



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy

Twenty-first Report of
Session 2005–06

*Report, together with formal minutes,
oral and written evidence*

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The Committee of Public Accounts

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Summary

The UK has lower levels of literacy and numeracy in the adult population of working age than many of our international competitors. This is partly due to long standing low levels of achievement in schools, where there are improvements in train that the Department for Education and Skills expects will raise results in a few years' time. To address the needs of adults in England,¹ in 2001 the Department launched an ambitious strategy, with a target to improve the skills of 2.25 million adults by 2010.

By 2006, at least £3.7 billion will have been spent on the strategy, *Skills for Life*. Given the size of the challenge, it is likely only to mark the start of a long-term programme, but it is not clear how much more money will be needed to make real improvements in our position relative to other countries. Estimated further expenditure of over £2 billion could be needed to sustain the strategy until 2010.

The Learning and Skills Council plans and funds learning provision by further education colleges and a range of other providers. None are under the Council's direct control, and it uses its annual business cycle – involving discussions with colleges and other providers and approval of their development plans – to influence their contribution to meeting the priorities of the strategy.

New qualifications, developed to replace over seventy that were of variable quality, are underpinned by national standards and curricula. However, the first few years of the strategy have produced little evidence of improvement in the quality of provision, and people with the greatest need get the worst provision. Raising quality will depend on raising the skills and capability of the teaching workforce. There are new, higher qualifications for new teachers, and training for existing teachers. The Department intends all teachers to be qualified by 2010, but existing teachers are not individually required to qualify by any set time.

The Department achieved its first milestone of 750,000 adults achieving qualifications by July 2004. Over half were gained by 16 to 18 year olds who had not managed to get the qualifications at school. More recently, the balance of the programme has been moving in favour of older adults. So far most learning has been provided as courses in further education colleges, where most of the teaching expertise is concentrated.

The future targets are challenging. The 2007 milestone is for 1.5 million adults to achieve qualifications, and the 2010 target to raise this further to 2.25 million adults. The Department has started to work with the Civil Service and large private sector employers. Local Learning and Skills Councils find that many small and medium sized enterprises are reluctant to provide their employees with opportunities to improve their literacy and numeracy. If the targets are to be met, employers of people with low skills need to be persuaded to identify employees who need help to improve, and encourage them to take up appropriate training. In addition, people should be able to continue learning as their

¹ Measures to address levels of literacy and numeracy have also been introduced by the Scottish Executive (*Adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland*, July 2001) and the Welsh Assembly (*Basic Skills Strategy for Wales*, February 2002)

personal circumstances change, for example as they move in and out of work. There is a need for better joined-up working between government agencies, and collaboration from employers, so that there are no unnecessary obstacles to people completing their course when they start a new job.

An increasing proportion of the strategy's resources is devoted to English for speakers of other languages. Progress is being made through community groups to reach people with language needs, and the lessons should be disseminated to areas of the country where there are increasing needs but little experience of dealing with them.

On the basis of a Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General,² our predecessors examined the Department and the Learning and Skills Council on the progress made in improving the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults in England, expanding learning provision and improving its quality, and reaching adults who need to improve their skills.

2 C&AG's Report, *Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy* (HC 20, Session 2004–05)

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1. So far 2.4 million people have participated in learning, and the first milestone of 750,000 adults achieving qualifications in literacy or numeracy by July 2004 was achieved.** All the elements that support good quality learning were either non-existent or underdeveloped before 2001, whereas the learning is now underpinned by national standards and curricula. Learners are thus able to demonstrate clear achievement against rigorous benchmarks that are meaningful to them and employers.
- 2. By 2006 some £3.7 billion will have been spent on Skills for Life.** If progress is to be maintained and affordable, unit costs need to be controlled, which will require reliable information on the actual costs of helping adults with different levels of need to achieve acceptable standards of literacy and numeracy. The Department should develop unit cost data and use it to establish reliable estimates of future resource needs.
- 3. The Department's aim is that by 2010 at least 2.25 million adults should have achieved qualifications, with an intermediate milestone of 1.5 million by 2007.** Achieving these targets is likely to become increasingly difficult over time, because they can only be met by attracting 'hard to reach' and older learners. Many of these learners start from relatively low levels of literacy and numeracy, which places additional demands on teaching skills and capacity. The Department should guard against the risk of qualification standards being diluted to achieve the targets, by subjecting qualifications to international benchmarking of standards achieved, and regularly testing the degree of challenge built into the qualifications.
- 4. The quality of learning is still too low and a more skilled teaching workforce is the key to improvement.** Adult literacy and numeracy teachers were previously neglected and under-trained, but there is no data on the numbers of practising teachers who are not qualified. Teaching qualifications for new teachers and continuing professional education for existing teachers were introduced in 2002. The Department intends that all teachers should be qualified by 2010. The Learning and Skills Council should assess the extent of non-qualification among practising teachers and set a date by which all the providers it funds use only qualified teachers.
- 5. There is a risk of 'mission drift' in that more than half of the qualifications in the first three years of the Skills for Life strategy were gained by 16 to 18 year olds.** The Skills for Life strategy is intended to meet the needs of adults. But a large proportion of its resources are taken up by recent school leavers, many of whom might reasonably have been expected to gain their qualifications at school. The Department should examine what colleges and other providers are doing differently, and disseminate any good practice that would assist schools in enabling these young people to succeed in English and mathematics at an earlier age. For those who do not succeed, Connexions, the government's support service for all young people aged 13 to 19 in England, should improve the young person's chances of achievement by helping them to find a purposeful mix of academic and vocational study to suit their aspirations.

6. **More than two million of the 2.4 million people taking up courses by July 2004 undertook them in further education. Other training, such as through community groups, has been very slow to build up.** ‘Hard to reach’ learners such as homeless people are least likely to be attracted to learning in an institution such as a college. They are much more likely to agree to being helped through voluntary or community groups they already know. The Learning and Skills Council should focus on building a more diverse supplier base that can meet the needs of the full range of potential learners. Local Learning and Skills Councils should expect providers to combine quality with improved access, for example by established providers such as colleges working with voluntary and community groups to ‘reach out’ to reluctant learners.
7. **People in low-skilled employment are a large group whose needs are not being met.** Many employers do not place a high priority on staff training and are only likely to become involved if the training offered is very flexible and does not interfere with their business. Local Learning and Skills Councils need to support training providers who have a good track record of convincing employers of the business benefits of training their staff, and offer training tailored to employers’ needs.
8. **Jobcentre Plus has to focus on getting people into jobs, but starting a job should not mean that a person has to give up learning.** The Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus are increasingly working together to reduce the barriers to people continuing with learning once they start work. The Council needs also to engage with local Chambers of Commerce and employers to encourage them to support courses delivered on business premises during working hours, lunch breaks or at the end of the working day.
9. **People whose first language is not English should be encouraged to learn so that they can participate fully in work and civil society.** Many people from diverse ethnic minorities are strongly motivated to learn, but in some groups there are cultural barriers to engaging in education. Community groups have helped to draw in people who may be reluctant to take up language learning. Examples include providing English for Speakers of Other Language classes in different types of venue such as restaurants, or linking classes to other activities such as an embroidery group at a local mosque. But there are shortages of good quality, accessible provision in some parts of the country. The Learning and Skills Council should disseminate good practice in assessing local needs and providing good quality language learning, particularly to areas with a growing need but limited previous experience.
10. **Problems of continuity of learning when prisoners move between prisons or are discharged into the community have gone on for far too long.** Continuity is only beginning to be addressed with the introduction, in autumn 2004, of learning plans that will stay with offenders throughout their sentence and probation. Our predecessors recommended in 2002 that prisoners should be offered basic literacy and numeracy courses tailored to their period of imprisonment.³ Continuity of learning for offenders should not be delayed until the planned new integrated

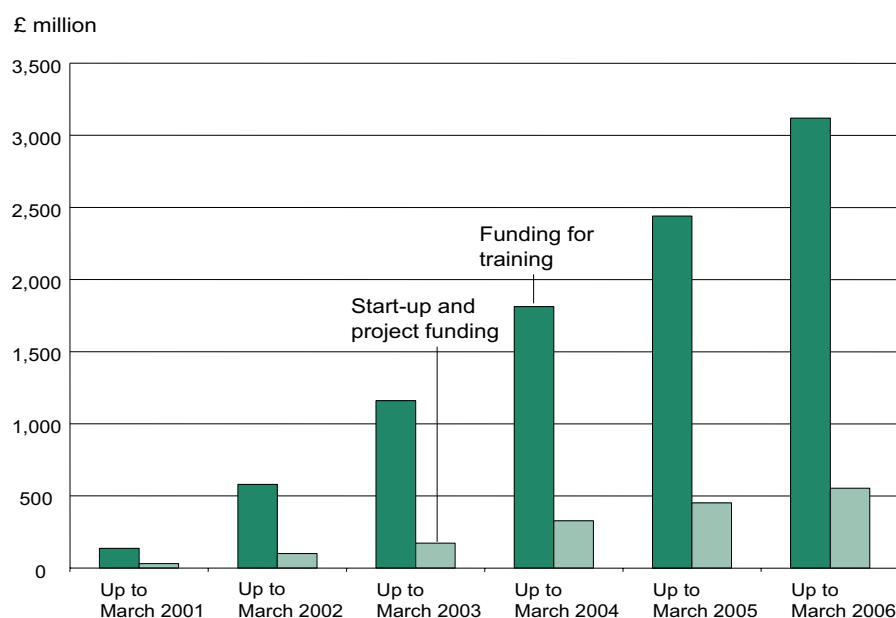
3 53rd Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *Reducing prisoner reoffending* (HC 619, Session 2001–02) para 9(ii)

learning and skills service for offenders is implemented in 2006. The Learning and Skills Council should agree contracts with providers that give offenders the opportunity to complete their qualifications within the prison system and after release.

1 The effectiveness of Skills for Life in improving the skills of the population

1. The UK has lower levels of literacy and numeracy in the adult working age population than many of our international competitors. The reasons are partly a past lack of focus in schools, which have been turning out large numbers of young people with poor literacy and numeracy. Many adults, too, have been unwilling to improve their skills and the importance of mathematics is not sufficiently appreciated.⁴ The Department believes improvements are coming through in schools, which it expects to see reflected in results in two or three years' time.⁵ To improve the skills of adults, the Department launched the Skills for Life strategy in 2001.⁶

Figure 1: Cumulative expenditure on Skills for Life to 2006



Source: C&AG's Report, Figure 13

2. By 2006 at least £3.7 billion will have been spent on Skills for Life (**Figure 1**). The £2.1 billion already spent has enabled 839,000 people to achieve a qualification, and has set 2.4 million adults in total on the path to improvement. In 2003, however, an estimated 26 million people of working age did not meet one or both standards of literacy and numeracy that the Department considers necessary for school leavers in today's economy. It is not clear how much more money will be needed to achieve the Department's targets. The strategy has an ambitious target for improvement by 2010, when 2.25 million adults should have moved up one level of qualification (**Figure 2**). If the Department were to maintain annual funding for training individual learners at the levels currently planned up

4 C&AG's Report, paras 1.2, 1.4, Figure 6; Qq 37–39, 45

5 Qq 28–29

6 C&AG's Report, para 1.10

to March 2006 (**Figure 1**), a further £2.3 billion could be needed over the period 2006–2010.⁷

Figure 2: Qualification levels

Level of qualification	Equivalent to	Do specified qualifications ¹ at this level count towards the Skills for Life target?
2	GCSE grades A*–C	Yes
1	GCSE grades D–G/11 years	Yes
Entry level 3	9 to 11 years	Yes
Entry level 2	7 to 9 years	No
Entry level 1	5 to 7 years	No

Note 1: Specified qualifications are national tests of literacy and numeracy developed for Skills for Life, approved qualifications in English for Speakers of Other Languages, Key Skills qualifications in communication and application of number, and GCSEs in English and mathematics.

Source: C&AG's Report, Figure 15 and Appendix 2

3. The Department achieved the first milestone – at least 750,000 adults gaining qualifications by July 2004.⁸ Only specified qualifications at defined levels count, up to and including the equivalent of a good GCSE (**Figure 2**). New qualifications were developed to replace the previous range of over seventy, which were of variable quality. They are underpinned by national standards and curricula, and thus able to demonstrate clear achievement against rigorous benchmarks that are meaningful to learners and employers.⁹

4. Currently the level of skills of 16 to 18 year olds is no better than the level for older adults, and more than half of the qualifications achieved by July 2004 were gained by this age group (**Figure 3**), which represents a high proportion of resources under Skills for Life.¹⁰ The Department expects the number of 16 to 18 year olds with low literacy and numeracy skills to fall as school strategies start to have an impact,¹¹ and considers that the balance of the adult literacy and numeracy programme is shifting towards the post-18 age groups. The proportion of qualifications achieved as national literacy and numeracy tests passed by adults aged 19 or over was 23% in September 2001 and had increased to 37% by July 2004.¹²

7 C&AG's Report, paras 1.3, 1.6, 2.2, 2.10, Figure 13; Qq 5, 26

8 C&AG's Report, para 2.12, Figure 16; Q 26

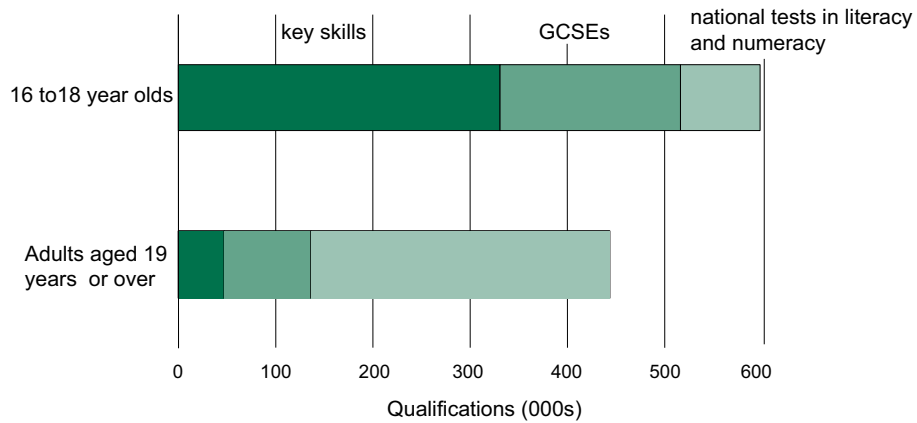
9 C&AG's Report, paras 4.5–4.11, Figure 15; Q 27

10 C&AG's Report, paras 1.6, 2.13, Figure 17; Qq 3–4

11 C&AG's Report, Figure 7; Qq 28–29

12 C&AG's Report, para 2.13; Q 4

Figure 3: Qualifications gained from April 2001 to July 2004



Note: Further education provision funded by the Learning and Skills Council only. This figure includes all qualifications — learners achieving more than one only count once against the Department's target.

Source: C&AG's Report, Figure 17

2 The quality of learning provision

5. The Department works through the Learning and Skills Council which plans and funds learning provision for people aged over 16. The Council funds a wide range of organisations to provide learning opportunities, including further education colleges, private sector training providers, adult and community education services, learndirect centres and voluntary and community groups.¹³ None of these organisations are under the direct control of the Council. For example, colleges are autonomous institutions with their own governing bodies and responsible for their own strategic direction. Local Learning and Skills Councils buy provision from providers in their areas. In 2004 the Learning and Skills Council introduced a new annual business cycle which brings together planning, funding and raising standards, and is based on three-year development plans that the Council negotiates with providers.¹⁴

6. The historical pattern of provision of adult literacy and numeracy learning has been defined less by what was needed and more by what providers have made available, and in some areas relatively little has been provided, such as the South West.¹⁵ So far most learning has been provided as courses in further education colleges, where most teaching expertise is concentrated. More than two million of the 2.4 million people taking up courses by July 2004 did them in further education (**Figure 4**). There has been some recent increase in prisons, probation, Jobcentre Plus, work-based learning and adult and community education, but the build up in the first few years of the strategy has been slow.¹⁶ Local Learning and Skills Councils need to contract for flexible provision that can supply learning to meet diverse needs in their populations. The Councils will have identified mismatches between demand and supply in their areas through the Strategic Area Reviews, completed in March 2005.¹⁷

13 C&AG's Report, paras 1.14, 4.26, Figures 11, 31

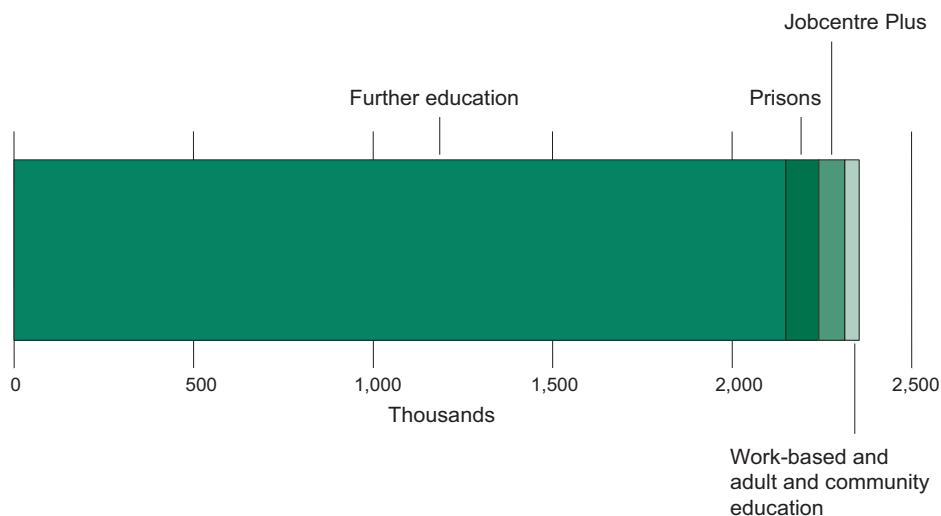
14 C&AG's Report, *Securing strategic leadership for the learning and skills sector in England* (HC 29, Session 2005–06) paras 1.5, 2.8–2.11, Figure 20

15 Q 7

16 C&AG's Report, paras 2.21, 4.22, Figure 21; Q 21

17 C&AG's Report, para 4.30; Q 15; *Learning and Skills Council Circular 03/06, Strategic Area Reviews*, March 2003

Figure 4: Participation in literacy and numeracy courses between April 2001 and July 2004



Source: C&AG's Report, Figure 21

7. The quality of provision for adults with literacy and numeracy needs is still too low. An extensive review of quality and standards by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate found widespread weaknesses. People in the greatest need were getting the worst provision, and even in colleges, provision of literacy, language and numeracy was poorer than provision for other areas of learning. In the first three years of the strategy, inspections have shown little evidence of improvement.¹⁸ A further evaluation of the quality of provision by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate, one year on from their first review, found no such evidence either. The Department considers that it is too soon to see progress, because the strategy started from a very low base, and only really got moving in 2002–03. Significant improvements will take more time.¹⁹

8. The key to improving quality is better teaching. For many years the teaching workforce for adult literacy and numeracy was neglected and under-trained. In 2002 the Department introduced new teaching qualifications, higher than past requirements, for new teachers, and a programme of continuing professional education for existing teachers. Ofsted has evaluated the new courses for teachers and found them of good quality. The Department intends that all teachers should be qualified by 2010, and is trying to encourage existing teachers to take up qualifications, and to persuade colleges and other providers of the advantages of having qualified staff. There is, however, no requirement for existing teachers to achieve the new qualifications by a set time.²⁰

18 C&AG's Report, paras 4.22–4.23, Figure 30

19 Q 2

20 C&AG's Report, para 4.15; Qq 2, 8–11, 13

3 Reaching people who need to improve their skills

9. People with literacy and numeracy needs are often reluctant to admit their difficulties with reading or arithmetic, and may have devised coping strategies over the years to conceal them.²¹ The Department has sought to get people to recognise their needs and take up learning through a series of advertising campaigns featuring the ‘gremlin’ character. The campaigns have achieved high awareness and generated over 300,000 calls to a helpline. An increasing proportion of callers have taken some action to improve their skills. But follow-up research indicates about half still do not, suggesting that there are still significant barriers which prevent people from taking up literacy and numeracy learning even if they want to improve their skills.²²

10. There are about 12 million people in employment with literacy skills and 16 million with numeracy skills at level 1 or below (Figure 2 explains the levels of qualifications). The Department needs to draw these people into learning to meet its future targets, and recognises the importance of engaging the co-operation of employers. It has started to work, particularly with the Civil Service and large private sector employers, to help them identify and meet the needs of their staff.²³

11. Local Learning and Skills Councils continue to find it hard to get co-operation from small and medium sized enterprises. Historically many such employers have not given a high priority to training for employees. Employer training pilots²⁴ have shown that reaching them requires short spells of customised training, which can be time-consuming and expensive to design and arrange. The Skills White Paper seeks to put employers’ needs centre stage in the design and delivery of training and introduces the new national employer training programme, which will build on the employer training pilots and be launched nationally from 2006–07. This programme will include support for leadership and management development in small and medium sized enterprises. The Department and the Learning and Skills Council see the programme as a way of focusing on employers who do not train.²⁵

12. The Skills for Life strategy includes speakers of other languages as a priority group. Since 2001, the numbers of people achieving English language qualifications and participating in language learning have risen every year and there are waiting lists for courses in some areas. The need for English language teaching has historically been concentrated in urban areas, but it is now rising in other parts of the country, for example Devon and Cornwall and Norfolk. Language learners represent an increasing proportion of

21 C&AG’s Report, para 3.2; Q 22

22 Qq 35–36; Ev 11

23 C&AG’s Report, para 3.23; Qq 22, 26

24 These pilots are designed to encourage employers to train low-skilled employees and give them paid time off work to be trained. They are targeted towards employers who traditionally do not train their staff.

25 C&AG’s Report, para 3.24; Qq 6, 34; *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work*, Department for Education and Skills, March 2005 (Cm 6483-I), paras 27–38

learners benefiting from the strategy, up from 22% at the start of the strategy to 31% now.²⁶ Many of these learners are highly motivated, but they include groups that have cultural barriers to engaging in education, particularly for women. **Figure 5** illustrates some targeted work to reach such people through community groups.²⁷

Figure 5: Examples of innovative projects engaging people through community groups

Name of project	Who was involved	Type of provision
Exeter and Plymouth English for Speakers of Other Languages pathfinder	A multi-agency partnership led by Exeter Council for Voluntary Services, including the Islamic Centre of the South West as a key partner	English classes in the Islamic Centre, restaurants and learners' homes
Community English for Speakers of Other Languages Project in Exeter	Volunteers running activities at the mosque	Women-only classes at the local mosque. Linked to other activities such as an embroidery group.
South East Coastal Counties Pathfinder	Sompriti, a voluntary sector Black and Minority Ethnic organisation	Support for English for Speakers of Other Languages learners
<i>Source: Ev 14–15</i>		

13. A large proportion of offenders, in prison or on probation, have poor literacy and numeracy skills. Improving skills improves offenders' chances of future employment and reduces the probability of their re-offending.²⁸ They represent only a small proportion of the learners and achievements under the Skills for Life strategy, although the numbers of qualifications gained by prisoners has risen from 41,000 in 2002–03 to 64,000 in 2004–05.²⁹ Since 2001, the Department and other relevant bodies have been working together on education and skills training for offenders. There is to be a new integrated learning and skills service, planned and funded by the Learning and Skills Council, from August 2006.³⁰

14. One of the main difficulties in prisons has been the movement of prisoners around the system. Our predecessors concluded in September 2002 that the impact of such moves on prisoners' education should be reviewed and that there should be programmes that are tailored to mitigate the impact. It was not until autumn 2004 that learning plans were introduced that stay with prisoners for the length of their sentence and through probation.³¹

26 C&AG's Report, paras 1.11, 2.14, 2.24, 2.29, Figures 18, 20, 32; Qq 48, 50

27 Qq 49, 51–56

28 C&AG's Report, para 3.9; Q 18; 53rd Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *Reducing prisoner reoffending* (HC 619, Session 2001–02) para 2

29 C&AG's Report, paras 2.12, 2.21, Figures 16, 21; Q 18; Ev 11

30 C&AG's Report, para 3.8; Q 18; Ev 11

31 Q 18; 53rd Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *Reducing prisoner reoffending* (HC 619, Session 2001–02) para 8

15. The Department is working with a wide variety of organisations in identifying adults with needs and engaging them in learning, including other government departments, employers, and various training providers. Although it aims to join up services, unfortunate gaps can arise from lack of co-ordination of different elements of a learning programme or competing objectives of different agencies, which can create barriers that prevent people from completing a course.³²

16. After a slow start, Jobcentre Plus has become a major part of the Skills for Life programme, screening people who are claiming benefits to establish their literacy and numeracy needs, and referring them for more detailed assessment and suitable courses where appropriate. Jobcentre Plus is focused on getting people into work, and people on its literacy and numeracy courses stop attending if they obtain employment.³³ Under the Skills White Paper, Jobcentre staff will make sure people can continue learning if they get a job. This important step should be facilitated by closer working between Jobcentre Plus offices and local Learning and Skills Councils, and harmonisation of their contracting for training services, as recommended by the National Employment Panel last year. In some parts of the country the local Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus are already working together with a single family of providers, who can provide continuity for learners, and the aim is to spread this approach across the country.³⁴

32 C&AG's Report, Figure 27; Q 24

33 C&AG's Report, paras 3.12, 3.14; Qq 21, 56

34 C&AG's Report, para 3.18; Qq 56, 64–66; *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work*, Department for Education and Skills, March 2005 (Cm 6483-II) para 197

Formal minutes

Monday 19 December 2005

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Greg Clark
Mr Ian Davidson
Helen Goodman

Mr Sadiq Khan
Sarah McCarthy-Fry
Jon Trickett

Draft Report (Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 16 read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Twenty-first Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned until Wednesday 11 January at 3.30 pm

Witnesses

Wednesday 6 April 2005

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Sir David Normington KCB, Ms Susan Pember OBE, Department for Education and Skills, and **Mr Mark Haysom**, Learning and Skills Council

Ev 1

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Department for Education and Skills

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Second Report	The regeneration of the Millennium Dome and associated land	HC 409 (<i>Cm 6689</i>)
Third Report	Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2004	HC 410 (<i>Cm 6712</i>)
Fourth Report	Fraud and error in benefit expenditure	HC 411
Fifth Report	Inland Revenue: Tax Credits and deleted tax cases	HC 412 (<i>Cm 6689</i>)
Sixth Report	Department of Trade and Industry: Renewable energy	HC 413 (<i>Cm 6689</i>)
Seventh Report	The use of operating theatres in the Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services	HC 414
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Eighteenth Report	Department for Education and Skills: Improving school attendance in England	HC 789
Nineteenth Report	Department of Health: Tackling cancer: improving the patient journey	HC 790
Twentieth Report	The NHS Cancer Plan: a progress report	HC 791
Twenty-first Report	Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy	HC 792

The reference number of the Treasury Minute to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number

Oral evidence

Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts

on Wednesday 6 April 2005

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Allan
Mrs Angela Browning

Mr Ian Davidson
Mr Alan Williams

Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office, further examined.

Ms Paula Diggle, Second Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, further examined.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

SKILLS FOR LIFE

Witnesses: **Sir David Normington KCB**, Permanent Secretary and **Ms Susan Pember OBE**, Director, Learning and Skills Performance Group, Department for Education and Skills, and **Mr Mark Haysom**, Chief Executive, Learning and Skills Council, examined.

Q1 Chairman: Good afternoon. Welcome to the last Committee of Public Accounts of this Parliament. We are once again joined by Sir David Normington. We hope that you will enjoy the last hoorah of this Parliament! We are going to deal with an important subject from your Department, Sir David, which is the progress that we are making in adult literacy and numeracy. Perhaps you could introduce your team, please.

Sir David Normington: Mark Haysom is the Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Council and the Accounting Officer for the LSC. Susan Pember is my Director in the Department responsible for the Skills for Life Strategy we are discussing and she has been responsible for it from the start.

Q2 Chairman: Could you please start by looking at page 53 of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report and, in particular, if you could look at Figure 30. You are spending £3.7 billion in total on this programme up to 2006 to teach adults to read, write and count. If we look at Figure 30 and the results from Ofsted inspections, we can see very little improvement in the quality of teaching. Is this not absolutely key? What is going on?

Sir David Normington: It is key. Clearly the quality of teaching is absolutely critical here. We come from a long way back with this strategy. It was piloted in 2001–02 and really gets moving in 2002–03. Some of the early work has been putting in place a proper programme of assessment, a proper curriculum, which we have never had before in this area, and proper teacher training. I hope as the years go on you will see significant improvements as a result of that. It would be surprising if there were significant improvements in this short timescale. There has not been enough time in the first couple of years of this strategy for it to have made a significant impact on teaching. This is a workforce that has been very neglected and very under-trained over a lot of years. That is what we are trying to turn around.

Q3 Chairman: It is also mentioned in paragraph 4.23 that “Results from Ofsted inspections of literacy, numeracy and language provision in further education colleges indicate little improvement so far.” You have basically given the answer that it is early on. We will explore this as the hearing goes on because it is absolutely key. I would like you now to turn to page 30 of the Report and look at paragraph 2.13 which tells us that more than half of the qualifications that count against the target were gained by 16 to 18 year olds. What I want to put to you is that really you have only managed to reach your target, have you not, because you are getting 16 to 18 year olds to take qualifications they should have obtained before leaving school?

Sir David Normington: I suppose the first answer is they have not gained them and in a sense one is trying to ensure that before they leave what you might call full-time education and training they do gain those qualifications. As you know, we have a major programme to raise literacy and numeracy standards in primary and secondary school which is having a great effect, but it is not yet catching everyone. I think it is legitimate to go on making sure that those who leave school without the requisite qualifications do get them.

Q4 Chairman: I do not deny that. Here we have a situation where we have got research from 2003 which tells us that only one in five of the adult population of working age have both literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to a pass A to C at GCSE. A pass C at GCSE is not high academia, let us face it. You are achieving your targets by concentrating on the 16 to 18 year olds and they should have been dealt with at school. You are missing out on these older people.

Sir David Normington: We have some figures which show that we are now shifting the balance of the programme. Mr Haysom can update us on that.

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Mr Haysom: I can update you on the figure in the Report because it is now 61% of the period of the strategy that is adults, in other words post-18, and it was 62% last year. There is a movement towards more and more adults getting qualifications.

Sir David Normington: Clearly our aim is that people should leave school at 16 with adequate levels of literacy and numeracy. That is a central objective of Government policy and we are making progress on that, but there are still some who leave school without those qualifications. We have to go on picking them up.

Q5 Chairman: On page 25, paragraph 2.2 we see you have now spent £2.1 billion on adult literacy, language and numeracy since the strategy began. If we turn to page 29, Figure 16, we can see that that £2.1 billion is spent on 850,000 learners, so we have been spending, roughly speaking, £2,500 per learner. You have not made a great deal of progress. How much more money will you need to make a difference?

Sir David Normington: I think we have made progress, if I may say so. What Table 16 is showing is the progress we are making against our Public Service Agreement targets, which is about the achievement of qualifications. In addition to the 839,000 shown on Figure 16 there are 2.6 million people taking literacy and numeracy programmes which are not leading to qualifications at the levels covered by the targets in paragraph 16. That £2.1 billion has paid for 2.6 million people to start on the ladder of literacy and numeracy improvement. Not all of them have got qualifications which count towards our targets, but to get them there you have to get them on the first rung of the ladder.

Q6 Chairman: I may want to come back to this at the end. Let us look at the employer training targets which are mentioned in paragraph 3.25 on page 46. It says there, "At local level, employer training targets are funded and managed by local Learning and Skills Councils." What have they told you? What seems to work as far as small employers are concerned?

Sir David Normington: The basic message is that you need to customise the training to the needs of small and medium sized employers because they need training that does not interfere with the business they are doing and that it is done at times which suit both the employer and the individual. It is often necessary to do it in bite-sized chunks because in a small firm you cannot be losing your employee for a long period. It may need to be done in the evenings or at weekends. It has told us that if we want to make an impact on skills in small and medium sized enterprises we need to be very flexible about how it is organised.

Mr Haysom: It is all about flexibility. Something like 11% or 12% of the provision through employer training pilots is about this Skills for Life activity. I think it has actually shown some very good results in reaching some difficult people to reach, ie some of the adult groups we were just talking about earlier. So we are actually starting to get there. I personally

have seen some really interesting examples of that with Skills for Life training actually taking place in the workplace. I have been working with union reps to encourage people to take part.

Q7 Chairman: Let us look at what has happened around the country. If we look at page 35 and Figure 24, we have all sorts of figures here for numeracy participation and literacy participation. Mrs Browning is here. I see that in the South West they are particularly unwilling to learn how to count. Does this figure actually mean anything? I cannot believe that people in the South West are any less interested in learning than people in the North East or the North West.

Sir David Normington: I agree with you, I do not think it means all that much. What it reflects is the historic pattern of provision. In other words, it is as much about what is available as what is needed because there was not a national programme until recently and therefore it depended on what was provided locally. Part of what is happening in the South West is that rather little was provided.

Q8 Chairman: Mrs Browning will be able to leap to the defence of her constituents in a moment, but before I end I want to ask you about a key point which is to do with teachers. Let us look at page 51, paragraph 4.15, where the Comptroller and Auditor General says, "Existing teachers do not have to achieve the new qualifications within a given time." This is a fairly key and worrying point. If you are not requiring existing teachers to achieve these new qualifications how are you going to achieve the progress and targets that you want to achieve?

Sir David Normington: It is on a long-term basis, but by 2010 it is our intention, as the paragraph says at the end, that "all teachers should be qualified". That is quite a long programme. As I said at the beginning, we come from a long way back here.

Q9 Chairman: Can you honestly commit yourself in front of this Committee to meeting that target by 2010?

Sir David Normington: That is our intention, yes.

Q10 Chairman: That is your intention?

Sir David Normington: Yes.

Q11 Chairman: Is there a realistic chance that you will meet that target?

Sir David Normington: Yes.

Ms Pember: We do feel that by 2010 we will be able to reach that target and we are working at it in different ways. We are working at it with the universities and they can provide part-time programmes for existing teachers and we are also working with the existing teachers to find ways that make it easier for them to take up this activity, and we are also working with the managers of colleges and local education authorities so they understand the real importance and what a difference it makes to performance if your teachers are qualified in this area.

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Q12 Chairman: Instead of raising expectations in the way that you have done, if we are talking about teaching adults, should you not have started with a step-by-step approach, trying to get teachers in and raising their qualifications? Would that not have been a better way of doing it rather than having this programme and a great fanfare which appears to have achieved very little?

Sir David Normington: With respect, it has achieved a great deal in a short time. It is the first serious attempt in this country to tackle literacy and numeracy problems amongst adults. It tackles teacher qualifications and quality. For the first time it sets a national qualification and assessment framework and it puts serious money into supporting people through a whole range of different types of training. It is a programme that builds up over time. We have started quite modestly. The long-term targets are very ambitious indeed. We recognise we have to have the quality provision. This is probably one of the most ambitious programmes in the world and it is the first time in this country we have tried it and we should be really proud of it.

Q13 Chairman: Yet, as we see in paragraph 4.22, the learners with the most need get the poorest quality of teaching.

Sir David Normington: I say again, we come from a long way back here. There had been no focus on this at all before 2001. We have put in place now a programme to address the quality of training and to provide a national framework of assessment and qualifications. This is the first time this has been done. This is trying to reverse something which is much neglected.

Chairman: Thank you.

Q14 Mrs Browning: I would like to pick up on this point about the South West.

Sir David Normington: I was not attacking the South West.

Q15 Mrs Browning: I do hope not. Certainly in Devon—God's own county—we value the standard of our primary school teaching and I believe in the main most of our primary school children go on to secondary having achieved certainly an adequate standard. What analysis have you made of an area like the South West—and by that I mean Devon and Cornwall—in terms of rurality and sparsity because it does seem to me access is very important? Have you looked at whether the service could be more peripatetic and go to the person? I realise, given the stigma of this subject we are dealing with, it would not be appropriate for somebody to go into the workplace specifically to see an individual because they needed to access these services. Have you looked at overcoming that problem of sparsity?

Sir David Normington: The brief answer is yes. The local Learning and Skills Council is largely responsible for this provision. It is the essence of this programme that it needs to be flexible. We need to provide online learning, community learning, college learning and work-based learning because it

is in the nature of this population that there are all kinds of ways that you need to provide them with the opportunities in the right context.

Mr Haysom: I think you have hit on one of the very great difficulties that there is in terms of getting provision right. One of the things that you can track across is that there is an issue about rural communities and getting the right kind of provision and there is a separate set of issues amongst urban communities and the solutions do have to be different. We are trying all sorts of different solutions in different parts of the country to overcome that issue. One of the recommendations in this report is about sharing that best practice and building on that.

Q16 Mrs Browning: One of the things that I constantly have to bat on about here is the question of deprivation in rural areas because we see it on a scale in larger towns and cities, but the difficulty for the truly rural communities is the lack of transport and it is totally impractical to think there is ever going to be a bus service running in a large part of a constituency like mine. One of my local charities provides motorbikes for young people who have been accepted on training courses and they borrow these bikes—I do not know what their mums think—for the length of the course. Are you as innovative as that?

Mr Haysom: Yes. I was aware of that. There are all sorts of different initiatives. I would not wish to refer to any specifically at the moment. You are right about the transport issue, which is why e-learning is a big part of it and why the voluntary sector has a huge role to play.

Q17 Mrs Browning: If you cannot read very well it is very difficult to find your way through a computer programme, is it not?

Mr Haysom: I am not sure that is the case. I have had the opportunity of seeing some of the learndirect work and there is some really valuable work that learndirect have done with some of the provision they have made available around the country to help learners through all of this. I was talking about the voluntary sector and reaching into these communities. I think they are playing a key role for us and we are working very hard with them. I am glad that you have raised that as an issue.

Q18 Mrs Browning: I particularly wanted to ask you about the service in prisons because clearly this is one of the core problems in terms of rehab, ensuring that while a prisoner is serving a sentence they have every opportunity to maximise and improve their literacy and numeracy skills. When I look at Figure 21 on page 33 I see there has been some improvement in prisons, but as we see from this Report, it is these particular niche groups where one would be looking to see a lot more progress. What actually is the problem in providing this service on the scale necessary within the prison network?

Sir David Normington: It is our aim. We have prioritised the prisons. There is a clear connection between people who cannot read, write and add up

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and their lack of employment and their prison record often. A major part of this programme is in the prisons. You asked what the difficulty has been. The difficulty with all training in prisons has been, at least in part, about the way in which prisoners get moved around and that is what we are trying to address. We are working with the Prison Service to screen prisoners when they go in so that we assess their needs and then develop a proper training programme.

Ms Pember: The Prison Service and Martin Narey, who is now in NOMS, has been a champion of basic skills over the last five years and the Prison Service has met the targets that we have set them. You are right to say there are difficulties there. The main difficulties are to capture the person's need on entry and then to make sure that as they move through their prison sentence the learning programme goes with them. From last autumn the Prison Service has put in place a structure so that the learning plan for that individual prisoner goes with them for the length of their stretch and then goes out with them into probation and that is a real step forward, but we still want to be able to get to more prisoners and to be able to support them in different ways when they are at work within the prison, as well as when they are in education, and that means structural changes in some prisons to help us do that.

Q19 Mrs Browning: Are you able to provide us with the figures in terms of the percentage of prisoners who you assess have these needs for training and how many you are able to set off on this course and how many actually complete it to a satisfactory level?

Sir David Normington: We can certainly provide that.

Q20 Mrs Browning: I think those would be very useful figures.

Sir David Normington: We will definitely do that.¹

Q21 Mrs Browning: Thank you very much. If we look again at paragraph 2.21, why is provision in places other than education colleges coming on so slowly? What is the problem here?

Sir David Normington: Some of this is about the build-up of the programme and getting enough provision in place with the tutors and the trainers to provide it. That is what has been happening. We are just entering the fourth year of the programme. This programme has been a programme where each year we have increased the reach. The job centres and Jobcentre Plus are now a major part of this programme, but it has taken until the last year to get in place the screening and the provision to support the results of that screening. That is now in place. What this report was reflecting when it was written was the position a year ago. This programme is building up and we are on this upward curve.

Q22 Mrs Browning: Can you give us any idea about the people who are employed but who lack these skills and for whom it becomes a difficulty within the workplace? How does this work in practice? Is it that employers identify the lack of skills? I should imagine that many basic jobs today which require people to incorporate keyboard skills have identified a group of people who previously might have got by, but now it has been identified that their problem is not their lack of keyboard skills, it is their lack of basic literacy. Where is the drive coming from? Is it coming from within the workplace, from employers who have recognised the difficulty they have with people in their workforce and they are the people who are seeking this type of support, or is it the person themselves? My understanding of this difficulty, particularly with the older adults, is that once they have got by for a few years they become very sensitive to letting people know that they lack these basic skills and therefore they are not the best group to come forward and self-certify that they need this support. How do you deal with those two problems, the one of the employer and the other one of the person in employment who needs a skill?

Sir David Normington: You have put your finger precisely on the difficulty with this programme, which is identifying the people with the need and persuading them to come forward. Many adults have found ways of getting by, they have found coping strategies. They are not completely illiterate and therefore they cope. We know from our dealings with employers that they are increasingly frustrated with groups of their employees who they feel could achieve more but who have got blockages. Often the employers do not recognise them as literacy and numeracy problems because individuals have been getting by. It is easier to identify people who come into the jobcentre or if they come to the prison. If they come into the Army, for instance, you have ways of putting in place the screening process. If they are in employment it is much more difficult. We are trying, through our work with major employers, our work in the Civil Service, to show employers how you identify those needs and how you meet them, but even then you have individuals who are reluctant to admit it because of the stigma attached. We have been backing this up with a national publicity programme, it is really one of the most successful that we have ever run, which shows individuals trying to remove the stigma of coming forward for the first time. After all, this is a voluntary thing, people have to be willing to do it in the end and we have to persuade them.

Q23 Mrs Browning: Forgive me if I have missed this particular grouping in Sir John's Report. Among the older adults, those over the age of 40, there has been quite a move to encourage people who perhaps have never worked or who have worked in sheltered accommodation and who have either a physical or a learning disability to get into employment. If we look back at the education system, many of them will not have received what we would regard as a normal education. Statementing itself did not come in until the Eighties. So there is a whole generation

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out there potentially available for the workforce but who, apart from their other difficulties in accessing work because of their disability, will almost certainly have missed out on some of the basic skills in literacy and numeracy. I just wonder how you are handling that group because they clearly do need special consideration. How are you approaching that group?

Sir David Normington: It is the essence of this programme to try to be inclusive and to reach all kinds of groups. The answer to each question is you have to reach them in a different way.

Ms Pember: That has been a priority group of people for us. For the people with specific learning difficulties, which can be severe to moderate to just mild, we have had to have different strategies for each one. We have worked with employers. The four big ones that have been exemplars are Asda, Tesco, Walkers and Remploy who have worked with us to develop programmes so that they can recruit people from exactly that catchment of the population you are talking about. The fact that we have got those large employers and Remploy working with us has been an exemplar to other employers to think that they can actually take on these types of programme as well. Then we produce support like toolkits and learndirect learning centres. Just on the mobility point, coming back to your rural issues, it is the same for these employers as well. We have introduced online testing so that we can actually take an exam centre in a bus out into the community or to an employer's premises and the person can do the test or the assessment online where they work.

Q24 Mrs Browning: I hope you will indulge me on this as it is almost the last day of this Parliament. I have got a difficulty with a lot of these schemes that do not seem to be approached by a joined-up government approach in terms of adults and training and learning. I have just had a constituency case where a chap who is on a work-based learning for adults course is on a course and they have told him that the training is going to cease at the same time as his short-term work-based contract ceases, which will mean he has a shortfall of about two months in completing the training course he has been put on. I know this is not specifically what we are looking at here. If you look at this whole area of adults and getting them trained and getting them into work, it is all part of the same package. Why do we do things like that to people? Why do we suddenly cut them off at the knees? I have had a letter from Jobcentre Plus this week for this constituent of mine. In response to me they have said they will extend the training for him but there will still be a shortfall of three weeks at the end of the course. Does this make sense in anybody's language? Why are we putting people through all these hoops?

Sir David Normington: I cannot answer the specific case, of course. It is our aim to join up our different services better. We are trying to make this programme one in which Jobcentre Plus and DWP work very closely with the Department and the Learning and Skills Council. All across our training programmes we are trying to ensure that those sorts

of gaps do not open up. That is all I can say really. We absolutely understand that issue and it is at the top of our agenda.

Mr Haysom: We have to work increasingly closely with Jobcentre Plus and other agencies to overcome the kind of issues that you are flagging there.

Q25 Mrs Browning: Thank you for that. This person is learning to be a plumber on a work-based learning for adults course and yet we learn that somehow they are going to cut the course off before the qualification. It does not make sense, does it? It is a pretty crazy idea, is it not?

Sir David Normington: It does not seem very sensible.

Mrs Browning: I am glad you agree with me on that. Thank you.

Q26 Mr Allan: Sir David, it is good to look at a report where a Public Service Agreement target has been met. It is a rare treat on this Committee for us to see a target being met like this. You are lucky you are not heading up the Department of Transport, for example, with their targets on congestion because they are miles off. You have met this 2004 target. You have got a much more ambitious target for 2010 which looks like it is going to be as challenging as some of the ones we look at in other Departments. Are you confident we are going to get there?

Sir David Normington: It becomes more and more challenging. It has doubled and then there is a three-fold target. Am I confident? Yes. We would not have accepted this target otherwise. These targets are negotiated. We start from a view that we have to hit this target in order to make an impact on the problem. The problem is large and therefore we need to have large ambition. In order to meet it we will have to have a much bigger impact on those in the workplace and those who are hidden from us. We have concentrated in the early part of this strategy on the people who are unemployed who we can identify through our contacts with various parts of some of the statutory services and public services. We have begun to now move on to people who are in employment or entering employment and that is how we will make a big impact. The big private sector employers are going to be really important to us here. We have got the whole of the Civil Service committed as employers to dealing with these issues. That is how we are going to get to these numbers.

Q27 Mr Allan: The target you have got is about inputs, it is about giving training to people and that is still set against this very large number of people who are yet to be addressed. If we look at page 15, Table 6, which compares countries, even if you meet that target, are we going to be more like Germany or the Netherlands or a north European country, which are down at about 10%, or are we hoping to get up to the US level which is just a few per cent off where we are now? What sense do you have of where we are trying to get to? By 2010, if you get these numbers in, what will we look like in that table?

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Sir David Normington: Can I just correct you on one point? The targets are a measure of outputs because they are a measure of qualifications achieved. What we actually measure is whether someone has moved up a level, so it is a real measure of achievement. We also measure the number of people in training, but the target is related to outputs. I asked this question when I was preparing for this Committee meeting and we do not know the answer because we do not know what is going to happen to all the rest. Our ambition is to move as far up this table as we can. I would suspect that if we achieve the 2010 target we will be in the upper half of this table.

Q28 Mr Allan: The other responsibility is school age education. I was quite shocked in Table 7, page 16, to see that the 16 to 19 year old group are really no better than those who are 55 plus. You have put loads of money into the education system. What this looks like is that 16 year olds are leaving school with the same levels of illiteracy and innumeracy as people who left school 30 years ago. My common sense assumption would be that that should not be the case, that general levels for school leavers should be improving over time.

Sir David Normington: And they are. I think there are two things to be said about that. One is that there are some really steady improvements coming through now in the achievements of secondary school pupils in literacy and numeracy which we will begin to see reflected in this, but they are not reflected there yet. Secondly, what seems to happen here is that younger people go on in employment picking up these skills. What I think happens is that as 16 to 19 year olds become 20 to 25 year olds they will show up much better against the measure of literacy and numeracy, so you have a progression through. Many of those young people are going on learning either in employment or in further education.

Q29 Mr Allan: So the number of 16 to 19 year olds will shrink over time. The ones already at 45 will have had a few years of shrinking, will they?

Sir David Normington: That would be my expectation. I hope so. The absolutely key thing here is the improvement that is coming through from primary schools and secondary schools. We ought to be seeing the impact of that in the next two or three years.

Q30 Mr Allan: And we should be looking for that if people are interested in value for money.

Sir David Normington: It is essential. That will enable us to keep this movement towards focusing the Skills for Life programme on adults who missed out.

Q31 Mr Allan: Paragraph 16 on page 7 talks about the Learning and Skills Councils' funding for literacy, language and numeracy being 40% higher than for other comparable programmes. I wanted to ask whether the funding going into this is additional because there is a perception locally that things like adult education courses, which are not directly tied

into these kinds of targets, are somehow suffering because all the money is now being directed to the targets. That may be an explicit result of government policy. It would be helpful to be clear of the extent to which this is additional money and the extent to which you expect it to divert money away from other forms of adult education or LSC funded work.

Sir David Normington: You can see from the figures in the Report, although it is true generally, that over this Parliament the amount of resource going into training has been growing. In the lifetime of this programme so far we have actually been increasing the resource and it has been additional resource. I am aware of the worries that there are about adult and community provision. What the Government said in its recent White Paper is that it is committed to preserving broadly that level of provision. In fact, we are spending something like just over £200 million on that provision through local authorities at the moment compared with about £140 million in 2001, so that budget has been increasing as well. What the Government has not said is it will go on increasing that provision, but it has said that it will be looking for ways of broadly preserving that provision. However, that cannot mean that it is all frozen in aspic for all time. Within that budget of around £200 million there will be provision coming and going. There is a huge amount of adult and community learning goes on. I think the latest survey showed that under a million people are on those sorts of programmes and many of them are paying by the way. It is quite normal for you to pay if the courses are subsidised. We have asked the LSC to have a look at the balance of that provision but with the aim of broadly protecting it.

Mr Haysom: And that is what we are doing. One of the things that we are quite keen to do is to increase the proportion of provision that actually leads to the qualifications that are part of the target because it does seem to be self-evident that we should be trying to target that as best we possibly can. You will have seen within the Report something like 44% of what we currently do does not lead to a qualification. We want to reduce that by getting it to lead to a qualification. We want to do that very sensitively.

Q32 Mr Allan: I had a query about the funding of services for those who have autism and who still benefit from education post-16 but for whom that is not necessarily going to lead to a qualification.

Mr Haysom: That is why we want to do it sensitively and at a very local level, to make sure that we respond to those needs. We will never see a situation where 100% of this activity is going to lead to targets because that would be an absolute nonsense.

Q33 Mr Allan: The perception is that if it ain't got a qualification attached it ain't got any money attached.

Mr Haysom: That should not be. The guidance is very clear.

Q34 Mr Allan: My other point is on the relationship with employers. Are LSCs any better than TECs? TECs were supposed to bring all the employers in

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and get them all signed up and a lot of them found that was very difficult. My perception is that the LSCs have found it equally difficult. Is it not the case from an educationalist point of view that the SME sector in Britain is pretty grotty? It does not prioritise training and education. It almost has the approach of you should not train them because then they will improve their skills and go off and get a job somewhere else. Do you not still find that prevalent?

Sir David Normington: I believe that Learning and Skills Councils are an improvement on TECs. We have brought together in Learning and Skills Councils training and further education. TECs were not responsible for all that. I do not think just doing that makes it any easier to tackle the problem that some employers do not train. What we are doing is providing the LSC with a lever, through the national employment training programme, for focusing precisely on that problem and I do not think the TECs had that lever. This ought to be a major step forward.

Mr Haysom: Our job is a different job to the TECs' job. Part of our job is to engage with local employers. It is tough, there is no denying it. Part of the programme here is about motivating employers to get involved. The marketing campaign that David referred to earlier has been a great spur for that and the employer training programme, which is at a pilot stage at the moment but it will be rolled out in due course, is already showing it is possible to make that difference.

Q35 Mr Allan: I want to talk about your advertising. We have some of the advertising shown in Table 26 on page 41. You have got a "Call us to get rid of your gremlins advert". I am interested to know whether you have measured the success or otherwise of these. My reaction to them was quite negative. I would be interested to know the extent to which you have assessed them from a value for money point of view and found them to be value for money or otherwise.

Sir David Normington: We have. They are not aimed at you! It has been one of the most successful campaigns in reaching the people we are trying to reach. I can provide you with the evaluation of them which is very, very positive. It does get very high recognition among the group; it is something like over 90%.²

Q36 Mr Allan: It is a bit like Howard from the Halifax.

Sir David Normington: It has caused 300,000 people to contact the helpline, with a very high proportion of people then taking up some provision or taking some action. It has been remarkably successful. You have to follow it up with lots of local advertising, some related to the gremlins, some not. It cannot be the only thing we do. It has been very effective. Not everybody likes it, but it is targeted on that group. The group does relate to it. The idea of the gremlin which is stopping them doing what they want to do does seem to work.

Mr Allan: That is good to hear. Thank you very much.

Q37 Mr Williams: If we look at the table of international competitors in Figure 6 on page 15, it is really quite appalling that we have lower levels of literacy and numeracy than 13 of the 20 countries listed there when you think of the priority that is supposed to have been given to education over the post-war years. What this Report does not do is address where it all went wrong. It had to go terribly wrong somewhere, did it not, for the figures to be this bad? Our children are as capable as other nation's children so it must be the education system that is the problem.

Sir David Normington: I think you have to draw that conclusion. I pondered this because obviously these figures being this low in this league table is really disappointing. It must mean that not enough people have been leaving school with the levels of literacy and numeracy which are desirable and in the post-war years that must have been so.

Q38 Mr Williams: That is exactly what it says in paragraph 1.4 and yet we have done nothing to try to identify why that went so wrong. If we do not know what caused it to go wrong, at least not directly, we will not know what the things are we have to do to put it right, will we?

Ms Pember: The previous work to our strategy had been done by Sir Claus Moser in the Moser Report that came out in 1998–99 and he did reflect on what had gone wrong in previous generations and there was a mixture of factors, one of which is culture. The importance of mathematics in England has not been seen as that important for a very long time. Another one may have been that we allowed many young people to leave school at 14 and then at 16 without the prerequisite qualifications that they needed for the rest of their lives. The second thing was about adults themselves not wanting to go back to learn in this area of work.

Q39 Mr Williams: The point about numeracy is clearly correct in what you say there, but when you then look at the bar diagram in Figure 6, the literacy figure is almost identical. It was not just a numeracy cultural problem, there was a literacy cultural problem. Our figures are more than double those of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands.

Sir David Normington: I think it reflects on an education system which did not focus enough on literacy and numeracy and, of course, that is what we have been trying to put right for over 10 years now. If you look at the achievements of 11 year olds 10 years ago and the achievements of 16 year olds at GCSE level in English and maths 10 years ago, fewer than half of all 11 year olds were getting to the accepted levels of reading and writing and maths at 11. In a sense that is what we have been trying to put right. I think it must mean that over a lot of years there have been one group of pupils in the education system that have been doing wonderfully well and some have been missing out.

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Q40 Mr Williams: It seems to me perverse that there should be opposition from some supposedly knowledgeable sources to the concept of testing. As we were not testing I assume we did not know it was this bad, did we?

Sir David Normington: We did not.

Q41 Mr Williams: Have we discovered anything as a result of tests?

Sir David Normington: In the late Eighties we did not have a National Curriculum, we did not have tests, we did not know enough about what people were achieving against the national standard and that meant that we did not know at all what the baseline was.

Q42 Mr Williams: We went through all manner of political correctness in literacy and your children picked magical ways of self-education and this was allowed to dominate in so-called academic quarters for years. It must have damaged the careers of numerous youngsters and their prospects.

Sir David Normington: I think you cannot argue with the figures. Clearly not enough adults have literacy and numeracy at the levels needed to succeed. In a sense that is why the focus—I never apologise for it—in school education is on, first of all, giving people the basics. If compulsory education cannot do that then it is not achieving, is it?

Q43 Mr Williams: I am agreeing entirely with what you are saying. When you go back to the days of National Service, at that time one did have a form of measurement because much of the Army's education service was devoted to teaching people to read and write. Someone I grew up with graduated and went into the Army. I remember him saying how he could not believe the gratitude you would get from big burly characters in uniform who could read for the first time. We have known for a long time there was something wrong and yet for some reason no one was willing to address it. Everyone seemed to be afraid of those who were preaching the doctrine of political correctness on literacy.

Sir David Normington: It seems that people were not addressing that. I have been in this world for 10 years and in all that time we have been addressing it and it is one of the most important—

Q44 Mr Williams: I am not criticising you for that.

Sir David Normington: I know that. I agree with you really. That is why it is such an important priority.

Q45 Mr Williams: It is frustrating, all those wasted decades.

Sir David Normington: It is frustrating because when you are faced with a table like this it is very upsetting. It is partly what has held the productivity of the workforce back here over a lot of years.

Q46 Mr Williams: Even the Army does not want these people now. It had to take them when we had National Service. Everyone had to do their National

Service and, therefore, they had to take them, but nowadays it is more difficult because of the nature of any equipment they have to use.

Sir David Normington: That is true. That is why the Army has literacy and numeracy as one of the central things that it provides new recruits with, particularly the Army because it needs people sometimes to do quite a technical job.

Q47 Mr Williams: It is not the day of the universal Army when every young man went in.

Sir David Normington: They take 15,000 a year, that is all.

Q48 Mr Williams: It is more selective and they are touching on a small group. Sorry, I meandered off on a personal hobbyhorse there. Can we look at chart 18, page 30, the section on English for speakers of other languages? Obviously this is an increasingly important subject. I have probably not had the time to go in-depth into the report that I should have, but do we have separate targets in this area for attainment?

Sir David Normington: No, we do not. We do have performance indicators under the headline targets to measure how we are doing on English as a second language. English as a second language is part of the overall vision, so what we are measuring is literacy, numeracy and achievement in English as a second language.

Q49 Mr Williams: You cannot draw comparisons because you are not dealing with comparable groups. In the English for speakers of other languages you are dealing with a high proportion of people who have a propensity to learn and a disposition and motivation to learn, I would have thought.

Sir David Normington: Yes.

Q50 Mr Williams: I am not trying to draw comparisons between one and the other. I see you have talked of £3.7 billion somewhere, but what proportion now goes into education for speakers of other languages? It is very important to us.

Sir David Normington: Yes, it is. I think Mr Haysom can answer that.

Mr Haysom: It is of growing importance, as you rightly say. Back in 2001 it represented 22% of learners going through; it is now up to 31%, so it is growing all the time. One of our big challenges is to be able to respond to that increasing demand.

Q51 Mr Williams: How actively are we promoting the opportunity to learn in the market because with some groups there is a much lower priority given to allowing women to be educated than getting men educated? Are we making any penetration into those who are otherwise treated with a sort of sexist non-integration of a large proportion of the immigrant population who may not be encouraged to learn the language? Are we trying to ensure there is a degree of equal participation?

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Mr Haysom: Yes, we are. We recognise that is a very big challenge and very specific challenge. Personally, I have seen some really good work on this. In some areas of Birmingham there are some good examples, as there are throughout London. There is some really good, very targeted work to encourage some of the harder to reach groups. In overall terms, we have a high proportion of ethnic minorities taking part in the skills monitoring, so we are reaching lots of them.

Sir David Normington: Obviously as a way to reach those groups you have to use the community groups. It has to be very local.

Q52 Mr Williams: Tell me about that.

Sir David Normington: In fact, an important component of this programme is to work with local community groups who can reach these hard to reach groups like Bangladeshi women, for instance. That is an important part of this programme and it has been quite successful. Obviously it is in certain parts of the country. Do you want to say a bit more?

Ms Pember: We did a large survey two years ago that went down to ward level about how many people need support in literacy, numeracy and language, which we had never done before. We can match that with data about participation. There have been some absolutely first class projects, one done in the Medway in Kent where they were able to identify that certain Asian women were not participating so they went and found a community group that could give them access to those women. There is some really good work there.

Q53 Mr Williams: That is very encouraging. How far is that sort of information disseminated more widely around the UK? This is a good example but is it a good example that is now being promulgated and how is it being promulgated? How is it being stimulated?

Mr Haysom: If I may pick up on that?

Q54 Mr Williams: Please, I do not mind who answers.

Mr Haysom: I think it is fair to say that because of the speed with which this programme was put in place and the journey that David described earlier about how far we have travelled, perhaps the Learning and Skills Council was not as smart as it could have been about sharing best practice. We are now doing that very actively. We now have regional plans which describe exactly what we are doing in each area and we share across the regions the examples of best practice to make sure that we learn from each other. That is a very important part of the way forward.

Q55 Mr Williams: The particularly good example you quoted, did you say Chatham?

Ms Pember: Medway. It is Chatham.

Q56 Mr Williams: Would it be possible to let us have a note on this so we can put it as an annex in the information and we can draw it to the attention of our own local communities as well? That would

be very helpful.³ One final point: we dealt with prisons and one of our colleagues came up with a very original solution as far as prisons are concerned and the low attainment of literacy. He is not here today but he said that they should not be allowed out until they had reached a certain standard. We did point out that this would mean in many cases pickpockets would be sentenced to life! You will gather it was not one of our recommendations as a Committee but it was an interesting side view. Jobcentre Plus: what are they doing that is different from what the colleges for further education are doing and how cost-effective is one as opposed to the other?

Sir David Normington: For quite a lot of people claiming benefits and Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobcentre Plus is the frontline service and they now do the initial screening to identify people who they think have literacy or numeracy needs at the point of claiming benefit. Then they refer them to a more detailed assessment if they judge that is needed and behind that is the provision. Some of that provision might be further education colleges, it will depend, it might be a community group. They will look for the best type of provision. It is not very easy to answer your question because Jobcentre Plus is the frontline point and then there will be a referral to a number of different agencies.

Ms Pember: If I could just expand slightly. Jobcentre Plus advisers are now all trained to help diagnose where somebody has got literacy or numeracy need. They can refer them for a further assessment and then they signpost them to a programme. Some of the programmes are funded by Jobcentre Plus. The short intensive programme where the adviser thinks it will make a difference means they can go in, have the programme and go off to work. The new White Paper expands on the Jobcentre skills course, so we have people in Jobcentres whose main job is to make sure that people turn up for the learning, make sure people stay in learning, and if they get a job—this will be piloted next year—they make sure that somewhere in the community that learning continues so we do not have an example of what we have just heard from this side.

Mr Williams: Thank you very much, that was most interesting.

Q57 Mr Allan: I would like to follow up on precisely that area. To understand from the customer's point of view, if I turned up at Jobcentre Plus in Sheffield next week and I did not have Level 1 skills, Jobcentre Plus would contract to provide me with those Level 1 skills from DWP money, would they? Potentially I could go to Sheffield College funded by Jobcentre Plus.

Ms Pember: In Sheffield they have got quite a good network that is quite mature. You would be funded under what we call the 16 hour rule, so you would be funded by the Learning and Skills Council but at Sheffield College.

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Q58 Mr Allan: If I turned up at the Learning and Skills Council because I was in work or I was a spouse at home not on benefit, therefore not Jobcentre Plus, I would get the same service?

Ms Pember: Absolutely.

Q59 Mr Allan: But the 16 hour rule—

Ms Pember: For Jobcentre Plus clients they must be available for work and, therefore, they should be putting work first. What the new Skills Strategy is about is saying training for that individual can be as important as work and it might be better to put them in training and to pass the course so that when they go into a job that job is sustained, they are not made redundant.

Q60 Mr Allan: But you have to shoehorn their training into 16 hours in order to avoid problems?

Ms Pember: Not with the new Skills Strategy.

Q61 Mr Allan: That is where you have put the flexibility in because this is something that people complained to us about historically.

Ms Pember: Absolutely.⁴

Q62 Mr Allan: If it is Level 2 that they need, Jobcentre Plus does not fund Level 1 to Level 2, does it?

Ms Pember: No, but if that would help the person's career prospects they would signpost the person to a college where they would get free training.

Q63 Mr Allan: The monies all go through the Learning and Skills Council so it is in DfES' budget, not in DWP's budget.

Ms Pember: It simplifies things that way.

Q64 Mr Allan: As you develop this new concept, and I know Jobcentre Plus and private sector companies that we have looked at are providing a lot of training and so on, are we going to see a divergence potentially between Jobcentre Plus diverting to private sector training providers and Learning and Skills Council to colleges?

Ms Pember: No. The Learning and Skills Council often funds the same private training providers, something like an apprenticeship scheme, so Jobcentre Plus has got the choice. If it feels it wants to signpost it to an independent provider they can do that if it is right for that person. If it is right for the person they could be signposted by the LSC to the same activity.

Sir David Normington: Jobcentre Plus will remain a service for individuals first and it will be looking for the best provision for those individuals.

Q65 Mr Allan: Where it works the way you want it to work, like in Sheffield now, it is a single family of providers and an LSC and a Jobcentre Plus working together without anybody worrying about whether it is DWP or DfES.

Sir David Normington: I think an individual should not be worried about that, they need to get on the programme that suits them.

Q66 Mr Allan: I was worried that the individual might have to be worried about it, but you are telling me they do not.

Sir David Normington: Our aim is that will be the position over the whole of the country in time. Sheffield is ahead.

Chairman: Mr Allan is retiring from Parliament, so—
Mr Allan: So I may be at Jobcentre Plus next week!

Q67 Chairman: Retiring at the tender age of 39, sensible chap. Thank you very much for those questions. This international comparison that Mr Williams reminded us about is interesting. For instance, I noticed that there are some figures here for French speaking Switzerland and they are doing so much better than we are. One of the things they do in continental education systems is force children to redouble every year who do not meet the minimum standard. I know this is rather outwith what we are talking about this afternoon, but why do we perform so badly?

Sir David Normington: They go back through the same year in other words.

Q68 Chairman: They go back through the same year if they do not meet the minimum standard, so they are not just left floundering as they move up the school, constantly falling further and further back. I think the *redoublement* is a very good system.

Sir David Normington: Increasingly, in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 we are looking for ways of doing just that. Not making people go through the whole year in every subject but not being able to progress in English and maths until they have reached a certain level and really sticking at it and, if necessary, giving them some flexibility to relax other bits of the curriculum so that they can continue to study English and maths until they get to the correct levels. It is such an important basis for subsequent progression. In the 14–19 White Paper, which the Government published a few weeks ago, which was not commented upon, was a very, very important focus on just this issue of how you make sure in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 that secondary school pupils get that basic level of function on maths and literature. If they do not their life chances and their employment chances will be reduced.

Q69 Chairman: Okay, Sir David, thank you very much for a very interesting hearing. I am sure the key to it is to try to improve the qualifications of existing teachers, particularly because we are dealing with a very difficult area. Thank you very much for answering our questions in your usual positive and charming manner, we are very grateful to you.

Sir David Normington: Thank you very much. I wish you all well, Mr Allan particularly.

Chairman: Thank you very much.

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Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Department for Education and Skills

Questions 19–20 (Mrs Browning)

For the period April 2002 to March 2003 the Prison Service assessed the literacy of 96,589 prisoners and the numeracy of 95,277 prisoners. For literacy, 36.9% were below level 1, 18.2% were at level 1 and 44.9% were above level 1. For numeracy, 42.9% were below level 1, 25.9% were at level 1 and 31.2% were above level 1.

There is no data available on the number of individuals starting a basic skills course. However, for the period April 2002 to March 2003, over 41,000 nationally recognised qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy were achieved by prisoners.

Performance in meeting basic skills needs of prisoners has continued to rise. In 2004–05 prisons delivered 63,726 literacy, language and numeracy qualifications against a national target of 56,080.

Work is now underway to develop a new integrated learning and skills service for offenders which will be planned and funded by the Learning and Skills Council. The new service will be piloted in three regions: the North East, North West and South West from August 2005, and will roll out in the remaining six regions in England from August 2006. The new service will be based around a set of aspirations for the quality of delivery, as set out in the “Offender’s Learning Journey” available on www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning. The LSC will be accountable for delivery of targets for the new service and will provide data to the Department on how learner needs are met.

Question 35 (Mr Allan)

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The Get On Campaign aims to raise demand for basic skills learning in order to help 2.25 million adults achieve a first literacy, language or numeracy qualification by 2010. Since 2001 the objectives of the promotion campaign have been to:

- (a) Raise awareness of literacy, language and numeracy skills issues;
- (b) Reduce the stigma attached to English and maths skills needs; and
- (c) Motivate adults to take action to improve their skills.

1.2 The advertising consists of a mixture of television, radio and print advertising (such as press adverts, billboard posters, bus/train headliners and bus tickets) and is complemented by a range of PR activity and local campaigning activity. In each year of advertising the campaign has featured the now well-known “Gremlins” characters. The advertising encourages people to ring learndirect, the national learning advice line, on 0800 100 900.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 The Get On campaign has been instrumental in raising awareness of skills issues and encouraging action: we estimate that well over 300,000 calls to learndirect are directly attributable to the campaign. Along with delivery partners such as the Learning and Skills Council, learndirect and Jobcentre Plus, the campaign has made a significant contribution to meeting the 2004 target of 750,000 learners achieving their first level Skills for Life qualification.

2.2 The campaign achieves very high awareness figures (currently a peak of 93% amongst the target group—March 2005) and is among the most well-known of all Government campaigns. People engaging with the campaign report that the systems (eg the telephone helpline) work well and that the information provided (eg the motivational video or course information) encourages them to take action to improve their skills.

2.3 There are some areas for improvement, such as better targeting of ESOL learners (people with English as a second language) and older learners, and better conversion of awareness into action.

3. KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

3.1 *Tracking Research*

3.1.1 The tracking research is done on a survey basis and identifies people in the Skills for Life target group. It measures their awareness and recall of the advertising, as well as their attitudes and whether they have taken any action to improve their skills.

3.1.2 Tracking research suggests that the campaign has delivered the messages it set out to deliver. Initial executions focused on raising awareness of the campaign and offering people help and encouragement. As the campaign has moved through its various phases—such as tackling people’s excuses for not taking action, then focusing the work context and the benefits of gaining a qualification—respondents’ take-out from the advertising has reflected these messages.

3.1.3 Among all those who have seen the campaign, a huge majority describe the campaign positively (85% v 14%). This has been consistent across all waves of the advertising.

3.1.4 The campaign has increased the motivation to take action and has made people more likely to admit that taking action is something that needs to be done. However, these increases in motivation have yet to be fully translated into action—suggesting that there are still significant barriers, even once people have reached the stage of wanting to progress.

3.1.5 The campaign is less likely to reach those for whom English is their second language (although it should be noted that the campaign has never specifically sought to target this population—with demand for courses already being high amongst speakers of other languages). However, they are also most likely to feel that the advertising is relevant to them.

3.1.6 The perceived relevance of the campaign drops dramatically for those over 55 years.

3.1.7 Wave 9 of the campaign (February/March 2005) recorded the highest level of awareness of any advertising about basic skills since the campaign began. 74% of the basic skills population are now aware, which represents an increase of 2.2 million adults since the campaign began in 2001.

3.1.8 Amongst those respondents aware of advertising around basic skills, total recognition of the Get On campaign has reached an all-time high of 93%. According to the Central Office of Information (COI), this is the highest awareness figure for any campaign that they can remember, which makes Get On possibly the most successful Government advertising campaign ever.

3.1.9 Television advertising drives the campaign and dominates recognition, with just 3% of recognition coming from Radio/Press only.

3.1.10 Recognition of the campaign is almost identical across the minor, moderate and severe skills needs groups (98%, 97% and 95% respectively.)

3.1.11 The main exception is respondents with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). 50% of ESOL respondents watch none or less than 2 hours of television a day, compared to 31% of those with English as first language.

Has the advertising changed the likelihood of taking action?

3.1.12 The recognised impact of the advertising on motivation has been maintained at a higher level since wave 7 (end 2003), with 34% of those not doing a course now saying that the advertising has made them “much more”, or “a little more” likely to take a course.

3.1.13 Phoning for a basic skills pack: Amongst people yet to engage with helpline, there is significantly less rejection of the idea of phoning for a basic skills pack observed in the last two waves. Only 24% say they “definitely will not phone for pack” against 39% in the first two waves. And 24% now say they “definitely” or “probably” will phone for a pack, compared to 13% in the first wave. This is encouraging because the people in the target group who have yet to take action are those for whom it is most difficult to engage.

3.1.14 Reasons for not contacting helpline: Throughout the campaign, there has been an increasing recognition that contacting the helpline is necessary—with only 33% now saying it is unnecessary, against 44% in wave 2. However, increasingly, practical reasons are cited as the main barriers to taking action. Lack of time is the main practical barrier, with 19% of respondents citing this, against 15% in wave 2.

3.2 Caller follow-up research

3.2.1 This research was required to examine caller experience, satisfaction with service and follow-up action taken. The most recent wave of research was conducted in December 2004 amongst those who called the learndirect helpline between August and November 2004.

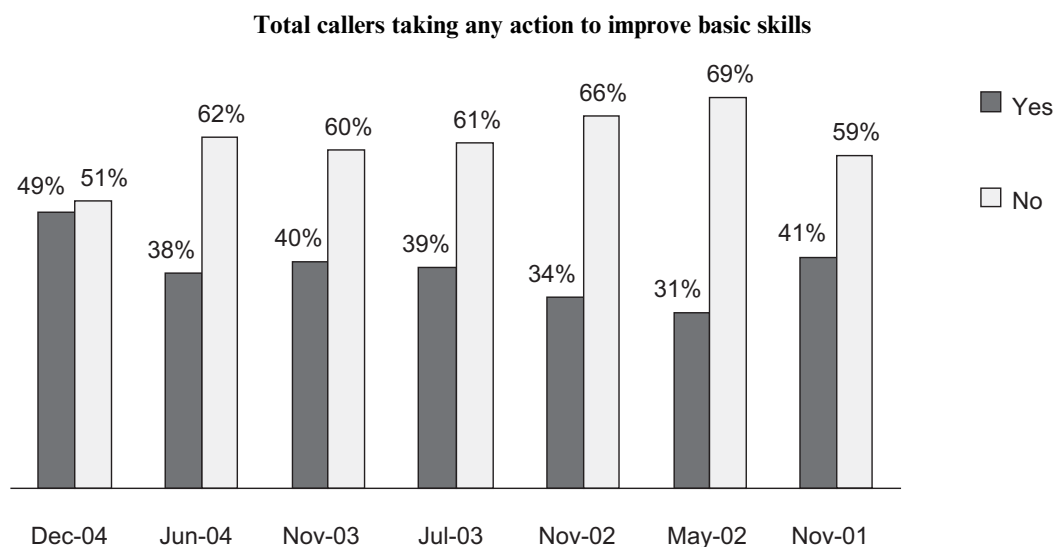
3.2.2 Nine in 10 callers are contacting the helpline for the first time—suggesting that the advertising has been effective in motivating new individuals to seek help.

3.2.3 49% of all callers said they had taken action to improve their basic skills. This represents a significant increase on previous waves (38% and 40% respectively on the most recent waves) and now stands at its highest recorded level.

3.2.4 62% of those who claimed to have taken action to improve their basic skills have started or completed a course (which equates to 30% of all callers).

3.2.5 The majority of those not having taken any action to date state that they intend to do so in the future (91%) and such callers propose to approach a college or enrol on a course.

3.2.6 73% of callers said that watching the video/DVD had encouraged them to do something about their skills.



3.2.7 The resources available to callers clearly encourage them to take action. Callers were more likely to have taken action to improve their skills if they had either spoken to an adviser (41%, against 21% who hadn't), watched the video (43% against 32%), been given information about colleges/courses (43% against 26%), or had contact with an organisation (50% against 26%).

3.3 Media (PR) Evaluation

3.3.1 The Media Evaluation measures the impact of articles (in the press, on television, on radio, or published on websites) about the Get On campaign and Skills for Life learning.

3.3.2 During the period August 2004—February 2005, the Get On campaign generated 146 media articles in total, of which 96% were favourable and 10% strongly so. (This includes both paid and non paid coverage.)

3.3.3 The estimated percentage of UK adults reached by this media coverage is 46%. This compares well with other campaigns: the yearly average of UK adults reached through activity by a large company with a very significant advertising campaign (and a much bigger budget) such as British Telecom (BT) is around 65%.

4. GET ON CAMPAIGN OFFICE

4.1 The Get On Campaign Office provides marketing and promotion advice to learning providers and distributes the Get On campaign promotional materials. The aim is to encourage and support Get On campaigning at the local level. The Campaign Office has been successful in advising large numbers of providers about campaigning activities.

4.2 Campaign Office Statistics

4.2.1 Call levels to the Campaign Office generally mirror activity in the Get On campaign national advertising. Campaign Office activity peaks around the two bursts of advertising in the autumn and the New Year, and during Adult Learner's Week in May. This suggests that the national advertising is a significant motivator for learning providers to run their own synchronised local campaigns.

4.2.2 Calls to the Campaign Office rose from around 52 per week in 2003–04 to 61 per week in 2004–05, a rise of 17%.

Total number of enquiries in 2003–04 = 2,703 (Weekly average = 52)

Total number of enquiries in 2004–05 = 3,098 (Weekly average = 61)

4.3 Numbers of selected promotional materials distributed

Promotional materials	Number distributed in 2004–05
Marketing toolkit	1,442
Get On postcards	180,784
Get On beer mats	86,540
Gremlin paper masks	16,696
Scratchcards	92,542
Get On pencils	75,511
Get On bookmarks	98,989

5. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The Get On campaign has clearly been successful in terms of raising awareness, reducing the stigma around skills issues and encouraging people to take action. However, there are several areas where the campaign could be more effective and which future activities should aim to tackle.

5.2 *Converting awareness into action*

5.2.1 Research shows that the campaign has increased the motivation to take action and has made people more likely to admit that taking action is something that needs to be done. However, often these increases in motivation have yet to be fully translated into action—suggesting that there are still significant barriers even once people have reached the stage of wanting to progress. These need to be tackled as part of both policy implementation and communications activities.

5.3 *ESOL learners*

5.3.1 The campaign is less likely to reach those for whom English is their second language, according to the tracking research. This may be explained by the fact that many ESOL learners watch little or no television, the main driver of the campaign. However, they are also most likely to feel that the advertising is relevant to them. This suggests that more specific targeting of ESOL learners could bring reasonable benefits in terms of higher response rates and recruitment of new learners to courses.

5.3.2 However, the need for a campaign specifically targeting ESOL learners would need to be balanced on the capacity of the system to provide opportunities for learners when demand is already high and capacity already stretched in some areas. Advertising for ESOL learners may be best targeted locally—where demand and supply can be monitored.

5.4 *Older learners*

5.4.1 The tracking research tells us that the perceived relevance of the campaign drops dramatically for those over 55 years. Since the 2005 white paper, *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work* commits the Government to ensuring that learning is accessible to older people, future campaigns could therefore consider including elements that specifically target older learners.

Question 56 (Mr Williams)

The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Pathfinder project tested and developed the delivery of the ESOL curriculum by exploring new and innovative ways of addressing the English language needs of adults across England. Each ESOL Pathfinder project had its own local and regional challenges and its own population demographics, so the ESOL Pathfinders were able to explore innovative ways of reaching out to potential ESOL learners in a range of contexts.

The Exeter and Plymouth ESOL Pathfinder was a broad multi-agency partnership led by Exeter Council for Voluntary Services. The Islamic Centre of the South West was a key partner in enabling the harder-to-reach hidden learner group to access provision. Through community links the project set up 10 new ESOL classes around Exeter. Two of the classes took place in the Islamic Centre itself; five operated in small businesses (all restaurants); and three took place in learners' homes. Retention rates generally remained high in these classes with increasing numbers of learners moving on to mainstream college courses.

The Community ESOL Project in Exeter set up women-only classes at the local mosque. In addition, and of equal importance in ensuring good retention and progression rates, were the other activities organised such as a very popular Embroidery Group, run by volunteers, once a week in the ladies' prayer room. The members of the class were mainly Muslim women from the Exeter area, with ages ranging from 25 to 55. Some were resident in Exeter, some were wives of visiting learners and some wives of asylum seekers. Most of them attended English classes as well. This activity helped create a context in which the acquisition of language skills became meaningful.

Sompri was a principal partner in the East Sussex strand of the South East Coastal Counties Pathfinder. Sompri is a voluntary sector Black and Minority Ethnic organisation established in April 2000 and managed by South Downs Council for Voluntary Sector. Through its previous work Sompri had experience in encouraging and providing support for people from BME backgrounds to attend ESOL classes. The ESOL Pathfinder project offered the opportunity to build on this work and to establish effective partnerships and collaborative working with colleges and referral agencies. The aims of the project included enabling new learners to access ESOL classes and providing on-going support to ESOL learners and help them meet their aspirations.

The ESOL Pathfinder project raised awareness and interest. It stimulated individuals, communities and partners and provided an essential beacon to ensure that the black and minority ethnic population is enabled to contribute to the mutual benefit of the nation.

We have been unable to provide information on the specific project mentioned in the hearing as it occurred a few years ago and the individuals involved have since moved on.

Questions 60–61 (Mr Allen)

I thought it would be helpful to clarify the situation on the 16 hour study rule.

People in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit and Carer's Allowance are allowed to study part-time—currently defined as less than 16 hours of guided study. People in receipt of Income Support or Incapacity Benefit are not restricted in hours of study, as long as taking up a particular course or other issues connected with studying does not call into question the reason that they are in receipt of that particular benefit.

From October 2006 the Department for Work and Pensions will run a small scale trial to allow all benefit recipients not holding a first full Level 2 qualification, to study full-time, mainly to Level 2, but with scope for some to study at Level 3, whilst in receipt of benefit. As part of a balanced package they will also test changes to the definition of part-time study, to better match the LSC definition of part-time—ensuring that the primary activity for Jobseeker's Allowance is job search.

Sir David Normington KCB
Permanent Secretary

15 May 2005