



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

ADULT LITERACY FOR LIFE

A 10-YEAR ADULT LITERACY, NUMERACY
AND DIGITAL LITERACY STRATEGY



Adult
Literacy
for Life

July 2021

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Minister's Foreword

Literacy is a form of power.

It offers a person the opportunity to carve out a place for themselves in the world.

The ability to read and write, work with numbers and navigate the digital sphere can unleash an individual's potential.

By the same measure, unmet needs in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy can leave a person feeling powerless, disenfranchised, and with little hope of advancement.

Many people feel they are too old to learn to read and write and improve their numeracy skills. They tell themselves that if they couldn't learn it in school, what chance do they have now?

Developing computer skills and figuring out the internet seems a leap too far. Many people with unmet literacy needs are afraid to ask for help because of misguided shame and believing that there is a stigma attached to having unmet literacy needs.

Too many struggle to write a shopping list or read a prescription. Too many are unable to calculate a bill or balance a household budget. And far too many individuals can't bear the idea of going online to make a booking, or avail of a public service.

This has to change. We have to challenge the misconception that an inability to read, write or digitally communicate is a failure of the person. It is a failure of society and the State. But one I intend to address.

This Strategy will aim to ensure that everyone has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully participate in society and realise their potential.

Crucially, this Strategy aims to improve the Adult Learning system and we are committed to using every resource available to ensure support is easily, and locally, accessible to everyone who needs it.

I hope it will encourage those who are struggling to take that vital next step and call into your local Education and Training Board or **freephone 1800 20 20 65**.

I would like to thank SOLAS for the amazing work they have done, in collaboration with my Department, other Government Departments, agencies, stakeholder bodies, communities and individuals in developing, what I think is, a really unique and important piece of work to examine this issue and develop a framework on how we can work together to address this.

We know it won't be easy, but it is clear we need to do more to address evidenced unmet needs in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in the adult population in Ireland to ensure full economic and social participation.

This Strategy will ensure that people can **understand** their needs and where to go to meet them; that they can, on the basis of that understanding, **access** all of the learning and support they need, that the learning and support made available can **expand** to meet the literacy and numeracy challenge, and that people and communities are **empowered** to make a real difference to their lives.

In order to achieve sustainable success in realising the vision of the Strategy, a cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-society approach to the implementation of the Strategy will be essential. In this context, the Strategy contains a number of important actions to ensure an integrated and collaborative structure is in place to underpin implementation. This will include communicating and delivering public services in plain language.

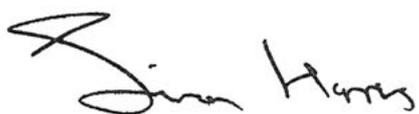
By any objective measure, this is an excellent example of a joined-up, whole of Government action-orientated Strategy focused on a significant and substantial societal challenge.

The Strategy clearly has the potential to be transformative – in its implementation and we must achieve the transformation the Strategy promises. Securing the objectives of the Strategy in terms of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy creates opportunities and potentials for a significant number of people in our society that otherwise will be unrealised in their lives.

I strongly believe that by working together on this Strategy, we can ensure that we reach those that are hardest to reach and that nobody will be left behind.

We know literacy is a form of power.

So let us empower everyone in Ireland to be their best possible selves.



Simon Harris TD

Minister for Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science.

Learner's Foreword

Starting with my local Education and Training Board's Adult Literacy Service was one of the best decisions I have ever made. I became aware of the service through family and friends and while I was a little nervous at the beginning, I am very glad that I took that first step, as once I started, I never looked back.

My experience of the service has been extremely positive; for the first time, I realised that there was a world of learning opportunities available to me as an adult to help me improve my literacy skills. My learning journey with the Adult Literacy Service was completely different from my experience of school. As an adult learner, I felt that I belonged, that I had ownership of my learning and that we were all equal. The Tutors were interested in me as a person and wanted me to enjoy learning, build my confidence and develop my potential. I feel safe, included, connected and supported, both by the Tutors and the other adult learners in my group.

As the Adult Literacy classes are run on a part-time basis and at the right level and pace for me, it meant that I could manage my learning while balancing my home life and other commitments. I have surprised myself as I have gained knowledge and skills that I never had before, my IT skills have developed beyond what I would have expected. Throughout the last year, I have used them to participate in my classes and to connect with people online using Microsoft Teams. I have also gained a recognised qualification from QQI and I am very proud of my achievements. I am a different person now than when I first started; I am much more confident now to try new things.

I would like to encourage everyone to take the first step, contact your local ETB's Adult Literacy Service and start or continue your lifelong learning journey. I think that you will surprise yourself and once you start you will never look back!



Martina Kiely

Kilkenny and Carlow ETB

A Strategy for ALL (Adult Literacy for Life) - Executive Summary

All adults in Ireland should have the literacy skills to enjoy a good quality of life within their families, communities and workplace. Literacy involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate, access services, and make informed choices. This whole-of-society strategy aims to equip all adults with the literacy skills they need. It is a key step in achieving Ireland's goal of a fully inclusive and equitable society and economy.

The strategy complements and reinforces the actions and ambition of cross-government, cross-society initiatives including the **Healthy Ireland** strategic action plan 2021-2025, **Pathways to Work** 2021-2025, Ireland's **Roadmap for Social Inclusion** 2020-2025, and the work currently underway on the first **Well-Being Framework for Ireland**. The Adult Literacy for Life strategy also enables Ireland to align internationally with sustainable development, social and economic goals of the EU, UNESCO and the OECD.

The process of developing the strategy itself gives hope that real and lasting change is achievable over its lifetime. Over 2,000 individuals or organisations fed into what you see here. The passion, commitment and insight of these stakeholders provided a compelling evidence base for a range of innovative and ambitious actions to be pursued in this strategy.



These actions are urgent and essential. Despite a generally well-educated workforce and technology-driven economy and society, too many people in Ireland lack the reading, writing, numeracy, communication and digital skills required to perform essential daily tasks. This means that they might struggle to read the dosage on their child's medicine bottle, fill out a job application, understand safety signs in a hazardous workplace, claim unemployment benefits online after a sudden job loss, or manage a household budget. It impacts areas of active



Almost 1 in 5 (18%) of adults struggle with reading and understanding everyday text.



1 in 4 adults (25%) had difficulties using maths in everyday life.



Almost 1 in 2 (47%) adults lack basic digital skills.

citizenship, such as the likelihood to volunteer or to vote, and influences the overall trust in institutions. The recent changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic to the way we work, learn, do business and interact with each other have increased the risk of people being left behind.

So who do we mean when we think about unmet literacy needs?

The link between literacy and equality and disadvantage is clear. Those groups most at risk of social exclusion are often those where unmet literacy needs are most significant, whether it is: early school leavers with a negative experience of education, people with a disability, people seeking international protection or other migrants needing language support, or minority ethnic groups who have struggled due to inequality and racism.

However, there is also another more 'hidden' group within the workforce itself, and particularly across older age groups. Over 300,000 adults in Ireland do not have any formal education equivalent to the Leaving Certificate while almost 900,000 people have no formal education beyond school level. Many of these adults struggle with the literacy, numeracy and digital skills which will be necessary for sustaining employment. Some examples of the daily struggles encountered by those with unmet literacy needs are highlighted below.

"If I couldn't do it then, why can I do it now. I hated school and there is no way I'm going back to a place like that again."

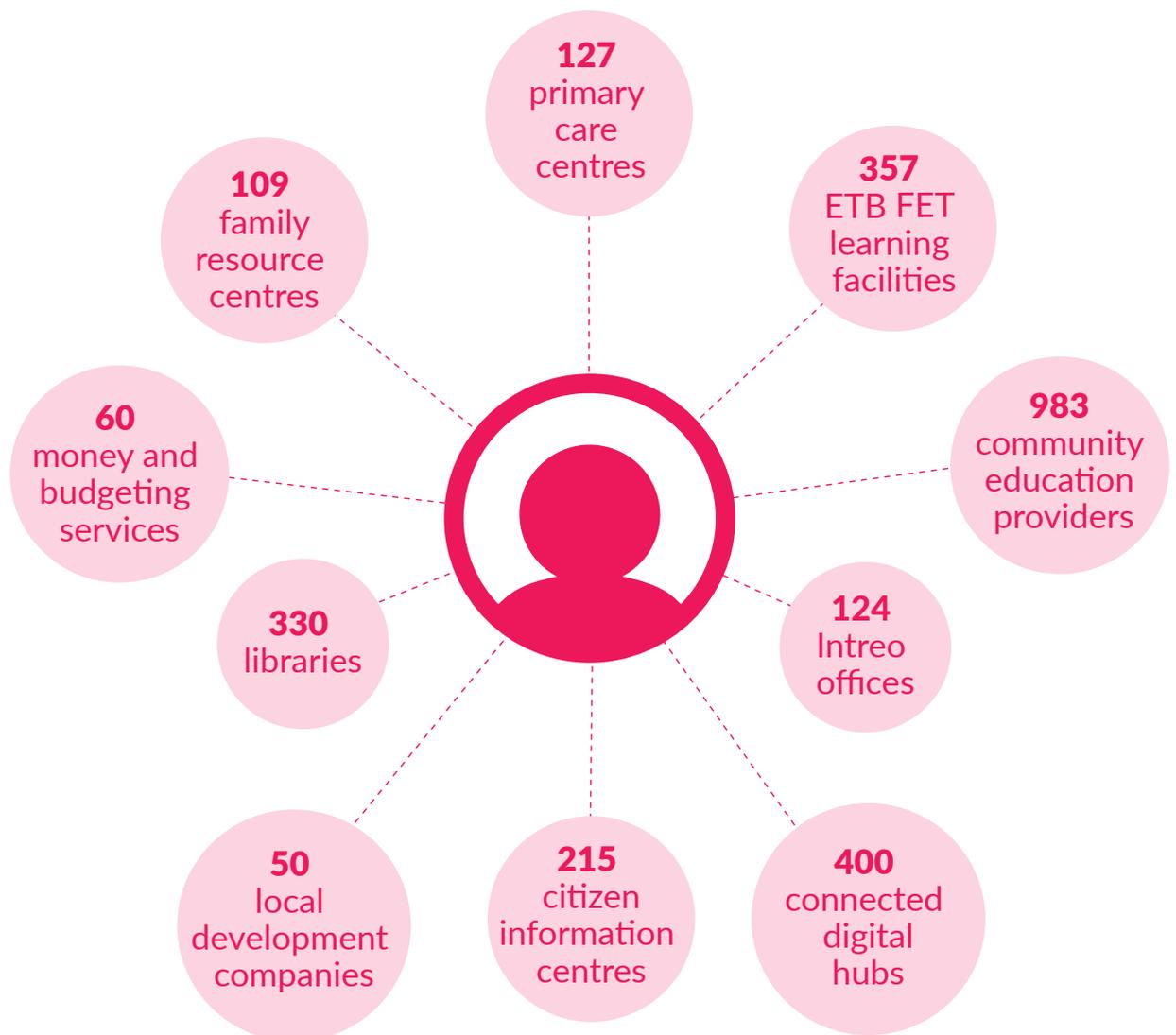
"If I told my family I wanted to learn, they would laugh. I don't know anyone in my community who has gone back to education but I can't even pay a bill online at the moment."

"I struggle with numeracy and like everyone I would love to develop my digital skills but I have a disability and I just don't see the supports I would need to be able to learn these skills locally."

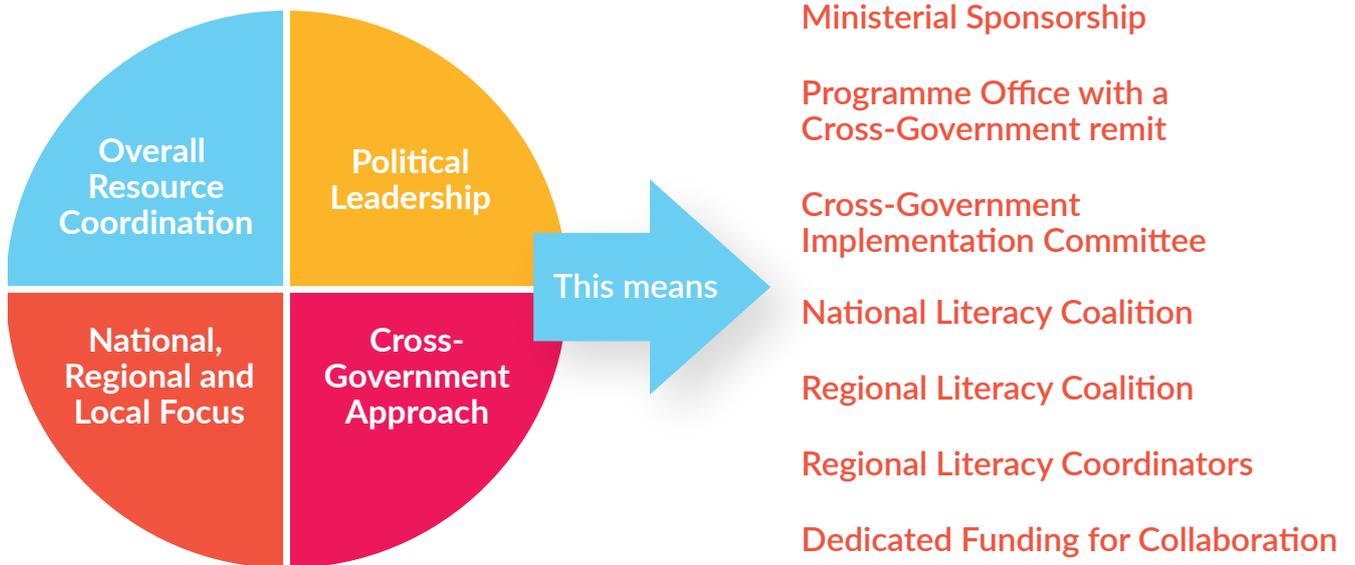
"No one at work knows I can't read. I've spent years covering it up. And now they have all these systems I have to learn and I don't have a clue about technology. My job will be gone in a year unless I do something."

"I've learned English to do my job, but finding help with services in Ireland is confusing, so many Irish words that I don't know."

There is now widespread recognition of Ireland's literacy challenge, with an incredible commitment to addressing this need at a national, regional and local level. There are many great examples of supports and learning opportunities that make a real difference in improving individual situations and helping people to lead more fulfilled lives. However, too much of this activity happens in isolation. In contrast, it needs to be more connected to wider education, health, community development, employment and local government support to make a substantial and sustainable impact. If we can do this, there is a powerful support network available in every corner of the country which can make a real difference in people's lives. This includes:



The most critical thing that this strategy needs to do is **join up** this support so that people have access to the learning to address unmet literacy needs as well as all of the support to address the barriers that caused these literacy difficulties. The strategy proposes an innovative, systems-based approach to literacy that works across Government, across economy, across society and across our communities. This involves:



This systems-based approach provides the foundation for this 10-year literacy strategy. It is a strategy that is underpinned by one simple vision:

An Ireland where every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential.

From that foundation, a range of commitments and actions are in place across four pillars to: ensure people can **UNDERSTAND** their needs and where to go to meet them. That they can **ACCESS** all of the learning and support they need. That the learning and support available can **EXPAND** to meet this massive challenge; and that we **EMPOWER** people and communities to make a real difference to their lives. The overall strategic framework to achieve this is set out below.



This is a 10-year strategy and it will require long-term commitment and action to realise the scale of improvement in literacy levels sought by the end of its life. The strategic direction set out above will be driven by a system of national Literacy Annual Action Plans. Coordinators will be appointed to bring stakeholders together and develop plans at the regional level which implement the national agenda across the country. A centralised fund will drive innovation and collaboration, and support mainstreaming good practice, which is already evident.

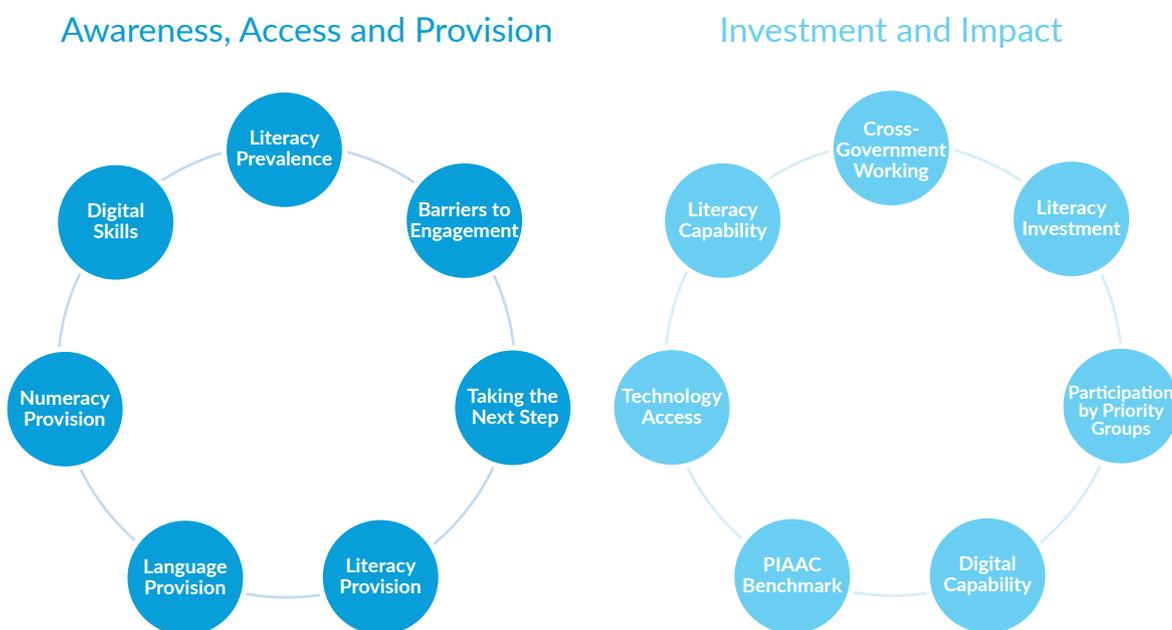
With this partnership infrastructure in place, a platform will be created for collaborative action to drive the change we need. Alongside this, there are critical and immediate steps that must also be taken. These are detailed within the strategy, some of the highlights for the initial implementation phase include:

1	2	3	4
A major national campaign around literacy awareness and the supports that are available to help people with literacy issues, using multiple media channels and reinforced by stakeholders at national, regional and local level.	A one-stop-shop to bring together all relevant information and advice on literacy, help in identifying the literacy needs and link to further resources that allow people to take the next step in accessing support and services. The NALA freephone service will also be expanded alongside this resource as a first port of call for advice.	Online training modules developed and made available to all working directly at local level, with people who may have unmet literacy needs, to help them identify needs and signpost people appropriately.	A full and comprehensive roll-out of a consistent initial and ongoing assessment approach to literacy and numeracy across ETBs and their education partners.
5	6	7	8
Explore and progress steps required to ensure that communications from public organisations are delivered using plain language .	Commitment to new, long-term funding to mitigate educational disadvantage , drive community responses to improve literacy, meet the needs of specific target groups and support access to technology and devices.	A new initiative to expand literacy support in the workplace and a full roll-out of integrated literacy support across all FET provision.	Implementation of the new Universal Design for Learning guidelines and use of the UDL resource toolkit across all literacy provision.
9	10	11	12
Immediate expansion of flexible and intensive literacy provision, including further development of standalone adult numeracy modules in accessible formats and with flexible levels of support; more intensive English language support for migrants; and more tailored projects targeting unmet literacy needs of priority target groups .	Simplification of all informal and accredited, private and public, onsite and online digital skills opportunities by listing them all in one place in the one-stop-shop, and expanding investment in digital skills provision across formal and non-formal routes.	The development and establishment of an overall continuous development framework for literacy practitioners , embedding a consistent approach to initial and ongoing skills development.	Establishment of a core skills framework that allows learners to understand the skills they need and learning paths available.
13			
Building Healthy Ireland resources into overall literacy support and growing family literacy and learning approaches as part of a targeted programme of support for health, social care and family support interventions .			

Part of the challenge in targeting unmet literacy needs is a reliance on historical data from a PIAAC survey in 2012. A strategy this long-term in nature must have the capability to continually review progress and adapt actions and responses to take account of the rapidly evolving environment. There will be a strong focus on measuring success and reporting performance through the Programme Office to the Cross-Government Implementation Committee. This will link the collaborative actions across all key national, regional and local stakeholders to overall targets for progress and ensure accountability for delivery. The ALL strategy has to make a real difference in transforming people's lives and this will mean that over its lifetime it will:

Literacy	Decrease share of adults in Ireland with unmet literacy needs, that is PIAAC Level 1 or below, from 18% to 7%.
Numeracy	Decrease share of adults in Ireland with unmet numeracy needs, that is PIAAC Level 1 or below, from 25% to 12%.
Digital Literacy	Decrease share of adults in Ireland without basic digital skills from 47% to 20% (as measured by DESI).

This will involve establishing a more regular means of measuring levels of literacy and numeracy, with a research body contracted to develop and operate an ongoing benchmarking exercise based on the PIAAC methodology. An outcomes framework will also be implemented alongside these overarching targets, including tracking the aspects of strategy success set out below.



This strategy sets out an ambitious agenda to ensure adult literacy for life. It can only be achieved through partnership and innovation but will be driven by the passion and commitment from so many, who together can deliver the learning and support that transforms lives.

1. **An Inclusive Approach for an Inclusive Strategy**



1.1 Introduction

Imagine that you cannot figure out how much medicine to give your child, understand safety signs in a hazardous workplace, sign up online for unemployment benefit after a sudden job loss, apply for a driving license or figure out how to juggle a tight household budget. Unfortunately, this is a reality for too many people in Ireland today. Literacy is essential for these types of vital daily tasks. It involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, being able to complete mathematical tasks and using everyday technology to communicate, access services, and make informed choices. Literacy is not just about the ability to read and write. The Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) strategy aims to ensure that everyone feels included and enabled to participate fully in society, in the workplace and in their daily lives. These literacy skills are essential in ensuring that every individual can lead healthy, fulfilling, productive lives. They will improve confidence and self-esteem, enable fuller participation in community, society and economy and raise social and political capital.

There is already significant investment in Ireland to tackle unmet literacy needs. A wealth of initiatives facilitate access to literacy learning and support social and political capital levels. Ireland has many dedicated, skilled practitioners and organisations who are totally committed to tackling unmet literacy needs within communities, homes, and the workplace. However, the research undertaken for this strategy shows, that many with unmet literacy needs are reluctant to take the first step. The network of organisations, tools and initiatives can seem difficult to navigate and therefore difficult to access.

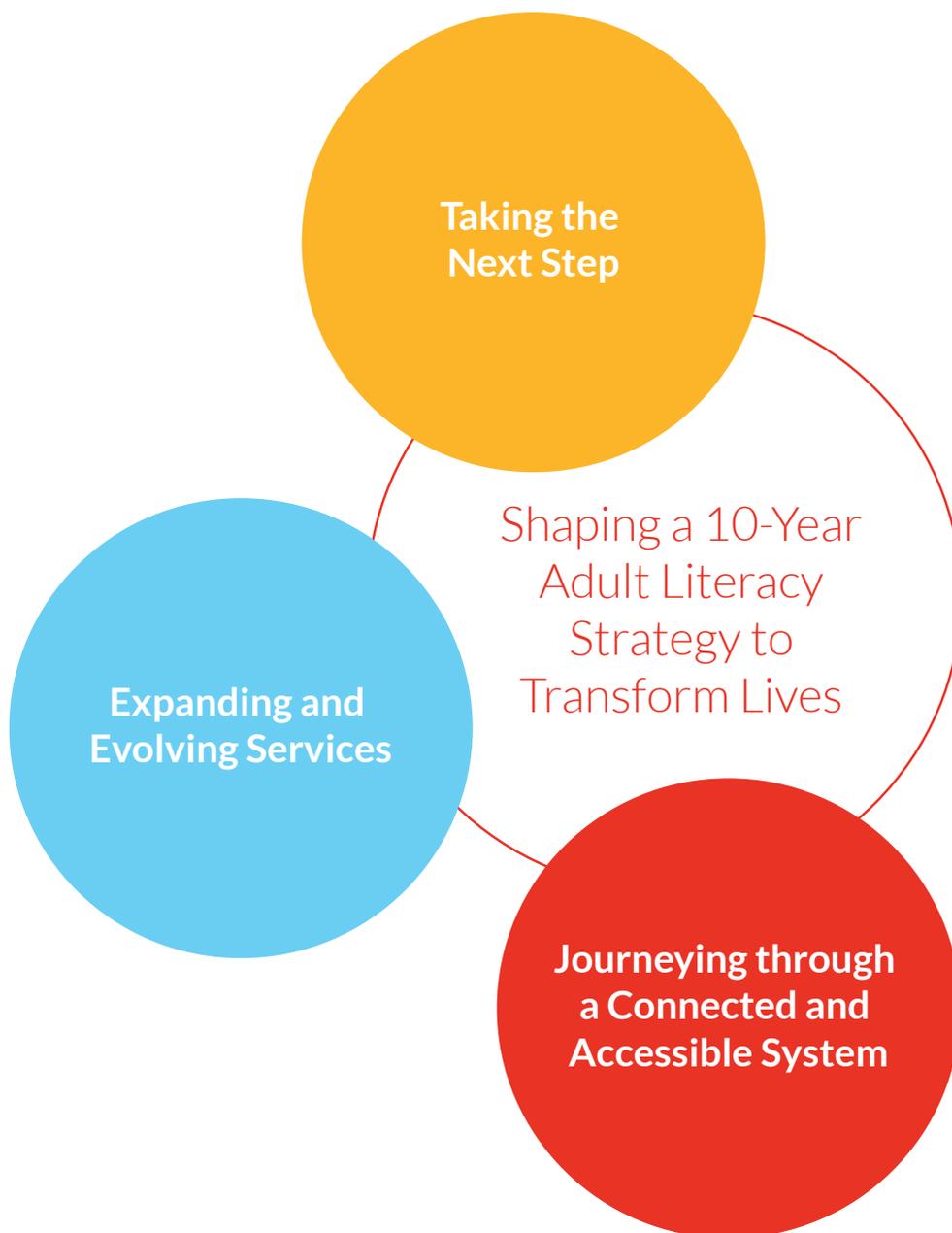
This strategy will harness the resources already in place to help adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy and make it:

1. Easier for those with unmet literacy needs to 'take the next step'.
2. A more connected and accessible system that ensures access to all of the supports and services and a clear pathway to further develop skills.
3. A responsive approach that offers increased learning and support opportunities for the rapidly changing world in which we live.

Meeting unmet literacy needs within our communities is a cross-society, cross-government challenge. This strategy and the accompanying action plan will coordinate the efforts of all partners and committed practitioners. During development, the ALL strategy has closely referenced complementary initiatives that include the Healthy Ireland strategic action plan 2021-2025, the National Traveller and Roma Strategy 2017-2021, Ireland's Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025, the Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025, the forthcoming National Digital Strategy for Schools, the Department of Education's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the National Action Plan Against Racism, and the Well-being Framework for Ireland. This approach will enhance the impact and help ensure that Government departments, communities, education practitioners and all involved in adult literacy work effectively together.

Literacy initiatives around the world were also examined in the strategy development, as unmet literacy needs among adults is a global social inclusion challenge. Learning from strategies and actions internationally was also incorporated, such as the European Commission 2030 Digital Compass and the EU Web Accessibility Directive. The UNESCO global reports on Adult Learning and Education, were referenced, as well as OECD initiatives and reports that include the periodic survey of adult skills, PIAAC and ongoing skills reports that deal with literacy challenges.

Figure 1: Key Challenges of the ALL Strategy

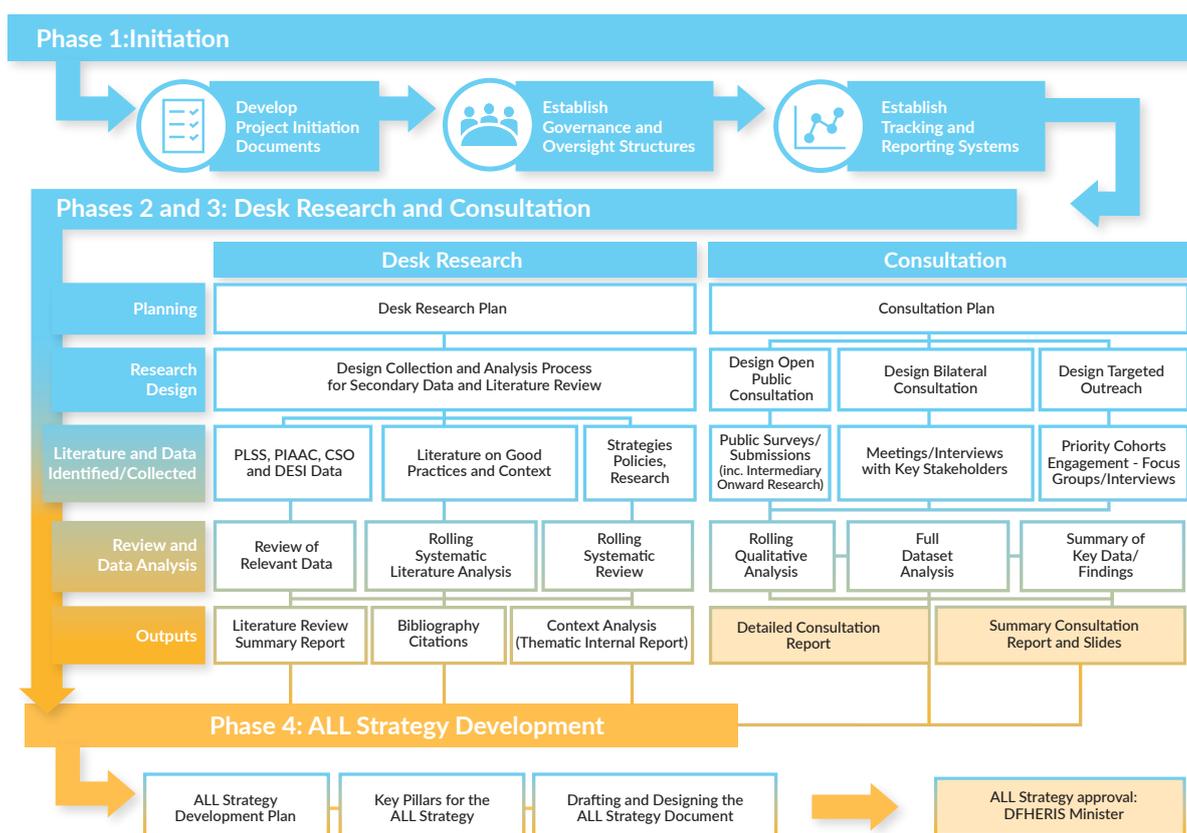


1.2 Developing the Strategy

One of the first announcements by the new Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science was to set out plans to develop of a 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy. This pledge was built upon a commitment in the Programme for Government – ‘Our Shared Future’ – that one is developed within its first year. The Minister wrote to SOLAS on 31 July 2020 requesting that, in line with its responsibility under the Further Education and Training Act to develop a literacy and numeracy strategy, SOLAS commence planning and bring forward early proposals on this programme of work.

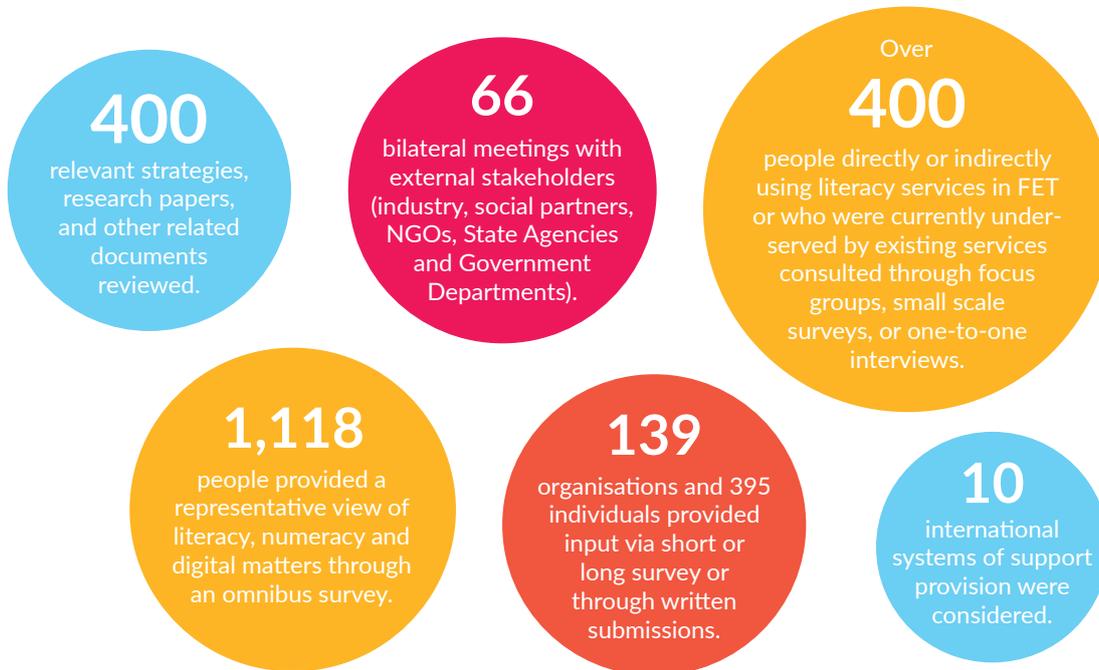
During August and September 2020, a strategy initiation phase was progressed. This phase plotted the key steps that needed to be delivered and put in place the support, advisory and governance structures to ensure an effective and inclusive strategy. A key motivation behind the development of the strategy was to embed a more connected system that could meet the wide range of complex individual needs in a simpler and more accessible manner. Having the right partners around the table was pivotal to ensuring a collaborative approach to success. This phase was the first of four, as set out in the diagram in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Strategy Development Process



Phases 2 and 3 gathered all of the relevant information, research and analysis, and incorporated consultation with those with an interest in the development of the strategy.

A bibliography highlighting the many sources that have fed into the strategy has also been created.¹ In addition, a detailed consultation report was produced detailing findings from the consultation process.² A summary consultation report was also produced.³ The process was fully inclusive, gathering the insight and expertise of over 2,000 individuals and organisations who contributed to the development process, including:



This allowed initiation of the fourth and final phase to develop the strategy itself, built upon four key pillars, ready for submission to Government.

1.3 Defining Literacy

In the past, literacy was considered to be the ability to read and write. Today, the meaning has evolved to reflect changes in how we live and the skills needed by individuals to participate fully in society. Having literacy, numeracy and digital capabilities is key to such participation. Individuals, families and communities across Ireland face big challenges without literacy, numeracy and digital capabilities. They are foundational skills that enable full participation in life, work and leisure. As the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has stated, “These skills enable people to reach their potential to be active and critical participants in society and help address poverty and social exclusion.”⁴

What literacy means to me

“able to read well enough to get through day-to-day life, following instructions, getting the correct information, building confidence and then, secondly, starting to enjoy reading with confidence and discovering the new worlds and experiences literacy opens up.”

It is important to understand that literacy is not fixed. Like any capability or skill, it must be used regularly to be maintained and advanced. Modern understandings of literacy have

1 https://solas.ie/f/70398/x/57b83b0532/all_bibliography_final.pdf
 2 https://solas.ie/f/70398/x/430d4dbae2/all_strategy_detailedconsultationreport_final.pdf
 3 https://solas.ie/f/70398/x/b034a67b1d/all_strategy_summaryconsultationreport_final.pdf
 4 NALA, ‘Literacy now’ 2020, p. 8.

expanded to include areas such as digital literacy, family literacy, environmental and eco-literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, media literacy and numeric literacy. It is therefore possible to understand literacy to mean all of the foundational skills related to reading, writing, maths and technology as well as having the confidence to use them. Literacy should be seen through the lens of the personal, emotional, social and psychological well-being that it provides.

From the analysis of over 2,000 contributions and submissions to the consultation process for this strategy, literacy was cited as critical to a number of aspects of day-to-day life, which are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Functional Literacy

<p>Family Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the confidence and ability to read a bedtime story, help with maths, English or Irish homework, or even fill out a form required to register or enrol in school. 	<p>Employability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read job advertisements, fill out applications, be able to search for vacancies, apply online and communicate clearly in interviews.
<p>Good Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange a follow-up appointment with your doctor online, read the label on a medicine bottle and understand the diet and lifestyle needed to be healthy. 	<p>Job Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be able to read safety signs at work, send e-mails, complete health and safety courses, work with and use technology and conduct online meetings.
<p>Living Safely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be able to understand safety warnings and instructions, understand situations to make sound judgements and decisions. 	<p>Shopping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be able to shop and purchase things online, know your consumer rights and entitlements, assess value for money.
<p>Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access Government services and other online services required. Understand rights and eligibility, be able to apply online, provide the necessary evidence, deal with follow-up correspondence and complain about poor service. 	<p>New Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be able to learn new skills online, complete online assessments, read theory and do coursework as part of a course.
<p>Finances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage finances, budget effectively, pay bills, use an ATM and online banking, access essential financial services and be able to identify a scam. 	<p>Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be able to identify phishing, protect your personal information and data and avoid other forms of scams, targeting and manipulation online.
<p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help people learn to live together, have the language and social skills to integrate within their communities, be healthy and thrive, irrespective of their economic, social or cultural background. 	<p>Digital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the technology and be able to use it to complete many of the functions outlined above. To access news and information, to use e-mail, social media and other tools to interact with others.

Gaps in literacy – which can be related to reading, writing, mathematical or digital skills – can present practical constraints in negotiating daily life and may discourage people from participating in their communities and developing their personal potential. They may hinder adults’ progress in working towards qualifications, which in turn puts them at a disadvantage in the job market. With better skills, people can seek new and better employment opportunities, especially as job markets continue to evolve.

Strong literacy skills allow individuals to engage effectively with public institutions, access public services, understand and act upon new information and policy changes, use technology, or advocate for themselves and their communities regarding issues that affect their lives. It impacts on areas of active citizenship, such as the likelihood to volunteer or to vote, and influences our overall trust in institutions.

Literacy has a significant impact on the quality of life and the well-being of an individual. The importance of well-being has been recognised by Government and an initial well-being framework is being developed. This is a way of establishing a well-rounded, holistic view of how Ireland is performing, alongside existing economic measurement tools. Over time it will be used across Government to inform policy-making, complementing existing tools for policy analysis. This new 10-year adult literacy strategy has strong linkages to this whole-of-Government well-being approach and in improving an individual’s well-being outcomes over time.

Functional literacies can be represented in the following conceptual framework that NALA has created to define the various literacy domains and how they impact the individual.⁵



5 For further details see <https://www.nala.ie/publications/literacy-impact/>, pp. 17; 21.

Figure 4: Key Adult Literacy Domains



1.4 Literacy in Context: Ireland and the EU

Ireland has always valued education and the right of all citizens to have access to education. Recent decades have seen positive trends in producing a highly-educated population, with early school-leaver rates declining substantially and higher education participation levels increasing to the extent that they are amongst the highest across the OECD. This has allowed Ireland to develop an international reputation for a skilled workforce, which is often cited as a key factor in attracting foreign direct investment.

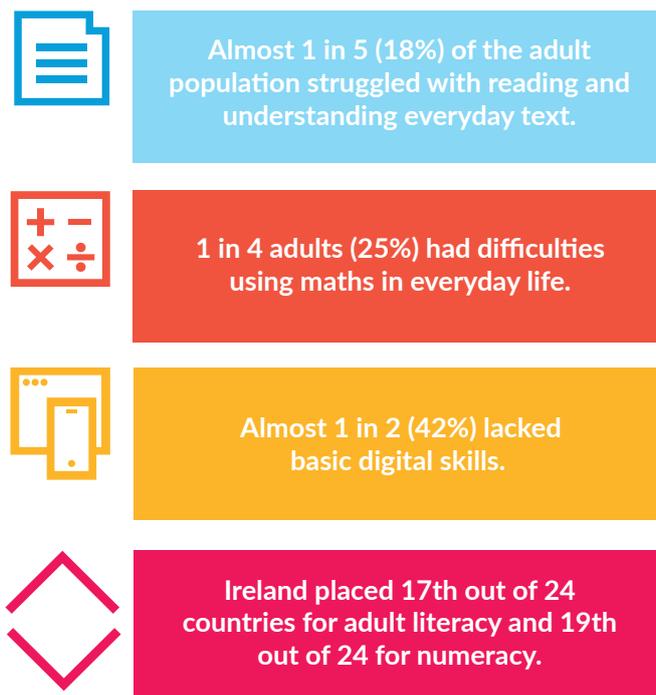
This is reflected in literacy and numeracy capability assessments of school-age students in Ireland. The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) takes place

every three years and measures how well 15-year-old students perform in three areas: reading, mathematics and science. The last assessment in 2018 found that Ireland:

- Ranked 4th out of 36 OECD countries and 3rd out of 27 EU countries for reading literacy (and 8th out of all 77 countries/regions participating in PISA).
- Had significantly fewer low-performing students (11.8% below level 2) and significantly more high performers (12.1% at levels 5 and 6) than the OECD average for reading literacy.
- Ranked 16th out of 37 OECD countries and 21st out of 78 participating countries/regions in mathematics, with lower-than-average numbers of low performing students in maths.

However, capability levels of the adult population in Ireland vary from the positive PISA results. The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) involves a periodic, OECD-coordinated, comprehensive survey of literacy and numeracy skills. The last PIAAC survey was undertaken during 2012.⁶ Figure 5 gives an overview of the survey findings for Ireland:

Figure 5: PIAAC Results 2012



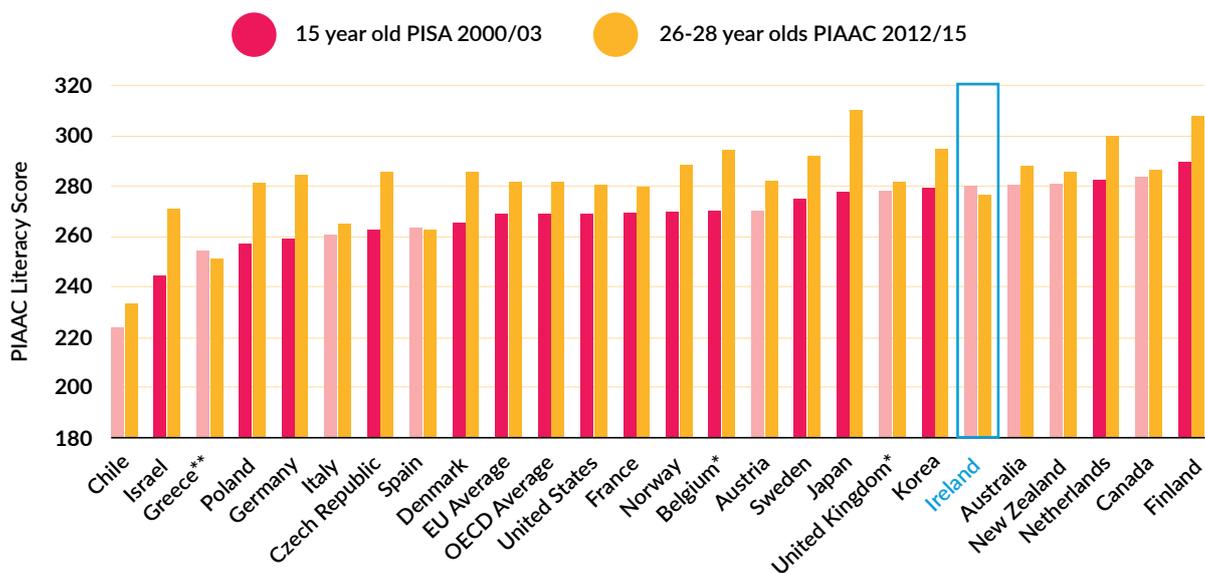
Ireland is a relatively technologically advanced economy that benefits from an established “tech” industry. Ireland performs strongly under a number of metrics in the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), ranked 6th overall in 2020 in Europe across a range of criteria including connectivity, human capital, use of internet services, integration of digital technology and digital public services. Ireland’s relative position has also improved in recent years, moving up from 8th in 2018. However, in sharp contrast, just 47% of the adult population report not having at least basic digital skills. CSO data also shows that while 79% of people use the

⁶ The next comprehensive PIAAC survey is now overdue but has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

internet every day, 8% have **never** used it. According to recent Eurostat figures, more than 43% of the EU-27 population aged 65-74 years did not use the internet in the last 3 months. Therefore, people aged 65-74 were three times as likely as all adults aged 16-74 never to have used the internet. This emerging digital divide presents a significant challenge given that basic digital capability is increasingly critical for participation in society and the labour market.

While the last comprehensive analysis of literacy and numeracy levels in Ireland was completed almost a decade ago (2012), emerging analysis from the OECD suggests that these issues continue to prevail. As set out in Figure 6, in a recent ‘OECD Skills Outlook 2021: Ireland’ report it finds that when comparing the literacy achievement of the cohort of individuals who were 15-year-old students in 2000 and 26-28 year-old adults in 2012, literacy achievement in Ireland declined by 3 points on the PIAAC scale, and this is in contrast to an average growth across OECD countries of 13 points. In Ireland, the literacy proficiency level of the cohort of students who were 15 years old in 2000 was 279 points on the PIAAC scale, which was above the OECD average of 268 points. Among individuals whose parents completed tertiary education, literacy achievement at ages 26 to 28 has been similar to the literacy level at age 15; the OECD average growth was 14 points. Among individuals whose parents did not complete tertiary education, literacy achievement at ages 26 to 28 declined compared to the literacy level at age 15 by 6 points; the OECD average growth was 10 points.

Figure 6: Achievement growth in literacy between ages 15 and 27, by country



Note: Countries are sorted in ascending level of achievement among 15 year olds. Differences between age 15 and ages 26-28 that are not statistically significant at the 5% level are marked in a lighter tone. PISA reading scores are expressed in PIAAC literacy scores, following Borgonovi et al. (2017) and based on the methods described in Box 3.1. Robustness checks and results for numeracy are available in the supplementary online tables for Chapter 3. See Annex Table 3.A.1. In PISA 2000, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands fell short of the minimum response rate requirements. Information provided by the United Kingdom led to the assessment that response bias was likely negligible. No similar information was provided by the Netherlands. PISA data for Chile and Greece refer to 2003. PIAAC data for Chile, Greece, Israel, New Zealand refer to 2015. How concordance scores between PISA and PIAAC were derived is described in Box 3.1 of the report.

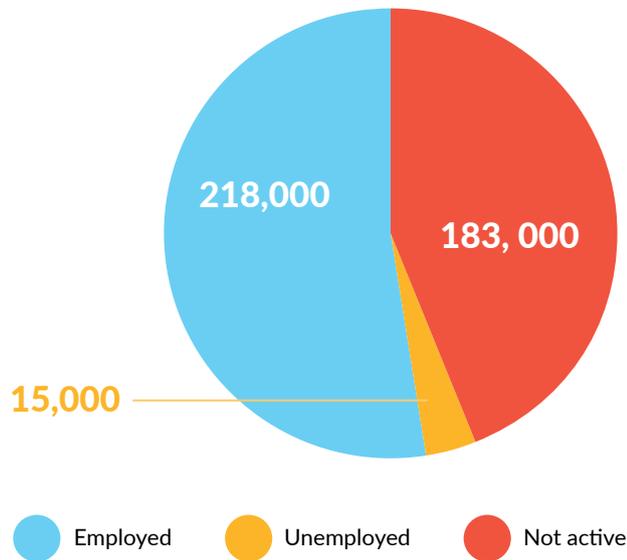
*In PIAAC, data for Belgium refer only to Flanders and data for the United Kingdom refer to England and Northern Ireland jointly. The relevant estimated PIAAC score for Flemish community of Belgium in PISA 2000 is 282 and the PIAAC score difference between 15 and 27 year olds corresponds to 12 points.

**The data for Greece include a large number of cases (1,032) in which there are responses to the background questionnaire but where responses to the assessment are missing. Proficiency scores have been estimated for these respondents based on their responses to the background questionnaire and the population model used to estimate plausible values for responses missing by design derived from the remaining 3,893 cases.

Source: OECD (2000), PISA database 2000; <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/database-pisa2000.htm>; OECD (2003), PISA database 2003; <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/database-pisa2003.htm>; OECD (2012), (2015), Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) databases; <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/publicdataandanalysis/>.

This is also reinforced by recent data from the CSO, set out in Figure 7, which shows that there are currently over 400,000 people with less than a QQI Level 4 qualification (i.e. Leaving Certificate or equivalent).⁷ Most strikingly, 52% of this cohort are currently employed, which emphasises the need for education and literacy support to extend into the workforce, future-proofing skills for the changes to the world of work that are already in place.

Figure 7: People of Working Age with Less than QQI Level 4 Qualification

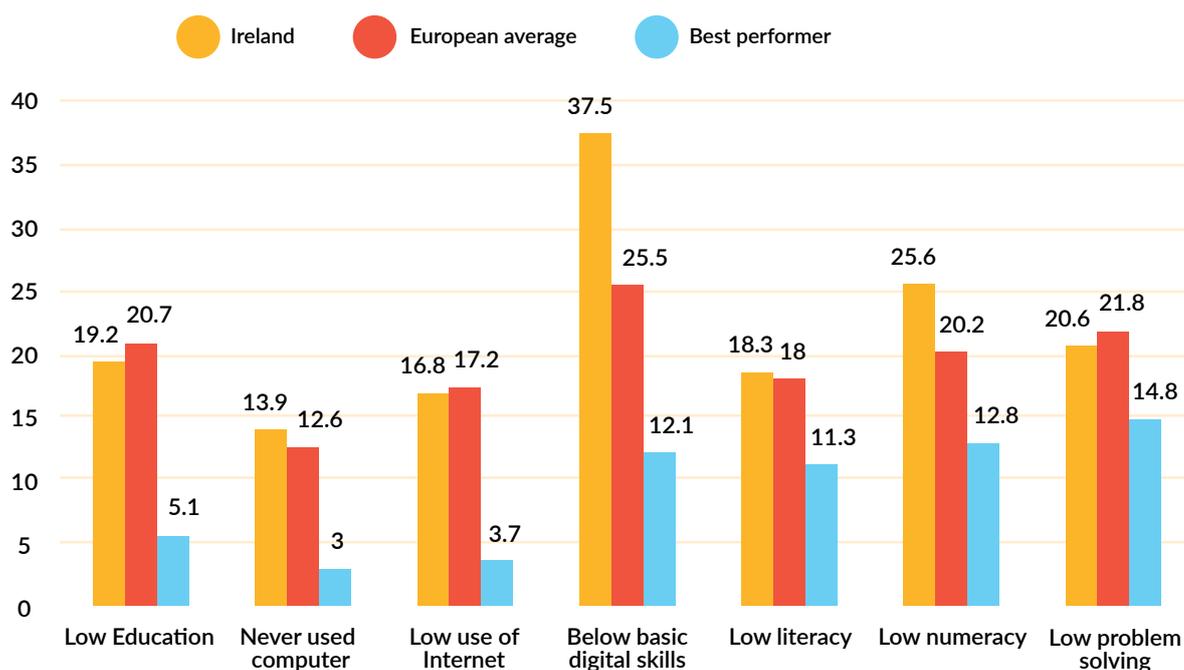


Assuming that the PIAAC literacy and numeracy deficits found in 2012 still prevail and combining this with CEDEFOP country factsheet for Ireland, it suggests that the share of the adult population in Ireland in need of potential upskilling in a variety of literacy skills is estimated to range between 35% and 46% of the total population aged between 25 and 65 years. Between 0.9 million to 1.2 million adults in Ireland in this age range may need supports with daily tasks, along with many more over age 65. CEDEFOP has provided further analysis on the relative skills deficit compared to European peers highlighted in Figure 8. This work has informed Ireland’s response to the European Council Recommendations on Upskilling Pathways, an EU wide programme, that aims to help adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills to enable progress towards further capability development.⁸

⁷ Source: Based on Labour Force Survey (ISCED 0-2); Relates to those aged 25-64 with less than ISCED 2 (equivalent to QQI less than level 4), Q2 2019, (figures are rounded); ESTAT, (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat> (URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFSI_EDUC_Q_H__custom_1192640/default/table?lang=en; and https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFSQ_IGAED__custom_1192470/default/table?lang=en; online data code: LFSQ ; Central Statistics Office, (2019), *Education Attainment Thematic Report*.

⁸ Cedefop (2020). Cedefop country fact sheet: Ireland - Adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/ireland_country_factsheet.pdf

Figure 8: Incidence of low skills among those aged 25-64



Source: Cedefop (2020). Cedefop country fact sheet: Ireland - Adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/ireland_country_factsheet.pdf

Given that text-based and numeric information occupies a considerable portion of the digital world, access to that world depends not only on information and communication technology skills but also upon basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy. In other words, the digital divide may also reflect a literacy and numeracy divide.⁹

1.5 Adapting to a Rapidly Evolving Environment

In addition to an already evolving digital economy, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 caused an unprecedented period of economic and societal disruption. The way we work, do business, learn and even interact with each other has changed fundamentally, changes that will leave a lasting legacy even after the restrictions imposed by the pandemic are alleviated. Highly innovative approaches have been rolled out to keep learners supported and engaged, and keep essential public services flowing. For example, the last year has seen significant growth in uptake of the National e-ID (MyGovID), facilitating mass delivery of several online services, including Driving Licence Renewal and applications for the National Childcare Scheme. Furthermore, the government's gov.ie portal has now become the authoritative source of government information including in terms of the national response to the pandemic.

⁹ OECD Skills matter: further results from the survey of adults skills, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, (2016) Paris.

However, despite these positive benefits from digital transformation, there is no question that the most marginalised in society have suffered the most from the move to an almost wholly online, digital world. In Further Education and Training (FET), participation and certification levels of key target groups have fallen, and the move to online learning limits the tailored support that can be provided to meet literacy and numeracy needs. All this, of course, occurred at a time when there was an urgent need for everyone to be digitally literate. NALA noted that we are already seeing an impact of the ‘imposed’ digital world of COVID, with a recent survey suggesting that 8% of adults have never used the internet, down from the 11% cited by the CSO in 2019. There is also emerging evidence of more use of online government services, and some evidence that a cohort is struggling to adapt to this mode of service provision due to a lack of skills.¹⁰

NALA noted a 73% increase in calls to its information helpline during 2020. The types of support requested becoming more varied, including specific help in understanding COVID-19 guidance and using technology to stay connected.

This strategy must therefore put in place a pathway to engage and recover adult learners that take account of both the damage done by restricted support and services and the “new normal” that we will face when the worst effects of the pandemic are at an end.

In many ways, the changes brought about by COVID-19 were already taking place due to technological change: meeting the needs of the future world of work and an overriding focus on sustainable development goals at a national, European and global level. Looking ahead over the lifetime of the strategy, to 2030, we need to consider how adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy can equip people to meet these future demands. For example:

- Ireland has published a **Sustainable Development Agenda** with 17 goals covering poverty and climate change to infrastructure development and industry. Implementation plans are published in 3 yearly cycles to provide a whole-of-Government approach to delivery. Enshrined in this is the principle of “furthest behind first”, a principle that will build a more equal, more resilient and happier society.
- The European Commission’s priorities to 2024 include the **European Green deal**, a digital future, an economy that works for people, and promoting and strengthening European democracy. Digital technology is changing peoples’ lives and being able to access and use this technology is becoming just as essential reading and writing. The EU’s Digital Strategy aims to make this transformation work for people and businesses while helping to achieve its target of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050.
- The European Commission 2030 Digital Compass: The European Commission has set out targets for a **digitally empowered Europe** by 2030. The four target

¹⁰ Over five in ten (53%) internet users obtained information from public authorities’/public services’ websites or apps, an increase of 3 percentage points on 2019. Downloading or printing of official forms and submitting of official forms also increased. Half (50%) of internet users reported downloading/printed official forms (an increase of 2 percentage points on 2019), while 63% submitted forms online, up 3 percentage points on 2019 figures. Respondents who did not submit completed official forms online were asked for their reasons for not doing so: 5% said that a lack of skills or knowledge prevented them from availing of this service.

key areas are: a digitally skilled population, secure and sustainable digital infrastructures, digital transformation of businesses, and public services digitalisation. A key enabler to implementing '2030 Digital Compass' is to ensure that 80% of adults have basic skills. The Commission has also proposed to introduce a **Digital Services Act** to support this.

- The **EU Web Accessibility Directive** was transposed by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment in September 2020. The European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020 requires public bodies to ensure their websites and mobile applications are accessible to all and especially to persons with disabilities.
- The **European Pillar of Social Rights** sets out 20 essential principles and rights in the areas of equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. It is seen as a compass for a renewed process of upward convergence towards better working and living conditions in the European Union.
- Finally, the **European Social Charter** (ESC) guarantees a broad range of everyday human rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare for EU citizens. The ESC emphasises the protection of vulnerable persons such as older people, children, people with disabilities and migrants. It requires that enjoyment of these rights be guaranteed without discrimination. Fundamental Literacy skills and the ability to fully participate in society and the labour market fall under the remit of the ESC.

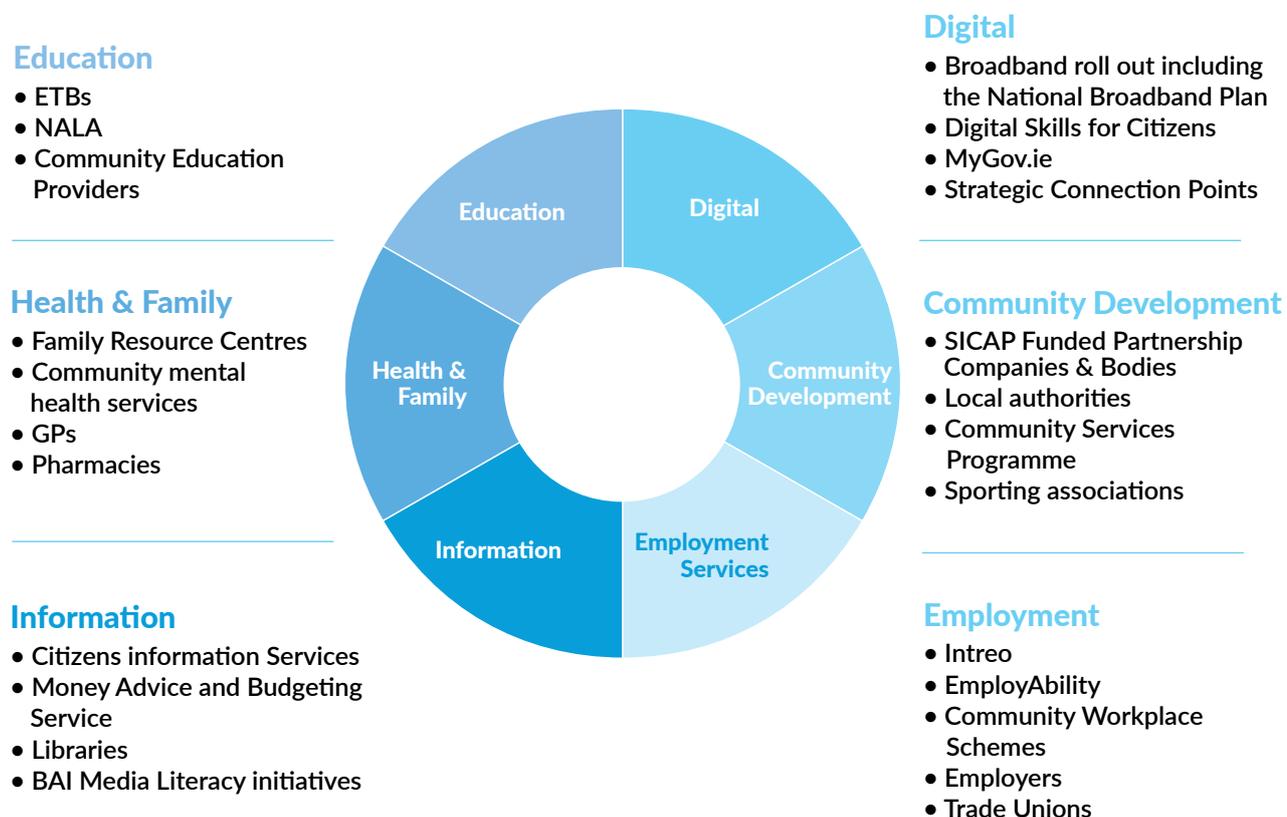
Tackling Ireland's adult literacy demands will require a resilient, flexible strategy, based around fair, digital and green transitions for all. Societal developments – such as a focus on overall well-being, globalisation, urbanisation, climate change and ageing demographics – must be taken into account. These will interact alongside technology megatrends, including reconfigured global value chains, artificial intelligence, robotics and nanotechnology, smart automation technology, big data and augmented and virtual reality. These megatrends will impact economic activity and growth, the natural environment and social well-being and health. Many jobs in their current form will become obsolete. There will be an imperative to continually upskill and reskill in order to maintain the relevance of one's skills, and digital literacy will become a prerequisite for every role across every industry. Technology is transforming areas as diverse as healthcare, media, financial services as we speak, and all are central to an integrated and sustainable strategy for literacy.

This new strategy must contribute to helping Ireland and its adult learners emerge stronger and more resilient from the COVID-19 pandemic. It must impact and influence how we support the basic skills and capabilities which will allow individuals to actively engage in the future world, both now and in the future. It must consider how the literacy approach will respond to this constantly evolving environment.

1.6 The Support Landscape

The existing support landscape for literacy is multi-faceted. Achieving the aims of the literacy strategy will require engagement across government, the economy and society, both at a national and local level. Many government departments already have significant involvement in literacy-related issues, with supports and services available to the public, delivered through statutory agencies and also through partnerships with local, community-based organisations and networks. Additionally, across the range of government services, there are many identifiable “contact points” where an opportunity exists for an individual to receive initial advice and subsequent referral to more direct literacy supports. A range of some of the key mechanisms, through which literacy supports are delivered on the ground, as well as the key services “contact points”, are set out in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Key Mechanisms of Literacy Support

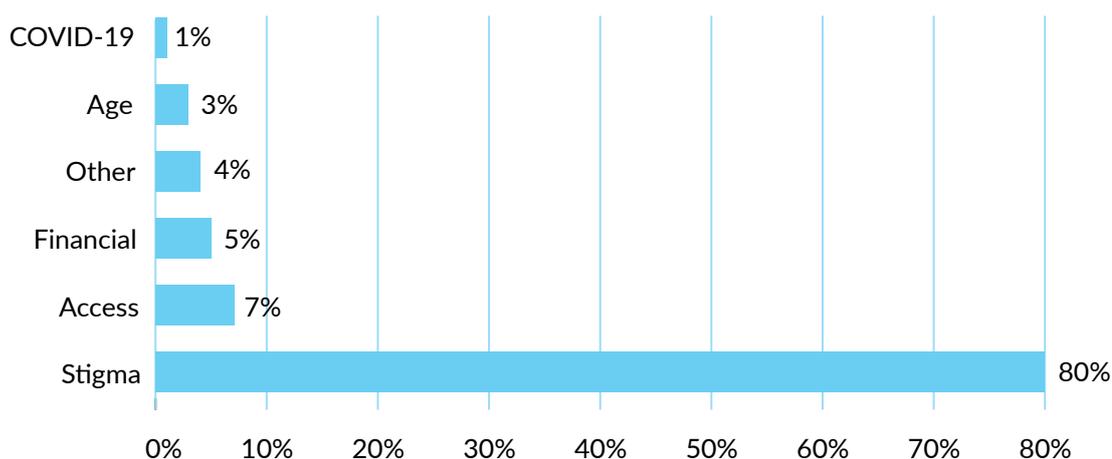


Each of these support mechanisms is discussed in greater detail in Appendix A.

1.7 Barriers to Engagement

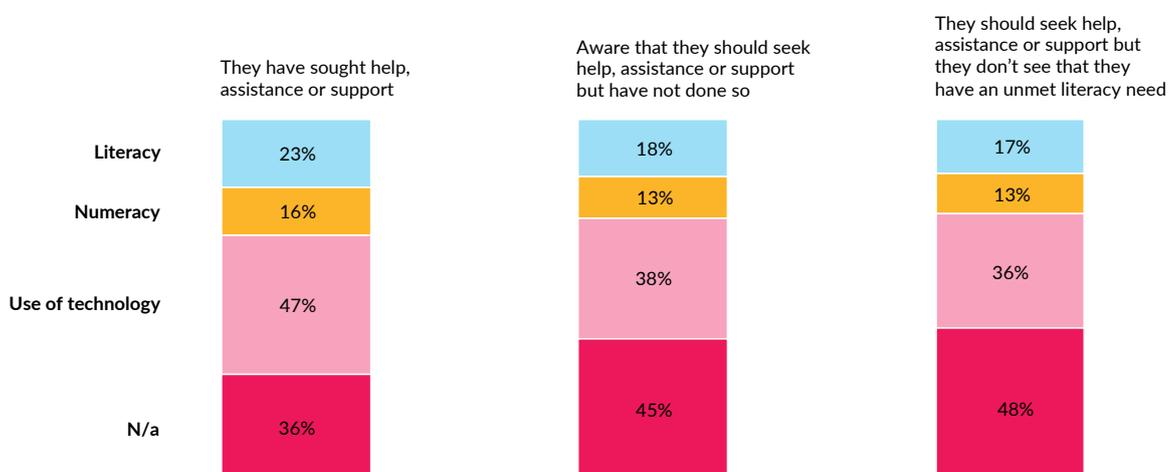
While it is clear that there are already many agencies, supports and significant investments targeted at literacy inclusion, wider social cohesion and well-being issues, the continued prevalence of inequality in this regard suggests that there remain barriers to engagement. The Ipsos Omnibus Smart Poll Survey conducted by Amárach during the research phase for this strategy identified that social embarrassment/stigma is the most critical barrier that prevents people from accessing the supports they need (as shown in Figure 10).

Figure 10: Barriers to Literacy Support



The prevalence of unmet adult literacy needs across society – and the barriers that prevent people engaging with available support – was also borne out in the survey’s questioning awareness of people who struggled in these areas. As shown in Figure 11, almost a quarter of respondents knew someone (family, friend or colleague) who had sought help with literacy, and almost half knew someone who had accessed support for the use of technology. There was also a substantial additional base of people they knew who had not sought help or assistance, including many who did not recognise that they had an unmet literacy need.

Figure 11: Knowledge of Family, Friends and Colleagues who Struggle with Literacy



While personal psychological barriers of fear, shame and low confidence are a very significant and important barrier for people, the submissions to this strategy also highlight the equal importance of socio-cultural and economic barriers. There are also signs of barriers to engagement by people in particular circumstances, including migrants. Over 80,000 adults indicated in the CSO Census in 2016 that they did not speak English well, with 6,376 unable to speak English at all. These figures far exceed the numbers currently receiving English language supports from FET, which indicates that barriers may exist to securing the help they need.

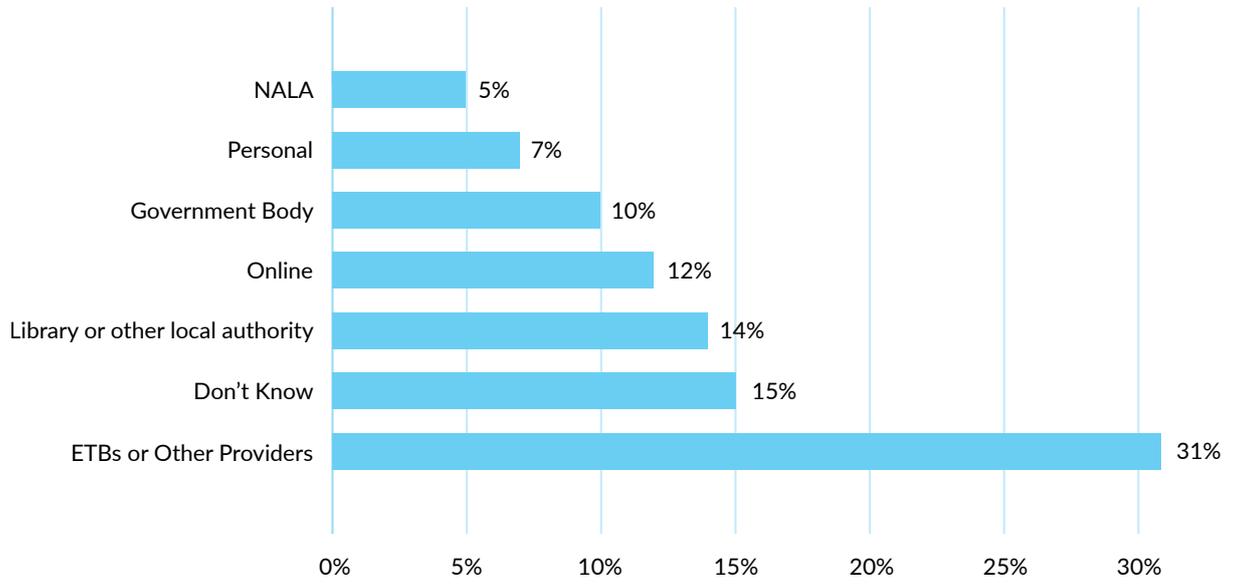
An additional, often overlooked area of literacy need is among those in more advanced education and training (e.g. Level 5 and above courses across further and higher education and Apprenticeships) and those already in employment. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) research report on literacy, numeracy and activation among the unemployed shows that work-specific training in literacy and numeracy enhances employment prospects by up to three times the average. This is keeping with the approach across FET of integrating literacy and numeracy support with wider training, rather than providing it as a standalone intervention. There has also been increased activity to support the needs of people in workplaces, with Skills for Work¹¹ and EXPLORE¹² key interventions to support this. However, more needs to be done to raise awareness, identify needs, facilitate educational access, support and provision. Another ESRI research report on literacy and numeracy difficulties in the Irish workplace shows a wage differential for employees with literacy and numeracy needs. It found the negative wage impact from having a numeracy need is confined to those with low earnings. In contrast, employees with middle-to-upper level earnings are most negatively affected by having a literacy need.

There are also indications that the multiplicity of actors involved in the support landscape can confuse a person in need of support and can act as a barrier to initial engagement. The survey queried awareness of available support by asking participants who they would contact to avail of literacy support. As set out in Figure 12, while there was knowledge across respondents of the different support organisations that could help, there was substantial divergence in where best to 'take the first step'. This suggests that communication and simplification around the best place to start for literacy support could help with overall engagement in these supports.

11 <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/cb762-skills-for-work-training-courses/>

12 <http://www.regionalskills.ie/explore/>

Figure 12: Perceptions of where to seek Literacy Support



2. A Cross-Government, Society and Economy Strategy



2.1 The Vision for a 10-Year Whole of Society Strategy

Although literacy, numeracy and digital literacy capabilities are so intertwined with so many other aspects of life and work, the ALL strategy is underpinned by one simple vision:

An Ireland where every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential.

In order to achieve sustainable success in realising this vision, a cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-society approach will be required, one that can help create a more equal, inclusive Ireland for all where everyone feels they can participate and belong.

This will mean that more people will be able to recognise literacy in themselves and in others, and that everyone will know where to get help. It will mean a whole range of local services will understand literacy barriers and work together to ensure that needs can be identified quickly and that the right learning, support and services are signposted straight away. It will mean that the diverse needs across communities and societies are understood and tailored approaches are developed to meet these needs. It will mean that literacy learning and supports will be available in workplaces, through education and training providers, in communities and through outreach and online resources.

While education is fundamental to achieving this vision, real progress will require all Government departments and agencies, communities (and the organisations that support and represent people), businesses and individuals to play an active role in making this vision a reality. The most fundamental change that this strategy must bring is a collaborative, integrated approach across all of these actors to agree on the action plan to drive change and be accountable for those actions.

Such an integrated, multi-stakeholder approach should enable real progress in substantially growing the number of adults in Ireland who have the desired and necessary literacy, numeracy and digital skills and address the underlying inequalities that contribute to these issues. The approach will be underpinned by five guiding principles, set out in Figure 13, which will ensure a connected system in which **no one is left behind**.

Figure 13: ALL Strategy Guiding Principles



If the strategy is successful, it will mean:

- **MORE** adults accessing literacy, numeracy and digital literacy education and supports.
- **FEWER** adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs.
- **GREATER** provision of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy education and supports.
- **INCREASED** access to services by adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs.

2.2 An Integrated Systems Based Approach

Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy have a profound effect on an ability to undertake everyday tasks, participate in society and overall well-being. The issues raised cannot be addressed solely by delivering literacy supports and learning opportunities. Making sustainable progress is only possible in tandem with wider interventions to support education, health, family, finances and employment.

Addressing adult literacy effectively and strategically means an integrated approach with measures to tackle the many other inter-related factors that drive inequality and undermine well-being. Ensuring the new strategy can respond to cyclical, political, economic and societal challenges of the next 10 years will be critical to ensuring everyone in Ireland has the necessary literacy to participate in society fully and realise their potential. To do this, Ireland must therefore take a cross-Government, cross-society and cross-economy approach. The strategy must be considered in the context of working to secure interconnected literacy, as set out in Figure 14.

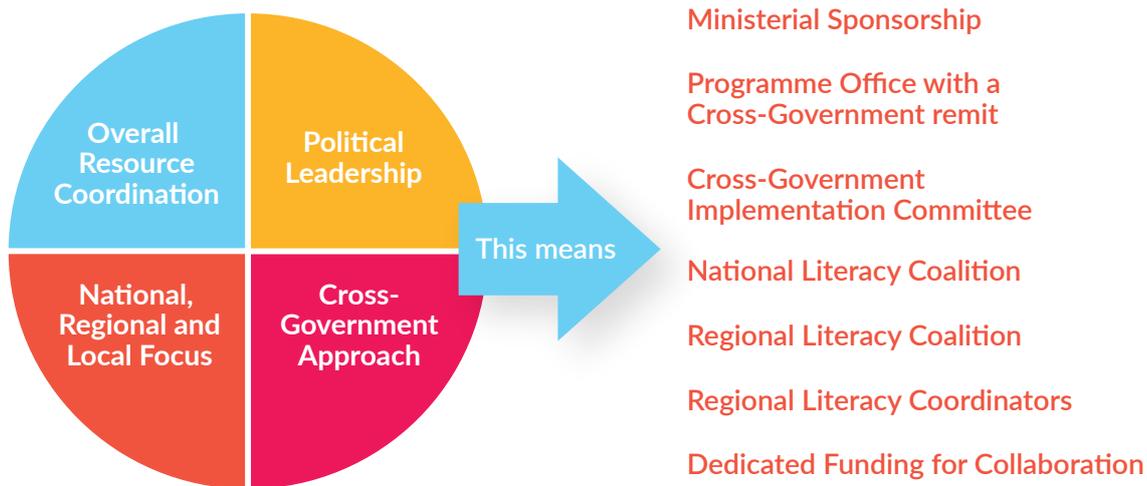
Figure 14: Interconnected Literacy



Active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmet literacy needs can impact trust in political efficacy, participation in volunteering activities, and self-reported health status. • Adults with unmet literacy needs may be more prone than others to social exclusion, poverty, engage less in civic life, poorer health, reduced well-being and life satisfaction.
Sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UNESCO Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education illustrates how adult learning and education can promote sustainable development, healthier societies, better jobs and active citizenship.
Healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EU Health Literacy survey (2012) shows that 4 in 10 adults had limited health literacy. • This can mean that people do not fully understand their condition and treatment, may engage less with health screening or visit the emergency department in the hospital more frequently.
Jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PIAAC found that literacy proficiency is positively and independently associated with the probability of having higher wages. On average, as an individual's proficiency increases, their chances of being employed increase too, as do wages. • For employers, where employees have unmet literacy needs, it becomes difficult to introduce productivity-enhancing technologies and new ways of working.

The strategy will require integrated and broad-based policy responses, with leadership and collaboration at the national, regional and local level. Notwithstanding the efforts required to embed a collaborative approach, such interconnected leadership will create the essential organisational capacity for innovation in policy-making and to anticipate and develop the responses required to address literacy over the coming decade.

Figure 15: Interconnected Leadership



2.3 International Approaches to System Coordination

Devising a cross-Government, cross-society and cross-economy approach is complex. However as the strategy has noted Ireland is increasingly adopting this approach in policy development, with recent examples, including **Healthy Ireland Strategic Plan 2021-2025**, the **Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025**, and the recently published **National Economic Plan**. There are also international examples of how collaborative approaches have been successful in the face of similar challenges. Through the international literature review and engagement with representatives from Australia, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the following key pointers for the new strategy were identified.

Figure 16: Learning from International Approaches

Align	Define	Expertise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align the literacy strategy with existing and forthcoming strategies in related areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration of the complex nature of inequality and define specific forms of inequality (for example, health inequality). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritise the quality of teaching and expertise. Teaching and learning specialists are critical to ensuring learning is inclusive. Embed principles of Universal Design for Learning across all systems.

Learn	Include	Collaborate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online training programmes that provide practical guidance on how to navigate public services should be part of strategy implementation. Adopt social metrics within the strategy, in particular the area of non-accredited learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A citizen's curriculum ensures that the needs of any citizens are reflected in any curricula design. Disability training for all staff. The strategy should be available in accessible formats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of a partnership approach. Identify any partnership gaps with actions to address these gaps.

Existing frameworks and systems developed across the EU can also inform the approach to cross-Governmental collaboration in the delivery of the literacy strategy. For example, the **Europass** system allows individuals to record all training, development, schooling and work opportunities that take place over one's life. Awards and achievements from this training activity are captured within one system. The Erasmus Programme promotes outcomes in the area of engagement and participation in social settings. The programme is developing digital badges, open badges and badges for engagement.

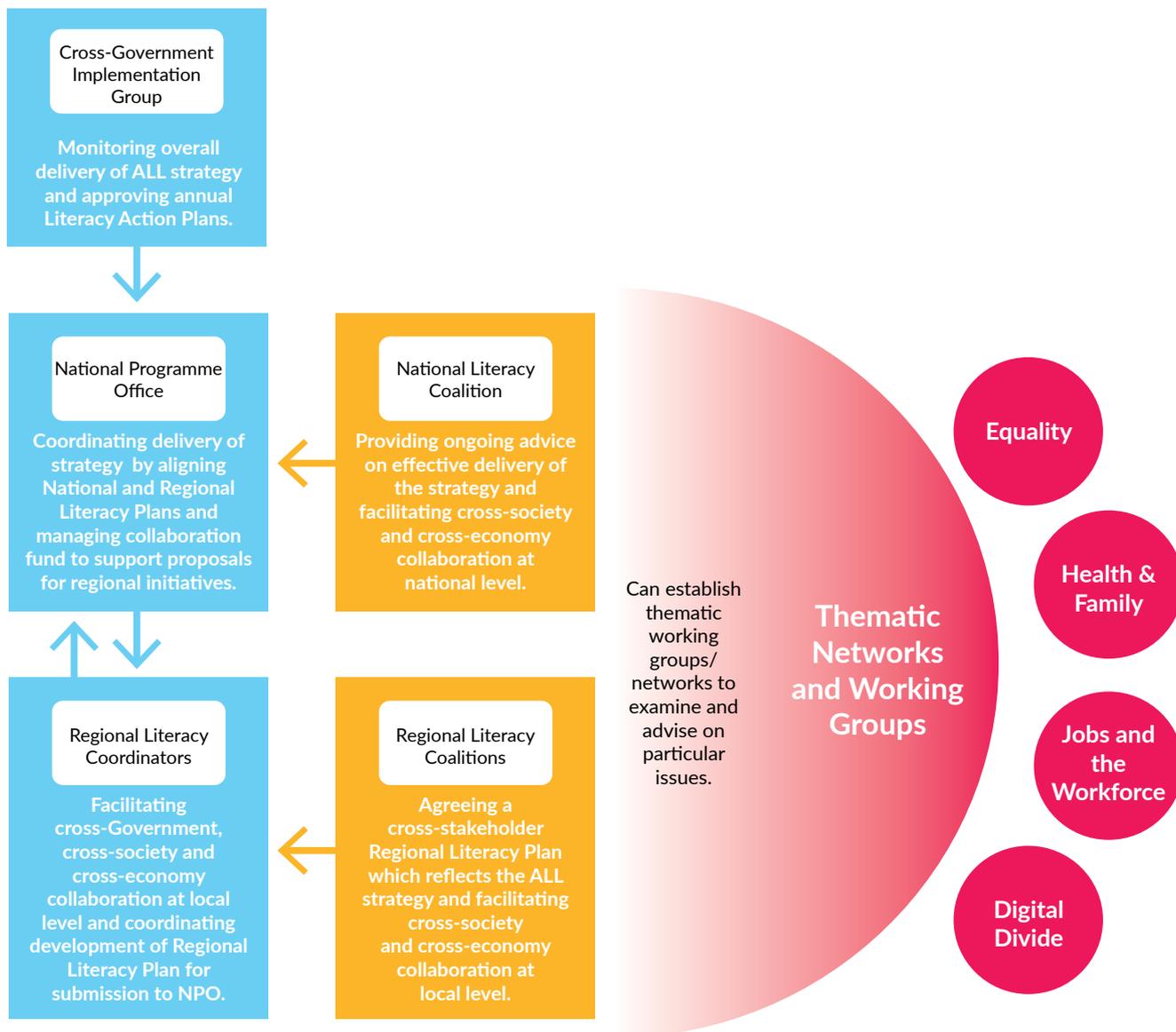
2.4 Integrated and Collaborative Structures for Strategy Delivery

The strategy aims to ensure that by 2030, no one is excluded, isolated, segregated, marginalised or stigmatised due to literacy barriers. There are multiple stakeholders across Government, society and the economy. The 10-year strategy presents an opportunity to activate an integrated, collaborative structure without adding further complication to a well-established strategic network of support.

Effective partnership structures at national, regional and local level with individuals, communities, community-based organisations, employers and businesses, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector, private and public organisations are integral to this goal.

The national, regional and local structures set out in Figure 17 and discussed below, leverage existing collaborative approaches. These structures will be supported and enhanced to deliver literacy supports with appropriate strategic oversight provided by Government agencies, bodies and departments.

Figure 17: ALL Strategy Governance and Implementation Structures



2.4.1 Cross-Government Implementation Group

Following the work of the Inter-Departmental Committee in developing the strategy, a Cross-Government Implementation Group will be established and chaired by the Minister. This Governmental oversight will ensure that;

- All relevant Government policy and actions are aligned across departments, agencies and bodies.
- The strategy is adequately resourced and progress is monitored and evaluated.
- Targets and enabling actions are agreed and achieved.

2.4.2. Programme Office and Collaboration Fund

A Programme Office will be established to operate as a central, coordinating body across Government departments and other relevant stakeholders. With appropriately experienced and resourced staff, it will serve as a driver of collaboration and overall implementation. The strategy notes the importance of the NGO sector of working with people at a local level, and of education, health, community development and local government supports and services to embed the required systems-based approach to addressing unmet literacy needs. To ensure this holistic perspective, and lever appropriate cross-Government and cross-society responses, the Programme Office should include seconded resources with expertise or roles in these domains. This might involve secondments from bodies like NALA, ETBs, Pobal, the LGMA and the HSE, who can then link to stakeholders within their respective 'sectors' to ensure a coordinated response.

The Programme Office will be responsible for:

- Developing and monitoring an overall implementation plan and guidelines/ support for developing and delivering regional/local implementation plans.
- Supporting the Cross-Government Implementation Group.
- Supporting and monitoring the reporting systems to ensure accountability for progress.
- Supporting Regional Literacy Coordinators.
- Convening the National Literacy Coalition and Thematic Networks/Working Groups that may be established to progress specific issues.
- Measuring and communicating progress against the agreed indicators set out in the strategy.
- Identifying and seeking solutions to issues in implementation.

The Programme Office can ensure focus and collaboration between stakeholders identified through the coalitions and working groups. Ministerial oversight through the Cross-Government Implementation Group will, in turn, ensure the efficacy of the Programme Office. The Programme Office will stimulate greater collaboration between stakeholders to ensure effective and seamless learning, services and support for those most in need.

The Programme Office will have responsibility for coordinating communication flow, reporting structures and the overall organisation of the implementation structures. It will identify practical means for cross-agency working, including referral protocols, learner data requirements, aligning strategies and responses and sharing data with relevant stakeholders to ensure delivery of effective literacy services.

A fund to drive these collaborative responses should also be established, and pilot new collaborative approaches, managed by the Programme Office and approved by the Cross-Government Implementation Group.

2.4.3 National Literacy Coalition and Thematic Networks/Working Groups

The establishment of a multi-stakeholder National Literacy Coalition will facilitate sharing existing expertise on literacy supports and interventions in an interconnected literacy framework over the lifetime of the strategy. In keeping with the approach of the Technical Advisory Committee, the Coalition will include representatives from civic society, community and the voluntary sector, the private sector, Government departments and agencies, trade unions and representatives, employer bodies, academics, learners and representatives of those in most need of literacy support.

The Programme Office will convene quarterly or bi-annual meetings of the National Coalition to review progress and inform the evolution of the strategy, particularly its reporting, monitoring and evaluation framework. The National Coalition may establish a range of thematic networks or working groups, in line with key themes or domains related to addressing literacy barriers. These could focus on areas like health and family, education and skills, jobs and the workplace, the digital divide, or equality and disadvantage.

2.4.4 Regional Literacy Coalitions

This strategy has acknowledged that literacy issues can only be addressed effectively with co-ordinated action to target the areas impacted directly: health and family, education and skills, finding and sustaining jobs, an increasingly digital society, income and financial management, equality and sustainability. While national partnerships and cross-Government commitment are important in this regard, it is partnership at the regional level which will really drive success.

The existing regional structure of the FET sector through sixteen ETBs can be leveraged as a platform for information sharing, policy collaboration and innovative responses to literacy as defined in the strategy. ETBs, through the national Further Education and Training Strategy 2020–2024, are in a perfect position to help drive the wider partnership and development work that needs to occur across communities, linking back to Government and strategic objectives. They can naturally link to existing networks of Local Community Development Committees, Children’s Service Committees, Regional Skills Fora, Community Education Networks, ETB Active Inclusion Networks and Right to Read Committees and provide the framework for delivery of key actions in the literacy strategy. However, while ETBs have a statutory responsibility to deliver the learning required to address unmet literacy needs, it is clear that much more needs to be done to embed

real wider working partnerships at a regional and local levels. This is essential to drive awareness and access, and to ultimately deliver the holistic package of support required by individuals with these unmet needs.

The relationship between ETBs and local authorities will be particularly crucial to progressing literacy supports at a community level, particularly in areas of greatest disadvantage. Local authorities already have responsibility for producing local economic and community plans, and effective partnership should ensure that these plans help to reinforce the objectives of this strategy. There is also potential to consider how the 'Framework for Local Authority Community Support' could provide specific first step 'wrap around' literacy supports in conjunction with ETBs and other key partners. For example, coordinating access points for literacy support and wider well-being support through existing community amenities such as local libraries could be highly impactful.

The role of employers, enterprises and employees and their representative bodies (for example, chambers of commerce, IBEC, unions) can ensure full cross-society collaboration in driving the literacy strategy at micro and macro levels. Employers can help identify skills needs and unions can work with local authorities and ETBs to develop work-based literacy support programmes, particularly in sectors where gaps are most prevalent, such as construction, manufacturing and hospitality. There is scope for employers to become literacy role models to their peers and champions within local communities by sponsoring events and initiatives and providing information to their staff and customers.

Leveraging these existing networks and potential, a Regional Literacy Coordinator should be appointed to support each ETB in establishing a Regional Literacy Coalition. The Coordinator will have a clear partnership, cross-organisation remit, linked to the plan set out by the Regional Coalition when established. This would allow ETBs to take on more of an outreach, partnership-based role within the local community, developing greater links with local schools, community groups, initiatives and resource centres, building on the strong links that already exist with many public services at regional and local levels.

Each coalition would then have responsibility for developing Literacy Action Plans against the agreed action framework to address the regional and local literacy, numeracy and digital inclusion needs. These action plans would be submitted in draft form to the national Programme Office to ensure alignment with the overall implementation of the strategy. The plans will then be finalised and formally approved by the Cross-Government Implementation Group. The Literacy Action Plans will facilitate access to the Collaboration Fund referenced above, which will support collaboration and integration in the local literacy response.

3. Framework for Action on ALL Strategy



The cross-Government, economy and society approach set out in the previous section will provide the foundation for a framework for action on the Adult Literacy for Life strategy. From this foundation of collaborative structures, plans and resources, a series of priorities will be progressed across four key pillars as follows;

1. **Pillar One: Understand**
2. **Pillar Two: Access**
3. **Pillar Three: Expand**
4. **Pillar Four: Empower**

As these priorities are delivered, it will be important to track implementation and measure strategy success over time, with Section 4 setting out how this will be achieved. In this section, we focus on the pillars and the strategy commitments in each case.

Figure 18: Framework for Action on ALL Strategy



3.1 Pillar One: Understand

3.1.1 National Campaign

A national campaign targeted at raising awareness of literacy support services across the country will be an important step in launching the strategy. Such a campaign has the potential to have an immediate effect on the take-up of literacy, numeracy and digital upskilling opportunities. It can build upon the success of the 'Take the First Step' campaign in recent years. This focus of the campaign would be on:

1. Emphasising the need for literacy upskilling at all levels and all ages, showing where people can go to “take the next step” to get the support they need.
2. Recognising the barriers to participation faced by people who need literacy support, telling the stories of people from diverse backgrounds who overcame these barriers, and address literacy issues.

The campaign should use multiple media channels at national and local levels and should be reinforced by national, regional and local stakeholders. It will establish the **ALL Strategy** as a key whole of Government initiative, with an identifiable logo and brand that will make services more accessible and new actions and initiatives under the strategy more visible. The campaign should also represent the starting point for a longer-term communication plan, approved by the Cross-Government Implementation Group and overseen by the Programme Office.

3.1.2 One-Stop-Shop

While one of the assets in addressing literacy in Ireland is the commitment and reach of a wide range of organisations and resources, this also poses a challenge. As indicated in the research, people in need of support can be confused or overwhelmed by the breadth of available services, unsure about how best to get the help they need. Public perception of “where to go” for literacy support will be greatly aided by a national campaign, though for this campaign to be successful, there must also be an immediate and simplified entry point to access literacy support. While there are currently a range of competing sites and campaigns, all with value, this single resource serving as the first port of call must be in place at the time of the campaign launch. Matching the success of the **right course** portal will involve bringing together all relevant information and advice on literacy, including help in identifying literacy needs, and linking to further resources that will allow people to take the next step in accessing services and support.

Over time, the one-stop-shop should be developed to include a host of online literacy options, including family learning, English language skills, learning to learn, digital literacy, health literacy, environmental literacy, financial literacy, and learning with numbers.

- National Campaign
- One-Stop-Shop
- Proactive Local Services
- Common Assessment Approach

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In addition to serving as a public-facing tool, the one-stop-shop should also be developed over the initial implementation phase of the strategy to serve as a resource hub for all organisations and staff potentially engaging with people who struggle with literacy. This will allow them to give basic and consistent information and know where to direct them in accessing education, financial, health, welfare and other relevant supports.

3.1.3 Proactive Local Services

While national campaigns and a simple and accessible single resource are important for improving awareness and accessibility, local support networks and initiatives are just as critical in persuading people to take the next step. Strategy research noted two key barriers to engagement with literacy support services: lack of awareness of supports available and social embarrassment. Therefore, it is critical that the **adult literacy for life** message gets out in a positive, encouraging and consistent way through all of the local services with which people engage. The development of cross-agency communications and access points at the local level, alongside establishing of local helplines and appointment of learner champions and peer mentors, are important developments to embed a more consistent, localised approach to literacy support.

As part of the one-stop-shop website development, we have noted its role in becoming a resource hub for all national, regional and local stakeholders engaging with people with unmet literacy needs. If used properly by local organisations, this will ensure consistent messaging, information and signposting on literacy support for people regardless of the service to which they are presenting. It can also be supplemented by a range of non-digital resources, such as brochures, posters and service application forms, which can be made available, for example, in local healthcare settings, employment services, libraries, sports centres, post offices and community development organisations.

Recognising the need for literacy upskilling is just as important as knowing where to go for support. Strategy research showed that even those who were aware of their unmet literacy needs had a reluctance to seek support. It is critical that front-line services and staff have the capability to recognise and respond when they encounter a person in need of literacy support. Investment in capacity-building across all key stakeholders should also be progressed via a literacy awareness training programme and plain language training. This can build on training resources held by NALA and ETBs and should be developed on an online platform to maximise access and engagement.

Alliances should be formed with business representative bodies at local and regional levels to harness their support in disseminating resources to their employees, but also the wider public, with particular opportunities to use bank and retail settings for this purpose.

Case Study 1: Consistent Training Across Local Services via the Citizens' Curriculum

In 2015, a Citizens' Curriculum in England was developed by 13 pilot projects involving a range of organisations including colleges, local authorities and charities. The pilots tapped into what motivates adults to learn, ensuring that more people are learning skills which are relevant to their lives, their needs and their work. Particular areas of focus included provision for homeless or vulnerably housed adults, offenders, ex-offenders, migrants, families and disadvantaged young adults. The local authority sought to increase access to, and participation in, the existing learning provision available in the area. They delivered training to a group of 25 people working in various roles across the public sector, such as social workers, police officers and mental health workers. The programme was designed to help these workers recognise the value of learning, particularly around literacy and health capabilities, and how this can contribute to the development of resilience and independence in the individuals they work with. The training also aimed to help them engage with members of the community more effectively and increase the number of people accessing the different services available. This would then support people to become more active citizens in the community. The project had a significant impact on motivation to learn, employability, engagement with services and levels of volunteering.

3.1.4 Common Assessment Approach

Persuading people to take the next step to access support, ensuring consistent information is available to help them make that choice, and using frontline staff in local services to advise and steer them appropriately will all be key to an effective pathway to improved literacy. But it is also important that individuals have access, at the earliest opportunity, to an assessment of their particular learning and support needs. In recent years, there has been substantial research on good practice in assessing literacy and numeracy needs across the FET sector and many ETBs now use common assessment approaches in learning across NFQ Levels 1 to 6. This must continue to be mainstreamed with full and comprehensive adoption across all ETBs, embedded by agreement with SOLAS via strategic performance agreements. There is also potential to link the existing approach to Wide Range Achievement Tests (WRATs), which can support assessing individual learning plans and this approach will be piloted with the providers.

It is critical that access to these common literacy assessments are available to community education providers, employment services, and local and community services who are engaging with people with unmet literacy needs. Work should be progressed to put cross-referral protocols in place with ETBs. Literacy and numeracy assessment will be offered where individuals wish to avail of this service.

The assessment of digital literacy is more complex, with numerous tools available to help individuals understand their needs. An Cosán has developed the Digital Stepping Stones programme, based on the EU's Digital Competency Framework, offering assessment, pathways and support to learners. The EU Check-In, Take Off (CITO) project is moving to establish a Skills Checker tool for an effective and independent assessment of one's digital skills. The establishment of a single, common digital literacy assessment tool should be considered by the Cross-Government Implementation Group and made available online through the one-stop-shop within the first 24 months of strategy implementation.

3.2 Pillar Two: Access

3.2.1 Plain and Accessible Content

One of the barriers to making education and wider public services more accessible is the use of complex language, instructions and conditions that make application processes difficult to navigate. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reforms' **'Our Public Service, Development and Innovation Framework for the Public Service'**, commits to key actions relating to improving service for the public and making services more accessible for all.¹³ In line with this, it is essential that all services designed to support literacy and associated needs communicate clearly using plain language and easy-to-read principles.¹⁴ This will require plain language training and plain language editing capability.

The Cross-Government Implementation Group should ensure that each of its constituent members has a clear plan in place to ensure communication in plain language, with a nominated person responsible for coordinating action to deliver on this.

This approach should also support the implementation of the following two guidelines developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER):

- **'Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service'**, which the DPER Quality Customer Service Network (QCSN) developed in collaboration with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority, is designed for public service communications.¹⁵ The Toolkit complements the **Plain English Style Guide for the Public Service**, which DPER developed in collaboration with NALA.¹⁶

- Plain and Accessible Content
- Accessible Technology
- Integrated Supports in Work and Education
- Universal Design Approach

2

13 <https://www.ops.gov.ie/actions/delivering-for-our-public/accessibility/>

14 For example, as set out in these guidelines from Inclusion Ireland <https://inclusionireland.ie/easy-to-read/>

15 <https://www.ops.gov.ie/news/Resources/customer-communications-toolkit-for-the-public-service/>

16 <https://www.ops.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/09/Plain-English-Style-Guide-for-the-Public-Service-2.pdf>

- A Quality Customer Service Initiative (QCSI) ‘Guiding Principles of Quality Customer Service’ which references the provision of public service information.¹⁷

Accessible documents also require the application of a number of minimum standards to ensure all persons, including those with vision impairment or intellectual disabilities, can comfortably engage with official communications. This includes correct formatting and tagging of online documents to accommodate the needs of those with reduced physical or intellectual abilities who may require the use of a text-to-speech tool.

Government commitments on the accessibility of services are detailed in the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021. Also, legal obligations to make all public-facing digital services accessible to persons with a disability are in place under the Disability Act 2005. The Web and Apps Directive is now a requirement for all public bodies,¹⁸ as is the Irish Sign Language (ISL) Act 2017.¹⁹ Also relevant here are provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,²⁰ as well as other United Nations and Council of Europe Human Rights Treaties and Conventions that Ireland is party to. The key to ALL strategy success will lie in ensuring that there is full awareness of these obligations by those providing support or services to persons with unmet literacy need, and that support tools and resources are available to help ensure accessible services.

The literacy needs of native Irish speakers must also be accommodated. A development programme should be rolled out to improve the accessibility of Government services for native Irish speakers and expand communication by public sector bodies in Irish. This should examine the potential for:

- Support material being created in natural, accessible Irish in the three major dialects.
- The use of “Plain Irish” and forms that are readable.
- Use of bilingual information, forms etc. with both languages “side by side” rather than separate documents.
- High-level visibility of Irish language documentation.
- The Irish language being included in all publicity campaigns across all media.
- Specific training programmes for staff from various agencies (including programmes in the Gaeltacht as part of CPD) to develop competency in the Irish language.

17 These guidelines were set out by DPER and are intended to apply across all public service communication. They are available <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/89dbad-guiding-principles-of-quality-customer-service/>

18 <http://universaldesign.ie/technology-ict/web-and-mobile-app-accessibility/>

19 <http://nda.ie/isl/>

20 The Irish Government signed the Convention in 2007 and in March 2018 the Convention was ratified. See <https://www.ihrec.ie/guides-and-tools/>. Relevant provisions include Article 24 which covers education and Article 4 which covers universal design, Article 9 which deals with accessibility and Article 21 which addresses the right to receive information and Article 27 on Employment.

3.2.2 Access to Technology

One of the most concerning trends arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to an online world of learning has been the fall in levels of engagement with adult education by the most marginalised groups. Many of these learners are either not suited to wholly online learning, or do not have access to the required technology to engage effectively. While a range of innovative approaches has been adopted to maintain support for these learners – from distanced 1:1 support, issuing of learning packs, and regular outreach by phone – it is evident from the data that more needs to be done to address their needs.

To help address these issues in 2020, €5m dedicated funding was provided by DFHERIS to ETBs to support access to devices, and the establishment of the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage fund provided support for community education provision. The roll-out of similar schemes in at least the first 3 years of the strategy will further tackle the digital divide by providing access to technology to allow more learners to engage with literacy learning and support.

Rollout of infrastructure by carriers, including the National Broadband Plan, is delivering greater levels of connectivity across the country. Strategic Connection Points have already been put in place which can be utilised to drive local access and connectivity. Access to this type of reliable Wi-Fi, and increasing the numbers of sites where this service is available, including in community digital hubs, libraries, ETBs and family resource centres should continue to be pursued. This will also provide a platform to support the ongoing work of HEAnet to make Eduroam Wi-Fi access available in local areas and expand access to FET learners, including those in literacy and community education provision.

Consideration should be given to loan schemes to distribute devices, or tax credit schemes to facilitate device purchase, including agreements with private telecommunications providers for unlimited data bundles for individuals.

There must also be a stronger role for assistive technology in supporting the literacy needs of people with disabilities. For example, assistive technologies can allow people who cannot use a pen to write, that have difficulty in speaking to communicate, and offer specialised software to support learning disabilities. Such interventions need to become the mainstay of all educational provision in the coming years.

3.2.3 Integrated Literacy Supports in Work and Education Settings

Literacy and numeracy issues are faced not only by those experiencing social exclusion or unemployment, but those in the workforce, particularly amongst older workers who may have limited previous levels of formal education. It is also becoming increasingly apparent that basic digital literacy will be required for almost every type of employment in the future. As such, even those who are currently employed may have difficulty adapting to technological change and will require periodic upskilling in digital and other key areas. Employers and

employer representatives have a key role to play in facilitating literacy upskilling among the general workforce. There are now a range of industry-led networks to support the identification of skills needs, including Regional Skills Fora, Ibec structures, Skillnet networks and apprenticeship consortia. Supports and learning opportunities can also currently be made available in the workplace, with FET initiatives like Skills for Work and Skills to Advance ready to meet upskilling needs. However, concerted action is now required to match and enhance this provision with the requirements identified by the networks. Initiatives to engage with these networks on a systematic basis around workforce literacy and digital capability issues and agreement on collaborative actions should be progressed.

The one area of education and training that has thrived amidst the pandemic restrictions has been around wider workforce skills development. The flexibility that online learning offers make it attractive to employers and employees alike. An important aspect of addressing workplace literacy, numeracy and digital literacy issues should be the use of online learning and support resources. These should be tailored in partnership with employers to meet the needs of different groups of workers.

The challenge of integrating literacy support into the workplace mirrors that of ensuring it is available to all across further and higher education settings. In the past, literacy learning tended to be standalone and accessed separately from mainstream education and training. This was based on the perception that those undertaking courses at NFQ Level 5 and above possessed the necessary literacy skills. In recent years there has been an acknowledgement that many learners at these levels can also struggle with literacy and numeracy, including apprentices.²¹

As a result, ETBs now provide literacy support as an integrated part of the training programmes at all levels. Additionally, a range of resources have been developed by the Support to Apprentices group established by ETBs. The approach and resources must continue to be rolled out across all FET provision, with communities of practice formed to ensure that practitioners at all levels and across all disciplines can recognise literacy needs. Public libraries will also provide vital access to digital and family learning resources.

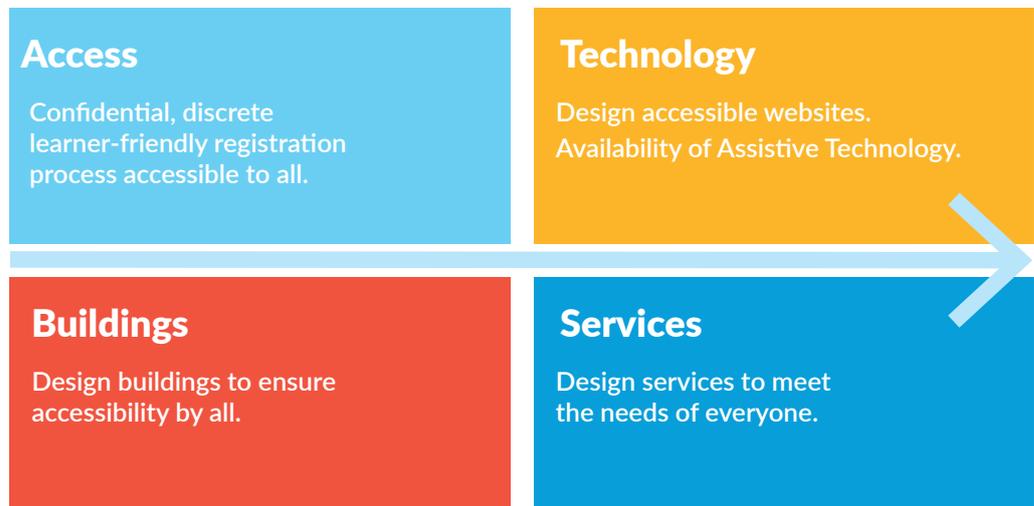
The Department of Social Protection (DSP) should also play a key role in helping to identify, and source support for unmet literacy needs among job seekers and those subsequently placed in employment. A new Work Placement Scheme was recently launched by the Department to provide access to work experience and reskilling opportunities in response to the significant unemployment caused by the pandemic. The Department should work with SOLAS and the ETBs to ensure that integrated literacy, numeracy and digital upskilling support is available if required to all participants on the scheme as an integrated part of the training on offer.

21 See findings of 'Integrating Literacy and Numeracy' (2018).

3.2.4 Universal Design Approach

Applying a Universal Design approach is critical in encouraging systems and solutions that can be accessed, understood and used by all persons regardless of age, size, ability or disability.²² The core components of a universal design approach are set out in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Components of Universal Design



In considering the design of facilities and services, it must be recognised that many individuals wishing to address literacy issues have had negative experiences at school or with other institutions. Ensuring a welcoming, open environment must therefore be a key priority. For example, the scope to 'bring a friend' can immediately make the next step seem far less intimidating. A universal design approach will help to move modern learning away from traditional structures. It should be adopted to all of the service, support, learning and technology developments set out in this strategy, based on the range of guidelines developed by the National Disability Authority (NDA).²³

Guidelines and a resource toolkit for universal design for learning in a FET context were published in June 2021. This is the product of a two year work programme driven by AHEAD Ireland, ETBI and SOLAS and involving many stakeholders. In line with an overall universal design approach, these guidelines should be implemented across all literacy provision, with the resource toolkit deployed wherever appropriate.

²² <http://universaldesign.ie/Products-Services/Design-for-All-Accessibility-following-a-Design-for-All-approach-in-products-goods-and-services-Extending-the-range-of-users/#:~:text=EN%2017161%3A2019%20'Design%20>

²³ <http://universaldesign.ie/products-services/customer-communications-toolkit-for-the-public-service-a-universal-design-approach/>

Case Study 2: Universal Design in TAFE Australia

- Technical and Further Education for South Australia (TAFE SA) enrolls more than 68,000 students per year and delivers training at over 290 locations across southern Australia. Courses cover more than 80 industry and activity areas, with flexible delivery options that suit students' needs.
- All students accessing subsidised vocational education and training in South Australia are required to undertake an Upfront Assessment of Needs (UAN). Part of the UAN is to complete a Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) assessment called the Core Skills Profile for Adults (CSPA). TAFE SA then uses this information to identify if a student will require any learning support to assist them in the successful completion of their studies.
- Students who do not meet the required LLN levels for a course are offered Bridging Units or Pathway Qualifications. Focusing on the development of core reading, writing and numeracy skills aligned to the Australian Core Skills Framework.
- Additionally, TAFE SA offers a range of orientation short courses for students who may be new to tertiary education and training, may use English as a second or third language, or looking to expand their study skills, entry-level digital technology or employability skills needed for success on a pathway to further study or employment.
- TAFE SA, in accordance with the Australian Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the associated Disability Standards for Education 2005, provides support and reasonable adjustments for learners with disabilities through individualised Access Plans.
- Learners can also contact an 'Access and Inclusion Advisor' to access assistive or adaptive technology and learning tools such as devices, equipment, furniture, hardware or software that can assist students with verified disabilities or medical conditions to access and perform learning and assessment tasks that otherwise may be difficult.
- TAFE SA is also working towards a more inclusive model of further education, where the principles of Universal Design for Learning are incorporated into curriculum design and development. Teaching and Learning specialists work with technical specialists and educators to design curriculum with Universal Design principles embedded at the design and development stages.

3.3 Pillar Three: Expand

3.3.1 Focus on Numeracy

Building numeracy skills is key for citizens' well-being and active participation in modern society. This links to the ability to access financial services, manage household budgets, or use basic computer software. Core numeracy capabilities are already essential for progression to certain careers or to access apprenticeships or higher education. The need for numeracy skills for everyone will inevitably increase as we progress towards a digital society and economy in the coming decade. Sometimes however, numeracy needs are overlooked when considering wider literacy needs. It will be important that the distinct numeracy supports available are a core focus of the national launch campaign and enhancing future provision.

Key to an effective numeracy response is a consistent and robust system of addressing numeracy needs. Good practice guidelines on the assessment of numeracy at NFQ levels 1 to 6 have recently been published. These should be used to ensure a common assessment approach to numeracy is implemented across all ETBs and community education partners in the first instance, with the exploration of its wider use by other local support organisations over time.

Numeracy support should be linked to, and accessible from all programmes and services. This should involve further development of standalone adult numeracy modules in accessible formats and with flexible levels of support, rolled out through ETBs, other community learning organisations, and local libraries.

The importance of support in the workplace and educational settings has been highlighted and it is important that numeracy learning is tailored to the context of the study discipline, trade, occupation or industry sector of the group targeted. These approaches should employ authentic 'real-world' tasks and there are good recently developed examples to build on and mainstream including, the *Maths for Electrical Apprenticeships* and *Maths for Carpentry and Joinery Apprenticeships programmes*.

3.3.2 Drive Digital Competencies

The strategy has noted how broadband infrastructure and access to technology can be key drivers of digital inclusion by facilitating access to learning and participation in the many aspects of life that now require digital understanding. This provides a platform for driving the digital competencies which are increasingly essential to lead fulfilled lives.

- Focus on Numeracy
- Drive Digital Competency
- Support Skilled Practitioners
- Innovate and Enhance Provision

3

Unlike more traditional literacy support, there are a wider range of potential providers, including significant private sector investment, in developing digital capabilities, including major initiatives from Microsoft, IBM, Google and Accenture in this space. Community development organisations are also proactive with digital initiatives supported by SICAP and Community Services programmes. Within FET, there are focused courses on building digital skills, but also modular approaches which embed digital capability as part of wider provision across NFQ Levels 1-4. There are also eTutor supported online courses via eCollege that have been made openly accessible during the pandemic. However, while online resources are important, it must also be recognised that most of the cohort struggling with basic literacy skills will also require face-to-face learning and support.

To bring more consistency and facilitate pathways between the existing offerings, a competency-based approach should be adopted at a national level. Building on DigComp, the EU's digital competence framework, this will allow the network of ETBs, community education and development providers to tailor learning and assessment to meet key needs of the economy and society. There should also be a focus on using this to develop and offer more accreditation options for digital skills across NFQ Levels 1 to 4, and to link to learning pathways within FET and beyond. The work undertaken by QQI to develop standards at levels 1 to 4 will also support this process.

The strategy research indicated that many people lacking literacy and digital skills prefer informal learning rather than accredited routes. It is important as a cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-economy strategy that a means is found to tap into the many different courses and supports which exist outside the formal state education sector. By using the new one-stop-shop, all informal and accredited, private and public, onsite and online digital skills opportunities will be gathered in one place. It will link to online resources but also provide clear access routes to securing advice and support. The level of investment, and the number of learners supported across the various initiatives, should also expand significantly.

Case Study 3: DigComp and Recognising Digital Competencies

DigComp: The European Digital Competence Framework is the EU reference framework that describes what it means to be digitally competent. DigComp can be used across sectors, disciplines and systems to enable people to develop digital competencies.

Being digitally competent is more than being able to use the latest device or software. Digital competence is a key transversal competence that means being able to use digital technologies in a critical, collaborative and creative way. DigComp supports a comprehensive understanding of digital competence, including information storage, digital identity, developing digital content and behaviour online in everyday life such as working, shopping, and participating in society.

DigComp sets out the essential 21 digital competencies that people need (these are clustered under five areas) and maps each over eight proficiency levels from the most basic to advanced skill level.

The DigComp Into Action guide provides over 50 examples of how DigComp is used across the EU and in partner countries. Similarly, DigComp at Work provides case studies and guidelines on digital skills training for individuals and groups in the workplace.

3.3.3 Support Skilled Practitioners

A key driver of better literacy outcomes lies in building the skills of all of those involved in delivering learning and support. However, the current approach to developing capabilities of tutors, teachers, support workers and others is too disparate: clearer and more consistent requirements need to be defined to ensure the quality of service and the supply of adequately trained practitioners needs to grow to expand and enhance literacy provision. There are four key areas of focus:

- **Higher Education (HE) routes into the profession:** There are different HE qualifications that can help you enter the profession of teaching literacy or digital skills, but there is no standard initial education requirement for FET, nor are the different HE options funded in the same way or valued consistently across ETBs.
- **Continuing professional development of practitioners:** A continued focus on professional development for practitioners is important to ensure that skills remain relevant and can respond to the rapidly evolving landscape. There are a range of higher, further, NGO, community and private education providers of upskilling opportunities for practitioners, but there is little consistency in how this is funded, a lack of structure to how the offerings are communicated to practitioners, and a lack of focus on an overall CPD journey and portfolio for practitioners.

- **Development of the role of the literacy tutor:** While there has been a general move away from using voluntary literacy tutors as a support mechanism in recent years, they do play an important role, particularly in offering a non-formal, non-threatening route for those seeking help for the first time. This form of one-to-one initial support and tuition can make a valuable contribution in bridging the gap for a learner from an informal to a formal setting. However, it is equally important that such support is offered consistently across the country and that all practitioners have common capabilities to assist in delivery and access to learning programmes.
- **Upskilling supports for all those who deal directly with people in need of support:** The development of 'bite-sized' courses, supports and capability assessment tools will also be crucial in helping develop skills, including those who are not formally employed as literacy practitioners, but who deal with people in need of support.

The first step to addressing these issues should be an initial mapping exercise by the Programme Office to understand the full diversity of current approaches. A working group should then be set up to develop and establish an overall skills framework for literacy. This will set consistent initial education requirements, a structured portfolio-based approach to continuing professional development, a consistent defined future role for literacy tutors and a range of core skills modules to be made available for all involved in literacy support.

3.3.4 Innovate and Enhance Provision

The existing literacy support landscape has already made progress in tackling Ireland's adult literacy deficits. However, the wider indicators of prevailing levels of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy suggest that the existing support structure does not go far enough. Therefore, there is a need to ramp-up literacy support capacity to fully address current and evolving needs. This strategy seeks to:

- Increase investment in overall literacy provision across FET.
- Target an increase in the number of learners engaging with FET services for direct literacy and language support from 60,000 to 80,000 by expanding the range of courses available over the first half of the strategy's lifetime.
- Increase the intensity of English language support provided to native speakers of other languages and the overall number of learners receiving this support from 12,000 to 20,000 over the first half of the strategy's lifetime.
- Expand Learn with NALA provision and its tutoring service.
- Continue to build targeted funding schemes to support the community education and community development role in addressing the digital divide and supporting people with literacy needs.
- Agree, via the Cross-Government Implementation Group, how other complementary and critical supports and services can be developed to support an increased offering on literacy support.

Alongside the expansion of literacy support capacity, there is also a need to simplify literacy provision within FET. There are a range of programmes designed to target literacy upskilling. These were developed in line with the emergence of new policy announcements and funding commitments in recent decades. The different titles and eligibility requirements are confusing and may act as a barrier to participation. In keeping with a core aim of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024, programmes need to be consolidated and harmonised to focus investment and attention on core literacy and numeracy issues in each region. This must also preserve a diverse base of learning opportunities and supports to meet the different needs of learners and potential learners. A blend of small group, one-to-one, online, classroom-based and voluntary, non-formal and accredited learning and support should be maintained and expanded with flexible delivery options.

In a completely transformed and continually evolving world, innovation in access, support, and provision will be essential. There has been significant work in recent years to research good practice in literacy provision. This has included a focus on improving family literacy approaches and intergenerational learning, English language provision and assessment for migrants, standalone numeracy provision, and the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities. Building on this work and ensuring that learning is embedded across provision will be a key priority for the literacy strategy. SOLAS will work with ETBs to agree on 3-year Strategic Performance Agreements to ensure that good practice in these areas is being mainstreamed across the FET system.

The work to develop this strategy has also helped to identify innovative ideas and good practices outside FET provision, including international experience. It is important to harness these learnings and integrate them into existing good practice as part of a consistent, country-wide support landscape. The oversight structures set out in Section 2 should be charged with keeping a focus on innovation and streamlining good practice. A centralised collaboration and innovation fund, run by the National Programme Office and overseen by the Cross-Government Implementation Group, will also be set up to incentivise such innovative partnership activities. There may be particular opportunities around the deployment of technology – such as assistive technologies and software and processes to meet support needs.

The insight and expertise on offer from higher education institutions during the strategy development process underline their importance to shaping innovative learning and support to address unmet literacy needs. A fund to support research into relevant areas which impact literacy will be established and the outcomes will be used to inform future approach and practice.

3.4 Pillar Four: Empower

3.4.1 Person-centred Pathways

Every learner with literacy support needs will require interventions, assistance and assessment tailored to their individual goals. The literacy support system must accommodate formal and informal learning, with clear pathways and a clear purpose for learners.

The adult guidance and information service and the adult literacy service within ETBs will play an important role in supporting and linking people to the supports needed. Ongoing guidance and information will be key to ensuring responsive and flexible learning pathways that meet people's current and future needs and ambitions. An initiative worth exploring as part of this approach is the use of the Europass tool, which allows learning (both informal and accredited) to be recorded as part of an individual learning journey.

In this strategy, we have flagged the need for common assessments for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy and to link learning and support to the development of relevant competencies. Effective person-centred pathways will be able to link to formal learning journeys along the NFQ framework, and the development of standards at Levels 1 to 4 will assist in this process. However, the desire of many people for more informal, unaccredited support must also be acknowledged. They must also be able to see a clear journey to get the help they need. International literacy support models have adopted a core skills framework in addition to national frameworks of qualifications. It is recommended that a core skills framework is developed in the short-term to help embed a person-centred approach to literacy that helps learners and practitioners to understand needs.

In consideration of the key barriers to participation highlighted in Section 1.7, it is essential that investment in provision and services is also accompanied by wider support in areas such as access to transport in rural locations, travel expenses, affordable childcare and meal allowances. In addition, access to hardship funding to deal with particular financial circumstances should also be considered, in-line with the existing approach in place for access students in higher education. This could be built into the remit of the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund once a workable operational hardship model is developed and agreed.

3.4.2 Furthest Behind First

A range of mutually-reinforcing and integrated strategies and actions are required to encourage, support and empower people to prioritise their literacy, numeracy and digital development. To enact sustainable progress, those furthest behind in these terms will need to be prioritised, and this will mean targeting particular groups who are most at risk of marginalisation. The work of representative NGOs

- Person-centred Pathways
- Target Vulnerable Groups
- Support Community Initiatives
- Link to Health and Well-being

4

and community development organisations will be critical in accessing those hardest to reach and identifying specific support needs. These organisations must also be involved in tailored programmes and supports to meet the needs of groups that are most vulnerable whom they represent, while the onus will be on education providers to develop closer links with organisations to facilitate this. Over the first two years of the strategy, a themed call should be launched focused on innovative proposals to address the needs of vulnerable cohorts. The cohorts identified during the strategy development process that are most in need of focused support are set out in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Potential Vulnerable Cohorts for Targeted Funding

Older Adults (55+)	Members of the Traveller Community	Persons with Disabilities
Low-paid Workers	Carers	One-parent Households
Incarcerated Persons and Ex-Offenders	Persons Recovering from Addiction	Long-term Unemployed
Migrants	International Protection Applicants	People with Language Needs

Many individuals will require personalised active integration support and the facilitation of upskilling to achieve economic and personal goals. It must also be acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic will leave a legacy of structural change across the economy, with many unable to return to their previous jobs and in need of upskilling with literacy or beyond.

To engage with the farthest behind first, peer mentors, learner champions and ambassadors in local communities are critical. They can also link to community development groups and other organisations who, in addition to supporting individual needs, can build collective community responses to overcoming barriers to initial engagement.

Learner support is a critical issue in supporting the most vulnerable people. Efforts to establish a consistent learner support service across FET should be fast-tracked, and consideration should be given to the appointment of a Learner Support or Access Officer at ETB level to coordinate and progress this activity. Financial and hardship support for learners also needs to be incorporated as part of a future framework for this learner support.

3.4.3 Support Community Initiatives

There is a widespread support network established at a community level that can help with a range of literacy-associated issues. Ground-up initiatives delivered by community and voluntary organisations in partnership with ETBs, local authorities, Pobal and the SICAP programme will assist with engaging those most at risk of marginalisation. Initial engagement is the key to delivering informal supports and learning while encouraging people to engage with more formal education opportunities if appropriate. The following actions will facilitate support for community-based initiatives:

Figure 21: Actions for Community-based Initiatives



The appointment of the regional literacy coordinators and the development of regional literacy plans overseen by the Regional Literacy Coalition provide a platform for much more proactive engagement between education providers and community-based organisations and initiatives. As noted in Section 2, it is really important that the regional literacy plans align with local economic and community plans for each local authority area. They will also have to reflect the objectives of the Government’s Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 in ensuring inclusion and parity of services nationwide.

One immediate area of opportunity that should be progressed is the development of the role of libraries as a first port of call and place to access information and resources about literacy. This could mirror the initiative to roll-out Healthy Ireland resources via libraries. As key community resources, libraries also have the potential to serve over time as a natural extension of the classroom and another space where adults can access a range of digital technologies and supports.

The regional literacy plans will also be required to demonstrate how community education and development organisations are involved in addressing needs, with central funding available to support collaboration and innovation, in addition to the opportunities provided by the MAEDF.

3.4.4 Link to Health and Well-being

The direct link between good literacy and health and well-being has been discussed in detail. As such, this strategy should reinforce the objectives of Sláintecare as well as the Healthy Ireland initiative and integrate the supports that it has made available into the future approach to meeting literacy needs. The use of local authorities and libraries in rolling out Healthy Ireland should be mirrored in the roll-out of Adult Literacy for Life. It should build on the approach, look and feel of this parallel cross-Government initiative, given its targeting at many of the same people.

The strategy, and the collaborative and innovative funding which underpins it, 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.

The strategy research has reinforced how important health literacy is to the overall quality of life. The development of the health literacy quality mark – Crystal Clear – by the Irish Pharmacy Union, NALA and MSD, supported by Healthy Ireland, is a good example of innovation and collaboration which can have a real impact on literacy. The Crystal Clear mark recognises the critical role pharmacies play in helping people understand their health issues and the steps they need to take to improve their health. Currently, this mark is held by 104 pharmacies, and its roll-out should now be supported across all pharmacies, and further developed so the mark can also apply to General Practices, primary care centres and mental health services.

The latter focus should reflect the fact that mental health is a key concern of many of those with unmet literacy needs. Aligning national annual literacy plans, and regional plans, with Mental Health Ireland's ongoing strategic plans and other supporting initiatives will be important. However, it is also critical that mental health support is made available, as part of the wider package of literacy support alongside learning, and regional coordinators should help to ensure that local support networks are linked to education providers within communities.

4. Implementing the Strategy and Measuring Success



4.1 Implementation

Sections 2 and 3 outline a cross-Government, economy and society approach, and a framework for action, to fundamentally change the approach to literacy, numeracy and digital inclusion over the next decade and support real transformation of peoples' lives. The work that has gone into the strategy, and the inclusive approach that underpinned it, has created a momentum and spirit of partnership among key stakeholders that must now be harnessed as part of the implementation phase.

The initial stages of strategy delivery will be the most critical. An effective launch, new partnership structures and focused coordination support, and actions that can immediately make a difference, will be important in establishing unmet literacy needs as one of the key societal challenges of this generation. There are a range of key actions for this initial implementation phase of the strategy that will define how we think about literacy and work towards ensuring Adult Literacy for Life.

Theme	Actions in the Initial Implementation Phase
Embedding a Cross-Government, Economy and Society Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Cross-Government Implementation Group. • Set up a Programme Office. • Launch a centralised Collaboration and Innovation Fund. • Form a National Literacy Coalition. • Appoint regional Literacy Coordinators to drive partnerships at regional and local level. • Establish Regional Coalitions for each ETB area.
UNDERSTAND: National Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a major national campaign around literacy awareness and the support available to help people with literacy issues, using multiple media channels and reinforced by stakeholders at national, regional and local level.
UNDERSTAND: One-Stop-Shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a one-stop-shop web resource, bringing together all relevant information and advice on literacy, all help in identifying literacy needs, and linking to further resources that will facilitate people to take the next step in accessing support and services. • Expand the NALA freephone service to sit alongside the one-stop-shop resource as a first port of call for advice.

UNDERSTAND: Proactive Local Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and make available online training modules for all working directly across local services with those experiencing unmet literacy needs, to help identify needs, communicate appropriately and signpost accordingly.
UNDERSTAND: Consistent Assessment Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full and comprehensive roll-out of a consistent initial and ongoing assessment approach to literacy and numeracy across all relevant providers.
ACCESS: Plain and Accessible Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector organisations to agree plans via the Cross-Government Implementation Group to ensure direct communication with the public is in plain language.
ACCESS: Access to Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target funding on access to technology and devices. • Expand community access to Wi-Fi and broadband resources.
ACCESS: Integrated Literacy Supports in Work and Education Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand literacy support in the workplace by linking to employer support infrastructure and agree action plan. • Full roll-out of integrated literacy support across all FET provision. • Ensure access to literacy support as part of new Work Placement Scheme.
ACCESS: Universal Design Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines, and use the UDL resource toolkit across all literacy provision.
EXPAND: Focus on Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop standalone adult numeracy modules in accessible formats and with flexible levels of support.
EXPAND: Build Digital Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather all informal and accredited, private and public, onsite and online digital skills opportunities in one place in the one-stop-shop. • Expand investment in digital skills provision across formal and non-formal routes.

<p>EXPAND: Support Skilled Practitioners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and establish an overall continuous development framework for literacy practitioners, embedding a consistent approach to initial and ongoing skills development.
<p>EXPAND: Innovate and Enhance Provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase investment in literacy provision, including more English language support for migrants. • Consolidate literacy support programmes. • Embed consistent good practice across FET via strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and ETBs.
<p>EMPOWER: Person Centred Pathways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a core skills framework that allows learners to understand the skills they need and available learning pathways.
<p>EMPOWER: Furthest Behind First</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund and roll-out specific initiatives to support marginalised target groups, including Ex-Offenders, Migrants, Travellers and People with Disabilities. • Appoint peer mentors, learner champions and ambassadors in local communities.
<p>EMPOWER: Support Community Initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding provided via the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund to address unmet literacy needs.
<p>EMPOWER: Link to Health and Well-being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise Healthy Ireland resources to ensure health literacy support is part of the wrap around services for any individual with unmet needs. • Grow family literacy and family learning approaches as part of a targeted programme of support for health, social care and family support interventions.
<p>Measuring Success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes framework approved by Cross-Government Implementation Group.

Appendix B also highlights the longer-term commitments which will have to be embedded within the annual national and regional action plans as the strategy progresses, alongside the initial implementation phase noted above.

4.2 Measuring Success

This strategy has been put in place because recorded levels of adult literacy, numeracy and digital inclusion in Ireland are not good enough for a generally well-educated and technology-driven economy. Therefore, it is critical that ambitious targets are set to reduce levels of unmet literacy needs substantially over the lifetime of the strategy.

A strategy this long-term in nature must have the capability to continually review progress, and adapt actions and responses to take account of the rapidly evolving environment. There will be a strong focus on measuring success, and on reporting of performance through the Programme Office to the Cross-Government Implementation Group. This will link the collaborative actions across all key national, regional and local stakeholders to overall targets for progress, and ensure accountability for delivery. This strategy **has to make a real difference in transforming people's lives** and this will mean that over its lifetime it will:

Figure 22: High-Level Strategic Targets

Literacy	Decrease the share of adults in Ireland with unmet literacy needs, that is PIAAC Level 1 or below, from 18% to 7%.
Numeracy	Decrease the share of adults in Ireland with unmet numeracy needs, that is PIAAC Level 1 or below, from 25% to 12%.
Digital Literacy	Decrease the share of adults in Ireland without basic digital skills from 47% to 20% (as measured by DESI).

While the evidence of the prevalence of literacy issues across Irish society is stark, it is nonetheless based on historic data. The PIAAC international study that highlighted relatively poor performance in Ireland was undertaken in 2012, and the next planned study has been delayed due to COVID-19, with data gathering to begin in 2022 and 2023. While this will provide an updated benchmark, it is clearly not a robust basis for measuring the ongoing success of the strategy. It would mean waiting until well after the end of the strategy timeframe before a further PIAAC measurement could gauge the degree to which progress was made, with no interim indicators to flag a need to change or adapt actions while strategy implementation is in progress.

A more regular means of measuring levels of literacy and numeracy needs to be established, with a research body contracted to develop and operate an ongoing benchmarking exercise based on the PIAAC methodology. The situation with regard to digital inclusion is more straightforward, with annual DESI reports providing an update on the levels lacking basic digital skills. Related, the development of a new Well-being Framework for Ireland, aims to facilitate a well-rounded, holistic view of how the country is performing, alongside the existing economic measurement tools. It is intended that over time the framework will be used across

Government to inform policy-making and complement existing tools for policy analysis. It is anticipated that there will be clear interactions between the types of outcomes that this well-being framework will seek to measure, and those sought by this literacy strategy.

Taking this into account, and alongside the detailed implementation plan, the oversight structures should also work to agree on an outcomes framework that will formalise a set of indicators for the strategy. An overview of the types of indicators that should be considered as part of the monitoring of the strategy is set out in Figure 23, with further explanation of what and how these should measure provided in Figure 24. The outcomes framework is split into two broad categories: Awareness, Access and Provision; and Investment and Impact. A collaborative approach to the development of the outcomes framework also provides an opportunity to bring together the many information systems and tools in place to monitor the impact literacy has on broader life outcomes.

Figure 23: Overview of the ALL Strategy Outcomes Framework

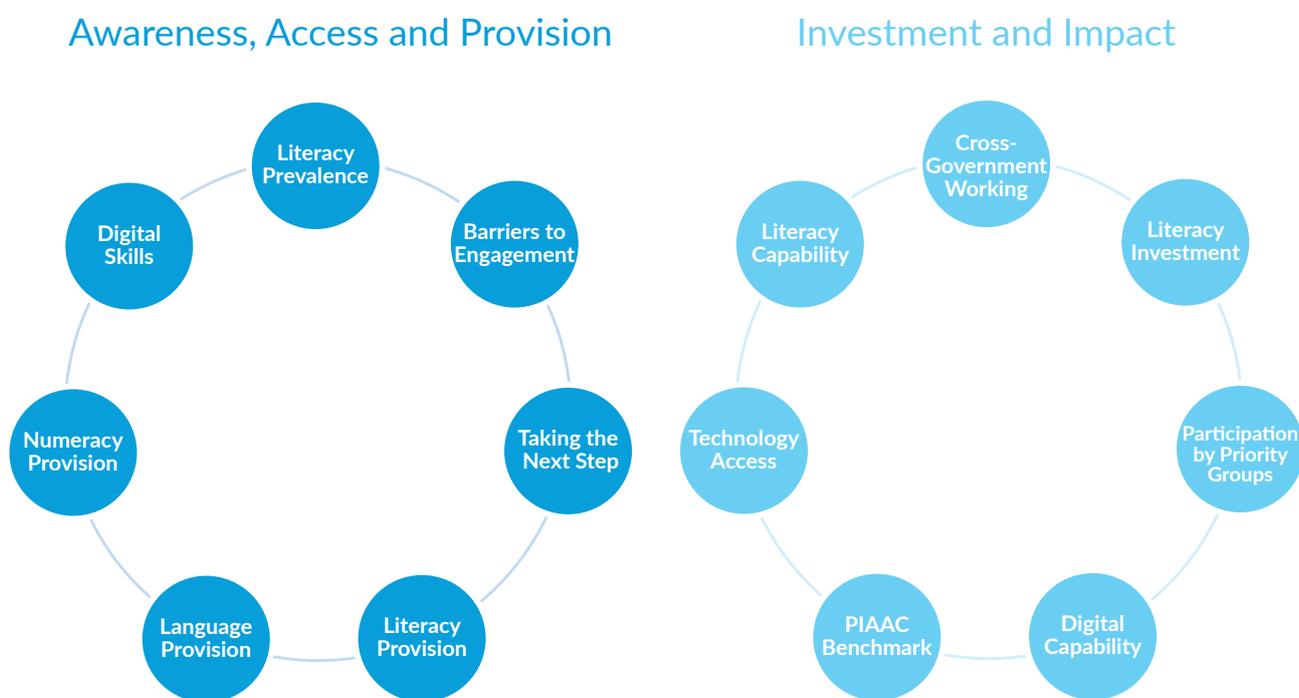


Figure 24: Measuring Strategy Success

Theme	Indicator	Source
Awareness, Access and Provision		
Literacy Prevalence	Percentage of people who know someone with unmet literacy, numeracy, digital capability needs.	Regular public survey
Barriers to Engagement	Reduced incidence of factors cited as barriers to accessing literacy supports.	Regular public survey
Taking the Next Step	Numbers engaging in new one-stop-shop literacy supports.	Ongoing monitoring
Literacy Provision	Numbers engaging in literacy learning across FET.	ETB FET learner database (PLSS)
English Language Support	Number of people receiving English language support.	ETB FET learner database (PLSS)
Numeracy Provision	Number of people engaging in numeracy learning.	ETB FET learner database (PLSS)
Digital Skills Provision	Numbers accessing basic digital skills courses via eCollege, ETBs, libraries, employers, etc.	SOLAS and other stakeholders
Investment and Impact		
Literacy Capability	Assessment of literacy capability levels across the Irish population.	Need to develop more regular tool than PIAAC
Literacy Investment	Level of overall investment in literacy supports.	SOLAS
Participation by Priority Target Groups	Numbers from key priority target groups developing basic skills in FET.	ETB FET learner database (PLSS)
Digital Capability	Percentage of people lacking basic digital skills/Percentage of people with at least basic digital skills.	DESI Index
Technology Access	Percentage of people with broadband access.	CSO
PIAAC Adult Literacy Benchmark	Periodic PIAAC benchmark giving comprehensive analysis of literacy levels by international standards.	PIAAC (expected 2024)
Cross-Government Working	Effective structures in place with an active participation from education, health, welfare, local government and community development perspectives at national, regional and local levels.	DFHERIS

It is also really important that measuring the success of the strategy is focused on both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Ongoing learner and participant feedback will be key to continuous improvement and delivering on the actions and targets set out in this strategy. The National FET Learner Forum has been an important development in this regard, but this must be built on with focused consultation with those accessing literacy services throughout the lifetime of ALL.

There is also potential to roll out a ‘distance travelled’ tool that can track the progress of those engaging with literacy learning and support over time. Pobal has been leading the development of such a soft skills measurement tool, working closely with Quality Matters, Trinity College Dublin, and Local Development Companies. The tool, entitled My Journey, supports service users and staff to work together to identify personal goals and to show progress on these over time. My Journey measures five soft skill areas:

1. Literacy and numeracy confidence
2. Confidence, goal setting and self-efficacy
3. Communication skills
4. Connection with others
5. General work readiness

Its application across many of the challenges to be addressed by those with unmet literacy needs suggests potential as a qualitative measurement tool for this strategy. Its use should be piloted during the initial implementation phase, and fully rolled out if it proves effective.

There is also potential to assess literacy impacts locally, by developing an integrated Social Impact Assessment or well-being framework approach. Tools and supports for the Regional Literacy Coordinator to use in partnership with Local Authorities and ETBs will be further developed to assist them in considering literacy outcomes in the context of well-being assessments. There is emerging international practice on measuring overall well-being, as set out in Figure 25, and this strategy has noted the planned development of a well-being framework for Ireland. It is important that the strategy targets and outcomes feed into this wider framework as it further develops.

Figure 25: International Approaches to Measuring Well-being

Country	Tool
Netherlands	Monitor of Well-being The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Dutch context - Monitor of Well-being and the Sustainable Development Goals 2020 CBS
New Zealand	Treasury Living Standards Framework https://statisticsnz.shinyapps.io/wellbeingindicators/_w_0f2965ef/?page=alignment&subpage=aligningcurrent
Scotland	Scotland Performs National Performance Framework National Indicator Performance National Performance Framework NPF Presentation National Performance Framework
UK	What works centre for well-being Home - Evaluating wellbeing (whatworkswellbeing.org)

While strategy implementation will be underpinned by ongoing monitoring and tracking of success, it will be important to formally take stock of progress during its lifetime. An independent mid-term review of progress will be commissioned by the Programme Office five years into delivery. This will allow the second half of strategy implementation to be informed by a timely analysis of the environment and the continued relevance of strategic priorities.

Appendix A: The Literacy Support Landscape in Ireland

Related to Section 1.7, the tables below provide greater detail of the existing support landscape for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy support in Ireland.

The Literacy Support Landscape in Ireland

Education	
Education and Training Boards (ETBs)	A regional Network of 16 ETBs offer local services to address the needs of the significant base of adults with low literacy and numeracy levels in Ireland. SOLAS data shows that in 2019 programme enrolment numbers included Adult Literacy Groups (25,356), BTEI groups (22,030), ESOL (12,265), Refugee Resettlement (693) and Voluntary Literacy Tuition (749). Family learning supports are also provided. ETBs deliver English language support programmes to individuals seeking to improve their English Language skills. ETBs also deliver a wider range of programmes across several funding streams to adult learners with integrated Literacy and Numeracy support in all programme types. Adult Guidance Services in ETBs provide impartial careers and education information to adults who wish to return to education and training or are already registered on a FET programme within the ETBs - to make informed educational, career and life choices. ETBs also offer literacy support as part of wider prison education programme.
NALA	NALA provides advice, information and educational opportunities to people who want to improve their literacy. NALA offer a Tutoring Service that provides support over the phone and internet. NALA also manage, Learn with NALA, an eLearning website where people can have their skills assessed across a number of areas and receive an individual learning plan to address the needs identified. NALA also raises awareness of literacy services, conducts and publishes research, promotes good practice and represents and empowers adults with unmet literacy needs. It coordinates the Take the First Step campaign in partnership with SOLAS and ETBs that has run each year since 2016.
Community Education Providers	A network of community education providers offer a range of literacy, numeracy, digital skills development and other courses and supports. Principally funded through ETBs, although often accessing other community development funding, community education encompasses both formal accredited and non-formal learning. Over 33,000 learners were supported in FET via community education in 2019.

Health and Family	
Family and Community Services Resource Centre (FRC)	Through its established network of 121 Centres nationwide, and two outreach Centres, the FRC programme is Ireland's largest family support programme delivering universal services to families in disadvantaged areas across the country based on a life-cycle approach. It is funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and is managed at a national level by TUSLA.
Pharmacies/ GPs/Primary Care Centres	As part of Health Literacy, the Healthy Ireland framework has supported the Crystal Clear Pharmacy and General Practice Programme developed by NALA, MSD and the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU). ²⁴ This framework helps the Pharmacy industry develop literacy friendly ways of dealing with customers. Research has shown that primary care practitioners who have regular contact with individual and families represent a key contact point for the promotion of literacy.

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Digital Divide	
National Broadband Plan (DECC)	Rollout of infrastructure, including the National Broadband Plan, is delivering greater levels of connectivity across the country. Strategic Connection Points have already been put in place which can be utilised to drive local access and connectivity. Making Wi-Fi available in community digital hubs, libraries and other centres such as family resource centres, should be considered.
Digital Skills for Citizens (DECC)	The Digital Skills for Citizens Scheme focuses on providing people who are not online with the opportunity to gain the basic skills and confidence to start their digital journey. The scheme provides ten hours of free classroom training in numerous locations in every county. Classes are delivered by community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations and are advertised locally with times and venues arranged to meet the needs identified by participants. This programme aims to provide courses to 70,000 learners. ²⁵
Media Literacy (BAI)	The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) funds programmes to improve adult literacy. In addition, the BAI facilitates the work of Media Literacy Ireland, an independent association of members committed to the promotion of media literacy across Ireland.

Community Development	
Local Development Companies and Other SICAP Implementing Bodies including other local independent community development organisations	Delivered by local Implementing Bodies, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2022 provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. SICAP includes the provision of IT related training actions to prepare people for the labour market and to upskill and help people engage with new technologies. These companies also deliver programmes through LEADER, Tús and the Rural Social Scheme. In addition, the National Traveller Partnership, the National pilot Community Development Programme and the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWNN) work collectively, using community development principles and practice, to support marginalised minority communities.
Community Services Programme	Several IT / basic digital skills training/courses are also funded through the Community Services Programme, run by Pobal, and offered by community education or other community and voluntary organisations. 308 courses ran in 2020 with 1,994 participants.
Sporting Associations	Sporting associations at local level have a key role in engaging with people and communities, and can often provide an informal way for those with literacy or other needs to seek support.

25 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/cb7ce-digital-skills-for-citizens-scheme/>

Information	
Libraries	Libraries promote the benefits of literacy and reading development for all ages and provide opportunities for people to develop as literate and informed individuals. The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), through Libraries Development and the 'Our Public Libraries 2022' national public library strategy, has a core strategic component focused on reading and literacy development. The country's 330 public libraries deliver a national programme – Right to Read - through a core set of services and resources. Libraries also support ongoing learning in literacy, including digital literacy, through the provision of programmes and access to essential information and communications technology. Public Libraries, in partnership with publishers, booksellers and authors launched a new national "Ireland Reads" day, to encourage people of all ages to get reading and help promote mental health and well-being.
Citizens Information Services	Citizens Information Board (CIB) provides funding to Citizens Information Services (CIS) throughout Ireland. CIS provides support to citizens in relation to accessing their rights and entitlements. In 2019, CIS saw over 560,000 clients and 1 in 9 of these had access issues which would include language, literacy and digital access. CIB funds the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) which provides IRIS (Irish Remote Interpreting Service) and in person interpreters to the Deaf Community.
MABS	CIB provides funding to the Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS) throughout Ireland. MABS provides support to individuals experiencing debt and money issues including help with budgeting and dealing with creditors. CIB also funds National Traveller MABS which is a specific organisation that provides financial literacy and other finance and debt supports to the Travelling Community.

Employment	
Intreo	Intreo is a single point of contact for all employment and income supports. Designed to provide a more streamlined approach, Intreo offers practical, tailored employment services and supports for jobseekers and employers alike.
Employability	The EmployAbility Service helps people with disabilities, injuries and illnesses to get a job. The EmployAbility Service works through sponsor organisations in local communities.
Community Workplace Schemes	Community workplace schemes providing work opportunities for unemployed people. As part of the overall support for scheme participants receive, they may often be linked into other serviced and supports they require. Examples include Community Employment, Tús and the Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS).
Employers	A significant base of the existing workforce face literacy barriers, and it is therefore really important that employers are aware of potential issues, can identify needs and link their employees to appropriate support and services.

Appendix B: Overview of Short-term and Longer-term Commitments

Theme	Actions in the Initial Implementation Phase	Longer-term Commitments
Embedding a Cross-Government, Economy and Society Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Cross-Government Implementation Group. • Set up a Programme Office. • Launch a centralised Collaboration and Innovation Fund. • Form a National Literacy Coalition. • Appoint regional Literacy Coordinators to drive partnerships at regional and local level. • Establish Regional Coalitions for each ETB area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on Framework for Community Support to develop 'wrap around' cross-agency local literacy support resource. • Development of Regional Literacy Action Plans agreed by Regional Coalitions. • Mainstreaming of successful collaborative pilot projects.
UNDERSTAND: National Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a major national campaign around literacy awareness and the support available to help people with literacy issues, using multiple media channels and reinforced by stakeholders at national, regional and local level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term communications plan, including brand guidelines. • Ongoing campaigns on at least an annual basis.
UNDERSTAND: One-Stop-Shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a one-stop-shop, bringing together all relevant information and advice on literacy, all help in identifying literacy needs, and linking to further resources that will facilitate people to take the next step in accessing support and services. • Expand the NALA freephone service to sit alongside the one-stop-shop resource as a first port of call for advice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a resource bank that can support all those dealing directly with people with unmet literacy needs. • Substantially expand the portfolio of online learning opportunities and supports for people with unmet literacy needs.
UNDERSTAND: Proactive Local Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and make available online training modules for all working directly across local services with those who may be experiencing unmet literacy needs to help identify needs, communicate appropriately and signpost accordingly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent set of literacy learning and support resources developed and made available to the public across all local services.

<p>UNDERSTAND: Consistent Assessment Approaches</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full and comprehensive roll-out of a consistent initial and ongoing assessment approach to literacy and numeracy across all relevant providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-referral process for access to standard ETB initial and ongoing assessment processes for community education providers and local and community services. • Pilot linking literacy assessments to wide range of achievement tests with education providers. • Develop a common digital literacy assessment tool made available online via one-stop-shop.
<p>ACCESS: Plain and Accessible Content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector organisations to agree plans via the Cross-Government Implementation Group to ensure direct communication with the public in plain language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement an Irish language development programme to improve communication in the native language by public sector organisations.
<p>ACCESS: Access to Technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target funding on access to technology and devices. • Expand community access to Wi-Fi and broadband resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the network of community based digital hubs linked to literacy support. • Rollout of infrastructure by carriers, including the National Broadband Plan, to deliver greater levels of connectivity across the country. • Use of Strategic Connection Points to drive local access and connectivity. • Investigate feasibility of tax credit and loan schemes for devices and implement if there are positive outcomes. • Pursue access to eduroam for literacy learners. • Ongoing investment programme in assistive technology. • Pursue unlimited data agreements with telecoms providers to facilitate learner engagement with online literacy learning and support resources.
<p>Integrated Literacy Supports in Work and Education Settings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand literacy support in the workplace by linking to employer support infrastructure and agree an action plan. • Full roll-out of integrated literacy support across all FET provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link employers to online literacy learning and support resources and tailor them to meet their needs. • Mainstream support resources and develop communities of practice across FET. • Embed literacy, numeracy and basic skills support as part of the offering under the DSP Work Placement Scheme.

<p>ACCESS: Universal Design Approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the UDL guidelines, and use the UDL resource toolkit across all literacy provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use long-term capital investment and leasing strategy to ensure modern, informal 'non institutional' facilities are available for literacy learning and support.
<p>EXPAND: Focus on Numeracy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further development of standalone adult numeracy modules in accessible formats and with flexible levels of support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll-out common numeracy assessment tool across all relevant providers of learning and support. • Support development of contextual numeracy support initiatives linked to study disciplines, occupations, trades or industry sectors.
<p>EXPAND: Build Digital Competencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather all informal and accredited, private and public, onsite and online digital skills opportunities in one place in the one-stop-shop. • Expand investment in digital skills provision across formal and non-formal routes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link all digital skills provision to the EU DigCom digital competency framework. • Support stepping stones initiatives to link competency assessments to learning pathways.
<p>EXPAND: Support Skilled Practitioners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and establish an overall continuous development framework for literacy practitioners, embedding a consistent approach to initial and ongoing skills development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree a consistent approach to provision of one-to-one literacy tutoring, that all tutors have common capabilities to assist in delivery of training programmes. • Set consistent initial education requirements, a structured portfolio-based approach to initial and ongoing development, a consistent defined future role for literacy tutors and a range of core skills modules to be made available for all involved in literacy support.

<p>EXPAND: Innovate and Enhance Provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase investment in literacy provision, including more English language support for migrants. · Consolidate FET literacy support programmes. · Embed consistent good practice across FET via strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and ETBs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Continue to build targeted funding schemes to support the community education and community development role in addressing the digital divide and supporting people with unmet literacy needs. · Agree, via the Cross-Government Implementation Group, how other complementary and critical supports and services can be developed to support an increased offering on literacy support. · Establish a research fund to support research into relevant areas which impact literacy and use this to inform future approach and practice. · Consistent and enhanced support and services around family literacy approaches and intergenerational learning, English language provision and assessment for migrants, standalone numeracy provision, and the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities, in line with good practice guidelines.
<p>EMPOWER: Person Centred Pathways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Development of a core skills framework facilitating learners to understand the skills they need and the learning pathways that are available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Embed guidance in the support model to inform learning pathways.
<p>EMPOWER: Furthest Behind First</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fund and roll-out specific initiatives support marginalised target groups with ex-offenders, migrants and people with disabilities. · Appoint peer mentors, learner champions and ambassadors in local communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · System of consistent learner support introduced across FET. · Themed call focused on the needs of specific vulnerable cohorts requiring partnership between education providers and NGOs representing or providing services to those vulnerable cohorts.

<p>EMPOWER: Support Community Initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding provided via the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund to address unmet literacy needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop common themes focused on unmet literacy needs across SICAP and MAEDF programmes. • Align regional literacy plans with local economic and community plans for each local authority area. • Develop the role of libraries as a first port of call and access to resources which can support literacy and digital skills. • Put in place referral protocols across community-based services. • Simplify registration process for people participating in literacy learning and support at community level.
<p>EMPOWER: Link to Health and Well-being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise Healthy Ireland resources to ensure health literacy support is part of the wrap around services for any individual with unmet needs. • Grow family literacy and family learning approaches as part of a targeted programme of support for health, social care and family support interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop targeted literacy support for those experiencing mental health issues. • Expand Crystal Clear health literacy mark across other pharmacies, primary care centres, GP practices and community mental health services.
<p>Measuring Success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes framework approved by Cross-Government Implementation Group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop regular research mechanism to benchmark PIAAC adult literacy and numeracy levels throughout the lifetime of the strategy. • Recommend an appropriate qualitative or distance travelled tool for adoption in measuring the impact of literacy support. • Undertake an independent mid-term review of strategy progress.

Appendix C: Key Acronyms

AEGS	Adult Education Guidance Service
ALL	Adult Literacy for Life Strategy
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
AONTAS	Irish National Adult Learning Organisation
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
BAI	Broadcasting Authority of Ireland
CAO	Central Applications Office
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.
CIB	Citizen Information Board
CIS	Citizens Information Services
CITO	Check In, Take Off project
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRPD	(United Nations) Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
CSIS	Community Statistics on the Information Society
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CTC	Community Training Centres
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DoE	Department of Education
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
DECC	Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index
DoF	Department of Finance
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

DoH	Department of Health
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DoJ	Department of Justice
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
DSP	Department of Social Protection
DTCAGSM	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
DFI	Disability Federation of Ireland
DAI	Dyslexia Association of Ireland
EAAL	European Agenda for Adult Learning
ECS	European Social Charter
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
FL	Family Literacy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GP	General Practitioner
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HSE	Health Service Executive

IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPU	Irish Pharmacy Union
IRIS	Irish Remote Interpreting Service
IT	Information Technology
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
IDS	Irish Deaf Society
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
LES	Local Employment Service
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
MABS	Money Advice and Budgeting Service
MAEDF	Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund
MSD	MSD Ireland – Human Health
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NDA	National Disability Authority
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLN	National Learning Network
NSC	National Skills Council
NSS	National Skills Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PD	Professional Development
PEIL	Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning
PES	Public Employment Service
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLSS	Programme and Learner Support System
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RSF	Regional Skills Fora
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SFW	Skills for Work
SLIS	(Irish) Sign Language Interpreting Service
SLMRU	Skills and Labour Market Research Unit
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna The Further Education and Training Authority
SPA(s)	Strategic Performance Agreement(s)
TAFE SA	Technical and Further Education for South Australia
TUSLA	An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanáí agus an Teaghlach Child and Family Agency
TV	Television
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UN	United Nations
WRATs	Wide Range Achievement Tests
YESS	Youth Employment Support Scheme

