

PIAAC:

Impact & Insights for Adult Literacy in Ireland

*Presented by
Colleen Dube, CEO
National Adult Literacy Agency*



NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Presentation Overview

- National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
- Evolution of Adult Literacy in Ireland
- PIAAC: Findings and Impact
- Current State of Play
- Conclusion



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National Adult Literacy Agency

- Established in 1980 as a membership organisation to tackle adult literacy issues
- Emerged from 1970s grass roots, volunteers' efforts
- Equated literacy and education with social inclusion and human rights
- **Now:** still a membership organisation (Close to 2500) but also a company limited by guarantee and registered charity; €2.6 million annual budget primarily from Irish government




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Our mission

Our mission is to advocate for literacy as a right and to collaborate with our partners to influence policy and practice to support the development of literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Our vision

Our vision is an Ireland where adult literacy is a human right, where everyone can develop their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, and where individuals can take part fully in society.

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Evolution of Adult Literacy in Ireland

- Small, open economy reliant on Foreign Direct Investment reflected in GNP vs GDP
- Population of 4,982,907 (UN 2021 Estimate)
- 84% Roman Catholic; 11.6% non-Irish nationals
- OECD Economic snapshot:
 - GDP is projected to grow by 4.2% in 2021
 - GDP per capita is 60% higher than best OECD
 - Employment @ 70% for 15-64 year olds, on par with OECD
 - Inequality is on par with OECD but ageing population and persistent pockets of inequality
 - Adoption of technology uneven and associated skills shortages
- UNICEF: **14%** of the population is at risk of falling below the **poverty line**. In 2017, if all **social transfers** were excluded from income, **the at risk of poverty rate would have been 43.8%**.

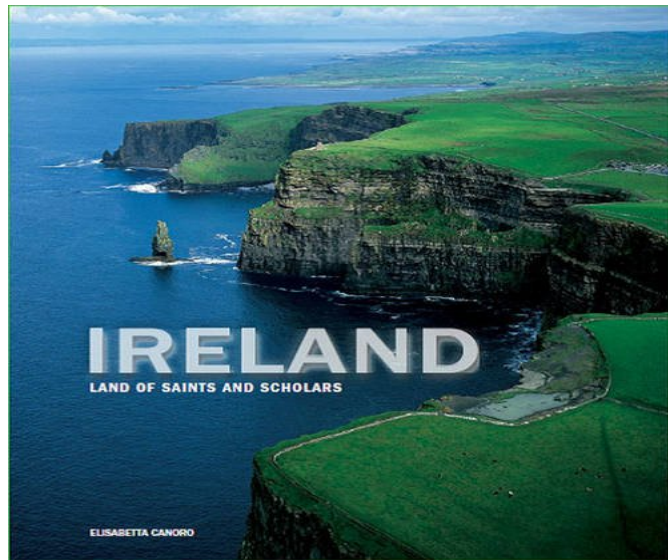


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Evolution of Adult Literacy in Ireland

- Influenced by socio-economic and political forces from the mid 19th century
- Reputation and Rhetoric does not always match Reality



Overview of the Irish Context: Literacy

Date	Event
1831	National School System established by the ruling British, primarily with economic and political motivations
1841	Literacy first measured in 1841; 47% of the population over than 5 years of age could read
1911	Figure was 88% but variations by region, class, gender and “literacy” was not defined
1922	Irish Independence from UK / Free State established, “limited education and literacy was deemed sufficient for the poor and working classes”
1929	62% of 14-16 year olds were not in school
1930	Establishment of Vocational Educational School for those under 18, no provision for adults
1950	“This system of ours ... no comparable on earth, is very appropriate to this country.” – Minister of Education
1960	According to an educational leader, the Irish population was “almost universally literate... only the unteachable are illiterate.”

Overview of the Irish Context: Literacy

Date	Event
1967	Free secondary level education
1969	Foundation of AONTAS – National Association for Adult Education
1973	Murphy Report: first report on adult education, 22 recommendations including research into literacy difficulties Ireland now a member of the European Economic Community
1979	Establishment of first dedicated adult literacy scheme in Dublin Influenced by Paolo Freire; literacy issues associated with social inequalities; literacy / education = a human right
1980	National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) established By 1985, funding for literacy had increased from £10k to £1million
1992	Following economic recession, <i>Green Paper on Education in Changing World</i> included a section on adult education for the first time
1996	European Year of Life Long Learning

Overview of the Irish Context: Literacy

Date	Event
1997	International Adult Literacy Survey <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First international study & evidence base• 55% between 16 & 64 scoring below minimum desirable level• Met with shock & disbelief• Led to 1st Junior Minister for Adult Education, Government Targets & 16% budget increases from €1 - €18 m by 2003• Coincided with Rise of the Celtic Tiger
1998	Green Paper on Adult Education
2000	White Paper: Learning for Life & National Anti Poverty Strategies 1st ever National Literacy Strategy with €93.7 million, stimulated development for next decade
2009	Dorgan Report Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• decrease the % in the lowest literacy category to 12.5% in 2020• “national adult literacy survey... to take place in an international context”
2012	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) takes place

PIAAC: Findings

1 in **6** adults find everyday text, such as a bus timetable or medical instructions, hard to read and understand



18% of Irish adults are at or below level 1 of literacy – 521,550 people

25% of Irish adults are at or below level 1 of numeracy – 754,000 people



1 in **4** adults struggle with everyday maths such as working out a discount or dividing up a bill

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

Ireland is in **17th** place in literacy and **18th** in numeracy out of 24 countries.

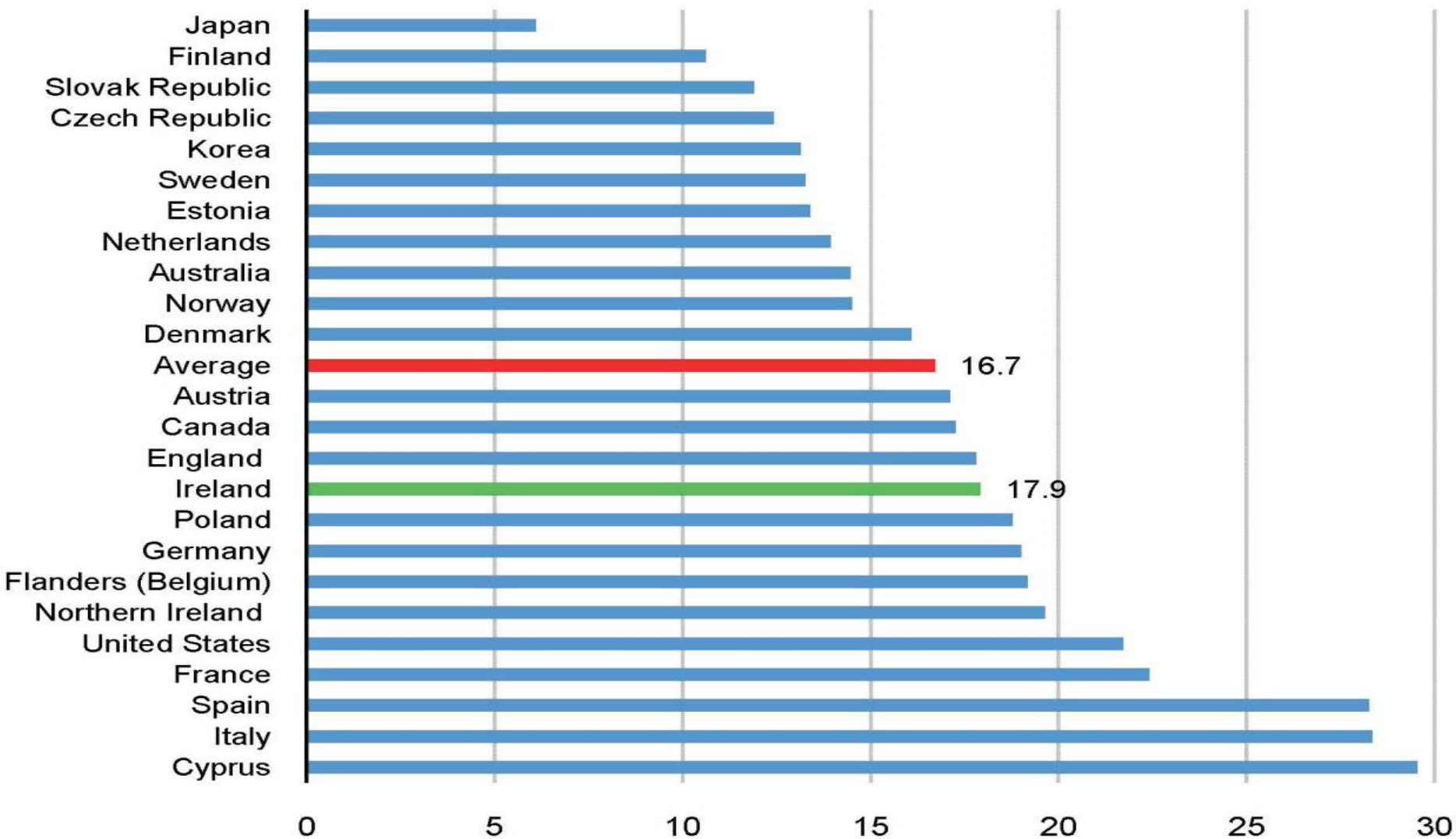


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PIAAC: Findings

Figure 2.1
Percentage of adults (16-65) at or below Level 1 of literacy proficiency



PIAAC: Impact

- “**Strong evidence** that participation in mainstream education alone does not produce strong literacy and numeracy skills for life.” – NALA (Winder Edition 2013), *Literacy Matters*
- **Catalyst** for NALA’s lobbying efforts, membership drives and awareness campaigns in the intervening years to bring systematic change
- Led to **further research** (2014) into the supply side of the Irish labour market, particularly literacy levels among woman, older workers and certain workers to inform ongoing national skills & policy development



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PIAAC: Impact

2020: Culmination

June: Commitments in the Programme for Government

1. Develop and implement a new **10-year strategy** for adult literacy, numeracy, and digital skills within the first year of the Government;
2. Introduce a **plain language requirement** for all public service communication, so that people can understand information the first time they read or hear it. Using plain language saves time and money and reduces mistakes and complaints.



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PIAAC: Impact

July: Publication of the 3 NALA commissioned report

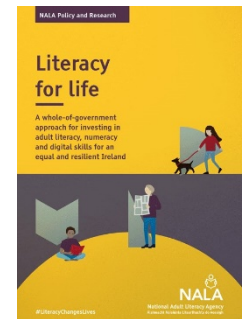
Literacy Now

- Report examining key policy and practices in adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills – read [here](#)



Literacy for Life

- Whole-of-Government approach for investing in adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills – read [here](#)



Literacy Impact

- Outcomes framework for measuring the impact of improved literacy, numeracy and digital skills – read [here](#)



PIAAC: Impact

September / November: Announcement of 10 Year Strategy for Adult Literacy, Numeracy & Digital Literacy and Consultation Process

“I have updated my Government colleagues of my plan to develop a new strategy to build on and streamline the substantial work that is already being done in this area, to increase awareness of services for the public and to capture the contribution that can be made right across Government to deliver better literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the adult population.”

Minister Simon Harris, 8 September 2021



Every adult in Ireland should have the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully participate in society.



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Current State of Play

- **December 20 – May 2021:** NALA made a submission and further comments on the Draft Strategy, **Adult Learning for Life (ALL): A 10-Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy** and supporting documentation - read [here](#).
- **April 2021:** Minister Harris at NALA's AGM,
“I am determined to see an end to unmet literacy needs, including digital literacy. My department will work across government to promote plain English and to support adults with the skills they need to navigate daily life, achieve their ambitions and reach their full potential, in work and at home.. “
- **Late June / July 2021:** Strategy to be launched



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Current State of Play

Still **worrying statistics**, while we await an updated PIACC:

- *Literacy Provision in Ireland*: approximately 60,000 enrolled in literacy provision, **only @ 15%** of those requiring support
- *PIACC Growth in Literacy*: no evidence that literacy and numeracy levels in 26-28 year olds are greater than 15 year olds
- *Central Statistics Office*: Over 400,000 with less than a level 4 qualification and 52% of those in the workforce, between 35% and 46% (.9 to 1.2 million) of the total population aged between 25 and 65 years need improved literacy skills; more over 65

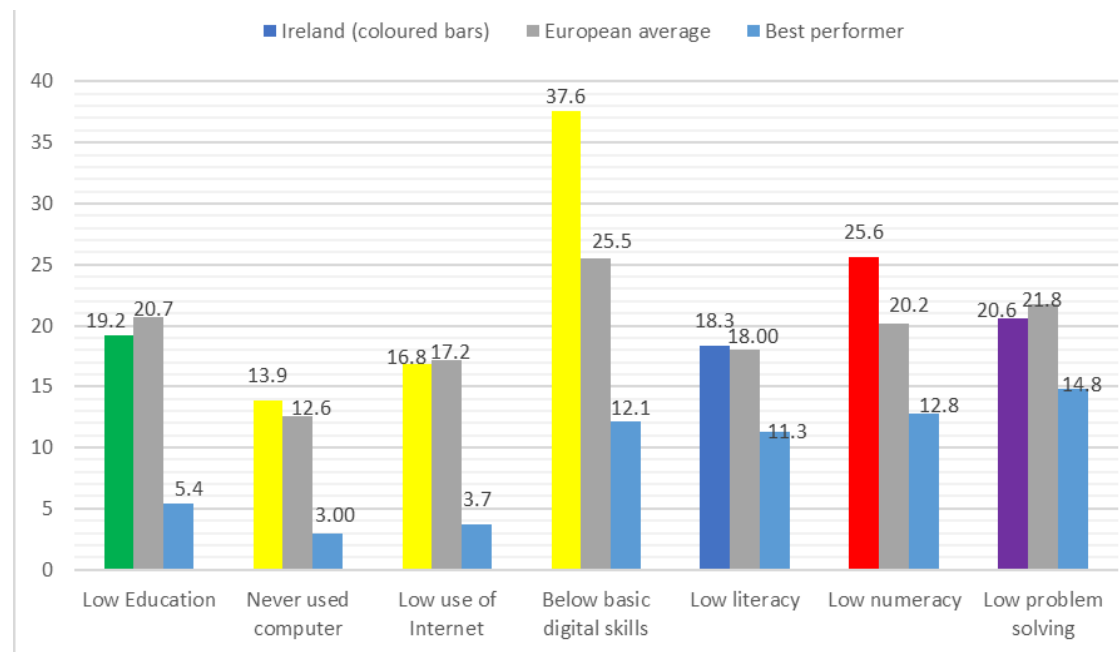
- *CEDEFOP* (right)

14% never used a computer

37.6% with below basic digital

18.3% with low literacy

25.6% with low numeracy

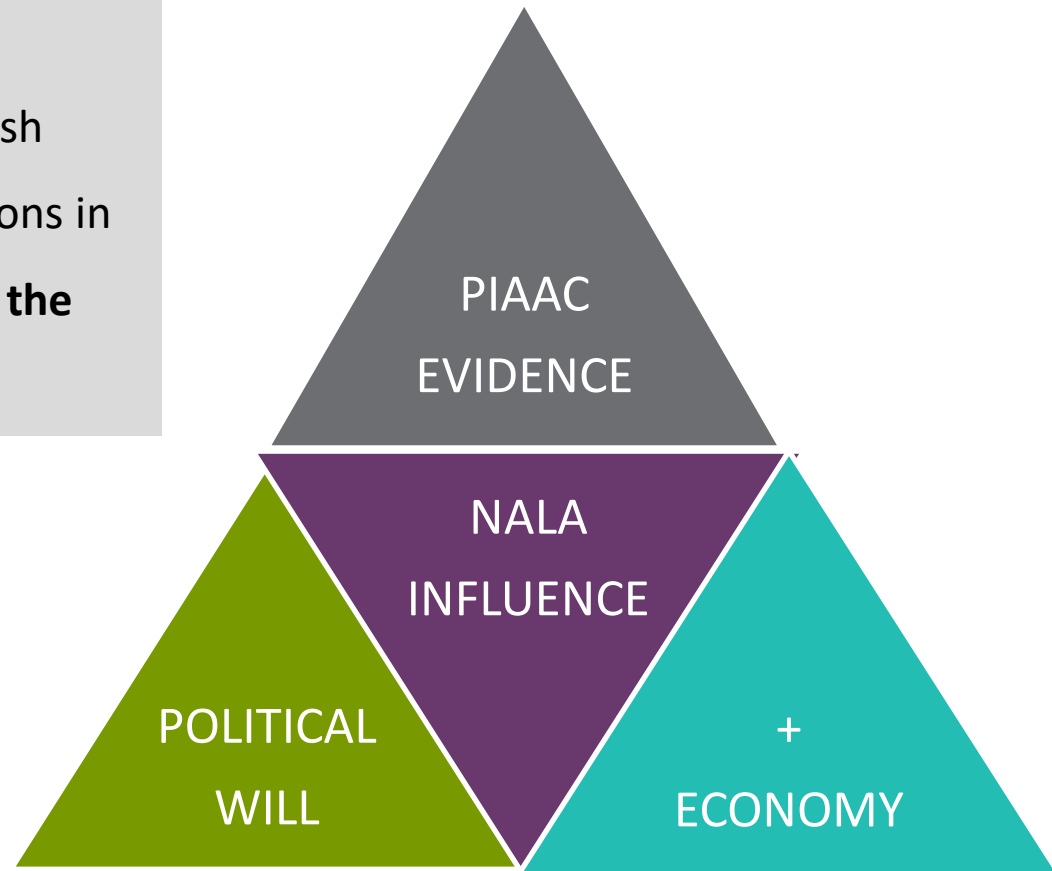


Conclusion

PIAAC like IALS in 1997 had a **profound impact** on stimulating NALA and the Irish Government's attention and interventions in literacy policy and provision. It **moved the needle from assumption to action**.

Remaining challenges include how to

- Keep the data current to inform ongoing policy and programmes
- Develop consistent integrated learner-centred data, assessment systems and provision
- Incorporate softer, qualitative outcome indicators
- Identify, invest in and overcome the barriers to engagement that still remain for adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital needs.



Progress on indicators / evidence **will be subject** to NALA's persistence and persuasion, consistent and committed political will and favourable economic conditions / investment

Further Information

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Go Raibh Maith Aгаibh!
Thank you!



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