

Skills for life
The national strategy for improving
adult literacy and numeracy skills

Executive Summary



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The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills



Rt Hon David Blunkett MP,
Secretary of State for Education
and Employment

David Blunkett

We are tackling under-achievement in schools. Today children are reading, writing and using numbers better than at any time in the past. Adults must be able to make the same progress.

Our mission is to give all adults in England the opportunity to acquire the skills for active participation in twenty-first century society and to engage their energy and commitment. Working together, we can succeed.

Seven million people have poor literacy and numeracy skills, including around half a million or more who struggle with English because it is not their first language. This has disastrous consequences for the individuals concerned, weakens the country's ability to compete in the global economy and places an enormous burden on society.

People with poor literacy, numeracy and language skills tend to be on lower incomes or unemployed, and they are more prone to ill health and social exclusion.

Skills for Life, the Government's strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, sets out how we plan to tackle this problem.



Angela Black

Angela Black had a severe disability. A nurse suggested that she take up a course to make herself busy.

She undertook an Office Skills course which helped her English, maths and computer skills. Her confidence and capacity to be a useful worker increased.

“I am amazed that I have achieved so much in a short time,” she says. “I’ll soon be at a stage when I can hold down a full-time job.”



David Revell

David is 6 months into his New Deal course at South Tyneside College. He eventually aims to get a job as a manager, possibly in the leisure and tourism field.

David's school days were a struggle. "I'm not sure why, but however hard I tried, things didn't seem to click."

As a result David left school without any qualifications. "I've improved a lot", he says, "but I've still got a lot to learn. You never stop learning. I've got confident now, in writing and spelling and punctuation."

Our priority groups

Identifying the one in five adults with literacy and numeracy skills difficulties and bringing them back into learning is critical. Our priority is to target those groups where literacy and numeracy difficulties are known to be common and where our help can have the greatest impact.

Unemployed people and other benefit claimants

At least 32% of the 870,000 or so people who are registered as unemployed have literacy, language and/or numeracy needs which prevent them from finding

and keeping secure work. We will address these needs.

All those entering the New Deal for Young People and those over 25 who are unemployed for six months or more will be 'screened' for literacy and numeracy needs. This means we will find out if they need help.

We will pilot faster screening processes and screening at 13 weeks, as well as at 6 months, to determine how best to identify unemployed people's needs.

We will pilot the use of financial incentives – a £10 week top-up on the training allowance and a £100 bonus for completion of a literacy or numeracy qualification – to see their effect on achievement.

We believe that people out of work have a responsibility to improve their employability and take advantage of opportunities offered to them. So, in two areas, we will introduce a requirement that those people with literacy and numeracy needs must address them. If they fail to do so, they risk losing benefit for a short period.

Those who are improving their literacy and numeracy skills whilst studying other subjects will no longer have to do so within the current 16 hour rule.

Unemployed people will be encouraged and helped to continue with their learning after they return to work.

From April 2001, screening for literacy and numeracy needs will be extended to lone parents, disabled people and partners of those out of work as part of the New Deal interview arrangements. Work is already underway to

provide additional support to people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Prisoners and those supervised in the community

Around 130,000 people are, or have been, in prison in any one year, and a further 200,000 are on probation. Around 50% have poor reading skills, 66% have poor numeracy and a staggering 81% have poor writing skills.

The Government has announced £173 million over 2001-02 to 2003-04 to improve prison education. Much of this will

support literacy and numeracy skills learning. Responsibility for this funding will transfer from the Home Office to the Department for Education and Employment.

The Probation Service is running pilots to screen probationers for literacy and numeracy needs. We are exploring whether prisoners eligible for early release can be required to attend literacy and/or numeracy classes as a condition of licence.

Public sector employees

The Government is a major employer and is committed to

helping any of its staff who have literacy and numeracy needs. The Department of Education and Employment will pilot a suite of measures to assess the scale of need, provide access to in-house or other local learning facilities, allow time off for training and enable staff to take the National Tests.

The armed forces, National Health Service and local government have made similar commitments and are taking action to provide appropriate support for their staff who have literacy and numeracy needs.

Workers in low-skilled jobs

Up to half of the 7 million people with weak literacy or numeracy skills are in work. Many are in low-skilled or short-term jobs.

We will provide employers with the support they need to get their staff trained. Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships can help employers identify literacy and numeracy skills needs among their staff. We will run a targeted information campaign that can be used by employers themselves.

All literacy and numeracy skills provision will be free to them and

Our Priority Groups

quality assured. Practice tests and learning materials will be available online. We will publish a toolkit for employers to use in taking action. Employers who are particularly successful will be offered the chance to become champions and share their success with others.

Small and medium-sized businesses will benefit from shared use of training facilities, Employer Learning Networks and an extension of pilot arrangements to help them develop a constructive working relationship with providers.

In one pilot area, we will fund employers for the cost of their staff attending literacy and numeracy skills training for one day a week for 13 weeks.

Trade unions will help to promote literacy and numeracy skills and offer guidance and training to members. We will consult on how to give union representatives statutory backing. An additional £6 million will be available through the Union Learning Fund for literacy and numeracy skills activities.

Young adults in the workforce will benefit from the Connexions



John Grundy

John Grundy is 57 and has joined a class called Basic Employability, run by Age Concern's Walsall Training Centre. "Jobs nowadays, they all want qualifications, literacy and numeracy and computers."

He has only been on the course a month and already his maths has improved. "I can subtract, add up, divide, multiply. I can do percentages", he says proudly. "And I know about computers, word processing, e-mail and the internet."



Nasrin Sheikh

Nasrin Sheikh was keen to learn to read, write and speak English.

She attend a Skilltrain course that combines English as a second language tuition with training in a variety of skills.

“The most useful thing from the course is that I can speak, read and write English fluently now, I feel I can do whatever I like on my own independently.”

Our Priority Groups

Service. Personal advisers will encourage all those who are 16 or 17 to take up their statutory right to time off for study or training. Specialist training will be provided for those with literacy and numeracy needs before they start a Key Skills or Foundation Modern Apprenticeship programme.

Other groups at risk of exclusion

Around 100,000 people were registered as homeless last year. Between 450,000 and 1 million people do not speak English as their first language. Others at risk of exclusion include travelling families and the elderly.

We are working closely with voluntary organisations and faith-based organisations to ensure that all those from these groups with literacy and numeracy needs are identified and have access to flexible learning opportunities that are sensitive to their circumstances.

Schools will promote literacy and numeracy to parents and will help to identify those with skills needs and offer them advice. Others who work with children and parents, such as health visitors, childminders and heads of nurseries, playgroups and after-schools clubs can play a similar

role and will be offered training to help them do so.

Support for families will be provided through the family literacy and numeracy programme, which we will expand from April 2002.

People with literacy and numeracy skills needs can be found in all parts of the country, from rural areas to inner city estates. Local Learning Partnerships and local Learning and Skills Councils will develop targeted action plans to meet skills gaps and ensure that the full range of learning opportunities are available to

those in need. And the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit will ensure that all literacy and numeracy learning activities are co-ordinated as part of the national strategy and conform to national quality requirements.

The sizeable number of people who do not fall into our priority groups, or who fall into many, will continue to access learning through **learndirect** and other Government programmes free of charge.

Delivering Higher Standards

Funding and planning

Our initial aim is that 750,000 adults will improve their literacy and numeracy by 2004. In the longer term we want to give England one of the best adult literacy and numeracy rates in the world. And ultimately we want to eliminate the problem of poor literacy and numeracy skills altogether.

Achieving the target will require both higher participation and rising levels of achievement. We will provide over 2 million flexible learning opportunities over the next 3 years. And we will

introduce measures to deliver higher standards.

These activities will be supported by significant additional funding. The central budget for literacy and numeracy will rise from £241 million in 2000 to over £400 million in 2003. Overall spending on improving literacy and numeracy skills will rise to around £1.5 billion overall over the next three years.

These objectives will not be achieved by Government alone. Every relevant organisation, at national and local level, will

contribute by working to a common set of objectives and within a clear national framework.

Increasing demand

A national promotion campaign will let people know what they can do to improve their skills and where they can go for help.

National products will be branded with a **read.write.plus** logo. New learners will be referred through the **learn**direct helpline (0800 100 900).

Improving supply

'Pathfinder' research projects will be set up from April 2001 to test

out the new learning infrastructure, develop and assess new approaches to learning (including through new technology) and pilot incentives to motivate learners. One will be located in each region – Liverpool, Tyne and Wear, Leeds, Nottinghamshire, Birmingham, Cambridgeshire, the Isle of Thanet, Gloucestershire and East London – and a further project will be located in prisons.

Meeting learners' needs through new technology

All learners can expect flexible and high quality learning experiences.

Delivering higher standards

The range of learning programmes will include full-time courses, intensive 'booster' courses of up to 60 hours, individually tailored tuition, as well as learning opportunities which exploit new technologies.

Learning will also be available in a wide range of informal settings outside traditional classroom locations, including shopping malls, community centres, libraries and even pubs.

We will actively promote the use of new technology with literacy and numeracy learners.

The network of **learndirect** and UK Online centres, and funding to equip voluntary organisations with laptop computers, is providing less well-off communities with access to ICT facilities. The BBC is developing proposals for offering online support to its viewers.

A learner focus

Providers will be regularly inspected to ensure that all learners:

- have an action plan which includes short- and long-term goals;
- receive regular positive feedback;
- have access to a full range of learning techniques;



Paul Wragg

Paul Wragg joined a 10-week Family Literacy course, to find out how his daughter's literacy was being taught and to improve his own reading, writing and communication skills.

Paul passed the course, receiving a City and Guilds Wordpower Certificate. He now plans to set up his own business.

"I'm a positive person I know I'll be able to help others", says Paul.



Gary Hughes

Gary Hughes has turned his life around. He decided to go to basic English and numeracy classes. Now, five years later, he works for Bath and North East Somerset Council as an IT Tutor and Community Tutor, helping people overcome Basic Skills problems.

“The courses, training and education, have helped my confidence”, he says. “I want to keep learning and help other people to learn.”

Delivering higher standards

- are supported by volunteers; and
- receive guidance on progression to other learning opportunities at higher levels.

Training without these features will not be funded.

Raising standards

Assessment of need

We are developing effective mechanisms to identify and assess need in non-threatening situations, and more people will be able to carry out these assessments, including personal advisers in Job Centres and the Connexions Service, the information, advice and guidance

services, probation officers and community care workers.

National models for diagnosing needs in more detail will be developed and tested. Adults with dyslexia will receive specialist help.

National standards

National standards will establish clear definitions for what adults are expected to achieve in order to progress towards literacy and numeracy qualifications.

National core curriculum

A national core literacy and numeracy curriculum, based on

the new national standards, sets out clearly what has to be taught and learned at each level.

Parallel curricula are being developed for learners below Entry Level and for those who do not speak English as a first language.

New teaching materials

We are commissioning professionally-produced materials for use by teachers across the country. The materials will be widely available, online and on paper, and easily customised. They will be linked to work-related programmes and reflect people's interests and

hobbies. The first materials should be available in 2002.

National Literacy and Numeracy Tests

New National Tests will be tested out in our pathfinder areas before becoming available nationally from September 2001. From September 2002, no adult qualifications for literacy and numeracy at Levels 1 and 2 will be awarded other than those based on the National Tests.

A national research centre

We are identifying best practice from around the world to develop and implement our strategy. We

will establish a national centre to lead and co-ordinate this, working closely with the Basic Skills Agency. We are aiming to announce the location of the centre this autumn.

Teachers

From September 2001 all further education teachers will work towards a teaching qualification that includes literacy and numeracy among its key elements.

Teachers specialising in literacy and numeracy skills will be expected to work towards new literacy and numeracy qualifications from September

2001. They will be supported by a programme of continuous professional development. The first phase is already underway. The second phase will focus on the needs of adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those whose first language is not English.

The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit and Learning and Skills Council will develop a teacher supply plan to forecast future needs. The new pay arrangements for further education colleges will provide additional incentives.

£3 million will be available over three years in 20 deprived communities to develop the use of volunteer managers in recruiting and training 2000 volunteers.

Quality assurance and inspection

Robust monitoring and inspection arrangements will be put in place. Inspection criteria and the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark will be reviewed to ensure they are compatible and reflect the new requirements of the national strategy.

The Learning and Skills Council will use inspection evidence to invest selectively. Firm action will be taken if provision is ineffective and providers cannot bring about improvements.

Conclusion

Inertia and fatalism – not least among low-skilled individuals – are our chief enemies. We must be bold and imaginative to overcome them. This strategy marks a decisive step in tackling the basic skills problem. But it will only succeed if all those who can make a difference join us to do so.

Further information

Further details about relevant government agencies and programmes can be found on the following websites:

Adult and Community Learning Fund

www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/aclf

Adult financial literacy

www.dfef.gov.uk/adflag

Basic Skills Agency

www.basic-skills.co.uk

Connexions Service

www.connexions.gov.uk

Employment Service

www.employmentservice.gov.uk

Individual Learning Accounts

www.dfef.gov.uk/ila

Key Skills

www.dfef.gov.uk/key

learnirect

www.learnirect.co.uk

Learning and Skills Council

www.lsc.gov.uk

Learning Partnerships

www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/lp

National Grid for Learning

www.ngfl.gov.uk

National Training Organisations

www.dfef.gov.uk/nto

New Deal

www.newdeal.gov.uk

Sure Start

www.surestart.gov.uk

Ufi

www.ufilttd.gov.uk



Wayne Alphonso Richards

Wayne wants to become a studio engineer. He needed to have proper training and improve his basic skills. He enrolled on a course and has improved his written and spoken English and maths.

Wayne recommends Adult Basic Skills courses. “It gives people a chance of a better life and I now have the opportunity and am going to use it.”

Copies of the full strategy, this summary and other information can be downloaded from our website at:

www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

Alternatively, copies of this publication can be obtained from:

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Produced by the Department for
Education and Employment

D32-PP32/42292/1100/14

