

Literacy for life, literacy for all

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 needs

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.²



Recent research³ 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.

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. We did not meet the previous NSS target relating to the low skilled.
- [CSO](#) data shows us that currently there are 248,400 people (aged 25-64) who have less than a QQI Level 4 qualification (220,100 are employed and 28,300 are unemployed).
- Currently adults can receive between 2 and 6 hours adult literacy tuition per week. 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 radical, creative and ambitious plan to meaningfully improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the next 10 years.

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

² OECD (2013) [Skills Outlook 2013](#): First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills

³ CSO (2013) [PIAAC 2012](#) - Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies: Survey Results from Ireland

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

Solutions: Thinking big

Policy

NALA suggests that the government needs to:

- Appoint a **Junior Minister** for lifelong learning and literacy
- Set up a **cross departmental co-ordination group** to develop, implement and evaluate a national plan for improving adult, young people and children's literacy, numeracy and digital skills. This should include community, cultural, digital, family, financial, health, media, sport and workplace literacies.

Practice

- All adults with literacy, numeracy and digital needs and less than a QQI Level 4 qualification should be offered a **high quality and relevant learning programme** with a local education and training provider. 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 and could be funded through the National Training Fund (NTF).
- Develop **new and innovative ways to improve literacy** such as:
 - blended and distance learning,
 - intensive basic education programmes including in the workplace,
 - bridging programmes to prepare people for other training, and
 - integrating literacy into vocational education and training programmes.
- Introduce a **targeted paid learning leave** programme for employees in work with 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

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Website for parents to help their children