

Updated North West Skills for Life Strategy 2008-2011



Leading learning and skills

21 August 2008

Background

- 1 In March 2001, the Government launched its Skills for Life Strategy aimed at improving adult skills in literacy, numeracy and language to ensure they had better opportunities in life – both professional and personal. Since then Adult Certificates in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) have been developed, alongside a delivery curriculum and an infrastructure for the training of delivery staff.
- 2 The original Public Service Agreement (PSA) target of 2.25 million adults to improve their literacy, numeracy or language (ESOL) skills by a level by 2010 has been achieved early (2,276,000 by July 2008).
- 3 Since then, Lord Leitch published in December 2006 his ambitious goals for 2020, which if achieved, would make the UK a world leader in Skills. Within this document there was an aspiration that 95% of adults should have functional literacy/ESOL skills at level 1 or above and functional numeracy skills at entry level 3 or above. Current baselines would suggest that in the North West the actual figure of adults operating at these levels is 83% for literacy/ ESOL at level 1 and 75% for numeracy at entry level 3 (DFES 2003 Survey). Therefore Skills for Life continues to be a key priority for all stakeholders and providers in the region. In particular there needs to be an increased focus in numeracy provision, which in the past has been in the shadow of literacy programmes
- 4 On 6 June 2008, the National Audit Office published a document looking at the progress made in Skills for Life; “Skills for Life: Progress in Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy”. This document made a number of recommendations for the future focus for Skills for Life and the key areas of activity highlighted have been used as the framework for the North West Skills for Life Implementation Plan. Highlights include;
 - the need to deliver more numeracy provision,
 - monitor the potential impact of other agendas including functional skills (set to replace Skills for Life adult qualifications in 2013) and the foundation learning tier,
 - improve participation and achievement on Skills for Life programmes,
 - improve participation on Skills for Life programmes from priority groups, including Jobcentre Plus clients and offenders,

- more support to encourage employers to invest in Skills for Life development for their employees (including better use of Train to Gain
- increased engagement with the Third Sector (voluntary and community organisations),
- continue to invest in professional development of teaching staff.

Priorities for the Region

- 5 In the North West there has been significant progress. The region achieved 108% of its 2001- 2004 Public Service Agreement (PSA) target. The 2004-07 regional target for learner achievement was 109,670 and by August 2007 the North West had achieved 244, 329 (223%). The region has achieved a further 12,106 learner achievements in the first term of 2007-8. (Annex 1 outlines which qualifications are counted as part of the PSA target.) However the majority of this provision was delivered at levels 1 and 2 and therefore more needs to be done to improve achievement of entry level provision, especially as this is the functional level identified for numeracy.
- 6 North West providers have also achieved the aspirational benchmark of 80:20 – approved/target: non approved provision. In 2006-7 the balance and mix for the region was 82: 20. However this move may have affected the success rates for Skills for Life provision as approved qualifications are more difficult to achieve.
- 7 The North West success rate for all Skills for Life provision (all subjects, all levels, all funding streams) is 53%. This is below the national average of 57% and significantly below the DIUS aspiration of 70% to be achieved by 2010. Therefore further support for providers needs to be put in place to ensure this position improves.

Key Actions

- 8 The region is also looking to disaggregate Skills for Life targets in the future to regionally planned programmes, such as Offender Learning, Train to Gain and Employability Skills Programme (Skills for Life programme for Jobseeker Allowance claimants), and to sub-regions based on adult responsive fund allocations. This will encourage a wider ownership of the target and promote more engagement of adults to contribute to targets through all funding streams/activities.
- 9 The region will also be planning to respond to recommendations made as part of the recent consultation on ESOL provision carried out by DIUS (expected in Autumn 2008) and the National Numeracy for Employability Strategy (expected Summer 2008).
- 10 The region will also need to consider how learners are engaged and what interventions may be required to allow them to persist in learning. (Persistence describes a learner's commitment to pursuing and completing a personal learning journey, no matter how complex or how long the process takes.) Providers need to review current policies, practices and modes of delivery to give learners the best possible chance of persisting. This will be

key as many of the easier to reach learners may have been engaged and as the strategy develops more innovative and flexible ways of delivering programmes may be required to deliver to those “hardest to reach” but with the most need. This will also support progression within entry level provision and therefore the hope that ultimately more adults are able to achieve functional levels in literacy/ ESOL and numeracy in future years.

- 11 The Government is devolving responsibility to collaborative partnerships with employers at their centre. These partnerships will need to have strong relationships at geographical levels, with Regional Development Agencies and Local Strategic Partnerships and develop value-added proposals through local partnerships, for example Working Neighbourhoods Fund, City Strategy areas, Local and Multi-Area Agreements. Skills for Life will play a critical part in delivering on these proposals. There is also greater emphasis on the need for more responsive delivery, both personalised and targeted. This implies that local policymakers have to be constantly reviewing the characteristics and geography of workless people and the nature of employer demand and developing strategies and services to meet their requirements.
- 12 Currently the North West Jobcentre Plus (JCP) procure New Deal provision which delivers numeracy and literacy skills up to level 2. Although not broken down by subject, JCP expects to support 1000 Skills for Life qualifications a year.

The North West Skills for Life implementation plan

- 13 The plan will be delivered through partners in the region. It is envisaged that it will evolve over time and be monitored on a quarterly basis by the North West Skills for Life Strategy Group and amended as appropriate to reflect any revision of priorities. Review of the plan will also help to ensure that actions will be delivered and that they have made a significant impact across the North West region. This plan should also form the basis of a joint investment plan.

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Annex 1

Counting Achievements

Achievements that can be counted towards meeting the PSA (2001-2010) target fall into the following categories. They are as follows:

- a. The Certificate in Adult Literacy, Numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at Entry Level 3, Level 1 and 2 (National Tests)
- b. Key skills qualifications in communication and application of number at level 1 and 2
- c. GCSE in Maths and GCSE English (post 16)
- d. Functional maths and English at level 1 and 2

National modelling for Leitch

National LSC have carried out some modelling in order for the LSC to measure achievement towards the Leitch aspirations. They are outlined in the table below. It is estimated that a significant amount of achievements at levels higher than the functional levels identified by Leitch are “first” achievements and therefore will need to be captured when monitoring progress. Current benchmarks suggest that 30% of level 2 achievements in literacy and ESOL are learners achieving for the first time and 50% of level 1 and level 2 achievements in numeracy are from learners achieving for the first time, and thus will be included as counting towards Leitch aspirations.

Subject	Level achieved	% which contributes to Leitch Aspirations
Literacy	Level 1	100%
Literacy	Level 2	30%
ESOL	Level 1	100%
ESOL	Level 2	30%
Numeracy	Entry level 3	100%
Numeracy	Level 1	50%
Numeracy	Level 2	50%

Policy Note

In 2008-9 the LSC will continue to fund all Skills for Life activity, from pre-entry to level 2 and this will remain priority provision for planning purposes.