



What works for Entry Level Skills for Life Learners?

A SKEIN Pilot Research Report

**Adult Literacy & Numeracy Provision in Hackney and Brent:
A Comparative Study of Factors Enabling Progression**

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Section 1: Research Aims and Objectives

This report was commissioned as part of the Skills for Economic Inclusion (SKEIN) pilot research programme in May 2006. It focuses on adult literacy and numeracy learning provision in the London Boroughs of Hackney and Brent.

The over-arching aim of the research was to find out what types of learning provision are the most effective in terms of facilitating learner progression into the education and training mainstream. 'Mainstream' is defined as *above* Entry Level – ie, the level, according to the Skills for Life Strategy, which is sufficient for sustained and successful engagement in further vocational training and the labour market. Given the extent of literacy and numeracy needs in both boroughs, an understanding of these factors is essential for the development of localised social and economic inclusion strategies.

In seeking to answer this question we also aimed to explore a broader set of questions, all of which directly or indirectly impact upon progression:

- What proportion of learners entering Entry Level literacy and numeracy provision enter into the educational mainstream?
- What level of intervention, and how many Guided Learning Hours, are required to facilitate progression between learner levels?
- Does current literacy and numeracy provision adequately facilitate progression into further vocational training?
- What barriers exist which inhibit progression, and how can teachers and institutions help to overcome these?
- To what extent can successful entry into mainstream training and employment be attributed to quality teaching and learning?
- How equipped do practitioners feel in meeting literacy and numeracy needs, and how important is teacher training?
- How does provision need to shift in order to facilitate progression, and what funding will be required to do this ?
- Do we currently have the correct set of interventions to ensure that everyone can move out of Entry Level learning provision?

A secondary objective of the research was to find out to what extent the issues uncovered were common to both Hackney and Brent, or were specific.

Section 2: Research Methodology

The research involved interviewing a range of literacy and numeracy learners, practitioners and managers in selected providers in both Hackney and Brent. A series of semi-structured questionnaires were designed based upon the research objectives outlined above. Interviews were both individual and in groups, and full transcriptions were produced.

Provision surveyed included:

Hackney	Brent
<p>Hackney Community College 1 group of Entry 2 literacy learners 2 literacy practitioners 1 numeracy practitioner/manager 1 literacy practitioner/manager 1 SfL manager</p> <p>Doorstep Training 1 group of mixed-level literacy and embedded ICT learners 1 project manager</p> <p>LifeLine Learning Ltd. 1 group of (mixed) Entry 3 & Level 1 learners 1 literacy practitioner</p>	<p>The College of North West London 1 group of Level 1 literacy learners 2 literacy practitioners 1 numeracy practitioner 1 SfL manager</p> <p>Brent Adult & Community Education Services (BACES) 1 group of literacy and numeracy practitioners/managers 1 literacy practitioner 1 group of E1 literacy learners</p>

In order to contextualise these perspectives, several providers were approached to share relevant internal Management Information System (MIS) data, in particular key statistics on enrolment, retention, achievement and progression within literacy and numeracy programmes. Unfortunately, only a small amount of data – and from one provider – was submitted in time for analysis. It was not possible to share statistics for contrasting academic years. Therefore, a full quantitative analysis of provision and progression was impossible to attempt.

This is arguably a key weakness of this report. As a result, we attempted to find other statistical evidence. However, as the research progressed, it became clear that data *specifically* on progression within and out of literacy and numeracy programmes is not collated by either the Learning & Skills Council (LSC), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) or the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED). Nor do local authorities collate this data. Quantitative intelligence at this level of analysis is entirely lacking, and it was beyond the remit of this research to attempt to substitute for this lack.

However, the qualitative research gathered and analysed below is extremely rich, and undoubtedly throws much light on the questions we set out to answer. Much of it is not new, and many of the issues raised will be familiar to those working in the field. In writing this research, we have tried to compensate for this lack of a quantitative perspective by ensuring that the voices of learners, practitioners and managers of provision themselves come through loud and clear – there is much to be learned by listening to these voices.

Section 3: Socio-Economic Snapshot of Hackney and Brent

The London Boroughs of Hackney and Brent contain some of the most socially and economically deprived wards in the UK. In both boroughs, New Deal for Communities (NDC) regeneration programmes are attempting to combat social and economic exclusion (Shoreditch Trust and South Kilburn NDC). Both are ethnically diverse: Hackney is home to the largest Turkish-speaking and Vietnamese communities in Britain, whilst Brent is historically home to a large Irish community. Both have large African and Afro-Caribbean communities.

However, there are also key differences. Hackney is located in East London, Brent is in West London. Brent is a much larger borough and contains suburban areas in its north, whilst Hackney is much smaller and is entirely an inner-city borough. Hackney has (as yet) no tube stations, whereas Brent is well-served by the London Underground. Hackney is set to benefit from development stemming from the 2012 Olympics; West London should similarly gain some benefit, but this area has had large-scale development projects for several years (Wembley Stadium and Heathrow Terminal 5).

1. Deprivation, Economic Activity and Skills

Hackney:¹

According to the 2001 Census, Hackney's population is 202,819. Using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) it ranks as the 4th most deprived borough in England and the 2nd most deprived in London (after Tower Hamlets). Almost all of the borough is within the top 20% most deprived areas in the country.

Brent:²

According to the 2001 Census, Brent's population is 263,463. Again, using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) it ranks as the 68th most deprived borough in England and the 13th most deprived in London. However, significant deprivation is concentrated in the south and centre of the borough (eg, Kilburn, Harlesden

¹ Source: <http://www.renewal.net/England/London/>

² Source: <http://www.renewal.net/England/London/>

and Willesden).

Both boroughs suffer similar levels of economic exclusion and worklessness amongst their most deprived residents:

Hackney:³

- 56% of residents are in employment, 7% are unemployed and 37% are economically inactive
- The percentage of the working age in employment is significantly lower than the London average, and this gap has got wider in the last five years
- Amongst Job Seekers' Allowance claimants, 72% are male and 28% female
- The majority of claimants are between 20-29 (33%)
- Hackney has a higher proportion of self-employed workers than the national average

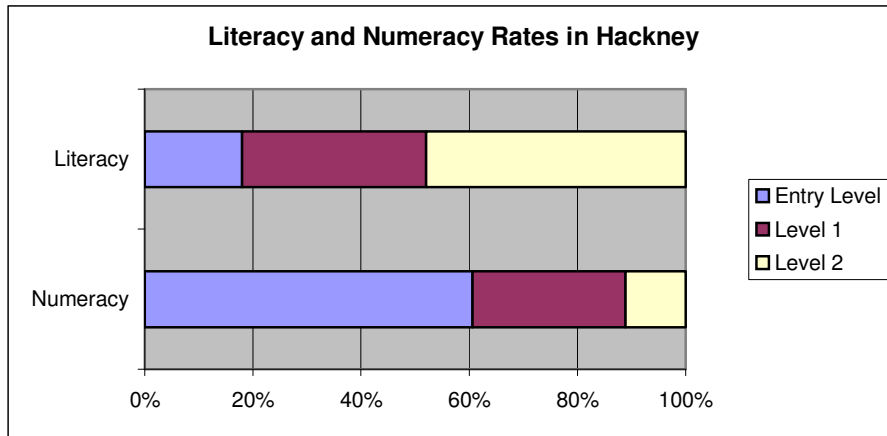
Brent:⁴

- 67.1% of residents are employed
- Brent has very similar levels of economic inactivity as Hackney - two-thirds of the economically inactive are women
- The employment rate is much lower amongst particular disadvantaged groups: Black & Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) (61.4%), disabled (45.1%), lone parents (40.4%) and those with no qualifications (38.4%)
- The Brent claimant count rate is 4.4% compared to 3.4% for London
- Unemployment is highest amongst 16-24 year olds
- Approximately half of all unemployed residents have been unemployed for at least a year

³ Source: London Borough of Hackney

⁴ Source: London Borough of Brent

The following is an estimate of the literacy and numeracy skills levels of residents. These estimates are based on samples taken by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in the 2001 National Skills for Life Survey.⁵



Entry Level:

Entry 1:

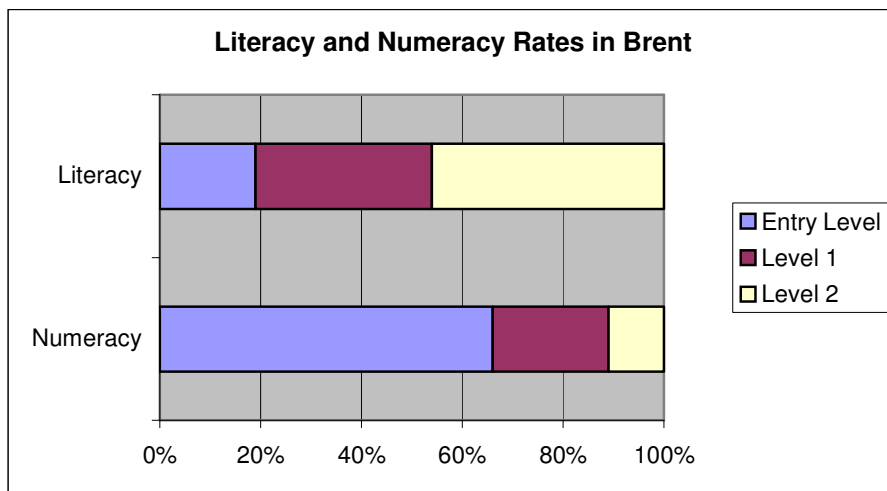
Absolute beginner – will have few skills and little knowledge

Entry 2:

Building on initial skills – consolidating an ‘elementary’ competence

Entry 3:

Moving towards a competent level of skills, but still with significant gaps



Mainstream Levels:

Level 1:

The lowest level of skills required for most further training – equivalent to GCSE D-G, NVQ 1 or GNVQ Foundation

Level 2:

A competent level of skills and knowledge – equivalent to GCSE A*-C, NVQ 2 or GNVQ Intermediate

If these estimates are correct, both boroughs also have very similar levels of skills deprivation. In both, only approximately 10% of the adult population have numeracy skills equivalent to a good pass at GCSE. In both, around half the adult population have functional literacy at Entry Level.

2. Snapshot of Adult Learning Provision

Whilst skills profiles may be similar, the way in which adult learning provision is organised in both boroughs is very different. In Brent, the Local Education Authority (LEA) directly delivers adult and community learning in Brent Adult &

⁵ Source: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus_skillsforlifesurvey/

Community Education Services (BACES) venues across the borough. There are several independent providers in Brent and attempts were made to contact some of these, but they did not agree to take part in this research.

By contrast, in Hackney, The Learning Trust (LEA) Adult Learning Services has very little direct delivery, and contracts a wide range of voluntary and community sector learning providers, instead of delivering provision in centres directly under its control. Where it does deliver directly this is usually within organisations with no adult education expertise, eg Tenants' Management Organisations (TMOs) and Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs).

There are large Further Education (FE) Colleges in both Hackney and Brent. The Community College Hackney is located in Shoreditch in the south of the borough, and offers a broad range of academic, vocational and leisure courses, both on campus and in community venues on estates and in community groups. The College of North West London offers a similarly broad range of provision, on several large sites spread across Brent, including Kilburn, Willesden and Wembley. The college also delivers provision in community venues. In both colleges, practitioners can train to teach literacy and numeracy, and The College of North West London is home to the West London Professional Development Centre (PDC) for adult education teachers.

3. Is Literacy and Numeracy Important?

The Skills for Life Strategy document makes the following claim: "Our strategy will also link with broader government policies, such as the commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal, to tackle the problems deprived communities face, from crime, poor health, bad housing, poor educational standards and unemployment."⁶

Recent research from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) seeks to demonstrate the correlation between poor literacy and numeracy skills, and income and employment deprivation.⁷ According to this research, more men and women with Entry Level literacy skills were economically inactive – and fewer in full-time employment or training - than those with literacy at Levels 1 and above. The correlation between economic inactivity and low numeracy skills is even stronger than with low literacy, with 37% of women with numeracy skills at Entry Level 2 or below classified as economically inactive.

Similarly, according to the Basic Skills Agency's longitudinal research studies of a cohort of adults born in 1970⁸, adults with low literacy and numeracy skills are:

⁶ **Skills for Life: The National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills**, Department for Education and Skills 2001, p9

⁷ John Grinyer, **Literacy, Numeracy and the Labour Market: Further Analysis of the Skills for Life Survey**, DfES 2005

⁸ 7 See the Basic Skills Agency website for more information on the longitudinal studies:
www.basic-skills.co.uk

- up to 5 times more likely to be unemployed or out of the labour market
- more likely to live in a household where both partners are not in paid employment
- more likely to have children at an earlier age, and to have more children
- more likely to have children who also struggle with literacy and numeracy
- less likely to own their own homes
- less likely to be in good physical or mental health
- less likely to be involved in public life, a community organisation or to vote
- more likely to be homeless
- over-represented in prisons and young offenders institutions

However, researchers and academics debate the extent to which low skills in literacy and numeracy play a *causal* role in social and economic exclusion. For some, functional literacy and numeracy is not a set of statically-defined core skills, but shifts with changes and demands of the economy and even within people's life-spans. As one academic puts it, the assumption that we can "give them literacy and they will achieve social mobility, economic and political equality and participation in the social order"⁹ is not only simplistic. It ignores the very unequal and complex distributions of wealth and power which determine the life (and educational) chances of individuals and social groups.

Low literacy and numeracy skills may therefore be a symptom of these inequalities rather than a root cause, although this is not to deny that tackling low levels of skills is empowering, both for individuals and for the communities in which they live. Whilst government thinking may be informed largely by one set of assumptions we do not want to treat these assumptions as the only perspective on how best to tackle adult literacy, language and numeracy skills. Other governments, such as in Scotland and Canada, have approached this issue in very different ways which we will refer to later in this report.

⁹ Brian Street, **Putting Literacies on the Political Agenda**, in **Insights from Research and Practice: A Handbook for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Practitioners**, Margaret Herrington and Alex Kendall (eds.), NIACE 2006, p57

Section 4: Research findings

The following section outlines the findings of the qualitative research. Analysis is interwoven with verbatim quotations from the individuals and groups who offered their perspectives.

What is striking about these perspectives is that, despite the differences between the two boroughs, there is a consistency of opinion on most issues, and relatively little controversy. Not only that: the picture which emerges is equally synonymous with the fault lines of debate within the field nationally. This was not something which was anticipated at the beginning of the research process. Key themes emerging include the need for **more flexible provision, less prescriptive funding regimes**, and **varied teaching and learning strategies** in order to facilitate maximum progression.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that, on several key issues, the perspectives outlined below **diverge from the current national policy consensus** on adult literacy and numeracy education.

1. Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and Progression into the Mainstream

Across the provision surveyed views varied as to whether enough Guided Learning Hours (GLH) were being offered to enable students to progress. Equally, opinions differed between teachers and learners, and between learners at different levels:

- Learners in a campus-based Entry 2 literacy class unanimously agreed that not enough hours were offered (7 hours per week with half an hour tutorial over an academic year)
- Learners in another campus-based Level 1 literacy class (with 10 hours contact time per week over an academic year) also unanimously stated that not enough hours were offered, despite the fact these learners also had additional numeracy
- Interestingly, learners in a voluntary sector mixed-level literacy class (E3/L1) agreed that 4 hours a day every afternoon (Monday-Friday) was a sufficient amount of time in which to make real progress.

However, practitioners differed as to what timescales *and hours per week* would be needed in order to progress for Entry Level students. One practitioner teaching on a part time course thought that:

“...for the majority of students, [they] need a couple of years to progress”

By contrast a practitioner on a full-time course disagreed with this, and argued that much shorter timescales are sufficient to allow learners to progress. This is

no doubt because of the significant number of hours offered per week, and the regularity with which he sees his learners:

Interviewer: ***Is the sixteen weeks that they're getting enough for somebody to actually move a whole level? What do you feel?***

Practitioner: ***More, more than enough. No-one would be here for sixteen weeks without moving from one level. Definitely. One of them, Juliana, was saying that when she came in she was a certain level and now she's at another. That was true. She's been here for five weeks and she couldn't do anything when she came in.***

Interviewer: ***I wonder if that's very much to do with the fact that it's every day.....***

Practitioner: ***When they are not coming every day, there will be a problem of getting them involved continually, because they are adults. They come home and they want to study, so many problems come their way and they won't study, but if they come every day it keeps them on their toes.***

This opinion is partially borne out by another teacher. Whilst agreeing that a significant level of class time is required on a regular basis, the fact that this occurs at a consistent time each day is, for her, of fundamental importance:

"My students attend for a good 6 to 8 hours a week, consistently the same time everyday..... it makes a lot of difference. It's not always the amount of hours as much as seeing them at the same time every week..... Hours are not necessarily the most critical - if they have days in between, I think, [it] doesn't work"

However, there is also a recognition that not all people will be able to move on, whether out of Entry Level programmes or into 'the mainstream', and that for some people, even 2 or 3 years will be insufficient. This is despite the widespread expectation, largely on the part of funders, that learners should progress at the end of a set period of time, whether 13 or 16 weeks, a semester or an academic year. As one practitioner says

"if you've got to this age without functional literacy skills then it's going to take you a lot longer to get to a functional level.... some of our students may not ever reach L1. Some may have mild learning disabilities..... we can't up-skill everybody to L1, so what are the other options?"

Whilst full-time programmes may facilitate progress for many learners, it is equally the case that full-time learning may be counter-productive in some cases:

"If you're working with quite basic literacy students, I don't think they can take intensive programmes as much..... I think you have to be at a certain level to actually benefit from really concentrated programmes"

Another practitioner, in a Brent community-based literacy class, argued that for pre-Entry Level learners it is of absolute importance that learners attend *every day* to allow progression into Entry 1. For students at this level – and at Entry Level in general – there may also be particular learning difficulties which the teacher must pick up on in order to teach to an individual's needs. The more a teacher sees his or her students per week, the easier it will be for them to identify these difficulties, and help learners to overcome them. Two or three hours a week were felt to be wholly insufficient to do this.

It also seems that the hours allocated for numeracy provision are less than for literacy, and that numeracy is often only offered as part of a package of 'Basic Skills' provision at Entry Level, rather than as a course taken in its own right. Literacy is often seen as a more fundamental underpinning skill, despite the fact that statistical evidence suggests that it is lack of numeracy which correlates most strongly with economic exclusion.

Furthermore, where numeracy is offered as part of a package, there is variety in the ratio of literacy to numeracy offered:

“..... they usually have 2 hours a week (of numeracy), in some cases they have 3 hours a week split over 2 sessions and it runs across the year for 30 weeks. But all of this is changing and next year there'll be variations on that. Nobody receives more than 3 hours a week”

“On average they do about 6 hours of numeracy and 7 and a half hours of literacy”

In the former case, the teacher clearly considers her allocation of GLH for numeracy as wholly insufficient:

“for lots of the people who've achieved at Entry 2 and move on to Entry 3, it's not really enough time to come once a week for 2 hours, people often forget what they've learned one week when they come back the next week, and they slip backwards”

In both literacy and numeracy, practitioners seem to be saying that learners who have been successful at achieving one level may find the next level too demanding, particularly with the same level of Guided Learning Hours. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the gap between Entry 3 and Level 1 is much wider than between any of the Entry Levels. Learners arriving in Level 1 provision will be well aware of the jump between Entry Level and the 'mainstream'.

One practitioner contends that, rather than simply progressing learners into Level 1, many learners will need to consolidate their skills at Entry 3 before they can

cope – and feel comfortable in – a much more challenging level. She further states that where learners are moved on, few continue to pass the Level 1 National Tests:

“many people pass E3 and they want to continue with numeracy so we have no option but to put them on a L1 course – and that’s the hurdle where they fall. So I would say, probably 70% of the people who pass E3 want to return and do another maths course, but it’s not very many of those who actually pass L1”

However, it may also be that learners find progress from Entry 3 to Level 1 particularly difficult because, once a ‘functional’ level has been achieved, many people will either be working or looking for work. Attendance and retention can often drop off because of this, and this can impact both upon the speed with which learners improve their skills for those who stay in learning, and on progression for those who drop out. The current emphasis on the part of government and funders to achieve at Level 2 needs to take account of the difficulties in engaging, sustaining and progressing at this level.

If all of these factors are correct, then the very idea of progressing ‘up’ a level needs to be rethought, and the curriculum re-designed to take into account the existence of possible ‘intermediate’ stages between levels. A single level may also include different layers or ‘sub-levels’, and it may be necessary to give ‘booster’ classes to those predominantly ready to progress, but who retain significant weaknesses or have ‘spiky profiles’. It also suggests that flexible learning programmes, and learner support, are pivotal for sustaining engagement and progression from Entry into the ‘mainstream’.

A literacy practitioner in Brent highlighted her own research (as part of Initial Teacher Education) which suggests that learner motivation may be equally decisive in facilitating progression, and that there may even be a gender differentiation in progression rates. This research demonstrated that learners often get stuck at Entry 2 – in her words, there is a ‘log-jam’. Moreover, men were much more likely than women to get stuck at this level. Mothers were often motivated by employment goals in order to improve their children’s material standard of living, whilst men simply wanted to improve their reading and writing in order to be more self-reliant, but were not necessarily focused on improving their job prospects.

Much more analysis of learner progression needs to be undertaken to see if this is indeed the case – and whether particular social groups find making progress more or less difficult due to social pressures or structural disadvantage. However, there is a more fundamental problem which makes collating genuinely accurate data on progression virtually impossible:

“You don’t track here. In Canada we track. In Canada we phoned them up 6 months later to see if they’ve found employment”

This absence of tracking, which other interviewees referred to, has implications equally for how individual providers plan in order to facilitate progression and for how provision is planned on a borough or sub-regional level. Teachers and managers often have no idea where learners go to when they stop attending a class, or even why they stopped attending in the first place. There are no systematic attempts to gather this information:

“Without tracking it’s really hard. I can only give you anecdotal and some statistical data from the class”

Without this *specific* data being gathered on a massive scale, we will never really know how effective current provision is in terms of progression into the mainstream, nor how effective it could be.

In summary:

- Where provision is consistent and requires a high number of class contact hours, swift progress can be made
- Most provision is part-time, and there is a higher amount of contact time for literacy than for numeracy provision
- Where only a few hours of provision is offered each week, it may take several years for learners to progress
- In some cases it is entirely unrealistic to expect any significant progression in terms of the Skills for Life levels
- The very idea of progressing ‘up’ a level is questioned and it may be necessary to take into account the existence of possible ‘intermediate’ stages between levels
- Whilst a higher number of hours may be needed to allow people to progress, people’s prior responsibilities and problems may prevent this
- Learners face particular hurdles when progressing from Entry 3 into Level 1
- There is no consistent tracking of learners, so it is very difficult to arrive at a definitive picture of what factors enable and disable progression

2. Progression into Mainstream Vocational Provision

Individuals assessed as having Entry Level literacy or numeracy are - according to the benchmarks laid down by the Skills for Life Strategy – not considered to be equipped with the functional skills necessary to succeed in the workforce. This assumption at policy level has equally resulted in funding targets which have as their goal the attainment of a Level 1 qualification as a route into employment or further training. Any account of progression *out of* Entry Level learning needs to take account of this.

Yet it is not the case that learners with Entry Level skills are uniformly 'workless':

“[My learners] are not employed, or if they are they’ve got early morning cleaning jobs, menial jobs.....”

The same practitioner went on to state that:

“In the old days, you didn’t have to be able to read and write to get into a training position and work your way up, learning the skills on the job, but today you need the basics in reading and writing to even get on the training programme. I find that lots of the students at Entry level haven’t got the skills, and they don’t get on to the training programmes.....”

In a voluntary sector Entry 3 literacy class in Hackney, learners themselves were clear about what their skills issues were, and how these impacted upon their employment prospects:

“You need to do that nowadays. You need to be able to read and write properly. You do. In most jobs”

However, it was also felt that many employers have unrealistic expectations of the skills competencies required, and that both employers and the vocational training sector lack the in-depth knowledge to ascertain to what extent low skills in literacy or numeracy would impact upon performance in a job. One practitioner argued that:

“.....employers are not always very clear either – many of them are locked into a fairly traditional approach, like if you don’t know your tables off by heart you’re no good at anything. So I think there needs to be some more substantial research about the kinds of skills people need”

A number of practitioners commented on the fact that current literacy and numeracy provision often takes little account of the working lives of individuals:

“I think we need full provision from Entry 1 to Level 2..... for both day and night. There has to be two options. We don’t have enough provision for working people. The system is set up for people who can come during the day and that is just not a reality”

One manager in Hackney went as far as saying that provision during the early mornings, late evenings and at weekends was required in order to cater for shift workers, but acknowledged the difficulties in deploying staff during hours which most people would consider to be unsociable.

In terms of offering *progression* out of discrete Entry Level provision, one Brent practitioner commented that:

“..... we need more pathways courses, pathways to vocation, introduction to plumbing and carpentry for Entry Level learners. It’s too divorced from vocation and jobs. The best thing we did with 16 to 18 year olds was [we] did a work placement for 1 week. I can’t see why we can’t do that with adults. It’s not tied in with vocation. That said, we still need discrete provision”

It was recognised that vocational and discrete provision could complement each other, and that the acquisition of vocational skills could both facilitate and bolster the acquisition of ‘discrete’ literacy and numeracy. Nor is such progress linear:

“..... it’s not just a straight road, it’s a bendy road, and to get to one point, you need to go round the bends, learn a practical skill, learn the language for that skill and then build on those skills to go somewhere else, and that’s the route to a higher level. Because it’s taking the pressure off the functional literacy”

Furthermore, according to one academic, “the separation of ‘vocational’ from ‘non-vocational’ is particularly unhelpful..... Neither category is adequate to define the range of functions that literacy programmes should be able to fulfil”¹⁰ – in other words, literacy and numeracy education is not just about learning reading, writing or numbers, but should by definition include the acquisition of broad contextualised skills, including job-related skills.

It can therefore be argued that the current set of interventions in literacy and numeracy – mainly discrete and non-vocational – are not only insufficient to progress people into employment, but are insufficient to allow people to progress into vocational training. The current consensus states that literacy and (perhaps) numeracy levels should be one step behind the National Qualification Framework (NQF) level of a vocational course, so that those studying on an NVQ Level 2 should have literacy and numeracy at Level 1.

This has been a useful benchmark when assessing whether a learner has the requisite skills to begin a course, but it doesn’t tell us what *specific* literacy and numeracy skills will be needed, at what level, and in what context – vocational or discrete – those skills hitherto lacking can be acquired. This is, essentially, the crux of the argument for vocationally-embedded literacy and numeracy provision, although it is generally recognised that this model does not suit all learners, especially those with multiple barriers to learning or extremely low skills.

¹⁰ Mary Hamilton, [Keeping Alive Alternative Visions](#), in [Insights from Research and Practice: A Handbook for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Practitioners](#), NIACE 2006, p 101

Whether a learner has the underpinning literacy or numeracy skills as they progress from Entry Level has implications for whether learners succeed in mainstream vocational provision. One numeracy practitioner argued that:

“..... if [the learners have] just had two hours a week of maths and they’ve not had very much before that, they may find that they struggle with the demands of a maths content in a vocational course”

Equally, much vocational provision still does not take account of the needs of learners with a legacy of low literacy and numeracy skills. As one manager explains:

“[for vocational teachers] there’s also that added pressure of having to adapt what they’ve planned to meet [the] probably lower needs (sic) of the learners coming along. And I think that’s a very hard lesson for a lot of the vocational staff to learn”

Failure to deal with this – to plan for a range of skills needs – can often result in learners progressing from Entry Level literacy and numeracy programmes being screened out of vocational provision. This is even more the case in some vocational sectors than others. The same manager continued:

“Clearly, construction is the area where there is more opportunity, however, it’s also an area where traditionally [vocational tutors] have used the diagnostic assessment to cream off the learners with the highest level of literacy and numeracy skills”

In some vocational provision, this failure can result in ‘spoon-feeding’ learners for the test or the portfolio, or copying assignments, rather supporting learners to develop their literacy and numeracy skills within specific contexts. A literacy practitioner, who supports learners on a vocational course, gave a not untypical anecdote:

“She’s handing in assignments that deserve a merit but we know she can’t write. I said to the tutor ‘if you think that’s the case, you must sit [the learner] down to reproduce some of that knowledge in writing..... to check that it is the student’s own writing’..... It’s terrible, but then those students can’t progress. She is a low Entry 3”

There are clear responsibilities for all learning organisations to ensure that Entry Level learners can progress beyond discrete literacy and numeracy provision. There needs to be a consistency of approach in how literacy and numeracy is taught both across an organisation - in both Skills for Life and vocational provision - *and across the adult and community learning sector as a whole:*

“..... if it’s taught in very different ways in isolation, in different pockets, it can be a bit of a bumpy ride for students moving from one thing to another, and there is inconsistency in methods, methodology and in levels and expectations”

In summary:

- Learners are generally aware of the underpinning functional skills required for employment, although much more detailed research still remains to be done
- Much discrete literacy and numeracy provision does not take place at times when people with work commitments can attend
- There is a need for more pathways out of Entry Level literacy and numeracy and into vocational provision, including tasters and work experience
- Much current discrete literacy and numeracy provision does not adequately prepare learners for vocational provision
- Vocational teachers often take little account of their learners’ literacy and numeracy needs
- Vocational programmes can enhance the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills in parallel with stand-alone provision, and thereby facilitate progression
- There needs to be consistency of methods and approach across all areas to smooth the transition out of Entry Level literacy and numeracy

3. Ensuring Flexible and Responsive Provision

There is a wealth of evidence which suggests the need for a mix of campus-based and community-based language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) provision in any locality. Further Education (FE) Colleges will be attractive places to learn for those who feel confident enough to negotiate the systems of a large institution. However, the continued need for provision in smaller, community-based locations is borne out by the research:

Interviewer: ***How do you feel that this place..... compares with the college and why did you choose this rather than a bigger college?***

1st learner: ***It’s more personal, isn’t it? This is more personal. You get individual attention.***

2nd learner: ***That’s it, isn’t it? You get the individual attention that you need. That is very important.***

The learners continued:

3rd learner: ***I went to one of the big colleges..... they sent me upstairs, they sent me downstairs.....***

4th learner: ***Nobody knows..... they just look at you like you're mad.***

A manager of a small estate-based project in Hackney stated that:

“One huge benefit of the local nature of the provision is that the women who come, women who live on the same estate, who didn't talk to each other, now talk, meet and discuss things together, [for example] going on to other courses”

Of course, FE Colleges *do* provide learning in community-based venues, and learners may be able to enrol in these venues rather than have to face the complexities of campus-based enrolment. Furthermore, a distinction needs to be drawn between provision within community venues which treats people as individuals, or which works with and responds to them as specific members of a target community – as a report into community-focused provision makes clear, “..... what matter[s] more than the ‘where’ of provision [is] the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ – its *focus*..... it is perfectly possible for provision to be community-based but not community-focused”¹¹, although both types of provision contain their own inherent strengths and weaknesses.

However, there is concern amongst FE-based practitioners that the amount of local provision is not sufficient to meet the needs of all learners:

“..... If we do not have enough [provision] in their [travel] zone..... I've had students say they can't go because there is no money left in the hardship fund and 'I have no bus pass'. Provision where you live is not happening anymore”

One practitioner further stated that not enough provision is situated in local libraries – a real ‘literacy rich’ environment – despite substantial investment in language, literacy and numeracy collections which often remain under-used. Libraries with community-focused provision could be one way of plugging geographic gaps in provision, but this needs to be planned strategically on a borough-wide basis.

For those who eventually make it into campus-based provision, the organisational requirements of colleges to maximise room usage and increase GLH can occasionally result in provision which manifestly fails to take into account individuals’ circumstances:

“I am quite concerned that they are changing the college day as they want these people to be there by 9am in the morning, which is ridiculous

¹¹ Hannon, Pahl, Bird, Taylor, Birch, **Community-Focused Provision in Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Language: An Exploratory Study**, National Research and development Centre (NRDC) for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, 2003, 7-8

because some of them have to take children to school and they have other commitments”

Practitioners also testified to the diverse range of needs of those on literacy and numeracy programmes – but worryingly, in some cases, stated that these needs are not being met due to the difficulties of engaging people with protracted and multiple barriers to learning. For example, learners with mental health issues:

“..... we’ve got a problem with mental health service users..... because they tend to have health issues, drop out, come back. So, basically - I mean this is not official - but basically, we are told not to take mental health users on to the courses”

Further research is required to test how widespread this phenomenon is across London. However, a recent study of provision in Hackney has found that, whilst there are organisations offering literacy and numeracy training specifically for people with mental health problems (eg City & Hackney Mind), there are other sections of the community whose needs are not being fully met – for example, drug and alcohol users, and those in temporary and emergency accommodation.¹²

Equally, teachers often do not have the training to adapt their classroom management and teaching styles to accommodate those with multiple barriers to learning, and many would like their organisations to do more to facilitate specialised training in working with vulnerable groups.¹³

As one practitioner stated:

“..... the range of students’ needs is such, some of course are never going to be able to move out, and maybe they need to be catered for in a different context, and that means actually ‘squeezing’ the provision for them”

In other words, learners with specialised needs may have to be catered for in more generic programmes, which are then ‘squeezed’ to fit a diverse set of needs. Additional Learning Support (ALS) can help to facilitate this. One practitioner described something close to the ideal in many respects:

“[The learners] get a jolly good offer here. In terms of hours, very up to date IT, we’re very well resourced here, so really they should progress. Basic Skills classes are not huge. They are actually really manageable in size. I teach Entry 1 and Entry 2, which have class sizes of no more than ten, and

¹² See: Sonia Khan, Sonia Fox & James Drummond, Skills for Life in Hackney: Meeting Unmet Need, Hackney Training & Employment Network, June 2006

¹³ See: Sonia Khan, Sonia Fox & James Drummond, Skills for Life in Hackney: Meeting Unmet Need, Hackney Training & Employment Network, June 2006

we can get learning support, and also, because we do teacher training, we actually get people on placement there as well, which is also an advantage”

Unfortunately, evidence from provision in both Hackney and Brent suggests that this is only usually available on campus rather than in smaller venues – the very venues which are likely to attract the most vulnerable learners, for the reasons outlined above. One practitioner in Brent suggested that *all* literacy and numeracy practitioners should be trained in dyslexia support (whether Additional Learning Support is available in a particular class or not), and that there are only 2 such specialists within her relatively large community-focused organisation.

Responsive and flexible provision also entails shorter, specialised skills-based courses, both to meet a specific skills need and to provide a ‘taster’ route into more formal, accredited provision. However, this is not always possible in the current target-driven funding climate, particularly in LSC-funded provision. As a Brent FE-based practitioner noted:

“I do think they need to have specific courses on formal letter writing, how to use a computer. They will probably come in again but with Basic Skills students you need little 6-week short courses and that is what is missing now. There is no flexibility anymore. You have to stick to this year programme because that’s how we get the funding and that’s not how it used to be”

Furthermore, many learners on literacy and numeracy programmes, especially at Levels 1 and 2, may not be native English speakers. It is generally assumed that those who speak English as a second language – however competent – will access ESOL provision, and that literacy classes are for native speakers who have failed to attain a functional level of competence earlier in life.

However, a campus-based Level 1 literacy class in Brent contained the following group student profile:

- A Moroccan with a degree and teaching qualification, who taught for 5 years in a secondary school, and wants to teach in the UK
- A Greek nurse who started a degree in clinical studies in her home country, and who wants to improve her written English in order to continue her studies
- An Afghan interpreter, fluent in Farsi, Spanish, Russian & spoken English, and who finished university in the former Soviet Union

This poses particular challenges in designing genuinely responsive provision, since acquiring writing skills in English may be more complex for these learners due to what linguists call ‘language interference’ (where the grammar, structure, spelling conventions or script diverge from English and ‘interfere’ with the active acquisition of the ‘correct’ English structures).

Again, designing genuinely responsive provision to meet an even more diverse set of needs will pose particular challenges both for practitioners and managers, especially in smaller organisations. Ultimately, meeting these needs is not the individual responsibility of the teacher but an organisational and management responsibility:

“The sort of learner we get in the classes..... tend to be not the most confident of learners, so I think their progression is very much dependent on what the college can do for them. And it’s not just the teaching and learning, it’s the whole support environment”

In summary:

- Entry Level learners often feel most comfortable in small, community venues – many learners may get ‘lost’ in a large institution
- However, this is not always the case, and there is a need for a mix of campus- and community-based provision for all learners
- Whilst many learners have diverse needs, more could be done to make provision genuinely responsive to these needs
- There is a need for short skills-based courses to meet specific needs, and to encourage enrolment on longer discrete programmes
- Making provision responsive is the responsibility of the whole organisation, and not just the classroom teacher
- Literacy and numeracy learners may include learners with English as a second language, and these learners have specific educational needs

4. Learner Support – Overcoming Barriers to Learning

Literacy and numeracy learners, especially at Entry Level, are some of the most vulnerable learners in adult education. For many, getting as far as the classroom – even when this is located in a community setting where they feel at ease – can be an enormous achievement. For many, overcoming barriers begins well before they enter a classroom. The following experience, from a literacy learner in Brent, is common:

“When I started to come to the College, my husband didn’t want me to come. ‘Its too late’ he said, ‘we are too old, we’re already 40’. My children wanted me to go, and even though my husband didn’t, I went anyway. They pleaded with their father to let me go and learn something”

Merely attending a literacy or numeracy course can have huge benefits, both for the individual concerned and their families:

“Before, I was spending all my time cooking and cleaning and had no other job, and when I started the college I forget (sic) everything and spend (sic) all of my time reading with my daughter. It makes me very happy”

“When my children see me working it has an effect on them, and it lets them know they can do more in their lives as well.... I ask [my daughter] to come and help me, and she comes and sits with me, and she helps me with my homework”

In order to help learners overcome their own individual barriers, they need to be recognised for what they can already *do* and what they aspire to do – not just what they are lacking:

“I think people don’t just come here because they want to learn literacy. I think they want to come here because they have a vision of what they want to do”

Viewing learners as individuals, with a complex set of needs and capabilities, is something which both teachers and managers have to recognise – otherwise, without a commitment to building on the learners’ strengths and supporting this process in a variety of ways, progression will be difficult:

“we have to be careful about heaping more barriers on what’s already there. And that said, we still look at things from a deficit model and that itself impedes their progression. We should look at things in terms of capacity, what they bring to the table. I learn a lot from my students..... A lot of this stuff gets fed into the tutors but managers need to understand [individual] capacity building. Managers need to be trained in all this stuff”

Practitioners and managers need to provide *enabling mechanisms*, in order to ensure sufficient flexibility of provision *as well as* meeting the support needs of individual learners. This is fundamental to ensuring learners complete the course and can move on.

“I think they drop out when their needs aren’t met in terms of support, bus passes, [geographical] closeness of the course, no learning support”

Another tutor was explicit about what types of learner support are needed to ensure progression:

“They need time off..... [and to be] released from work, they need child care provision, they need bus passes, and they need these things to be available without huge amounts of bureaucracy, and they need a flexible timetable that has opportunities to learn when they are working or not working”

Across all provision, it is widely maintained that current learner support is inadequate. In particular, an acute lack of on-site childcare and limited funds for travel expenses are identified as particular barriers to accessing and staying in learning:

“Everything is being cut back. There is no childcare provision anymore, there is money for babysitters but there is no on-site childcare anymore. There is bus money but it runs out”

For people on benefits, restrictive rules around how many hours learners can study per week can impact upon whether they stay on a course. If learners study in excess of 16 hours per week their benefits can be cut – yet as has been shown, many learners need to be studying *more* than this.

Moreover, learners who are referred to the New Deal programme may be forced to leave their previous classes and can be required to attend an entirely different provider. The learner has no choice as to whether they can stay within their chosen provider, since this is determined by whoever Job Centre Plus has a contractual arrangement with. This is a major cause of complaint amongst literacy, numeracy *and* ESOL tutors. For especially vulnerable learners, leaving a teaching environment where they are at ease and where they may have friends and support networks can potentially be disastrous:

“..... you get students at Entry Level, and they will be called away by the benefit office to do a six-week literacy course that is not in any way connected to college. So then, they are missing six weeks of their college course where there’s a continuation, and they’re put into this singular thing because they need to keep their benefits”

A Hackney practitioner offered a concrete example of this. Having supported a very vulnerable young female learner who was beginning to make progress, the learner was sent on an enforced learning programme:

“I’m so upset because not only did she develop in her reading and writing, but she developed confidence, she developed so many other things, and she was called off for six weeks and she never came back”

This is an issue across London. Another practitioner in Brent stated that:

“..... I had a chap last year, he moved into Entry 1 and he was really good. He was on a course and he was in a room with a whole load of ESOL people, and they knew he couldn’t read and write but yet they stuck him in front of a computer with that whole programme, expecting him to go through the resources, but he couldn’t read them to do it”

Concerns such as this have consistently been raised by practitioners about the quality of provision within some (though not all) JCP contracted providers.

Not all learners' participation fluctuates. Those learners who are more integrated into the labour market, however casual, are less prone to dropping out and are more likely to progress and achieve on a course. Staying in a job in itself requires a degree of commitment, organisation and a functional level of life skills, and therefore this should not necessarily come as any surprise:

“The people who are more consistent tend to be working during the day and who come to evening classes..... many of those people, their lives are more structured and they also have perhaps a clearer goal, and can see where they're going and why they want to be there”

Yet not all practitioners are unanimous in asserting that externally-imposed barriers are decisive in determining whether learners continue and progress. For some, the problem is attitudinal, and moreover, this is the tacit assumption of both funding regimes and management:

“..... as our funding becomes more and more dependent on success rates, we can't be seen to be a social club any more, where people just drop in and drop out as they feel. We've got to be clear about making sure they have a firm commitment to us”

“..... if they don't attend regularly they are not really motivated. They may have an occasional excuse but they basically just don't want to be here. We are getting very strict on this now”

The final point that needs to be made is that it is very difficult to say with any certainty why people drop out and what happens to them when they do. Funding does not currently follow the learner and tracking is not a requirement: if someone drops out of an Entry 3 class, there is no way of knowing whether that person then goes on to access Level 1 provision elsewhere. Given the likelihood that people with multiple barriers may need to drop in and out of provision according to their circumstances, it may be several years before they 'progress' into the educational mainstream. In such cases, this person will not be officially deemed to have progressed from Entry Level at all, because they will be a fresh enrolment in another provider.

In summary:

- Many literacy and numeracy learners come from backgrounds where learning is not a priority, and may encounter resistance within the home or from peers
- Lack of on-site childcare will prevent many from engaging, sustaining and progressing in their education

- Where provision is not within walking distance, learners on benefits or low incomes may require travel subsidies, but these are often not adequately funded
- Organisations need to plan sufficiently to meet their learner's support needs
- Without these needs being met by providers, learners are more likely to drop out of their chosen provision
- Many learners are forced to leave their chosen provision because of benefits rules, and this can have a negative impact upon learning
- The 'deficit model' should be abandoned – organisations should enable learners to build on their strengths
- Organisations and teachers need to be clear that learning requires a commitment of time, energy and effort
- Where barriers are successfully overcome, engagement and progress in learning can impact upon the confidence of other family members

6. What is 'Good' Teaching and Learning?

Both practitioners and learners were clear that this was the most important factor in ascertaining to what extent learners can progress. As a manager of provision in Brent succinctly put it:

“Whatever students do can be attributed to high quality teaching and learning. Whatever the aspirations of the learner, it's down to how the teacher guides and supports them to reaching those goals. So I think it's absolutely fundamental”

There are both formal guidelines and a consensus of good practice amongst teachers as to what exactly 'good' teaching is – and what it isn't. Far more problematic, however, is the extent to which the *personal* attributes of teachers are decisive in determining whether their teaching is 'good'. In terms of technique, an individual teacher may be faultless, but every teacher knows that without good classroom rapport, interest and engagement in learning will be difficult to sustain.

A group of learners in a Hackney voluntary sector class confirms the importance of good teacher-student rapport:

1st learner: ***Well, I don't think we would have been able to learn anything if, you know, unless we had, you know, a good teacher...***

2nd learner: ***We have the best.***

3rd learner: ***..... we have the best. We're lucky. We are.***

One learner in Brent clearly attributed her learning to the intervention of her teacher, and to the methods she used:

“I used to have a spelling problem. You could understand what I am (sic) writing but there are still spelling mistakes. Then [my teacher] has taught me(sic) how to write with the spelling and now I’m ok. I feel more confident”

However, this does not mean that learners see themselves as passive receptacles, whose learning is dependent on their teacher. They often clearly see each other as a means of support. The same Hackney learners expressed this well:

1st learner: ***We have a laugh and a joke as well.***

2nd learner: ***I’ve learnt some stuff I haven’t even learned in school.***

1st learner: ***Yeah, exactly.***

These same learners also help each other in overcoming ingrained stigma on having to work on literacy or numeracy skills, and in so doing create an environment conducive to learning on account of the *sociability* of the classroom:

1st learner: ***That’s one of the things that keep you confident in your own thing, that you know you’re not on your own.***

2nd learner: ***I think, I think that is, you know, it builds up your confidence doesn’t it?***

1st learner: ***Yeah, it builds up your confidence. You’re not on your own. It’s not just you.***

It is vitally important that tutors have the skills to build on and facilitate this, and to encourage collaborative learning from day one. Fostering a culture of collaboration in the classroom has enormous pedagogical benefits:

“They’re supporting each other, they’re learning from each other, they’re teaching each other, they’re assessing each other. They are able to tackle much more complex problems than they might do otherwise”

This collaborative approach was clearly contrasted by all practitioners and managers with more traditional forms of teaching:

“The worst lessons are the worksheet.... I have been in classrooms where there have been 9 different learners all working on their own on different worksheets in silence, and that doesn’t seem to be the right way to do it, but I think there is a bit of that still going on”

Despite the fact that raising the ‘quality’ of teaching has been a central plank of the Skills for Life Strategy, five years on there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that such an approach has not yet disappeared. The reasons for this are complex: lack of access to teacher training and little or inappropriate professional development opportunities for tutors are certainly factors. A lack of effective

management of teaching and learning, less than robust developmental observations and a failure to nurture a culture of professionalism across organisations have equally negative affects. It must also be stated that if tutors are hourly-paid and on casual contracts, it is sometimes difficult to maintain sufficient enthusiasm to be creative in lesson planning. Many tutors have insufficient time to plan due to an imbalance of teaching and administrative duties. The result is that:

“..... if you have a teacher who is quite disaffected and who is quite happy delivering one worksheet after another, then you are not going to hold those students, and therefore they are going to miss out”

Progression can therefore be detrimentally affected.

Having established what good teaching and learning is not, the question remains: what exactly are the methods teachers of literacy and numeracy should be using? First of all, fostering collaborative learning and a conducive, ‘social’ atmosphere to learning does not imply a lack of structure in the classroom. As a Brent literacy practitioner explained:

“The most successful thing I do is to run a tight ship. I have a clear definable structure, which I stick to. I also make sure that I teach the word, sentence and text level, and I don’t ignore the sentence level..... Reading is something that we seem to have discarded and it’s absolutely essential”

Her learners clearly appreciated this approach – they noted with enthusiasm how she constantly revises what has been learnt before, and how she pays each individual student lots of attention so that they are aware of their own mistakes and can learn from them.

Other literacy practitioners discussed the need to focus on the form and structure of the written language, rather than simply the ideas learners wish to communicate or have imparted to them (previously the dominant model in teaching literacy to children). Learners in an Entry 2 class in Hackney reported that the teacher:

- Used dictionaries to expand vocabulary, focus on spelling and develop study skills
- Broke down words and sentences into sounds, and visually highlighted common or unusual spelling and phonological patterns
- Grouped words into ‘lexical chunks’ – instead of learning individual words, learners were encouraged to look for groups of words which frequently collocate or occur together in certain contexts
- Gave the learners lots of reading, both at home and in class
- Gave learners lots of homework, for reinforcement of class work and to prepare for the learning to come

These same learners also noted that if they were given tasks to work on in groups or pairs, they made faster progress and developed their communicative confidence. Following on from this, the importance of speaking and listening skills was similarly highlighted by one practitioner, who consistently uses short videos and films in her classes to spark discussion, encouraging learners to ask questions and to formulate opinions. In this sense, literacy is not simply about the written word, but is about *communication* within a series of discourses.

The content of the lessons is equally important. The focus must be firmly based on the learners' interests and rooted in a real-life context, not simply a page out of textbook or abstract exercises. As one numeracy practitioner put it:

“Try to make it as relevant to their needs as possible, picking topics that are concrete, nothing abstract and irrelevant, and lots of change of activities so they don't get bored”

This learner-centred approach was backed up by literacy practitioners:

“..... language experience is definitely used. That's where students talk about themselves and start writing it down – or the teacher writes it for them”

“..... because it's what they want to learn, learning takes place quicker and it's easier for me. If they want to learn about the human body, then we'll do something around that rather than me coming in with all the ideas. That works the best”

There was a recognition that the topics suggested in the Literacy Curriculum for England and Wales are insufficient to allow learners to progress:

“I tend to extend the curriculum. It's all based on what we're supposed to be teaching, but when we were teaching the environment we did Global Warming. My main aim is to expose them to as many different types of text..... because when it comes to doing things like National Tests, one of the things that gets them is the fact that they don't know all the words, there is a lot of vocabulary”

As well as extending the curriculum, several managers and practitioners spoke about the need to teach to differing learning styles and to allow learners to move, walk, touch, feel, see and listen, and use various learning technologies. As one numeracy teacher argues:

“..... in the best classes there is a lot of use made of interactive materials such as ICT, using BBC websites, getting the learners to interact..... not very easily understood concepts put across in a very easy to understand

way. Lots of visual stuff used..... lots of real objects, stuff the learners can touch”

Varied teaching is especially important, given that the difficulties faced by many learners will actually be rooted in dyslexia or dyscalculia. Research suggests that these difficulties are best overcome by inclusive multi-sensory teaching strategies. However, whilst such strategies can help to overcome these difficulties in a general way, it is equally the case that in order to *really* help learners overcome dyslexia and dyscalculia, *specialist* teaching strategies and diagnostic skills are required – as previously highlighted, there is a real lack of teachers trained in this.

The need to bring learning out of the classroom and to connect with the ‘outside’ was also highlighted:

“..... things like taking the students out more – field trips, visits, residential, those kind of things – it’s got very boring”

The same manager contested that lack of a real-life, ‘outside’ context for learning can impact negatively upon attendance and ultimately progression:

“Literacy is something that you learn through everyday activities. I think that [because] it’s stuck in a classroom and more theory based, it’s very passive learning. I think that’s why they have difficulty with punctuality and attendance.....”

This emphasis on context amongst practitioners is interesting, given the apparent divergence in policy between England and Wales on the one hand, and Scotland on the other. In England and Wales, “the current government approach emphasises learning in classrooms, with a strong curriculum framework and forms of assessment”¹⁴ – although both the Literacy and the Numeracy Core Curricula *do* suggest situated contexts within which to develop discrete component skills (eg reading for gist, using percentages, etc.).

By contrast, the Scottish Adult Literacies and Numeracy Framework takes individual needs as the starting point of curriculum content, and provides a ‘Curriculum Wheel’ as a framework within which to do this. In England and Wales, this content is more or less at the discretion of the teacher, with no formal framework within which to negotiate.

Scotland’s framework document also states that, *as a matter of policy*, “we are using a **social practices** account of literacy and numeracy..... Rather than seeing literacy and numeracy as the decontextualised, mechanical manipulation of letters, words and figures this view shows that literacy and numeracy are

¹⁴ David Barton, **Situating Literacies** in **Insights from Research and Practice: A Handbook for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Practitioners**, NIACE 2006, p43

located within social, emotional and linguistic contexts”.¹⁵ It also refers to literacies and numeracies in the plural, as a set of multiple interconnected skills, rather than one single ‘skill’ you either can or can’t ‘perform’.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that responsibility for adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland rests with the arm of the Scottish Executive overseeing community social and economic regeneration, not education, as in England and Wales.

However, in all parts of the UK, having enough good-quality teaching and learning resources which can be easily adapted for use in a range of classroom situations is of paramount importance. As part of the Skills for Life Strategy, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) produced free learning materials from pre-Entry to Level 2 for use in literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes, as well as in embedded vocational provision. As far as literacy and numeracy practitioners are concerned, however, these materials do not meet the needs of their learners:

“They are not basic skills. They are poor. We like nice white space on the page, big print, clearly defined”

“They are actually quite terrible aren’t they?..... at the end of the day it’s like the students using a workbook. It’s very programmed, isn’t it? Like, you stop there, you play the tape.... ”

“..... I think most of the numeracy tutors..... are not using Skills for Life materials, have not found them useful or relevant, have found them contextualised in a way that is not relevant to most of the students and very limited in their approach”

Throughout the research, practitioners emphasised creating and adapting their own materials – only in this way can individualised learning be ensured. However, it needs to be recognised that there is an enormous pressure on teachers to complete administrative paperwork and ensure records are kept for inspection purposes. This regularly takes time and energy away from focussing on teaching and learning:

“There is no any administrative support any more, so we end up being receptionists and secretaries as well as teachers. This is taking a huge amount of our real teaching time away”

In summary:

¹⁵ **An Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland**, Learning Connections (Communities Scotland), The Scottish Executive, p13

- Good teaching and learning is absolutely fundamental in ensuring that learners learn quickly, build on their strengths and make progress
- Teachers should foster good collaborative relationships between learners
- Teachers need to pay learners individual attention and show them how to learn from their mistakes
- Facilitated group and pair work allows learners to progress faster than individual tasks and worksheet-based teaching
- Teaching needs to be highly structured, with attention to the nuts and bolts of each skill, allowing all the building blocks to be put into place
- The content of lessons should be determined by the learners, using relevant and contextualised examples drawn from real-life experience
- Teachers should ensure that their lessons are multi-sensory, and include Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
- The 'outside' world should be brought into the classroom as often as possible
- The Skills for Life learning materials are not viewed as being useful for teaching and learning in either literacy or numeracy
- Teachers are expected to do a lot of administration and student liaison, which encroaches on teaching and learning and on lesson preparation
- The adult learning workforce is made up of large numbers of sessional hourly-paid tutors, which calls into question whether practitioners are being adequately remunerated

7. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The ability to teach well does not come automatically to any practitioner, however experienced. Training and professional development is essential. If good teaching and learning is pivotal to ensuring learners progress, to what extent is the current literacy and numeracy workforce trained and qualified to teach to exactly the standard which allows learners to progress?

Arguably *the* central plank of the Skills for Life Strategy is to ensure that all literacy and numeracy practitioners receive Initial Teacher Education (ITE) equivalent to Level 4 in both adult teaching and learning in general, and the specific subject knowledge required to teach literacy and numeracy – in other words, teachers need to have the equivalent of a Degree in Applied Linguistics in the context of adult literacy, or Applied Mathematics in the context of adult numeracy, before they should even be able to enter the classroom.

Until very recently, there was no requirement to hold a teaching qualification at all, and unqualified or part-qualified teachers still predominate (though with some unevenness) in both the FE and the voluntary sector:

“I think we have gone through a phase that they were so desperate for tutors that people didn’t look too closely into what the tutors’ qualifications were in the first place”

“..... for too long there was this train of thought of that anybody who could read and write themselves, and who knew a bit of maths, could teach somebody else, and it’s not like that at all. It’s a bit insulting to us I found..... ”

The situation is often better in FE colleges, since the initial push to train tutors began in this sector. In many respects, smaller providers are playing catch-up. However, in one Brent provider – which delivers numeracy in community venues – there are no numeracy tutors qualified to Level 4 at all. We know from research that this is by no means uncommon for either literacy or numeracy.¹⁶

It is also the case that some tutors themselves lack sufficient literacy or numeracy to consistently teach. As a manager of a small project in Hackney explains:

“It’s a requirement of the [Local Education Authority] to take tutors who have qualifications and who are experienced. They did have a trainee who was very good, doing a 7407 related to literacy and numeracy, but he himself had literacy issues”

Even where there is an identified training need it is not always possible for tutors to be released from teaching to attend. Equally, most of these courses are expensive – anything from £600 to £1,500 – and not all organisations have the funding to pay these fees. Statutory local authority funding for the ESOL, literacy and numeracy PGCE/CertEd (the level required by 2010) has recently been withdrawn. Problems related to paying fees and releasing staff are especially acute in the voluntary sector, where funding often only covers the cost of a tutor and some delivery overheads:

“It’s not very easy for teachers to actually do the teacher training that’s available because they can’t get remission, and funding problems. So there’s not very much joined up thinking in the current state of the Skills for Life Strategy”

Some practitioners had very clear ideas on what knowledge is important – and what is *not* important – for literacy or numeracy teaching professionals. One practitioner contrasted the UK and Canada, her country of origin:

“I think the vetting process for the qualification needs to be upped. In Canada you need a degree to teach Basic Skills”

¹⁶ Sonia Khan, Sonia Fox & James Drummond, [Skills for Life in Hackney: Meeting Unmet Need](#), Hackney Training & Employment Network, June 2006

In the UK it is sufficient to be assessed as academically capable of working at degree level in order to undertake Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for adults – yet a degree is a prerequisite for secondary teacher education. She goes on:

“A lot of [teachers have] never had training in grammar & punctuation..... we don’t need to worry as much about..... Schemes of Work and Lesson Plans, because they will learn that on the job anyway, and that just changes anyway. I think the research literature needs to be brought into teacher training more. It has to be taught in a..... more developmental fashion, that literacy is a set of building blocks, not just a set of unrelated things”

Similarly, once qualified, teachers need consistent and on-going Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in order to keep their skills up-to-date. Indeed, from September 2007, fully-qualified teachers will need to *prove* that they have undertaken 30 hours of CPD per year to attain and renew Qualified Teacher for the Learning & Skills Sector (QTLS) status. There is currently very little awareness of both CPD in general and the requirements outlined above. CPD in the voluntary and community sector is virtually non-existent, and there are as yet no attempts to roll out CPD specifically within the voluntary sector, which is accessible to practitioners in smaller organisations and is funded by the mainstream.

On the other hand, whilst there is some good practice in internal CPD for literacy and numeracy tutors in one of the FE colleges surveyed, in the other college, one practitioner stated that there was *no CPD specifically for literacy or numeracy tutors whatsoever*, and that internal CPD was merely focused on working in that particular institution.

This is especially worrying, given that practitioners often have to deal with complex learning needs - particularly at Entry Level – and that training is fundamental to meeting those needs:

“I would say [we need more] dyslexia qualifications, [it] would be really good to have, and to be a specialist in that area, because you find that a lot of the students..... quite a lot of them that are not even aware that’s what the problem is”

In summary:

- Good teaching – and therefore learner progress - is underpinned by thorough teacher training and professional development
- Until recently, there was no requirement for adult education practitioners to be qualified in their subject specialism
- Some teachers themselves have gaps in their own literacy or numeracy skills and knowledge

- Lack of funding for course fees and remission means that despite the fact that teachers want to access training, many currently find this impossible
- Professional development specifically geared to the needs of literacy and numeracy teachers is rare, although some good practice exists
- There is a need for more training to enable teachers to meet specialised learning needs, eg dyslexia

8. Course Planning and Delivery Infrastructure

In designing provision for Entry Level learners, consistent and careful planning across an organisation is essential. It's simply not enough to put a group of learners and a teacher together in a room and hope that progress will be made – good teaching and learning requires organisational planning. Furthermore, the Skills for Life Strategy contains a clear infrastructure within which to deliver teaching and learning. As a result, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) requires consistent evidence that needs are being met (and progress is being facilitated) before awarding even a 'satisfactory' inspection grade.

Within smaller providers especially, this can be challenging. There may be no-one sufficiently experienced in the field to *manage* (as opposed to teach) specialist learning provision. There may also be a tendency for all staff to 'muck in', sometimes with unintended negative consequences, as in the case of initial assessment and placement:

“When I joined the company (sic) I was doing the screening and initial assessment so it means (sic) there was a teacher doing it. Now, due to a few factors it is the administrator who does it..... but because it's done by the administration, they just go strictly according to the book. Some of [the learners] come in [and] because they speak English, they appear to be fluent in Basic Skills, but I would realise that it's just a high level of ESOL”

Where provision is working well, formative assessment, tutorials and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) should form part of the active content of the course, rather than as disparate 'bits', or paperwork exercises for the course folder:

“a good numeracy lesson should be an essentially very busy one where the learners are busy all the time working together on appropriate activities. And that is a very rich opportunity for assessment of all kinds. Assessment of how much learning they've done, and how much learning they need to do, and what adjustments need to be made, and what issues come up”

“I think very careful English [diagnostic] assessment, which includes finding out about what the students want to get from it, is really important”

“Tutorials are really important, reviewing the course and making learning quite exciting and different”

“It’s a good ILP and it’s kept as a record sheet. I find it quite a good working document actually. Not everyone likes it but I think it’s good, because you need a record sheet, and the student keeps a copy in their file, and it reminds you of what you need to do the next time”

Managers also have a responsibility to plan staffing across their organisations appropriately. Provision in the voluntary sector is especially prone to short-term funding cycles and an over-reliance on hourly-paid casual teachers. In order to ‘do’ them effectively, initial and formative assessment, tutorials and ILPs require a substantial amount of time *over and above* class contact time. This is *additional* time for which hourly-paid teachers are not (or are insufficiently) remunerated.

There are other reasons for organisations to plan provision to employ full-time staff wherever possible:

“..... a lot of our staff working in discrete provision..... are fractional staff, therefore they have commitments at other times of the week, therefore they are not available, and that impacts on how the [course managers] timetable. Because those staff might have skills that we need at different times of the week. And so we need to be building more and consolidating more full-time teams”

In summary:

- Screening and initial assessment needs to be carried out by a qualified practitioner in order for learners to be placed in the appropriate class
- Diagnostic assessment is required in order to ensure that teaching engages the learners, and students are therefore given the maximum chance to progress
- On-going formative assessment is essential in order for learners to be aware of their skills gaps, and thereby to overcome them
- Tutorials are important for setting and negotiating goals, and finding out what students want (and need) to learn
- ILPs can be useful tools to set, review and monitor goals and progress, although their use should be guided by the learner’s needs
- Teachers need to be given sufficient time to administer course delivery
- Managers need to ensure there is a robust delivery infrastructure in place
- Organisations should employ teachers on permanent contracts wherever possible, and end reliance on a casualised workforce

9. Targets, Testing and Funding

An Entry 2 literacy class in Hackney stated categorically that they didn't want any accreditation or 'certificates' at their level – they were happy to learn, and explained that exams and formal assessments would create too much anxiety for them.

On the other hand, given the government's commitment to facilitating entry into the labour market, one practitioner was genuinely puzzled as to why there was no way to claim funding for a 'success' when a learner gets a job:

“if we've got a student confident enough to get back into work, we should really count that as a success, but at the moment we have no mechanism to do that”

Some funding – measures stipulated by the London Development Agency (LDA), for example – do contain job outcomes which have to be met. However, for Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded provision, the only thing which counts are qualifications, whether learners want them or not.

Because learners are categorised according to an official level of competence, funders want to see evidence when this level has been completed, and to what extent a provider is able to facilitate this completion. In principle, tests are one way of doing this. Tests in and of themselves can also be useful for a learner to prove that he or she has the requisite skills to get a particular job, or to move into vocational or other learning programmes. Tests and assessment – if done properly - can also boost self-confidence, and foster a real sense of learner achievement.

However, there is evidence to suggest that the requirement to test and to 'prove success' is skewing the provision:

“..... now we have this 80/20 spilt where 80% has to be externally accredited..... because of the semesterisation of the courses, they offer one qual (sic) at the end of 16 weeks..... and the students obviously can't progress from one level to another within the space of a year so”

In other words, anecdotally, learners are having accreditation squeezed out of them at a rhythm dictated by the institution, not by the learners. In this case, learners were apparently expected to jump 2 levels in an academic year.

Equally, some learners may not be ready to take a test at the end of the year (or other period) – they may have a 'spiky profile', or they may have had erratic attendance for a variety of reasons. Yet these learners are often still entered for tests purely in order to hit targets. One practitioner contends that:

“..... what [learners] need is provision which is able to take more account of that. LSC funded provision, and the emphasis on targets and achievement rates, success rates, currently dictate totally the opposite, and impede provision which could be more imaginatively set up otherwise”

Funding organisations similarly have the authority to determine what level of provision is offered within a provider – in other words, how many qualifications at a particular level a funder wants to ‘purchase’ – instead of this being determined by a detailed analysis of the needs of learners within a provider or a locality:

“the drive towards reaching targets and providing more at Entry 3 and Level 2, and moving away from an emphasis on provision at Entry 1 and Entry 2 levels, has absolutely dire consequences. What it actually means is that we’re really picking off people who’ve already got a certain level of skills..... and that people who are below a certain level are no longer priorities”

The current emphasis on achieving accreditation at Entry 3 to Level 2 is welcome, as long as this reflects the real needs of learners and potential learners. The full impact of this new emphasis is yet to be felt in terms of a substantially reduced amount of lower-level provision – although both managers and practitioners are fearful that cuts to this provision are a real possibility in the immediate future.

Accreditation-based funding criteria are therefore widely felt to be skewing the course offer. It is also skewing the *content* of the provision, since the need to squeeze accreditation outcomes and thereby secure continued funding all too often results in teaching to the test, rather than to the learners and their interests:

“..... what we have to spend quite a bit of time doing is training people how to jump through the hoops of the tests..... I’m talking about Entry Level here, and I think the problems are even more exaggerated when you look at the National Tests at Level 1 and Level 2”

Nor does the content of the test always reflect the real skills learners have acquired through their studies – if it did, the ‘hoops’ would not be so bad. However, it would seem that the tests themselves are of limited value in establishing whether a learner is really able to progress a level, or to what extent the provider offers effective teaching and learning:

“They don’t cover a huge range of topics, and the tests are not really particularly relevant to people’s lives – they’re not really investigating the depth of people’s understanding or the concepts, or the thinking skills that we would want them to develop”

The National Literacy and Numeracy Tests at Levels 1 and 2 came in for some serious criticism. Whilst the tests at Entry Level are paper-based and require learners to express themselves independently in writing (important in *both* literacy and numeracy assessment), the National Tests are on-line and multiple choice. Skills are not actively or creatively applied within any kind of context. The National Literacy Test only tests reading, and doesn't test writing at all – an omission most practitioners find bizarre, to say the least.

Everyone who passes the Level 2 National Test is considered to have acquired sufficient literacy or numeracy skills despite these rather blatant shortcomings. The government has exceeded its National Test targets, and it therefore claims that the strategy is a success. But there is no attempt to make an in-depth, rigorous assessment which *really* probes the complexity of people's skills acquisition before being considered to have moved into the 'mainstream'.

An in-depth research study into the benefits of adult learning concludes that "learning outcomes should be assessed within a framework which goes far beyond the acquisition of qualifications, and includes learners' capacity to sustain and develop themselves and their communities across a range of domains. It follows that learning opportunities should be broad and diverse in content, mode and pedagogy, and driven by personal need and motivation more than top-down specification".¹⁷

Far from taking such an approach - and whether or not this is intended - funding methodologies have led to far less flexibility to offer shorter or non-accredited courses. 80% of LSC funding within Skills for Life must achieve recognised literacy and numeracy accreditation, and increasingly, the only courses on offer are those with an accredited outcome which can also count towards the targets. Yet short, non-accredited courses are precisely the types of courses which can attract those who are the most anxious to admit their literacy or numeracy problems. The effect of this was illustrated by a practitioner in Brent:

"..... [there] was a spelling group that I ran on a Friday. A lot of Irish people came to it and because they called it 'spelling', no stigma was attached to it whatsoever and it was great, but they closed it. They closed it because the funding doesn't stretch to 'spelling'"

Finally, because funding is driven by centrally-imposed qualifications targets, and provision is dictated by funding, the whole culture of adult learning is permeated by a top-down bureaucratism which militates against any feeding of perspectives from the bottom up – least of all from learners and practitioners. This is especially the case in large and medium-sized organisations, and is particularly acute in the FE sector.

¹⁷ Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brassett-Grundy, Brynner (co-authors), **The Benefits of Learning: The Impact of Education on Health, Family Life and Social Capital**, Routledge Falmer 2004, p192

“It’s a very top-down system here. It seems that everything we do is related to money, and we get more funding for this and more funding for that”

This hierarchical and bureaucratic system means that the voices of those teaching in the classroom, and who are closest to the learners themselves, have been lost:

“The education for Basic Skills is manager driven, administrative driven, that’s the focus. The educational side has been lost. There’s no attempt at consensus building and lateral thinking ”

Very few literacy or numeracy practitioners, it seems, would dispute this. It is partly the intention of this report to begin to redress this imbalance, since it is precisely these practitioners – and of course their learners – who have the most light to shed on what ‘progression’ actually means, and how it can best be achieved.

In summary:

- Summative testing does not always take place when learners are ready, and is dictated by institutional and funding constraints
- There is a widespread fear amongst practitioners that funding for Entry 1 and Entry 2 provision will be reduced within the next few years
- Provision is primarily dictated by the requirement to meet centrally-imposed funding targets, and only secondarily by an analysis of the real needs of learners in the local community
- The need to get students to pass tests means that teaching is often based on ‘teaching to the test’ rather than teaching the learner
- The tests do not fully or adequately reflect the needs or interests of learners
- The tests do not assess each component skill with enough rigour to be a reliable benchmark for progression
- Despite this, those who pass at Level 2 are considered literate or numerate, and contribute to government targets for literacy and numeracy
- The need to ensure that accreditation targets are met can sometimes result in a lack of short, non-accredited provision, or even closure for existing ones
- There is little opportunity in the current top-down funding system for practitioners to make their concerns or opinions heard

Section 5: Recommendations

This research is a qualitative examination of policy and practice and while its focus has been on two areas of London, the issues raised, and recommendations made, have a wider application.

From the perspectives outlined above, it should be clear that progression within and out of Entry Level literacy and numeracy provision is circumscribed by a range of factors which in some cases pertain across the whole spectrum of adult education, rather than being specific to literacy and numeracy. The recommendations therefore address issues relating specifically to literacy and numeracy interventions as well as issues relating to adult education policy more widely.

Recommendations are included for both providers and policy makers as indicated. Many of these recommendations have policy, funding or resourcing implications. Where this is the case and it would be difficult to make immediate changes, the recommendation is intended to contribute to a review of existing strategies and to inform future policy directions.

1. Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and Progression into the Mainstream

In some cases full-time provision is required to enable learners to progress more quickly. However, current provision is mostly part-time and learners on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) benefits will be restricted from attending full time courses unless they are on the New Deal Programme.

- Larger providers should try to introduce more full-time learning options (ie 20 hours per week), promoting this as an intensive route into further training, alongside part time options, and funding agreements should encourage such a mix of provision. The levels of progression from such intensive training should be monitored by providers and funders, in order to fully test and explore how full time provision facilitates progression.
- Provision needs to be planned strategically across localities to allow cross-referral for all learners to full-time provision if that is the most suitable option for them.
- Learners claiming JSA should be able to take up full-time learning of literacy and numeracy as a route into employment, for a set period, without falling foul of the 16 hour rule which limits the number of hours they can study per week while on JSA. This has already been piloted for New Deal clients and should be extended to the short term unemployed too, as a way of ensuring people acquire the skills they need to secure and sustain employment.
- Furthermore, when a JSA client has to join a New Deal programme, advisors should establish as part of their assessment whether learners already on a literacy and numeracy course should be supported to complete that course, rather than being re-directed to New Deal funded training provision.

Conversely, for some learners, especially at lower levels, part time provision may be more appropriate, and several years may be needed to progress from one level to the next.

- Community-focused providers should be enabled to plan provision recognising that groups and individuals may progress at different speeds, rather than using arbitrarily-imposed timeframes.
- Each curriculum level should be divided into sub-levels to allow some groups and individuals to take longer to progress than others.

<p>Progression from Entry 3 to Level 1 can often be difficult for many learners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners should be offered Additional Learning Support (ALS) or short specific skills-based courses to facilitate progression out of Entry Level. Additional funding for Level 1 provision will be required to enable this support to be provided.
<p>No systematic, rigorous tracking of learners is required to be undertaken by providers. Neither do funders analyse progression of learners accessing their funded provision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers should build qualitative and quantitative learner tracking into their own review processes, and funders should specify this at commissioning and procurement stage. • Funders (eg LSC) should collate and analyse statistics based upon learner achievement, progression and follow-up tracking locally, regionally and nationally to assess the impact of <i>specific</i> funding for literacy, language and numeracy. At the same time, in-depth tracking and analysis of a representative sample of learners should be carried out to provide qualitative data which can complement the statistical analysis.
<p>2. Progression into Mainstream Vocational Provision</p>	
<p>Discrete provision does not usually take place at times when people with work commitments can attend.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders should ensure that their contracts reflect an adequate level of provision at times and in locations which take account of diverse needs which fall outside of 9-5 campus-based provision. • The impact of Train to Gain in meeting the needs of those with literacy and numeracy should be measured, as should the take up of Train to Gain among employers who do not have a staff development infrastructure, including in Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs). • To facilitate the progression from learning into work, the ways that Train to Gain can be targeted at those coming off benefits and entering employment should be explored, and further pilot models developed and funded.

<p>There are few pathways into vocational provision to support progression out of discrete Entry Level programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be a broader range of vocational training at Entry Level with embedded literacy and numeracy. • Vocational training providers should be encouraged to develop embedded provision, and forge partnerships with language, literacy and numeracy specialists to support the development of embedded provision where this can be found, whether in-house or externally. • Increased funding needs to be made available for short taster courses in vocational areas, either stand-alone or integrated into existing discrete literacy and numeracy programmes. • Work placements should be integrated into both vocational and discrete literacy and numeracy provision as appropriate, and organisations need to build in employer engagement into programme design and delivery.
<p>Vocational teachers often take little account of learners' literacy and numeracy issues, and there is inconsistency in methods and approach, between literacy and numeracy, and vocational tutors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations should be supported to implement a whole-organisation approach to Skills for Life – with a possible continuation and expansion of the Skills for Life Quality Improvement Programme. • Vocational tutors should undertake Skills for Life awareness training as appropriate. • There should be regular sharing of practice across both literacy and numeracy, and vocational areas – organisations need to facilitate this. • Literacy and numeracy practitioners should build in vocational elements into their courses, as part of a broad contextualisation of curriculum content and in order to support progression to vocational programmes.

3. Ensuring Flexible and Responsive Provision

There is a need for a genuine mix of provision geographically accessible to where learners live.

- Provision should be strategically planned at a local authority level by Adult Learning Services and Local Strategic Partnerships to ensure geographic targeting of learners.
- This should include a mix of both *community-focused* and *community-located* provision, and wider statutory sector involvement – eg extended schools, libraries, etc.
- More Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services that facilitate clear progression routes for learners needs to be developed across provision, with a focus on IAG in community-focused provision.

More could be done to accommodate the needs of vulnerable learners with multiple barriers to learning in the classroom, or with specific learning needs.

- Increased funding and support should be made available to allow groups working with specific sections of the community to develop provision appropriate to specific needs (eg mental health service users).
- All staff working with adult learners should be able to access training to allow specific learners' needs to be supported, and to signpost to external support agencies.
- Funding needs to be increased to allow a full complement of trained and qualified Additional Learning Support (ALS) teachers in all provision.
- Literacy and numeracy practitioners should be trained to support specific learning needs – eg, dyslexia, dyscalculia, working with speakers of other languages, etc. through CPD programmes.

4. Learner Support – Overcoming Barriers to Learning	
<p>There is insufficient learner support to enable all learners to overcome barriers to engagement with learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners’ support needs should be assessed and identified. • A universal entitlement to funded childcare should be available within all learning provision to overcome this major barrier to sustained and uninterrupted engagement with learning. In many cases, this will mean on-site childcare facilities. • Additionally more provision should be located in community centres where childcare is already available (e.g. Children’s Centres) and can be purchased by the provider in order to provide fully subsidised childcare for the learner. • Where learners on low incomes or benefits have to travel, increased funding should allow travel expenses to be fully covered in all provision.
5. What is ‘Good’ Teaching and Learning?	
<p>Much provision is appropriate and well-planned – however, there is still a legacy of inappropriate and inadequate teaching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers with a strong track record in teaching and learning should be supported to link up and disseminate good practice with weaker providers. • Specialised teams should be set up to mentor inexperienced or ‘failing’ tutors, eg college CPD teams, borough-wide support programmes, etc. • There should be increased funding to ensure sufficient access to enrichment activities (eg trips, study visits) for all learners. • There should be investment to ensure that ICT equipment is available to all learners, and that teachers have the training to use this technology.
<p>The approach to literacy and numeracy prescribed by the Skills for Life Strategy is one which emphasises learning in classrooms,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In reviewing the Skills for Life Strategy, the ways that the Literacy and Numeracy Curricula currently may impede learner progression, should be analysed. Alternative approaches should be researched including the Social Practice model adopted in Scotland.

<p>with a strong curriculum framework and forms of assessment. This de-contextualised approach is seen to inhibit progression. The Skills for Life learning materials do not meet the needs of learners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The take up and use of Skills for Life learning materials should be evaluated and feedback should be solicited. The materials should then be reviewed. • Adequate levels of resources should be budgeted for and a full suite of published materials (eg readers, dictionaries) should be available in all provision. • Practitioners should be given sufficient time, resources and training to enable them to design their own learning materials or adapt existing ones
<p>There is an over-reliance on hourly-paid casual staff across the sector, and this can impact upon the amount of extra time tutors spend in lesson preparation or with their learners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an urgent need to address the fragmentation of funding in the adult skills sector in order to enable providers to operate within longer time frames and therefore be able to offer permanent or fixed-term full-time or fractional contracts rather than rely on a workforce that is predominantly hourly-paid. This will require funders of a curriculum area like literacy and numeracy (e.g. Regional Development Agencies, Learning and Skills Council Further Education, European Social Fund Co-financing, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding) to bring greater consistency to their commissioning and procurement. • Pay for tutors should be consistent with nationally-agreed pay scales for Further and Adult Education and funding should require this. • Providers should recognise the level of administration that tutors undertake, and acknowledge the potentially detrimental impact this can have on teaching and learning, and on progression. A more realistic weighting of teaching to administration duties should be included in all employment contracts for teaching staff.
<p>7. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)</p>	
<p>Lack of funding for remission and course fees means that many tutors cannot access ITE – despite the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding should enable all organisations to cover course fees and provide remission • Organisations should develop training plans on a whole-organisation basis in

<p>fact that all new tutors need to be qualified to PGCE/CertEd level by 2010.</p>	<p>order to cost this.</p>
<p>There is little CPD specific to literacy and numeracy especially in smaller providers, yet practitioners need to access 30 hours CPD per year to qualify or renew QTLS status from September 2007.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully-funded CPD programmes should be designed for all practitioners on a borough-wide basis using local co-ordination or partnership mechanisms eg cross-borough Adult Learning Groups. • Provision should be planned and timetabled strategically across a borough to allow all practitioners to attend appropriate CPD using local co-ordination groups or partnerships . • Providers should plan in order to allow tutor remission and payment to attend a minimum of 30 hours CPD per year.
<p>8. Course Planning and Delivery Infrastructure</p>	
<p>There is inconsistency in the delivery infrastructure, its management and rigour, or the extent to which it facilitates learning and progression.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial assessment should only be conducted by a specialist practitioner. • Diagnostic assessment tools and Individual Learning Plans should be designed with sufficient flexibility to be meaningful to learners and practitioners. • Good collaborative formative assessment practices should be implemented in order that learners understand where and how they are making progress. • All provision should be planned to allow for adequate group and individual tutorial time. • Providers should allow sufficient time to plan and design the delivery infrastructure and course documentation, drawing on a sharing of good practice across all local and national provision. • Smaller organisations – or organisations where there is no literacy and numeracy expertise at management level – should work in partnership to access this, ie with a support unit or specialist provider.

<p>Teachers often have insufficient time or remuneration to administer course delivery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer-term funding arrangements should allow organisations to employ permanent or fixed-term full-time or fractional staff. • Contractual duties should have a realistic balance of teaching and course administration.
<p>9. Targets, testing and Funding</p>	
<p>Current external literacy and numeracy accreditation often does not provide an adequate measure of learners' skills levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexible forms of portfolio-based or mixed exam/portfolio assessments should be designed, which reflect learners' real needs and interests. • The National Literacy and Numeracy Tests should be radically overhauled to include independent, contextualised application of skills within a concrete, real-life situation. There should be a national consultation process to facilitate this.
<p>Funding is accreditation-driven, and funders are often reluctant to resource provision not set up to deliver accreditation outcomes. Accreditation may not be a priority for a learner and the over-emphasis on achievement can affect positive progression. Although in theory no learner is forced into an accredited programme, by default this happens because funding is not available to run non-accredited courses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public funding of provision is driven by government targets. Funding should be based on a qualitative analysis of local skills needs, rather than a set of arbitrary government targets unrelated to actual skills levels or the type of provision individuals require in order to progress. • Literacy and numeracy provision at Entry 1 and 2 should continue to be funded at a level commensurate with need. • More funding should be made available to enable a less rigid course offer, and especially for short, non-accredited courses focusing on specific skills or sub-skills (eg spelling). • Accreditation in community-focused provision should be taken at times dictated by the learning and progression needs of individual learners or the group, not according to set timescales.
<p>The funding of adult skills tends to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms need to be established where learners and practitioners are

<p>push requirements down from decision makers and funders to providers and practitioners. There needs to be a mechanism by which perspectives on learning and progression are communicated up from those on the ground.</p>	<p>actively consulted in the formulation of adult education policy and funding, from individual providers to a national level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A comprehensive national review and consultation on the Skills for Life Strategy in England and Wales should be launched, in order to ensure that the perspectives of learners and practitioners inform the development of the 'Functional Skills' training framework which will replace Skills for Life after 2010.
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