskilling Co-ordination Group, chaired by the Department of Education and Skills.

As well as this, we made submissions to a range of policy makers and policy documents including consultation documents on:

- the recognition of prior learning;
- EU Guidelines for Basic Skills; and,
- the Delivering Equal Opportunities in Schools (DEIS) Family Literacy report.

We also worked with the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) to make sure that its accreditation processes suit people with literacy difficulties and that communications is specifically covered in general learning programmes at FETAC Level 3.

### Our expertise in Europe

As part of the EU Action Plan on Lifelong Learning, John Stewart, National Literacy Co-ordinator, took part in the peer learning activity on basic skills organised by the European Commission in Norway in March. Our input is evident in the follow-up report. This report informed the development of guidelines for basic skills which is due to be published in early 2011.

Helen Ryan, Policy Officer, represented us at the conference that launched the European Basic Skills Network in June 2010. This conference, organised by Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, included representatives from many EU member states. Vox was very interested in our distance learning work while we were interested in the various projects presented at the conference.

## **Hosted conference**

During National Adult Literacy Awareness Week, we held a conference on International Adult Literacy Day. This had a strong policy focus on the role of adult basic education in responding to the current economic downturn, with presentations from:

- Brigid McManus, Secretary General, Department of Education and Skills. She provided a useful outline of developments in the education and training sector in Ireland with particular emphasis on policy and adult literacy;
- Alan Tuckett, Chief Executive, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), who gave an overview of the UK sector;
- John Martin, OECD Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, who gave an overview of the main labour market trends in OECD countries during the recent recession. He drew attention to the risk of persistent long-term unemployment and its links with low literacy.

## **Paid learning leave (PLL)**

In 2010, we continued to advocate for paid learning leave from work for employees with less than a FETAC Level 4 qualification. This option is already in operation in other countries. We updated our policy paper on this and circulated it to key players for feedback. We also raised and discussed PLL during meetings with employers, trade unions and community and voluntary sector organisations.

## **Increasing our policy expertise**

We worked with The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy Development in the UK to produce an up-to-date review of international adult literacy policy. This will be published in February 2011.





Brigid McManus, Secretary General, Department of Education and Skills speaking at our conference on International Literacy Day.



John Martin, OECD Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, and Barney Whelan, Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs, An Post, speaking at our conference on International Literacy Day.

# Participation



Making it easier for more adults to develop their literacy and numeracy through education and training programmes

People with literacy and numeracy difficulties are less likely to take part in education and training. New approaches are needed to enable them to overcome barriers to accessing, taking part and achieving success in adult and further education and training. Our contribution to this in 2010 was to:

- use TV to increase participation;
- provide a distance learning service;
- publish research on numeracy;
- organise or attend key events;
- promote literacy in the press.

## Using TV to increase participation

### **New TV ads encourage people to 'Take the first step'**

At the start of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week (September 6-10), An Post in partnership with NALA, launched a major new TV advertising campaign with a view to encouraging and facilitating more adults improve their numeracy and literacy skills. There was extensive research with literacy students to develop the new advertisements, which profile three people who have overcome their problems with writing and maths. They include:

- a woman who learns to write her first birthday card;
- a young man who writes an email to his brother in Australia; and
- a father who left school early but went back to education and can now help his daughter with her homework.



The advertisements focus on the benefits of returning to further education and show that this issue is not confined to any particular group of people.

To see the ads, go to <http://www.youtube.com/user/nationaladultliterac>

The campaign was a huge success; in the first two weeks, more than 1,000 people contacted adult education services by ringing our freephone support line.

**Our TV series attracts callers**

Our TV series, *Stuck for Words*, helped to channel thousands of callers seeking help with their literacy difficulties to our freephone and to the VEC Adult Literacy Service.

This year marked our 10th year of programming on RTÉ One television. Our six-part TV series, *Stuck for Words*, was broadcast on Mondays at 7.30 pm on RTÉ One from 10 May to 14 June 2010. The series featured nine learners telling their stories. The purpose of the series was to break down barriers to participation in learning. On average, the series attracted 203,617 viewers each week, representing 16.81% of the viewing public. This was our highest-rated TV series yet.

Our 2009 TV series, *Written Off?*, was shown again on Sunday mornings. Again, this increased the number of people calling our freephone service for information on literacy learning opportunities.

**“ On average, our *Stuck for Words* TV series attracted 203,617 viewers each week, representing 16.81% of the viewing public. ”**

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Stars of *Stuck for Words*: Chantelle Harcourt (18) and Anthony Fynes (16), both students at Bonnybrook Youthreach in Coolock, Co Dublin

### **Secured funding for another TV series**

We secured funding from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and RTÉ for a new TV series in 2011. Its working title is *A Book with Me In It*. This six-part documentary series will follow the lives of a number of learners as they work with well-known Irish writers to develop creative writing pieces. It will be broadcast on RTÉ One in May and June 2011 at 7.30pm.

### **Providing a distance learning service**

More than 600 learners engaged with our distance learning service during the year. This service involves a freephone administrator and three freephone operators working from our Dublin office. We also recruited 21 learning support workers and distance learning tutors to work from home with the distance learners.

Ireland's first e-learning site for FETAC Level 2 and more recently Level 3 learners, [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie), has gone from strength to strength. As this report was being written, there were more than 9,450 distinct learning accounts. This includes almost 6,000 new accounts set up in 2010. An evaluation of our distance learning service focusing on learners' experiences of using [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) has been published in early 2011.

**“ 9,450 students are using  
our e-learning site,  
[www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie). ”**

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Some 315 learners received a total of 1,424 FETAC Level 2 minor awards and 142 Level 2 Certificates in General Learning. These included independent learners and learners working in 14 different learning centres across Ireland.

### **More opportunities to get qualifications**

During 2010 we secured the first FETAC-validated programme at Level 3 and, at the time of writing, we are the only registered provider of RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) at FETAC Level 2.

### **Mixing it up with blended learning**

Our distance learning service also ran a blended learning project in 12 centres during 2010. Blended learning means a mix of teaching and learning techniques, usually face-to-face teaching and computer-based learning. We distributed 38 laptops donated by Perlico to the 12 centres in return for them taking part in surveys and site visits around their usage of [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie). On visits we monitor how students and tutors are using the website and invite them to identify areas for improvements. We see blended learning options as an important part of the opportunities available to people who wish to get qualifications.



Patrick Fitzpatrick (better known as Zumo from Fair City) launches NALA's new online programme, Write on 4 Work.

## Major new distance learning project funded by the Labour Market Activation Fund

In 2010, we launched an online FETAC Level 3 project funded by the Labour Market Activation Fund. Called *Write On 4 Work*, it is our distance learning programme for unemployed adults. We offered 500 free places to unemployed adults who wished to improve their skills and gain a qualification at FETAC Level 3. People who are employed can also benefit.

*Write On 4 Work* offers 11 minor awards including computer literacy, health and safety awareness, maths and career preparation. Learners can also work towards major awards in general learning, information and communication technology and employability at Level 3.

We did extensive promotion of Write On 4 Work with our partners:

- Department of Social Protection
- IVEA
- Irish Local Development Network
- Citizens Information Board
- Skillnets
- the Library Council
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)
- FÁS
- St Vincent de Paul
- AONTAS, and
- the National Centre for Guidance in Education.

Based on the new FETAC awards, *Write On 4 Work* builds on our existing interactive learning website, [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie), and access to a distance learning tutor over the telephone or online. The site went live in October. Seán Haughey, Minister for Lifelong Learning, formally launched the site in November.

The *Write On 4 Work* programme will run until June 2011 when it will be externally evaluated. The programme is supported by the Department of Education and Skills through the Labour Market Activation Fund and the European Social Fund.

## Publishing research on numeracy

Our research on mathematics showed that 40% of Irish people have problems doing everyday maths. This made headline news in the national newspapers, radio and TV and we used the research results to launch National Adult Literacy Awareness Week in September.

The research was reassuring for many people with literacy difficulties as it showed that they are not the only ones to have problems with maths. The research asked 1,000 adults how to do two maths questions taken from the primary school curriculum and four basic calculations that people would need to do on a daily basis. Some 40% of participants got half or all of the questions wrong. Men did slightly better than women but education level was the strongest factor determining correct responses among the public. The research showed that those who leave education early are most likely to struggle with numeracy.

**“ 40% of Irish people  
have problems doing  
everyday maths. ”**

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## Organising or attending events

We promoted people participating in adult literacy learning through events such as our International Literacy Day conference and our stand at the National Ploughing Championships in Athy.

### International Literacy Day

More than 100 people involved in adult literacy provision in Ireland and other key stakeholders in education and training attended our International Adult Literacy Conference, held in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham in Dublin.

The morning session focussed on raising awareness of the role of adult basic education interventions in the current downturn. There was a prestigious line-up of speakers. The afternoon session gave information on new teaching methods and practices for the adult literacy sector. You can read about this in the Practice section.



Students at the Ploughing Championships in Athy.

## Literacy students at the Ploughing Championships

Nine adult literacy students, mainly from our student sub-committee, took part in a huge awareness campaign at the National Ploughing Championships in September in Co. Kildare. Around 182,000 people attended the championships over three days. A significant number of them met students – Alison Hickey, Breda Kavanagh, Frank Locke, Kevin O'Duffy, Mandy Kennedy, Martina Lawlor, Michael Power, Olive Phelan and Peggy Murphy – at the NALA stand. The students said it was a fantastic awareness-raising event. They felt their presence as students had a huge impact.

The students did an interview on Farm TV, a TV network targeted exclusively at farmers. The interview was shown nine times on a large screen during the championships. The initial response from the public was very positive.

**If you would like to read more about this event, go to the publications section of [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie) and see *Literacy Matters* Winter 2010.**



## Promoting literacy in the press

In 2010, we worked with a range of media, setting up interviews with literacy students and specialists, issuing press releases and policy statements, and answering questions related to adult literacy. The Irish media were very supportive in reporting literacy issues. They were also hugely influential in both encouraging adults with literacy difficulties to return to learning and explaining what literacy means for wider social and economic development in Ireland.

There were more than 250 mentions of adult literacy and NALA in the press. The breakdown was as follows:

- 67 articles in national broadsheets, tabloids and Sunday papers;
- 160 articles in regional papers;
- 30 articles in the trade press and TV guides.



Tom Walsh, Kieran Kane and Martin O'Shea from Kilkenny, all featured in the TV series *Stuck for Words*.



Anita Hopkins, student and  
star of *Stuck for Words*.



The broadcast media were also very supportive, with students and staff doing national and regional radio interviews throughout the year. There were also pieces about literacy on RTÉ and TV3 News. Examples include:

### **National TV**

- The Six-One News on RTÉ did a special on our ACE literacy awards.
- The Afternoon Show, also on RTÉ, interviewed participants of our TV programme, *Stuck for Words*.
- TV3 News interviewed adult literacy students.

### **National Radio**

- The *Ray Darcy Show* on Today FM interviewed *Stuck for Words* participants.
- *Newstalk* and *Morning Ireland* interviewed our director, Inez Bailey.
- *Newstalk* broadcast a documentary on literacy by Francesca Lawlor.

### **Regional Radio**

- Our staff did about 50 regional radio interviews during the year.

Following radio and TV coverage during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week, we received a significant number of calls from adults wishing to improve their literacy.

**“ You don’t realise until you get older the things you missed out on. I mean you’re not going to go anywhere in life without an education. ”**

Anita Hopkins, student and star of *Stuck for Words*.

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# Practice



Making approaches to  
teaching and learning  
more effective

Good practice in adult literacy starts with the needs and interests of people. Our work in this area is closely guided by *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work* (2005). To promote good practice in 2010, we:

- ran professional conferences and seminars;
- supported and facilitated adult literacy student development;
- assisted centres to develop an 'integrating literacy' approach;
- supported outstanding literacy projects;
- did research;
- developed a new financial literacy website;
- shared and developed our expertise.

## Conferences and seminars

In 2010, we held six new and exciting forums and conferences on adult literacy, all based on *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work* (2005). Over 600 people attended. The events were:

- a national forum for adult literacy tutors with the theme of developing curriculum with students in adult literacy. Some 160 tutors attended. The highlight was an informative and encouraging presentation from a student and tutor from the KLEAR Adult Education Centre in Kilbarrack, Co. Dublin on KLEAR's approach to curriculum development;
- a national forum for adult literacy organisers (ALOs). The theme was the adult literacy service in a changing landscape with a focus on economic and demographic influences. Around 60 ALOs from 21 VECs attended;
- a conference on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) titled 'Curriculum and class content'. This event drew 70 people and highlighted the wider issues of ESOL such as curriculum and professional development and embedding ESOL into other subjects;



Pip Kings, London Strategic Unit for the Learning and Skills Workforce at the NRDC speaking at NALA's International Literacy Day conference.



- a family literacy event titled 'Listening to parents: building curriculum in family learning'. This event showed that children can use their knowledge in the area of technology to teach their parents digital skills, which creates a two-way flow of teaching and learning. Some 76 people attended;
- a numeracy event, 'Count me in: Developing numeracy teaching and learning, numeracy and literacy'. A total of 75 people came to this event. Bill Lynch, Director, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA, presented Project Maths which is designed to change the way mathematics is taught and learned. The project emphasises the importance of understanding mathematics by using it in meaningful ways. The main strategy is to introduce a story that engages the minds of the learners.
- our International Literacy Day conference, 'Skills for Life' focused on improving practice in the afternoon. Over a 100 people came to this event.

**You can download reports on these conferences from our website, [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie).**



Bernie McKeivitt, Adult Literacy Organiser, Meath VEC asks a question at NALA's International Literacy Day Conference.

## Student development work

In *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work* (2005), we state: 'The contribution of learners has always been central to the development of adult literacy work at both national and local level.' Our main work with students in 2010 involved our student development days, student development fund, student sub-committee and financial support for the Evolving Quality Framework.

### Student development days

Some 165 students from 11 counties came to our student development days in 2010. This was twice the number who came in 2009 although similar to the number of students who attended in 2008. In 2010, we held two student development days, one in Dublin and one in Cork. The theme was voter education. The morning focused on what voting means in Ireland today and how to vote. The afternoon activities included a mock election, an update on literacy developments and an input by the Adult Education and Guidance Initiative.

Students told us they enjoyed the days. For the first time, we did a small follow-up study with a number of these students and some adult literacy organisers. This was really useful in helping us to understand the real impact of the student days.

### Student development fund

In 2010, we had 38 applications for our student development fund. The fund supports learning at various levels. Some adult literacy centres used the grant to organise specific meetings to gather students' views on pre-set topics; however, most used the grant for social or educational events and activities. More than 800 students from around the country shared their views on family literacy, their experience of FETAC accreditation and our distance learning service.



## **Our student sub-committee**

There are 12 students on the sub-committee as well as Frances Ward, an adult literacy organiser in City of Dublin VEC. Frances represents the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA).

The student sub-committee did a range of work in 2010 including:

- contributing to the development of our next strategic plan; and
- helping to plan and evaluate events such as the student development days and National Adult Literacy Awareness Week.

Bridie Daly, a member of the sub-committee, represented Irish adult literacy students at the European Parliament in Brussels.

## **Support of the Evolving Quality Framework**

Our role regarding the Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education has been the administration of grants to support its use. The framework is a self-evaluation tool which allows local teams in adult literacy services to assess the quality of their work in a structured way. In 2010, we received 20 applications for grants from centres around the country. We believe that the quality framework and its participative way of working is now embedded in practice and will no longer need financial support.

## **Student development impact research**

We commissioned research to find out the value of our student development work from 2007 to 2010. This report will be completed in early 2011.

## **Integrating literacy**

Our integrating literacy work aims to overcome barriers to access, participation and success on further education and training programmes by people with literacy difficulties. It also aims to help providers to build literacy and numeracy development into the main content and activities of their programmes. This helps make programmes more inclusive and the teaching and learning of the main subject or skill more effective. It also helps develop literacy and numeracy skills and confidence.

In 2010, we were pleased to work again with FÁS and community training centres, this time to provide support for using an integrated, 'real world' approach to the teaching and learning of mathematics. We worked on this project in partnership with the National Centre for Excellence in Mathematics and Science, University of Limerick, and with Dr Terry Maguire, Head of Lifelong Learning, Institute of Technology, Tallaght.

The project involved designing and producing two teaching and learning programmes and two sets of associated resource packs for tutors and learners. It also involved the design of a professional development programme for staff on how to use the programme materials as part of an integrated, 'real world' approach to mathematics. The programmes and resource materials are mapped to FETAC award specifications for Level 3 Application of Number and Level 4 Mathematics.

## Supporting outstanding literacy projects

'Liter-a-Teen', a project aimed at teenage literacy students, was awarded the prestigious 2010 EBS/NALA Adults Continuing Education (ACE) Award for its innovative work. The Co. Wicklow VEC Youthreach, which developed the project, was awarded a research grant of €10,000 by the EBS at an awards ceremony held in Dublin.

There are very few educational materials geared specifically to teenagers with literacy difficulties. This project aimed to explore the literacy needs of teenagers in Ireland and to develop age-appropriate teaching and learning material. Findings from the project will be shared with other adult literacy tutors and will help influence good practice across the adult literacy sector.

Yasmin Fortune of Wicklow Youthreach, Co. Wicklow VEC was awarded €10,000 in the EBS/ NALA ACE Awards for her 'Liter-a-Teen' project aimed at supporting teenage literacy students.



Other ACE prize-winners included:

- South West Dublin Adult Learning Centre, City of Dublin VEC, for its project on how best to use adult literacy voluntary tutors; and
- ABLES Adult Literacy Scheme in Cork City which proposed to set up a literacy tutor response unit for parents and children using mobile phones.

## Research work

### New guidelines developed

One of our goals is to conduct research into reducing barriers to participation in adult literacy and numeracy tuition. In 2010, we produced a briefing paper that summarised the research carried out since 2007 and gave guidelines on how to reduce barriers at a local level. The guidelines were developed from the research and a consultation with adult literacy organisers and adults with literacy difficulties. We sent the guidelines along with a supporting poster to adult literacy organisers and other key stakeholders.

The research has enhanced and deepened our knowledge and understanding of the barriers adults face when returning to education. It has been designed to inform adult literacy practitioners, providers and policy makers about the barriers to participation in adult literacy tuition and how they might reduce these barriers or their impact. The research findings will allow us and other key stakeholders to plan our policies and practices in a more targeted, rigorous and effective manner.

**Our briefing paper and other research reports are available to download free from [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie).**

## **New research on family literacy**

We identified the need for more research on effective teaching and learning methods for adult and family literacy. We wanted to know more about the growing literacy demands and changing practices which families with literacy difficulties face every day. Our focus was from the perspective of the adult. We think that family literacy work is a broader concept than the needs and demands of schoolwork.

With this in mind, in 2010 we commissioned and carried out two new pieces of research:

1. research that explored parents' attitudes, perceptions, knowledge and understanding of family literacy and identified any perceived benefits and value of engaging in a family literacy programme; and
2. research with adult literacy services to broaden our knowledge, understanding and expertise in terms of family literacy provision and uptake in Ireland.

In October 2010, the German Federal Literacy Association invited us to take part in a conference on family literacy in Frankfurt. The conference served as a platform for an international exchange of experience and provided an opportunity for networking with different national literacy institutions. The NALA research officer attended the conference and gave an overview of family literacy in Ireland with a particular focus on the research NALA has carried out in this area.

**“ We think that family literacy work is a broader concept than the needs and demands of schoolwork. ”**

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## Research on adult literacy learners

In early 2010, NALA made representation to the Department of Education and Skills to carry out an analysis of the adult literacy returns data provided each year by the VECs. NALA and the Department agreed to develop a statistical profile of adult literacy learners in Ireland from 2000 to 2008. This work should be completed in spring 2011.

## New financial literacy website

In March 2010, we launched a new online financial education resource, [www.makingcents.ie](http://www.makingcents.ie), with our long-term partners, EBS. The website brings together all the financial literacy resources developed by the EBS and ourselves. These are now more easily accessible to the public. The website also forms part of the EBS's and our commitment to the Financial Regulator to develop and publish free resource materials aimed at supporting adults to develop their financial literacy. The website is aimed at the public and is accessible for people with literacy difficulties. Further financial education resources are available at [www.financialcapability.ie](http://www.financialcapability.ie).

**“ Our new online financial education resource, [www.makingcents.ie](http://www.makingcents.ie), brings together all the financial literacy resources developed by the EBS and ourselves. ”**

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# Sharing and developing our expertise

## At home

Our work with Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) focused on contributing to the management of the NALA / WIT Accreditation Project, particularly the development of the Institute’s new strategic plan. We also co-operated in an EU Grundvig project, where two literacy students, Michael Power and Bridie Daly, represented Irish students on a European network of practitioners and learners.

## Abroad

During 2010, adult literacy policy makers from Australia, Holland and Turkey visited us to learn about our policy, practice and research. They were particularly interested in our distance learning and plain English services.



# Organisations



Persuading organisations  
to be fully accessible to people  
with literacy and numeracy  
difficulties

In 2010, we continued working with organisations to influence and support them to be more accessible to people with literacy difficulties. Our main areas of work were:

- literacy awareness;
- plain English;
- case studies of how organisations can become more literacy friendly; and
- networking and contributing our expertise.

## Literacy awareness

Our literacy advisory service dealt with many organisations during 2010. The plain English element of this service was the most popular but literacy awareness sessions were also in demand. During the year, we delivered 14 literacy awareness training sessions. Feedback was very positive and people have increased awareness of literacy difficulties as a result of these events.

We also followed up with participants through our 'One Small Change' campaign and this was very useful in seeing if and how people had made a change in their work to deal more effectively with people who had literacy difficulties.

## Plain English service

In 2010, the plain English service helped a range of organisations to make their written information easier to understand. Our clients included:

- local authorities such as Galway and Cavan County Councils;
- hospitals and other bodies under the Health Service Executive such as the Crisis Pregnancy Programme and the National Cancer Screening Service;
- public sector bodies such as the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Competition Authority and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland;

- voluntary organisations such as the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the Irish Cancer Society; and
- private companies such as Merck Sharpe & Dohme and AIB.

## **Training, editing and presentations**

We offered 19 group courses to 12 organisations, ranging from 1.5 hour workshops to two-day train-the-trainer sessions. On average there were 10 people at each course. We also provided three one-day open courses in Dublin.

We edited and reviewed documents for 39 organisations. We also made presentations to Dublin City Council, the Local Government Services Social Inclusion Group and the Irish Association for Cardiac Rehabilitation.

## **Half-day plain English seminar**

This was the final event during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week and was funded under the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion to help raise awareness of plain English. It was over-subscribed within a week.

Over 80 delegates took part in workshops and heard presentations from our chair, Michael Power, Helen Cullen from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and Tony Kavanagh from the Transforming Public Service Programme Office.

Although there was a slight fall in editing jobs, we were encouraged that organisations were still contacting us to present to and train staff. We look forward to continuing to raise awareness of plain English through presentations and our new website in 2011.

## **Developing new plain English website**

We developed and launched this website, [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie), as a way of improving our service and a means of presenting all information on plain English in one place. The website has lots of plain English tips and links to resources and overseas plain language websites. It received an average of 500 hits a month from September to December 2010. We are also getting direct requests for editing from users of the site.

## Case studies

There is a shortage of Irish research on what organisations can do to support people with literacy difficulties. In 2010, we contributed two new pieces of research to help fill this gap. The first was a study within a community-based context and the second was a health literacy audit report.

### 1. The impact of a whole organisation approach to literacy

We published *Becoming Literacy-friendly: The Fingal Experience*, a research report based on the Fingal Centre, a community organisation. The project explored the process and impact of integrating literacy into a community organisation. The report analysed from a literacy perspective the policies, procedures and general approach to service provision in the Fingal Centre.

The project showed that the staff in the Fingal Centre were already literacy aware and that many literacy-friendly policies and procedures were in place. The report recommended continued awareness training for community employment (CE) scheme staff, using the induction process for initial literacy assessment and exploring alternative methods of evaluation that do not require reading or writing.

## 2. NALA's Health Literacy Audit Project

This project, funded by a grant from MSD, introduced four new Irish health settings to the NALA/Health Service Executive literacy audit. The project invited focus groups to give their opinions on communications in health encounters and suggest how things could be improved.

Settings included in the project were:

- Irishtown Primary Care Centre;
- Information Centre in Temple Street Hospital;
- HSE Community Care Centre in Waterford; and
- Diabetic Clinic in St James' Hospital, Dublin.

We hope that the project's recommendations will stimulate interest among other settings to use such tools as the audit and start a discussion around health literacy.

The report was launched on 1 December by US health literacy consultant, Helen Osborne, who gave a workshop in Dublin. Severe weather limited the number of attendees, however health journalist Aileen O' Meara interviewed Helen for the website [www.healthliteracy.ie](http://www.healthliteracy.ie).

## Irish Hospice Foundation

In 2010, we conducted our first literacy audit in a hospice thanks to an Irish Hospice Foundation local grant. Milford Hospice in Limerick was the setting. This project aimed to raise awareness of health literacy and to support staff in their efforts to make their work more literacy-friendly. We will follow up the audit with a literacy awareness and plain English training session for staff at Milford.





Crystal Clear Award Winner, Una O'Brien with Jennie Lynch, NALA and Ciara O'Rourke, MSD.

### Crystal Clear Awards

We continued to work in partnership with MSD (Merck Sharpe & Dohme) in 2010. We had the Crystal Clear Awards in April, highlighting the efforts of health settings and individuals to make their procedures more literacy-friendly.

Una O'Brien, a staff midwife from Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda fought off tough competition to win the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Award for her pioneering project, 'Txt and Twitter ur Teenage Mums. B in Touch.'

Other award winners included:

- DEBRA Ireland for its entry, 'My Diary,' a tool to provide information to healthcare professionals and families about the rare skin condition Epidermolysis Bullosa; and
- the Irish Osteoporosis Society, for its project 'Osteoporosis: the Silent Disease' DVD and educational pack.

The Fatima & Dolphin Health Projects were recognised for their initiative which tackled the high rates of ill-health within the Fatima Mansions and Dolphin House estates and improved the wellbeing of the entire community.

## Networking and contributing our expertise

### **Irish conference on health literacy**

In June 2010, MSD and NALA organised a national health literacy conference. Professor of Public Health and Vice-Chancellor of Southampton University, Don Nutbeam, gave the keynote presentation. Don was one of the early academics to research this area and he discussed the strong practical and ethical reasons to actively involve patients in shared and informed decision-making. Dr Gerardine Doyle from UCD School of Business gave an overview of the health literacy landscape in Ireland.

### **London health literacy conference**

In February 2010, Jennifer Lynch, Health Literacy Officer, attended the first European health literacy conference in London, organised by London South Bank University. This conference offered a great opportunity to find out how other countries are tackling this issue.

### **Health literacy debate in Brussels**

In June, Pat 'the Cope' Gallagher, Member of the European Parliament, invited us to take part in a lunchtime debate concerning health literacy. This debate was organised by the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences in the University of Maastricht and supported by MSD Europe.

In the 2007 White Paper, *Together for Health: A strategic approach for the EU 2008-2013*, the European Commission named the promotion of health literacy as one of the key actions to reduce health inequalities within the EU. Jennifer Lynch, Health Literacy Co-ordinator, outlined how Ireland has approached health literacy and our work with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and MSD.



Inez Bailey, NALA and Dara Deering, EBS  
at the launch of our new financial literacy  
website called '[www.makingcents.ie](http://www.makingcents.ie)'.

# Effectiveness



Strengthening our effectiveness  
as an organisation

Throughout 2010 we worked to strengthen our own effectiveness in delivering on our strategic plan 2007-2010. Much of our work here involved:

- preparing our next strategic plan;
- offering training to staff and Executive members;
- reviewing our use of the balanced scorecard;
- keeping in touch with our members;
- drafting and updating written policies and procedures; and
- commissioning the history of NALA.

## Strategic plan

Our strategic plan 2011-2013, which we finalised in November, has three objectives based on the themes of policy, practice and access. Integrating literacy into further education and training programmes will be a particular feature of the plan.

We developed the plan based on consultations with our members and key partners such as the IVEA, FÁS, AONTAS and the Department of Education and Skills, as well as a series of meetings among a small group of our staff and Executive members.

## Staff and Executive training

Our annual staff development day in May featured a morning presentation from Helen Keogh, Department of Education and Skills, about European Union policies to improve literacy and an afternoon session of team-building exercises.

Executive member training in late 2010 covered Executive member roles and responsibilities in relation to the key points in NALA's governance manual. This prompted further discussion of board members' roles and legal duties.



# Review of balanced scorecard

We gathered staff comments and suggestions on how we were using the balanced scorecard, a system that measures how well an organisation performs across four areas – financial, customer satisfaction, internal operations and learning and growth. We also met a small number of other voluntary organisations that were using it. As a result, we have linked the balanced scorecard more closely to our annual work plans and made it easier to follow.

# Keeping in touch with our members

To keep in better contact with our 550 or so members we took a number of measures including:

- issuing two *Literacy Matters*, our twice yearly magazine that provides an update on what we do and on new resources;
- sending out 13 e-zines to members; and
- re-arranging our main website, [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie). This work paid off as we received very positive feedback from members and the site was nominated for the Irish web awards.



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





## Drafting policies and guidelines

We updated our organisational handbook, worked on a draft risk register to help with project planning and developed a records management policy to help in handling information requests.

In 2010, our focus was to build upon our existing policies and practices to work as cost-effectively as possible. Our next strategic plan will provide further opportunities for us to regularly keep track of and improve our effectiveness.

## Commissioning a history of NALA

As we celebrated our 30th birthday in 2010, we decided it was time to write the history of NALA before too many more years pass. We appointed two researchers to work together on the project. We want to capture the excitement of our early years and the ways we have grown and developed since that time. We also want to see how we worked out the core values and ideas that are still important today. This will help us to think about how our history assists us to understand what is important for our future.

**The history will be completed in early 2011 and will be available on our website, [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie).**



## Our administration team

Our administration team provided excellent support to all sections of the Agency during 2010 and at most of our events. They dealt with 5,288 telephone queries through our main phone number up to November 2010. They personally met over 60 customers who visited our Dublin office seeking information and resource materials. Our administration team dealt with an average of 225 orders by post, fax, email and telephone this year. We received 128 orders for free resources. The administration team also managed the moving of our offices from Dublin City Centre to Ranelagh, Dublin 6.

***“ We dealt with 5,288 telephone queries through our main phone number and personally met over 60 customers. ”***

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***“ We received over 225 orders by post, fax, email and telephone this year, as well as 128 orders for free resources. ”***

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www.simplyput.ie

You can view or download a copy of NALA’s full audited accounts, further details of our organisation’s structure, staff and executive committee, and all publications from [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie).

Students Anne Aherne and Mandy Kennedy  
at NALA's 30th birthday celebrations in  
Áras an Uachtaráin.



# What we stand for

- Literacy as a human right and a tool for change
- Respect for equality and diversity
- Involving people with literacy difficulties in our work
- Learning and growth
- Partnership
- Transparency and quality

# Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>AGM</b>	Annual General Meeting
<b>ALO</b>	Adult Literacy Organiser
<b>ALOA</b>	Adult Literacy Organiser's Association
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>EBS</b>	EBS Building Society
<b>ESOL</b>	English for Speakers of Other Languages
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FÁS</b>	Foras Áiseanna Saothair – the national training and employment authority
<b>FETAC</b>	Further Education and Training Awards Council
<b>Forfás</b>	Ireland's national policy advisory body for enterprise and science
<b>HSE</b>	Health Service Executive
<b>INOUE</b>	Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
<b>ITABE</b>	Intensive Tuition Adult Basic Education
<b>IVEA</b>	Irish Vocational Education Association – an organisation representing Vocational Education Committees
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>MSD</b>	Merck Sharp and Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd.
<b>SIPTU</b>	Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union
<b>VEC</b>	Vocational Education Committee – a committee that manages adult and further education at county or any level
<b>VTOS</b>	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

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# What's next

## Looking ahead to 2011

We have three objectives, each with related actions that will be central to raising adult literacy levels in Ireland over the next three years.

The first objective focuses on existing adult literacy policy and its implementation. The second relates to the roll-out of a plan to integrate literacy across further education and training programmes in Ireland. The third objective focuses on our continued work to increase access to learning opportunities and public services.

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