

**Skills for Life**  
The national strategy for improving  
adult literacy and numeracy skills

**Focus on delivery to 2007**



Snapshot

# Foreword

by the Rt. Hon Charles Clarke MP,  
Secretary of State for Education and Skills

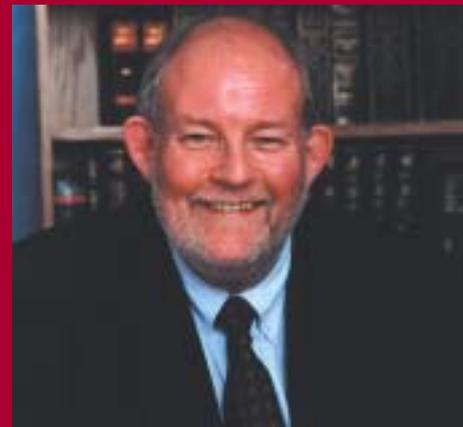
When the Prime Minister first launched *Skills for Life* in March 2001 we set ourselves formidable targets.

We want 750,000 adults to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills by 2004 and aim for 1.5 million adults to have improved these skills by 2007. I am happy to say that we have already made good progress. More than quarter of a million people have gained national certificates.

This revised version of *Skills for Life* sets out what we have done and more importantly, what we still have to do by 2007. We must do more to improve vocational and workplace training to meet the demands of business.

Our delivery to 2007 should also reflect and use new developments to maximum advantage. These include *Success for All*, our strategy for transforming further education and the new *Skills Strategy*.

On the way we need to work closely across Government and with our partners to succeed. Then we will help many more adults enjoy happier futures.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ch Clarke', written on a white background.

# Summary

Up to 7 million adults in England cannot read or write as well as the average 11-year-old: bad news for the adults and bad news for the national economy. People with poor literacy, language or numeracy skills are less productive at work, earn less and are more likely to suffer from ill health and social exclusion.

Tackling this skills problem is one of the Government's priorities. And the *Skills Strategy* for improving skills for work will include driving forward *Skills for Life* as a main goal. The aim is to ensure that the skills we

develop are valuable to young people and adults and valued by employers.

This updated version of *Skills for Life*, the Government's strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, sets out what we have already achieved and our targets to 2007.

We aim to help 750,000 adults achieve national certificates by 2004, and for 1.5 million to achieve the same by 2007.

# Our priority groups

We will only succeed by identifying and helping those in most urgent need. We know from research that certain groups have a much greater need for literacy, language and numeracy skills than others, and our priority is to make sure these groups get help first.



Top skills scorer Charlotte (left) with tutor Lindy

## Charlotte Brady

Just over a year ago Charlotte, 18, was unemployed, unable to read or write and lacked self-confidence. She turned her life around after enrolling on a Basic Skills course with Rathbone training providers. Then she quickly found part-time employment as a housekeeper in a nearby Care Home.

Said her training adviser Lindy Thomas, “Charlotte came to Rathbone with the opinion that she was stupid, but she has now found her own place to live and learnt valuable budgeting skills.”

## Unemployed people

### ◦ Jobseekers

Around a third of the unemployed people in England have literacy, language and/or numeracy needs that prevent them from finding and keeping secure work.

Jobcentre Plus screens all clients on Jobseeker’s Allowance after 6 months unemployment and all those on voluntary New Deals, to find out if they need help. Based on screening evaluation pilots (due to report this summer), it has also appointed skills co-ordinators to oversee provision in their districts. Other pilot activities include testing the use of financial incentives and sanctions.

Allowance claimants are allowed to study for up to 16 hours per week. Jobcentre Plus is reviewing ways of offering them extra support. Furthermore, the unemployed are encouraged and helped to continue learning when in work so that they can improve their job prospects.

### ◦ Benefit claimants

Benefit claimants with skills needs are already well advised and guided by Jobcentre Plus advisers. New measures to be introduced in 2004 will offer them even more benefit improvements.

Screening, advice and referral are also now offered to lone parents, disabled people and partners of those out of work through New Deal initiatives. New guidance for

teachers and diagnostic assessment tools are providing excellent additional support to those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Moreover, Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding arrangements for these learners aim to make sure that all providers can offer them appropriate support.

### **Prisoners and those supervised in the community**

A staggering 80% of prisoners have poor writing skills. 50% have reading difficulties and around 65% have trouble with numbers. This is a huge obstacle to their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Prison Service have helped over 32,000 prisoners to gain skills qualifications and improve their prospects of a life away from crime. The Prison Service has set a target of 36,000 qualifications for 2003-04. The National Probation Service is also reviewing its Public Service Agreement targets. From 2004 we will offer an improved cross-governmental, integrated service to ex-offenders. Ministers have this year agreed to make skills testing a condition of licence for ex-offenders.

### **Employees**

#### **Public sector employees**

Like all employers, the Government has a responsibility to address the skills of its own employees. Leading by example, the DfES is mainstreaming literacy and numeracy provision for its own staff and we aim for every Government department to be able to make the same claim by 2004.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD), for example, already screens all recruits for literacy, language and numeracy skills and has recruited specialist teachers to each of its learning centres both here and overseas. Moreover, we are working with local authorities to develop similar strategies for local government staff.



*Lesley Elliot: from phobic to champion*

## Lesley Elliot

Lesley has been working in Human Resources for many years and needed to improve her numerical ability to evaluate other employees' skills.

She volunteered to trial a numeracy core curriculum programme she had been developing with Fast Forward (a training organisation contracted through the Employer Training Pilot). Recently she took the Level 1 Test which she feels was a real achievement as she “panics when I see numbers.”

### ◦ Low-skilled employees

Productivity per hour worked is 20% lower in Britain than in Germany. As if that is not bad enough, two thirds of employees with literacy skills below Level 1 earn less than £9000 a year. To get workers with skills needs into secure, rewarding work we will continue to encourage employers to commit to staff development. This means ensuring that businesses work towards the Investors in People standard set by IIP (UK).

In September 2002 we started a series of Employer Training Pilots to engage employers with financial incentives and free training courses to up-skill their workforce. After extensive trials we have produced and distributed an Employer Toolkit, bringing together

best practice to help employers introduce literacy, language and numeracy training at work.

Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships and trade unions are helping employers to identify and support literacy, language and numeracy skill needs among their own staff. Our online practice tests and learning materials are helping all businesses – regardless of size – do this in the long term. As important are trade union learning representatives, currently providing for over 5000 learners through the Union Learning Fund. Sector Skills Councils have a key role, and we are working with them to map occupational standards to our skills standards and to develop materials to support training.

This year also sees the start of our *Employer Engagement Strategy*, promoting our skills agenda to employers throughout the country.

- **Young people**

Connexions personal advisers support young people (14-19) with poor skills in and out of work. Advisers have a central role in identifying those with needs and referring them to local training and support opportunities. And through our *Opportunities for Excellence* strategy we are working to bring many more of these young people back into learning. For those who are not ready for the Key Skills or Foundation Modern Apprenticeship (FMA) programmes, we are encouraging providers to offer

literacy, language and numeracy training from Pre-Entry Level to Level 1. Furthermore we are piloting improvements to pre-vocational provision.

- **Other groups at risk of exclusion**

Other groups at risk – including the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, drug abusers and travelling families – are usually reached through the voluntary and community sector. We will continue to promote the *Skills for Life* agenda with these organisations, in partnership with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service.

- **Speakers of other languages**

Learning opportunities and support provided must be sensitive to the circumstances of all these individuals. In particular, those who do not speak English as their first language and all those seeking a new life in the United Kingdom need real opportunities for integration into the community. The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teaching and learning infrastructure addresses their needs.

- **Parents**

Families are supported by LSC funding for local provision and a range of DfES-led family programmes, including *Sure Start*, *Step in to Learning* and *Skills for Families*. These



Rodney (right) receives his Young Learner of the Year award from Godfrey Allen, Chair of governors at South Thames College

## Rodney Kizomba Martins

Eighteen-year-old Rodney arrived in the UK only two years ago on his own after his parents were killed in Angola. Since completing an ESOL Level 2 course, Rodney achieved a National Diploma in Music Technology.

Rodney is full of praise: “I’m learning things I didn’t know about the composition of R&B and Hip Hop. I’m also working on African sounds and rhythms in a contemporary setting. I now hope to study music production at university.”

programmes work with community childcare providers and target the places that parents and carers frequent.

Childcare and education providers and schools at all levels have a key role to play. We are also working with others such as health visitors, the courts and probation officers to identify the skills needs of the parents they encounter.

### ◦ Those living in disadvantaged communities

Our strategy must recognise that potential learners are spread throughout the country, and are often hard to reach. So we must continue to improve the access and flexibility of learning opportunities. The Regional Development Agency

(RDA) has now proposed targets for improving the adult population’s skills in every region. Those in disadvantaged areas are also reached through various Government initiatives. These include the family programmes that operate in the most deprived wards in England. Learning is also available through *learnirect*: for all and free of charge.

# Focus on delivery

## Boosting demand

The national *Get On* campaign is encouraging thousands of adults to overcome their fears and 'get rid of their gremlins'. Over 150,000 adults have phoned the *learnirect* national helpline (0800 100 900) for information about literacy, language and numeracy learning programmes. This is thanks in no small part to the providers, local authorities and local LSCs that have adopted marketing strategies.

We will continue to raise awareness and support across

Government and with employers to boost demand and increase our capacity to address skills needs (see *Priority Groups – Public Sector Employees*). As part of our agenda for mainstreaming provision, the LSC will lead all promotional activity by 2005. We will continue to provide advice and materials through our *Update* newsletter, *Skills for Life* conferences and ReadWritePlus website ([www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus)).

## Ensuring capacity

Over 300,000 learners have achieved national certification in

literacy and numeracy through over 2 million programmes. While this progress is welcome there is still much to do.

In the last year a further £1.6 billion of funding was announced for adult literacy, language and numeracy provision across Government to 2006. This funding enables us to meet universal screening referral and support targets for jobseekers through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)/ Jobcentre Plus and other government provision for young offenders, prisoners and those supervised in the community.

The most important delivery partner of all, the LSC, has adopted the *Skills for Life* targets and has a central role and responsibility for planning, funding and co-ordinating *Skills for Life*. At national and local level the LSC will set and monitor providers' funding regimes and targets. The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) will continue to provide guidance and support.

Involving all our partners to take forward a common, national improvement strategy is a tall order. But it is one that we must accomplish.

## **Monitoring, evaluation and research**

Progress towards meeting our Public Service Agreement targets is continuously and rigorously monitored by ABSSU. But we could not do it without the help of key partners who report regularly on delivery. By 2004 all awarding bodies will have a common protocol for recording and reporting on achievements, to be fully implemented by 2007. To help us analyse potential hurdles to delivery and identify avenues for improvement, we are undertaking a national Adult Basic Skills Needs Survey. It is due to be published in Autumn 2003.

## **Raising Standards**

Since September 2002, all new teachers in the post-16 sector who wish to specialise in teaching adult literacy and numeracy are required to gain qualifications that meet the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) subject specifications for literacy, numeracy, and from September 2003, ESOL. This gives teachers the clear definitions they need for high quality teaching. We are also exploring ways of improving the delivery of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills teaching and learning.

Over 15,000 teachers have been trained in the literacy and numeracy core curricula and a

further 5,000 ESOL teachers have been introduced to the ESOL curriculum. 2,000 teachers have attended training in the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework and *Access for All* guidance for those who teach adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. This is part of a bank of guidance materials – referenced to the national standards and core curricula – produced to support teachers and learners.

The LSC has taken responsibility for the funding and delivery of all teacher training and continuing professional development. We estimate that 25,000 teachers will have made use of the programme by 2007 and be able to demonstrate skills at the appropriate level.

We are also working across government to ensure that workplace and frontline managers and facilitators are appropriately trained in the workplace to identify and refer those with skills needs, through *Link Up* and other programmes.

*Our Guide to support the Common Inspection Framework* sets high standards for delivery on the ground. Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspect the skills provision of all LSC-funded providers. We expect all providers to have plans in place that set out how they will recruit, assess and monitor learners as they progress to qualifications. Moreover we are developing a national award scheme to reward excellence and innovation to be available in

summer 2003. All teacher training materials and programmes will include a module on *Success for All*, our strategy for transforming further education.

## **Learner achievement**

We expect all learners to have access to high quality learning opportunities. So since September 2002, we have had national standards in place for all literacy, numeracy and ESOL learning programmes and qualifications.

We have also published core curricula for literacy, numeracy and ESOL learning as well as a Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework. Furthermore, we have produced literacy and numeracy materials for



*Mary receives her award from the Prime Minister*

## Mary Davies

Mary was among the first to pass the National Tests in literacy and numeracy. Since receiving her award from the Prime Minister a year ago, she has completed GCSE English, passing with a Grade A. Mary is currently halfway through studying for a Maths GCSE.

She is determined to pass this year so that she can embark on an English A-Level course. Mary is able to balance her studies and a full-time job in Liverpool, by working four-day shifts.

screening, initial assessment and diagnostic assessment to ensure potential learners receive the guidance they deserve. We aim to publish ESOL-specific screening and initial assessment materials by 2004. A suite of contextualised diagnostic assessment materials for literacy, numeracy and ESOL and dyslexia will be available by summer 2003.

National Literacy and Numeracy Tests at Levels 1 and 2 are now in place, developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Linked to the national standards and curriculum, they provide a clear and reliable measure of personal achievement. National ESOL qualifications will be available in 2004.

## Innovation and development

Literacy and Numeracy Pathfinders were piloted in ten areas in 2001 to test out the core teaching and learning infrastructure. Nearly 2000 adults sat national tests, with a success rate of 65%. Innovative approaches led to over 3,500 adults taking part by July 2002. Building on this success, eleven ESOL Pathfinders are now up and running to test the ESOL teaching and learning infrastructure.

There are still gaps in our knowledge about what motivates adults to learn and what helps them to improve their skills. So in March 2001 we established the National Research and Development

Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC). Its function is to undertake research and development projects at home and abroad that underpin *Skills for Life* to inform and improve our teaching and learning practice. It builds upon the work of the Basic Skills Agency that informed the development of the national teaching and learning standards and core curricula. Throughout 2003 the NRDC is leading annual conferences to share and assess good practice from around the world.

Our strategy is designed to offer flexible and interactive learning opportunities so that individuals can learn at their convenience. We have initiated a national baseline survey of ICT skills to explore these opportunities. It is due to report this year with recommendations for using new technologies to improve the delivery and assessment of literacy, language, numeracy and ICT learning. In today's wired up world, computer skills are as vital as the ability to read, write and add up.



James: "You're never too old to start"

## Get IT on board

James Mitchell, 76, currently works as a volunteer manager for the Unemployed Resource Centre in Liverpool. Before enrolling on a 12-week ICT course on the Knowsley IT Bus mobile ICT programme, he had no knowledge of computing or the internet.

"The bus provides an excellent service to local people who have no access to computers and are nervous about learning. It has opened my eyes to lots of opportunities!," James comments.

## Working together

We have already achieved many of our targets for improving adult skills throughout the country. But there is still much to do. With the help of partners and providers who share our vision, we will succeed in turning good intentions into lasting results.

## Further information

Further details about relevant Government agencies and programmes can be found on the following websites:

**Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit**  
[www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus)

**Adult and Community Learning Fund**  
[www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/aclf](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/aclf)

**Adult financial literacy**  
[www.dfes.gov.uk/adflag](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/adflag)

**Adult Learning Inspectorate**  
[www.ali.gov.uk](http://www.ali.gov.uk)

**The Basic Skills Agency**  
[www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk)

**Connexions Service**  
[www.connexions.gov.uk](http://www.connexions.gov.uk)

**Department for Work and Pensions**  
[www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

**Jobcentre Plus**  
[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

**Key skills**  
[www.dfes.gov.uk/key](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/key)

**Learndirect**  
[www.learndirect.gov.uk](http://www.learndirect.gov.uk)

Learning and Skills Council  
[www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

Learning and Skills  
Development Agency  
[www.lsd.gov.uk](http://www.lsd.gov.uk)

National Grid for Learning  
[www.ngfl.gov.uk](http://www.ngfl.gov.uk)

National Institute for Continuing  
Adult Education  
[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

National Research and  
Development Centre  
[www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)

New Deal  
[www.newdeal.gov.uk](http://www.newdeal.gov.uk)

Office for Standards in  
Education (Ofsted)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority  
[www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)

Sector Skills  
Development Agency  
[www.ssda.org.uk](http://www.ssda.org.uk)

Sure Start  
[www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)

University for Industry  
[www.ufild.gov.uk](http://www.ufild.gov.uk)

UK Online  
[www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk)



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### Focus on delivery to 2007

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