

Review

Our year and our work, 2011

Policy Forming detailed policy to expand adult literacy services and making sure that national adult literacy policy priorities are put into action. **Practice** Supporting education and training providers to implement policy on integrating literacy development in all education programmes. **Access** Making it easier for people with literacy difficulties to take up learning opportunities and use public services.

Summary Annual Report 2011



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Contents

3

About NALA

4

Overview

8

Our key
achievements

10

Policy

18

Practice

26

Access

38

Strengthening our
effectiveness as an
organisation

41

Structure
and funding

42

Some acronyms
explained

44

Our Vision

46

Looking ahead to
2012

Susan Coyle, star of RTÉ's *A story with me in it* and journalist Charlie Bird at the launch of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2011.



About NALA

NALA stands for the National Adult Literacy Agency. We are an independent charity committed to making sure that people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can access learning opportunities that meet their needs.

According to the latest international survey, one in four – about half a million Irish adults – have problems with reading and writing.

Since volunteers set NALA up in 1980, we have been a leading campaigning and lobbying group on adult literacy issues.

We have been involved with:

- developing teaching materials;
- distance education services;
- policy-making;
- research;
- campaigns to raise awareness about adult literacy difficulties in Ireland; and
- tutor training.

Many people and organisations have given a lot to adult literacy work in Ireland. For our part, we have put literacy on the political agenda and secured funding to provide adult literacy services. Currently, 55,000 adults are attending adult literacy courses run by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) across Ireland.

About this review

This review tells you about the work we did during 2011. The sections follow the same order as our Strategic Plan 2011-2013. You can read and download information about our strategic plan, accounts and publications at www.nala.ie.

Overview



The general election in February 2011 meant that we spent the first two months of the year lobbying all the political parties to make sure that adult literacy was part of their agenda. This lobbying work paid off with a commitment in the new Programme for Government 2011 to 'address the widespread and persistent problem of adult literacy'. Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, outlined this commitment in an address to our members at our

annual general meeting (AGM) in March. The Minister of State for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon, also spoke about this commitment at the annual adult literacy organisers' forum in mid-April in Galway.

During the summer, Minister Quinn launched *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*. This ambitious document includes a role for NALA to help parents and communities support their children's literacy and numeracy development. We met with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to see how we might develop this in 2012.

Before the budget, NALA was invited to meet with Minister Quinn to discuss our priorities for investment in adult literacy. We highlighted to the Minister that after decades of neglect, the adult literacy service had only in recent times seen increases in funding which had resulted in thousands more adults returning to learning. Basic education was a right and a necessity even more so in times of pressure on the economy. With the budgetary difficulties, we highlighted the importance of greater synergies between people working in adult literacy and those concerned with the literacy and numeracy development of young people and children. The Minister said this was a useful and welcome idea.

All of us working in adult and further education and training must achieve more with the resources we have. One way to do this is to make literacy and numeracy part of all adult education and training programmes. This will lead to higher achievement rates among students. In 2011, with support from Minister Ciarán Cannon and Séamus Hempenstall, Principal Officer from the DES, we began high-level policy work with the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) to achieve this.

A new campaign to engage key influencers in Irish society began with our attempt to highlight the importance of adult literacy and numeracy development to critical areas of all our lives – health, employment, active citizenship. We made contact with organisations concerned with these broad areas and met them to discuss their understanding of adult literacy and how it might impinge on their work. So far this work has culminated in organisations like Social Justice Ireland, IBEC and ICTU publicly highlighting the importance of adult literacy development for a stronger fairer Ireland and calling on Government to continue to address this issue. Minister Ciaran Cannon reiterated the government position and pledged his support during the difficult budgetary negotiations and during the consultation on SOLAS.

Last year, we also began working closely with AONTAS, the national adult learning organisation, to promote our common aims.

We organised a range of professional development events to support adult literacy organisers and group tutors. More than 530 adult literacy practitioners took part. We continued to work with Waterford Institute of Technology on the professional development training of adult literacy practitioners and with NUI Maynooth on the integration of literacy training and development for community training centre (CTC) staff.

Our research work in 2011 included a profile of the VEC adult literacy service and its students, drawing on 10 years of statistics. We also distributed research findings on family literacy among adult literacy practitioners and others working in the wider education sector.

Our Distance Learning Service had a good year. We added more content to Level 3 courses and also introduced some Level 4 courses. More than 500 unemployed people used the service and a quarter of these gained a qualification, on average within six months.

The NALA student sub-committee again went to the National Ploughing Championships to raise awareness of literacy issues among those attending. This coincided with National Adult Literacy Awareness Week. Other events during the week included a workshop on family literacy in the early years and a training session to encourage information providers to use plain English.

During 2011 a new television series featured six people trying to improve their literacy. Each was teamed with a well-known Irish author to write a story that had great meaning in their lives. While the person writing the story got advice from the professional authors, the authors also gained an insight into the lives of people trying to overcome the barriers of an incomplete education. Large audiences watched the series. One programme featuring a native Irish speaker was nominated for an Irish Film and Television Award. Many of those who took part also attended a powerful and moving event in the National Library to mark International Literacy Day. This event was widely covered in the media.

In addition to the TV series, An Post funded television advertisements in January and September which resulted in thousands of calls to our freephone service. We referred these callers to VEC adult literacy services throughout the country.

During 2011, the Plain English Service worked with the Houses of the Oireachtas to develop a plain English guide to explain how the Oireachtas works. This was launched by the Ceann Comhairle and the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad in December. The service also won a competitive grant to provide plain English training to the community and voluntary sector. The number of organisations using the service for plain English editing and training held steady throughout the year. But there was an increase in the number of people and organisations using our plain English website, www.simplyput.ie.

Our work in health literacy moved forward in 2011. We met with Minister of State for Primary Care, Roisín Shortall, about the primary care strategy; and with the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr John Devlin, about the public health strategy, which will be published soon. Both saw the relevance and importance of health literacy to their health policy areas.

The pharmaceutical company MSD (Merck Sharp & Dohme Ireland Ltd) continued to support the Crystal Clear Awards, which recognise 'best practice' in health literacy in the healthcare sector. We gave health



The NALA student sub-committee at work.

literacy awareness training to the HSE's communications staff and other health workers.

We also began work with Temple Street Children's University Hospital, which became the first Irish hospital to integrate health literacy into its publications and signage. This was an important development given the worrying findings of a survey into Irish people's health literacy levels.

Overall, 2011 was a successful year, strengthened by our working relationships with our existing partners in the further education and training sector and the new alliances that we built during the year. Together we made measurable gains in improving literacy in Ireland. Thank you to everyone who helped us – our Board members, staff, funders and supporters.

Inez Bailey

Director
National Adult Literacy Agency

Our key achievements

Policy

Government recognition

The 2011 Programme for Government made reference to our policy priorities and the Houses of the Oireachtas recommended them.

National strategy

The commitment to improving literacy made by Minister for Education and Skills Ruairí Quinn became a reality in the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy for children and young people.

Further education

Minister of State for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon, advanced the 'integrating literacy' agenda in the Further Education sector.

Practice

Working with VECs and FÁS

We contributed to the plans of the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and FÁS to adopt an 'integrated literacy' strategy in their organisations.

Research

We carried out new research to provide evidence-based solutions to adult literacy issues.

Online learning

We developed more online learning and accreditation options, which led to more than 400 people gaining FETAC awards.

Access

Television audience

Around 231,800 people tuned in each night to watch the television series, A story with me in it.

Freephone

A total of 4,748 people called our freephone service. This included 910 learners who used the Distance Learning Service. In addition, people sent in 80 stories to our website, www.astorywithmeinit.ie.

Plain English

Some 55 clients used our plain English editing, review and training service. We won a highly competitive bid to provide plain English. We also developed relationships with influential new partners who will work with us to promote plain English.

Recognition by Social Justice Ireland, IBEC and ICTU

Social Justice Ireland, the employers’ organisation IBEC and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) said adult literacy was a necessary part of Ireland’s socioeconomic development.

Adult education

The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) made progress on the take up of an ‘integrating literacy’ approach by its members.

Professional development

We held five professional development events for more than 530 people working in adult literacy.

Student development

We held two student development days and other activities where students could make suggestions and tell us what they thought of our work. Nearly 250 students took part in these events.

Membership

We developed our membership services to offer more benefits to members.

Working with the Department of Health

We met with ministers and officials in the Department of Health and asked that health literacy be considered as part of Your Health is your Wealth: A Policy Framework for a Healthier Ireland 2012-2020.

Policy

Raising literacy levels is vital for Ireland's economic and social development. We believe the government must do two things to achieve this:

- expand the existing adult literacy service; and
- integrate literacy development across adult education and training, using national and international research on the best way to do this.

In 2011, we:

- concentrated on meeting politicians and policy-makers and getting our policy priorities included in national plans, including the need for a refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy;
- worked with key stakeholders in education and training to integrate literacy development in their programmes;
- developed a new campaign to highlight what adult literacy means for wider social and economic development in Ireland, targeting employer organisations, unions and community groups; and
- formed a working group with AONTAS to advance our common agenda for the adult learning sector.

“ Raising literacy levels is vital for Ireland's economic and social development. ”

Ruairi Quinn, Minister for Education and Skills and Inez Bailey, Director, NALA at our AGM.



Getting our policies into national plans

We were successful in getting our priorities into national plans and important reports.

The Programme for Government 2011

It commits to “address the widespread and persistent problem of adult literacy through the integration of literacy in vocational training and through community education”.

The Oireachtas

The Houses of the Oireachtas (Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education) recommended: “A National Adult Literacy Strategy should be developed and published as a matter of top priority”.

Department of Education and Skills

The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 was published in July 2011. In the strategy, the Department of Education and Skills gave NALA a specific role to support a national information campaign highlighting the role that parents can play in improving children’s literacy and numeracy.

Expert Group on Future Skills

A report by this group on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) said our website, www.writeon.ie, was an example of good practice. The objective of RPL is to help learners progress through the recognition of their prior learning within the National Framework of Qualifications. The group recommended that the website be used as a platform to develop an integrated national system of RPL.

Government level

At Government level, we met with the Minister for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon, to speak on behalf of adult literacy development. Minister Cannon maintained the adult literacy budget in 2011 despite financial cutbacks in education.

We also met with the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, to make sure that unemployed adults could continue to address their literacy needs in the new National Employment and Entitlement Service.

Working with SOLAS

In addition, we contributed to the Department of Education and Skills' review of further education and training. SOLAS, the new authority for further education and training, is consulting NALA on its plans.

Adult literacy forum

Another highlight was the Adult Literacy Organisers' Forum where Minister Cannon launched *A Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policy*. This described what was working well in other countries and what Ireland could learn from that.

Working with EU

At European level, we contributed to the work of the EU High Level Group on Literacy.

Speaking in the Dáil

We also gave a presentation to the Parliamentary Labour Party. This was the first time that NALA was invited to speak to a parliamentary party in the Dáil. The presentation both raised awareness of adult literacy issues with government backbenchers and proposed effective solutions.

Working in partnership

VECs

At national level, we worked closely with the IVEA (the association for VECs) to develop supports for integrating literacy across all VEC programmes for adults. We focused on FETAC Level 4 programmes. The Further Education Support Service guided this process. The VEC management is considering a policy on integrating literacy.

Other adult educators

We also stayed in close contact with organisations such as:

- the Adult Education Officers' Association (AEOA);
- the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA);
- the VEC Adult Literacy Forum; and
- the ITABE Advisory Group (Intensive Training Adult Basic Education).

Kieran Harrington, Adult Literacy Organiser, City of Galway VEC, Minister Ciarán Cannon and Tomás Mac Phaidín, acting CEO with the City of Galway VEC.



‘Realising our Potential’ campaign

The aim of this campaign is to highlight what adult literacy means for wider social and economic development in Ireland and to persuade politicians and policy-makers to invest adequate resources in:

- intensive literacy services for people in the labour market;
- family literacy programmes for those wishing to develop their own and their children’s literacy;
- general adult literacy programmes for people in the community; and
- incentives to encourage more people to take part in literacy programmes.

In 2011 our work on this campaign involved:

- meeting and building partnerships with key stakeholders;
- exploring policy and practice on adult literacy in their organisations; and
- recording and publishing these findings.

In early 2011, we contacted 70 organisations to raise awareness of adult literacy issues and to find out how literacy difficulties might be affecting their organisations. We met 30 of these organisations including:

- employer organisations;
- trade unions;
- community and voluntary groups;
- the National Economic and Social Council (NESC); and
- the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

During National Adult Literacy Awareness Week in September, we held a policy seminar to:

- highlight the support for adult literacy from the organisations we had met;
- promote what literacy means for wider social and economic development; and
- show the need for a refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy.

About 30 people attended the seminar and speakers included:

- Ciarán Cannon, Minister of State for Training and Skills;
- Donal Kelly, (PIAAC presentation) Central Statistics Office;
- John Douglas, Mandate trade union;
- Kara McGann, IBEC; and
- Seán Healy, Social Justice Ireland.

For the seminar we published a paper outlining the work of the '*Realising our Potential*' campaign to date; and responses from 10 organisations about their policies and practices on adult literacy.



John Douglas, MANDATE and Willie Mooney, CWU at our policy seminar.



Berni Brady,
CEO of AONTAS

Working with AONTAS

In 2011, we got funding from The Wheel's Collaborate to Innovate programme to develop our working relationship with AONTAS and to build a joint plan of action. AONTAS is the national adult learning organisation. We met four times during the year and AONTAS took part in an event that we organised as part of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week. Their presentation showed how adult literacy students could progress into other adult education programmes.

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Practice

We believe that new approaches are needed to enable adult literacy students to access and achieve success in adult and further education and training. We are working with our partners to develop new teaching methods. In 2011, we:

- helped our education and training partners to adopt and put into action an 'integrated literacy' strategy in their organisations;
- carried out research so that we could give advice based on sound evidence to organisations;
- developed more online learning and accreditation options;
- held five professional development events for people working in adult literacy;
- organised two student development days; and
- supported other activities so that students' views could help shape our work.

Frances Killen and Pat Ayton, NALA Executive Committee at our AGM.



Partnership with VECs and FÁS continues to strengthen

Our work on 'integrating literacy' is about encouraging education and training providers to use systems and procedures that take account of people who may have literacy difficulties. The aim is to make sure that no one is excluded from education and training on the basis of literacy issues alone.

FÁS

In 2011, we worked with FÁS Community Services to help develop their 'integrating literacy' strategy.

NUI Maynooth

We worked with NUI Maynooth (NUIM) to deliver the NALA-NUIM certificate course in six locations. A total of 115 staff from 33 community training centres (CTCs) and two local training initiatives took part. They carried out practical projects in their centres to integrate vocational and literacy learning.

We visited the centres to help staff plan how to integrate literacy across their curriculums.

FETAC Levels 3 and 4

Towards the end of 2011, FÁS asked us to develop resources for teaching and learning functional mathematics at FETAC Levels 3 and 4. We are doing this in partnership with the National Centre for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and Learning; and with Dr Terry Maguire of the Institute of Technology, Tallaght. The resources will be ready in early 2012.

Integrating literacy

In 2011, we gave introductory seminars in integrating literacy to:

- four VEC education centres;
- a National Learning Network centre; and
- FÁS programme development project managers.

We would like to thank Fergal Corr and Avril O'Neill of Dublin South East CTC; and Audrey Killock and Susan Moylan of Tolka Valley CTC for their contributions to the FÁS seminar. They gave valuable examples of how they integrate literacy and vocational learning in their centres and the positive difference this makes to learners and teachers.

Research that makes a difference

We place a strong emphasis on research to find effective ways to teach and learn in adult literacy. We use the findings from this research in our policy proposals and our advice to organisations. In 2011, our research work included the reports below, which you can download for free from www.nala.ie.

Family literacy reports

We carried out two research reports on family literacy and a briefing paper that summarises the findings from the family literacy research. Our research findings were included in our successful submission to *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*.

Adult literacy report

We published a report profiling adult literacy learners in VEC Adult Literacy Services in Ireland between 2000 and 2009. This was the first profile of adult literacy learners in Ireland and was funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

'Blended learning' report

We published a report on 'blended learning'. It shows how adopting a blended learning approach can help adult literacy organisers, tutors and, most importantly, learners. Blended learning means creatively mixing learning resources, for example, using one-to-one tuition and online resources, to offer diverse learning opportunities.

Spreading the word

The findings from our research allow us to plan our policies and practices in a more targeted and effective way. We have shared the research findings with other organisations and have presented the research at conferences on:

- family learning, organised by the National Education and Welfare Board;
- older people and lifelong learning, organised by the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland, (CARDI); and
- intergenerational learning, organised by the European Network for Intergenerational Learning, held in Rome.

Leading the way in online learning

Our learning website, www.writeon.ie, has gone from strength to strength. It now has more than 18,000 accounts with nearly 8,000 new accounts set up in 2011. We have added a new section, resources.writeon.ie, which includes most of our learning resources. In 2011:

- 442 learners achieved 2,871 minor and 244 major awards at FETAC Level 2; and
- 129 learners achieved 684 minor and 46 major awards at FETAC Level 3.

This included distance learners and students in 18 VECs across Ireland.

Write On 4 Work offers accreditation at FETAC Level 3

Our programme, Write On 4 Work is the only learning website in Ireland to offer accreditation and recognition of prior learning at FETAC Level 3. Write On 4 Work was a successful labour market activation fund (LMAF) programme that ran from October 2010 to June 2011. The LMAF was developed to stimulate innovation in the provision of training for jobseekers seeking to up-skill and get back into work. During this time:

- 594 unemployed adults took part in the online learning programme;
- 16 major awards were achieved at FETAC Level 3;
- 359 minor awards were achieved at FETAC Level 3; and
- 81 learners completed multiple awards.

Following the once-off LMAF investment, the learning programme on www.writeon.ie was greatly extended and it continues to make an impact far beyond the project deadline. It is available to all adults who want to improve their literacy and numeracy or gain a national qualification at FETAC Level 3. This is particularly relevant to adults with low or no qualifications and will help to achieve the objectives of the national skills strategy. The LMAF was developed to stimulate innovation in the provision of training for jobseekers seeking to up-skill and get back into work.

More than 530 people attend NALA adult literacy events

In 2011, we organised five conferences for adult literacy tutors and organisers to highlight new initiatives in adult literacy and numeracy tuition and to show what works best. These included a:

- national forum for adult literacy tutors;
- national forum for adult literacy organisers;
- conference on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL);
- family literacy conference; and
- numeracy event.

Each event raised awareness of developments in adult literacy, numeracy, family literacy and ESOL and allowed practitioners to network and share ideas and resources.

National forum

The title of the 2011 National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors was *The future is now: Making technology work for you*. In all, 188 tutors attended. The highlight for most tutors was the presentations from two students from the Cabra Adult Literacy Scheme who spoke about how learning to use the computer had been great for their self-confidence.



Maggie Feeley, speaking at the Adult Literacy Organisers' Forum in Galway.



Adult Literacy Organisers at the NALA Forum.

Forum for Adult Literacy Organisers

The theme for the Adult Literacy Organisers' (ALO) Forum was *Resourcing ALOs in a time of change: Partnership, accreditation and student care*.

59 ALOs attended. They were asked what 'one small change' they would make in their work as a result of the conference.

The most common answers were to:

- encourage more use of Information Technology in the workplace;
- support tutors in the introduction of new Level 3 FETAC programmes; and
- use new evaluation techniques in their work.

ESOL conference

The title of the ESOL conference was *The impact of social and personal factors on language and literacy acquisition: motivation, engagement, learner identities and aspirations*. This conference highlighted the wider issues around ESOL. 75 ESOL practitioners attended.

Family literacy conference

The title of the family literacy conference was *What's the story? The role of storytelling in family learning*. 100 people attended. Carmel Maginn, writer and director of The Power in Story literacy programme told delegates that listening to stories helps people to develop a belief in themselves and gives them confidence that their thoughts have value and that their story is important.

Numeracy conference

The numeracy conference was titled *Sharing innovative numeracy teaching and learning*. It was co-hosted by NALA and the Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) and showed the innovative and fun ways in which maths is being taught to adults around the country. 110 people attended.

Student events

Student events are a valuable way to get feedback from students about their issues and rights. We make sure:

- we use this feedback in our work; and
- when we meet politicians and policy makers that they hear this feedback and take it into account.

Student days

In 2011 we ran two student days, one in Dublin and the other in Cork. The theme was *Living as a literacy learner*. These drew 242 adult literacy students – the highest attendance ever. The 2011 days were different to other student days as they were run for and by adult literacy students from the NALA student sub-committee. This is a group of 12 students who highlight student issues at national and local level.

During these days, students from across Ireland came together to identify and talk about their issues and rights. We got valuable feedback from students about the problems they face in everyday life because of their literacy difficulties and what they think of their local adult literacy services.

Student development fund

Our student development fund gives financial help to organisations that run events for people who are working to improve their literacy skills. In 2011, we supported 32 organisations. One VEC Adult Literacy Center said the grant “has given us the scope and confidence to work together on a planned project and it made learning fun and interesting”.

We got valuable regional feedback on topics such as: “How we make sure that students’ views and opinions are heard at the adult learning centre”; and “What adult literacy students want politicians to do for people with literacy difficulties”.

Student sub-committee activities

As well as organising the student days, the sub-committee reviews and gives its opinions on NALA’s policies and plans.

In 2011, two students attended the Eur-alpha conference in Barcelona. The whole committee is working on a submission to the European Charter of Learner Rights, which is being drafted.

Sub-committee members are also running peer-training sessions on how to use social media, as this is the theme for the 2012 student days.

Access

One of our main concerns is to encourage adults with literacy difficulties to take up learning opportunities. In 2011, we did this by creating greater awareness of the supports that are available and motivating people to return to education through TV programmes, advertising, online campaigns, events and other media work. All our activity directs people to call our freephone support line, which handled over 4,500 callers last year.

Another main concern is to influence and support organisations to be more accessible to people with literacy difficulties, by using plain English. It was another busy year for us as our Plain English Service won 55 editing and training contracts. We secured influential new partners to help us promote plain English, and a competitive bid to provide training to community and voluntary groups.

We continued to promote and develop a health literacy policy with the Health Service Executive, the Department of Health, the pharmaceutical company, MSD and other groups. We also worked with our partner EBS to update the content on www.makingcents.ie to give more consumer-friendly information on financial literacy.



Examiner

- Marie (39)
David (37) Michael (50) Anthony
(29) Vincent (37) Barbara (40) David (26)
(24) Andrea (51) Patrick (51) Edwin (36) Martin
(22) Gerard (24) Michelle (32) Maureen (22) Kate (16)
Laura (42) Laurence (32) Richard (30) David (30) David (41)
Anne (44) Keith (20) Margaret (36) Patrick (21) Eve (26) Catherine
(33) Cornelius (37) Dominic (39) Stephen (30) Philip (47) Christopher
(41) Joseph (40) Martin (36) Stephen (21) Philip (47) Derek (22)
(9) James (72) Sheila (33) Kevin (36) Amy (22) Robert (37) Derek (22)
Stephen (31)
James (38) John (53) Joseph (34) Denise
(50) Robert (34) Joseph (23) Brian (34)
(50) David (30) Stephen (32) Derek (23) Teresa
(27) Jane (38) Patrick (31) James (30)
(31) Patrick (32) Joseph (24)
(28) William (36) Elizabeth (30) Paul (30)
Rachel (34) Shane (24) Patrick (37) Gabriel
(41) Patrick (46) Eugene (47) Cathal
(33) Sullivan (36) Patricia (36) Eoin (36)
Coral (42) Gerard (42) Peter (42) Paul
(44) James (25) William (30) Patricia (30)
Derek (40) Thomas (41) Eoin (30) Patrick
(44) Anthony (18) Stephen (37) Patrick
(75) Matthew (41) James (18) Stephen (32)
Stephen (32) Patrick (36) Stephen (16) Eoin (41)
(26) Anthony (38) Denis (28) John (36) John
Catherine (40) Victor (29) Patrick (33)
(57) Maize (40) George (36) Vincent (36)
(57) Anthony (40) Anthony (36)
Lorraine (35) Angela (35) Anthony (36)
Susan (35) Anthony (30) John (33) Carol
Eric (29) John (34) Eoin (35) Declan (31)
(26) John (34) Kait (32) Kevin (30) Robert
Dermot (21) Keith (30) David (30)
(58) Barbara (49) Anthony (34)
(17) Louise (55) Gary (31) Anthony (34)
Eoin (31) Susan (21) John (44) Kevin
(40) John (36) Francis (36) Michael
(78) David (21) John (37) Jane (30)
Coral (36) John (47) Benjamin (40)
Thomas (34) Joseph (32) David (24)

Winner, John O'Mahony of the The Examiner's 'Let's Talk Suicide' campaign and the Minister for Health, Dr James Reilly at the Crystal Clear Awards.

LET'S TALK
SUICIDE

Creating awareness

Record numbers tune in to watch *A story with me in it*

A Story with me in it was our 2011 television series made by Animo. It teamed six well-known Irish authors with six adults who had struggled with writing throughout their lives. Each programme focused on one person's story and the challenges they faced to write that story. It was a fresh, honest and insightful look at how people cope with having to learn the basic skills that many of us take for granted.

Six episodes were broadcast on RTÉ One from 16 May to 20 June 2011. This series was similar to previous series in that it showed literacy learners talking about themselves and how literacy problems affected their lives. It was different in that it showed the learners writing stories with the support of famous authors as well as their local literacy tutors.

Eileen Sheehan, a mother of three from Moyross in Limerick, worked with award-winning author Alice Taylor.

Author Marita Conlon-McKenna helped Susan Coyle from Rathmines to create a children's story that Susan could read to her daughter.

Writer Peter Sheridan helped Paul Hughes from Blanchardstown to write about his vivid memory of killing a goose for Christmas.

Author Sheila O'Flanagan helped Catherine Delaney from Portlaoise to write about how running away at 15 led to her proudest moment, the birth of her grandson, almost 25 years later.

Author Dermot Bolger helped Joe Begley to write about the Dublin of their youth.

Poet Louis de Paor supported Eoin O'Turaisc from Connemara to write a poem for his father.

It was these personal stories that made this TV series one of our most popular to date. Around 231,800 people tuned in each night to watch it. This is nearly one in five (18%) of the viewing public.

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and RTÉ have given funding for a second series of *A story with me in it*. This will also be in six parts and will be filmed in early 2012. The series will be broadcast on RTÉ One starting on 30 April 2012.

Story-writing website supports new writers

We developed a small website, www.astorywithmeinit.ie, to accompany the TV series and support other students who would like to show their work and read each other's stories. The website features all the stories from the TV series along with lots of writing tips.

Students can submit their stories and poems under a number of categories, including achievement, family, friends, humour, kindness, love and relationships, and poetry. Outstanding stories, or those with the highest recommendations, get promoted on the home page. So far, the website has received over 80 stories and poems.

International Literacy Day celebrates TV participants and story writing

There wasn't a dry eye in the National Library of Ireland when those who took part in the TV series and submitted stories to the website read their personal stories to a packed audience of friends, family and fellow students. The event was held to celebrate International Literacy Day on 8 September and to encourage people to write a story. Both RTÉ's radio programme, *Drivetime*, and *The Irish Times* reported on the event.

Taking the first step to learning

In 2011, we decided to redevelop www.takethefirststep.ie, the website we created with An Post to encourage people to improve their reading, writing and maths. We wanted to make the website easier to use and to share with friends and family through social media.

Linked with Facebook and YouTube, the website shows literacy students talking about their journey back to education and the impact it has had on their lives. The aim of the campaign is to show people that learning to read and write is not the daunting challenge they thought it might be.

Journalist Charlie Bird launched the redeveloped website in September to mark the beginning of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week.

Other highlights during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week

- AONTAS launched a new directory of adult education services and courses in Ireland.
- Our staff and students promoted literacy services at the National Ploughing Championships.
- We ran an event for parents and carers of young children in The Ark, Temple Bar, Dublin, to raise awareness about family literacy.
- Minister of State for Trade and Skills, Ciarán Cannon, along with business groups, trade unions and community and voluntary organisations, attended our literacy policy seminar at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.
- Employees of public and private sector organisations attended plain English training sessions in Newman House, Dublin.

Frank Locke, Michael Power, Sean Gallagher, Olive Phelan and Bridie Daly at the Ploughing Championships



Raising awareness of literacy through the media

We would like to thank all the literacy students who agreed to do media interviews in 2011. These interviews bring to life the literacy issue and encourage other people to return to education. These interviews included:

- Bridie Daly, on the *Ryan Tubridy Show* on RTÉ Radio 1;
- Olive Phelan and PJ Byrne, in the *Irish Daily Mirror*; and
- Chris Potts, on RTÉ's *Daily Show* and Spirit FM.

NALA staff also gave numerous national and regional radio interviews during the year and there were more than 190 mentions of adult literacy and NALA in the Irish media. The breakdown was as follows:

- 42 articles in national daily and Sunday papers;
- 140 articles in regional newspapers; and
- 15 articles in trade journals.

Calls to our freephone

As a result of the TV series, the 'Take the first step' advertising campaign and other publicity, we got 4,748 calls to the freephone service last year. This included 910 learners involved with the Distance Learning Service.

During the summer we rang callers who had contacted us during the previous year to see how they were getting on. From this we put together a report based on what 100 callers said about:

- their fears of returning to learning;
- their motivation for calling; and
- the positive difference learning to read and write had made to their lives.

“ We got 4,748 calls to the freephone service last year. ”

Plain English - on track to be the national leader

It was another busy year for our Plain English Service. Among the highlights:

- 55 clients used our editing, review and training service;
- we secured influential new partners to work with us to promote plain English; and
- we won a competitive bid to provide plain English training to community and voluntary groups.

New clients

We had 55 clients for our editing and review service and our training in 2011. They included:

- the Road Safety Authority of Ireland;
- the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA);
- the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE);
- ComReg; and
- the Dental Council of Ireland.

These clients all achieved our Plain English Mark for their documents. We also delivered plain English training to organisations such as:

- the Health and Safety Authority;
- Special Olympics Ireland;
- Waterford Literacy Network; and
- Mental Health Reform.

In addition, we ran a plain English training session in September that was open to all. Some 50 people attended.

Securing influential new partners

In 2011, we did a lot of development work to promote plain English as a national standard. Our main successes were with:

- the Houses of the Oireachtas;
- the National Standards Authority of Ireland; and
- Excellence Ireland Quality Assurance.

Houses of the Oireachtas

Our work on a plain language project with the Houses of the Oireachtas involved:

- a language audit to see what trends, customs and practices needed to be addressed;
- a staff briefing to explain the value of developing a plain language policy;

Cathaoirleach, Paddy Burke and Ceann Comhairle, Seán Barrett at the launch of A Brief Guide to How Your Parliament Works.



- a plain language style guide that staff could consult when writing documents;
- training for publishing and communications staff; and
- a plain language guide to the Houses of the Oireachtas (see www.oireachtas.ie).

The findings from the evaluation of this project were encouraging and we will use this project as a case study on how to promote plain English to other organisations.

National Standards Authority of Ireland

In June, we began to develop a guidance document on a Universal Design for Energy Suppliers, working with:

- a committee from the National Standards Authority of Ireland;
- the Commission for Energy Regulation; and
- the National Disability Authority of Ireland.

The guide will help suppliers to develop easy-to-understand products and services for household customers. Our plain English guidelines are included in this document, which will be launched early in 2012.

Our Plain English website,
www.simplyput.ie



Excellence Ireland Quality Association

Our work with Excellence Ireland Quality Association (EIQA) involved:

- publishing four articles on plain English work on EIQA's website, www.qmark.ie (there were 860 visits to this site in the two months that our articles were on the site);
- a presentation by EIQA director, Irene Collins, at our plain English seminar in September; and
- ongoing promotion work with EIQA members.

Funding for plain English training

Together with our 11 partners in the community, voluntary and charitable sector, we won a competitive grant from The Wheel's Training Links Grant Programme. We will use this to provide plain English training to the sector and to increase the use of plain English in their documents and communications.

Other work

We gave free advice and help on plain English to some organisations and voluntary groups. Of particular note was an initial edit of the code of governance for the community, voluntary and charitable sector.

Health Literacy

Health Service Executive (HSE)

In October, we gave a two-day training workshop to a group of HSE communications staff. The training will enable this team to train and support other staff members who produce materials for the general public. We also met with the HSE's national director of communications, Paul Connors, to discuss the importance and value of health literacy.

Irish results of European health literacy survey

The Irish results from a European health literacy survey were announced at a health literacy seminar run by NALA and the pharmaceutical company MSD at the Royal College of Surgeons in November.

The survey, conducted by UCD, found that four out of 10 people (39%) in Ireland have difficulty understanding basic health information. Those with the lowest levels of literacy were in vulnerable groups such as those:

- with long-term illness;
- in financial difficulty; and
- from lower-socio-economic groups.

An advisory committee is looking at ways to use the results to influence health policy and develop practical ways to improve health literacy. This advisory committee is made up of staff from the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), the Department of Health, the HSE and Temple Street Children’s Hospital.

Department of Health

In September, we made a submission to the Department of Health’s proposed national public health policy, *Your Health is your Wealth: A Policy Framework for a Healthier Ireland 2012- 2020*. This proposed policy will set out the government’s long-term vision for the health and well-being of the population.

We also met Assistant Medical Officer Dr Devlin and officials in September to outline our work in health literacy.

Minister Shortall

In recent years we have worked with health organisations to help make them more literacy-friendly. In this context, we met with Minister of State for Primary Care, Roisín Shortall, to discuss how we could help primary care practices.



Louis de Paor and Eoin O’Turaisc who both starred in RTÉ’s *A story with me* in it.



Emer Smyth, Dr Nazih Eldin and Eileen McAvoy won the Crystal Clear Awards for the Be Active After School Activity Programme, HSE North East.

Temple Street Children's University Hospital

In May, we met Mona Baker, the hospital's acting director and Gráinne Dowdall, co-ordinator of the hospital's Child Health Information Centre, to discuss health literacy initiatives.

Each year the hospital sees 123,000 patients and their families. Gráinne works with staff to make sure that leaflets and websites for the public are clear and easy to understand.

In 2011, the hospital set up a committee, which included NALA, to look at its notice boards, signage and other communications to make sure that patients, parents, visitors and staff could understand them. The hospital wants to become the first literacy-friendly hospital in Ireland.

NALA/MSD initiative

In 2011, there was an increase in the number of entries to the Crystal Clear awards. There was also a 20% increase in visitors to www.healthliteracy.ie, a website sponsored by pharmaceutical company MSD and supported by NALA.

Both of these developments show a greater awareness among the general public and health practitioners about health literacy and how it can affect patient care.

Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP)

Since May 2011, doctors must enrol in a professional competence scheme. The ICGP has produced an audit toolkit for its members, which mentions the NALA/HSE Literacy Audit for Healthcare Settings.

Financial literacy

EBS and NALA update www.makingcents.ie

The EBS and NALA have updated their joint financial education website, www.makingcents.ie, to make it even more relevant to anybody who wants to know more about managing their finances. It contains information for all stages of people's financial life cycle as well as explanations of financial terms. The newly renovated website is easy to use and covers a variety of money-related topics.

Strengthening our effectiveness as an organisation

Administration

Our administration team were a great support to us in 2011. Over the year, they:

- dealt with more than 2,700 telephone queries;
- met 52 customers who visited our Dublin office looking for information and resource material;
- processed 300 orders for resources;
- provided administration support for 13 NALA events catering for 1,103 participants; and
- processed membership forms for 335 NALA members.

Membership

At the end of 2011 we had 335 members representing the further education and training sector, the community and voluntary sector, and industry. Our members have different interests so we decided that for 2011 we would look at what we give our members to see if we could serve them better. We also piloted a new pricing structure to encourage members to renew in 2011. So far we have attracted 53 new members.



Communications

In 2011, we concentrated on building our social media presence and held staff training early in the year to build skills in this area. We now have more than 700 fans on our Facebook page and more than 380 followers on Twitter.

We post news, questions and comments three or four times a week and, judging by the feedback, it's a great way to communicate with people interested in literacy.

We also have a NALA YouTube channel with more than 400 clips from our various television series.

Our main website, www.nala.ie, continued to attract a large number of visitors. We had more than 51,000 unique visitors in 2011, 40% of whom were returning visitors.

Also in 2011, we issued 15 ezines and published two Literacy Matters newsletters for our members.

New partnership with Better World Books

Better World Books sells books online to raise money for literacy charities around the world. These charities use the money to build schools, start libraries, provide scholarships and support learning. In 2011, we became their partner charity in Ireland. We would encourage everyone with an interest in literacy to buy their books from Better World Books as a portion of the money from each book sold goes to support literacy projects. See www.betterworldbooks.co.uk.

Gretta Vaughan became the new Chairperson of NALA in 2011.



Structure and funding

Our membership is open to all people and organisations interested in or 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.

We are a registered company with limited and charitable status. We receive a grant from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) that enables us to staff a national and regional office.

You can view or download a copy of our full audited accounts, details of our organisation's structure, staff and executive committee, and all our publications from www.nala.ie

Some acronyms explained

AGM	Annual General Meeting
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
ALOA	Adult Literacy Organiser's Association
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EBS	EBS Building Society
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair – the national training and employment authority
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Forfás	Ireland's national policy advisory body for enterprise and science
HSE	Health Service Executive
INOUE	Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
ITABE	Intensive Tuition Adult Basic Education
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association – an organisation representing Vocational Education Committees
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NGO	Non-governmental organisation

MSD	Merck Sharp and Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd.
SIPTU	Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union
SOLAS	The new authority for further education and training
VEC	Vocational Education Committee – a committee that manages adult and further education at county or any level
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

Our Vision

We want Ireland to be a place where adult literacy is a valued right and where everyone can develop their literacy and take part more fully in society.

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What's next

Looking ahead to 2012

Policy Achieving the integration of literacy and numeracy across further education and training. **Participation** Delivering a campaign highlighting the important role of parents in their child's literacy and numeracy development. **Practice** Supporting practitioners to deliver high quality literacy and numeracy teaching. **Access** Working with local authorities and others to improve their information services through using plain English.

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