

Submission on the Census 2027 Public Consultation

Submitted to the Central Statistics Office

January 2023

Introduction

We are the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), a registered charity with 2,300 members. We believe literacy is a human right. We are committed to making sure people with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs can fully take part in society, and have access to quality learning opportunities that meet their needs.

Some people have their **literacy needs met**; others do not.

This can be for **many reasons**.



NALA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Census 2027 Public Consultation.

What do we mean by literacy, numeracy, digital and financial literacy?

Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills enable people to reach their full potential, be active and critical participants in society and help address poverty and social exclusion. These life skills allow us to participate in, and make sense of, the world.

Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs in Ireland

Unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs are not a given in our society. They arise because of educational and wider structural inequalities.

The most recent adult literacy survey¹ showed that:

Adult Literacy Survey results	Number of adults
One in six (18%) adults (aged 16 to 65) struggle with reading and understanding everyday text. For example, reading a bus timetable or understanding medicine instructions.	554, 946
One in four adults (25%) has difficulties using maths in everyday life. For example, basic addition, working out a bill or calculating percentages.	793,666
42% of adults struggle with basic digital tasks. ² For example, they find looking up a website or sending an email difficult.	1,302,108

¹ CSO (2013). [PIAAC 2012](#) Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies: Survey Results for Ireland

² Note that the majority of people who have digital literacy needs have underlying literacy issues.

Addressing these needs

The Government recently published a [10-year Adult Literacy strategy](#), which aims to “ensure that everyone has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully participate in society and realise their potential”.

One action in the strategy is to:

“Explore and progress steps required to ensure that communications from public organisations are delivered using plain language.”

Having information for the public, especially forms, written in plain English benefits everyone. In particular, however it allows for greater access for adults with literacy needs to participate in the national census survey

NALA comments on the current Census form

Overall, the form could benefit from a plain English and universal design edit (including design amendments) to make it even easier for everyone to read and understand it and then fill it in correctly. This would align with public sector requirements around plain English, form development and EU law on accessibility.

We offer suggestions below and welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Suggestions

NALA proposes that the form is reviewed, rewritten and redesigned from a plain English and universal design perspective.

We suggest that you:

1. Use questions in your [Step-by-step Guide to filling in your Census 2022 form](#) in your main census form. In appendix 1, we give four examples.
2. Update other questions (existing and new) to tally with the plain English approach in the Guide.
3. Consider how best to design the form to better help respondents reply in full and accurately to your questions.

What is the purpose of these suggested changes?

The purpose of rewriting and redesigning the form using plain English and universal design principles is:

- To give every person the **opportunity to understand** what they are completing in full: Everyone has a right to information written and presented in plain English in all documents but particularly one of national importance. This is important for adults with particular needs, such as adults with unmet literacy needs (1 in 4 adults), unmet numeracy needs (1 in 6) and unmet digital skills needs (4 in 10 adults).
- To adopt a **literacy friendly approach** to the census form and process which aims to include people rather than exclude. NALA research at our national student days for adult literacy students highlight adults particular fear with form filling. Many adults also still have a stigma and feel embarrassed about struggling with filling in form so we try to make forms as easy to read, understand and fill in as possible. This means a more inclusive and accessible survey.

What analysis will be required?

The analysis required involves:

- **Agreeing core questions and a user-friendly design** (online and in paper copy)
Identifying what questions you can take from the Guide and what questions you need to update on the current form alongside of new questions or revisions you received.
- **Consider design early.**
- **Auditing questions against plain English and European and national accessibility guidelines:** See updated Communications Toolkit (DPER/NDA) coming in Q1 2023.
- **User test** here or after considering processes
- **Consider process issues**, such as:
 - how and where different adults are going to complete the form,

- timings (tell them how long it might take to complete and what they need to hand before they start filling it in as these help full completion rates),
 - supports that people may need online for example an information icon if you need to look up what NFQ is if not spelt out in full or similar, and
 - **user analysis** and testing of questions and flow of process (online or paper).
- **Finalise process and go live**
 - **Track completion rates** relative to completion rates before – note and improve for next time.

Benefits of using plain English and universal design approach

These benefits include:

- **More accessibility assured**

These amendments would make your form more accessible and easier to complete for all adults.

- **Higher integrity of data more likely**

Respondents will be more likely to complete questions more accurately so data collected should be even more complete and reliable.

- **More fully meet public sector duties and accessibility requirements**

You will fully fulfil your public sector duties to align with:

- plain English writing and design guidelines and best practice in information provision.
- EU Accessibility legislation that applies to the public sector and includes plain English
- GDPR, which requires the use of plain language.

Supporting adults with filling in the form

Many adults struggle with reading fluently, working out numbers and filling in forms and they may need some literacy support when completing the Census form. Another member of the household or a family member often gives this support. However, there may be some adults living alone and with no available literacy support and the Enumerator might have to help them with this.

We are aware that in your training for Enumerators, literacy needs are mentioned. NALA is happy to offer literacy awareness training for your staff and we have a new one-hour online literacy awareness course that may be of interest. You can see this course [online here](#).³

NALA is also very familiar with the [guide to filling in the Census](#) and adult literacy learners and ETBs have told us that tutors and learners find this interesting.

Follow on

NALA would be delighted to talk further about this work and help you with reviewing the form. We can also suggest how user testing might be done with adult literacy students.

As mentioned above NALA can facilitate literacy awareness training for your enumerators, and we have a free [one-hour online literacy awareness course](#) that may be of interest and become part of the enumerator training.

Further information

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³ The webpage is: <https://www.learnwithnala.ie/product?catalog=Understanding-adult-literacy>

Appendix 1

Examples where text would benefit from being written in plain English

Example 1

Question H5 On the Census form	Question H5 as written in your Guide to filling in the Census
<p>H5 How many rooms do you have for use only by your household?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do NOT count bathrooms, toilets, kitchenettes, utility rooms, consulting rooms, offices, shops, halls, landings or rooms that can only be used for storage such as cupboards Do count all other rooms such as kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, studies and conservatories you can sit in If two rooms have been converted into one, count them as one room <p>Number of rooms <input type="text"/></p> <p>Of which bedrooms <input type="text"/></p>	<p>H5: How many rooms do you have?</p> <p>Count kitchen, living rooms and bedrooms Do not count toilets, bathrooms, halls and other areas like this</p> <p>Write in the number of rooms Write in the number of bedrooms</p>

The difference? The question in the Guide is shorter and tells people what do to before telling them what not to do. It reads better and is clearer.

Example 2

Question H9 On the Census form	Question H9 as written in your Guide to filling in the Census
<p>H9 What type of sewerage facility does your accommodation have?</p> <p>Mark <input checked="" type="radio"/> one box only</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Public sewer <input type="radio"/> Individual septic tank <input type="radio"/> Individual treatment system other than a septic tank <input type="radio"/> Other sewerage facility <input type="radio"/> No sewerage facility 	<p>H9: Where does your toilet waste go?</p> <p>Mark only one box</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public pipe Septic tank Your own system Other, including chemical toilets You have no toilet

The difference? The question in the Guide uses more everyday language so would be faster to read and understand.

Example 3

Question H21 On the Census form	Question H21 as written in your Guide to filling in the Census
<p>21 How long does your journey take?</p> <p><i>Write in minutes</i></p> <div> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> </div>	<p>How long does it take to get to work, school, college or childcare?</p> <div> <p>Hours to minutes</p> <p>½ = 30</p> <p>1 = 60</p> <p>1½ = 90</p> <p>2 = 120</p> </div> <p>Please answer in minutes</p>

The difference? The question in the Guide takes into account that one in four adults in this country cannot find the mid-point on a thermometer between 60 and 70 degrees.

Example 4

The text on data protection text is difficult to read and understand. Here is just **one** example of revision we think would help.

Current	Plain English edit
<p>A comprehensive explanation of your data protection rights, entitlements and how to submit queries is available on www.census.ie</p>	<p>You can find a full explanation of your data protection rights, entitlements and how to submit queries online at www.census.ie</p>

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a charity and membership based organisation. We work to support adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs to take part fully in society and to have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. NALA does this by raising awareness of the importance of literacy, doing research and sharing good practice, providing online learning courses, providing a tutoring service and by lobbying for further investment to improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.

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Registered Charity Number: 20020965

Charity Number: 8506

Company Number: 342807

NALA 
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Có-mhaoinithe ag an
Aontas Eorpach
Co-funded by the
European Union

SOLAS
learning works

Adult Literacy is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Social Fund.