

# Delivering Skills for Life:

The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

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## Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy a guide for policy makers

## SKILLS FOR LIFE: THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING ADULT LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS

Many millions of adults in England need help to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills. *Skills for Life*, launched by the Prime Minister in 2001, sets out the Government's strategy for meeting these needs.

Since the launch of *Skills for Life*, we have gained an even greater insight into the effect of low levels of literacy and numeracy skills on individuals, their families, on the economy and on society. For example, adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills could earn up to £50,000 less over their lifetime than other adults, and are more likely to have health problems, live in a disadvantaged area or be unemployed. They and their children risk being cut off from the advantages of a world increasingly linked through information technology. Additionally, poor literacy, language and numeracy skills have been estimated to cost the country in excess of £10 billion a year.

*Skills for Life* is not just an education-only strategy, nor is it a purely Government response to addressing literacy, language and numeracy skills needs. It covers all post-16 learners on learning programmes at levels from Pre-Entry up to and including Level 2. These programmes range from discrete to embedded courses, and from classroom and community provision to voluntary and work-based learning. *Skills for Life* addresses assessment through Key Skills, GCSE maths and English, and adult literacy and numeracy skills certification. So it is crucial that the strategy supports and reflects the successful implementation of other post-16 strategies. These strategies include Success for All, the strategy for reforming post-16 further education, and the *Skills Strategy (21st Century*

*Skills – Realising our Potential*), which aims to ensure that the skills we develop are valuable to young people and valued by employers. Our goal to improve the skills of young people is also central to the *Opportunity and Excellence 14–19* strategy.

Every organisation and individual has a contribution to make. The most important element for successful delivery of *Skills for Life* is partnership, together with the ownership of the strategy by all our key supporting and development partners.

Government departments, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), JobCentre Plus, the Prison and Probation Services, external partners in the post-16 learning sector, businesses, the CBI, TUC and many others are working together to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults by:

- **boosting demand** for learning through a high-profile promotional campaign and by engaging all partners across Government and among employers in identifying and addressing the literacy and numeracy needs of their clients and employees;
- **ensuring capacity** of provision by securing sufficient funding and co-ordinating planning and delivery to meet learners' needs;
- **improving the standards** of teaching and learning in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision;
- **raising learner achievement** through the new national learning, teaching and assessment infrastructure, and reducing barriers to learning.

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# Introduction: the cycle of need

## Component parts of the *Skills for Life* learning infrastructure

National standards of attainment for listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy were published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in 2001.

Between 2001 and 2003, the following were produced:

- core curriculum documents for literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL)
- a pre-entry curriculum framework for literacy and numeracy
- *Access for All* – guidance on making the core curricula accessible to the whole range of learners, including those with disabilities and/or learning difficulties
- diagnostic assessment and learning materials
- national tests – Adult Literacy and Numeracy Certificates at Levels 1 and 2.

*Skills for Life* has a target of improving the literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 adults by 2004, and a further 750,000 by 2007.

**In order to break this generational cycle of underachievement we must ensure that we are working with parents – as well as with grandparents and other primary carers – to support literacy and numeracy activities with their children.**

*(DfES, 2001)*

## The level of need

The national strategy, *Skills for Life*, was launched in 2001 to help an estimated 7 million adults who had literacy, language and numeracy needs. More recent research undertaken in 2003 for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has drawn a distinction between the level of literacy and numeracy need in the adult population. According to this research, 5.2 million adults have the level of literacy skills, and 15 million the level of numeracy skills, that we would expect from an 11 year old.

These figures are national figures and therefore cloak regional, local and social variation. Adults in more deprived areas of the country have lower levels of literacy and numeracy than those in less deprived areas; adults living in more financially advantaged households have much higher literacy skills than those living in financially disadvantaged households; and those adults whose first language is not English tend to have literacy skills that are well below average.

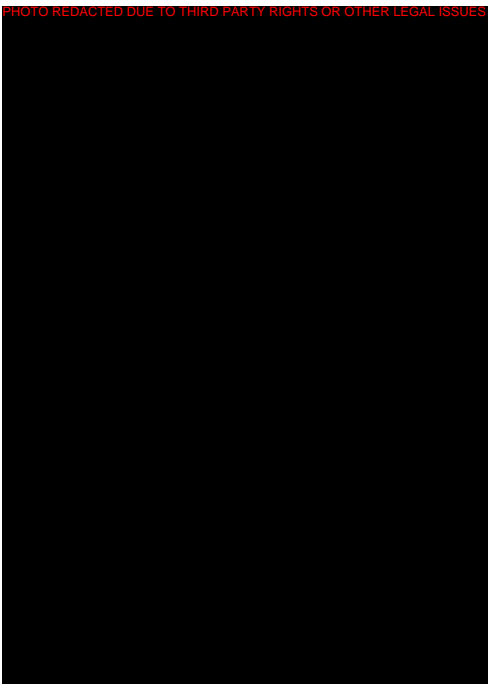
Parental involvement in the form of interest in the child and manifest in the home as parent–child discussions can have a significant positive effect on children’s behaviour and achievement even when the influence of background factors such as social class or family size have been factored out. (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003)

## The effect on children

What these figures also fail to capture is the effect of low levels of adult literacy, language and numeracy on children. Children whose parents have literacy and numeracy difficulties are themselves likely to find reading, writing and numeracy difficult, and to underachieve at school. And educational underachievement is in turn strongly associated with other patterns of behaviour that maintain this cycle of need and pass low levels of skills from generation to generation.

By contrast, separate research evidence shows that children whose parents support their learning and take a keen interest in their education do better at school and in later life. All parents aim to do the best for their children, and their interest, love, support and encouragement can help every child fulfil his or her potential; if those basic instincts are harnessed to supporting the child’s education, the child achieves more.

It is against this background that the national initiative, [family literacy, language and numeracy](#), was set up – to raise the literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents and children and to increase parents’ support for their children’s literacy, language and numeracy development.



# What is the family literacy, language and numeracy programme?

## Some examples of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes

Early Start focuses on building parenting skills into an understanding of the part language, literacy and numeracy can play in the first three years of a child's life.

Family Literacy and Family Numeracy are two separate programmes, defined by curriculum area.

Family Finance helps to develop parents' understanding of financial matters while helping them support their children's development of numeracy skills.

Family programmes encourage adults to learn for their own personal development and for the benefit of their children. For many adult learners a family programme is their first step back into learning since their own school days and they go along because they want to offer their child or grandchild support and opportunity. The LSC is pleased to be involved in this work because it is a great way of engendering a love of learning that can last a lifetime.

*Sue Evans, Learning and Skills Council*

Family literacy, language and numeracy is co-ordinated by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) as a strand within *Skills for Life*, the national strategy led by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit. Building on the work of other organisations in this area, most notably the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), it promotes a range of programmes targeted at different learner groups. Some of these differences are defined by age, some by curriculum area, some by gender, and some by parental status.

### Key organisations in family literacy, language and numeracy

The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) is the division within the DfES with overall responsibility for co-ordinating the *Skills for Life* national strategy. Website:

[www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus)

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is the agency responsible for funding and planning education and training for over-16-year-olds in England, and a key partner in ensuring the delivery of *Skills for Life*. Website: [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

The Basic Skills Agency (BSA) is the national development agency for adult literacy and numeracy. It has initiated and supported family literacy, language and numeracy since 1994.

Website: [www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk)

The family literacy, language and numeracy programme dates back to 1994, when the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) funded the BSA to develop four demonstration programmes. These programmes were found to have triggered improvements in the literacy, language and numeracy skills of both parents and children; they also deepened parents' involvement in their children's learning and prompted parents to go on to further training and to gain qualifications. As a result, family literacy, language and numeracy became a central plank of the emerging *Skills for Life* strategy.

## The main aims of the programme

The programme has three core aims:

- to raise the literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents
- to improve parents' ability to help their children
- to improve children's acquisition of literacy, language and numeracy.

Since 2002, the LSC has been responsible for funding and supporting family literacy, language and numeracy; the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit transferred £23.1 million to the LSC for programmes to be undertaken in 2003–04 and a similar amount for 2004–05.



# A programme at the heart of government

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Our LEA continues to see the engagement of the community, be it adults, children or families in learning, as the key to a brighter, more dynamic future, where its citizens will be proactive and confident individuals, able to contribute to our society at all levels and secure employment in the rapidly expanding economy. Learning for life is not just a slogan – it is about day-to-day action, which will enable people to make choices about the lives they wish to lead.

*LEA Director of Education*

Family literacy, language and numeracy is unlike many other government programmes for a number of reasons. First, it is 'intergenerational': adults and children learn together; in ways that happen rarely on other programmes, it raises standards across generations. Second, it crosses the separate phases of education, from pre-primary to higher education. And, third, it crosses government departments, sitting as naturally in the Department of Education and Skills as it might, for example, in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or the Department of Health.

# Family programmes

Family literacy, language and numeracy comes under the umbrella of Family programmes, which are co-ordinated by the LSC. Although the motivation for all Family programmes is similar, their focus and their aims vary.

## Family programmes

All family programmes encourage family members to learn together. They promote learning together as a family, but also learning within the family. They should aim to allow adults and children to pursue further learning. The 'inter-generational' aspect of family programmes is important: the key principle is that children and adults learn together.

## Family learning programmes

Programmes in this category aim to get adults and children learning as or within a family, or to help parents/carers learn how to support their children's learning. They have two main aims:

- to develop the skills or knowledge of the adult and the child
- to help parents/carers to be able to support their children's learning and development more actively and with greater confidence, and to be able to understand why that support is important.

## Family literacy, language and numeracy programmes

Programmes in this category have three main aims:

- to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents/carers
- to improve the ability of parents/carers to help their children
- to help children acquire literacy, language and numeracy skills.

As this shows, family literacy, language and numeracy programmes are, by definition, always family learning and family programmes, whereas family learning programmes are not necessarily family literacy, language and numeracy programmes.

# How does family literacy, language and numeracy fit with other government programmes?

When I first came here, parents stayed at the school gate. Family learning has helped the school to engage with the community. Parents now see it not just as a place to bring their children to. We now have an active parent governor and parents are confident to come into school. When children work alongside their parents, they see that adults go on learning and it is not just something for the children.  
*Primary School Headteacher*

Far from being a discrete, isolated programme, family literacy, language and numeracy is at the heart of a number of national strategies. It is most obviously part of *Skills for Life*, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, to which it also makes a central contribution – and at the root of *Skills for Life* is the recognition that inadequate literacy, language and numeracy make it impossible for the adult to play a full part at home, in the community and at work.

The available research supports the idea that improved literacy, language and numeracy skills lead to increased participation: as adults work with their children to develop their skills, their own skills develop, and they are more likely to go on to learn for themselves. Research into the family literacy, language and numeracy programme in 2001–03 indicated that between one-half and four-fifths of parents attending courses in family literacy and numeracy planned to go on studying.

The course has made me and my son closer. It has made me realise that I am capable of helping him. It has also brought him on in leaps and bounds.

I was always embarrassed. I wouldn't even read to my children if my husband was in the room. The course really built up my confidence. I even read in the park now.

The *National Literacy Strategy* and *National Numeracy Strategy* are twin initiatives that were introduced into primary schools in England and Wales in 1998 and 1999 respectively. They have the same aims of providing children with firm foundations in their subject areas, and of supporting the achievement of ambitious targets for raising standards. The key stage 2 targets are for 85 per cent of pupils to achieve level 4+ in English and mathematics and for 35 per cent to achieve level 5+ in English and mathematics as soon as possible. The government hopes to achieve this by 2006. The new Primary Strategy – *Excellence and Enjoyment* – launched in May 2003 aims to build on the success of the national strategies, to enable primary schools to combine a strong focus on high standards of literacy and numeracy within a broad and rich curriculum.

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## THE LINK WITH SCHOOLS

**The courses have an enormous impact upon the attainment and achievement of both children and parents. Our recent HMI inspection recognised the success of Family Learning as part of our raising standards agenda.**

*Belinda Basnett, Headteacher of St Aloysius Primary School, Merseyside*

**The children's teachers say they can see the course has helped them in their work. It is important for the parents to feel able to help their children at home and to know that learning does not happen only at school.**

*Kay Clifford, Year 1 Teacher, Castle Hill Infant School, Ipswich*

Most family literacy, language and numeracy programmes are delivered in schools and in conjunction with the local education authority (LEA). One of the key aims of these programmes is to help children develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills, so they contribute centrally to raising standards in English and mathematics, particularly in primary schools. Children who have been involved in family literacy and numeracy programmes have demonstrated dramatic improvement in their skills, with just under three-quarters (according to the research referred to above) making progress in their writing skills and just under two-thirds making progress in their reading skills. Such progress signals the first acquisition of significant skills, and may represent the first step towards educational achievement and away from social exclusion.

The quality of the learning environment of the home (where parents are actively engaged in activities with children) promoted intellectual and social development in all children. What parents do with their children is more important than who parents are. Young mothers with few qualifications can improve their children's progress, and give them a better start at school, by engaging in those activities at home that foster children's learning.

*(SureStart/Institute of Education, 2003)*

In contrast to what is usually found, social class, family size, and parental education ... have relatively small effects ... Of the family inputs, only parental interest has a consistently strong impact.

*(Feinstein and Symons, 1999)*

A further aim of family literacy, language and numeracy is for parents or carers to understand why it is so important to help their children learn and develop in their schooling, and to acquire the skills and the confidence to be able to provide this help. The involvement of parents in their children's schooling is one of the cornerstones of the government's educational policy. It lies behind home-school agreements and parental involvement strategies, it explains the increased importance given to parent governors, and it is based on clear evidence that the child whose parent is involved in his or her learning does better at school and in later life. Research has shown that parents' attitudes to learning and their aspirations for their children are clear factors in determining the educational attainment of children. Children whose parents show high levels of interest in their children's schooling can progress 15–17 per cent more in maths and reading between the ages of 11 and 16 than pupils whose parents showed no interest.

Family literacy, language and numeracy is proving particularly successful at hitting the target of increased parental involvement and confidence: more than four-fifths of parents or carers who attended family literacy courses ended up feeling more confident about supporting their children's literacy development, and just under three-quarters of parents or carers attending family numeracy courses felt the same way about their children's numeracy. Four-fifths of parents (80 per cent) attending family literacy courses reported that they were doing more activities related to literacy with their children at home, and 60 per cent of parents attending family numeracy courses that they were doing more activities related to numeracy.

Parents who are more involved in their adolescents' schooling, regardless of parents' gender or educational level, have offspring who do better in school, irrespective of the child's gender, ethnicity or family structure. (Bogenschneider, 1999)

Step in to Learning is a programme funded by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit and the Sure Start Unit that provides training for managers and staff in Early Years settings to identify and signpost parents and carers with family literacy, language and numeracy needs.

As family literacy, language and numeracy broadens its scope – expanding into the early years sector, extending its reach into secondary schools, and running courses in Sure Start local programmes, libraries, health centres and voluntary organisations – the expectation is that an increasing number of parents who had previously been neither involved in their children's education nor particularly concerned about their own skills will become more confident about their ability to support their children's learning development and to extend their own. Already, for example, Step in to Learning has proved to be successful in making parents and carers aware of the opportunities to develop their skills and further their learning.

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The courses had boosted [parents'] confidence about helping their children and about their own educational attainment. Many parents were keen to progress to further courses, and many became more involved with their children's schools.  
*(NFER/University of Sheffield, 2003)*

A single parent, mother of four children, the eldest of whom attends a school for children with behavioural difficulties, Meirion attended a Family Numeracy course at her third child's nursery three years ago. She successfully completed an intensive course, which helped her to support her children more effectively. The following year she moved on to a numeracy course provided by the local adult education centre as progression for parents from Family Learning courses, and completed stages 2 and 3 of City and Guilds Numeracy 370. She is currently attending a GCSE course (also run by Adult Education) and will take her first module in the autumn.

'My tutor asked me to think about taking the national numeracy test. At first the thought made me anxious but we talked about it in the group, and four of us decided to have a go. I was really thrilled when I received my Level 1 Numeracy Certificate. Stuart (my 12-year-old son) was really proud of me. He and I are much more confident working together – now I help him when he gets stuck with his homework.' (Learner on family numeracy programme)

Shelagh has five children and after years at home decided to join a Family Literacy programme which was running in her children's primary school. After an uncertain start she became a key member of the group and was delighted when she gained an Entry-level literacy qualification. Following this she enrolled on an adult literacy programme and last summer gained her English GCSE Grade B. Currently she is attending a creative writing group.

## BEYOND FAMILY AND SCHOOL

There are no national figures on the impact of family literacy, language and numeracy courses on broader participation in the community, and to provide them would require a complex, long-term research study. But underpinning the *Skills for Life* strategy and all other programmes within it – such as family literacy, language and numeracy – is the need to eliminate social exclusion, for the good of the people who are currently excluded and for the wider benefit of society.

Family literacy, language and numeracy has a crucial role to play here, because its central thrust is to break the cycle of deprivation that lies at the heart of social exclusion. It aims to do this by establishing links – between the parent/carer and the child, between the parent/carer and the school, between the parent/carer and the community. Or rather it is the adult who creates the links, as a result of acquiring skills that give them a confidence and a sense of potential that they are unlikely to have had before.

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Family literacy and numeracy have a clear contribution to make to raising standards of achievement of both parents and children, and thus contributing to the government's wider goals of social inclusion and widening participation.

*(NFER/University of Sheffield, 2003)*

Participants [in family literacy and numeracy programmes delivered through Adult and Community Education] claim social and personal benefits including 'enhanced health, active ageing, self-esteem, communication skills and improvement in family relationships'.

*(DfES, 2001)*

Thousands of parents and children have already taken part in family programmes of one kind or another, benefiting from them in some of the ways described in this section. The government would now like to see even more family learning taking place throughout the country, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas. The LSC is funding over 100,000 learners on family programmes in 2003/04.

A family learning worker with the Youth Offending Service encouraged Ailsa to attend a parenting programme (her 12-year-old son was not attending school, was at risk of offending and was becoming increasingly violent towards her). She learned and applied strategies that resulted in her son attending school regularly; he also improved his literacy and numeracy skills. Ailsa observes and records what factors are helping her son, and at the same time improves her own literacy skills.

So there is every indication that a number of other benefits will flow from the achievement of the 'basic' aim of improving the literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents/carers and their children. Acquiring new skills puts adults in the market for jobs they would previously have been unable to do, or points them in the direction of other learning opportunities that could give them new qualifications. Either way, the effect is to add to the skills in the national workforce. Children reach levels of educational achievement beyond those they would otherwise have been expected to reach. Households that had previously been socially excluded become socially included. In other words, there is a raft of potential positive results from the programme, affecting not only the individuals but also their communities and stretching out to the national economy.

# What courses are available?

The LSC produces guidance for local LSCs on family programmes and lists the range of programmes approved for family literacy, language and numeracy funding. These are divided into four separate categories of programme, largely on the basis of the course's length and some key criteria; the categories are: taster courses and workshops, introductory programmes, short programmes and intensive programmes.

Courses approved for LSC funding for 2004/05 are listed on the following two pages.

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# Scope and range of LSC-funded family literacy, language and numeracy courses, 2004/05

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## Taster courses and workshops

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### Play and language taster (children aged 0–3 years)

Encourages parents with no or few qualifications to talk to and play with their babies and toddlers, and sets out the importance of play in early language development.

### Family Literacy Workshop (children aged 3+)

Raises standards of literacy for both parents and children, extends parents' skills in supporting their children's developing literacy skills and provides opportunities for parents to go on to further programmes.

### Family Numeracy Workshop (children aged 3+)

Provides opportunities for parents and young children who need it most to improve their numeracy skills.

### Combined Family Literacy and/or Language and/or Numeracy Workshop (children aged 5+)

Provides and explains opportunities for parents and children to improve their literacy/language/numeracy skills.

### Keeping Up with the Children Taster – (parents/carers of school-age children only)

Explains how parents/carers can become more involved in their children's education by understanding the literacy/numeracy curriculum and improving their own skills.

## Introductory programmes

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### Play and language (children aged 0–3 years)

Supports parents and carers and their babies/toddlers with language development and positive interaction, and shows parents/carers how improving their own skills can help their children.

### Skills for Families Springboard (parents/carers only)

Introduces parents and carers to the range of family services and programmes available in their locality and points them in the direction of the most appropriate progression route.

### Keeping up with the Children (parents/carers of school-age children only)

Introduces parents and carers to how their children are taught in the literacy hour and the daily maths lesson at schools, so that they can be confident in supporting them; develops adults' own literacy and numeracy skills.

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## Short programmes

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### Early Start (children aged 0–3 years)

Enhances language development from birth to 3 years old, encourages strong attachments and positive everyday interactions among parents/carers and their babies and young children; helps parents and carers explore ways of playing and talking with and listening to their children and enhances early language development.

### Playing with Language 3–5 years

Helps parents understand, develop and use language interactions that have been researched and shown to be useful, improves parent/carer skills and helps them prepare for their child's entry to school, provides opportunities for parents and carers to work towards the national tests.

### Family Literacy (school-age children)

Raises standards of literacy for both parents and children, extends parents' skills in supporting their children's developing literacy skills and provides opportunities for parents to work towards Entry-level qualifications and/or national tests as appropriate.

### Family Numeracy (school-age children)

Raises standards of numeracy for both parents and children, extends parents' skills in supporting their children's developing numeracy skills and provides opportunities for parents to work towards Entry-level qualifications and/or national tests as appropriate.

### Family Finance

Develops parents' literacy, language and numeracy skills and their knowledge and understanding of everyday financial matters; provides opportunities for parents and school-age children to develop financial literacy skills.

### Keeping up with the Children + (parent/carers only)

Extends parents' skills in supporting their children's literacy and numeracy (by understanding more about the school curriculum) and provides opportunities for parents to develop their own literacy or numeracy skills.

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## Intensive programmes

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### Family Literacy

Raises standards of literacy for both parents and children, extends parents' skills in supporting their children's developing literacy skills and provides opportunities for parents to achieve Entry-level qualifications and/or national tests as appropriate.

### Family Numeracy (school-age children)

Raises standards of numeracy for both parents and children, extends parents' skills in supporting their children's developing numeracy skills and provides opportunities for parents to work towards Entry-level qualifications and/or national tests as appropriate.

### Combined Family Literacy and/or Language and/or Numeracy

Improves the literacy, language and numeracy of both the parents and the children, develops parents' skills in supporting their children's progress at school and provides opportunities for parents to achieve Entry-level qualifications and/or national tests as appropriate.

# Skills for Families – family literacy, language and numeracy in practice

*Skills for Families* pilot partnerships between LEAs and local LSCs, 2003–04

Cheshire  
Coventry  
Croydon  
Derbyshire  
Gloucestershire  
Hampshire and Portsmouth  
Knowsley  
Newcastle and South Tyneside  
Suffolk  
Wakefield.  
West Sussex  
Wirral

We know that poor literacy and numeracy skills often run in the family, and family literacy, language and numeracy courses can be an effective way of breaking the cycle of underachievement. *Skills for Families* has been successful in showing how using the new national teaching and learning infrastructure can help to improve the quality of family literacy, language and numeracy courses and boost learner achievement. It has developed a tailored teacher-training programme and helped more learners to achieve national qualifications and secure the ambition, confidence and dignity that such achievements bring. It is a vital part of the *Skills for Life* strategy.

*Ivan Lewis, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Skills and Vocational Education*

*Skills for Families* is a pilot family literacy, language and numeracy project funded by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit and the LSC and delivered through a consortium of 12 LEA/LSC partnerships across the country, currently managed by the BSA.

*Skills for Families* is providing a very worthwhile and unique opportunity for LEAs and LSCs to come together nationally to share good practice and work together to address the challenges.

Hampshire and Portsmouth LEAs

The project has four main objectives:

- To pilot local infrastructures for planning and managing family literacy, language and numeracy
- To develop and test a range of new family programmes, using LSC funding and, based on the *Skills for Life* learning infrastructure and the national curriculum, to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents and children
- To test approaches to teacher training and capacity building for LEAs, schools and other organisations working with families, linking closely with the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit's frontline staff training strategy at all times
- To disseminate effective practice to other LEAs, local LSCs, voluntary organisations and other relevant agencies.

The key principle behind the project is that the more you can bring partners into the delivery of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes, and the more you can embed the concept in the local and regional education structures, the better the quality of these programmes is likely to be.

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# What does *Skills for Families* do?

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*Skills for Families* is an umbrella project, providing support for a range of activities undertaken by its partnership groups. The project is co-ordinated by the BSA, which works with the local partnerships to:

- develop prospectuses and guidance for partner organisations
- support and manage activities within each region
- help to appoint staff and create links with LEAs, schools, advisory services, early years, voluntary organisations
- design and pilot a range of innovative courses and learning activities
- set recruitment, retention and achievement targets
- enlist the support of local stakeholders in the development of programmes
- find out ways of assessing, testing and showing progression in a variety of settings, and of monitoring learners' progression into further learning, training or employment
- increase the ability of schools and other organisations to provide family literacy, language and numeracy programmes, by training staff and promoting courses
- generally spread the word about its activities through its website, articles, publications, handbooks, national forum, etc.

Within this arrangement, local partnerships are able to offer activities they consider to be locally needed. As a result, the 12 partnerships are currently running a diverse range of activities, from capacity-building events to tailored ESOL or financial literacy programmes, working closely with a variety of other organisations such as Sure Start local programmes, Gingerbread and Fathers Direct.

# Lessons for the future

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Feedback from the 12 partnerships involved in *Skills for Families* indicates that the project has helped to extend and embed family literacy, language and numeracy within their area, as these two comments suggest:

*Skills for Families* has enabled Knowsley LEA to progress from a situation where family learning was fragmented and lacking in strategic direction to one which is increasingly being seen as a core part of the LEA's provision and essential to meeting key strategic priorities. Presenting a case for family literacy, language and numeracy and winning the support of the leadership team has been crucial to this.

Suffolk is moving the work of family literacy, language and numeracy on, allowing the work to be established within the wider framework of school, and improved achievement.

The experience of *Skills for Families* has already made it possible for certain lessons to be learned about the most effective local structures for the delivery of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes. Among the most important of these lessons are the crucial need for effective communication, the establishment of strong networks between LEAs and local LSCs, the critical roles of programme co-ordinator and individual teachers, and the broader and better promotion of these programmes, nationally and locally.

A further phase of *Skills for Families* is to be launched for 2004/05. This will involve further LEA/LSC partnerships and the development and piloting of more delivery models and courses for young fathers and mothers, and for working parents; it will also work with extended schools to provide courses as part of their family learning provision.

For a full account of the *Skills for Families* programme, visit the website: [www.skillsforfamilies.org.uk](http://www.skillsforfamilies.org.uk)



# Who funds and delivers the programmes?

Family learning courses in adult and community provision are often very successful in encouraging parents with low levels of literacy and numeracy to take a greater interest in their children's education ... Family learning is also used to reach parents from the hard-to-reach groups who need help with literacy and numeracy. This activity is very effective in building links between these parents and their children's schools and successfully encouraging parents to take a greater interest in their children's education.

*(Ofsted, 2003)*

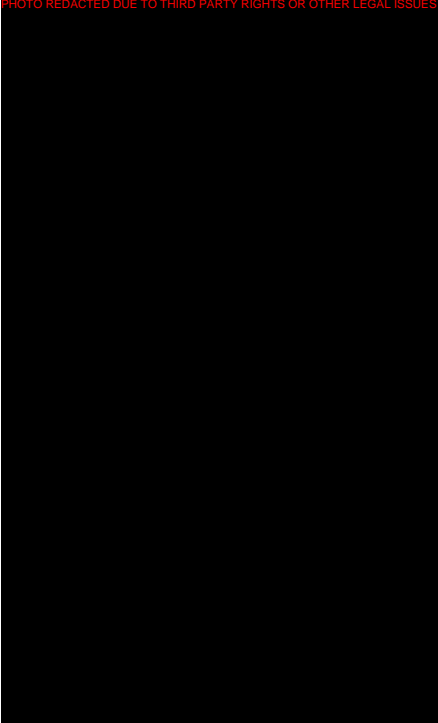
In a further demonstration of the importance the government attaches to family literacy, language and numeracy, the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit has transferred £23.1 million to the LSC for family literacy, language and numeracy programmes in 2003–04 and a similar amount for 2004–05. With funding for family literacy, language and numeracy and wider family learning programmes, the LSC intends to reach over 100,000 family learners in each of these years.

Because socio-economic deprivation and lower levels of literacy and numeracy tend to go together, LSC funding for FLLN (and much of the activity in family literacy, language and numeracy) is targeted on the most-deprived LEAs in England, with the less-deprived LEAs getting a proportionately smaller allocation of the overall funding.

The LSC provides detailed guidance for LEAs allocated funding in this area (this guidance is available from [joanne.bratby@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:joanne.bratby@lsc.gov.uk)). This guidance lays down some specific requirements for LEAs, among which are the following:

- They are expected to work in partnerships (e.g. with the voluntary sector) on some of the programmes.

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- They are encouraged to work from pre-school and across the key stages. (The LSC publishes a menu of family literacy, language and numeracy courses, approved by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, from which LEAs can plan the most appropriate programme for the area.)
- The emphasis for these programmes should be on access, quality and progression (including qualifications).

In addition, the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit has identified the following target groups for these programmes:

- Unemployed people and benefit claimants
- Jobseekers
- Prisoners (funded by the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit) and those supervised in the community
- Public sector employees
- Low-skilled people in employment
- Young adults
- Other groups at risk of exclusion
- Parents
- People who live in disadvantaged communities.

# Websites and contacts

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## WEBSITES

Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit	<a href="http://www.DfES.gov.uk/readwriteplus">www.DfES.gov.uk/readwriteplus</a>
ALI	<a href="http://www.ali.gov.uk">www.ali.gov.uk</a>
BSA	<a href="http://www.basic-skills.co.uk">www.basic-skills.co.uk</a>
DfES	<a href="http://www.DfES.gov.uk">www.DfES.gov.uk</a>
Extended Schools	<a href="http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/educationoverview/briefing/extendedschools/">www.teachernet.gov.uk/educationoverview/briefing/extendedschools/</a>
Family Programmes	<a href="http://www.familyprogrammes.org">www.familyprogrammes.org</a>
Learning and Skills Council (LSC)	<a href="http://www.lsc.gov.uk">www.lsc.gov.uk</a>
Move On	<a href="http://www.move-on.org.uk">www.move-on.org.uk</a>
National Family Learning Network	<a href="http://www.familylearningnetwork.com">www.familylearningnetwork.com</a>
NIACE	<a href="http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/Family/Default.htm">www.niace.org.uk/Research/Family/Default.htm</a>
Parent Centre	<a href="http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk">www.parentcentre.gov.uk</a>
Skills for Families	<a href="http://www.skillsforfamilies.org">www.skillsforfamilies.org</a>
Sure Start	<a href="http://www.surestart.gov.uk">www.surestart.gov.uk</a>
Teacher Training	<a href="http://www.teachernet.gov.uk">www.teachernet.gov.uk</a>

## CONTACTS

### Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit

Tel: 020 7273 1223

The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit has contacts in each of the nine government regions.

### Basic Skills Agency

Email: [familyprogrammes@basic-skills.co.uk](mailto:familyprogrammes@basic-skills.co.uk)

Tel: 020 7405 4017

### Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

Tel: 0845 019 4170

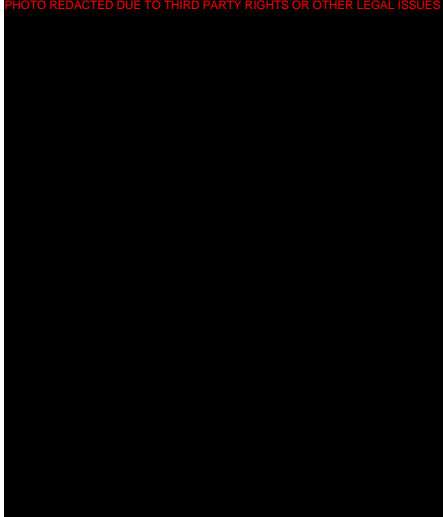
The LSC has 47 local offices.

Contact the national office or check the website for your local LSC contact details.

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Copies of this publication can be obtained from:

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