



National Research and Development Centre  
for adult literacy and numeracy

**FIVE YEARS ON**  
**RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT**  
**AND CHANGING PRACTICE**  
NRDC 2006-7

Edited and compiled by JD Carpentieri

The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) was founded in 2002 as a cornerstone of the government's Skills for Life strategy in England. Our remit is to provide underpinning evidence and practical guidance for teacher educators, teachers and other professionals. We are working to help improve the quality of teaching and learning so that young people and adults can progress, achieve and develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in life and work.

NRDC is a consortium of 12 partners, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. It brings together the best United Kingdom researchers in the field, together with expert and experienced development professionals and a wide range of talented practitioners.

- Institute of Education, University of London
- Literacy Research Centre, Lancaster University
- School of Continuing Education, The University of Nottingham
- School of Education, The University of Sheffield
- East London Pathfinder Consortium
- Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership
- Basic Skills Agency at NIACE
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- LLU+, London South Bank University
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**Information about the research and development programmes and projects from which the evidence in this document is drawn can be found on the NRDC website:**

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# **FIVE YEARS ON RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGING PRACTICE NRDC 2006-7**

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**FIVE YEARS ON**  
**NRDC 2006-7**



# FOREWORD

In his review<sup>1</sup> of NRDC's 2005 publication *Three Years On: what is the research saying*, Barry Brooks, former Head of the Skills for Life Strategy Unit at DIUS (then DfES), issued this challenge to NRDC: that when the Centre publishes *Five Years On* in 2007, it should spell out not only what the research has said, but 'what development has been achieved'. That way, Barry suggested, we would be delivering our commitment to 'generating knowledge and transforming it into practice'. We hope that, on reading this publication, you will agree that NRDC has now travelled a long way towards our goal of informing and helping transform practice through a whole range of activities which are developing and improving the teaching and learning of literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

This series of annual publications are milestones along the way. The evidence from research which we drew together in *Three Years On* and *Four Years On* (2006) still stands and has been developed during 2006-7. What marks out this year is the volume of new work focused specifically on practice, and the use of NRDC research by the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) to inform national development programmes. We have produced practitioner guides based on our three-year Effective Practice studies

and engaged teachers through conferences and workshops. We continue to roll out guidance to practitioners from our Maths4Life programme, and support the work of the National Centre for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics (NCETM). We have reported on a series of action research and development projects. We have completed a successful project to encourage learners' writing, *Voices on the Page* – a book of the best writing has been published, encouraging more learners to write, and teachers to use learners' writing to support reading activities.

We work ever more closely with practitioners: teachers and the wider workforce. We will shortly publish practical, focused handbooks to develop and improve teacher education in literacy and ESOL practice. Another publication offers guidance on 'practitioner-led' research and development, with lessons learned from our 'Practitioner-led Research Initiative'. The majority of our research projects engage practitioners in fieldwork – as do all of our development activities. CfBT Education Trust has funded NRDC projects leading to toolkits and guidance in two important areas: family literacy, language and numeracy; and developing inclusive learning for young people in secure settings.

[1] Brooks, B. (2005) 'NRDC *Three Years On*: a synthesis'. In *Literacy and Numeracy Studies: An international journal in the education and training of adults*, 14:2. Centre for Language and Literacy, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.

**We hope that, on reading this publication, you will agree that NRDC has now travelled a long way towards our goal of informing and helping transform practice through a whole range of activities**

NRDC is a key partner in major national reform, development and quality improvement programmes. For the QIA-sponsored 'Skills for Life Improvement Programme' (SfLIP), NRDC leads the work on increasing the numbers of qualified teachers and engaging them in continuing professional development. The SfLIP is using our embedded research findings to inform development work with over 700 organisations in the sector. We have undertaken development work with 194 providers to promote the QIA-funded project: 'Motivating Learners to Persist, Progress and Achieve'. With LLUK, NRDC worked to develop the quality of initial teacher education in preparation for the September 2007 reforms.

NRDC's research focus has also shifted this year. We are creating new knowledge through analysing data from earlier, primary research projects – and not only NRDC's. We have been drawing substantially on the work of partner research organisations, including the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre, the Centre for Longitudinal Studies and the Centre for the Economics of Education. Collaboration between centres has been a hallmark of the last year's activity and we believe it shows in the quality of the data we have produced for policy. A notable example is our study of the Value of Basic Skills in the British Labour Market, with its encouraging messages about the positive impact of literacy and numeracy learning. We have also been drawing on an increasing number of national datasets, ensuring the most up to date and robust figures are available for us to work on. We have been able to investigate key areas of the social inclusion and community cohesion agendas, including an analysis of Minority Ethnic success rates for QIA and

Engaging Muslim Learners as part of a DIUS programme led by The Experience Corps.

In terms of our impact on policy and practice, no area of work has been more prominent or influential than our research on 'embedding' Skills for Life in vocational programmes. We have produced convincing evidence, qualitative and quantitative, of the value of this approach, and this is now a key DIUS area of work. We have also produced guidance on which models of embedding work best in practice.

As you will see, *Five Years On* is organised around key areas of post-16 policy in education, skills and social inclusion, including World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England (2007). Woven into these is knowledge derived from NRDC's research and development activities to support real change: how to shift to a more demand-led system, engaging employers and learners in ways which best support them; how to sustain the motivation of learners; how to reach the most needy and least qualified groups; how to tackle the critical area of numeracy, needed ever more in the workplace and in daily life. And how Skills for Life can support a more inclusive, diverse and cohesive society.

We hope you enjoy this overview of our recent work. We always welcome your comments, feedback and contributions and hope you will engage with us in our continuing work.



**Maggie Semple**

Chair, NRDC Advisory Group



**Ursula Howard**

Director, NRDC

**In terms of our impact on policy and practice, no area of work has been more prominent or influential than our research on 'embedding' Skills for Life in vocational programmes**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



### Introduction

This publication is for policy-makers, practitioners and all organisations and individuals engaged in Skills for Life. It aims to provide evidence and ideas which will inform policy development, briefings and presentations, and improve the quality of teaching and learning. The publication draws on and summarises a wide range of research, and is arranged according to the headings that follow in this executive summary.

### Economic development and social inclusion

Despite an increase in many people's literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills, the economic demand for these remains consistently high. Economic returns to improving literacy and numeracy skills are also evident. Looking at a cohort of individuals born in 1970 (the British Cohort Study 1970, or BCS70), NRDC has found that for men and women lacking Level 2 skills at age 26, acquiring higher qualifications by age 34 was associated with significant wage gains.

#### *Trajectories of disadvantage*

As the economic demand for improved skills grows, so do the penalties for poor LLN. New NRDC research sheds light on the trajectories of disadvantage that led BCS70 cohort members to have poor literacy and/or numeracy skills at age 34. Individuals with poor skills were much more likely to have grown up in low income homes and to have parents who lacked qualifications. By age

16, boys and girls who would go on to have Entry 2 literacy at 34 were at least six times more likely than those at Level 1 or higher to leave school with no qualifications. Educational disadvantage carried over into the workplace, with men at Entry 2 literacy suffering four times the unemployment by age 34, being half as likely ever to have been promoted and less than half as likely to have received any workplace training. A skills-based digital divide is apparent, with men and women at Entry 2 being roughly three times less likely to use a computer or have internet access at home.

#### *Achievement*

Achievement rates in the Further Education (FE) system have increased for all ethnic groups in the last three years, but there continue to be persistent gaps between the success rates of Minority Ethnic (ME) learners and white learners. ME young people are also less likely to see benefits from work-based learning (WBL) – only 48% of those completing WBL training find jobs, compared to 72% of white young people. While Muslims as a group are less qualified than others, young Muslims are more likely than non-Muslims to be in education. This is true of females as well as males.

Research on priority groups and vulnerable learners finds both challenges and reasons for optimism. Education in young offender settings tends to be worksheet based and de-

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contextualised, but when improvements are made to provision, engagement and motivation increase. Despite significant barriers, literacy and numeracy classes in young offender settings do improve skills. Looking at so-called 'hard to reach' learners, we find that if we get provision right and reach out to learners as individuals with complex needs, while they remain hard to reach, they are willing to engage.

### **Persistence, progression and achievement**

#### *Persistence*

Persistence is retention turned inside out. Such a learner-centred focus takes account of the complexities of adult learners' lives, and recognises that individuals who appear to be dropping out may only be dipping out, and may engage in self-directed study before returning to formal provision when they are able.

#### *Progression*

New evidence suggests that Skills for Life is increasing progression as well, perhaps by as much as 30% for the BCS70 cohort. Other evidence indicates that socio-economic constraints may play less of a role in adult progression than previously believed, and that attitudinal barriers may be more important.

There appear to be no typical pathways of progression: many adults go straight from having no qualifications to Level 2, while many others at Level 1 take additional qualifications at the same level before moving to Level 2. Fewer learners than we would hope move from learning aims that do not count towards Skills for Life targets to those that do: of 1.3 million learners who first enrolled on 'non-counting' aims only between 2000-1 and 2004-5, 13% went on to enrol on 'counting' aims. But we should not forget that these figures do not include progression to vocational qualifications.

#### *Enrolment and achievement*

Skills for Life has increased participation: for white learners, the numbers more than tripled over the five year period from 599,352 to 1,465,219; black learners more than doubled from 87,933 in 2000-1 to 189,853 in 2004-5; for Asian learners the numbers did not quite double, from 101,538 to 193,203 and for Chinese learners the number rose by just over two thirds, from 16,445 to 28,223.

Over the same period, enrolments in all Skills for Life provision more than doubled, while achievements trebled. Looking only at aims that counted towards Skills for Life targets, enrolments rose from 750,000 to 1.1 million, and achievements rose from 240,000 to more than 400,000. In all five years, achievements were highest at Level 1. Over the last three years of that period, workplace learning enrolments increased forty-fold, and achievements eighty-fold.

At the same time, there remain challenges in the way of translating an encouraging increase in enrolments into an equivalent increase in achievements. Some of those adults we need to reach out to and support back into learning are only likely to respond to provision that is innovative and understanding of their needs. And whilst the improvement in workplace engagement and achievement is highly encouraging, there is still plenty of work to do to encourage ever larger proportions of the workforce to engage in and stick with their learning. The recent employers 'Pledge' to supporting Skills for Life will help, and union learning representatives will continue to be pivotal to increasing participation.

### **Employability, employees and engaging employers**

An ongoing NRDC study into workplace learning shows that workplace changes are increasing the

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need for LLN skills. Learning at work is particularly valuable to individuals who have had negative experiences of school. For learners joining workplace learning, the most common expectations were learning new skills, doing their job better, improving their chances of getting a job, and improving their chances of promotion. Following their training, more than expected found their ability to do the current job had improved, in many cases because of increased self-confidence. Nearly 80% said learning at work had changed their attitude to training and education.

Workplace learning reaches learners which other provision often misses out. This applies to men and older learners. Almost two-thirds of our sample were men, and the average age was just over 40. Almost all were in permanent full-time employment and the average time spent with current employers was almost eight years.

We have also found that many ESOL learners regard the workplace as an important site of learning, both formal and informal. For others, however, work is a barrier to learning, because it leaves no time for education and/or because little or no English is spoken on the job.

Analysis of Apprenticeships suggests a need for a context-sensitive mix of frontloaded, integrated and discrete LLN provision. Learner commitment to LLN tends to mirror that of their employers; the commitment of employers and the whole organisation is therefore essential.

## Teaching and learning

### *Family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN)*

FLLN provision successfully reaches parents and children that other approaches might miss, and can help to reverse trajectories of disadvantage. A new NRDC handbook offers guidance to support effective

and inclusive practices which are essential to success. The guidance builds on our study of FLLN programmes around the globe, which found evidence of improved outcomes for adults and children. It also highlighted the need for more robust research which is now being taken forward by NRDC for QIA.

### *ILPs in ESOL*

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) put learners and their needs at the centre of practice and are thus a very effective tool. In ESOL, however, teachers have questioned whether ILPs are appropriate at lower levels, particularly Entry 1 and Entry 2. The issues here are unpacked in our forthcoming report.

### *ESOL and literacy*

One of the key challenges in Skills for Life is the placement of bilingual and multilingual learners on the right programmes for them, particularly at Entry 3 and Level 1. NRDC research finds a clear need to open boundaries between ESOL and literacy, and for more professional development. Most literacy and ESOL teachers belong to one tradition or another, but we now need teachers who are confident in both.

### *Formative assessment*

Formative assessment is increasingly thought of as integral to all good Skills for Life teaching and learning practice. Building on research in schools, new NRDC research shows how formative assessment can promote learning by encouraging a positive interaction between teachers and learners, and by providing learners with ongoing and detailed feedback on their progress.

### *Literacy, learning and health*

Health is a topic of particular interest to many ESOL learners, who sometimes struggle to navigate the British medical system. This is also true of some literacy learners, who report struggling with 'medical-ese', complex forms and →

**Formative assessment is increasingly thought of as integral to all good Skills for Life teaching and learning practice**

other aspects of healthcare. In our study of literacy, language and health, learners explain the various strategies they adopted to cope with communication challenges, and reveal how keen they are to see health issues in the curriculum.

#### *Skills and social practices*

While there appears to be increasing agreement over the potential importance of health in LLN education, there is a sometimes heated debate over which model LLN should be based on: skills or social practices? NRDC research strongly suggests that this is not a matter of 'either/or': skills-based and social practice-based models can and should complement one another.

#### **Numeracy**

The evidence is clear: numeracy is of central importance to the economic and social well-being of adults. Among teenagers, a review of the achievement levels over the last four decades shows some improvements in numeracy/maths, but worrying stagnation in other areas. For younger children, recent research finds more positive news: between ages 7 and 11, socio-economic status may have less influence on maths scores than on literacy, and low income high achievers appeared to improve more than high achievers in high income families.

Looking at numeracy provision and Skills for Life, enrolments rose by 89% between 2000-1 and 2004-5, with achievements nearly trebling. These are encouraging results. However, if numeracy achievements are to rise in line with government targets, motivation and engagement will have to increase. Some factors affecting participation and persistence in numeracy may differ from those affecting literacy and ESOL. Embedding may help to improve engagement, as could a more fully qualified numeracy workforce. Good teaching and

learning lie at the heart of successful maths and numeracy provision, and, encouragingly, younger numeracy teachers are markedly better qualified than their older peers.

#### **The Skills for Life teaching workforce**

The success of Skills for Life, and efforts to meet the targets laid out in World Class Skills, critically depend on a highly qualified, professional workforce. There were an estimated 18,800 individuals teaching Skills for Life in 2004-5. ESOL accounted for the highest number of teachers but literacy contributed the highest volume of teaching, with numeracy coming third in both categories. Qualification levels rose sharply between 2000-1 and 2005-6, from 13% fully qualified with both the target qualifications in the former year to 35% in the latter. While 74% of ESOL teachers taught ESOL only, 64% of literacy teachers and 66% of numeracy teachers taught more than one subject. This has implications for the quality of provision, as Skills for Life staff who taught two or more subjects were less likely to be fully qualified in any one subject than those who taught only one.

#### **Teachers, learners and stakeholders: experiences of Skills for Life**

More highly qualified teachers tended to have a higher opinion of Skills for Life, as did those who engaged in more professional development. Overall, teachers felt that Skills for Life was a very valuable initiative, one from which learners had benefited hugely. However, some teachers were worried that the need to meet targets was negatively affecting provision for the most vulnerable learners. 90% of learners said they were satisfied with their experience of Skills for Life. In research on what learners did after their courses, we found that 74% were either progressing in some way or continuing in learning.

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# → POLICY BACKGROUND

Skills for Life has represented an unprecedented investment in adult learning, aimed at increasing social inclusion and encouraging economic development on individual and national levels. The publication of *World Class Skills*, in July 2007, building on the Leitch Review of Skills (2006), marks the start of implementing a major drive to raise skills levels and support the UK economy to 2020. The policy focus on improving adult literacy, language and numeracy skills has never been stronger. Skills for Life works across all government departments and brings together all the UK strategies to share and discuss policy goals.

If 95% of England's adult population is to have at least Level 1 literacy and Entry 3 numeracy by 2020 and 90% of adults are to be qualified to at least to Level 2, the pace of skills improvement will have to increase. Key to achieving this improvement will be a focus on the needs of individuals and businesses, through workplace learning, greater emphasis on numeracy, a more qualified teaching workforce and a qualifications system that puts learners' complex lives at its heart. The cost of not meeting the Leitch targets are great, but so are the rewards of achievement: by bringing an additional 3.5 million adults up to Level 2 over the next 15 years, the Government could raise employment by an estimated 375,000 to 425,000, yielding gains to the economy of more than £3 billion per year.

The rewards for Skills for Life are not just economic, and there is a welcome policy emphasis on the ways in which adult learning contributes to social justice and stronger communities, and how learning plays a central role not just in economic attainment but in self-fulfillment, for learners at

all levels. Skills for Life is a central driver of these economic and social changes, but does not by any means stand alone on the policy landscape. The Education and Skills Bill will contribute to increased overall levels of qualifications in LLN by ensuring that more young people participate in post-16 learning. And by introducing legislation that gives individuals a right to free basic and intermediate skills development in literacy and numeracy, and to achieving their first full Level 2, the Bill supports the efforts of adults to improve their lives through learning.

Learners in all subjects deserve a professional workforce, just as all LLN teachers deserve the status and respect that comes with the professionalisation of the sector. New qualification requirements in the adult learning sector will further the rapid progress in this area, progress which is documented in NRDC research.

Through our development and research work in this and other areas, NRDC seeks to support all policy initiatives that further adult learning, LLN, skills and practices, economic well-being and social inclusion. By generating research knowledge and engaging in essential development work to convert that knowledge into practice, NRDC is playing a central role in the still-unfolding success of Skills for Life and the government's broader skills agenda.

NRDC works with QIA to feed emerging research findings into the QIA drive for evidence-based innovation in pursuit of quality improvement.





## FIVE YEARS ON NRDC 2006-7



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

As the labour market demand for literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills grows, NRDC is developing a clearer, more nuanced picture of the economic value of those skills and of the trajectories of disadvantage that lead to poor skills in adulthood. Adults with poor literacy and numeracy tend to have encountered more economic and educational barriers as children than their peers, and those barriers tend to multiply over time. Destinies are not pre-ordained, however, and new evidence indicates that adult learning in general and Skills for Life in particular can and do improve economic outcomes and promote social inclusion.

These gains do not appear to be evenly shared, however. Despite rising Further Education achievement rates for all ethnic groups over the last three years, there continue to be persistent gaps between the success rates of white learners and many Minority Ethnic (ME) groups, as well as marked differences in the economic returns to work-based learning, with ME groups seeing fewer employment gains.

The focus on economic development and social inclusion means improving provision for priority groups such as jobseekers and young offenders. The evidence is clear that the former group need LLN skills to gain and retain employment, and that the latter benefit from contextualised and embedded learning. Learners such as these are often hard to reach, but they are willing to engage if provision meets their needs and responds to them as individuals.

### The labour market value of basic skills

There is a substantial body of evidence on the labour market value of literacy and numeracy skills. However, much of this evidence has been based on data from the UK labour market in the 1990s. Since then, the economy and the supply of literacy and numeracy skills themselves have changed significantly. Any arguments about the economic value of LLN skills needs to be based on the current value of those skills in the labour market.

Evidence from the 1990s showed that the labour market value of literacy and numeracy skills was higher in the UK than in many of our competitor countries. Such a high 'price' for basic skills suggests a deficiency in supply, consistent with the Leitch Review's conclusion that the UK's skills base lags well behind those of its economic competitors.

Literacy and numeracy skills retained their high value in the UK labour market between 1995-2004, despite numerous policy attempts to increase the supply of these skills during this period. In other words, although the population has become more skilled, in terms of literacy, the value of both literacy and numeracy remained high because the demand for such skills remained strong. We also find that having better basic skills improves a worker's chances of being in employment. Specifically, for women, higher levels of literacy are associated with a higher probability of being in employment, whilst men with higher levels of numeracy have significantly higher employment rates.

Our findings reveal that literacy and numeracy skills are still very much valued in today's UK labour market. Even if there have been substantial gains in the skills of the UK workforce over the last decade, it appears this has not been sufficient to reduce the price paid for these skills by employers. These results imply that continued efforts to improve the skills of the UK workforce are needed, and that investment in initiatives that genuinely improve individuals' basic skills are likely to yield relatively high wage (and potentially employment) returns.

### Trajectories of disadvantage

As the economic demand for basic skills grows, so do the penalties for poor LLN. Earlier NRDC analysis of the British Cohort Study 1970 (BCS70) demonstrated strong relationships between poor literacy and numeracy skills and a number of disadvantages in adulthood, with our research finding particularly severe problems concentrated at Entry 2 and below.

NRDC has now conducted further analysis on the experiences of individuals from the BCS70 who had

Entry 2 literacy and/or numeracy at the age of 34. By looking retrospectively at these individuals' lives – i.e. starting with their outcomes at age 34, then looking back at their experiences at ages 5, 10, 16, 26 and 30 – we are able to gain a richer understanding of the trajectories of disadvantage that lead to poor literacy and numeracy at age 34. The picture that emerges is daunting, with stumbling blocks appearing early and accumulating steadily as individuals age.

### Childhood and school years

In childhood, we found strong evidence of disadvantaged home lives, both educationally and economically. 55% of individuals with Entry 2 had grown up in low income families, compared with 32% of individuals at Level 1 or higher. 76% of mothers and 71% of fathers of individuals with Entry 2 literacy at age 34 had no qualifications, compared with 50% of mothers and 42% of fathers of cohort members with Level 1 or higher. 40% of adults with Level 1 or higher literacy had been read to as a child, that compares with 31% of those at Entry 3 and 22% of those at Entry 2.

Such early disadvantages continued throughout the school years. Men and women with Entry 2 literacy were at least six times more likely than those at Level 1 or higher to gain no qualifications from school. By age 16, males and females who would go on to have Entry Level skills at age 34 were four times more likely than those with Level 1 or higher skills to hold negative views on the value of education for future employment opportunities and on their own chances of success.

### Working life

After school, these educational disadvantages carried over into employment. Men with Entry 2 literacy averaged nearly two years unemployment by age 34, twice that of men with Entry 3 literacy and four times that of men with Level 1 or higher. By age 34, only 12% of men and 10% of women with Entry 2 literacy had received work-related training, compared with 32% of men and 21% women with Level 1 or higher. Only 27% of men and 32% of women with Entry 2 literacy had ever been promoted, compared with 54% of men and 51% of women with Level 1 or higher.

### Digital divide?

Of particular concern was the exclusion of adults with the poorest skills, particularly literacy, from the digital revolution. In comparison with those at Level 1 or higher, far more men and women with Entry 2 skills were without a computer (48% to 16% for men, 40% to 17% for women) or access to the internet at home (62% to 19% men, 62% to 23% women).

### *Families and relationships*

In terms of relationships and family life, men at Entry 2 had an earlier average age for becoming a father, but they were also less likely to have had a child by age 34 than those with Level 1 or higher skills. Women at Entry 2 were nearly four times more likely than women at Level 1 or higher to have had four or more children by age 34 (11% to 3%). They were also twice as likely to have been a teenage mother (18% to 8%).

For the cohort members who had children by the age of 34, there was evidence of a generational transfer of disadvantage, but also some positive news. Parents with Entry 2 skills were no less likely than their peers to help their children learn to recognise numbers, the alphabet, shapes or colours. This is encouraging. However, their children had fewer books in the home and were less likely to read for enjoyment.

### **Economic returns to improved basic skills**

Given the markedly worse labour market outcomes for individuals with poor literacy and numeracy skills, it is important to determine whether Skills for Life qualifications generate economic returns. That is, do they improve individuals' wages and employability? This question has become pressing in the light of conflicting evidence on the economic returns to qualifications at Level 2 and below, particularly when those qualifications are vocational. On vocational qualifications, for example, recent research by the Centre for the Economics of Education (CEE) and NRDC shows evidence of a positive wage effect for Level 2 qualifications when acquired between the ages of 26 and 34.

### **LLN and jobseekers**

Such findings are important, particularly when placed in the context of an NRDC review of the changing role of literacy, language and numeracy in programmes for jobseekers since the 1970s. During this period there has been a succession of government initiatives to support and train the unemployed. Through these,

the role of LLN role has fluctuated. In the current climate a general view of basic skills as essential human capital, and the introduction of Skills for Life in particular, has led to the increasing prominence of LLN. Analysing what has and has not worked over the last four decades, we found that what was most effective were individual solutions, supportive relationships with personal advisers, and subsidised jobs. However, it is also clear that individuals who lack the LLN skills required by their new jobs soon find themselves unemployed again. Jobs are essential, but so is support and training in LLN.

### **Minority Ethnic (ME) learners**

Minority Ethnic (ME) learners are amongst the priority groups for the government. The reasons for this are clear. ME individuals suffer from multiple economic disadvantages, including lower rates of employment. However, they are comparatively more likely than their white peers to take advantage of Further Education (FE). Achievements rates in the FE system are rising and have increased for every ethnic category over the past three years. However – and here is a cause for serious concern – there remain persistent gaps between the success rates of many ME groups and white learners. Also, ME learners are more likely to drop out of education between ages 16–18 than at 19+, in contrast to white learners.

There is good news with regard to participation. Recent evidence reveals substantial increases in the numbers of Black heritage learners participating in full Level 2 courses in 2005–6 compared with 2004–5. However, ME learners report feeling less satisfied with teachers than white learners. This may be related to the ethnic composition of the teaching workforce: only about 7% of FE staff are from minority ethnic groups, and these groups are not promoted as regularly as their white peers. Of 389 FE colleges, only 147 have ethnic minority governors.

Improving literacy, language and numeracy for employability is at the heart of Skills for Life and the →

**Women at Entry 2 were nearly four times more likely than women at Level 1 or higher to have had four or more children by age 34**

World Class Skills agenda, and here we found positive and negative news.

Within FE there are some areas of learning where ME achievement rates are particularly encouraging. Indian and Chinese heritage learners typically have the highest rates of success, but success is not confined to these groups. For example, in health, public services and care, Bangladeshi heritage learners are succeeding at rates of 80%. In construction, planning and the built environment, Pakistani heritage learners are succeeding at 67% - the same as Indian heritage learners. Pakistani and Chinese heritage learners have comparable success rates, 77%, in retail and commercial enterprise.

Within apprenticeships there are some areas in which ME learners do better than white learners. In addition, in some areas ME groups who generally perform less well overall outperform other groups, both ME and white. However – and it is a big ‘however’ – ME groups suffer lower employment returns. During a review of the apprenticeship programme it was found that 48% of ME young people completing WBL training found jobs; the comparable figure for young white people was 72%. Figures like these will get in the way of incentives for ME young people to enrol on apprenticeship and WBL courses.

It is a policy priority to provide adequate transitions between apprenticeships and other employment opportunities. Perhaps incentives to colleges and workplaces could be provided to connect successful ME apprenticeship completers with appropriate job placements.

The availability of tailored and supportive transitions was also found to be essential in the context of moving from the community to an FE college. ME learners gave evidence of how forbidding a large college could seem without the support of a mentor or community leader who knew the ropes, and could help prepare learners for the cultural and pedagogic demands that characterise FE. As in so many areas within the learning and skills sector – workplace learning, outreach provision, adult and community learning - the role of mentor, broker or learner representative is indispensable to the process of engaging learners in learning environments that might otherwise seem dauntingly unfamiliar.

### **Muslim learners**

NRDC research on the engagement of Muslim learners in Skills for Life provision for the Experience Corps and DIUS has found that Muslims as a group appear to perform less well than other faith groups in

terms of educational achievement. A lack of acknowledgement of overseas qualifications may contribute to this result. A higher proportion of Muslims, especially Muslim women, possess no qualifications.

While the general picture is that Muslims are less qualified than members of other faith groups, there are some important positives. It is probable that the pattern of educational attainment will change: younger Muslims are markedly more engaged in learning than young members of other religions, which will lead to higher levels of educational attainment in the future. Although less qualified (by UK standards) than other faith groups, Muslims, and women in particular, are more engaged in education overall.

### **Homeless people**

One of the government’s key priority groups is homeless people. NRDC research into the learning experiences of homeless learners indicates that even when learners display an antipathy to formal learning situations, they can benefit greatly from Skills for Life provision. However, this provision must be finely attuned to their needs and circumstances. If this is the case, we find that homeless learners, while still hard to reach, are willing to engage if provision reaches out to them, meets their needs and responds to them as individuals.

Literacy practices that appear most motivating are those where homeless people actively take part in key decisions about what they are doing, why they are doing it and the language in which this should all be expressed. This process is not easily replicated in traditional classroom settings. Our research also shows that an individualised, flexible, holistic approach is needed when working with vulnerable adults, including the homeless. This will often necessitate one-to-one and small group work, followed, where possible, by referral to more mainstream opportunities.

### **Young offenders**

Young offenders are another government priority group and are the focus of much recent NRDC research. Recent surveys in the UK have found that more than half of young offenders in custodial settings or supervised in the community are below Level 1 in literacy, with a similar number being below Level 1 in numeracy. While there is a clear imperative to improve skill levels, our research reveals a strong tension between young offenders’ need for skills and their tendency to have negative views of education, often seeing it as boring, irrelevant, and a step backwards



from a goal that many of them do profess: getting a job.

Given this emphasis on getting a job in the near future, embedding offers clear opportunities. And NRDC has clear evidence on how embedding literacy and numeracy in vocational programmes in secure settings improves motivation, retention and achievement. However, embedding is not always an option in custodial settings, where there is currently not enough vocational provision available. When a front-end delivery model of embedding is used, learners may not see the connection between early literacy and numeracy provision and the vocational training to come.

One question we investigated was whether the custodial setting was so challenging as to impose severe limits on the extent and quality of learning. The answer was encouraging. When lessons became more contextualized – woven around material of direct interest to learners and drawn from their own experience – many students became more engaged. Formal education can function well in custody; the key is getting the content right.

Despite the tensions inherent in young offender settings, we found that literacy and numeracy classes did improve skills. Assessment of 147 students upon entry to provision and then again 20 weeks later showed significant improvement. However, our findings on motivation and engagement were mixed. When NRDC researchers asked students how they would feel about taking literacy or numeracy courses in the future, only a third (37% for literacy, 38% for numeracy) said they would be happy to do so.

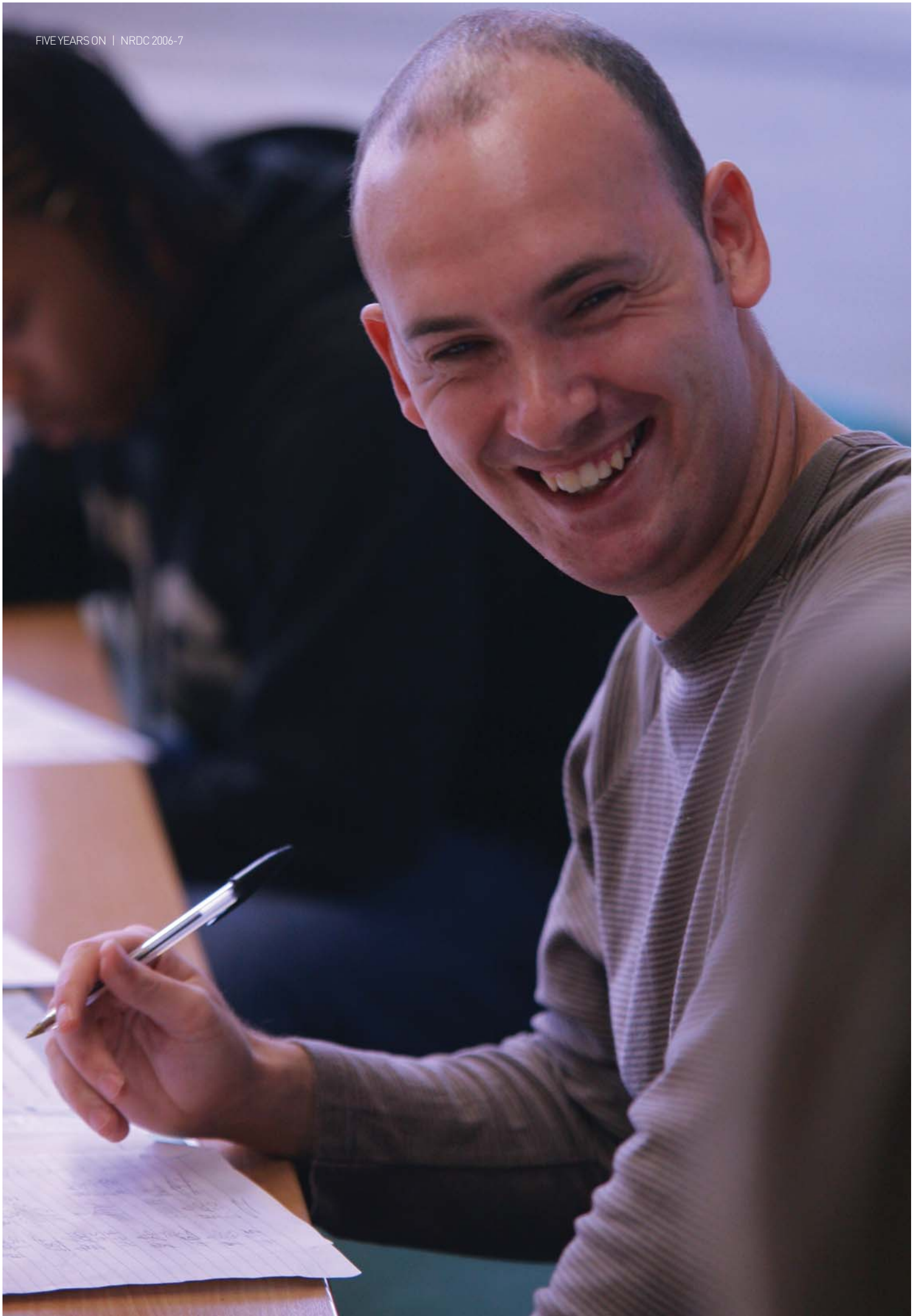
### **Good practice toolkit for young offender settings**

In partnership with the CfBT Education Trust and working with practitioners at HMYOI Huntercombe, NRDC has developed a toolkit offering practical guidance for practitioners and managers who work with young people in secure settings. The toolkit includes a set of resources, including details on the policies, principles and materials that underlie good practice. There is a summary of good teaching and learning practice in YOIs – practically the only example of its kind – and guidance on knowing your learners and capturing young people’s voices. There is also a detailed account of how to develop a contextualized literacy and numeracy curriculum within an existing education timetable. There are two key elements: first, building into the curriculum a series of themes which reflect the interests of learners, allowing not only for themed material but also themed displays and discussions. And, second, the process of developing a thematic curriculum involved learners and teachers throughout – it was a highly participative process.

### **Other learners at risk of social exclusion**

Many vulnerable learners have had negative previous experiences of education and authority figures. As adults, they tend to experience a range of barriers to learning, including physical, mental, social and emotional constraints. Social circumstances mean that many lead turbulent and unpredictable lives. Many vulnerable learners see themselves as living outside the world of ‘normality’. However, these same respondents shared the many of the aspirations associated with ‘normal’ lives: wanting a safe settled life; a good home; good family relationships; a good job and good health. With the right combination of commitment, experience and knowledge, Skills for Life can help them achieve these aims.

**Despite the tensions inherent in young offender settings, we found that literacy and numeracy classes did improve skills**





**FIVE YEARS ON  
NRDC 2006-7**

## → PERSISTENCE, PROGRESSION AND ACHIEVEMENT

There are no simple answers to the question of why some adult learners persist with their studies while others drop out, sometimes to return later or perhaps never to return at all. Even the best teachers will find that some of their students leave their course early. Sometimes these individuals never return to formal learning. Often, however, research shows that they are merely dipping out rather than dropping out. One of the challenges we are now investigating is how to help keep those learners 'warm' until they are ready to dip in again. That requires more flexibility from providers, and more support for learners who are outside any formal learning environment. In a word, the system must become more demand-led.

Progression is central to Skills for Life, and if the targets established in the Leitch Review and World Class Skills are to be achieved, progression rates will need to rise, especially in numeracy and for priority groups. Recent NRDC research has shown that the introduction of Skills for Life coincides with an increase in progression for adults with low qualification levels. Research also suggests that attitudinal barriers may be more important in explaining non-progression than socio-economic constraints.

Achievement rates have also risen under Skills for Life. This is not only because many more people are now participating; individuals are now significantly more likely to achieve their learning aims with workplace learning playing an increasingly important role.

## Persistence

NRDC is engaged in a two-year project for QIA on motivating learners to persist and achieve. Our starting point is a conviction that to understand persistence (an under-researched subject in the UK), it is essential that it is distinguished from retention. Whereas retention is a provider-centred concept, persistence puts the learner at the centre of the equation - turning retention inside out. This helps illuminate the complex nature of persistence. Whereas a provider-centred focus might see a non-continuing learner as dropping out, a learner-centred focus acknowledges that learners may merely be 'dipping out' for a while, generally because of other responsibilities such as family and work. Research shows that breaks in attendance do not necessarily equate to dropping out altogether. Inconsistent does not necessarily mean non-persistent. So, while from a provider's standpoint a learner may appear to be irregularly engaged in learning, from a learner's perspective periods of formal provision sandwiched by breaks of self-directed study or just meeting the demands of life may be natural and rational elements in a lifelong learning journey. A system that seeks to facilitate persistence and progression needs to be able to accommodate such an 'irregular' or 'inconsistent' journey.

Along that journey, learners may meet obstacles which we can classify as situational, institutional or dispositional. Situational barriers encompass the problems of day-to-day life that prevent continuity in study. Institutional barriers are those related to the rules and procedures of the organisation where learning is taking place, or the restrictions relating to the system of provision itself. Dispositional barriers concern learners' attitudes to learning. It is the dispositional barriers that most likely inhibit learner persistence and it is these same barriers that are least well understood by practitioners.

Despite the complex combination of barriers to persistence, or perhaps because of it, there appear to

be few differences in the demographic characteristics of adults who persist in their studies and those who do not. However, non-traditional learners – including those who are 'hard to reach' – appear to be the least likely to persist. For these learners, engagement with learning has to occur at the 'right time', with the emphasis on small steps, such as an improvement in self-confidence, rather than a focus on qualifications. And they will require support from peers and mentors in any transition from one setting to another.

Support and encouragement from people in one's social network can have a particularly strong impact on learners. Promoting learner satisfaction and achievement can also aid persistence, particularly in the case of vulnerable learners. Other strategies for encouraging persistence include the setting and revisiting of realistic but challenging goals, effective pedagogy, a strongly supportive organisational culture, and professional development for practitioners that supports persistence.

## Progression

Recent NRDC research investigates the progression rates of a cohort of adults born in 1970 (the British Cohort Study 1970, or BCS70), paying particular attention to those who had not attained Level 2 qualifications by 1996, when they were 26 years old.

The study initially looked at this group's rate of progression from 1996-2000 – that is, before the launch of Skills for Life. The researchers then compared progression rates from this four-year period with rates for the same group between 2000 and 2004, during most of which time Skills for Life was in existence.

Looking at the period 1996-2000, the study found what could be called a 'rule of 10%': among adults with no qualifications, or qualifications at Levels 1, 2 or 3, approximately 10% of each group progressed to a higher qualification in this period. Looking at the next four years of this same cohort's lives, we found that,

**Research shows that breaks in attendance do not necessarily equate to dropping out altogether, and that inconsistent does not necessarily mean non-persistent**

for adults with qualifications at Level 1 or below, progression to a higher level rose to 13%. This three-percentage-point gain, compared with 1996-2000, represents an increase of approximately 30% in the likelihood of progressing.

The sum total of qualifications achieved (including those not leading to a progression) also increased. Among members of this cohort with qualifications below Level 3 in 1996, a total of 592 qualifications were achieved between the ages of 26 and 30. However, between the ages of 30 and 34, individuals in this cohort with below Level 3 qualifications achieved 810 qualifications – an increase of 34%.

At this stage, it is too early to say whether Skills for Life has increased progression, although the signs are certainly encouraging. The introduction of Skills for Life does coincide with a marked increase in progression for adults with low qualification levels. However, other factors may have played a role in explaining the rise. Like persistence, progression is still an under-researched field, calling for further investigation.

### Barriers to progression

Research at the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning, one of NRDC's partner organisations, has recently found evidence suggesting that attitudinal barriers may be more important in explaining non-progression than socio-economic constraints. Socio-economic constraints in adulthood may not be as educationally significant as they are in childhood. Analysis of recent research using the Millennium Cohort Study has found that even as early as age 3 there are large, socio-economically related gaps in cognition, with vocabulary tests revealing that the 3-year-old sons and daughters of graduates were already 10 months ahead of children of the least educated parents. At age 7, this significant performance gap persists, with high socio-economic status (SES) groups scoring 31 percentage points higher on tests than those from low SES groups. In

adulthood, while gaps remain, they are much smaller than in childhood. In terms of progression to Level 2, analysis of the National Child Development Study (NCDS) cohort, born in 1958, found that adults from high SES groups were still more likely to do better than those from low SES groups, but the high SES groups out-performed the low SES groups by only nine percentage points. While this remains a significant gap, it is far smaller than the gap at age 7, suggesting that socio-economic factors are less significant for adult learners than previously believed. This is encouraging.

Among adults, there were age-related differences in predictors of progression. While factors from childhood played a key role in predicting the NCDS cohort's progression to Level 2 or above between ages 23–33, these factors played less of a role between ages 33–42. For example, whereas parental expectations regarding schooling during childhood was a key factor in predicting attainment of Level 2 or above between ages 23–33, it was not a significant factor in predicting attainment between ages 33–42.

This suggests that as adults get older, their past – and its influence – recedes in importance. For those aged 33–42, the key predictors of achievement were not factors experienced as a child, but activities engaged in as an adult – and those included enrolment on adult education courses not leading to qualifications. This may indicate that while positive learning experiences and childhood attainment are key elements in predicting successful progression, adult experiences and attitudes grow progressively more important.

### Progression and Skills for Life targets

Because progression is so central to Skills for Life targets and the World Class Skills agenda, policy-makers are paying greater attention to progression from courses which do not count towards Skills for Life targets to those which do. NRDC has recently engaged in qualitative and quantitative analysis of this issue. →

**While positive learning experiences and childhood attainment are key elements in predicting successful progression, adult experiences and attitudes grow progressively more important**

The results are intriguing, and highlight the tremendous challenges faced by Skills for Life. Between August 2000 and June 2005, more than 3 million individuals enrolled on Adult Literacy, Language or Numeracy courses. Of this number, 44% (more than 1.3 million) initially enrolled with 'non-counting' aims only – i.e. enrolled on courses that did not count towards Skills for Life targets. This group was the focus of our study.

Of the 1.3 million individuals who enrolled with non-counting aims between August 2000 and June 2005, 37% were enrolled on literacy courses, 42% on ESOL, 9% on Numeracy, and 11% on literacy and numeracy. A significant majority (61%) enrolled at Level 1, with 24% enrolling at Entry Level and 2% at Level 2. The most popular subject and level combinations were Literacy Level 1 (27% of all non-counting aims) and ESOL Level 1 (29%).

176,000 - 13% - went on to enrol on a course that would count towards the target, indicating that progression from non-counting to counting provision is low. This is a worrying statistic. But we should not forget how far is the distance from many non-counting learning aims – including those at pre-Entry level – to Levels 1 and 2; nor that we have learned a lot in the recent past about how better to support progression, and the results of these improvements will not be evident in our research. Perhaps most importantly, the figure of 13% is an average; we also have evidence from some providers who are ahead of the field and whose progression rates are significantly higher. There are plenty of examples of good practice we can turn to in an effort to increase rates across the board.

We were also able to analyse how long it tended to take individuals to progress from non-counting to counting provision. Here too we found surprising evidence. While the mean length of time taken to progress from non-counting to counting provision was 7.5 months, by far the most common length of time was one month.

Less surprisingly, the second most common length of time was one year. Beyond 24 months, there was very little progression. We urgently need to find out why this is so. How far does this reflect inadequacies in provision, progression pathways, and support for learners? If many learners will not stay in formal learning for more than 24 months, what more can we do to better support their learning progress during the period when they are able to engage?

### **Achievement**

NRDC analysis of Learning and Skills Council (LSC) data on adult literacy, language and numeracy learners has given us a good picture of Skills for Life enrolment and achievement levels<sup>2</sup>.

Between 2000/01 and 2004/05, enrolments in Skills for Life provision more than doubled, rising from roughly 1 million to nearly 2.2 million. The rise was in the form of a smooth gradient, with enrolments increasing by about the same proportion each year. Over the same period, learning aims completed (but not necessarily achieved) rose from roughly 700,000 in 2000/01 to more than 1.5 million in 2004/05. Achievements increased from roughly 440,000 to nearly 1.3 million.

There are two interesting facts to take from this data. First, even as enrolments soared, completions as a percentage of enrolments held steady, and in fact rose slightly from 71% in 2000/01 to 73% in 2004/05. The significant increase in participation over this half-decade did not lead to a higher proportion of learners dropping out, as some might have expected it to. More remarkably, the percentage of enrolments that led to achievements soared from 42% in 2000/01 to 59% in 2004/05. As a percentage of completion rates, achievement rates rose even more sharply, nearly quadrupling from 21% in 2000/01 to 81% on 2004/05. Thus – and this is of great importance – despite far more learners participating, individuals became significantly more likely to achieve their learning aims.

**There are plenty of examples of good practice we can turn to in an effort to increase progression rates across the board**

### Subject specialisms

The considerable increase in enrolments, completions and achievements over this period occurred in all three subject areas. However, there was some variation between subjects in the proportion of achievements counting towards the overall total. Looking first of all at achievements (ie counting and non-counting), literacy accounted for between 38% and 43% of total achievements in every year. ESOL came second in each year, accounting for between 32% and 37%. Numeracy hovered between 25% and 30%.

When only counting provision is taken into account, however, literacy and numeracy each made up more than 35% of the total achievements in every year. ESOL on the other hand rose from 20% in 2000/01 to nearly 30% in 2002/03, but then plummeted to roughly 10% of total counting achievements in 2004/05. This is indicative of the much higher proportion of non-counting ESOL achievements.

### Levels of attainment

In each of the five years we looked at, achievements were highest not at Level 2, which is the primary focus of the government's skills agenda, but at Level 1. Achievements were lowest at Entry Level at the start of the five-year period, but Entry Level figures increased substantially in 2002/03, overtaking the number of achievements at Level 2<sup>3</sup>. From this point onward, Level 2 achievements represented the lowest number each year. The proportion of the total made up by Level 2 achievements fell between 2000/01 and 2002/03, and remained steady from then on at 17% of all achievements.

### Workplace learning

One of the most notable changes over this five-year period occurred in workplace learning. In 2002/03 when the LSC began to keep records, there were fewer than 9,000 WBL enrolments and barely more than 800 achievements. By 2004/05 these figures had risen to nearly 340,000 enrolments and 44,000

achievements - a nearly 40-fold increase in enrolments and an 80-fold increase in achievements. These are impressive figures. At the same time the recent high enrolment and low achievement figures raise questions about recruitment: how far is provision for the massively increased number of enrolled learners matching either their needs or the needs of employers?

Within these figures there is a significant trend in relation to gender: after accounting for only 40% of WBL achievements in 2002/03, female attainments rose steadily over the next three years, hitting 50% in 2004/05.

### Learners' ages

During the five-year period we analysed, 16-19-year-olds made up over 60% of enrolments counting towards the government target, dropping slightly from 69% in 2000/01 to 64% in 2004/05. This age group also made up over half of all achievements during this period (61% overall in 2000/01, falling to 55% in 2004/05).

### Ethnicity

Our analysis uncovered several interesting findings regarding ethnicity. For example, whereas the English population was 92% white as of 2001, white learners accounted for only 63% of LSC-funded enrolments that year. In contrast, other ethnic groups were over-represented. Whereas 2% of the population was Black, 11% of learning aims applied to Black individuals. Indians made up 2% of the population and 4% of learning aims, whilst Pakistanis made up 1% of the population and 6% of learning aims.

<sup>2</sup> In the following discussion, the figures cited represent learning aims, not individual learners.

<sup>3</sup> Because LSC data sources do not disaggregate information for Entry 1, 2 and 3, we are unable to provide more detailed information about Entry Level enrolments.

**One of the most notable changes over this five-year period occurred in workplace learning**







## **FIVE YEARS ON NRDC 2006-7**

# → EMPLOYABILITY, EMPLOYEES AND ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England (2007), the government's response to the Leitch Review, puts employers at the heart of a demand-driven learning and skills sector, in which Train to Gain and workplace learning are key. In addition to confirming the pivotal role of employers in developing a world-class skills base, Leitch detailed the current skills deficit, pinpointing Level 2 as the minimum level necessary for full economic functioning in society. Of the 11 million people currently without Level 2 qualifications, around 7 million are in work. Those employees need to improve their skills, but most will lack the time or opportunity to engage in learning outside the workplace.

The importance of engaging employers in the skills agenda has therefore never been greater. Union Learning Representatives are playing a key role in this process and it is heartening that an increasing number of companies are involved in Skills for Life training programmes. Benefits reported range from reductions in absenteeism, higher retention rates, improvements in customer satisfaction, and increased productivity resulting in improvements to the bottom line.

**Workplace learning**

A multi-year NRDC investigation into workplace basic skills training (the 'workplace study') shows that workplace changes are increasing the need to develop LLN skills. Our evidence suggests that two key, often interrelated, processes are particularly important in driving up the need for LLN in the workplace. Both the tendency towards the 'flattening out' of management structures and the rising importance of regulations and targets are causing lower-level employees to take on more responsibility. Among other duties, both trends lead to a greater need for report writing and filling in forms such as incident reports.

Our workplace study has found that workplace learning can be particularly valuable to individuals who had negative experiences in compulsory education, and who associate school-based settings such as colleges with failure and stress. For many employees without basic skills, the idea of going to college can be too daunting. Workplace learning offers an alternative. The overriding majority of learners also cited accessibility, convenience and familiarity as other key advantages to learning at work.

When researchers asked these learners what they expected to get out of their course, they found that the most common expectations were: learning new skills (45%), doing their current job better (28%), improving their chances of getting a better job (26%), and improving their chances of getting a promotion (22%).

Following their basic skills courses, more workplace learners than expected found that their ability to do their current job had improved. One-third of those people who felt that they were doing their job better said it was because the course had improved their self-confidence. This provides evidence against arguments that employees in low

skilled jobs do not need basic skills training because that training is not directly relevant to how they do their job.

Looking more fully at employees' expectations and what they actually got out of their course, it is fair to say that in some ways they did not get what they expected, but in others they got more than they had hoped. On the whole, expectations of increased wages, chances of promotion and better jobs were not met. On the other hand, before the course only 12% of people said that they thought taking it would make their job more interesting, whereas afterwards about 25% reported that in fact it had. This is a lesson that human resources departments should take note of.

Nearly 30% said their course had helped them meet new people; 66% said they were more confident at work than before their basic skills training; 59% said they were more confident outside of work and nearly 80% said that workplace learning had changed their attitude to learning and education.

**ESOL in the workplace**

An area of particular interest to policy-makers and employers is ESOL in the workplace. Since 2001, national demand for ESOL courses, and with it government funding, have tripled. While it is exciting and welcome to see such high demand for learning, funding these phenomenal rates of growth is unsustainable. Because much ESOL learning is aimed at improving skills for work, employers are central to future growth in this area of provision, and the government has now embarked on a series of initiatives to engage employers.

NRDC research into learners' attitudes to work shows that many ESOL learners regard the workplace as an important place for the practice and development of their language skills. However, this did not always involve formal learning. Many individuals said that social networks and friendly banter at work were also

**Workplace learning can be particularly valuable to individuals who had negative experiences in compulsory education, and who associate school-based settings such as colleges with failure and stress**

key means of improving their English skills. Some learners were less positive about combining work and learning, saying that the demands of work reduced opportunities for them to join language classes outside the workplace, with knock-on effects on their ability to integrate into the wider community. Others were hampered by the lack of spoken English at work. In both these instances, workplace ESOL provision could contribute to improved skills and greater social cohesion.

### **Train to Gain**

A key target group for Train to Gain is employees in small and medium-sized 'hard to reach' businesses. The need for customised courses delivered in the workplace on a one to one basis or to very small numbers of employees is a resourcing challenge for providers. As increasing amounts of the adult learning budget are channelled through Train to Gain, the evolving role of Skills for Life in this programme will benefit from development and further research.

### **Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeships play an important role in the government's skills agenda. However, the poor success rates of apprenticeships programmes have been of concern since their introduction in 1994. One of the main reasons for these poor results has been the failure of apprentices to complete and achieve the key skills element of their apprenticeship framework. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) has suggested that in many cases the failure to complete key skills was linked to delivery models which provided discrete LLN learning at later stages of the apprenticeship. As a result, the benefits of LLN to vocational learning were not experienced by the apprentices or their employers, and were not seen to be relevant or important. NRDC research into improving LLN provision in Apprenticeships suggests that there is a need for an appropriate mix of front-loaded, integrated and discrete delivery of LLN, depending on the context in which the learner is working. While providers were

clear that the front-loaded models of delivery help learners, in many apprenticeships, the complexity of the job role increases gradually and some tasks requiring more complex LLN skills may not be encountered until some way into the training. One size does not fit all, and front-loading may be useful for some aspects of LLN learning but not for others.

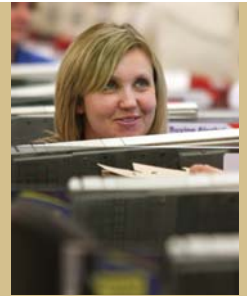
Our research suggests that commitment to LLN may be increased by providing evidence of improved performance in the jobs that young people currently hold, or aspire to later in their career. However, on the programmes we studied, this commitment tended to mirror that of the employer, and the value placed on LLN development was higher when employers emphasised it.

Contextualising LLN was also important, as was the presence of strong champions of LLN who had credibility with their peers in vocational learning or with fellow employers.

National data shows steadily improving success rates in framework completions for both apprentices and advanced apprentices over the last three years. Several providers in our study said that front-loaded delivery models helped apprentices to produce better technical certificates and NVQ assignments and portfolios. All providers said that apprentices were only entered for external assessment when they had built up sufficient confidence and motivation. As a result, the great majority of apprentices passed the test at their first attempt.

**One size does not fit all, and front-loading may be useful for some aspects of LLN learning but not for others**





**FIVE YEARS ON  
NRDC 2006-7**

## → TEACHING AND LEARNING

Skills for Life teaching and learning takes place in a great many different contexts. The evidence demonstrates ways in which we can all work together to improve outcomes for adults through effective and inclusive provision. Family literacy, language and numeracy provision can reach learners that other approaches might miss. Health is a topic of particular interest to many learners who sometimes struggle with 'medical-ese', complex forms, navigating the British medical system and other aspects of healthcare. Formative assessment, encouraging positive interaction between teachers and learners, and providing learners with ongoing and detailed feedback on their progress, are increasingly central to all good Skills for Life teaching and learning practice.

There are also contested areas. One such is Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). They can be a very effective tool in putting learners and their needs at the centre of practice. In ESOL, however, teachers have questioned whether ILPs are appropriate at lower levels, particularly Entry 1 and Entry 2. Another is the placement of bilingual and multilingual learners on the right programmes - ESOL or literacy. Most literacy and ESOL teachers belong to one tradition or another, but we now need teachers who are confident in both. There is also debate over whether we should be following a skills or social practices model. NRDC research strongly suggests that this is not a matter of 'either or': skills-based and social practice-based models can and should complement one another.

### **Family literacy, language and numeracy learning (FLLN)**

FLLN has a central role to play in promoting social inclusion and reducing economic disadvantage. NRDC research has shown that there are statistically significant correlations between poor LLN skills in parents and poor test performance by their children, with the correlation being strongest at the lower levels of parental literacy and numeracy. New NRDC research reaffirms the effects of poor parental LLN skills, finding that adults with the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy reported receiving little educational support or encouragement as children. A new NRDC practitioners' handbook offers guidelines for achieving effective and inclusive practices in FLLN. One of the keys to building successful provision is partnership working between organisations. Another is successful recruitment: headteachers report that the 'personal touch' is the most important aspect while sending home letters is unlikely to reach those with significant literacy and language needs. FLLN teachers' broad range of skills and knowledge are of the utmost importance.

Assessment and accreditation have a central role to play in family learning, but some learners are uncomfortable with the idea of being assessed, particularly if they have had previous negative experiences of learning. Very few participants on FLLN courses begin with an expressed desire to receive accreditation as part of the course. Indeed, the mention of accreditation in course publicity materials can have a negative effect on recruitment. However, attitudes to assessment can and do change. Family learning courses lead to increased confidence in their LLN skills, which in turn piques their interest in gaining a qualification and/or measuring their progress and confirming their new abilities. For many family learners, the key to this transition is the supportive, relaxed approach of their teacher.

When there is no pressure to take a test, but learners are made aware of it and what is entailed, some will want to take it.

Evidence from 19 international studies of family learning programmes around the world showed improvements in children's assessed literacy skills, as well as reported improvements in language and numeracy. Research indicates that one of the comparative strengths of UK programmes lies in the complex, community-focused partnerships that the various initiatives have encouraged. NRDC is engaged in new FLLN research for QIA, closely linked to national development activity.

### **ILPs in ESOL programmes**

Effective teaching involves putting learners and their needs at the centre of the process, and individual learning plans (ILPs) can play a key role in doing this. However, while ILPs are well suited to literacy and numeracy instruction, teachers have questioned whether they are pedagogically appropriate for ESOL learners, particularly at Entry 1 and Entry 2.

NRDC has undertaken a nationwide investigation of the range of practices used to plan learning for Entry 1 and Entry 2. We found uncertainty about the function of ESOL ILPs, and considerable variation in the ways SMART targets are being written.

Teachers argued for more group as opposed to individual goals as particularly at Entry 1 and Entry 2 learners tend to share common needs and goals, in terms of their language and literacy development. Thus much of the work currently undertaken in one-to-one tutorials at these levels can be taken up with the whole group. It was strongly expressed that learners should only participate in an ILP process when they have the necessary linguistic skills for it to be meaningful.

**Research indicates that one of the comparative strengths of UK FLLN programmes lies in the complex, community-focused partnerships that the various initiatives have encouraged**

### ESOL or literacy? Choosing the right course

One of the most challenging issues currently faced by Skills for Life practitioners is the placement of bilingual or multilingual learners on the right course. At Entry 1 and Entry 2, the distinctions between ESOL and literacy students/classes are relatively straightforward. At Entry 3 and Level 1, the picture becomes more complex. Many students in existing literacy classes at Entry 3 or Level 1 are bilingual or multilingual. Often an ESOL class is not appropriate for learners at this level because even though they are second language speakers, their spoken language seems too fluent for ESOL and their main objective is to improve their writing and reading, traditionally the main concern of literacy teaching.

We looked in detail at these issues by asking how ESOL or bilingual learners at Entry 3/Level 1 get placed or place themselves in literacy and/or ESOL classes. Two major themes emerged. The first was the need to rethink the relationship of literacy to ESOL in ways which take into account the full range of the needs of these learners. The categorisation of individuals into bilingual or monolingual implies a fixed view of language development that is at odds with the realities of people's lives, goals and learning needs. Many learners in urban literacy classes would benefit from some of the approaches more commonly found in ESOL teaching, particularly in relation to grammar and accuracy in spoken language.

The second theme was the identification of the need for professional development for literacy practitioners, which would include support for the full language learning needs of bilingual and bidialectal learners in literacy classes. Most literacy and ESOL teachers belong to one tradition or another, traditions with very different approaches to pedagogical issues. Among literacy tutors there is a growing recognition of the emergence of a group of literacy learners

with broader language requirements, and with it, a corresponding recognition of their own training and professional development needs. This corresponds with the acknowledgement among ESOL tutors that they have a training need when it comes to teaching ESOL literacy to 'new' readers and writers. For a changing world we now need teachers trained and confident in both traditions. Currently NRDC is working with LLUK on national pilot projects which are trialling elements of a joint or common core of training for literacy and ESOL teachers.

### Speaking and listening

Literacy instruction has tended to focus on reading and writing rather than speaking and listening; the same can be said of research - there is a scarcity of recent empirical evidence on adult speaking and listening skills and capabilities. Key elements of oracy include clarity, discussion, respecting people, and interrupting. An important initiative in the teaching of oracy is dialogic teaching as expounded by Robin Alexander, who sets out the case for 'a kind of teaching in which talk is given the prominence which effective thinking and learning require'. This can act as a corrective to over-reliance in the classroom on the use of closed questions, and the associated temptation to focus exclusively on eliciting the correct answer. We hope for increased policy and research emphasis on speaking and listening as practices in their own right. Informed by the research findings, the QIA SfLIP has initiated development activity on speaking and listening in a range of settings.

### Formative assessment

The revised national strategy, Focus on Delivery 2007, gives a higher profile to formative assessment practices and provides specific guidance on implementation. This adds to the focus given to initial assessment, diagnostic

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**The categorisation of individuals into bilingual or monolingual implies a fixed view of language development that is at odds with the realities of people's lives, goals and learning needs**

assessment, and individual learning plans (ILPs) that have all been part of the explicit and ongoing SfL 'infrastructure', with tools, guidance and training available.

A challenge for the future is to develop a research-based set of guidelines to help teachers and learners develop formative assessment skills and practices, and to promote their widespread use. Various aspects of the learning process offer opportunities to use formative assessment. These include diagnosis of learning need; development of relationships within the classroom; and the tracking of learner progress. Formative assessment can also promote learner autonomy. The key is that learners 'own' the assessment process. ILPs, portfolios and checklists all have the potential to support such ownership. However, there are concerns that target-focused performance measures limit opportunities for formative assessment.

### **Literacy, learning and health**

The use of health as a topic in adult LLN classes has not been widespread, and there have been few attempts systematically to integrate health issues with adult basic education. Where such programs have existed, they tend to have been set up on the initiative of a particular teacher or as part of a specific college's curriculum. Of late, however, health has received greater attention from adult educators, and improved health is seen as one of the important wider social benefits of enhanced basic education. As a topic for adult LLN, health can 'embed' learning in students' everyday concerns and needs. To that effect, the DIUS recently produced a set of learning materials on health. And because health providers acknowledge that there is a link between poor health and poor literacy, the Department of Health has initiated various policies to support patients' understanding of health information and to empower them to

make informed decisions regarding their own health. The 'Skilled for Health' initiative has also aimed to engage young people in learning Skills for Life.

It is within this context that NRDC conducted research into the LLN demands placed on people in health care settings, and the ways they cope with these demands. We found challenges in written text and spoken language, both of which are often complex and context-specific. Non-native speakers reported a variety of literacy demands in healthcare settings, such as understanding medical vocabulary and the expected roles and behaviours to be adopted in the British health system. It is not only ESOL speakers, however, who report struggling with the language of healthcare. One British woman in her early sixties, for example, reported struggling with 'medical-ese', and said she felt her doctor not only did not make enough effort to speak in plain English, but used 'big words' to 'feel and look important'.

Not surprisingly, written literacy was cited as particularly challenging, with forms deemed especially frustrating, both in terms of understanding their demands and filling them in. Individuals reported a variety of strategies for coping with these challenges. These included using friends, family and the internet. As one woman observed, 'No one laughs at you on the internet'.

Because of the central role of healthcare in many peoples' lives, there is potential to interweave these issues into LLN provision. However, because health is a sensitive and personal issue, it can be a difficult topic, particularly when a class includes learners from different age, gender, class and ethnic backgrounds. Adult LLN programmes that wish to make health a central topic are more likely to succeed if the provision is addressed to specific

**Various aspects of the learning process offer opportunities to use formative assessment**



groups, for example women of a certain age, mothers with young children, or people suffering from a specific disease.

### **Skills and social practices**

Social practice theory focuses on the significance of what people actually do with LLN – that is, not only the highly varied contexts in which LLN activities take place, but also the purposes behind them. Advocates of this approach contrast it with that of functional skills, which they see as presupposing the existence of a set of universal (i.e. non-context-dependent) cognitive and technical skills that people need to function in society and which can be simply assessed. The debate over which is the better of these two approaches can grow heated. However, NRDC research offers evidence that social practices and skills-based approaches can be mutually supportive, and provides clues to how to benefit from both.

It can be easy to see the skills-based approach as narrow in scope. However, it is in social practices, including workplace practices, that skills are expressed. From this understanding a broader definition of ‘skill’ emerges, one that recognises the underpinning, enabling role of skills and which is supported by longitudinal evidence, such as that from NRDC, on the impact of skills levels on life chances. There is depth in the concept of ‘skill’ but in its focus on economic issues, it often goes unrecognised. Indeed, it may be that policy tends to undersell the skills model by not bringing out more clearly the interplay between skills and practices.

For example, NRDC research has revealed substantial differences in life chances, quality of life and social inclusion at or below Entry 2. The effects went beyond the economic. Poor mental and physical health prospects and lack of social and political participation were also associated

with skills at this level. For men, improvement in skills was associated with increased home ownership and employment prospects as well as political interest and community participation. They were also more likely to have married and/or had children. Women experienced similar benefits and were far less likely to show symptoms of depression, express feelings of disillusionment such as lack of control over their lives, or report long-term health problems.

Skills can enable people to engage more fully across the range of contexts in their lives. Government strategies to improve people’s basic skills – such as Skills for Life – can therefore be seen as part of an inclusion agenda. Research from the US supports this conclusion, with the Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning finding that supporting proficiency supports practice, and vice versa. Basic skills programmes appear to have the most direct and immediate impact on literacy practices, underlining the role of skills enhancement as a facilitator of literacy activities. A further dimension of this argument concerns vocational learning, where employment in a chosen occupation acts as a powerful motivator. In this context, barriers to engagement in LLN can be overcome as learners come to identify gaining certain skills with their envisaged future practices in the workplace.

Skills matter; they also enable social practices, and supporting practices in turn leads to enhanced proficiency. Teachers understand the need to combine both approaches and recognise how they dovetail in learners’ lives. In good classrooms, both are developed, particularly when there is an emphasis on personalisation, which can cut across policy areas and ideological boundaries. There is far more common cause across the apparent policy divide than is often recognised, and there is movement towards a more shared approach. But there is still much work to be done.

**We know from research that skills matter. We also know that they enable social practices and that supporting practices in turn leads to enhanced proficiency**



Route to City Centre, Parramatta, Westmead



**49** City to Parramatta

From	To	Frequency
City Centre	Parramatta	Every 15 minutes

**319** City to Parramatta

From	To	Frequency
City Centre	Parramatta	Every 15 minutes

**345** City to Parramatta

From	To	Frequency
City Centre	Parramatta	Every 15 minutes



## FIVE YEARS ON NRDC 2006-7

# → NUMERACY

Despite the greatly heightened policy profile given to numeracy by Skills for Life, it continues to be literacy's 'poor cousin'. Fewer learners take up numeracy despite lower national levels of competence. For some adults, being 'bad at maths' or 'not having a head for figures' is not only not worth worrying about, it is even something of a badge of honour.

Earlier NRDC research showed that for others, there is a real fear of maths, or a sense of defeat following bad experiences at school. Some learners are determined to get to grips with a subject held in high esteem and most common of all, to help their children succeed at maths. NRDC research shows that numeracy matters – perhaps even more than literacy. This is particularly the case

for women. Those with poor numeracy were less likely to be in a full-time job at age 30; they were also less likely to be in any form of paid employment (including part-time), and more likely to be engaged in home care. Among those in work, poor numeracy also predicted being in an unskilled or semi-skilled job.

To address this it is essential that numeracy is placed firmly at the heart of government strategy. Fortunately, Skills for Life and World Class Skills are committed to vastly improving England's numeracy skills, with a particular focus on increasing achievement at Entry 3, which NRDC research has shown to be the key level for full economic and social participation.

Numeracy skills affect life chances and ambitions, from childhood into adulthood. Analysis of the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) shows that male and female 16-year-olds with Level 1 or higher numeracy were the most positive and ambitious. At the age of 30 men and women with poor numeracy were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as those with competent numeracy; and men with poor numeracy had the lowest hourly rates of pay. At age 34, men with Level 1 or higher numeracy were the least likely to be living with their parents.

Poor numeracy is gendered: whereas men and women have similar literacy skills, women are more likely to have poor numeracy. Even when combined with good literacy, low numeracy in women is a significant predictor of poor outcomes, whereas the same is not true for women with low literacy and good numeracy. Among BCS70 members, 10% of those with Entry 2 numeracy had experienced a spell of homelessness by age 34.

### Young people's skills

To develop a coherent strategy for improving numeracy levels, we need to understand where we are now. Starting with young people, research into the achievement levels of 13 – to 19-year-olds over the last few decades offers some encouragement. For 14-year-olds, international surveys show no significant change between 1995 and 2003, but national test data show a slow improvement between 1995 and 2005. For 15-year-olds, we find a steady increase in the GCSE pass rate between 1989 and 2005.

However, the data for individuals aged 16 and over are more sobering. Four surveys, conducted between 1987 and 2003, found that substantial proportions of young adults in each survey – around 22% – had poor numeracy skills.

On a more positive note, new research on the maths scores of children at ages 7 and 11 has found that

socio-economic factors appear to have less impact on maths than on literacy. Disadvantaged children who score high in maths at age 7 show greater overall improvement by age 11 than do their better-off peers with similar age 7 scores. Similarly, the intergenerational transfer of numeracy skills is less marked than it is for literacy; so low numeracy levels amongst parents are less likely to be repeated in their children.

### Adult achievements

Turning now to Skills for Life, NRDC has utilised data from the LSC to analyse numeracy participation and achievement between 2000/01 and 2004/05. Throughout this period, enrolment figures for numeracy were markedly lower than those for literacy, highlighting the former's 'poor cousin' status. Looking at all three Skills for Life subjects over the five-year period, numeracy accounted for between 32% and 35% of enrolments each year, putting it third behind ESOL (32%-37%) and literacy (roughly 40%). However, those figures cover all enrolments/achievements. When only those counting towards the Skills for Life target are taken into consideration, numeracy leapfrogs ESOL and is a very close second to literacy.

This is encouraging news, as is the finding that total numbers for participation and achievement in numeracy rose substantially between 2000/01 and 2004/05. Over the five-year period, enrolments showed an increase of 89%, from roughly 360,000 to nearly 690,000. Achievements nearly tripled, rising from 120,000 to 345,000, with the highest proportion at Level 1, which rose from roughly 46,000 in 2000/01 to more than 200,000 in 2004/05. At Level 2, achievements rose from 59,000 to 89,000. Because the LSC data does not disaggregate achievements and enrolments at the various Entry Levels, we were unable to ascertain achievement levels at Entry 3, Entry 2 and Entry 1. However, even when combining all three Entry Levels, achievements were much lower than at Levels 1 and 2, rising from 14,400 in

**Poor numeracy is gendered: whereas men and women have similar literacy skills, women are more likely to have poor numeracy**

2000/01 to nearly 55,000 in 2004/05. Taken together these increases are considerable, and represent a significant triumph for both policy and practice. In every year we analysed, women were better represented in numeracy courses than men, both in terms of enrolments and achievements. Taking all five years together, women accounted for 54% of enrolment and 58% of achievements. Given the gendered nature of numeracy skills in England, this was another encouraging finding.

### **Motivation, participation and persistence**

If numeracy levels are to rise in line with the challenging objectives put forward in the Leitch Review and World Class Skills, motivation, participation and persistence must increase, and this can only happen with a culture change in attitudes to numeracy. To accomplish this, we need a better understanding of why people take numeracy courses and what they seek to gain. Early findings from the NRDC's persistence project indicate that many issues related to engagement and motivation do not have a subject-specific dimension. However, we have found three key issues where numeracy learners appear to differ from other Skills for Life learners.

In terms of previous learning experiences, we found that numeracy learners had more negative compulsory school experiences than ESOL and literacy learners, and were more likely to perceive learning environments that were reminiscent of school as hostile and demotivating.

Numeracy learners appeared to be more likely to engage with learning when their numeracy needs were presented in terms of real life challenges, and appeared more likely to persist when classwork seemed relevant to their daily lives. Many numeracy learners needed to learn specific skills. We found evidence that these learners were less likely to be motivated and to persist in programmes with a broad curriculum: numeracy content that was perceived as irrelevant was a barrier to persistence.

Age appears to matter as well. In NRDC's research in effective numeracy teaching and learning, we found age differences with regard to motivations for taking numeracy courses. 16- to 19-year-olds tended to say that they were studying numeracy because their employers told them to or because numeracy was required for another course. Adults over 20 were more than twice as likely to say that they wanted to study numeracy to prove something to themselves, to become more confident or to help with their lives outside the classroom.

For adults to want to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, they must first recognise that they have poor skills and see this as a problem. Such recognition is rare, even where objective tests show a considerable problem. Yet without it, motivation to attend literacy and numeracy classes is likely to be poor. Over the years, in both NCDS and BCS70 surveys, the proportion of cohort members reporting problems with numeracy has been remarkably consistent at 3-5%. However, in the 2004 BCS70 survey, this rose to 11%. This figure is higher because, for the first time, respondents were not simply asked if they had general difficulties with numbers, but were asked specific questions about their capacity to perform operations such as multiplication and division. In response to these questions, 4% of men and 8% of women reported difficulties with multiplication, while 7% of men and 10% of women said they had problems with division. The significance of respondents' reluctance to report general problems with numeracy indicates that many people believe that, despite some specific problems such as division, their overall numeracy skills do not present significant hurdles, even when, objectively assessed, those skills are very poor. Motivating such individuals to improve their numeracy will present significant challenges, and is likely to be less straightforward than motivating learners to improve their literacy.

That said, NRDC attitudinal research on the BCS70 cohort offers some promising data, in particular the →

**Numeracy learners appeared to be more likely to engage with learning when their numeracy needs were presented in terms of real life challenges, and appeared more likely to persist when classwork seemed relevant to their daily lives**

finding that among those who did report difficulties with numbers, more than one-third of men (35%) and nearly half of women (45%) wanted to improve their skills. This response compares very favourably with attitudes to literacy improvement, where only around one in four men and one in five women reporting difficulties said they wanted to improve.

### Maths4Life

In 2007 a three-year national development and research project, Maths4Life, which began in 2004, completed its first stage. The focus of the final year of this stage was Thinking Through Mathematics (TTM), a research and development programme which attempts to transform educational practices in numeracy/mathematics classrooms within the Skills for Life sector by helping teachers to develop more 'connected' and 'challenging' teaching methods. These in turn enable learners to develop more active orientations towards their learning. A series of teaching and learning materials was developed based on principles derived from many years of research and development work with practitioners by Malcolm Swan<sup>5</sup>. Those principles state that numeracy teaching is more effective when it:

- builds on the knowledge learners already have
- exposes and discusses common misconceptions
- uses higher-order questions
- uses co-operative small group work
- encourages reasoning rather than 'answer getting'
- uses rich, collaborative tasks
- creates connections between topics
- uses technology.

The aim of our research was to study the feasibility and potential impact of these teaching and learning approaches. Whereas teachers generally rated their practice before the project began as being learner-centred, their own learners tended to see them as being more teacher-centred. Over the course of the project, the teachers' practice changed, particularly in terms of their organisation (more group work), classroom ethos (learners were more relaxed and felt

less worried about making mistakes), and learners' practices (learners were given more choices and encouraged to ask questions).

However, we also found that teachers' actions did not always follow their beliefs. For example, whereas teachers said that 'exposing and discussing misconceptions' was an important principle, NRDC observers did not see this being used effectively in the classroom, or consistently. Almost all of the teachers reported that there had been pressures and constraints that prevented them from using the approaches in the best possible ways, particularly the pressure from senior management to prepare learners for accredited tests, and to map learning outcomes to particular content areas.

Teachers' general pedagogical knowledge varied considerably, and successful use of some activities was directly related to teachers' knowledge of subject-specific pedagogy. This included anticipating learners' questions, and adopting a more flexible approach by being able to respond to learners' needs. We also noted that some teachers had significant gaps in their deeper understanding of basic mathematical concepts.

Despite the fact that many learners had suffered a negative experience of learning mathematics at school, their attitudes towards learning mathematics were generally very positive. Most noticed a major change in their teacher's practices, and by the end of the project the vast majority seemed very supportive towards the project and embraced the approaches. Many learners particularly enjoyed group work, and felt less threatened and more relaxed when they worked towards making a group decision.

Maths4Life also produced a series of five teaching handbooks based on teaching methods we have found effective. The topics covered are measurement, time and money, number, topic-based teaching, and fractions.

<sup>5</sup> The background to these approaches is provided in Swan's book *Collaborative Learning in Mathematics: A challenge to our beliefs and practices* (2006). Leicester: NIACE/NRDC.

**Many learners particularly enjoyed group work, and felt less threatened and more relaxed when they worked towards making a group decision**

Maths4Life also produced a policy discussion paper which examines workplace mathematics in terms of policy priorities and recent evidence on the changing mathematical demands of the workplace. It looks at the importance of skill levels, the cost and benefits to employers and individuals of workplace mathematics, and teaching and learning.

### **The future of Maths4Life**

Maths4Life was based at NRDC between July 2004 and March 2007. In April 2007 the work to take forward and develop Maths4Life transferred to the National Centre for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics (NCETM). NRDC remains a key partner in NCETM's further development of the post-16 maths and numeracy programme started by Maths4Life.

### **Embedding numeracy**

NRDC research shows that embedding LLN can help address motivation and engagement issues and offer significant improvements in achievement rates. Comparing courses that offered four different approaches to numeracy - non-embedded, partly embedded, mostly embedded and fully embedded - we found that qualification rates rose steadily with the level of embedding: from 70% on non-embedded courses to 79% on partly embedded, 90% on mostly embedded and 93% on fully embedded.

### **The numeracy workforce**

The 'poor cousin' status of numeracy is particularly apparent when one investigates the qualification levels and teaching duties of the Skills for Life workforce. Of the 6,095 staff teaching numeracy in England in 2004-5, two-thirds were teaching at least one other subject, usually literacy. Of those individuals teaching literacy and numeracy, only 4% were fully qualified in numeracy.

Among those who taught numeracy only, however, the situation was remarkably different, with 57% being fully qualified as a numeracy teacher. This group of teachers were the most well-qualified sub-

set of teachers within Skills for Life, being almost twice as likely to be fully qualified as ESOL-only teachers and nearly three times as likely as teachers who taught only literacy.

Further analysis of workforce demographics offers encouraging signs for numeracy provision. Whereas numeracy teachers over age 50 tend to be less well qualified than their peers in literacy, this is not the case among younger teachers. 28% of numeracy teachers under age 30 have full qualifications, as do an impressive 49% of those aged 30-39. This compares very favourably to the 14% of literacy teachers under the age of 30 and 15% of those between 30 and 39 who are fully qualified. A young, well-qualified numeracy workforce bodes well for provision.

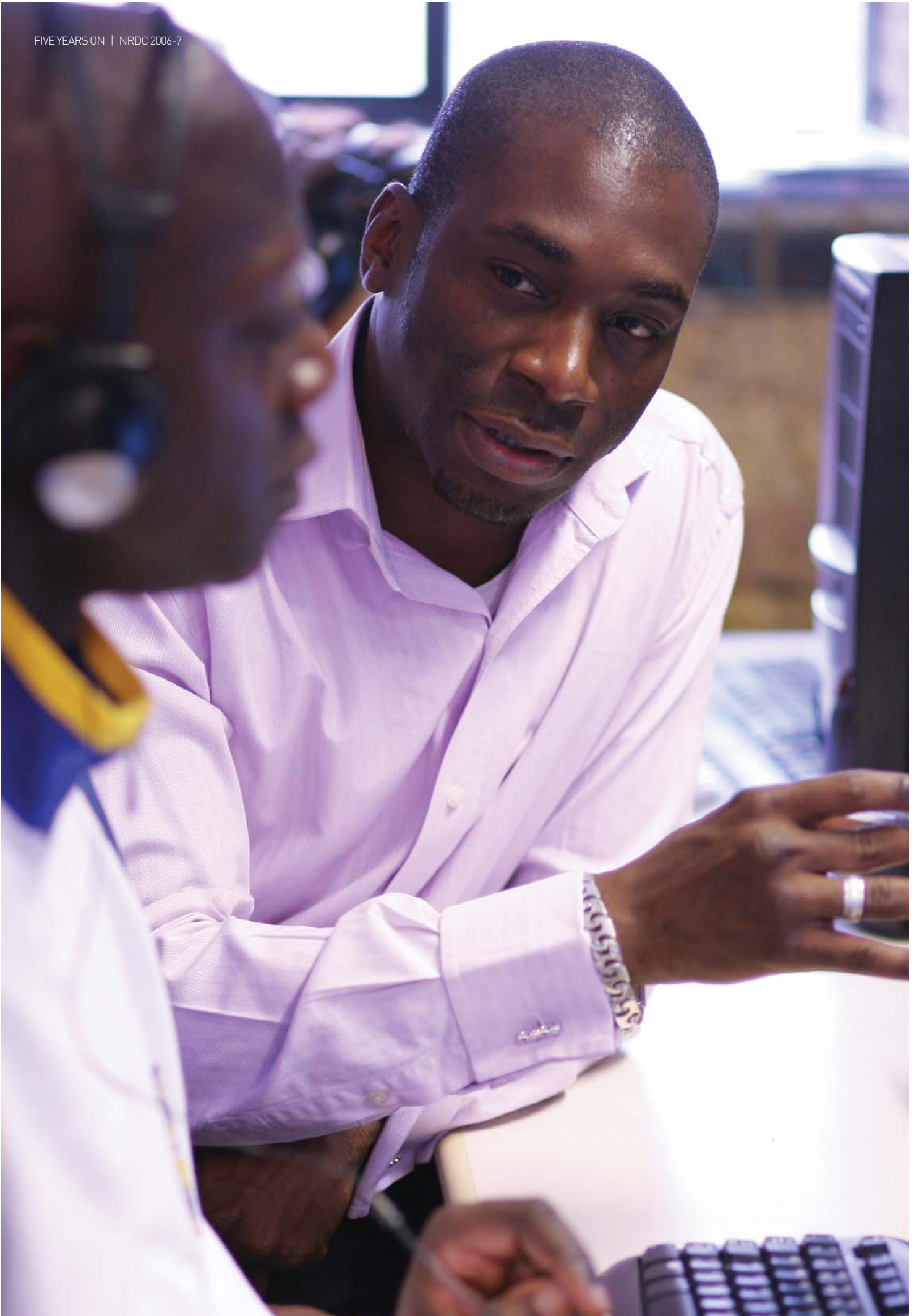
The size and capacity of the numeracy workforce needs to grow. Working with the QIA-led SfLIP, NRDC is offering enhanced development grants for numeracy teacher education programmes in 2007-8 to encourage further growth.

### **Financial literacy education and Skills for Life**

Research has demonstrated a strong link between poor financial understanding, poor literacy and numeracy, poverty and social exclusion. Little is known about the range and scope of financial literacy provision. However, NRDC has recently completed a government-commissioned research project on this issue.

In the public sector, we found that provision and accreditation of financial literacy education is patchy and piecemeal. Provision is often linked to basic skills, but many of those teaching financial literacy education lack relevant qualifications. In the private sector, there is little formal personal financial education for adults. Employers and trade unions generally do not provide or support financial education courses for employees.

**The 'poor cousin' status of numeracy is particularly apparent when one investigates the qualification levels and teaching duties of the Skills for Life workforce**







## **FIVE YEARS ON NRDC 2006-7**

# → THE SKILLS FOR LIFE TEACHING WORKFORCE

The development of a highly qualified, professional workforce is central to Skills for Life. Working in partnership with Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), NRDC has generated the most complete picture so far of the Skills for Life workforce, including size, qualifications, demographics and employment patterns.

NRDC leads the workforce development activity for the QIA SfLIP. In 2006-7 over 1,400 teachers were supported in gaining appropriate teaching qualifications, with many more grants on offer in 2007-8.

We combined two data sources: the NRDC Teachers Study and LLUK's 'snapshot' survey of the teaching workforce. The 'snapshot' survey gathered data from all providers of Skills for Life in England, which, taken with data from the LSC Individual Learner Records (ILR), enabled us to establish the size and key characteristics of the entire Skills for Life workforce.

The data collected for the LLUK 'snapshot' survey were representative of all Skills for Life providers in England, but they were not as rich as data collected for another NRDC research project, known as the Teachers Study. This is a longitudinal NRDC research project gathering data from the LSC ILR on the key characteristics of Skills for Life teachers, tutors and trainers. It offers a rich source of information on over 1,000 specialist teachers in the Skills for Life workforce in England. However, the Teachers Study is not representative. Speaking metaphorically, the Teachers Study is deep (in that it provides a great deal of detail on about 1,000 teachers), while the 'snapshot' survey is broad (it tells us less about each teacher, but has data on 18,800). By combining data from both projects, we have been able to establish the size and key characteristics of the entire workforce, generating a fuller picture than either study could in isolation.

## Size

There were an estimated 18,800 individuals teaching in the Skills for Life workforce in 2004-5, the most recent year for which full LSC data are available: 9,796 in ESOL, 8,039 in literacy, and 6,095 in numeracy .

ESOL accounts for the highest number of teachers, but literacy accounts for the highest volume of teaching, with numeracy coming third in both categories – i.e. having the lowest number of teachers and lowest volume of provision.

Comparing the number of teachers with volume of provision, 34% of Skills for Life staff teach literacy, but the subject accounts for 37% of Skills for Life provision. 41% of Skills for Life teach ESOL, but, as these teachers are more likely to be part-time, ESOL accounts for only 35% of all Skills for Life teaching. Numeracy accounts for 25% of Skills for Life teachers, and 28% of all Skills for Life provision.

Looking at the workforce as a whole, on average Skills for Life teachers worked the equivalent of half of a full-time post, with literacy and numeracy both having Full Time Equivalents of 0.55, and ESOL 0.42.

## Subjects

Thirty-two percent of Skills for Life teachers taught more than one subject in 2004-5. However, this figure masks considerable variation across specialisms. While 74% of ESOL teachers taught ESOL only, in literacy and numeracy teachers teaching more than one subject was the norm, with 64% of literacy teachers and 66% of numeracy teachers also teaching another subject. In fact, while one can safely refer to most teachers of ESOL as simply 'ESOL teachers', it would be more accurate to refer to teachers of literacy as 'literacy and numeracy', since more do both than teach literacy alone. The same is true for numeracy teachers. In both of these subjects, teaching both is the norm rather than the exception.

<sup>6</sup> Ufi is the organisation behind learndirect and UK online centres. See [www.ufi.com](http://www.ufi.com)

## Socio-demographics

In 2004-5, nearly two-thirds of the Skills for Life workforce (64%) was aged 40 or above. In terms of experience, more than half of the literacy and numeracy workforces had been teaching their subjects for less than four years. ESOL staff tended to have worked for longer. The Skills for Life workforce was predominantly white, with ESOL being markedly more diverse than literacy and numeracy, and overwhelmingly female (77%) - numeracy had the fewest female teachers at 65%, ESOL the most at 79%.

## Employment patterns

Two in every three members of the 2004-5 Skills for Life workforce were part-time; 44% were hourly paid and 20% worked on a fractional basis. FE providers were the largest employers of Skills for Life staff in 2004-5, employing 56% of the workforce; 22% worked for local authorities; 17% for ufi<sup>6</sup> directly funded hubs. The workforce was highly concentrated in the largest providers, with the largest 10% of organisations employing two-thirds (66%) of the total workforce. This tendency was strongest in London, where the 10% largest providers employed almost nine of every 10 workers (88%).

## Qualifications

Encouragingly, qualification levels rose sharply between 2004-5 and 2005-6. While only 13% of the Skills for Life workforce was fully qualified in 2004-5 (i.e. with both a generic PGCE Certificate of Education and a Level 4 subject specialist qualification), this figure had risen to 35% by the following year.

However, the situation is not necessarily as straightforward as that 35% figure would indicate. Even though 35% of the workforce is classified as fully qualified, these are the percentages of fully qualified staff teaching in each subject:

- Literacy: 21%
- Numeracy: 29%
- ESOL: 28%

**ESOL accounts for the highest number of teachers, but literacy accounts for the highest volume of teaching, with numeracy coming third in both categories**

The anomaly here is clear: if no subject specialism has even 30% of its teaching staff as fully qualified, how can the total Skills for Life figure add up to 35%? The answer is that 35% of the Skills for Life workforce is fully qualified in at least one subject but, since so many staff teach more than one subject, the qualification levels of those teaching the individual subjects are somewhat lower.

Each of the individual subjects showed a large rise in levels of fully qualified staff between 2004-5 and 2005-6. In literacy, the proportion of fully qualified staff rose from 8% in 2004-5 to 21% the following year. In numeracy, there was an almost five-fold increase in the percentage of fully qualified teachers, rising from 6% to 29%. The rise in fully qualified ESOL teachers was from 11% to 28%. An additional 12% of ESOL teachers were technically unqualified on the terms of the survey but had ESOL Diplomas at NQF Level 7, giving a total of 40% of ESOL teachers either fully or highly qualified.

While only about one-quarter of ESOL teachers taught another subject, roughly two-thirds of literacy teachers do so, as do the same proportion of numeracy staff. Skills for Life staff who taught two or more subjects were less likely to be fully qualified in any subject than those who taught only one.

At this level of detail, some interesting features emerge. For example, the percentage of all numeracy teachers who were fully qualified was 29%, but for those who taught only numeracy, the proportion rises to 57%. However, as discussed earlier, most numeracy teachers do not teach only numeracy; they also teach literacy.

Looking at those who taught both literacy and numeracy, only 9% were fully qualified in both subjects. Among those who were fully qualified in only one of the two subjects, this was over three times more likely to be literacy (14% versus 4%). This indicates the much higher likelihood of qualified literacy teachers also teaching some numeracy. A

picture emerges of a small number of more qualified numeracy teachers alongside a greater number of literacy teachers who also teach some numeracy, but are not well-equipped to do so.

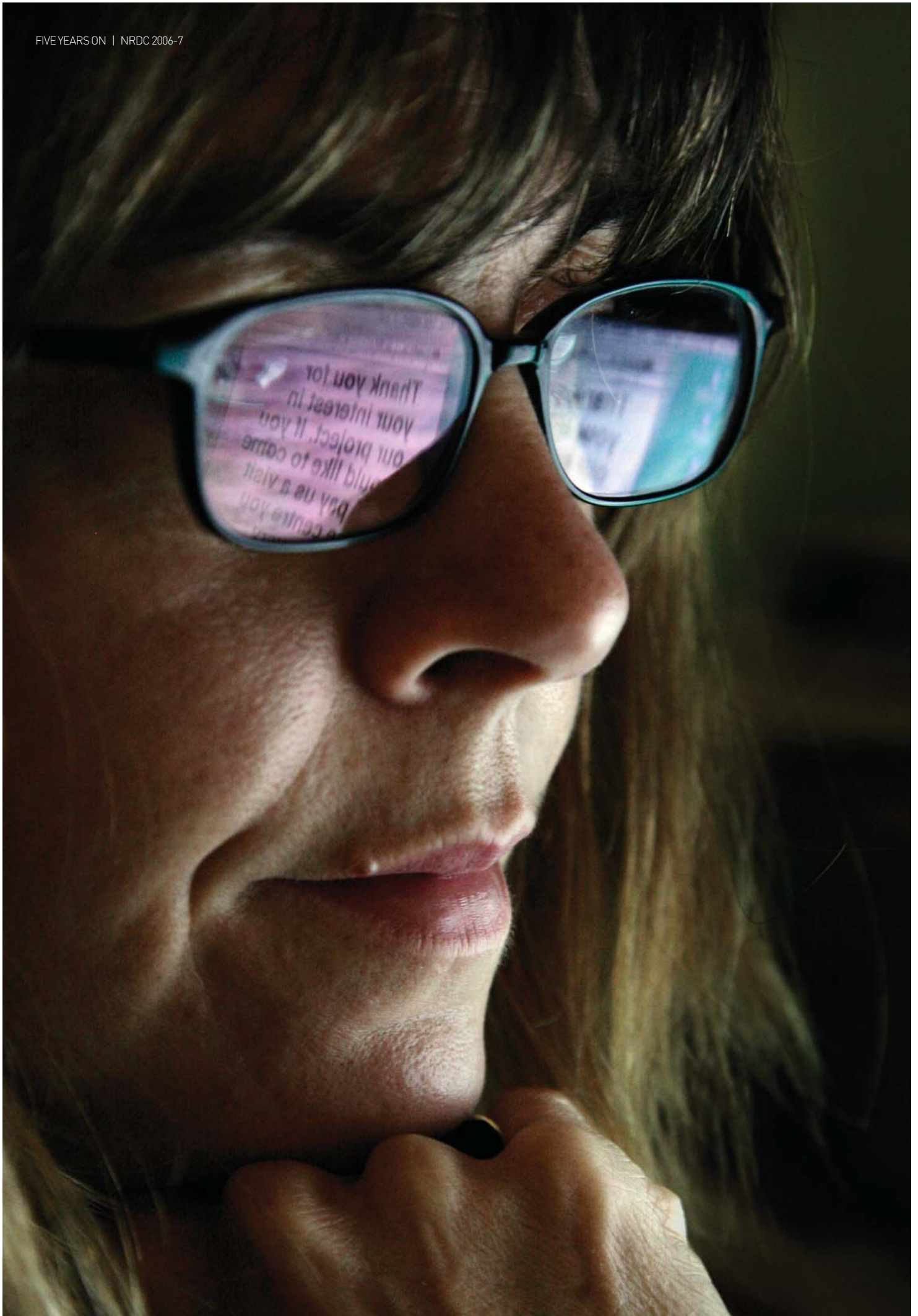
At the other end of the scale, 25% of staff members teaching both literacy and numeracy were unqualified in both subjects – that is, of the nearly 3,500 teachers in this group, almost 900 had no teaching qualifications at all.

### **Workforce development**

NRDC has worked extensively with LLUK and with the QIA SflIP to develop and build the capacity of the teaching workforce. In 2006-7 a shared programme, 'Creative Routes to Qualified Status', offered a range of grants to support teachers in becoming qualified – you can find more about this on page 52.

NRDC has worked with LLUK to increase the supply of the more effective and efficient integrated teacher education programmes, combining subject and generic teaching skills in one programme. New pilot programmes will explore the potential overlaps between ESOL and literacy, and the important area of pre-service teacher education for literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers. Participating teacher education programmes are encouraged to build on emerging research and to contextualise provision to meet the needs of teachers working in different parts of the sector.

**Each of the individual subjects showed a large rise in levels of fully qualified staff between 2004-5 and 2005-6**





**FIVE YEARS ON  
NRDC 2006-7**

# → TEACHERS, LEARNERS, STAKEHOLDERS: EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SKILLS FOR LIFE

NRDC is engaged in a series of related research projects examining the impact of the Skills for Life learning infrastructure on teachers and learners. Our research with learners has a particular emphasis on the effects of the strategy on the government's priority groups: unemployed people, benefit claimants, prisoners, workers in low skilled jobs and other groups at risk of social exclusion. Early findings suggest that 90% of learners were satisfied with their experience of Skills for Life, though attitudes to qualifications were mixed. It also throws light on the barriers learners face, why they persist or drop out and what their attitude is to the national test.

Skills for Life has brought about a great number of changes in the working lives of all those who teach under the Skills for Life banner. The sweeping changes inherent in such an ambitious agenda have inevitably had an impact on teachers' attitudes and experiences.

Our Teachers Study, described in the previous section, also investigated the attitudes of Skills for Life teachers toward the strategy, asking what factors influence those attitudes and what the implications of teachers' feelings and experiences might be for the strategy's successful implementation.

## Learners

Some important themes emerged from the learner interviews. With regard to qualifications, learners had mixed opinions. Some older individuals did not want to take tests and gain qualifications. For many individuals, qualifications were important to achieving their goals, whether that meant getting a job (or a better one) or progressing in education. Others said they were very proud of the evidence of what they were achieving. Some learners with physical or mental health issues found regular attendance and taking the tests difficult but felt a sense of pride when they succeeded.

## Learning contexts

LLN classes are held in a variety of contexts. In the workplace, many learners, particularly those on ESOL courses, told us that they had more than one job and that trying to fit in work and study was difficult. Interviewees said that union learning representatives were an important factor in enrolling and being supported on employer-based courses. However, the union learning representatives themselves reported finding it difficult to strike a balance between managers' requirements and learners' needs. Where these issues were resolved, learners benefited from flexible learning opportunities; where they were not, learning was vulnerable to being made less of a priority or being cut altogether.

In prison, many learners described being able to read and write more confidently after attending classes. Most felt that certificates were important in showing what they had achieved – one learner sent his home for his mum to stick on the wall to show he was 'improving himself inside'. All described improving their confidence, both in the ability to learn and also to engage socially with others. The drawback to prison learning came when learners had to move on to other institutions, which often interrupted or terminated learning altogether.

It was clear that community-based provision was

reaching people who would not be in learning otherwise – older learners or those with lower levels of confidence, learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia), disabilities or health issues (both mental and physical), all found it easier to access this provision.

## Moving on, moving around and moving out

In characterising what learners did after their courses, we define 'moving on' as moving on to other forms of learning. 'Moving around' means carrying on with the same course, or an equivalent level of learning, without taking qualifications. 'Moving out' means leaving learning altogether. To better understand what learners were doing, and why they chose to move on, move around or move out, we carried out second interviews with a sample of learners. We found that 74% of learners re-interviewed were either progressing in some way or continuing in learning. ESOL had the highest percentage of learners moving on or moving around, which perhaps reflects the long-term and ongoing nature of second language learning. We also found a difference between the more rural and more urban case study sites, with less moving around in the rural sites. This may be due to the increased difficulty of attending and a lack of alternatives available for learners in geographically remote and rural areas.

People also described some of the barriers to continued participation. These included: courses that did not fit in with learners' lives; inability to access courses and maintain progress, particularly in Level 2 and Level 3 ESOL provision; changing personal situations, such as becoming unemployed; employers' learning requirements being at variance with the learners' own goals, particularly in workplace learning; and feeling coerced to attend or having sanctions imposed, for example through Job Centre Plus provision.

## Teachers

We found that more highly qualified teachers tended to feel better about the Skills for Life strategy. Engagement in professional development activities

**For many individuals, qualifications were important to achieving their goals, whether that meant getting a job (or a better one) or progressing in education**

was associated with teacher attitudes, as were teachers' subject specialisms. ESOL teachers tended to be slightly more negative about the Skills for Life core curricula, but were more positive about the effect of national tests on learner morale.

Overall, Skills for Life teachers appreciate that the new standards have helped to professionalise the workforce. They may have increased workloads and, in many cases, instituted a more hierarchical structure between managers and teachers – changes often associated with decreased job satisfaction. However, the national tests, new teaching and learning materials, and the core curricula were all viewed as helpful tools. Teachers were also appreciative of the fact that they had opportunities to be creative and to use standardised materials in an innovative way.

### Stakeholders

Overwhelmingly, stakeholders expressed a critical but positive view of the strategy. We found no instances where individuals were uncritical advocates, or conversely, were completely opposed to the strategy; Skills for Life was seen not as a deficit model, but as a more positive and inclusive 'entitlement model'. Most managers and co-ordinators spoke of its important role in destigmatising adult basic education. Another important impact cited by providers was the heightened national awareness of LLN need. Skills for Life, and particularly its targets with attached funding, encouraged organisations to identify more people with skills needs, and to encourage and enable organisations to recognise that many learners on vocational courses had LLN needs.

Some managers, co-ordinators and tutors had issues about the content of tests and what and how they were delivered, but overall the response to them was positive. The fact that the tests were national with clearly defined levels seemed to outweigh any disadvantages.

### Reaching the 'hard to reach'

Whereas 'reluctant' learners in prison represented a captive audience, most other 'hard to reach' learners were less easily attracted into provision, we found. Reaching the hardest to reach of the Skills for Life priority groups has proven particularly challenging for the strategy. Recent NRDC Practitioner-Led Research Initiatives (PLRIs) have shown that innovative and creative approaches can increase engagement. Our research on 'Illuminating Disadvantage' has reinforced the key challenge of getting those with the lowest skills – Entry 2 and below – to acknowledge their learning needs, and has found that if they do, the rewards are greater in terms of progression than for those with higher skills.

For many providers, working with hard to reach learners presented a funding risk, as these learners were less likely to attend regularly and to be able to meet national targets quickly, especially at Levels 1 and 2.

### Targets, qualifications and assessment

For all those interviewed, the national targets represented an ever-present feature of Skills for Life provision. Most managers and co-ordinators were largely happy to have targets, as they felt they helped to increase the quality and quantity of provision. Teachers tended to be less enthusiastic, with some saying that they were forced to organise their work around the targets rather than the learners. Some teachers reported feeling pressured by the need to contribute sufficiently to the targets to enable provision to continue.

There was a strong view amongst managers, coordinators and tutors that the Level 2 target dominated provision, and that other levels did not sufficiently 'count'. Positive comments about the national tests focused on how the tests were a means of motivating learners, enabling them to gain a qualification without a long wait, and to move on.

**Skills for Life encouraged organisations to identify more people with skills needs, as well as encouraging and enabling organisations to recognise that many learners on vocational courses had LLN needs**







**FIVE YEARS ON  
NRDC 2006-7**



# TRANSFORMING KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE

NRDC's mission is to transform knowledge into practice and we have always placed communication at the heart of our strategy to achieve this. However, at NRDC communication has always been about far more than dissemination and this year, more than ever, we have found innovative and effective ways to ensure that the knowledge produced through our research and development activities impacts on practice. There has been a wide range of work to support practitioners in developing their practice; this particular focus on development has been supported by, but not limited to, new publications.

We have worked with our national development partners to promote new knowledge about effective practice through their programmes and activities.

We have engaged directly with practitioners with practical guidance on effective practice in all Skills for Life subjects, in family literacy and embedding. We have also made a major contribution to professionalising the Skills for Life workforce, including work on helping new and existing teachers towards fully qualified status. We have been active and influential internationally, and are working in partnership with an increasing range of organisations.

As can be seen from 'NRDC in numbers' (page 58) and the rich communication and development activities outlined below, NRDC has been more effective than ever in meeting the challenge we set ourselves in *Four Years On*: to continue to transform the wealth of knowledge about the contexts, practices and demands of teaching and learning in LLN that our research programme has generated into practical, accessible guidance for policy and practice. We think we have begun to make the evidence count. And we will continue working hard to do so.

### Practitioner guides

In 2006 NRDC published a series of five research reports looking at effective practice in the teaching of reading, writing, numeracy, ESOL and ICT. Building on the findings in these research projects, NRDC has developed a series of practitioner guides aimed at helping Skills for Life teachers improve their pedagogy. These guides have contributed directly to QIA-led CPD activity.

Written by practitioners and researchers working together as teams, the guides are not manuals on how to teach. Instead, they provide examples of good practice, encourage teachers to reflect on their own practice, and inspire them to try new approaches. The guides also challenge teachers to ask questions and undertake their own classroom research in order to understand better how to best help their learners develop.

Looking at some specific examples of good practice, the reading guide highlights how group working encourages progress. Learners who spent more time working in pairs made better progress, as did learners who spent less time working alone. In writing, the practitioner guide looks at how to help learners focus on the communicative aspects of writing, rather than getting overwhelmed by spelling and punctuation. To achieve this, teachers need to respond first and foremost as readers, not assessors. This is based on Effective Practice research which found that many teachers praised learners' work, but then immediately moved on to a discussion of its technical flaws, such as spelling or punctuation errors. This reinforced students' over-emphasis on these areas of literacy, and fears of 'getting it wrong'.

Among the numeracy guide's tips is a discussion of the significant difference between mistakes and misconceptions. Typical mistakes include performing actions in the wrong sequence. Misconceptions, on the other hand, are usually ways of thinking that are reasoned but incorrect. For example, 'if  $10\% = 1/10$ , then  $20\% = 1/20$ '. Misconceptions give teachers the opportunity to address conceptual confusion and delve further into an issue, so that learning is deeper and more long-lasting.

ESOL guidelines include encouraging teachers to turn talk into learning and 'allow the outside in': if a student comes to class with a need to communicate, allow space for the issue. Involve other students, make learner talk the subject of the lesson, and follow it up with action if necessary.

In ICT, the practitioner guide looks in-depth at some

of the wide variety of ICT tools and strategies that can be used with learners.

These guides have been co-published as part of a joint publishing initiative with NIACE through which we hope to extend and maximise our impact on practice.

### Development project reports

In addition to these subject-specific practitioner guides, the Effective Practice research projects spawned a series of five development project reports focusing on specific elements of effective classroom practice in the following areas: oral reading fluency; collaborative writing; 'bestimation', i.e. using basic calculators in the numeracy classroom; the use of voting technology for assessment; and how to use action research in ESOL.

### Effective practice in embedding

Research tells us that learning is most effective when individuals see the relevance and application of what they are doing. As reported in *Four Years On*, NRDC research has found that embedding is particularly helpful in enabling learners to achieve literacy and numeracy qualifications. Our research also found a significant association between the degree of embedding and the overall success rates of the vocational course that LLN provision supports, and between the degree of embeddedness and how well learners rated the course as preparing them for their work in the future.

NRDC contributed to the Learning and Skills Network (LSN)-run Train to Gain Development Programme by leading a project on embedding Skills for Life into Train to Gain delivery. Nine providers were given support over the year, and case studies and a guide were produced at the end of the project.

Since the publication of NRDC's research evidence, methods of organising the teaching of literacy, numeracy and ESOL within a vocational context have become a focal point of discussion. We know there are many different systems used to deliver Key Skills/Skills for Life to individuals also doing a vocational qualification, and we know the methods which are most likely to be successful, both in terms of qualifications gained and learner retention, but there is as yet no clear picture of how much embedding is taking place. NRDC is therefore undertaking a nationwide baseline survey on the extent of embedding nationally. Concurrently, NRDC will be running an action research project on models for embedding specifically in employer-based learning contexts. The original NRDC research was

carried out mainly in FE colleges, and further work will now be done to explore the uses of these models of delivery in the specific context of the workplace. In order to transform this research and development into practice, NRDC is creating a guide to effective practice in embedding. Like other NRDC effective practice guides, this guide is not a 'how to' manual. Instead, it is intended as a source of practical advice, and as a practice-centred look at the implications of NRDC research on embedding.

NRDC research underlines the importance of a whole organisation approach to embedding LLN. Embedded provision is most likely to be successful where, at both organisational and departmental level, managers and policies support embedding in principle and management structures support embedding in practice.

Sound pedagogy is also essential. LLN must be treated by all staff as an essential part of the learners' vocational programme and not as something additional. Embedding does not mean smuggling LLN learning into the curriculum by stealth. Where it is viewed as something to be hidden, there is a danger that its importance will be overlooked by both teachers and learners, and that vital learning opportunities are lost.

Ultimately, of course, the focus should not be on organisational structures, pedagogy or teamwork, but on the learner. For the great majority of learners on vocational courses, the primary aim is to achieve a vocational qualification and to find a job in their chosen area. Success in this aim must be the main focus of both vocational teachers and LLN specialists. We know that achievement is highly dependent on motivation and a sense of relevance. Embedding responds to learner need and places the learner journey at the centre of all planning. This is what is at the heart of effective practice in embedding.

NRDC and QIA have worked collaboratively to

transform the embedded research knowledge into practice to ensure that providers in the sector are well supported, working with over 700 providers through the SfLIP.

### **Practitioner-Led Research Initiative**

One of the underpinning strategies of the NRDC is to 'build research capacity, reflective practice and career development through the systematic engagement of teachers and other practitioners'. Over the last three years, one of the centrepieces of this effort has been the Practitioner-Led Research Initiative (PLRI), which has offered practitioners the opportunity to engage in research, reflect on practice, and explore key issues of importance to their organisations and the Skills for Life agenda.

Over the three years of the initiative, which produced its final report in early 2007, 17 PLRI studies produced a substantial number of findings along three key themes: engaging priority groups, persistence, and creativity in teaching and learning. On the first topic, practitioner-researchers found that while Skills for Life had undoubtedly raised the profile of basic skills, there are still major barriers to overcome in order to attract learners who have little tradition in signing up for courses. However, they also presented encouraging evidence to suggest that these barriers can at least be reduced.

If engagement is the first hurdle, persistence is the second. Here, practitioner-researchers found that for some learners, the biggest factor contributing to enjoyment of learning was having the opportunity to put aside other responsibilities, e.g. work and family. Looking at the learning experiences of homeless vulnerable adults, they found a 'ping pong' relationship between results and feelings: learning made the adults feel better about themselves, which in turn made them want to learn more.

This is a theme which also arose in research projects looking at creativity in teaching and learning. Here, →

**Embedding responds to learner need and places the learner journey at the centre of all planning**

practitioner-researchers found that enjoyment furthered persistence and process – e.g. encouraging learners to read for pleasure led to substantial increases in knowledge, skills and motivation.

NRDC is publishing a practical guide to practitioner-led research, focusing on how to maximise the impact of such work on provider organisations.

### **Professionalising the Skills for Life workforce**

Since 2006, NRDC has led on national programmes to help new and existing teachers towards fully qualified status. Grants from QIA and LLUK through 'Creative Routes' have been managed by NRDC to support over 1,600 teachers and over 100 teacher education programmes. NRDC ensured that funds supported teachers who were in priority contexts, e.g. work-based, workplace, offender, voluntary, community and Jobcentre Plus learning.

Teacher-education providers were encouraged to develop a range of creative solutions to getting more people qualified. Some piloted or extended residential programmes and blended learning, some targeted particular sectors such as prison education staff, and others started integrated programmes in preparation for the new teacher qualifications. In 2007/08 NRDC will help a further 1,400 as part of the QIA Skills for Life Improvement Programme. Numeracy, integrated and locally creative programmes will be a high priority and NRDC will bring teacher-educators together to share expertise and contribute to action research.

NRDC has been working closely with partners in the South East region to support teacher education, both at specialist LLN level and those working with vocational learners. The South East region partners have extended their expertise in embedded learning and supporting workforce planning. Their new regional web site, [www.newfutures-southeast.org](http://www.newfutures-southeast.org) is managed by NRDC. NRDC also ran a successful

regional conference for them in June 2007.

The professionalisation of the workforce continues and the focus is now on the role of the Learning Support practitioner. Currently there are many models of learning support, many different titles given to practitioners, and a workforce with widely different qualifications. NRDC is working with providers through action research to evaluate and explore different models of delivery and funding. Findings from this work will be central to the development of a qualifications framework being developed by LLUK to construct a clear progression pathway for learning support practitioners.

### **Jobcentre Plus**

NRDC has undertaken an evaluation of Phase 2 of the Basic and Employability Skills Programme for Jobcentre Plus customers, and it is anticipated that recommendations made by the report will contribute to making the programme more responsive to the needs of the Jobcentre Plus customers.

### **Evaluating Initial Assessment tools**

NRDC and LSN jointly conducted an evaluation of the new initial assessment tools, which include occupationally specific tools. The findings and recommendations about best practice in delivering initial assessment emerging from this evaluation have resulted in a strand of the QIA Skills for Life Improvement Programme being devoted to this in the current year, to which NRDC will contribute.

### **Partnership, co-operation and joint working**

NRDC values partnership and joint working to ensure that we draw in the best expertise to work on our programmes and projects. The last year has seen our work with existing and new partners, including funders, grow significantly. As well as our major programme of work for DIUS, we are delivering projects for QIA; LLUK; the National Adult Literacy Agency (Republic of Ireland); The Scottish Executive; The New Zealand Department of Labour; the

**Encouraging learners to read for pleasure led to substantial increases in knowledge, skills and motivation**

Learning and Skills Council; the CfBT Education Trust; The Experience Corps, LSN and others.

NRDC is building links with more partners. For example we have conducted major development work with CfBT and a wide range of partners on the Skills for Life Improvement Programme, with Tribal Group on a range of FLLN programmes and on a project funded by the Nuffield Foundation on formative assessment in 14-19 education. We are also working closely and directly with several hundred provider organisations and practitioners on development, improvement and evaluation programmes.

At the Institute of Education we have strengthened our co-operative efforts with the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning, the Centre for the Economics of Education and the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, using more and different datasets so we can continuously improve the data we offer to policy makers, and link data on adults with data on children and young people.

### International

Constant feedback from around the world, increasingly numerous citations in books and international journals, and regular invitations to present at international research and policy conferences across the world, indicate that we have achieved the firm status of a recognised international centre of excellence in research and development in our field. We are proud of that status and offer below some examples of our international activity.

Building on our published reports, NRDC researchers are now bringing out books based on our work. Several NRDC researchers have contributed to a book on longitudinal study methods edited by Steve Reder and John Bynner to be published by Routledge in 2008. Ursula Howard has contributed a chapter to an American book on writing, published in 2007, and David Barton at Lancaster has written a book based on the Adult Learners' Lives project. Several other

books carry chapters by NRDC authors and journal articles based on our completed work are also growing.

NRDC is supporting DIUS in helping to implement the EU's 'key competences for lifelong learning' agenda, shaped by the 10-year Lisbon goals set in the year 2000, joining colleagues from many countries in Peer Learning Activities.

We co-presented with American researchers from Harvard and Portland in Chicago, 2007, on 'motivating learners to persist' at the American Educational Research Association conference which attracts over 10,000 participants. And we presented at the international British Education Research Association (BERA) conference.

We have been invited to present evidence to government departments in New Zealand, at national conferences in Germany, and to organisations in the USA, South Africa and many other countries. Our work for the OECD has included a completed project on Formative Assessment in Adult Basic Skills and advice on assessing numeracy in international surveys. Greg Brooks spoke at the three UNESCO conferences on Family Literacy and Diana Coben gave Keynote Addresses in Italy, Scotland and Switzerland.

NRDC has researched, developed and produced two curriculum guides for the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), the national development agency for adult literacy in the Republic of Ireland. The first is a guide to teaching and learning across literacy and numeracy provision; the second, guidance on good practice in intensive learning programmes.

We have analysed the Scottish 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) data to offer the Scottish Executive an enhanced picture of LLN levels and needs in Scotland.

**We have achieved the firm status of a recognised international centre of excellence in research and development in our field**



## FIVE YEARS ON NRDC 2006-7

# → VOICES ON THE PAGE

Voices on the Page, a national writing event for adults in Skills for Life classes in England, was an attempt to encourage more writing in Skills for Life programmes: not just work on the component skills of writing, but authentic and creative writing tasks that have a purpose and audience beyond the classroom. Our aim was to get everyone writing and sharing stories, memories or poems - to inspire, collect and celebrate writing. Voices on the Page encouraged adult literacy, language and numeracy learners to write about 'anything that expresses what it is to be alive at the moment'. We called for learner writing: true stories, fictional stories or poems about life, love, home, family, dreams, happiness, sadness, hopes, experiences. Between December and March 2006 almost 700 pieces of writing were sent in from

classes all over England. They were as varied as the learners who produced them and not only provide a picture of what it is like to live in England in the early 21st century but should also empower other teachers to get stuck into writing, enabling their learners to develop their writing skills, share with us their unique take on life and create new texts for other learners to read.

Voices on the Page has three elements: a national online storybank of all submitted writing on the NRDC website, a book published with New Leaf publishers ([www.newleafbooks.org](http://www.newleafbooks.org)) and an awards ceremony during Adult Learners Week. Year two of Voices on the Page is being run jointly with NIAACE.



Voices on the Page winners at the award ceremony in London, May 2007: (from left to right) Kerry Davison, Salma Aroof, Rashana Shirley, Mary Jennifer Duddy, Paul Young, George Cochran, Percy William Cox, Ouahiba Boudiaf, Elisabed Iberi



### **Lost Family**

I was seventeen and my dad had a heart attack.  
He got old.  
He really got old.  
And then he died and is buried in Archway.  
I really missed him.  
I miss him and I miss my mum.  
It's not the same when you're in with foster parents.  
It's not the same.  
People want to move on.  
I haven't got his furniture.  
All his stuff has been cleared.  
I don't know if he ever had any money.  
I bought a grave stone for him  
and I put some flowers on it.  
I like to visit his grave  
because it's a memory of him.

**George Cochran** (pictured)  
National Voices on the Page award winner

## FIVE YEARS ON NRDC 2006-7

# PUBLICATIONS AND PROJECTS

**Unless indicated otherwise, all titles were published by NRDC in 2006-7 and are currently available both in print and as downloadable pdfs on the NRDC website [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk).**

### Economic development and social inclusion

*Adult learners' lives: setting the scene* by David Barton, Karin Tusting, Yvon Appleby and Roz Ivanič (available to download only on [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk))

*Minority ethnic groups: success rates in further education. A literature review* by Lara Frumkin, Maria Koutsoubou and John Vorhaus (QIA, forthcoming)

*Developing inclusive learning: a toolkit for practitioners and managers* by Jane Hurry, Laura Brazier, John Vorhaus and Judith Williams (forthcoming for CfBT)

*Engaging the Muslim community in learning* by Augustin De Coulon, Marisa Yates and Charley Greenwood (forthcoming)

*Illuminating disadvantage: Profiling the experiences of adults with Entry level literacy or numeracy over the lifecourse* by Samantha Parsons and John Bynner

*Improving the literacy and numeracy of young offenders (experimental report)* by Jane Hurry, Laura Brazier and Anita Wilson (forthcoming)

*New Light on Literacy and Numeracy* (available in full and summary versions) by John Bynner and Samantha Parsons (currently out of print and available to download on [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk))

*Post-16 education and training through disaffected young people in custody and in the community: Literature review* by Laura Brazier, Jane Hurry and Anita Wilson (forthcoming)

*Programmes for unemployed people since the 1970s: the changing place of literacy, language and numeracy* by Karin Tusting and David Barton

*Skills for Life: An Analysis of Adult Skill Levels in the UK* by Augustin De Coulon and Anna Vignoles (forthcoming)

*The value of basic skills in the British labour market* by Anna Vignoles, Augustin De Coulon and Oscar Marcenaro-Gutierrez (forthcoming)

*Young offenders and the teaching of basic skills* by Jane Hurry, Rachel Emslie-Henry, Kate Snapes and Laura Brazier (forthcoming)

### Persistence, progression and achievement

*Determinants and pathways of progression to Level 2 qualifications: evidence from the NCDS and BHPS\** by Ricardo Sabates, Leon Feinstein and Eleni Skaliotis (Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning)

*Impact of the Skills for Life Strategy on adult literacy, language and numeracy learners: quantitative report* by Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Greg Brooks and Mark Pilling

*Motivating Skills for Life learners to persist, progress and achieve: literature review* (forthcoming for QIA)

*Progression from non-counting provision to counting provision* by Greg Brooks, Mark Pilling and Sammy Rashid (forthcoming)

*Skills for Life: An Analysis of Adult Skill Levels in the UK* by Augustin De Coulon and Anna Vignoles (forthcoming)

### Employability, employees and engaging employers

*Enhancing Skills for Life: Adult Basic Skills and Workplace Learning – a TLRP and NRDC project, 2003-08*

*Learning for and in the workplace* by JD Carpentieri

*The impact of literacy language and numeracy (LLN) and key skills provision on modern apprenticeships* by Maria Hughes and Laura Brazier (forthcoming)

*Putting good practice into practice: Literacy, numeracy and key skills in apprenticeships. Part two: Revisiting and re-evaluating (May 2005)* by Olivia Sagan, Edmund Waite and Steve Cowan, with Helen Casey and Karen Evans (full report available to download on [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk), summary available in print)

### Teaching and learning

*Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy* by David Mallows (forthcoming for CfBT)

*Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: a review of programmes and practice in the UK and internationally* by Greg Brooks, Kate Pahl, Alison Pollard and Felicity Rees (forthcoming for CfBT)

*Effective teaching and learning: ESOL* (available in full and summary versions) by Mike Baynham, Celia Roberts, Melanie Cooke, James Simpson, Katerina Ananiadou, John Callaghan, James McGoldrick and Catherine Wallace

*Effective teaching and learning: Numeracy* (available in full and summary versions) by Diana Coben, Margaret Brown, Valerie Rhodes, Jon Swain, Katerina Ananiadou, Peter Brown, Jackie Ashton, Debbie Holder, Sandra Lowe, Cathy Magee, Sue Nieduszynska and Veronica Storey

*Effective teaching and learning: Reading* (available in full and summary versions) by Greg Brooks, Maxine Burton, Pam Cole and Marcin Szczerbiński

*Effective teaching and learning: Using ICT* (available in full and summary versions) by Harvey Mellar, Maria Kambouri, Kit Logan, Sally Betts, Barbara Nance and Viv Moriarty

*Effective teaching and learning: Writing* (available in full and summary versions) by Sue Grief, Bill Meyers and Amy Burgess

*Evaluation of the DFES materials for embedded learning* by Chris Atkin, Anthea Rose and Anne O'Grady (available to download only on [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk))

*Formative assessment and adult learning: a literature review* by Jay Derrick (forthcoming)

*Getting the practical teaching element right: A guide for literacy, numeracy and ESOL teacher educators*, by Helen Casey, Jay Derrick, Samantha Duncan and David Mallows

*Literacy, learning and health* by Uta Papen and Sue Walters (forthcoming)

*Oral reading fluency in adults* by Maxine Burton

\* NCDS = National Child Development Study BHPS = British Household Panel Survey



*The Right Course? An exploratory study of learner placement practices in ESOL and literacy* by James Simpson, Melanie Cooke and Mike Baynham (forthcoming)

*The role of Individual Learning Plans in planning learning for ESOL learners at E1 & E2* by Melanie Cooke and Karen Dudley

*Skills and social practices: Making common cause* by Alix Green and Ursula Howard

*"You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering..." Embedding literacy, language and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes - the impact on learning and achievement* (available in full and summary versions) by Helen Casey, Olga Cara, Jan Eldred, Sue Grief, Rachel Hodge, Ivanić, Tom Jupp, Desiree Lopez and Bethia McNeil

The 'Developing adult teaching and learning: Practitioner guides' series, published in partnership with NIACE (2007/08): *Bridges into learning for adults who find provision hard to reach*, by Yvon Appleby (forthcoming)

*Embedded literacy, numeracy and ESOL*, by Helen Casey, Mary Conway, Sue Grief and Desiree Lopez (forthcoming)

*ESOL*, by Melanie Cooke and Celia Roberts

*Numeracy*, by Jon Swain, Barbara Newmarch and Oonagh Gormley

*Reading*, by Maxine Burton

*Responding to people's lives*, by Yvon Appleby and David Barton (forthcoming)

*Using ICT*, by Barbara Nance, Maria Kambouri and Harvey Mellar

*Working with young adults*, by Bethia McNeil (forthcoming)

*Writing*, by Sue Grief and Jan Chatterton

## Numeracy

*Effective teaching and learning: Numeracy* (available in full and summary versions) by Diana Coben, Margaret Brown, Valerie Rhodes, Jon Swain, Katerina Ananiadou, Peter Brown, Jackie Ashton, Debbie Holder, Sandra Lowe, Cathy Magee, Sue Nieduszynska and Veronica Storey

*Impact of the Skills for Life Strategy on adult literacy, language and numeracy learners: quantitative report* by Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Greg Brooks and Mark Pilling

*Financial literacy education and Skills for Life* by Diana Coben, Margaret Dawes and Nirmala Lee

*The literacy and numeracy levels of 13- to 19-year-olds* by Sammy Rashid and Greg Brooks (forthcoming)

*The Skills for Life workforce in England: summary report* by JD Carpentieri, Olga Cara and Helen Casey

*What role for the three Rs? Progress and attainment during primary school* by Kathryn Duckworth (Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning)

## Maths4Life publications

*English for Healthcare Pathfinder - Numeracy and ESOL in Health and Social Care workplaces: Converting and upgrading numeracy skills for employees whose first language is not English* by Gillian Jones and Violet Windsor (available to download only from [www.maths4life.org](http://www.maths4life.org))

*Gloucester College of Arts and Technology - Mathematics in the workplace - the challenge of matching of employers' and employees' needs* by Debbie Holder (available to download only from [www.maths4life.org](http://www.maths4life.org))

*Institute of Education Pathfinder - Towards a professionalised, qualified workforce: Planning and prioritizing staff development as a whole organisation approach* by Olivia Sagan (available to download only from [www.maths4life.org](http://www.maths4life.org))

*LLU+ Pathfinder - Integrating Formative and Diagnostic Assessment Techniques into Teachers' Routine Practice in Adult Numeracy* by Noyona Chanda, Graham Griffiths and Rachel Stone (available to download only from [www.maths4life.org](http://www.maths4life.org))

*Measurement* by Debb Bouch and Christine Ness

*Number* by Barbara Newmarch and Tracy Part

*Thinking Through Mathematics: A practical guide to establishing and managing the mathematics footprint in educational organizations* by Geoff Wake and Val Beamish

*Thinking Through Mathematics: Research Report* by Jon Swain and Malcolm Swan

*Thinking Through Mathematics: Strategies for teaching and learning* (resource pack) (available to order on [www.maths4life.org](http://www.maths4life.org) only)

*Time and Money* by Christine Ness and Debb Bouch

*Topic-based teaching* by Christine Ness and Debb Bouch

*Using Numeracy Skills in the Workplace* by Sue Prew and Alison Tomlin (available to download only from [www.maths4life.org](http://www.maths4life.org))

*Working mathematics for the 21st century: A discussion paper on workplace numeracy and mathematics* by Caroline Hudson

## The Skills for Life teaching workforce

*The Skills for Life teaching workforce in England 2006: summary report* by JD Carpentieri, Olga Cara and Helen Casey (for LLUK)

## Teachers, learners, stakeholders: experiences and perceptions of Skills for Life

*Impact of the Skills for Life Strategy on adult literacy, language and numeracy learners: qualitative report* by Yvon Appleby, Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Pam Cole and Linda Pearce

*Teacher attitudes towards the Skills for Life national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills* by Olga Cara and Jenny Litster (forthcoming)

## Transforming knowledge into practice

*'Bestimation': Using basic calculators in the numeracy classroom* by Barbara Newmarch, Valerie Rhodes and Diana Coben

*Collaborative writing* by Sue Grief

*Greater than the sum... Report of the action research project: The Use of ICT in Adult Numeracy Teaching in Scotland, Phase 2* by Diana Coben, Jim Crowther, Maria Kambouri, Harvey Mellar, Nora Mogyey, Sheena Morrison and Ian Stevenson

*A literature review of research on teacher education in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL* by Tom Morton, Terry McGuire and Mike Baynham (currently out of print and available to download only on [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk))

*Insights: What research has to tell us about ESOL* by David Malloes (currently being prepared for reprint)

## FIVE YEARS ON NRDC 2006-7

# NRDC IN NUMBERS

### Publications

Over the last year, NRDC has produced **42** publications, including **13** research reports, **8** research summaries, **1** research digest, **1** evaluation, **15** practical guides and **1** annual report. Our publications can be downloaded directly from our website and ordered online.

Between October 2006 and September 2007 we distributed more than **74,724** hard copies of our publications in the UK and internationally. Many of these were used at Professional Development Network events, on training courses and other practitioner events, and we also had requests from organisations abroad to send a complete set of our publications.

We have just produced issue 9 of Reflect magazine which continues to be a must-read for all in the sector with its unique mix of voices from practice, research and policy. Over **7,000** copies of Reflect are mailed directly and **1000s** more are distributed at events and through professional development centres.

We produce a monthly e-newsletter to alert subscribers to new events, projects and publications by NRDC and partners. The September issue was sent to **4,186** people and the October one to **4,337**. Our mailing list currently has more than **7,500** members.

### Website

Between October 2006 and September 2007 **1,786,161** pages were viewed and **602,283** visits were made to the NRDC website. There are more than **7000** registered users who visit the website to keep up to date with the latest policy news and information from our research and development projects; to register for events or to download publications. Unsurprisingly the publications page was the most popular area - there are now over **100** publications available for order or to download.

### Events

Since March 2006 we have organised **22** events including the annual Skills for Life conferences for DIUS in London, York and Birmingham (a total of **1,300** delegates over the three conferences) and two conferences to share implications from our Effective Practice projects with practitioners and policy-makers.

*'I just want to congratulate and thank you for a very interesting conference earlier today and to say how much I appreciated being able to bring home the elegantly produced summaries. Many of the findings resonate with my own experiences – especially the crucial role of the instructor/facilitator. With warm good wishes for the continuing success, impact and growth of the NRDC!' feedback from London Effective Practice Conference, 30.01.2007*

In April 2007 NRDC ran another successful International Conference, attended by colleagues from Europe, US, Australia, Brazil and Malawi. NRDC hopes to build on this success at the 2008 conference entitled "Moving in, on and up – social inclusion, persistence and progression".

*'Congratulations on this year's international conference. It was packed with crucially relevant information and buzzed with an atmosphere of professional camaraderie. I especially enjoyed learning about the research carried out in the US and Brazil, and will keep tabs on this in future.'* Ibrar Butt

We also exhibited at more than **40** events across the UK including the LitCAM event which was part of the Frankfurt Bookfair in 2006 and 2007. Staff regularly present at other seminars and events.



# **FIVE YEARS ON RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGING PRACTICE**

NRDC 2006-7

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