

The Survey of Adult Skills

PIAAC results for Ireland 2012

About PIAAC

The OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is a major new international survey of adult skills. 24 countries, including Ireland, took part in the survey. Ireland had the third highest response rate of participating countries at 72% with almost 6,000 adults (5,983) between the ages of 16 and 65 responding to the survey.

Literacy trends over time

When the PIAAC results are compared with the results of the 1997 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the literacy trend shows that: There is no statistical change between the average scores in the IALS and PIAAC.

In IALS 22% of adults were assessed as being at Level 1 or below and this figure has now dropped to 18%.

Of the fifteen countries who participated in IALS and PIAAC, five including Ireland have seen a drop in the percentage of adults at or below Level 1 at literacy while nine have seen an increase.

Population change

The adult population of Ireland has changed considerably since IALS was conducted. Those aged 16 – 65 has increased by almost 700,000 between 1996 and 2012.

In the same period the percentage of non Irish born residents aged 25-44 has increased from 9% in 1996 to 23% in 2011.

In 1996 almost 25% of the population reported their highest level of education was at primary level. This has dropped to 10% in 2011.

Main results – Literacy

18% of Irish adults are at or below Level 1 on the literacy scale.

Ireland ranks 17th out of the 24 participating countries.

There is no statistical difference between the score of males and females on the literacy scale.

In Ireland adults between the ages 25 – 34 have the highest literacy score while adults aged 55 – 65 years have the lowest score.

Reading components

PIAAC uses 3 basic reading tests to examine reading ability of those with the weakest literacy skills. These are: word meaning; sentence processing; and passage comprehension.

Irish adults who were assessed at being below Level 1 answered on average correctly:

- 95% of word meaning
- 84% of the sentence processing
- 91% of passage comprehension tasks

This compares to adults at Levels 4 and 5 who answered 99%, 97% and 99% correctly.

This suggests that many adults at the lower end of the scale have basic literacy skills.

Main results – Numeracy

Just over 25% of Irish adults score at or below Level 1 for numeracy compared to a 20% average across participating countries. This score ranks Ireland 19th out of the 24 participating countries.

Males score higher than females by 12 points.

Adults aged 25 – 34 have the highest score for numeracy while adults aged 55 – 65 have the lowest score. This mirrors a trend across participating countries which show a decline in numeracy proficiency for older age groups.

30% of those aged 16 – 24 are at Level 1 compared to 18% for those aged 25 – 34 and 36% of those aged 55 – 65.

Where did we get this information?

On 8 October 2013 the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the Irish results of PIAAC. We have used the figures from this published report which is available at <http://bit.ly/16PxDvd>

What is NALA?

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent membership organisation, concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and offering advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland.

National Adult Literacy Agency

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Main results – Problem solving in technology-rich environments (PS-TRE)

Problem solving in technology-rich environments was also tested in PIAAC. This is the first time that this assessment has been attempted for an adult population. The results show that:

10% of Irish adults said they had no computer experience, 5% failed the assessment and 17% opted not to take a computer-based assessment.

42% of Irish adults score at or below Level 1 on the problem solving scale, the same as the study average. Males score higher than females.

25% of Irish adults are at Levels 2 and 3 compared to 34% on average internationally.

The OECD has cautioned that the levels in PS-TRE are affected by the percentage of respondents who opted out of the computer-based assessment therefore the problem solving scores are not representative of the full population of computer users across countries. Instead the OECD uses the percentage of adults within each level as a more robust measure.



National Adult Literacy Agency
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