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## 'SKILLS FOR LIFE': POLICY, IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES FOR DEVELOPEMENT: A RESEARCH- BASED APPROACH

- Evidence on the impact of LLN problems and the benefits of engagement in learning
- Numeracy
- Soft Skills
- Social Inclusion
- The 'so what' questions

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## Literacy, numeracy and ESOL (LLN) in the UK: the context

- **1970s** National Adult Literacy Campaign (Media-led: BBC + £1million government funding)
- **1998** IALS (OECD) survey reveals low literacy levels in UK
- **1999** Government Inquiry (Moser report): '**A Fresh Start**' for adult literacy and numeracy. Complains of low research and evidence base
- **2000** The Lisbon Goals: 8 Key Competences encompass LLN & ICT at EU level
- **2001** Government launches 10 year strategy: '*Skills for Life*' in England. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland follow. Includes English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- **2004** ICT (Information & Communication Technology) officially becomes a fourth basic skill/interim *Skills for Life* target met
- **2007** 'Leitch' report on UK skills for competitiveness – LLN and workplace learning a priority to 2020
- **2007** Policy/funding for ESOL modified to contain cost – impact of migration
- **2007** SfL now part of new 'Innovation, Universities and Skills' Gov. Dept.



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## *Skills for Life* 2001 – 2010 → 2020?

- A publicity campaign (TV; press; magazines, billboards & beer mats...)
- Target, 2.25million adults to raise skills by one level by 2010 (from Entry 3 upwards) – on course for success
- Assessment regime: a new national 'test' (multiple choice)
- Standards, curriculum and 'learning infrastructure' established at 5 levels – Entry 1,2,3; Level 1, Level 2 – (GCSE-level 2); also pre-entry-SLDD
- Regularly updated Delivery Plan
- A national research and development centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) established in 2002
- Funding for '*Skills for Life*' to date: £3 billion+
- Future – Treasury-sponsored Leitch report set new targets to 2020: 95% for L & N
- Evaluations, Accountability, Inspectorates, National Audit Office, Public Accounts Committee



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## Literacy and Numeracy in England: summary evidence of needs and gains

- 2003 National Survey\* by government (DfES) confirmed IALS/ 'Moser' pictures
- Very low skills: 5.2million – literacy; 15million – numeracy
- Social class: adults living in social class 1 four times as likely as adults in social class 5 to reach 'level 2' – a class-divided society?
- Most parents with literacy and numeracy needs help their children with school work – literacy and maths – even when they do not feel confident and have problems themselves
- There are strong 'returns to learning' – strongest in numeracy – (earnings and employment chances)
- But debate over the returns to vocational qualifications at the levels SfL is targeting

\* DfES (2003) *Skills for Life Survey of Need and Impact*



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## A research-supported strategy: What is the NRDC?

- National Centre for Research and Development for literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT; a consortium of universities and development organisations.
- Established by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) in 2002 as part of *Skills for Life* strategy in England to develop empirical evidence, theory and models to engage with, refresh and help take forward the SFL strategy.
- 'Development programmes' to transform research into practice: guidance; action research; demonstration projects; trialling methods.
- Engagement in research and development by practitioners (teachers).
- Putting research to work in policy development: sound evidence, advice and guidance to policy.
- Rigour, synthesis and accumulation of findings.
- International collaboration and comparison: especially USA, Australia, NZ, EU and several developing countries.
- Communication and Impact on practice.



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## Key policy issues – 2007 Snapshot

- Engaging employers in literacy and numeracy – high expectations, policy ideas (e.g. The Pledge) and debate about balance of responsibility – employers/state/individual
- Too few teachers, fewer qualified teachers, esp. numeracy
- Far-reaching teacher education reforms: but can they keep pace with growth in learners? A 'tiered' workforce to meet demand?
- Migration: large numbers (new EU countries) = funding problems for ESOL
- National Target – is it set too high at Entry Level 3? – New targets for 'Leitch'
- Entry 2 and below: how to reach the 'hardest to reach' and people most in need
- UK skills: future competitiveness and productivity: focus on literacy and numeracy at Level 2 and above
- Progression to higher skills and employability in a high skill economy
- From supply-led to demand-led – back to employers
- Numeracy



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## Hot topics and key policy issues – 2007 Snapshot

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## Addressing the lowest level skills

- Basic skills problems impact on people's working lives, social inclusion and health. Quantitative research with 10,000 people shows that those with skills at Entry level 2 and below are especially disadvantaged and low maths and numeracy has a particularly strong impact, especially on women.
- When skills deteriorate through lack of use \* there may be relatively little impact on life chances or quality of life, **whereas skills enhancement may have the potential to open up opportunities and improve self confidence.** This gives powerful support to the Skills for Life strategy goal of skills enhancement to support social inclusion.

\* Bynner and Parsons (1997) "Use it or Lose it"



## Low-level skills and breaking cycles of underachievement – the social and economic impact

- Literacy and numeracy (basic skills) problems impact on people's working lives, social inclusion, health, relationships, well-being (ca. 4% of population). Those with **skills at Entry level 2 (very low) and below** are especially disadvantaged.
- **Low maths and numeracy** has a particularly strong impact, especially on women's work and life chances.
- The children of parents with skills at 'Entry Level 2' and below are more likely to have problems with literacy and numeracy. Disadvantaged 3 year olds up to one year behind their peers.
- A parent's literacy appears to be more important than numeracy in intergenerational transfer of skills, with **literacy skills below Level 1 casting a shadow on the potential achievements of children.**
- Effective, accessible and flexible **adult learning and family LLN** can develop adults' skills and help children's education in their early and school years.
- Adults reluctant to acknowledge needs, but if they do gains can be more substantial for those at lower levels. \*

\* Bynner and Parsons (2007) 'New Light on Literacy and Numeracy'

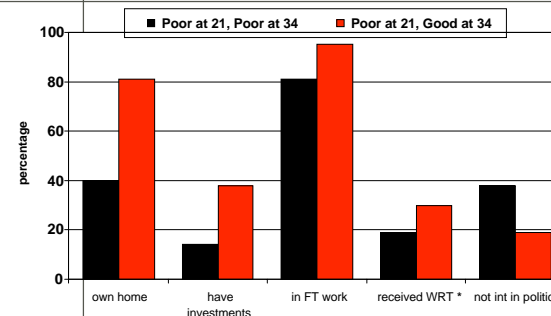


## How to break cycles of underachievement

- The children of parents with skills at Entry Level 2 and below are more likely to have problems with literacy and numeracy: effective, more flexible and accessible adult learning, including work-based and family LLN can develop adults' skills and help children's education in their early and school years.
- A parent's grasp of literacy appears to be more important than their grasp of numeracy in terms of intergenerational transfer of skills, with literacy skills below Level 1 casting a shadow on the potential achievements of children.



## Emerging findings: Life chances - the impact of improving skills



Differences in outcomes at age 34 for men who had poor literacy at age 21 and either poor or good literacy at age 34.

**New Light on Literacy and Numeracy - NRDC Sept 2006**

\* work-related training

A study of 10,000 adults aged 34 in 2004, and their children (3–16)



## Substantial returns to learning

- There are substantial returns to learning from literacy and numeracy.
- Evidence is stronger in relation to earnings than employment (at least as far as numeracy is concerned), and in relation to numeracy than literacy.
- Returns are greater for numeracy.



## Costs of poor skills

- The costs of poor skills well established
- Example, men aged 30 in BCS \* cohort who were poor in literacy and numeracy: more likely to be in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs; fewer work-related training courses; lower weekly wages; poorer promotion opportunities
- 40 per cent of women with low skills were in manual work, a much higher proportion than for all women of this age.

\* British Cohort Studies (born in 1970)



## Earnings

- *Skills for Life* is generating economic returns for adults.
- Level 1 in literacy is associated with a minimum of 1-3% higher earnings for adults, as compared with earnings for those at lower levels
- (Level 1 literacy is associated with anything up to 12% higher earnings when compared with earnings for adults at Entry level 3.)
- Compared with lower skills levels, Entry level 3 in numeracy attracts up to 13% higher earnings, whilst workers at Level 1 in numeracy earn a minimum of 6% higher hourly earnings than those at Entry levels and below.



## Earnings

- The economic benefits of *Skills for Life*, like the social and educational benefits, often take years before becoming fully apparent
- Returns for adult learners are greatest when looking at earnings *three or more years* after attending a course



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## Employment

- Higher levels of literacy and numeracy are associated with increasing employability
- At the age of 30 in the BCS70 cohort, 70 per cent of men with poor literacy and/or numeracy were in manual jobs, compared with 50 per cent of those who were competent in both
- Women at Level 1 literacy are up to 7% more likely to be in the workforce than women at Entry level 3. Men at Entry level 1 or 2 are up to 12% more likely to be outside the labour market than men at Entry level 3
- Level 1 numeracy is associated with a minimum 2-3% higher probability of being employed.



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## Employability

- A study of FE literacy and numeracy learners found that the net increase in the proportion of learners in paid employment was 5.3 per cent, while for non- *Skills for Life* learners it was 3.8 per cent.
- Furthermore, one year on *Skills for Life* learners improved significantly more than non-*Skills for Life* learners in terms of self-esteem, perceived improvement in basic skills, attitudes towards education and training, long-term illness or disability, and employment commitment – important antecedents to improved employment outcomes.



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## Numeracy

- Poor numeracy rather than poor literacy was associated with low economic well-being at the age of 30 for the BCS70 cohort. Even when combined with good literacy women's low numeracy is a significant predictor of negative outcomes, whereas poor literacy combined with good numeracy generally isn't.
- For women, while the impact of low literacy and low numeracy skills is substantial, low numeracy has the greater negative effect, even when combined with competent literacy.



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## Soft Skills: linking social inclusion with economic focus (1)

- Explicit in the *Skills for Life* strategy is the aim of facilitating social inclusion. Raising literacy, language and numeracy skills are keys to facilitating social inclusion processes.
- Social inclusion is one of the many positive outcomes of improved literacy, language and numeracy skills, and can be an integral part of a work-based learning process. For example:
  - Learning environments improve confidence and participation by providing structure and social support.



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## Soft Skills: linking social inclusion with economic focus (2)

- An improvement in 'soft skills' such as confidence, valued by employers, emerges as an important outcome of engaging in learning which can promote social inclusion.
- Apart from building capability to learn, participate and progress in education and employment, the positive effects of improving individuals' literacy, language and numeracy skills include higher levels of participation in work and society. For example:



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## Soft Skills: linking social inclusion with economic focus (3)

- Research with socially excluded young adults reveals gains associated with social inclusion, such as developing self confidence, finding employment and securing long-term accommodation.
- For school leavers, literacy and numeracy was significant not only in gaining employment, but in retaining and progressing in the labour market.
- Research with young offenders (Hurry et al., forthcoming 2007) emphasises the benefits of work-related, practical (work-based) LLN learning, embedded in vocational education.



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## Numeracy

- For men and women with poor numeracy, skills decline if not used and practised in employment. Vicious circle: poor numeracy - limited employment - declining numeracy - harder to obtain employment
- However: improvement makes more of a difference than deterioration
- Deterioration of skills between 21 and 34 may have less significant impact on quality of life at age 34 than improvement of skills across same period.



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## Numeracy – the social and economic impact

- As socio-economic predictor, numeracy matters more than literacy; women with poor numeracy exceptionally disadvantaged out of labour market; poor physical health; depressed; feel they lack control over their lives
- How can we target numeracy provision for women? Are the primary barriers practical, pedagogic or motivational? How to overcome these?
- Mathematics needn't be 'functional' to capture interest: adults can attend numeracy classes to prove that they can succeed in a 'high status' 'gateway' subject, support their children
- People want more from numeracy than how to read their gas bills – the 'algebra' factor.



## Economic Development and Social Inclusion

*How can we improve life chances and skill levels, and engage employers in Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN)?*

- Numeracy matters more than literacy; women with poor numeracy are exceptionally disadvantaged
- Such women tend to: be out of labour market in full-time home caring roles; live in non-working household; not vote and not have political interest; have poor physical health; be depressed; feel they lack control over their lives
- Entry level 2 and below – impact on adults' lives
- Intergenerational effects of low levels of skills: improving parents' literacy and numeracy likely to improve children's acquisition of skills, not only in pre-school period, but throughout their school careers



## Economic Development and Social Inclusion

- Literacy and numeracy problems have adverse effect on earnings and employment
- **Workplace programmes** provide learning opportunities for adults who rarely or never participate; especially men, including older men - inconvenient working hours, other commitments and alienation from education, prohibit enrolment on local college courses
- Evidence suggests: workplace courses too rarely focus on numeracy
- Union Learning Reps successful in raising participation and retention rates
- Higher levels of skills required in jobs at all levels – particularly numeracy and writing with ICT

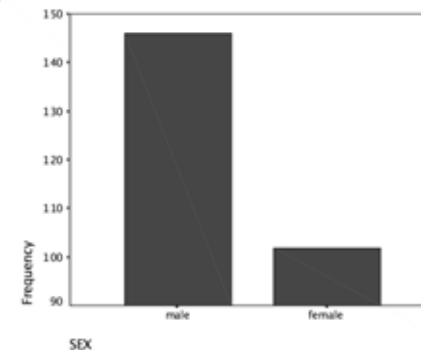


## Delivery and learning infrastructure of Skills for Life

- How rural proof is *Skills for Life*?
- Largely based on urban models of delivery and patterns of funding
- Main barriers to delivering rural provision: scattered communities; difficulties with transport and childcare; developing a 'learning' identity (esp. men)
- Increasing need for ESOL in rural areas



## Employers: workplace learning and adult basic skills



- Workplace learning motivates and engages people who would not normally attend college provision – most notably men...

NRDC workplace study – (NRDC:forthcoming)



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## Evidence and policy development: the ‘so what should we do?’ question

- **How we move learners** from pre-entry and low-entry levels to PSA target (Entry Level 3, 1 & 2)
- Convincing **employers and unions to support employees’ LLN learning in shared settlement between state, individuals and employers**
- Making provision **much more flexible**, with enough time supports (incl. ICT) to help learners persist and achieve
- **More family literacy**, numeracy and ESOL
- **More embedded provision** to motivate and support achievement
- **Training more teachers**, more effectively and more quickly before they work with learners to maximise benefit of future CPD
- Motivating adults to learn maths – especially in workplace
- Professionalising teachers and others in the workforce
- Developing teaching and learning **strategies**: phonics, fluency, free writing



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## Where to get more information about NRDC

For more information about the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy please access our website:

[www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)