

DIGITAL LITERACY IN ADULTS

FIT's Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills.

19th November 2019

1. Introduction / FIT's Experience

Madam Chairperson, TDs and Senators – thank you for the invitation to make a submission on this very important topic and for inviting FIT to your meeting today.

1.1. FIT works in close collaboration with SOLAS and ETBs to facilitate job seekers to access quality ICT training programmes and apprenticeships.

FIT has also developed digital literacy programmes with the support of the private sector, foundations, the EU, the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment and SOLAS benefitting over 30,000 people in total.

These programmes demonstrate a practical low cost train-the-trainer approach, supporting people with literacy and numeracy gaps; youth at risk; migrants; older people; farmers and those who want access to services, such as online banking.

2. Digital Literacy Policy and how Ireland is doing

2.1. In our submission we highlighted Irish and EU policies that we believe are important in addressing digital literacy including

- The National Digital Strategy and its Digital Skills for Citizens scheme,
- The FET Strategy and its goal of Active Inclusion,
- The Skills to Advance and Innovation through Collaboration schemes and
- The EU's Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning one of which is Digital and Technology-based Competency.

Our work on the ground has made us acutely aware that projects such as Digital Skills for Citizens funded by the Dept of Communications, Climate Action and Environment provided a constant glimmer of hope and connectivity for many communities during the darkest days of the recent recession.

2.2. In our submission we reported Ireland's poor ranking for digital literacy, 21st out of 33 countries, in the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills. We can do better.

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3. Emerging Needs

3.1. There are two key emerging threats that Ireland needs to act on with urgency.

- First, that due to the impact of digitalisation, one in three jobs in Ireland are at high risk.
- Second, that accelerating digitalisation in private and public service delivery has the potential to increase the digital divide.

We need to ensure that digitalisation is an enabler for people - particularly vulnerable workers and older people.

4. Recommendations

FIT has four recommendations that we believe merit your consideration.

1. **DIGI-COMMUNITY.** We propose the development of a five-year digital inclusion strategy to invest in the building of social capital in communities; building on the experience of activists such as FIT and others; and the needs articulated by disadvantaged communities, whether they be neighbourhood based or defined by other factors such as age, education, disability or ethnicity.
2. **DIGI-WORKFORCE.** We propose the establishment of a targeted programme to upskill employees who are vulnerable due to their lack of digital literacy.
3. Our third recommendation is to embed a **Digihub** and **Digiclub** model as a strand in the proposed **DIGI-COMMUNITY** and **DIGI-WORKFORCE** actions.
4. Finally, we believe that achieving both a workforce and a community that is digitally literate, goes hand-in-hand, and that the monitoring of progress is best judged in the round. We recommend the creation of a **DIGITAL SKILLS OBSERVATORY** to track progress, benchmark against peer nations and appraise stakeholders.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our views and make our recommendations.