



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy



Summary

NRDC Annual Report 2003/04:

Generating knowledge and
transforming it into practice

About NRDC

The NRDC was established in 2002 as part of the Skills for Life strategy. We are a consortium of 11 partner organisations, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. The Basic Skills Agency is a key partner. The NRDC is dedicated to improving literacy, numeracy, language and related skills and knowledge. One of our key goals is to refresh and help take forward the government's *Skills for Life* strategy. NRDC brings together research, development and action for positive change to improve the quality of learning and the achievements and progression of learners to further learning and employment.

What were our key achievements in 2003/04?

Research

In June 2003, we published the **NRDC strategy 2003-2007: generating knowledge and transforming it into practice**. Key achievements in delivering the strategy include:

- Producing comprehensive international reviews of the state of knowledge in **Skills for Life** subject areas
- Running a world-class research programme: by March 2004, NRDC had 35 linked projects in progress, from long-term investigations of effective practice to short, focused development and evaluation projects
- Establishing a major ESF-supported research project Skills for Work and Life: conducting rigorous research on 'what works', using 'before and after' assessment of learners, detailed observation of teaching and learning, and correlating learners' progress and achievements with different teaching and learning strategies.

Development

A wide range of development activities, including:

- Two handbooks for practitioners, published jointly with national organisations (BSA and FENTO).
- Supporting DfES, cross-government policy teams and key national organisations by conducting development and evaluation work on Foundation Degrees, Apprenticeships, **Skills for Life** and Health; the DfES adult ICT team; a paper for OFSTED/ALI linking NRDC research to identified areas where quality can be improved.
- Establishing NRDC's role as a strategic partner with CfBT the delivering the **Skills for Life** Quality Initiative on behalf of LSC.
- Reports and themed workshops on initial teacher education and CPD, together with development work with national partners (QCA, FENTO, BSA and others).
- Development of NRDC networks of practitioners in teacher education, numeracy and ESOL;

creating strong links with active practitioner networks, e.g RAPAL, NATECLA.

- Supporting the DfES by: taking forward the 2003 Needs and Impact Survey to provide advice on international surveys; responding to new research needs, e.g. the impact of **Skills for Life** on learners; promoting **Skills for Life** which are embedded in vocational and adult community learning.

Communication, promotion and dissemination

Our activities across the year included:

- Developing NRDC's website and publications in an instantly recognisable house-style and achieving a high profile at events across the country and internationally:
- Raising the profile of numeracy: ministerial conference at the Institute of Education, University of London, in December 2003; publications; workshops for teachers; engagement of practitioners in research and development; Adults Learning Maths network.
- Publishing 14 research reports to date.
- Publishing 18 short research summaries.
- Three **Skills for Life** conferences for DfES in November 2003, reaching over 1,200 practitioners, regional and local planners and funders.
- Three regional conferences to launch six contextualised Raising Standards Guides in March 2004.
- A second international conference (March 2004), with speakers from four continents; an international seminar – exploring and exchanging the lessons to be learned from policy research in developing and developed countries.
- Themed workshops, including family learning; ESOL; assessment.

Practitioner engagement

NRDC places practitioners at the heart of project design and delivery, involving them at all stages of research and development. Key achievements in 2003/04 include:

- Six research and development projects, led by practitioner groups across the country, to find out 'New Ways of Engaging New Groups of Learners'.
- 19,300 publications distributed; in addition, NRDC reached over 4,000 practitioners through speaking and workshop engagements nationally and regionally.
- Training and deploying over 80 practitioners engaged actively as fieldworkers, observers and practitioner consultants in research.
- A conference for 100 practitioner-researchers and stakeholder groups: January 2004.
- Practitioner-led research initiatives.

Forthcoming publications and activities include:

- Developmental dyslexia in adults: a research review to be published 1 July, 2004.
- Research reports to be published end of June 2004: ICT in literacy, numeracy and ESOL; Teaching and learning reading and Teaching and learning writing; followed by conferences and workshops
- Trialing of new 'e' and paper-based publishing formats to ensure our publications speak to all stakeholders. These include:
 - short accessible booklets: produced with practitioners on the implications for action from research in numeracy, literacy, teacher education, ICT and ESOL .
 - research and practice magazine/journal: new publication for and by practitioners, fostering engagement with research, development and action for improvement. First issue October 2004.
- Communication and action arising from NRDC's numeracy and maths research (following the completion of the Making Numeracy Teaching Meaningful and Teaching Common Measures projects in August 2004).
- Action to enhance effective provision of literacy, numeracy and maths in the workplace and **Skills for Life** learning embedded in vocational and other provision which enable learners to progress to Level 2 skills and qualifications.

What is NRDC research saying?

MESSAGES AND ISSUES ARISING FROM WORK IN PROGRESS.

The workplace

NRDC's research and development are now bearing fruit. Below are some of the key messages which are emerging from a range of programmes:

- The need for adult numeracy/mathematical skills is extending throughout the workforce. Employees increasingly need to have broader general problem-solving skills, inter-relating IT with mathematics.
- Robust evidence from large-scale UK surveys shows that poor literacy and numeracy skills have adverse effects on the earning and employment prospects of individuals.

Motivation to learn

- Young adults are not resistant to learning as such, but to the manner of delivery, which is critical to successful recruitment and engagement. It is important to identify and develop a range of options, including short, sharp 'bursts' of activity and embedding basic skills.
- Some findings defy expectation: many adults learn numeracy not to cope better with their daily lives, but in order to get the better of a subject that once defeated them, and they know is a highly-valued 'gateway' subject.
- There remain significant difficulties in the way of recruiting and retaining adult learners. A high proportion of learners are young and full time.

Basic skills and social inclusion

- Birth cohort studies show that over the last 20 years, adults with literacy, numeracy and language problems have faced increasing difficulties gaining and maintaining work.
- Learning environments can improve confidence and persistence by providing structure and social support. Example: learning for ESOL learners often takes the form of structured group interactions.

Teaching and learning

- Context matters. Learners often engage most successfully with real and situated literacy, numeracy and language practices, seen as directly relevant to their wider goals and lives.
- Embedding or integrating literacy, numeracy and language in other types of learning or in the workplace is often the best way of attracting learners.
- There is often no clear distinction between formal and informal learning as a mode of delivery; getting the right balance is what matters most.
- Young offenders: traditional classroom arrangements impede learning; the largest literacy and numeracy learning gains occur in vocational contexts.
- Oracy: much knowledge and understanding is gained through speaking and listening, but it is often a neglected feature of teaching and learning practice.
- Teaching and learning across **Skills for Life** have much to learn from practices for dyslexic people.

Teacher education and professional development

- Involving teachers in research projects makes a large contribution to their professional development, to the culture of their work places and to regional networks.
- There is a need to develop better understanding of cultural issues in working with the hardest-to-reach and priority **Skills for Life** groups.
- There is support among teacher trainers and trainees for raising subject knowledge to improve practice; getting the right balance between subject and pedagogic knowledge is a challenge for teacher trainers.
- 53 per cent of teachers have recognised teaching qualifications; a challenge remains to upskill the workforce.

About NRDC: our vision, aims and values

NRDC's vision is: "To become an internationally recognised centre of excellence for research, development and effective practice in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL"

About NRDC

NRDC is the national centre dedicated to research and development on adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). We are an expert and experienced consortium, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. It aims to provide an independent voice through rigorous and relevant research. The Centre plans to improve practice and inform policy through the generation of new and useful knowledge, by creating a strong interdisciplinary research culture in the field and by developing professional practice and by working with teachers to ensure learners have high quality enjoyable, learning experiences which enable them to achieve their goals in learning, life and work.

NRDC's unique remit is to design and conduct both research and development, linking the two to create a strong evidence base and practical guidance. We promote the use of, and engagement in, research by practitioners and policy makers.

The Centre works closely with stakeholders and partners at local, national and international levels. It prioritises the engagement of practitioners in research and development and always has as its focus the needs and success of learners.

The NRDC consortium partners are:

- **Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)**
- **LLU+, London South Bank University**
- **National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)**
- **King's College, University of London**

A wider group of associates contribute to the Centre's work, including: The University of Leeds; Read on, Write Away!; Cambridge Training and Development (CTAD); Centre for British Teachers (CfBT); Portland College.

Advisory Group

In 2003/04 NRDC established an external Advisory Group to guide its long term strategic thinking, priorities and communication work. Its role is to support and guide NRDC, to enable it to achieve the goals set out in its strategy and to help it to maximise the impact of its research and development activity on the successful delivery of **Skills for Life**.

The Advisory Group consists of experienced people from policy, teaching and training practice, employment and research. It is chaired by Maggie Semple, Chief Executive of the Experience Corps. Other members are: Lord Moser; Lord Layard, London School of Economics; Anna Reisenberger, The Refugee Council; Professor John Field, Stirling University; Professor Lorna Unwin, Centre for Labour Market Studies University; Di McEvoy-Robinson, West Nottinghamshire College; Dr Lesley Dee, Cambridge University; Liz Smith, TUC; Richard Hill, NHSU; Joseph Kingsley-Nyinah, Kensington & Chelsea College; Jane Williams, Standards Unit, DfES; Marie Gill, ASDA Ltd; Caroline Neville, LSC; and Susan Pember, Director of the Strategy Unit.

- **Institute of Education, University of London**
- **Literacy Research Centre, Lancaster University**
- **School of Continuing Education, The University of Nottingham**
- **School of Education, The University of Sheffield**
- **East London Pathfinder Consortium**
- **Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership**
- **Basic Skills Agency (BSA)**

NRDC's strategic aims are to:

- become, within five years, an internationally recognised centre of excellence for research and the development of effective practice in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL.
- create a coherent and reliable research resource which develops literacy, numeracy and ESOL policy, improves practice and identifies further research needs.
- establish reliable and useful research evidence drawn from quantitative, qualitative and experimental methods and develop a strong international dimension to our work, sharing ideas.
- engage with, refresh and help take forward the **Skills for Life** strategy.
- create new theory, scholarship and innovative thinking in the field, engaging interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches.
- contribute to establishing a strong professional identity for teachers and other practitioners, through new training and development frameworks.
- devise new ways of transforming research and development, so that they are effectively and routinely used to develop policy and practice, and support researchers in communicating with practitioners about research findings.
- build research capacity, reflective practice and career development, through the systematic engagement of teachers and other practitioners in the Centre.
- systematically engage the users of research – particularly: employers and unions, teachers and the wider **Skills for Life** workforce, and agents of change in communities and the wider social context.
- draw on research and good practice from across the world, developing and sharing ideas and outcomes.

The values and principles underpinning NRDC's activity are set out in full in: "Strategy 2003-2007: generating knowledge and transforming it into practice"



Contact us

Many NRDC projects are completing in 2005. There will be publications and events to mark the completion of these and to report on their findings and implications for practice and policy.

To allow us to keep you up to date with NRDC publications and events or for you to get involved in the work of the NRDC please register at our website:
<http://www.nrdc.org.uk>

If you would like more information about NRDC contact us through: info@nrdc.org.uk

Copies of all NRDC reports, reviews and other publications can be downloaded from the publications page of the NRDC website at <http://www.nrdc.org.uk> or ordered by post or email from:

Publications,
NRDC,
Institute of Education,
University of London,
20 Bedford Way,
London,
WC1H 0AL

tel: 020 7612 6476
publications@nrdc.org.uk

The full version of this annual report is available from our website and can be ordered through NRDC Publications.

www.nrdc.org.uk

NRDC
Institute of Education
University of London
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7612 6476
Fax: +44 (0)20 7612 6671
email: info@nrdc.org.uk
website: www.nrdc.org.uk

NRDC is a consortium of partners led by the Institute of Education, University of London with:

- Lancaster University
- The University of Nottingham
- The University of Sheffield
- East London Pathfinder
- Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership

- Basic Skills Agency
- Learning and Skills Development Agency
- LLU+, London South Bank University
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- King's College London

Funded by the Department for Education and Skills as part of **Skills for Life**: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills.