

Skills for Communities

Skills for Life

The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

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department for
education and skills



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities



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Skills for communities



We live and work in a world in which the range of skills we need in our jobs and communities, to help our children at school for example, gets ever more demanding.

People with lower levels of literacy, language (also known as English for Speakers of other Languages or ESOL) and numeracy skills may be excluded in our society. It is important that we build the confidence of individuals and communities to develop and use these skills in every aspect of their lives.

This short guide is for people working in and with communities. It will help you understand more about how literacy, language and numeracy issues may affect people you work with, the services you offer and what you can do.

Following this introductory section, a series of brief specialist sections put these topics in context for people in different agencies or settings.

Find out more

Throughout this leaflet there are links to other sources of information and to websites that will give you further information

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Why literacy, language and numeracy should matter to you

Jane works for a housing association as a tenant support worker. She realised that many of the people she was working with found it difficult to complete forms and respond to letters and they sometimes got into difficulties with their rent. She often found herself having to help people to unpick their problems as a result of their difficulties with reading, writing and numeracy.

Most people manage perfectly well with their existing literacy, language and numeracy skills, but for many it is just that: they *manage*.

Many perform well in their jobs although their options for promotion or changing employment may be limited. But the skills people need keep changing and, for too many individuals with skills gaps, the reality is that they are more likely to earn less, live in poor housing and be more prone to health problems than people with these skills.

Lack of confidence in their skills can mean that people are less able or willing to take up learning or training for themselves or to help their children at school. There is also an impact on the wider community. People with lower levels of literacy, language and numeracy skills tend not to take an active part in their community, to vote or to volunteer. Recognising and addressing this issue can open up people's life chances in a wide range of ways.

**Find out about
the national *Skills for
Life* strategy:**

www.dfes.gov.uk/

readwriteplus

[www.sfcguide.org.uk/
strategy](http://www.sfcguide.org.uk/strategy)

Although there are plenty of education experts out there paid to deliver learning for people with literacy, language or numeracy needs, that is only part of the answer. It can be very difficult for people to decide to take that first step and seek help. Some would never approach a college or local authority class or programme without encouragement from people they already know. In addition, the fact that some people you are working with have lower levels of literacy, numeracy or language skills could be making it harder for them to benefit from your service and for you to deliver that service effectively.

However, you do not need to try to solve these issues alone.

Jane spoke to her line manager and they approached the local college. A teacher came to talk to them about the problem and together they decided to try a short course which they called 'Managing all those forms!'. It was a great success and is now running for a second year.

Understanding and tackling these issues will not only empower the people you work with and help your organisation achieve its objectives; it will also contribute to building a local learning community.

There are more and more learning communities all over the country working to strengthen the capacity of people to access local services, improve their quality of life and develop skills and knowledge for living and working in the 21st century. They are helping to stimulate demand for learning from a wide range of adults who perhaps:

- disliked school or left school with few or no qualifications;
- are in low-paid jobs;
- feel they have few or no choices about work opportunities;
- want to do more for themselves and their families;
- would like to develop their skills and knowledge.

What can you do?

Working through the following questions will help your organisation to reduce the barriers facing people you work with. You could use the questions as a checklist to find out how much you know and what else you need to find out.

- Do we know enough about how our users' or community's current levels of literacy, language or numeracy affect their ability to access our services or achieve their goals?
- Do we have members of staff who could benefit from improving their literacy, language or numeracy to meet the demands of a changing workplace?
- Would you like to improve your skills?

- 
- Do we know how to help service users, local community members or staff improve their literacy, language and numeracy? Have we checked to find out about resources that may exist in our own organisation – such as people who know about literacy, language or numeracy or who have expertise in working with particular groups?
 - Can we help people get involved who feel that learning is not relevant for them?
 - Can we recognise those with very low skills and distinguish them from those who may only need to brush up their skills?
 - Have we looked at our written materials, signs and posters to check that they are not presenting barriers to understanding? To be able to participate, people need timely access to information that is often complex. Do we provide this in a genuinely accessible way?
 - Do we know about local literacy, language and numeracy provision?
 - Do we know who can help us develop solutions?

Find out about

writing:

www.sfcguide.org.uk/writing

If you do not have the answers to all these questions yet, this guide and the associated website can help. While not all the information will be suited to you, or your work, you may want to explore some of the ideas.

Understanding what we mean by literacy, language and numeracy

'*Skills for Life*', 'basic skills', 'functional English and Maths'... all these terms can be confusing. They refer to the ability to read, write and speak in English and to use mathematics at a level adequate to function at work and in society – what was previously referred to as 'basic skills'. '*Skills for Life*' is also the name for the government's strategy to improve adult literacy, language and numeracy. The following pages illustrate some of the challenges posed by our need for these skills and how people are successfully addressing literacy, language and numeracy difficulties.

Find out about

the national *Skills for Life* strategy:

www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus
www.sfcguide.org.uk/strategy

The challenge of literacy

***Did you know?** 5.2 million adults in England – more than one in six of those of working age – are estimated to have literacy skills below Level 1.*

Find out about
what the **levels** mean:
www.sfcguide.org.uk/levels



Most of us are able to get by with the skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening gained at school and gathered along the way. But, as the world changes, we are expected to deal with more complex information and with specialist terminology and jargon. Therefore we need to develop new skills or update existing skills.

This can present a problem for those lacking confidence in their skills and often means that they avoid situations that might expose them.

Meg loves helping out with her grandchildren and always tried to help them with their homework. Meg found that she couldn't understand some of the work her eldest grandchild (aged 11) was being set. The younger child noticed that she made up some of the words in stories and missed others out.

Meg decided to face up to the fact that she had always felt that her English let her down and went to a 'Brush Up your English' class at the local community centre. She has found it a great help and is now not only reading stories but writing them as well!

The challenge of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

***Did you know?** About half a million people want to learn English because it is not their first language.*

For many, English is a second, third or even fourth language. Some have lived in this country for many years and find that as jobs change they need to develop their spoken and written skills. Others, more recently arrived, have the challenge of learning a new language in order to find work and settle into a new community.

Following the decline of the textile industry in Bradford, Ramsarup's factory closed and he was made redundant. His confidence was shaken but he knew he needed new skills to get him back on his feet and to find a new job. Ramsarup had left education as a teenager when he emigrated from India. He joined a spoken English class at the College, which helped him to improve his grammar and speak with more confidence.

He has now taken a pre-GCSE English course and a GCSE Maths course. His confidence has increased dramatically and he is sure he will reach his ultimate goal of 'a decent job and career... doing something worthwhile and valuable, perhaps in accountancy'.

The challenge of numeracy

Did you know? *Almost 50% of the adult population have numeracy skills below Level 1.*

**Find out about
what the levels mean:**
[www.sfcgguide.org.uk/
levels](http://www.sfcgguide.org.uk/levels)

More people are prepared to admit that they are no good at maths but manage fairly well in their daily activities. Others find that they are held back by their lack of confidence in their numeracy skills.

Danny left school at 16 and went straight into a job he has been in ever since. He disliked maths at school to such a degree that he didn't turn up for his GCSE exam. Despite this, all went well at his job until he was told he ought to go for a supervisor's job. This would mean more money but more paperwork and, worse, timesheets and reports on productivity to go to head office.

Fortunately, Danny knew the Union Learning Representative, who was able to advise him how he could brush up his maths skills. He is going to do the national test soon and is really confident. He will apply for the next supervisor job that comes up.

What about dyslexia?

Did you know? As many as 10% of the population are affected by dyslexia to some degree, 4% severely. Some groups, such as offenders, are more likely to have dyslexia, although it may not be diagnosed.

Dyslexia is not related to intelligence – many people with dyslexia are very intelligent and creative. However, dyslexia can:

- make it difficult for people to develop literacy and numeracy skills;
- make it hard to develop the skills required for organisation, time management and taking in and understanding oral information;
- contribute to people feeling stupid or seeing themselves as failures.

The effects of dyslexia can be lessened by skilled specialist teaching and support.

Helene had spent most of her life working in fish and chip shops and bringing up her family. Four years ago she started to attend an English workshop where it was discovered that she was dyslexic. With some support for her dyslexia Helene was able to achieve her Level 2 literacy qualification. She was then able to join an Access to Nursing course at her local FE college where she received support from a specialist dyslexia teacher. Her teacher helped her to apply for Disabled Students' Allowance, a grant that pays for computer equipment and other support at university. Helene is now studying for her degree in Nursing and planning to specialise in Accident and Emergency medicine.

The development of literacy and numeracy skills can also be affected by hearing or sight impairments, physical disabilities, autistic spectrum disorders and mental health problems.

Find out about dyslexia:

[www.sfcguide.org.uk/
dyslexia](http://www.sfcguide.org.uk/dyslexia)

Find out about learning difficulties and disabilities:

[www.sfcguide.org.uk/
ldd](http://www.sfcguide.org.uk/ldd)



The implications of Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Did you know? By 2010, approximately 95% of all new jobs will require ICT skills, and yet it is estimated that there are currently 24 million people in the UK who do not have basic ICT skills.

**Find out about
ICT Skills for Life:**
[www.sfcguide.org.
uk/ict](http://www.sfcguide.org.uk/ict)

ICT plays an increasingly important part in the way we work, learn, relax and govern ourselves. Recently ICT has been recognised as a 'basic skill' because, without ICT skills, individuals are in danger of becoming excluded from many aspects of society, particularly when it comes to finding employment.

Matthew is 57 and has spent most of his adult life doing manual work. He really wanted to work in an office but was nervous of computers because he didn't know anything about them and was scared of pressing the wrong button. Matthew's next-door neighbour told him about his local learndirect centre where all sorts of courses were available, including basic ICT. Matthew enrolled at the centre and his confidence and skills rapidly developed, so much so that he moved from being terrified of computers to helping support new learners.

Recognising literacy, numeracy and language abilities

There may be people in your organisation or the community who have let you know they don't feel confident about some of their skills or have asked you for help in things such as completing forms. Or you may have noticed people not becoming involved and avoiding certain kinds of tasks.

**Find out about basic
skills awareness:**
[www.sfcguide.org.
uk/awareness](http://www.sfcguide.org.uk/awareness)
and screening:
[www.sfcguide.org.
uk/screen](http://www.sfcguide.org.uk/screen)

A lot of people in workplaces and communities have taken part in basic skills awareness training to help them recognise literacy, language or numeracy needs and support people to take the next steps to address these needs. Contact your local Learning Partnership or Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (see page 12) to find out more about this training.

Find out about referral and information and advice services:
www.sfcguide.org.uk/referral

If you are working with people who may wish to develop their literacy, language or numeracy skills, you can talk with a college or other learning provider (such as the local authority) about developing provision in your area. This provision could take place on your premises or in the local community – anywhere people are likely to find comfortable and easy to access. Alternatively, you can try to publicise provision already available in your area. Information and advice are available for individuals or groups from:

See *The Learning Journey* for the stages that learners will go through after you refer them to improve their skills.
www.sfcguide.org.uk

- the learndirect helpline on 0800 100 900 or www.learndirect-advice.co.uk;
- your local **college or local authority adult learning service**;
- your local **nextstep** network of organisations that provide information and advice on learning and work to adults;
- your local **Connexions** service – advice, support and information for 13–19 year olds.

What kinds of literacy, language and numeracy provision are available?

Adults are now improving their literacy, language or numeracy skills in a host of different ways, in groups or online, at work or in the community. The provision is free. For example:



- Many people now develop these skills while following another course or activity – from working towards a vocational qualification to volunteering in the community. This approach ensures that their learning in those areas is backed up by the development of their literacy, language or numeracy skills.

Find out about embedding literacy, language or numeracy in other programmes
www.sfcguide.org.uk/lln



- Some courses offer 'brushing up' or 'second chance' learning to help individuals build their skills and confidence before moving on to another course of study. These courses are offered in community venues as well as through colleges and may be linked to helping people get back to work or into further study.

Find out about Move On:
www.sfcguide.org.uk/moveon



- Move On is a national project aimed at learners who don't see themselves as needing help with their 'basic skills'. It offers the chance to brush up on literacy and numeracy skills with a chance to try the new national Certificate in Adult Literacy and Numeracy.

Find out about family learning:
www.sfcguide.org.uk/family



- Many parents, grandparents and carers work alongside children in family literacy, language or numeracy classes in schools or children's centres to aid their children's development by improving their own skills and confidence.

Find out about Skills for Life in the workplace
www.sfcguide.org.uk/work

- Employers in both the public and private sectors have realised that they need to support their staff to face new challenges in the workplace. In many workplaces adult learning providers are working with Sector Skills Councils, employers and staff to develop programmes which help bolster skills for an ever-changing workplace – these skills include literacy, language and numeracy. Many workers have been encouraged to develop these skills through the union Learning Fund with support from over 700 Union learning representatives (ULRs).

Staff at a volunteer bureau could not understand why some of the small organisations they were supporting to get the Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations (PQASSO) were struggling to fill in the paperwork. The Adult and Community Learning Service at the LEA found a teacher who was familiar with the voluntary sector. She developed a short course and worked with a small group of learners to develop their skills and confidence to help them with both the paperwork and with running their organisation.

The national **Skills for Life** qualifications and national tests

The national qualifications offer the opportunity for recognition of literacy, numeracy and language skills from Entry Level up to and including Level 2. Many learners are keen to gain a national qualification to show how they have progressed and to be able to demonstrate their skills to employers, colleagues and their family.

Find out about qualifications, accreditation and the national tests:
[www.sfcguide.org.uk/
tests](http://www.sfcguide.org.uk/tests)

Test your own skills
[www.move-on.org.uk/
testyourskills.asp](http://www.move-on.org.uk/testyourskills.asp)

Who can you work with?

The important thing to remember is that there are many organisations and individuals who can help identify what people can already do and support them to access appropriate provision or who will work with you to respond to development opportunities you have identified. You can talk to:

- your local Learning Partnership;
- local adult learning providers such as your local further education (FE) college or LEA adult education service;
- your local LSC;
- local information and advice services.



Local Learning Partnerships

Most areas have a partnership that has an overview of learning provision in the area, and many of them have a *Skills for Life* sub-group. Your local Learning Partnership is a good first point of contact to find out about what provision is available locally and how to help people access it.

Find out about
Learning Partnerships
www.sfcguide.org.uk/lp



Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

The LSC funds learning for adults. Every local LSC has someone responsible for *Skills for Life* who should be able to point you towards a provider with whom you might work in partnership.

Find out more about
Learning and Skills Council
www.lsc.gov.uk

Local adult learning providers

Most literacy, language and numeracy provision is funded through the LSC to approved adult learning providers such as FE colleges, local authority adult education services or private training providers. The LSC also funds local education authorities to plan and deliver family programmes including family literacy, numeracy and language.

Adult learning providers often want to work with other organisations to reach new learners and may be interested in working with you or your partnership to develop new approaches.



Most larger providers will have a *Skills for Life* team (sometimes called the Basic Skills team). Ideally, they will have a member of staff able to meet to discuss your concerns or ideas and plan how you might work together: this could involve anything from 'basic skills awareness' training for your staff to provision for your service users.

Find out about
funding:
www.sfcguide.org.uk/funding

There are also many smaller organisations, often in the voluntary and community sector, with considerable expertise in delivering learning to particular groups of learners. They may not get funding from the LSC directly – some work through an arrangement with a larger provider and

others may have formed a consortium with other organisations to negotiate a contract with the local LSC. You may want to find out about how they can help.

Local information and advice services

Local **Connexions** services give advice, support and information to 13–19 year olds. Each area also has a **nextstep** network of organisations giving information and advice on learning and work to adults.

In addition

- Your Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is likely to have considered the development of skills for local people. You might look at the Community Plan or, where available, the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.
- If your LSP has not yet identified literacy, language and numeracy as a priority, your organisation might push it to do so. The LSP can draw on good examples of broad or high-level partnerships, such as East Manchester and Birmingham, that have made a real difference in tackling these issues.
- If you would like to test your own literacy, language and numeracy skills, log on to the Move On website and try the mini-test or get a copy of the National Test Toolkit.
- Ensure you make the best use of knowledge within your own organisation – e.g. a member of staff who volunteers in a literacy programme or who knows about working with particular groups whose literacy, language and numeracy needs you are concerned about.

Find out about referral and information and advice services:

www.sfcguide.org.uk/referral

List of LSPs

www.sfcguide.org.uk/lsp

See case studies of East Manchester and Birmingham

www.sfcguide.org.uk/manchester
www.sfcguide.org.uk/birmingham

Test your skills

www.move-on.org.uk/testyourskills.asp



- If you would like to support adults to improve their skills, you could take the Level 2 Adult Learner Support qualification. Contact your local college about this.



- To find out about the range of abilities in literacy, language and numeracy of people in your area, you could start by looking at the statistics – these are available at a ward level and can be found through the link on the right.

Find out more about
**literacy and numeracy
levels in your area**
www.sfcguide.org.uk/area

- Plan long term for this work, with partners if at all possible. Some people will have learning needs that may need time to be met. Short-term grant or project funding cannot always accommodate this.



- If you want more information, then the new website www.sfcguide.org.uk can help and can link you to a wide range of websites with further information.

Link to website
www.sfcguide.org.uk

You may also find the following websites useful

www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus Information on the *Skills for Life* Strategy from the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit

www.basic-skills.co.uk The Basic Skills Agency

www.lsc.gov.uk The Learning and Skills Council

www.niace.org.uk NIACE (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)

www.lsda.org.uk The Learning and Skills Development Agency

www.socialexclusion.gov.uk The Government's Social Exclusion Unit

www.renewal.net A guide to what works in neighbourhood renewal

www.neighbourhood.gov.uk The Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

To find out more about the impact of literacy, language and numeracy issues on different services, communities or groups of people, and how the issues can be addressed, look at the following specialist sections

within this pack. They contain information on literacy, language and numeracy issues relating to:

- children's centres
- coalfield communities
- community activists
- extended schools
- health
- housing and homelessness
- inner city areas
- offenders or those at risk of offending
- refugees and asylum seekers
- rural communities
- young people

Though there are many others of significance, these groups and contexts are particularly important to those developing learning communities. Taken together, they provide a diverse range of examples and suggest approaches that might be also useful with other groups or settings.

Children's centres



How supporting the development of literacy, language and numeracy can help children and their families

Building the skills and confidence of parents and carers has benefits for the whole family. Family literacy, language and numeracy programmes, involving parents and children, have proved a particularly effective way of helping parents and carers to improve their own skills and give their children a good start.

The challenges

Parents' and carers' own literacy, language and numeracy levels and confidence can affect the extent to which they feel able to support their children's learning. Nearly all parents and carers want to help their children, but those with skills gaps may find it harder to do so and may feel less confident about attempting to. Parents or carers may be particularly anxious about their children's development because of their own difficulties.

This can have a number of results for the children:

- Where parents or carers have skills needs, children's learning may not be encouraged or supported. This can affect children's attainment and aspirations.
- People with lower levels of literacy, language or numeracy often experience multiple social disadvantage, which can affect their children's life chances. Children from multiple-disadvantaged backgrounds are three times more likely to experience language delay than the national average.
- Older children may be kept out of school in order to help with activities the parent or carer finds difficult.

However, some parents may need only to brush up their skills to be able to play an enhanced role as parents and in their local communities.

Staff in children's centres may themselves welcome the opportunity to improve their English and maths skills to gain qualifications and access support for their NVQs or other professional development, and to support parents and children in their learning.

How parents' and carers' literacy, language and numeracy can affect the delivery of your service

Early years and childcare managers and staff will be familiar with difficulties experienced by parents or carers with lower levels of skills in literacy, language or numeracy. Some of the difficulties are listed here:

- Despite wanting the best for their children, parents or carers may find it difficult to access help and support for themselves and their children – for example, help with health issues or advice on children's behaviour.
- Parents or carers may find it harder to work in partnership with staff because of a lack of confidence.
- There may be problems for parents or carers in completing paperwork or reading letters from the children's centre.
- They may need to ask staff for help in unexpected ways, for example if they are unable to read and understand the dosage on a bottle of medicine for their child.
- Parents or carers with very low levels of literacy are more likely to be unemployed, earn less and be in temporary jobs than the rest of the population. They are also more likely to suffer from ill health and depression. This may have implications for their children.
- Other parents, of course, may simply lack a Level 2 qualification and find that acquiring this can boost their skills and confidence.

What you can do

For parents and carers

- Develop links with adult learning providers, such as the local authority or the local college, in order to be able to provide parents or carers who want them with a choice of learning opportunities (for example family learning) which reflects their different needs.
- Talk with the learning providers about how literacy, language and numeracy skills development can be embedded into your centre's programme, for example into parenting skills groups or support groups.
- Provide training for staff in how best to identify parents with a literacy, language or numeracy need and how to signpost them to provision – see Step into Learning below.
- Work with your local authority and their partnerships for childcare or early years to identify ways of providing additional support for potential new learners (such as information, advice and guidance). If the childcare/early years partnerships are not doing this already, encourage them to work closely with your area's 'nextstep' network for information and advice for on learning and work. (See www.sfcguide.org.uk/referral.)
- Raise awareness among staff of the numbers of people who have literacy, language and numeracy needs and the impact this can have on their lives, for example in getting employment or supporting their children's learning.
- Produce materials for communicating with parents and carers which take account of the fact that some of them will have lower levels of literacy, language or numeracy. The leaflet *Making Reading Easier* gives advice on producing materials and is available from the Basic Skills Agency. (See www.sfcguide.org.uk/writing.)
- Make sure there are opportunities for information to be shared with parents and carers at face-to-face meetings and social gatherings as well as on paper.

For staff

Staff in your setting will undoubtedly want to take advantage of professional development opportunities and enhance their skills in supporting parents and children. Some may not hold a national qualification in English or maths and may want to develop or brush up their skills.

- Ask an adult learning provider to come in and work with staff in identifying skills gaps. Let staff know about the 'mini test' on the Move On website. (www.move.on.org.uk/testyourskills.asp)
- Work with a provider to explore ways in which literacy, language and numeracy skills development can be embedded into in-house learning opportunities for staff.

Sure Start in West Bassetlaw developed a project to increase the literacy and numeracy of young mothers in order to reduce the number of children under four being brought up in workless households in this former mining community in North Nottinghamshire. It involved North Nottinghamshire FE College working with a number of partner organisations such as the Pre-School Alliance, the local community, a local drop-in centre and local employers.

The project established a range of initiatives and provided support for young mothers where possible. This included providing laptops to support literacy and language development in the young mothers' homes (which also helped to engage young fathers) and liaising with local employers to provide the women with experience of the working environment and a positive experience of juggling parenting and a career. Various clubs on family learning and other activities provided support and advice for the young mothers from peers, staff and older mothers. Childcare issues were addressed by the Pre-School Alliance, which supported children's development whilst their mothers were engaged in college activities. In addition, the college used its Student Support Fund to cover any external childcare, transport and resources costs.

Fourteen young mothers passed Level 1 and Level 2 literacy, with eleven of them entering either full-time or part-time employment. A number of parents in families where both partners had been long-term unemployed are now working.

More information on www.sfcguide.org.uk

Further information

There are several targeted programmes currently running which are of particular relevance to workers in Sure Start and children's centres.

- Step in to Learning is a training and development programme for managers and staff in neighbourhood nurseries, Sure Start local programmes and children's centres. This programme can be run locally by your organisation in partnership with an adult learning provider. Information about the programme, which includes case studies and examples of good practice, can be found on the website www.stepintolearning.org
- Family literacy, language and numeracy is a mainstream programme in each LEA funded by the LSC. It offers parents and children a menu of learning opportunities including Early Start. Skills for Families is a two-year project working with 19 LEA/LSC partnerships to develop local infrastructure, and to pilot new models of delivery to extend and embed family literacy, language and numeracy. More information about Skills for Families can be found at www.skillsforfamilies.org
- For details on family literacy, language and numeracy, contact your local LEA Family Learning Officer or Local LSC.

There are a number of *Skills for Life* publications for family programmes available free from the DfES, including a guide on *Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy for Children's Centres*. See www.sfcguide.org.uk/family

The section on 'extended schools' in this guide may also be of interest.

Coalfield communities

Literacy, language and numeracy issues and how organisations working in coalfield communities can address them

What's the challenge?

Local economies in coalfield areas have recovered to some extent, since the closing-down of the mines. However, unemployment has fallen not only because of new jobs but also because people have moved out of the area or are commuting, and because many men have become economically inactive. Considerable socio-economic problems remain and there are still significant jobs shortages for men.

When jobs were plentiful, they often demanded low skill levels. Coalfields have comparatively low levels of educational attainment, literacy and numeracy skills and are frequently described as having cultures of low aspiration and expectation. This pattern continues: the educational achievement of coalfields children and young people is currently lower than the national average, as is often the case with deprived areas that have experienced economic decline.

Addressing skills gaps is an important part of the recovery of the coalfields, and there have been many community initiatives which have resulted in some training and jobs. Success has often come about by involving and including people who feel they are not valued or useful any longer. But the process is not necessarily straightforward. For example:

- Learning and skills development may not be immediately attractive to people. Many are likely to have had unrewarding experiences of education. They may not be convinced that training offers them a way out of their difficult situation, particularly as a lot of the new jobs are flexible, part-time and taken by women, for example in call-centres.
- Residents sometimes have difficulty accessing learning, for example, because there are insufficient outreach facilities.

- There have been criticisms that a large number of initiatives seeking to address social, educational and economic issues have been poorly co-ordinated. Local people may well be cynical about the value and effectiveness of new initiatives.

Implications for the development of learning provision

The approach taken to developing learning provision will determine whether or not it is successful. Strategies which include and involve local people have been shown to be effective – learning which is integrated with other community initiatives, or built on people's personal skills and interests, is more likely to be attractive, relevant and purposeful. For example, many former miners had a wide range of skills and interests outside mining. Learning opportunities that harness such interests, and integrate literacy or numeracy into them, could develop an awareness of the rewards and benefits of learning as well as contributing to community development. However, this type of approach needs sustained activity and can be relatively costly.

Partnership working involving adult learning providers, community organisations well connected with local people and other interested agencies is crucial to develop the most appropriate local responses and to sustain them over time. Partners can access resources, for example funding opportunities from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, to develop a range of learning provision, including literacy, language and numeracy. Local partnerships can also ensure that there is training for staff and partners in how best to identify adults with a literacy, language or numeracy need and how to signpost them to provision.

What you can do

- Develop knowledge about learning opportunities that are already available locally and make links with local advice and information workers.
- In addition, work with adult learning providers to make sure that there is a range of easily accessible learning provision built on the specific interests and concerns of local residents.

- Work with adult learning providers and partners to ensure that there are good progression routes towards further skills and qualifications from activity that encourages people to return to learn. The planned progression may need to include small steps and will need to be flexible and include support such as childcare.
- Take part in training to recognise literacy, language and numeracy skills gaps and to signpost those with such gaps to learning opportunities. You may also want to gain a recognised qualification called a Level 2 Certificate for Adult Learner Support.
- Where possible, ensure that learning opportunities take place in local venues, where people regularly meet and where other activities are supported and encouraged.
- Several of the other sections in this guide – for example, for organisations working with young people or children's centres – include ideas on working with specific groups that may also be of interest.

Rugeley, in southern Staffordshire, is a former coalmining community that has, over the last twenty years, lost not only the pit but also many of its other major employers. The population has decreased and there is very little work in the town and no further education college or higher education provision. For those without ready access to transport, it is difficult to access local educational opportunities.

The Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) and the Workers' Education Association (WEA) jointly applied for funding and were able to establish an IT suite for the Lea Hall Miners' Welfare Social Club in Rugeley with a purpose-built high-quality crèche and new meeting rooms within the club.

The study club set up in the new premises has proved to be an invaluable community education resource. 'First Step' provision and literacy, language and numeracy development are a well-established part of all the provision offered at the social club. There are literacy and numeracy programmes, offering accredited and unaccredited pathways, marketed under banners such as 'Get your Brain in Gear' and 'The Pound in your Pocket'. This emphasises the practical application of the literacy and numeracy skills being developed and has proved very effective in attracting learners into such provision for the

*first time. Development of literacy, language and numeracy skills is also embedded into popular subjects such as IT, family history, local history, volunteering skills and Access to HE. All learners at the centre have the opportunity to prepare for and take the national **Skills for Life** qualification online.*

Strong links with other educational bodies and community organisations, together with a clear understanding of the learning needs and aspirations of the local residents, have ensured that provision at the centre has remained popular and relevant.

You can find out more information about this work in Rugeley on www.sfcguide.org.uk. See also the SureStart case study of work in West Bassetlaw.

Further information

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust:
www.coalfields-regen.org.uk

Read Write Plus and Coalfields Regeneration Trust:
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/CRT2

Hetherington, P. *Hidden legacy of pit closures* (4 March 2005):
http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/story/0,,1430044,00.html#article_continue

Beatty, C., Fothergill, S. and Powell, R. (2005) *Twenty Years On: Has the Economy of the Coalfields Recovered?* Sheffield Hallam University: Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research.

Community activists

(campaigners, school governors, volunteers, fundraisers, committee members)

How supporting community activism can develop the literacy, language and numeracy of local adults

As a community activist you will be actively involved in the life of your community, probably on a voluntary basis. You might be one or more of the following:

- A member of a community organisation such as a tenants' group or community association, or be a school governor;
- A member of a campaign or action group, for example, a group trying to start a youth group in your area;
- An organiser or helper in a local group such as a children's football team;
- A member of local task groups or someone who attends consultation events organised by agencies such as regeneration projects or Local Strategic Partnerships.

Why literacy, language and numeracy issues are important for your group or campaign

Skills for successful action

Community and political activity relies on a vast range of different skills. Well-developed skills will enable members of your group to work effectively to get things done and carry out successful campaigning activity. For example:

- **Higher-level speaking and listening skills** enable activists to communicate views and opinions more effectively (for instance, in meetings, when speaking to local councillors or negotiating with officials), influence people (including local residents and/or politicians) and convey messages to the media.

- **Higher-level reading skills** enable group members to make sense of the full range of information available, which is often complex. This will support the group to make decisions and take the best course of action.
- **Higher-level writing skills** enable community activists to express their message in the style and format appropriate to the audience, for instance letters to politicians, press releases, publicity materials and newsletters as well as internal communications such as meeting papers.
- **Higher-level numeracy skills** can help the group with practical tasks such as managing accounts, costing a community event, monitoring grant expenditure or producing statistics to support a campaign.

Getting new people involved

Everyone has the potential to make a valuable contribution but research has shown that people with poor literacy skills are the least likely to be interested in politics or to become members of a community organisation or charity. Of course, not everyone wants to get involved and there are many reasons for lack of participation. However, the reasons may include lack of access to information about your activity, organisation or campaign, or reluctance to join in because of personal worries about literacy, language or numeracy.

Supporting people who attend community events and activities

People who attend the community activities you organise may have low literacy, language or numeracy skills. This does not necessarily affect their ability to take part, but it may deter them from becoming more involved.

Low skills levels can also limit people's choices and aspirations. Developing skills and confidence can widen the choices and action in all areas of life including social and working life, family and community. A community activity, such as a toddlers' group, can provide a safe environment in which opportunities and skills development can be discussed. As a community activist, you will have earned the trust of your group members and are therefore likely to be able to talk to them about the benefits of learning and local opportunities.

What you can do

- Make sure that the literature you produce for your organisation or campaign group is accessible. (See www.sfcguide.org.uk/writing) Consider whether you need to translate your information to encourage adults who speak English as a second language to join you.
- Develop your capacity to recognise when people might have low skills, appropriate ways of talking about this and knowledge of where to signpost people to develop their skills. A good way of doing this is to talk with a 'basic skills manager' at your local college or LEA.
- Develop knowledge about opportunities available locally and make links with local advice and information workers.
- Become a learning champion or mentor, supporting others to take the first steps into learning. The influence of community activists taking on these roles has been very successful as you can encourage others, act as a role model and challenge negative attitudes. You may also want to gain a recognised qualification called a Level 2 Certificate for Adult Learner Support. A local adult education centre or college will usually offer this.
- You may be able to work with a local learning provider to develop customised courses for your group. For example, language, literacy or numeracy skills could be 'embedded' in relevant topics such as 'Letters that Get Results', 'Better Meetings', 'Powerful Press Releases'.

For more information on recognising and responding to learning needs, becoming a learning champion or mentor, or exploring customised courses, contact your local Learning Partnership, college or LEA adult education service. You may want to enrol on the Level 2 adult learner support qualification.

Brighton and Hove Working Together project aims to support voluntary organisations and community groups working in marginalised or excluded communities. It provides training and accreditation of learning to community activists, paid workers and members of management committees. A rolling programme of training for voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) is offered across the city, in addition to which community-based courses are developed to meet the specific training and learning needs of individual or clusters of community groups. The Working Together Project aims to ensure that there is a clear progression route from community-based courses to the rolling programme of training.

In one of its projects, the Working Together project worked in partnership with the Brighton and Hove City Council Community Development Team to develop and deliver training for community volunteers in the Hollingdean area of the city. The course was developed in full consultation with local community activists and sessions were themed around such subjects as: life planning; how the Council works; equal opportunities; legal issues; fundraising; presentation skills; and legal issues. Besides addressing specific subject training needs, the course also aims to identify and meet literacy, language and numeracy needs. Accreditation was offered on elements of the course through the Open College Network. Participants overwhelmingly described the course as 'very good and useful'.

You can find more information on this case study on
www.sfcguide.org.uk

Further information

Parsons, S. and Bynner, J. (2002), *Basic Skills and Political and Community Participation*. London: Basic Skills Agency.

You can also order this publication from the BSA website:

www.basic-skills.co.uk

Check www.sfcguide.org.uk for information about:

- writing in an accessible way
- referral and information and advice services
- Local Learning Partnerships.

Extended schools



The role schools can play in making adult and family learning more accessible

'Extended schools' is a key government initiative. The Government wants all schools to become extended schools by 2010, providing a core offer of services including childcare, a varied menu of activities for young people, parenting support (including family learning), swift and easy referral to a wide range of specialist support services, and wider community access including adult learning. It has made it clear that it does not expect schools to make this 'extended offer' alone: the LEA/Children's Trust will help to bring schools together with partners.

How literacy, language and numeracy issues can affect the school's work

- People with lower levels of literacy, language or numeracy often experience multiple social disadvantage, which can shape their children's life chances. Children from multiple-disadvantaged backgrounds are three times more likely to experience language delay than the national average.
- Parents are the first, and usually most influential, educators of their children. Some parents who give less support than others to their children's schooling may lack confidence in their own skills (including literacy, language or numeracy) or feel let down by their own school experiences. This can affect children's aspirations and attainment, which in turn can affect their behaviour.
- Parents' skill levels and educational experiences are also usually related to the nature of the jobs they have and how well paid and secure those jobs are.
- There may be problems for some parents or carers in completing paperwork or reading letters sent by the school. Some may keep older children out of school to help them with activities they find difficult.



- The extended schools approach is about schools working with other agencies in order to provide more accessible and 'joined-up' services to children, parents and carers and local communities. Adults with skills needs may be less confident about making use of those extended services and accessing support for themselves or their children.

Building the skills and confidence of parents and other adults in the community can be an important role for extended schools. Learning new skills, or brushing up existing skills, can open up many new opportunities – helping children, better job prospects, personal interests and activity in local communities. Some parents may need only to brush up their skills to be able to play an enhanced role as parents and in their local communities. However, becoming involved in formal learning is challenging for many adults. Research indicates that it is crucial not to make assumptions about what people need or want to learn and that what is offered draws on their strengths, experiences and interests.

What you can do

- Most LEAs have an adult learning service whose focus includes widening participation in adult learning, developing family learning and family literacy, language and numeracy, supporting the development of adults' literacy, language and numeracy skills and linking learning to neighbourhood renewal and regeneration. These fit with the adult learning interests of extended schools. You have the local contacts, and the adult learning service or other partners such as colleges or other adult learning providers have experience in consulting adults about their learning needs. You could work effectively together to identify needs and how best to meet them.
- Schools can develop a range of 'taster' and short courses with and for parents and the local community. The LEA's adult learning service, the local college or voluntary organisations such as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) are all possible delivery partners for adult learning, including literacy, language and numeracy skills development. They will be familiar with the national curriculum for *Skills for Life*, have properly qualified teachers and know about the adult learning quality requirements.

- Your delivery partners can also help you explore the benefits of family learning or family literacy, language and numeracy provision.
- Provide training for staff in how best to identify parents with a literacy, language or numeracy need and how to signpost them to provision.
- Extended schools can be a central element in the development of a broader learning community. Ensure any adult learning provision offered by the school is part of an integrated strategy for meeting local needs and aspirations by working with the local LSC and local adult learning providers. This will avoid duplication and help to build progression opportunities.
- Ensure your partnerships include those who can offer information and advice to adults about learning and work – your local nextstep network is an ideal place to start. (See www.sfcguide.org.uk/writing)
- Check that your methods of communicating with parents do not put up barriers for parents or carers with lower levels of literacy or language skills.
- Talk with your delivery partners about how to embed opportunities for literacy, language and numeracy development in activities for parents or staff.

Mitchell High School is an extended school set in the midst of three large housing estates in a particularly disadvantaged area of Stoke-on-Trent. In 2001, the school was characterised by low numbers, low average reading ages, very poor GCSE results, poor attendance, high mobility rates and many young people leaving with no qualifications. It was under constant threat of closure.

The school developed a comprehensive approach to multi-agency working and working with its local community. The strategy included opening a community learning centre. The school's community officer works full-time building community links which include encouraging parents and local adults to come into the school for informal activity or to join in adult learning provision at the learning centre. It also employs a learning centre manager and two tutors and works closely with 'College

in the Community' (a joint initiative between Stoke-on-Trent LEA Adult and Community Learning service and Stoke-on-Trent College), learndirect and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Adults are encouraged to participate in a 'Steps' programme focusing on individual self-esteem and goal-setting. Many then go on to other things. Family learning is popular as are learndirect provision in ICT and literacy or numeracy skills development and other classes for leisure or personal development. The learning centre programme and initiatives continue to grow. New literacy and numeracy workshops are planned, links are being built with Connexions and adult information and advice services, and with a local community residents' group for a Job Finder programme, and staff are looking for partners with whom they can develop work experience programmes. There are plans to develop an additional community house and credit union.

The school has turned itself around: numbers are up, results have soared and Ofsted has noted exemplary practice. In addition, 350 adults took part in activities at the learning centre last year, with many gaining qualifications in literacy, numeracy and/or ICT through learndirect. Some have progressed to learning aimed at future employment. A few have been able to get paid work at the school, some work there voluntarily to develop community facilities and their skills, and a few have gone on to paid work elsewhere.

There is more information on this case study on www.sfcguide.org.uk

Further information

Family literacy, language and numeracy is a mainstream programme in each LEA funded by the LSC. It offers parents and children a menu of learning opportunities including Early Start. Skills for Families is a two-year project working with 19 LEA/LSC partnerships to develop, local infrastructure, and pilot new models of delivery to extend and embed family literacy, language and numeracy. More information about Skills for Families can be found at www.skillsforfamilies.org.

For details on family literacy, language and numeracy, contact your local LEA Family Learning Officer or Local LSC.

There are a number of *Skills for Life* publications for family programmes available free from the DfES including a guide on *Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy for Extended Schools*. See

www.sfcguide.org.uk/family

In April 2005 the National Remodelling Team (NRT) was appointed to support schools through a culture change programme to enable them to develop extended services. This will ensure that extended services are developed in a way that is supported by workforce remodelling and the teacher workload agenda in schools:

www.remodelling.org

The Extended Schools Support Service, delivered by ContinYou, also provides practical advice and support to schools, local authorities and others. The NRT and ContinYou are already working closely together to ensure coherent support for the development of extended schools:

www.continyou.org.uk

Some of the case studies on www.teachernet pick up issues of adult learning in extended schools:

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/casestudies

NIACE has produced a briefing sheet on: 'Extended Schools and adult learners': www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing_sheets/53-extendedschools.htm

Cummings, C., Todd, L. and Dyson, A. (2004) *Evaluation of the Extended Schools Pathfinder Projects*. London: DfES.

Smith, M. K. (2005) *Extended schools: issues: theory and practices*.

www.infed.org/schooling/extended_schooling.htm

Health

How supporting the development of literacy, language and numeracy can help you deliver better healthcare services and improve the health of your patients

The challenges

Many complex factors influence people's health, including social class, housing, employment, and access to services. The 1997/98 Acheson Inquiry into health inequalities recognised that educational qualifications are important in determining an individual's economic position, which in turn affects health status.

- Women with low skills are five times more likely to be depressed than the average.
- About 25% people with no qualifications suffer from depression.
- Research has suggested that having better numeracy skills reduces the likelihood of having long-term health problems even after allowing for other causes.¹
- People with low skills are more likely to have poor health, smoke or be overweight.

How it can affect the delivery of your service

People with lower educational attainment and lower literacy generally experience poorer health outcomes. Poor basic skills profoundly affect a person's ability to navigate the healthcare system, talk to healthcare professionals and to get the most from the healthcare services. Research from the US² shows that:

- 42% patients with low literacy skills have difficulty following basic instructions on taking medicines;

- 60% have difficulty with a standard informed consent form;
- hospitalisation rates are almost double for people with low levels of literacy than for those with average or higher literacy levels.

The ability to understand information about health and healthcare is a precondition for taking preventative health action and responding appropriately to health concerns or illnesses – for oneself or others, such as children, in the family. People with greater confidence and practical skills are better at managing their conditions, and literacy, language and numeracy skills can contribute to this. In addition, adults returning to learning of any kind cite a positive impact on mental and physical health and pain management.

The national *Skilled for Health* programme was launched in January 2003 as a joint project between the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills. The programme, which complements wider work on health inequalities and improving adult basic skills, aims to improve health literacy and basic skills among specific groups with common health issues, and to build awareness among NHS staff of the links between poor basic skills and health outcomes.

Skilled for Health will help people to manage practical situations such as making an appointment with a doctor, or calculating a dosage of medicine. There will also be projects that will help teenage parents to improve their reading skills while they help their own children to learn.

Choosing Health (DoH: 2004) committed the Government to:

- providing new funding to enable every NHS PCT to run at least one local *Skilled for Health* programme each year by 2007;
- expanding *Skilled for Health* with a further wave of projects in workplaces, in partnership with Business in the Community;
- drawing on the specialist skills of relevant organisations to develop action on health literacy (CH2.37).

These commitments recognise the need to improve levels of health literacy. They underline that providing information alone will not benefit those who cannot readily understand or use it.

What you can do

- Consider existing provision (for example, parenting support groups), where literacy, language and numeracy links could be made.
- Consider the skills of patients when prescribing or explaining things to them.
- Develop links with local adult learning providers such as colleges that can provide *Skills for Life* awareness training for your staff and learning opportunities for your patients and local people. Ask them how literacy, language or numeracy skills could be embedded into any existing educational programmes that you offer – for example, into parenting skills groups or health support groups.
- Look at the appropriateness of your literature. Is it straightforward and accessible? Look at the leaflet *Making Reading Easier* (see page 41).
- Provide information on *Skills for Life* provision as part of your information package for patients.
- Consider working with a local learning provider or your local 'nextstep' partnership (and GP practice if you are not one) to develop a 'Prescriptions for Learning' approach whereby patients are given advice about the benefits of learning and different options available to them.
- Make links with other organisations or community groups active in your area who are aware of this issue.
- Wherever possible, involve service users in these discussions. All the evidence indicates that programmes are more likely to work if people have had some involvement in discussing or shaping the ideas.

Case Study 1: *Disadvantaged parents with young children (Thurrock, Essex)*

*This innovative parent support programme has been part of the **Skilled for Health** project. It enables parents with young children to access learning provision or one-to-one basic skills support in their own homes from Community Mother basic skills tutors. The programme aims to improve health and parenting skills by reaching out to isolated and vulnerable parents who are not accessing mainstream provision. A set of learning materials produced by the project is available.*

Case Study 2: Prescribing learning (St Austell, Cornwall)

A 'Prescription for Learning' project was set in St Austell, Cornwall – a primarily rural location with an economy based mainly on tourism and clay mining. It aimed to test out the growing evidence that returning to learning has great potential to make a positive impact on adult health and well-being, particularly in terms of improved confidence, self-esteem and health management. By establishing learning referral points in three local GP surgeries, the project aimed to increase participation in learning among adults with health problems and to demonstrate to healthcare workers how learning benefits the health of their patients.

Healthcare staff referred 35 people to learning advisers from Cornwall College, St. Austell to discuss whether they wanted to access learning, what learning they wanted to do and what support they might need to enable them to succeed in their learning. Over half of these went on to engage in learning, many of whom were not in paid employment, had low or no qualifications and limited social contacts. They expressed 100% satisfaction with the project, stating its helpfulness, relevance and beneficial effects. New learners reported improved mental health, greater confidence, better ability to cope with their illness, and enhanced social interaction. Healthcare staff involved in the project also reported observing great benefits for learners.

You can find out more about this project at www.sfcguide.org.uk

Further information

Skilled for Health

Find out more about the links between learning and skills and health from the *Skilled for Health* programme – a joint DfES and DoH initiative to improve essential skills and health literacy, which is developing practical demonstration projects (www.continyou.org.uk).

The programme has established eight demonstration sites around England. These sites, which received central funding for one year, have been working to produce health-related learning materials and assessment tools. Although the number of learners that progress through the demonstration sites is relatively small, the potential impact of each

programme will increase when the projects are replicated nationally. A guide, drawing on what has been learned through *Skilled for Health*, is expected to be published in March 2006.

You can also look at the NIACE briefing sheet on learning and health:

www.niace.org.uk

For more information on *Making Reading Easier*, visit the Basic Skills Agency website:

www.basic-skills.co.uk

For more information on the Department of Health Programme for Action on tackling the wider determinants of health inequalities:

[www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAnd SocialCareTopics/HealthInequalities](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/HealthInequalities)

For research-based evidence and extensive website links to related agencies, visit the Health Development Agency:

www.hda-online.org.uk/html/resources/links

Over the past few years, a number of *Prescriptions for Learning* projects have been established around the country. They involve basing a learning adviser in a GP's surgery or a health centre to take referrals of individuals and work with them to access appropriate learning opportunities. The Department of Work and Pensions' five-year strategy paper, *Opportunities and Security Throughout Life*, published in February 2005, identifies such initiatives as a useful way of helping people with health conditions and disabilities get into work.

'*Winning Hearts and Minds*', published by NIACE, is a guide to setting up a *Prescriptions for Learning* project.

¹DfES (2003) Education and Skills: The Economic Benefit:

www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/ECO/e00098/index.shtml

²Quoted in *Skilled for Health* newsletter, Spring 2004. Produced by DfES and DH. email

sfh.mailbox@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

Housing and homelessness

How supporting the development of literacy, language and numeracy can help you deliver better housing services

Literacy, language and numeracy issues can have a big impact on people's housing situations and on housing or homelessness organisations. For instance, those with lower skills in literacy, language and numeracy are:

- less likely to own their own home and more likely to live in social housing or privately rented accommodation, or to be homeless;
- much more likely to be unemployed or in low-paid and less-stable employment and, if they are children, to live in a household where neither parent is in paid employment;
- have possible 'financial literacy' and numeracy problems that may lead to indebtedness;
- be over-represented in prison and young offenders institutions.

Yet, to successfully manage to get into and stay in social housing or any other form of independent accommodation, people need to be able to carry out a wide range of tasks that require literacy, language and numeracy skills, some at very high levels. They will, for instance need to be able to:

- read letters from the housing department or housing association;
- complete forms;
- arrange for gas and electricity and telephone to be connected;
- sort out the council tax;
- budget for rent and utilities;
- read and understand tenancy agreements and codes of practice.

How literacy, language and numeracy issues can affect the delivery of your service

People may have difficulties in budgeting and dealing confidently with the array of household administration that characterises modern life. This may lead to indebtedness or arrears. Significant amounts of staff time may be spent in chasing payments or helping people with the necessary forms.

Tenants may be reluctant to use the tenants' handbook to report repairs or damage, which means that you don't get the information you need. They may have difficulty reading and understanding the tenancy agreement and may, as a result, not fully understand their rights and responsibilities.

New rules around tenant involvement in social housing mean that there is a greater emphasis on involving individuals in meetings and reports. These all require literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Without confidence in their skills, people may be put off from participating. Similar issues may apply to participation in other tenants' or residents' activity or local activity such as credit unions.

Recognising that service users may have literacy, language or numeracy needs, and working with others to address them, can help the people you work with secure their home lives, and enable you to provide services more efficiently and effectively.

What you can do

- Develop links with local adult learning providers who can provide awareness raising around literacy, language and numeracy training for your staff and learning opportunities for your residents. Knowing your residents, you can help providers guarantee the relevance and appropriateness of what is offered.
- You could help residents or tenants by providing a 'signposting' service that informs them about a range of learning opportunities in your area. You may want to provide information on learning opportunities, offered either by you or your educational partners, as part of your information package for residents.

- You can also provide encouragement and back-up to people who have taken their first steps back into learning.
- You are likely to have access to venues on your residents' doorsteps that could be used to provide learning activities. This would make it easier for people to participate, as they would feel on 'home ground' – very important to individuals who are taking their first step back into education.
- You will know where to put information or publicity so that people will see it, but don't forget to check its appropriateness. Make it fully inclusive by checking that it is easy to understand both in terms of the language and layout. It may be useful to provide versions in any community languages used by your tenants.
- Invest in workforce development around *Skills for Life*. If all staff who come into contact with your tenants understand and are sensitive to the issues, then they can help make the whole organisation more responsive.

The Cambridge Housing Society New Horizons Service delivers one-to-one, home-based learning in literacy, numeracy and IT to residents of Cambridge Housing Society (CHS) properties. Learners include benefit claimants, single parents, unemployed people and people working in low-skilled occupations. The 'New Horizon Service' is one of a variety of products and services developed by CHS to help people achieve a secure home life, opportunities for personal development and the quality of life they want. It was developed in partnership with a sixth-form college that delivers the learning provision.

The New Horizons Service brings learning to the learner and tailors delivery to meet individual needs. This enables people to access learning for whom geographical isolation, health problems, childcare responsibilities, low self-confidence or other factors would otherwise be reasons for not joining a class. Services offered include free laptops to support literacy, numeracy and IT development in the learner's own home; information about training and employment; and weekly tuition meetings, arranged at times to suit the learner. Tuition continues until learners are ready to take a national test. Transport and childcare costs are paid to enable the learner to attend the college to sit the test.

Since the project began in 2003, 122 learners (mostly women) have taken up literacy and numeracy provision. Achievement rates have been over 90% for those taking the national tests to gain Certificates in Adult Literacy at Levels 1 and 2, and many move on to further learning. The project has successfully tapped into and supported people's aspirations, and there are plans to recruit 144 learners for 2005–06.

One learner noted: "My literacy has improved so much – I have learned a lot more than I ever thought I would. Without the laptop computer and support I would not have achieved what I have done. Now I am more confident with my daughter."

You can find out more about this work in Cambridgeshire on www.sfcguide.org.uk

Further information

The Basic Skills Agency has produced an excellent booklet entitled *Basic Skills for Housing Organisations*. You can order it from their website: www.basic-skills.co.uk

Check www.sfcguide.org.uk for information on:

- writing in an accessible way
- referral and information and advice services.

Inner city areas



Literacy, language and numeracy issues in inner cities and how organisations working in the community can address them

What's the challenge?

The 'inner city' is not necessarily 'deprived' – some inner city areas are among the wealthiest areas in the country. Some, particularly in London, present a 'street by street' jigsaw of wealth and poverty; and some of the country's most deprived areas are located in rural areas and former industrial towns. Living in an inner city area does not inevitably mean being a passive victim of poverty, deprivation, crime and social exclusion. Inner city communities are often celebrated for their lively cultural life, their social diversity and the wealth of community activities and networks they generate.

Nonetheless, there are many run-down inner city areas whose residents do experience multiple deprivation in terms of income; employment; health and disability; education, skills and training; barriers to housing and services; living environment and crime, including racial harassment.

- 70% of all people from minority ethnic groups lived in the 88 most-deprived local authority districts compared with 40% of the general population. The majority of these areas are in, or include, inner cities.
- 18% of England's children live in the most-deprived 10% of wards.
- In recent years, people with need for community care support, refugees and asylum seekers have also been housed in some inner city areas.

Factors contributing to the decline of inner city neighbourhoods are complex and often tend to reinforce each other, speeding decline. The Government recognises that more needs to be done to tackle the problems it defines as driving social exclusion and low educational attainment, and poor basic skills have recently been highlighted as contributing to these problems. (See Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Breaking the Cycle*. London: ODPM)

For young people, educational deprivation shows itself in poorer GCSE performance rates, higher secondary school absence rates and lower numbers entering post-16 education and higher education. For adults, it means a higher proportion of working-age adults (25–54) with no or low qualifications and with low literacy, language or numeracy skills.

In addition to seriously affecting individuals' life chances (for example, in relation to employment, confidence and ability to help their children at school), literacy, language and numeracy skills gaps can have knock-on effects on the development of social capital and economic well-being, and so can contribute to maintaining disadvantage. Low skills or confidence may hinder residents from getting support from local agencies or from working with others to improve their area (see the section on Community Activists, pages 27–30). This is likely to make your job in delivering services and supporting neighbourhood renewal and regeneration that much more difficult.

What you can do: issues for effective service delivery

Addressing the literacy, language and numeracy skills needs of inner city residents is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and adult learning providers such as colleges, local authority adult education services, private and voluntary/community sector training providers. However, it is important for agencies and organisations that know the local context and have good roots in local communities to work closely with adult learning providers so that they get things right. Your organisation may be able to contribute to this in a number of ways.

Joint working

Inner city areas may have a large number of competing adult learning providers and other initiatives. This is not necessarily in the interests of local people, as it can cause duplication, confusion and gaps. To develop appropriate responses to local learning needs, providers should work closely with other agencies and link into cross-agency forums. You may be able to work in partnership with one or more providers and ensure that they are invited into forums dealing with local issues.

Developing provision that people want and need

Because of the diverse nature of potential learners in inner city areas, traditional ways of delivering literacy, language and numeracy provision may need to be reconsidered. The provision may not be accessible, or seen as appropriate, or may not meet complex needs. There is a lot of evidence that literacy and numeracy learning becomes more attractive when it is embedded in other learning that speaks directly to people's everyday concerns and interests.

Developing language provision in inner cities is complex, as it involves the needs of a number of different constituencies. It is important to establish the language-learning interests of second-language speakers from the established minority ethnic communities in a locality and to ensure that these are not overlooked. In addition, there is often a critical need for higher-level language provision from refugees and asylum seekers that the current offer of part-time, standard ESOL programmes does not satisfy. (See also the section in this guide on refugees and asylum seekers, pages 59–64.)

A range of factors can be at play in areas where there is low uptake for literacy, language, numeracy provision and other learning opportunities, despite apparently considerable provision on offer locally. We shouldn't automatically assume apathy. Research by the Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership, for example, revealed positive responses from inner city residents about the value of education and learning but residents were critical of the lack of availability or appropriateness of what was on offer.

All of this underlines the importance of good needs analysis. Especially where adult learning providers cannot themselves undertake a lot of consultation with potential learners, they can design much better responses to local needs if they talk to those who are already closely involved with local people. Your organisation may be able to help here.

Supporting community cohesion

Many groups in inner cities may experience racism and discrimination. Adult learning can contribute to increasing community understanding of the nature of racism, both through an anti-discriminatory approach in its own practice and through a curriculum offer that challenges racism. You can talk with adult learning providers about this potential and about what is needed locally.

Training and support for volunteers, peer educators and local networks

Development workers and teachers who work in community-based settings such as the inner city need a range of skills that include personal commitment, understanding of the issues facing the learners, flexibility and skill in using teaching and learning strategies that work with those people. 'Home-grown' teachers often bring these strengths to their teaching as well as providing positive role models to learners. Partners may be able to identify local people who would make excellent teachers or 'learning champions' if given training and support.

NEARIS is a registered charity based in Manchester providing a range of services to disadvantaged adults. The majority of service users are unemployed and isolated by a range of difficulties: for example, they are ex-offenders, have mental health or substance misuse problems, or are homeless or vulnerably housed. NEARIS manages the Manchester Education Resettlement Centre (MERC), to provide learning opportunities in a range of areas including literacy, language and numeracy, IT and art and craft.

NEARIS aimed to recruit and train volunteer learner support workers to make the educational services offered by MERC more accessible to learners from its target groups. Many of the volunteers had been through some kind of resettlement or rehabilitation process, so had personal experience of the types of disadvantage which created barriers to learning. They were trained to act as 'learning promoters' to their peers.

During the project, over 70 volunteers were successfully recruited and trained, and many of these successfully progressed to other volunteering, work or further learning. Particular training needs were identified by volunteers themselves, and 'Dyslexia Awareness Training' and 'Introduction to Sign Language' courses were developed accordingly.

Volunteer tutors successfully supported learners on the majority of courses on MERC's timetable. Their role has been particularly important with learners developing their literacy, language or numeracy skills.

For more information on this case study, go to www.sfcguide.org.uk

Further information

The English Indices of Deprivation 2004:

www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups

A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal. National Strategy Action Plan. Social Exclusion Unit. 2001:

www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/publications

Breaking the Cycle – Taking stock of progress and priorities for the future. (2004) Social Exclusion Unit;

www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/publications

A number of features have been identified over time as effective when working with communities. (See *Evidence of Effectiveness*, Health Development Agency, 2005.) These can be applied to the provision of literacy, language and numeracy within an inner city area.

Birmingham has used a high-level strategic partnership (the Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership) to drive change in a cross-city approach to children's and adults' literacy, language and numeracy. For more information on its activities, see www.coreskills.co.uk or the case study on www.sfcguide.org.uk/birmingham

The *Skills for Life* Survey – A National Needs and Impact Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT skills (DfES, 2003):

www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/research

Offenders or those at risk of offending

Working in the community with offenders or those who may be at risk of offending, to support the development of their literacy, language or numeracy skills, can help to prevent crime and reduce re-offending

The challenges

There are about 74,000 people in prison in England and Wales at any one time, and the general educational achievement level of those coming before the courts is low. Estimated figures suggest that 55% of offenders have poor literacy and communication skills and as many as 68% have poor numeracy skills. It is not surprising that over two-thirds of offenders are likely to be unemployed, with low levels of income and poor housing.

The transformative power of education is increasingly acknowledged as an important factor that can help to prevent offending and reduce re-offending. Supporting adults to obtain the skills they need has benefits for the individual and the whole community.

Improving literacy, language and numeracy skills can be a useful way of improving the prospects of those at risk of offending. Improved skills make it easier for an offender/ex-offender to:

- obtain and hold down a job;
- access public services;
- tackle issues that will prevent the temptation to offend again;
- promote self-esteem and confidence;
- feel socially and economically included.

Offenders need access to appropriate training and education opportunities while they are in custody, in the community and after release. Offender education is improving but there is a need to ensure that organisations work together to make sure that an offender's learning journey is not stifled

prematurely. It is particularly important to engage fully with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) on offender learning and skills. The LSC currently has joint responsibility with the Probation Service for the learning and skills needs of offenders in the community. That responsibility will be extended to encompass offenders in custody in three regions of England from August 2005, and across the country from August 2006. Thus, progressively, the LSC will take over the responsibility for planning and funding all offender learning and skills, offering a real boost to the 'joining-up' agenda.

The impact of the Criminal Justice Act

Under the terms of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 the majority of custodial sentences imposed for offences committed after 4 April 2005 will have a community element. Sentences will embrace a number of 'specific requirements' which relate to the needs of the offender, and often to a learning need. The development of local partnerships to support offender learners in custody and in the community will play an increasingly vital role in providing and co-ordinating learning opportunities.

What you can do to support offenders and those at risk of offending

Offenders and ex-offenders have multiple needs, and it is most helpful if organisations can work together to provide a co-ordinated approach to support education, training, rehabilitation and resettlement. In addition, by focusing on the learning needs of people at risk of offending, partnerships can take preventative measures to reduce the incidence of crime.

Partner organisations have different skills, which permit partnerships to put together holistic package of assistance. As part of their strategies for preventing and reducing the incidence of crime in their local communities, consideration could be given to how partners can:

- promote learning as a worthwhile activity to those at risk of offending and to offenders/ex-offenders;
- develop activities to support the development of literacy, language or numeracy skills, tailored to the particular interests of individuals or groups of offenders or those deemed to be at risk of offending;

- support the families of offenders both during the sentence and on release – this support may include consideration of their learning needs and interests;
- support access to housing and healthcare, recognising that low literacy and language skills may make access to these services even more difficult for people;
- use local labour market information to identify potential jobs for offenders in the area in which they will be released;
- work with local support and advocacy agencies and employers to secure employment opportunities and consider ways in which to ensure offenders or those at risk of offending are supported to develop the skills they'll need to succeed;
- support access to education and training in prison and the community;
- secure access to appropriate educational information, advice and guidance;
- support the transition of offenders from the prison estate to the community.

Local adult learning providers can help in a variety of specific ways. They can:

- provide 'basic skills' awareness training to staff in organisations working with offenders or those at risk of offending so that they recognise literacy, language and numeracy skills needs and are able to provide encouragement and signposting to learning opportunities;
- recognise the need to employ innovative strategies to engage and motivate learners;
- develop opportunities where literacy, language or numeracy development is embedded in other activities or vocational training;
- provide vocational qualifications that are valued by employers and that will have active application in the labour market;
- ensure that the quality of education and training provision is consistent in prison and the community;
- provide a range of learning opportunities that reflect the diverse needs of the learners (offenders are not an homogenous group);
- provide opportunities to complete qualifications that were started in custody;
- offer learning opportunities that fit the length of the sentence being served.

Nacro Services Newcastle works with young people in the Byker Village area of the city to provide education and training opportunities. Their aim is to prevent crime, by assisting young people with 'severe social needs' to make choices about their futures. Nacro Services are funded by the local LSC, and offer each young person attending their provision four hours dedicated literacy, language and numeracy support each week. Young people are able to develop their personal and social skills, vocational and employability skills, and work towards accreditation in literacy and numeracy, ICT, key skills and vocational subjects. They have seen big results in improved confidence, self-esteem and communication skills. Over the past year, out of 100 learners:

- *17 have moved into employment;*
- *nine have gone on to other training with Nacro Services;*
- *16 have gone into further education.*

*Offenders supervised by Yeovil Probation offices were required under a court order to take part in a **Skills for Life** programme from which probation teachers positively encourage learners to engage in other provision in order to gain qualifications, with a view to securing employment and moving on with their lives. Using the Move On national toolkit material, practice tests, CV writing and money management, teachers at Yeovil College supported the learners to develop skills necessary to engage fully with society. Under this support learners were keen to develop their skills. The group began in April 2004 with six learners, this number has since increased to 35, with learners requesting additional provision for basic IT. The programme has achieved a 100% pass rate from learners in both literacy and numeracy, and some learners have since progressed to other courses in college.*

You can find more information on these two case studies on www.sfcguide.org.uk

Further information

Uden, T. (2003) *Education and Training for Offenders: A NIACE Policy Discussion paper*. Leicester: NIACE.

(You can order a copy of this paper from www.niace.org.uk.)

Uden, T. (2004) *Learning's not a Crime: A NIACE Policy Discussion Paper*. Leicester: NIACE.

(You can order a copy of this publication from www.niace.org.uk.)

The Basic Skills Agency website contains a lot of useful information. Go to www.basic-skills-observatory.co.uk and search for prisons and probation.

Liggins, M. (2004) *The Prison Curriculum in England. A Review for the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit*. London: LSDA. The review may also be downloaded from:

<http://www.lsda.org.uk/files/PDF/041944WO.pdf>

Refugees and asylum seekers



How supporting the development of literacy, language and numeracy can help settle and integrate refugees and asylum seekers

The challenges

Processing, supporting and integrating refugees and asylum seekers is hard to plan for, although areas of arrival (Dover, Heathrow Airport) are easy to identify, as are inner city areas with a high turnover of housing. There is often a chain effect by which groups from one part of the world congregate in one area and become a base for new arrivals. There are also some low-paid work areas, where employers may use available labour without asking questions including people with claims to asylum. A further issue is the reluctance of newcomers, unsure of their status, to approach public service organisations. In most areas of settlement, and most cities, there are effective voluntary and statutory organisations dealing with these issues.

People who seek and get asylum may have high levels of education in their country of origin. Their needs as English language learners are often different from those of settled communities. At one extreme, they need advanced language skills, including the language skills necessary for their particular profession or occupation, and 'fast tracking' where possible to help them move speedily into employment that makes best use of their existing skills. At the other extreme, there are people with poor or no literacy in their first language (although the refugees with least resources usually manage to cross only one border). Both of these situations demand specialist teacher knowledge and skills.

Refugees are also likely to have other support needs: many are traumatised or in a less acute state of distress; they may have left with

very little property and no contacts; they may have little or no idea of how a Western, usually urban, society works. Some are unaccompanied minors – technically children but with adult experiences – and it may not be obvious where their learning and support needs are to be best met. If they are of school age, they should be admitted to schools, but not all schools have experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers. Some colleges have a good focus on the needs of this group but, again, not all. Social services have an important role to play in supporting housing and other needs.

How learning needs affect the delivery of services

The primary responsibility for the welfare of new arrivals, refugees and asylum seekers lies with local authorities. This places a high demand on available language resources (e.g. interpreting services) and on housing, school places and social support. It may be hard for people to establish that they are eligible for benefits, and there is a risk of people in this group being pushed into the informal or illegal economies. Working English as a first stage, and managed transition in using vocational skills, are key places to start.

There are voluntary sector organisations that focus specifically on refugee communities and issues, but it may be an organisation such as the summer play scheme or the disability support group that finds itself engaging with people with these histories. The voluntary sector itself may be a new concept for recently arrived people: it's useful to make it very clear who you are, and what your functions and purposes are, and to think through issues of confidentiality.

What you can do

The key information to gather is:

- What forms of association, activity and support already exist? For example, are there cultural/ethnic-specific or language-specific organisations already in existence or taking shape? What functions are they taking on, what services are they offering?

- Are the newcomers engaged with adult learning providers? If so, it may not be with the local college or local authority adult education division, however good their service: people may initially prefer culture- or language-based groups under their own control, faith-based organisations, or small neighbourhood centres. This is fine, but they need to find out where they can progress to.
- What are the priority learning needs? Everyone will say 'English', but what do they mean? Is it shopping? It seems obvious, but there may already be language-friendly shops in the neighbourhood. Is it communication with local schools for the children? Mothers may be reluctant to let children out of their sight, and may know little or nothing about the school curriculum. Is it how to sign on, how to fill in an application form? It will take time for supportive groups to gather reliable information and to work out how they can respond.

If the primary need is to learn English, it will be worthwhile doing some 'homework' with earlier settled groups about what local provision they found most helpful. Some of the issues to consider here are:

- Have the local adult learning providers (e.g. colleges, local authority adult education service, private or voluntary and community sector training providers) got good cultural information and good links to other services to meet different needs? Can your organisation help them in this?
- Have those providing the learning had any training in working with traumatised people? Have they got bilingual resources for needs analysis and curriculum planning? Have they got access to national curriculum and teacher-training structures? Small home-grown organisations may excel in some of these aspects and be weak in others. Likewise, established adult learning providers for whom this is a new issue may need to plan differently and review their quality assurance frameworks.
- How well is learning linked to seeking and getting work? This is not just an issue of language provision. Does the available work and the training match the skills people have brought with them? There are some particular issues: for example, in trades such as building, there is a high concern for safety, which will be affected by communication skills; and with professional skills the gate-keeping structures in the UK can be hard to negotiate.
- How well prepared are language and literacy teachers? There are issues of awareness, of tailoring learning to complex needs, of

negotiating with other organisations (both for social support and for job-related learning), and of networking with organisations that offer other kinds of support.

Where there is a relatively large and stable community from one place of origin, you will probably find that there are identified community leaders and that it is possible to work co-operatively to bring together their needs and quality-assured learning provision. But don't assume that all people from the same country want to work together at learning: conflicts travel as well as people, and there are always differences in social status, gender and beliefs which mean that one group will not work with another.

For local authorities, cross-departmental working is essential: for example, where is it appropriate to teach an unaccompanied 16-year-old girl escaping from traumatic attacks on her community? Where will she live? Is school or college a better option? Who is treating her mental distress or anorexia? Does she want to talk English at all – if so, who to and what about?

For community groups, you may find that you can support people in understanding the range of local services and making any specific requirements clear to service providers, including those providing adult learning. Networking with other voluntary organisations is obviously sound, and learning to navigate a new society is one of the functions of a good language class.

People in new communities will welcome ways in which they can be part of the support and settlement systems. Useful models of self-help and community support include advocacy and community interpreting: there is Open College Network accreditation available for both of these. They offer a way in which a new community's cultural knowledge can be used to support service users and inform public service providers. Language support for this may need to go beyond the Level 2 threshold of *Skills for Life*, so you may need to find different adult learning providers to work with. It will be useful in any case to find out which higher education providers are successfully supporting refugees to validate their qualifications from home, so that they can use their skills in the new environment.

Barnet Council for Voluntary Service works closely with Barnet Refugee Forum, a collection of 65 organisations, 39 of which are community groups working with refugees and asylum seekers. The CVS has a Refugee Service offering training to statutory and voluntary service providers in issues and service needs affecting this client group, and information and support to refugees and asylum seekers themselves. Two important aspects of the service the CVS offers are running learning advice clinics and supporting ESOL work, both of which are undertaken through partnership working with Barnet College.

There are challenges: the advice clinics run by the voluntary sector at Barnet College are limited by their budget and by the availability of bilingual advice workers. The language issue affects other services too: the Primary Care Trust has set up a 'voluntary and interpreting services department' which is represented on the CVS's committee. Not many services have in-house interpreting staff, though, and private language services are expensive. The CVS has good links with most of the community organisations set up by different refugee groups, and they will interpret in an emergency.

The Refugee Service is a recent innovation. However, it has already developed successful links with education services in the borough to provide support to adult learners on ESOL programmes at Barnet College.

Further information

Find out who in your local authority has the lead responsibility for refugees.

The Refugee Council:

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Visit www.sfcguide.org.uk/refugees for a list of national agencies and organisations relevant to asylum seekers and refugees.

Open College Network of the West Midlands:

www.ocnwm.wlv.ac.uk

A factsheet about new language requirements for naturalisation/ citizenship for LSC-funded provision can be obtained through going to 'Guidance' on the following link, and clicking on 'Basic Skills Factsheet 5':
www.isc.gov.uk/National/Documents/SubjectListing/FundingLearning

Rural communities



Rural communities pose particular challenges to both providers and learners of language, literacy and numeracy

What's the challenge?

- Patterns of employment in rural areas are changing, with the result that there is an increase in the required level of skills in the workforce. Rural economies have traditionally not required high levels of literacy, language and numeracy, which has made it possible for people to work productively without having high levels of skill in these areas. Indeed, employers have often had relatively little interest in literacy and numeracy issues. Yet, changes in employment patterns mean that the level of skills required is rising, as traditional agricultural jobs disappear and other jobs are exported as a result of globalisation.
- Remaining agricultural jobs tend to require more diverse and technical skills. Other forms of employment available may require increasingly higher levels of literacy, language and numeracy. Employers setting up new businesses in rural areas may have difficulty finding workers with an adequate level of skills. Those with lower levels of literacy, language or numeracy are likely to face diminishing employment prospects, which may include becoming trapped in seasonal or casual low-paid work. The combination of these factors has led to a rise in rural poverty.
- There are concerns over the levels of educational attainment among children in rural areas. There is some evidence that these levels are accepted as being part of the rural culture and that children who live in families where parents or carers have low levels of literacy, language and numeracy are less likely to obtain qualifications at school.

- Many communities, especially in accessible rural areas, have experienced relatively high numbers of incomers in recent years as well-qualified people from urban areas decide to relocate. Sometimes this results in rural communities becoming more and more like dormitories, as people work, shop and focus much of their social life on nearby centres of larger population. It may also mean that village life and committees are increasingly peopled by incomers. Both can exacerbate trends towards social exclusion amongst rural people with lower skills levels.

How skills development can improve the quality of life in rural areas

Addressing skills can affect people's employment prospects and their capacities and confidence to participate in their communities and to help their children. So this is a good way of responding positively to some of the pressures on rural communities and increasing vitality and inclusion in those areas. However, there are particular issues to consider when trying to do this:

- Providing learning opportunities in rural areas is often more expensive because of the smaller concentrations of potential learners, distances and other factors. It can also be difficult to engage with potential learners in rural areas, and practical barriers to learning in rural areas (such as costs, childcare or transport) can be particularly severe.
- The prevalence of employment in micro-businesses can mean that it is difficult for employers to release workers to take part in learning provision.
- It may be difficult for people to access information about services, including adult learning provision. In addition, the competitive nature of provision can make it difficult for learners to gain an overall picture of what is available, as adult learning providers may only give information about their own courses.
- In small communities where everyone knows everyone else there can be embarrassment in admitting literacy or numeracy needs; as a result, potential learners may be reluctant to seek help or fail to do so entirely. It has also been suggested that lack of interest in literacy and numeracy is linked to distinctively rural kinds of coping and that people may feel that it would be inappropriate to seek training, having managed successfully thus far.

- Adult learning providers may not be sufficiently sensitive about the particular requirements of rural learners. For example, courses may be scheduled at busy times during the agricultural year, or providers may not understand the greater autonomy preferred by rural learners or the likely travel patterns in rural communities.
- Adult learning providers may make inappropriate assumptions about the make-up of rural communities and their learning needs or find it difficult to meet these needs. A recent study noted the high take-up of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in rural counties, caused by recent migration patterns, but also highlighted the shortage of suitably qualified ESOL and literacy teachers.

What you can do

These issues have implications for a wide range of agencies and organisations in rural areas

Within your own organisation, you can:

- arrange for training for your staff and volunteers so that you recognise literacy, language and numeracy skills needs and are able to signpost people to appropriate provision;
- ensure that your publicity and other written material is sensitive to people's potential literacy, language and numeracy skills levels;
- work with adult learning providers to embed literacy, language and numeracy skills development in activities you offer.

Several of the other sections in this guide (for example, those for community activists, for staff working in children's centres, extended schools, housing agencies or with young people) include ideas which would work well in rural communities.

In addition, you can also help to increase an awareness of literacy, language and numeracy issues in rural communities. An important starting point is engaging local opinion formers (agency, political and business leaders) in understanding the implications of literacy, language and numeracy issues and in championing the drive for appropriate provision to meet people's needs. This could mean:

- ensuring that research or action on issues of literacy, language and numeracy is included in Rural Development/Rural Action and Parish Plans/Market Towns Initiatives;

- working in partnership with other agencies such as Connexions, health care providers, community councils and voluntary organisations to develop awareness of literacy, language and numeracy issues in the community;
- raising awareness of literacy, language and numeracy issues among employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses.

The particular challenges of literacy, language and numeracy in rural settings make it especially important that adult learning providers work closely with agencies and community organisations with good knowledge of local communities and routes into them. Adult learning providers are more likely to be effective in their planning and delivery when:

- accessing local networks and using them as a way to 'piggyback' the delivery of literacy, language and numeracy provision where appropriate – for example, using existing opportunities such as playgroups or local meetings as a way of introducing 'taster' sessions;
- working with community and voluntary organisations or other agencies with good local knowledge to identify ways in which provision can be responsive to local issues or particular local patterns – e.g. those of employment;
- recognising that, although courses may be free, learners may still be put off because of the cost of childcare or transport;
- identifying sources of funding to make small-scale delivery of literacy, language and numeracy provision affordable and financially viable for adult learning providers;
- integrating literacy, language or numeracy into other learning activities, such as ICT or vocational skills, to overcome embarrassment and reluctance.

Community Action Furness (CAF) is a training organisation and social enterprise based in Barrow in Furness, Cumbria, a town which faced substantial industrial decline during the 1980s and 1990s. It has a large rural hinterland which has also suffered economic decline. The project works with young people and adults who need a supportive environment in which to learn and develop their skills to help them into employment, as well as developing new employment opportunities across a range of areas. It provides training in many vocational areas,

*including horticulture, catering, construction, furniture restoration and upholstery, with literacy, language and numeracy embedded into all vocational programmes. Additional discrete provision in literacy and numeracy is also available where there is a need. If and when they feel ready to do so, learners are supported to move into formal **Skills for Life** programmes and to work towards national qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy. Learners include adults who have learning disabilities, mental health issues, or who for a variety of reasons are not yet ready to progress on to mainstream activities. To support this work, a programme of staff training has been developed through the **Skills for Life** facilitation process.*

*Since it began in 1993, the project has supported a great many learners. During 2003–4, 350 learners took part in CAF training programmes. Forty of these were engaged on formal **Skills for Life** programmes, whilst the others engaged in embedded learning as part of their vocational training. Besides developing their vocational and literacy, language and numeracy skills and having access to new employment opportunities, learners have consistently reported increased levels of confidence.*

There is more information on www.sfcguide.org.uk. See also the case study on Cambridge Housing Association.

Further information

- Move On (www.move-on.org.uk) offers the opportunity for adults to brush up their skills online.
- Learndirect offers online provision in literacy and numeracy.
- LANTRA – the training body for environmental and land-based industries – has identified basic skills as an important issue within the sector. For more information visit their website:
www.lantra.co.uk
- The Countryside Agency website has links to papers on the implications of basic skills for the rural economy. See:
www.go-nw.gov.uk/nwraf/documents/paper302.pdf

- There is a helpful case study of setting up an IT-led community-based basic skills project in the Cotswolds. For details go to:
www.countryside.gov.uk/Images/10-12_tcm2-19338.pdf
- Rural Community Councils (RCCs) are county-based charities working to improve the quality of life of local communities:
www.countryside.gov.uk/VitalVillages/social_capital/rcc.asp
- The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) website (www.NRDC.org.uk) lists the following papers on basic skills in rural areas:
 - *The impact of adult literacy and numeracy levels on small businesses in rural Lincolnshire: a case study.*
 - *Provision of, and learner engagement with, Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL support in rural England: a comparative case study.*

Young people



How supporting the development of literacy, language and numeracy can help young people achieve the things that matter to them and make a successful transition to adulthood

When children and young people were consulted as part of the development process leading to the Government's Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*, they identified five outcomes that mattered the most to them:

- being healthy
- staying safe
- enjoying and achieving through learning
- making a positive contribution to society
- achieving economic well-being.

The Government expects public and voluntary services to work together to ensure these outcomes and that, as part of this process, children and young people will be given the chance to have a say about issues that affect them as individuals and collectively.

The challenges

The connection between young people's skills and their ability to achieve the five outcomes is clear. The situation is particularly challenging for young people at risk of social exclusion. Although there are many factors that contribute to young people's experience of social exclusion, low attainment or non-attainment at school is recognised as being strongly linked to longer periods of unemployment, periods of economic inactivity, depression, involvement in crime, experience of poverty and teenage parenthood.

- At any one time, approximately 10% of young people aged 16–19 are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This figure varies across different parts of the country – in some parts of Eastern England, this figure is 7% but rises to 44% in some parts of the North West.
- Young people with health problems or a disability are more likely to be unemployed, and not be involved in education or training.
- Around 5% of young people leaving school every year do so without gaining any qualifications. This figure is higher among young men, and is increasing. It is highest among young people who are looked after, 53% of whom leave school with no qualifications.

According to the 2003 DfES *Skills for Life* survey, 57% of 16–25 year olds are working at Level 1 or below in literacy, and 77% are working at Level 1 or below in numeracy. These figures are higher among certain groups of young people:

- One in four looked-after young people over the age of 14 does not attend school. Only 3% of care leavers leave school with 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C.
- 40% of teenage mothers leave school with no qualifications.
- Young people who do not like school are three to four times more likely to be involved in offending behaviour. Playing truant, being excluded from school and low educational achievement are all risk factors associated with offending behaviour in young people.
- Black Caribbean young people are four times more likely than white British young people to have been excluded from school.

How these issues can affect the delivery of your service

Those working closely with young people will be aware that many socially excluded young people experience conflicting pressures and demands in their lives, which can mean that learning is not seen as priority. In addition, low levels of literacy, language and numeracy skills often go hand in hand with negative experiences of the formal education system, low self-esteem, and a perception that learning is ‘not for me’.

- A key issue for many young people is the development of employability and vocational skills. Low levels of literacy, language and numeracy skills can seriously affect the development of these skills.
- Young people not in employment, education or training, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds, are less likely to be known to or registered with support services or agencies.
- Young people are very aware of feeling patronised or not being understood – they are unlikely to engage with any learning or activities that make them feel this way.

Developing young people's literacy, language and numeracy skills is not only important in supporting them to make choices and live independently, but is also central to increasing their confidence, self-esteem and a feeling of control in their lives.

What you can do

- Develop links with local colleges and other adult learning providers to explore professional development, awareness raising and partnership opportunities.
- Young people are far more likely to get involved with organisations with which they are familiar and feel comfortable. If you already have good relationships with young people, you are in an ideal position to work with others to support young people's literacy, language or numeracy skills development.
- Young people believe other young people, so explore how mentoring or learning buddies can attract young people to provision and support them to keep coming back.
- New technologies, such as Palm Pilots or laptops, can help to 'hook' young people into learning. Offering young people the chance to explore new technologies also signals respect and trust for them.
- Disengagement calls for a creative approach to provision – think about young adults' interests and aspirations, and tap into these to create routes into learning.
- Opportunities for developing skills in literacy, language and numeracy can be met through a range of activities and as part of your programme. You could work with a learning provider, such as a local college, to help you develop some 'embedded' activities, in music, arts and crafts, drama, cookery or sport, for example.

- Maintain an informal approach – taking time to build open and trusting relationships is central to creating an environment where young people can safely explore literacy, language and numeracy learning.

The TAKE 1 project was established to engage with young people from disadvantaged communities within Nottingham. It enabled young adults to engage in media-based activity, such as music, video and drama. The learners were predominantly young men of African Caribbean descent who had experienced low levels of literacy, language and numeracy, little formal educational attainment and poor employment prospects. The project aimed to focus on the needs of this group and to develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills, raise their self-esteem and provide opportunities for them to move into further vocational training. This was achieved by working in partnership with the South Nottingham College, local employers and the local community.

The project was delivered over five months and engaged the young people in all aspects of theatre production. As part of their development, they were also given the opportunity to work-shadow individuals in the media. To demonstrate the outcomes of the project, a live performance was presented at Nottingham Playhouse and a video was made to share the good practice.

Being engaged with the production from the outset gave the young people a sense of achievement and ownership over the product. Transferable literacy and numeracy skills were learnt through writing music, counting beats and developing sample project budgets. In addition, through project discussions learners refined other skills such as communication.

You can find out more about this project on www.sfcguide.org.uk

See also the case studies on Nacro Services Newcastle and SureStart West Bassetlaw.

Further information

The Young Adults Learning Partnership (YALP) is a joint initiative between NIACE and the National Youth Agency. YALP has undertaken a variety of work on learning opportunities for socially excluded young adults, including *Success factors in informal learning: Young adults' experiences of literacy, language and numeracy*, a National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) research project. More information on:

www.nya.org.uk

www.niace.org.uk/research/yalp

www.niace.org.uk/project/successfactors

www.nrdc.org.uk

The Prince's Trust – for more information on young people's experience of social exclusion, and their work to support young people's learning and personal and social development. Includes links to related agencies:

www.princes-trust.org.uk

Infed – extensive website focusing on informal education, with a variety of articles exploring informal education and learning with young people:

www.infed.org

ContinYou is one of the UK's leading community learning charities. Their website allows visitors to remain up to date with the charity's programmes and services in its various areas of work including children, family and young people, extending schools and lifelong learning:

www.continyou.org.uk

Glossary

Basic Skills Agency (BSA)

The BSA is the national agency for basic skills in England and Wales and is supported by the Government. This site contains information about the agency, along with basic skills news and events and details of programmes on offer.

<http://www.basic-skills.co.uk/>

Connexions

Connexions offer a range of guidance and support for 13 to 19 year olds, to help make the transition to adult life a smooth one. This site is for those involved in delivering Connexions and will, as the service grows, become an important resource for the sharing of information and ideas.

<http://www.connexions.gov.uk>

DfES

The Department for Education and Skills.

Diagnostic assessment

The *Skills for Life* Diagnostic Assessment materials are designed to provide a detailed assessment of a learner's skills and abilities against the requirements set out in the national standards and core literacy, language or numeracy curriculum. The results can be used as the basis for the development of the learner's individual learning plan (ILP) and learning programme.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia causes difficulties in learning to read, write and spell. Short-term memory, mathematics, concentration, personal organisation and sequencing may also be affected. Dyslexia usually arises from a weakness in the processing of language-based information. Biological in origin, it tends to run in families, but environmental factors also contribute. Dyslexia can occur at any level of intellectual ability. It is not the result of poor motivation,

emotional disturbance, sensory impairment or lack of opportunities, but it may occur alongside any of these.

Embedding

A process whereby learners improve their literacy, language or numeracy skills through the tasks and activities they undertake as part of vocational training programmes and community-based activities.

Family literacy, language and numeracy

The family literacy, language and numeracy initiative 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.

Get On

Get On is the advertising and promotion campaign featuring the well-known gremlin characters. The campaign is designed to raise demand for *Skills for Life* learning.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/get-on/>

ICT

Information Communication Technology

Initial assessment

Initial assessment will help identify a learner's skills against a level or levels within the national standards. Learners may have different levels of reading, writing, numeracy and language skill. Initial assessment is often used to help place learners in appropriate learning programmes. It should be followed by diagnostic assessment. Several initial assessment materials for literacy and numeracy are available.

learndirect

learndirect was developed by Ufi (*University for industry*) with a remit from government to provide high-quality post-16 learning through the use of new technologies. It operates a national help line to provide information on learning and skills opportunities and a network of more than 2000 online learning centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, providing access to a range of e-learning opportunities including literacy, language and numeracy.

Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

The LSC is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over-16 year olds in England, with the exception of higher education. There are 47 local LSCs.

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/>

Learning and Skills Council Skills for Life Quality Initiative

A major LSC programme that supports the implementation and delivery of *Skills for Life*: the national strategy to improve adult literacy and numeracy skills. The *Skills for Life* strategy underpins both Success for All and the Skills Strategy.

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/sflqi>

Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) is a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training. As part of the national changes to support quality improvement from April 2006, the LSDA will split to take on a new strategic role as the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and its QI services will be delivered by the Learning and Skills Network.

<http://www.lsda.org.uk>

Learning communities

Learning communities are developed where groups of people, linked geographically, online or by shared interest, collaborate and work in partnership to address their members' learning needs.

Learning partnerships

Learning partnerships exist in most areas of England to improve the planning and coherence of local post-16 learning. They encourage collaboration amongst learning providers and support the contribution that learning can make to regeneration.

<http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/llp/>

Move On

The aim of the Move On project is to develop and pilot a short course to engage higher-level literacy and numeracy learners and promote the

national test in adult literacy and numeracy. It is targeted at those within the top 60% of basic skills needs and includes a three-hour taster test to identify areas that require brushing up and a 30-hour short course to brush up these skills, which culminates in the group taking the national test.

<http://www.move-on.org.uk>

National Literacy Trust (NLT)

The NLT is an independent charity dedicated to building a literate nation.

This website tells you more:

<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk>

National tests

The national tests assess a sample of the requirements described in the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy. The multiple-choice tests are available at two levels (Level 1 and Level 2) and are designed to measure skills at an equivalent level to other national qualifications.

nextstep

Nextstep is the LSC's national brand for the provision of information and guidance for adults. nextstep offers a free information and advice service to eligible adults aged 20+, and aims to support adults in improving their skills, including maths, writing and computing.

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

NIACE is the national organisation for adult learning in England and Wales. It is a voluntary organisation with a membership drawn from the full spectrum of adult education provision and from private, public and voluntary sector organisations.

<http://www.niace.org.uk/>

Screening

Screening is used to find out whether or not someone might have a literacy, language or numeracy need. If a need is recognised, initial assessment can then provide a means of establishing a learner's level/s. The *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit does not recommend specific tools for screening but suggests that adult learning providers use whichever screening approaches and materials best suit their learners, provided they are mapped to the *Skills for Life* standards.

Skills for Life

The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/>

Skills for Life Strategy Unit

Formerly called the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU), the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit was set up in 2000 within the DfES to be responsible for driving forward implementation of the national *Skills for Life* strategy and ensuring efforts to improve literacy, language and numeracy skills at national and local level are consistent and well co-ordinated.

Social Exclusion Unit

The Prime Minister set up the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997. Part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the Unit works closely with other parts of the ODPM such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate with the aim of tackling deprivation.

<http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk>

Sure Start

Sure Start is a Government programme which aims to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and communities by:

- increasing the availability of childcare for all children
- improving health and emotional development for young children
- supporting parents as parents and in their aspirations towards employment.

Way to Learn

Developed by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES), and partner organisations, Way to Learn is a web portal for adult learners. The portal pulls together, in one convenient place, links to all the information that adult learners may need to help them make better-informed decisions about learning and also encourage and inspire them to return to learning. The site also contains the latest news, case studies, course details as well as advice and support.

<http://www.waytolearn.co.uk/>

Skills for Communities

Skills for Life

The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

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department for
education and skills



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities


**Social
Exclusion
Unit**