



LITERACY IRELAND

Labour Party proposals to ensure
literacy supports are available to
every adult and child

LABOUR

LABOUR PARTY PROPOSALS

1. *Literacy Ireland* is Labour's proposal to create a joined up government strategy to improve outcomes in adult literacy levels, with a particular focus on people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. Labour would combine the diverse budgets that exist across multiple departments and agencies into a single fund, to be directed in line with a coherent, cross-departmental *Literacy Ireland* strategy.

OUR VALUES

Article 42 of the Constitution commits the State to provide for free primary education and pledges that the State "as guardian of the common good" will ensure that "children receive a certain minimum education".

Literacy is one of the most basic aspects of education.

It is our view that the State has failed those in Ireland who have left school in the past without adequate literacy skills.

It is often those people from the poorest backgrounds, or those who have worked in manual jobs, who have the greatest literacy problems, which is a lifelong disadvantage that compounds economic inequality in our society.

Literacy is also a barrier to the full integration of migrants into Irish society, who may not have English as their native language and who, in some cases, may not have adequate literacy in their native language either.

OUR ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Literacy Education at Primary School Level Now Performing Well

Today's primary school education is performing well, with Ireland ranking highly in the world for literacy, as measured by PISA scores.

But Some Children are Still Left Behind

Nonetheless, every school has children who leave without acquiring full literacy. There are also significant gaps between the results attained by disadvantaged urban schools and other types of school. Even after secondary school, there are still cohorts of young people who are leaving school without adequate literacy and numeracy skills.

Many Adults Need Literacy Support

There is also a long-term issue that many adults left school at an earlier time when literacy education was not as advanced. There are many adults in Irish society who are "functionally illiterate".

According to the last major survey of adult skills, published by the OECD in 2015, one in six Irish adults has difficulty understanding basic written text and one in four of them find it difficult to do simple maths calculations.

Poverty and Disadvantage are linked with Literacy Problems

Labour's analysis is that socio-economic disadvantage is one of the major causes of literacy difficulty, alongside other factors including conditions such as dyslexia.

The OECD reports makes it clear that there is a social gradient associated with literacy levels, with lower literacy levels among people whose parents had less formal education.¹

New Literacy Barriers

The National Adult Literacy Agency makes the important point that the bar has been raised in terms of people's literacy needs:

"In the past literacy was considered to be the ability to read and write. Today the meaning of literacy has changed to reflect changes in society and the skills needed by individuals to participate fully in society. It involves listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information."

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/publications.htm>

Many Government departments and agencies now require people to apply for services through their websites. And many companies offer discounts or special offers to online customers, and some will only transact online.

Literacy barriers to using the Internet mean that new inequalities are being created. Those without literacy are either left out or end up paying more for the same goods and services.

The Government is committed to potentially spending billions to ensure every household has access to Broadband Internet. The issue of literacy could be address for a much smaller investment. And even if Broadband was available at everyone's door, literacy difficulties would mean that large numbers of people cannot avail of it.

PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS LITERACY IRELAND

Literacy Ireland would be established as an all-of-government strategic unit, similar to the *Healthy Ireland* initiative. The unit would be under the Department of Education, but with close engagement with the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, to ensure cross-departmental co-operation on policy and on funding respectively.

The *Literacy Ireland* unit would be led by a manager at Principal Officer grade, and would have a small staff cohort and budget to enable it to drive the initiative.

Budgets that are currently split over multiple departments and agencies would be consolidated under *Literacy Ireland*, in order to ensure that a coherent all-of-government strategy is driving the effort to eradicate illiteracy. Some of that funding would continue to be deployed by other departments and agencies, but with oversight from the new unit.

The priority of *Literacy Ireland* would not be merely promoting literacy or numeracy, but would be on social inclusion and removing barriers to equality that are caused by illiteracy or innumeracy.

While some of the functions of *Literacy Ireland* will be on education, it will also have a remit to ensure all public agencies adhere to national standards on using Plain English in their publications, websites and application forms.

Literacy Ireland will promote:

- Social inclusion and equality

- Development of literacy and numeracy teaching at all levels of education
- Supports to parents and families in disadvantaged areas to support literacy
- Use of Plain English by all public agencies and by NGOs and businesses
- Inclusion of people with disabilities that affect their literacy and numeracy
- Inclusion of migrants
- Reading and the Irish book industry
- Bilingualism and literacy in Irish and other languages as well as English

OUR LOCAL ELECTION COMMITMENTS TO SUPPORT LITERACY IRELAND

Labour Party candidates if elected to their local council will pursue the implementation of the following proposals in support of Literacy Ireland.

We believe libraries and arts centres should have longer opening hours, especially at evenings, weekends and on bank holidays

- We are passionate about the promotion of literacy programmes, that's why we will heavily promote outreach initiatives by libraries and arts centres targeted at marginalised and disadvantaged groups, including people with literacy or learning difficulties, to encourage their use of these facilities.
- We will enhance the role of libraries as resource hubs for people seeking training or work, or seeking to set up their own businesses.
- Library programmes that promote computer and Internet literacy are really beneficial to people in our communities, especially for the oldest and youngest in our society. These types of programmes can help people avoid being caught by Internet scams while also promoting safety online.
- Libraries are a great resource for students, especially those doing exams. Labour councillors will promote facilitate funding for homework clubs to take place in libraries and community centres, run by community development workers.
- We'll support the use of mobile libraries, especially in rural areas.

We'll make sure local council services are accessible to all.

- If you want to deal with your local council in Irish, we will make sure that there is someone able to help you with your request.
- We'll encourage local councils to produce materials in Plain English to meet the needs of people who do not have strong English or who have literacy problems.
- We will work with Council officials to ensure that their websites are fully accessible for people with additional needs.
- We will work with Council officials to ensure that council websites meet the standards of the EU accessibility directive (guaranteeing that persons with sight, hearing and dexterity needs can use local authority websites as two-way communication portals).
- Advocate for mandatory disability awareness training for all local authority staff, to include awareness of autism, mental health issues and learning difficulties, for example to simplify application forms.