



Better Basic skills

– Improving adult literacy and numeracy

The Report, 'A Fresh Start', published in March this year, estimated that around 7 million adults have poor literacy skills. This means that one in five adults reads and writes less well than an average 11 year old. An even greater number have poor numeracy skills.



Department for
Education and Employment

"My Government is committed to doing something dramatic about this."

Rt Hon David Blunkett MP,
Secretary of State for Education and Employment

"The Government is today making a pledge that, for as long as we remain in office, we will give high priority to reducing the number of adults with poor basic skills. We will treat this objective with the same urgency and the same passion as getting the basics right in schools. "Education, education, education" is for adults too!"

Tessa Blackstone
Minister of State with responsibility for lifelong learning

Introduction

The consequences of poor basic skills are unacceptable. For the nation, they affect economic performance. For individuals they can be devastating. They affect people's job prospects, their ability to manage their own affairs, their safety, the support and guidance they can offer their families, and the contribution they make to society.

Poor basic skills are one of the main contributory factors to a cycle of poverty and disadvantage which is passed on from generation to generation. The Government is committed to tackling this problem and this pamphlet summarises the first phase of Government action to do so.

Longer term action will need to be in three main stages:

STAGE 1 – building a firm foundation

This stage entails a major reform of the way basic skills education is provided. It will lead to a clear and coherent system of basic skills education, easier access to learning opportunities, and improved quality, giving learners a much better chance of success.

STAGE 2 – building capacity

This stage entails a steady increase in the capacity of the system to provide for up to and beyond the target of 500,000 adults participating in basic skills education by 2002.

STAGE 3 – a step-change in participation and achievement

This stage will entail driving up demand in line with increased capacity and making sure that participation really leads to achievement.

Tackling this issue will be a major undertaking. It will require serious and sustained commitment – not just on the part of Government, but from everyone who can make a difference: employers, trade unions, public and voluntary bodies, colleges and other providers, and from the people themselves who need help.

We must make sure that the resources match the need. As a first step the Government will be devoting £16 million between November 1999 and April 2001 for improvements in quality and access to basic skills learning. The

Government's spending review next year will be an opportunity to assess financial requirements in the medium and long term.

Preventing the problem at source

Prevention is part of the solution. We must make sure that today's schoolchildren do not become tomorrow's adults with poor basic skills. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies are already having a major impact in schools. The proportion of 11 year olds who are achieving the expected standard in Key Stage 2 tests for English has jumped from 57% to 70% in the past 3 years. Standards in mathematics are also on the increase: 69% of 11 year olds now achieve the standard expected for their age.

Getting the basics right

A coherent system of basic skills education must start with a clear understanding of what adults should be able to achieve in literacy and numeracy at different levels. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) have recently issued draft **standards** at entry level, level 1 and level 2 for consultation. The final version is expected in March 2000.

The Basic Skills Agency (BSA), the QCA and others will shortly begin developing a national basic skills **curriculum**. The new curriculum will correspond to the new standards and should be available soon afterwards.

Employers need to have reliable information about the basic skills of job applicants. A **national test** will be established to assess basic skills at level 1 and level 2. The national test will replace all other test-based basic skills qualifications at these levels. QCA have begun developing test items. The national test will become available from January 2001.

Information about basic skills attainment and provision is patchy. We need better information on the characteristics of the millions of adults with poor basic skills and the effects of poor basic skills for individuals and the country. We need to identify obstacles and incentives to learning, and to find out which methods of learning work most effectively for which groups. DfEE is developing a **research strategy** in consultation with other partners and has commissioned or will be commissioning work on these issues in the near future.

“Further education plays a crucial role in delivering basic skills and releasing hitherto untapped potential. The Further Education Funding Council has already agreed to implement the Moser report’s recommendations and is working in partnership with providers to take forward the government’s agenda for basic skills”

David Melville – Chief Executive FEFC

Improving Quality

The National Training Organisation for FE (FENTO) and the BSA have begun developing a new **initial training** framework and qualification for new entrants to basic skills teaching. This new framework will be closely aligned to the new training framework being developed for FE teachers in general.

A **tool-kit** for teachers will be produced. This will include details of the new standards and curriculum as well as guides to effective pedagogy and approaches to basic skills education. Every basic skills teacher will have ready access to a copy of the tool-kit.

An **intensive training** programme will be introduced for all existing basic skills teachers. The programme will use the same successful cascade model as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Over the next few months, training materials and programmes will be developed and piloted. Teacher trainers should each receive 5 days intensive training by the end of 2000. All basic skills teachers should receive 3 days training by summer 2001.

The tool-kit and training programme will be informed by four **Quality Workshops** for basic skills practitioners being held this autumn. The workshops will help to identify and consider ways of improving and spreading effective basic skills provision.

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) have introduced several significant initiatives focused on basic skills as part of their quality and widening participation agenda. Financial incentives include automatic funding uplift and 100% fee remission for all basic skills students. FEFC have also funded basic skills Easter and summer schools in 1998 and 1999. FEFC is also supporting a major Basic Skills Quality Initiative which will address the need to develop staff skills in initial assessment and ongoing support at basic skills level.

Basic skills provision will be inspected against a common **inspection** framework. Subject to Parliamentary approval, a new system of independent external inspection will be established from April 2001, which will rationalise existing inspection arrangements.

Improving opportunity

Extending the flexibility of provision and its availability in

the community will improve access to basic skills learning. BSA and The National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) have been asked to take forward a £4 million project to support **community** based organisations in the development and delivery of high quality basic skills programmes and to set up a number of local pilots.

The Government is also extending provision for Family Literacy and Family Numeracy (by £1 million) to £7 million next year. This will help to raise standards of language, literacy and numeracy amongst underachieving parents and their children.

Access to **information and digital technology** is another crucial factor in extending assessment and learning opportunities: the 700 new ICT learning centres the Government has already announced for disadvantaged communities, and the University for Industry’s (Ufi) learning centre network will widen access considerably.

Many adults with poor basic skills are in work. We want to make it easier for them to learn basic skills at a time, in a place and in a way which suits them and their employer. We will provide an additional £3 million between November 1999 and April 2001 for the development of new ways of supporting basic skills learning in the workplace. Priority will be given to proposals which involve partnerships between business, NTOs and/or trade unions and which will particularly benefit employees in small and medium sized firms. Over the same period the Union Learning Fund will be boosted by £1.5 million for basic skills developments.

Other improvements to workplace provision include:

- Support for the expansion of the Workplace Basic Skills Training Network, providing training for basic skills teachers in colleges specifically to address the business needs of employers.
- The BSA have established a workplace pilot in West London. Its aims are to develop models of workplace programmes and explore the use of former business people as brokers between business and providers.
- Ufi are working with BSA to produce workplace based learning materials for introduction by Autumn 2000.



“Moser tells us that failure to respond to his agenda means a continuing cost to the nation of £10 billion a year. Big money. But the moral and social issues underlying the Moser findings are far greater than £10 billion a year. Our response must be nothing less than a crusade.”

Lord Dearing – Ufl Ltd

We will ensure that unemployed people get the help they need. Currently, systematic screening and intensive programmes of help in basic skills are available within the New Deal 18-24. We will introduce systematic screening for those aged over 25 who have been unemployed for 6 months, to help us identify those who would benefit from the basic skills support currently available. We will also pilot new arrangements for carrying out diagnostic assessments and new programmes tailored to the needs of individual clients. These pilots will help inform decisions about future provision for this group.

Two working groups have been set up to consider the basic skills needs of adults with **learning difficulties** or **disabilities** and of **speakers of other languages**. The two groups are due to report early next year.

Delivering a step-change in participation and achievement

It will be important to have clear lines of accountability for delivering improvements and making progress.

We will expect the new Learning and Skills Council to give high priority to adult basic skills. Local Learning and Skills Councils will set clear objectives and participation and achievement targets, reflecting advice from the Lifelong Learning Partnerships.

The Ufl will also have a key role in the promotion, co-ordination and delivery of basic skills provision to learners. Ufl will be launched in Autumn 2000.

‘A Fresh Start’ recommended a continuous high profile **promotion** campaign. The Government accepts the need to promote basic skills learning to different groups of learners at the right time, and in a way which reflects their needs and interests. **Maths Year 2000**, the launch of the Ufl next Autumn, and the expansion of digital television will provide excellent promotional and learning opportunities in the year ahead.

We will continue to review and revise these measures in the light of progress.

Ask yourself what you can do

This leaflet sets out our plans and progress so far. We will continue to develop the strategy to tackle the enormous problem of poor basic skills. But the Government cannot tackle this problem alone.

We recognise that some organisations, businesses, colleges and practitioners are already doing a great deal to support adults with poor basic skills. But the size of the task means that many more have to make this commitment. We need your help.

Adults with poor basic skills often do not realise they have a problem. And if they do, many are not able or prepared to do anything about it. We have to change the culture of learning in this country, and that requires constant encouragement and pressure from everyone who can make a difference.

We would like you to consider the following questions:

- What commitment can you or your organisation make?
- Is your organisation already addressing the issue of basic skills needs and do you have examples of good practice you could share with others?
- What are the challenges you face?
- What are your priorities? Have you set targets?
- What changes do you hope to see in the next two years?
- Do you have links with your Local Learning Partnership to enable you to contribute to basic skills learning plans for your area?
- What other specific actions should the Government consider?

This is not a formal consultation exercise, but we would be pleased to hear your views.

A copy of this document and email response mechanism can be found on our website at www.lifelonglearning.co.uk

“We hear a lot these days about a ‘learning revolution’. But this revolution must reach everyone, not least the millions of people, young and old, who suffer from poor basic skills. The ability of a broadcaster like the BBC to reach into almost every home and to create high quality and engaging content puts it right at the centre of any national drive to respond to the agenda set by the Moser Report.”

Will Wyatt – Chief Executive, BBC Broadcast

SUMMARY AND KEY MILESTONES	
KEY MILESTONES	WHEN INTRODUCED
<i>Getting the basics right</i>	
Standards	March 2000
New basic skills curriculum	April 2000
National tests	January 2001
<i>Improving quality</i>	
New initial training framework and teacher qualifications	Draft – March 2000 Launch – June 2001
Tool-kit and intensive training programme for teachers	By June 2000. Completed by summer 2001
Unified inspection arrangements	Fully in place by April 2001
<i>Improving opportunity</i>	
Expansion of community-based basic skills provision	From November 1999
ICT { 700 new IT learning centres Up to 1000 Ufl learning centres	From September 2000 to September 2001 In place by March 2001
Expansion of workplace provision through Skills Development Fund and Union Learning Fund	From Autumn 1999
Screening for unemployed people	April 2000
New programmes tailored to the needs of individual clients	From Spring 2001
Reports on the needs of speakers of English as a second language and those with learning difficulties or disabilities	Spring 2000
<i>Delivering a step-change in participation and achievement</i>	
Learning and Skills Council	Fully operational from April 2001
Launch of Ufl	Autumn 2000
Maths Year 2000	From October 1999 and throughout 2000

“The Moser Report has succeeded in highlighting the Basic Skills crisis. Unions are uniquely placed to give unbiased advice to our members and to encourage them to get involved in learning. We have already shown that working in Partnership with employers, we can successfully encourage members to return to learn, whether they work in factories, offices or shops. If we are ever going to get to grips with the Basic Skills crisis, Trade Unions have a key role to play.”

James Rees Education Officer – USDAW

“As part of its mission QCA aims to support lifelong learning and raise national standards. In these circumstances we were pleased to give evidence to Sir Claus Moser’s Working Group on Adult Basic Skills and welcomed their report, ‘A Fresh Start – Improving Literacy and Numeracy’. Equally, we were pleased to be asked by the Minister of State, Baroness Blackstone, to take the lead on developing national standards for literacy and numeracy for adults. We agree with Sir Claus that these standards will provide the necessary foundation on which other aspects of the national strategy can be built. QCA looks forward to making further contributions to improving the opportunities available to adult learners through work on the curriculum, national tests and qualifications.”

Nick Tate – Chief Executive, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

“Employers are keenly aware of the importance of individuals’ basic literacy and numeracy – not only are these the bedrock on which employability is built but they are also vital to achieving fulfilment in all areas of life. This is why we have strongly supported the Government’s National Literacy and Numeracy strategies for schools. However, we also recognise the difficulties faced by those with poor basic skills who are or wish to be active in the workforce. Solutions here may be more difficult to apply but, with a concerted push from all stakeholders, we are confident that we can bring about a step change in Britain’s levels of literacy and numeracy.”

John Cridland – Director of Human Resources Policy, Confederation of British Industry



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Department for
Education and Employment