

A statement by the Rt Hon David
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for Education and Employment

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



Introduction

The Government believes that tackling poor basic skills among adults is a key priority. It wishes to engage those working in this area in developing its strategy.

This document sets out proposals for action and invites views on the way forward.

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Foreword by David Blunkett MP, Secretary of State for Education and Employment

In today's knowledge economy, social justice and economic prosperity go hand in hand. Our success in the world, and the cohesion of the communities in which we live, depend on how well we utilise the skills and abilities of all our people. A prosperous and decent society is one in which everybody has the skills they need to be productive at work, active in their community, and fulfilled in their personal and family life.

We cannot achieve this ambition for our society while large numbers of people lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. There are up to seven million adults in this situation in England alone. This is a silent scandal and a huge waste of talent and potential. It is a national disgrace – a legacy that I am determined to put behind us.

Last year, a committee chaired by Sir Claus Moser reported on the root causes of the problem and the reasons why our present system of adult learning is failing to make a real impact on it. The Moser report – A Fresh Start – outlined starkly just how serious the neglect of adult literacy and numeracy had been in the past, and the inheritance it had left us with:

- inconsistent and often poor standards of teaching and learning;
- no proper system of teacher training and development;
- unco-ordinated and inadequate public funding for provision. All the building blocks of a decent basic skills education service for adults were missing.

We recognise that to address these problems we need to invest in the infrastructure and teaching force of adult basic skills learning in the same way that we are doing in our schools. Last year, the Government committed an additional £17 million to support implementation of a number of the Moser report's recommendations. This year, we have announced an additional £20 million for 2000 and, more importantly, a rise in annual spending of at least £150 million to £403 million by 2003-04.

These developments have led to progress in a number of areas and a new sense of purpose among providers of basic skills education. But there is still a great deal more to do. We have now set a new target to reduce by 750,000 the number of adults who have difficulty with literacy and numeracy by 2004.

This is a major challenge. It will require sustained commitment from all those who have a stake in the issue: Government and its agencies, employers and trade unions, education providers, the voluntary sector, and many more. Government will provide national leadership, but we cannot tackle the problem alone. Overcoming a major and deep-seated social problem requires the expertise, energy and commitment of people throughout our society.

That is why we are today setting out proposals on which we are inviting views. We intend to launch a comprehensive national strategy in Spring 2001, building on the recommendations of the Moser report. But before we finalise the strategy, we want to involve all our partners closely. We want those working in the field of adult basic skills and others with an interest in this area, to express a view on whether we have determined the appropriate priority groups, and how best we can reach them. It is vital that we get this right. We cannot afford to fail another generation of adults.

We intend to launch a set of pathfinder projects over the next nine months to test out how best we can deliver the proposed strategy in the years ahead. In each of the selected projects, we will guarantee quality through clear National Standards, National Tests and a new adult literacy and numeracy curriculum.

Sustained and profound reform does not happen overnight. It takes commitment and hard work. Many of our greatest advances in adult and community education, reaching back to the pioneering movements of the nineteenth century, have been achieved because learning was deeply valued by ordinary people who supported each other in their efforts to improve themselves. This culture of commitment to learning is a tradition that we must rediscover and renew today. Only then will the drive to tackle poor adult literacy and numeracy skills be truly successful.

The Challenge

1. As many as seven million adults of working age in England cannot read or write as well as an average 11 year-old. One in five adults of working age cannot look up a plumber in the Yellow Pages or read the instructions on a medicine bottle. Even more have trouble with numbers. One in four adults has difficulty calculating the change due from a simple purchase at the corner shop.

2. The roots of the problem lie in early childhood. Even at birth, family circumstances such as social class and the age at which parents left education are important predictors of the level of adult basic skills. As children grow up, these early predispositions become manifest in poorer performance at school, and weaknesses in English and mathematics at the end of primary education. As much as 40% of the differences between the basic skills of adults can be accounted for by what happens to a child by the age of ten.¹

3. These educational deficits accumulate until young people take their GCSEs—poor performance in which leads to a lower likelihood of undertaking further education or training during working life. Those with poor basic skills are more likely to suffer unemployment, or get stuck in unskilled areas of the labour market, earning less than their peers. If not out of work, men with poor basic skills are more likely to be in manual, routine operative and other unskilled jobs. Women with weaknesses in literacy and numeracy are more likely to end up in less skilled manual service jobs, such as care-assistants or cleaners, or packing and factory work. In the workplace, poor literacy and numeracy leads to lower productivity, less training and greater risks to health and safety.

4. The effects are just as severe in individuals' personal and family lives. People who have weak literacy and numeracy skills tend to suffer poor self-esteem and lack trust in others. They are less likely to vote or own their own home, and more prone to physical and mental health problems. They are also less likely to take an active part in the community: just one in five women and one in ten men with weak basic skills has ever been involved in a charity or Parent Teacher Association, compared to one in two women and one in three men with good skills.²

5. To break the cycle of disadvantage, we have first to raise standards in our schools, so that young people no longer leave compulsory education without reaching expected levels of literacy and numeracy. We are making good progress. The proportion of 11 year-olds achieving the level expected for their age has risen to 72% in mathematics and 75% in English from 54% and 57% respectively in 1996. And as we continue to secure improvements in primary schools, the next stage of reform will be to carry through this improvement to our secondary schools.

6. Early interventions, however, should not stop at the school gates. Parental involvement in a child's educational progress is critical, both before formal education begins, and in subsequent years. Parents need the confidence and ability to help their children with their education—which means that they themselves need decent basic skills.

7. We have much further to go to tackle the problems faced by the adult population. Standards in adult basic skills education have been too low. Progress and achievement on basic education programmes is limited. Inspection evidence points to poor attendance rates on courses, and under-achievement by learners. Teaching and management is weaker than in most other forms of adult or college education. Too few adults have been taking action to improve their literacy and numeracy skills or have had the support or encouragement to do so.

¹ Bynner, J. and Steedman, J., *Difficulties with Basic Skills*, Basic Skills Agency, London.

² Bynner, J. and Parsons, S., *It doesn't get any better: the impact of poor basic skills on the lives of 37 year olds*, Basic Skills Agency.

An Infrastructure for Delivery

8. The Government recognises that it has a responsibility to provide national leadership in the drive to tackle poor adult basic skills. A Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, has been set up to lead action across Government departments. Malcolm Wicks, the Minister for Lifelong Learning, has been given specific responsibility for basic skills. A new Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit in the Department for Education and Employment, headed by Susan Pember, will support this committee. The Unit will lead and co-ordinate all aspects of policy. It will have a regional team to oversee the effective implementation of the strategy at local and sub-regional level, similar to that established for the school literacy and numeracy strategies.

9. The Unit will work closely with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). From April 2001, the LSC will have clear responsibilities for assessing local need and ensuring that flexible opportunities exist for adult basic skills education. Each local LSC will have dedicated basic skills staff, responsible for both planning and funding, and the provision of expert pedagogic advice and support. The LSC will set targets within a local plan, and will monitor and evaluate the success of that plan in meeting needs. Where there are gaps in provision, the Learning and Skills Council at national and local level will be responsible for ensuring that they are filled. Funding will be directed to education providers who are successful in raising standards of achievement, and away from those who are failing to do so.

New Targets and Resources

10. In 1998 only around 250,000 out of the seven million people estimated to have poor literacy and numeracy skills were on programmes of learning to tackle their problems. We set ourselves an initial target of doubling this number by 2002. We are well on the way to meeting that target, with an estimated 390,000 adults participating in literacy and numeracy skills courses in 2000-01.

11. But it is critical that participation leads to improved skills. We have therefore now set ourselves a target linked to achievement: to reduce by 750,000 the overall number of adults who have difficulty with literacy or numeracy by 2004.

12. The Government has announced new resources for meeting this target. Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) expenditure on literacy and numeracy development and provision is £241 million in 2000-01. This will rise to £313 million in 2001-02, £366 million in 2002-03 and at least £403 million in 2003-04.

13. An additional £87 million over three years will be available from the Government's Welfare to Work budget in support of literacy and numeracy learning. Some £80 million a year is also spent on adult literacy and numeracy learning through other Government and community programmes aimed at economic and social regeneration and education in prisons. In addition to funding for the LSC, adult and community education, and **learnirect**, the new resources will enable us to invest substantial sums in adult basic skills education over the three years.

Priority Groups

14. To ensure that these significant resources are deployed effectively, the Government intends to determine key priority groups on whom to target activity. These groups are set out below, alongside mechanisms that we believe will be most effective at raising standards of achievement. **We invite comments on both the selection of these groups and the proposals we put forward for effective intervention to meet their needs.** These views will be used to inform the finalisation of the national strategy for tackling adult basic skills which will be launched in the New Year, and pathfinder projects which will be launched in March 2001.

Young adults in the workforce

15. Around 45,000 (1 in 11) young people leave school without achieving passes in GCSE mathematics and English. After leaving school only nine per cent of these young people achieve at least grade G in both mathematics and English GCSEs by the age of 18. Forty per cent of them are not in education after leaving school, and three quarters are outside education and training at age 18. The majority of these young people spend their later teenage years in low-skilled jobs without training, or outside any formal activity whatsoever.

16. The new Connexions Service will be established from April 2001 onwards. It will be a universal service, integrating careers advice and youth services, and providing access to other specialist services. Each local Connexions Service will be set clear targets for ensuring that all 13–19 year-olds remain in learning, and they will include those who lack basic skills. The service will concentrate on motivating and encouraging young people to continue in education.

17. In addition, the Government is expanding and reforming 16–19 education and training. As part of these reforms, we intend that literacy and numeracy education will be integrated into all learning programmes for the age group, such as apprenticeships, other work-based training, vocational and other courses undertaken full- or part-time in colleges, and pre-vocational lifeskills provision. Those in work without training who have

not achieved GCSE-level qualifications are now entitled to a right to time off for study, which can be exercised for basic skills courses. All young people who leave school with poor basic skills will therefore have the opportunity and financial support necessary to undertake literacy and numeracy programmes. The Connexions Service, working with local education providers, and the local LSC, will be responsible for ensuring that this happens.

People who live in disadvantaged communities

18. Poor basic skills are correlated with disadvantage, and people with weaknesses in literacy and numeracy are therefore particularly concentrated in deprived areas. We estimate that there are 1.7 million adults with literacy problems living in the 10% most deprived wards. We therefore intend to pursue targeted, area-based interventions for tackling poor basic skills, just as we have in schools through the Excellence in Cities programme and Education Action Zones.

19. We wish to consider carefully how best to select these areas, in light of the best research evidence, the likely effectiveness of interventions, and resource and capacity considerations. **We would welcome views on how to achieve the most robust and effective selection of area-based interventions, and how they can best be linked to existing regeneration programmes, such as the Single Regeneration Budget and New Deal for Communities, and other area-based strategies.**

20. We envisage that targeted help for people living in these communities will be available both through mainstream learning provision, and a wide range of community-based learning opportunities under development in UK Online Centres, **learn**direct centres, public libraries and schools. This help will be in addition to activities carried out through the Adult and Community Learning Fund, and those jointly supported by the Basic Skills Agency and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. Through the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, we will ensure that help at community level is co-ordinated.

21. There is a close link between poor literacy and numeracy skills and financial exclusion. The Government believes that tackling poor financial literacy and poor basic skills go hand in hand. New approaches are being developed in literacy and numeracy skills programmes under the Department for Education and Employment's Adult and Community Learning Fund. This fund offers community and voluntary organisations grants to open up access to learning, improve basic skills, and build capacity. An additional £1 million has been provided to help adults improve their financial literacy. We would welcome views on how best to take forward this work.

Parents

22. Studies have shown that basic skills problems run in the family. Those children whose parents have poor basic skills are more likely to have problems with literacy and numeracy themselves. A 1993 study found that 60% of children in the lowest reading attainment group at age 10 had parents with low literacy scores, whereas only 2% had parents with high literacy scores.³

23. On the other hand, parents can provide critical support to their children as they develop: reading to them and helping with their homework. The evidence we have strongly supports family literacy and numeracy programmes, and suggests that these are likely to produce the best results for parents and children in disadvantaged circumstances.⁴

24. Current family literacy and numeracy programmes aim to raise the standards of literacy and numeracy for both parents and children, and to extend ways in which parents support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development. The priority group has been parents with few qualifications, who have children aged between three and six, living in areas of deprivation. A variety of courses has been developed ranging from two- to five-hour tasters, to intensive courses of between 45 and 96 hours, which lead to qualifications. They offer separate sessions for parents to improve their own skills, sessions for the children, which support their learning in school, and

sessions where the parent and child learn together. Every Local Education Authority has funding allocated to them to enable them to run a number of courses in their area.

25. The family literacy and numeracy programmes are proving to be an effective means of improving children's early learning and at the same time enabling their parents to re-enter education, training and work. Provision has been expanded during 2000 as a result of an extra £10 million of Government funding. Around 50,000 parents will benefit this year.

26. A new course linked to the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy has been put in place in co-operation with LEAs and will reach up to 42,000 parents. Innovative pilot community projects, to reach a further 4,000 parents, will start in January 2001 and expand the range and type of programmes being offered. This has strengthened the programmes available through schools and forged greater links with community partners.

27. We would welcome views on how best we can extend family literacy and numeracy programmes, and how we can motivate more parents, both fathers and mothers, to participate in them. In addition, we need to ensure that levels of achievement that parents reach in these programmes are raised, and this will require careful consideration.

28. The Government also believes that parental involvement strategies in disadvantaged areas should be closely linked to the expansion of Sure Start, our key programme for tackling child poverty and social exclusion. Sure Start provides physical, intellectual, social and emotional development for young children and their parents, offering new services and reshaping existing ones, so that children are ready to flourish when they begin school. The Government is increasing provision from 129 local programmes this year (reaching 105,000 children under four and their parents) to 500 programmes in disadvantaged areas by 2004 (reaching up to 400,000 children under four and their parents). We invite views on how this expansion should best be integrated with literacy and numeracy provision for parents.

³ *Parents and their children*, Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, London.

⁴ Bynner, J. and Steedman, J., *Difficulties with Basic Skills*, Basic Skills Agency, London.

Workers in low-skilled jobs

29. Whilst people with poor basic skills can be found throughout the workforce, we know that a lack of literacy and numeracy skills traps people into low-skilled, poorly paid jobs, in clearly identifiable occupations, such as manual workers, care workers and cleaners. We therefore propose to concentrate our efforts on these workers. Tackling basic skills not only improves the employability of the individual but also raises productivity and earnings levels. Those in work with Level 1 numeracy skills earn around six to seven per cent more per hour than those without them, and over 25 years the possession of these numeracy skills secures average additional earnings of around £50,000.⁵

30. Work-based literacy and numeracy skills training is still at a very early stage of development. The Government believes that it should be expanded and strengthened. We envisage that the key partners in taking this forward should be the following:

- Trade unions, which have already begun to show how effective they can be at motivating and persuading people to improve their basic skills. Currently 5,000 learners are involved in trade union provision through the Union Learning Fund, which has provided £2 million specifically to support the development of literacy and numeracy skills. We believe that union-led provision should be a high priority in basic skills education in the workplace.
- The LSC, which will have targets for driving up skills levels in the workforce, and will be expected to draw up guidelines to facilitate employer training and development programmes. The Council will work with employers with suitable facilities to open them up to firms with which they have a working relationship.

- The University for Industry, which under its brand **learndirect** provides access to innovative and high quality courses, over 80% of them on-line. **learndirect** aims to help up to 200,000 learners to participate in basic skills learning by 2003-04. The national network of **learndirect** centres will expand to 1000 by April 2001, in which individuals can gain access to information on learning opportunities and learn on-line.
- National Training Organisations (NTOs), which should give literacy and numeracy skills a high priority in workforce development plans. NTOs should also facilitate, with the Learning and Skills Council, the wider establishment of group training arrangements and other collaborative networks of employers, to ensure that training costs are minimised.
- Investors in People UK, whose standard will be developed to include an extension module on employability skills that will include literacy and numeracy skills.

The Government recognises that reaching those in the workforce who have basic skills needs, particularly those in small and medium-sized enterprises, is a complex and demanding task requiring commitment from employers and their employees. **We would welcome views on how best we can make progress in this area.** Since costs for releasing staff are often difficult for small and medium-sized employers to meet, we will examine whether replacement funding to cover the loss of staff for one day a week for 13 weeks would raise levels of participation and achievement in basic skills education in these businesses.

⁵ Dearden, L. et al, *The Returns to Academic, Vocational and Basic Skills in Britain*, Skills Task Force Research Paper, DfEE: 2000.

Unemployed people

31. Addressing the literacy and numeracy skills needs of unemployed people is essential if they are to secure lasting, rewarding employment. We estimate that at current levels of unemployment, some 300,000 unemployed people have literacy and numeracy skills needs. The contact jobseekers have with the Employment Service and the assessment of their employability offers an opportunity to identify basic skill problems and to support them in securing training to overcome them. A key will be flexibility. We are learning from the experience of Employment Zones about the importance of providing customised help for the individual and the need to empower both the contractor and the individual concerned to find the solution that suits best. Systems we set up need to be flexible in nature and able to allow for a very wide range of solutions to be available for as many people as possible.

32. The literacy and numeracy skills needs of jobseekers will be tackled through a systematic process.

- Screening by personal advisers to ascertain basic skills needs. Currently, those on the New Deal for Young People are screened at the point of entry and those aged 25 and over are screened after the first six months on JSA as part of their Restart interview. From April 2001, screening for literacy and numeracy skills needs will be extended to include clients on the New Deals for the 50 plus, Lone Parents, Partners of the Unemployed and Disabled People
- Assessment – a detailed diagnosis of basic skills gaps, carried out by a specialist. Clients will then be directed to one of several different types of provision.
- Learning – For those with fewer skills gaps this may be self-directed study, perhaps through FE or **learnirect**, whereas for others it could be more intensive help to tackle severe literacy and numeracy needs. Clients with additional barriers to employability will be referred to Basic Employability Training. The New Deal for Young People will provide appropriate help for the young unemployed.

33. Currently, far fewer jobseekers are identified by screening as having basic skills needs than we would expect. Despite recent improvements, there is still scope for faster and more reliable methods of screening, referral arrangements that minimise client drop-out, and more opportunities for clients to learn basic skills in a way that reflects their needs. We will pilot new forms of screening and different types of provision to encourage achievement. The Employment Service will ensure that new screening tools are used effectively and that all clients who are identified as needing help to improve their literacy and numeracy skills are encouraged to take it up. It will liaise closely with assessors, providers, and will work alongside adult Information, Advice and Guidance services, to ensure, as far as possible, seamless progression from screening through to diagnostic assessment and learning.

34. Those claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) are permitted to study part-time (for 16 Further Education Funding Council 'guided learning hours'). Where additional literacy and numeracy needs are identified, these cannot always be addressed alongside other study within the 16 hours. There is experience of allowing people in receipt of JSA to undertake training, for example in the Workskill Pilots which ran from April 1997 to August 1998 and which informed the design of the New Deal through testing whether access to education and training helped people to find and retain employment. We intend to explore ways of allowing those who require literacy and numeracy support alongside their existing vocational or other studies to have the time spent on basic skills work discounted for the purposes of the 16-hour rule. **We would welcome views on whether this approach should be explored further and how best this could be achieved.**

35. The Government also believes that there is a case for doing more to help those in receipt of JSA to take up appropriate training if their lack of literacy or numeracy skills is preventing them from getting a job. We therefore intend to pilot the introduction of universal screening, early in a JSA claim, and incentives for participation and achievement on basic skills courses. At present, participation in learning amongst unemployed people largely follows the pattern for adults as a whole, that is,

those who receive continuing education are those who are already qualified. We believe action is necessary to focus more attention on those with the greatest needs.

Benefit claimants

36. A further 2.4 million adults who are in receipt of other working-age benefits are estimated to have literacy and numeracy problems. Some of this group will have more pressing personal and social problems that need to be tackled as a first priority, but for others, acquiring literacy and numeracy skills should be integral to their development. Lone parents are a key target group: out of 900,000 lone parents claiming Income Support, around 240,000 have no qualifications. We will be proactive in identifying the literacy and numeracy needs among this group; all those joining the New Deal for Lone Parents will be screened for basic skills problems from next April. The New Deal will give priority to supporting lone parents with children of school age on appropriate basic skills provision related to their individual learning needs. **We would welcome further views on how to engage lone parents in successful basic skills learning.**

Prisoners and those on probation

37. A much higher proportion of people in prison have serious difficulties with literacy and numeracy skills than in the population as a whole. Sixty-nine per cent of prisoners have low literacy and 76% have low numeracy. The prison population is currently some 65,000 people, and therefore as many as 47,000 potentially have problems with literacy and numeracy.

38. The Prison Service has set annual targets for improved achievement rates: in 2001-02 the target is for 23,400 prisoners to achieve accredited national qualifications, rising to 36,200 in 2003-04. Approximately three quarters of these individuals will be working towards basic or Key Skills qualifications. Funding for prison education will be transferred from the Home Office to the DfEE from April 2001 and targets will be agreed jointly between the Department and the Prison Service. This partnership will include an action plan for tackling literacy and numeracy needs among inmates and

staff, building upon the Prison Service's existing strategy (which was itself commended by the Moser report). The action plan will reflect the objectives of the national strategy and its key elements.

39. The Probation Service is developing a strategy along the same lines, and the Youth Justice Board has recently launched the first part of a Basic Skills Toolkit for use by Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). We will ensure that the work of the YOTs is compatible with the forthcoming national strategy.

Groups at high risk of social exclusion

40. There are a number of groups at high risk of sustained social exclusion whom the Government believes should be a priority for basic skills education. These are homeless people and refugees or other people who do not speak English as their first language.

41. There were 100,000 people registered with their local authority as homeless last year. We intend to ensure that those who are registered as homeless and have literacy and numeracy skills needs are identified and referred to appropriate local literacy and numeracy providers, including those involved in providing comprehensive support.

42. The development of support and delivery mechanisms in the voluntary and community sector will be crucial in reaching these and other groups such as ex-offenders and drugs or alcohol abusers. Work is under way at a national level with voluntary organisations, including the Foyer Federation, the Prince's Trust, the Salvation Army, NACRO and the Refugee Council, to help them train their staff and develop their infrastructure to identify and support the basic skills needs of their members and integrate literacy and numeracy into the training and support activities they deliver. At a local level, models of delivery are being developed which link voluntary sector organisations with local quality providers, so that high quality literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision can become an integral part of their work with disadvantaged adults.

Building a Firm Foundation for Success

43. At least 500,000 people in England who do not speak English as their first language need help with English (ESOL) literacy and numeracy. Some of them belong to settled communities, others are refugees or migrant workers. We will be taking action to address their individual needs, in line with the recommendations in our report *Breaking the Language Barriers*, published earlier this year. Developments already under way include a specialist ESOL curriculum, based on the national literacy standards, and the delivery of a programme of ESOL-specific teacher training. Similarly, work has been commissioned to meet the specific needs of adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as identified in our report *Freedom to Learn*, in particular the development of a pre-Entry Level curriculum. Views on further developments in this area would be welcome.

Government employees

44. The Government is a major employer and has influence over wide areas of the public service. Ensuring that our own staff have effective literacy and numeracy skills is a responsibility we take very seriously. Government Departments with responsibility for large numbers of staff who are believed to include a significant proportion with literacy and numeracy skills weaknesses will publish action plans for tackling the problem. Further details of these plans will be given in the national strategy.

45. Sustained improvements in adult literacy and numeracy cannot be secured on the basis of the existing infrastructure for basic skills education. Standards are too variable, attendance and achievement rates too low, and provision is too unco-ordinated. Learning is not always available quickly or in the places where people would find it convenient to learn.

46. Change will require sustained leadership and a clear national framework in which teaching and learning take place. Each individual who has been identified as having basic skills needs requires quick diagnostic assessment and learning opportunities which are of high quality and which lead to the achievement of sustained and measurable improvement in their skills.

47. The Government intends to bring about a sea change in the quality of adult learning. Plans are already under way to enhance the professional status of teachers of adults. From September 2001, all further education teachers will work towards a teaching qualification, and those specialising in basic skills will also be expected to work towards new literacy or numeracy qualifications available from September 2002. An intensive training programme on the new Standards and curriculum is being provided over the next six months to those who currently teach basic skills for more than six hours. Managers are also receiving training through the FEFC/LSC Quality Initiative. We are considering what further action is needed to strengthen the quality of teaching and the role of support staff and will announce our conclusions in the New Year.

48. The Government has already, however, put in place steps to improve the consistency and quality of adult skills and learning, including better management of learning and a national framework of Standards, curriculum and assessment. These issues are covered in the following paragraphs.

Management of Learning

49. The LSC will be able to influence the work of providers through its funding arrangements. In adult basic skills, the Government will expect all learning programmes to include the following key features:

- *An individually-monitored action plan for every learner* – these will include short- and long-term goals and state what the learner and the provider must do to meet them.
- *A flexible approach to teaching and learning based on best practice and the needs of individual learners* – with all teachers competent to provide alternative learning techniques, including interactive learning with groups and individuals, face-to-face and on-line.
- *Bite-sized goals* – so that the learner can feel a sense of achievement. Success must be recognised and praised. Achievement should be recorded on the action plan and where possible, certification provided.
- *Regular positive feedback* – documented and available to tutor and learner.
- *Effective use of volunteers as personal mentors and coaches* – to raise or maintain learner motivation. Arrangements will reflect the concept of New Deal personal advisers.
- *Seamless progression to Key Skills* – and other learning opportunities through ensuring that when learners achieve Level 1 in literacy and/or numeracy they receive advice and guidance on options for progression to Key Skills at Level 1 or higher and alternative learning routes.

We intend that these features become part of every literacy and numeracy learning programme by making them part of a minimum quality requirement on which funding from the LSC or from other sources will depend. We will expect arrangements for learning on-line or through other media to replicate these features as far as possible.

Setting National Standards for Learning and Achievement

50. In the past, there have been no clear definitions of what a person at each level of literacy and numeracy can do and what they need to learn in order to move to the next level. The Government has taken action, through the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, to establish a set of National Standards which will provide the framework for all adult literacy and numeracy courses. The Standards explain in detail what is expected in literacy (in each of the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening) and in numeracy (in each of the skills of interpreting, calculating and communicating mathematical information) at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2. These are broadly equivalent to the attainment expected of an average seven year-old, an average 11 year-old and GCSE grades A-C respectively and are aligned with NVQ Levels and Key Skills at Levels 1 and 2.

51. The National Standards will provide teachers and learners with clear goals in literacy and numeracy. They will also provide a fixed benchmark against which skill levels can be assessed. This will allow us to obtain better estimates of the scale of the problem and through regular surveys determine how much progress is being made. The Standards are available on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website.

The National Literacy Test and the National Numeracy Test

52. New National Tests for Literacy and Numeracy at Levels 1 and 2 are being developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and will be available from January 2001.

53. The National Tests will provide a consistent and reliable measure of the literacy and numeracy skills of each adult, irrespective of learning context. In literacy, the Tests will assess reading and comprehension as well as the essential skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar. In numeracy, the Tests will focus on interpreting mathematical information from a range of different sources and the ability to complete accurate and meaningful calculations. The introduction of on-line assessment will ensure that the full range of literacy and numeracy skills set out in the new National Standards will be assessed and reported. The intention of the National Tests is to confirm learners' achievements and to encourage them to continue to develop their skills as well as to provide employers and others with valuable information on the skill levels of the adult population.

54. Until September 2001, while the bank of test items is still under development, access to qualifications through the National Tests will be limited to adults involved in learning in pathfinder areas (details of pathfinder proposals are set out in paragraphs 64 to 70 below). For these learners the Tests will be available on a specified number of occasions and at particular locations. In the longer term, it will be possible to take the Tests at a wide variety of accredited centres under supervised conditions and at times to suit the person who takes it, in much the same way as the theoretical part of the driving test.

55. At Entry Level, the assessment of literacy and numeracy will be more flexible and through a limited range of methods such as tests, tasks and portfolio. Each Entry Level qualification will include external assessment to provide consistency and credibility.

56. The National Tests will also be available for use as screening tools and as a means of providing broad diagnostic information. For example, confident candidates who believe they have some or all of the literacy and numeracy skills needed at Level 1 may prefer to take the Tests rather than go through a screening and diagnostic assessment process. The results of a Test will give a broad indication of what more they need to do to reach the next Level.

A National Curriculum for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

57. At present, teachers of literacy and numeracy skills decide for themselves what to cover in courses. The Government believes that a more structured approach to teaching will be required to raise standards and achievement. A national core literacy and numeracy curriculum for adults has been developed by the Basic Skills Agency, in consultation with a wide range of partner organisations and practitioners. The new curriculum is based on the new National Standards and sets out clearly the specific literacy and numeracy skills that need to be taught and learned at Entry Level and at Levels 1 and 2. It identifies the skills that are required to meet the Standards, the knowledge and understanding that underpin those skills and example strategies to develop them. It will ensure consistency and continuity for the learner and will help teachers meet the needs of individuals. The national curriculum will be published after the strategy has been issued. Free copies will be circulated widely and will be available on the Basic Skills Agency's website for downloading.

New Teaching Materials

58. For many years, teachers of adult literacy and numeracy have had to draw teaching materials from disparate sources. This is not only inefficient, it also contributes to inconsistency in standards. To ensure uniformly high standards, the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit will commission a bank of professionally-produced materials for use by teachers across the country. The materials will be widely available, free at the point of use, and easily customised by teachers and individual learners. They will cover the main elements of the literacy and numeracy skills curriculum in a number of contexts linked to work-related learning programmes, leading to NVQs or other qualifications. Materials will also be produced which can be integrated into people's interests and hobbies. Teachers and learners will be able to choose from a variety of materials on different topics, so that they can assemble a programme of learning that both reflects their individual needs and interests, and meets the National Standards. The first suite of materials will be available from September 2001.

59. The materials will be paper- and screen-based and designed to support learning in a range of locations and formats. This will provide pre-assembled programmes that draw on individual interest and aptitude and facilitate progression and achievement. The national availability of the materials will allow teachers to make more cost-effective use of their lesson preparation time and enable them to avoid having to 'reinvent the wheel', without stifling their creativity. They will also be designed to allow a programme of individual learning to be assembled for those learners who are more able to work on their own. The Government will also develop, in conjunction with the Basic Skills Agency, materials for the independent learner that will be easily available from community sources, such as schools, supermarkets, bookshops and football grounds. The materials will be available not only to teachers who specialise in adult literacy and numeracy skills, but to subject teachers who incorporate literacy and numeracy skills education into their courses. The materials will be quality-assured and given the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit's *readwriteplus* logo as a seal of approval.

Inspection

60. Robust inspection arrangements are critical to raising standards. In recent years, inspection evidence from the further education sector has revealed clear weaknesses in basic skills education provision – weaknesses not always recognised by colleges themselves. In 1999/2000, for example, inspectors judged that 52% of basic skills education curriculum provision was good or outstanding, and 8% was unsatisfactory or poor. Colleges, however, considered that 67% of provision was good or outstanding and that none was unsatisfactory or poor.⁶

61. All providers of adult literacy and numeracy provision will fall within the general arrangements for inspection by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate, where they are funded by the LSC. The Chief Inspectors of Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate will be responsible for delivering an annual report on the state of the provision in their respective areas of authority.

62. Specific inspection arrangements for literacy and numeracy provision will be set out in a handbook. To ensure that the handbook, the Basic Skills Agency's Quality Mark criteria and the new minimum criteria set out above are entirely consistent, the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit will lead a review of them, in consultation with the Basic Skills Agency, the Adult Learning Inspectorate, and the LSC. The review will be completed by September 2001.

63. The LSC will ensure that the approach to raising standards in literacy and numeracy skills provision is consistent with the general approach it will adopt for other types of provision. The LSC will use the information it gathers to reward those performing well, to invest selectively and to facilitate improvement where necessary. It will take firm action where suppliers fail to respond, including, where necessary, ceasing funding of literacy and numeracy skills provision altogether, provided there are alternative providers nearby who could make up the shortfall in provision and offer a better service to learners. Providers who are particularly effective will be rewarded through being given special status and extra funding, on the condition that they are prepared to share their expertise with others.

⁶ *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector, Further Education Funding Council, Coventry: 2000, p 30.*

Pathfinder Projects

64. The infrastructure and targeted approach described above builds upon good practice, but they have not been tested holistically. In order to ensure that a step change in standards and participation is achieved, the Government will establish an area pathfinder project in each Government Office region and one prison-based pathfinder. These pathfinders will begin in March 2001. Evaluation of the pathfinders will be used to inform the roll-out of the national strategy.

65. The core activity of each pathfinder will be to test a range of infrastructure developments and methods of reaching priority groups. In each area, the National Standards, core curriculum and National Tests will be used. Teachers and volunteer mentors will undergo training and development programmes. The first stage will be to train teachers in using the new National Standards and core curriculum. The National Tests will then be administered to those who have been taught using the new Standards and curriculum. A key priority for the pathfinders will be to test out the use of ICT for motivating people to learn and to deliver education programmes.

66. Each pathfinder area will be expected to implement these activities in different contexts: community/voluntary sector provision, further education colleges, including outreach provision (colleges involved will have an Inspection Grade 1 or 2 for programme area 10 and, preferably, the BSA Quality Mark), family literacy projects, work-based learning for employees, and **learnirect** learning centres. Self-study packages will also be piloted and made available in, for example, local schools, community centres, sports clubs and supermarkets. The pathfinders will provide early evidence on the effectiveness of different methods of reaching priority groups.

67. The Government also intends to test one or more of the following in each of the pathfinder areas:

- employee replacement funding to cover the loss to employers of their staff for one day a week for 13 weeks;
- intensive training in employability and basic skills for jobseekers;
- financial and other incentives to participate in learning programmes and to reward achievement;
- encouragement for jobseekers to undertake learning programmes, such as additions to benefits and course completion bonuses. These incentives will follow the piloting of universal screening early in the JSA claim.

68. We also intend that there should be joint partnerships between Government agencies to train their staff to recognise basic skills problems and to offer a referral service. We envisage that such staff will include health visitors, probation officers, the police and others.

69. There will be a separate Prison Pathfinder which will be jointly managed by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit and the Prison Education Service. The Prison Pathfinder will cover all the infrastructure activities and evaluate basic skills provided through intensive training.

70. The criteria for selection of pathfinder projects will include evidence of effective partnership arrangements, an ability to provide core infrastructure activities, management capacity to develop and implement the pathfinder, evidence of high standards in existing provision, a knowledge of basic skills needs in the area (through an area assessment that has already been carried out), and an ability to embed the pathfinder project infrastructure. We expect that Local Education Authorities involved in pathfinders will be those in which good progress has been made in meeting the school literacy and numeracy targets.

Flexible Learning Opportunities and the Use of ICT

71. It is critical that, following screening and diagnosis for basic skills, individuals are referred to a programme of learning that is both engaging and flexible. Individuals should be able to learn at a time and location convenient to them. People may prefer a traditional weekly class with a tutor or on-line learning at their own pace.

72. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) will play a vital role in engaging people in learning – people can readily admit lacking ICT competence and public appetite for this learning is strong. ICT will also be important in assessing people's learning needs and can transform the delivery of literacy and numeracy education. A recent survey commissioned by the Basic Skills Agency and **learnirect** indicated that more than three quarters of adults wanted to use a computer as part of a programme of help. Currently the benefits of ICT have not been fully exploited by adult literacy and numeracy teachers. **The Government believes that improving the use of ICT should be a central priority for improving basic skills, and we would welcome views on this issue.**

73. Everyone who has problems with basic literacy and numeracy will be entitled to the opportunity to learn these fundamental skills in a way that meets their individual needs. We will continue to ensure that all basic skills education is provided free of charge to the learner, no matter who provides it, where it is provided, or in what form.

Next Steps

74. In the coming weeks, the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Malcolm Wicks, will hold a series of seminars on the key issues raised in this document to receive views at first-hand. We will invite leading experts, practitioners and other partners to come forward with their concerns and ideas at these seminars. In addition, Susan Pember, the Director of the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, will organise and chair regional meetings with key players to discuss the issues raised in this document.

75. Tackling the adult basic skills problem is a major challenge and not an easy one. It is crucial that all those involved understand the importance of the task and work together as partners to tackle it. We now need your views urgently on the priorities we have set out. The forthcoming national strategy will be finalised as we collect these views. We intend that it should command widespread support and engagement.

76. For too long, both through failures in our school system and a failure to offer support to adults with basic skills difficulties, we have given insufficient priority to the development of a literate and numerate population. That will now change. A major national drive to overcome poor adult basic skills will start next year. It needs the commitment of all those involved with this critical issue. We will only succeed if we work together.

Consultation

Throughout this document we ask for the views of providers, key partners in delivery and any groups or organisations who have an interest in our proposals and plans. We will be using this feedback to inform the full strategy, which we intend to publish in the New Year. We are also keen to confirm our plans for the pathfinders, some of which will pilot methods of targeting the priority groups. The full strategy will also be informed by the seminars set out above that will commence shortly.

The questions on which we would welcome comments and views are as follows:

Priority Groups

- Do we have the priority groups right? Are there any groups of people with literacy and numeracy needs not included?
- As we discuss methods and targeting of specific groups, are there any key partners omitted who are likely to be key in engaging the specific groups?

People who live in disadvantaged communities

- How do we best target our resources in deprived communities, bearing in mind the existing area-based initiatives and local partnerships?
- How best can we tackle basic skills and poor financial literacy in developing programmes under the Adult and Community Learning Fund and taking forward recommendations of the Adult Financial Literacy Advisory Group?

Parents

- How can we best extend family literacy and numeracy programmes and how can we motivate more parents to participate in them?
- How best should the expansion of Sure Start provision be integrated with literacy and numeracy provision for adults?

Workers in low-skilled jobs

- How can we make progress in securing a commitment from employees and their employers to tackle problems of literacy and numeracy, especially those based in small and medium-sized enterprises?
- We are intending to pilot in a pathfinder area replacement funding to cover the loss of staff for one day a week for 13 weeks to attend literacy and numeracy training. Would this be welcomed by those involved?

Unemployed people

- We are due to pilot several new initiatives, intensive training for employability and training for jobseekers, financial and other incentives for JSA claimants to take up learning programmes and bonuses for completion, early screening for all jobseekers, and for discounting additional study to address basic skills needs in terms of the 16-hour rule to allow jobseekers to participate in any additional literacy and numeracy learning alongside their existing vocational study. These initiatives are confined to pilots in specific and discrete areas and will not be rolled out nationally, but we would welcome views on them.

Benefit claimants

- How can we further engage lone parents in successful basic skills learning?

Groups at high risk of social exclusion

- How can we further develop our policy to address the basic skill needs of those who have English as a second language and those adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?

ICT

- We have set out the Government's belief that we can use ICT, not only to engage the learner and to provide a convenient form of skills assessment, but also to transform delivery of basic skills education. We would welcome thoughts on how we can fully use ICT to improve literacy and numeracy skills.

Contacting the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit

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