



DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Skills for Life:
Improving adult literacy and numeracy

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Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy

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John Bourn
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

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The National Audit Office study team consisted of:

Angela Hands, Chris Lambert,
Christine Rose, Rebecca Sidell Dawson,
Philip Wilson, and Victoria Lewis

This report can be found on the National Audit Office web site at www.nao.org.uk

For further information about the National Audit Office please contact:

National Audit Office
Press Office
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road
Victoria
London
SW1W 9SP

Tel: 020 7798 7400

Email: enquiries@nao.gsi.gov.uk

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PREFACE



Twenty-six million people of working age have levels of literacy and numeracy below those expected of school leavers. They are spread across all ages, with no significant variation between men and women or different English speaking ethnic groups. Many who did not learn these skills at school are reluctant to start or persevere with learning as adults. People with the lowest levels of skills – those expected of a 9 to 11 year old or below – can experience practical difficulties in their everyday lives. They may be unable to read and understand signs, notices or labels, or check whether they have received the correct change when shopping. Many work in low-skilled employment, are unemployed, or on benefits. Some are offenders in prison or being supervised in the community.

In March 2001 the Department for Education and Skills launched the Skills for Life Strategy which began a long-term programme to break the cycle of low literacy and numeracy skills in England. At least £3.7 billion will be spent on implementing the programme by 2006. The Strategy is starting to have an impact on people's levels of literacy and numeracy and is increasing participation in learning. Our main findings are:

- The latest estimates suggest that the Department has achieved its 2004 Public Service Agreement target of increasing the skills of 750,000 people. Achievement of the 2010 target will require a further 1.5 million learners to achieve a first qualification, and the Department has recognised the need to draw a large number of people into learning, from a wide range of groups, some of whom will be harder to engage than others.
- The Department has led the development of lasting improvements in literacy, language, and numeracy learning. There are more ways for people to improve their skills and the Department has raised awareness by advertising and working with other departments to reach their clients.
- Before 2001, adult literacy and numeracy learning was of low status, and the Department started by doing a lot of work to improve the framework for delivery. The quality of learning still needs to be raised to a consistently high level in all areas of the country, and more teachers with up-to-date training in teaching literacy, language and numeracy are needed to provide high quality learning. Initiatives are in place to train new and existing teachers but will take time to make an impact.
- The Department has sponsored a variety of approaches to identifying people with low skills and engaging them in learning. It will need to continue to find and sponsor new and creative ways of involving more people with the lowest skill levels and those who are least likely to perceive they have poor skills, so that they are persuaded that improving their skills is worthwhile. There continue to be high barriers to some people taking up opportunities to learn, or to them continuing with learning once started. Some learners need more incentives and choice to encourage them to persevere. More providers need to develop creative and flexible learning that attracts learners and encourages them to improve.
- The Department has promoted initiatives to engage employers but progress at local level is slow. Low-skilled employees are one of the hardest groups to reach and more small and medium sized employers need to be persuaded of the benefits of raising the skills of their employees.
- Voluntary and community organisations are essential partners because they are often best placed to encourage into learning those people who are very hard to reach. Barriers to these organisations becoming effectively involved have been identified and the Learning and Skills Council is working to address them.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



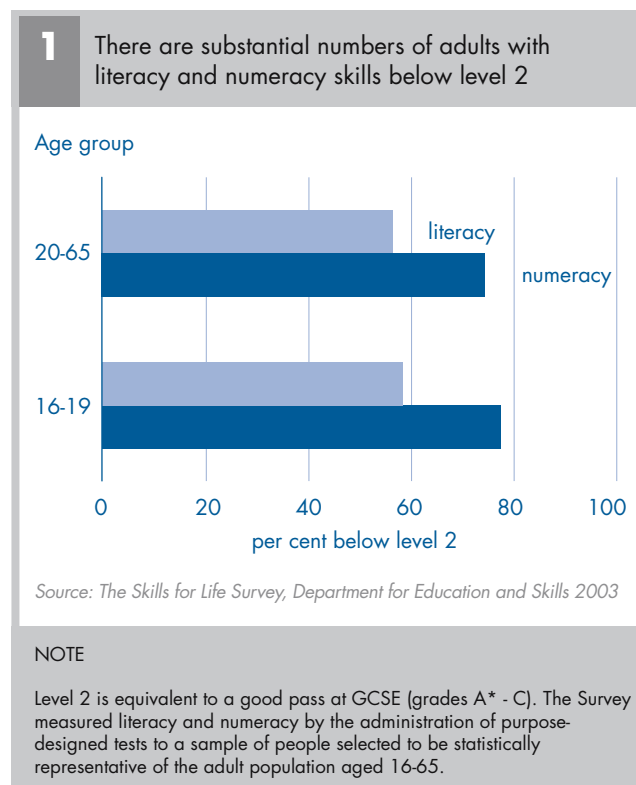


1 Twenty-six million people of working age have levels of literacy or numeracy below those expected of school leavers.¹ People with the lowest levels – those expected of a 9 to 11 year old or below – can experience practical difficulties in their everyday lives. They may be unable to read and understand signs, notices and labels, or check whether they have received the correct change when shopping. Low levels of literacy and numeracy can affect people’s ability to interact with other people, bring up their children and hold down a job. Many are unemployed, on benefits or work in low-skilled employment. Some are offenders in prison or being supervised in the community.

2 People who did not learn to read, write and carry out simple arithmetic in childhood may be reluctant to start or persevere with learning. There are substantial barriers to literacy and numeracy learning as an adult:

- People may be embarrassed about their low level of skills.
- They may not realise how poor their skills are because they have spent years developing coping strategies to reduce the impact on their daily lives.
- Poor experiences of learning in school, for example involving exclusion from school or coping with unidentified difficulties such as dyslexia, may have sapped their confidence and given them a negative view of education.
- Practical barriers to participating in learning include the need for childcare, the cost of transport, or the difficulty of getting time away from work to attend a course.

3 The UK has relatively high numbers of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy compared with other countries, and there are substantial numbers of adults in England with literacy and numeracy skills below a good pass at GCSE (**Figure 1**). The low skills are spread equally across all age groups in the working age population, with no significant variation between men and women



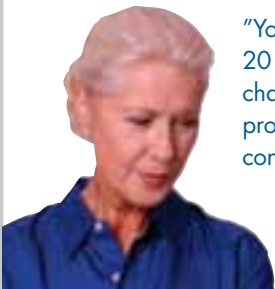
¹ The equivalent of grades A* to C at GCSE, which is level 2 in the national qualification framework (Figure 8 on page 18 and Appendix 1).

or between ethnic groups where there are no language barriers. Those migrants who enter the country without English language skills may also have low levels of literacy in their own language, or low levels of numeracy. Some may have lived and worked within their own community, perhaps for a decade or more, without substantially improving their English language skills.

4 The labour market demand for people with good literacy and numeracy skills is increasing, and a working population with low literacy and numeracy skills is therefore increasingly likely to reduce the UK's economic competitiveness.


5 In March 2001 the Department for Education and Skills launched the Skills for Life Strategy, which began a long-term programme of improvement to break the cycle of poor literacy and numeracy skills in England. At least £3.7 billion will be spent on implementing the programme by 2006. Language skills (English for Speakers of Other





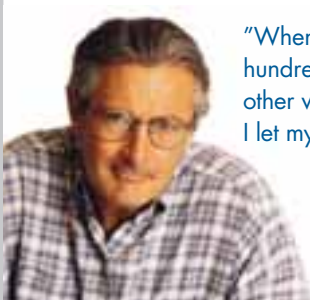
"You could be in the same job for 20 years and you might want to change it but it's still a daunting prospect... it's just having the confidence in yourself to change".

Unemployed learner in Norwich



"The first time that I came here I had a lot on my mind: who are the people, who is the teacher?"

Language learner in London



"When I walked up and there were hundreds of youngsters walking the other way and I thought 'what have I let myself in for?'".

Unemployed learner in Norwich

Languages) are included in the programme to address the needs of migrants entering the country with poor or no English. This report covers literacy, language and numeracy. The Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly have also introduced measures to address levels of literacy and numeracy.²

6 The Department is working with other departments, agencies, colleges, charities, voluntary organisations and private sector companies to increase the number and quality of learning opportunities for people to improve their literacy and numeracy. The learning provision is funded by the Department via the Learning and Skills Council which funds education and training for people aged over 16, or by Jobcentre Plus as part of entry to job-related training for people receiving working age benefits. Potential learners can access learning opportunities across a range of providers and locations including colleges, private sector providers, learndirect centres, and community learning centres (Figure 2). For many learners there will be a choice of the type of learning that they can take up, when and where they can do so. Figure 3 opposite sets out some of the paths that a learner may take.

7 In addition, the Department has encouraged departments and other public sector employers to help their own relevant staff to recognise they need to improve their skills and to find ways of learning that will be effective for them.

2 Adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland, July 2001 and the Basic Skills Strategy for Wales, February 2002.

3 Examples of the different paths potential learners may take to improve their literacy, language or numeracy

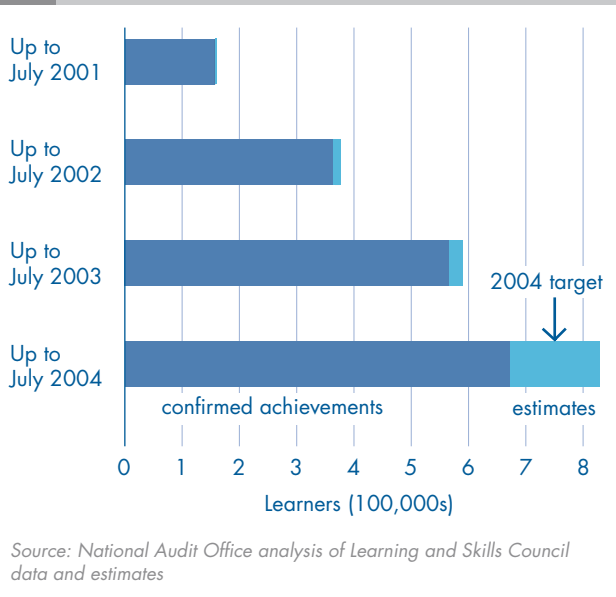
	How do learners get into learning?	Where are needs assessed?	Where does the learning happen?	
 Low-skilled employee	Employer, union learning representative and learning provider stimulate interest Adverts and/or speaking to friends	— Learning provider working with employer — College or learndirect centre	— Usually in the workplace — At home, college and/or learndirect	 
 Teenager over school age	Applies to college for vocational or other course	— College as part of course induction	— If needed, alongside a college course applied for	
 Unemployed and seeking work	Applies for Jobseeker's Allowance and is automatically screened by Jobcentre Plus adviser	— Jobcentre Plus contractor providing learning	— Jobcentre Plus contractor's premises or at the Jobcentre	
 Not working and not seeking work	Applies for personal interest course (for example shiatsu massage)	— Learning provider, after discussing embedded ¹ learning with applicant	— If needed, as part of embedded learning in personal interest course	
 Migrant	Immigration adviser and/or speaking to other migrants	— College or other learning provider	— English for Speakers of Other Languages in college or other provider	
 Offender committed to prison	As part of a programme to reduce re-offending	— On admission to prison	— In prison or later in college/other learning provider	

Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

¹ Embedded learning is where literacy or numeracy is taught as part of a vocational programme or wider programme, for example as part of a course on plumbing or a personal interest or skill.

4 The latest estimates suggest that the 2004 target has been achieved



NOTE

The reasons for the need to estimate achievement are set out in Figure 15 on page 28.

8 Our report explains the background to the Skills for Life Strategy and how it is being implemented (Part 1) and examines:

- the costs of the programme and its achievements to date (Part 2);
- the growth in participation (Part 3); and
- how delivery will be sustained (Part 4).

We make recommendations to support the delivery of the Strategy until 2010 and beyond.

Findings

9 The Department has set about implementing the Skills for Life Strategy in a pragmatic way. It concentrated first of all on raising the standards of learning, increasing the quantity of provision and encouraging people to take up the learning. Since many of the people taking up learning had difficulties with education in the past, the Department wanted to secure sufficient good quality learning early on, so that once attracted to learn, a learner's experience as an adult would be a good one. Some of the improvements will take time to have their full impact.

What has worked well

10 The Skills for Life Strategy is starting to have an impact on people's levels of literacy, language and numeracy, and is increasing participation in learning.

According to the latest estimates, the Department has achieved its initial target of improving the literacy or numeracy of 750,000 people by 2004 (Figure 4).

11 The Public Service Agreement target for 2010 and its milestones – 750,000 people by 2004, 1.5 million by 2007, and 2.25 million by 2010 – appear small in comparison with the 26 million people with literacy and numeracy below a good GCSE. However, there are enormous cultural and cost barriers to raising the skills of a large proportion of the population above this level except, possibly, over the longer term. The Department is placing emphasis on building participation of all adults with skills below the target level and estimates that by July 2004 over two million people had taken part in literacy and numeracy learning.

12 Evidence is building up on the impacts of improving literacy and numeracy as an adult. There has been a lack of research on beneficial impacts from gaining literacy, language and numeracy later in life both nationally and internationally. The Department has commissioned research to track the experience of learners. In 2005 the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy intends to investigate the value placed by the labour market on adult literacy, numeracy and language skills. Evidence from individual learners suggests beneficial impacts – for example through increased confidence in dealing with banks, their doctor, social situations and personal relationships. Many learners say they feel better equipped to get a job or move on to a further course of study.

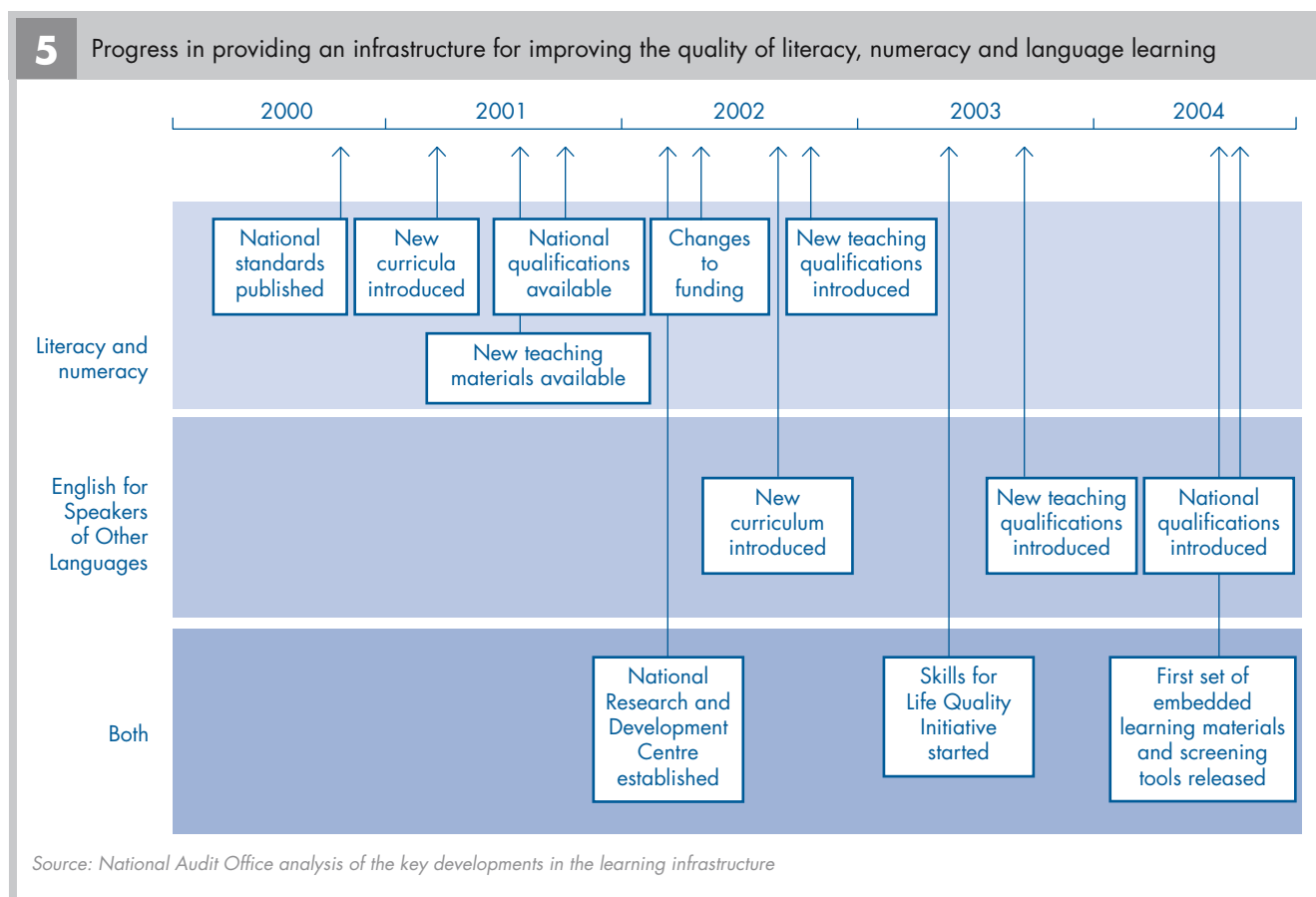
13 The Department has led the development of lasting improvements in the quality of literacy, numeracy and language learning. All the elements that support good learning – such as skill standards, curricula, good quality teaching and recognisable qualifications – were either non-existent or underdeveloped before 2001. Different colleges and examining boards offered a wide range of courses and qualifications which were not recognised by employers. Teachers were not always supported by good quality teaching materials and there was no clear path for improving the teaching of literacy, language and numeracy and for training and developing teachers.

14 The Department has introduced standards, curricula and new teaching materials to raise the quality of learning. It has brought in national tests and associated qualifications so that people know when they have achieved the standards. The developments on language learning followed literacy and numeracy, drawing on some of the work undertaken for literacy. The infrastructure shown in **Figure 5** will underpin the continued implementation of the Skills for Life Strategy.

15 Literacy and numeracy learning will increasingly need to attract people who are ‘difficult to reach’. Encouraging some of these people to learn will require creative provision through practices such as ‘embedding’, where literacy or numeracy is taught as part of a vocational programme or through family literacy which helps parents support their children in school. Learners we met liked this style of learning because they see it as more relevant to their daily lives. The Department has

commissioned a project to provide embedded learning materials over three years to 2006. Some providers are making good progress in developing embedded courses that both appeal to learners and meet their learning needs.

16 **The Department and the Learning and Skills Council have given incentives to providers to deliver more opportunities for people to learn literacy, language and numeracy.** The Learning and Skills Council’s funding for literacy, language and numeracy is 40 per cent higher than for other comparable programmes. In response, colleges are offering more options for people to improve their literacy and numeracy, including some flexible provision such as learning in the evening and at weekends. learndirect³ also provides opportunities for people to improve literacy and numeracy either at learndirect centres or online. The places are free to learners with low skills.



³ learndirect provides flexible e-learning solutions enabling learning to take place at work, home or in one of over 2,000 learndirect centres.

17 The Department has raised awareness by advertising and by working with other departments to reach their clients. The Department has run national campaigns on radio and television designed to help people recognise when they have low skills and to tell them where they can go for help. The campaigns were reinforced by advertising from local Learning and Skills Councils and a campaign by learndirect.

18 The Department, the Prison Service and the Probation Service have co-operated to improve the assessment of offenders' levels of literacy, language or numeracy. An estimated 92,000 offenders have gained qualifications in literacy or numeracy. From April 2004, the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus have introduced arrangements to screen all people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance within six months of making their claim for benefit, followed by more detailed assessment where appropriate. People with literacy and numeracy skills below level 1⁴ are offered courses funded by Jobcentre Plus which are designed in part to improve their literacy and numeracy in a work environment. Jobcentre Plus is also introducing less formal screening of other working age benefit claimants where they attend work-focused interviews as part of the regular review of their entitlement to benefit. If these customers are identified as having potential literacy and numeracy needs below level 1, Jobcentre Plus advisers offer them more detailed assessment of their skills by a Jobcentre Plus' contractor. The contractor may then offer the client Jobcentre Plus funded courses, or direct them to further education colleges or to learndirect.

Where more progress is needed

19 The Department is continuing to direct its efforts into increasing participation, reducing the barriers to learning and raising the quality, accessibility and flexibility of the provision. The following areas are those which seem to us to present the greatest challenges for the Department, the Learning and Skills Council and their partners.

20 More people with the lowest skill levels and those who are least likely to perceive they have poor skills need to be persuaded that improving their skills is worthwhile. More than half of the qualifications counting towards the July 2004 target were gained by 16 to 18 year olds. Many people who have recently experienced formal education perceive relatively few barriers to learning – although equally many young people are in danger of being lost to the education system. Most qualifications were also achieved by people who were happy to study at a further education college. Participation by older adults is increasing, but only slowly. Larger numbers of older adults with low skills need to be encouraged into learning to make substantial inroads into the low literacy and numeracy skills of the working age population. Local Learning and Skills Councils have had varying success in raising participation, but in all areas only a small percentage of the potential numbers are participating in learning so far and new learners need to be encouraged to take up opportunities over the next few years.

21 There continue to be high barriers to some people taking up opportunities to learn, or to them continuing with learning once started. Many people lead complicated lives with commitments to family, employers and often both. They are understandably reluctant to take on extra hours to improve skills they do not think need improving, or where the benefits of improvement are unclear. Some people may not have held a job for any length of time or may have chaotic, unstructured lives involving substance abuse, periods of homelessness or mental illness. Local Learning and Skills Councils have historically had poor information on the extent of low skills in local populations.

22 Refugees and asylum seekers face cultural barriers, may be traumatised from past experiences, face uncertainty about their immigration status and may be dispersed around the country. The local picture on migrants' literacy and numeracy needs can change rapidly as people with different countries of origin come into the UK.

4 Level 1 is the level equivalent to a GCSE grade D-G and equates to that expected of an 11 year old.

23 For all potential learners barriers can include: recognising that they can improve their skills; being able to find out what learning opportunities exist; having courses in places they can get to; or simply being unable to organise their lives to include regular time in which to learn new skills. The gremlins promotion campaigns have sought to address many of these barriers and the latest campaign focuses on people in the workplace and the benefits of gaining qualifications. Local campaigns complement the national ones and can be tailored to local circumstances.

24 Assessment of peoples' skill needs varies widely among these and other groups. Offenders are routinely assessed in prison or during probation and offered relevant courses. As explained in paragraph 18, Jobcentre Plus undertakes a formal assessment of the literacy and numeracy skills of customers receiving Jobseeker's Allowance. In around half of its offices, Jobcentre Plus advisers also informally screen customers claiming working age benefits when carrying out work-focused interviews to review their entitlement to benefits. This will be extended to all offices by 2006.

25 The Department for Education and Skills has sought to enlist employers, unions, and many public sector agencies that may come into contact with potential learners in identifying those who have low literacy and numeracy skills, encouraging them to have their skills assessed and supporting them into learning. There remains a risk that the needs of people such as those who do not receive benefits, or who do not receive benefits on their own behalf and are not themselves employed, would only be assessed if they identify a need to improve their skills and ask a learning provider for an assessment.

26 Some learners need more incentives and choice to encourage them to persevere with learning opportunities. The Department has sought to engage potential learners who only need short courses to improve their skills and gain a qualification by promoting short, specific courses that best meet their needs. Offenders are on probation for an average of six months. Thereafter they need to take up learning from another provider and the risk that they will drop out of learning increases.

27 Jobcentre Plus' primary objective is to help people into work, though it funds literacy and numeracy learning as one element of training aimed at getting people into employment. Attendance on the courses is for the most part voluntary. Jobcentre Plus' customers who obtain employment cease to attend any training course provided by Jobcentre Plus' contractors even where the job is short-term, and few people seek to continue the learning elsewhere. The drop-out rate for customers on Jobcentre Plus courses has been high and few have achieved qualifications.⁵ In April 2004, the Department for Work and Pensions introduced financial incentives for taking up training and achieving a qualification, which are intended to increase participation rates and reduce the number of people who drop out before finding work.

28 Low-skilled employees are one of the hardest groups to reach, and more small and medium sized employers need to be persuaded of the benefits of raising the skills of their employees. Many employees who have low literacy and numeracy skills are not aware of it, and if they are, they may not see the benefits of improving their skills. Similarly many employers, particularly those running small or medium sized enterprises⁶, are not readily convinced of the business benefits of improving employees' literacy and numeracy. Consequently they may be reluctant to invest cost and staff time in training. Barriers include work time lost from releasing employees for courses, fitting courses around working patterns, and the time and effort required for a learning provider to develop flexible and effective programmes that meet both the employer's and employees' needs. To promote the benefits of learning to employers and to address the perceived barriers, the Department has sponsored a number of initiatives such as employer training pilots and union learning representatives. Progress at local level is slow – even those providers and local Learning and Skills Councils that are engaging most effectively with employers of low-skilled employees find they have to expend considerable effort and resources to develop a successful offer of opportunities to improve skills.

⁵ Jobcentre Plus considers that this is primarily due to customers finding employment and leaving the unemployment register.

⁶ Small to medium sized enterprises, with 200 staff or fewer, are around 80 per cent of employers in England.

29 Voluntary and community organisations are essential partners because they are often best placed to encourage into learning those people who are very hard to reach, but there are barriers to these organisations becoming effectively involved. The Department and the Learning and Skills Council have taken steps to involve voluntary and community organisations in engaging reluctant learners and organising appropriate and personalised learning for them. However most organisations have much wider roles than learning provision and can find it difficult to cope with the Council's conditions for obtaining funding, which are designed for organisations mainly focused on providing learning. In May 2004 the Learning and Skills Council published a strategy for working with the voluntary and community sector, which included plans for making voluntary and community organisations' access to funding more straightforward.

30 More teachers with up-to-date training in teaching literacy, numeracy and language are needed to provide high quality learning. There are widespread shortages of teachers with up-to-date skills to match the success so far in raising demand for learning. In September 2002 the Department introduced new qualifications at level 4⁷ for literacy or numeracy teaching, and a programme of continuing professional education for existing teachers. It has made clear to providers that it expects them to encourage teachers to improve their skills and that by 2010 all teachers will be qualified. Not all providers are fully responding to the call for improvement so that, for example, existing teachers, especially those on temporary and part-time contracts, may not be persuaded of the benefits of improving their teaching skills or feel supported to do so.

31 The quality of learning needs to be raised to a consistently high level in all areas of the country.

A review of the quality and standards of literacy, language and numeracy provision by the Adult Learning Inspectorate and Ofsted, reporting in September 2003, found examples of good practice but also widespread weaknesses. The report established a baseline against which the improvements in quality can be assessed. As yet there is little evidence from individual inspections of improvements in the quality of learning delivered. The continuing weaknesses may partly be explained by the lead time required before improvements, for example in training of teachers, feed through to the learning they deliver. However, some low performance is likely to be due to providers not energetically taking up the fruits of the new learning infrastructure (Figure 5 on page 7).

32 More providers need to engage in creative development of flexible learning that people want because it meets both their practical requirements and personal needs. More innovative approaches such as embedded learning present particular challenges, for example because of the need to ensure that the literacy or numeracy elements within an embedded programme are given sufficient attention and that the programmes use teachers trained in teaching literacy or numeracy. Some providers are already developing learning that is both creative and effective, and there is increasing support available for others to do so, drawing on resources such as the work of the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy which, among other things, tests new ideas and approaches to learning.

7 The qualifications are set at the level of difficulty of a degree, but are not equivalent to a degree because they do not cover the breadth of material covered within a degree course.



RECOMMENDATIONS

33 We support the comprehensive and pragmatic approach that the Department for Education and Skills is taking to improving adult literacy, language and numeracy. The low levels of skills are a big problem that can only be addressed through action over the long term, and the Department and its partners' work will take time to have a major impact on the level of literacy and numeracy in the working age population. The Department and its partners should work together to implement our recommendations. There are, in addition, complementary recommendations set out in our recent report on the barriers to employment of older people.⁸

1 **Local Learning and Skills Councils should use the information from the Skills for Life survey and detailed information collected in their local area to build a clear picture of local needs for literacy, language and numeracy learning. They should help a range of learning providers to develop their capacity to meet the assessed local needs.**

Local Learning and Skills Councils have the primary responsibility for assessing local needs for further education and planning the provision to meet it. The picture on need for language learning can change particularly rapidly. Local Learning and Skills Councils have been hampered by poor local information both on low levels of literacy, language and numeracy and how far local learning provision matches the needs. Some have made good progress – for example, the Learning and Skills Council West Yorkshire has worked with local providers to map local provision in Bradford and has removed duplication, so freeing resources to provide learning where there was little or no provision.

2 **Local Learning and Skills Councils should use the enthusiasm, commitment and local knowledge of existing and recent learners to attract other people into learning.**

The people who best know the benefits of improving their literacy, language and numeracy are the learners themselves. For many learning unexpectedly turns out to be a life-changing experience and their enthusiasm is infectious. Some of the best provision builds on this experience to create learning that meets new learners' personal needs – for example some learndirect centres employ learners from deprived areas to support new learners in its centres. The Department ran a successful project, called Link Up, to recruit volunteers who undertook a qualification to become adult learner supporters. This scheme is now being devolved to a local level and needs to be maintained and built upon. The Department and its partners are using examples of successful learners to promote the benefits. They should extend this approach to local mentoring and outreach work to help people to see the benefits of improving their skills.

8 National Audit Office Report. Welfare to work: tackling the barriers to the employment of older people (HC 1026 2003-04).

RECOMMENDATIONS *continued*

3 The Department and the Learning and Skills Council should establish and disseminate examples of embedded and personalised learning that are successfully raising literacy and numeracy levels and encouraging learners to take up further learning opportunities. They should draw on examples of good practice involving work with voluntary and community organisations in encouraging very reluctant learners to get involved.

By embedding learning in vocational training or personal interest subjects, reluctant learners can be helped in a non-threatening way to address their literacy and numeracy skills. Some providers are working creatively to develop flexible and attractive programmes by assisting with embedding literacy, language and numeracy into vocational courses such as plumbing. Some voluntary organisations are helping hard to reach learners by embedding skills in courses such as needlework for Bangladeshi women run in local community centres. The Department has commissioned a national embedded materials project to provide support for teachers. These are all potentially very rewarding approaches that need to be evaluated and good practice shared throughout the country.



4 Local Learning and Skills Councils should continue to work with local employers to overcome the barriers that employers perceive to providing their employees with improved skills, and with providers to help develop choice in flexible learning to meet the needs of employers and employees.

Many employers, particularly smaller employers, consider that they do not have sufficient capacity or resources to be able to free employees to improve literacy and numeracy during working hours. The Department has been trialling different ways of engaging employers. Local Learning and Skills Councils are encouraging employers to draw on flexible learning opportunities – for example through learndirect, colleges providing courses on business premises and literacy and numeracy embedded in vocational learning. Financial incentives may also be needed to help some small employers to release their staff for learning and are being piloted in the employer training pilots. Successfully engaged businesses should also be encouraged and supported to persuade other employers of the practical benefits of improving the literacy and numeracy of their staff.

5 The Department for Education and Skills should develop ways of following up learners, encouraging them to persevere with improving their skills and to take up further opportunities.

The Department already funds helplines that can direct potential learners to appropriate learning provision. As part of its evaluation of the helplines, the Department follows up a group of callers to find out the action they take and their views of the helpline. With the consent of the person calling, telephone helplines make follow-up calls to encourage progress and provide links to local mentors and other support. The Department should consider extending this follow up to the majority of callers. While this type of support increases costs, it has been demonstrated to be cost-effective for other services such as the NHS Smoking Helpline.



6 The Department for Education and Skills, Learning and Skills Council and the Department for Work and Pensions should work together to ensure that customers on Jobcentre Plus funded courses are encouraged to continue their learning if they take up employment

At present people have to give up learning funded by Jobcentre Plus once they get a job and the barriers they face in continuing to learn when in employment can be very high. Jobcentre Plus should work with local Learning and Skills Councils to encourage customers to access and complete their learning in a way that suits them, whether as part of their new job or in their leisure time. Local Learning and Skills Councils should also consider what encouragement local employers need to help them see the benefits of their staff continuing to improve their skills.

7 The Department for Education and Skills should look at ways of ensuring that programmes for literacy, language and numeracy assess progress at frequent intervals.

Our society tends to see non-completion of learning in a negative light – as ‘dropping out’. And there are barriers to picking learning up at a later date because the learner often has to start all over again. People’s circumstances change and learning needs to be devised that fits better with their lives, and with their employer’s business if they work. When tutors assess skills as they are gained, learners build a sense of achievement from their ‘credits’ and are more easily able to pick up learning where they left off. The Department has been working to introduce flexible and innovative assessment, but this is not always operated effectively or recorded.

8 Local Learning and Skills Councils should work with providers to make sure that there are sufficient appropriately trained teachers in their areas and that existing teachers are supported to develop their skills.

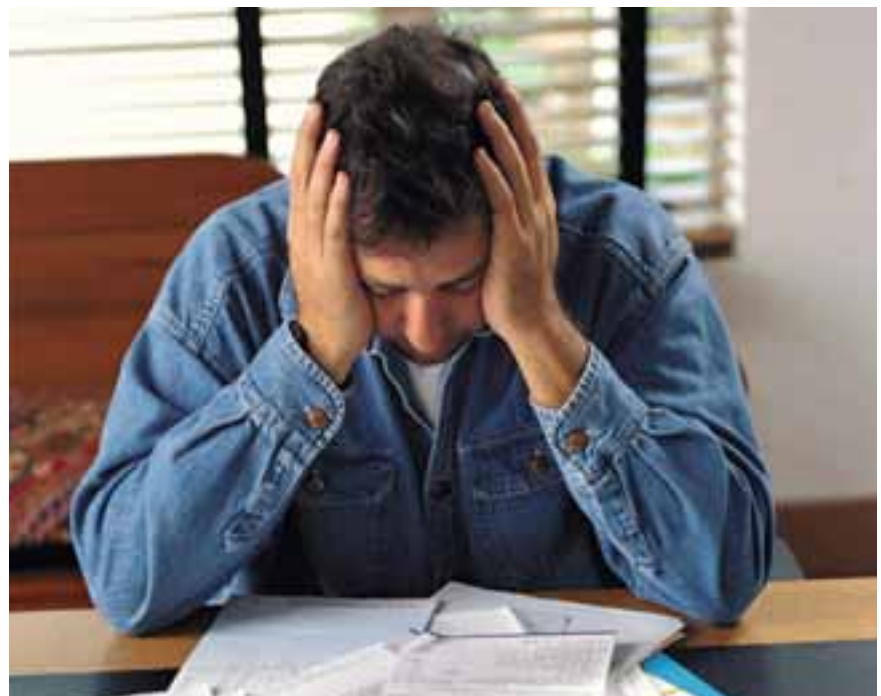
Most areas have shortages of teachers able to provide the high quality teaching to meet local demand. Most also have high numbers of existing teaching staff who need to develop their professional skills further. Local Learning and Skills Councils should explore the specific reasons for shortages of teachers in their areas. Where there are few or no local programmes for teacher training, they should work with Higher Education Institutions to develop them. Professional development programmes such as those under the Skills for Life Quality Initiative, funded by the national Learning and Skills Council, are available for existing staff, and local Learning and Skills Councils need to ensure providers make full use of the opportunities they provide. Where teachers are not being retained, local Learning and Skills Councils should work with providers to find out why and get them to tackle the problems that emerge – whether related to pay, contract terms, or other reasons.

9 The Learning and Skills Council should assist local Learning and Skills Councils in sharing approaches and experience of what works (and what has not worked) in increasing participation in learning and achievement of the national target.

All the local areas need to increase participation of the large numbers of people identified with low levels of skills. There are regional differences such as varying levels of low-skilled employment and the varying proportion of urban and rural communities, but the local Learning and Skills Councils we visited all agreed they could benefit from sharing ideas and learning from each other’s experience. The Learning and Skills Council could increase its active support, for example by increased use of its intranet to share experience and by facilitating events to explore innovative approaches.

PART ONE

The challenge of increasing literacy, language and numeracy skills



1.1 This part of the report sets out the rationale for the Skills for Life Strategy, which aims to raise the levels of literacy, language and numeracy skills.

Why levels of literacy, language and numeracy need to be raised

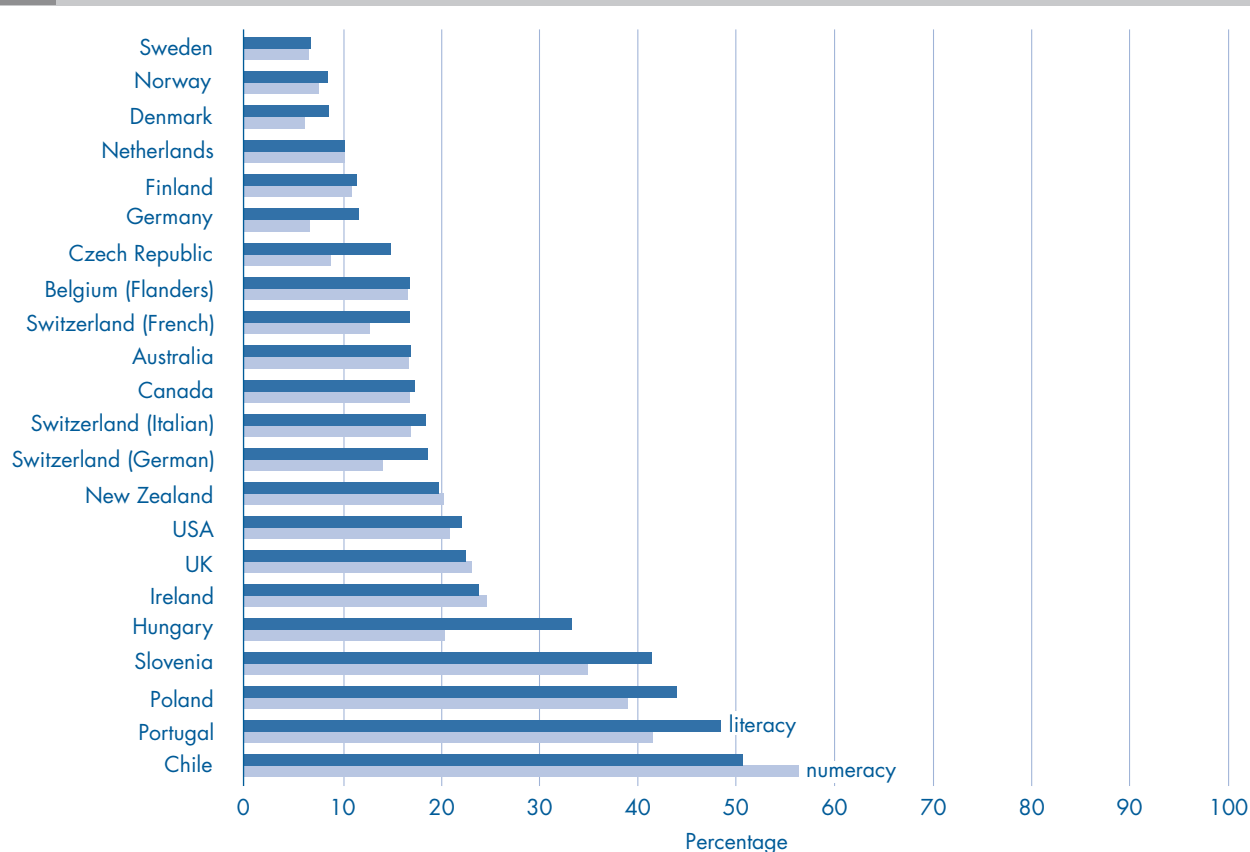
There are low levels of literacy, language and numeracy across the adult population

1.2 There is increasing concern in many countries about the role that basic literacy and numeracy skills play in achieving and sustaining economic growth and

social cohesion. The International Adult Literacy Survey⁹ reported that the UK had a greater percentage of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy than 13 of the 20 countries covered, and of all the English speaking countries except Ireland (**Figure 6**).

1.3 The Department for Education and Skills' research on the extent of the problem in England found that only one in five of the adult population of working age had both literacy and numeracy skills at levels equivalent to a good pass at GCSE. An estimated 17.8 million (56 per cent) had literacy skills, and 23.9 million (75 per cent) numeracy skills, below this level. In total an estimated 26 million people up to age 65 in the working

6 The UK has a greater proportion of adults with the lowest level literacy and numeracy skills than many of its international competitors



Source: *Literacy in the Information Age*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistics Canada, 2000

NOTE

This figure shows the percentages of the populations aged 16-65 with the lowest level of skills, measured on a scale devised for the Survey. This level indicates persons with very poor skills, where the individual may, for example, be unable to determine the correct amount of medicine to give a child from information printed on the package.

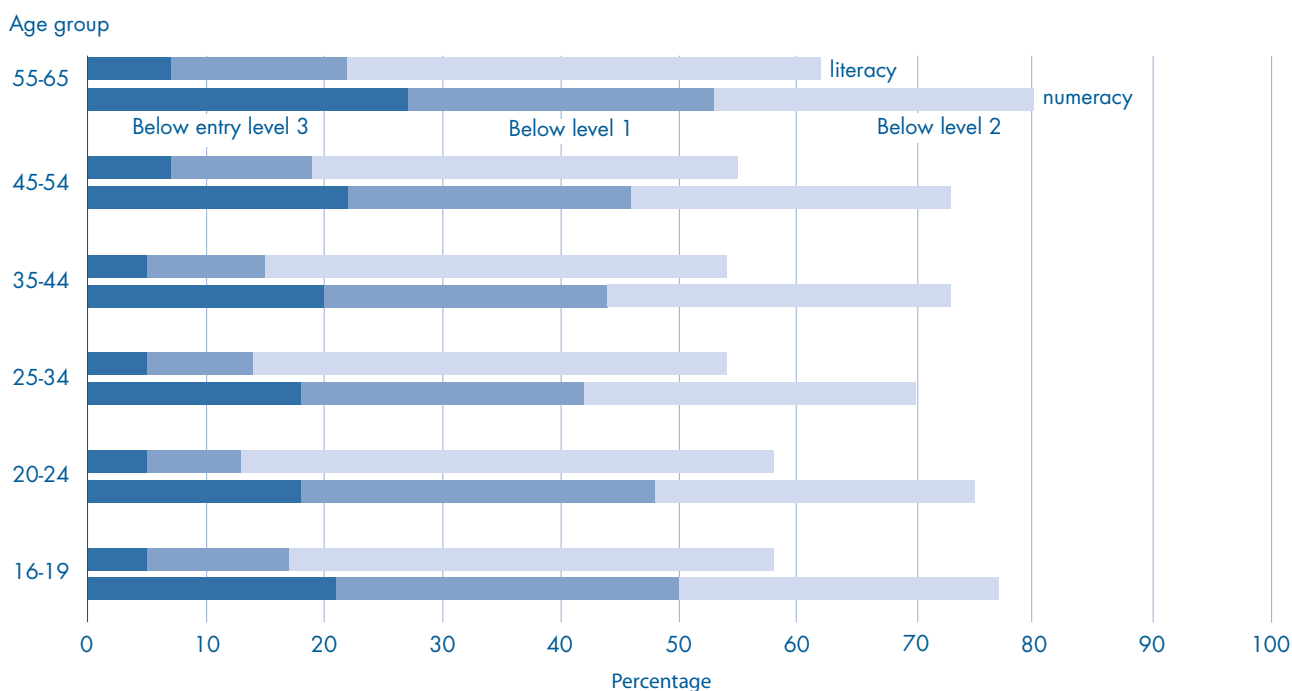
⁹ The Survey published three reports, in 1995, 1997 and 2000. It provided the first reliable and comparable estimates of literacy and numeracy skills in the adult populations of 20 countries accounting for over 50 per cent of the world's gross domestic product. Data for the survey were collected between 1994 and 1998; data for the UK were collected in 1996 and first published in the 1997 report.

population do not meet level 2 standards in either or both literacy and numeracy. There were minor variations in the proportions across age groups, with substantial numbers of people with skills below GCSE A* to C (level 2) at all ages (Figure 7). Around half of people in all age groups had numeracy skills below level 1, which is the equivalent to the level expected of an 11 year old, and around a fifth of people had numeracy skills below entry level 3 which is equivalent to the level expected of 9 to 11 year olds. In contrast there are only one in twenty people with literacy skills below that level.

1.4 These low levels of literacy and numeracy are the result of several factors:

- For years large numbers of young people have left school with poor literacy and numeracy skills. In 1998 the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies for schools were introduced, but their effects will not work through fully to a generation
- People may not take up any further education after leaving school and may not recognise that they have a problem. The Skills for Life survey reported that very few people regarded their reading, writing or maths skills as below average (five per cent, eight per cent and seven per cent respectively). Even among those with skills equivalent to an 11 year old or below, the proportion regarding their reading, writing and maths as below average were lower than might be expected (46 per cent, 54 per cent and 32 per cent respectively).
- Some people who did attain the skills may have not have sustained them. Adults who are out of work lose their skills, and such loss tends to be more acute, and to start sooner after loss of employment, for numeracy than for literacy.¹⁰

7 There are substantial numbers of adults with low literacy and numeracy in all age groups



Source: The Skills for Life survey, Department for Education and Skills 2003

NOTE

The survey used levels linked to the national qualifications framework (Figure 8 and Appendix 1). Level 1 is equivalent to the level expected of an eleven year old, or a low pass at GCSE (Grades D-F); Level 2 is equivalent to a good pass at GCSE (grades A*- C). Data was collected between June 2002 and May 2003.

10 Bynner, J. and Parsons, S. 1998, Use it or Lose it?

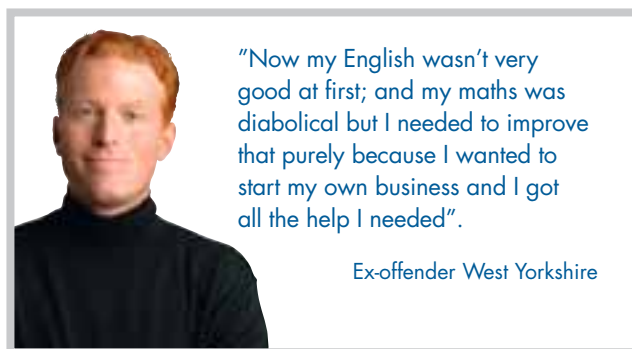
- Since the 1950s large numbers of people have migrated to the UK, and their needs for learning vary greatly. Some arrive fully literate in their own languages but need to learn English. Others have literacy needs in their own language, and some may not have learned English despite living here for many years. The Skills for Life survey found that respondents whose first language was not English performed less well in literacy and numeracy tests.

Low levels of literacy and numeracy may reduce economic competitiveness

1.5 Employers increasingly need workers with the ability to read and write at a good level. Most jobs require some competence in literacy and numeracy and half of jobs are closed to people who lack such skills at least to the level of a GCSE grades D-G. People with poor literacy, language and numeracy skills are less productive at work.¹¹ A recent survey of 520 firms by the Confederation of British Industry indicated that 47 per cent of employers were not satisfied with the basic literacy and numeracy of school leavers.¹²

1.6 The major growth in jobs in recent years, which is expected to continue, was in professional, technical and managerial positions. The number of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the UK is reducing because of increasing competition from lower cost countries such as China.¹³ Global competition also requires that the workforce increase its productivity, which lags behind

many of our competitors. While there will be a large proportion of low-skilled service sector jobs in the foreseeable future, technical change and changes in working practices are leading to increasing literacy and numeracy requirements for these jobs. Workers may need to be able to read health and safety guidance, understand complex equipment instructions or deal competently with measuring chemicals. If the employees currently filling these jobs do not increase their skill levels, they are likely to perform poorly. School leavers without skills will increasingly be less able to find a job. The Department has set the required standard expected of school leavers at the level considered necessary to maintain our future competitiveness. This level (equivalent to a GCSE grade A* - C) is higher than was thought necessary in the past.¹⁴



11 Department of Trade and Industry Economic Paper No. 6. UK Productivity and Competitiveness Indicators 2003, November 2003.

12 CBI/Pertemps 2004 Employment trends survey 2004.

13 Institute of Employment Research (2001) Projections of occupations and qualifications 2000-2001; Performance and Innovation Unit (2001) In demand: adult skills in the twenty first century.

14 Department for Education and Employment (2000) Skills for all: Proposals for a National Skills Agenda, the final report of the National Skills Task Force, sets out the research supporting the decision to set the level for school leavers at level 2 equivalent to GCSE grades A* - C.

People with low literacy and numeracy are less able to cope well in society

1.7 People with good literacy and numeracy skills generally have better employment opportunities and income and they also tend to have a better overall quality of life.¹⁵ For example, a low level of literacy can make it difficult to understand a range of information, such as instructions on medicines, and can prevent parents from helping their children learn to read – with the risk of poor skills levels being transferred between generations. Low levels of numeracy affect day to day activities such as being able to check change given in shops. **Figure 8** illustrates how not having literacy or numeracy at particular levels can affect a person’s ability to function in society.

8 Literacy and numeracy skills affect a person’s ability to function in society

- Adults with skills below entry level 1 may not be able to:** select the correct numbered floors in lifts or write short messages to family → **Entry level 1** is the national school curriculum equivalent for attainment at 5 to 7 years of age
- Adults with skills below entry level 2 may not be able to:** describe a child’s symptoms to a doctor or use a cash point to withdraw cash → **Entry level 2** is the national school curriculum equivalent for attainment at 7 to 9 years of age.
- Adults with skills below entry level 3 may not be able to:** understand price labels on pre-packed food or pay household bills → **Entry level 3** is the national school curriculum equivalent for attainment at 9 to 11 years of age
- Adults with skills below level 1 may not be able to:** check the pay and deductions on a wage slip or read bus or train timetables → **Level 1** is the equivalent of GCSE grades D-G.
- Adults with skills below level 2 may not be able to:** compare products and services and work out the best to buy or work out a household budget → **Level 2** is the equivalent of GCSE grades A* - C.

Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

Appendix 1 explains skills levels in more detail.

1.8 Proportionately more people with poor literacy and numeracy skills are offenders compared to the general population. Fifty per cent of prisoners have poor reading skills, 80 per cent have poor writing skills, and 67 per cent have poor numeracy.¹⁶

The Skills for Life Strategy aims to raise literacy and numeracy

“We have found that people are staggered when one confronts them with the basic facts about literacy and numeracy, and rightly so...It is a state of affairs that cannot be allowed to continue, and our Report proposes a wide-ranging approach to the challenge...”

Foreword by Sir Claus Moser, the Moser Report, February 1999

1.9 In 1999 a Working Group on improving literacy and numeracy, chaired by Sir Claus Moser, reported on the need for a national strategy to address low levels of adult literacy and numeracy. The adult strategy would complement the national strategies that were being introduced in schools. The report looked at the situation in England.

1.10 The Skills for Life Strategy was introduced in March 2001. The Strategy was a response to the Moser report, not a direct implementation of its recommendations, but the Strategy’s key priorities (**Figure 9**) reflect those identified in the Moser report.

1.11 Moser’s benchmarks for functional literacy and numeracy were broadly equivalent to level 1 for literacy and entry level 3 for numeracy (Figure 8). The Skills for Life Strategy widened the focus, seeking to give adults the skills not only to be functionally literate and numerate, but also the level 2 skills in literacy and numeracy needed to equip people to progress to learning the higher level and technical skills necessary to support the government’s economic goals. It also extended the original recommendations on lower level skills to cover adults with entry level skills, which was split into three stages (Figure 8), and includes provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. Also, having identified people not speaking English as their first language as a priority group, the Strategy covers the English language skills they need in addition to literacy and numeracy.

15 Department for Education and Skills (2003) *The Skills for Life survey: A national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills*; Dearden, McIntosh, Myck & Vignoles (2000) *Skills Task Force Research Paper: The Returns to Academic, Vocational and Basic Skills in Britain*; Bynner & Parsons (1997) *It Doesn’t Get Any Better*.
 16 Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners*.

9 Key priorities of the Skills for Life Strategy

Engaging learners

- Giving all adults an entitlement to free literacy, numeracy and language training, reflecting their needs and available when and where they need it.
- Establishing a clear route to qualifications that help learners and teachers understand what is needed to progress.
- Launching and sustaining a promotional strategy targeted at those who could improve their skills and those who can support them.

Raising Standards

- Establishing national standards, screening and diagnostic assessment, a national core curriculum and new National Tests, and commissioning new learning materials to support them.
- Enhancing the status of teachers by introducing professional qualifications for all literacy and numeracy teachers from September 2001.
- Improving inspection arrangements to provide a rigorous and robust quality framework.

Co-ordinating planning and delivery

- Setting targets and increasing funding so that all providers receive funds for learners following a literacy or numeracy course.
- Targeting key priority groups and making sure all parts of government are focused on common goals.
- Establishing regional pathfinder areas to test how best to increase retention and achievement rates. A new centre of research will commission more analysis including a baseline survey of need.

Source: *Skills for Life: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills*



1.12 The Strategy set out an initial aim of improving the literacy and numeracy of 750,000 adults by 2004. Its longer term aim is to make sure that England has one of the best adult literacy and numeracy rates in the world and ultimately to eliminate the problem.

1.13 To implement the Strategy, the Department works in partnership with a wide range of other organisations, including other public sector bodies whose clients or employees may have literacy and numeracy needs, private sector employers and providers of literacy and numeracy courses. The work is underpinned by professional and research organisations (**Figure 10**).

1.14 The Department works via the Learning and Skills Council which funds most of the different types of learning opportunity available for people aged over 16. **Figure 11** shows the service delivery network illustrating the funding of learning for different clients.

10 The Department is working with a wide range of partners

Department for Education and Skills

Responsible for policy on improving literacy and numeracy, funding research, promoting demand from potential learners and monitoring progress against the targets.

Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus

Responsible for welfare policy and delivering support for people on benefits and advice and help for those seeking to work.

Home Office, including the Prison Service, National Probation Directorate and Youth Justice Board

Responsible for correctional programmes for offenders which are designed to reduce re-offending behaviour. From June 2004 a single National Offender Management Service is being developed.

Learning and Skills Council

Responsible for funding and planning education and training for 16+.

Ofsted

Inspects education for 16 to 18 year olds in further education colleges.

Adult Learning Inspectorate

Inspects all adult education and work-based training.

Further Education National Training Organisation

Responsible for developing standards for teaching literacy, language and numeracy.

Qualifications and Curriculum Agency

Responsible for developing and administering national tests for literacy and numeracy.

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

Responsible for developing more effective methods for delivering courses and ways to learn.

The Basic Skills Agency

Responsible for initiating and supporting innovation and development, providing high quality advice and consultancy and disseminating good practice.

Ufi

Provides planning, funding and support for learndirect centres to provide online learning.

Large employers including other departments, the NHS and the Armed Forces

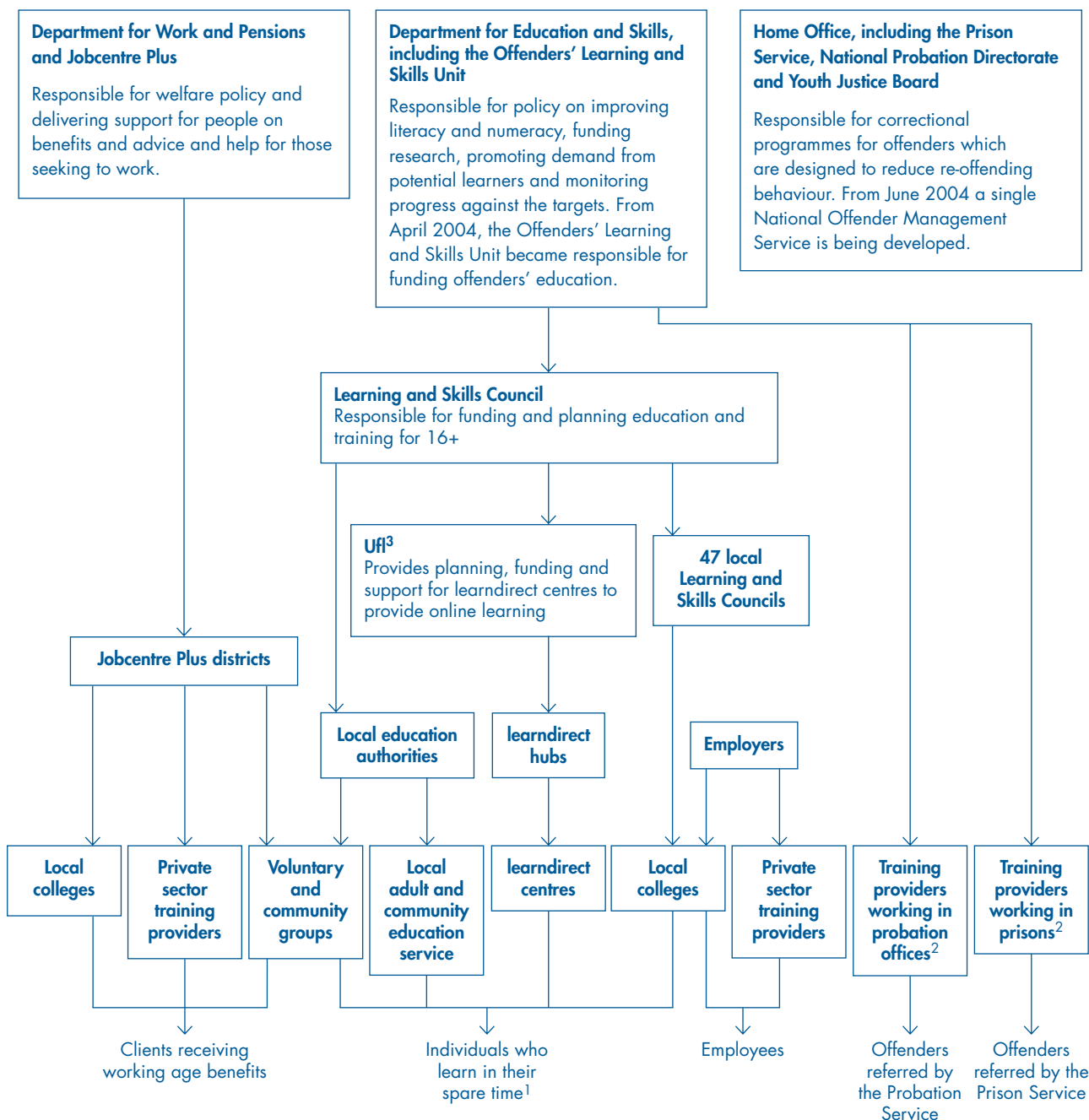
Responsible for improving the skills of any low-skilled employees.

Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

These are only the main partners involved in the Skills for Life Strategy; a wide range of other organisations in the public and private sectors also contribute.

11 A wide range of organisations are funded to provide learning opportunities



Source: National Audit Office

NOTES

- 1 People learning in their spare time may be in receipt of benefits or employed.
- 2 Training providers working both in prisons and the Probation Service may be directly employed staff, private sector providers, colleges, or learndirect.
- 3 Uffl was formerly known as the University for Industry.

Some of these organisations may spend additional funds from other sources.

How we approached our examination

1.15 We decided to evaluate the Department and the Learning and Skills Council's programme to implement the Skills for Life Strategy because the low levels of literacy, language and numeracy potentially affect many people. We felt that an examination early in the timeframe for the programme would enable us to provide conclusions and recommendations on how the programme should be developed in future. Our work focused on whether the programme is delivering the intended results and whether the Department has managed the programme to best effect. Our report looks at the:

- costs and achievements (Part 2);
- actions to raise participation by potential learners (Part 3); and
- actions to sustain delivery (Part 4).

1.16 Figure 12 summarises our approach to the examination and Appendix 1 sets out our methodology in more detail.

12 Our methodology for examining Skills for Life

Part 1 The challenge of increasing literacy and numeracy

- Literature review
- Case studies of local Learning and Skills Councils, jobcentres and probation services

Part 2 Costs and achievements

- Analysis of financial information
- Analysis of performance measurement system used to monitor performance against the targets
- Focus groups with learners

Part 3 Raising participation

- Literature review
- Case studies of local Learning and Skills Councils, jobcentres and probation services
- Focus groups with learners

Part 4 Sustaining delivery

- Literature review
- Interviews with stakeholders
- Case studies of local Learning and Skills Councils, jobcentres and probation services
- Focus groups with learners

Source: National Audit Office

PART TWO

Costs and achievements



2.1 This part of the report sets out the expenditure on the Skills for Life Strategy, and evaluates the progress made since 2001 in increasing participation and achievement in literacy, language and numeracy learning for adults.

Substantial sums are being spent on improving literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults in England

2.2 At least £2.1 billion has been spent on adult literacy, language and numeracy since the Strategy began, with a further £1.6 billion planned up to 2006 (**Figure 13**). Most of this money came from existing budgets. It provides funding for individuals for courses in further education colleges, adult and community education, learndirect centres, prisons and the probation service, as well as for a variety of projects to set up and build capacity. Set-up costs were substantial in the early years of the Strategy

KEY POINTS

- By 2006, at least £3.7 billion will have been spent on literacy, language and numeracy learning for adults.
- Many people are improving their skills and more need to take up opportunities to learn.
- Levels of participation and achievement are increasing but are small relative to the low levels of skills in the

because of investment in developing standards, curricula and qualifications and work with pilot approaches for different potential learners, but are now decreasing. Other government departments are contributing to the Strategy, by identifying and in some cases providing courses for those of their clients or employees who have literacy and numeracy needs.

13 By 2006 at least £3.7 billion will have been spent on Skills for Life

	Estimated actual spend				Planned future spend	
	2000-01 £ million	2001-02 £ million	2002-03 £ million	2003-04 £ million	2004-05 £ million	2005-06 £ million
Funding for individuals: Department for Education and Skills and the Learning and Skills Council Including for example: level 1 courses in literacy at colleges	137	420	554	604	534	582
Start-up and project funding: Department for Education and Skills and the Learning and Skills Council Including for example: expenditure on developing teaching materials	30	69	73	155	124	102
Funding in other government departments: Including for example: Jobcentre Plus expenditure on basic employability training	-	22	27	48	94	97
Totals	167	511	654	807	752	781

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental information

2.3 The Department has been successful in engaging central government partners such as the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Home Office in implementing the Strategy, but this makes it difficult to estimate total costs and our analysis in **Figure 13** is likely to be an underestimate for the following reasons:

- The Department has not been able to obtain complete expenditure information from partners, for example because some costs for literacy, language and numeracy learning are included in wider programmes. For example the Department for Work and Pensions provides a variety of training as part of its New Deal programmes¹⁷ and cannot separate out expenditure on the literacy and numeracy elements of these courses.
- Local Learning and Skills Councils have drawn on other sources of funding such as the European Social Fund and regional development money. There are no national figures, and local records at the councils we visited showed that for many projects literacy and numeracy are among several elements, and the costs cannot easily be separated out.
- Project and pump-priming funding distributed by the Learning and Skills Council is likely to include some resources for literacy, language and numeracy, but the Council only collects separate information where the funds have been specifically allocated to Skills for Life.

2.4 One of the objectives of the Strategy is to develop ‘embedded’ learning of literacy, language and numeracy within other programmes – for example literacy and/or numeracy might be taught within vocational qualifications supporting the construction industry.¹⁸ This approach is generally more attractive to learners who may have been put off learning English and mathematics by their experience at school. It also makes the learning more relevant to day to day life experience. However, success in ‘embedding’ the learning can make the extraction of specific costs more difficult.

2.5 The average costs per learner or qualification vary according to the type of qualification and the learners most likely to undertake it. GCSEs are typically the lowest cost, and courses in literacy and numeracy the highest. These averages can mask wide variations due to differences in the type, intensity and length of course, which need to take account of where different learners are starting from. **Figure 14** indicates the extent of variation in the costs of provision.

14 The costs of qualifications range widely, reflecting the needs of learners

Qualification type	Average cost (£)	Range
Adult literacy and numeracy	1,301	From £609 for level 2 literacy to £3,469 for entry level literacy
Key Skills of communication and application of number	1,119	From £998 for level 2 communication to £1,518 for level 2 application of number
GCSE English and Mathematics	660	From £491 for GCSE Mathematics D-G to £808 for GCSE Mathematics A* - C

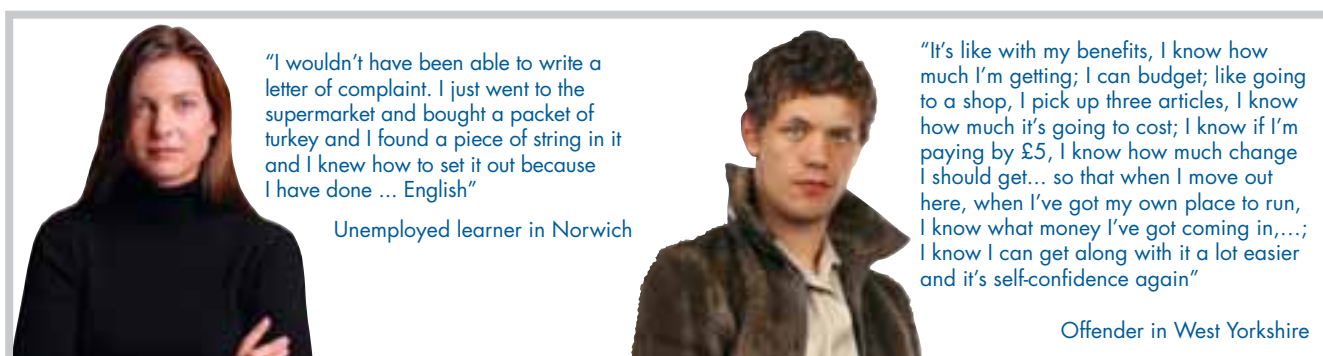
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Learning and Skills Council data

NOTE

Figures are average costs for qualifications achieved in 2002-03 through Learning and Skills Council funded provision in colleges.

17 The New Deal programmes help working age Jobseekers into work through the provision of information, advice and support. This includes appropriate training, for example employability training.

18 For example the NVQ level 2 Trowel Occupations which covers subjects such as bricklaying.



"I wouldn't have been able to write a letter of complaint. I just went to the supermarket and bought a packet of turkey and I found a piece of string in it and I knew how to set it out because I have done ... English"

Unemployed learner in Norwich

"It's like with my benefits, I know how much I'm getting; I can budget; like going to a shop, I pick up three articles, I know how much it's going to cost; I know if I'm paying by £5, I know how much change I should get... so that when I move out here, when I've got my own place to run, I know what money I've got coming in,...; I know I can get along with it a lot easier and it's self-confidence again"

Offender in West Yorkshire

Many people are improving their skills and more people need to take up opportunities to learn

2.6 The success of the Skills for Life Strategy can be measured in a number of ways:

- from evidence of impact on the people undertaking training in literacy, language or numeracy;
- people who gain certain specified qualifications; and
- people who participate in relevant learning, whether or not they gain a qualification.

Beneficial impacts on the learner are indicated but not proven

2.7 Evidence that higher levels of literacy and numeracy are associated with better life chances is derived from research on people who gained their skills principally in their formative years at school.¹⁹ There is no research, in this country or elsewhere, that demonstrates beneficial impacts from gaining these skills later in life. There is, however, a range of anecdotal evidence that indicates increased confidence and self-esteem and that learners feel better equipped to get a job.²⁰ The people in our focus groups reported an increased sense of their 'job-readiness' after taking courses. They felt more confident about dealing with social situations such as registering with a GP, using public transport, as well as in their personal relationships. Many expressed an interest in moving on to other courses of study now that they had developed self-confidence and a positive view of education.

2.8 Information on the wider impacts on adult learners of gaining skills in literacy and numeracy will be available in future from studies tracking the experience of learners. For example, the Department for Education and Skills has commissioned a longitudinal survey of learners and published a report in May 2004 providing a baseline for measuring impacts in future years. A further report will be published at the end of 2005.

2.9 There is very limited evidence of the costs to the economy. In 2003 the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy reviewed the available material and concluded that while there was robust evidence that poor literacy and numeracy have adverse effects on earning and employment of individuals, there was no systematic data on the benefits for employers in the UK of investing in literacy and numeracy training. And there was an almost total lack of data – especially UK data – on the return from investing in training of any kind or on training costs.²¹ The Centre is carrying out a project, co-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, to investigate literacy and numeracy in the workplace and in particular the impact on productivity of improving these skills in the workplace. The project will publish an interim report in 2005 and the final report in 2007. In addition, the Centre will investigate the value to the labour market of adult literacy, numeracy and language skills.

19 Dearden, L, McIntosh, S, Myck, M and Vignoles, A (2000) Skills Task Force Research Paper. The Returns to Academic, Vocational and Basic Skills in Britain; Bynner, J, McIntosh, S, Vignoles, A, Dearden, L, Reed, H, and Van Reenen, J (2001) Improving Adult Basic Skills. Benefits to the Individual and to Society; Bynner, J (2002) Literacy, Numeracy and Employability.

20 Peters, M., Rousseau, N. and Lynam-Smith, C. (2003) Evaluation of literacy and numeracy pilots: quantitative report - Department for Education and Skills report.

21 National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (2003) Research Review: The benefits to employers of raising workforce basic skills levels: a review of the literature.

The latest estimates suggest that the Department has met its 2004 target for learners achieving specified qualifications

2.10 The Public Service Agreement target is to improve the literacy and numeracy skills levels of 2.25 million adults by 2010, with milestones of 0.75 million adults by 2004 and 1.5 million adults by 2007. The targets for 2004 and 2007 were set before the Department had authoritative data on the size of the improvement required. However, earlier information from the International Adult Literacy Survey and the Basic Skills Agency was sufficient to indicate that these targets could only mark the start of a very long term programme.

2.11 Figure 15 outlines the key features of the target and the limitations around measuring it, which have restricted some of the analyses in our report. For example, breakdowns by age, subject, or level of qualification are only possible in respect of Learning and Skills Council funded training provided by further education colleges.

2.12 There has been a steady increase in the number of qualifications. The latest estimates suggest that the target of 750,000 learners achieving an approved qualification by July 2004 has been achieved, with a confirmed 670,000 people achieving qualifications and a further 160,000 estimated as achieving qualifications. Most qualifications have been obtained through further education colleges. Providers other than further education and prisons have not contributed substantially towards the achievement of the target (Figure 16).

15 The key features of the Skills for Life target and measuring achievement

The target:

- covers people aged 16 and over in England who have left compulsory education (excluding students in schools sixth forms, but including those in sixth form colleges);
- refers to numbers of people achieving qualifications – a person achieving more than one qualification should only be counted once; and
- defines improvement as movement up a level and the achievement of a qualification – only qualifications at entry level 3, level 1 or level 2 count towards the target (Figure 8 and Appendix 1), and only specified qualifications count – the national tests of literacy and numeracy developed for Skills for Life, approved qualifications in English for Speakers of Other Languages, Key Skills qualifications in communication and application of number, and GCSEs in English and mathematics.

The Department and the Learning and Skills Council have had to devise methods of estimating participation in learning and progress against the target, and there are limitations on the data:

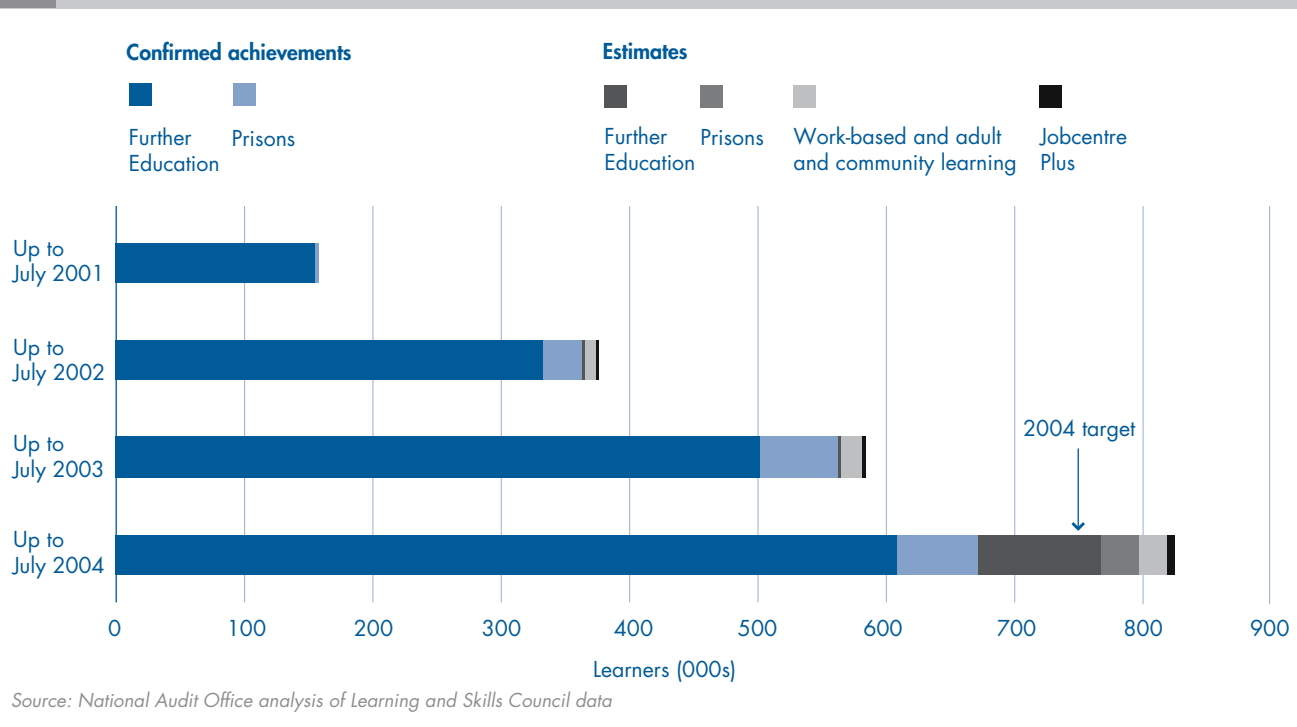
- Each provider maintains student records for funding purposes and monitoring of participation and achievement.

There are, however, no unique identifying numbers for students, and no student-level tracking of learning received by adults through the wide and complex range of options available to people after they have left school. A small number of people study with more than one provider, such as with a college and with learndirect, and therefore have more than one record. To reduce the risk of counting achievements twice, the Department and the Council have to adjust the total qualifications by a factor that they review every year.

- Other than for further education colleges, for 2001-02 and 2002-03 the Council can only produce estimated totals for providers, with no breakdown by age or type of qualification. These providers did not have individual learner records in the early years of the Strategy. The Learning and Skills Council has been working with them to develop records, but progress was slow. All the Council's providers are now using individual learner records which the Council expects to provide more complete data for 2003-04.
- The Council has to estimate results until final returns are received. The normal cycle for submitting data is lengthy and involves considerable administrative effort – final returns for an academic year are not due until the following February. Some colleges can be very late in making returns, though timeliness is improving.

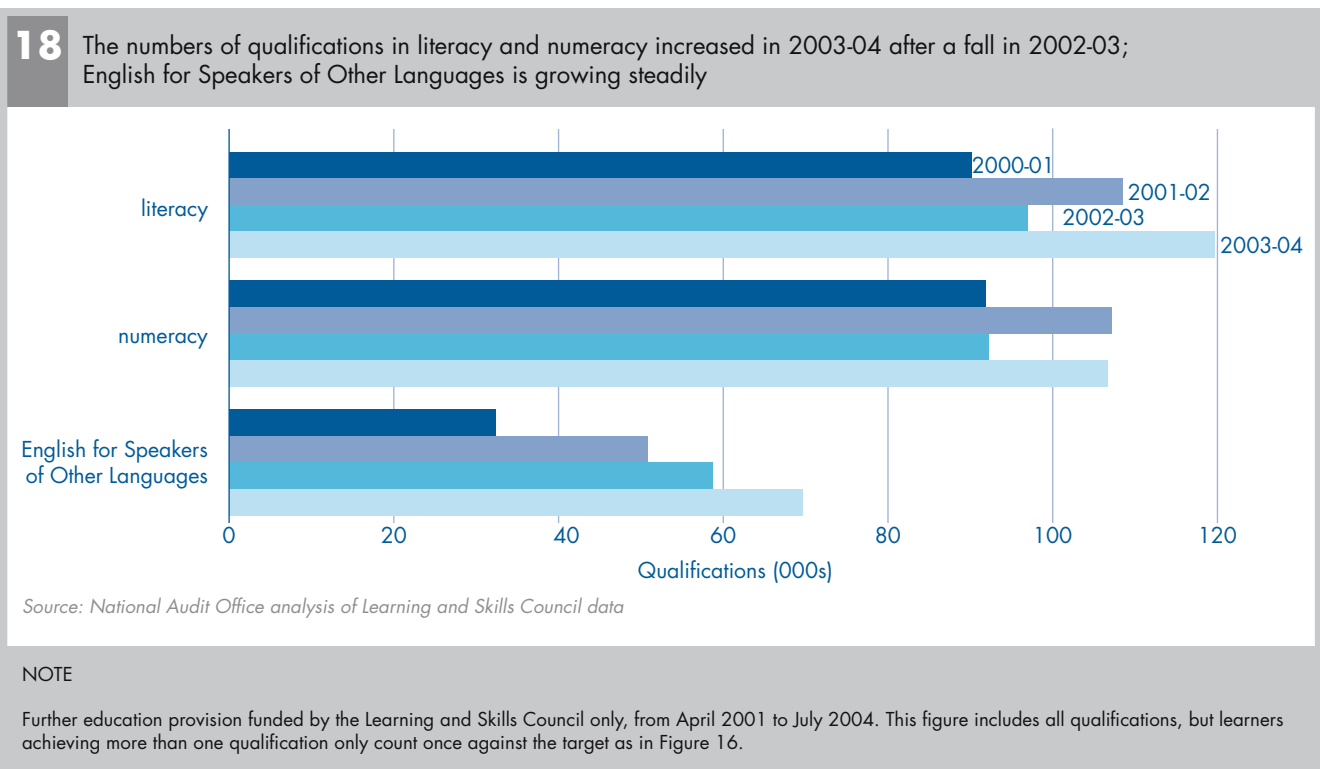
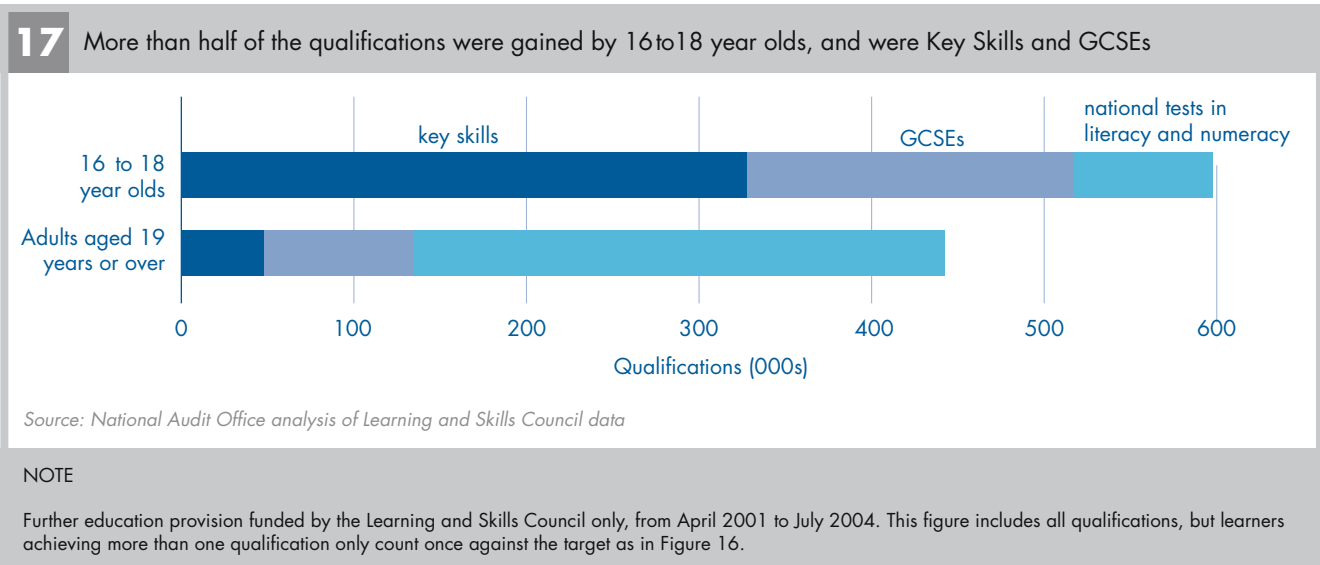
Source: Department for Education and Skills, Technical Note

16 The latest estimates suggest that the 2004 target has been achieved



2.13 More than half of the qualifications that count against the target were gained by 16 to 18 year olds, and were principally Key Skills and GCSEs in English and mathematics (Figure 17). However, the pattern of achievement has moved a little over the period of the Strategy – the proportion represented by adults aged 19 or over passing national literacy and numeracy tests (available from September 2001) has increased from 23 to 37 per cent, and the proportion of Key Skills and GCSE qualifications for 16 to 18 year olds has declined from 55 to 43 per cent.

2.14 In the period of the Strategy so far, the numbers of qualifications achieved that count towards the target have been broadly equal for literacy and numeracy, each contributing around 40 per cent. Over that time, the number of literacy and numeracy qualifications has varied with a large increase in 2003-04, whilst the number of qualifications in English for Speakers of Other Languages has risen each year (Figure 18).



More people need to participate in literacy, language and numeracy learning and the most recent milestone looks likely to be met

2.15 Achievement of the 2010 target will require a further 1.5 million learners to achieve a first relevant qualification at entry level 3 or above in literacy, language or numeracy above the level reached in July 2004. And this will only happen if sufficient numbers of people commence and progress, as necessary, through the lower entry levels and sustain learning that leads to achievement of a relevant qualification. Though participation in courses for entry levels 1 and 2 does not count towards the target, the courses provide an essential step towards it for people with the lowest levels of skills.

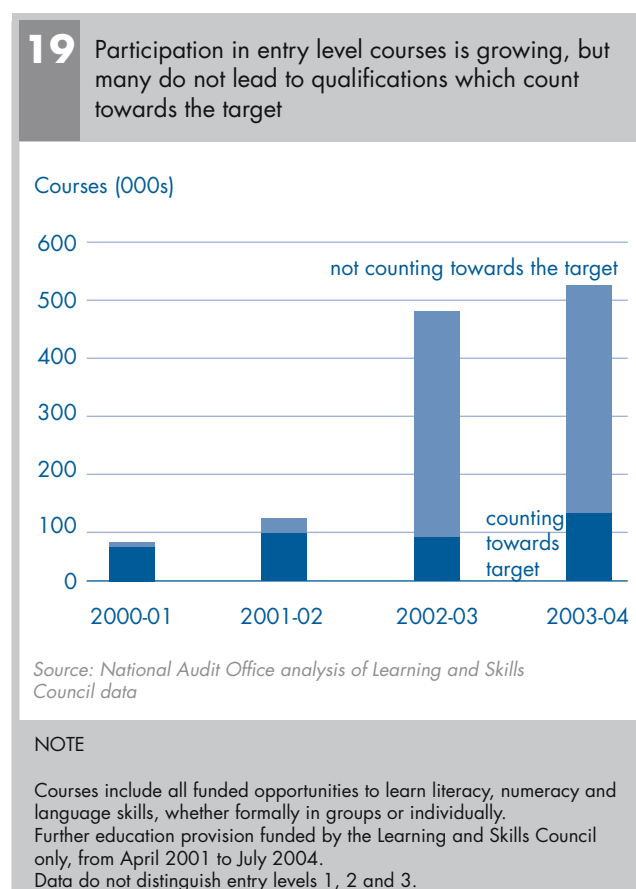
2.16 The Department set a milestone for two million people to be participating in relevant learning by July 2004. The number of people participating in literacy and numeracy learning has increased; the Department estimates that 2.4 million people took up relevant learning opportunities by July 2004, well over its milestone.

2.17 A large proportion of these learners are 16 to 18 years old, but the proportion of adults aged 19 years or over is rising slowly and by July 2004 was over 60 per cent.²² In 2003-04 0.43 million people over 19 took up literacy, language and numeracy learning compared with 0.24 million in 2000-01. In the same period the number of 16 to 18 year olds taking up such learning fell from 0.21 million to 0.20 million. People aged over 50 are underrepresented in the labour market and improving their skills would help those who wish to work to do so.²³ The highest rates of growth are in the older age groups, but these groups started from a very low participation rate, and the largest group after 16 to 18 year olds for literacy and numeracy is the 25-34 year age group, constituting just over 20 per cent of learners.

2.18 The growing proportion of older learners, who are harder to encourage to take up learning opportunities, marks an achievement for the Strategy but is likely to make it more difficult – or take longer – to meet the Public Service Agreement targets for 2007 and 2010. Over 90 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds taking up literacy or numeracy learning start with courses leading directly to a qualification which counts towards the target. In contrast, a large and increasing proportion of older adults – over 60 per cent by July 2004²⁴ – start with courses not leading directly to such a qualification.

2.19 Figures 19 and 20 illustrate the effect of older learners on the types of courses currently contributing most to the growth in participation. The number of courses taken up has grown from 700,000 in 2000-01 to 1.4 million in 2003-04, with much of the growth occurring in entry level courses (Figure 19) and in courses which do not immediately lead to a qualification that counts against the target (Figures 19 and 20). Many people are attending lower level courses who may later undertake qualifications that count against the target. However, many are undertaking a variety of courses at entry level 3 and above that do not lead to the national tests and do not count towards the target. Some providers still offer these courses, but the Learning and Skills Council is encouraging them to replace such provision with courses that lead to recognised qualifications and that count towards the target.

2.20 Growth is greater in literacy courses than in numeracy (Figure 20). The focus on English for Speakers of Other Languages started later, but it is now an area of growth with courses rising from 159,000 in 2000-01 to 455,000 in 2003-04.

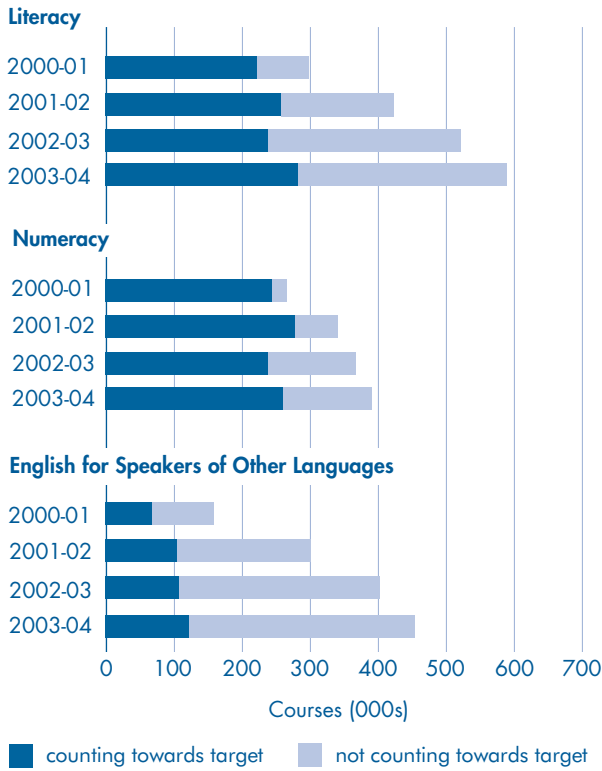


²² Learning and Skills Council funded further education provision only.

²³ National Audit Office Report *Welfare to work: tackling the barriers to the employment of older people* (HC 1026, 2003-04).

²⁴ Learning and Skills Council funded further education provision only.

20 Participation is growing in courses which do not lead to a qualification that counts towards the target



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Learning and Skills Council data

NOTE

Courses include all funded opportunities to learn literacy, numeracy and language skills, whether formally in groups or individually. Further education provision funded by the Learning and Skills Council only, from April 2001 to July 2004.

2.21 Most people are continuing to undertake their learning in further education colleges (Figure 21). There has been some increase in provision in prisons, probation and Jobcentre Plus and a smaller expansion in work-based learning and adult and community education.

Participation and achievement are small relative to the need for improvement

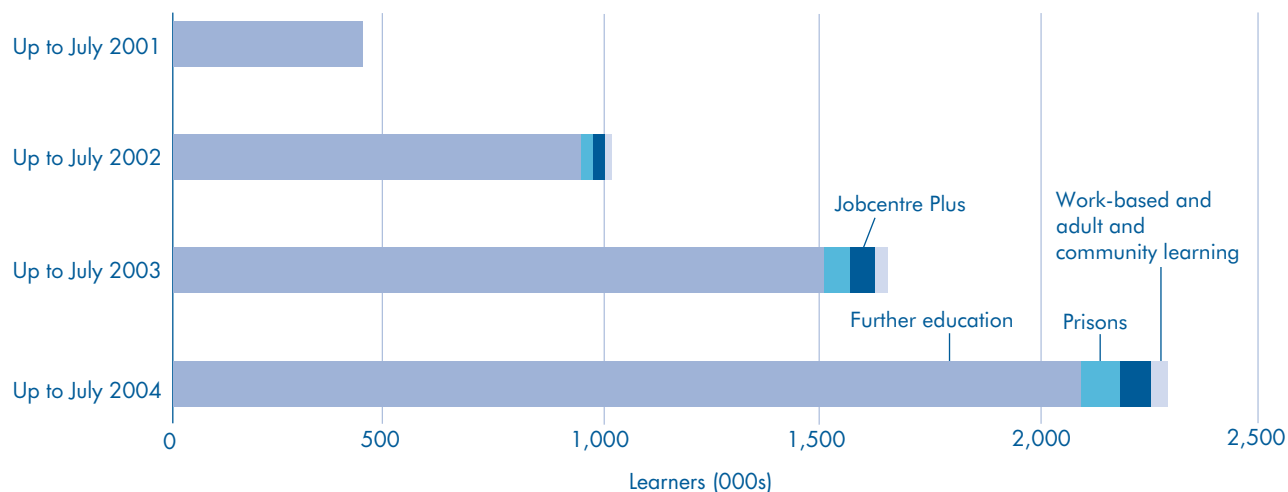
2.22 Since Skills for Life started, in England as a whole only 2.5 literacy qualifications of a type that counted against the target were achieved for every 100 people without skills equivalent to a GCSE (Figure 22). Achievement was lower still for numeracy, at 1.8 qualifications for every 100 people. (In reporting this particular ratio, it is important to bear in mind that we are using numbers of qualifications, not people. Where a person achieves relevant qualifications in both literacy and numeracy, or more than one literacy or numeracy qualification, only the first qualification gained should be counted towards the target.)

2.23 Many factors other than skills enhancement affect the levels of literacy, language and numeracy of people in the population of working age and it is not possible to quantify the effects precisely. For example, the estimated 26 million people up to age 65 in the working population who do not meet level 2 standards in either or both literacy and numeracy²⁵ will be reduced by age-related retirements – and the 55-65 year age group currently has the highest proportion of people with poor literacy and numeracy skills (Figure 7 on page 16).

2.24 Numbers requiring language learning are increased by the arrival of migrants who lack English language and in some cases literacy and numeracy skills. There is no information equivalent to the Skills for Life survey on the numbers of people needing English for Speakers of Other Languages, but demand is known to be high and many areas have shortages of places on courses even though provision is increasing (Figure 20). Publicly funded places are limited to learners who meet eligibility requirements, for example refugees and asylum seekers in receipt of benefit and migrants who have lived in the UK for three years or more. In July 2004, the Home Office published a consultation, Integration Matters: a National Strategy for Refugee Integration.²⁶ The strategy proposes a more

25 Department for Education & Skills (2003) The Skills for Life survey: A national needs and impacts survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws___policy/consultation_documents/current_consultations.pdf.

21 Most courses are undertaken in further education colleges

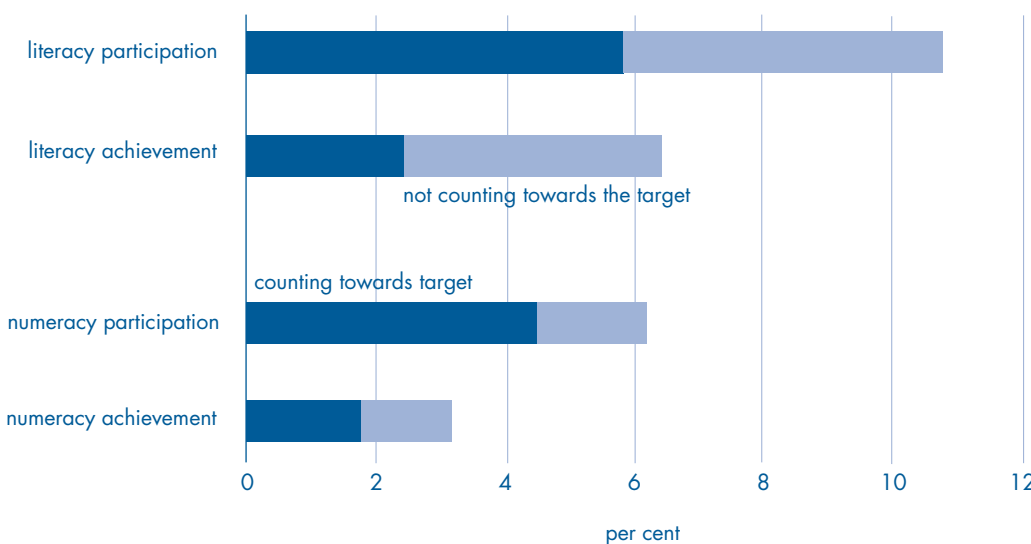


Source: National Audit Office analysis of Learning and Skills Council data

NOTE

This figure shows the number of people who have taken part in literacy and numeracy courses since April 2001. The numbers of qualifications achieved and counting against the target are shown in Figure 16 on page 29.

22 Only a small proportion of relevant people are currently participating in learning and achieving qualifications that count towards the target



NOTES

Further education provision funded by the Learning and Skills Council only, from April 2001 to July 2004.

Participation – courses taken up as a percentage of estimated adults with skills below level 2 equivalent to GCSE grades A*-C.

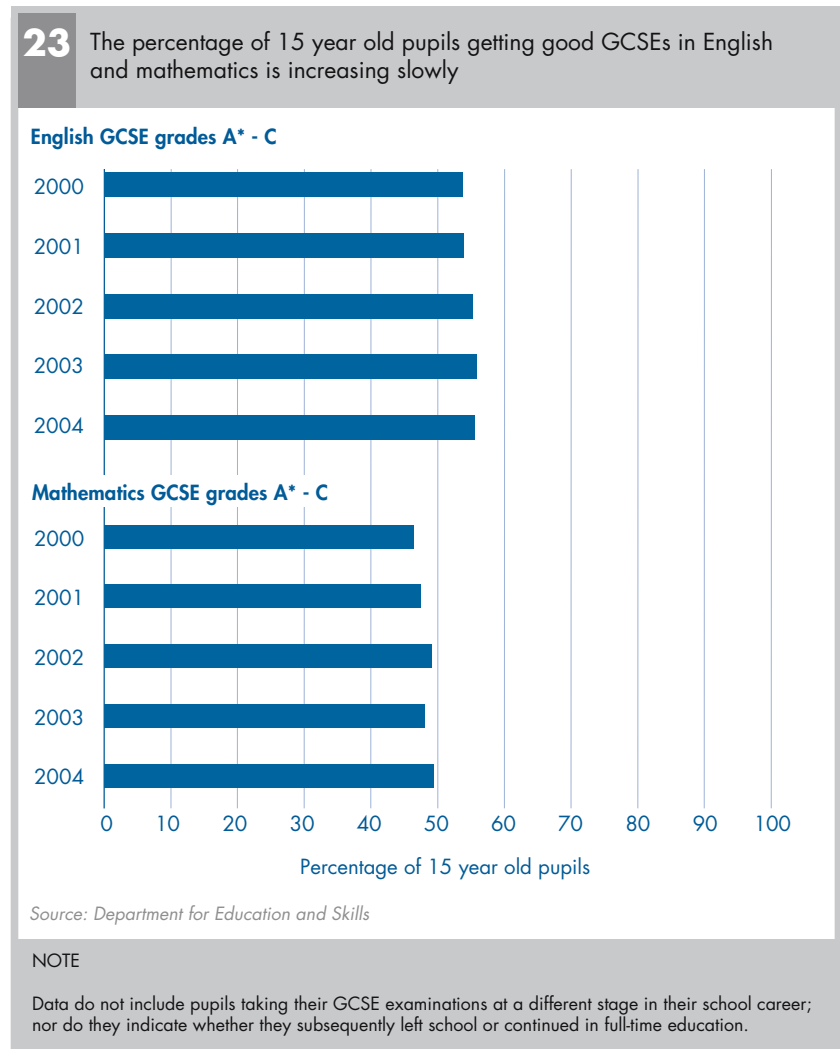
Achievement – qualifications achieved as a percentage of adults with skills below level 2.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Learning and Skills Council data

personalised approach to helping refugees to settle in the UK which, if implemented, is likely to increase access to English for Speakers of Other Languages, which will lead to further demand for increases in provision.

2.25 Though outside the scope of the Skills for Life Strategy, literacy and numeracy learning in schools is within the responsibility of the Department for Education and Skills. Skills for Life needs to be matched by a big improvement in the literacy and numeracy of school leavers if a substantial increase in the literacy and numeracy of the adult working population is to be achieved.

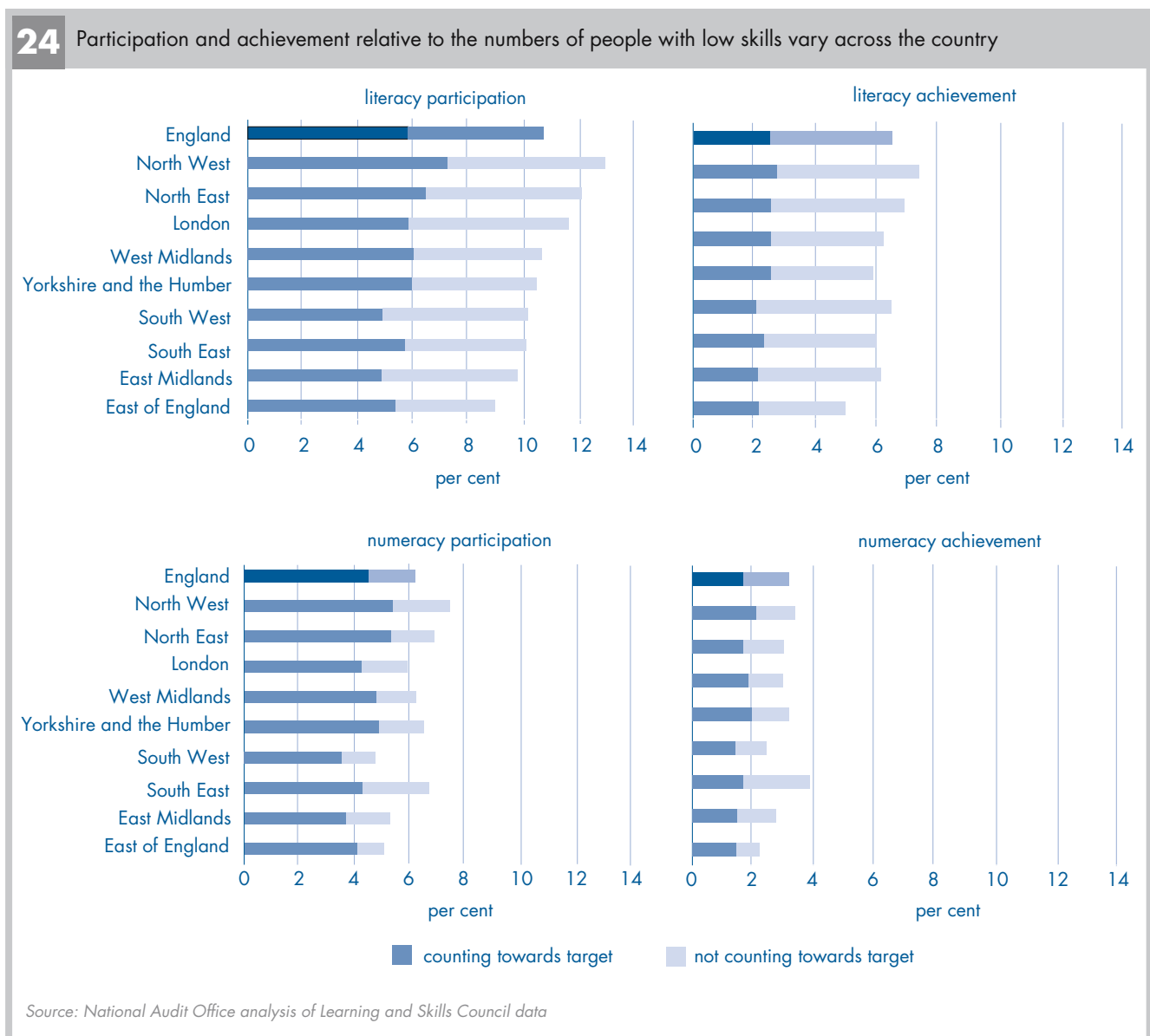
2.26 Data are available on the number of 15 year olds in any one year who pass, fail or do not take the examinations, rather than on the number of school leavers who do not have GCSEs in English and maths. About half of pupils gain GCSEs at grades A*-C, and the trend is increasing, but only very slowly (**Figure 23**). In 2004, 290,000 15 year olds did not achieve a good GCSE in English, and 330,000 did not achieve a good GCSE in mathematics.



Participation, and achievement of the target, vary across the country

2.27 As Figure 24 illustrates, some regions are raising the literacy and numeracy levels of a greater proportion of adults without skills equivalent to a GCSE than others. Relative to numbers of people without skills as measured by the Skills for Life survey, the South West has had the lowest rate of achievement for both literacy and numeracy

against the target. In contrast the North West has the best rate of achievement for both literacy and numeracy. In addition, all regions have people whose achievements do not count towards the target, possibly because the courses are at entry level 1 and 2 or because they are taking courses that do not lead to an approved literacy, numeracy or language qualification.



NOTE

Further education provision funded by the Learning and Skills Council only, from April 2001 to July 2004.
 Participation – courses taken up as a percentage of adults with skills below level 2.
 Achievement – qualifications (or other measure of achievement) as a percentage of adults with skills below level 2.
 Estimates of numbers of adults with skills below level 2 are taken from the Skills for Life Survey.

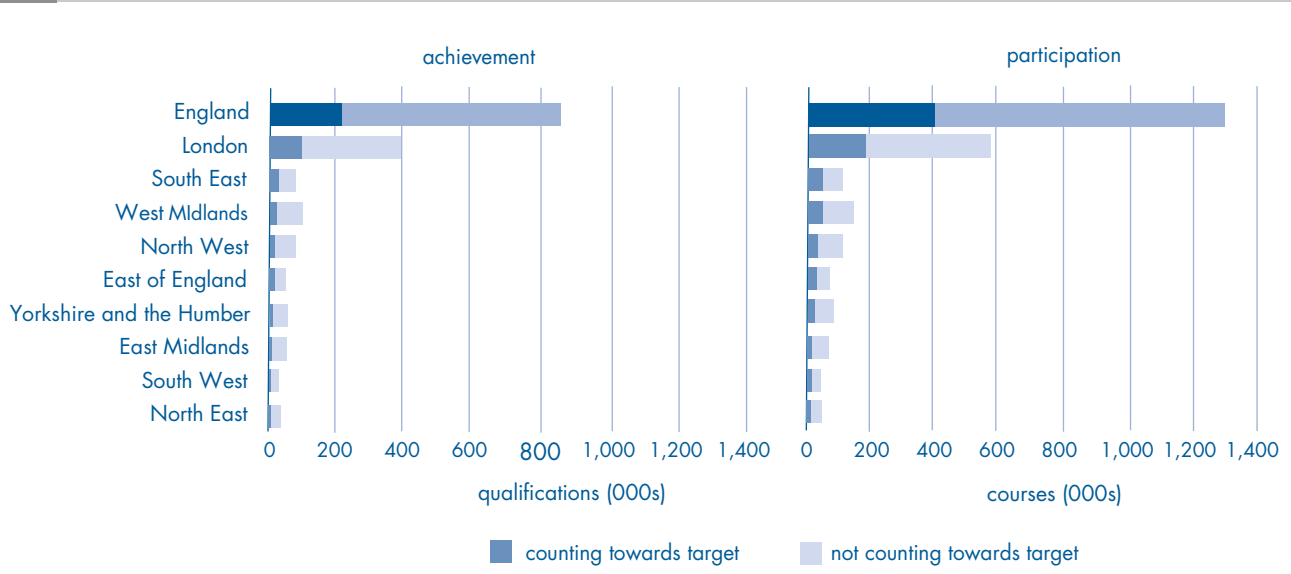
2.28 Regions’ relative achievements are also reflected in their participation rates (left hand side of Figure 24). Total learning opportunities taken up, compared with the estimated numbers of the population without level 2 skills, is lowest in the East of England on literacy and in the South West on numeracy, and highest for both in the North West. The higher participation rates reflect relatively higher success in encouraging potential learners to improve their skills. Nevertheless, all regions need to make more progress, since none have yet achieved participation greater than 13 courses taken up for each 100 people with low-level skills.

2.29 Participation and achievement in courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages is concentrated in London and other urban areas, where most migrants live, although there is some need and activity in rural areas (Figure 25).

2.30 There are no clear reasons for the variation across the regions for literacy and numeracy, and it is likely that a range of factors are at work. Factors suggested by people we consulted were: the relative performance of local Learning and Skills Councils, participation in projects commissioned by the Department to trial approaches to improving literacy and numeracy (pathfinder projects), and success in obtaining European Social Fund money. Also, where regions had other activities such as neighbourhood renewal projects these might give added momentum to Skills for Life. Some people in rural areas suggested that transport and accessibility of provision were important barriers for their populations.

2.31 There are particular difficulties in engaging with employers and attracting people who are already in employment into literacy or numeracy training (paragraph 3.24). These difficulties may account for some of the regional differences, given the relatively greater employment levels in some of the regions showing the lowest levels of participation and achievement.

25 Participation and achievement in courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages is concentrated in London



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Learning and Skills Council data

NOTE

It is not possible to display this data relative to population needs, since data on need is not available in the same way as for literacy and numeracy.

PART THREE

Raising participation



3.1 Raising participation of adults in learning that improves their literacy, language and numeracy skills is an essential strand of the Skills for Life Strategy. This part of our report looks at what the Department has done to engage potential learners, both directly and through working with other organisations.

Advertising campaigns have raised awareness of opportunities and benefits

3.2 Many people with poor literacy and numeracy skills are reluctant to take up learning or enter a formal education setting. As well as practical concerns such as travel costs and childcare arrangements, they may face emotional barriers arising from lack of confidence, bad experience of compulsory education, or fear of failure. They may also be unaware of or 'in denial' about their low level of skills.

3.3 The Department launched its "Get On" campaign in August 2001, using a 'gremlin' character to challenge people to recognise their needs and take up learning. The campaign was based on research showing that non-learners needed to be directly confronted with their discomfort with poor literacy and numeracy skills.²⁷ TV and radio advertising was accompanied by national newspaper adverts, leaflets and posters. Local Learning and Skills Councils produced complementary material for local campaigns (example at **Box 1**).

KEY POINTS

- Advertising campaigns have raised awareness of learning opportunities and the benefits of improving skills.
- The Department is working with other public sector organisations to reach those of their clients and employees who may need to improve their skills, but more remains to be done.
- The Department and Learning and Skills Council have launched initiatives to engage employers so as to reach employees with low skills, and find it hardest to engage small and medium sized firms.

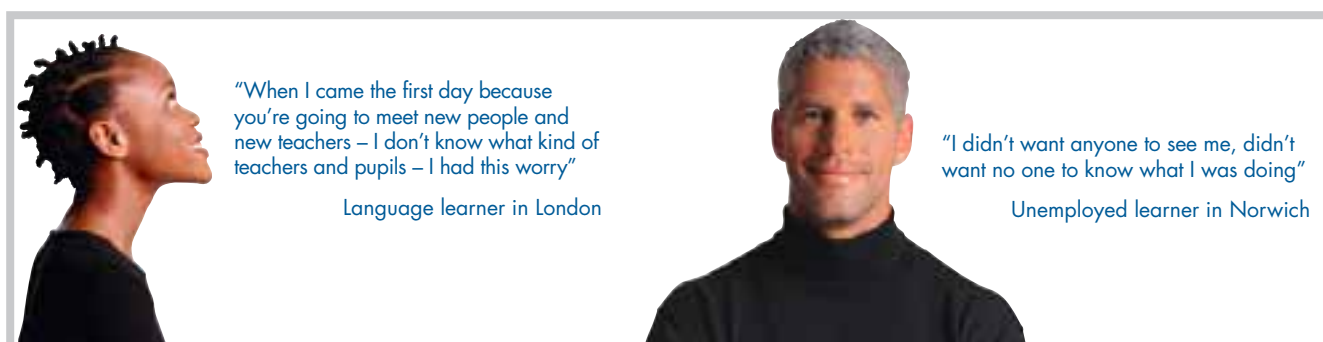
3.4 The Department's media monitoring indicates that the Get On campaign has a high recognition rate among the general public.²⁸ Learners taking part in our focus groups whose first language was English had high awareness of the campaign and commented on its effectiveness. And some said they had taken up courses directly as a result of the advertisements. Almost 300,000 people contacted the learndirect national advice line following the campaign. The Department has spent just over £16 million on the campaign, evaluation of its impact and supporting associated local activities to raise people's awareness. Follow-up research indicates that 26 per cent of people who called the helpline took up learning opportunities as a result. The latest gremlins campaign started in August 2004 and focuses for the first time on people in the workplace and the benefits of gaining qualifications.

BOX 1

Tailoring of advertising to local circumstances

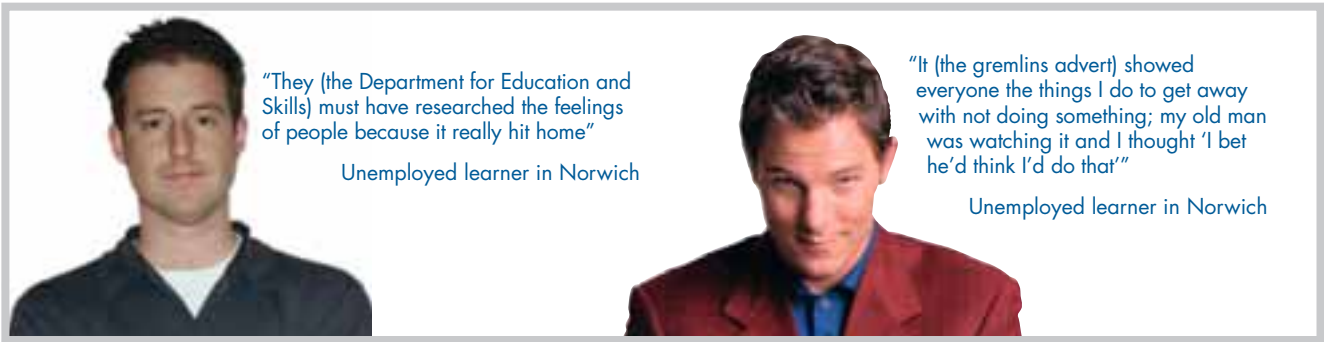
Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council felt that, to market the Skills for Life initiative in its area, localised delivery allowed for a more targeted, fit for purpose approach. It used a variety of tools such as: adverts on bus tickets, beer mats and bottled water;

posters in sports centres, doctors' surgeries, and working men's clubs; and features on local television news. It also staged a road show for public and private sector employers, taking a trailer and advisers around the area at county shows.



²⁷ "Why Gremlins?" Stuart Barnes, St Luke's advertising agency, on www.dfes.gov.uk.

²⁸ www.dfes.gov.uk/deptreport2004/uploads/chapter11.doc.



3.5 Speakers of other languages found the advertising difficult to understand in terms of what the gremlin represented. However the campaign was specifically intended to reach people with low levels of literacy and numeracy rather than non-English speakers with language needs, which would require a different campaign. Of the non-English speaking learners in our focus groups, some had heard about courses on the radio and in a newspaper. However, word of mouth was their main source of information.

3.6 learndirect launched a campaign in 2004 to attract learners to take up training in learndirect centres. Its campaign used a less personally challenging approach than the gremlins campaign and focused on specific benefits and incentives, such as parents being more able to help their children’s education. **Figure 26** illustrates examples of advertising from both campaigns. In 2003, around 239,000 learndirect courses were taken up leading to 637 test passes. During that year, learndirect embarked on a programme to introduce the national literacy and numeracy tests to its centres so that it had the capacity to offer learners both the courses and the tests directly. learndirect’s campaign ran after learndirect had increased the number of its centres offering tests. The campaign generated 10,800 enquiries to the learndirect helpline requesting more information. Following the campaign period January to March 2004, there was a substantial increase in take up resulting in 356,000 courses taken in total since January 2003.

The Department has built partnerships with other organisations to reach their clients and employees

3.7 Reaching and influencing people who need to improve their literacy and numeracy is not something the Department can do effectively on its own. As illustrated in **Figure 10** on page 20, it has worked with organisations such as the Prison Service, the Probation Service, and Jobcentre Plus, whose clients were identified as priority groups in the Skills for Life Strategy, as well as with other employers who have employees with literacy and numeracy needs. **Figure 27** on page 40 illustrates further the complex range of people needing help and the means and organisations involved in helping them.

Offenders are a high priority group and the management of their learning is improving

The Prison Service and National Probation Directorate

Responsible for correctional programmes for offenders which are designed to reduce re-offending behaviour. From June 2004 a single National Offender Management Service is being developed.

3.8 Since the launch of Skills for Life, the Department and other relevant bodies have worked to increase the integration of all education and skills training for offenders with training for the wider population. In 2001 the budget for prison education was transferred to the then Department for Education and Employment, and the Offenders’ Learning and Skills Unit was set up with responsibility for education and skills in prisons. This unit’s responsibilities were extended to offenders in the community in 2003, and it is working with the Learning and Skills Council to develop new models of provision.

26 Examples of advertising used to support Skills for Life



Example of national poster



Example of local poster using national publicity material



Example of national poster

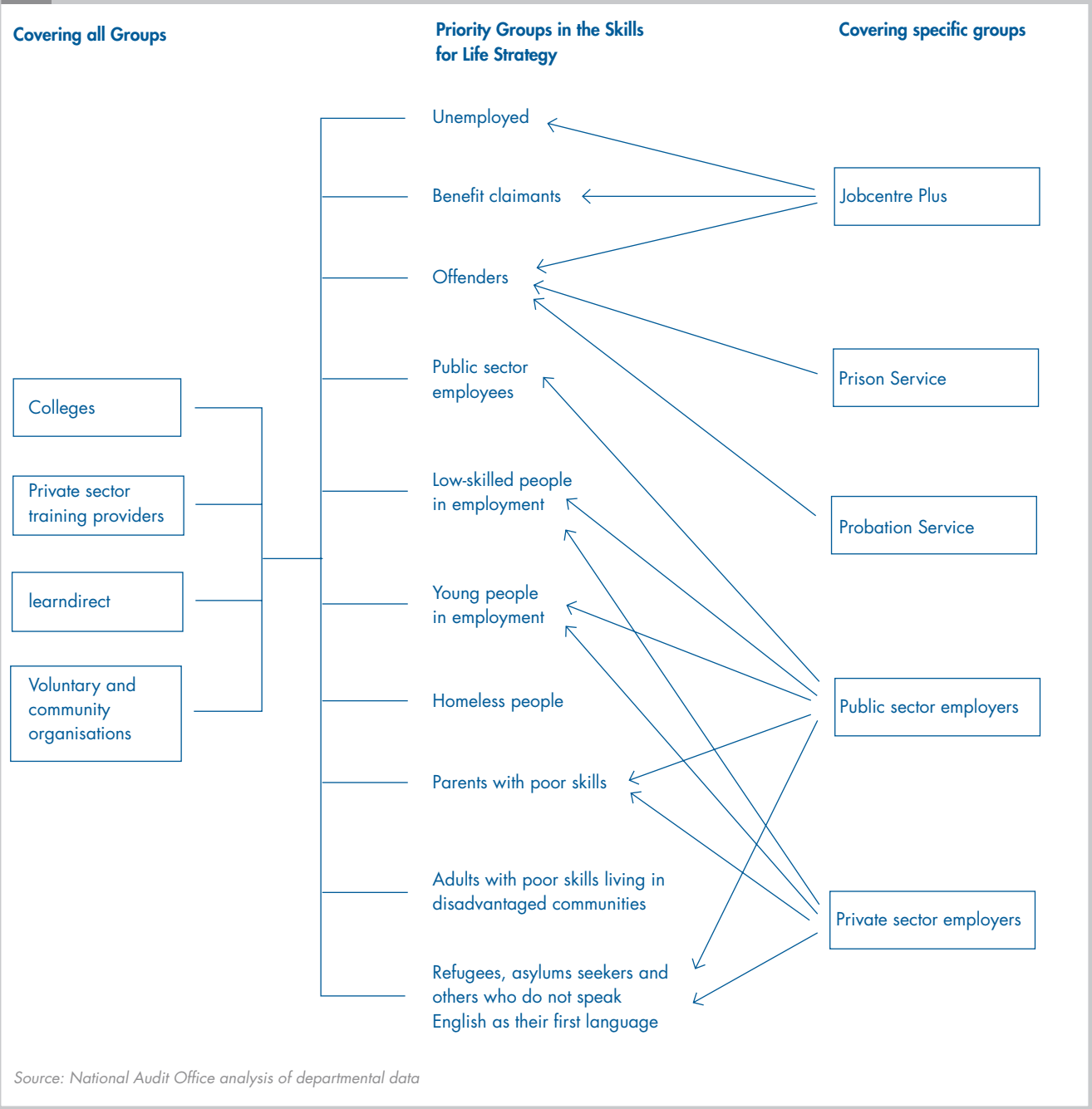


Front and reverse of learndirect leaflet used nationally



Source: Department for Education and Skills

27 The Department has involved a variety of organisations in identifying and engaging potential learners in the priority groups



3.9 In any one year, around 130,000 people are or have been in prison, and a further 200,000 are on probation. Data on the literacy language and numeracy needs of offenders is not reliable because in the past assessments were duplicated as offenders moved between prisons or from prison to probation. All offenders are now assessed for low literacy and numeracy on admission to prison or when initially assessed by their probation officer, and needs are very high.

For example, large proportions of prisoners currently being screened on reception are at or below level 1 – half in reading, two-thirds in numeracy and 80 per cent in writing. In 2004 HM Inspectorate of Probation concluded that while employability, literacy and numeracy were assessed in a high proportion of cases, opportunities for offenders to improve these skills were not consistently applied by the Probation Service when managing cases.²⁹

29 HM Inspectorate of Probation (2004) Work to reduce crime: An inspection of the delivery of employment and basic skills with offenders by the National Probation Service.

3.10 Of the 0.8 million learners achieving a qualification in literacy and numeracy learning since 2001, an estimated 92,000 were offenders. A new Offender Assessment System, planned to be fully operational in prisons and probation areas by June 2005, will include an assessment of literacy and numeracy. The shared system is intended to help reduce the risks of duplicate skills assessments and offenders having to restart the same level of training as they move between prisons or from prison to probation.

Jobcentre Plus is improving its identification of its customers with low skills but needs to do more to engage them and raise their achievements

Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus

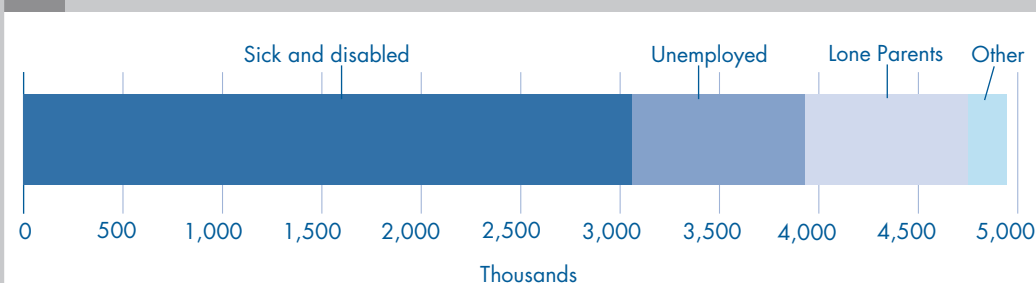
Responsible for welfare policy and delivering support for people on benefits and advice and help for those seeking to work.

3.11 At any one time, the Department for Work and Pensions and its agency Jobcentre Plus have day to day contact with large numbers of unemployed people and benefit claimants (Figure 28). The Department and Jobcentre Plus are trying to help and support a proportion of all these groups into work. Many of their customers have low levels of literacy and numeracy. Successfully engaging these people in learning is an essential strand of Skills for Life, and Jobcentre Plus is working to identify customers who have low skills.

3.12 Jobcentre Plus is focused on helping people into employment and supporting those unable to take up employment. Its main objectives and outcome targets relate to that focus and do not cover literacy and numeracy skill needs or training. It does, however, have a formal target looking at the number of customers attending assessment of their literacy and numeracy and an internal measure of the number of customers starting the courses that it funds.

3.13 Prior to April 2004 those customers who received Jobseeker's Allowance were informally screened to identify a potential literacy, language or numeracy need. Other working age benefit recipients who joined a voluntary New Deal programme to help them take up employment were also informally screened. Where appropriate they were referred to a Jobcentre Plus contractor for a more detailed assessment and then to the training provided by the Jobcentre Plus contracted training provider if they had skills below level 1.³⁰ Customers whose literacy or numeracy skills were above entry level 3 but below level 1 were referred to short courses lasting up to eight weeks. Those with language needs or more serious literacy or numeracy needs were referred to employability training lasting up to 26 weeks, which included training in these skills as well as vocational training and training on skills such as team-working. In addition, a full-time education and training course for up to a year was offered in New Deal for Young People. People with skills at level 1 or above were signposted to local colleges or learndirect.

28 Unemployed people are a minority of people of working age receiving benefits



Source: Department of Work and Pensions Departmental Report 2004

NOTE

Working age key benefits comprise: Disability Living Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Severe Disablement Allowance, and also include people who are in receipt of National Insurance credits only, without any benefit payment, who are unemployed, sick or disabled.

30 Level 1 is equivalent to GCSE grades D – F.

3.14 The Department for Work and Pensions does not historically have robust data on the achievement of qualifications from courses provided by its own contractors. However, the Department was able to provide us with data, for 2003-04 only, on the numbers of customers receiving Jobseeker's Allowance who completed each stage of its process. The data show that the drop-out rate at each stage was high, and that the numbers achieving qualifications was very small. Jobcentre Plus advisers used informal screenings of customers to identify potential literacy, language or numeracy need - 190,000 screenings indicated a potential need. Sixty-two per cent led to customers being referred for a more detailed assessment by the contracted assessment provider³¹; 47 per cent attended the assessment and nine per cent started a course.³² Just under one per cent achieved a qualification.³³ Attendance was for the most part voluntary, and customers who obtained employment would cease to attend any training course provided by Jobcentre Plus' contractors, which are held in normal working hours. From April 2004, Jobcentre Plus introduced a payment of an additional £10 per week to customers receiving Jobseeker's Allowance when they were attending literacy, language and numeracy training in England, and an additional £100 for achievement of one of the recognised qualifications that count towards the Department for Education and Skills' target.

3.15 In April 2004 Jobcentre Plus introduced a number of measures intended to increase the number of customers taking up literacy and numeracy training. Jobcentre Plus advisers in England and Wales started to use a fast-track screening tool, devised by the Basic Skills Agency, to screen customers receiving Jobseeker's Allowance. The screening tool should lead to more people with low skills being accurately identified and referred for more detailed assessment. It extended screening for literacy and numeracy to people who receive work-focused interviews. For these customers Jobcentre Plus is using a light-touch approach to assessment, rather than the Basic Skills Agency's fast-track assessment. The interviews take place when customers start to claim benefits and at review points that vary according to the benefit and the person's circumstances. At present the interviews are only undertaken in the new Jobcentre Plus offices being phased in across the country, with approximately half in

place at the beginning of 2004 and the remainder being introduced by 2006. It will be several years before all working age benefit recipients are assessed.

3.16 The Department for Work and Pensions does not monitor the take up of learning opportunities by customers other than those provided by its contractors. The Labour Force Survey for spring 2003 indicates that around 260,000 adults who are receiving unemployment benefits, Income Support or sickness and disability benefits (five per cent of those receiving working age benefits) are studying for a qualification up to level 2. There is no information about the subjects being studied.

3.17 From 2001 to 2003 the former Department for Education and Employment commissioned a pathfinder project looking at providing incentives or applying sanctions to customers receiving Jobseeker's Allowance to encourage them to improve their skills. The results were inconclusive because the numbers taking up the training were too small to produce persuasive results. The Department for Work and Pensions has set up a mandatory training pilot, where people face possible benefit sanctions if they do not participate, to run in 12 areas from April 2004 to 2005.

3.18 A recent report by the National Employment Panel³⁴ recommended closer working between Jobcentre Plus offices and the local Learning and Skills Councils. The collaboration envisaged included joint local delivery plans with measurable objectives for key joint activities, and harmonisation of contracting for training services. Some local Learning and Skills Councils we visited perceived conflicts between their targets and activities and those of Jobcentre Plus, and felt that the Panel's recommendations would help resolve them. The Department for Work and Pensions intends to implement a number of the recommendations as part of the New Deal for Skills.³⁵

Parts of the public sector are developing good practices in improving their employees' skills

3.19 An estimated 200,000 public sector employees with literacy, language and numeracy needs are targeted as key priority groups in the Skills for Life Strategy.

31 The 38 per cent who were not referred to the Jobcentre Plus contractor for a more detailed assessment included those who were referred to the wide range of other learning providers, and included those who left the unemployment register to start work.

32 This figure excludes those customers who started literacy, language or numeracy courses as part of the New Deals, since Jobcentre Plus was unable to provide the data.

33 In addition, a further nine per cent who had a detailed assessment were not found to have literacy, language or numeracy needs. There are no data on how many completed courses.

34 National Employment Panel (2004) Welfare to Workforce Development, report to the Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions and Education and Skills. Available at www.nationalemploymentpanel.org.uk.

35 The New Deal for Skills was announced by the Chancellor in the March 2004 Budget. It sets out new ways of tackling long-standing barriers between welfare and workforce development and the problem of people with no or low skills.

National large employers

- Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces
- Department of Health and National Health Service
- Departments employing potentially low-skilled employees
- Local authorities
- Private sector employers of over 200 staff

3.20 In central government, Permanent Secretaries of departments made a commitment that literacy, language and numeracy would be incorporated into their training and development plans, which were in place for all major government departments by April 2004. For example, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions are identifying the needs of their own staff through appraisals, self-referral and union learning representatives. They refer staff to external providers and encourage them to take the national tests. The Ministry of Defence has a strategy for addressing literacy, language and numeracy needs of its staff and the armed forces. Needs are greatest in the Army, and all recruits have their skills assessed and are offered courses if appropriate.

3.21 The NHSU was set up to support the modernisation of the National Health Service. It provides a national framework and quality standards intended to help standardise learning experiences across the health and social care sector. The Department of Health has set it a target of having 57,000 people participate in literacy, language and numeracy learning and for 21,000 people to have passed a test at level 1 or level 2³⁶ by 2007.

3.22 The Employers' Organisation for local government was established in 1999 to support local authorities as employers to help deliver quality services. It has appointed a Regional Skills and Capacity Advisor in each region to help local authorities assess and address their individual and regional skills needs. A Local Government Generic Skills framework sets out the organisation's core expectations about the knowledge, skills and behaviours that local authorities can use to support recruitment, development, progression, performance and service improvement programmes. The framework covers literacy and numeracy skills amongst other skills such as IT, health and safety and team-working skills.

The Department has developed a number of initiatives for engaging with private sector employers

3.23 In 2001 the Department for Education and Skills identified low-skilled people in employment with literacy, language and numeracy needs as a priority group. Figures from the Skills for Life survey indicate that there are about 12 million people with literacy skills at level 1 or below in employment; and 16 million people with numeracy skills at level 1 or below. The Department is establishing and developing partnerships with private sector employers of large numbers of relatively low skilled workers. For example, ASDA has set up a work-based learning scheme for 400 employees to train towards qualifications in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages.

3.24 Local Learning and Skills Councils that we visited were finding it hardest to gain co-operation from small and medium sized employers. Employers understandably focus on their business, rather than area or individual benefits. For them, staff training has to bring business benefits, otherwise it would not be surprising to find they do not wish to be involved. Working with employers and low-skilled employees has to take account of a number of important constraints:

- helping employers to recognise the benefits to the business of having more skilled employees and bringing them together with suitable providers can take time (**Box 2**);

BOX 2

Working with employers

Northamptonshire has a high proportion of small and medium sized enterprises. Unemployment in the county is very low, but much of the working population is low-skilled. The local Learning and Skills Council recognises the importance of engaging with employers and ran an "essential skills" campaign to stimulate interest in literacy and numeracy learning for staff. It used funding from the national Learning and Skills Council to employ an adviser to follow up employer contacts and help them to establish contacts with learning providers.

Progress in translating this activity into actual courses for learners has been slow. A provider also commented that promoting and establishing programmes in the workplace is very time consuming and often involves large set-up costs that may not always be reflected in the funding.

36 Level 1 is equivalent to GCSE grades D-F; level 2 to GCSE grades A*-C.

BOX 3**Flexible provision for full-time employees**

An ice cream factory in Leeds, West Yorkshire employs a large number of people with English for Speakers of Other Languages needs. The factory works with a local college – Thomas Danby College – to provide English language lessons for employees working both day and night shifts. Following initial assessment, employees attend the course on the factory premises for two hours a week in addition to their full-time working hours. Some also take up the opportunity to attend a local learndirect centre and/or Thomas Danby College campus to use the internet facilities there.

A focus group we held with employees attending the course at the factory was very positive about the training. For example, they found the tutor very responsive to their needs. Particularly because the employees worked full time, having the course on the factory premises was essential to enabling them to have the time to attend.

- employees also need to be convinced of the benefits of the extra work involved in taking courses;
- once the employer and employees are interested, courses will usually take time to set up to provide tailored provision that fits in with employees' working arrangements (Box 3); and
- providers working with employers need to be prepared to be flexible, for example by providing courses on business premises where doing so will maximise attendance and so long as suitable facilities are available (Box 3).

3.25 At local level, employer training pilots are funded and managed by local Learning and Skills Councils. These pilots were devised to test different approaches of support for small companies that might otherwise not provide or be able to afford training, to enable them to release staff for training to improve skills, including literacy and numeracy skills. They can include reimbursement of some of the costs incurred in giving staff time off to attend training.

3.26 In March 2003, the Department launched an Employer Engagement Strategy designed to encourage employers, trade unions and others to ensure that people in low-skilled work are given the opportunities they need to improve their skill levels. From November 2003 to November 2004 the Department contracted with the Confederation of British Industry to undertake the Skills in Supply Chains and Clusters project, which looks at how employers can work together to develop the skills of their employees.

There are many potential learners still to be attracted to learning opportunities despite efforts to encourage participation

3.27 Many of the learners who have taken up learning have so far been among the easiest to reach. Many are among the younger age groups who have not experienced a long gap since full-time education and over 90 per cent have been happy to spend some time attending a further education college (Figure 16 on page 29). The more difficult to reach groups tend to be receiving benefits, but not necessarily actively seeking work, or already in employment. There are many reasons why these people may not engage with learning. They may be unaware that they have low skills, or reluctant to admit to them. They may have developed elaborate coping strategies over years, or may feel they are too busy. New ways need to be found to attract these people into learning if the very large numbers of people with low skills are to be substantially reduced.

3.28 The Department and the Learning and Skills Council have been supporting a wide variety of projects to explore approaches to identifying people with literacy and numeracy needs and helping them to improve. For example, many parents may be motivated to undertake literacy or numeracy learning by a desire to help their children with reading and schoolwork. The Learning and Skills Council has funded a national initiative to improve the literacy, language and numeracy of parents and carers and their skills in helping their children learn. Each local education authority has agreed targets for participation and achievement with its local Learning and Skills Council. The programmes offered are typically delivered in a relatively accessible setting such as a primary school. Courses range from short sessions lasting 2-3 hours to intensive programmes totalling up to 96 hours. There are often both separate and joint sessions for parents and children. Over 60,000 parents participated in 2003-04.

3.29 The Department has sought to enlist many public sector agencies who come into contact with potential learners in helping those with low literacy and numeracy skills. It has provided these agencies with screening tools and training. For example it has funded the Basic Skills Agency to train staff working in neighbourhood nurseries and Sure Start centres to identify people who have literacy or numeracy needs and support them into learning.

3.30 The Department's Move On project seeks to engage potential learners who do not consider they have literacy or numeracy skills needs, and may only need to brush up their skills and fill in gaps. Such learners are offered a short introduction session and skills assessment, followed by a short course of up to 30 hours over up to ten weeks leading to the national tests (Box 8 on page 57 provides an example of the Move On initiative).

3.31 The Department's Link Up project used volunteers to support learners. After piloting, the project recruited 6,400 adult learner supporters and developed a level 2 qualification for them. In order to complete the qualification, volunteers needed to demonstrate that their own literacy and numeracy skills were at least level 2. More than 600 people were supported to pass the national tests through this scheme, which is now being incorporated into local funding and programmes.

3.32 Other initiatives to address barriers to learning include the development of:

- screening tools which may be used in a range of different environments; and
- a framework for understanding dyslexia and a project to describe teaching and learning approaches which tutors may use.

3.33 Voluntary organisations often focus their priorities on the needs of individual people. Their priorities can often be complementary to Skills for Life, for example where helping socially excluded people such as the homeless may fit well with improving literacy, language and numeracy skills. Voluntary organisations can be especially valuable partners because many have direct contacts with groups of 'hard to reach' people who might not wish to approach organisations such as colleges themselves.

3.34 As with many other elements of Skills for Life, there is a need to build capacity, and from November 2000 to summer 2002 the Basic Skills Agency ran the National Voluntary Organisations Partnership Programme. The programme was designed to help national voluntary organisations build their capacity to address literacy and numeracy needs of their clients. However an evaluation of the programme in March 2003 identified barriers to progress in voluntary organisations accessing funding to provide sustainable literacy and numeracy provision, for example because the funding process can be especially complicated for organisations that are not primarily learning organisations but offer wider services.

3.35 In May 2004, the Learning and Skills Council published a strategy for working with the voluntary and community sector in the sector's roles as learning provider, employer and channel for communicating with the hard to reach. The strategy has a number of aims, including opening access to funding for more voluntary and community organisations. It proposed that the Learning and Skills Council would review contracting and funding arrangements and introduce improvements. For example, using consortia to act as intermediaries between local Learning and Skills Councils and voluntary and community organisations is becoming more common. Following from the strategy the Learning and Skills Council is working with the sector to agree common standards and support for consortia arrangements.

3.36 In 2004 the Department has also started a national project to develop new approaches to volunteering and the voluntary and community sector. It will report in March 2006.



PART FOUR

Sustaining delivery



4.1 This part examines how the Skills for Life Strategy was implemented from 2001 to 2004 by the Department, the Learning and Skills Council and the 47 local Learning and Skills Councils, which plan and co-ordinate learning delivered by a range of partners.

Initially the Department focused on improving the framework in which literacy, language and numeracy are delivered

4.2 The Strategy described high levels of need among large sections of the population – the unemployed and benefit claimants, low-skilled people in employment, offenders and groups at risk of exclusion – which could not be met just by continuing with the existing volume and quality of provision. The Department set out to create an infrastructure that would enable increasing numbers of people to make real improvements in their skills.

Funding changes have given providers incentives to increase the amount of literacy, language and numeracy provision

4.3 The Department does not provide learning opportunities directly, and needed to encourage existing providers – mainly further education colleges – to increase their provision. The Learning and Skills Council is the main public sector planning and funding agency for literacy, language and numeracy learning. In April 2002 it altered its funding formula so that literacy, language and numeracy learning attracts a rate 40 per cent higher than other comparable courses. As well as providing an incentive for growth, the higher funding was intended to

KEY POINTS

- The Department's initial focus was to develop standards, curricula and qualifications to raise the quality and effectiveness of learning.
- There has been much progress but little evidence as yet of an impact on the quality of learning and much remains to be achieved. In particular there is a widespread shortage of qualified teaching staff.
- The Learning and Skills Council devolved the target for achievement of qualifications to local Learning and Skills Councils, and the targets have focused their attention on literacy, language and numeracy provision for adults.

help meet the costs of attracting and retaining learners with low skills and high needs. In addition, providers can claim further funding when learners achieve relevant accredited qualifications³⁷ or achieve their individual learning goals set to match the national standards.

4.4 The level of funding enables learners with low skills to take up courses free of charge, so learners are not deterred by the cost of courses.

The quality and effectiveness of learning is being improved

4.5 When the Strategy was launched in 2001, adult literacy and numeracy learning was low status and had received relatively little attention. A very large amount of work was needed across a range of activities to raise standards of learning. For example, at the time a plethora of courses and certificates set differing standards and were not recognised by employers, so national standards and qualifications needed to be developed.

³⁷ A qualification accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority or an externally assessed English for Speakers of Other Languages certificate.

4.6 From autumn 2000 the Department has introduced the following measures to improve the learning infrastructure:

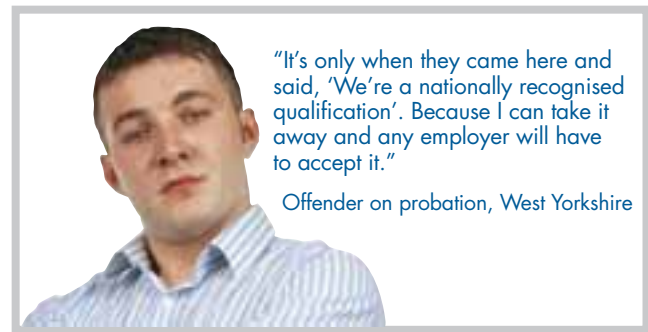
- national standards for literacy and numeracy;
- curricula and new learning materials linked to the national standards, and standard qualifications for literacy and numeracy;
- higher level qualifications and training for teachers; and
- testing of different approaches to teaching adult literacy and numeracy, and the establishment of a National Research and Development Centre for research on adult literacy and numeracy.

4.7 National standards for adult literacy and numeracy provide the basis for the learning infrastructure because they help to achieve consistency and provide a recognisable benchmark for learners and employers. Once they exist, curricula and qualifications can be developed against the standards.

4.8 National standards for literacy and numeracy were being developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority before the Strategy was announced and were in place by autumn 2000. For literacy they cover speaking and listening, reading and writing. For numeracy they cover interpreting, calculating and communicating mathematical information.³⁸

4.9 Linked to the standards, the Department published **curricula for adult literacy and numeracy and language** (September 2002). New **learning materials** for all three, referenced to the curricula, are paper-based and available on CD-ROM. A resource pack for tutors has also been developed that includes advice on learning difficulties and/or disabilities that learners may have.

4.10 The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority accredited **national qualifications for adult literacy and numeracy** for use from September 2001. At entry level, these qualifications are developed by awarding bodies based on the standards. At levels 1 and 2 the qualifications comprise the national literacy and numeracy tests for which the Authority developed the specifications. These qualifications are intended to replace the previous confusing range of over seventy adult literacy and numeracy qualifications, most of which were publicly funded but of variable quality and not accredited by the Authority. The new qualifications consist of entry level, level 1 and level 2 certificates for both adult literacy and numeracy.



"It's only when they came here and said, 'We're a nationally recognised qualification'. Because I can take it away and any employer will have to accept it."

Offender on probation, West Yorkshire

4.11 New **qualifications for English for Speakers of Other Languages** were introduced in September 2004.

4.12 The national tests for literacy and numeracy were initially paper-based but are now also available on-screen through most accredited awarding bodies, together with practice tests to help learners prepare. At levels 1 and 2 learners sit a one-hour test with forty multiple choice questions, usually in a college or learndirect centre. The literacy tests assess a learner's ability to read, understand writing techniques and proofread documents for accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar. The numeracy tests assess learners' ability to interpret mathematical information, to calculate and to interpret and present results. The tests do not assess spoken language.

Figure 29 illustrates some test questions.

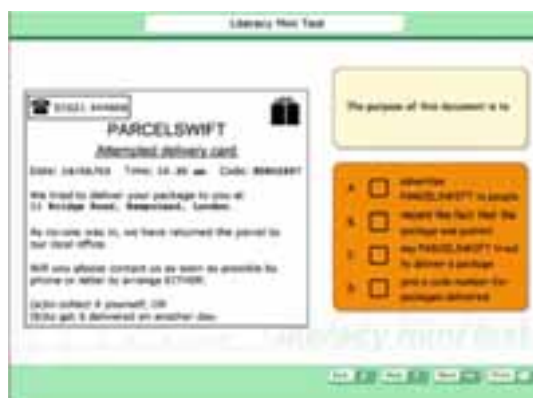
4.13 The Department has looked at the attitudes of tutors and learners towards the tests.³⁹ Only around half of tutors felt the tests were 'positive'. The tutors considered that tests would tend to put learners off. These findings reflected views expressed to us during our fieldwork visits that many tutors tended to see their role more as helper than teacher, and that many felt testing was at best unimportant and at worst harmful.

4.14 In contrast, three quarters of learners in the Department's survey said they enjoyed the tests and over 90 per cent found the tests easy to read and understand, despite challenges they may have faced with the test itself. Learners we consulted were also generally positive about the tests and, most importantly, gained a sense of achievement from their qualification.

³⁸ <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/teachingandlearning>.

³⁹ Department for Education and Skills (2002) *Pathfinders – Lessons for Success*.

29 Examples of questions from the national literacy and numeracy tests



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

4.15 New **qualifications for teachers** and a programme of continuing professional education for existing teaching staff were introduced from September 2002. Prospective teachers work towards a level 4 certificate for adult numeracy or adult literacy, which is equivalent to degree level and higher than past requirements. New teachers must also have a full teaching qualification such as a Certificate in Education or Post-Graduate Certificate in Education. Existing teachers do not have to achieve the new qualifications within a given time. The Learning and Skills Council's Quality Initiative, launched in September 2003, which aims to raise the quality of teaching and learning, includes a professional development programme with modular courses for teachers with qualifications pre-dating the national standards. The Department expects providers to encourage staff to improve their skills and that by 2010 all teachers should be qualified.

4.16 In addition, new qualifications at level 3 are available for teaching staff who support literacy and numeracy learners. Level 2 qualifications are also available for staff who support learners by assessment of their learning needs and direct them to the right courses.

4.17 Professional Development Centres have been opened as a resource for training teachers. For example, in February 2004 the Learning and Skills Council London Central opened a centre providing courses at levels 2, 3 and 4 in teaching of adult literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages. The Centre also offers professional advice and guidance, and opportunities for sharing good practice on approaches to teaching. It caters primarily for Skills for Life professionals living or working in one of the seven central London boroughs. London East was the first Learning and Skills Council in London to establish Professional Development Centres, from September 2002. **Box 4** describes a Professional Development Centre operating in Lewisham, within the Learning and Skills Council London East area, and the benefits for some participants in a level 4 course.

BOX 4

Professional Development Centre in Lewisham, South East London

The Learning and Skills Council London East provided £160,000 of capital funding for a centre which opened at Lewisham College in May 2003. Participants⁴⁰ on the level 4 course found the opportunity to share good practice with other tutors with a range of different experience especially beneficial. They felt that the course raised awareness of the requirements of the national standards and provided innovative approaches. The course leaders and mentors were responsive and tried to shape the course to the participants' needs.

40 Participants present on the day of our visit were from community colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist charities.

4.18 People working and studying in the further education colleges we visited were very positive about the new teaching qualifications. They felt the qualifications offered progression routes that should attract more teachers to adult literacy, language and numeracy teaching. They also identified some challenges for recruitment and retention of suitably qualified teachers:

- Existing staff have a range of different qualifications and matching these to the new qualifications can be complex. Some experienced staff may resent having to retrain and may view the requirements as unnecessarily onerous.
- Some tutors are on short-term (for example one year) employment contracts and therefore may be reluctant to commit to retraining. Colleges and other providers do not always know what future funds will be available for staff development.
- Conditions of pay and promotion opportunities have historically been poor.

4.19 To establish which teaching practices are most effective for different groups of learners, the Department ran a series of Pathfinder projects during 2001 to **test different approaches to teaching adult literacy and numeracy**. The projects looked at the various elements – national standards, curriculum and tests – and out of the findings the Department published good practice guides based on experiences of learners, teachers and managers.

4.20 As explained in paragraph 2.4 on page 26, ‘embedding’ of literacy, language and numeracy within other programmes can be an effective way of encouraging learners reluctant to admit that they need to improve their literacy and numeracy and assist them to achieve vocational qualifications (**Box 5**). It can also make the learning more relevant to day to day life experience. Successful ‘embedding’ is, however, not easy to achieve. Programmes need to be carefully constructed to ensure that all the required elements of literacy and numeracy are given appropriate attention and effectively taught and learned. The approach requires highly skilled teaching by vocational teachers who have good literacy and numeracy themselves and an appreciation of the needs of learners with poor literacy and numeracy skills, as well as having expertise in their own vocational area. The Department launched training for vocational tutors in October 2002, and has commissioned a national embedded materials project which will provide materials over the three years from 2003 to 2006 to support the embedding of basic skills within a number of vocational subjects. The first set of materials was released in September 2004.

BOX 5

Learning Ladders, East London

The Learning Ladders Project is run by the Romford-based Learning Freeway (part of Havering Adult College) and provides embedded literacy, language and numeracy training in local communities. The Project aims to attract people who would otherwise be unlikely to engage in formal learning by offering creative skills training in a number of small modules.

Bridge-Over Mardyke: The Learning Flat

One of the Learning Freeway’s projects is the Learning Flat, which is a community-based learning scheme run from a once derelict council-owned flat in Rainham, Essex. The flat was offered rent free by the local council, and funding from the Basic Skills Agency and a local partnership Social Regeneration Budget helped to refurbish the flat. The flat is easily accessible for local residents, and the range of modules on offer has also proved attractive to residents and led to very high retention rates. Literacy, language and numeracy components are embedded within popular subjects such as working with computers, complementary therapies, arts and crafts, and beautician techniques such as nail technician. Branded as “Learning Ladders”, it allows learners to step onto ladders of learning and can hop from one to another to try out a range of subjects before moving on to a longer course. Learners can take an accredited course at level 1 or level 2 in the subjects on offer.

4.21 In spring 2002, the Department established the **National Research and Development Centre** for adult literacy and numeracy to conduct research and development which helps develop policy and improve practice. The Centre is led by the Institute of Education at the University of London. Its work includes creating new evidence, testing new ideas and approaches to learning, supporting initial teacher education and the professional development of the skills for life workforce, and identifying international best practice. It is currently carrying out a three year research programme on embedded provision which will finish in 2006.

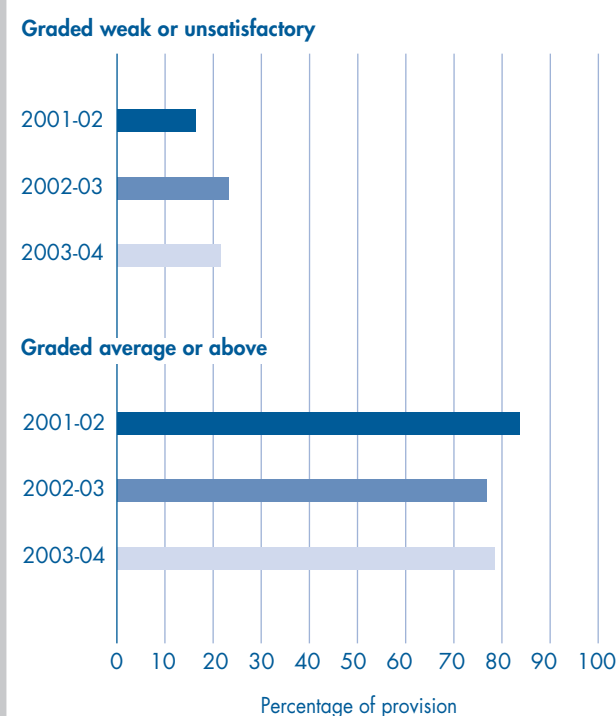
Despite substantial progress in developing the delivery framework, much remains to be achieved

4.22 In September 2003 Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate⁴¹ published a joint review of the quality and standards of literacy, language and numeracy provision in post-16 education. The review was extensive, involving examination of the delivery plans of all 47 local Learning and Skills Councils and drawing on over 650 full inspections of a range of providers, including further education colleges, specialist colleges, adult education institutes, community organisations, providers of work-based learning, learndirect, prisons and young offender institutions. It found examples of good and exceptional practice, but also widespread weaknesses. A major concern was that many learners with the greatest need were being taught by providers with the least qualified staff and lowest budgets for staff training. The report commented that:

- few providers were monitoring retention and achievement rates or measuring the effectiveness of learning support they offered;
- there were weaknesses in initial assessment of learners;
- the quality of individual learning plans was poor;
- following the rapid increase in learner numbers there was a serious shortage of qualified and experienced teachers; and
- most expertise was concentrated in colleges, but even in colleges the proportion of good provision was lower for literacy, language and numeracy than for other areas of learning, and there was a higher proportion of unsatisfactory provision.

4.23 Current data on trends in inspection grades are limited. The Adult Learning Inspectorate began to grade literacy and numeracy provision separately in 2003, so there are no trend data for non-college provision. Results from Ofsted inspections of literacy, numeracy and language provision in further education colleges indicate little improvement so far (**Figure 30**). It will take some time for the impact of recent changes introduced in colleges to show through in the results.

30 Ofsted grades for the three years to 2003-04 indicate little improvement in performance so far



Source: Ofsted reviews of provision in further education colleges

4.24 A key problem has been a shortage of teachers in all types of provision, with prospective tutors unable to start until the new teaching qualifications were available from September 2002 (September 2003 for English for Speakers of Other Languages). During our visits many staff in colleges and local Learning and Skills Councils referred to a lack of qualified staff and suitable local training courses. For example, there were no courses for full teaching qualifications at levels 3 or 4 in Northamptonshire. The shortages extended also to the people capable of training literacy and numeracy teachers. Home Office research⁴² published in 2003 suggested that the main barrier for refugees wanting to access English for Speakers of Other Languages was a shortage of classes and long waiting times in both London and the regions. We found evidence of shortages in two of the five areas we visited – London and West Yorkshire.

⁴¹ The Adult Learning Inspectorate inspects all learning undertaken by people over 16 years outside higher education, with the exception of provision for 16 to 18 year olds in further education colleges which is inspected by Ofsted. The two bodies carry out some inspections of further education colleges jointly and use a common inspection framework.

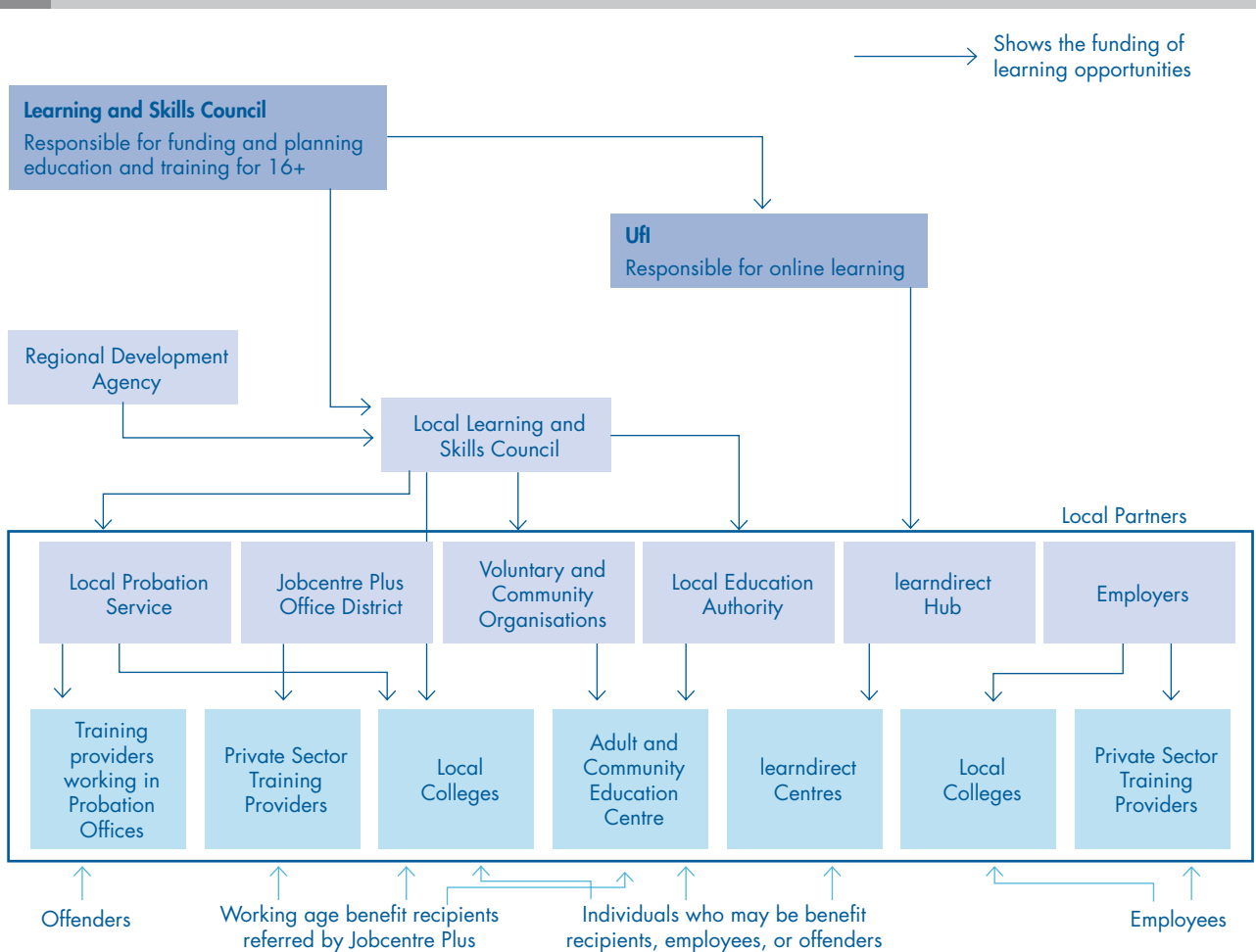
⁴² David Griffiths (2003) English language training for refugees in London and the regions: Home Office Online Report 14/03 <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/rdsolr1403.pdf>.

4.25 In September 2003 the Learning and Skills Council introduced a ‘Golden Hello’ for teaching posts in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages. It is a one-off payment of up to £4,000 at the beginning of the second year of teaching and has helped to recruit some high quality teachers into further education colleges. There have also been some local initiatives. For example, in West Yorkshire the local Learning and Skills Council has run a joint project with the Regional Development Agency to train sixty-two teachers for the level 4 teaching qualification.

The local Learning and Skills Councils have the main responsibility and challenge for securing provision to meet local needs

4.26 The local Learning and Skills Councils need to work with a range of local partners to plan and co-ordinate literacy, language and numeracy provision (Figure 31). Some partners link to national funding partners, for example the Probation Service and Jobcentre Plus. Others are local providers, such as colleges and local authority funded community education, and employers with low-skilled employees.

31 The local Learning and Skills Councils work with a variety of partners



Source: National Audit Office analysis

NOTE

The Ufi was formerly known as the University for Industry.

4.27 The Councils need to:

- have reliable information to enable them to assess local needs for literacy, language and numeracy learning; and
- develop effective relationships with partners on whom they rely for cooperation and to do a lot of work on their behalf.

4.28 The Councils serve a wide variety of communities with different levels and types of employment, and employers requiring different skills. Populations have different needs, partly depending on past education and employment and extent of migration in and out of the area. **Figure 32 overleaf** illustrates the very different circumstances of the five local Learning and Skills Council areas that we visited during our study. Some combinations of circumstances may give rise to creative solutions to help address, for example, problems of rural access and young people's attitudes to continuing education (**Box 6**).

4.29 Few of the providers or local Learning and Skills Councils we visited considered that they had sufficient detailed information about adult literacy, numeracy and language needs in their areas. The Councils used information from the Labour Force Survey on levels of qualifications attained. Many were also using data from a Basic Skills Agency survey carried out in the late 1990s that was increasingly out-of-date, particularly regarding the language needs of people entering the country as asylum seekers. The requirements for language learning can change rapidly as asylum seekers are dispersed, under the Home Office's policy, to different areas, and existing staff shortages (paragraph 4.24 on page 53) can make new and increased requirements especially difficult to cope with.

BOX 6**Access to Mopeds, Norfolk**

Access to Mopeds is a pilot project set up in 2004 as part of the Entry to Employment programme funded by the Norfolk Learning and Skills Council. This pilot gives young learners in rural parts of Norfolk with no access to public transport the opportunity to use a 50cc moped to get to their place of learning or training. It is intended to help address the area's low skills and low participation by 16 to 18 year olds.

4.30 Under the separate but complementary Success for All Strategy⁴³, all local Learning and Skills Councils are required to produce Strategic Area Reviews to:

- identify demand from learners and employers for all types of adult learning;
- ascertain the provision available in their area, including non-Learning and Skills Council funded provision; and
- assess how any gaps can be filled or how imbalances can be addressed (**Box 7**).

4.31 The Learning and Skills Council has devolved the Public Service Agreement target to increase the skills of 750,000 adults to the 47 local Learning and Skills Councils. The national Council negotiated the targets with each local Council taking into account the proportion of the population of working age in each area, the extent to which learners travelled across the local boundaries to take up learning, and past performance. At the time it did not have detailed data on the local levels of literacy and numeracy, and assumed that there was no material variation in the levels between each local Council. When setting local targets for 2004 to 2007, the Learning and Skills Council plans to use data from the Department's Skills for Life survey in order to set targets related more closely to actual need in each local Council's area.

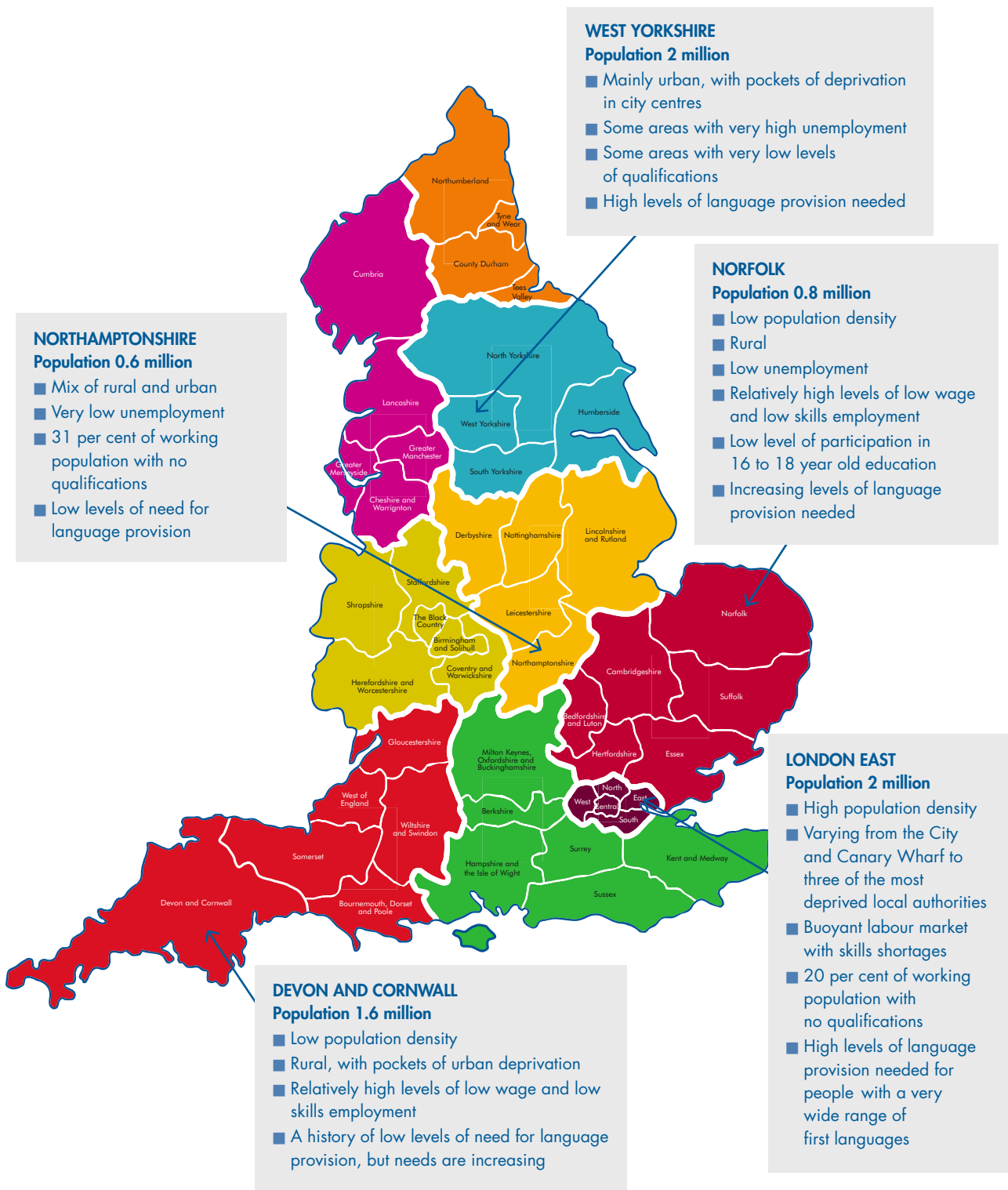
BOX 7**Distributing learning opportunities evenly**

The Learning and Skills Council West Yorkshire and the providers in Bradford jointly mapped provision. There was no provision in three local districts, so the Council encouraged its existing providers to redistribute their funding to develop provision in these areas. This activity was also supported by European Social Fund money.

The mapping also identified some providers offering the same course on the same premises on different days of the week and this has now stopped.

43 Launched in November 2002, <http://www.successforall.gov.uk/>.

32 Local Learning and Skills Council areas have a wide range of characteristics



Source: National Audit Office analysis of the factors affecting the demand for Skills for Life

4.32 The Learning and Skills Council uses data from further education colleges to provide information to the local Councils on progress against their targets. During our visits, people in the local Councils indicated that the targets and this information had helped to focus their attention on literacy, language and numeracy provision. The targets had encouraged them to regard it as a priority, and to develop ways of reaching learners and giving them help that was well adapted to meeting their needs (**Box 8**).

BOX 8

Learning and Skills Council West Yorkshire

Learning and Skills Council West Yorkshire encouraged providers to insert some literacy and numeracy into a whole range of courses so that people would be able to improve their skills as part of the course and take the national literacy and/or numeracy tests.

The Council's providers used Move On courses for people whose skills were assessed as near level 1 or 2. These are short courses that enable appropriately selected learners to take the national tests quickly. They have the added benefits of reducing costs and the risk of demotivation that can result from learners being expected to attend an unnecessarily lengthy course.

4.33 Some local Learning and Skills Councils are using the network of Learning Partnerships set up in 1997 to rationalise local partnership arrangements for adult learning. The partnerships vary depending upon local needs, but generally have a wide membership (example at **Box 9**), including local learning providers (private and voluntary sector, schools, colleges and universities), local education authorities, Connexions, trade unions, employers, faith groups and the Regional Development Agency.

BOX 9

Using local learning partnerships

Northamptonshire Learning Partnership is a key partner of the local Learning and Skills Council. It consists of principals of three colleges, three secondary head teachers, representatives from the local Learning and Skills Council and the County Council, Connexions, University College of Northampton, work-based learning providers and people from the voluntary sector. The local Learning and Skills Council identified a need for an organisation with contracting powers to act for the voluntary sector. A proposed consortium did not work out, and the Council is encouraging the Learning Partnership to set up a trust. The Northamptonshire Learning and Skills Council also worked with the Learning Partnership to address the lack of training courses for teachers in the county (paragraph 4.24), and a range of local courses is now available.

APPENDIX 1

Our methodology

Introduction

1 We adopted a variety of methods in our examination of adult literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages provision in order to:

- examine how effectively the Department managed the Skills for Life Strategy;
- examine progress towards the targets; and
- identify examples of good practice.

Consultation with stakeholders and key interest groups

2 Throughout the planning and fieldwork stages we consulted widely with stakeholders and key interest groups. The consultation largely took the form of unstructured and semi-structured interviews. The groups we consulted included:

- Adult Learning Inspectorate
- Association of Colleges
- Association of Learning Providers
- Basic Skills Agency
- LLU+ at London South Bank University
- NHSU
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy
- Ofsted
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
- Ufl
- Workers' Educational Association

3 We asked these groups for their views on:

- achievements of the Skills for Life Strategy to date;
- demand for adult literacy and numeracy learning and how to increase the demand from people with low levels of literacy and numeracy;
- the best ways of identifying and meeting adult literacy and numeracy needs;
- adequacy of resources, for example appropriately skilled staff, IT, buildings, and funds; and
- monitoring and evaluation of specific projects.

4 We collated and analysed the issues discussed during these interviews to ensure breadth of coverage.

Expert panel

5 We convened an expert panel in July 2004 to discuss our preliminary findings and recommendations. The members of the panel included:

- Nic Brown, Inspection Manager, Adult Learning Inspectorate
- Peter Mayhew-Smith, Director of Foundation Studies, Lewisham College
- Silvana Harvey, Development Officer for literacy, numeracy and language, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- Laura Fairweather, National Implementation Manager, Community Reintegration, National Probation Directorate
- Nick Fenn, Project Manager for English for Speakers of Other Languages, West Nottinghamshire College

Case examples in five geographical areas

6 Between February and April we conducted series of visits to five parts of England, each representative of the Learning and Skills Council clusters identified in analysis by MORI. We visited the local Learning and Skills Council and key partners in West Yorkshire, Norfolk, East London, Northamptonshire and Devon and Cornwall. The partners we visited included a range of learning providers, such as colleges of further education, as well as Jobcentre Plus offices and local probation services. For example, we interviewed staff in two local Jobcentre Plus offices and two local probation services. In each case we met some of their providers to look at the types of services they offered learners. During our visits to providers we took the opportunity to observe classes and speak to some of the learners about their experiences.

7 We asked the local Learning and Skills Councils about the sources of funding they received for adult literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages provision; their targets for attracting learners and enabling them to gain qualifications; the characteristics of learners in their area and how they assessed local levels of need; any challenges they faced in delivering the Skills for Life Strategy; and any partnership working with other organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus and the Probation Service.

Analysis of existing data

8 We have drawn upon existing departmental data in our analysis, such as the Skills for Life survey conducted between June 2002 and May 2003, which provides wide-ranging information on the extent of the literacy and numeracy problem in England and its impacts.

9 In estimating the amount of expenditure on the Skills for Life Strategy, we analysed departmental information for 2000 to 2006 on actual and estimated expenditure.

10 We collected data from the Learning and Skills Council on the number of qualifications gained that count towards the Public Service Agreement target on adult literacy and numeracy. We analysed the data to establish regional variations in the number of courses taken up and the number of qualifications achieved across England. We also analysed data for learners of English for Speakers of Other Languages in London.

Literature review

11 We reviewed literature and research on the provision of adult literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages to inform our understanding of key issues and trends. Our literature review was especially concerned with how literacy and numeracy needs are defined and measured, why literacy and numeracy training is important for people, how it is delivered and what impact poor literacy and numeracy skills have on life chances.

Focus groups and depth interviews with learners

12 We commissioned NOP World to conduct four mini focus group discussions and six individual depth interviews with adults on courses for literacy, numeracy or English for Speakers of Other Languages. A total of 32 respondents were recruited, 21 were male and 11 female. The respondents were selected from a range of learning providers including further education colleges, learndirect, and private providers.

13 The respondents had to meet certain sampling requirements to be selected for the mini focus groups and depth interviews. The requirements for each group were as follows:

London

Group 1: Speakers of Other Languages

- Member of minority ethnic community
- First language not English
- Speaker of conversational English
- Mixed sex
- Aged 20-29
- Working or in education / skills training

West Yorkshire

Group 2: Speakers of Other Languages:

- Member of minority ethnic community
- First language not English
- Speaker of conversational English
- Male
- Aged 20-29
- In full-time employment

Norfolk

Group 3: Unemployed:

- English speaker (first language)
- White British
- Unemployed or actively seeking work OR
- Employed (recently found work)
- Mixed sex
- Aged 35+

London

Group 4: Unemployed:

- English speaker (first language)
- Any ethnicity
- Unemployed or actively seeking work
- Mixed sex
- Aged 18-24

London and West Yorkshire

Depth interviews 1 – 6:

Offenders and ex-offenders:

- On probation
- White British
- Unemployed / actively seeking work
- Male
- Aged 20-29

14 The topic guide for the focus group discussions covered a range of subjects including how learners found out about their current course and why they chose to enrol; their experiences of the course so far, including their attitudes towards teachers and the work set; whether there were barriers or obstacles to attending the course; what benefits they felt they were gaining from attending the course; learners' awareness of any promotional campaigns, such as the gremlins advertisements; what feedback they received on their own performance and were asked for on how the course was going; and whether they would recommend the course to friends.

Consultation with the Department for Education and Skills and other government departments and agencies

15 We discussed our study with the Department for Education and Skills as well as other central government departments and relevant agencies, such as the Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus, the National Probation Service and the Learning and Skills Council.

16 Within the Department for Education and Skills we liaised with officials in the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, which is responsible for bringing the different elements of the Skills for Life Strategy together. During the scoping stages of the study we discussed our issue analysis – a key document outlining key research questions – with the Unit. This helped to ensure that we had identified key issues from the perspective of the Department as well as from the perspectives of other key stakeholders and interest groups. We consulted analysts and statisticians at the Department on the use of survey data on learners.

17 We consulted a number of teams within the Department for Work and Pensions, including the Policy and Performance team, about the role played by Jobcentre Plus offices in getting benefit claimants onto literacy and numeracy courses and the progress being made. We consulted the Department's Analytical Services Division about the impacts of improving literacy and numeracy skill levels.

APPENDIX 2

Qualifications and levels

1 The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has produced a national framework for qualifications and equivalent levels. Its website (www.qca.org.uk) has a searchable database of qualifications. Within the framework the Authority has classified literacy and numeracy from entry level 1 up to and including level 2 (GCSE A*-C) and its equivalent qualifications (**Figure 33**)

2 Key Skills are the skills that are commonly needed for success in a range of activities in education and training, work and life in general. They are: application of number, communication, improving learning and performance, information and communications technology, problem solving, and working with others. All young people aged 16-25 years and undertaking work-based learning have their skill needs determined and addressed through Key Skills and have been taking Key Skills qualifications since 2000. The Key Skills qualifications are assessed through tests and also a

portfolio showing application of the skills in context. The Key Skills standards for communication and application of number at levels 1 and 2 cover the same range of skills as adult literacy and numeracy at levels 1 and 2, and at these levels the Key Skills tests for communication and application of number are the same as the national tests for literacy and numeracy introduced under Skills for Life.

3 For literacy and numeracy entry level 3 is broadly equivalent to the level of skill expected of a competent 9 year old and level 1 (GCSE D-G) is broadly equivalent to that expected of a competent 11 year old. **Figure 34** sets out how the different skills applied in context can benefit people when they attain a particular level. People whose abilities are below level 1 (broadly that expected of a competent 11 year old) may typically be unable to read a train timetable, check their pay or household bills, express their opinions at a school parents' meeting or estimate the cash required for a night out.

33 The levels and equivalent qualifications

Level of qualification	General	Key Skills	Occupational	National Curriculum Level
5			Level 5 NVQ	
4		Level 4	Level 4 NVQ	
3	A levels and AVCE	Level 3	Level 3 NVQ	
2	GCSE grade A*-C	Level 2	Level 2 NVQ	
1	GCSE grade D-G	Level 1	Level 1 NVQ	4 to 5 (11 years)
Entry level 3				3 (9 to 11 years)
Entry level 2				2 (7 to 9 years)
Entry level 1				1 (5 to 7 years)

Source: www.qca.org.uk, Quality and Standards Directorate, Skills for Life Quick Reference Guide

34 Gaining literacy and numeracy has an impact on people's ability to function in society

Area of ability	Entry Level 1	Entry Level 2	Entry Level 3	Level 1	Level 2
Citizen and community	Listening for relevant information in public announcements for example platform information at train stations OR selecting correct numbered floors in lifts	Asking for directions to particular destinations OR finding an address by reading door numbers	Using telephone help-lines for information OR matching the number on front of a bus with the destination	Seeking support from officials such as councillors OR reading bus and train times correctly	Expressing opinions among strangers at a public meeting OR understanding the relevance of information about local council and government spending
Economic activity, including paid and unpaid work	Asking for items in shops OR counting the appropriate number of drinks for visitors	Responding to questions from others OR choosing the correct coins to put into a vending machine	Ordering goods by telephone OR understanding price labels on pre-packed food	Obtaining information from trade union representatives OR checking pay and deductions on a payslip	Handling difficult situations at work OR comparing products and services and working out the "best buy"
Domestic and everyday life	Writing short messages to family members OR choosing the correct coins in public telephones	Describing a child's symptoms to a doctor OR understanding measurements on labels	Explaining technical faults to service engineers OR paying usual household bills	Expressing opinions at parents' meetings at school OR checking household bills	Putting forward a proposal at a parents' school meeting OR working out a family budget
Leisure	Buying cinema tickets OR ordering a round of drinks in a bar	Ordering food from simple menus in bars OR choosing lottery numbers on a lottery ticket	Making telephone bookings for sports activities OR understanding television listings	Following instructions to use equipment in a gym OR estimating the cash needed to cover the cost of a night out	Coaching a local sports team OR converting distances from kilometres to miles when travelling abroad
Education and training	Asking tutors to repeat information OR using calculators to check simple addition	Following instructions to carry out tasks and taking part in informal group discussions OR keeping to simple timetables	Discussing and agreeing a learning programme with tutors and making relevant points in group discussions OR using a calculator to work out contextual problems	Obtaining specific information from presentations OR using a calculator to calculate fractions or decimals	Making short presentations to other learners in a group OR using a calculator to provide accurate solutions to specific problems
Using ICT in social roles	Understanding symbols on TV remote controls OR selecting numbered options from a simple on-screen menu	Using cash points to withdraw cash OR using simple ICT programs for learning and recreation	Using touch-screen information points OR using a range of banking services	Understanding and using buttons on an internet browser OR using software to draw simple charts from data	Using a computer system in a library to find if a book is in stock OR using a spreadsheet model to make and test predictions

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