



House of Commons

Business, Innovation and Skills
Committee

Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Fifth Report of Session 2014–15



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Business, Innovation and Skills Committee

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Summary

There are many adults in this country who have low levels of literacy and numeracy skills— young and old, in and out of work, with and without children—who are trying to live their lives without the skills that many people take for granted. This low level of literacy and numeracy among adults needs to be tackled, not least for those adults who may be trapped in a cycle of either low-skilled jobs or unemployment. A survey carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD) in October 2013—based on interviews with 166,000 people in 24 countries—found that England and Northern Ireland was ranked 22nd for literacy and 21st for numeracy. This low level of adult skills inevitably impacts on the success of the economy as a whole.

We heard the experiences of adult learners, and of volunteers and paid professionals who teach adult literacy and numeracy. There are many programmes that help adults to gain better skills, which are set within specific contexts: in the workplace; in prisons; in community centres; in schools; and in homeless charities. Undoubtedly, the earlier the intervention the better, and we urge the Government to invest and promote family learning schemes—where parents learn, and encourage their children to learn. We are not persuaded that GCSEs are the gold standard by which adults' skills should be measured and assessed, and we urge the Government to take a more flexible approach to the way in which skills in adults are measured.

There are specific environments in which there are high numbers of adults with low literacy and numeracy skills. The Army is one such organisation, and it has a rigorous assessment programme and an effective training scheme which delivers literacy and numeracy skills. In contrast, there is much less rigorous and uniform assessment when adults claim for unemployment benefit—despite the fact that this is an ideal opportunity to help adults to gain essential skills needed to get a job.

What is really important is the need for flexibility, both in the types of programmes on offer—by both voluntary and paid organisations—and in the types of funding given by the Government. We know that funding is limited, but we are concerned that funding has been cut to adult learning schemes, including Unionlearn, which have achieved outstanding results at a fraction of the cost of full-time formal education. Such short-sighted financial savings risks the imposition of long-term costs, as such cuts will make it harder for adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills to gain employment and to help their own children.

Adult literacy and numeracy are included in the remit of many Government Departments—the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence—and there should be appropriate cross-Departmental support in developing and implementing adult literacy and numeracy policies and programmes. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should take the lead in promoting closer collaboration between the Departments, and

a civil servant in each relevant Department should be chosen to act as a champion for adult literacy and numeracy. Should this approach not deliver better collaboration and long-term planning between Departments, the BIS Minister should be given more formal powers to intervene.

The ability to gain literacy and numeracy skills should be considered a fundamental right of all adults. Improved skill levels contribute to the social and economic well-being of individuals and the country as a whole. It is essential that the Government develops clear strategies and guarantees funding for effective initiatives that improve adult literacy and numeracy levels.

Above all, the Government should launch a high-profile national campaign to promote its funding for free training and tuition for any adult wanting to study English and maths up to and including GCSE level. It should also help adults in finding the most appropriate and nearest help, with either voluntary schemes or more formal classes.

1 Introduction

*When you have learning difficulties, you're given limiting beliefs by many of those around you as you grow up. You believe your family, your friends and teachers when they say you are thick, stupid and lazy; your mindset becomes limiting for everything else in your life, including jobs and relationships. You have no self-belief or self-worth. [The Cascade Foundation]*¹

1. This quote from the Cascade Foundation highlights how many adults who have difficulties in reading, writing and maths feel about themselves. Problems with reading, writing and maths have a huge impact on people's daily lives, including getting and keeping a job, finding a home, understanding bills, forms and documents, and guiding children through education. It can affect adults in many walks of life, but also undermines the economic performance of the country. We heard from people in work and out of work, in prison, without a home, in the Army, and caring for children. Anna Page, representing St Mungo's,² a homeless charity working in London and the South, told us what it is like for adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills:

The impact of not having literacy and numeracy skills can affect every part of your life. Particularly for people who are trying to sort out their housing situation, they may have trouble with filling in a benefits claim form, looking for accommodation online, or working out how much rent they can afford to pay. [...] It might be around being able to read a story to your child.³

As Members of Parliament, on the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee at the House of Commons, we wanted to explore: why these and other adults have been let down; what motivates those who decide to improve their skills; and what more the Government can do to help improve standards in reading, writing and maths for adults across the country.

2. We received over 80 written pieces of evidence, and several organisations submitted oral evidence, in addition to our three formal evidence sessions at the House of Commons.⁴ We also visited Leicester, where we met several providers and receivers of adult literacy and numeracy classes. We went to Leicester College and Leicester Prison, where we talked with learners and staff about their experience of adult literacy and numeracy provision. We would like to thank everybody who contributed to this inquiry; those contributions really helped us in understanding the issues involved and in working out what we should recommend to the Government.

1 The Cascade Foundation ([ALE 52](#)) extract

2 St Mungo's Broadway was formed in April 2014 by the merger of two homelessness charities, St Mungo's and Broadway. The oral and written evidence from St Mungo's was submitted before April 2014, and therefore, when Anna Page gave evidence, she represented St Mungo's.

3 Q102

4 The oral evidence was transcribed, and was accepted by the Committee as formal evidence on 22 July 2014.

3. We received a lot of evidence from learners themselves, and we are grateful to them for their invaluable contributions. Tracey, a learner from Leicester College, sent in audio visual evidence, telling us of her motivation for enrolling in English and maths classes:

I've always had this hankering to get my maths and my English, and prove that I can actually do it, because I've always been treated as if I'm stupid and I don't want to be treated as if I'm stupid anymore. I want to be able to say I can do maths. I can already do mental maths in my head a lot better. I'm a lot quicker at maths. Before I would just keep my mouth shut. I wouldn't involve myself in any sums or anything because I didn't want to show myself up.⁵

4. This Report will outline:

- the measurements used to define the level at which adults are in literacy and numeracy;
- the people who teach literacy and numeracy, including organisations, charities and volunteers, and how easy it is to find out about this help and how it is financed;
- the work done on raising literacy and numeracy skills in the Army, in prisons, and for homeless people;
- how learning can be carried out within communities and in the workplace.
- the different people working in the Government who are involved in raising and supporting this issue.

5. We are departing from the usual method of releasing recommendations of Committee Reports. As well as a published written Report, we are releasing a short video, with two Members of our Committee—the Chair, Adrian Bailey MP, and Caroline Dinenage MP—summarising the findings of the inquiry and the recommendations. The video will also include clips from those who submitted audio and audio-visual evidence, and from our oral evidence sessions. We hope that this new approach will provide access to our findings and recommendations for many more people than would normally read a Select Committee Report. The Government has two months in which to respond to our recommendations, and we will look forward to hearing their responses to our recommendations. We lay down the challenge to the Department to respond in kind, with both a written response and a video.

2 Current situation

We have been damned [...] by a culture of low expectations and by poor quality provision that has meant that most countries in the world have gone from being behind us, in terms of capabilities, to ahead of us over four generations. [Matthew Hancock MP]⁶

Understanding the problem

6. The quotation above is from Matthew Hancock MP, the former Minister for Skills and Enterprise.⁷ He described to us the low levels of adult literacy and numeracy in England and Northern Ireland. While the different levels of numeracy and literacy are widely discussed, they are rarely defined. They are broadly as follows:

- Functional skills are the core elements of English, maths and ICT that give people the skills and abilities they need to carry out their lives effectively, confidently and with independence;
- Entry level skills are below level 1, and an adult at this level may be able to read an article in a newspaper, but slowly and with limited understanding;
- Level 1 literacy and numeracy skills equates to a D to G grade in GCSEs, and is judged to be the level of skill needed for adults to function effectively in society;
- Level 2 of adult literacy and numeracy equates to an A to C in GCSEs, and adults may have different levels of skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening.⁸

7. Helen Casey, from the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, highlighted the problems of comparing adults' literacy and numeracy skills with levels within the school curriculum:

The parallels with the curriculum in schools really do not work, because the developmental stage that a seven-year-old is at does not equate to an adult who is a fully-functioning person who happens to not have reading and writing skills.⁹

8. These levels are used to compare not only adults within this country, but also with other countries around the world. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD) is an organisation that promotes policies to improve the economic and social wellbeing of people around the world. In October 2013, it published its International Survey of Adult Skills, which was the result of interviews with 166,000

6 Q208

7 As of 15 July 2014, Nick Boles MP is the Minister of State for Skills and Equalities, and has responsibility for vocational education.

8 NIACE, *Work, Society and Lifelong Literacy: Report of the inquiry into adult literacy in England*, September 2011

9 Q12

people in 24 countries. (The survey included people from England and Northern Ireland, but did not include people from Scotland or Wales.) It found that:

- England is the only country in the developed world where the generation approaching retirement is more literate and numerate than the youngest adults, with adults aged 55 to 65 in England performing better than 16 to 24 year olds at foundation levels of literacy and numeracy;
- Out of 24 developed countries, England's 16-65 year olds ranked 11th in literacy and 17th in numeracy, with 16-24 year olds ranked 22nd and 21st respectively;
- England was ranked 22nd for literacy and 21st for numeracy out of 24 countries;
- Adults in full-time employment are most likely to have the highest levels of literacy and numeracy. For literacy, unemployed people and students in England scored lower than the OECD average, and for numeracy, most groups generally performed lower than the OECD average;¹⁰
- 24% of adults scored at or below Level 1 in numeracy compared with an average of 19% across all OECD countries.¹¹

9. Commenting on the UK results, the OECD stated:

These results confirm the vicious cycle in which low-skilled workers risk being trapped in a situation in which they rarely benefit from adult learning and their skills remain weak or deteriorate over time, making it even harder for these individuals to participate in learning activities. The key priority challenge is to help low-skilled adults break this cycle.¹²

10. When he came before us, Matthew Hancock MP spoke about the OECD Report:

What the Report showed was that we have been damned in England and Northern Ireland—for that is what it refers to—by a culture of low expectations and by poor quality provision that has meant that most countries in the world have gone from being behind us, in terms of capabilities, to ahead of us over four generations.¹³

To appreciate fully the extent of the problem, it is important to have detailed and accurate statistics. The Forest Read Easy Deal's written submission made this point:

FRED would benefit greatly by Government providing accurate and up to date statistics that show, truthfully, the breakdown of adults struggling with literacy, according to area, ie, the Forest of Dean, not just Gloucestershire or nationally. These statistics also need to show important distinctions in

10 Department for Business Innovation and Skills ([ALE 87](#)) para 1.5

11 TUC ([ALE 41](#)) para 2

12 TUC ([ALE 41](#)) para 4.1

13 Q208

gender and culture as well as socio-economic. [...] Statistics are crucial to funding bids: when so many people have legitimate claim to limited funding sources, we need to make ours as decisive and factual as possible. True and accurate statistics would help enormously.¹⁴

11. A Department for Business, Innovation and Skills representative, Catherine Paulson-Ellis, explained that the Government has commissioned further research, particularly on young people's transition from school and college into the workplace and on skills in the workplace, and that a report will be published later in the year.¹⁵ The Minister also announced the establishment of a new research centre for maths and English, to find out the best way for adults to learn English and maths:

It is a research project of over £2 million, and the aim of it is to understand the incentives and people's behavioural responses to why they do not learn—what we can do and how best we can ensure that they learn English and maths. That is a new research project; I do not have the results yet.¹⁶

We were told that the centre will be funded for three years, after which the Government hopes that it will become self-sustaining and draw funding from other sources.¹⁷

12. There is still an alarmingly high proportion of adults with low literacy and numeracy skills, a situation which successive Governments have failed to address adequately. We welcome the Government's announcement that a Behavioural Insights Research Centre for maths and English is being set up to undertake scientific analysis of how adults best learn English and maths. This is such an important matter that the Government must produce an urgent update. We also welcome the further work commissioned by the Department, to investigate the reasons for the poor performance of England compared with other countries, with respect to adult literacy and numeracy. In its response, the Government should set out a timetable for the work being completed, the findings being published, and when action will be taken as a result of those findings.

Getting the message across

We heard from many people and organisations who believe that adults who are struggling at entry level in English and maths—those adults who need the most help—are not being targeted enough by BIS, in terms of investment. David Hughes, from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), told us:

A lot of investment from BIS goes into people who are already at Level 1 or Level 2 in terms of literacy and numeracy, and it misses an enormous number of people at Entry Level. That is the hardest group to get to; it is the hardest group to motivate; and they are the people who are most skilled at

14 FRED ([ALE 63](#)) page 2

15 Q204

16 Q204

17 Q205

getting round the fact that they have poor literacy and numeracy. There is a really big challenge about that.¹⁸

13. Matthew Hancock MP defended the Government's position, stating that "this is a perennial challenge of persuading those who do not have very low-level skills, to first give them the confidence to know that they can get the skills—they will be paid for and that they can themselves do it—and it is also about reaching people".¹⁹ However, the role of the Government is to tackle such a challenge, by targeting those adults who are unable or unwilling to seek help, with a concerted outreach programme. Audio evidence from some learners at Leicester College—and a significant amount of other written submissions—highlighted the fact that not enough adults know that there is free provision for English and maths training, up to and including GCSE level. One of the learners, Mohammed, suggested the following ways of publicising the availability of free classes:

I think that the information is out there, but for some people it's not accessible. If this information was made available at places where people go—community centres, churches, mosques, doctors' surgeries, even supermarkets—and they could see it and then are motivated to find more about it, I think that would help.²⁰

Karen Adriaanse, an HM Inspectorate (HMI) from Ofsted and Ofsted's Special Adviser for Improvement for Further Education and Skills, agreed, telling us:

Where you can change the culture and one of the things the Government could do—and certainly started to do in the past—is to raise the profile nationally of English and maths across the board. I think talking about basic skills, literacy and numeracy, is not necessarily helpful. Talking about English and maths will almost instantly raise the profile. There needs to be things to diminish the stigma. It is how it is promoted through everyday lives, whether it is received in things like soap operas or films so people understand that this is a problem that everybody has, and also then celebrating when it makes a difference.²¹

14. There are problems with reaching out to learners, but also for learners to find the courses that are relevant to them. We received evidence from a wife explaining her husband's difficulty in finding adult literacy classes:

Back in around 2001–2002 there was a television program about adult literacy and through this we contacted a helpline and subsequently took part in an evening course at a local school. This came to an end after about 18 months and since then we have been trying to find a replacement course to no avail. I have contacted all our local schools and colleges, explored every

18 Q11

19 Q209

20 Leicester College ([ALE 82](#)) extract

21 Q172

avenue on the internet and sent countless emails but nobody seems able to help.²²

However, we heard from many organisations, including formal classroom-based courses and other, equally effective voluntary schemes that do a tremendous amount in supporting adults with learning needs.²³ What is missing is a comprehensive way of accessing information about available schemes.

15. The Government has pledged funding for free training and tuition for any adult who wants to study English and maths up to and including GCSE level, but it needs to get the message across to adults with limited English and maths skills that this help is available. To make sure that this message reaches the right people, we recommend that the Government carry out a high-profile national campaign to promote robustly this initiative. This must be treated as a priority. The Government must publish a timetable of how and when the national campaign will be launched. Coupled with this national campaign, the Government should develop clear signposting routes, helping adults to find the most appropriate and nearest help (either voluntary schemes or more formal classes). The Government should report back in its response on the methods it will use to develop this initiative.

22 Leicester College transcript ([ALE 82](#)) extract

23 Voluntary organisations will be studied in greater detail in Chapter 3

3 Adult literacy and numeracy schemes

If you can get people's expectations to turn around, you can turn their lives around.

[Matthew Hancock MP]²⁴

The type of adult literacy and numeracy provision

16. We asked whether provision of adult learning should be along formal, classroom-based lines, or on a more flexible and informal basis, where the subject is taught in a context that relates more directly to learners' own lives. For some people, a classroom context can revive a sense of failure they felt when at school; others may benefit from the structure it provides. Tracey, a learner from Leicester College, described how she felt when at school: "When I got to the exams, I knew that I was going to fail them, and I didn't want a piece of paper saying, "You've failed".²⁵

17. There is no right or wrong way of teaching adults these skills; different styles of learning programmes are required. The type of provision depends on each adult, and whatever style of learning helps them to develop their literacy and numeracy skills is the right one for them. The motivation of adults is crucial and that motivation might not fit well with participating in formal GCSE English and maths classes. Libby Coleman, co-author of the one-to-one teaching and reading book, *Yes We Can Read*,²⁶ highlighted what it means not to have basic skills, and described why she developed her teaching aid:

When we are talking about basic skills, we are talking about something you just need the confidence to be told how to do. We felt that we had to produce something that anyone who could read could use, whether they were autistic, 80 years old or Travellers who had just learnt to read themselves; it did not matter. It had to be applicable for everyone, as long as we could follow the steps.²⁷

18. The Association of Colleges also noted that functional skills are as important as qualifications:

Functional literacy and numeracy is a valuable tool. The reformed GCSEs may be unhelpful if they do not allow students to demonstrate the skills employers need in 16 to 18-year-olds. Any reform of GCSEs in maths and English must ensure they have more functionality (ie relevance to the

24 Q202

25 Leicester College transcript ([ALE 82](#)) extract

26 One of the Committee Members, Robin Walker MP, visited St Pauls Hostel, Worcester on 18 May 2014, and gave them two copies of Libby Coleman's book, *Yes we can Read*. When he visited again, on 18 July 2014, the hostel's literacy coordinator, Gerry Lowman, praised the book and its strength in helping adult learners in a one-to-one environment, especially for learners with dyslexia.

27 Q34

workplace) to capitalise on the evidence of how maths and English skills are both developed as concepts and retained in practical applications.²⁸

19. Tom Wilson, the Director of Unionlearn—the learning and skills arm of the Trades Union Congress (TUC)—agreed, telling us that one of the reasons why more formal-based teaching does not work for adults is that they are not being treated as adults:

They are effectively sent off to the local college, and what the local college does, with the best will in the world, is put them back in a classroom. That is exactly the environment that failed them in the first place. That is the worst thing you could do. That happens a lot to 16 and 17-year-olds, who move on from school to college hoping that they will be entering a very different environment and knowing that they want to get up to Level 2 maths and English, but the college, with the best will in the world, is not really able to provide the different, more challenging, more interesting and more contextualised environment that treats them like adults. Very often, you find that those same 16 and 17-year-olds are disappointed and failing because they are not getting something that is different to what they have just had at school.²⁹

20. Karen Adriaanse, from Ofsted, told us that there was “very much room for both”³⁰ professional and volunteer programmes, supplementing each other for the benefit of learners:

It all depends on the individual learners. Some will benefit. [...] Peer support, which I know people have already promoted, can be absolutely invaluable as a start and then it may be that to develop those initial skills and build on those skills, they may need the professional support to learn the skills that employers need and be in charge of their own learning. On the other hand, there may be some learners who need more professional support first and then will need mentors or volunteers to help them reinforce or maintain their skills in the future.³¹

Examples of context-specific learning schemes are explored more in Chapter 6.

GCSEs

21. Helen Casey, from the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), explained the strains on the GCSE system, in having to meet so many different requirements:

There is a big tension inside GCSE between it being preparation for higher study in that subject and preparation for life and work. We are told that

28 Association of Colleges ([ALE 23](#)) para 13

29 Q44

30 Q175

31 Q175

employers want GCSEs, but I think that is the one they have heard of, and actually what employers actually want is literate, numerate staff. That is not necessarily what the GCSE does; it equips you for the next stage in that subject.³²

Connected with this point is the fact that GCSEs are used as the measurement and achievement of adults in improving their skills. As the City & Guilds written evidence highlighted, there seems to be a contradiction in the Government's thinking:

On the one hand, it seems to recognise that learning needs to be engaging and personalised, focusing on learners' real world application of English and mathematics within contexts that are relevant to their life and work experiences. On the other hand, the Government's pre-occupation with GCSE as a single 'gold standard' at Level 2 for all learners in all settings would seem to be run counter to that message. The move towards 'linear' qualifications with one final assessment will also make these qualifications very difficult to deliver in anything other than a traditional academic setting where learners study often over two full years. This model may not be conducive to the audience we are trying to reach.³³

22. The Government written evidence states that:

We have embedded English and maths in all our major programmes, including Apprenticeships and traineeships, and within study programmes for 16-19 year olds to ensure people understand the significance of these subjects.³⁴

In our 2012 inquiry into Apprenticeships,³⁵ we highlighted the problem of the requirement for apprentices to take GCSE exams in English and maths. The Edge Foundation wrote that:

Some young people choose apprenticeships because they are fed up with classroom study. Some take GCSE exams in English and maths several times without achieving the magic grade C: it may not be easy to make them carry on until they are 18.

The answer to that particular challenge should be to make maths and English more relevant to the jobs apprentices are being trained to do. Indeed, there are examples where this happens already, with good results. However, it isn't easy to take best practice and implement it everywhere. One barrier is that

32 Q12

33 City & Guilds ([ALE 28](#)) page 3

34 Department for Business Innovation and Skills ([ALE 36](#)) para 1.5

35 Business Innovation and Skills Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2012-13, *Apprenticeships*, HC 83-1

people with the skills to teach—say—apprentice chefs might not have the skills to teach them maths and English as well: so who will? ³⁶

23. A learner from St. Mungo's Broadway highlighted the fact that being forced to follow a specific route, without paying attention to the specific learner, is not conducive to the ability to learn:

I feel I need, and in general people need, sustained support from all services working together, with lots of different models. Failure is part of the journey, but you have to understand that a punitive system does not incentivise—you need a system with constructive, sympathetic support. Reading does matter, and writing and IT skills are important to everyone, but unless these opportunities are offered across the board then people will keep repeating circles of unemployment and long-term homelessness.³⁷

The need for a multifaceted approach to adult learning came across again and again in our evidence. Genevieve Clarke, a programme manager from the charity, the Reading Agency, described how they introduced the Six-Book Challenge:

It is a very simple thing of being invited to read six things; they do not have to be books. We were talking about people who, in some cases, cannot manage the Quick Read books, which are very short.³⁸ It is reading material and they log it in a reading diary; they have to write a few words about it, so it involves writing as well. At the end they receive a certificate. In many cases, that is the first certificate they have ever had. It is motivation and reward along the way: 90% of those surveyed say that taking part gives them more confidence.³⁹

Moreover, this concept of reading six books is imbedded within a structure that involves many organisations: public libraries; Further Education colleges; prisons; Unionlearn; hospitals; the Army; and other employers.⁴⁰

24. English and maths programmes for adults have to be flexible if they are to be successful, which means that the Government should not be pre-occupied with GCSEs being the only measurement at Level 2 for all learners in all settings. The Government has successfully recognised that a more flexible approach to learning reaps success, and therefore the accompanying Government funding must move away from the traditional, linear approach to achieving qualifications.

36 Business Innovation and Skills Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2012-13, *Apprenticeships*, HC 83-1, Written evidence submitted by [the Edge Foundation](#), para 57

37 St Mungo's Broadway transcript ([ALE 81](#)), extract

38 Quick Read Books are short books by best-selling authors, and are easier to read for adults who are less confident in their reading ability. See Quick Reads evidence ([ALE 8](#))

39 Q149

40 Q149

The standard of English and maths providers

25. Written evidence from Ofsted outlined the fact that out of the 54 inspections in foundation English and maths, over half required improvement or were inadequate:

Since the introduction of our revised Common Inspection Framework for further education and skills (2012), we have regularly inspected foundation English and mathematics.⁴¹ Inspection evidence from September 2012 to August 2013 shows that:

- in the 54 inspections of these subjects, separately or in combination, more than half (54%) required improvement or were inadequate
- more than half (56%) of provision of foundation mathematics when inspected in its own right was judged to require improvement or be inadequate
- almost three quarters (74%) of foundation English inspected alone required improvement or was inadequate.

26. Karen Adriaanse, Ofsted's Special Adviser for Improvement for Further Education and Skills, described the poor level of attainment:

That is a concern that we have had and certainly the Chief Inspector mentioned that in his Report. [...] We do have some excellent examples or purposeful, stimulating and inspirational teaching and learning that works. On the other hand, where the learning is dull and demotivates, it does not help anybody at all and it is not a good use of public funds either.⁴²

Karen Adriaanse went on to describe the lack of support available to teachers of adult literacy and numeracy:

There still is not a strong culture in this country that teaching English and maths to adults who have not been able to succeed in the past is a difficult thing to do, and it needs to be recognised as a high professional career with post-graduate qualifications and support to ensure they really have the expertise to motivate them.⁴³

Connected with this was the call for a greater emphasis on career structure for people delivering adult learning, so that training provides teachers with an understanding of maths and English. Karen Adriannse told us that "I would not want to teach anybody to spell or to read. What I want to do is to help them understand how they do it and give them support so they, in the future and for the rest of their lives, can teach themselves to

41 Ofsted reports on provision in these subjects from entry level up to and including level 2 (GCSE grade A* to C or equivalent) as 'foundation English' and/or 'foundation mathematics'.

42 Q171

43 Q172

spell and to read”.⁴⁴ She called for a reintroduction of the post-graduate qualification for adult learning, which was stopped in the early 1990s.⁴⁵

27. *The Government needs to study the type of adult literacy and numeracy provision on offer. The Ofsted results on the provision of adult literacy and numeracy show a mixed bag of provision; some are excellent, but many need to improve. If the Government is successful in persuading adults to improve their maths and English skills, then those adults cannot be let down by inadequate provision. We support voluntary organisations, which do a tremendous amount in supporting adult learners. Such voluntary schemes are run in tandem with other provision involving qualified teachers. To support these teachers, post-graduate qualifications should be reintroduced, to reinforce the fact that adult learning is a specialist job and to ensure that the best teachers are helping adults to improve their English and maths.*

28. The Association of Colleges highlighted the difference in funding given to 11-16 year olds and 16-18 year olds:

Expecting colleges to ensure that all young people without maths and English at grade A* - C at the age of 16 have these qualifications at 18 with £1400 less funding for a 16-18 year old than a 11-16 year old is not the solution. Adults with poor basic skills need to have a comprehensive offer that is accessible to them. Adult learning opportunities have reduced since 2010 with fewer young and older adults accessing learning opportunities year on year. Investment by local authorities in adult learning has reduced and colleges, under considerable funding and policy pressure, have also reduced adult education opportunities.⁴⁶

29. The Skills Funding Agency and BIS have started to move towards the funding of units for adults, supported by awarding bodies such as City & Guilds. However, as David Hughes, from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), told us, this is being held back:

That ability to pull in a number of units that meet people’s immediate needs and allow them to take smaller steps, build confidence and build self-esteem is critical, but, again, it is held back by the amount of funding that is available and the quality of the teachers to be able to deliver that very personalised and quite difficult offer to people who need to be motivated and need a lot of extra support. As the money overall diminishes, at least in terms of the budget of the Skills Funding Agency in England, some of that hard-to-reach and hard-to-do extra supported learning gets pushed to one side.⁴⁷

30. This point was reiterated by Caroline Robinson-Day, a literacy tutor with a background in providing literacy classes in Further Education Colleges, the workplace and community:

44 Q176

45 Q176

46 Association of Colleges ([ALE 23](#)) para 5 and 6

47 Q20

Currently, learners are expected to pass one level per year with no opportunity for a learner to consolidate their skills. This is extremely important for learners working at Entry Level as many are learning to read and write. To give these learners more opportunity to work at their level enables them to develop their confidence which is a vital factor in their decision to carry on attending class. In addition to this it allows the learners to develop their language skills and discover reading for pleasure and writing for self expression as well as learning general literacy and employability skills. In my experience the profile and learning needs of adult learners are often ignored by policy makers and by those implementing the policy in some organisations.⁴⁸

The need for adults with lower levels of English and maths to be allowed more time to consolidate their skills was also stressed in the BIS Department's written evidence:

There are greater gains for lower level English and maths learners where courses involve tuition of over 100 hours, as learners require more support and time to make significant progress than is generally available in short courses.⁴⁹

31. However, funding has also forced some colleges into making decisions on which courses to prioritise, and our evidence has shown that some colleges prioritise learners aged 16 to 19 on full-time courses, as incentivised by funding.⁵⁰ Funding also seems driven by the need for qualifications. Margaret Chadwick wrote of the experience of her daughter and friends trying to improve their English skills, and her daughter being told that the only available course was one she took years earlier:

My daughter and a group of other young adults bothered to attend adult classes in the Stroud area for about 20 years. This was through illness, disability, snow, ice and whatever. When Stroud College joined with Bristol colleges, funding was reduced. My daughter had finally got her Level 2 numeracy and was trying hard to get from Level 1 to Level 2 Literacy when the class was dropped and she was told that the only class open to her would be one that taught Entry Level, which she had done several years ago. This faithful little group of about 9 adults disbanded. Learning had always been a struggle for them but they had persevered and enjoyed learning. [...] In the light of sheer commitment and dedication of this group, I feel that they were let down because of financial restraints.⁵¹

32. We recommend that the Government reassesses how it funds adult literacy and numeracy courses and charities, and gives those organisations the flexibility to adapt their own courses for the individual concerned, while still, of course, ensuring accountability of providers in the process. Peer-based learning is equally valuable and

48 Caroline Robinson-Day ([ALE 71](#)) extract

49 Department for Business Innovation and Skills ([ALE 36](#)) para 4.5

50 S.Ozkan ([ALE 73](#)) extract

51 Margaret Chadwick ([ALE 72](#)) extract

should be promoted. The system should be flexible enough to support voluntary organisations, as well as formal-based classes.

Maths

33. We received written evidence from Jane, about her difficulties in learning maths:

I'm a 57 year old woman; I work full time; I went back to education as a fulltime mature student and carried out work at the same time. I graduated with a BA Hons. I have diplomas for occupational therapy, law and welfare benefits, music and catering but when it comes to passing a GCSE/O Level in Maths I'm the pits!⁵²

There are other adults like Jane who are very capable at literacy, but who find maths extremely hard. But also, some adults have difficulty in understanding the maths texts. Mike Power, an Usdaw Union Learning Representative, described this: "Sometimes it's best for people to concentrate on their reading and writing skills before tackling maths. In the early stages we had maths learners who couldn't really understand the materials we were using. They thought it was a maths problem but I could see it was their English skills that needed improving first".⁵³ Libby Coleman, co-author of the one-to-one teaching and reading book, *Yes We Can Read*, made the same point to us: "Until you can read for meaning, you cannot use a computer and you cannot start looking at maths".⁵⁴

34. National Numeracy, an independent charity that focusses on adults and children with low levels of numeracy, stated that adult numeracy and literacy should be treated equally:

Adult numeracy is a long neglected area that now deserves urgent attention. [...] Government initiatives over the past 15 years have had no significant impact on adult numeracy. Whereas there has been some improvement in adult literacy, numeracy levels have actually shown a slight decline and from a far lower base. Adult numeracy and literacy should be treated equivalently. It should no longer be assumed that a lower level of numeracy is acceptable; doing so to date has hidden the true extent of the numeracy issues in this country. [...] We believe that improving the quality and supply of the adult numeracy workforce is a key role for government and urge it to give this greater attention.⁵⁵

Matthew Hancock MP praised National Numeracy is being "an absolutely brilliant organisation".⁵⁶ He also said it was unacceptable for people to claim they cannot do maths:

One example that always frustrates me is that, particularly in maths, we have a cultural problem in that some people who get very high maths grades—for

52 Jane ([ALE 58](#)) extract

53 TUC ([ALE 41](#)) case study 2

54 Q34

55 National Numeracy ([ALE 4](#)) summary

56 Q211

instance, they might have got a B at maths and As or A*s at everything else—think it is okay to claim that they are not very good at maths. It is not okay; it is completely unacceptable for people in positions of responsibility to claim that. Maths is as important as English, if not more important. In terms of the research, the research shows that the likelihood of getting a job is increased more by maths than it is by English. We are further behind on maths and we absolutely need to turn that culture around.⁵⁷

For adults to claim that it is acceptable that they cannot do maths downgrades the crucial importance of maths, and is especially damning for children's aspirations, perpetuating a belief that maths is not crucial for their future careers.

35. All too often, adult numeracy is considered the poor relation to adult literacy, and the Government should encourage initiatives that seek to reverse the perception among adults that it is acceptable not to have functional skills in maths. The Government should seek to change the culture in which low levels of numeracy are considered acceptable. This must start at school.

4 Unemployed people

You need a job to live, but you also need an education to get the job. [Caroline, Leicester College]⁵⁸

Assessment of basic skills levels

36. The quote above, from Caroline, a learner at Leicester College, highlights the problems of both gaining skills and getting a job. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) submitted written evidence, setting out the steps the Government is taking to ensure unemployed people gain the skills they need to get and keep a job:

The ability to get and keep a job and progress in work is the best route out of poverty. The Government is committed to ensuring that people have the necessary skills to do this. Recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), the full-conditionality group of Universal Credit (UC) and the work-related-activity group of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) are required to take steps to address any gaps in their skills that may be preventing them from securing employment. A range of basic skills and work-related training is available through the further education system to support benefit claimants who need to improve their skills to find work.⁵⁹

37. The BIS Department's evidence also stated that since 2011, it has “actively prioritised support for unemployed people who need to improve their skills to get into work. Closer working between Jobcentres, colleges and other providers means that many more learners are starting English and maths courses after being referred by their Jobcentre adviser”.⁶⁰ Matthew Hancock MP told us that

The combination of work experience—or, even better, getting a job—and learning at the same time is incredibly powerful. We have found that with Apprenticeships. We found that in the research that led to the development of traineeships. That culture change is getting through to Jobcentres, but it takes time.⁶¹

38. The DWP told us that ‘skills screening’ was carried out at JobCentres, to assess the level of skills of each claimant:

Skills screening is an integral part of work-focused interviews for claimants of working-age benefits. The aim is to identify potential skills needs in relation to the claimant's job goals. Skills screening is undertaken during the diagnostic part of the new jobseekers interview or the new joiners work-focused interview and reviewed at all subsequent work-focused interviews.

58 Leicester College transcript ([ALE 82](#)) extract

59 DWP ([ALE 31](#)) para 1.2

60 Department for Business Innovation and Skills ([ALE 36](#)) para 1.6

61 Q250

Advisers have discretion on whether to use an initial or in-depth screening approach. Initial skills screening involves observation and discussion during work-focused interviews to gather evidence on skills, qualifications, previous training and work history. Information gathered informs decisions about any onward referrals.⁶²

39. While this is a positive intervention, we received evidence that indicated that this assessment was not carried out consistently or, in some cases, was not carried out at all. St Mungo's Broadway wrote that its clients

regularly spend years attending Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme advice sessions without their needs ever being properly assessed. This means that opportunities to identify and address reading, writing and maths needs are being missed.⁶³

40. This lack of proper assessment was also raised in oral evidence by David Hughes, from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (known as NIACE):

Unemployed people [are] being pushed into the Work Programme without an adequate skills diagnostic and without really being able to understand fully the basic skills needs they have, which will help them have a proper job and a proper career, rather than that cycle of getting into a job and getting out again and getting into another entry-level job. That is a missed opportunity from Government. There are lots of strong words at the moment from all parties about the need to provide a proper diagnostic for people who are unemployed. We are seeing patchily some of that working in partnerships between colleges and Jobcentre Plus, but it is still not universal. That means that hundreds of thousands of adults are missing out.⁶⁴

41. The Work and Pensions Select Committee published its Report, *The role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system*, in January 2014. It found that Jobcentres applied various approaches to assessing claimants' needs, with no systematic assessment of basic literacy and numeracy skills at the new claimant interview stage. The Committee recommended that:

Jobcentres adopt a more thorough and systematic initial face-to-face assessment of claimants' barriers to employment to identify the level of employment support they need from Jobcentres and contracted providers. Assessments should be regularly updated during longer claims, and relevant data passed to Work Programme and other contracted providers if claimants are referred on.⁶⁵

62 DWP ([ALE 31](#)) para 2.1 and 2.2

63 St Mungo's ([ALE 25](#)) para 7.1

64 Q11

65 Work and Pensions Committee, *The role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system*, 20 January 2014, Para 24

However, the BIS Minister told us that he would go further: “I want to see a basic maths and English test for everybody who applied to go on a maths and English course who turns up at a Jobcentre, but getting there is a big old task”.⁶⁶

Referrals to adult training

42. Written evidence from Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations stated that there was no consistency in the method of referrals to skills providers:

From attendance at conferences and our customer feedback, a key concern that is routinely voiced by providers is difficulty and inconsistency in dealing with Job Centre Plus with regards to referrals. We believe this must be addressed by greater clarity from the centre about what is prescribed and what freedoms are available at a local level to adapt to individual circumstances. The use of e-learning and assessment seems to us to offer greater flexibility to JCP advisors in sourcing appropriate courses for adults.⁶⁷

43. The Association of Employment and Learning Providers also raised concerns about the lack of data sharing between the Jobcentre Plus assessors and the providers who give the training:

Initial Assessment by Jobcentre Plus (JCP) should be improved and JCP should work closely with training providers to utilise the expertise in those organisations to identify literacy and numeracy needs early on in their period of unemployment. [...] If passing responsibility for initial assessment to providers is too radical there should at least be a new standard data sharing protocol, agreed between JCP and providers, on any barriers to employment that a jobseeker may have.⁶⁸

The Minister told us that there was quite a lot of autonomy given to Jobcentre advisers on referrals, but that this culture change takes a while to embed:

The combination of work experience—or, even better, getting a job—and learning at the same time is incredibly powerful. We have found that with Apprenticeships. We found that in the research that led to the development of traineeships. That culture change is getting through Jobcentres, but it takes time. Jobcentres have quite a lot of autonomy in how they deal with individuals within the benefit rules, for which they do not have any autonomy.⁶⁹

Matthew Hancock said that the Department for Work and Pensions took the lead on this work, but argued that this was “a broad change that we need to make”.⁷⁰

66 Q251

67 OCR ([ALE 37](#)) para 6

68 The Association of Employment and Learning Providers ([ALE 9](#)) paras 4 to 10

69 Q250

70 Q250

44. We received audio visual evidence from Caroline, a learner at Leicester College, who said that her benefits were at risk if she did not look for a full-time job, but that, in turn, could jeopardise her course place:

If I don't look for a 40-hour-a-week job and give up my course they can stop my benefit. I said, 'I'm not stopping my course. I was doing my course before I signed on and I'm not giving it up. If you want to stop my benefits, stop my benefits, but I'm not looking for a full-time job just so you can make me give up my college course—I'm not doing it'. I like my learning and I want to do my learning. I wouldn't have come here in the first place if I didn't want to do it, but I want to do it. If I'm honest, I'd rather do this than look for a job, because this is important to me. Yeah, you need a job to live, but you also need an education to get the job.⁷¹

45. If adults are in training programmes of more than 16 hours a week, they normally lose their entitlement to benefits. In March 2014, the Department for Work and Pensions relaxed the 16-hour rule to allow claimants to take part in traineeship programmes for up to 30 hours a week, without affecting their Job Seekers Allowance entitlement. However, that still leaves those unemployed learners not on traineeship programmes but on literacy and numeracy courses in a vulnerable position. Evidence from Unionlearn TUC highlighted this problem:

The DWP should relax benefit conditions such as the 16 hour rule which can inhibit NEETs⁷² and the adult unemployed (the recent announcement in relation to the 16 hour rule and Traineeships is very welcome).⁷³

Tom Wilson, Director of Unionlearn, also made the following point about the eight-week rule to us:

What about the eight-week rule, which currently prevents anybody who is doing a work placement for more than eight weeks from continuing to receive their benefits? There are many other benefits rules that need to be waived, softened or amended in order to help people who are currently stuck at home watching daytime TV because they cannot get off benefits to be in a position where they can learn. Marrying together the learning regime and the DWP regime would be enormously helpful.⁷⁴

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers stated that “unemployed people lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills must not be put under pressure to come off a training programme in order to get them off benefits and into any job, however short term. [...] All too often learners claiming benefits are not encouraged to take effective learning programmes in literacy and numeracy because the drive is to get them off benefits.

71 Leicester College transcript ([ALE 82](#)) extract

72 A 'NEET' is a young person who is 'not in education, employment or training'

73 TUC ([ALE 41](#)) page 1

74 Q54

However in the long run their need to get good basic skills is essential for keeping a long term job.⁷⁵

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) evidence highlighted the need for Job Centres and skills providers to work more closely together, to ensure that claimants get the most appropriate skills support:

Finding an effective approach to literacy and numeracy screening of benefit claimants has proved challenging for Jobcentre Plus. NIACE recently met with BIS and DWP officials to explore new and more effective approaches. NIACE's own BIS-commissioned report into *Helpful approaches to the delivery of English and maths provision for unemployed adults* (2013) reported that in many areas providers and Job Centres work together, often in creative ways, to ensure that benefit claimants with literacy and numeracy needs get the support they need. There is however a need for the Skills Funding Agency to scope the size of need and potential demand for English and maths skills provision from JCP customers, Work Programme participants and others to identify whether this demand can be matched by current provider capacity and funding. The report also showed that despite skills conditionality arrangements, a large proportion of JCP referred job seekers do not attend their initial appointment with skills providers.⁷⁶

46. It is crucial that when someone starts claiming unemployment benefit, there is a method of testing his or her English and maths skills. When this happens at the moment, it is neither systematic nor consistent. We agree with the Work and Pensions Committee that Jobcentres should have a more thorough and systematic initial, face-to-face assessment of claimants, to understand the skills support they need to get a job. Assessments should be regularly updated during longer claims, with the relevant data being passed on to the Work Programme and other contracted providers, if claimants are referred on. We recommend better co-ordination between the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Jobcentre Plus and skills providers, to ensure that there is consistent and thorough assessment of basic skills needs at the earliest possible stage of unemployment benefit claims. There also needs to be better information sharing between providers and referral onto courses which effectively address identified needs. For this to be effective, the Government must marry together the learning regime and the Department for Work and Pensions regime, to ensure that unemployed adults have the most flexible opportunities to develop their skills. If this is approached in a constructive, cross-Departmental way, there will be benefits both to the learners and to the public purse.

Screening tool for 18-24 year olds

47. Catherine Paulson-Ellis, Assistant Director in Vocational Education at the BIS Department, told us that new pilots starting in the Autumn of 2014 will offer English and

⁷⁵ The Association of Employment and Learning Providers ([ALE 9](#)) para 9

⁷⁶ NIACE ([ALE 33](#)) para 20

maths training for 18-21 year olds, and the Department for Work and Pensions was developing a screening tool, which would be used for young people making a claim who do not have evidence of Level 2 skills. The Department's written evidence outlined this further:

Within the Autumn Statement 2013 we announced that we will pilot a new scheme of support, predominantly online, for 18 to 21 year olds on Jobseeker's Allowance in two parts to ensure they continue to work towards achieving the levels of skills that are vital in the labour market. JSA claimants without Level 2 qualifications in English and/or maths will be required to study these subjects for up to 16 hours per week alongside job search. After 6 months on JSA, claimants will be required to participate in a work experience placement, a traineeship or other relevant skills provision, or community work placement.⁷⁷

48. We were told by the Government of current pilot schemes, offering English and maths training for 18 to 21-year-olds, which include the development of a specific style of assessment that will be used for young people making a claim who cannot already provide evidence of their Level 2 skills through certificates. We look forward to hearing the results of the pilot. If proved to be successful, we recommend that the Government extend this assessment to all claimants, regardless of their age, so that claimants who need further skills can be identified at the earliest possible stage, and action can then be taken.

77 Department for Business Innovation and Skills ([ALE 36](#)) para 3.8

5 Workplace initiatives

[A] third of all employers are still not offering any form of training to any of their staff and 38% of employees say that they received no training over the past 12 months. [Trade Union Congress]⁷⁸

Unionlearn

49. According to Ofsted, employers are still struggling to find staff with appropriate literacy and numeracy. It highlighted the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES):

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) 2013 Employer Skills Survey, that surveyed over 90,000 employers, reported that there appears to have been an increased difficulty finding applicants with appropriate oral and written communication, literacy and numeracy skills. These core generic skills were all cited as lacking by greater proportions of employers reporting skill-shortage vacancies than in the previous survey of 2011.⁷⁹

The TUC also highlighted the 2013 Employer Skills Survey:

[A] third of all employers are still not offering any form of training to any of their staff and 38% of employees say that they received no training over the past 12 months.⁸⁰

Our evidence also highlighted the fact that many working adults have a lack of literacy and numeracy skills, which is holding them back, or putting their jobs at risk. The Workers' Educational Association highlighted this worrying position for many employees:

Many adults requiring these skills are in employment, often of a precarious, short term and/or part-time nature. The co-operation of employers is essential; government should take the lead in developing (directly or indirectly) strong links between industry/sector bodies and employers to ensure their needs are well-understood and embedded in English and maths provision as well as encouraging Community Learning involvement in LEPs and similar planning bodies.⁸¹

50. One organisation that helps both employees and employers in accessing greater skills is Unionlearn, the learning and skills arm of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) which supports a union learning model that has “drawn praise and respect from all quarters”.⁸²

78 TUC ([ALE 41](#)) para 4.3

79 Ofsted ([ALE 34](#)) extract

80 TUC ([ALE 41](#)) para 4.3

81 WEA ([ALE 22](#)) para 6.8

82 TUC ([ALE 41](#)) para 1.6

Tom Wilson, the Director of Unionlearn, described to us their work, in relation to adult literacy and numeracy, specifically in relation to peer-to-peer coaching:

Our union learning reps, of whom we now have 30,000 trained up and down the country, do exactly this kind of peer-to-peer, ‘If we can do it, you can do it’. They are workers too, so it is dinner ladies teaching other dinner ladies, train drivers teaching other train drivers, and prison officers teaching other prison officers—and prisoners too, by the way. That model of peer-group learning is fantastically successful and very cost-effective. We have trained, I would guess, around 1.2 million learners over the last 10 years—probably more; that is a conservative estimate—at an average cost of £97 per learner, which is less than 5% of the cost of the typical FE student. I am not claiming that we do everything; a lot of our learners will go on to do FE, but is a massive cost-effective programme that is training over 1 million people. You can ask the question, ‘How do we train the next million?’ We can do that in five years—much quicker—and probably at slightly less cost, but not a great deal less.⁸³

He went on to pay tribute to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, for the support that the Department has given to Unionlearn:

Around half of all the learning that unions do is funded by the taxpayer through BIS; the other half is funded by unions themselves. The half that is funded by the unions is growing, because the whole operation is growing. It is enormous. Around 15% to 20% of everything unions do is now about learning. That is the way in which they can help their members to get on at work. A great deal of that is about workers who would otherwise never get off the churning around of moving in and out of low-paid jobs, which is bad for them, bad for the economy and bad for their employers.⁸⁴

While Matthew Hancock MP told us that he worked closely with Unionlearn because it is able to reach people who cannot be reached as easily in other ways,⁸⁵ the Government has recently cut its funding for Unionlearn. Tom Wilson explained the effect of this reduction:

Our funding has been cut by about £2.5 million so far this year; it could be more. That will directly result in thousands fewer learners in the workplace than would otherwise have been the case. I entirely understand the pressures on the public purse, but I would just like to take this opportunity to put on record the fact that we do think it is a real mistake.⁸⁶

51. *The Government is cutting £2.5 million from Unionlearn’s budget, even though the Minister himself acknowledged the impressive work that the organisation does in adult skills training. This is short-sighted financial gain, which goes against the many positive*

83 Q42

84 Q42

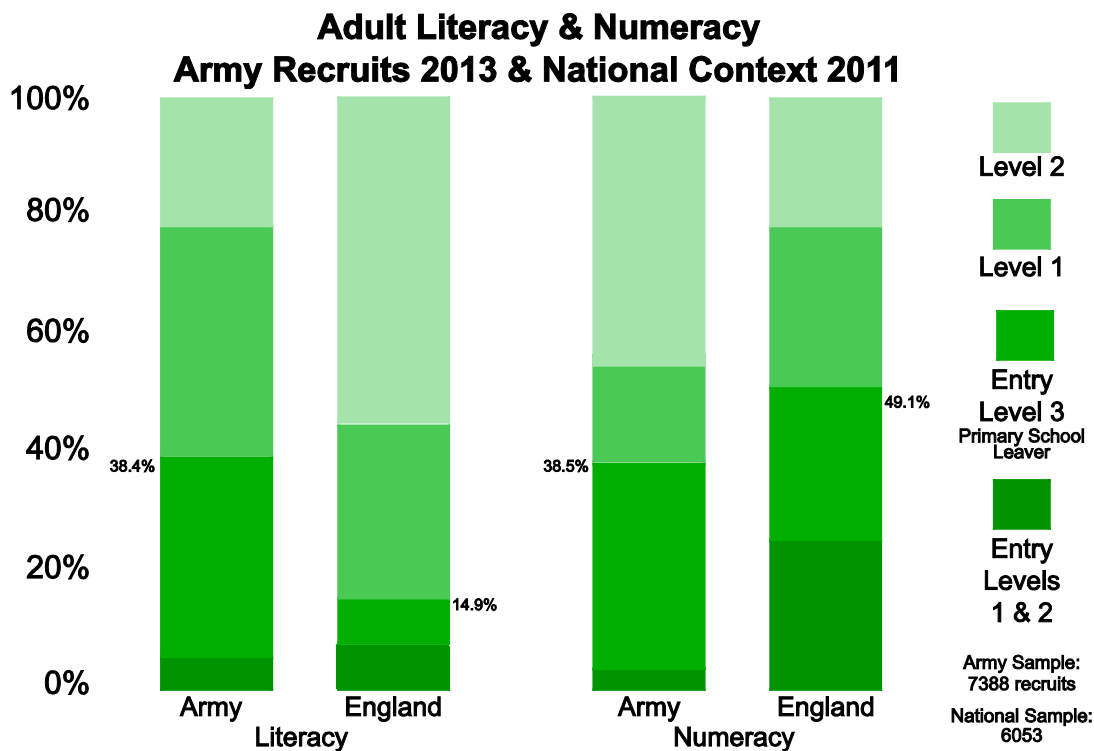
85 Q200

86 Q54

interventions by the Government. It also sends out the wrong signal about the Government's commitment to adult learning. At a cost of under £100 per learner, and bringing in an extra £4 to £6 additional employer funding for every £1 of Government funding, Unionlearn is a cost-effective way of reaching large numbers of learners with the most acute English and maths needs. This is an area of high impact, which offers value for money, so we urge the Government to reverse its decision to cut Unionlearn's funding.

The Army

52. In 2013, around 38% of trainees joining the Army were assessed with literacy skills below Level 1, and around 38.5% has numeracy skills below Level 1:



The Army, ALE46

Brigadier Gary Morris, the Army's Director of Educational Capability, told us of the flexible approach to English and maths learning that the Army takes. When asked whether specialist teaching or informal teaching works better, he replied:

We use the whole spectrum and that has got to be the way forward. At one end, we do have some specialists and we do target them at the guys who are struggling at the lowest levels who might need a one-to-one and a particular programme developed. Around that, we wrap soldiers supporting other soldiers. They may have gone through the same learning themselves and they are great instructors who have learnt quite recently, as adults, how to get through this. We are supporting that with more generalist teaching staff. We take every opportunity to build into them specialist support where they need it, and a lot of them can get through without that one-to-one support. There

is a spectrum, though, that does need that sort of support. In terms of what the Government can do, it is recognising that we need to be flexible in how we support those people, as opposed to presuming how we might get to that end-point because some of them take a lot longer than others.⁸⁷

53. The Army uses Ministry of Defence in-house provision (delivered by Army specialists), publicly-funded external provision through FE colleges, and other providers, such as those that deliver its Apprenticeship schemes. The Army's written evidence described the funding arrangements:

Central Skills Funding Agency-Army funding arrangements, enable the Army to organise contracted external literacy and numeracy provision. This gives the Army greater 'employer ownership' with the ability to source provision to meet Army requirements more closely.⁸⁸

The end results for the Army are impressive, with the vast majority undertaking support programmes:

It is estimated that around 80% of Army literacy and numeracy learners undergo intensive provision. The model has been successful in delivering qualifications at Level 1 and Level 2. 10,703 Functional Skills (FS) English or Maths awards were achieved through the Army Apprenticeships route during 2012-13. Standalone provision for Level 1 and Level 2 has consistently delivered annual pass rates above 87% over the last four academic years. In 2012-13, this delivered a further 3,879 qualifications.⁸⁹

Gary Morris told us that the Army runs the biggest Apprenticeship programme in the country, with over 40 schemes, and he said:

It is a really practical way of getting adults to learn literacy and numeracy because it is embedded in the workplace. It is making them practically apply what they are doing. That is the key; it makes it tangible and real to them, so whether they are an infantry man, a signaller or a gunner, they have to apply what they are learning in those subjects to real-life problems which can be contextualised for their workplace.⁹⁰

54. The Army's provision of literacy and numeracy is to be highly commended, and it has a good record of delivery. Although their military training might not always translate into other organisations, their approach to adult literacy and numeracy, embedded within functional skills, and contextualised to make it relevant to the learners' lives, has been shown to be extremely successful, with tangible benefits for Army personnel. The Government should acknowledge the fact that a significant part of this success is the fact that the Army delivers training under Central Skills Funding Agency-Army funding

87 Q107

88 The Army (ALE 46) para 16

89 The Army (ALE 46) para 17

90 Q127

arrangements, which means that the Army can organise its own contracted external literacy and numeracy provision. We recommend that the Government study the Army's methods, and promotes examples of best practice in other Government-funded initiatives.

6 Other examples of adult learning programmes in specific contexts

They are far more likely to learn because they can see the point of it, they are being treated as adults, it is contextualised, and they know it is going to help them to get a job on the outside. [Tom Wilson, Unionlearn, on a programme for young offenders]⁹¹

55. The need for a range of types of provision was addressed earlier in this Report, and the need for learners to see the relevance of what they are learning to real-life problems is particularly important for the most disadvantaged learners. This chapter explores two examples of such contextualised learning programmes.

Prisons

56. The take-up of English and maths learning is especially low among prisoners compared with the level of need assessed at prisoners' inductions. Partnership with the prisoners and learners rather than prescription is key to the success of literacy and numeracy strategies. One prisoner from Leicester described the negative effects of being forced into attending prison classes:

You've gone upstairs and done the tests and probably failed them, but that don't mean you should be stuck in a class where you don't want to be. You should have that option to be in a class where you want to be, really—somewhere where you feel comfortable, as well [...] If you're in a class where you enjoy doing something you're more likely to get on with it and enjoy it rather than just sit there.⁹²

57. Tom Wilson, from Unionlearn, told us about a programme run in a young offenders' institute, which embeds numeracy and literacy teaching within other, vocational courses, within a relevant context:

We have a programme in Glen Parva Young Offenders Institute, where a great majority of young people with literacy and numeracy issues—and these are 17-year-olds who cannot read at all—are working class white from local council estates. What we are doing with them is giving them skills in logistics, which is how to get a job in a warehouse. There are union reps from the local Sainsbury's who go into that young offenders institute and will teach them how to drive a forklift truck and how to work in a warehouse, which is a complicated operation these days, if you think of Amazon, and so on. To get those skills they have to learn, on the way, ICT, literacy and numeracy, all embedded together. They are far more likely to learn because they can see the point of it, they are being treated as adults, it is contextualised, and they know it is going to help them to get a job on the outside. That is the kind of

91 Q49

92 Leicester Prison transcript ([ALE 83](#)) extract

thing that we would advocate as being the most effective way to deal with the massive literacy and numeracy problems that there are in prisons and young offenders institutes.⁹³

58. Adam Fruish is the Writer-in-residence at Leicester Prison. His evidence described the innovative paths used to get prisoners interested in reading and writing:

These ‘hard-to-reach’ prisoners can be engaged with, by creating non-threatening, fun situations that are entirely for their own sake. Too hasty attempts to tie everything into a qualification, are often counterproductive with the people who need the most help. Qualifications scare some people off.⁹⁴

59. Nina Champion, from the Prisoners Education Trust, also highlighted the need for each prisoner to have his or her learning plan, specifically formulated for their particular learning requirements:

We welcome the recent Government announcement of the roll out of literacy and numeracy assessments for all prisoners, but this must be done [...] in a way that is going to engage that learner—not just assess them, but look at them as a whole person. The timing of the assessment is also really important. If it is done with the first couple of days of coming into prison, often someone is not in that right frame of mind; they might have been still using drugs or it might be their first time in custody. In some prisons they do two lots of testing and the second test tends to be more reliable in terms of their actual ability. That should be borne in mind. Joining up is important. A lot of the time they will have a number of different plans, so they might have a learning plan through education; they might have a National Careers Service plan⁹⁵ and they might have a sentence plan. More often than not, those plans are not actually joined up together. We would like to see much more joined-up working across Departments to formulate one single plan for that prisoner for their time in prison.⁹⁶

60. One of the obstacles to effective provision of services appears to be confusion over who is accountable for it. Karen Adriaanse, from Ofsted, who told us about the separation of the education and training provision, and the prison system. She said that:

The governors of a prison do not currently have clear accountability for the quality of the education, the teaching, the literacy and numeracy, or the English and maths provision in a prison. We would expect that the governors would know what the need is, would know how well they are meeting the needs and support that.⁹⁷

93 Q495

94 Alastair Fruish ([ALE 85](#)) extract

95 The National Careers Service provides information and advice on learning, training and work opportunities

96 Q104

97 Q78

However, Matthew Hancock MP argued that this issue was known to the Government and was being addressed:

The training providers that go in are graded by Ofsted. The prison governor is increasingly being held to account, under the reforms, for what happens to their prisoners when they leave; that is part of the rehabilitation revolution. It is a bit like school heads being held to account now for the destination of kids when they leave school. Obviously prison governors being held to account for what happens to the prisoners when they leave is a different level. There is a form of accountability there, but Ofsted is also a form of accountability; if we have a grade 3 or 4 provider in a prison, then we should be asking questions about it.⁹⁸

61. Partnership working with prisoners, and the offering of more relevant, functional courses, in which English and maths skills are embedded, has a record of success. There is a problem with the separation of the education and training provision from the prison system itself. There is also a lack of clarity on the accountability for the quality of English and maths provision within the prison. This needs to be spelt out to providers and to Governors.

62. There may not be enough hours of literacy and numeracy classes to raise prisoners' reading, writing and maths to a reasonable standard, especially if those prisoners have short sentences. The courses need to be flexible enough to ensure that prisoners take their accredited hours of literacy and numeracy work with them, and, much like the pupil premium, the funding of the prisoner should be portable and should accompany the prisoner.

63. All prison libraries should be open over the weekend, to ensure that prisoners have greater access to prison libraries. We would also like reassurance from the Government that improved literacy supports rehabilitation, and that the Government is doing as much as possible to encourage this.

Homeless men and women

64. There are many problems faced by homeless men and women, many of whom find it extremely hard to access formal literacy and numeracy courses. St Mungo's Broadway is a charity which supports people who are sleeping rough in London, Bristol, Oxford, Reading and Sussex. According to its evidence: "many of St Mungo's clients find it difficult to read, write and do basic maths; 33% do not have the necessary skills to complete a form, 16% cannot read a letter and 14% need support with numeracy". One of the learners from St Mungo's Broadway sent in audio evidence, telling us of her experiences:

I was fostered as a child and told that I was stupid and chaotic, which I believed. I didn't spend much time in school so I didn't improve my literacy. I had no self-esteem or confidence, and I'm starting to build on this now.

Because of my bad literacy, I lost my home because I couldn't fill in housing benefit forms. I didn't know what it was, so I put it in the drawer. I didn't know whether or where to find support to help me. We were then evicted and I ended up living on the street. I now attend St Mungo's Broadway recovery college. I have completed courses such as self-confidence, IT and assertiveness. This has improved my confidence and self-esteem, and I am now improving my literacy. This is because it is flexible, the clients and tutors are there to help others, and we are not embarrassed to do so. I can now complete forms, and my hope for the future is to help people in the care sector.⁹⁹

65. Anna Page, from St Mungo's Broadway, told us about the benefits of embedding the teaching of literacy and numeracy within vocational training courses:

We have basic skills tutors. We both train up the staff working on those vocational courses and will have literacy tutors who go and work with clients in those courses to help them with their book work that they need to complete for work they are doing for the vocational course. In bricklaying, it might be about working out which quantities people might need to measure to make up the cement, or in the music studio about writing lyrics for a song that they might have composed. It is very much about finding something that is relevant to people and working there.¹⁰⁰

66. St Mungo's, Crisis and Homeless Links produced a report which was critical of the Work Programme. As part of that report it established a pilot programme, STRIVE ('Skills, Training, Innovation, Employment'), which became operational in April 2014. It is being delivered by St Mungo's Broadway and Crisis and is supported by around £450,000 of funding from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Skills Funding Agency and the Department for Communities and Local Government, with co-operation from the North London Jobcentre Plus district.

67. STRIVE will help at least 50 people who are or recently have been homeless each year. Funding is confirmed for two years, and it is envisaged that STRIVE will run for three years but this cannot be confirmed until after next year's General Election. STRIVE will enable participants to develop literacy, numeracy and IT skills needed to take full advantage of more mainstream skills and employment training. It will also support participants to develop self-confidence and motivation needed to enter and sustain employment. The Minister, Matthew Hancock, was a supporter of the pilot:

The idea is to deliver English, maths and IT skills, but tailored to people who are homeless. The goal is to have smaller class sizes and a modular structure, because then if people miss a session it is easier to come in and out of. The

99 St Mungo's Broadway transcript ([ALE 80](#)) extract

100 Q102

aim of it is to be more attractive to people who are homeless and to be able to be delivered in a way that works for them.¹⁰¹

68. We recognise the fact that homeless people face huge challenges, and welcome the STRIVE pilot, proposed by St Mungo's Broadway and Crisis, and funded by the Government. This is a long-term project which should not be hindered by the political timetable of elections. We look to all three major political parties to commit publicly to the STRIVE programme so that long-term planning can take place beyond the 2015 General Election. Furthermore, if the pilot is shown to be successful, we recommend that the pilot is adopted nationwide. In its response, the Government should give an indication of how the pilot is progressing, and the timescale for extending the scheme to other parts of the country, as there is a clear need for adult literacy and numeracy schemes in homeless hostels throughout the country.

7 Community learning initiatives

I think the engagement of parents into the learning of their children and the engagement of their own learning can have knock-on effects into their aspirations for themselves and for their children. [Andrew Sharp, Headteacher, Robin Hood primary school]¹⁰²

69. The Education Act of 1944 raised the school leaving age to 15, and in 1972, it was raised from 15 to 16. In September 2013, the education leaving age was raised to 17, and from September 2015 it will rise to 18, which includes provision for 16-year-olds to go to college or to become an apprentice, as alternatives to attending school. However, even though the education leaving age has increased over the past 70 years, there is still a high proportion of adults who find English and maths difficult. Many older adults find the idea of returning to classroom-based learning daunting, and instead find less formal approaches more appealing. As NIACE wrote, “Adults returning to learning and with poor experiences of school often find community-based provision less intimidating when taking their first steps. In addition there is room in literacy and numeracy provision for trained volunteers to assist learning”.¹⁰³

70. We received evidence from many organisations that work with adults, improving their reading, writing and or maths within the community: Read and Grow¹⁰⁴; Got to Read¹⁰⁵; Ruskin Readers Adult Literacy Club¹⁰⁶; Forest Read Easy Deal¹⁰⁷, and Reading Force¹⁰⁸ to name but a few. Judith Norrington, from City and Guilds, spoke of adults learning through other activities, such as gardening or sports:

We have got a research report called *Roots to Work* looking at people working in the community in small green spaces, growing plants, and building their whole range of skills, including literacy and numeracy. We have got examples of people doing work through sport. There is a college that has used snooker as a way of helping adults and young people to learn. There are lots of examples, but the important point you have raised is how universal they are and also how much opportunity there is for that innovation to be able to work creatively.¹⁰⁹

71. One such example of community learning is the Out There project, delivered through St Vincent College and funded by Hampshire Learning:

102 Robin Hood ([ALE 90](#)) extract

103 NIACE ([ALE 33](#)) para 27

104 Linda Curtis, from the *Read & Grow* initiative, gave oral evidence on 11 February 2014

105 Got to read ([ALE 15](#))

106 Ruskin Adult Literacy Club ([ALE 66](#))

107 Forest Read Easy Deal ([ALE 63](#))

108 Reading Force ([ALE 86](#))

109 Q10

The Out There project provides short, first-step courses, covering a wider range of subjects to adult learners to support their lifelong learning journey. Some learners are able to go straight into English and maths courses to develop these skills, but for many, the barriers and lack of confidence that have grown over many years mean that they often need to start with a hobby/leisure interest course before progressing onto further learning.¹¹⁰

When giving evidence, the principal of St Vincent College, Di Lloyd, described a typical course, which involves buying and selling on eBay:

In buying and selling on eBay, first they have to be able to use the computer—I suppose that is the starting point—but there is numeracy involved there in the bidding process on eBay and so forth. It is not too difficult to bring in some very basic numeracy and literacy. That might be the point where some real difficulties are diagnosed as well.¹¹¹

72. Di Lloyd went on to say the Out There project was subject to the short-term nature of BIS funding, which leads to uncertainty over the courses and for the staff:

Our Out There project is subject to bid funding. We had funding for the first three years of that project, but then, although the project was clearly successful, we had to re-bid for funding. We are employing people on fixed-term contracts because we are not sure whether the funding is going to come through for the following year. It is very difficult to make sure that we get the right people—the good, well-qualified staff who are able to teach on the courses that we are offering, particularly on the literacy and numeracy qualifications—and are able to offer to our community a continuity of those courses going forward.¹¹²

This point was supported by Jex Langhorn, Senior Vice President, Chief People Officer at McDonald's:

For McDonald's, we are very pleased with the support that we are getting. Our education programmes go back over five years. I would just echo the point about continuity. We have an annual agreement with the Skills Funding Agency, who have been very supportive, as has BIS, but that is only an annual contract now, so McDonald's takes on a proportion of risk with the teams that we dedicate to this and the contracts we have with suppliers etc. That has not been a problem so far, but it is something that we perhaps consider is a long-term outlook on that support going further.¹¹³

When asked about the insecure nature of adult courses, and short-term contracts for staff, Matthew Hancock MP responded:

110 St Vincent College ([ALE 032](#)) page 2

111 Q74

112 Q64

113 Q64

Within the adult skills budget, we tend to base next year's allocation to an individual provider on what they have delivered this year, and then [...] if they under-deliver we recoup the money and if somebody over-delivers then they ask for a growth case, and if the growth case provides good value for money then we fund it. [...] I would not want to give very long contracts, because where there is under-delivery or poor-quality delivery I want to be able to tackle that. If Ofsted come in to any provider and say, "You are inadequate", then we want to come in and be pretty tough on them. It is true that we hold providers to account for what they spend, and it is right that we do that, because it is public money.¹¹⁴

73. The Skills Funding Agency's bidding process means that demonstrably successful providers of courses have to go through the process of rebidding, which leads to insecurity of both the learners and staff providing those courses. BIS needs to re-examine this arrangement, to ensure that there is continuity for both providers with a proven record of success, and recipients of the adult learning courses. Schools do not have this insecurity; neither should providers of adult courses.

Family-learning initiatives

74. Family-learning initiatives are an important subsection of community-learning initiatives, and they focus on any learning activity that involved both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both and result in a culture of learning in the family.¹¹⁵ The BBC's written evidence highlighted the fact that there is a direct correlation between low grades achieved by pupils and low family income and parental educational levels:

Over 100,000 16-year olds failed to achieve above an F grade in GCSE maths last year. There is a strong correlation between low maths and literacy skills and low family income, low parental educational achievement, poor mental and physical health and poor overall educational attainment.¹¹⁶

75. Booktrust runs reading and writing projects, literary prizes and reading campaigns. Through its children's reading programmes it helps to "engage adults in informal learning with their children in the home, which builds parental confidence and interest in learning for themselves".¹¹⁷ Booktrust highlighted the positive benefits of family-learning initiatives:

Recent research that we have conducted indicates how attitudes to reading are passed on through the generations. The research found that adults with more positive attitudes to reading grew up in homes where they were encouraged to read by their parents. In turn, those adults who were encouraged to read as children go on to be more likely to read with their own

114 Q225

115 NIACE, *Family Learning Works*, October 2013

116 BBC written evidence ([ALE 43](#)) para 14

117 Booktrust ([ALE 26](#)) para 3

children. [...] Booktrust believes that there should be increased investment in family learning and the development of a family learning plan to address intergenerational cycles of illiteracy. Developing whole family approaches to tackling literacy could give children the best start in life and support informal adult learning.¹¹⁸

76. As a result of our inquiry being publicised on Martin Lewis’s Money Saving Expert website, we received evidence from an organisation called Everyday Maths, which runs workshops to empower parents into understanding their own use of maths in their life in order to help their children with their maths, and whose research is supported by a grant from the Nuffield Foundation:

Our workshops empower parents to draw on their uses of mathematics in everyday life. For example, parents use mathematical thinking when travelling, walking in the park, planning activities, shopping, cooking, or watching a football match, but are not always aware of these as examples of mathematical thinking, or as opportunities to share mathematics with their children. Once parents find the maths in their everyday lives they are then invited to explore how the mathematics can be shared creatively with their children.¹¹⁹

77. David Hughes, from NIACE, explained that family learning schemes have proved to be successful in raising adults’ and children’s skills, but that support for such schemes is patchy:

It is very unsupported, really; it is very ad hoc. Family learning practitioners—teachers—are not well supported. Their continuous professional development is not well supported. It is not funded in every area. Lots of schools do get involved in it. Lots of local authorities do it, but perhaps not in partnership with schools. It is very patchy. We are doing a lot of work on trying to make it more comprehensive and available everywhere. Where schools do get involved and where they bring the parents in support and engage the parents, the results are staggering. That gets the whole-school improvement. It is fantastic stuff.¹²⁰

78. The positive aspects of family learning schemes was illustrated by the audio-visual evidence submitted by the Robin Hood School, in Nottingham. Joyce Keller described the variety of adult courses on offer, including English and numeracy skills—helping parents to help their children with their work, but also to develop their own skills—family science, a fashion course, CV writing, help with dealing with debt, and “tiny tots” (a parent/pupil shared cooking course). She said the courses were available and free to all parents, with a

118 Booktrust ([ALE 26](#)) para 3 and para 6

119 Dr Tim Jay, Dr Jo Rose, Dr Ben Simmons, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol ([ALE 65](#)) extract

120 Q10

crèche on offer, to ensure that “every parent is free to learn”.¹²¹ Andrew Sharp explained the positive effects of the scheme for both parents and children:

There is increased parental participation and engagement with the school, so things like parents’ evenings and open evenings are better attended. There is an open-door policy, where parents don’t feel afraid to come in and ask questions of their child’s learning. In terms of other impacts, attendance has improved by 3% and we’re now above 95% when we were around 92%, so that’s always good. Our number of persistent absentees—that’s children who are coming to school less than 85% of the time—are far less now. Also our attainment of pupils right across the school, including our outcomes for Key Stage 2, have gone above national average and we are now rated as a good school, whereas when I started we were satisfactory, in danger of going into being inadequate.¹²²

79. When asked about what BIS could do, in partnership with the Department for Education, to support more family learning, the Minister replied that funding was “at reasonably early stages” and they were looking at the results. He went on to say that “on the basis of what works, we will move money towards what works”.¹²³ After being asked for further clarification, he said: “the thing that we need to study is how effective it is. I have not got a specific timescale to hand”. However, the Government’s own written evidence stated that “Community Learning provides flexible, non-formal and usually unaccredited but structured courses, based on national objectives”. Of the 4,000 learners who had taken part in community learning, 71% felt their quality of life had improved, 82% felt more confident in their abilities, 51% felt they had a better understanding of what they wanted to do in life, and 68% felt they had more opportunities.¹²⁴

80. *Family learning provision must be at the heart of schools and community centres, so that learning is rooted within communities, especially those that are disadvantaged. However, the evidence we received, including that from the Government, showed that despite overwhelming support for family-learning schemes, they are hampered by a lack of long-term, consistent funding. We recommend that the Government must commit to the long-term funding of family-learning schemes, and must set out in its response how this funding will be provided.*

121 Robin Hood ([ALE 90](#)) extract

122 Robin Hood ([ALE 90](#)) extract

123 Q229

124 Department for Business Innovation and Skills ([ALE 36](#)) para 4.6

8 Collaboration between Departments

*We need to be brought together to work together in order to crack this incredibly intractable nut. We also need to tackle this within communities. I must emphasise that that is never going to happen unless we have got somebody very high up in Government who makes that happen. [Libby Coleman]*¹²⁵

81. If the Government is going to be successful in raising adult's standards in reading, writing and doing maths, the collaboration between the relevant Departments—Business, Innovation and Skills; Education; and Work and Pensions—needs to be well-structured and co-operation needs to be embedded deeply in all Departments. Matthew Hancock told us that it was truly cross-Government, and reported to him: “I am a BIS and DfE Minister. [...] Both. I am in both Departments, so this reports to me. I do not do things with a BIS hat on and then with a DfE hat on; it just reports to me”.¹²⁶ He went on to say that:

We are using a whole series of policy tools across this Department, across DfE, across DWP and across the Cabinet Office [...] We are using a whole swathe of different policy areas in order to try to tackle this.¹²⁷

While it is clear that BIS and DfE are working together, questions were raised about DWP's commitment. The Association of Colleges made this point to us:

We encourage BIS and DWP to work closely to ensure that practice and funding supports those who are unemployed and seeking to gain the skills for employment particularly in literacy and numeracy. DWP and JobCentre Plus need to recognise the time it takes to improve these skills.¹²⁸

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers—which represents the interests of over 650 organisations delivering vocational learning and employment/employability support—wrote that “progress on tackling the lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills in adults cannot be achieved unless and until the Government integrates all education, employment and skills policies across the three main funding Departments involved. There must be a more coherent procurement across DfE, BIS and DWP with co-ordination of data management, target setting and performance management”.¹²⁹

82. Undoubtedly, there is a lot of effort and attention given to adult literacy and numeracy, but there are concerns over whether they are being channelled most effectively, as evidenced by parallel pilot schemes in different Departments. Kris Ventris-Field, a volunteer who has worked in the field of adult literacy for over 25 years, wrote to express her frustration at the lack of focus from successive governments:

125 Q37

126 Q217

127 Q200

128 The Association of Colleges ([ALE 23](#)) para 19

129 The Association of Employment and Learning Providers ([ALE 9](#)) page 2

Unfortunately, each government fails to learn from previous initiatives—what has worked and what hasn’t—and we go round in an ever increasing circle, wasting time, energy and millions of pounds on getting new initiatives in place, when we could build on and refine those that already exist. There are thousands of frustrated practitioners who are fed up of hearing these messages and the press that results—when what they want is support to get on with the job and to be listened to about what works for people.¹³⁰

The point is not necessarily to be coming up with new schemes, but in maintaining and developing effective schemes over the long term. This point was made by Alistair Fruish, Writer-in-residence, at HMP Leicester, who wrote that “sadly, there are only a handful of writers-in-residence remaining working in prisons. Much of the expertise that has been built up over the last two decades is in danger of being lost”.¹³¹

83. The personal commitment of the former Minister, Matthew Hancock MP, to addressing adult literacy and numeracy was commendable, and his Ministerial roles in both the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Education (DfE) underpinned the close collaboration between the two Departments. We hope that the present Minister, Nick Boles MP, meets the high standards set by his predecessor, and continues the close collaboration in his role as Minister of State for Skills and Equalities, working jointly across BIS and DfE. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Ministry of Justice, and indeed the Ministry of Defence, also have a crucial role to play in developing and implementing adult literacy and numeracy policies and programmes. However, those departments appear less able to collaborate on a suitable level. In its Response, we look to the Department to set out how it will achieve closer collaboration from these Departments. We recommend that a civil servant in each of the relevant Departments is chosen to act as a champion for adult literacy and numeracy. Should close collaboration between these Departments not be delivered, we recommend that the Minister be given more formal powers to intervene in those Departments on matters of adult literacy and numeracy.

130 Kris Ventris-Field ([ALE 50](#)) page 1

131 Alastair Fruish ([ALE 85](#)) extract

9 Conclusion

Good quality provision is expensive but it is a worthwhile investment because it will help to address gaps between rich and poor and the attainment gaps that have a negative impact on the UK's workforce. Ignorance is always much more expensive than knowledge. [Lyn Tett]¹³²

84. This quotation is from Lyn Tett, who submitted evidence in a personal capacity, and who led the team that produced the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework in Scotland. The quote highlights the main thrust of our Report—that adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy have difficulties in navigating through their lives, and this has an economic impact on both their lives and on the economy as a whole, putting a strain on the benefits system, and perpetuating a cycle of under-achievement.

85. There is no silver bullet to solve the issue of adult literacy and numeracy; it is a complicated problem because of the diverse range of people involved, young and old, in or out of work, who have very different experiences and needs—and who may not admit to needing help, be willing to seek help, or know where to find help. There are many effective programmes that help adults to gain better reading, writing and maths skills, set in a variety of contexts: in the workplace; with homeless people; in colleges; and in the community. The earlier the intervention, the better, and we therefore recommend that family learning—where parents learn, and encourage their children to learn—and schemes for young people (who, for whatever reasons, have not attained necessary skills at school) are both made a high priority for the Government to invest in and to promote. Also, there needs to be better assessment of the skills that adults have, when they claim unemployment benefit. That is an ideal opportunity to ensure that claimants are assessed for the skills they need to get a job rather than merely their eligibility for benefits.

86. We reject the blanket acceptance that GCSEs in English and Maths are the gold standard by which schemes and attainment are measured. GCSEs are not always the most appropriate qualification for adults to work towards, and we look to the Government to give employers, colleges and adults themselves the flexibility to choose the type of learning that best suits those adults. In the workplace, organisations such as Unionlearn has achieved outstanding results at a fraction of the cost of full-time formal education, by introducing literacy and numeracy skills to apprentices and other workers, presented within the context of the jobs they are doing or the vocational skills they are learning. The Army uses functional skills, and the teaching of literacy and numeracy within the context of learning skills out in the field, which have been proved to be an effective way of teaching. In the prison system, improvement of English and maths skills can be a major component of rehabilitation, but courses and funding need to be flexible and portable enough to ensure that prisoners take their accredited hours of literacy and numeracy work with them, when they are moved within the system or leave it, so they can continue to develop their skills.

¹³² Lyn Tett, Emeritus Professor, University of Edinburgh ([ALE 53](#)) para 5.2

87. We are encouraged by the deep commitment and achievements of those engaged in adult learning, but are disturbed by the examples of reductions in Government funding for various schemes, which has caused concern and instability for learners and learning providers alike. This is a short-sighted financial saving which will result in long term costs, as any reduction in provision can only make it harder for adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills to gain employment.

88. That said, we were heartened by the enthusiasm and support given by Matthew Hancock, the Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise, and hope that his commitment will be matched by his successor, the Minister for Skills and Equalities, Nick Boles MP. This commitment needs to be matched with significant financial support from the Government, and with cross-Departmental support. The Government must make best use of limited funds, and so we urge them to undertake long-term, joined-up planning, concentrating resources on a core of effective, established, proven schemes, rather than being diverted by a proliferation of short-lived pilots across various Departments. First and foremost, the Government must get the message across to those adults with limited English and maths skills that help is available, with a national campaign that advertises the fact that there is free training and tuition for any adult who wants to study English and maths up to GCSE level.

Conclusions and recommendations

Understanding the problem

1. There is still an alarmingly high proportion of adults with low literacy and numeracy skills, a situation which successive Governments have failed to address adequately. We welcome the Government's announcement that a Behavioural Insights Research Centre for maths and English is being set up to undertake scientific analysis of how adults best learn English and maths. This is such an important matter that the Government must produce an urgent update. We also welcome the further work commissioned by the Department, to investigate the reasons for the poor performance of England compared with other countries, with respect to adult literacy and numeracy. In its response, the Government should set out a timetable for the work being completed, the findings being published, and when action will be taken as a result of those findings. (Paragraph 12)

Getting the message across

2. The Government has pledged funding for free training and tuition for any adult who wants to study English and maths up to and including GCSE level, but it needs to get the message across to adults with limited English and maths skills that this help is available. To make sure that this message reaches the right people, we recommend that the Government carry out a high-profile national campaign to promote robustly this initiative. This must be treated as a priority. The Government must publish a timetable of how and when the national campaign will be launched. Coupled with this national campaign, the Government should develop clear signposting routes, helping adults to find the most appropriate and nearest help (either voluntary schemes or more formal classes). The Government should report back in its response on the methods it will use to develop this initiative. (Paragraph 15)

The type of adult literacy and numeracy provision – GCSE's

3. English and maths programmes for adults have to be flexible if they are to be successful, which means that the Government should not be pre-occupied with GCSEs being the only measurement at Level 2 for all learners in all settings. The Government has successfully recognised that a more flexible approach to learning reaps success, and therefore the accompanying Government funding must move away from the traditional, linear approach to achieving qualifications. (Paragraph 24)

The standard of English and maths providers

4. The Government needs to study the type of adult literacy and numeracy provision on offer. The Ofsted results on the provision of adult literacy and numeracy show a mixed bag of provision; some are excellent, but many need to improve. If the Government is successful in persuading adults to improve their maths and English skills, then those adults cannot be let down by inadequate provision. We support voluntary organisations, which do a tremendous amount in supporting adult learners. Such voluntary schemes are run in tandem with other provision involving

qualified teachers. To support these teachers, post-graduate qualifications should be reintroduced, to reinforce the fact that adult learning is a specialist job and to ensure that the best teachers are helping adults to improve their English and maths. (Paragraph 27)

5. We recommend that the Government reassesses how it funds adult literacy and numeracy courses and charities, and gives those organisations the flexibility to adapt their own courses for the individual concerned, while still, of course, ensuring accountability of providers in the process. Peer-based learning is equally valuable and should be promoted. The system should be flexible enough to support voluntary organisations, as well as formal-based classes. (Paragraph 32)

Maths

6. All too often, adult numeracy is considered the poor relation to adult literacy, and the Government should encourage initiatives that seek to reverse the perception among adults that it is acceptable not to have functional skills in maths. The Government should seek to change the culture in which low levels of numeracy are considered acceptable. This must start at school. (Paragraph 35)

Referrals to adult training

7. It is crucial that when someone starts claiming unemployment benefit, there is a method of testing his or her English and maths skills. When this happens at the moment, it is neither systematic nor consistent. We agree with the Work and Pensions Committee that Jobcentres should have a more thorough and systematic initial, face-to-face assessment of claimants, to understand the skills support they need to get a job. Assessments should be regularly updated during longer claims, with the relevant data being passed on to the Work Programme and other contracted providers, if claimants are referred on. We recommend better co-ordination between the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Jobcentre Plus and skills providers, to ensure that there is consistent and thorough assessment of basic skills needs at the earliest possible stage of unemployment benefit claims. There also needs to be better information sharing between providers and referral onto courses which effectively address identified needs. For this to be effective, the Government must marry together the learning regime and the Department for Work and Pensions regime, to ensure that unemployed adults have the most flexible opportunities to develop their skills. If this is approached in a constructive, cross-Departmental way, there will be benefits both to the learners and to the public purse. (Paragraph 46)

Screening tool for 18-24 year olds

8. We were told by the Government of current pilot schemes, offering English and maths training for 18 to 21-year-olds, which include the development of a specific style of assessment that will be used for young people making a claim who cannot already provide evidence of their Level 2 skills through certificates. We look forward to hearing the results of the pilot. If proved to be successful, we recommend that the Government extend this assessment to all claimants, regardless of their age, so that

claimants who need further skills can be identified at the earliest possible stage, and action can then be taken. (Paragraph 48)

Workplace initiatives - Unionlearn

9. The Government is cutting £2.5 million from Unionlearn's budget, even though the Minister himself acknowledged the impressive work that the organisation does in adult skills training. This is short-sighted financial gain, which goes against the many positive interventions by the Government. It also sends out the wrong signal about the Government's commitment to adult learning. At a cost of under £100 per learner, and bringing in an extra £4 to £6 additional employer funding for every £1 of Government funding, Unionlearn is a cost-effective way of reaching large numbers of learners with the most acute English and maths needs. This is an area of high impact, which offers value for money, so we urge the Government to reverse its decision to cut Unionlearn's funding. (Paragraph 51)

Workplace initiatives – The Army

10. The Army's provision of literacy and numeracy is to be highly commended, and it has a good record of delivery. Although their military training might not always translate into other organisations, their approach to adult literacy and numeracy, embedded within functional skills, and contextualised to make it relevant to the learners' lives, has been shown to be extremely successful, with tangible benefits for Army personnel. The Government should acknowledge the fact that a significant part of this success is the fact that the Army delivers training under Central Skills Funding Agency-Army funding arrangements, which means that the Army can organise its own contracted external literacy and numeracy provision. We recommend that the Government study the Army's methods, and promotes examples of best practice in other Government-funded initiatives. (Paragraph 54)

Other examples of adult learning programmes in specific contexts - Prisons

11. Partnership working with prisoners, and the offering of more relevant, functional courses, in which English and maths skills are embedded, has a record of success. There is a problem with the separation of the education and training provision from the prison system itself. There is also a lack of clarity on the accountability for the quality of English and maths provision within the prison. This needs to be spelt out to providers and to Governors. (Paragraph 61)
12. There may not be enough hours of literacy and numeracy classes to raise prisoners' reading, writing and maths to a reasonable standard, especially if those prisoners have short sentences. The courses need to be flexible enough to ensure that prisoners take their accredited hours of literacy and numeracy work with them, and, much like the pupil premium, the funding of the prisoner should be portable and should accompany the prisoner. (Paragraph 62)
13. All prison libraries should be open over the weekend, to ensure that prisoners have greater access to prison libraries. We would also like reassurance from the

Government that improved literacy supports rehabilitation, and that the Government is doing as much as possible to encourage this. (Paragraph 63)

Other examples of adult learning programmes in specific contexts – Homeless men and women

14. We recognise the fact that homeless people face huge challenges, and welcome the STRIVE pilot, proposed by St Mungo's Broadway and Crisis, and funded by the Government. This is a long-term project which should not be hindered by the political timetable of elections. We look to all three major political parties to commit publicly to the STRIVE programme so that long-term planning can take place beyond the 2015 General Election. Furthermore, if the pilot is shown to be successful, we recommend that the pilot is adopted nationwide. In its response, the Government should give an indication of how the pilot is progressing, and the timescale for extending the scheme to other parts of the country, as there is a clear need for adult literacy and numeracy schemes in homeless hostels throughout the country. (Paragraph 68)

Community learning initiatives

15. The Skills Funding Agency's bidding process means that demonstrably successful providers of courses have to go through the process of rebidding, which leads to insecurity of both the learners and staff providing those courses. BIS needs to re-examine this arrangement, to ensure that there is continuity for both providers with a proven record of success, and recipients of the adult learning courses. Schools do not have this insecurity; neither should providers of adult courses. (Paragraph 73)

Family-learning initiatives

16. Family learning provision must be at the heart of schools and community centres, so that learning is rooted within communities, especially those that are disadvantaged. However, the evidence we received, including that from the Government, showed that despite overwhelming support for family-learning schemes, they are hampered by a lack of long-term, consistent funding. We recommend that the Government must commit to the long-term funding of family-learning schemes, and must set out in its response how this funding will be provided. (Paragraph 80)

Collaboration between Departments

17. The personal commitment of the former Minister, Matthew Hancock MP, to addressing adult literacy and numeracy was commendable, and his Ministerial roles in both the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Education (DfE) underpinned the close collaboration between the two Departments. We hope that the present Minister, Nick Boles MP, meets the high standards set by his predecessor, and continues the close collaboration in his role as Minister of State for Skills and Equalities, working jointly across BIS and DfE. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Ministry of Justice, and indeed the Ministry of Defence, also have a crucial role to play in developing and implementing adult literacy and numeracy policies and programmes. However, those departments

appear less able to collaborate on a suitable level. In its Response, we look to the Department to set out how it will achieve closer collaboration from these Departments. We recommend that a civil servant in each of the relevant Departments is chosen to act as a champion for adult literacy and numeracy. Should close collaboration between these Departments not be delivered, we recommend that the Minister be given more formal powers to intervene in those Departments on matters of adult literacy and numeracy. (Paragraph 83)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 2 September 2014

Members present:

Mr Adrian Bailey, in the Chair

Mr Brian Binley
Paul Blomfield
Caroline Dinenage

Rebecca Harris
Robin Walker
Nadhim Zahawi

Draft Report (*Adult Literacy and Numeracy*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 88 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

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

[Adjourned till Tuesday 9 September at 9.00 am]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at www.parliament.uk/bis.

Tuesday 11 February 2014

Question number

David Hughes, CEO, the National Institute of Adults Continuing Education (NIACE), **Helen Casey**, Executive Director, the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy and **Judith Norrington**, Director of Policy, Research and Regulation, City and Guilds Q1-32

Libby Coleman, author, *Yes, We Can Read*, **Tom Wilson**, Director, Unionlearn, TUC and **Linda Curtis**, volunteer for *Read & Grow* initiative Q33-54

Di Lloyd, Principal, St Vincent College, *Out There* project, **Jez Langhorn**, Senior Vice President, Chief People Officer, McDonald's and **Neil Couling**, Director, Benefit Strategy, DWP (Operations Director, Job Centre Plus) Q55-95

Tuesday 18 March 2014

Brigadier Gary Morris, Director of Educational Capability, The Army, **Nina Champion**, Head of Policy, Prisoners Education Trust, **Anna Page**, Policy, Public Affairs & Research Manager, St Mungo's and **Audrey Mitchell**, Director of North London and Outreach Services, Thames Reach Q96-139

Heather Akehurst, Chief Executive, Open Awards, **Professor John Field**, Chair, Scotland's Learning Partnership, **Mike Ellicock**, Chief Executive, National Numeracy, **Jonathan Douglas**, Director, National Literacy Trust and **Genevieve Clarke**, Adult Literacy Specialist, The Reading Agency Q140-167

Karen Adriaanse, HMI Specialist adviser, the National Adviser for careers guidance and employability, OFSTED, **Keith Smith**, Executive Director, Skills Funding Agency and **Lesley Giles**, Deputy Director, UK Commission of Employment and Skills Q168-192

Tuesday 8 April 2014

Matthew Hancock MP, Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise, and **Catherine Paulson-Ellis**, Assistant Director, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Q193-267

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at www.parliament.uk/bis INQ numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 4Children ([ALE0016](#))
- 2 Andrea ([ALE0048](#))
- 3 Army ([ALE0046](#))
- 4 Army ([ALE0079](#))
- 5 Association Of Colleges ([ALE0023](#))
- 6 Association Of Employment And Learning Providers ([ALE0009](#))
- 7 BBC ([ALE0043](#))
- 8 Booktrust ([ALE0026](#))
- 9 C ([ALE0056](#))
- 10 Cascade Foundation ([ALE0052](#))
- 11 Margaret Chadwick ([ALE0072](#))
- 12 City & Guilds ([ALE0028](#))
- 13 Sally Collard ([ALE0005](#))
- 14 Crossbow Education Ltd ([ALE0044](#))
- 15 Julia Davies ([ALE0075](#))
- 16 Department For Business Innovation And Skills ([ALE0036](#))
- 17 Department For Business Innovation And Skills ([ALE0087](#))
- 18 Department For Business Innovation And Skills ([ALE0089](#))
- 19 Department For Work And Pensions ([ALE0031](#))
- 20 Dyslexia Action ([ALE0017](#))
- 21 First Class Learning Broughton ([ALE0059](#))
- 22 First Class Learning Chesterfield ([ALE0057](#))
- 23 Forest Read Easy Deal ([ALE0063](#))
- 24 Got To Read ([ALE0015](#))
- 25 Veronica Joan Greyer ([ALE0020](#))
- 26 HMP Leicester ([ALE0085](#))
- 27 J ([ALE0060](#))
- 28 Jane ([ALE0058](#))
- 29 Sally Kirkland ([ALE0062](#))
- 30 Learndirect ([ALE0039](#))
- 31 Learning Link ([ALE0069](#))
- 32 Leicester College ([ALE0082](#))
- 33 Leicester Prison ([ALE0083](#))
- 34 Leon ([ALE0084](#))
- 35 Libby Coleman ([ALE0035](#))
- 36 Local Government Association ([ALE0024](#))
- 37 Sarah Long ([ALE0055](#))
- 38 McDonald's Restaurants Ltd ([ALE0030](#))
- 39 Medusa ([ALE0054](#))

- 40 Ministry of Justice ([ALE0088](#))
- 41 Ken Moore ([ALE0064](#))
- 42 National Institute of Adult Continuing Education ([ALE0033](#))
- 43 National Literacy Trust ([ALE0021](#))
- 44 National Literacy Trust ([ALE0051](#))
- 45 National Numeracy ([ALE0004](#))
- 46 NCC ([ALE0047](#))
- 47 OCR ([ALE0037](#))
- 48 Ofqual ([ALE0038](#))
- 49 Ofsted ([ALE0034](#))
- 50 Joan O'Hagan ([ALE0007](#))
- 51 Open Awards ([ALE0003](#))
- 52 Open University ([ALE0027](#))
- 53 S Ozkan ([ALE0073](#))
- 54 Prisoners Education Trust ([ALE0042](#))
- 55 Publishers Association ([ALE0018](#))
- 56 Quick Reads ([ALE0008](#))
- 57 Read Easy UK ([ALE0061](#))
- 58 Reading Agency ([ALE0013](#))
- 59 Reading Force ([ALE0086](#))
- 60 Rex Hall Community Interest Company (RHCIC) ([ALE0001](#))
- 61 RNIB ([ALE0019](#))
- 62 Robin Hood School ([ALE0090](#))
- 63 Caroline Robinson-Day ([ALE0071](#))
- 64 Ruskin Readers Adult Literacy Club ([ALE0066](#))
- 65 Society of Chief Librarians and the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians ([ALE0014](#))
- 66 St Antony's Adult and Community Training Centres ([ALE0070](#))
- 67 St Mungo's ([ALE0025](#))
- 68 St Mungo's Broadway ([ALE0077](#))
- 69 St Mungo's Broadway ([ALE0080](#))
- 70 St Mungo's Broadway ([ALE0081](#))
- 71 St Vincent College ([ALE0032](#))
- 72 Lyn Tett ([ALE0053](#))
- 73 Think2read ([ALE0045](#))
- 74 Tower Hamlets College ([ALE0078](#))
- 75 Alan Tuckett OBE ([ALE0067](#))
- 76 Unionlearn TUC ([ALE0041](#))
- 77 University and College Union ([ALE0006](#))
- 78 University of Bristol, Graduate School of Education, ([ALE0065](#))
- 79 University of Worcester ([ALE0076](#))
- 80 Kris Ventris-Field ([ALE0050](#))
- 81 Eleanor Willard ([ALE0002](#))
- 82 Eunice Whitelaw ([ALE0068](#))
- 83 Workers' Educational Association ([ALE0022](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/bis.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2014–15

First Report	Royal Mail Privatisation	HC 539-I/II
Second Report/First Joint Report	Scrutiny of the Government's UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2012, the Government's Quarterly Reports from October 2012 to September 2013, and the Government's policies on arms exports and international arms control issues	HC 186
Third Report	Student Loans	HC 558
Fourth Report	The Implications for Scottish Independence on Business; Higher Education and Research; and Postal Services	HC 504
Fifth Report	Adult Literacy and Numeracy	HC 557

Session 2013–14

First Report	Women in the Workplace	HC 342-I/II/III(Cm 8701)
Second Report/First Joint Report	Scrutiny of Arms Exports and Arms Control (2013): Scrutiny of the Government's UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2011 published in July 2012, the Government's Quarterly Reports from October 2011 to September 2012, and the Government's policies on arms exports and international arms control issues	HC 205
Third Report	The Kay Review of UK Equity Markets and Long-term Decision Making	HC 603(HC 762)
Fourth Report	Consultation on a Statutory Code for Pub Companies	HC 314
Fifth Report	Open Access	HC 99-I/II(HC 833)
Sixth Report	Draft Consumer Rights Bill	HC 697-I/II/III
Seventh Report	Payday Loans	HC 789

Session 2012–13

First Report	The Hargreaves Review of Intellectual Property: Where Next?	HC 367-I/II(HC 579)
Second Report/First Joint Report	Scrutiny of Arms Export Controls (2012): UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2010, Quarterly Reports for 2010 and January to September 2011, the Government's review of arms exports to the Middle East and North Africa, and wider arms control issues	HC 419

Third Report	Post Office Network Transformation	HC 84(HC 678)
Fourth Report	Overseas Students and Net Migration	HC 425(<i>Cm</i> 8557)
Fifth Report	Apprenticeships	HC-I/II/III(HC 899)
Sixth Report	The Insolvency Service	HC 675 (HC 1115)
Seventh Report	Too Little, Too Late: Committee's observations on the Government Response to the Report on Overseas Students and Net Migration	HC 1015(<i>Cm</i> 8622)

Eighth Report	Pre-appointment hearing of the Government's preferred candidate for the post of Groceries Code Adjudicator	HC 1011
Ninth Report	Local Enterprise Partnerships	HC 598

Session 2010–12

First Report	The New Local Enterprise Partnerships: An Initial Assessment	HC 434 (HC 809)
Second Report	Sheffield Forgemasters	HC 484 (HC 843)
Third Report	Government Assistance to Industry	HC 561
Fourth Report / First Joint Report	Scrutiny of Arms Export Controls (2011): UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2009, Quarterly Reports for 2010,licensing policy and review of export control legislation	HC 686
Fifth Report	Government Assistance to Industry: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2010–11	HC 1038
Sixth Report	Is Kraft working for Cadbury?	HC 871
Seventh Report	Rebalancing the Economy: Trade and Investment	HC 735 (HC 1545)
Eighth Report	Trade and Investment: China	HC 1421 (HC 1568)
Ninth Report	Time to bring on the referee? The Government's proposed Adjudicator for the Groceries Code	HC 1224-I
Tenth Report	Pub Companies	HC 1369-I/II (<i>Cm</i> 8222)
Eleventh Report	Time to bring on the referee? The Government's proposed Adjudicator for the Groceries Code: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2010-12	HC 1546
Twelfth Report	Government reform of Higher Education	HC 885-I/II/III (HC 286)
Thirteenth Report	Pre-Appointment Hearing: Appointment of Director of the Office for Fair Access	HC 1811
Fourteenth Report	Debt Management	HC 1649 (HC 301)
Fifteenth Report	Stamp Prices	HC 1841-I/II