

Submission to the Consultation: Towards a New Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy

Submitted to the Department of Education and
the Department of Children, Equality, Disability,
Integration and Youth

February 2023

Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy skills	3
Literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs in Ireland	3
Literacy and equality	4
Family literacy	5
Addressing adult literacy needs	6
NALA comments and recommendations on the new strategy	
Overall	7
Factor 1. Enabling Parents and Communities to Support Children's Literacy and Numeracy Development	9
Factor 2. Supporting Teachers' and Early Years Educators' Professional Practice and Leadership	13
Factor 3. Improving the Curriculum and the Learning Experience	14
Factor 4. Supporting Diverse Learners to Achieve their Potential	16
Factor 5. Improving Assessment and Evaluation to Support Better Learning in Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy	19
Factor 6. Digital Literacy	20
Conclusion	21
Further reading and references	22

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 consultation 'Towards a New Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy'.

Literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy skills

These skills involve listening, speaking, reading, writing, using numbers and everyday technology to communicate, to build relationships, to understand information and make informed choices.

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, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs in Ireland

Unmet literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs arise because of educational and wider structural inequalities.

The most recent adult literacy survey¹ showed that:

- 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.
- One in four adults (25%) has difficulties using maths in everyday life. For example, basic addition, working out a bill or calculating percentages.

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

- About 2 in 5 (42%) adults struggle with basic digital tasks. For example, they find looking up a website or sending an email difficult. Note that the majority of people who have digital literacy needs have underlying literacy issues.
- There are also language needs amongst many adults where English is a Second or Other Language (ESOL).

Within the context of the family, parental education is a strong predictor of their children's educational attainment and literacy skills. In Ireland, adults with parents who attained upper secondary education only were more likely to have unmet literacy needs (at or below Level 1 measured by the PIAAC survey).²

Literacy and equality

Literacy is a barometer of equality and is the gateway to creating a society that is better and equal for all. Equality is not about treating everyone in the same way, but it recognises that individuals' needs are sometimes best met in different ways. At present, those who need to access education and training the most, benefit the least. This is the Matthew effect where “without intervention, those who have acquired more education get more and those that have not, get little or nothing.”³

NALA believes that priority should be given to those most in need of experiencing educational disadvantage, the **furthest behind first**. This is a principle in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴ and in successive national anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies. It means that where funding is limited, State investment should target those most in need. Within such a framework, **the needs of those with less than a QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) Level 4 qualification would be met first**. These adults and young people are most at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion in a changing world. Vulnerable adults, who cannot access supports or are refused help when they need it, may not seek help again. This includes young people, especially where the mainstream system is not working for them. For the furthest behind first, there must be enhanced and targeted opportunities and supports for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy learning.

² Gibney, S. and Byrne, T. (2015). Social wellbeing Bulletin: Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Dublin: NALA.

³ Kerckhoff, A. and Glennie, E. (1999). The Matthew Effect in American Education. Research in Sociology of Education and Socialization.

⁴ [Transforming our world](#): the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Family literacy

The family is a key site of literacy learning. According to the research, parental involvement in a child's learning has more of an impact on their educational outcomes than any other demographic measure including social class or level of parental income.⁵

Family literacy describes the uses of literacy and numeracy within families and communities, especially activities that involve two or more generations. Family literacy also includes education programmes to support literacy learning.⁶

Family literacy has the potential to provide an important intervention into the cycle of educational disadvantage. Evidence from a whole range of studies shows that quality family literacy interventions lead to significantly raised literacy levels in participating adults.⁷ Parents also learned valuable skills and methods that they were able to introduce into their family literacy practices, to better realise their desire to do the best for their children. Parents spoke of the support they felt from being in a group of other parents and the sustainable nature of acquiring skills that they could deploy and develop over the long term throughout their child's schooling.⁸

Family literacy is needed because there are still substantial literacy inequalities both amongst adults and children in Ireland.⁹ These disparities are indicators of wider and multifaceted inequalities including poverty, social and cultural exclusion, disaffection and disempowerment.¹⁰ Having better literacy skills does not change structural inequalities but it does increase the likelihood of personal wellbeing, employment, social and cultural inclusion and the skills to work for just change in our communities.

“ You are learning your kids before they start school. You are not teaching them in a school way but you are their teacher.”

Parent interviewed in NALA research (2010) Taking care of family literacy work.

“ Trying to teach your kids as well as trying to teach yourself is difficult which is why support is so important. ”

Parent interviewed in NALA research (2010) Taking care of family literacy work.

⁵ Desforges (2003); Feinstein et al. (2004); NESF (2009).

⁶ NALA (2011a). [Family literacy in Ireland, Research Briefing Paper](#). Dublin: NALA.

⁷ NESF (2009); Carpentieri et al (2011); Flanagan (2016)

⁸ NALA (2016). [Impact and Implementation of Family Literacy Programmes: Review and Recommendations](#)

⁹ Central Statistics Office (2013). PIAAC 2012 Survey Results for Ireland; Educational Research Centre (2015). The 2014 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics.

¹⁰ Baker, J., Lynch, K., Cantillon, S., and Walsh, J. (Eds) (2004). Equality: From Theory to Action.

Addressing adult literacy needs

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

For many adults, negative prior learning experiences make reengagement in a learning situation unattractive. An adult learning approach that values adults’ life experience and creates a relaxed, fun and learner-centred environment is found to work best. We know that good relationships between tutors and learners ensure many adults keep engaged and gradually became committed learners. This in turn impacts positively on children’s schooling and can shift the whole family culture of learning.

The strategy says that:

“collaborative and innovative funding will support initiatives that build on health, social care and family support interventions, with the aim to strengthen key competencies of parents, carers, individuals and families to support literacy choices for their children and themselves. This will be reflected in the **enhancement of family literacy and family learning approaches**, which have proven to help break down intergenerational disadvantage and literacy issues and link to improvements in health and well-being.”¹¹

The Adult Literacy for Life Strategy and this upcoming strategy should work together to identify overlapping areas and align actions, for example on family literacy programmes and initiatives.

“ In my opinion education is power. In this particular area alone you can have third and fourth generations of families with a history of early school leaving. It is now very important that we remove the barriers especially around parents’ negative experiences of school. They have gone through a system that has left them with shattered confidence and self-esteem, and has virtually thrown them out on the streets.”

School Principal from [NALA Family literacy briefing paper \(2011\)](#).

¹¹ Government of Ireland (2021). [Adult Literacy For Life: A 10-year Strategy](#) (page 61)

NALA comments and recommendations on the new strategy

The discussion paper identifies six key factors that will underpin the new strategy:

1. Enabling Parents and Communities to Support Children's Literacy and Numeracy Development
2. Supporting Teachers' and Early Years Educators' Professional Practice and Leadership
3. Improving the Curriculum and the Learning Experience
4. Supporting Diverse Learners to Achieve their Potential
5. Improving Assessment and Evaluation to Support Better Learning in Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy
6. Digital Literacy

We will comment on each of these areas and give recommendations.

To start we have some **overall recommendations**:

Awareness of unmet needs

We need to **raise awareness** of the unmet adult literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs of many parents and caregivers and the impact this has on individuals, families, our society and the economy. This is needed with Government Departments, civil servants and policy makers, teachers, trade unions and others.

Aligning the two literacy strategies (and others where appropriate)

Actions in the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy and this upcoming strategy should **align** on areas where appropriate. This new strategy should identify overlapping areas and align actions, for example on family literacy programmes and initiatives.

Lifelong and life-wide learning

We need relevant Government Departments to devise and **embed lifelong and life-wide learning**, competence-based curricula and learning opportunities for literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy skills that enable everyone to develop and enhance their skills in and outside of formal educational settings.

Shared understanding

It would be useful to explore and develop a shared understanding among education stakeholders of what is meant by adult literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy in the 21st century. Together we need to inform, debate and educate society about what is literacy, how literacy is changing constantly and why it is important to develop literacy throughout life. We need to challenge current perceptions and break down the stigma of unmet literacy needs.

Literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy skills:

- are not static and they evolve.
- are not something that you get once in school and you have it forever – you must practise these skills or you lose them – deskilling.
- can vary depending on the context, for example, dealing with a lawyer and legal terminology.
- can be good in one area, for example reading, but weak in another, for example writing – people have “spiky” profiles.

Cross-departmental response to family literacy needs

We need a **cross-departmental national policy** and action plan on family literacy, which includes an increased commitment and resources to family literacy as a basis for improving chances of educational equality for both children and adults. Such policy should always be grounded in an analysis of the systemic roots of literacy and educational disadvantage as this would give added credibility, motivation and optimism to participants and practitioners. The policy should align across government strategies.

Communicating effectively

Schools should communicate using **plain language** and **universal design principles**, especially with parents and caregivers. More information on [plain English](#) online here.

Staff in school settings must be provided with training in how to design, develop and communicate using **literacy friendly approaches** – this means:

- o being aware and **taking account** of the unmet literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs of parents,
- o **removing literacy related barriers**, and
- o promoting literacy learning supports where appropriate.

NALA can advise schools on this.

We will now comment on the six key factors and give recommendations:

Factor 1. Enabling Parents and Communities to Support Children's Literacy and Numeracy Development

Parents must be involved and included in their children's early years', primary and secondary education. This is especially important given the changes in curriculum, teaching and learning and methods of communication, which are increasingly reliant on digital channels.

A recent review of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCLS) (Weir et al, 2018) found that both school principals and HSCL teachers identified increased parental involvement in schools as a central determinant in improving literacy and numeracy levels in DEIS schools.¹²

As so many adults in this country have literacy, language, numeracy and digital needs (see above research), this means some parents will likely find it hard to engage with settings which impact on their child's learning. These settings include the early learning and care setting and school.

Many parents want to help their kids with learning and in school. This is why we believe family literacy and schools have a role to play to support better literacy outcomes for children, young people and their families. Providing family literacy programmes gives parents the opportunity to engage in learning for their children rather than for their own immediate learning needs. Parents repeatedly state "they are concerned for their children's future well-being and are prepared to face their own demons about education to help their children's life chances. Schools have seen their culture change to better embrace the role of parents as co-facilitators of their children's learning development."¹³

A recent NALA report identified provision of family literacy in Ireland outside of the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs).¹⁴ The findings highlight the range of needs of learners across the sector and the breadth of resources being developed and used. The research identified some specific support needs for groups (for example, ESOL, Travellers) and preferences for

¹² Weir et al (2018). Partnership in DEIS schools: a survey of home-school community liaison coordinators in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland

¹³ SOLAS, ETBI and NALA (2020). Family Literacy Practices in ETBs: [Guidelines, case studies and recommendations](#)

¹⁴ NALA (2022). [Report on family literacy provision outside of Education and Training Boards in Ireland](#)

resource (central repository) and professional development (face-to-face, networking and webinars). It also highlighted substantial expertise that could be harnessed in the future. Participants indicated a need for more connectivity or visibility across the sector in order to identify appropriate programmes for learners but also potentially to develop productive professional networks between organisations and individuals working in family literacy.

It is also essential to have clear, literacy friendly and plain English communication from education services to parents. Communication should be offered in a variety of ways – for example, could the school hold a meeting as well as sending out written information. This means parents have a greater opportunity to hear about the information and understand it.

Recommendations

Implement all the recommendations in the [2020 report on Family Literacy Practices in ETBs](#), some of which include:

- Setting up an **interdepartmental working group** on family literacy to steer the development of national family literacy policy. The group should be representative of practitioners, community stakeholders and family literacy experts. There should be family literacy champions and the strategy should encourage the equality outcomes that intergenerational learning can deliver.
- Developing **collaborative family literacy partnerships** in order to facilitate a more systematic approach to family literacy. These could include adult literacy services, DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), public libraries and CYPSCs (Children and Young People’s Services Committees). These partnerships would allow them to develop provision that harnesses all their skills, resources and contacts with parents who will most benefit from family literacy initiatives. These core groups should meet with other stakeholders and develop a **local, needs-based family literacy strategy**. Other stakeholders will need to participate less frequently and as local circumstances dictate. The partnership building process should be financially resourced and supported. A recent NALA report identified needs of providers of family literacy in Ireland outside of the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs).¹⁵

¹⁵ NALA (2022). [Report on family literacy provision outside of Education and Training Boards in Ireland](#)

- Employ **additional staff** in outreach, brokerage and development of family literacy provision in each ETB area. This might include a dedicated family literacy coordinator employed locally. This work should be adequately resourced with a **ring-fenced budget** and data collected as a separate category from other literacy provision.

National media campaign and programmes

Work together with the Adult Literacy for Life programme office to develop a **national media campaign** to build up awareness of the important role that parents and communities can play in supporting literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy development of children and young people. The campaign should highlight the importance of strong literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy skills and the need to constantly improve them throughout life and not just during formal schooling.

We suggest a series of **TV and radio programmes** to:

- Promote family learning and good family literacy practice,
- encourage participation in community-based programmes, and
- disseminate useful support materials in an accessible format for those with unmet literacy needs.

There are existing local family literacy partnerships along with the [family learning](#) work from Clare and Limerick ETB that could be showcased and promoted as a model to roll out nationally.

Collaboration

Develop systems and adequately resource **collaboration, information sharing and professional development programmes** between Home School Community Liaison Officers, schools, libraries and other local providers and organisations.

Learning programmes

Invest in family literacy and learning programmes to support parents who have unmet literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs. This could include a menu of (accredited and non-accredited) family literacy modules available to parents that recognises the needs of different parents and children. These modules could be in person or online or a combination of both.

These modules would include:

- understanding how learning happens;

- early years language development;
- reading with children;
- fun and creativity in language,
- literacy and numeracy learning;
- computer skills as a basis for a digital approach to family literacy;
- communicating successfully with schools;
- dealing with bullying (and its negative impact on learning); and
- strategies for family literacy with children who have specific learning difficulties and or disabilities.

The [Family Digital Literacy](#) research project run by the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin (TCD) in partnership with NALA explored how to use technology to improve the literacy skills of parents with literacy learning needs through a family digital literacy programme. The resources developed¹⁶ could be used in family literacy programmes.

Promote the parents' voice in education to encourage and empower parents to have a say in education.

Schools and education services need to be aware of people's confidence and self-esteem. Not every parent will feel comfortable with sharing their opinions in groups or in online surveys and may require some support. Therefore, when schools and services look at responses from parents, they should ask have you heard from all or a representative sampling of parents – for example, urban/rural mix, socio-economic and disadvantaged areas, different nationalities and so on. If not, they should consider different ways of engaging those parents – think about how you could use a blend of written, face-to-face and digital communication. Have you asked parents how they prefer to be communicated with?

We recommend that schools and services use a literacy friendly approach. This means communicating and designing processes to take account of literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs and remove literacy related barriers. Services should use plain language for all communications.¹⁷

¹⁶ The resources include:

- [Literacy on the Loose](#): webinar, support videos and tip cards for parents
- [Numeracy in the Now](#): webinar, support videos for parents
- [Home languages and home learning](#): webinar, support videos for multilingual families
- [Communicating effectively with parents](#): support for schools through videos and booklet

¹⁷ There are some good tips in the [Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach](#)

Factor 2. Supporting Teachers' and Early Years Educators' Professional Practice and Leadership

NALA believes that it is essential that anyone who is entering or already in the teaching profession in Ireland (at any level and all settings) should be aware of unmet adult literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs in Ireland, its link to inequality and social exclusion and benefits of using a literacy friendly approach.

Where teachers do not know how to engage or support parents to support their children's school performance, this should be explored during their teacher training (both undergraduate and postgraduate). Teachers and school leaders need to raise their capacity to progress family literacy programmes to better respond and support the literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs of school children, parents and families.

It is also important that Universities look at who is participating on teaching courses and develop ways to encourage and support students from underrepresented groups to participate. Recent initiatives in this area such as Maynooth University's [Turn to Teach Project](#) are welcome but need to be embedded. In addition, post graduate teacher training programmes, such as those offered by Hibernia College, need to be made more financially and logistically accessible for a more diverse cohort of potential teachers.

Recommendations

Mandatory module in all teacher training courses

There should be a **mandatory module on adult literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy** needs in all undergraduate and postgraduate teacher training courses. This module would raise awareness of these needs and offer ideas and support to teachers about how to support parents and families with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs. NALA has developed a Literacy ambassador programme for staff working with the public and could easily adapt this for teachers.

This training should also be delivered to Home School Community Liaison staff, Special Needs Assistants, Youth workers and others working with children and young people in education.

Factor 3. Improving the Curriculum and the Learning Experience

People's experience in school was often that there was one way of teaching. When adults return to adult education, they see different teaching methods applied and wish they were taught like that when they were in school. Adult literacy students are aware, as are we, that some children are still falling through the cracks in school and leaving school early. As evidenced in the recent OECD's Education at a Glance Report, 5% of adults in Ireland still do not have a secondary education qualification.¹⁸ This gap needs to be addressed through collaborative solutions and other strategies.

Students learn best when learning reflects their interests and lives. Building literacy learning into a particular subject area allows people to learn more about their chosen subject and at the same time learn and practise the key words and phrases of that subject. There is a need for continued work on a whole of education sectoral commitment and approach to literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs. The integration of literacy and numeracy across the curricula must involve all teachers, SNA's and others in an effective whole-school/setting approach to literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy. NALA's work¹⁹ in relation to integrating literacy in further education and training includes research, guidelines and training on this. It is also important that teachers use plain English and universal design when teaching, assessing and reporting on progress.

Learning to read is a developmental process that does have a component of instruction but it is also built on a foundation of other skills that can be provided in school and at home. In Ireland, we use 'a balanced approach to literacy development in the early years'.²⁰ It would be good to critically evaluate how this approach is working for children and especially for those who are struggling with learning to read.

¹⁸ OECD (2022), Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators, p. 42 [Education at a Glance - OECD](#)

¹⁹ More information on this here: <https://www.nala.ie/integrating-literacy>

²⁰ NEPS (2016). [A balanced approach to literacy development in the early years: NEPS Good Practice Guide](#)

Recommendations

Embedding integration of literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy

Review the progress and outcomes of embedding the integration of literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs across subjects in the primary and secondary curricula. This should involve all teachers and students. Where there are needs identified, schools should engage with the Department to request refreshed professional development to build and enhance skills and capacity.

Share good practice and resources on integrated teaching

Building on the work and experience of integrating literacy in the further education and training sector, it would be good to **share good practice and resources** on integrated teaching and learning approaches in primary and secondary school. This research could be coordinated by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

Review of approaches to teaching reading

Critically evaluate how the current and other readings approaches are working for children and especially for those who are struggling with learning to read.

Training on using literacy friendly approach

Teachers should have access to training in **using literacy friendly approaches** and communicating in **plain English**.

Curriculum

The **curriculum** should reflect learning about practical skills that we use everyday, such as form filling, budgeting and financial literacy, shopping and cooking. It could consider offering **learning modules** that relate to and support apprenticeships or other technical, professional, enterprise or creative areas of learning.

Definitions

Fast track the definition and implementation of lifewide and lifelong competence based frameworks and curricula for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.²¹

²¹ Please see NALA's [Numeracy Definition Report](#) (2022) for further information and discussion of the need for an agreed Numeracy Definition for Ireland.

Factor 4. Supporting Diverse Learners to Achieve their Potential

While literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs are evident across society, the issue is particularly prevalent among children experiencing educational disadvantage.

In the last strategy and Interim Review, the particular needs of four groups were highlighted:

- children and young people attending schools that serve communities where there are high concentrations of social and economic disadvantage, including members of the Traveller community
- children of migrants whose first language is neither English or Irish
- children and young people with special educational needs, including children who are exceptionally able
- young people who have dropped out of school early and for whom centres for education, for example, Youthreach and Community Training Centres, provide a second chance to acquire and improve literacy, numeracy and other necessary skills.

Children from these communities are more likely to have literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs, and the gap widens as children progress through school. The new plan must respond to this reality and include a more robust and specific element focusing on how schools, particularly those serving disadvantaged communities and children with diverse learning needs and profiles, can cooperate with children, parents and communities to redress this imbalance.

While School Completion Programmes provide excellent support to children who are at-risk of leaving school early, some children still disengage from school before they are 16. Very often, there are no appropriate alternative supports available for these children. The Department of Education funds 120 children a year to work with iScoil to complete their home-based QQI Level 3 programme. Children are only eligible if they have been out of mainstream school for at least six months and when all other options have been exhausted. iScoil, an evidenced-based provision, regularly reports that they turn away eligible children due to a lack of funding for places. In their annual report²², iScoil notes that despite being the largest provider of alternative education in Ireland, “55 Tusla home-based referrals were turned down, as were partnership requests from youth services, youth diversion projects, and residential care services”. Many of these children and their parents have no other option to access a minimum

²² iScoil (2022). [Annual Report and Financial Statements](#).

education and some turn to other services, which are not designed for children, such as NALA's online learning platform, Learn with NALA.

As discussed above, 5% of Irish citizens are leaving school before receiving a secondary school qualification. The reasons for this are many but our recent experiences with our eLearning platform, Learn with NALA, points to gaps in the curriculum and provision particularly for children with intellectual disability and spectrum disorders. Specific tailored provision and supports that is still linked to the curriculum needs to be further developed and resourced as part of this strategy.

Recommendations

Innovation

Review and publish any **innovative practices or initiatives** that supported the four groups identified in the Interim Report.

Barriers

Identify and remove further barriers and **provide supports** for full participation for these learners, such as exam fees, materials, access to technology, food costs and travel.

Support

Build in **personal development** classes into the curriculum and include good **mental health support**.

Partnerships

Building on the Right to Read strategy, there should be greater emphasis on the **role of libraries** in disadvantaged communities to support parents and children develop a culture of reading. Libraries should be an integral part of each school's education plan and strong partnerships should exist between every school and their local library.

Support and outreach

- Re-engage with adults who left school early through **targeted outreach, guidance** and a range of options for participation.
- Expand **the funding to iScoil** to enable them to offer places to all eligible Tusla referrals, for young people aged 13-16, who have disengaged from mainstream school.

Factor 5. Improving Assessment and Evaluation to Support Better Learning in Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy

Children's literacy and numeracy development remains a pressing and critical issue. If standards of performance at school have not changed significantly in years, more of the same will not change this, and there is a need for a more holistic approach to support learning in schools (Sticht, 2008). Improving standards may be found in addressing other factors that impact on learning and school performance such as support for education from parents and carers, family members and communities.

The Leaving Certificate is seen as the main validation certificate for young people and as an entry system into further and especially higher education. However, we know that many adults return to do the Leaving Certificate later in their lives, often choosing to sit only a few subjects.

Recommendations

Understanding assessment

Engage with parents to assess how well assessment data is understandable to parents through current reporting processes, particularly at key transition stages. Where there are challenges, then explore how to make the data easier to read and understand.

Leaving certificate

Review assessment practice at Leaving Certificate level and **redefine the purpose** of it and its audience. This will help inform what we want to assess and determine how best to do this.

Assessment Options

Based on the changing assessment options for State Examinations during the Covid-19 pandemic, there should be an **independent review** with meaningful input from upcoming, current and former students especially adults who returned to do the Leaving Certificate in later life.

Factor 6. Digital Literacy

Information Communications Technology (ICT) provides an opportunity to bridge the gap between schools and families. Everyday ICT applications – such as websites, apps and social media – can promote a sense of community in a school, and support schools connections with parents.

ICT provides an opportunity to better engage children in learning to learn, to use ICT as a research and learning tool, and to apply learning in out of school contexts in areas of their interest. It can also help to provide more tailored responses to individual student needs, including educational disadvantage and pupils with additional needs. This could increase motivation, interest, persistence and achievement for children. It would also support teachers to adapt content within the national curriculum to provide assessment that is more flexible and learning responses to the needs of all students.

Digital family literacy is a recent term to describe the activities in the home that support the development of digital literacy and the digital practices that support literacy development more broadly. The distinction between literacy and digital literacy is becoming blurred as more and more of our literacy practices are mediated by technology.

The Family Digital Literacy research project developed resources in a number of areas.²³ It also produced a [video with guidelines](#) on setting up and running a family literacy programme online.

Recommendations

Digital Strategy

Implement the [Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027](#)

Integrate digital learning

Integrate digital learning and skills into all subject areas and upskill teaching staff as needed in accordance with the [European Digital Competence Framework](#).

²³ The resources include:

- [Literacy on the Loose](#): webinar, support videos and tip cards for parents
- [Numeracy in the Now](#): webinar, support videos for parents
- [Home languages and home learning](#): webinar, support videos for multilingual families
- [Communicating effectively with parents](#): support for schools through videos and booklet

Conclusion

Literacy development of adults, children and young people remains a crucial and pressing issue in Ireland. To improve children's learning outcomes, we must look at supporting parents with unmet literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs along with other actions.

Investment in family literacy provides a win-win scenario to policy makers. Family literacy programmes improve the literacy practices of parents and other family members. In the current climate, family literacy provides a policy option that can help deliver value on several socio-economic priorities such as raising adult literacy levels, enhancing child literacy development and improving children's performance in schools. The evidence strongly supports the effectiveness of family literacy in addressing the goals of more active inclusion and improved literacy skills for parents and children. It is an important way of recognising and building the literacy strength of families who before have felt excluded or marginalised from the expectations of schools and society. Finally family literacy work offers potential opportunities to break inter-generational cycles of educational disadvantage that exist in Ireland.

We need a joined up approach from Government Departments to address and support unmet literacy, language, numeracy and digital literacy needs of children, young people and adults. This new strategy gives us an opportunity to coordinate, share and align to maximise our efforts to improve and support these intergenerational needs. This will help build a more equal, more resilient and happier society.

Further reading and references

Baker, J., Lynch, K., Cantillon, S., and Walsh, J. (Eds) (2004). Equality: From Theory to Action.

Carpentieri, J., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Lister, J., Vorhaus, J. (2011). Family literacy in Europe: Using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development. London: NRDC

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

Desforges, C., and Abouchar, A. (2003). The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A review of literature. London: DfES.

Educational Research Centre (2015). The 2014 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics.

Feinstein L, Galindo Rueda F and Vignoles A (2004). The labour market impact of adult education and training, The Scottish Journal of Political Economy 51(2): 266-280.

Flanagan, M. (2016). Literacy Begins At Home: A Review of My Baby and Me Pilot Project 2013-2015, in Haugh, K. (Ed) Limerick Education Centre and Clare Education Centre – 2016 Research Conference Journal. Vol IV 58- 62.

Gibney, S. and Byrne, T. (2015). Social wellbeing Bulletin: Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Dublin: NALA.

Government of Ireland (2021). [Adult Literacy For Life: A 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy](#)

iScoil (2022). [Annual Report and Financial Statements](#).

Kerckhoff, A. and Glennie, E. (1999). The Matthew Effect in American Education. Research in Sociology of Education and Socialization.

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) (2011a). [Family literacy in Ireland, Research Briefing Paper](#). Dublin: NALA.

NALA (2016). [Impact and Implementation of Family Literacy Programmes: Review and Recommendations](#). Dublin: NALA.

NALA (2022). [Numeracy Definition Report](#)

NALA (2022). [Report on Family Literacy Provision outside of ETBs](#)

NEPS (2016). [A balanced approach to literacy development in the early years: NEPS Good Practice Guide](#)

National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (2009). Child Literacy and Social Inclusion: Implementation Issues, Ireland: NESDO.

SOLAS, ETBI and NALA (2020). Enabling Intergenerational Learning: Background report on family literacy practices in Irish Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
<https://www.nala.ie/publications/enabling-intergenerational-learning-background-report-on-family-literacy-practices-in-irish-education-and-training-boards-etbs/>

SOLAS, ETBI and NALA (2020). Family Literacy Practices in ETBs: Guidelines, case studies and recommendations
<https://www.nala.ie/publications/family-literacy-practices-in-etbs-guidelines-case-studies-and-recommendations/>

Weir, S., Kavanagh, L., Moran, E., and A. Ryan (2018). Partnership in DEIS schools: a survey of home-school community liaison coordinators in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

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.

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Ranelagh, Dublin 6
D06 YF65

Phone: 01 412 7900

Freephone: 1 800 20 20 65

Registered Charity Number: 20020965

Charity Number: 8506

Company Number: 342807

Websites:

nala.ie
learnwithnala.ie

Email: info@nala.ie

f nalaireland

🐦 @nalaireland



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.