



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

Research Review

Assessing adult literacy and numeracy: a review of assessment instruments

Synopsis

NRDC needs valid, reliable and manageable assessment instruments for its own research and development programmes in support of *Skills for Life*, and the research community in general needs such instruments. This report was therefore commissioned to provide a review of existing instruments for assessing adult literacy and numeracy. About 15 instruments were analysed. The overall conclusion was that none was fully suitable for NRDC's research programme.

Key Points

- ❑ The major criteria for useful instruments were that they should be secure (unpublished, or not readily available), be aligned to the new national Standards, and (for use in intervention studies) have parallel forms.
- ❑ No wholly suitable instruments meeting these criteria were found.
- ❑ For the forthcoming (2004) sweeps of the lifetime cohort studies it was recommended that the instruments used in the early 1990s be used (with some modification).
- ❑ For NRDC's intervention studies it was recommended that new instruments be commissioned. These are therefore being developed by the National Foundation for Educational research (NFER).

Background and rationale of research

There had been no previous thorough review of adult literacy and numeracy assessment instruments used in Britain. A review was particularly opportune in 2002 because several new instruments had appeared recently (the national tests of key/basic skills at levels 1 and 2, the Basic Skills Agency rapid screening tool Fast Track and its Initial Assessment pack (2nd edn), Cambridge Training and Development's Target Skills, the DfES-commissioned diagnostic tool, the tests for the baseline survey of adult basic skills being conducted in the summer of 2002).

Main elements of research

Some 15 instruments used to assess adult literacy and numeracy in Britain in the period 1992-2002 were identified, obtained and analysed. The analysis was carried out against a checklist and framework derived from theory, previous analyses, and the research team's experience.

The conclusions of this analysis were that no wholly suitable instruments - secure (unpublished, or not readily available), aligned to the new national Standards, and (for use in intervention studies) having parallel forms - could be identified.

Research team

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References and further reading

Kruidenier J (2002). 'Literacy assessment in adult basic education.' In J. Comings, B. Garner and C. Smith (Eds) **Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy. Volume 3**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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**The full report will be available from
September 2003 in PDF and Word formats
from NRDC's website at**

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