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I would like to thank the many people who contributed to this evaluation of the *Read Write Now* project. In particular, the independent and literacy group learners who spoke so openly and personally about their experiences, uses and opinions of the *Read Write Now* project. I would like to thank the literacy tutors and organisers who facilitated access to learners and gave their own evaluations of the project.

Many people who were involved in the development and production of the *Read Write Now* project, including the staff of NALA, AV Edge, RTÉ, the Editorial Board, and the writers of the support pack. RTÉ's audience research department and the providers of other telephone support services (especially Lever Brothers and FEXCO) who gave information about their services.

I am particularly indebted for the assistance of NALA in this evaluation, especially the support and help of Helen Ryan and the telephone support workers in gathering information for this research and conducting interviews with learners.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

1. The *Read Write Now* project was **instrumental in bringing the issue of literacy out onto a public stage in Ireland** through its broadcasts to a general audience on a mainstream television channel (RTÉ 1), and through the provision of a free printed learning pack to all learners contacting the project. This increased public awareness had two important consequences - firstly, the awareness that the general public have developed concerning literacy issues, and secondly the confidence and empowerment that this national coverage of literacy has given to a wide variety of learners.

2. The *Read Write Now* project **successfully attracted an audience of new independent and existing literacy group learners**. Viewing numbers for the television series were very high (averaging at 136,000 viewers on Tuesday nights and 19,000 viewers on Wednesday mornings). These figures reflect the success of this dual strategy of using a mainstream evening broadcast time and a repeat broadcast on the following morning. Viewing figures for the *Read Write Now* series were consistent and broadly equivalent to other programmes broadcast at these times[1].

3. In addition to its target audience of independent and scheme-based literacy learners, the *Read Write Now* project **attracted a wide variety of other people and groups** including community and disability groups, youth and employment based training groups, adult education schemes, primary and second level schools, Travellers and prison education groups. Its audience and influence spanned the fields of education, work, family and social life, epitomising the idea of lifelong learning as an on-going, all purposeful activity throughout all areas of life.

4. 30,000 printed support packs had been sent to learners across the country by the middle of December 2000. This number exceeds the initial target estimates of learner numbers and doubles the numbers of learners accessing literacy services in Ireland[2]. **11,000 new independent learners used the *Read Write Now* project** and **19,000 people accessed the project throughout the different institutions and groups** mentioned above.

5. The profile of those using the *Read Write Now* series was very varied. Learners were scattered across the country and were predominately female (55 - 65%). They ranged in age from early teens up to over sixty (with younger learners accessing the project through schools and groups, and older viewers featuring more amongst the independent learners). With the exception of these younger and older learners, the age profile is similar to profiles of existing literacy services. The majority of learners had left school at an early age (14 years or lower). A high proportion of learners left the school system at a higher level with literacy difficulties (30% of independent learners at the ages of 14 - 16 years and 10% at the ages of 17 - 19 years).

6. The *Read Write Now* project succeeded in **attracting large numbers of its target audience group of learners with basic and intermediate literacy skills**. Many other learners at differing levels also watched the series. While most learners were satisfied with the learning content of the project, many literacy group learners suggested that there could have been more learning included and all learners called for other series to be made that would address more basic and advanced levels of literacy.

7. The **advertising campaign** in September 2000 **was very successful**. Most participants found out about the project from the broadcast media (television and radio) and existing literacy services. 97% of independent learners heard about the project from media sources. 32% of group-based learners had heard about the project from the media and 58% from existing literacy services.

8. The development and production of the *Read Write Now* project that involved the partnership of NALA, the Department of Education and Science, AV Edge, RTÉ, VEC and other representatives from literacy organisations resulted in the successful completion of the television series, the learner support pack, freephone support system and referral to existing services.

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[1] While acknowledging the fact that direct comparisons of programme ratings are difficult to make due to the many factors intervening (see section 2.10.2)

[2] Number of learners registered in existing literacy services for the year 2000 was 17,000 © NALA 2001

9.   The **format of the television series was successful** with the majority of viewers enjoying the mixture of drama segments, real life interviews and explanations of learning points. Viewers' background and expectations did influence their approach to the series however. In particular, literacy group learners' expectations of an educational approach similar to their literacy system caused problems for some learners. For many independent learners, it was the opposite with learners identifying with and liking the use of the entertainment and interview segments for learning purposes.

10.   Tutors and organisers were very critical of the first programme (along with members of the public also) due to its unsuccessful ending; the style of drama used; and the humorous approach that the programme took (which was re-interpreted by some viewers as an insinuation that women and people with literacy difficulties were stupid). They, and many of their group-based learners, had approached the series with different expectations and took a while to adjust to the style of the television series. Later programmes, especially those featuring learners, gained more favourable responses from viewers. This points to **the need for the programme to be very clear on its objectives and approach**, and to be aware of the possible readings that can be interpreted from programmes.

11.   The **learner support pack gained very positive responses** with all learners impressed by the quality of presentation, the content and the mere fact that they could access such material so freely. Independent and group based learners used the workbook. Some independent learners were hesitant and unsure about how to use the workbook instructions at the beginning. They wanted examples and reassurance about how they should complete the workbook.

12.   All learners saw the **freephone support line as an essential service**. Over 10, 808 learners accessed the *Read Write Now* project through this service - mainly to request printed learner packs. Lower numbers contacted the telephone support tutors, with many people using existing support structures instead (tutors, family, friends). Those who did contact the support line found it very useful, especially for encouragement and reassurance along with specific learning queries. The existence of the support line was perceived as an essential resource for independent learners working on their own.

13.   The **number of referrals to existing literacy services from the *Read Write Now* project was low**. Some learners did intend to join a literacy scheme once they had gained more confidence by completing the *Read Write Now* project. The majority of independent learners (62%) did not see themselves accessing existing literacy services in the future. Reasons included time and distance factors, other family and work commitments, a fear of 'going public', dislike of formal education, and a lack of flexibility in learning. Many learners liked the independence and flexibility of a distance education approach like the *Read Write Now* project.

14.   The **timing of the Tuesday night broadcasts at 11 p.m. gained mixed responses**. Many learners - especially those in full-time employment - were tired at this stage and found it difficult to concentrate. While they acknowledged the demands on primetime broadcast hours, they would have preferred an earlier evening time of 9 - 10.30 p.m. All learners did point to the necessity of having an evening viewing time to cater for those working (92% of independent learners were working on a part-time or full-time basis). Most respondents gave a favourable reaction to the timing of the Wednesday morning repeat broadcasts - with the proviso of learners having an alternative evening time to access the series.

15.   **Learners favoured the making of further television programmes and learning support packs along the same lines as the *Read Write Now* project**. Many called for specific changes to the project, with the most common requests being for the provision of material for more basic and advanced literacy levels.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The *Read Write Now* media literacy project was an **ambitious national project that succeeded in breaking barriers to participation in adult literacy tuition in Ireland**. The scope of this media project has implications for adult literacy policies in Ireland and worldwide.

    The success of this project has to be placed within a national and international context. The OECD (2000) estimated that at least 25% of the adult population in Ireland 'have literacy skills at only the most rudimentary level' - a finding that is in line with many of the countries surveyed. NALA give similar findings estimating the total adult population experiencing literacy difficulties in Ireland at 500,000 adults. A total of 20,000 adults - or 4% of the total adult population of Ireland - are reached by existing literacy services nationally. The VEC sector cater for the majority of this population and the remaining 3,000 people are provided for in other educational and training settings. Literacy services worldwide predict that their services reach only 5-10% of the target population of people experiencing literacy difficulties (NALA, 2001).

    The television ratings for the *Read Write Now* series[3] estimate that an average of 136,000 people watched the series, which equates one third of the estimated total literacy population in Ireland. This represents a five-fold increase in the numbers accessing literacy services in Ireland and together with existing services, encompasses 36% of the total adult population in Ireland experiencing literacy difficulties. The implications of these results are important. The *Read Write Now* project has succeeded in highlighting the issue of adult literacy in Ireland and was watched by 30% of its target audience. Nearly 30,000 people used the *Read Write Now* learning support pack which - in a six month period - is greater than the entire population in existing literacy services in 2000. **The continuation and expansion of alternative learning approaches like this literacy programme of distance education is necessary to provide for this population.** This is in line with the White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life, recommendation that more flexible delivery mechanisms be developed. Such alternative approaches are also supported by the European Commission (2000: 4-7) within their call for the provision of 'high quality basic education for all…[as] the essential foundation' of lifelong learning which is a prerequisite for the knowledge society we live in. These lifelong learning opportunities should be provided as close to learners as possible…so that people can participate in learning throughout their lives and can plan for themselves, how they combine learning, working and family life'.

2. The *Read Write Now* media literacy project attracted 10,650 individuals who used the series and learning support pack independently in their own homes. As the television ratings and interviews with viewers revealed the numbers using the television series without the learning support pack were far higher. The majority of these people - including those who did approach the *Read Write Now* support service and those that did not access the support service - were not provided for by literacy services in the past and were unable to or had no intention of approaching literacy schemes or group-based learning in the future.

    This data reveals the need for continued provision of variety of adult literacy tuition services in Ireland. In particular, this media literacy project, highlights the needs of learners who do not access the existing literacy services. These learners responded very favourably to the distance education mode of independent learning that the *Read Write Now* project incorporated. **A continuation of a national media literacy tuition service through the modes of television and printed material should be maintained to cater for this population of independent learners**.

3. A wide variety of group-based learners also used the *Read Write Now* project. Many of these groups were not catered for by existing literacy services. They provided additional literacy services as a supplement to their primary function. The functions of these groups were varied but they encompass two main areas. i) groups centred around the civil society and the community (community training groups, disability groups, Travellers groups, prison-based groups); ii) education-based groups (those providing literacy and basic education training, other adult education groups, primary and second level educational institutions). The different requirements and expectations of these groups needs to be taken into account in the development and design stages of a project like the *Read Write Now* project. **Continuance of a distance education support service will provide these groups with additional support and supplementary learning material that can be integrated into their existing mode of learning**.

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3 © A. C. Nielsen, 2000

4. The findings of the *Read Write Now* report point to the success of the project's objectives of providing for an audience of learners at an intermediate literacy level. **Continuation of this media literacy service should also be supported at more basic and advanced literacy levels** to cater for other learners who felt that they were not fully provided for in the current project.

5. The advertising strategies through national and local broadcast media (television and radio) and existing literacy services were successful in attracting the target audience of independent and group-based learners. **These publicity strategies should be continued, incorporating information about the literacy level and format**.

6. The **collaborative development and production of the *Read Write Now* project should be maintained**, incorporating all of the interested bodies in a partnership arrangement. These institutions and bodies include the television production company, the print development team, NALA, RTÉ, the Department of Education and Science, literacy learners and tutors, and other funding bodies.

7. The development of the *Read Write Now* project in the form of a national television series and one set of centrally produced learning materials gave the project a consistent structure and identity. It is necessary that the further development and distribution of such a project occur on a national stage, providing free access through national broadcasting and telecommunication services. The **delivery of the project** through its broadcast of the series on a popular and mainstream Irish television station, RTÉ 1 at accessible broadcast hours of late evening and early morning; the distribution of printed material through the national postal service, An Post; and the national freephone support service **should be maintained**. The national distribution of the television series through a video format enables the continuation of this delivery process.

8. The **support services of a printed learning pack and tutor telephone support surrounding the project should be sustained**. Their organisation through the central structures of NALA worked successfully. The use of the freephone services for the dual purposes of distributing the learner support packs and providing literacy tutor support should be preserved. This dual use of the freephone service for distribution and literacy support is a factor that needs to be accounted at the beginning of the campaign. More facilities need to be provided at the beginning of the project for distribution purposes before returning the focus to the tutor support services.

9. The success of the *Read Write Now* project points to the **need for a continuation and expansion of this service on a national and freely accessed system**, to cater for independent and group-based learners from a variety of contexts. The ideal stage for this is a similar combination of national broadcasting systems, telecommunications, and printed material. The funding of this needs to be on a similar scale as the *Read Write Now* project and would ideally include primary funding from the Department of Education and Science, development and implementation support from NALA, RTÉ, groups involved in literacy provision and all other related services. The costs of a national service like the *Read Write Now* project are very high in relation to the overall literacy budget. The potential of funding from alternative sources should be investigated, especially in the light of the national reach, public awareness and civil impact of such a project.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The development of a national television series and one set of centrally produced learning materials gave the *Read Write Now* project coherence and consistency. It is necessary **that the development and production of the television programmes and the learning support material occur in conjunction and that linkages between both are consistent**. The television programmes should also be used as a resource to explain and illustrate how to use the workbook.

2. The focus on everyday scenarios in the drama segments of the television series resulted in strong viewer identification with the series. Programme-makers need to take this into account at the stage of design and **ensure that the character development, scenarios and overall message of each programme in the series are positive and coherent**.

3. The **segments of the television series with people speaking about their own literacy experiences** were extremely popular with viewers and **should be continued**. Drama

segments involving learners were also very popular (programme 5 and 10), highlighting the importance of viewer identification with the characters and learners featured in the series.

4. Both literacy and social learning occurred from the use of the *Read Write Now* project. The background and learning expectations that learners bring to the project must be taken into account in the design stage. In particular, the different expectations and approaches of the two audiences of independent and literacy group learners needs to be acknowledged. **The approach taken should be clearly outlined at the beginning of the programmes and learning support material to ensure that learner expectations of the project are clear from the outset**.

Independent learners were characterised by a lack of contact with existing literacy services and methods, a familiarity with the conventions and content of television, and were primarily female, working, and spanned across a wide age range attracting a new audience of older learners. For many, an independent and distance education format like *Read Write Now* project was the only form of literacy learning that they had or would use. Group-based learners were familiar with the structures and methods of existing literacy services, and expected learning to occur within a similar framework rather than the conventions of broadcast television. They were mainly female, and from a variety of working and training backgrounds. Their age range varied but featured many younger learners and all learners came from a variety of specialised group-based and training locations. The *Read Write Now* project was used as a supplementary activity within their existing learning structures. The characteristics of these learner profiles are a factor that should impinge on the design process.

An important subgroup within these profiles that the *Read Write Now* project did not succeed in attracting in large numbers was a male audience. They may have featured amongst viewers of television series who did not access the support services, but this is an issue that should be considered in the development and design stages of the project.

5. The *Read Write Now* media literacy project **attracted the attention of learners who wanted to learn in different ways**. Independent learners favoured the distance education method that enabled them to work in an independent and flexible manner within the context of their daily life and home. Many of these learners did not want to access existing literacy services. Group-based learners and tutors used the *Read Write Now* project as ancillary material that could be flexibly adapted to the requirements of their own course structures. They favoured the inclusion of more learning points and less entertainment formats in the project. These dual uses of the *Read Write Now* Project by learners must be facilitated within the planning and design of the project.

6. The **advertising strategies that were most successful were national and local broadcast media (television and radio) and information through existing literacy services**. These publicity strategies should be continued. The literacy level and methods of the project should be emphasised within this publicity information.

7. The **collaborative development and production of the *Read Write Now* project should be continued**, incorporating all of the interested bodies including the television production company, the print development team, NALA, RTÉ, the Department of Education and Science, existing literacy learners and tutors, and other funding bodies.

8. The **support services surrounding the project should be continued**. The use of the freephone services for the dual purposes of distributing the learner support packs and providing literacy tutor support needs to be organised at the beginning of the campaign. More facilities need to be provided at the beginning of the project for distribution purposes before turning the focus to the tutor support services.

9. While the use of **the freephone service** for tutor support and referral to existing literacy services was lower than the demand for printed learner packs, it **is an essential part of the support services and needs to be maintained**. Learners who used these services spoke of the reassurance, clarification and encouragement that this service gave them. Learners who did not use the service still gained reassurance from knowing this central facility was available to them.

CHAPTER 1

LITERACY
THROUGH
THE
MEDIA

1.1 - INTRODUCTION TO LITERACY THROUGH THE MEDIA

The *Literacy Through the Media* project began in November 1999 marking the initiation of a nationwide campaign to address literacy difficulties among the Irish adult population. It was developed in the context of the large number of Irish adults who have varying degrees of literacy difficulties[4]. It was intended to address some of the limitations that existing literacy services could not deal with. Bailey and Coleman (1998) point to the access difficulties for many people unable to avail of existing literacy services for a variety of reasons including situational, informational, institutional and dispositional barriers. The *Literacy Through the Media* project was established as a means of overcoming some of these barriers, complementing existing literacy services and raising awareness of literacy issues among the general population. *Literacy Through the Airwaves* was the first pilot stage of this campaign developing the national campaign on a local stage through the use of radio programmes in the Tipperary and Mayo areas in 1999. The second stage of the *Literacy Through the Media* project operated on the national stage in 2000. It consisted of a series of twelve television programmes broadcast on RTÉ and a printed study pack of support material distributed through the freephone telephone support line and existing literacy services.

1.2 - LITERACY THROUGH THE AIRWAVES

The *Literacy Through the Media* project was launched by the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Mr Willie O Dea, T.D. in November 1999. NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency), in partnership with Tipperary FM developed the pilot project, *Literacy Through the Airwaves*, in co-operation with North and South Tipperary VECs (Vocational Education Committees). This distance education radio project aimed to develop literacy and basic education through the use of a dedicated local radio frequency and supporting print materials. The radio programmes and print materials were developed by NALA, a local radio station, Tipp FM, with the collaboration of local VEC adult literacy agencies in the implementation of the project. The project's aim was 'to design, produce and deliver a distance education learning programme in adult basic education, consisting of a series of radio programmes supported by a printed study pack, which will help adults to improve their reading and writing skills in the privacy of their own home' (McSkeane, 1999:1).

The Department of Education and Science funded the *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project with additional funding by the Independent Radio and Television Commission (IRTC). NALA supplied the resources to develop and implement the project with the assistance of the VEC and the local radio stations, Tipp FM and Community Radio Castlebar (CRC). Tipp FM applied to the IRTC who allocated time on two specific radio frequencies to run this pilot programme in Clonmel and Nenagh in Co. Tipperary. Support material for students was developed and sent out to people who wished to participate in the project. A freephone line was established for enquiries, information and support packs when the programmes were broadcast[5]. The series was broadcast on Tipp FM in early 1999 and consisted of twenty-one radio programmes based on the twelve lessons in the study pack.

The Mayo participation in the project was initiated by Mayo VEC who submitted a proposal to the IRTC for permission to broadcast radio literacy programmes and applied to the Department of Education and Science for funding support. They became involved in the *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project when they became aware of the Tipperary project and approached NALA for permission to use the *Literacy Through the Airwaves* study pack as the basis for a series of radio programmes with similar aims that would be produced locally. They produced 12 one-hour programmes based on the study pack with broadcasting beginning in March 1999. These programmes were designed to represent the format of a one-to-one literacy session with a learner and tutor allowing listeners to eavesdrop on this interaction. Additional support structures were put into place including the freephone support line and referrals to existing literacy services.

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[4] As the OECD International Literacy Survey, 2000 reveals.
[5] NALA Literacy through the Media Press up-date May 2000

The project was aimed at a broad group of learners incorporating a range of materials that would be covered in adult literacy sessions from basic reading and writing skills through to more advanced reading, writing and spelling skills. These learning objectives were developed in the study pack enabling the radio programmes to develop local and current topics that could be applied to the non-thematic learning objectives of the study pack. The project was evaluated by Liz McSkeane from May to July[6]. She concluded that the *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project was:

1. Instrumental in recruiting literacy students to local adult literacy schemes.

2. Beneficial for learners in terms of their general enjoyment of the programmes and their progress in reading and writing skills. This progress was described primarily in terms of specific knowledge and skills (with form filling, letter writing, dictionary work, word building, and syllables being cited as learning gains).

3. The broad basis of the literacy level of the project resulted in mixed assessments of the pace and level of the radio programmes and the support materials. Just under half of the evaluation respondents found the literacy level and pacing appropriate. This accessibility of the project was assisted by the fact that most respondents were receiving help from literacy tutors or friends. Most respondents agreed that the material was too difficult for a beginner working alone.

4. Beneficial for learners in terms of motivation, overcoming a sense of isolation, and general awareness raising.

5. Positive response from literacy tutors using the project materials as an additional resource for learners and as potential source materials for tutor training.

6. Content of print and radio materials was relevant to learner's needs.

7. Specific suggestions were made by learners and tutors regarding some details of the programme and support material's presentation.

8-10. Comments on reception including radio reception difficulties, transmission times, and repeat broadcasts.

11. The format of the programmes, simulating a typical literacy session, was well-received.

12. Freephone helpline was generally accepted as a good system for those comfortable with telephone usage. Additional support structures needed for other learners.

13. Strong emphasis on need for additional learner support for those following the series, especially from literacy tutors.

14. *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project involved the co-operation of several organisations (NALA, Tipp FM, Community Radio Castlebar, VEC and the network of Adult Literacy Centres).

15. *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project achieved the aims of raising awareness of existing services for people who need help with reading and writing; and assisting learners in making progress in their reading and writing. It provides a resource to support existing literacy services.

16. The development of two separate series of radio programmes based on the same print material raised important issues about future development of the project (recommending that the optimum developmental strategy would be one set of radio programmes and one set of print materials all centrally produced and following a more thematic approach).

17. Organisational and structural issues will have a major impact on any future strategies for development and implementation.

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[6] 1999 Liz McSkeane 1999 Literacy Through the Airwaves: Project Evaluation Report Dublin: NALA
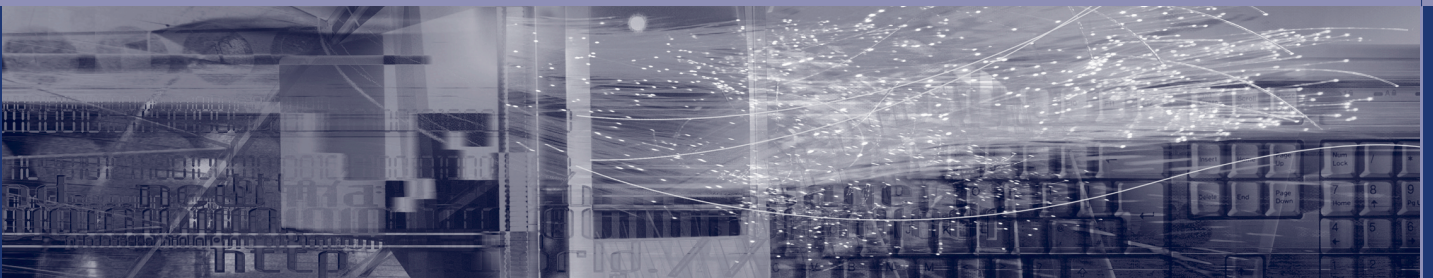
1.3 - READ WRITE NOW

The second stage of the *Literacy Through the Media* project began in late 1999 following in the success of the radio campaign. It consisted of a printed pack of support material and a series of programmes developed for broadcast on RTÉ television in Autumn 2000. This second campaign was to operate on a national stage, building on the facilities and services established by the *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project. An Editorial Board was established with representatives from the VEC sector, including the Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA), Adult Education Organisers Association (AEOA), Chief Executive Officers Association (CEOA), other literacy and student representatives, the Department of Education and Science, RTÉ and chaired by NALA. The Editorial Board was to oversee the development of the project.

The television production company, AV Edge, was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science and NALA to produce 12 literacy programmes late 1999. NALA (working in association with AV Edge) developed the learning objectives and outcomes of the series and produced the support pack for the programmes. They co-ordinated the telephone support system and worked in association with the project evaluator to collect information on the viewing of the series. RTÉ provided the transmission facilities to broadcast the series from September to December 2000. The Minister for State at the Department of Education and Science, Mr. Willie O'Dea, launched the project during National Literacy Awareness Week on Monday 11th September 2000 in Dublin.

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION OF THE READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

SECTION A - THE DESIGN PROCESS

2.1 BACKGROUND - FINANCIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

The development of the *Read Write Now* distance education project began in 1999 with the establishment of an Editorial Board to oversee the development of the project. The idea for the television literacy series had originated from the *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project with NALA approaching the Department of Education and Science with a proposal for a nation-wide literacy distance education series. The Department of Education and Science agreed to fund the project and together with NALA, RTÉ and various representatives from literacy organisations formed the Editorial Board. NALA undertook the development and production of the print materials, learning objectives and aims, and the co-ordination of the support services for the project. A tender process for the production of the television series resulted in AV Edge being commissioned to produce twelve television programmes. The series was produced during the summer of 2000 and broadcast in the autumn schedule on RTÉ. The support pack consisting of a workbook and support book was designed concurrently and produced in the late summer of 2000. The tender for the evaluation of the project was awarded in June 2000 encompassing the production and later development process and the learning process and outcomes of the *Read Write Now* project.

2.2 AIMS OF READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

NALA issued a mission document that outlined the aims and intentions of the *Read Write Now* project. The aim of this initiative was 'to develop and deliver a distance learning programme in adult basic education, consisting of a series of 12 television programmes supported by a printed study pack, which will help adults improve their reading and writing skills in the privacy of their own homes'.

The aims of the project were threefold. It was intended that learners should have achieved the following aims by the end of the series.

• Improve their reading, writing and spelling skills up to NCVA Foundation Level standard.

• Practice reading and writing skills in everyday situations.

• Continue on a lifelong learning process.

Thus, *Read Write Now* was aimed at the provision of basic literacy education for a broad and unidentified audience. The project targeted people who were not involved in existing literacy services, providing them with basic literacy learning. In addition, it was hoped that the series would raise awareness of literacy issues amongst the general populace.

NALA developed specific learning objectives that learners would be able to achieve by the end of the series. These objectives covered different types of literacy skills and were aimed at learners with different literacy levels.

1.	Use the support pack and follow the TV learning format
2.	Understand alphabetical order
3.	Construct simple written sentences
4.	Read and understand basic written notes/ instructions
5.	Write a short note/ simple instructions
6.	Read and understand basic written text/ letters
7.	Write a letter
8.	Improve spelling
9.	Understand and complete simple forms
10.	Improve quantitative literacy

These learning objectives were developed into specific learning outcomes and skills that learners would have achieved by the end of the series. These learning objectives were developed in the printed support pack and then applied to the programmes in specific scenarios. A profile of learners that the series would target was also developed at this stage in the planning process[7].

2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT - THE TELEVISION SERIES

AV Edge, a multimedia production company specialising in educational and instructional materials, were commissioned in late 1999 by the Department of Education and Science and NALA to produce the television series for the *Literacy Through the Media* project. This series was to consist of twelve programmes developed and produced during the Spring and Summer of 2000 and to be broadcast by RTÉ in Autumn 2000. They were commissioned by the Editorial Board to produce a pilot programme, *'The Letter Chain'*, based on their tender proposal. This pilot programme consisted of a mixture of docu-dramas based on different learning issues and real learning contexts featuring elements of a typical learning context with a presenter linking these different elements together. This pilot programme was shown to three focus groups of literacy schemes learners and practitioners and was subsequently adapted to include their changes.

A more controlled learning approach was adopted as an outcome of this pilot process. Detailed learning objectives were developed by NALA and applied to the different programme scenarios and role plays (see section 2.2 above) in the shape of detailed treatments for every programme. Each programme and its learning objectives were designed to stand alone, encompassing basic and more advanced learning aims. They focused on role-plays of everyday situations (buying concert tickets, applying for a job, arranging a birthday party etc) and reviews of the learning points during the programme (through graphics and a voice-over by the narrator, Teri Garvey).

An important element of this developmental process was the building of a relationship between the different parties involved in the project. Shared objectives and ways of working had to be developed between the television producers, the literacy developmental organisations and the Editorial Board. NALA and AV Edge worked closely in the process of developing and applying specific learning objectives to each programme. They reported back to the Editorial Group every two months outlining what had been achieved. The pilot programme had illustrated the importance of shared and definite aims, objectives and teaching methods with the different groups involved having different expectations and aims. The shared relationship and knowledge basis that developed between the different parties involved in the *Read Write Now* project enabled the development of specific and controlled learning objectives and materials.

The Editorial Board meetings that took place every two months gave a format that enabled this relationship and knowledge to build up between the different parties - the television producers, literacy organisations, student representatives, RTÉ, and the Department of Education and Science. These meetings discussed the different elements of the project including the development of learning aims and objectives, the television series, time scheduling, promotion of the project, the evaluation, and the support system. They enabled the sharing of ideas, communication and trust to develop between all the participants in the project, and brought in the expertise of those involved on the ground in this area.

2.4 DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT - SUPPORT STRUCTURES

The importance of support structures for distance education was highlighted by the *Literacy Through the Airwaves* evaluation report. The recommendation of that report for the production of one centrally produced set of programmes and printed materials that would adopt a more thematic approach, addressing issues of general interest and incorporate literacy activities at varying levels of skills was adopted for the *Read Write Now* project (McSkeane, 1999: iii). The support system developed encompassed several approaches. A printed learner pack of support materials was developed for NALA by materials developers, based on the learning objectives (see section 2.2). Other elements of the support system included a national freephone system staffed by literacy tutors. Existing literacy services would also be used for distributing the support pack and promoting the series. New learners would be referred to existing literacy services and schemes on request.

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7 NALA Mission document for Read Write Now project, 2000

The learning objectives and profile of learners was prepared by NALA and presented to Editorial Board in March 2000. AV Edge and NALA then began working on the detailed programme treatment and the printed material. Examples of worksheets for the learner pack were reviewed at the next Editorial Board meeting in May 2000 and the need for consistency of presentation and clarity of instructions was emphasised. The applications for tutor support workers had been received at this stage and candidates were interviewed and selected by NALA in the following weeks. The transmission times for the television series were confirmed and the freephone system was set up around this schedule. The freephone number was confirmed at the Editorial Board meeting in June and was to run from the 4th of September until mid December 2000.

SECTION B: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

2.5 INTRODUCTION

The development of the *Read Write Now* series and support structures had been set in place during the spring of 2000 as sections 2.1 to 2.4 described. The responsibilities of the involved parties and overall objectives of the project were clarified during the Editorial Board meetings. The production of the different elements of the project began in the early summer of 2000. The printed support pack was developed and produced by the end of summer 2000 to be distributed nationwide from September onwards. The television series was developed (pre-production stage) and producing (filming and editing processes) simultaneously. However, the television production was a longer process than the production of the text and continued on after the text materials were printed. The docu-drama segments of the programmes were filmed first (beginning in May 2000). The learner interviews were filmed later in the proceedings (late August) and were added into the programmes[8] to give variety to the programmes and to ensure that viewing learners would have a point of identification in the programmes. The graphics and narration were developed before and throughout the editing process in conjunction with NALA. The graphic elements of the programmes were an integral and critical part of the series programmes, visually transmitting and explaining the learning points alongside the audio narration. Programmes were finalised a few weeks before broadcast, allowing any further changes to be integrated during the broadcast.

The two main parties involved in the production process include NALA (developing the learner pack and acting as external consultants for the production and editing processes) and AV Edge (producing the television series). Additional staff were hired by NALA to help develop and write the printed support material and to assist AV Edge. Tutor support workers were hired by NALA to run the freephone system from September to December 2000. AV Edge's production team for the series included an executive producer (Mary Harkin), Producer (Sue Russell) and two directors (Sue Russell and Ruth Meehan). Each director filmed six programmes each with a three person crew. A researcher worked on the series for a three month period and two editors worked on the graphics, narration and presentation of the programmes. Other AV Edge staff also worked on the programmes at different times (including the development of the programmes, the filmed segments, viewing material, giving feedback, editing and general production work).

2.6 PRODUCTION OF READ WRITE NOW TELEVISION SERIES

The *Read Write Now* television series was produced during the summer and autumn of 2000. Treatments were devised for the twelve programmes giving a detailed outline of the content and style of each programme. A controlled learning approach had been adopted and programme ideas were devised around the learning objectives outlined in section 2.2 and presented at the Editorial Board meetings. AV Edge worked closely with NALA personnel during this time to develop four or five learning points for each programme. Programmes were based on real life scenarios enacted by actors with learning points presented and reviewed at stages through the programmes. Six programmes were filmed and produced by the two directors with the graphics and narration developed throughout the extensive editing process.

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[8] The learner interviews were a key element of the pilot programme - see section 2.3

An important relationship of trust and knowledge was built up between the literacy experts (NALA) and television producers (AV Edge) during this time to produce a series of programmes that would achieve a polished mainstream television style with detailed learning outcomes. During this period both parties had to learn the skills and methods of the other - with AV Edge personnel learning about literacy content and teaching methods and NALA learning about the mechanisms and standards of television production[9].

The television series was to begin on a strong note to attract an opening audience in this prime time evening slot on national television. The order of the programmes was changed to achieve this with the first programme focusing on a role-play about going to a concert. Other changes to the running order and content of the programmes were made during the production process adopting some changes recommended by learners and tutors as the programmes were broadcast. The use of two directors gave programmes a different style with one director focusing more on dramatic aspects and the other on the story line and narrative flow of the programmes. The production process itself became more effective and quicker as the series went on as working patterns and methods were developed. Role-plays became shorter and more emphasis was put on learners' profiles - one of the more popular aspects of the programme as the chapters 3 and 4 will outline.

2.7 CONTENT OF READ WRITE NOW TELEVISION SERIES

Each programme involved short pieces of drama based around a theme, for example, going to the races, getting a new job, booking a holiday, family life. Pieces of the drama were replayed to go through the learning parts. The learning objectives were outlined and presented through the use of graphics and narration. Content was developed around the learning objectives and based on the workbook material that was produced before the programmes. Each drama segment was two to three minutes long followed by a learning point lasting one to two minutes. Four to five learning points were presented in each programme. Learners' profiles were also presented in programmes with people recounting their literacy experiences. The programme ended with a review of all of the learning points presented throughout the programme.

Twelve dramatic themes were developed - one for each programme. These themes were based on real life scenarios and played out by actors as role-plays. The final running order of these programmes was as follows:

Programme 1:	Going to a Concert
Programme 2:	Buying a Video Recorder
Programme 3:	A Day at the Races
Programme 4:	The Birthday Party
Programme 5:	A Promotion
Programme 6:	A New Job
Programme 7:	Applying for the Driving Test
Programme 8:	Going to the Hospital
Programme 9:	Saturday at the Pictures
Programme 10:	Family Life
Programme 11:	Booking a Holiday
Programme 12:	Trip to Newgrange

Each programme began with a review of what the programme would cover. This was narrated by Teri Garvey. The telephone tutor support number was also given out at this stage and at other points throughout the programmes. The drama segments were then presented - each followed by the graphic and narrative presentation of the learning points. These learning points were based on some of the learning material presented in the workbook. For example Programme 3 'A Day at the Races' showed viewers how to read and fill out a betting slip, check the newspaper for the times and names of horses, fill out a form, creative writing, and the use of abbreviated words.

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[9] For an account of a similar participative method of television production see Kelly, Mary 1996 *Educational Television; emancipatory education and the Right To Learn project* RTE: Dublin

2.8 STYLE OF READ WRITE NOW TELEVISION SERIES

The *Read Write Now* series had to develop a distinctive style and tone of its own. This style had to adhere to the high standards of professional broadcasting and the requirements of literacy learning. These two objectives were vitally important for the series' success. Professional broadcasting requirements for a programme that was to be transmitted in the mainstream evening television schedule to a national audience who are extremely media literate had to be high. The literacy requirements and aims of the series that entailed the use of specific learning objectives, methods and standards were equally important. The two main groups involved in the production of the series were experts in these two areas but had to learn about the requirements of each other's fields. AV Edge is a professional television company that has specialised in the production of educational programming in Ireland. NALA is a non-profit membership organisation that is concerned with the co-ordination, training and policy formulation in the adult literacy sector in Ireland. It aims "to raise public awareness about literacy issues, secure adequate funding for adult literacy work, and develop and support high quality adult literacy provision"[10]. As outlined above, both parties had to build a working relationship integrating their own area of expertise into a coherent presentation format for the programmes and the entire project.

The series was aimed at a broad range of learners across the country - many of whom would have had no experience of basic adult education or literacy learning prior to this. They were from a variety of backgrounds and had different needs and preferences. The series' content was aimed at a foundation level of literacy education. The style and overall tone of the programmes had to reflect this and was developed throughout the initial developmental and design stages - primarily in consultations between NALA, AV Edge and the Editorial Board. The tone of the series had to reach a mid-level, avoiding the dangerous grounds of being over-simplistic or patronising and the opposite extreme of being too complex. The scheduling time of the programmes meant that a mainstream audience would be watching and the programme style had to encompass this audience also. The series hoped to raise general awareness of literacy issues amongst the population.

The combination of docu-drama role-plays based on real-life scenarios and specific learning points were devised. The drama segments were played by actors enacting real-life scenarios to illustrate different learning points. The learning points were then explained through the use of graphics and narration in segments following each drama section. When the drama and learners' personal experience segments were filmed and edited with the graphics and narration integrated into the entire programme, the final programme was edited. This was shown to NALA before finishing the editing of the programme and sending it to RTÉ for transmission. The opening sequence and music was commissioned from outside companies.

2.9 BROADCAST OF READ WRITE NOW TELEVISION SERIES

The twelve part *Read Write Now* series was broadcast by RTÉ television from September to December 2000. It was broadcast on RTÉ 1 on Tuesday evenings at 11.05 p.m. and repeated the following morning at 10 a.m. The *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project had demonstrated the importance of having a centrally produced distance education project that would have national access and optimum technical standards for broadcast (McSkeane, 1999: iii-iv). As a result, the Minister for State at the Department of Education and Science, in support of NALA objectives, approached RTÉ with the idea for the series expressing a preference for a late evening time slot when a large and general audience would be watching, with the repeat broadcast the following morning catering for those not available in the evening times.

The series was scheduled to begin broadcasting on Tuesday 26th of September. A national publicity campaign began in the middle of September spanning newspapers, radio (national and local stations) and television. Literacy schemes and services across the country were also informed. The media campaign was extremely successful as the television ratings demonstrate and the scale of calls to the freephone support line during this time (averaging at 3, 200 calls a week for this time period - see section 3.2). This media campaign included press releases, interviews and promotional slots on radio and television.

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[10] NALA 2000 *Directory of Adult Literacy and Basic Education Services in Ireland* Dublin: NALA and other documentation from NALA, 2001

The television ratings for the *Read Write Now* series reflect the success of this policy (see Table 2.1). *Read Write Now* attracted several thousand viewers every week with the Tuesday evening slot attracting an average of approximately 136,000 viewers. This number ranged from 14% to 25% percent of the audience viewing at this time. The earlier weeks were the more popular with viewers tuning in to see what the series was like, but it maintained a large audience averaging at 19% of the available viewing at this time. Less than one percent to five percent of the entire population watched the series every week with nearly 200,000 viewers watching the most popular programmes. The influence of the programme content and format on this decision to watch will be examined in later chapters. The ratings also give us a brief profile of the audience, revealing that more females watched series than males on Tuesday evenings with the 35 plus age bracket dominated. The majority of viewers were located in the Leinster area (including Dublin), followed by Munster and Connacht/Ulster regions.

The repeat broadcast on Wednesday morning shows a different picture as is typical for the off-peak and morning time television (see Table 2.2). The ratings numbers are lower - between 8,000 and 65,000 viewers, representing between 5% and 25% of the available audience at this time. The profile of viewers remains the same with slightly more females viewing than males (9,000 women as compared to 8,000 men). Again, the over 35 years age group dominated (an average of 26,000 viewers over 35 year as compared to 8,000 under 35 years). The regional location of viewers is similar to that of Tuesday night viewers. These patterns will be explored in more detail in chapter 3 and 4, and point to the broad audience that the *Read Write Now* series attracts.

These high ratings reflect the success of the strategy of transmitting this series in a mainstream timeslot on a popular national television station (as compared to the more usual practice of marginalising educational programmes by broadcasting them in morning timeslots or late night timeslots). The *Read Write Now* series succeeded in attracting more viewers than other educational programmes[11] and also achieved the impressive feat of attracting similar viewing numbers as comparative programmes broadcast on the same Tuesday night timeslot. While direct comparisons of programme ratings are difficult to make due to the many factors intervening[12], the *Read Write Now* series gained an average audience of 136,000 people for a specialist media literacy series as compared to the 129,000 to 183,000 people that mainstream historical and documentary programmes attracted[13]. As Chapters 3 and 4 reveal, the series succeeded in attracting their target audience of independent learners, and many other viewers also. Literacy scheme learners and tutors also watched the series, along with people from an array of different institutions and groups (schools, community groups, youth groups, disability groups, employment and training groups, Travellers, families, and others - see chapters 3 and 4). The series also succeeded in attracting a general audience who found the series interesting and felt they gained general awareness and social learning from the programmes.

Table 2.1: Television ratings for Read Write Now series - Tuesday p.m.[14]						
Tuesday 26/9	Tuesday 3/10	Tuesday 10/10	Tuesday 17/10	Tuesday 24/10	Tuesday 31/10	Average
154,000	193,000	150,000	113,000	127,000	136,000	
22%	25%	21%	16%	19%	18%	
Tuesday 7/11	Tuesday 14/11	Tuesday 21/11	Tuesday 28/11	Tuesday 5/12	Tuesday 12/12	
191,000	128,000	149,000	108,000	103,000	80,000	**136,000**
22%	17%	20%	12%	14%	17%	**19%**

[11] With the *Read Write Now* series gaining an average of 136,000 viewers on Tuesday night as compared to the 8,000 to 20,000 viewers that educational programmes broadcast in the morning normally gain. The *Read Write Now* broadcast on Wednesday morning reached the higher end of this scale at 19,000 (source - A.C. Nielsen for RTÉ 2001).

[12] Including different programme types, different broadcast seasons, influence of other TV channels, promotional strategies and target audiences for different series, and audience recognition of the series.

[13] Viewing nos. for the *Second World War* series and the *Millennium* series respectively - both broadcast at a similar time, day and season on RTÉ 1 in 1999 - Source - A.C. Nielsen for RTÉ 2000

[14] Viewing nos. and percentage share of available audience - Source - A.C. Nielsen for RTÉ 2000

Table 2.1: Television ratings for Read Write Now series - Wednesday a.m.[15]						
Wed 27/9	Wed 4/10	Wed 11/10	Wed 18/10	Wed 25/10	Wed 1/11	Average
64,000	28,000	12,000	10,000	8,000	12,000	
22%	25%	13%	11%	9%	5%	
Wed 8/11	Wed 15/11	Wed 22/11	Wed 29/11	Wed 6/12	Wed 13/12	
11,000	17,000	17,000	14,000	13,000	-	**19,000**
9%	13%	11%	8%	11%	-	**13%**

2.10 SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR THE READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

2.10.1 INTRODUCTION

A core part of the *Read Write Now* project was the support structures that would be developed around the television series. These support structures included the printed learning pack (an A4 workbook and an A5 support book) developed and produced by NALA; the freephone literacy tutor system; and the support of the existing network of literacy schemes. The design and development of these support structures has been described in earlier sections of this chapter. The printed learner pack was designed to be used with the television series and was distributed nationwide through existing literacy services and the freephone system. Support for learners and literacy tutoring was provided through the freephone service with existing literacy schemes taking referrals for learners who wanted to enter a literacy scheme. Use of the support line is outlined in chapter 3 on independent learners.

2.10.2 READ WRITE NOW PRINTED SUPPORT PACK

The learner support pack was produced over a number of months. It was developed in the design process of the *Read Write Now* project and was based on the ten learning objectives outlined in section 2.2. These learning objectives were explained in the workbook and accompanied by exercises that allowed learners to practice these skills. The workbook contains twelve sections - similar to the programme outline - developing the learning points and exercises around these. The support book contains information on reading, writing and spelling skills including alphabetical order, a dictionary, grammatical structures, numeracy, writing formats (for letters, notes, forms, and memos) and spelling tips.

The printed support pack was produced and finalised before the programmes and contains similar material and presentation style. It was developed and produced by two writers commissioned by NALA. In many cases, more learning points are covered in each workbook section than in the programmes so they do not collaborate directly. The intention was that the workbook, and indeed each individual section within it, could be used on its own, but preferably in conjunction with the television programmes. The print run for the learner pack was 40,000 with 8, 486 packs sent out to literacy schemes around the country in early September. A further 11,000 packs were requested by literacy groups in the three months after this date. Another 8, 534 packs were requested by individual learners through the freephone support line. Requests for learning packs continued with the repeat broadcast of the series in January 2001. Close to 30,000 learner packs have been sent out to learners to date (along with a referral leaflet to existing literacy services). The initial evaluation of these packs by these learners is contained in chapters 3 and 4 below.

2.10.3 READ WRITE NOW TELEPHONE SUPPORT SYSTEM

The other key element of the *Read Write Now* support system was the establishment of a national freephone support system. This ran from early September until the end of the series and was staffed by literacy tutors. These tutors answered the phones, took down requests for learner packs, provided literacy tutoring, referrals to existing literacy services and general support for learners. Tutor support workers were selected in early summer 2000 and began working in September 2000 following a training period. The times of the freephone system were established around this schedule of the television programmes and were to run from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Saturday from 4th of September to mid December[16]. An answering machine service picked up calls at the other times when tutors were not working.

[15] Viewing nos. and percentage share of available audience - Source - A.C. Nielsen for RTÉ 2000
[16] The telephones were staffed in two shifts - the first from 9 am to 4 pm and the second from 10 am to 5 pm.

The purpose of the freephone system was three-fold - firstly to provide a point of access where learners could request the printed support pack; secondly to provide literacy support and tutoring for learners via the telephone; and thirdly to refer learners to existing literacy schemes. The number of calls to the support lines for learner packs demonstrates the success of this first aim with the freephone number providing a focal point where these unknown learners could access the support system. This was the main use of the support line, particularly during the opening weeks, when the scale of the project took everyone by surprise. As a result of this the freephone lines were manned up to midnight on the first Tuesday night of broadcast.

672 referrals to existing literacy services were given out through the freephone system by the middle of December 2000. 110 tutor support calls were received from the end of September to the middle of December 2000. The purpose of the calls ranged from clarifications, assistance in completing workbook exercises, general advice and referrals (see section 3.4 for additional details). The support line was vital as a point of contact for independent learners - many of whom had no prior contact with literacy services and were working in isolation. The tutor support staff working on the freephone recorded details about callers and comments made, and conducted follow-up interviews with some of these learners. The findings of these independent learners' assessment of the *Read Write Now* project are presented in chapter three.

Existing literacy services provided additional support for the *Read Write Now* project accepting referrals for new learners into their schemes. The television series and learner pack were also promoted and used by literacy schemes. The 125 literacy schemes registered with NALA were sent promotional material and learner packs about the project. All groups using the *Read Write Now* learning support pack (including literacy schemes) were asked to track the number and profile of current learners using the pack and record the number of new referrals that came into their groups during this time. 110 literacy groups had returned their tracking forms with a total of 2,172 group learners using the *Read Write Now* material. Questionnaires were sent out to all of the literacy schemes in October asking tutors to assist learners in their completion. The questionnaires asked learners to evaluate the series and support pack. The findings from the tracking and 400 questionnaires are presented in chapter 4.
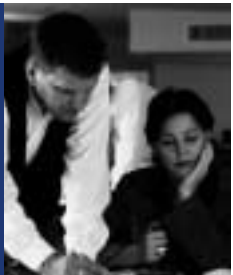
READ WRITE NOW PROJECT - THE INDEPENDENT LEARNING AUDIENCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary intention of the *Read Write Now* distance education project was 'to develop and deliver a distance education programme in adult basic education…which would help adults to improve their reading and writing skills in the privacy of their own homes' (*Read Write Now* mission statement, NALA, 2000). The project was hoping to reach adults who had not availed of the existing literacy services. A profile of this audience was drawn up by NALA outlining the factors motivating the *Read Write Now* project. Little was known about this target audience group who were scattered across the country and coming from a variety of demographic backgrounds. The number of learners who might avail of the *Read Write Now* literacy service was estimated at approximately 10,000 people.

Learners' motivation for participating in the *Read Write Now* distance education project was perceived as a general desire to improve reading and writing in the comfort of their own homes, using programmes that would address real life situations and issues relating to their lives and work. They would use the support pack to learn and improve their literacy skills with the television programmes providing an entertaining way to achieve this. Previous negative experiences and beliefs about learning, misconceptions about their own learning ability, the isolation and possible frustration of working alone were all identified as potential barriers to this learning. In addition, these learners would have little or no experience of open or distance learning, and may have limited learning skills.

They were perceived as preferring an informal learning style using television in an entertaining and informative way and being open to a practical learning process that would develop their reading and writing skills giving them strong life skills. The advantages of learning through this distance education method included the financial aspect of no cost; the spatial aspect of being able to learn in their own homes; the time efficiency of watching a half hour programme and appropriately two hours of own study time with the support pack a week; and the possibility of accessing the support systems of the freephone tutoring and referral to a literacy scheme[17].

As this profile illustrates, few specifics were known about this audience group who had not accessed any existing literacy services. These individuals have not availed of assistance until now and represent a group of individuals about whom little is known. This evaluation report begins to redress this neglect presenting a preliminary profile of these learners and their use of the *Read Write Now* project. For the purposes of this research, learners were traced through their access to the freephone support system, with the telephone literacy tutors recording details of calls and other information provided by learners on a database. The evaluation requirements and needs were obviously secondary to the primary support function of the freephone system. For this reason, telephone support tutors only asked callers if they if they would participate in follow-up interviews at a later stage, when time permitted. Many learners agreed to participate in these interviews with 370 people agreeing in the first few weeks of the programme. The telephone support tutors stopped taking names at this stage, recruiting only a small number of learners in late November who were contacting the support lines for the first time. These interviews were conducted by the telephone support workers and the evaluator between November 2000 and February 2001.

This chapter presents the findings of a profile of independent learners using the *Read Write Now* project, before continuing to look at their uses of and responses to the programmes and the support services. Information that the telephone support tutors recorded includes the number, type of call, length of call, and additional information supplied by learners. This information forms the main basis of the profile presented below, along with the interview data. The telephone tutors also recorded comments made by those calling the service. The freephone support service began in the week of the 1st of September 2000 prior to the programme broadcasts on RTÉ in late September. Information that was collected from the 1st of September through to the 20th of December is included in this analysis. The freephone service is still running, facilitating learners using the repeat broadcasts of the *Read Write Now* television series and those using the radio programmes that are currently being broadcast.

3.2 READ WRITE NOW FREEPHONE SUPPORT SERVICE

The freephone service was an enormous success from the beginning of the broadcast of the television series with a total of 10, 808 learners contacting the service between September and mid December 2000. The majority of individuals (8, 419) contacted the *Read Write Now* freephone support service in the first two months (from the 1st of September through to the 27th of October 2000). Calls were slow in the initial weeks prior to broadcast (averaging at 95 calls per week for the first two weeks) until the advertising campaign for the project began on Saturday 16th of September. This media campaign

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[17] NALA learner profile, 2000.

began with broadcasts on Today FM, followed by advertisements on 98 FM and 17 local radio stations on Monday 18th of September; the Gerry Ryan show (2 FM) on Wednesday the 20th of September; and advertisements on RTÉ television and radio from Saturday 23rd of September. Numbers calling the freephone service increased dramatically during this two-week period of 16th - 29th of September demonstrating the success of the advertising campaign (see Figure 3.1 below). The majority of calls at this stage were for learner packs (for individuals and groups) with 151 referrals to literacy schemes also given by 26th of September.

This two week period marked the most intensive period for the tutor support workers with calls coming in continually during these days. The Gerry Ryan show coverage on 2 FM on the 20th of September marked a high point of this activity with 867 calls coming in that day, and 667 and 596 calls on the following two days. This was followed by the RTÉ advertising campaign at the end of that week with 397 calls answered on the day it began. The effectiveness of this RTÉ campaign is really seen when we look at the following few days with 621 calls on Monday 25th of September, 577 calls on the 26th and 947 calls on Wednesday 27th of September. The local radio advertising campaign that began in the week of 18th of September was also very successful as the 458 calls on the 18th and 693 calls on the 19th September demonstrate. In total, 6, 437 calls were answered during this two-week period[18].

Figure 3.1: Number of freephone calls (14 Sept - 15 Dec 2000)
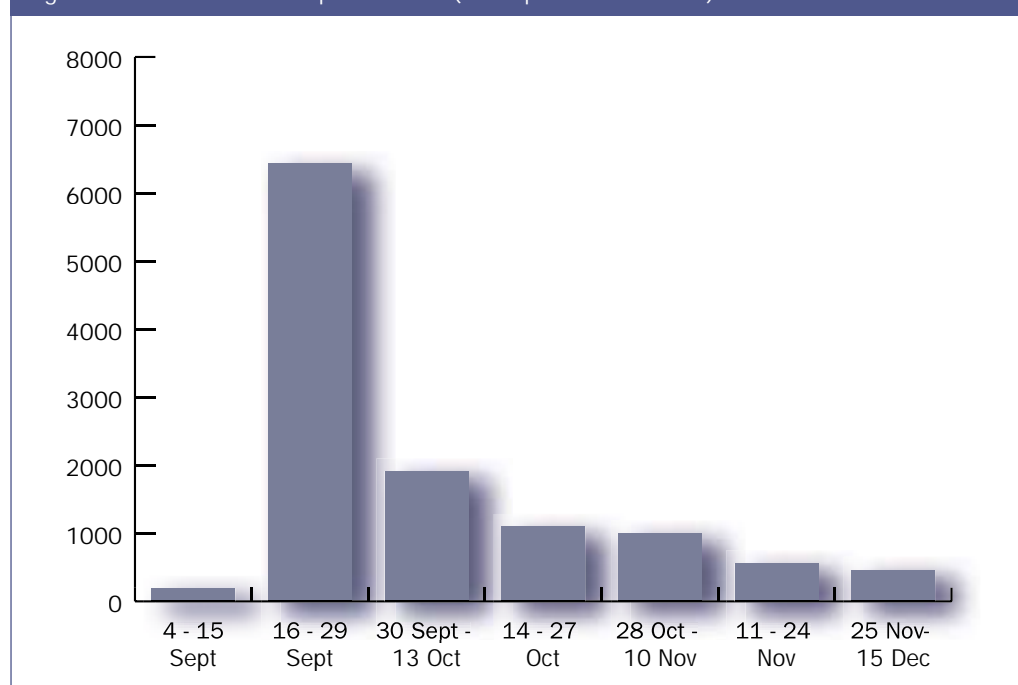
In the two week period from 30th of September to 13th of October, a further 1, 914 calls were received (see Figure 3.1 above) averaging at nearly 1,000 calls per week. Again the majority of these calls were from individuals and groups requesting learning packs. A further 97 referrals to literacy schemes were given to individuals by the 3rd of October followed by 65 more referrals before the 12th October, bringing this figure to a total of 313 referrals. 59 support calls were received by the 12th of October, mainly during this two-week period when the television series had been established and tutor support workers had more time to answer calls in detail (as opposed to the prior two weeks of advertising when tutor support workers were racing to answer the non-stop stream of calls for learner packs).

The next two-week period covered in this analysis was from Saturday 14th October to Friday 27th October. The total numbers of calls for this time was 1,098 - an average of 549 calls per week. The number of referrals continued to increase with 158 referrals to literacy schemes given out during this two-week period. Support calls also continued with a further 16 support calls answered during this period. By the end of this time period, 370 people had agreed to be interviewed at a later stage about the project. Numbers of learners calling the freephone services maintained a similar rating for the next two week period (28th October to 10th of November) with 502 calling each week. 114 referrals to existing literacy services were given and 7 support calls during this period.

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[18] This number of calls to a freephone service is very high as can be seen when it is set within the broader context of the use of freephone and callsave services in Ireland. Although the services cannot be compared directly, advertised carelines for washing powders and other domestic/ hygiene products averages at around 200 calls per week (although this is as a result of an on-going advertising campaign).

The numbers accessing the freephone services for the final five weeks continued to lessen as the series drew towards an end. 558 people rang the freephone service between 11th and the 24th of November (an average of 279 calls per week), with 43 referrals given and 16 support calls. 459 learners called during the final three weeks from the end of November to mid December (153 people per week on average), with 43 referrals given to literacy schemes and 17 support calls.

In total, 11,580 calls were received by the *Read Write Now* freephone support line. The majority of these calls were from the target audience of individuals at home (with 7, 809 people calling during these three months). The remainder were from groups (688 calls) and 3,083 calls were recorded on the answering machine services (operating outside of the support times of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.)[19]. While the answer machine service was effective in times when the telephones were not being staffed, some problems did arise. Some of the messages were difficult to decipher especially with regards to the address that learning packs were to be posted to. In addition, many learners disliked answer machines and were intimidated at the prospect of leaving a message. Ringing the freephone number was a fearful step for them and the presence of another human being rather than a recorded voice would have made this easier for them. While it may not be possible to have a 24 hour staffed service, efforts should be made to cover all of the peak times that people called at.

The two-week period of the advertising campaign was the busiest time by a large proportion (a total of 6, 437 calls from 16th to the 29th of September as compared to 191 calls in the first two weeks, over 3,000 calls during October, and over 2,000 calls in the final period covered). Most people called on Wednesday after seeing the programme on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning, with close to 1,000 people calling on the busiest Wednesday during the advertising campaign. On 8th November, 375 people called[20]. This pattern of calls centring around the broadcasts continued, becoming lesser as the weeks went by, until the final broadcast.

The majority of these calls were requests for the learner packs with a total of 25,040 packs sent out by Friday 27th of October (as Table 3.1 illustrates below). 8,486 learner packs had been sent to existing literacy schemes in early September before the broadcasts. A further 11,385 packs were requested during the following two weeks (6,117 individual requests for packs and the remainder from literacy groups). Demand for the learner support packs began to subside from this high level (which - in two weeks alone - was equivalent to the original estimated audience size). Nearly 3,000 learner packs were sent out to 1,468 individuals and 1,533 to groups during the first two weeks of October. 1,818 learner support packs were sent during the last weeks of October. 2,349 packs were sent out during the month of November and nearly 800 packs in the first two weeks of December.

In total 10,258 learning support packs were sent out to individual learners, and 9,427 packs were sent to 654 groups (after the initial 8,486 packs that were sent to literacy schemes), bringing the total number of packs sent out close to 30,000. The remaining 10,000 packs in the print run are still being distributed with 1, 759 packs sent out between 12th and 30th of January 2001 as the *Read Write Now* series was repeated on Fridays on RTÉ (to 589 individuals and 901 groups members spanning 64 literacy groups). More learner packs have been sent out since then and will use up the remaining copies in that print run of learner support packs.

Table 3.1: Read Write Now learner support packs							
	4-15 Sept	16-29 Sept	30 Sept - 13 Oct	14-27 Oct	28 Oct - 10 Nov	11-24 Nov	25 Nov- 15 Dec	TOTALS
Individuals	26	6,117	1,468	923	903	427	394	10,258
Groups	8,816	5,268	1,527	895	519	500	388	17,913
Total	8,842	11,385	2,995	1,818	1,422	927	782	28,171

3.3 USE OF READ WRITE NOW FREEPHONE SUPPORT SERVICE

110 support calls were received by the telephone support workers between late September and mid December 2000. The purpose of these calls varied, ranging from clarification and assistance in completing the workbook exercises, specific queries on learning objectives covered in the programmes and workbook, general literacy advice and referrals, and summaries of programmes that were missed. Support calls focusing on specific issues included the 24 hour clock, looking up a telephone directory, spelling advice, writing instructions, word searches, timetables, filling out forms, adverbs and adjectives, and word

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[19] As a result of the large numbers calling around and after the broadcasts, the phone lines were also opened for additional hours on the first Tuesday night to coincide with the broadcast.

[20] This figure is unusually high due to the late broadcast of the Tuesday night broadcast and the cancellation of the Wednesday morning broadcast as a result of the scheduling demands of President Clinton's final official visit to Ireland.
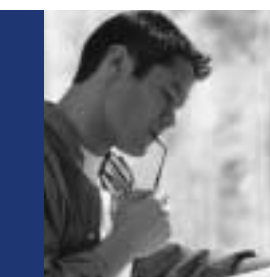
building. The support tutors went through these queries with callers often working with them as both parties looked at the workbook (in many cases going over several pages of the workbook with learners).

In some cases, callers wanted further explanation and tips about spellings - for example, one caller asking for more explanation on word building and suffixes on page 15 of the workbook, another asking for an explanation of the train station signs on page 12. In other cases, callers were confused about what was expected of them - for example, the race cards on page 32 of the workbook with one caller memorising the names of the horses in order to answer the questions. Another caller wanted help with reading the train timetables on page 10 - 11 and another was confused about the section on writing sentences (pages 56 - 8 in the workbook). These examples give a typical picture of the type of queries that prompted learners to call the tutor support line.

The majority of queries came from learners who were uncertain or confused about the workbook instructions. For example, many of the early support calls (in late September) concerned sections 1 and 2 of the workbook as learners were confused about what they were meant to do with the section about train arrivals and departures, and the section on taking down instructions for a plaster cast and turning on a gas cooker. Other issues that learners had specific queries about included word-building (section 1), writing sentences (section 5), word puzzle (section 7), along with more general questions about the sections on creative writing, form-filling and spelling.

One item that becomes clear from all of the support calls was the uncertainty and lack of confidence that learners felt. Many people rang the support line to check if they had completed the workbook exercises correctly - with one person asking if the completed exercises could be sent to the tutors for correction. The support line played an essential role in easing people's sense of isolation and gave them a contact point that they could ring to gain reassurance that they were using the *Read Write Now* learner pack in the correct way. For many people, this was the first time that they had attempted to learn in this way and they were uncertain about what they should be doing. Their previous experiences of learning came primarily from the school system and some learners were still attempting to operate within this framework wanting reassurance that they were working in the 'correct' way.

The support line was also important for giving people encouragement and general motivation with their own work. The support tutors gave learners guidance, working through issues that they were unsure about and reassuring them. The tutors also helped learners with a range of other literacy issues (including writing letters and Christmas cards) and gave them suggestions for further learning (including writing tips like diaries, summarising newspaper articles, spelling tips, names of books for further reading etc). They encouraged learners who asked about literacy schemes and gave them details about the relevant services in their area.

These support calls ranged in length from one minute to one hour with the majority lasting between 10 and 20 minutes. Some learners used the support line on several occasions to clarify issues that they were unsure of and gain reassurance about their work. The support line provided an essential point of contact for independent learners and eased the isolation and uncertainty they felt working at home with no support. Several learners mentioned their delight at having this service available for themselves and other learners, creating what could be termed a 'virtual community' with learners aware that there was this central point available that everyone could contact. This appreciation of the service's availability was also mentioned by members of the public and literacy tutors and organisers who rang the freephone number, along with learners using the project in literacy groups.

While the overall numbers using the freephone support line was low (just over 100 support calls as compared to the 10,000 calls for learning packs), it was viewed as an essential resource for learners. Many independent - and literacy group - learners who had not used the support service spoke of the importance and reassurance of knowing it was there. They were aware of its existence and felt they could call at any stage and speak to literacy tutors if they so wanted. They had not called the support line for a variety of reasons. The majority of *Read Write Now* learners had not called because they had no problems or questions about the programmes or learning pack, or because they had support from their own tutor, family members or friends who were helping them.
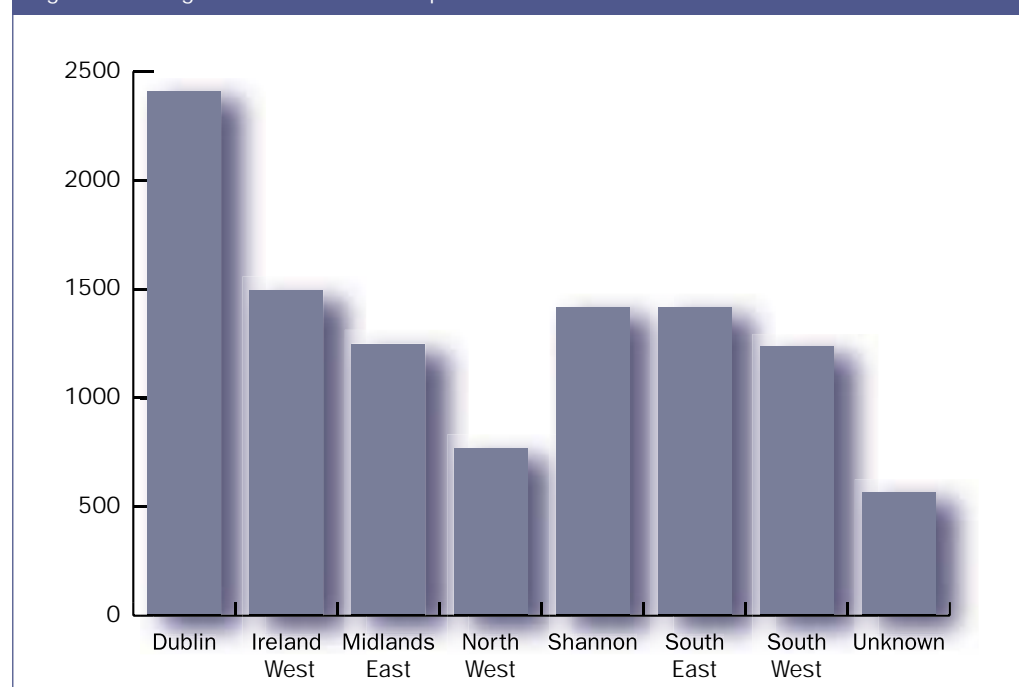
3.4 PROFILE OF INDEPENDENT LEARNERS

The *Read Write Now* literacy project was intended to deliver a basic literacy education programme to the many adults across Ireland who want to improve their reading and writing skills. Independent learners were the target audience that the *Read Write Now* project hoped to reach. The large number of telephone calls to the freephone support line and number of learner packs sent out to people gave an insight into the sheer size of this audience. The number of individuals accessing the *Read Write*

Now project gives some idea of the scale and extent of literacy difficulties amongst Irish adults[21]. The profile presented below gives some initial details of the demographic background of this learning group. The information below was collected by the telephone support tutors during freephone calls, with other details coming from the interviews with individual learners. Due to the nature of the freephone service, it is not representative of this population. Instead it gives us an insight into potential background of these individuals - most of whom had no previous experience or knowledge of literacy services. These individuals come from a variety of backgrounds and are scattered independently across the country. They do not fit into the conventional idea of a group. However they share important characteristics that unite them - primarily the scale and type of literacy difficulties faced by many Irish adults and the lack of literacy services catering for their needs.

A large proportion of this group of independent learners using the *Read Write Now* project lived in the Dublin area (24%) as Figure 3.2 illustrates (see overleaf). The remainder of this group was scattered around the country with 7% to 14% in each region. The North West region held the lowest number at 768 people and the West region held the highest number at 1, 495 people, followed closely by the South East, Shannon and Midlands East regions (12 - 13%). This proportion reflects the population densities of these areas and the regional location of these independent learners give a relatively balanced representation of the national demographic patterns[22]. With the exception of Dublin (which houses the largest proportion of the population), the counties of Cork, Galway, Tipperary, Donegal, Kildare and Wexford recorded the largest numbers of independent learners (in that order). Independent learners who were interviewed came from similar locations with the exception of the higher numbers from the Midlands East (30%) and Shannon (16%) regions.

Figure 3.2: Regional location of independent learners[23]

The majority of independent learners contacting the *Read Write Now* telephone support system were female (65%) with the remaining 35% of callers being male. This figure is similar to the profile of learners involved in literacy groups (ranging from 55 - 62%) that is outlined in chapter 4, and 64% female in existing VEC literacy schemes. The gender profile of independent learners who were interviewed was similar with the majority being female (in this case a greater proportion at 78%).

A lower percentage of callers answered the remaining questions in this profile. In many cases, callers were just requesting learner packs and did not seem willing to stay on the line. In other cases, the telephone lines were busy and callers agreed to be interviewed at a later stage. As a result, the profile presented below is not a valid reflection of this population. However the information given does give us an important insight into a group of Irish adults who have been outside of existing literacy services. In general the proportion of people answering the following questions is quite low (ranging from 178 to 502 people per question, with the exception of 4, 606 people who gave details about where they had first heard about the *Read Write Now* series).

[21] See OECD 2000 *Literacy in the information Age: final report of the international adult literacy survey* OECD: Canada.
[22] Statistics from the Central Statistics Office for 1996 give a similar population breakdown by county and the distribution of *Read Write Now* independent learners is within three percentage points of CSO figures aside from the Dublin region (CSO figures - Dublin 30% as compared to RWN -Dublin 24%).
[23] Division of Ireland into seven areas adapted from Irish tourist Board website: www.ireland.travel.ie/usefulfacts/mapireland

The age profile of independent learners who contacted the *Read Write Now* freephone service was quite varied and increased as the age grouping does (see Figure 3.3). The lowest number of respondents was under 18 (just 14%). The rest of the respondents were scattered across the other age brackets. One fifth of independent learners (21%) were in their twenties, just under one fifth (19%) were in their thirties, another 19% in their forties and the remaining 27% were over 50 years. This pattern is different to what was recorded by literacy groups as chapter four illustrates (with the school going population distorting the age profile towards a much younger profile).

It is more in line with the analysis of the literacy group learners' questionnaires[24] which revealed a more varied age profile focusing on the over thirties age groupings (see Figure 4.6). The one variation in this similarity to literacy group learners can be seen in the extremes of the age brackets. While the age of independent learners is scattered across the age range, it is more evenly distributed with more people under the age of 18 or over 50 years than is typical for a literacy group. Independent learners who were interviewed reflected a similar pattern as that of literacy group participants who had filled in questionnaires, again focused on the older age groups (in this case 65% were over the age of thirty years).

Figure 3.3: Age profile of independent learners
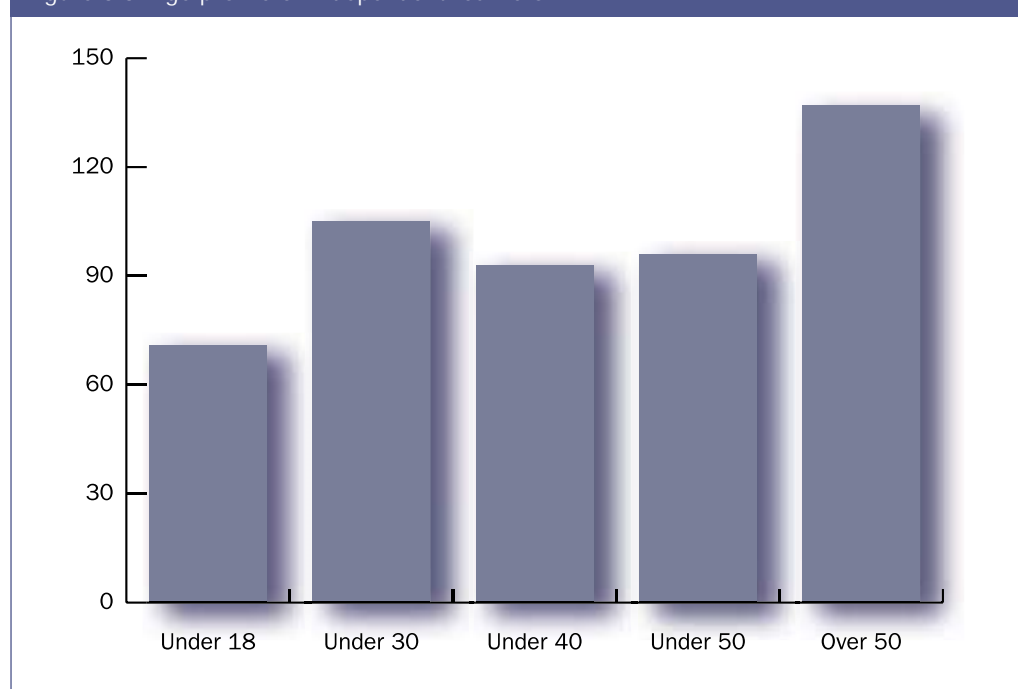
The age that respondents left school is similar to that of literacy scheme participants with the greatest number of people leaving school at or before the age of 14 (60%), having completed primary school (48%) and perhaps a year or two of secondary school. One tenth of these learners had left school by the age of 12 or less and 50% when they were 14 years or less. This proportion of early school leavers is higher amongst older age groups reflecting the changing educational profile of people with more people entering the second and third level educational systems[25].

A higher proportion of adults (especially those in the older age groups) were interviewed and gave voice to these statistics talking about the general culture of their youth when school education ended after primary level (or the early years of secondary education) to be replaced by work. Many of these respondents also spoke about their negative experiences of school. These experiences ranged from being placed at the back of classroom and hence to the back of teachers minds and attention also, having information drilled into you whether you understood it or not, to descriptions of physical terror and mental fear that children felt in this alien world of school. One woman summarised these experiences of school - similar to so many other *Read Write Now* participants - as *'getting Irish, religion and the stick beaten into you'*. Most felt that it was not a place where they belonged or were welcomed and left at the first opportunity. Others had to leave due to family or financial pressures.

The number of respondents who stayed in the school system is also symptomatic of another problem facing the educational system. The numbers leaving school at an older age is still very high with 30% having left at the age of 16 years or under, and the remaining 10% having left at 17 and 18 years. It

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[24] The majority of questionnaires were returned from VEC and other Adult Literacy Schemes.
[25] As the OECD literacy report (2000) outlines, a greater proportion of young people stay for a longer time in the formal educational system than in past decades. Ireland is no exception to this trend with the introduction of free secondary education in the 1960's and free third level education in the 1990's; and the changing cultural and economic emphasis on educational qualifications and meritocracy encouraging this participation.

is still a remarkable figure when we see that 10% of these learners had stayed in the school system during the senior years of secondary school (with 7% gaining their Leaving Certificate) and still left this educational system with literacy difficulties (Figure 3.4 below). This is an issue that has been highlighted again in recent years with an estimated 10% - 15% of this school age population being identified as 'educationally disadvantaged'[26] and leaving school with literacy difficulties[27].

Some of these independent learners who used the *Read Write Now* project had returned to education at a later stage to continue their formal education in the shape of VEC and other adult education courses (8%). 178 of these 10, 808 callers were already in existing literacy schemes and were usually calling for extra learning packs for themselves, family members or friends.

**Figure 3.4: School leaving age of independent learners**
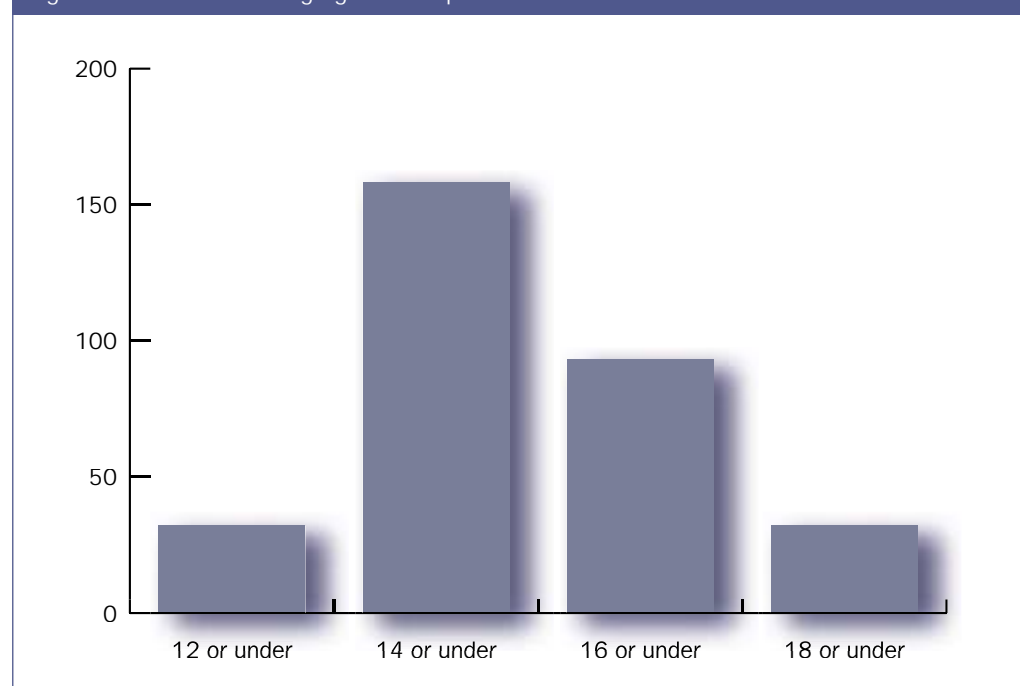
The majority of learners described their literacy ability in the middle to low literacy categories when asked in the interviews. There were some variations within this with self-assessments of reading ability being much higher than their self-assessment of their writing or spelling ability. 20% of learners described their reading ability as very good with only 2% defining their reading ability as poor. This is in marked contrast with the 4% who described their spelling ability as very good and the 36% who described their spelling ability as poor. Self-assessments of writing ability tended to lie in the middle ground between these other two self-assessments. The majority of learners placed themselves in the mid-range category of literacy skills (averaging at approximately 60 - 70% of those interviewed).

309 people gave details of their employment history. As Figure 3.5 demonstrates, the majority of these respondents were in full time employment (61%) with the remainder in part time employment (17%), or home based (14%). A further 8% were working but did not specify the nature of their work. The majority of those interviewed were also employed (70%) with two people still in secondary school. The high proportion of these with full time employment reflects the success of the *Read Write Now* project in facilitating groups of people who were unable to access daytime educational services.

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[26] Combat Poverty Agency 1998 *Educational Disadvantage and Early School Leaving* Dublin
[27] OECD 2000 *Literacy in the information Age: final report of the international adult literacy survey* OECD: Canada.

Figure 3.5: Employment profile of independent learners

- Not specified
- Home based
- Part time
- Full time
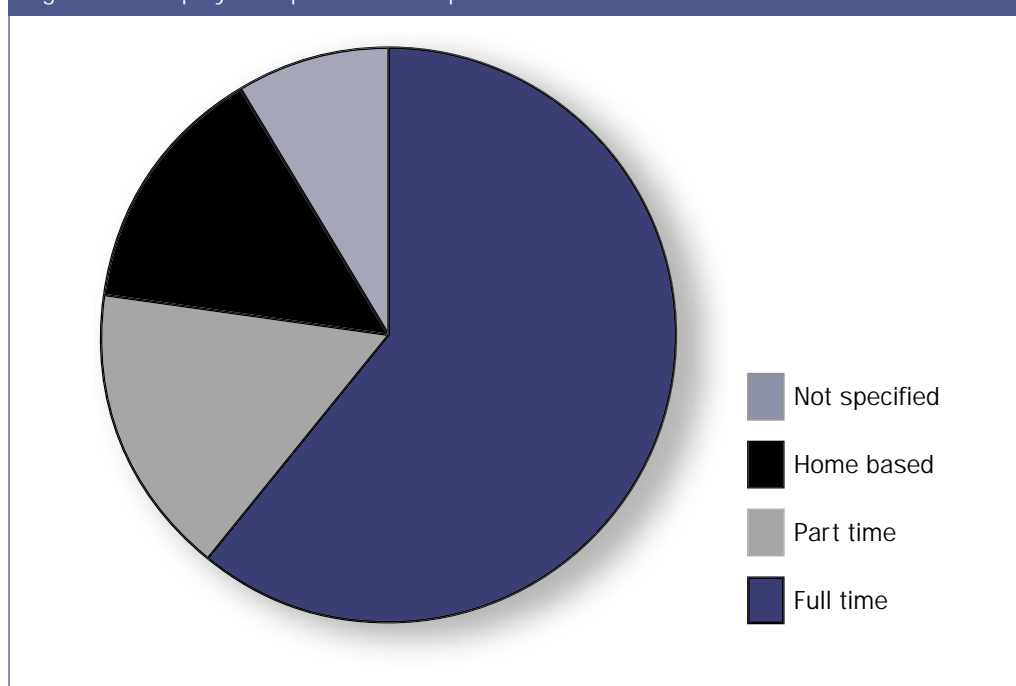
3.5 ASSESSMENT OF READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

3.5.1 PUBLICITY FOR THE READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

The majority of respondents (96%) had learnt about the *Read Write Now* project from the media campaign on television and radio (see Table 3.2 below). This is reflected in the thousands of calls to the freephone support system during the advertising campaign. As Section 3.2 outlines, the media campaign of the 16th to 29th of September resulted in over 6,000 people contacting the support line. The majority of these calls were requests for a learner pack with 151 referrals also given during this period. The number of calls during this time was over three times higher than at any other time and the success of the media campaign is reflected in the high viewing numbers that the series attracted (see Chapter 2).

Table 3.2: How learners heard about the Read Write Now project

TV	Radio	Print	Literacy Scheme	Friend/ Relative	Total
2,653	1,769	37	56	91	4,606
58%	38%	1%	1%	2%	100%

3.5.2 PROGRAMMES WATCHED AND TIMING OF THE READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

Interviews with independent learners revealed that 32% of participants had watched between one and four programmes in the series, a further 18% had watched 8 programmes or less, and 48% had watched all or most programmes in the series, with one person not answering this question. The majority of these people had watched the programmes on Tuesday night. Three people had watched on Wednesday morning and remainder at both times (depending on their availability) or on video. Viewers' evaluation of the timing of the series is given in section 3.5.3.

3.5.3 ASSESSMENT OF THE READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

The assessment of the *Read Write Now* project presented below is based on the analysis of comments made by callers to the freephone support service. These comments have been divided up into the three categories that are positive, mixed or negative in tone. The telephone support tutors recorded these comments about the programmes and learning pack. Comments from learners, tutors and members of the public were mainly positive (see Figure 3.6 below). Positive comments given by callers focused on their general enjoyment of and learning from the series and learner pack, with callers congratulating and thanking the programme makers for making the series. They spoke about how this was the first time that they had seen this issue being addressed on television and how it was done in a positive, pro-active way.

Learners also commented on how much they learnt from the *Read Write Now* project and how it had given them tremendous confidence and motivation to tackle their own literacy difficulties (further details on learners' assessments given in the following pages). In particular, they spoke about aspects they had learnt from the programmes including the 24 hour clock, timetables, symbols and breaking up words (see section 3.3). Many callers also mentioned the positive social learning and awareness that the series gave - both in terms of raising awareness about literacy in Ireland and for everyday social learning through the drama scenarios (i.e. driving tests, banks, form-filling and travelling etc). Sections where learners had spoken about their own literacy experiences were often mentioned, with programme 5 featuring Ernie and his promotion being very popular and encouraging for learners in their learning. Other positive comments focused on the literacy level of the project, the presentation of the programmes, the learning pack and the excellent quality and content of the workbook. Another factor mentioned by several learners was the nature of learning that the project provided. Learners appreciated the privacy and flexibility that the television series and learning pack provided, feeling that they had been *'thrown a lifeline'* after years of trying to cope on their own.

One fifth of the comments received were critical in tone (21%) and centred around negative assessments about the literacy level of the project (too advanced or basic for individual learners) and aspects of the television series and learning pack. Some viewers did not like the drama segments of the programme feeling that it was time-wasting and taking away from the learning aspects of the programme. Programme 1 with its unsuccessful ending came in for particular criticism with viewers feeling that this was off-putting and implying that people with literacy difficulties were stupid. Others perceived an urban bias in the scenarios or disliked aspects of the programmes or learning pack's presentation. The Tuesday night scheduling of the programmes was also criticised with learners calling for an earlier evening time slot instead. They found it difficult to concentrate at this late hour and would have preferred a slightly earlier broadcast time. Comments that were mixed in tone included general comments on the programme, its presentation and literacy level. Some difficulties with the workbook were also mentioned along with requests for the programme to be made available on video and the telephone number to be left on screen for a longer period of time.

Figure 3.6: Type of telephone comments from callers

Legend:
- Negative
- Mixed
- Positive
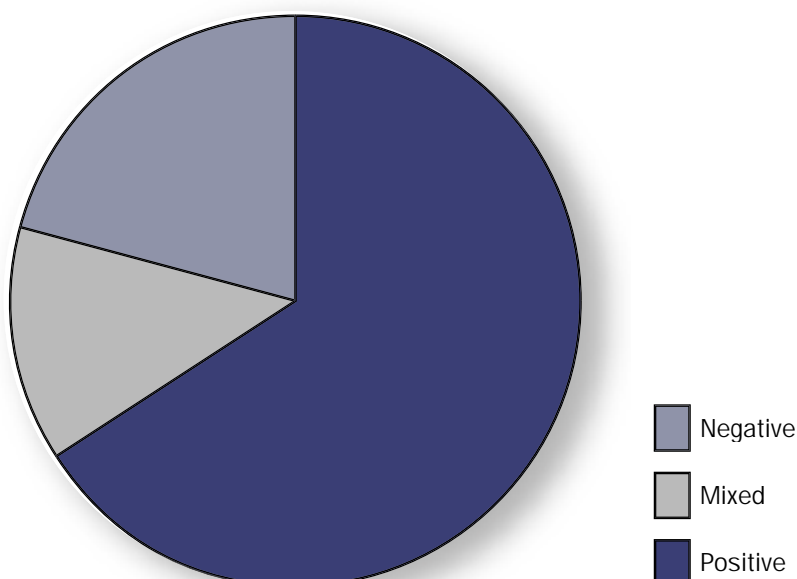
The majority of the positive comments came from independent learners. Some learners featured amongst those who gave mixed or negative assessments of the project, but interestingly other people who called the support line during the first few weeks (tutors, literacy organisers and members of the public) gave mixed or negative comments. No comments that were positive in tone were recorded in these early weeks from non-learners. Many of these calls were critical of the literacy level and content of programmes, and centred on the drama segments and actors. These type of comments seemed to originate from preconceptions of literacy learning held by these individuals - an issue that will be explored in chapter 4. Positive comments were made by tutors and members of the public but these occurred in the later weeks. In general, the number and ratio of positive comments increased across the board as the series progressed.

As Figure 3.7 below reveals, most learners who were interviewed expressed their feelings about the series in broad terms with 54% expressing a general liking of the series as opposed the 6% who disliked the series on this general level. The number of learners who mentioned no dislikes further enforces this. Particular aspects of the series that learners mentioned included the drama (with the majority of those interviewed giving it a favourable assessment). Learners liked the everyday nature of the drama and the demonstration of learning points from these scenarios. Many felt the series was very watchable and even if it did not suit their literacy level, they felt that they did learn something from every programme. The sections with people talking about their experiences and the learning that they had gained from the series were also mentioned as specific aspects that learners liked. On the other side of this coin, the level of learning in the series, a general dislike of the series, the drama sections and the presentation and pacing of the series were each mentioned as dislikes by only 2 to 5 people.

Figure 3.7: Likes/dislikes in general of the Read Write Now television series

Likes

Dislikes

Unanswered
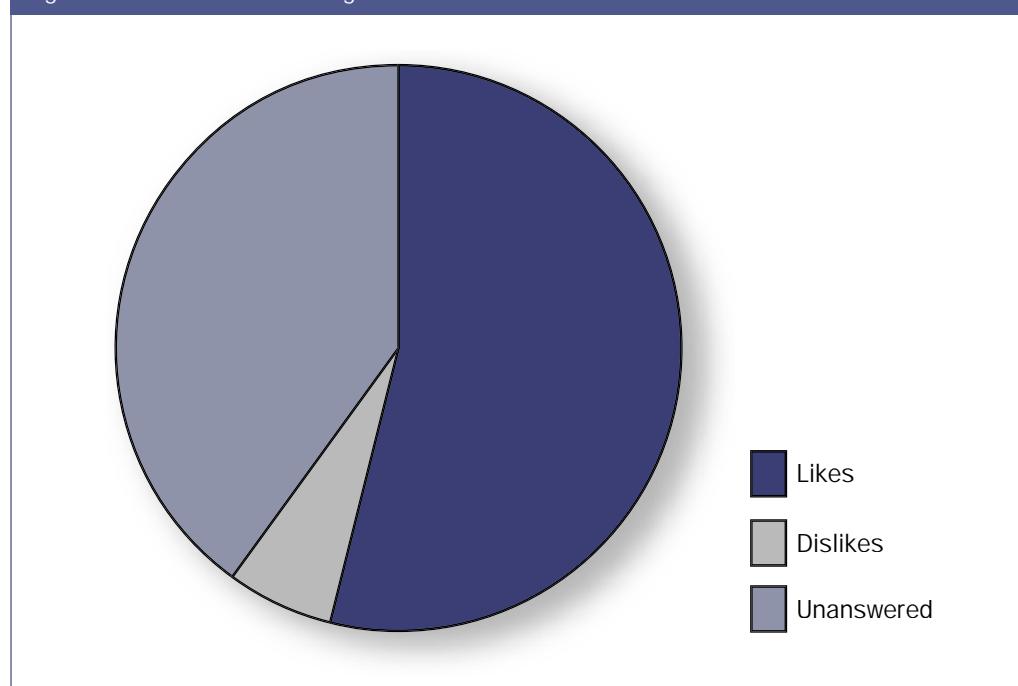
This positive response to the series is reflected in the individual answers given by those interviewed. 72% of these individual learners gave the drama segments a positive assessment. They liked the individual drama scenarios and actors, and felt they fitted into their learning very well, with the dramatised entertainment format *'keeping you interested'*. For some learners this use of entertainment formats for educational purposes did take some time to adjust to. One woman described that she found the structure of programme 1 *'quite strange and didn't really know what [she] was watching'*. After she had completed the relevant workbook exercises, she realised the extent of different learning points that she had picked up throughout the programmes - from what she described as *'real life situations in a dramatic form'*.

Most learners appreciated the focus on everyday life and situations. The sections with people talking about their experiences was mentioned by several interviewees who would have liked to hear more from them. Several learners mentioned the enormous relief and confidence boost that seeing people talking about their literacy experiences gave them. The combination of practical everyday tips and

learning, and the confidence inspiring factor of seeing people dealing with potentially hazardous situations (usually involving everyday reading and writing difficulties that many of these literacy learners experiences and usually hid) gave them great confidence. Learners described some of their own achievements from the *Read Write Now* project - writing down phone messages, filling out a lodgement form at the bank and generally having the confidence to ask other people for help. The personal sense of achievement from completing these tasks and the sense of relief at finally completing something you thought you were unable to do cannot be stressed enough. As one learner said:

> *'I don't have to fill up with fear because I don't know what to do. The programmes showed me that I can ask someone. I don't have to hide in shame'.*

The majority of interviewees also liked the presentation style of the programmes, but like the group learners, had very little detail to say about this feature of the programme aside from an expression of general liking for the way that the television series was made.

Just over half of the learners interviewed (52%) felt that the literacy level of the programme was suitable. 8% of these learners found the literacy level of the programmes too advanced for them and had only used parts of the programmes and the workbook. 38% felt that it was too low for them and they would have preferred more advanced material. However, many of these people continued to watch the programme - some for revision and as a way of measuring their own literacy level (with learners commenting that *'I wasn't as bad as I thought'*, *'It really boosted my confidence, I could do all of that with no hassle'*). In addition, many felt that they were still learning something from the programmes, in some cases just one or two aspects from each programme while others found it interesting and useful for social learning (i.e. doing a driving test, filling out forms, organising things).

3.5.4 ASSESSMENT OF THE READ WRITE NOW SUPPORT SERVICE

84% of learners interviewed used the *Read Write Now* learning support pack, with 12% not using the learning pack (usually because it was not suitable for their literacy level) and the remainder not answering this question. The majority felt that the workbook and support book was 'very good' (64%), with a further 20% saying that it was 'good'. Learners commented on the quality of the learning pack and their appreciation of this material. For many, it was the first time that they had received or used material such as this. Most learners looked over the learning pack when they had received it and then used it after watching the relevant programme (usually within the next few days). Some used it at a later date and a few learners completed it separate to the programmes (usually when they did not like or could not watch the programmes, with one or two people describing how they completed it straight away when they found out they could complete it easily. This gave them a great confidence to realise that they had already achieved this level of literacy).

All aspects of the workbook gained a favourable response from these learners. Spelling tips was mentioned favourably most often (by 80% of interviewees), followed by the sections on writing (76%) and finally reading (70%). Learners found that the workbook helped them to focus their learning and reiterated what the programme had demonstrated. It gave learners a structure where they could practice the learning points in a disciplined and orderly manner. This factor of controlled and paced learning was appreciated by many learners who were finding the process of returning to learning difficult to adjust to after so many years away from formal learning. Their only experience of education was from the school system - which held negative memories for most.

The *Read Write Now* approach was their first experience of adult education and it was a revelation to many that you could learn in this positive way from everyday drama and entertainment formats. The experience of learning in this practical way gave rise to a sense of achievement and empowerment for many learners. One learner described how the *Read Write Now* project had given him the confidence to:

> *'practice my writing and not be worried about misspellings or grammar'…'Some of my fellow workers even commented on the improvement from my usual scrawled messages. I could write but my scrawling was to cover my bad spelling'.*

Half of the respondents had also used the support book with the majority of these giving it a favourable assessment. Those learners who used the support book described it as very good - both for spelling tips and the word diary - and they described how they use it constantly as a practical resource for writing down notes, telephone messages etc.

Overall, these learners enjoyed the *Read Write Now* project and found it very beneficial and useful for their own learning. As the earlier section on learners' comments from the freephone service outlined, it also played an important role in boosting learners' awareness of and confidence about their own literacy ability. Most of the learners interviewed had not used the freephone support system after their

initial call to get a learning pack. They were working at home - usually on their own and often in secrecy without other family members knowing. In some cases, one or two family members or friends may know and support them, but most people surrounding them do not know about their literacy difficulties.

The majority felt that they would not approach or use the existing literacy services in the future (62%). This is reflected in the very low levels of people joining literacy schemes as a result of the *Read Write Now* project (see chapter 4). For some learners, time and distance were insurmountable factors and for others, the privacy of learning in their homes was valued. Other learners felt that they might join a literacy scheme in the future depending on their personal situation while some wanted to complete the *Read Write Now* project before contemplating joining a literacy scheme.

3.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As this chapter has demonstrated the *Read Write Now* project succeeded in reaching its target audience of independent learners who had not accessed existing literacy services previously. The advertising campaign in September 2000 made people aware of the project and over 10,000 people rang the freephone support line to get a learner support pack sent out to them. These people were scattered around the country and varied in age. The majority of viewers were employed and for a variety of reasons were unwilling or unable to attend existing literacy services. Most of these people had no previous knowledge or experience of literacy services and had been hiding their difficulties for many years. Many had left school early and had negative memories of the school system.
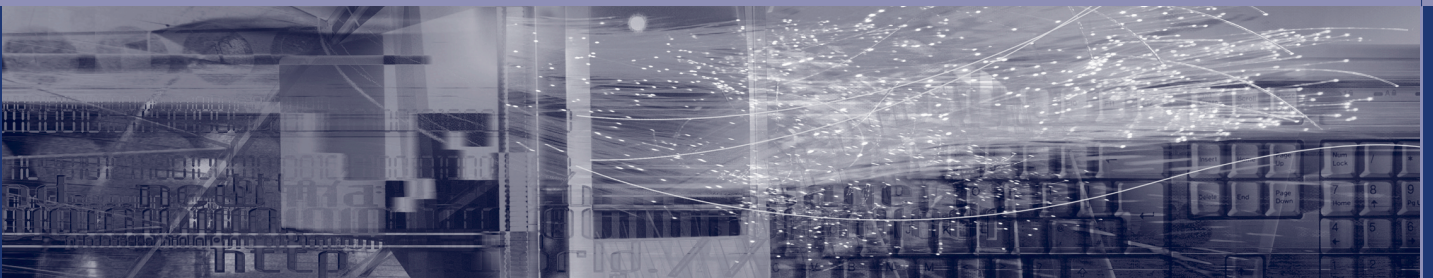
The mere fact of this subject being tackled on a public arena, like television, helped these learners to realise that they were not the only ones with these difficulties, that it was nothing to hide or be ashamed of. The sections of the programme with people talking openly about their experiences and the everyday dramatisation of real life situations helped to normalise the issue of literacy. The role of the project in raising awareness and normalising this issue for learners cannot be over stated. Many learners described the extent of their feelings of inadequacy and shame, and the relief that seeing these programmes had given them.

Most of these learners enjoyed the television series and learner support pack. They felt it had helped them learn in a very practical and pro-active way and learners spoke about the individual things they had achieved as a result of their learning from the programmes and support pack. This learning was on two levels - literacy skills and general social learning. The existence of this project and the freephone support line gave them a sense of reassurance and confidence that they had lost many years prior. It normalised their experiences of literacy and made them aware of the extent of people with literacy difficulties in Ireland, while also helping them to begin to tackle their own learning.

READ WRITE NOW - LITERACY GROUP LEARNERS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The second audience grouping targeted by the *Read Write Now* literacy campaign focused on learners who are already involved in literacy groups nationwide. This includes VEC literacy schemes, and other institutions and groups providing literacy services. All groups using the *Read Write Now* project were contacted through the auspices of NALA and the Department of Education and Science asking them to supply a detailed list of the number of learners using the project. In addition to this, literacy schemes were contacted through NALA and asked to distribute and facilitate their learners in the completion of a printed questionnaire on the *Read Write Now* project. Results from these two methods - group profile lists (all literacy groups) and the questionnaires (literacy schemes) - are represented separately below. Feedback and assessment of the *Read Write Now* project presented in the later sections of this chapter comes from the questionnaires completed by literacy scheme learners and from interviews conducted with a variety of learners and tutors/teachers/organisers from different types of literacy groups.

125 literacy schemes are located around the country at present catering for over 17,000 learners[28]. They provide literacy services for what is estimated at only 3.5% of the total number in the population who have literacy difficulties. Many of these services are provided on a part-time or voluntary basis (with 81% of literacy tutors working voluntarily and most Adult Literacy Organisers working part-time). The majority of these learners are female (64%). Learners' age range varies with 12% under 21 years, 33% between the ages of 22 and 34 years, 47% between the ages of 35 and 54, while the remaining 9% were over 55 years. Likewise the literacy level of these learners is varied with 33.5% at level 1, 46.5% at level 2 and 20% at level 3[29]. The majority of learners are tutored within a group context (nearly two-thirds of all learners) with the remainder being tutored on a 1:1 basis (nearly one-third) or both by group and 1:1 tuition.

Just under 18,000 *Read Write Now* learner support packs were sent out to a total of 654 institutions and groups providing literacy services by the end of the broadcasts in mid December 2000. 8,500 learner packs were sent to the 125 existing literacy schemes registered with NALA in early September before the broadcasts. Another 5,000 learner packs were sent out during the remaining weeks of September following requests to the support line for additional packs. This high level of demand for learner support packs began to subside from this with nearly 2,500 packs sent to literacy groups in October, over 1,000 packs in November and under 500 packs in the first two weeks of December (see Table 3.1).

These numbers indicate a very wide usage of the *Read Write Now* project by literacy groups (with 18,000 group learners using the *Read Write Now* project as compared to the registered national total of 15,000 people in literacy schemes). What came to light and deflates the numbers of literacy scheme learners using the project is the numbers of other groups also providing literacy services[30]. A wide variety of groups used the *Read Write Now* project as Figure 4.1 illustrates. The scope and variety of institutions and groups providing additional literacy services highlights the extent of adults with literacy difficulties (including younger adults and children) in Ireland. Their use of the *Read Write Now* project points to the lack of provision for these learners - many of whom are not accessing existing literacy schemes.

Adult education and literacy schemes only accounted for 13% of the groups using the *Read Write Now* project. Other groups providing literacy support included a variety of community based groups (such as local groups, health orientated groups, resource centres, libraries, different foundations and projects). The largest single type of group placed within this category was disability groups with 45 different groups participating in the *Read Write Now* project (including Rehab, NTDI, schools and other organisations). Other types of groups using the *Read Write Now* project included a variety of training and employment groups (16%), primary and secondary schools (16%), youth based training groups (9%), Travellers training and education groups (3%) and prison education groups (2%). The remainder consisted of learner packs that were not traced. The suitability and adaptability of a mass media project like the *Read Write Now* project to the needs of these groups and individuals is an issue that requires further investigation.

The size of these groups varied with community groups and training/employment groups asking for an average of 5 - 15 learning packs each. The average number of packs requested was 10 - 20 packs with the majority of disability, youth, and travellers groups all asking for this amount. Groups asking for larger numbers of packs included Prisons (20 - 40 packs), adult education and literacy schemes (20-30 per group), libraries (20-30) and schools (20-30 per school).

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[28] Figures for literacy schemes from NALA, 2000.

[29] Department of Education and Science literacy levels: (1) Those without reading and writing skills, or with very poor skills; (2) Those who have an acceptable reading standard but whose writing/spelling skills are not adequate to enable them to participate effectively in social and economic life; (3) Those whose skills were adequate on leaving school but now need updating to facilitate a return to further education and training.

[30] This chapter uses the overall term 'literacy group' to encompass all group-based adult literacy learners who were the target population for the *Read Write Now* project. Literacy Schemes refers to the groups registered with NALA, while other institutions and groups are named (i.e. schools, Youthreach, Community Employment groups).

Figure 4.1: Type and Number of Groups using the Read Write Now project

Figure 4.1: Type and Number of Groups using the Read Write Now project
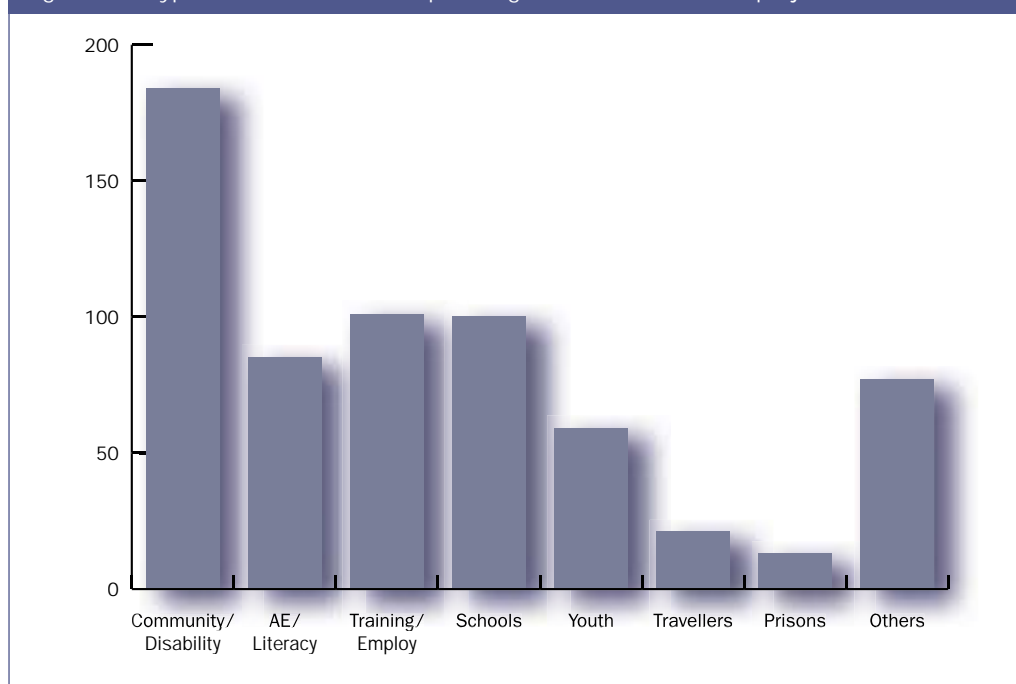
* Some types of groups are combined in the chart above (i.e. community and disability groups/ adult education group and literacy schemes/ training schemes and employment groups).

This wide variety of groups using the *Read Write Now* project reflects the wide range of people who have experienced literacy difficulties in Ireland today and the lack of literacy materials available to learners and tutors in this country. Learners range across different groups and localities nationwide, spanning the fields of education, health, community, employment and justice. While the different uses and suitability of the *Read Write Now* project was not addressed in detail in this research, an interesting feature of the profile presented above is the number of youth and school groups that requested and were sent *Read Write Now* packs for use with their students.

These learners were usually between the ages of 15 and 20 and were in secondary schools or youth training groups, but stretched back to the final year of primary school with teachers describing the pack as the last literacy and educational experience for many of these students[31]. This use of the *Read Write Now* pack reflects two important aspects - firstly, the lack of literacy materials available to learners and tutors, and secondly, the young adult status of these students able and willing to use this pack (as compared to the early primary school level material that they normally used). The existence of literacy difficulties within the school system is revealed by the large numbers of schools and youth-based groups using the *Read Write Now* literacy pack[32].

All literacy groups when they were sent the learning support packs were asked to track details about learners using the *Read Write Now* project and of any new referrals joining their services as a consequence of the project. They were sent another letter in the middle of October reminding them about the learner profile list. A final reminder was sent out by NALA in early February 2001. 110 literacy groups (mainly adult literacy schemes) responded, supplying figures of learners using the *Read Write Now* pack and a profile of their location, gender, appropriate age and literacy level[33]. 68 groups returned these details before Mid- November and the remainder in December and January. A total of 2, 172 learners were using the *Read Write Now* pack in these groups.

4.2 GENERAL PROFILE OF LITERACY GROUPS

The literacy groups that have responded to-date have been located across the country. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, a large number of learners (424 in total) came from the Dublin area (not a surprising figure given the population demography of this area). These learners were registered in 23 different literacy

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[31] A recent study by Cosgrove et al (2000) reported that one in 10 Irish primary school pupils had literacy problems and there has been no improvement in almost twenty years. Some of these students using the *Read Write Now* pack were being taught within the context of remedial or learning disability classes, while others were being taught in general classes.

[32] For a general discussion of literacy and the educational system in Ireland see Boldt and Devine in Combat Poverty Agency (1998).

[33] Literacy levels of 1, 2, 3 as established by the Department of Education and Science.

groups. Over 500 learners from the West region (encompassing the counties of Galway, Longford, Mayo, Roscommon and Sligo) were using the *Read Write Now* project. In part, this high number can be explained by the efficiency of the Adult Literacy and Adult Education Organisers in Co. Galway sending back accounts from every group in the county. Half of these learners were from Galway City, with the remainder scattered amongst 16 literacy groups in the rural areas of this county and the surrounding counties.

The areas of Shannon and the Midlands East had an average of 300 learners (in 12 groups) using the *Read Write Now* project. The South East, North West and South Eastern areas reported between 170 and 213 registered learners. The counties of Dublin, Galway, Offaly, Limerick, Cavan and Cork held the largest number of participating schemes (in that order). The high population numbers in the urban areas of Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Cork account for the high numbers from these counties. The presence of Offaly and Cavan in this group seems surprising but may be partially explained by the high return rate of evaluation forms from these counties.

Figure 4.2: Regional location of literacy group learners[34]
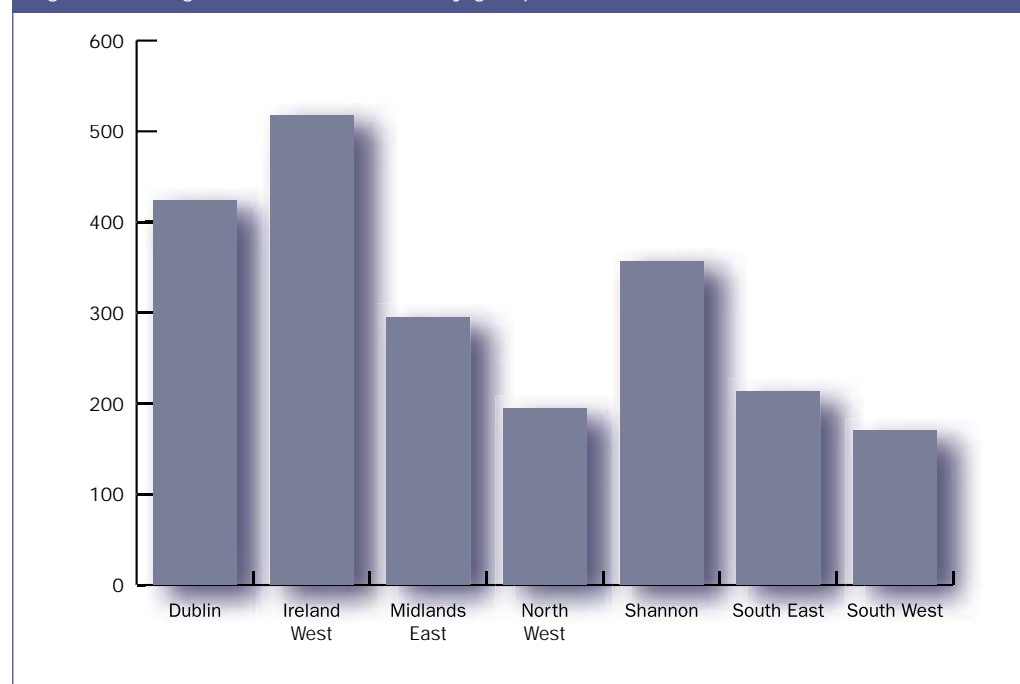
Over half of learners using the *Read Write Now* literacy pack were female - 1,002 as opposed 834 male learners. This female percentage is increased when the questionnaire responses are examined with 62% being female (see section 4.3). This figure is also similar to the gender profile of independent learners as chapter 3 revealed (with 65% being female) and to the gender profile of literacy learners provided by NALA (64% female).

The age profile of these participants ranges across the different age groupings from under 18 years of age to over 50 years. The presence of 340 learners under the age of 18 years is quite unusual for literacy groups. This reflects the use of *the Read Write Now* project by schools and the larger student numbers in the classroom-based school teaching system. This larger group size contrast with the small group numbers in most adult literacy schemes where most attention to literacy issues had traditionally focused (as indeed the *Read Write Now* project does in its target aims).

The continuation of the young age profile into the under thirty age bracket (450 learners) reflects the number of FÁS, Youthreach and similar training programmes that are providing additional literacy learning (see Figure 4.3 below). The age profile of learners is maintained through the next two age groups with 414 learners between 30 and 40 years, and 440 learners between 40 and 50 years. The age profile of learners finally falls when we look at those learners over the age of 50 years (178).

This profile is unusual for adult literacy groups with numbers at a younger age standing out. This can be explained by the high numbers of school students and youth training groups participating in the project. The lower numbers at the older age groups also contrasts with the profile of independent learners showing a greater number of participants who were over 50 years (see Figure 4.3). However, this figure is the same as most literacy groups (averaging at about 10% of their population over 50 years of age).

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[34] Division of Ireland into seven areas taken from Irish Tourist Board website: www.ireland.travel.ie/usefulfacts/mapireland

Figure 4.3: Age profile of literacy group learners
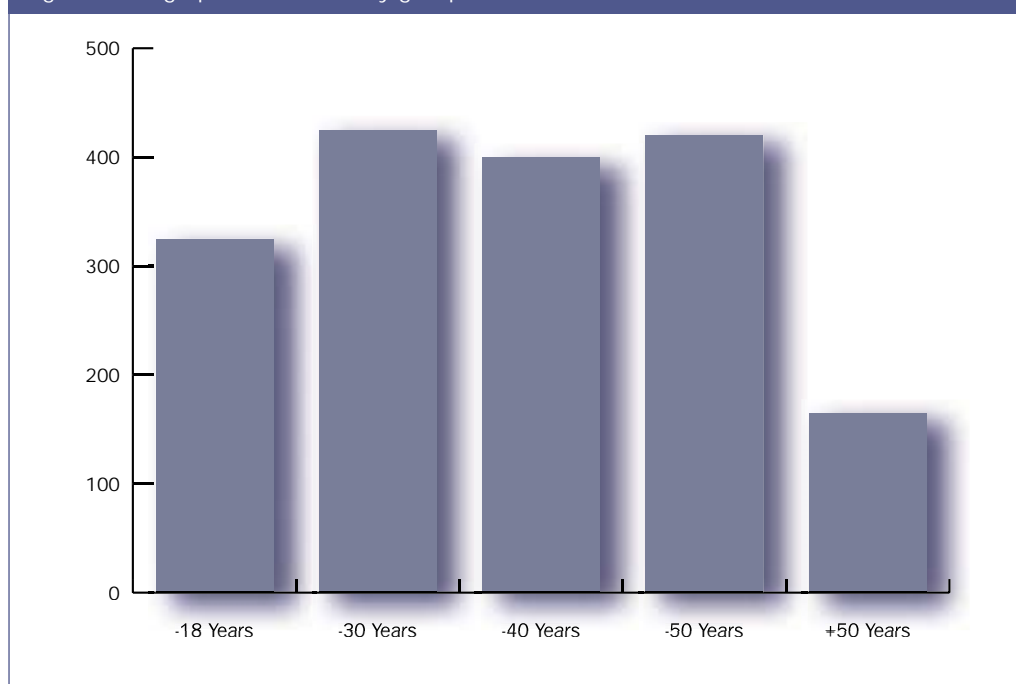
Literacy group organisers were also asked to supply details of their learners' literacy level according to the Department of Education and Science criteria. Details for 1,726 learners were supplied with the majority of these learners at literacy level 1 and 2 (over 700 learners at each level), and the remaining 263 learners at level 3 as Figure 4.4 illustrates. The wide spread of learners of differing standards (with the majority at a basic or intermediate level) reflects the target audience of the *Read Write Now* project. The audience for this project was perceived as a broad audience with a focus on basic literacy skills at foundation level.

Figure 4.4: Literacy levels of literacy group learners

Level 3
Level 2
Level 1
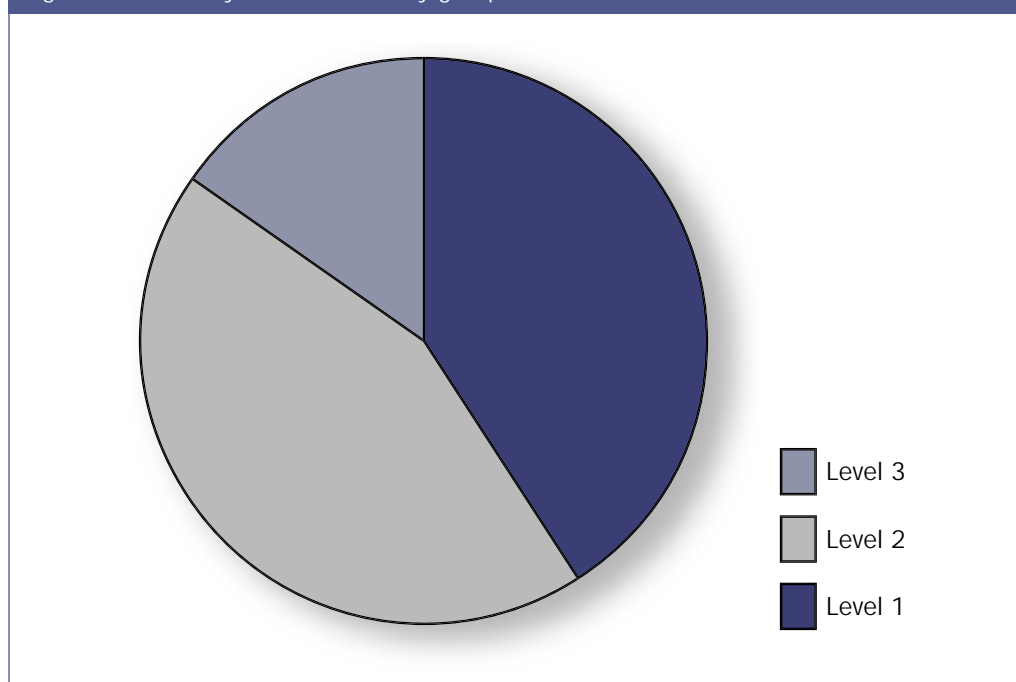
58% of these learners were being tutored in a group context, with the remaining 42% learning in a one-to-one situation with their tutor. The higher proportion of learners in a group learning context was inevitably biased by the number of school students involved in the *Read Write Now* project. As pointed

out earlier, the classroom context of the school system involves larger groups than is typical for adult education learning - particularly in the area of literacy learning with the adult literacy groups ranging from two to ten while school literacy classes ranged from fifteen to forty members.

4.3 LITERACY SCHEME LEARNERS - QUESTIONNAIRE PROFILE

Questionnaires were sent to literacy schemes registered with NALA during October 2000 for learners using the *Read Write Now* pack to complete with the assistance of their tutors. Over 400 questionnaires were returned - some filled out by individuals and others filled out within the context of their literacy groups with the assistance of their tutor. The way these questionnaires were filled out makes them unusual. The group context of completing the questionnaire within literacy schemes shows elements of the group dynamics that characterise focus groups[35]. The extent of group influences over individual thought cannot be fully ascertained. However, it is an issue that was redressed to some extent by later interviews. The other unique aspect of the questionnaire survey is the high number of open-ended questions that were not completed, but this was supplemented by the fact that they are preceded by similar closed questions that were answered.

400 questionnaires were analysed in total and the results are presented below. As with the general group profile presented in section 5.2, the degree of representativeness of these questionnaires is debatable. Literacy groups and learners voluntarily completed the general profile lists and questionnaires. In addition, some of the returned questionnaires did not include a group location (an option given to learners who wanted to maintain anonymity). As a result, the regional location of the questionnaires analysed in this report is not representative of the location of literacy groups or *Read Write Now* usage in Ireland. Once again, the high number of questionnaires (129) came from the Dublin region. In this case returns from Dublin vastly outnumber all other regions. As Figure 4.5 illustrates, questionnaires from the other regions ranged from 18 to 38 as compared to the 129 questionnaires from Dublin.

Figure 4.5: Regional location of literacy scheme learners
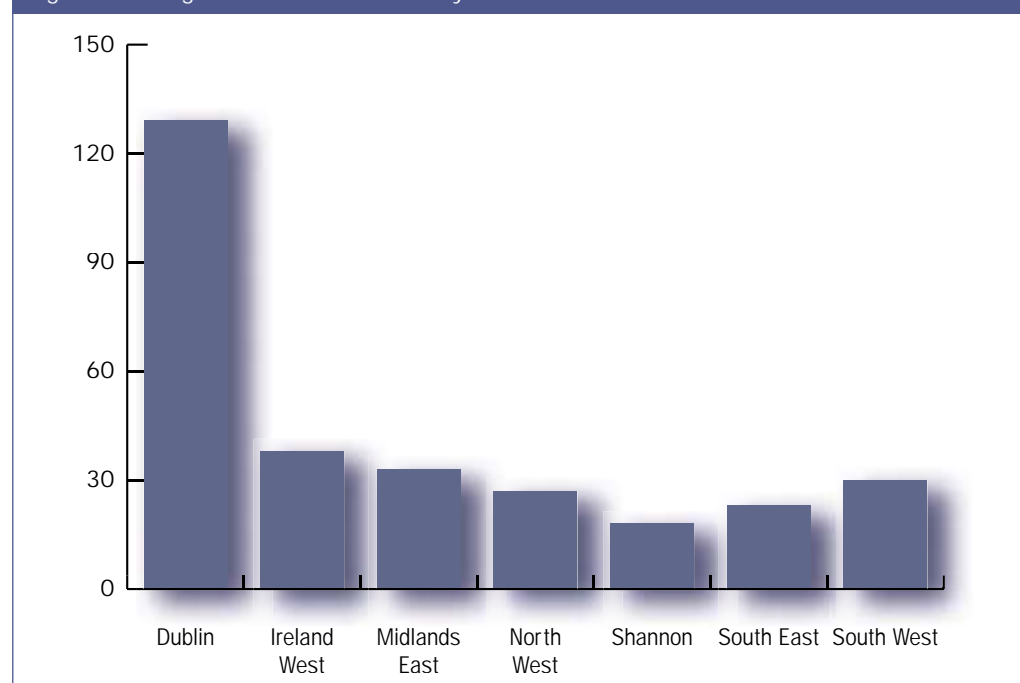
The gender profile that emerged from this sample of questionnaires from literacy scheme participants was dominated by females again (62% in this survey as compared to a figure of 55% female emerging from the general profile in section 5.2). This was similar to the gender profile that emerged from the independent learners in chapter 3 and from the general profile provided by NALA (65 % and 46% respectively). Reasons for this may include the high number of women who are free during the daytime when many literacy courses are held; the dynamics of adult education with the existence of many

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[35] See Morgan, David and Krueger, Richard 1998 *Focus Group Kit 1-6* Sage: London

women's groups across Ireland[36]; the number of men working during the day and therefore available only in the evenings when the literacy series is broadcast.

Gender preferences for group or distance education is also a factor as the interviews with learners revealed. Some of the women who were interviewed described how their male family members and friends (often at a similar or lower literacy level to themselves) were reluctant to attend literacy groups. They perceived this as a public admission of their own failure and refused to attend so long as they could cope. In many cases this was inter-related with their work status as they had hidden any literacy difficulties they had throughout the years and felt that they could not admit any difficulties at this stage.

The age profile of respondents was different to those presented earlier. As Figure 4.6 reveals, the largest percentage of these literacy scheme learners were in their thirties (32%) but learners' ages were scattered across the older age groups with 80% of respondents over the age of 30 years and ranging up to over 50 years. This was relatively evenly distributed with an average of 20 - 30% in each of these age groups. 18% were in their twenties. Only 2% were under 18, reflecting the more typical literacy scheme age profile of adults.

Independent learners also ranged in age but were more evenly distributed across the age groupings again with less under 18's but differing in the larger proportion of over 50 year olds (see Figure 3.5). The opposite pattern can be seen in the age profile of literacy schemes with relatively wide distribution but more under 18 years and less over 50 years (Figure 4.3). What becomes clear from these different profiles is the wide variety of age groups using the *Read Write Now* project. The differences in the profiles between independent and group learners points to the different groups accessing and using the project from schools and youth centres throughout to older people at home.

**Figure 4.6: Age profile of literacy scheme learners**
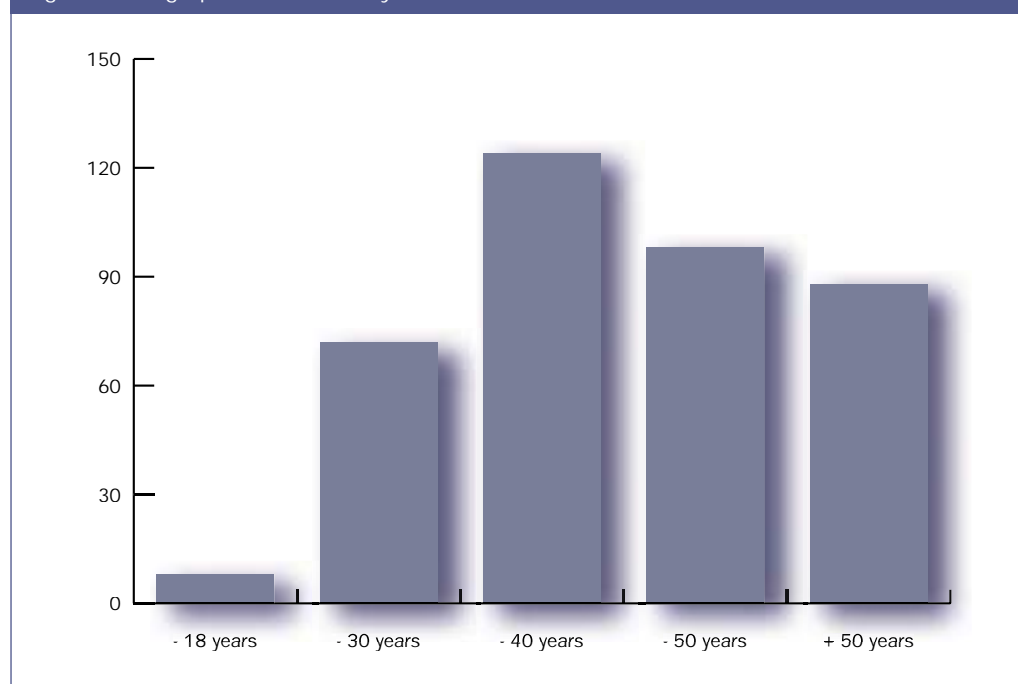
The majority of literacy scheme learners had left school by the age of sixteen or under (314 individuals). Only 2% of these group learners remained in formal education until they were 17 years or above. The general pattern revealed by Figure 4.7 is similar to that of independent learners as chapter 3 outlines. 10% of literacy group and independent learners had left school by the age of 12. In both cases, the majority of respondents left school between the ages of 14 and 16 years.

Learners' self assessment of their literacy level is slightly higher than the general pattern reported by literacy groups in Figure 4.8. The majority of respondents (70%) described their reading and writing skills as good or functional - placing themselves at a similar level to literacy level 2 (see section 4.2). Self-assessment of reading skills was ranked slightly higher than writing skills by these participants. Only 7-13 % described their reading and writing skills as very good.

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36 Inglis, Tom 1994 'Women and the Struggle for Daytime Adult Education in Ireland' in *Studies in the Education of Adults,* Vol. 26:1:pp50-64.

Figure 4.7: School leaving age of literacy scheme learners
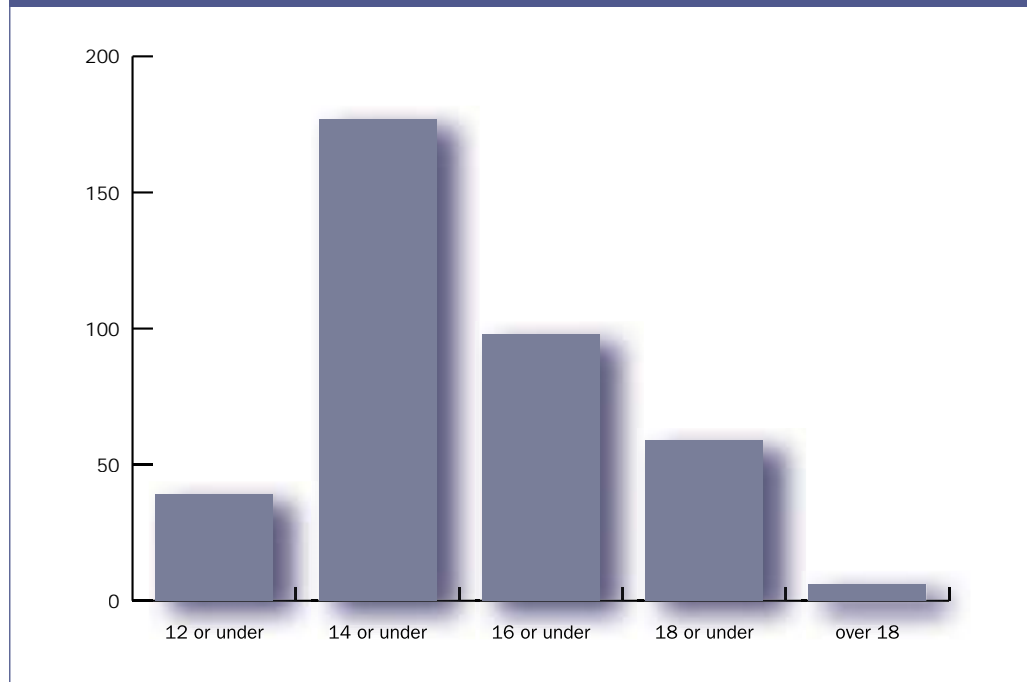
A larger number described their reading and writing skills as poor - a point that is reflected in the numbers saying that they found the *Read Write Now* literacy pack too advanced for them. The majority of users - and those who continued to use the pack - were at an intermediate level.

Figure 4.8: Literacy scheme learners' self-assessment of their reading/writing skills
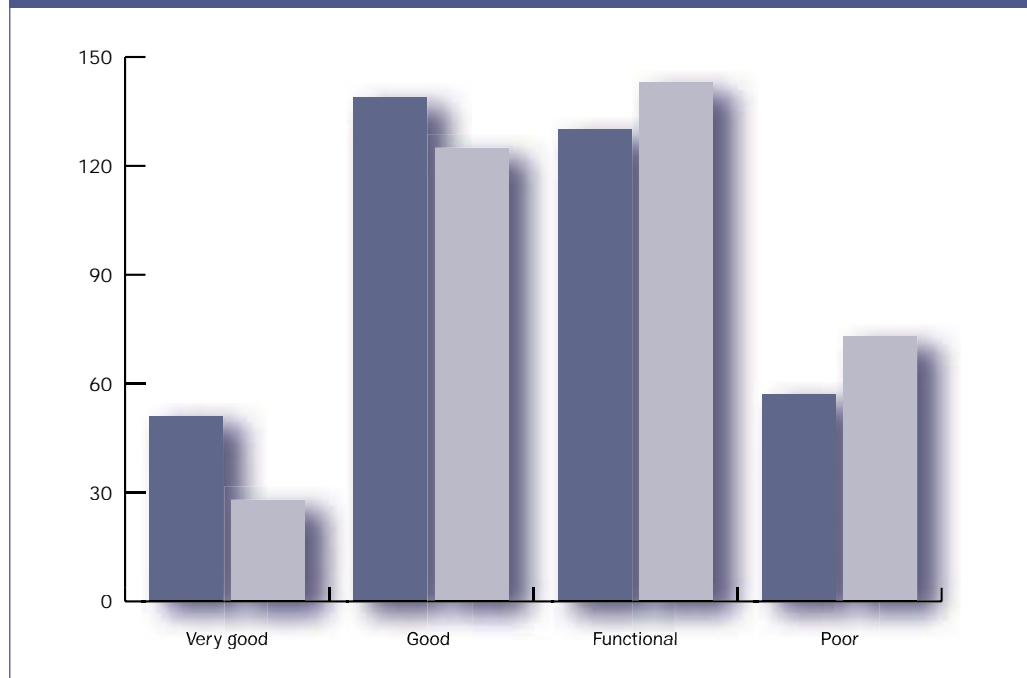
The majority of learners were being tutored in a group context as the general profile also indicated. 60% were being tutored in a group context and 33% were being tutored individually with the remaining participating in both (6%) or not answering this question (1%). This obviously contrasts with independent learners - the vast majority of whom were working on their own.

4.4.1 PUBLICITY FOR THE READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

The majority of learners (58%) had found out about the *Read Write Now* project from their local literacy services initially, demonstrating the success of the promotion campaign amongst literacy services. As Figure 5.9 demonstrates, 32% had found out about the project from the media (primarily from a variety of media sources including local and national radio, television and newspapers). Television was mentioned most often as the media source that had informed learners about the series (11%), followed by local and national radio advertisements. The remaining 10% had found out about the project from a variety of sources including friends or relatives (5%), a combination of literacy services and the media, and other unknown sources.

In total, 90% had found out about the project from literacy schemes or the media - the two promotional strategies of the *Read Write Now* production team. Only three people cited newspapers as a source of information about the project. The two-pronged targeted promotional campaign towards existing literacy services (and their learners) and the mass media (in the case of individual learners) was very successful in achieving its aim. What remains unseen is the people who did not respond to either method, but these people are impossible to identify, and likewise their reasoning.

Figure 4.9: How scheme learners heard about the Read Write Now project
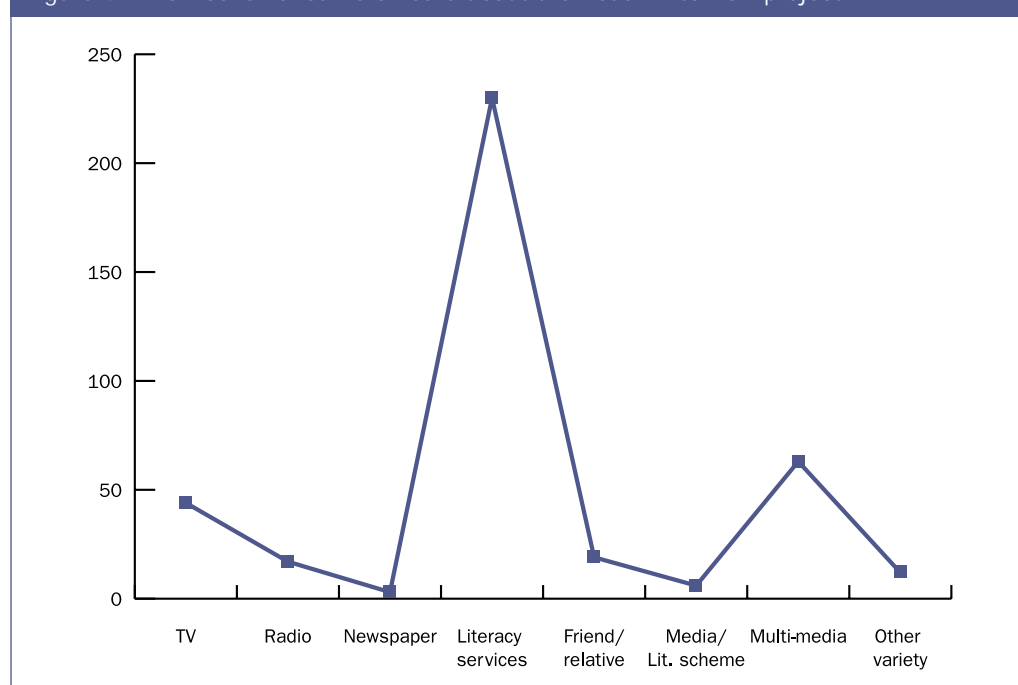
4.4.2. NUMBERS WATCHING AND TIMING OF THE READ WRITE NOW SERIES

The majority of learners had watched between one and four programmes before completing the questionnaire[37]. Most of the analysis presented below is based on their responses to the project at this stage - having seen up to one third of the series. The interview data referred to throughout this chapter was completed later when all 12 programmes in the series were broadcast. The majority of these viewers watched the programmes on Tuesday nights at the 11 p.m. slot (70%). 12% watched the programmes on Wednesday morning and 8% watched the series on video (usually taped by tutors). The remainder watched the programmes in either timeslot or on video depending on their availability that day.

Viewers were split in their assessment of the suitability of these timeslots with 45% agreeing with the suitability of the two timeslots and the remaining 55% disagreeing with the timeslots. The majority of those disliking the timing of the series referred to the lateness of the Tuesday night screening when they were too tired to concentrate on the programme. A few viewers perceived a negative connotation in this late night timing, with the implication that watching the series was something to cover up or hide. Others took the more positive perspective that this time slot gave more privacy for learners. Overall, viewers would have liked the broadcast at a slightly earlier time in the evening but were aware of the demands on primetime broadcast hours. In general, the Wednesday morning timeslot got

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[37] The questionnaire was sent to literacy services in October 2000.

favourable reactions from those who watched at this time and from those working at that time. Viewers did stress the need to have a timeslot outside of normal working hours, but preferably not too early or late in the evening.

4.5 ASSESSMENT OF THE READ WRITE NOW SERIES

Viewers were asked to cite their favourite programme from the *Read Write Now* series, before being asked about specific details of their reaction to the programmes. As the majority of the questionnaires were returned before or by week five of the broadcasts, detailed figures of programme preferences covers a choice of programme one to five. The producers' intention to have a dynamic and popular first programme worked very effectively with 57 out of the 215 respondents answering this question preferring this programme (see Table 4.1). Programmes 5 (*A Promotion*), 3 (*A Day at the Races*) and 4 (*The Birthday Party*) were the next most popular programmes (at 10.5%, 8% and 6% respectively). Another 5.5% liked aspects of all programmes (i.e. the learners' own experiences, drama segments etc). Programmes 6-12 gained an average ranking of above 1%. The programme cited least was programme 2 (*'Buying a Video Recorder'*)[38]. 185 respondents did not answer this question and were split between those who did not answer this open-ended question (31%) and those who disliked the entire series and found no programme to their liking (15%).

Table 4.1: Preferred programme from the Read Write Now series							
Prog 1	Prog 2	Prog 3	Prog 4	Prog 5	Progs 6-12*	Aspects of progs.	No answer
57	9	31	25	42	28	22	60

* Most respondents returned the questionnaire following the broadcast of the fourth/fifth programme, so figures for programme 6 - 12 are very low and were results from questionnaires sent back at a later date.

Respondents were also asked to detail what they liked and disliked about the television series. A high proportion of people did not answer this open-ended question (approximately 45%). The majority of learners cited a general enjoyment of the television series (see Figure 4.10). The most popular aspect of the programme mentioned was the general enjoyment that viewers felt they had gained from watching the series (14%). This was followed by the learner profile with people talking about their own experiences (8%), and the drama segments (7%). Also mentioned amongst likes were the presentation style of the programmes and specific items of learning. Other aspects - including the actors, programme review, programme pace, and timing - were mentioned by very few respondents.

On the other side, the actors were the most disliked aspects of the programmes followed by a general dislike for the series. The emphasis on the drama segments and actors does raise an interesting point that emerged in interviews with learners and some of the questionnaires. Many learners and tutors who disliked the drama focus of the programmes felt that the actors were inconsistent and unrealistic in their literacy skills throughout the role plays (see section 4.6 for further details). The original intention of the programme makers was not a re-enactment of people dealing with literacy issues but a role play with professional actors playing characters (who can read and write). These actors demonstrate some important literacy skills for the viewer through some of their actions in the role play.

Some viewers misunderstood the role of the actors criticising them for inconsistency and lack of realism when this was not the aim of the role play. While the number of these misreadings are low, with many other respondents liking the actors and drama sections, it does point to the importance of the series being clear on its intentions and structure from the beginning. What it may point to is an inconsistency between learners' expectations of a literacy distance education series. Learners (particularly group-based learners) are operating with two different frameworks - one based on the structures and intentions of literacy education and the other based on the enjoyment and leisure role that television plays in our lives (with learning and education often positioned on the opposite side of this continuum as something that involves hard work)[39].

For many people, education and learning seem opposite to the relaxation and entertainment that drama and television offers. An interesting aspect of this issue is that this conflict between learning and television was not mentioned by any of the independent learners described in chapter 3 who were

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[38] Programme 2 was a difficult subject to raise during interviews also with viewers. It did not seem to make an impact on viewers who did not really remember the programme or had very little to say about it as compared to the more passionate positive or negative comments on other programmes.

[39] For example Malcolm Tight (1983:4-6) outlines different types of education - formal, non-formal and informal - by using the distinction between educational ('intending to educate') and educative ('tending to educate'). A similar distinction is drawn between 'intentional' and 'incidental' learning, with much of television's educational value being placed in the educative or incidental category.

not involved in existing literacy services (and hence lacking the frameworks or expectations of what literacy learning involves). These independent viewers are operating within a framework of educative or incidental learning (see footnote below) while the literacy group learners are trying to balance with the demands of their formal educational experiences and frameworks. The Commission of the European Community's *Memorandum of Lifelong Learning* (2000:8) make a similar point, identifying three categories of purposive learning activity as formal, non-formal and informal learning. They point to the need for balance between these, as non-formal and informal learning are typically undervalued.

The framework and life experience of viewers was a significant factor in their attitude and approach to the series. In many cases this was positive with learners praising the series for showing aspects of their daily lives. In particular schools and various youth groups (including different community and employment groups, Youthreach, FÁS) were delighted with the series. For many students, this was the first adult-orientated resource material they had used and its' use of everyday life situations was appreciated by them. In particular, it made a great change from the usual 'babyish' material from primary school literacy books that they had been using. Teachers and tutors appreciated it for similar reasons using it for literacy and general social learning. Younger students using the *Read Write Now* project were from 11/12 years upwards and - as their teachers described - this would be their last formal learning experience in literacy issues as many left school at an early age.

Some rural learners disliked the series because *'it was too Dublin-based and unfamiliar to our lives'*. One tutor related this back to the life experiences of the women in her group, describing how they were focused around the small town where they lived and focused on their *'families, shopping and school'*. Many of the women had lived here all their lives and depended on their husbands for *'public things outside of their own realm of experiences'*. Programme topics such as going to the races and buying a video recorder were outside this realm of experience and therefore unknown and uninteresting to them.

Figure 4.10: Likes/dislikes of the Read Write Now series
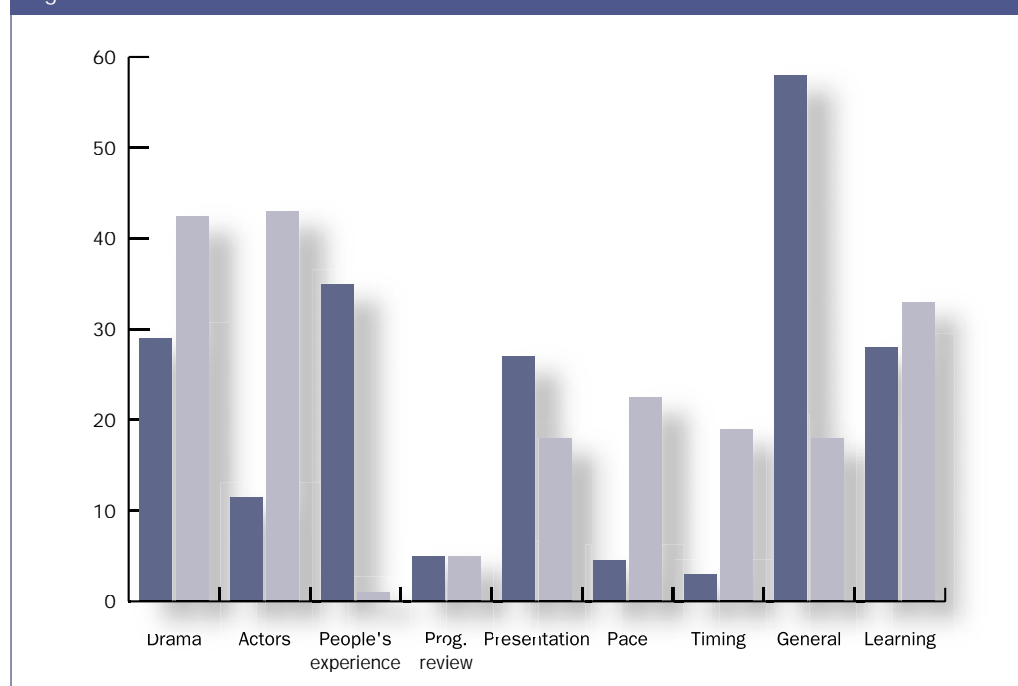
Other aspects of the series that viewers disliked includes the literacy level and learning aspects of the programme (with 5% of respondents feeling that they had learnt nothing from the series and the remaining 8% disliking the learning style and approach of the series). Several people also disliked the pacing and presentation style of the programmes (3.5% and 4.5% respectively) commenting that the pace of learning in particular was uneven throughout the series jumping between easy and more difficult aspects[40]. The late night timing of the series was also mentioned as a dislike by 5% of viewers. The remainder of comments on this aspect of the programme focused on a general dislike of the series, with a few people also mentioning the programme review and only one person disliking the sections with viewers talking about their own experience.

This aspect of the programme was also raised during the interviews gaining overall approval and admiration from viewers. For many, this was the first time they had heard this issue openly and publicly

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[40] As chapter 2 outlines, two factors impinged on this. Firstly, there was some discrepancy between the production of the printed learner pack and the programmes, and secondly the order of the programmes was changing during the production process causing some inconsistencies between the two.

discussed, and it reminded them of the enormous step they had taken when they had first joined a literacy group. They described the constant feelings of shame and guilt they had lived with because of their awareness of their literacy difficulties, the strategies they had used to avoid reading or writing something down, the lack of personal confidence and constant fear of discovery that they had lived under. They spoke of the process they had gone through since joining a literacy group of realising it is not a crime, they are not stupid, it is a failing of the system rather than themselves and that literacy is a gradual process. They spoke of their re-emerging personal confidence and sense of self-worth as they regained a balance in their life, no longer defining themselves by what they could not read or write.

They were filled with admiration for the learners who appeared in the programmes and spoke publicly to a national audience about their experiences. In many cases, they felt they were not at this stage of complete openness and confidence yet, but it inspired them to see it in someone else. The programmes involving learners were extremely popular amongst the independent and literacy group learners, especially programme 5 with Ernie dealing with his literacy difficulty in taking up a job promotion and programme 10 with Mandy and her children. Learners also felt the *Read Write Now* project had made an important contribution to Irish public life, raising awareness of literacy in Ireland and the reality of life for many people.

4.5.1 DRAMA IN THE READ WRITE NOW SERIES

63% of respondents gave the drama sections of the *Read Write Now* television series a favourable assessment. The majority of these assessments categorised the drama sections as 'good' as opposed to 'very good'. 11% saw the drama sections as 'not good' and the remaining 18% classified the drama segments of the programmes as poor. 8% did not answer this question. There was a slight difference in these assessments by the different gender groups (see Figure 5.11 overleaf). Women tended to give the drama sections a more extreme assessment (a very good or poor assessment).

Men, on the other hand, were more inclined to give the drama sections a middling assessment as 'good' or 'not good'. However, the majority of viewers gave the drama segments a favourable assessment. The tendency of women to express a preference for drama and for men to be more critical of drama is well documented in media studies[41]. Interesting, this is not evident in responses to this series, with women spanning both extremes of positivity and criticisms of the drama segments while men were more inclined to give the less radical assessments of good or not good.

Figure 4.11: Gender division between drama assessment of the programmes
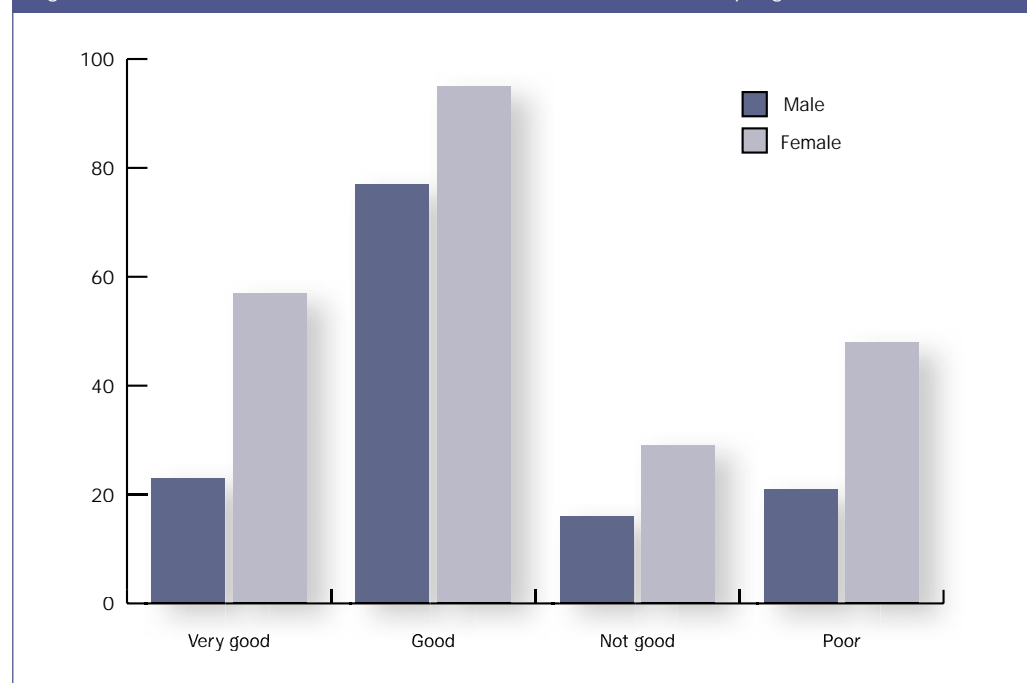
The overwhelming positive reaction of both genders to the drama sections is unusual and demonstrates the success of the programmes' use of dramatic and real life role plays to illustrate learning points. This reaction of learners is in contrast to some of the initial feedback given to the programme makers and tutor support staff. The early public reaction was extremely critical and

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[41] See Moores, 1993; Morley, 1992; Van Loonen, 1994 for discussions of the role of gender in media consumption and understandings.

negative of the drama segments. Those who contacted the programme makers and the telephone support workers felt that the drama segments distracted from the real purpose of learning, were silly and demeaning for learners, childish, irrelevant and time-wasting, and felt there was not enough learning in the programmes.

The particular focus of this criticism was the scenario in programme 1 of two women going to a concert in Dublin. Many viewers felt that the women should not have got lost and missed the concert, that it gave a negative connotation to the programme and its aims. In addition, many people felt that the two women (and by proxy, other women and literacy learners) were shown as silly and stupid. This initial response was primarily from those involved in literacy services (tutors, organisers and teachers) who rang to complain on behalf of the general literacy audience. The majority of learners did not pay much attention to this issue, focusing instead on their delight at seeing this topic on television and gaining this opportunity to learn. Critical comments made by learners in interviews, in particular about programme 1, raised the same issue as the literacy services personnel had - that the scenario was unrealistic and it would have been better to have a successful ending to their trip to the concert. Learners' comments however were far less critical in tone than those by people involved in literacy provision.

Learners' perception of role of the drama segments in the programmes and their learning was interesting. What became evident is the thin line existing between drama and reality during the process of watching and learning from the *Read Write Now* series. This is something that needs to be treated with care by the programme makers. While most viewers' reaction to the drama segments were favourable (both individual and literacy group learners), there were different levels of identification and confusion about these sections. The majority of learners recognised the constructed nature of the drama segments. The level of identification with these scenarios however gave rise to confusion and criticisms by some learners.

Interviews with literacy group learners explored this issue in more detail. What became evident was the identification of viewers with the actors and scenarios portrayed on screen - at times in spite of their awareness of its constructed and dramatised nature. Due to the nature of this project - literacy - and its viewers' intentions - learning - there was a very strong level of identification with what was portrayed in the programmes. Viewers assessed the drama segments and actors in terms of their similarity to their own experiences and feelings (i.e. you would/ would not do this, if you could not read/write that). This thin line between viewers' awareness of the constructed nature of drama and their identification with their own life experiences needs to balanced quite carefully in the design and making of programmes.

> 'They [the programme makers] took so much for granted. For an educational
> programme, it lacked basic common sense and would put people off learning'.

The difficulty of this balancing act is very clear in reactions to the first programme as the comment by a learner (see above) illustrates. While viewers liked the programme and drama, many were disappointed at the unsuccessful end to the scenario. They identified and placed themselves in the shoes of these women and criticised the programme makers for their actions. In particular, they felt that the women seemed to lack basic common sense (with the underlying association that learners themselves lacked common sense). Learners referred to the fact that common sense would have told you to use a map or ask someone if you were lost in an unknown city, instead of wandering off down back alleys. This was allied with the fact that viewers were told that one of the women had lived in Dublin for a year, yet seemed incapable of planning her journey from the train station to the concert location.

Viewers felt that the programme was good up to the point that the women arrived in Dublin but lost commonsense and a coherent plot-line after that. Instead of continuing with the travel theme, demonstrating how the women would get to the concert location, they were sent off eating, shopping and wandering around lost. Some of the respondents linked this inconsistency and lack of common sense back to their perception that those involved in making the series had no literacy difficulties themselves. They felt that the programme makers were unaware of the extreme caution and planning that many learners themselves took to unfamiliar situations due to their fears of being uncovered or not able to cope due to their literacy difficulties.

This issue of inconsistency was also raised as a general point in the interviews. Participants felt that there was a disparity between the programme makers' use of incidents in the drama segments for specific learning purposes and learners' more generalised and total involvement in the programmes. Learners approached the programme in its entirety for learning and viewed the drama segments as more than mere illustration for learning purposes (as some described their perception of the programme makers' attitude). They wanted more common sense and consistency throughout the programme, using and explaining all learning points that can be gained from the events of drama segments in sequence and consistency.

For example, one interviewee felt that programme 1 should have just dealt with the theme of travel rather than 'jumping around from washing clothes, booking tickets, and travelling'. She understood that the washing of clothes emphasised the same learning point of understanding symbols as the later train timetable sequence does, but felt that the variety of scenarios had caused inconsistency in the segment. It had also lead to irrelevant and time wasting scenarios - for example the women dancing around the back garden in programme 1, the teenage girl mooning over a guy instead of looking for a CD in programme 6.

For learners, the programmes - drama, real life experiences, and learning points - were all approached as an entirety and read through a filter of their own experiences and approach to life. As a result, the programme makers' use of aspects of the drama sections to illustrate learning points was felt to be inconsistent at times[42]. What this points to is the need for a careful balance between the use of entertainment formats like drama and the learning needs for educational programmes. Programme makers need to be aware of the expectations and frameworks of learners and clarify their approach from the beginning of the programme.

4.5.2. LEARNING FROM THE READ WRITE NOW PROJECT

Literacy group learners gave a positive response to the learning content of the *Read Write Now* programmes. 56% felt the learning content was 'good' or 'very good', with 20% classifying the learning content of the programmes as 'not good' and 10% as 'poor'. The remaining 14% did not answer this question. Proportionally more women gave positive responses to the learning content (8% more) and men featured slightly more dominantly amongst the critics of the learning content.

Again however, the overall reaction from both genders is positive (see Figure 4.12 below). This pattern of women giving more favourable comments and men more negative comments can be seen in the light of discourse and conversational patterns of both genders (which corresponds with this pattern of female domination on the positive end and male domination of the critical end of conversations and evaluations).

**Figure 4.12: Gender division between learning assessment of the programmes**
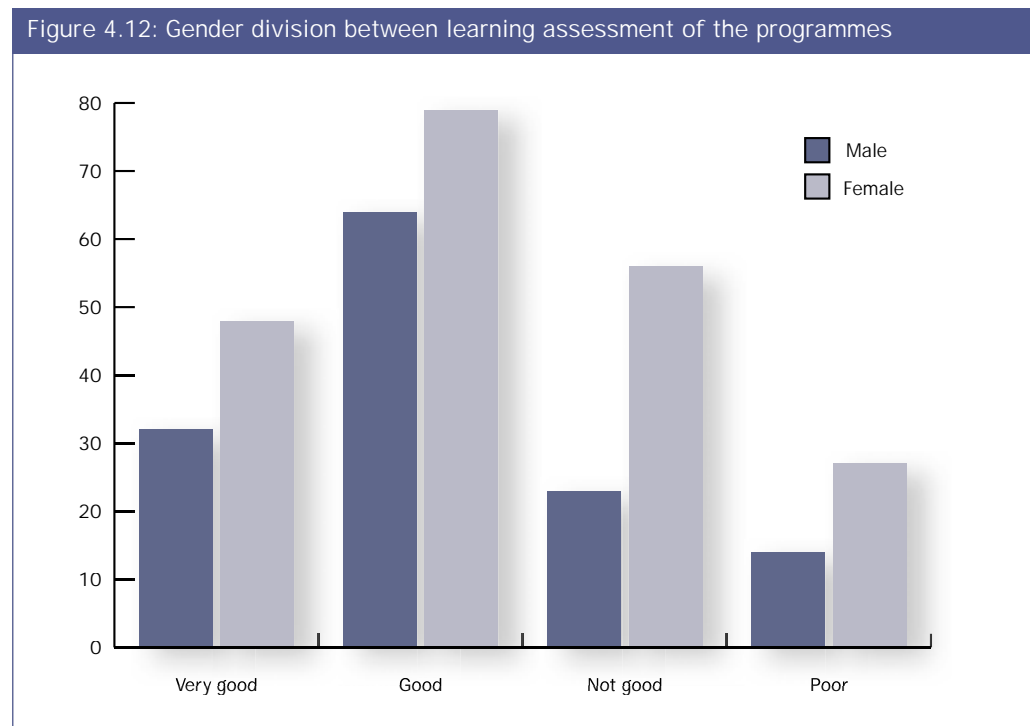
There was a mixed reaction to the questions on the learning levels of programmes. In general, literacy group learners felt the programme level was good (reflected in the 280 negative responses to the question of the programme being too hard and the 304 respondents who felt there was not too much learning in the programmes). On the other hand, many learners felt there could have been more learning in the programmes (304 respondents feeling there was too little learning in the programmes).

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[42] A similar point was raised in relation to the earlier *Right To Learn* project - an educational series that that took a similar approach of combined drama and other real life sections. Viewers of this series also referred to their dislike of the mixing of several issues within one drama segment (see Kelly, 1996)

Overall most learners seemed to feel the programme was not too hard and there was not too much learning. The opposing question of whether the programme was too easy with too little learning gained more mixed answers with 48% of learners feeling the programmes were too easy and 53% feeling there was too little learning in the series. The remainder of the answers were negative or unanswered. Mixed reactions were also gained from the interviews and were related to the literacy level of the learners. Many literacy group learners found the level of learning from the programmes to be unsuitable for them (too difficult or too easy). They did appreciate the fact they would suit other learners and hoped to see programmes at other levels in the future that they could use.

Figure 4.13: Assessment of the level of literacy learning from the programmes
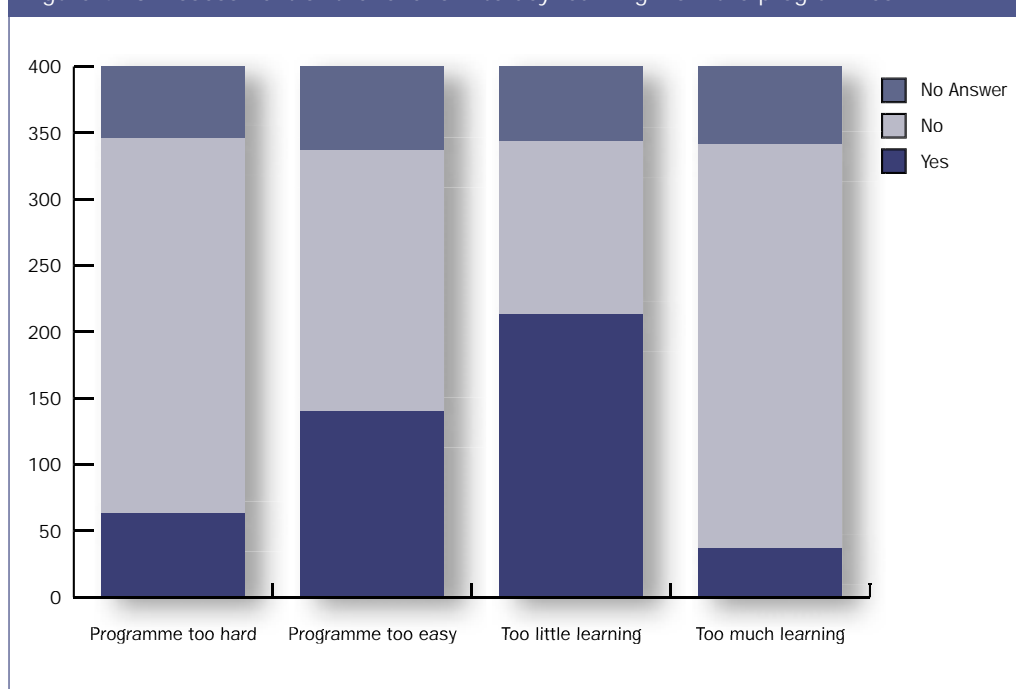
Respondents were asked to detail the different things they had learnt from the programmes. These open-ended answers were then coded according to the learning objectives outlined in the *Read Write Now* mission document and categorised into the learning types of reading, writing, quantitative literacy, general learning, and motivation for the purposes of this analysis. A broad range of learning was cited by the learners with 85 people citing reading and writing skills (cheques, forms, and letters were the most commonly mentioned). 34 people mentioned quantitative literacy skills with the 24 hour clock and timetables cited most often.

However, this figure does not reveal the full extent of literacy and numeracy skills acquired as some respondents mentioned this at other points in the questionnaires (or mentioned it as part of more general learning skills they had acquired). Form-filling and numeracy were the most popular aspects of learning mentioned. Many learners described the general learning on several levels that they had gained from the series. 10% of respondents raised the issue of how the series was important for their approach to learning, motivating and encouraging them to learn. Learners and tutors also spoke in interviews about the importance of the series for motivating people and providing them with an incentive to learn.

They also spoke about the different types of learning gained from the series - specific literacy skills and social learning. Social learning benefits from the series included this emphasis on the benefits of learning that the project promoted, the focus on daily life and interactions in the family, shops, working, learning to drive and even learning how to bet on a horse. Some learners described how they watched the series although they learnt no additional literacy skills, focusing on and appreciating the general social context of the series instead.

Over 25% felt that they had learnt little or nothing from the programme. This included people who did not like the programmes and those who felt that it was not suitable for their literacy level. There was no obvious correlation between literacy levels of viewers and their assessments or comments about the programme (difficult to ascertain as the majority of viewers placed themselves in the lower and middle category in their assessment of their literacy skills). In many cases, learners gave a general

assessment of the programmes although they had not learnt from the programmes themselves. Many of these people appealed for a more basic or advanced programme and workbook (dependent on their level). 18% of respondents did not answer this question.

Figure 4.14: Assessment of the type of learning from the programmes[43]

4.6 ASSESSMENT OF THE READ WRITE NOW SUPPORT SERVICES

The majority of literacy group respondents gave the *Read Write Now* learner pack a positive evaluation. More than 57% of respondents described the workbook as 'very good' and 29% as 'good'. This pattern of positive assessments ran across all aspects of the workbook (reading, writing and spelling) and support book as Table 4.2 illustrates. Only 3 to 4% of learners felt that the learner pack was not good (the majority of these negatively evaluating the learner pack on the basis of their own literacy level).

This overwhelming positive response points to the success of the learner support pack, with many learners describing how they use it independently of the programmes as a resource material on its own. Many learners and tutors also mentioned the lack of literacy material available to them, congratulating the programme makers and support pack writers on the excellent content and presentation of all aspects of the project. Tutors spoke about how the very fact they could give the pack to learners was encouragement and motivation in itself. For most learners, this was the first time they had received something like this. They commented on the high quality of presentation in the learner pack, describing how they were reluctant to write in the pack because they would ruin its new look or they might make a mistake.

The majority of learners used the learner pack in conjunction with the programmes (usually looking over the workbook briefly first, watching the programme and then completing the workbook exercises and in some cases discussing the programme and workbook exercises in their literacy group afterwards). Some learners did use the learner pack independent of the programmes - in some cases because they had missed a particular programme and in other cases when they disliked the programmes. They had no real problems using the pack independent of the programmes. For the majority of learners, the programmes were used as an integral part of their learning, and they spoke about the occasional discrepancy between the workbook and programmes that confused them.

The support book was also used by 63% of learners, with others not using it (who found it too easy or already had their own word diary) still giving it a favourable assessment. Tutors also gave a very favourable evaluation of the learning pack and found it an invaluable resource that they will continue to use. They also used the workbook as a resource of their own, adapting the worksheets to suit the literacy requirements of their own learners and as inspiration for similar worksheets for learners.

Table 4.2: General assessment of the Read Write Now learning support pack					
	Very good	Good	Not good	Poor	No Answer
Workbook - general	228	115	8	3	46
Workbook - reading	211	118	13	2	56
Workbook - writing	214	111	14	3	58
Workbook - spelling	205	116	14	3	62
Support book - general	200	101	14	2	83
TOTAL (Nos)	1058	561	63	13	305
TOTAL (%)	53%	28%	3%	1%	15%

The final aspect of the literacy group learners' response to the *Read Write Now* project concerns the other element of the support system - the freephone service. Very few of these group learners used the freephone service. Only 7% had rang the freephone number - the majority of these with a request for a learner pack. Only two people out of the 400 surveyed rang the freephone number for literacy support, giving the service a positive assessment. This issue was explored in the interviews with learners. Participants expressed no interest in using the support freephone service feeling that it was for learners who did not have the support of a literacy group. All of the literacy groups had tutors that they could ask if any queries or problems arose and many were using the support pack in class as part of their literacy work, so they did not feel the need to contact the freephone services. They were appreciative of its existence and felt that it was an essential resource for independent learners.

4.7 CONCLUSION - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As this chapter has outlined, the *Read Write Now* project was also very successful in attracting learners who were already attending existing literacy services. Nearly 18,000 learning packs were sent out to literacy group learners ranging across a variety of groups including existing adult education and literacy schemes, community-based and disability groups, training and employment programmes, youth groups, Traveller and prison educational schemes and others. These groups were scattered across the country.

The gender profile of these learners was quite typical of all literacy groups with a dominance of women. The age profile of learners was very varied with some unusual features of a large cohort of younger people (from schools and youth groups) and lower numbers of older people than was typical of independent learners using this project. Learners tended to leave school at an early and the majority reported a literacy level of 1 or 2. The majority of learners were being taught in a group context.

Group learners had learnt about the *Read Write Now* project from their literacy schemes or the media. The majority had only watched between 1 and 4 programmes at the time of the evaluation and most watched on Tuesday night or on video in their literacy schemes. The majority of learners liked the series overall with the sections with learners talking about own experience, the real life basis of the drama segments and the presentation style of the programmes mentioned most often. They felt that it raised awareness of literacy issues in Ireland and provided an essential service to people who had no contact with literacy services.

Several viewers disliked the entire approach of the series - in particular the drama - and seemed to be evaluating the series within an adult educational framework. These learners had problems reconciling the entertaining drama format with their usual expectations of formal learning. On the opposing side, other learners liked the series for these reasons, that it was real life and an enjoyable format. There was a mixed reaction to the literacy level of the programmes with half feeling that they were too easy with too little learning, and the rest that the programmes were too hard with too much learning. What these findings do reveal though is the need for the programme makers to be very clear from the beginning of the series and to explain their approach and literacy level to viewers to allay any false expectations.

Group learners' reaction to the *Read Write Now* support services was very positive on the whole. The majority of learners used and liked the workbook. They liked the content, learning points and presentation style of it. Like independent learners, they were very impressed with receiving the pack and seeing the programmes on national television and felt it was a great confidence boost for them.

Tutors also adapted the workbook to develop additional material for their learners. Some learners completed the workbook separate to the programmes - usually when they disliked the television series or found it too easy, using it as quick revision instead. Very few of the group learners had used the freephone service and had no interest in using it as they had support from their literacy group. They thought that it was a great idea and an essential facility for independent learners however.

READ WRITE NOW EVALUATION - CONCLUSION

This evaluation report has presented some of the main research findings and issues arising from the *Read Write Now* project. It presents a picture of the overall developmental process of the project - its origins, design and production (in chapter 2), and most importantly an insight into the use and learning outcomes of the project for independent and group learners (chapters 3 and 4).

What is clear is the general success of the *Read Write Now* national literacy project. Its development and production successfully identified and integrated specific learning objectives into a controlled learning process in the television series and learner pack. The groups of target learners were successfully reached (especially the unknown group of individual learners). Viewing numbers are very high for the series encompassing not only a literacy learning audience, but also a general audience interested in and learning from the programmes. The scope of this project is astounding, capturing the interest of on average 155,000 people nationwide (between Tuesday night and Wednesday morning broadcasts). This figure equates to one third of the estimated population in Ireland experiencing literacy difficulties (NALA, 2001). Existing literacy services have usually provided for about 4% (20,000 individuals) of this population per annum. Literacy services worldwide report that their services reach between only 5 - 10% of the target audience of people experiencing literacy difficulties.

Nearly 30,000 people accessed the *Read Write Now* support services with over 10,000 new independent learners actively participating in the project (with others watching the series but not contacting the support services). The majority of these new learners had not accessed literacy services previously, and were unable to or unwilling to use existing literacy services in the future. They favoured the independence, freedom and privacy that distance education offered them. The *Read Write Now* project fulfilled and exemplifies the strategies of lifelong learning outlined by the European Commission. The Commission (2000:3-4) argues that lifelong learning has to become the guiding principle of education of the 'knowledge-based economy and society' that characterises Europe today, promoting active citizenship and employability.

As chapter 3 illustrates, these independent learners gave an overwhelming positive response to the *Read Write Now* project. The support pack and system were also given a positive evaluation by independent learners. Similarly, the majority of literacy scheme learners gave the project (programmes and support pack) a positive assessment as chapter 4 describes. This was both in terms of the dramatic and presentation qualities of the television series and support pack, and the learning content of the material. Indeed many argued there could have been more learning and called for a series that would address more basic and advanced levels of literacy. The support pack gained very favourable responses with many respondents pointing to the lack of provision and material available to them.

Criticisms were presented but as chapter 4 discusses many of criticisms seem to originate in the expectations that learners bring to project. Learners came from a variety of backgrounds and were working within different frameworks. This influenced their understanding and use of the *Read Write Now* television series and learning support pack. The main frameworks that people were using included an educational framework (based on previous experiences of the school and/or the adult education system); an entertainment/ documentary framework (using their prior knowledge about television's formats to access the docu-drama segments of the programmes); and a socio-cultural framework bringing aspects of their own life experiences to bear on their interpretation of the programmes (i.e. identifying with the literacy learners in the programme, disliking the drama scenarios because of their perceived urban bias etc).

These criticisms however were far outweighed by the positive comments from viewers who were delighted to see this issue covered in a public format like national television. Learners spoke about the importance of this public awareness to them and their own realisation that there were others out there - that they were not alone and had nothing to be ashamed of. This distance education literacy project did fulfil its key objectives and in many cases went further by raising public awareness of literacy issues, breaking down the isolation and shame that many learners felt, giving them back self-respect and empowering them to begin learning, and generally imparting social education also.

APPENDIX A - REFERENCES

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APPENDIX B - FIGURES AND TABLES:

(Q) Figures and tables based on group learner questionnaire data.

APPENDIX C - READ WRITE NOW RESEARCH METHODS

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this evaluation was to document the development and broadcast of this *Read Write Now* adult literacy project and to explore the learning outcomes for its audience. The primary focus of the evaluation is an assessment of the learning objectives and outcomes of the *Read Write Now* project. This is examined in light of the project's national reach (building a profile of learners who contact any of the support structures set up for the series) and learners' use and assessment of the project (through questionnaires and interviews with participating learners and tutors).

A variety of research methods have been used through this evaluation. The primary aims of the evaluation have been two-fold - firstly, tracing and evaluating the development and users of this project and secondly evaluating learners' use and assessment of the project. Quantitative and documentary methods have been used to achieve the first aim - primarily, the use of documentary research (facilitated by NALA), databases, questionnaires and SPSS analysis. Qualitative research methods have been adopted as the suitable way of researching learners' uses and assessment of the *Read Write Now* project. They are recognised as a valuable tool to examine people's attitudes, actions and perceptions in a naturalistic and context-based manner[44]. They are also suitable for evaluation and exploratory research when little is known about a topic - which was certainly the case with the independent learners using the *Read Write Now* project.

READ WRITE NOW EVALUATION

The evaluation began in July 2000 focusing initially on the development and design of the *Read Write Now* project. Documentary material covering the events of the earlier planning stage of the project was supplied by NALA[45]. Other documentary material and interview material has been collected since then on the production of the series and learner pack. A final stage of interviews was completed in December 2000 and January 2001 when the project had run its course, assessing the overall project (with NALA and AV Edge - the two main bodies involved in the production of the project and other key people/institutions involved in the project).

Work on the main body of the evaluation research began in September and October as the television series was underway and the learning pack distributed. The *Read Write Now* project was part of a national drive to improve literacy standards in this country and therefore its potential audience was also scattered across the country. It was impossible - and unfeasible - to identify every viewer using these programmes. The evaluation focused on certain groups of learners that can be identified and accessed - namely learners accessing existing literacy services (referred to as literacy group learners throughout this report) and independent learners contacting the freephone support line.

Literacy groups were asked to track all learners using the *Read Write Now* support pack in August 2000 and return that information to the evaluator (number of learners, gender, age, literacy level and new referrals via the *Read Write Now* series). A questionnaire was sent out to all literacy schemes in November 2000 requesting them to distribute it to learners using the support pack to complete with the assistance of their tutor. The profile and questionnaire data was analysed using SPSS and included feedback from 110 literacy groups and 400 questionnaires from literacy scheme learners (the latter were primarily from VEC and independent literacy schemes registered with NALA, the former from different types of literacy groups).

The freephone telephone tutors used a database to track all calls by independent learners (type, length and any other information/comments supplied by learners). Interviews were conducted with some of the learners who called the freephone line (370 learners agreed to be interviewed about the project). These interviews were conducted by the freephone literacy tutors and the evaluator between December 2000 and February 2001. In addition, individual and focus group interviews were conducted with people (learners and tutors) using the *Read Write Now* series and support pack in literacy schemes. A pilot focus group was completed with a Dublin literacy group in November 2000. The rest of the interviews were completed over the months of January and March 2001. All of this documentary material and interview data was collated and analysed on an on-going basis during this time.

The individual interviews were conducted by telephone (the most effective method due to the scattered location of the *Read Write Now* audience). Focus group interviews were conducted with urban based group. Several focus group interviews with rural groups - scheduled to be held in

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[44] Hammersley, M and P. Atkinson 1995 *Ethnography: principles in practice* (2nd edition) Routledge: London
[45] Planning and development documents for the *Literacy Through the Media* project and *Read Write Now, Literacy Through the Airwaves* evaluation report, literature and conference reports etc.

February/March 2001 - had to be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions and the foot and mouth restrictions. Tutors, organisers and learners were contacted and interviewed by telephone instead. 50 individual interviews with independent learners have been analysed in detail for this report, with reference also made to other incomplete interviews (usually when learners had followed the programmes or not completed the learner support pack. Five focus group interviews with literacy group learners were completed (one in Galway City and the remainder in Dublin City). The other literacy groups around the country were contacted by telephone instead.

The interim report on *Read Write Now* project (November 2000) presents some of the initial research and findings on the project. This report presents the final research and analysis of the *Read Write Now* project. Chapter one looks at the background to the project from the earlier *Literacy Through the Airwaves* project. Chapter two traces the development of the project in term of its design and production processes. Chapter three presents a profile of learners and the initial findings on the use of *Read Write Now* literacy project by independent learners. Chapter four presents a profile and the findings on the use of the project within literacy groups. Chapter five concluded the report. The main focus of this research report has been the presentation of an overview of how the *Read Write Now* literacy project evolved and what it has achieved. It gives a general picture of the *Read Write Now* project and its learners.