

Literacy for all, literacy for life

creating a vision for adult literacy post 2020

Literacy promotes equality. Equal societies are happier, healthier and wealthier. Adult learning and education promotes “sustainable development, healthier societies, better jobs and more active citizenship.”¹

Literacy and numeracy in Ireland

Recent research² shows that one in six Irish adults (521,550 people) find reading and understanding everyday texts difficult: for example, reading a leaflet, bus timetable or medicine instructions. One in four (754,000 people) has difficulties in real world maths, from basic addition and subtraction to calculating averages.



Research shows that Irish people with low literacy, numeracy and digital skills earn less income, have poorer health and are more likely to be unemployed which has devastating consequences and costs for individuals, communities and the economy.³

Current situation

- [Ireland's National Skills Strategy \(NSS\) 2025](#) has a target of upskilling 165,000 people from PIAAC Level 1 in literacy (from 17.5% to 12%) and 256,000 people from PIAAC Level 1 in numeracy (from 25.6% to 17%), by 2025. This is the same target we had in the NSS 2007 and as we did not meet this target, it was rolled over.
- [CSO](#) data shows us that currently there are 445,800 people (aged 25-64) who have less than a QQI Level 4 qualification – 233,300 (52%) are employed and 24,900 (6%) are unemployed.
- Currently adults can receive between 2 and 6 hours adult literacy tuition per week (equivalent of 2 weeks full time tuition per year.) There are some longer programmes delivered under Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) and some through the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).
- There is a positive and rapid return on investment across the board, for participants, the companies they work for, the Exchequer as well as a significant return to economic development.⁴
- The recent European Commission [Upskilling Pathways](#) initiative aims to target adults with low levels of skills **and** without upper secondary education. Ireland will produce a plan for this in 2018.

NALA believe there is a need for new thinking and to develop a creative and ambitious cross departmental strategy to improve literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the next 10 years.

¹ UNESCO (2016) [3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education](#)

² CSO (2013) [PIAAC 2012](#) - Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies: Survey Results from Ireland

³ OECD (2013) [Skills Outlook 2013](#): First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills

⁴ NALA (2009), [A cost benefit analysis of adult literacy training](#) Research Report, Dublin: NALA

Solutions: Literacy Matters

To improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills, here are 6 actions for the Government:

1	Appoint a Junior Minister for lifelong learning and literacy.
2	The government should develop a creative, ambitious and aligned Whole-of-Government Strategy for literacy, numeracy and digital skills over the next 10 years. We suggest setting up a National Literacy and Numeracy implementation group with a specific task to develop, oversee and evaluate this strategy. The Group would consist of government departments, state agencies and civil society and should be given a specific budget to allocate to specific initiatives.
3	Introduce a Plain Language Act to require government and public services to communicate in plain English that the public can understand and use. See here for information on the US Plain Writing Act .
4	All adults with literacy, numeracy and digital needs and or less than a QQI Level 4 qualification should have access to a high quality and relevant learning programme with a local education and training provider that meets the person's literacy development needs. This would include intensive and flexible options; appropriate supports as required (income, transport, child and elder care), work placement where appropriate and progression opportunities. An increased investment in the Skills for Work programme could specifically target employees with literacy and numeracy needs in particular sectors. This could be funded through the proposed increase in the National Training Fund (NTF).
5	Develop new and innovative ways to improve literacy such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• blended and distance learning,• family literacy, financial literacy, health literacy and media literacy programmes,• bridging programmes to prepare people for other training, and• integrating literacy into vocational education and training programmes.
6	Introduce a targeted paid learning leave programme for employees in work with literacy, numeracy and digital needs and or less than a level 4 qualification to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills if they wish to do so. This intervention would be for a maximum time period and funded through our social insurance (PRSI) system.

Further information

National Adult Literacy Agency

Web: www.nala.ie

Tel: 01 412 7900



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[@nalaireland](https://twitter.com/nalaireland)

