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# Skills for Life – the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

## Delivering the vision 2001-2004

department for  
**education and skills**  
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence





# Skills for Life – the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

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## Foreword

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By 2001, we were already making progress in tackling literacy and numeracy underachievement in schools. The challenge remained however, that too many adults in England were unable to take up the opportunities of the knowledge based economy. To open up opportunity for all we faced an urgent challenge to address the literacy and numeracy needs of adults, and in the process, to undo years of neglect.

The legacy of skills needs and poor quality provision left millions of adults in England, and their families, disadvantaged. Adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills earn an average of £50,000 less over their working lives, are more likely to have health problems, and, in a world where there is so much emphasis on information and communication, to feel isolated from wider society. Since the launch of *Skills for Life*, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, we have made great strides in ensuring adults are able to gain the skills they need to be productive at work, active in their communities, and fulfilled in their home and family lives.

Public awareness of the importance of addressing adult literacy and numeracy skills needs has increased rapidly. The national Get On campaign has encouraged hundreds of thousands of adults to take the first step to improve their skills. We've undertaken work, supported by the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress, to convince and enable employers to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of their workforce. Government has played its part by ensuring we support our own employees in improving their skills. We've made improvements to the standards of delivery; ensuring adult learners receive a high quality and flexible service, and teachers have responded enthusiastically to the challenge of a professionalised workforce.

In 2001 we set ourselves an initial target of helping 750,000 adults to achieve a *Skills for Life* qualification by July 2004. I am delighted that we have achieved and exceeded this challenging target. Altogether, we estimate that 827,000 adults have achieved at least one qualification and millions more have begun the journey to improve their skills. Our success in implementing the first stage of *Skills for Life* has been due to the hard work and commitment of learners, teachers, learning providers, the Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus, the Prison and Probation Services and all our partners.

However, there is still more to do, and we cannot be complacent. We now have to build on the solid foundations in place and strive to increase the number of adult achievers to 1.5 million by 2007, and to increase this number to 2.25 million by 2010. Together we must sustain our efforts to raise standards of attainment and ensure that *Skills for Life* learning opportunities are embraced by many more.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP

December 2004

# Introduction

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Poor literacy and numeracy can prevent people from taking an active part in the community. People who experience difficulties with these skills are less likely to vote, less likely to own their own home and more prone to health problems. Poor literacy and numeracy leads to low productivity, fewer training opportunities and greater health and safety risks at work. The cost to the individual, the taxpayer, business and the economy is enormous.

In 1999, a working group chaired by Sir Claus Moser published the ground-breaking report *A Fresh Start, Improving literacy and numeracy* which reported on the scale and causes of poor basic skills among adults and made recommendations for tackling the problem. In March 2001, the Prime Minister launched *Skills for Life*, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. *Skills for Life* embraced and enhanced the recommendations in

*A Fresh Start* to ensure adults of working age are able to gain the skills they need to find and keep work and participate fully in society. For the first time, a co-ordinated cross-Government and multi-agency strategy put in place clear objectives to tackle the legacy of poor skills. The Government also set a challenging Public Service Agreement target based on the number of adults demonstrating improved skills and achieving recognition of their efforts through national qualifications.

Inherited strengths 2000	Inherited weaknesses 2000	Achievements to 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moser report published and recommendations welcomed by Government</li> <li>• Motivated tutors</li> <li>• Committed partners</li> <li>• Government commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No national co-ordination</li> <li>• No national standards or agreed pedagogy</li> <li>• Poorly trained teachers</li> <li>• Poor inspection grades</li> <li>• Ineffective management</li> <li>• Employers not engaged</li> <li>• Reluctant learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Strategy, Public Service Agreement Target and Delivery Plan in place, supported by partners' delivery plans and contributing targets</li> <li>• First target to improve the skills of 750,000 adults met and exceeded</li> <li>• Teaching and learning infrastructure including national standards, core curricula and national qualifications</li> <li>• Over 33,000 training opportunities provided between April 2001 and March 2004 in using the new infrastructure. Framework for teacher qualifications in place</li> <li>• Inspection grades improved in some sectors with best practice disseminated widely</li> <li>• <i>Skills for Life</i> Quality Initiative including leadership and management and professional development programmes</li> <li>• Employer champions and employer toolkit in place, employer training pilots and work based learning providers engaged in delivery</li> <li>• Over two million learners engaged but further work is still needed to motivate the hard to reach</li> </ul>

In 2001 we set out a vision where 750,000 adults would have been helped to improve their literacy, language or numeracy skills by 2004, evidenced by the achievement of a national qualification. In addition, over two million adults would have been motivated to take up learning, thereby laying the foundation for a new adult learning culture. We further expected that employers would be addressing employees skills needs in the workplace and would recognise the value in recruiting adults who have passed the new literacy and numeracy qualifications.

To realise this vision, we undertook a concerted effort with our partners to:

- **boost demand for learning** through promotion campaigns and by engaging partners across Government and employers in identifying and addressing the literacy and numeracy needs of their clients and employees;
- **ensure the capacity of provision** by securing sufficient funding and co-ordinating planning and delivery to meet learners' needs;

**raise the standard and quality** of literacy and numeracy provision; and

**increase learner achievement** through the new national learning infrastructure and by reducing barriers to learning.

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## Barbara Moran, 53

As a child brought up in Northern Ireland, Barbara experienced ill health and subsequently missed lessons at school. She only had a tutor for a few hours a week until she was 13 and later when she joined school was declared 'unteachable'.

It was no surprise that Barbara felt very isolated and leapt at the chance to leave school and take up a factory job. A few years later she came to England, where she heard there were more opportunities. However, her inability to read and write held her back. As a waitress she struggled, having to take the menu home and ask friends to help her identify the words attached to each meal.

Despite years of struggling Barbara did not have the confidence to return to education. The final straw was when her 11-year-old grandson realised that her version of Jack and the Beanstalk (woven together from the pictures in his favourite story book) differed from what was being read out in class. Although he said he preferred her version, Barbara knew she had to improve her skills.

The gremlin adverts on TV helped convince her that she was not alone, but she still found it difficult to pluck up the courage to begin learning again.

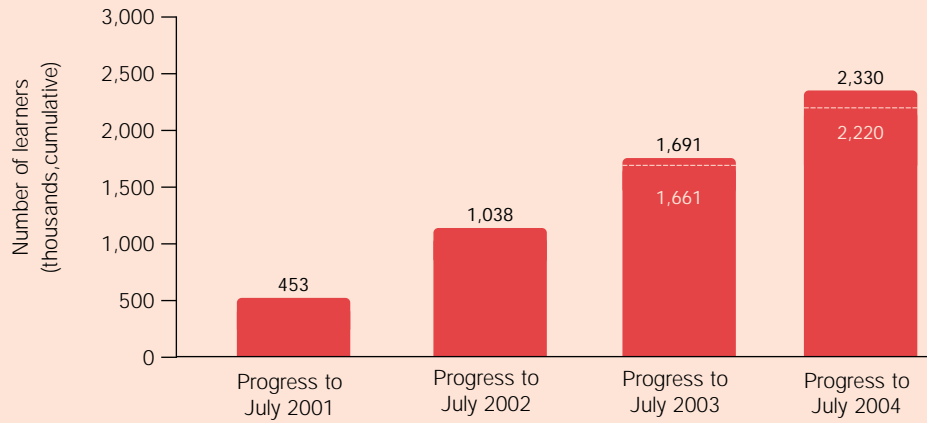
However, three times after stalling at her local college entrance, she made it through to classes. The first person she met was really helpful and recognised that she found it difficult to fill in forms. From that moment on Barbara made amazing progress. She has been learning for two years, and has just taken GCSE English. She remembers telling her tutor she had never read a book and she now feels justly proud that she wrote about *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck for her coursework. Barbara says "reading it was unbelievable, all the words came alive and leapt out at me", and she "couldn't put it down". Barbara has now well and truly caught the learning bug, and hopes to become a basic skills classroom helper, passing on her experience to others who need support.

## *Skills for Life* learners

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*Skills for Life* caters for the literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy needs of all post 16 learners from pre-entry up to Level 2. We aimed to expand provision to bring about an increase in the numbers of people participating in *Skills for Life* provision. Since the launch of *Skills for Life* almost 2.4 million learners have taken up over 4.8 million learning opportunities, against a target of 2 million learners by 2004. This is a tribute to colleges and other providers who have responded so positively to the challenge of delivering *Skills for Life*.

### Learners undertaking at least one *Skills for Life* learning opportunity



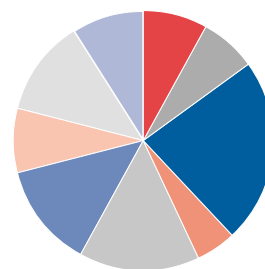
*Includes confirmed and estimated numbers of learners participating where final data not available*

The following pie charts give more details on the enrolment and the characteristics

of LSC funded learners taking up *Skills for Life* provision.

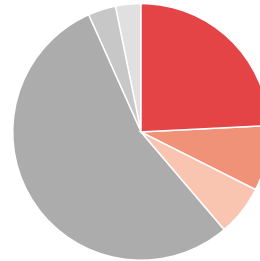
### Learners broken down by region

- East of England
- East Midlands
- Greater London
- North East
- North West
- South East
- South West
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire and the Humber



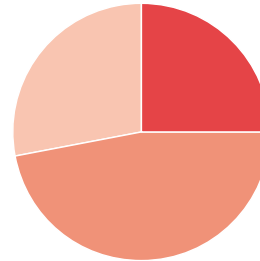
### LSC funded learning opportunities split by type of learning and age of learner

- 16-18 Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL
- 16-18 Key Skills
- 16-18 GCSEs
- 19+ Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL
- 19+ Key Skills
- 19+ GCSEs



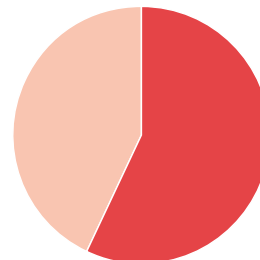
### Level of learning opportunity

- Entry Level
- Level 1
- Level 2



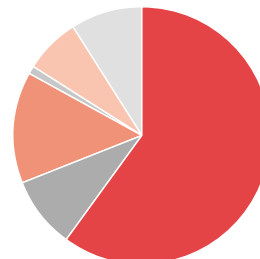
### Gender of learners

- Female
- Male



### Ethnicity of learners

- White
- Black
- Asian
- Chinese
- Mixed/Other
- Not known



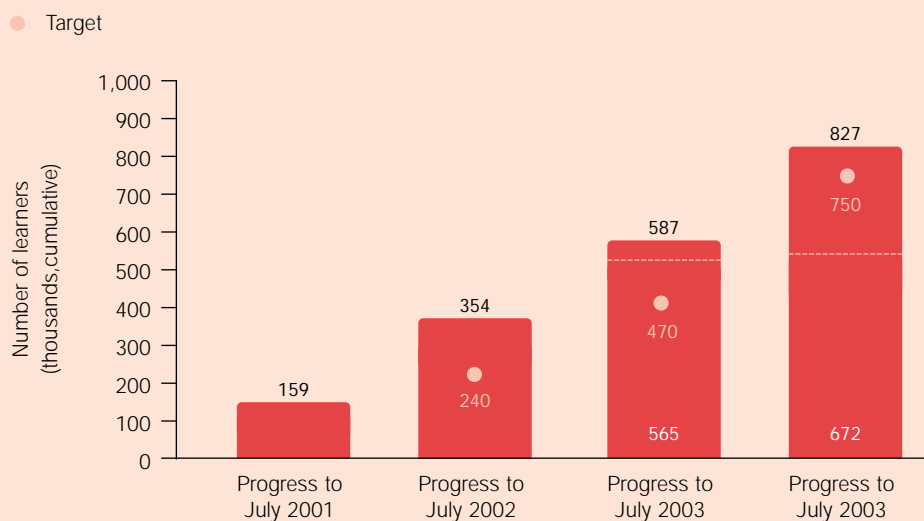
## Over 750,000 adults achieving literacy, language and numeracy qualifications

Our initial *Skills for Life* target was to improve the skills of 750,000 young people and adults by July 2004. Learners count towards the target if they achieve an approved literacy, numeracy or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) qualification, pass a Key Skills test in Application of Number

or Communication at Level 1 or 2, or achieve a GCSE in English or Mathematics.

The data returned from learning providers shows that we have achieved this target. In total, an estimated 827,000 learners have improved their skills, evidenced by the achievement of one or more approved qualifications.

Learners achieving at least one qualification counting towards the *Skills for Life* target



Includes confirmed and estimated achievements where final data not yet available

Many of these learners have achieved both literacy and numeracy qualifications and some have progressed through more than one level, meaning that learners have achieved many

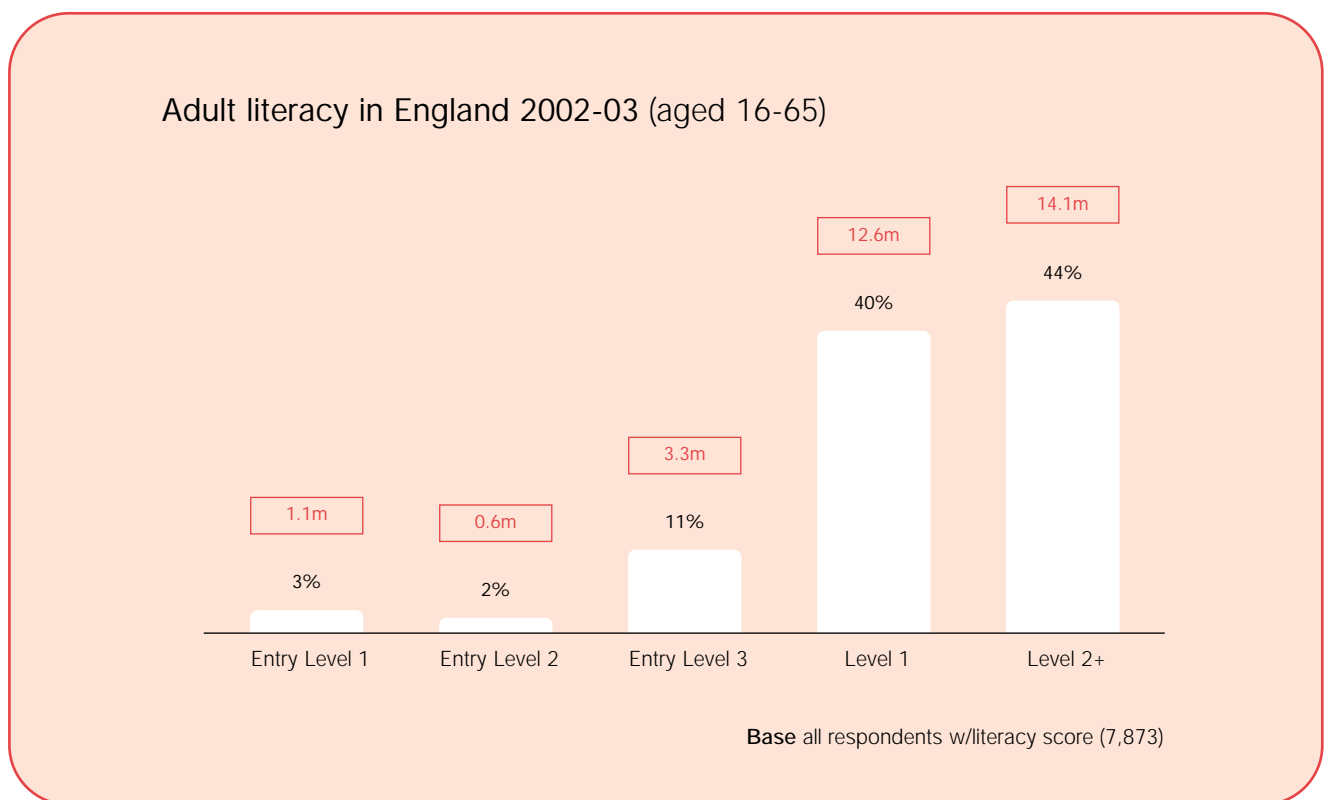
more qualifications than are recognised in our targets. In total more than 1.2 million *Skills for Life* qualifications have been achieved by learners across the country.

The work of our partners has been critical to the success to date in delivering *Skills for Life*. The majority of learners attended programmes funded by the Learning and Skills Council. HM Prison Service and the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit supported 92,000 people in gaining at least one qualification in Offender Learning programmes – with better skills providing them with greater self-confidence and increased opportunities. Programmes for Jobseekers helped 5,000 adults to achieve a qualification and Jobcentre Plus has been one of the key partners in encouraging adults to re-enter learning.

### The challenge ahead

All partners involved in implementing the strategy to date should take pride in these achievements, but there is much more still to do if we are to realise the vision and ensure all adults are equipped with the skills they need for life and work.

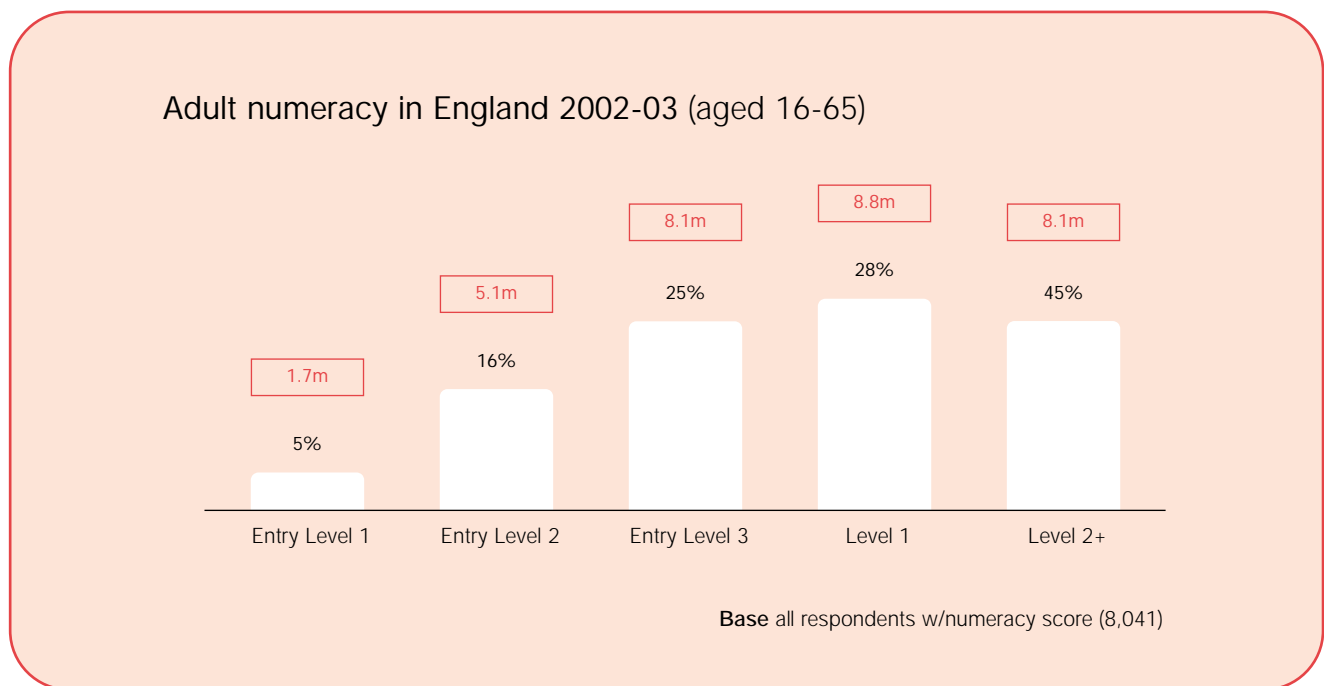
The *Skills for Life Survey*<sup>1</sup>, published in October 2003, gave us a robust baseline of the skills of adults in England. The findings of the report will be used to help target *Skills for Life* policy programmes effectively and to monitor progress towards reducing the number of adults with literacy, numeracy and language skills needs.



<sup>1</sup> The *Skills for Life Survey* was undertaken by BMRB and CDELL and is available at [www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus)

The findings from the survey estimate that there are 5.2 million adults in England with literacy skills below Level 1 (16% of the total population aged 16-65).

For numeracy, the challenge is even greater, with the survey findings indicating that 14.9 million adults have numeracy skills below Level 1 (46% of the total population aged 16-65). The chart below shows overall numeracy scores for all adults aged 16-65.



The challenge remains huge and there are millions more adults to reach. The Government has responded by announcing an even more challenging target to drive *Skills for Life* forward over the coming years. Our aim now is to ensure 2.25 million adults improve their literacy, numeracy or language skills by 2010, with an interim target of 1.5 million by 2007.

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## Ramsarup Raju, 49

Following the decline of the textile industry in Bradford, Ramsarup's factory was closed in December 2000 and he was made redundant.

Though Ramsarup's confidence was shaken he knew he needed new skills to get back on his feet and help him find another job. Ramsarup originally left education as a teenager when he emigrated from India to England. However with his family's encouragement he recently returned to education. Upon joining Bradford College his spoken English, which he'd first learnt in his local community, improved dramatically. This enabled him to improve his grammar and speak with much more confidence, and he has now taken both a pre-GCSE English course and GCSE mathematics course.

In Harrogate on May 9th 2003, Ramsarup received the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) Regional Award for the Best Adult Learner. He then went on to win the Adult Learners' Week Individual National Award. Ramsarup has become

something of an ambassador for Bradford College and gave a speech to 300 people at the awards ceremony, something that "would have been impossible two years ago".

Ramsarup's ultimate goal is "to gain a good education, decent job and career... doing something worthwhile and valuable, perhaps in accountancy".

Commenting on his achievements to date Ramsarup said:

*"I now feel more confident in my ability to read and write, and would encourage everyone to take advantage of the opportunity to come to college and improve their skills."*



# Boosting demand

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## Promotions and communications

The *Skills for Life* strategy is providing the first comprehensive approach to addressing the historical failures which have led to millions of adults lacking basic literacy or numeracy skills. At the launch of the strategy, we were clear that success was dependent on stimulating demand for learning. We therefore committed to launching and sustaining a promotional strategy aimed at both those who need to improve their skills and those who could support them to do so, such as family, friends and employers.

The Get On campaign and use of the Gremlin brand has raised awareness of the issues surrounding adult literacy, language and numeracy skills in England. The campaign aims not only to raise awareness, but also to reduce the stigma attached to English and maths skills needs, and to motivate adults to take action to improve their skills.

*The gremlin characters demonstrate the kinds of excuses people use to avoid taking action to improve their skills. The gremlin brand has become well recognised, with a 91% peak recognition rate amongst the audience.*

The gremlins advertisements have evolved on a yearly basis. Initial advertisements raised awareness and highlighted the problems faced by adults with poor literacy and numeracy. Since then the campaign has shown the benefits to be gained from improving these skills, focused on the excuses people make for not facing their skills needs, and illustrated the benefits of improving literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace. Most recently, learners have been seen to achieve qualifications and finally get rid of their personal gremlin.

The campaign encourages potential learners to call a free national learning advice line managed by one of our key partners, **learnirect**, who provide independent advice and expertise to potential learners. To date around 300,000 people have called in response to the campaign. People who call the helpline are offered details of local learning opportunities as well as a range of support to help overcome personal barriers to learning. Callers are also given the option of receiving a free video or DVD. This video features testimonials of real people telling their stories honestly and openly, and has motivated thousands and thousands of adults to take action to improve their skills. The video also won the International Visual Association Grand Prix Award in 2003.

*Since 2003, the Get On campaign has been part funded by the European Social Fund*



**EUROPEAN UNION**  
European Social Fund

Since 2001, the Get On campaign has been endorsed by many celebrities including Phil Tufnell, Lorraine Kelly and Jamie Oliver. This year the British Darts Organisation Lakeside world darts champion, Andy 'The Viking' Fordham, is supporting the campaign. His sport involves rapid mental arithmetic and is therefore particularly relevant in promoting the importance of good maths skills. The use of celebrities to reinforce the advertisements has kept the Get On campaign in the spotlight and in 2002 the campaign won an award from the International Public Relations Association.

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*Since the outset of the campaign, our partner and stakeholder organisations have played a crucial role and without this support and engagement we would not be in the position we are in today celebrating the success of such a huge number of learners. Organisations such as the Learning and Skills Council, Ufi/learnirect, NIACE, Campaign for Learning, Jobcentre Plus, The Probation Service, amongst others, have engaged wholeheartedly with the Get On Campaign.*

NIACE has promoted *Skills for Life* through high profile initiatives such as Adult Learner's Week, and by running their own targeted campaigns. This year NIACE is running a campaign targeting numeracy skills, called *Numbers in Everything* which recognises the importance of using maths skills in everyday life.

The *Skills for Life* message is also being promoted relentlessly at local level, with local partners and providers utilising the Gremlins brand and ever-growing range of free promotional materials to support local activities and initiatives. In June 2003 the Get On Campaign awards were launched to recognise and reward innovative and effective use of Get On and the Gremlins brand to promote *Skills for Life* opportunities locally. This year the competition was won by Boston College in Lincolnshire.

## Engaging employers

*Skills for Life* identified people with poor basic skills in the workplace as a key target group. At least three million adults in England with Entry Level 3 or below literacy skills are in employment. Poor numeracy skills in the workplace are even more prevalent.

Poor skills are not only damaging to an individual's chances of progression in their work, but also have an impact on performance at work with a cost to the employer. It is estimated that poor literacy and numeracy skills costs UK industry £4.8 billion each year in inefficiencies and lost orders. Workplaces where levels of poor skills are high tend to suffer from higher levels of staff turnover, higher rates of sickness absence, reduced confidence and motivation among staff and lower levels of accuracy. Over the past few years we've devoted energy to engaging employers and convincing them of the business case for investing in their staff. We've been supported enthusiastically by partners including the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

*"Low basic skills are as demoralising for individuals as they are damaging to business. The Government's Skills for Life Strategy is a key component in our fight to eradicate basic skills problems, helping employers and individuals to access the assistance they need to move forward."*

*Digby Jones, CBI Director General*

We have been working with employers in the public sector in central and local government and in the National Health Service, and with large employers and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the private sector. Over the past three years we have addressed four key areas:

- raising awareness of the issues faced by those with poor skills in the workplace and the implications for their employers, and encouraging them to take action;
- improving the information, support and guidance that is available to employers – working with agencies including the LSC, Regional Development Agencies, Business Links and Investors in People to ensure they have the underpinning knowledge to support employers on *Skills for Life*;
- building the capacity of providers to deliver a quality response in the workplace. The Employer Toolkit has now been sent to over 6,000 employers, intermediaries and providers, with an updated and improved version available from September 2004; and
- encouraging the recognition of achievement through working with partners including Ufl to improve access to the national qualifications through online and mobile testing facilities.

This work is starting to have a real impact. Over the past three years, over 160 companies have introduced or are further developing *Skills for Life* learning programmes as a result of engagement and support offered by Business in the Community (BITC). We have also engaged and are supporting 28 Employer Champions in the public and private sectors who are actively promoting the importance of *Skills for Life*. The Champions Network includes senior business leaders from Aramark Limited, Heinz, Remploy and Walkers Snacks Limited, among others.

We have worked with local Learning and Skills Councils to increase resources engaged in brokering relationships between employers and learning providers. To date the activity of workplace basic skills advisers based in local and national LSC has resulted in over 2,500 learner achievements.

On the 6th July 2004, Business in the Community announced the first ever winner of the *Skills for Life* Award for Excellence. Walkers Foods Peterlee site in East Durham employs 430 people. A *Skills for Life* Learning Centre was built in 2001 to enable employees to focus on learning both for self development and for business needs. In 2003 this became a full-time learndirect centre and meant that the centre was able to address literacy, numeracy and language issues not only with employees, but also with the wider community including families, local community schools and SMEs. There are three *Skills for Life* tutors available to learners who will meet them in an environment that the learners feels comfortable including in the learner's home. The Walkers learning centre is an accredited adult numeracy and literacy test centre, and employees can sit online City and Guilds Certificates in literacy and numeracy.

Phil Taylor, Plant Manager at the Peterlee site, says:

*"Encouraging life long learning, and supporting both our employees and the community, is something that makes you feel proud to be part of. It gives us the satisfaction of knowing that we have helped and will continue to help improve not just employees basic skills, but their self belief and self esteem which in turn will improve the culture for both business and the community in which they all live and work."*

Trade Unions are instrumental in reaching many employees in the workplace. Over 9,000 basic skills learners have been supported through the Union Learning Fund (ULF) with over 740 Union Learning Representatives trained in supporting *Skills for Life*. Over 70% of all ULF projects have a *Skills for Life* element.

*"In recent years the TUC and unions have clearly understood how poor literacy and numeracy skills hold individuals and employers back, and we are now great advocates of Skills for Life provision for working people. We recognise how much the Government has done to place this at the top of the agenda by increasing the accessibility and quality of provision and putting desperately needed investment into the training of practitioners who have all too often been underpaid and undervalued but committed and dedicated. We welcome also, the new qualifications which recognise the very real achievements of learners. We will continue to be active partners in making this strategy a success."*

*Brendan Barber,  
General Secretary of the TUC*

## Government playing its part

A Government committed to improving the skills levels of the country and seeking to persuade employers to embrace *Skills for Life*, must demonstrate that it is playing its part in identifying and tackling literacy and numeracy needs amongst its own staff.

In *21st Century Skills*, the Government recognised the importance of leading by example in order to drive forward the national skills agenda. In April 2004, the *Skills Strategy Progress Report: Government Meeting Its Responsibilities* was published. This set out the progress made by Government departments in addressing skills needs within their own workforce. Departments with more than 500 staff now have action plans to address employee's literacy, language and numeracy skills needs. Many have enabled and supported their employees to attend learning provision through local Further Education (FE) colleges, learndirect and other learning providers. Several departments have a named 'contact' for staff and managers who want information about literacy, numeracy and language skills needs and learning provision.

In addition, we have developed guidance to help departments use central government purchasing to support basic skills development for contractors' staff.

Organisations offering support services often have high levels of need – the cleaning industry alone estimates that up to 65% of staff have basic skills needs. The guidance represents an important step forward and the *Skills for Life* Cabinet Committee, chaired by Charles Clarke will review its use.

### Engaging customers in *Skills for Life*

In 2001, we identified a number of priority groups for the *Skills for Life* strategy, many of whom would be best reached by drawing on their contact with other Government departments. Our initial target groups included unemployed people and benefit claimants, offenders and those supervised in the community. Since then Government Departments have worked to embed *Skills for Life* in their policies to engage adults who come into contact with their service provision.

- The **Department for Work and Pensions** (DWP) introduced a three stage process involving universal screening for all Jobseeker Allowance customers at or before their six month interview. This involves:
  - identifying adults with potential basic skill needs;
  - offering an independent assessment to those identified; and
  - where assessment indicated the customer would benefit from help, the offer of a tailored programme of training.

DWP has now piloted a number of approaches to improve take-up and learner achievement and used the evaluation of these to improve the service. **Jobcentre Plus** now screens jobseekers when they have been unemployed for six months or when they join a New Deal programme, and has also introduced screening to the Work Focused Interviews for inactive benefit recipients. Since April 2004, Jobcentre Plus has also introduced financial incentives to encourage the take-up and completion of provision and has set up a second pilot to look at the impact of sanctions in 12 Jobcentre Plus districts.

- **HM Prison Service** and the **National Probation Service** have also played a key role in delivering *Skills for Life*. The Prison Service is established as a major contributor to the national *Skills for Life* target. Between 2001 and 2004, over 92,000 offenders achieved literacy, language or numeracy qualifications.

The Offenders Learning and Skills Unit ensured that prisons are part of the development and piloting of teaching materials and assessment methods, and that teachers in prisons access training to improve quality.





The Correctional Services Review, published in January 2004, announced the bringing together of the Prison Service and Probation Service into a single National Offender Management Service. The new service will improve offender management and enable progress made in prison to be maintained and extended when an offender is released on supervision. Ministers have already agreed to make skills assessment a condition of licence for offenders.

- The **Department for Health** is working jointly with the **Department for Education and Skills** on a project called Skilled for Health. This project aims to promote health literacy and build an awareness of basic skills needs in the National Health Service (NHS). The project is developing ways of delivering literacy, language and numeracy training within eight different healthcare contexts, including working with groups such as the elderly, ethnic minority groups and teenage parents.
- The **Department of Culture, Media and Sport** is working to target priority groups through libraries, museums and archives. In addition, schemes are being piloted to build awareness of *Skills for Life* among frontline staff and to test how links can most effectively be made for referral and provision.

Many of these joint areas of activity rely on staff working on the frontline to support and signpost potential learners. We have established a project which aims to give frontline workers the skills to identify customers with literacy, numeracy and language skills needs and to support them into learning through consistent and co-ordinated arrangements across a network of local organisations. The **Frontline Workers project** promotes social inclusion by involving frontline staff who work with groups of people who are traditionally more difficult to engage in learning and who are priorities of the *Skills for Life* strategy, such as people on benefits, ex-offenders and those who live in disadvantaged communities. The project is taking place in 12 pilot locations around the country with at least one in each region. So far over 1,000 frontline workers in over 150 different public and voluntary sector organisations have received *Skills for Life* awareness training. The project will run until March 2005 and will result in a recommended strategy for the dissemination and implementation of successful models.



## Delivering *Skills for Life* for the Army

The Army currently recruits almost 15,000 people each year and research suggests that up to 50% of all new recruits have literacy or numeracy skills at levels at or below Entry Level 3. The Army has developed a co-ordinated approach to tackle these challenges through building a system of basic skills provision that meets the needs of all Army personnel, wherever they are stationed.

Under the banner of *Step Up*, the Army provides a range of learning opportunities which fit in with the rigorous demands of service life.

- Initial assessment of the literacy and numeracy levels of all recruits is carried out during early training. Since April 2004, initial assessment has been conducted at recruiting offices before candidates are selected and enlisted. Candidates with literacy or numeracy skills assessed at Entry Level 1 and below are deferred. They are then offered advice and directed to local providers to seek tailored learning provision.
- Basic skills learning opportunities (including access to national testing) are available through in-house provision delivered via the Army's extensive network of 33 Army Education Centres and over 120 ICT-based learning centres in the UK and overseas (including a virtual learning centre).

- 41 Army locations are each supported by specialist Basic Skills Tutors, recruited to deliver in-house provision and also to co-ordinate external basic skills services for Army personnel. Basic skills awareness training is providing an integrated basic skills service.

In addition, the Army is involved in a range of exploratory trials to establish how best to organise and deliver its basic skills provision. For example they took part in the national Link Up project at three Army sites to trial how best to recruit, train and support volunteer basic skills mentors. The use of soldiers as volunteer basic skills workers to support learners in their own units (both in barracks and on deployments) is regarded as an essential part of a rounded basic skills service.

The Army is expecting to see measurable gains from its wide-ranging, integrated provision. Its target is for all personnel to attain at least Level 1 literacy and numeracy standards within three years of joining the Service. From 2004, all soldiers seeking promotion to the rank of Corporal are expected to hold a Level 1 literacy qualification (or its equivalent) as part of the minimum requirement for advancement.

Brigadier Mark Filler, Director of the Army's Educational and Training Services is convinced that tackling these difficulties is an essential investment. "Facing basic skills difficulties head on and effectively leads to more confident, responsive and thinking individuals – individuals that are better prepared to meet the many demands of modern-day soldiering."

## Malcolm Collingwood, 31

Since Malcolm's earliest school days he was aware that his writing skills were poor. At primary school he remembers reading out a whole page clearly and confidently – but only because he had memorised it the day before.

Malcolm went on to start a BTEC in care, but had to leave after a year because his writing skills were letting him down. He then decided to enter caring through another route, and spent 13 years at the Royal Star and Garter Home in Richmond. He loved it, but despite often being singled out to teach other colleagues, he missed out on promotions because of his lack of confidence in his writing. When offered the job of Ward Clerk he had to turn it down, citing a reluctance to leave his patients.

Malcolm struggled to complete forms and charts, and became increasingly stressed and despondent. When he hurt his back, it was almost a relief to leave the position. Although he was determined to 'face the music' it took a couple of months for him to summon up the courage to start his studies.

"It was quite a challenge, but it's very character building and with the confidence my course has given me. I feel that I'm much better equipped to face the future than before."

In September 2003, Malcolm set off on a six month trip to New Zealand, which he says he would never have been able to do without having brushed up his basic skills. He had always wanted to go travelling but didn't have the confidence and was afraid, for example, that if he lost his passport he wouldn't be able to write his details down.

As part of the basic skills course, Malcolm learnt how to do things that others might take for granted such as reading bus timetables – which was also essential when planning his trip.

Now that he's back in the UK, Malcolm is planning to continue learning as he has now proved to himself what he can achieve when he sets his mind to it.

## Ensuring capacity

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*"It is vital that the increased demand for literacy and numeracy skills provision is met by more and better quality supply. The quality improvements at the heart of our strategy and the active planning role of the Learning and Skills Council will deliver this over time. But we must make sure straight away that, having spent time and money motivating adults to acquire literacy and numeracy skills, we are able to give them training of a high standards which meets their needs."*

*Skills for Life*, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy, March 2001.

While initiatives to boost demand were underway, we took steps, with our partners, to increase the capacity of provision by securing sufficient funding and co-ordinating planning and delivery to meet learners' needs.

## Government commitment and funding

In 1998, fewer than 200,000 adults were taking basic education courses. We set initial targets to increase participation to 500,000 by 2002 and to engage two million learners in *Skills for Life* by 2004. We have exceeded that aim by around 300,000 learners. The funding to make this step change was secured and has continued to be identified as a key priority for the Department for Education and Skills. Including budgets from the Department for Work and Pensions and funding to address the needs of offenders, around £1.5 billion was identified to implement the strategy over the first three years. The 2002 Spending Review reaffirmed this by committing at least £1.6 billion to deliver the strategy from 2003-04 to 2005-6. The Government has recently conducted the 2004 Spending Review determining spending for 2005-06 to 2007-08 and again highlighted the importance of improving adult literacy and numeracy by extending the *Skills for Life* target to 2010.

## Funding incentives for learners and providers

A central tenet of the *Skills for Life* strategy was to remove barriers to learning for adults. Consequently, all literacy and numeracy provision remains free to learners. We also expect that charges should not be made for any related or 'hidden' costs including exam fees, charges for materials, administration and registration fees.

The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for planning and funding education and training for over 16 year olds in England and is our most important partner in delivering *Skills for Life*. The LSC has consistently set out the clear priority of this area of learning by ensuring that providers have full fee remission; literacy and numeracy receives a higher funding 'weighting' compared to similar programmes; and learners attract a disadvantage uplift to acknowledge the costs of engaging and teaching the most disadvantaged learners.

Over the past few years, we have produced an annual funding document to help explain how the LSC funds literacy and numeracy using a number of case studies to illustrate the funding methodology. We have also supported the LSC in the production of a series of fact sheets on funding and recording basic skills. These factsheets support providers as they respond to developments in delivering *Skills for Life*.

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In addition to the funding of provision, the LSC has played a key role in building capacity through significant additional funding in each year of the strategy to help implement local action plans, engage employers, build local partnerships and support staff development.

### Planning and partnership

In 2001 we set out our expectation that to implement the strategy successfully, and to improve the supply chain so that the system can deliver the learning opportunities when and where they are needed, all partners need to work together in a systematic and co-ordinated effort.

The national LSC developed a delivery plan in support of *Skills for Life* and ensured that each local LSC had robust plans and achievement targets in place to increase high quality provision in order to meet local needs. We also ensured that our other key delivery partners, including Jobcentre Plus, the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit and Ufl set out clear delivery plans to show how they would support the implementation of *Skills for Life*.

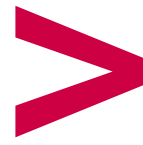
Over the last eighteen months, we have worked closely with the National LSC to provide a series of support seminars and workshops for both local LSCs and their providers. These were designed to support local efforts to improve planning and the capacity to deliver, as we set our sights on responding to the needs of more learners and the challenging 2007 target.

Over 500 providers and local LSCs have been involved and feedback has been excellent.

### Extending the reach of *Skills for Life*

We must now ensure that funding reaches all appropriate providers to support the continued implementation of *Skills for Life*. Over the last year we have funded a project to engage work-based learning and independent training providers in the delivery of *Skills for Life*. Our aim is to build on their extensive contacts with employers and increase the capacity to deliver literacy, language and numeracy training to employees in the workplace. To date 70 providers are participating in the project creating around 10,000 learning opportunities.

We are also working with the National Contract Service at the LSC to ensure that national employers are able to improve their employees' skills through a streamlined contracting process. Rentokil, Mimosa and Bright Horizons are just three of the employers who are benefiting from this approach to date.



Learning+Skills Council

## The view from the Learning and Skills Council

The LSC is the Government's primary partner in delivering *Skills for Life* and is delighted to have had a major impact on the achievement of the 2004 target. We adopted the *Skills for Life* objectives to Boost Demand, Raise Standards and Increase Learner Achievement. In particular, to deliver this challenging agenda it was vital to ensure capacity. Since 2001/02 almost £45 million has been distributed to local LSCs to build capacity and this has had a major impact in terms of boosting employer engagement and teacher training.

For example, London West LSC has, through collaboration with providers, regional partners and other key stakeholders, set up a centre to support the *Skills for Life* workforce – trainers, teachers, learning support workers and volunteers across the range of sectors delivering *Skills for Life* by:

- developing a basic skills network and a resource centre for tutors to encourage continuous professional development;
- working with partners to attempt to significantly increase the numbers of qualified basic skills tutors; and
- working with employers to extend literacy, numeracy and language training in the workplace and to encourage career development for low skilled workers.

Key successes have included:

- a central hub, and four satellite centres set up with training facilities including fully stocked learning and IT resources. Facilities are distributed strategically across London West to ensure geographic and sector coverage;
- over 200 *Skills for Life* tutors trained in a range of modular programmes;
- effective strategies deployed to ensure the participation of all sectors, particularly the **Work Based Learning** and **Voluntary** sectors; and
- the role of the Professional Development Centre built into the forward strategy of pilot projects such as the Link Up project.

Looking ahead to 2007, we are clear there is still much to do. We will continue to build on their successes to achieve the greatest impact by focusing on what both employers and individuals need. We will do this by engendering **trust** through the partnerships we build; **expertise** in all that we do; **ambition** for ourselves and for the individuals, employers and communities we serve; and **urgency** in responding to the challenges we face.

# Raising standards

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At the heart of the *Skills for Life* strategy is a commitment, not only to increase the numbers of learners, but also to improve their learning experience. We are determined to ensure that learners are motivated and enabled to progress rapidly and achieve recognised qualifications.



We knew from the national literacy and numeracy strategy for schools that good teachers are a pre-requisite for success. Consequently, the *Skills for Life* strategy in 2001 included commitments to enable high quality teaching and learning through:

- effective Initial Teacher Training;
- coherent high-level qualifications in the teaching of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL;
- a long term programme of continuing professional development;
- a clear structure for career progression; and
- recognition of expert practice.

### The teaching workforce

In order to meet these commitments, in conjunction with our partners, we've taken steps to professionalise the workforce. A new framework of qualifications for teachers and those that support the teaching and learning of literacy, numeracy and ESOL has been introduced. Since September 2002, all new teachers in the post-16 sector who wish to specialise in teaching adult literacy and numeracy are required to gain approved qualifications that meet the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) subject specifications for literacy and numeracy, and since September 2003, for ESOL.

The subject specifications define the knowledge, personal skills and understanding required of specialists in the subject area. For the first time, the expertise of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers is being formally recognised, and required of new teachers joining the profession.

*'Golden Hellos' have been introduced to encourage more literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers into the profession to further increase the quality and capacity of basic skills teaching. This year a 'minimum core' of literacy, language and numeracy skills has been introduced into initial teacher training which ensures that all adult learners can be supported to develop literacy and numeracy skills within any subject or vocational programme. The first pilot of a 'Skills for Life Foundation Degree' was completed in April 2004 by a consortium of partners led by City and Guilds and Wolverhampton University.*

These developments represent both a huge boost and a significant challenge to the profession.

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## Sutton Coldfield College

Sutton Coldfield College recently appointed two new staff who had completed the Level 4 certificate for Adult Literacy – Greg Coward and Amina Dar. Both Greg and Amina have previous degrees and both went on to complete a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) from Wolverhampton University, with Adult Literacy as the specialist subject.

Judith Park, Basic Skills Co-Coordinator at Sutton Coldfield College recognises that basic skills training has suffered in the past from “well meaning people who think they can do it”. The Level 4 qualifications were brought in to professionalise the workforce and improve the teaching provision. “The calibre of the people coming through with the subject specialism is different,” Judith says. “They’ve known what they were doing from the start.”

Amina and Greg recognise the benefit of the Level 4 training. “The course guided us through model lesson materials,” said Greg. “For example, we were made aware of the importance of using the right font and size of type for readability.” Amina added that the course had shown them how to bring ICT into the classroom. “The course inspired us – showed us new ways of teaching” said Greg.

Greg and Amina have drawn on previous experiences to help them to empathise with students. Greg who has previously worked as a psychiatric nurse feels that this is valuable in his basic skills teaching as it has emphasised the importance of being approachable to shy and withdrawn learners. For Amina, coming from a bilingual background, with Punjabi as her other main language, has helped her when teaching the many students at the college for whom English is not their first language.

Student feedback on Greg and Amina has been positive. One student who works with both teachers said “It comes over to us that they are very knowledgeable and organised. They bring out the best in us as individuals and somehow this makes us work better as a group”.

Judith Parks is just as complimentary about Amina and Gregs’ impact on the college. “We have heard about the changes that were happening” says Judith. “Now we are seeing the results – and it is working.”

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## Quality and inspection

Inspection underpins the Government's commitment in *Skills for Life* to improve the quality of the learning experience for adult learners. To assist providers we published *Success in Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL* with the support of the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and Ofsted. The guide supports the Common Inspection Framework and is designed to help all learning institutions, whatever their starting point, strive for continuous improvement. Since then, we have been able to extend support for providers by publishing a series of Raising Standards Guides contextualised to different learning settings including Further Education, Family Learning, Adult and Community Learning and Work Based Learning.

## Thematic review

In September 2001 we commissioned a thematic review of adult literacy, language and numeracy provision. The report, *Literacy, Numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages: a survey of current practices in post-16 and adult provision* was undertaken by the Adult Learning Inspectorate and Ofsted so that we could better understand where Government resources should be targeted for maximum impact.

The survey, conducted between March 2002 and Spring 2003, highlighted examples of very good provision across all sectors, and was positive about the direct provision of

literacy, numeracy and language courses, particularly through FE colleges. This is where the vast majority of learners receive their basic skills teaching and where the DfES had, at that time, focused most of its efforts.

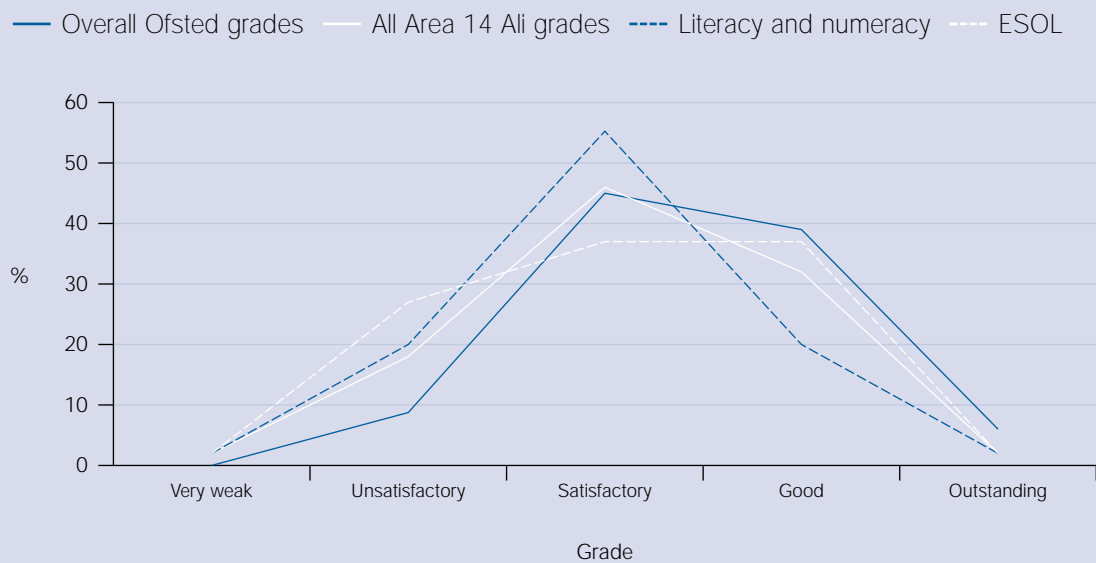
However, the inspectors also found examples of poor teaching in some sectors and weaknesses in the initial assessment of students. This led to inspectors calling for a sharper focus on the quality of education and training currently available for low skilled learners across all settings. The report demonstrated the importance of the action already underway to provide professional development and training opportunities to improve the quality of all teaching. This includes work-based provision and providers funded by Jobcentre Plus or the Prison Service.

Since the publication of Ofsted and ALI's findings, we've been working closely with the LSC, the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit and Jobcentre Plus to address the inspectorates' recommendations. Recent data from the inspectorates presented overleaf shows the distribution of inspection grades this year compared to 2002/03. There are some limitations to the data collected on quality improvements since *Skills for Life* was launched due to differences in scope, coverage and timing.

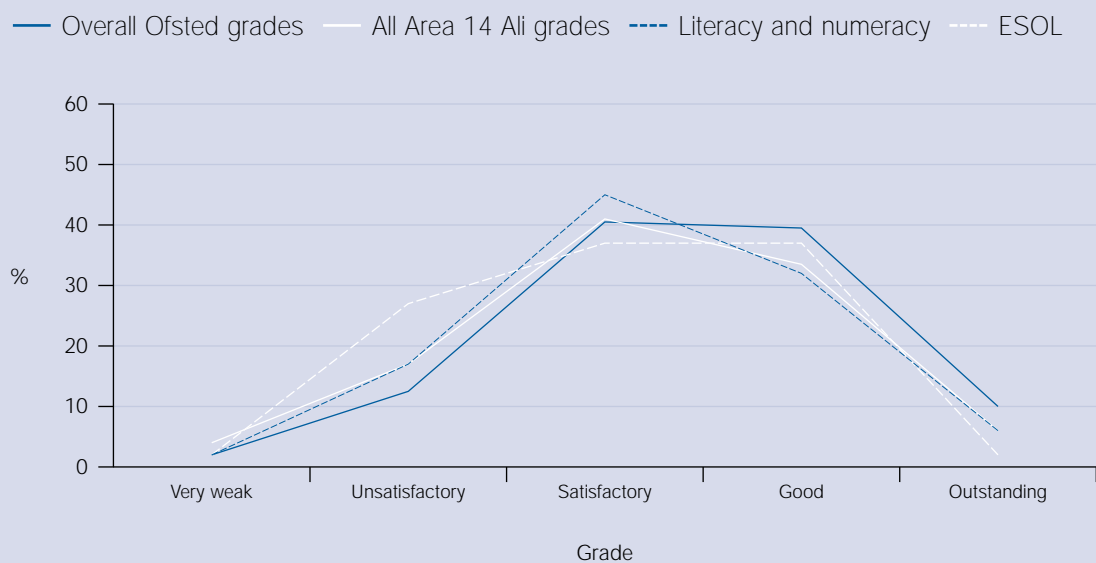
However, the charts below give an indicative picture of inspection results. It confirms that

some progress has been made already but that there remains much to do.

Ofsted and ALI inspection grades 2002/03



Ofsted and ALI inspection grades 2003/04



The 'Overall Ofsted grades' line shows the headline college grades for all colleges that Ofsted inspected. The 'All Area 14 ALI grades' line shows the grades that the Adult Learning Inspectorate awarded to institutions providing area 14 foundation programmes, which includes literacy, numeracy and ESOL. The literacy and numeracy and ESOL lines show a subset of the overall Ofsted figures. These indicate the distribution of literacy and numeracy, and ESOL grades that were awarded to colleges that had specific inspections in these areas.

The two graphs show an improvement in the grade distributions with all the lines, excepting ESOL, showing fewer Grade 3s and a higher proportion of Grades 1 and 2. This suggests literacy and numeracy grades are improving whilst ESOL grades have still to reflect the interventions made.

The Adult Learning Inspectorate data for Area 14 programmes can be split by institution type. Results of inspections between 2002/03 and 2003/04 show that:

- Work Based Learning Grade 1s increased from 3% to 5%, but Grade 2s have fallen from 32% to 23%. Grade 3s remained largely static from 47% to 48%, however, Grades 4 and 5 have increased from 18 % to 25%;
- providers under contract with Jobcentre Plus increased the proportion of Grades 1 and 2 slightly from 23% to 25%. Grade 3s fell from 50% to 43%.and there has been a growth in Grades 4 and 5 from 27% to 32%;
- Adult and Community Learning providers increased the proportion of Grades 1 and 2 from 24% to 32% and decreased the proportion of Grades 4 and 5 from 35% to 24%. Grade 3s rose slightly from 41% to 43%. Family learning providers increased the proportion of Grade 1 and 2s to 68% from 44% Grades 3s fell from 56% to 21%; and
- prisons have increased the number of Grade 2s from 22% to 42% and Grade 3s fell from 50% to 36%. The proportion of Grades 4 and 5 also decreased from 28% to 21%.

Over the next few years we will continue to monitor the impact of our interventions and support on inspection grades and publish more information on our website at [www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus).

## Skills for Life Quality Initiative

The *Skills for Life* Quality Initiative, managed by the Learning and Skills Council, was launched in April 2003, and supported by a budget of £9 million. Two programmes, the Programme of Professional Development, and the Leadership and Management Programme, were developed to form a continuum of professional and career development opportunities for those involved in delivering, leading and managing literacy, numeracy and language provision. In addition a further £5 million was invested in publicly-funded providers not in receipt of LSC funding, including Jobcentre Plus and prison education.

In total during 2003-04, 6,252 teachers and 1,310 leaders and managers undertook one of the training programmes and a further 1,618 specialists benefited from funding made available through local LSCs for *Skills for Life* training.

The programme is now in its second year and the emphasis has shifted from a 'one size fits all' approach to embedding *Skills for Life* within organisations, with a focus on meeting the needs for career and professional development at a local and regional level.

## Family literacy, language and numeracy

We have been working in partnership with the LSC to extend and embed family literacy, language and numeracy provision. By developing local infrastructures and piloting new models of delivery for families, the number of families participating has risen significantly. Over 60,000 parents participated in 2003-04 and we are projecting that this number will increase to over 90,000 in 2004-05. Programmes have all embedded the learning infrastructure and the quality of provision has improved – inspection grades for family learning are better than in other adult and community learning. The Skills for Families project has successfully piloted new approaches with families, with 35% of parents enrolled on longer courses, accessing and passing national tests.

A number of other projects are supporting the drive to widen participation and extend the reach of *Skills for Life* as well as strengthen the adult literacy, language and numeracy teaching profession. Between September 2001 and March 2004 the Link Up project recruited and trained 6,410 volunteers as 'adult learner supporters' and 2,380 Sure Start and Neighbourhood Nursery staff have been trained as a part of the Step in to Learning programme. Step in to Learning is managed by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA). The BSA is a key partner in delivering *Skills for Life* and has played an essential role in developing and testing new approaches.

## Step in to Learning supports the development of Family Learning

Step in to Learning is a frontline staff training and development programme which aims to promote sustainable models of literacy, numeracy and language learning opportunities and access to national qualifications for staff, parents and carers in the early years and childcare sectors. Flora Sheringham, Family Learning Advisor for Cambridgeshire County Council, has a county wide remit for Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy programmes in Cambridgeshire. When she attended a Step in to Learning briefing, she realised that the programme would be an excellent way to underpin much of the great work already taking place in Cambridgeshire.

“I was delighted with the stimulus and guidance that Step in to Learning provides. The initiative acknowledges the progression from initial engagement through wider Family Learning onto courses dealing with Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy, a stage so essential for many adults who do not see themselves as ‘learners’,” Flora said. “Family Learning has a tradition in Cambridgeshire, and it was encouraging to see how well Step in to Learning could fit into and enhance our practice.”

Flora promoted the Step in to Learning training programme to staff at local nurseries and in order to take the programme forward, decided to fund release time for one member of staff who had attended the training. The release time was used to develop that person’s role in promoting literacy, numeracy and language to parents and other staff.

One of the places where this is happening is Histon Early Years Centre, which is an LEA maintained nursery presently providing 92 part-time places. The Head of the Centre, Carole Faulkner said that although work with families was already well established at Histon, the Step in to Learning programme helped the school to focus particularly on the literacy, numeracy and language needs of parents. “The funding for release time has been really helpful, supporting us with the vital research and preparation involved in cascading the messages to all staff and maintaining the spin off from the course.”

# Increasing learner achievement

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*"..each new learner must be given a high quality learning experience that motivates him or her to keep on learning and to achieve... We are now creating a learning framework which will give us the tools we need to succeed."*

*Skills for Life*, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy, 2001

Until *Skills for Life*, there was no clear definition of what an adult should be expected to know, understand and do at each level of achievement in literacy, numeracy and spoken language. This created inconsistencies in the standards of delivery and assessment. This has been addressed over the last four years through the development and introduction of a new teaching and learning infrastructure, with comprehensive training provided to teachers.



## Key elements of the *Skills for Life* teaching and learning infrastructure

- **National standards for adult literacy and numeracy** were published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in 2000. The standards provide the framework for all adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL screening tests, initial assessment, diagnostic tools, programmes of study and qualifications.
- A range of **Screening and Initial Assessment Tools** are currently in development. These include ESOL, generic and workplace specific screening and initial assessment tools, and a good practice guide.
- **Diagnostic Assessment Tools** published in 2003 ensure teachers and learners develop individual learning plans with clear benchmarks and measures of progress.
- **Core curricula** for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL, based on the national standards were published in 2001 and 2002 and set out a progression framework, with clear goals for learners and their teachers. *Access for All* provides guidance for tutors on access to the curriculum documents for adult learners with physical disabilities, sensory impairment and learning disabilities.
- The *Skills for Life Learning Materials*, distributed in 2003, support our aim to offer uniformly high standards in delivery to all learners, and enable teachers to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' without stifling creativity.
- The **Framework for Understanding Dyslexia** provides useful information and case studies for teachers working in post-16 education or training.
- **National tests** in literacy and numeracy sample the skills set out in the national standards and are offered at Level 1 and Level 2, with qualifications at Entry 1, 2 and 3 available on a non-test basis through awarding bodies. **On-Demand, e-assessment tests** for Basic and Key Skills at Levels 1 and 2 have been successfully implemented.
- **The Planning Learning and Recording Achievement (PLRA) guide** was published in 2004 to help practitioners develop procedures and recording systems and improve the effectiveness of current Individual Learning Plan (ILP) practice.
- New **ESOL *Skills for Life* qualifications** were introduced in September 2004. These qualifications enable progression from Entry Level to Levels 1 and 2 and are specifically designed to meet the language development needs of adult learners living and working in England.

These measures have been taken with the aim of increasing learner achievement by recognising the needs of different learners, and acknowledging numerous and diverse learning contexts. Consequently, the most recent developments include materials for embedded learning. The first set of these materials, published earlier this year, can be used by vocational teachers to support the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

To support the introduction of the new infrastructure over 16,000 teachers were trained in using the core literacy and numeracy curricula. In addition 5,500 ESOL teachers have been introduced to the ESOL curriculum and 2,800 teachers attended training in the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework and *Access for All* guidance. Most recently, 8,000 teachers have accessed the Learning Materials and Diagnostic Assessment materials training.

## Pathfinders

To test the core elements of the new teaching and learning infrastructure pledged in *Skills for Life* before they were rolled out nationally, Literacy and Numeracy Pathfinders were introduced in 2001, within each of the nine government regions and through a consortium of seven prisons. Altogether over 9,000 learners and 400 teachers were involved. The Pathfinder projects reinforced the effectiveness of partnership working at all levels: between policymakers and practitioners, between providers and their local communities and between teachers and learners.

Pathfinder activities included looking into and developing new and innovative pedagogic approaches, including intensive courses, residential, highly structured programmes and delivery through ICT. Incentives were introduced to employers to release staff for literacy and numeracy training. Financial incentives were also introduced for literacy and numeracy learners, linked to attendance and achievement.

Lessons learned from the Literacy and Numeracy Pathfinders were published in 2003 together with good practice guides. The new curricula and accompanying training were universally welcomed and commented on favourably by teachers, and 92% of learners responded positively to the introduction of the new regime. Moreover, the very positive results of the evaluation of learner's views on the new qualifications, and in particular the format of the National Tests, persuaded many teachers who were previously opposed to any kind of summative assessment of their relevance and value to learners. Employers who participated in the Pathfinder were also positive about the benefits to their workforce and businesses.

The introduction of intensive and residential courses through Pathfinders has been widely accepted as good practice and in some prisons intensive programmes are now almost used exclusively as they overcome many of the logistical difficulties that previously undermined progress and prevented achievement. Methods of working with employers are now being much more extensively tested in the Employer Training Pilots and innovative approaches to working within the voluntary sector are successfully extending the reach of the strategy to non-traditional learners.

To extend the work of the Literacy and Numeracy Pathfinders, ESOL Pathfinders were established in 2002. They were designed to test the core ESOL teaching and learning materials developed to ensure that these were accessible to the full range of ESOL learner groups; and to investigate a range of delivery models and disseminate effective practice. Initial results suggest that around 75% of learners had seen a real improvement in their English, and around 85% were planning to undertake further courses.

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## Birmingham and Walsall ESOL Pathfinders

Walsall College of Arts and Technology (WALCAT) is the largest provider of post-16 education in the Walsall area. Since 2001 the Basic/Key Skills department has expanded in response to the challenges of the *Skills for Life* agenda and the needs of the local population.

Implementation of the WALCAT's *Skills for Life* strategy has involved working closely with a number of local businesses including Red Mill Foods Ltd. Red Mill is the fourth largest producer of snack foods in the UK and employs 360 people. Some 48% of their staff had ESOL needs.

Red Mill was very proactive and supported training on its premises paying workers to engage in learning. ESOL classes were timed to fit around the workers' shifts. The success of these classes led to a second programme, Level 1 Adult Literacy, being run.

After training, Red Mill employees indicated overwhelmingly that their language skills and reading and writing had improved which had the knock-on effect of improving work satisfaction and time saving. Improvements were also noted in communication with fellow workers and supervisors.

Many employees went on to complete Level 2 in Adult Literacy in their own free time. Red Mill supported them by making training facilities available on Saturdays.

For the college, this project demonstrated that *Skills for Life* can be delivered at the workplace as effectively as within the college. Retention was very positive considering the delivery pattern of learning before and after shift work, with 74% successfully completing the first programme and 87% successfully completing the second.

Following this success of delivering learning in the workplace WALCAT is determined to continue to meet the challenges of developing innovative approaches to meet the needs and demands of adult learners, increasing resource development and supporting teaching staff development.

To ensure that all people claiming disability benefit have equal access to opportunities to acquire literacy and numeracy skills, in Autumn 2003 we set up a three year Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD) project. The project was designed to develop and implement a range of LDD materials and activities within adult literacy, numeracy and language related programmes. LLD Pathfinders have been designed to improve access to, engagement with, and quality of learning for adults with disabilities across the full range of contexts and settings including the workplace.

### **Innovative approaches**

Alongside the Pathfinders, we have made great strides in improving the experience of the learner through innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

We have worked with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to provide on-demand tests through e-assessment as well as traditional methods. This approach lessens the 'fear factor' in taking tests and gives learners immediate assessment of their progress. Success rates are generally higher than those in the paper based medium, with successes bridging the age and gender spectrums. The number of people accessing e-assessment is growing daily. Over 100,000 tests have been taken in this way to date.

We have also commissioned programmes to help adults to simply brush up on their skills and to take the national qualification. The Move On project developed and piloted a short course to engage higher-level literacy and numeracy learners. Targeted at those within the top 60% of basic skills needs, the Move On project provides a framework and support for providers to maximise achievements by, for example, encouraging specifically run courses aimed at improving CVs. The pilot in Somerset achieved a 90% pass rate in the National Tests. A national project is now underway to disseminate the positive approach through nine regional Move On advisors.

## Move On Champions' success

Over 200 new learners, an intensive approach for Marines and new test centres in supermarkets and pubs – these are just some of the achievements of Move On Champions in Devon.

In recognition of the need for more learners to obtain national qualifications, Devon and Cornwall LSC funded eight Move On Champions.

These Champions, who were already working as qualified *Skills for Life* managers or teachers, took up their posts last November. Their aims were to:

- encourage uptake of national literacy and numeracy qualifications by working with current staff and contributing to the training of new staff;
- identify suitable materials for teachers and learners; and
- help evaluate Move On pilots.



At their training sessions in January, the Champions came up with some fantastic ideas in their action plans to take Move On forward. Apart from generally raising awareness and creating publicity, there were ideas to hold taster sessions during Adult Learners' Week and in places like supermarkets, with a view to encouraging adults to take the National Tests. Some key achievements included:

- extending online testing so intensive courses can be offered to Marines;
- use of the Move On approach as an ideal way to prepare for and to run concurrently with NVQs. One of the colleges already offers NVQs to four hospitals of the South Devon NHS Trust and now the Trust is hoping to go online as a satellite test centre for the National Tests; and
- Paignton Zoo wants to include Move On in their publicity, for their staff and to engage visitors, as part of their educational programme.

## Key Skills – securing progression

Key Skills are a vital part of the *Skills for Life* strategy, particularly for young people.

The key skills are a range of generic skills essential for continuing success in further learning, employment and adult life more generally. Communication and Application of Number qualifications at Levels 1 and 2 have contributed over 250,000 learners to the *Skills for Life* target.

Best practice in the teaching of key skills is promoted and disseminated through the Key Skills Support Programme which provides training, materials and consultancy support to practitioners in schools, colleges and work based provision. The programme has successfully raised the confidence and competence of practitioners and acts as a national focus for the development and dissemination of effective practice. The Key Skills Support Programme is provided by two managing agents; Learning for Work (LFW) for the work-based route and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) for schools and colleges.

Improving the transparency of the progression routes for learners moving on from literacy and numeracy to achievement of the more demanding key skills and other forms of learning is an aim of the current Basic and Key Skills Convergence Project being undertaken by a consortium led by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. This project will last until March 2007.

A significant boost to making a reality of the progression route from basic to key skills learning has been made by the 'Supporting Successful Outcomes' project undertaken with Apprenticeship candidates. This project followed concerns expressed by the ALI Chief Inspector in 2002 over the number of Apprenticeship candidates who were struggling with the key skills and other aspects of their frameworks because of basic literacy and numeracy needs. The project therefore looked at ways of making literacy, numeracy and key skills a higher and more integral priority from the outset of Apprenticeship programmes. The evaluation findings suggest that these 'front end delivery models' were successful. All centres emphasised that the model had been a highly motivational experience for both teachers and learners, and resulted in a number of positive outcomes, for example, higher retention rates or increased motivation of learners. The ALI Chief Inspector endorsed these findings and recently commented that this was a textbook example of effective joint working to solve a pressing problem. The roll-out of the front end delivery models will be taken forward with our partners in the Key Skills Support Programme, the Learning and Skills Council and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

## Research and development

*Skills for Life* acknowledged the importance of a continuous programme of research and development to evaluate, inform and improve the strategy. The Government also recognised that there was no national focus for this work and established a centre to lead and co-ordinate research and development. To this end, the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) was set up in 2002 to inform policy development, teacher training and learner achievement as the implementation of *Skills for Life* progresses.

## Longitudinal study

To understand the immediate and sustained impact that basic skills learning has on people's lives, and the costs for people who do not improve their basic skills, the Longitudinal Study was set up in April 2002. The study is following 2,000 basic skills learners and 2,000 non-learners with basic skills needs through three waves of annual face-to-face interviews. So far top line results show that those returning to education who have previously had negative experiences at school are now more positive about education, and that after studying on a course aimed at improving their basic skills people are more likely to want to progress to further education.

In the first wave of the survey, which took place soon after respondents had started their course we found that learners' expectations with regard to future education were already changing.

Early findings from wave two of the survey show that the learners group have become a great deal more positive in their commitment to further education and training than the non-learners group – the learners' commitment index improved by 93% more than the non-learners group when compared to wave one. In addition, the learners had improvements in the self-esteem index which were 62% larger than the improvements experienced by non-learners. The study is due to report in 2005.

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## The National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

The NRDC, a consortium of 11 partner organisations led by the Institute of Education, is dedicated to improving literacy, numeracy and language-related skills and knowledge as part of the *Skills for Life* strategy. As part of its 2003-7 strategy the NRDC has produced a set of comprehensive international reviews of the state of knowledge in *Skills for Life* subject areas and run a world-class research and publication programme. Some key messages have emerged from the projects in progress:

- poor literacy and numeracy skills have adverse effects on earnings and employment prospects. The need for numeracy skills in particular is pressing, with the labour market increasingly demanding general problem-solving skills combining IT and mathematics. International evidence suggests employer-provided training can increase productivity, save time, reduce costs and improve the use of new technology. There is however, a lack of numeracy-focused research. NRDC is leading the DfES' new three-year Maths4Life project, which will address a wide range of numeracy issues;

- adults engage in and persevere with learning for a plethora of reasons; for example, the desire to master a subject or comprehend its fundamental principles – rather than the need to acquire everyday skills – was found to provide the impetus to learn for many adults. NRDC recognises that understanding this diversity and translating that knowledge into practice are vital tasks for FE pedagogy; and
- learners often engage most successfully with scenarios that are 'real' and relevant to their everyday lives and experiences. Delivery is also important; embedding of basic skills in other types of learning or in workplace activity is often the best way to attract learners and maintain their motivation.

Communication and impact are important to allow NRDC's findings to become embedded in practice and to inform the development of policy. Three *Skills for Life* conferences held in 2003 reached 1,200 people in the practice, research and policy communities, while the planned practitioner magazine will facilitate effective communication, development and dissemination of research. NRDC actively seeks the involvement and input of research users in all its core activity.

# Delivering *Skills for Life* to 2007

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The work to ensure we continue to deliver *Skills for Life*, and achieve our next target, is already underway.

*Skills for Life* has proved enormously effective in providing learners with greater and more flexible access to learning and qualifications. If we are to take the next step forward we must extend the reach of the strategy including to those who do not recognise themselves as learners or who are disadvantaged because of their low skills levels. It is for this reason that we are extending our efforts to raise the quality of all teaching and learning, and are extending capacity by pursuing a broader range of learning contexts and settings. For example, we will be targeting the following key areas.

## Reaching individuals through the workplace

Over the next three years we'll build on the progress made with our partners to date in convincing employers and employees of the benefits to be gained through improving literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace. For example we will work closely with the Sector Skills Development Agency to support the development of a strategic approach in each Sector Skills Council and ensure literacy, language and numeracy skills acquisition are among the priorities for Regional Skills Partnerships.

We'll also extend the work we've already started, working with the Learning and Skills Council, to ensure that once an employer is engaged, their interest is quickly turned into action, with quality learning delivered for their employees. Moreover, our partners are continuing and extending their drive too – the NHSU is supporting the improvement of patient care through improved literacy, language and numeracy skills for staff. They aim to support 57,000 people to improve their skills by 2007.

## Supporting innovative delivery

Many young people and adults are attracted to vocational learning but lack the literacy and numeracy skills to successfully complete qualifications and progress. We want to ensure that learners are assessed and offered appropriate literacy and numeracy support no matter what primary qualification they are undertaking. We've already started developing and disseminating support to promote this approach.

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*We've worked with a consortium led by the Centre for British Teachers to develop materials for embedded learning. These motivate learners to improve their literacy, language or numeracy skills via the tasks and activities they undertake at work or as part of vocational/occupational training programmes. The first set of materials, covering construction, social care, horticulture, young parents' health and nursing for internationally qualified nurses, have been published.*

To test these developments and identify effective practice we've established a major Pathfinder project. Over the next three years this will encourage the development of coherent 'whole organisation' approaches with strong strategic leadership and organisational structures and procedures that embed *Skills for Life* at all levels. Organisations across all sectors will receive support to make *Skills for Life* central to their business and create models that can be sustained long term.

### A new deal for skills

To build the basic skills of the nation we must continue to lift the barriers that prevent people from seeking learning opportunities. It's vital that we extend approaches to engage the hardest to reach and individuals who aren't active in the labour market. The Chancellor outlined plans for a New Deal for Skills in the 2004 Budget to ensure that individuals develop the skills they need for employment. *Skills for Life* will play an important part in the developing proposals, building on the steps Jobcentre Plus has already taken to address the literacy, numeracy and ESOL needs of jobseekers and inactive benefit claimants.

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We must continue to be innovative to ensure young people and adults are offered learning at a time and location that suits their needs. Two key projects will contribute to this goal. We're supporting the implementation of *Skills for Life* through volunteering and the voluntary and community sector, building on this sector's expertise in reaching hard to reach adults. The project involves working with social enterprises and embedding literacy, language and numeracy in community based programmes. We're also embarking on a project to build long term relationships between football clubs, education providers and Local LSCs. Coaching for Success will aim to attract adults with literacy, language and numeracy needs into provision using the power of football.

## A professional workforce

Effective teaching and learning underpins all our future success. Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL teachers and support staff have already responded enthusiastically to the challenges set out in *Skills for Life* and *Success for All* and the new opportunities for professional development and career progression. While our concern has been to support the development of a learning infrastructure that includes national standards for teachers and learners the priority now must be to continue to support the quality of teaching and learning.

Issues previously identified by the Inspectorate have provided a framework for national and local interventions to improve the quality of teaching. This has involved key partners responsible for delivery, the Learning and Skills Council, the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit, learndirect and Job Centre Plus, supporting plans to address the weaknesses and build on the strengths highlighted by the Inspectorate. However much more needs to be done to realise the full potential of this opportunity. We will continue to work closely with the Inspectorate and national and local partners to ensure that in time all learners are taught by qualified teachers, and all teachers and support staff are given appropriate opportunities to continue their professional development.

## Jayne Solkhon & Genine Clarke, late 20s

Jayne and Genine work as learning ambassadors in the Northlands Park area in Basildon. Their role is to identify local residents who want to improve their literacy, language or numeracy skills, and to support them through the process of returning to learning. The local residents feel confident going to Jayne and Genine for advice as they are part of the community.

Jayne and Genine met when they were working as volunteers for the local Sure Start nursery project. At that time, they took Link Up training, which also gave them both the opportunity to face-up to their own 'gremlins'. Genine took a course in basic spelling, whilst Jayne took basic numeracy. Jayne hopes soon to be able to take the Level 2 national test.

Jayne and Genine are based in the local community centre, where they hold coffee mornings and fun days to encourage the local residents to come and discover more about the opportunities available to them.

They are also able to highlight the range of opportunities available, identify any fears the potential learner might have and give advice on learning providers that suit learners' particular needs – such as one with childcare facilities or one that is accessible on a specific bus route.

Neither Jayne nor Genine particularly enjoyed learning at school themselves, so they are able to empathise with many of the people they speak to. "By talking about my past experiences, I can show others that they're not the only ones. This gives them confidence and helps to motivate them to get on with their own learning," comments Jayne. "Learning as an adult is so different to what it was like at school. I'm sure this is partly because I wasn't ready to learn then, but also because the basic skills tutors are so patient. In my class I never felt stupid like I sometimes did at school and all of us worked together as a team, supporting each other through the course."

Genine adds, "when I started the Link Up training, I didn't really believe that I would make that much of a difference, but now I really enjoy seeing other people getting on and overcoming their basic skills gremlins."



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