

The National Literacy Trust

The National Literacy Trust (NLT) is an independent charity dedicated to building a nation in which everyone enjoys the skills, self-esteem and pleasures that literacy can bring. The NLT is the only organisation concerned with raising literacy standards for all age groups throughout the UK.

The Literacy and Social Inclusion Project is a three-year Basic Skills Agency National Support Project delivered by the NLT. It started in November 2002. The broad aims of the project are to identify the links between poor literacy skills and social inclusion, to provide information on current policies, the latest research and examples of good practice, and make recommendations for policies and approaches which will lead to the improvements in the life chances of those most at risk.

The Smith Institute

The Smith Institute is an independent think tank that has been set up to look at issues which flow from the changing relationship between social values and economic imperatives.

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literacy and social inclusion

A panel discussion held in
May 2004

Edited by Tony Pilch



THE SMITH INSTITUTE

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Preface

Wilf Stevenson, Director of the Smith Institute

The Smith Institute is an independent think tank, which has been set up to undertake research and education in issues that flow from the changing relationship between social values and economic imperatives. In recent years, the Smith Institute has centred its work on the policy implications arising from the interactions of equality, enterprise and equity.

Socially excluded groups, by definition, display a complex matrix of interlinked disadvantage; lower employment and income levels; poor quality housing; sub-standard access to healthcare; high crime environments; high incidence of family breakdown; and poor levels of basic and specialised skills. Tackling these structural and cultural disadvantages is crucial, both for the development of a fair and just society in which everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and for the future prosperity of Britain which will be severely hampered if large sections of our human capital are prevented from developing their skills and abilities. Policy towards the poor rates of literacy among socially excluded groups needs to approach the problem holistically, treating low basic skills as both a cause and an effect of social exclusion and addressing the many linkages between literacy and the other aspects of social and economic disadvantage.

The seminar transcribed here was held in association with the National Literacy Trust as part of the Literacy and Social Inclusion Project which they were conducting in partnership with the Basic Skills Agency. The project included a review and consultation process involving 25 different policy areas including health, housing, education, Sure Start and Connexions. Some cross-cutting and cross-age themes emerged, as well as findings relevant to those working with, or responsible for, particular age groups. The seminar explored the implications that their findings pose for policy across Government and many of the issues that were raised at this lively, informative and entertaining discussion fed into the final report which was published by the trust in February 2005. Inevitably, in transforming a live event into print, some of the colour and texture of the original has been lost. We hope, however, that those who attended the seminar will recognize much of what is included, and that those who read it fresh will respond to the flow of good ideas which emerged during the seminar.

A discussion paper prepared for the seminar by the National Literacy Trust, is reproduced in this pamphlet and the final report of the project – *Every which way we can* – is available from the trust's website: www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion

The Smith Institute gratefully acknowledges the support of the National Literacy Trust towards the seminar and this publication, and the support and encouragement of Baroness Ruth Rendell.

Welcome

Wilf Stevenson, Director of the Smith Institute

Good morning, ladies and gentleman, thank you very much for joining us today. It's perhaps appropriate to recall that John Smith, after whom we take our name, died 10 years ago today, and although I think we could spend some time on that, I think the best memorial to him in some ways is to continue his work, because I'm sure this is a topic that he would have been very interested in; and so we're going to carry on as normal, and in partnership with the National Literacy Trust, with whom we've been working on this project and have enjoyed the process. We're presenting something today which really is an ongoing process, the start of a long period of gathering information and trying to bring forward recommendations.

Three reasons to get involved

I think there are three reasons for getting involved in it. We at the Smith Institute have been tracking issues to do with social inclusion and economic performance for a number of years, and quite a lot of the time, basic and key skills have come up as one of the main factors that have been part of that approach. It's also clear that it's an extremely complex issue; you only have to look at the chart on page six of the paper you've got for this seminar to realise just how complicated it is. Also, the figures are still absolutely staggering, and the headline figures in the Moser report still give me cause for real concern: that so many people in this country have difficulties with basic literacy and numeracy.

Our second reason is that Amanda Jordan, who's with us today, is a member of our advisory committee, but she's also a member of the National Literacy Trust council and advisory committee, and she suggested that there might be some merit in working together. I'd like to thank her very much for that introduction, because we have indeed enjoyed working together and, I hope, developed a good partnership on this topic.

Our third reason is that one of our trustees is Ruth Rendell, who is with us again today, and I'd like to pay tribute to her for all her work on behalf of the Smith Institute. She, rather unwisely perhaps, let slip at a trustees meeting that she would be happy to speak for us, and of course who could resist such an offer? It's a tribute to her – who apparently never comes out until she's finished the number of words she's set herself to write that day – that she's here this morning, because it's an iron rule that you don't see her after lunch when she's done that. She is here for you and to give us her thoughts on this topic.

A good team for a worthy cause

This has been one of the nicest projects that I can recall in my time in a think-tank. Everybody has been accommodating and able to be present: speakers, panellists, Jon Snow, the audience; indeed, the number of questions you all sent in that we're going to talk about later on. When Charles Clarke had to drop out for reasons that he was called to a much more senior meeting, we found that David Miliband was available to come and take his place; and so we're very pleased, thank you, David, for coming.

Viv Bird will, I think, make it clear during the process that this is an event which is contributing to the literacy and social inclusion project, and we're anxious that we get as much of your contributions as we can: so Jon, will be very interactive, I think, in trying to get the audience to share with us the issues that they'd like to raise. We're doing the event in two parts: we're going to have the keynote address by Ruth Rendell, and then Jon is going to take us through to the closing time. We will have to stop at 11.30am. So, without further ado, David...

Introduction

David Miliband MP, Minister of State, Department for Education and Skills

Thanks, Wilf, and good morning everyone. I think my job is just to give a few introductory remarks. It's obviously a very sad day in many ways; 10 years since John's death. Those of you who remember where you were when President Kennedy was shot probably go through this thing of remembering where you were, and I think for the rest of us, for the younger generations that are interested in politics, we remember where we were when we heard that John had died. I didn't know John well at all, certainly not in comparison with some of the people in this room, but he was the driving force behind the idea of the Commission on Social Justice, which he established after the 1992 election; and I was privileged enough to be the secretary of that commission, chaired by Gordon Borrie, and had some engagement with John through that. I think that he would be absolutely delighted, not just by the fact that the Smith Institute is having a seminar today about literacy and inclusion; he'd be delighted by what the Smith Institute has done over 10 years – and that is a real tribute to you, Wilf, and to your team, because you've taken his passion for people and their potential and the good side of their nature, and tried to think how this finds form in the modern era.

The Smith Trust has funded budding politicians from central and eastern Europe whom I've met, and they come and spend a day with me and things like that, and I think he'd be proud of that, and I think he'd also be proud that in some ways, although one shouldn't be rose-tinted about this, especially at the moment; but in some ways I think he'd feel his values are more present in our country now than they were 10 years ago, because many of the things he struggled for throughout his life seemed in 1992-94 a long way away. People wrote books about why Labour would never win another election, and why the minimum wage would never be created, and why poverty could never be reduced. Ten years on, those things are happening, but it does give one pause, and I hope that we can all at least salute what the institute has done to keep John's values and memory alive.

Four key points

I just want to say, in introducing this seminar, four things. First, literacy is the food of life. No one is going to argue against that, but I think it's also important that when we talk about literacy and inclusion we don't fall into the trap, which I know Ruth won't, of forgetting that literacy isn't just mechanistic; it's about getting the best in life, and I think that's important.

Second, historically in this country we've had chronic problems in teaching people to read and write well. It's important not just to say read and write, but to read and write well. Through 40 years up until the mid-1990s, more or less, the percentage of young people leaving primary school reading and writing well didn't really change. It didn't really change with the abolition of grammar schools in most parts of the country. It didn't really change with the introduction of the Plowden report, but the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said more or less 50% of young people left primary school unable to read and write well. That is why we have the huge stock problem of significant numbers of adults who struggle to read and write well, and that is a tragedy for them, a tragedy for the economy of the country, and a tragedy for our society. Any MP or anyone who talks to a wide range of people will realise that immediately, and so in a way the explanation of our problem is not that complicated.

The third thing I'd say: our challenge is to tackle the stock and the flow. The great news is that I think in terms of tackling the flow there has been really astonishing progress in the past 10 years. There are gradations to this, and I think the aspiration that people should read and write well by the time they leave primary school, to have the tools to thrive in secondary school, three-quarters can now do that. We reckon there are 60,000 more kids that can read and write well when they leave primary school, so that 85% reach that level. So, I think we're doing better on the flow, and I think we're also doing better on the stock. I don't know if Susan Pember is here, who works on adult basic skills at the Bartnem, but the work that's been done by many of the people on this platform to tackle the issues of adult basic skills is very encouraging. I think the government has a target to tackle 750,000 adults by this year and then double that by 2007, so breaking into that seven million figure you talked about, Wilf, very encouraging progress on that; but we've got a job to tackle the stock as well as the flow.

The final thing, which I think is the most challenging for policy makers: we've got issues of under-fives in relation to Sure Start; we've got primary school programmes five to 11; we've got catch-up and development and enrichment and creativity programmes in secondary schools; we've got adult basic skills issues. The danger is that we all sit in our different silos, only addressing those different communities, and I want to bring home to you what we miss by sitting in our silos, with the following story.

Education begins in the home

Martin Salter, MP for Reading West, who comes to these events, came to see me a year ago with a proposal for an education action zone in his part of Reading, and he

introduced me to a woman whom he described as a trainee teacher; her story was that three years ago, she'd been informed by her school that her child was struggling in reading and that a big reason for this was that the child wasn't getting the proper support from home. The school invited the parent in to discuss the child's reading difficulties, and it immediately emerged that the parent had trouble reading; so the school put on a family learning programme for her to learn to read at the same time as the child was, and they started helping each other. The woman got much more confident and volunteered at the school. The school saw how much she was contributing in the nursery, talked about her working at Key Stage One, and took her on as a paid classroom assistant. She's now enrolled on a teacher-training course. Her horizons have been transformed, so she marches into the DfES to tell the minister why Reading deserves £1 million for its education action zone, something that I don't think she could have conceived of doing a year before. Her support for her own child was enormously enhanced, and it's that win-win that I think is the sort of virtuous circle that we're all trying to develop; that we're not just dealing with children on their own or parents on their own, we're thinking about them as families and together. I hope that from the DfES we can bring the values and the right aspirations and right purpose to each one of those groups, but we can also bring the imagination and rigour and competence to get it done.

Introducing Ruth Rendell...

That leads me to introduce Ruth Rendell, who miraculously manages to write books and be a politician at the same time – or a legislator, I should say, as a better way of putting it than a politician. As Wilf says, we're very lucky to have her here, because I understand her writing time is 9am till 12 noon, and the Lords sits much longer hours than the Commons, so from 12 noon until 2am or something she's legislating in the Lords. Since 1997 she's been an assiduous Labour peer, I think taking forward John Smith's values in a really exciting way, and at the same time managing to entertain and enthral us through her books, so it's a real privilege that she's here today. I'm going to stay for her speech and even for the discussion, but at 11am I'm going to have to sneak out, so what I'm going to do is find my way to the back of the room, and I promise to stay until 11am. I'm really looking forward to what people have to say, and hope you'll all join me in welcoming Ruth to the platform. Thanks very much.

Presentation

Baroness Rendell, Author

Good morning, I'm very happy to be here talking about something so dear to my heart, and to be addressing people who are so interested in this subject, and feel the same sort of passion about it as I do. A few weeks ago, I was going by train to the Oxford Literary Festival, and sitting in the same carriage was a well-known writer and broadcaster, on her way to promote her new autobiography. She and I had met a couple of times before and we started talking, about books of course. She had thought of a very original plot for a fantasy novel, and it was the kind of thing neither she nor I would write. Her idea was that by some quirk in human history electronics have been discovered, not before printing but before books, so that the world had become used to radio and ways of producing music, and television and computers. Then, in the late 20th century someone invented the book. Books became the rage, the absolute must-haves; thieving teenagers snatched books from the hands of those reading them in the street; their parents grew obese lying on couches reading books. Small children were unfit for school and too tired to use their computers in class because they were sitting up all night reading books. Well, I did say it was a fantasy...

I want to talk to you this morning about literacy, about being able to read, not unable. Seven million people in this country, as we've already heard, are unable to read, and they don't deserve our condemnation, which they so often get, nor our pity, which they wouldn't want, but our sympathy and understanding and help, because those who can read and read a lot and are, I might say, always reading, know that learning to do so is the greatest intellectual step they ever took, and the first.

Logon Pearsall Smith was exaggerating, but not all that much, when he said: "Some say life is the thing, but I prefer reading." Many believe printing to have been man's greatest contribution to cultural life, but there were books before printing; long, long before. In the 4th century AD, St Augustine saw St Ambrose reading. The remarkable thing to him, almost a thing of wonder, was that Ambrose was reading to himself, his eye ran over the page, Augustine writes in the Confessions, but his voice and tongue were silent. "Very often, when we were there, we saw him silently reading and never otherwise." Augustine thought he was saving his voice, not to become hoarse for teaching, not realising that Ambrose was setting the mode for the future – reading to oneself. So, it appears that previously people read aloud, even in the privacy of their homes, even in libraries. Few things can show us more profoundly the great gulf existing between the intellectual

habits of that time and this; the idea of Ptolemy's great library in Alexandria filled with scholars reading aloud, the noise of their raised voices making an enormous hubbub.

In the beginning was the word...

Books began as clay tablets, probably in that part of the world we call Iraq. I hope those in the museum in Baghdad have survived. Then came scrolls, then codices. Ambrose may well have been reading from a codex, bound sheets of parchment, rather than a scroll. In his wonderful book, *The History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel tells us how all ships stopping at Alexandria had to surrender any books they were carrying to be copied for the library, and how its catalogues became the models first for the libraries of ancient Rome and later for those of Christian Europe.

Hearing a couple of weeks ago that public libraries in the United Kingdom may cease to exist by 2020 was a piece of news which has depressed and haunted me ever since. None of us will be surprised to learn that in medieval times, an enormous bias against education for girls meant that only those woman destined to be nuns were taught to read, and even as late as the 18th century it was fashionable for women to be taught how to read but not how to write. Writing, apparently, was not something that we women were ever likely to be required to do, yet three or four hundred years before, a French woman called Christine De Pizan had made history by writing what is generally thought of as the first novel. Two centuries ago writing became the only respectable profession a woman could adopt, though it was often done in secret: remember Jane Austin writing on small pieces of paper, so that she could hide what she was doing if her brother came into the room.

I was going to say that reading to learn what the future may hold has died out now, and then I remembered the I Ching, still a popular method of divination. As a child, I knew old people who would open their Bible at random and be instructed as to their future conduct by the first verse that met their eyes. In ancient times, people consulted Virgil's Aeneid for forecasts, a method known as the *sortes virgiliae*.

A story is told of how King Charles I visited a library in Oxford during the Civil War, and the Lord Falkland of the day urged him to make a trial of his fortunes by the *sorties*. The line the king came upon read: "May he be harried in war by audacious tribes and exiled from his homeland." Six years later, the unfortunate Charles was condemned by his own people and beheaded at Whitehall. The novelist Jeanette Winterson, brought up in a fundamentalist community, as a teenager about to go up to Oxford, knew nothing about

that university, only that it was, she said, "A place where one spent all one's time reading books, and that's all right, isn't it?" At Oxford, Oscar Wilde was translating the Greek verse of *The Passion of Christ* in the New Testament for one of his examinations. The examiners indicated to Oscar Wilde that this was fine, and they had had enough. "No, let me go on," Wilde said. "I want to see how it ends." Doris Lessing began reading at seven, when she read the words on a cigarette packet. At 16, she realised there was a world of books out there, "and I began on a trajectory of discovery that will end when I die". The poet Carol Ann Duffy writes how her birthday fell two days before Christmas, but her early addiction to reading solved the problem; the obligatory doll, she said, "lay unloved on the floor as I opened my books".

My own father had been trained as a geologist, and aged about 10, I struggled one wet Sunday afternoon with *An Introduction to Palaeontology* and something called *Igneous Rocks*, because I happened to have nothing else to read, and read I must. I have been reading greedily ever since I first learned; I still remember Miss James, my first teacher, unkind and harsh with five-year-olds the way no primary school teacher would be now, bullying us over our reading books – I don't think I cared much.

The pronoun "her" presented me with an early difficulty; I wanted to pronounce it "hair", but once the scales had fallen from my eyes and, like Ambrose, I was able to repeat "her" silently to myself, I had got there, and there was no looking back. Since then I have never been without a book I'm reading: I often read two at the same time, one fiction, one non-fiction. This invincible love of reading, as Gibbon said, "I would not engage for all the treasures of India". People ask me how I have time to read, and I'm almost inclined to ask them how I have time for anything else. What else is there to do? Well, write: and I am lucky to be able to quote the 17th-century Francis Quarles and say to myself, "I wish you as much pleasure in the reading as I had in the writing."

The present-day war on modern illiteracy

Probably more is being done today to redress illiteracy than ever before. Reading courses are in operation all over the United Kingdom. Some strange measures are in place to encourage people to learn to read; in one area of the north of England, those who sign up for a reading course are given a small monetary reward, and 10 times that sum if they complete the course. In another, failure to join a class results in penalties. The unemployed, for instance, can have their Jobseekers' Allowance withdrawn. I can't make up my mind whether to approve or disapprove of these methods, though I probably will approve if they work. The Channon Trust has a project called Toe-to-Toe, for operation in

prisons. Educated prisoners teach illiterate prisoners to read, with apparently spectacular results. Men and women are coming out of prison at the end of their term with a new skill they never imagined they would master.

The charity, Bookstart, in conjunction with the government Sure Start programme, is bringing books to small children; a free book to everyone. Volunteer Reading Help pairs volunteers with children and adults to tackle illiteracy. The BBC's Big Read gave a huge boost to books and reading; I took part in it myself, talking on radio about a favourite book and appearing on television promoting the innovative idea of leaving a paperback on a tube train for an incoming passenger to pick up and read. Illiterate people are ashamed of their failure, and some go to great lengths to hide what they see as a blameworthy disability. As we have just heard from David, parents who can't read make poor role models for their children who are just entering education. In a speech on the eve of World Book Day in March, the publisher Gail Rebeck said that the UK is third in world-ranking for literacy among 10-year-olds, and yet a quarter of 11-year-olds are still not sufficiently good readers. Often, the illiteracy of adults is passed through the generations, as parents who can't read themselves are unable to help their children with reading. That is why the drive for literacy in schools must be carried out in partnership with the drive for literacy in adults.

I said I wanted to be able to talk about being able to read, not unable. British publishers are planning to get together and begin publishing in 2005 a specially written series of books, designed for those who have successfully completed an adult reading course, but are at a loss as to what to begin reading. These works of fiction and perhaps non-fiction will be for the newly skilled reader, and presented as a way of introducing them to the pleasures of reading. If I'm asked, I shall be more than happy to write one of them myself. The American Declaration of Independence ranks the pursuit of happiness alongside life and liberty. We hear a lot these days about the search for it. Old objectives such as duty, pleasing a deity and serving the state have given way, for good or ill, to the pursuit of happiness. Reading has been a great source of happiness to me and to countless others I know. Finally, rather late in the day perhaps, I declare an interest, as one who has contributed a lot of reading matter to the world.

Panel discussion

Chaired by Jon Snow

Thank you very much, Ruth, for a charming and lovely sweep right through the entire subject. Your mention of the scrolls in Baghdad put me in mind of arriving in Timbuktu and being absolutely staggered at the number of books tumbling out of old cupboards and libraries, and the discovery that the book was the main traded product in 1100, and that the University of Timbuktu had 25,000 enrolled students before Oxford even had 1,000 – so it does turn one's sense of books upside down. In a way, that's what literacy and social exclusion is designed to do, and what I thought today was to try and engage as many people in the room as possible, because even the chance collisions downstairs found people who'd come from Rochdale; setting out at half past five this morning, from Derbyshire, and our panellists too. People have come from all over the place; I want to get as many people contributing as possible, and I'd like to get Ruth Silver to pose the first question, please?

Ruth Silver CBE, Principal, Lewisham College

Serving the 16th most-neediest community in the country, and working with people when they come out of prison and return to further education, I think my question is about the relationship between literacy and citizenship. Inclusion is not citizenship; getting people to do a job or be involved in work and learning is not the same as citizenship; and I think that we too often make that slip. I wanted to ask the panel's view on how they saw that, what does literacy do for citizenship, and what else do we need to do as a society? My other question is, does the panel believe that there is a ceiling to the level of literacy we can achieve among the adult population, and if so, how far short of it are we?

Jon Snow

Neil, would you address the ceiling?

Neil McClelland

I don't think we should have a mindset that establishes a ceiling, otherwise we restrict ourselves. We need to actually see where we are at the moment, determine our ambition, look at that gap, and with that tension do something about that gap. We've got 5% of 16- to 65-year-olds in this country who do not read and write at the level of 11-year-olds at Entry Level Three. That's a massive figure, and obviously a component within the five or seven million, whichever way you judge it. So, I think we must not restrict ourselves to a ceiling; there is a massive shortfall in this country and we're behind so many other European countries.

Jon Snow

Carol, you're about solutions, where do you think citizenship and literacy sit?

Carol Taylor

I think if we think about citizenship in its widest sense it's about democracy, and literacy is about access to democratic processes; and when you're working on the ground you're working with people who may not see themselves as socially excluded. I think that's really important, they are included in some societies and some communities, but once they start to access literacy and realise the power that they can have, that's when you start seeing wonderful things happening. David talked about family literacy, and that's a classic one: women come into family literacy; they don't have access to anything that's going on; they may not be able to read their gas bill; they can't become a school governor; and then gradually they begin to get more power within their own community, and then they can do the most amazing things. It's the same in employment and the same with 16 to 19-year-olds, so I think it's about democratic processes.

Jon Snow

I'm keen people should chip in if they want to, but I'd like to bring in Professor Peter Hannon at this point.

Professor Peter Hannon, Director, Raising Early Achievement in Literacy Project, University of Sheffield

I was just musing on what would happen if Gordon was to wander into the room and tell us he had £10 million a year, say, for additional literacy action to reduce social exclusion. What action would colleagues on the panel recommend on the basis of what we currently know, and what effects do they think it would have?

Jon Snow

I'll talk to David in a moment, because it would be very interesting to get his view on this – suddenly to be dolloped with £10 million a year for three years – but I think, Alan...

Alan Wells OBE

I think the first thing I'd say, having been involved in this for 30 years, is that it wouldn't be enough (that's what we always have said); so I'd send David back to say: "This is rather mean." Can I just make two points? One is, we've got to be careful about definitions; in the 30 years I've been involved in this, I've been fighting against this idea that we've got seven million illiterate people in this country. There is absolutely no evidence for that, we

have probably around seven million people who struggle with some aspect of literacy or numeracy. Many struggle with writing and not with reading; you will find lots of people who can read quite competently, but can't write. David's definition of reading well – I'd be interested to take up what reading well now means, because it doesn't mean the same as it meant 50 years ago, for instance.

Jon Snow

So, if you looked to that seven million figure and took out writing, for example?

Alan Wells OBE

I should say I was one of the people who came up with the first figure of a million, 20-odd years ago, and I've now got it up to seven million: that's not been reflected in my performance-related salary. If you took that out, you would find relatively small numbers of people that you could define as having serious problems with reading. Some people read very slowly, but all the evidence was that, of that seven million, about a fifth of them would have really serious problems with reading. A substantial number have very serious problems with writing, and we shouldn't underestimate that, [we aren't talking about] not being able to punctuate or spelling the odd word wrong; but where they can't actually write anything that you would understand as being correct English. That often gets them out of the job market, because so much is to do with writing, and it's just important to take that broad view of the group.

Answering Peter's question, I'm a stronger believer as David Miliband argued in a sense, in a cradle-to-grave approach. I don't think you can just concentrate on one area or another. I would personally put quite a lot into prevention and family programmes, because it does have what the Americans call "double-duty dollars benefit", and it's also a very big motivator. Going to lots of schools, you increasingly see the price of failure as children get older, and you see how difficult it is, the older children get, to make a real difference. You can do it, but it's a very, very costly business. I certainly also think it's important to try to target outside of just geographical areas. The problem, somewhat, with Sure Start is it's great if you've got the project in your area, but if you happen to be on a disadvantaged council estate in the middle of quite an affluent area, you're just as disadvantaged as somebody in an inner city. So I think there needs to be some more sophisticated targeting to try to do a deal with raising standards, right across the board rather than just targeting postcodes in urban areas.

Jon Snow

It sounds to me as if Alan is saying he'd give the entire £10 million to your trust.

Response: Viv Bird

That would be great news: we're very keen on our partnership with the Agency. Actually, I think we do need to look strategically at all this, because there are some excellent initiatives and strategies already in place. For example: Skills for Life, all the strategies in schools, the Primary [National] Strategy, and the Key Stage Three National Strategy, which is just getting off the ground; so it's a bit early to see the results. What we need is something that actually pulls together; that harnesses all that real energy Ruth was talking about - the energy for reading, from the business community, the volunteering effort, the support from parents - and actually support those main institutions in doing their job better. Therefore, I would suggest that we gave £50,000 to every local authority in the country, to say: "OK, do a bit of co-ordination here; use that person to pick up some money from other sources, because there are other funding streams; use it to link together the formal education system with the informal learning, to maximise the benefits of formal provision and informal and voluntary approaches; and do something that celebrates what people are doing and achieving, because we know from evidence that people need those early achievements recognised, as part of the process of getting qualifications."

Jon Snow

It sounds as if you too would prefer to see it spent in the family context than, for example, in the classroom.

Viv Bird

I think it's broader than family; family is part of the process because in a sense we're all part of families - we are either children or parents - but we're also members of communities and we're part of working communities that also have a contribution to make, and within schools there is a wider community that isn't just teachers, there is a community that's contributing to children's well-being that can be captured and galvanised, and I think it's having that broad sense of what is possible, and someone who can see what's going on, for example, where the library services can provide support in useful, non-threatening ways.

Neil McClelland

In addition to this point, I think the £10 million isn't enough, and I could talk a lot about priorities, but I'm increasingly committed to the view that for the long-term change issues

that we need to face, particularly on that cycle of under-achievement that we're not dealing with over the generations. It's around parenting skills, and it's a big issue we have about children who are under-fathered in our community, so to speak, and I think we need to invest in that whole area much more. If I can put in a plug for an issue that the trust is significantly focused on at the moment, it is early language [development] and talking to your baby. And actually having some co-ordinated pilots at local level on top of what we're trying to do at a national level to help children develop those language skills in the birth- to three-years-old period would be, in the long run, a phenomenal investment.

Jon Snow

Does anybody here have a burning passion for a particular solution that a great deal of money would make a difference to?

Response: from the floor, unnamed speaker

I was in Derbyshire some years ago. People came from every different walk of life, all interested in literacy, and we were given this problem to discuss. It was interesting that in the end every single group decided that if there was a limited amount of money, they would spend that money on early years and on trying to develop the language – with this idea that reading and writing floats on a sea of words.

Jon Snow

Would you agree with that, Alan?

Alan Tuckett, Director, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

I work at NIACE, so I've got an industrial interest in saying, "yes, but", or "yes, and". There is a real issue about gendering in this, that family literacy and family focus policies have a huge benefit, but they often exclude men for a focus in social exclusion and literacy, the issue about the changing patterns of access of opportunity for men from working-class communities in declining industries. There are issues about the reinforcement of marginalisation and isolation that I think can go on a continuum across to people who are without the context of family. So if I had £10 million, partly because we already know the vital importance of family literacy and can make the argument for more money there, I'd put the money into dealing with older blokes. As a society we're facing – if you're older but not yet retired – no pension to look forward to, no skills to keep yourself going, and no strategy in public policy to help you deal with the balance of poverty, isolation and exclusion. I think literacy skills in that area for a pilot project would help us reinforce Alan's point, but it's a lot dearer than the sums this question asks.

Anita Wright, Head-teacher, Woodmansterne Primary School

Some inter-generational work has proved to be very successful, and taking the groups that have been described into schools – either primary or secondary – where a type of adult mentoring mechanism raises the profile for those adults who see their literacy skills as being limited, or wish to develop those literacy skills, but when they're put alongside young children or young students, it enhances both of their self esteems in terms of literacy. This approach also gives you a much clearer indication of the support that's needed for both groups, especially the different but mutual support that's needed too.

Jon Snow

What about the child-estranged father, and fathers in general? Are you really reaching men, or is it primarily a women-orientated exercise?

Response: Anita Wright

In the community I work in, it's predominantly women, and particularly women from ethnic minorities, because we have a high proportion where English isn't a first language; so the engagement tends to be through the mothers, women within those communities. But where we have linked with health and on projects that don't directly appear to be literacy-based, we do get a higher take-up.

For example, the local community health organisation had a project, which was looking at high level of heart attacks and various other aspects, so we had a health drop-in clinic at the school. It was very limited, because funding is always a major problem, and sustainability is a big issue with these kinds of projects, but we actually had a lot more fathers, particularly from Asian communities, coming in. The primary school environment was not as threatening as maybe going down to the health centre or the GP, so they were coming in to a social situation, where they all had the opportunity to meet and chat if they wished; but then they would get their health and cholesterol level checked and some health advice. So I think the concepts are there, but we don't always have to come at it from a very direct route; and I think that's the lesson that seems to be being learned in some of these contexts.

Response: Julie Wilson-Thomas, Project Manager, South Wye Literacy Project

I'd like to come out in support of the men here, in that we've devised a system of actually giving people what they want. So we do family learning, but our work-based Skills for Life provision has proved to be really exciting, and we achieved our targets and met with ten companies, and that seems to be the way to access men. They're quite a shy bunch, but

once you get them going we've had some incredible results.

Jon Snow

Give me an example of how you've reached them.

Julie Wilson-Thomas

Usually men come forward because they have some sort of catalyst to do with work. In Herefordshire we have basic skills needs of up to 37%, we've got a lot of SMEs, and we tend to find that middle-aged men are having to re-apply for jobs and courses with NVQs in the workplace and things like that; so they normally come forward quite shyly, and we'll support them. Of course, you can embed and deliver all the other skills that they want, so using units and accreditation that are applicable to their work needs seems to be a really ideal hook to catch them. They stay with us; we've got people who have been with us for four years now and have travelled an incredible journey from Entry Level One. We had one guy who spent 22 years in the army and couldn't manage the middle of the alphabet, but was a foreman at Special Metals. That chap has appeared in a DfES video, and he's a great learning mentor that will bring other men in. That video was shown at Special Metals, it went absolutely quiet, and then 31 people applauded him and came forward and said: "We want to improve our skills now." They're all going to Hereford group training, we did a small pilot with seven people, and now we have 55 ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] learners who've come forward. The main issue for us is funding, now that you've identified a need and opened the floodgates; we need that sustainable funding. The men are there, you just need to nurture them a bit.

Response: Carol Taylor

If we're not careful though, we're still talking about working in silos, and that, I think, is the fundamental thing if we're talking about literacy and social inclusion, or social exclusion. I would go beyond talking about families, because I think communities are more important in a sense, because it's within your community that social exclusion happens. I think when we launched in 1997, it was about flooding areas with literacy at all levels so you didn't just work with the early years or the families; you worked with everybody on an estate.

If you're talking about employment, what we found was that people in employment were the fathers or the mothers of the children in the schools, so if you just worked with the kids in the schools, with the best will in the world, the kids were not going to improve their literacy very much, because they went back to homes that may not know how best to support children's language development, or have books or whatever. If you work with the

employed or the unemployed, or the parents, the fathers, the early years, the children in schools, volunteers and mentors – absolutely brilliant idea, mentors, I think it's not been researched anywhere near enough – you end up with whole communities becoming excited about learning, and that's what we want.

We're not talking necessarily about people improving their skills, we're talking about that buzz that happens, and sometimes you want to be a fly on the wall in some of these homes where everybody is involved in all of these really exciting literacy activities, and see what happens within communities. You're building whole communities to get involved.

Response: Neil McClelland

I think that creating the resource to have the capacity across communities to put somebody in a post that has the vision that Geoff Bateson has got in Birmingham or Carol has got in Read On – Write Away! and Maggi Hunt used to have in Newcastle and also others here is rare. It's a very small spend for the ability to unlock a lot of perspective and new energy; and multiplying resources – a cradle-to-grave, community-wide perspective – and following through the link between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Jon Snow

You think the £50,000 given to each local authority might not be a bad idea?

Response: Neil McClelland

I think they could multiply the money significantly if they created the perspective and the vision locally of what a learning and literate community could look like, as long as the time-frames for doing it are obviously viable. Also, the perspective of the people who lead that vision must be wide enough, and that means involving libraries and the arts and cultural sectors as a critical motivating component in this task.

Alan Wells

Can I just make, before we forget, a slightly different point: there is a danger that we forget that a large part of children's time is spent in school, and that we take the view that almost everything is important, except actually teaching and learning in the classroom. I know children spend a lot of time out of school, but the most concentrated time they spend actually learning in a formal sense is in school. David Miliband made the point that standards have gone up, and if you go to a lot of schools, you can clearly see they have. I'm not interested particularly in whether it's measured or not in terms of SAT results, but you can see that standards have improved.

My guess is that for the bottom 20% who don't achieve the standard, the solutions for those are going to be much more difficult to find, and it's going to take a great deal of innovation and ideas for those solutions. Because in a sense we've got low-hanging fruit; we've managed to get those children who were just below up to standard. I think we need to encourage a sense of ideas and innovation within the school system, in terms of looking at where, for instance, there are schools who do incredibly well against the odds, and we don't quite often know enough and we don't share it well enough with schools that don't.

I find in all the visits I make to schools, and I make a lot, that quite often schools are very isolated and don't know much about what's going on just a little way away; for instance, a problem such as a boy's under-attainment that they can't deal with. So I would actually put the money into encouraging more innovation, more ideas and more creativity within the system, wherever it is, rather than arguing that it should be early years, or it should be adults, or it should be men.

Terry Piggott, Director of Education, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council

I'd like to use that £50,000. I thought one of the most interesting points of the question was that it was made clear it was year-on-year, and one of the things that most bedevils our work is that we almost dare not put in place proper co-ordination to harness all that energy and so on, because we're afraid that the funding will be cut off in a year or we won't have the sustainability; the contribution from Derbyshire, that's just the sort of thing we want to do more of. I think it is possible, going back to the very first point, to have much higher expectations. David made the point early on that this is an issue that's bedevilled the nation for decades. As Ruth was saying, it's that sort of understanding which is commonplace, and it's an absolute birthright to be literate, and that's the feeling that we want to get going, backed by lots of projects that are sustainable across all groups.

David Barton, Director of the Lancaster Literacy Research Centre, University of Lancaster

I'd like to broaden this out a bit when I think what should happen. In our work, we're looking beyond kids in schools or adults in colleges, and for us social exclusion means the kids who aren't in school, the homeless kids, the kids who are outside families, homeless kids who've experienced violence and things like that. I think it's the same point as Alan's; the easier things have been done and I'd focus on the much more difficult things if we're talking about social inclusion.

Jon Snow

Because I don't want to lose him before 11, I just want to ask David what he thinks. It's quite an interesting, and in the end, quite converging discussion, which does lead in one fairly obvious direction.

Response: David Miliband

I'm not sure if it does. The schools budget is £37 billion, so if you've got £10 million, you don't add it to £37 billion, because it's £400 for each school in the country, and that's not really the way to get systemic change. The other thing I'd say is that for all the local authorities, I completely agree with the man from Rochdale that the annual funding round is not sensible, and that's why we want to move schools and LEAs on to three-year funding so you can plan properly. Let me just pick up a couple of points from the discussion; one thing that was only mentioned fleetingly, right in the first or second question.

Five per cent of the population has trouble with reading or writing; I think it's two-thirds of people in prison that have trouble with reading and writing. The £7 billion schools budget is in comparison to a prison education budget, which I'm pleased to say has now been transferred to the department; it's not my area, but I think it's £60 million. Now, £10 million on £60 million, you're talking serious expansion, so I think there is a group there, and it plays into this hard-to-reach question that Alan Tuckett and others have referred to, and I think that's important.

The mentoring that someone asked whether there is much research about, the Excellence in Cities programme, which now covers 40% of the country, one of its six strands is a learning mentor strand that engages daily with some of the toughest kids in the country, and it has outstanding results. That's rather different from a mentoring programme where I suppose someone in this room would be mentoring someone once a month for an hour, but never the less that more intensive mentoring programme has real impact.

There is one other thing to say, I think one ventures on to very thin ice here, so let me try and say it without falling through: we've chosen 85% for youngsters to read and write well by age 11, and not 100%, because we don't think 100% will read and write well. There are some young people in school who aren't going to reach Level Four, but do need to reach their potential; and I think it's important that we're clear about that and that for some youngsters, reaching Level Two or Three is an education's work, but none the less it gets them to a degree of engagement that for them is as far as they're going to get; I think

we shouldn't get trapped in a sort of 85%-versus-100%, the thing should be that every youngster and adult needs to get the opportunity to develop themselves to the full. That's how we've reached the 85% idea for the 11 years Level Four but, unusually for a politician, if there was £10 million I wouldn't be claiming it for myself in this instance.

Viv Griffiths, Vice Chair, The Reading Agency

I'm formerly head of libraries and adult education in Birmingham. For those that don't know, the Reading Agency is a national body that has been set up to work with libraries, to work creatively with local communities to develop reading. Can I just put Miss Rendell's mind at rest: as far as I'm concerned the demise of libraries is much exaggerated and premature; the latest figures show an increase in visitors, and they're still rising. That's since the implementation of the People's Network in libraries, and I don't think 406 million books loaned a year and 370 million visits is something to be too depressed about. We're alive and kicking and we absolutely intend to stay that way.

The report emphasises a need to work together beyond the formal education system to build a literate nation and to address social exclusion. Public libraries have many strengths in relation to these issues: they're open to all, accessible, and engage with a wide cross section of people. They're actively involved in partnership with various other agencies and with all five groups in the report. How does the panel feel that these strengths could be better harnessed and exploited to support the literacy and social inclusion agenda?

Response: Viv Bird

I think there is a partnership challenge there, really, with libraries and the formal education system, and for there to be a better understanding of what libraries can offer nowadays. You talked about the People's Network and access to a much wider range of resources than books, important as books are. There are other ways that actually attract people into libraries, if only they knew about them, and getting them to move across to enjoy the books and get involved in reading for pleasure is part of that challenge. But I think what needs to happen is for the education sector to understand better what libraries can offer, for libraries to market themselves better, to think how they can fit into the strategies that are already in place and be more proactive about saying, "We're here, stand up and be counted, we can offer you something."

Response: Neil McClelland

I'd agree with that, I think there are some terribly important things happening in the library and cultural areas through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) at

the moment, and I think not everybody will know about the Framework for the Future rollout of the library strategy. It's critically important and I think it does stress within it the whole concept of the library's contribution to social inclusion and reading, and learning the role of public libraries and school library services in complementing the formal provision and the links with schools. A lot of work to do with that, and I think as Viv says, there is an issue on both sides of this partnership. There is a sense from my perspective that too often the education sector does not want to hear or engage adequately with the library sector, there is a reason we need to look at, in terms of the way the library sector communicates. Very important work is being developed under the auspices of Framework for the Future; for example, the Vital Link initiative, which is looking at adult basic education and the role of public libraries and is rolling out across the country after a pilot project. I think that's potentially powerful.

Martin Hall, Managing Consultant, Retail Education Partnerships

I just want to come back if I may quickly, without cutting across the point that's just been developed, to this business of the silo culture, and to make the point that I don't think we're hearing enough in this discussion so far about the role and responsibilities of employers. I'd like to just join this with what Judy was saying, and I do urge everybody who is in the room, we actually have to bully employers to continue the good work that is being developed elsewhere in the community – links with sector skills councils, centres of vocational excellence – and really develop this working partnership. Employers must keep developing literacy and writing skills; it's no good in just getting employees to the point where they can function. These skills have to be developed.

One final point: the more we can, we should exercise some influence on eliminating this creeping culture of jargon. I suppose it's not just employers but also the media. It is absolutely obscuring common sense and the useful application of writing skills.

Jon Snow

Is anybody engaged in a very fruitful experience with employers?

Ruth Silver

Yes we are, but actually through the auspices of the trade unions, the learning reps funded by government have brought into colleges and into the workplace itself enormous programmes in literacy, and it's really making a difference. It's the first breakdown in the silos, when the trade unionists and employers work together to expand learning.

*Sandy Adamson, Director of Education,
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham*

On that immediate point, we're doing some fine work with the famous Coca-Cola, Hammersmith Broadway and learning and mentoring, but I wanted to turn to libraries, which I was discussing in an efficiency review in our borough yesterday. Like others, I was brought up at the local library; age five, we all love them. Hammersmith and Fulham has six libraries, and the budget is £4 million out of a total education budget of £100 million. As one goes around them all they're terrific, but increasingly much of the custom is for the videos and using the PCs. We're doing lots of innovative things – mobile libraries are working well with the schools, children are coming in – but I say provocatively: I can't resist the re-occurring thought that there are a number of institutional and structural blockages to innovation by library services. For example, the framework of rules set by DCMS which states that a borrower must be within the mile or mile and a half of the library cannot be the best way to provide a service. I wonder if anyone else sympathises with my view, not many immediately I think, that there might be room for some sort of might be some form of membership idea involving charging, I'm not sure what. If they could find a way of doing some more charging to gain revenue for them then to invest, there might be incentives there for the development of more innovative ways of expanding libraries role within communities.

Jon Snow

Viv, what does that do to you?

Response: Viv Griffiths

It makes me want to scream. The Reading Agency is doing some incredibly interesting work which I think not many people will know about, and one of the issues for me...

Jon Snow

On the charging front?

Response: Viv Griffiths

I don't know what's going on in Hammersmith and Fulham; I can only tell you what is going on across the rest of the country. There are huge amounts of work going on in powerful partnerships, libraries working with youth workers on a project called Youthbooks, which is working with the most difficult teenagers to get them engaged and back with reading again and understand what it can bring to their lives; and working with Splash! Extra and positive action for young people over the summer, diversionary

activities which are really creative, working across artistic, different formats, but leading back to books and reading.

Okay, maybe sometimes it is computers that bring young people into the libraries, but library staff are increasingly being trained so that they can do activities which are positive and lead back into books and reading, and also working across the whole family. We've talked about the inter-generational stuff, right from Bookstart through to inter-generational work, which brings mentoring from older people with younger people, there is lots of very creative activity going on. If we're talking about social exclusion, I really don't think charging is an issue we should actually be thinking about.

Jon Snow

Let's take the discussion in a different direction. I'd like to ask Clare Tickell – family breakdown is a good area.

Clare Tickell, Chief Executive, Stonham Housing

We're a national, specialist housing association, and we work with very socially excluded people: a lot of offenders, children, care leavers. I completely agree with everything that's been said; actually, we spent 30 years looking at how we cared for people, and worked out very late that in fact 65% of the people we house can't read and write. If we were to crack that one and spend some time on it, we'd probably do far more for people. We're aware through the work we do that there is a strong link between school exclusion and family breakdown, and we also run a lot of refuges for women fleeing violence; a real issue for us is what we do with 14- to 16-year-old boys in our refuges. What additional strategies and mechanisms might the government employ to support excluded children and young people in developing their literacy skills, and what part should the voluntary sector play in this? I've got in mind in particular the fact that a lot of people we work with aren't interested or feel very disenfranchised from statutory agencies in asking the question.

Viv Bird

I'd like to say something about some of the things that motivate disaffected young people, because that's the key: if you can lock into their interests. We've heard about the Youthbooks project, which has been very successful, linking the skills of youth workers who know how to communicate with the skills of librarians, who know about books and learning; but we need to think of other ways that we might unlock that power and interest in learning. The Playing for Success scheme the government introduced has been very successful, using sports clubs to motivate and interest young people, in a setting

that's exciting and glamorous. They might see the famous football star they've always wanted to see, perhaps some benefits from match tickets if they come regularly.

The voluntary sector has a crucial role because it has those connections with young people. The difficulty is – and it's a whole big area – how you fund that sort of work. A bit of the innovative that Alan talked about; finding something that's really going to make a difference, and encourage and enthuse. There is the work that the Stonham Housing Association has been doing, linking learning with sport, making sports awards available to young people as a hook into learning; but as part of the deal they have to work on basic skills, too. The trick was having a basic-skills tutor who got interested in a sport, wasn't very good at playing football, but took part and built the relationship with young people, so when they'd done the football training she was able to say to them, "Come on, I've done your bit, you've laughed at me: why don't you come and have a go at learning your basic skills?" And they went along with it and got something positive out of it too, so I think there are a lot of lessons there.

Alan Wells

The point I'd make is, we often talk in education as if lots of people are queuing up for it; and large numbers of people are queuing up to try and get out of it actually, if they possibly can. This term "socially excluded" as well: if you ask people, they don't see themselves as socially excluded; they think we're the excluded or we're the ones that can't reach them; they don't see it as a problem for them. There is a difficulty, it seems to me: in every industrialised country, all the campaigns to encourage people to take up literacy courses have a very small proportion of the people who've got problems.

There are two points. One, I'm not in favour of being punitive: personally, I'm morally against people being punished because we didn't manage to give them a decent education; I just think that's the wrong approach. I don't really care – with respect, Ruth – whether it works or not, I'm morally against it. The Sun is a widely read newspaper, but that doesn't make me think it's a good newspaper. I do think you need incentives, and you particularly need incentives that are not so distant for people, because we're in an age where people get gratification fairly easily, if you know what I mean; they see the results fairly easily, and we certainly need incentives that give results, give them some purpose for staying in, and that may be financial support. It seems to me, in answer to the last question, that the way libraries could do things is to give books away. There would be a lot wasted, but there would be some people who would turn on to reading.

The second point is that, in all the years I've been here, the voluntary sector has been a stop-go funding special initiatives area, where there is a little bit of money produced; and then there is a lot of involvement, including Stonham and people like that; then the money ceases and they're told to apply to a bureaucracy, they've got no idea about accessing and they fade out of it. We should be giving incentives to voluntary organisations who can reach people that fundamentally most statutory organisations can't, and that does mean long term and some guarantee of funding.

Jon Snow

I've got four points on the floor: I want to start here and then we'll take a few more and come back to the panel.

*Professor Brian Street, Department of Education & Professional Studies,
King's College London*

Can I build on something that Alan was saying there: to introduce the international dimension so we don't just sit in the UK silo, as it were. There is a huge amount of experience over a long period of time of exactly the issues we've been hearing here; and I would just signal two or three of the mistakes there have been made internationally that we can learn from, and one or two of the positive ones. The low take-up and high drop-out in programmes are well documented. The explanations are often what are in some of the documents here: an over-emphasis on skills and assessment, framed as deficit, and cultural and class impositions on some groups by others.

The positive sides that people have learned in these programmes are to facilitate local interests and work with what people are already doing – your sports clubs and the arts work in Lancaster – but also the conceptual issue of building on local knowledge and learning. Occasionally, people say things like “we must introduce adults to learning”, as though they're not already learning all their lives. The metaphor of the “hook”: somehow we need to “hook” people into learning. One explanation for why people may not come, is that they don't think of themselves as fish. So I think there is a lot to be learned from international work of that kind, which we could build on.

Alisdair Macdonald, Head-teacher, Morpeth School

I wasn't used to the terms “flow” and “stock” until this morning, but by nature of being a head-teacher, I'm more interested in the flow than the stock. What interests me particularly is these figures we're throwing around of percentages – 15%, 25%, whatever it is that are not, in primary schools, achieving Level Four. As a secondary head-teacher,

I've seen a huge change in the pupils who are coming through to us from primary schools, but we've still got an average every year of 70 pupils – not percentages – who arrive at the age of 11 having not reached that level.

Where I'm very much in the innovation camp is, we don't really know what to do with them. We have a Key Stage Three strategy, which is good; we have all sorts of other programmes going on, but I don't think we've really cracked that one at all. I don't think secondary teachers are good at teaching literacy; I think they're not trained to do it; they don't really know how to do it. For the last two years we've abandoned, for about 30 of our pupils, the teaching of English. They don't learn English in terms of what the rest of the school does; they have an intensive literacy programme. We've made some progress with that and some of the pupils have done well, but after a year of doing that a lot of them are still not acquiring even functional literacy.

I feel that there is a huge area there which we need to really explore in a big way; it is three-quarters boys, one-quarter girls. But it's not just about [initiatives like] Playing for Success, which reach a tiny number of kids. In every secondary school, particularly in city areas, there are significant numbers of pupils who haven't acquired literacy. We don't really know how to teach them literacy – we don't have the skills – and I think a lot of them then acquire behaviours to conceal this, and they become more difficult pupils.

Jon Snow

You'd like to respond, yes?

Jill Baker, Director, PLUS

The PLUS strategy is a national strategy to address the literacy and numeracy difficulties of juveniles within the offending population under 18. One of the things that we've discovered and continue to learn is exactly that point: that there are many initiatives, many programmes, many things happening. Good stuff, and not to negate what's happened in the voluntary and statutory sectors, but one of the key things is enabling those that work with some of the most difficult young people in our society to have the skills to use those resources and materials to make a long-term impact. Because although raising self-esteem and motivation are important, unless people and teachers know how to work with those young people, it probably won't make a long-term difference. So I think the issue about training and support-and-development programmes for staff in prisons and the community is a key part of any strategy.

Roz Ivanic, Director, Literacies for Learning – Further Education, University of Lancaster

I'm here representing the teaching and learning research programme, which is currently in its third phase and is therefore concerned with education, post-compulsory; my own project is particularly concerned with further education, and I'm interested to see that further education hasn't really been highlighted so far, and yet in relation to Clare's question, some of the people who don't get on well in the compulsory-schools sector still find their way into further education. In further education there are fantastic opportunities for people to do what they find interesting, if only they are not subjected to the assessment regimes and ticking boxes of assessment targets that currently bedevil a lot of further education. I suggest that one of the recommendations in the report that we've read is a very important one; that the opportunity for people who might otherwise be excluded will be greatly increased if they're not forced to jump hoops in a way that is bedevilling a lot of further education at the moment.

Jon Snow

I'll get the panel to pick up on this, but were you still addressing 11-year-olds, predominantly boys?

Avril McIntyre, Director of Operations, LifeLine Community Projects

We are a community-based provider. I think it's such a key point in terms of what we're talking about in terms of incentives, and one of the things we've learnt, mainly by getting it wrong, is that "felt need" is critical. We did a project jointly with a school, where we went in to work with the teachers to engage 11- to 14-year-old boys, and it was absolutely fascinating. We talked to them about what they wanted in their lives (we're in Essex) and it was a Ford Escort along Southend and a four-bedroom house, with a wife and some children. When our worker started to strip back what you needed to get that, the boys really started to think, oh yes, I do need a job to get the four-bedroom house. Those boys are now engaged in the school in a way they hadn't been, because suddenly they realised there was a point to it; and the teachers have been able to work with them and take them on, and that's a whole issue of incentives and felt need.

Whether it's young people or adults, we've got to come back to what people want, rather than what we think they need, and that's a critical aspect of getting people engaged. Once you've got them engaged, it's not so much the issue, it's getting them there; but the funding often doesn't track getting them engaged, it attracts the actual provision of the literacy and numeracy.

Jon Snow

That brings us back to the panel in a way, because we did indeed pick off the lower fruit at the beginning of the session, with an agreement that it was about parenting and striking early; and then there was the plea for old blokes. But what we haven't really got are any clear-cut routes on are these two groups that have been talked about right now, the critical period at 11 and the further critical period, after formal education has ended and you've got the opportunity of FE and the rest of it. Who wants to pick up?

Response: Alan Wells

Can I just say on the point made by the head-teacher colleague over there; I sympathise with many of the points he's made. I think one of the things, from my visits to schools, that we could do immediately is to give teachers time. It's a funny thing to say, but most teachers, if you look compared to when I was teaching for instance, are enormously stretched now in terms of the expectations put upon them; and in a sense, the change of the world. If we could give teachers in some ordered way time to actually look at what other people are doing; websites don't do that and nor do publications.

What's fascinating about this discussion is I've been in this world a long while and yet I've written down a whole number of initiatives that I hadn't heard of until today. We've got probably quite a lot you haven't heard of as well, and we're kind of overloaded with initiatives with all sorts of interesting acronyms. So, I would certainly give teachers more time in the sector – including teachers in FE, actually, because I think it's true for all teachers and people working in education – more time to think and look at other things.

I do think, picking up the point that was made, the tick-box culture and the constant measurement has gone rather too far. We now tend to look at what we can measure rather than what we're trying to achieve, and that's had all sorts of sad effects on the system. I take the point David Miliband made about children moving from Level Two to Level Three, and I'm glad that the government has reached this conclusion now, but in fact at the moment the only way of measuring success in the system is if a child gets to Level Four. Children that get from two to three with a great deal of effort from teachers and their parents and other people don't count, and I don't think you'll get anywhere if you exclude people from being within the target group. So I do think that we've got to have some balance, but I think we've got to be very careful of measuring everything by recognised tick boxes and accreditation and qualifications; because I think there are all sorts of learning and improvements that don't suit being measured in that way.

Jon Snow

What I'd like to do is get on to one more area, because we're coming towards the end of our time. But it certainly strikes me very strongly that [with] this guest-list of people here, the greatest service the Smith Institute could do would be to create some opportunity for cross-fertilisation, through a website where people could post information. Because this human encounter in these rather celebrated and august circumstances has, I feel from up here, been a very productive experience and it would be a pity to lose this opening.

Response: Viv Bird

Could I just say that there is something in your pack which is a publicity card for the Literacy and Social Inclusion Project. One of the purposes of this project is to share good practices and the knowledge from research and policies, so this is a kind of focal point; and certainly the National Literacy Trust would be very keen to hear what you're doing and to disseminate that in a public sense.

Greg Brooks, Associate Director, National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, University of Sheffield

The first question I put was, what steps do the panel suggest would be most effective in simplifying and consolidating the plethora of funding streams and reducing short-termism, which I think perhaps we've addressed to an extent. The second one was, many social programmes take a grapeshot approach, using all available methods at once. Which element in successful programmes do the panel think are most and least crucial? For example, what evidence is there that working in parallel on literacy and explicit techniques to boost self-esteem is more effective than working on literacy alone?

Jon Snow

Some severe judgments to be made, Neil.

Response: Neil McClelland

I think Greg won't be surprised when I say he knows far more about that issue than any of us, probably, and ask Greg what his view on it is.

Response: Greg Brooks

I did partly ask the question to be provocative, because I think we know a great deal about who the excluded are and what the factors in that pattern are. We know that poor literacy is one of them; what we're less sure about is what unique contribution poor literacy makes to being excluded, whether it interacts with the other factors, to a great

extent, and therefore we're less sure about whether working on adults or other poor literacy groups in isolation will work well enough to boost their skills; or whether we need to work on other aspects of the circumstances that make them excluded at the same time. There is a bit of evidence for the benefit of working on literacy and self-esteem in parallel at primary level, but very little in other aspects of the field.

Jon Snow

There is a danger in looking at some particular silo, but prison education is an extraordinarily interesting area, because it is so confined and you can see the consequences. When an unnamed government slashed education in prison, it had an immediate effect, and when another unnamed government began to invest in prison education it also had an effect. In the prison population, given that we know – here is such a strange chicken and egg thing – that so many people enter prison with tremendous challenges in terms of literacy skills, it is an amazing arena in which to study the effect of various different programmes. There must be a very strong case – David agreed that £10 million spent on prison education would have a tremendous effect. This must be, even if an unrepresentative crucible, a tremendous area in which much more great work could be carried out, and you could study it.

Response: Alan Tuckett

We're doing our best and so are other people in the room who are part of the National Research and Development Centre. There are two big obstacles; one is getting agreement to have access to do any research in prisons and other parts of the secure estate, another is the geographical mobility of prisoners.

Jon Snow

Particularly women.

Alan Wells

I feel slightly uncomfortable now, because I slightly feel that we're taking the view that anybody who has poor literacy is therefore socially excluded, and that's multiple disadvantages. My experience is, large numbers of people don't have any other disadvantages; they have poor literacy and they've got families, jobs and all sorts of other things. They may have rather more restricted lives in some senses, in our terms, but they don't see themselves in that way. The interesting statistic is that when all of these surveys are done, testing people over years and years, particularly adults with poor literacy, you get this peculiar position where we say they've got poor literacy skills and real problems with

reading and writing, and they don't think they have.

For instance, in the United States when they did a survey, many people who had by our definition poor literacy and numeracy, one, didn't think they had, and two, had absolutely no intention of doing anything about skills that they either didn't think were important or didn't think they lacked. The same was true here as well, so there is a problem of breaking down [resistance]. There are lots of people who are excluded or who suffer multiple disadvantages who have good literacy – I guess we know it's a social class thing – but we've got to be careful about not thinking they're absolutely the same as each other.

Peter Farrell, UK Online Project Manager, Ufi

One of the projects that I'm working on is about engaging people who are already coming into these centres. There are 6,000 of them across the country, and coupled with 2,000 Learn Direct centres, we've got 7,000 centres who are delivering some form of learning to people. We've touched about 1.5 million people in three or four years, and what we're trying to do with the UK online centres is to use those centres and their clients and the people who work in them, who already work with their communities very closely, and get a learning message. I suppose what we're doing is almost learning by stealth, in that people will come in and use those centres for what they've already used them for; be they libraries, in schools, in community centres, housing associations and so on, and those people are coming in and we're having a degree of success with them. The other thing I'd like to point out: Ufi is working with a huge range of partners, all the people, I suspect, who've been speaking today have had some contact with us in some form or another. I'd just say it's an opportunity the government has created and now needs to really exploit.

Phil Street, Chief Executive, ContinYou

First of all, can I just say, listening here today, I'm beginning to realise how little I know, and the older I get the less I seem to know. I think I'm going to be buried or burnt knowing nothing. Twenty years ago I think I was certain of everything; now I'm pretty certain of nothing. What I am interested in, there is a line and it builds on the last point that Alan made, which was that very few adults regard their reading, maths or language skills as below average – even those with the lowest level of skills – and it seems to me there is some kind of gap between those we perceive as experiencing social exclusion and those who are trying to respond to it.

Although I have no answers, the one thing I do think might be of interest is to try and inject a bit of glamour into the situation, a bit of excitement, because we tend to be very

earnest and rather dour. I was at a health conference recently, and I saw a stand about slimming. What they've done is make slimming a very exciting, glamorous, attractive issue, and I think we must have the wit and the will to make learning and literacy exciting and glamorous; and I think the fantasy that Ruth Rendell referred to earlier, maybe we should try to look for other fantasies about ways in which we make literacy and learning exciting, interesting and relevant, and engage with people's lives.

Response: Kate Pahl, Literacy Research Centre, University of Sheffield

I just wanted to echo Phil's point on the role of creativity, particularly in family learning, but also in attracting disaffected groups. Roz mentioned further education; I'm working with the Sheffield College on a project, which uses rap and online learning to engage the least-skilled, refugees and young people with very low levels of basic skills, and it's an incredibly exciting project: we've got someone from the University of Delaware in the US called Shuaib Meacham who's been working with disaffected young people, people in prisons; using rap as a way into literacy, and I do think creativity is something we need to think about and be incredibly broad about in our conceptions of what we think literacy is and how young people can benefit.

Jon Snow

It's been one of the nice things in the last couple of weeks, Seamus Heaney embracing Eminem, saying what a tremendous link he makes to poetry and the written word, and boy, that connects; that's a fantastic thing. Very briefly, because you hear the clock strike and it's struck for us, but Viv, just draw us to a close.

Viv Bird

I just wanted to thank everybody who's contributed, and I hope will continue to contribute to the development of the Literacy and Social Inclusion Project. This is a consultation paper and we are still in our consultation phase, and we'll be talking to people here and more broadly as part of the development of a trust-position paper in the autumn. Very much part of this process is our partnership with the Basic Skills Agency, without whom we couldn't be doing this work: so thank you to Alan and the agency, and we will continue to work strongly in partnership with them. Finally, thank you Wilf and the Smith Institute, for organising this seminar.

Jon Snow

I must say, as an outside hack looking in, this is a very creamy audience, and it's amazing to be among it and hear of people's candour in what they don't know and what they'd

like to know, and what they are doing and hope to be doing. I hope that this morning has been a further stimulus to go back to the grindstone, link up and move on. I'd like to thank the panel on your behalf, and the Smith Institute, and the memory of dear John for bringing us all here together today. Thank you very much.

Literacy and Social Inclusion: The policy challenge A Discussion Paper

Viv Bird, National Literacy Trust, April 2004

A discussion paper, *Literacy and Social Inclusion: the Policy Challenge*, was published in April 2004, the basis for debate at the Smith Institute seminar in May. This was followed by a position paper *Every which way we can*, which was launched at the Institute of Education in February 2005. These papers can be downloaded from the project website www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion. In addition to the website, the project findings are disseminated through a quarterly email newsletter, contribution to policy papers, conferences and publications.

Literacy and Social Inclusion: The policy challenge

A Discussion Paper

This discussion paper is for those concerned about the contribution, and consequences, of poor literacy skills to social exclusion. The paper invites contributions and responses to stimulate discussion and consider the implications for policy, research and practice. Feedback will be incorporated into a position paper in the autumn.

The National Literacy Trust is an independent charity working with others to raise standards and build a literate nation. The importance of literacy has long been recognised; it underpins all educational achievement and is central to economic advance; it helps develop human potential and raises self-esteem. Literacy is required for people to get and keep jobs, and progress, and therefore is a critical dimension to improved employability. But building a literate nation will take much more than just focusing on improving the education system; we all need to work together to create the national culture in which education can thrive.

The Literacy and Social Inclusion Project is a partnership between the National Literacy Trust and the Basic Skills Agency, the national agency for literacy, numeracy and related skills for England and Wales. Funded by the Agency as a three-year national support project and delivered by the Trust, the project aims to create a national resource on what works around literacy and social inclusion. The focus is on home and community literacy, rather than classroom practice, with five key themes:

- early language and reading
- working with parents
- out-of-school-hours support
- motivating disaffected young people and
- upskilling adults at risk

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1. Why literacy is central to social inclusion policies

Background

"Social exclusion has complex and multi-dimensional causes and consequences, creating deep and long-lasting problems for individual families, for the economy and for society as a whole. It can pass from generation to generation: children's life chances are strongly affected by their parents' circumstances, such as their income and the place they live."

Tackling Social Exclusion: Taking stock and looking to the future – emerging findings, March 2004, Social Exclusion Unit.

According to the Social Exclusion Unit, social exclusion is what happens when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems including unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. The complexity in finding solutions is recognised by Government and translated into a range of cross-cutting policy initiatives such as neighbourhood renewal and Sure Start, while Skills for Life and the Skills Strategy aim to improve the skills levels of adults and young people in England, including those with poor literacy. In Wales, there is an all-age strategy, the National Strategy for Basic Skills in Wales, which is being overseen by the Basic Skills Agency on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Despite the investment in these and other policies to address social exclusion and social justice, and encouraging signs of improvements in young people's educational attainment – supported by the National Primary and Key Stage 3 Strategies in primary and secondary schools – there is still a long way to go, with a marked variation in performance between high-performing schools and those schools facing the greatest challenges. As the Social Exclusion Minister Yvette Cooper admitted in an article for the Guardian on 21 March 2004, the poorest groups are not catching up with the most affluent and are the least likely to benefit from policy initiatives.

It is clear that having poor literacy skills, coupled with low parental expectations and poor self-esteem can have a profound effect on educational attainment, life chances, employability and social cohesion. A number of studies have been carried out to investigate the role of education in preventing social exclusion, notably the work of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics, and the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning at the Institute of Education, which have greatly helped our understanding of the links between learning, class and social exclusion. Children suffer from the social exclusion of their parents; the psychological and social

barriers start very early on in a child's life and contribute to their own identity. The difference in achievement can be seen in children as young as 22 months, and the gap gets wider the older they get. However, we also know that involvement in learning has an influence on the level of individual resilience to setbacks and stress, and on feelings of wellbeing and self-efficacy, which refers to the extent to which individuals feel they can exert an influence on their lives.

The Basic Skills Agency, through its European Social Exclusion Network, is involved in sharing information about innovative approaches which promote social inclusion by improving levels of basic skills in six EU member countries. While each country has its own definition of basic skills, common to all countries is the need for adequate literacy to cope with the requirements of social, personal and vocational life. The 1999 Moser Report identified over seven million adults in England with literacy and numeracy difficulties and, more recently, the 2003 Skills for Life survey, published by the Department for Education and Skills, reported one in six respondents (16 per cent) as having serious problems in literacy or numeracy. Critically, most did not know that they had a problem.

Poor literacy skills are the visible tip of the iceberg. The less-visible factors need to be recognised and understood if those most at risk of severe underachievement are to benefit from sustained literacy improvements. We therefore need to examine and address the connections of influence between patterns of underachievement and the structural issues that reinforce rather than eliminate them, and the attitudes and perspectives held by prospective learners and the professionals, parents and other members of the community capable of supporting them.

For the purposes of this paper, the socially excluded or those 'at risk' are defined as those whose literacy skills, or attitudes, inhibit inclusion or put their children 'at risk'.

The effect of poor literacy

Families provide the foundations for early literacy development among very young children. Language – that is, speaking, listening, comprehension and vocabulary – is learned mostly through interaction with the environment and with adults. Parents do this through conversation, encouraging imaginative play, and by reading stories, singing nursery rhymes and encouraging book ownership. They continue to support their children's learning through talking about how they are doing at school, introducing them to the library, encouraging high aspirations and encouraging them to continue in education after compulsory schooling is finished.

Without wanting to suggest a linear relationship in what is obviously a highly complex area, this section focuses on what might be the effect when that crucial home literacy support is absent. First, children start school at a disadvantage: concerns have been expressed by headteachers, among others, about increasing numbers of children who arrive without the social and communication skills required to thrive in a busy classroom. If a child struggles to learn to read and write, he or she falls behind at school and as each year goes on it becomes more difficult to catch up. Where there are effective intervention strategies, good teachers and parental interest, initial problems can often be overcome. Where these safety nets are not effective, children become caught in the spiral of self-doubt and sense of failure. Absenteeism, 'switching off' or disengagement from formal or informal learning activities become well-used strategies, in school and outside.

In economic terms, there is evidence that adults with poor literacy skills are likely to be unskilled, in and out of work, have low aspirations, and more likely to be depressed and to engage in criminal behaviour and re-offend. While it may not be the main causal factor, adults with poor literacy are less likely to be active citizens, vote, take action to support or develop their communities (where it means dealing with officialdom) or take up learning opportunities. The consequences are unfilled job vacancies, higher social and welfare costs as more people claim benefits and use the health system (or contribute to inefficiencies by failing to turn up at appointments), and crowded prisons.

Understanding the relationship between poor literacy, low self-esteem and low confidence is critical. It is the reason why so many learners of all ages fail to take advantage of literacy support at various points in the system. Building confidence among those who have already experienced failure is therefore an important element of literacy work with those at risk.

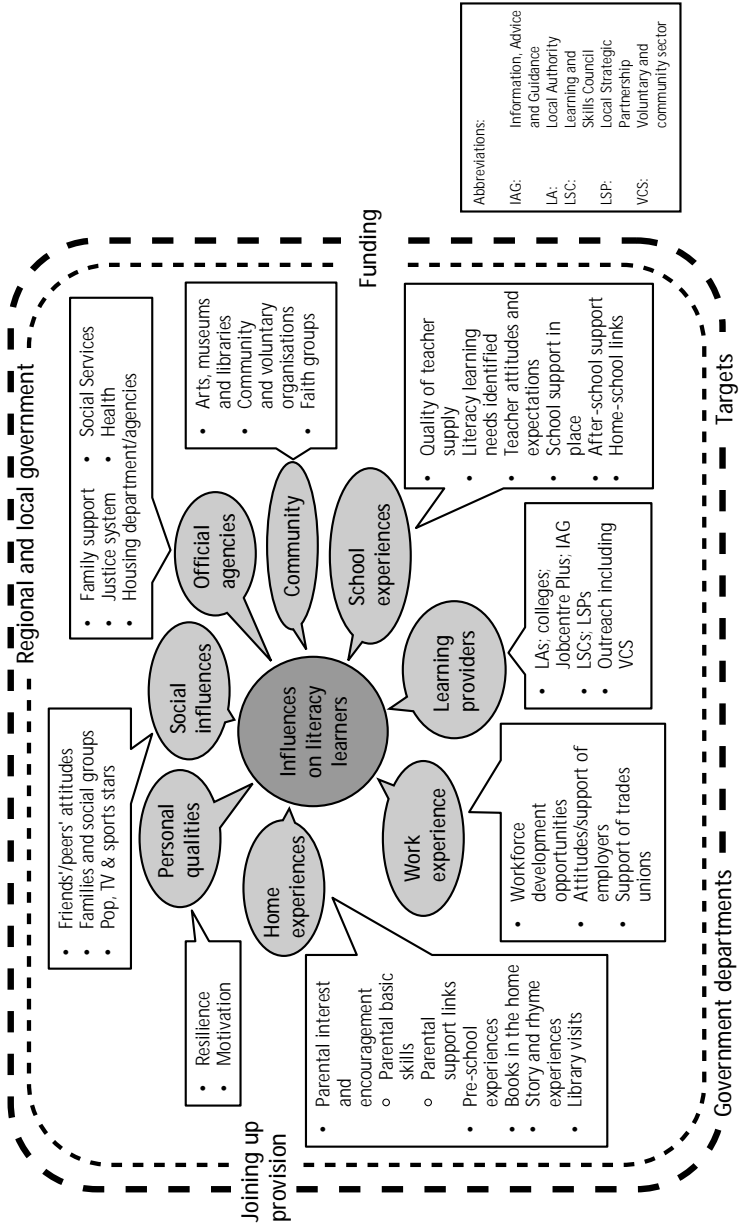
Through our information and research review, an extensive consultation process involving many different Government policy and practice areas, and subsequent data collection, a clear pattern has emerged of the key drivers that lead to improved literacy outcomes for those most at risk. In the process, good practice examples have been identified in which literacy professionals, mostly working in partnership, have engaged socially excluded children, young people and adults in learning, leading to skills improvement, with knock-on social and economic benefits.

2. Influences on literacy learners

The review and consultation process highlighted the many systems of influence on literacy learners of all ages, illustrated in the diagram overleaf. These influences may be positive or negative, either increasing confidence or instilling, or perhaps reinforcing, negative attitudes to learning. The key influences are shown with their different component parts, which may also link to more than one key influence. The strength of any one influence will vary according to the learner's circumstances and will depend too on the age of the literacy learner. The potential influence of the key learning institutions – e.g. schools and colleges – is greater where there is an understanding, and the capacity, to work in partnership with parents, outside agencies and voluntary and community groups to support those most at risk.

Two other points are worth mentioning. The personal qualities and resilience of the individual, formed to a great extent by early childhood experiences, will impact on that individual's motivation and determination to learn, whatever the odds. Finally, the importance of social networks to motivate and maintain interest in learning is a recurring theme in the findings of this project.

Literacy and Social inclusion: The policy challenge



3. The review process

A number of research reports, publications and websites were examined initially in the process of defining successful practice around literacy and social inclusion. By literacy, we included language and literacy learning among speakers of other languages, those from the lowest achieving and most economically disadvantaged groups such as the ethnic minorities, and populations with high basic skills needs, for example, offenders.

How we define 'what works'

Ultimately, something works if it has the desired, sustained outcome. In an age focused on targets and quantification, numbers of qualifications achieved provide a recognised and tangible measurement of 'success'. Indeed, qualifications play an important motivating role, provide public recognition of attaining a national standard and a 'good value' measure in relation to public expenditure. Yet in looking at progress on that measure alone, we may fail to understand the very important 'soft' indicators of progress that measure milestones along the way: reduced disaffection, enhanced self-esteem and confidence, increased motivation, and greater engagement in literacy activity in the long term for individuals and their families.

Drawing on the Trust's experience of working with community literacy partnerships, we also looked at the evidence from published evaluations in the literacy and regeneration fields, including Peter Hannon's paper on the evaluation of literacy initiatives, the evidence from the evaluation of Derbyshire's Read On – Write Away! initiative, neighbourhood renewal including New Deal for Communities, and the Prove It! evaluations conducted for Groundwork. The evidence from long-term funding streams such as the Single Regeneration Budget and the Adult and Community Learning Fund was also examined. A list was drawn up of what appeared to be the key component parts of successful literacy activity for those who are socially excluded or at risk. It should:

- impact on individuals' confidence or self-esteem
- lead to more positive attitudes towards literacy and learning
- support parents to appreciate better the positive things they can do to help their children acquire good literacy skills
- lead to improvements in skills
- lead to further studies, volunteering or employment
- include special success factors such as use of community artists, celebration events, IT, support from partner organisations, or use of volunteers

As a result of the review process, a framework was developed on 'what works' and translated into a user-friendly activity form. This was used to gather information about current practice.

4. The research evidence

Appendix 2 provides short summaries of research studies in the literacy and social inclusion field while Appendix 3 gives the full references for all the research reports referred to in this paper. The key points are provided below:

4.1 Poor reading is identified as an important element of social exclusion and, at the age of 16, boys with poor reading skills think school is a waste of time and want to leave as soon as possible. (Parsons and Bynner, 2002)

4.2 Social background is a powerful influence on student performance, but where parents read regularly and feel positive about it, this factor is more influential even than social class. (OECD study on 15-year-olds' performance, 2002)

4.3 While parents' social class and levels of education make a difference, the quality of the pre-school home learning environment is key. (EPPE, 2003)

4.4 Family literacy programmes are an effective way of improving the educational prospects of both children and parents. Father involvement and mother involvement at age seven significantly, and independently, predict higher educational achievement at age 20. (Brooks et al., 1997; Flouri and Buchanan, 2001)

4.5 While 41% of disadvantaged young people feel they are held back by a lack of qualifications, for many, there is a lack of understanding of how they might achieve their aims in life. (The Prince's Trust, 2003)

4.6 Underachieving children and young people can be helped to improve their reading scores through out-of-school-hours literacy support; evaluation of the Playing for Success initiative identifies the football or sports club setting as a motivator. (NFER, 2003)

4.7 Innovative approaches using new technology, helped by trained and supported mentors, motivate young people out of school to improve their literacy. (Ultralab, 2003)

4.8 Very few adults regard their reading, maths or language skills as below average, even those with the lowest level skills. (Williams et al., 2003)

4.9 Participation in learning produces positive health and social outcomes, but learners, especially those who face the greatest obstacles, need adequate support. (Feinstein et al., 2003)

4.10 Basic skills support for those on probation should be integrated within a multi-stranded framework aimed at gaining and maintaining employment. (Home Office, 2004)

5. Project findings

There are in the order of 70 practice examples on the project website across the five key strands, which demonstrate different approaches to partnerships, use of funding streams, types of activities, and outcomes. Look at www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion for details.

The review and consultation process, along with the activity forms received, suggest the following key features of successful home and community literacy practices that promote social inclusion by improving the literacy skills of those of all ages at risk. These are illustrated by five case studies. There are two general points, however, that are relevant to all age groups:

- It is vitally important to have high-quality staff specifically trained to identify literacy needs and who can develop effective relationships with at-risk young people or adults in order to build trust and encourage a 'can do' attitude.
- The time needed to develop good relationships as part of the learning process – and the funding to support this – can be underestimated, but is critical when working with those who are most disaffected.

The Early Years

Sure Start has developed a number of innovative approaches to promote early language and communication. Communicating Matters, a joint venture between Sure Start, the National Primary Strategy and the Special Educational Needs Division of the Department for Education and Skills, will develop new training materials for those working with young children aged from three to five. Our review process highlighted three key features of successful home and community approaches:

Modelling good early communication

Actually showing parents how to communicate with children is more effective than simply providing information. Practitioners need to demonstrate how to listen and respond to what young children say, share nursery rhymes and stories, and make books together. This modelling approach is a key feature of the ORIM framework (see page 65).

Case Study: Start Singing

A collaboration between Tullie House museum in Carlisle and the local Sure Start programme, and a grant from Curiosity & Imagination, led to the Start Singing project. Sessions for parents and under-fours used both widely-known and local dialect nursery rhymes as a starting point for raising parents' awareness of the importance of rhyme and song in children's language development. Hands-on fun activities were devised using objects from the museum's collections and included art and craft related to the nursery rhymes. Parents were then given a book and tape to encourage them to go on using the rhymes at home. An external evaluation is being carried out and indications are that parents continue to use the rhymes at home several months later, even though some did not know them before.

Home visiting

Home visiting, incorporated into Sure Start practice and other approaches (including the PEEP programme), provides an opportunity to get to know parents in their own environment, to offer some first-steps help around early language and literacy and to encourage them to step outside the home and join in group activities which can be daunting for many parents. Several visits may be needed before this is achieved.

Shared fun encourages parents to address their own literacy needs

Bookstart – the national baby book-giving programme given to parents by the health visitor at the nine-month health check, which includes a free board book for the baby, reading advice and information on how to join the library – may also be linked to multi-agency approaches such as Sure Start to reach those parents who are socially isolated. Many parents do not feel comfortable going to the library so having Bookstart events there helps parents to see the library as a place to enjoy and borrow books for their babies and young children. Other settings also provide these informal learning experiences around books and reading. As they experience the fun of shared literacy activities with their very young children, see them respond, and their concentration and behaviour improve, so parents can feel empowered and ready to take action to improve their own skills through more structured programmes.

Questions

1. How can our knowledge of early language development be shared more effectively with at risk parents whose very young children are manifesting signs of language delay?
2. How can links between early years settings and library services be developed further to promote parental interest in reading and sharing books with their very young children?
3. How can early years settings further support the development of family learning programmes, including support for parents' own skills development?
4. How can our understanding of successful basic skills awareness raising programmes such as Step in to Learning be extended to support other organisations in the parenting and health fields?

Working with Parents

Successful ways of getting parents with low skills and little confidence engaged in learning are highlighted below, along with some gaps in our knowledge, raising questions around funding and research.

Practical activities maximise participation

Parents with low levels of confidence, or with the greatest learning needs, are more likely to take part in practical activities that do not initially involve any reading or writing, for example, Storysacks, crafts or gardening projects. These approaches provide informal opportunities for parents to engage with books and reading. Once trust has been established between professionals, volunteers and parents, suggestions are more likely to be taken up, tried out in that setting and, later on, in the home. In this supportive environment, parents become more confident, more prepared to ask questions, and more comfortable with the concept of change and trying new ways of supporting their children's developing literacy.

Family literacy works

Family literacy programmes have been shown by research to be effective in improving the literacy skills of primary-age children and parents. Increased investment by the Government since 1997 has led to new courses to maximise parental participation. Developed by the Basic Skills Agency, these include Keeping Up with the Children, Early Start, intensive family literacy courses in community settings as well as in schools, online family literacy support and new approaches developed by Skills for Families programmes.

After taking part in these courses, many parents develop a taste for learning, go to college and gain qualifications, while some go on to become school governors or classroom assistants.

Case Study: Oakenrod Community Garden

A group of parents in Rochdale, with the support of community artists and a family literacy tutor from the LEA's Partnership Education Service, reclaimed a derelict area next to their children's school to create a garden and play area. Literacy improvement for the families, most of whom have English as an additional language, was an integral part of the project: books were used as source materials, and parents got involved in writing plans and diagrams. Discussing the planning and execution of the garden built parents' confidence and speaking skills. Since some of the activity took place on Saturdays, fathers and siblings were able to participate, and the asylum seeker families involved found a supportive social group. Teaching staff also joined in and included elements of the garden in the school curriculum. An unexpected outcome was that newly-confident parents led a campaign to keep the school and garden open when it was threatened with closure. A separate independent evaluation of the Partnership Education Service's involvement with community artists was carried out, and parents' feedback indicated that the opportunity for practical learning and producing something unique often overcame their apprehensions about literacy learning. The garden project was funded by a variety of sources apart from the LEA: Education Extra, the Children's Fund, the Millennium Reading Fund, the LSC, BTCV and parents' own fundraising.

The evidence on supporting parents at key stage 3 and 4 is less conclusive

Transplanting the family literacy model to parents with children in Year 7 has had less success, though there is some evidence from practitioners that IT courses and courses around money management ('financial literacy') can be successful 'hooks' to get parents involved in schools and interested in getting a qualification (often in IT). School approaches tend to be directed towards helping parents with older children change their children's learning behaviour (e.g. through the Excellence in Cities programme) rather than giving equal weight to supporting parents in the improvement of their own literacy skills. This would seem to be a fruitful area for research to see how parenting support in this context could also provide improved outcomes regarding employability.

Gaps in our knowledge

We do not have sufficient understanding of how to support at-risk parents with poor literacy skills, and also how to engage and support fathers. Obviously it takes time to

engage parents with low self-esteem, and especially those in greatest need of support – those with multiple challenges in their lives. Sometimes this is resolved, where programmes are sufficiently flexible, but there are concerns that those most at risk either fail to participate or drop out. Most family literacy programmes attract women and there is little research-based evidence as to the type of programmes that best meet fathers' needs. These concerns, and other policy challenges around funding, programme flexibility, professional development and the need for research and development, are described in the Hannon and Bird chapter in a recently published US handbook of family literacy, and summarised on the Literacy and Social Inclusion website.

Questions

1. How can funding mechanisms provide sustained support for parents in their parenting role, as part of the package to help them improve their literacy skills?
2. How can institutions in contact with parents provide a 'facilitating' or supportive role to help them improve their literacy skills? What support might they need?
3. How might research inform our understanding of how to design programmes that support parents' literacy within a wider support framework for families at risk?
4. How might research inform the development of effective approaches that involve fathers in literacy activity?
5. How might the Children Bill and *Every Child Matters: the next steps*, provide the strategic framework for improving the literacy skills of families at risk?

Working with children and young people

Three groups were identified in the review process: children who attend school but are disengaged; the 'lost children' who, for whatever reason, are outside the education system; and disaffected young people who require more vocational training with in-built literacy support. The following issues were identified:

Opportunities to improve verbal communication skills

Many young people with poor literacy also have poor verbal communication skills: boys (and girls) need opportunities to develop a discursive language, to develop confidence in their ability to articulate their feelings and responses to their world, as a precursor to improving their reading and writing skills. Young people who are better able to handle

dealing with authority, and who can articulate their views using appropriate language and who listen to the views of others, are more likely to develop good personal relationships. Understanding the power of language in effective verbal communication helps young people to appreciate more how they might, through improved literacy skills, have greater influence.

Book choice

Providing opportunities for children and young people to choose books helps to develop an interest in learning, especially where there is little previous experience of books in the home. This highlights the importance of working in partnership with the library service; library staff, like other non-teachers, are sometimes in a better position to develop different, more equal relationships with young people. Library staff also bring in other professional skills and provide young people with access to a wide range of library services. The Summer Reading Challenge which encourages book reading linked to fun events, and library outreach work such as the YouthBOOX project which works with the youth service to attract young people into libraries using books that specifically interest their age group, help to break down barriers to a vital local service that strengthens literacy for learning and enjoyment.

Case Study: Buddy Reading

Buddy Reading, run by Derbyshire community literacy initiative Read On – Write Away! (ROWA!), trains young people who are either care leavers, excluded pupils or young offenders in specific skills needed to support primary school children in their reading. Buddy Reading has improved the literacy skills of both parties, as well as the self-esteem and social and organisational skills of the young people, who can have their work accredited by the Open College Network. It also gives them a sense of structure which may have been missing from their lives before, as they have to ‘contract’ work with the younger child. The enthusiastic response of the younger children to their older buddies, and the fact that the young people are respected by the school staff, perhaps for the first time in their lives, help to reverse their negative experience of education. A large percentage have gone on to other forms of training. Buddy Reading is run in partnership with the Step Forward Educational Trust and After Care projects, and has won a national Community Care award. An evaluation by Lancaster University found that ROWA! was effective in forming partnerships and heightening literacy awareness among organisations not involved in education. These partners now see themselves as part of a community literacy strategy.

Arts and sports motivate many

A recurring theme from the consultation process was the potentially powerful role of the arts and cultural agencies, and sport, in providing disaffected children, young people and adults with the motivation to tackle their skills deficits. The use of storytellers and drama, musicians, other artists, libraries, museums and galleries can stimulate an interest in the development of language and wider communication skills. Without reducing the impact of the art activity, there should also be an opportunity, at the appropriate stage, to improve reading and writing skills. Encouraging a sensory and emotional response to artefacts can, in some cases, break down personal barriers to engagement at many levels, including skills learning.

Case Study: Txt, Lies and Audiotape

This was a New Opportunities Fund partnership project between Tate Modern and St Thomas the Apostle College in Nunhead. Twelve-year-old pupils, some of whom were in danger of exclusion, wrote text messages based on the formal writings of gallery text panels. They developed these text messages into designs, which were later printed on to T-shirts.

Txt, Lies and Audiotape 2, a follow-up project, aimed to create an alternative audio guide to accompany the Nude/Action/Body suite at the Tate Modern, using the pupils' communication and descriptive skills. The school reported that the boys' confidence in speaking, leading discussions and tackling complex issues was enhanced as a result of the project, and that the partnership with the gallery had increased in value over its three years and led to a strong working relationship.

Questions

1. Is the development of language and wider communications skills acknowledged, and built in, to literacy support for young people?
2. How can extra-curricular activities incorporate a literacy skills dimension in their work? What features would need to be in place?
3. How might out-of-school approaches to improving young people's literacy skills be developed to include a parental learning strand?
4. In the light of the Children Bill and *Every Child Matters: the next steps*, who might be responsible for coordinating support for home and community literacy approaches?

Upskilling adults at risk

Two groups were identified in the review and consultation process: first, there are those adults with poor literacy who do not see themselves as learners, who need their confidence boosting along with a reason to learn. Second, there are the 'hard to reach' who present multiple challenges of which poor literacy is just one. Within this group, there is a wide spectrum of literacy and learning needs. The following key issues were identified:

A wider vision of literacy skills learning

With the first group, taster courses or sessions can provide enjoyable learning experiences which encourage further participation, even though participants will not see themselves as 'learners' at this stage. Informal approaches work best, with minimum assessment of learning need, so that they are not put off. Providing participants with a choice of what to do next (a 'menu' of activities) encourages a sense of 'ownership' and commitment to attend. Practitioners can build in literacy tasks to the activity, where appropriate, be explicit about them and offer support where necessary. Recognising achievements, and celebrating success, builds confidence over time and an interest in more focused learning opportunities, leading to qualifications. There is some concern that a concentration on assessment might be inappropriate if introduced too soon; such a view is expressed in a recent NIACE discussion paper describing the development of the Skills for Life approach to assessment and the national literacy tests.

Case Study: South Wye Literacy Project

The South Wye Literacy Project is an independent voluntary organisation which provides basic skills tuition to adults living in an area where 32% of residents have basic skills needs. The project aims to meet the learners' individual needs and provide support and pastoral care for them. They enrol only once and are then members for life, and courses run on the calendar year, not the school year. Open College Network and OCR accredited units are mapped against the Adult Core Curriculum and delivered one-to-one by trained volunteer tutors, or in small groups; many are run in the workplace. Here, the project has found that it is best to begin by offering practical courses such as first aid or food handling, which have an immediate and obvious benefit both to employer and employee, and in which basic skills can be embedded without any stigma. The South Wye Literacy Project has found that some people, having had their achievements celebrated, have begun to see themselves as learners for the first time, and have felt able to sign up for other courses. The project is funded by the LSC, the Single Regeneration Budget and Herefordshire Council.

Effective learning provision for adults in the most challenging circumstances (such as homeless people, those recovering from drug or alcohol addiction, with mental illness, on probation or in prison) means being able to respond to their pressing needs before, or sometimes concurrently with, focusing on improving their literacy. This might include securing accommodation, or dealing with debt or addiction, an excluded child or a personal or family health problem. By allowing adult tutors to take a wider view of 'literacy support', rather than isolated skills learning, adults with poor literacy can be helped to develop the appropriate language and communication skills to deal more effectively with the issues they face. That process may include specific and relevant reading or writing tasks, for example, writing a letter to the housing office. Once literacy is identified as one way of dealing with situations of stress, engagement in the learning process deepens – along with the thirst for more skills. As many literacy learners have testified, once they become hooked, there is no stopping them. In these circumstances, a one-to-one approach may be needed.

Importance of teachers' personal qualities

Literacy teachers trained to national standards are vitally important. But other skills are needed in order to work with adults who do not perceive themselves as learners: skills of persuasion, encouragement and reassurance along with a belief in the capacity of everyone to re-focus and improve their life chances. Where the settings are risky and personally challenging, consideration needs to be given to staff supervision sessions, which are not part of the culture of adult learning, but certainly the expectation in the social services field.

Literacy support for front-line staff as well as service users

The importance of signposting service users to seek help with their literacy and numeracy is recognised in the Skills for Life strategy. In a number of pilot projects to build basic skills awareness in different front-line areas (including nursery staff through Step in to Learning, and supporters in the community and the prison service through the Link Up project), significant numbers of those in positions of potential influence have been found to have inadequate skills levels themselves, and in some cases basic skills needs. Where this is not addressed, the consequences may be low-level resistance to giving others the help they also need. Enlisting the support of front-line workers needs therefore to include advice and support to enable those with identified needs to improve their own literacy skills.

Case Study: LifeLine Community Projects

LifeLine Community Projects (LCP) is a London charity which offers courses for adults through learndirect and a partnership with the local further education college, along with ESOL classes and parenting sessions. LCP has accessed funding from various sources to run programmes that make the most of its IT training centre: a contract with Jobcentre Plus has resulted in a package of learning targeted at ethnic minorities, which includes ESOL and IT classes with a crèche, and 'life skills' sessions in CV preparation, interview technique etc. The London Development Agency funds LCP to run a vocational computer networking course, and the LSC provides funding to engage parents in IT-based learning through the Department for Education and Skills' Test Bed Project in schools. In 2003 LCP, together with the local authority and the Council for Voluntary Service, established the Barking & Dagenham Training Provider's Network, which helps 55 community-based providers to access information and funding, and to signpost learners to the most appropriate training.

Questions

1. How does main education spend and LSC funding support partnership development time and long-term support necessary to help engage disaffected young people and adults not predisposed towards learning?
2. Are teachers working with at-risk adults given adequate training and supervision?
3. How are front-line workers, including those in the voluntary and community sector, supported in their own skills needs, as well as in their capacity to encourage others to seek help with their literacy?
4. How can the experiences of other organisations in contact with at-risk adults in the health, housing and criminal justice fields contribute to our understanding of what works?
5. Can the experiences of adult literacy teachers in meeting the needs of adults at risk, and the adult core curriculum, be utilised in the proposed 14-19 curriculum reforms? What might the issues be?

6. The policy challenge

Despite heavy investment in education and social inclusion policies, there is widespread recognition that the system is continuing to create people who fail. Understanding the key influences on the literacy learner means policymakers can plan strategically to overcome the barriers to successful learning among those at risk, and, through partnerships, address the deep resistance that exists in many communities. Our review and consultations point to successful home and community literacy practices across many policy areas with a range of partners.

Despite the research evidence, and what practitioners tell us and policymakers acknowledge, there are contradictory forces that militate against long-term success. This leads us to suggest ways that Government policy might be improved to support the long-term literacy achievement of children, young people and adults at risk. We are keen to work with partners within Government, and other interested organisations, to see how we might work up some specific policy proposals over the next few months.

These are some of the policy challenges:

Targets which inhibit literacy support for those most at risk

Targets provide a clear focus, and public accountability, but their presence – or absence – may result in unintended consequences. Groups at risk of exclusion and those living in disadvantaged communities are among the target groups for the Skills for Life strategy to improve adult literacy, numeracy and language. There are concerns, consistently expressed during our consultation process, that a narrow basic skills focus in adult learning provision which is heavily influenced by the national achievement targets can put off some adults with complex problems.

The importance of rich early language and reading experiences is well understood and embedded in early years educational practice, and strengthened by the Sure Start initiative. However, encouragement of these skills is not a priority in all homes, or among health professionals who have the most contact with families in the early years and who are primarily concerned, understandably, with child protection and health issues. In this case, there are concerns that cutting the Sure Start target for library enrolments may lead to a reduction in the influence of library staff, people who are in a good position to promote early language and reading activities to families with very young children.

Taking partnerships seriously

For effective partnerships, different perceptions of partners need to be articulated and solutions worked through. Where insufficient time (or funding) is provided, issues may remain unresolved and minor partners (but perhaps important ones in terms of their influence with those most at risk) are more likely to withdraw, thus reducing the potential impact on the literacy learner. What are the incentives for the major institutions of schools, colleges and local education authorities to involve community partners, including library services, the youth service and the voluntary and community sector, in their efforts to raise literacy achievement for all? Inflexible mainstream funding systems with short-term funding for repeated cycles of outreach activity among the same at-risk client groups are a major barrier to long-term engagement and skills learning.

Additional support to meet exceptional challenge

Across the board, supporting at-risk young people and adults to improve their literacy skills requires the best teachers available who can motivate, personalise learning and provide opportunities for students to achieve the important small steps to success. Institutions working in challenging circumstances need to be properly resourced to do so, within a framework that encourages innovation and risk-taking. For example, schools working with large numbers of at-risk pupils need the same freedom as high performing schools to develop a curriculum relevant to the needs of all their pupils. John Gray's work has highlighted concerns that many English schools are taking a tactical route on school improvement (to improve their standing in the league tables), others follow a strategic path seeking to raise student achievement over time, and only a few see the solution as building the capacity of the organisation and developing its staff, increasing its resilience and sparking creativity.

Teacher shortages raise questions about how institutions allocate their human resources, given the need to raise achievement across the board, but especially to meet benchmark targets, whether it is the numbers of students who achieve 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE, or the numbers of adults achieving nationally recognised level 2 qualifications. How can institutions be encouraged to provide a fair deal for those most at risk, without being penalised on other core targets? And how can the national curriculum frameworks and the inspection process support, or inhibit, good literacy practices with those most at risk?

'Literacy-aware' learning champions, mentors and advocates

Many socially excluded young people and adults will be more influenced to improve their literacy skills by those not perceived as 'authority'. Schemes abound that offer one-to-one

advice and support, including Excellence in Cities learning mentors, reading volunteers and business mentors in schools, Sure Start champions, Connexions advisers and neighbourhood wardens. There is a developing expertise in how to best help those with potential influence to identify and support those with poor literacy, for example, through the Step in to Learning, Link Up and Skills for Families national programmes developed by the Basic Skills Agency. There is potential for a core training programme to be developed that includes a literacy component to raise awareness of how volunteers and mentors can support the wider reading for pleasure and skills agendas. The programme would need to include advice and support for those volunteers, and staff, who may have literacy skills needs themselves.

A lack of a literacy focus in extended schools

Extended schools are currently being promoted to provide services that might include out-of-school-hours learning activities, as well as health and social care, childcare, adult education and family learning, leisure activities, and IT access. A clear literacy focus as one of the roles of extended schools would facilitate additional literacy support for young people, and help for parents' own literacy and learning needs. The presence of a member of staff, trained in literacy issues, but not perceived as a teacher, would help schools to develop a high-profile culture for reading that involves parents and community partners, with separate literacy support for at-risk individual children and their families. Classroom teachers would benefit from more skilled and motivated children, adding value to the primary and key stage 3 strategies.

7. Summary and Conclusions

To summarise, our analysis points to four key drivers that will have the greatest impact on improving the literacy skills of those of all ages at risk:

1. Professional practice, underpinned by appropriate professional development, which values the contribution of home and community literacy activity and knows how to make it work. This needs to be coupled with an understanding that positive relationships and effective partnerships take time to show results – maybe several years
2. Clear lines of responsibility for the development of a home and community literacy strategy to improve literacy participation, enjoyment and skills achievement for those of all ages
3. Institutional targets for schools, colleges and other learning providers which support long-term engagement to build self-esteem, motivation and skills among those most at risk, and that recognise progress (and achievements) along the way
4. A funding formula that nurtures the development of home and community literacy approaches, according to the strengths of local partnerships, within a strategic framework that is aspirational but also driven by quality assurance

Finally, this paper has highlighted the findings so far of the Literacy and Social Inclusion Project. A number of policy issues and questions have been raised for those within, and outside, the education service to consider. Addressing these issues, we believe, will take us closer to achieving our long-term goals of improved literacy participation and skills, and sustained employability, for those of all ages most at risk.

Appendix 1: Background to the project

The Literacy and Social Inclusion Project is a three-year Basic Skills Agency national support project delivered by the National Literacy Trust. It started in November 2002.

The broad aims of the project are to:

1. Explore the key indicators of changed literacy practices and improved skills in the context of social inclusion
2. Identify 'what works' for those with few skills and educational experiences and attitudes that put them, or their children, at risk
3. Provide evidence about the step changes necessary to achieve outcomes at a personal level

Project Milestones

- A regional consultation process, carried out in June-July 2003 via Government Offices in the Regions, involved a large number of policy and practice areas operating across the age spectrum, including Sure Start, Children's Fund, Connexions, Jobcentre Plus, prison and probation services, further education colleges, learndirect, local education authorities, schools and the voluntary and community sector.
 - A new website was launched in July 2003 providing information and analysis on policy, research and practice concerning home and community literacy practices across the five key themes:
 - early language and reading
 - working with parents
 - out-of-school-hours support
 - motivating disaffected young people
 - upskilling adults at risk
 - A response to the consultation for the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* was submitted to the Department for Education and Skills in November 2003.
See www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion/youngpeople/ECMresp.doc
 - A separate consultation event was held in Wales in February 2004, in partnership with the Basic Skills Agency which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the National Strategy for Basic Skills in Wales.
- For more information on the project visit www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion

Appendix 2: Key research summaries

Key research showing the links between social exclusion and poor reading

Basic Skills and Social Exclusion drew on data from the reading test sat by the 1970 British Cohort Study at age ten. It established that at age 16, over half of boys with poor reading skills think school is a waste of time and nearly four in five want to leave school as soon as possible. Poor reading is an important element of social exclusion, with early risk factors compounding the process (social class, parents' education, overcrowded housing). Additional risk factors include having parents with little interest in their child's education or who are unsure about, or do not want their child to pursue, education or training post-16, and an overcrowded home.

Evidence from the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment* shows that social background is a powerful factor influencing performance, but that poor performance does not automatically follow; 15-year-old students, whose parents have the lowest occupational status but who read regularly and feel positive about it, are better readers than students with home advantages and weaker reading engagement. The researchers conclude that working to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to break the cycle of educational and social disadvantage.

Research findings which have been influential in the developing project analysis

Early years

1. The US *Harvard Home-School Study* has interviewed children since the age of three (they are now 16) and showed that the greatest predictor of their literacy development was support for literacy in the home; the areas of greatest impact were sharing books, extended talk at mealtimes and opportunities to chat about things beyond the here and now.
2. The Institute of Education's *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE)* research project in England confirmed that a high quality home learning environment (HLE), where parents are actively engaged in activities with children, promoted intellectual and social development in all children, and could be viewed as a 'protective' factor in reducing incidence of special educational needs. Although parents' social class and levels of education were related to child outcomes, the quality of the HLE was more important. The HLE was only moderately associated with social class and the mother's educational level.

3. The *Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP)* runs weekly group sessions in areas of disadvantage for families with very young children. Session leaders model different ways of sharing books with children, songs and rhymes are taught, and the contribution of everyday talk to children's development is emphasised. Evaluation showed that children in the PEEP group made significantly greater progress in their learning than those in the comparison group, in the areas of vocabulary, language comprehension, understanding about books and print, and number concepts. In addition, the PEEP children had higher self esteem in the areas of their feelings about their cognitive and physical competence. However, no study has yet determined the long-term impact of the PEEP intervention.

Working with parents

4. Evaluations of the *family literacy demonstration programmes* by the National Foundation for Educational Research reported on positive changes in attitudes and literacy practices on the part of participating parents which were maintained when they were re-interviewed six months later. The follow-up research showed that family literacy children were holding their own, and their educational prospects were better than they would have been without the programme.

5. The *Flouri and Buchanan* research discovered that father involvement at age seven and mother involvement at age seven significantly and independently predict higher educational achievement by age 20 and this applies to both girls and boys. An involved father is defined as one who reads to his child, takes outings with his child, is interested in his child's education and takes a role equal to mother's in managing his child.

6. The University of Sheffield's *REAL Project* developed a conceptual framework to help parents support their children's early learning, known as the ORIM framework – Opportunities to read texts; attempt writing and to talk about literacy; Recognition of early literacy achievements; Interaction with more proficient literacy users; and a Model of what it is to use written language in everyday life.

7. The *Charles Desforges review* concluded that 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement, even after all other factors affecting attainment have been taken into account. Good parenting in the home includes the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship.

Out-of-school-hours support

8. Greg Brooks' review in 2003 of *What works for children with literacy difficulties?* analysed approximately 40 intervention schemes, large and small, in a common framework. He identified a number of literacy approaches which produced a good impact and resulted in children catching up. Though mainly directed at classroom approaches, he concluded that working on phonological skills should be embedded within a broad approach, while working on children's self-esteem and reading in parallel had 'definite potential'; reading partners, if properly trained and supported, can be effective.

Motivating disaffected young people

9. The Prince's Trust research *Reaching the Hard to Reach: Breaking Barriers?* showed that the aims and aspirations of disadvantaged young people were very similar to those of all young people, although they do shift with maturity, and include having a family, an interesting job, and sufficient money to support their lifestyle. However, while 41% of the disadvantaged felt they were held back by a lack of qualifications, for many, there was a lack of understanding as to how they would achieve their aims in life.

10. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) evaluation of *Playing for Success* showed that participation in the scheme significantly improved the reading comprehension scores of underachieving young people at secondary school, boys and girls equally. Key success factors were the football or sports club setting which motivated pupils to become involved, the use of computers and the Internet, opportunities for choice of study and to develop independent study skills – and the chance to improve their sports skills too.

11. Evaluation of Ultralab's *Notschool.net*, which functions as an online community for teenagers who, for a variety of reasons, are out of school for a long time, showed that using the new technology and the support of 'mentors' (teachers) and 'buddies' (university students), the literacy skills of the young people improved. Most of them had very low levels of literacy when they joined the project, but they made "clear learning gains", mapped through their use of 'stickies', the virtual sticky notes that enable researchers to communicate with mentors and with each other, and in the accreditation they achieved. [Notschool.net is working with QCA to develop new forms of accreditation using technology, for example by having the researchers produce an electronic portfolio and justify its contents orally using their mobile phones.]

12. *Getting Connected* is a curriculum framework for disengaged young adults, developed by the Young Adult Learners Partnership (YALP), a joint initiative of NIACE and the National Youth Agency. Practitioners work as mentors to the young people, helping them produce evidence of their achievements in learning units. Initial findings from the evaluation, admittedly based on a small sample, indicate that the initiative is succeeding in its aim of fostering social inclusion by equipping young adults with the tools and confidence to participate in their communities and to deal with authority. Factors that contribute to the effective implementation of *Getting Connected* are the skills and qualities of the mentor, a focus on issues that matter to the young people, building their confidence and interpersonal skills, and an environment in which learners feel comfortable and secure.
13. YALP has identified '*Success factors in informal learning: young adults' experience of basic skills*'. The success factors identified so far are: 'hooks' and tailored provision that build on learners' interests and offer tangible rewards; non-academic approaches which work with young adults' communication and learning styles; a recognition of whether or not accreditation is important to the group; and basic skills which are integrated and linked to vocational interests, but not disguised.

Upskilling adults at risk

14. The 2003 *Skills for Life* survey reported that adults with poor literacy skills may not necessarily recognise that their skills are limited. Very few adults regard their reading, maths or language skills as below average, even those with skills at the lowest levels of ability. The survey also established that language was a barrier to those whose first language was not English and only one in four achieved a Level 2 or above in the literacy assessment (equivalent to a good GCSE).
15. *Community-focused provision of adult literacy, numeracy and language: an exploratory study*, funded by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) for adult literacy, numeracy and language, identified the key features of successful community provision: development, vision, and delivery. Delivery can be further understood by a holistic view of learning, concern about learning situations, quality and integrating basic skills without making them too apparent. A fourth issue, funding, emerged as absolutely critical.
16. The NFER evaluation of the *Adult and Community Learning Fund*, established in 1998 to increase access to locally-based learning opportunities, identified that adults' progress

in developing new skills was dependent on their confidence and emerging identity as learners. The programmes helped improve learners' basic skills, including reading more, and more advanced material, improvements in spelling and using a wider range of vocabulary in writing. The evaluation also finds that one year is not enough time to set up and run a programme which will be truly effective in reaching these client groups.

17. Evaluation of *basic skills programmes in the Probation Service* showed the high unemployment rate among offenders, but only a small proportion of those with basic skills needs having access to provision. Of those who did, attendance was often sporadic and drop-out rates were high. The researchers reported that there was a clear need for motivational strategies, a flexible approach to take account of individuals' needs, and probation staff who were committed to basic skills interventions.
18. *Use of libraries*: University of Sheffield research for Re:source (now MLA) identified that although many low achieving adult learners are using the public library service heavily they are doing so predominantly for leisure and are not as aware of the potential of the public library as a learning environment as other users. They were less likely to use IT, and not accessing those library services provided electronically.

In the workplace

19. The NRDC research review on *English for Speakers of Other Languages provision in the workplace* showed that language is a dimension of racial discrimination in 'gate-keeping' encounters such as formal recruitment and promotion procedures, and ESOL programmes often include an element of intercultural awareness training. The evidence is largely from North America and Australia as there is very little research in the UK, reflecting the low levels of provision so far.
20. A review by the Learning and Skills Development Agency identified the *key factors in successful workplace basic skills practice*, including the need to consider basic skills as a part of the firm's overall training and development programme. Basic skills tuition in the workplace is most effective if it is in working time and free to the learner.
21. *NRDC research into the impact of adult literacy and numeracy on small businesses in rural Lincolnshire and Rutland* indicated that small business managers do not see literacy and numeracy as the kinds of capital they value. This lack of interest on the part of employers and employees is a deep-seated part of rural ways of life, with a tendency in men to undervalue learning in favour of practical work.

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