

North West Skills for Life Strategy 2007-2010

31 March 2007

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. Aims of the Strategy included improved training for delivery and support of learners, the development of adult certificates in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to ensure a common approach to delivery, the identification of target groups and the announcement of the National Public Service Agreement (PSA) target of 2.25 million adults to improve their literacy, numeracy or language (ESOL) skills by a level by 2010.
- 2 Since March 2001, Skills for Life has featured in a number of key Government strategies, including the Foster Report, the Skills Strategy, the 14-19 Implementation Plan (functional skills) and the Leitch Report. All of these documents have highlighted the importance of the underpinning skills of literacy, language and numeracy in order for overall achievement and economic progress in the UK to be sustained and improved upon in the future. Leitch in particular recommended that 95% of adults should have functional literacy (level 1) and functional numeracy (entry level 3) skills in order for the UK to remain economically competitive in 2020.
- 3 In January 2006, the Government produced a Public Accounts Committee Report, which reviewed the progress made against the Skills for Life Strategy's aims and objectives. It concluded that although much progress had been made with regards to the introduction of a quality framework and learner achievement, there were still areas which need to be improved. These included the need to better plan funding resource to support delivery of provision, to ensure that "hard to reach" learners were accessing support and to encourage more adults to access learning opportunities.

The North West

- 4 The delivery of high quality, appropriate Skills for Life provision is important for the North West's economy and society. It is important economically as demographic pressures on the skills market means that;
 - there is a pressing need to get more of those adults not currently engaged in the labour market into jobs

- employers who offered low-skilled jobs in the past, are now wanting their employees to work more flexibly and at a higher skills level.
- Gross Value Added (GVA or output) per head of the North West is still 12% lower than in England, resulting in an output gap of £13bn.

If the North West is to achieve its ambition of transforming itself into a competitive, high added value economy, innovation together with high-level skills provision is essential. Without improving the Skills for Life of adults in the region, none of this will be achievable and as a result, Skills for Life is an essential part of the Regional Statement of Skills Priorities.

- 5 In the Regional Statement of Skills Priorities document for 2007-10, one of the priorities is to; "Increase the proportion of adults with the skills and qualifications needed for employment, with a focus on Skills for Life and Level 2 attainment". Skills for Life is also contained in the Regional Economic Strategy produced each year.
- 6 As a society, people who are excluded from the labour market are likely to be alienated more generally, preventing adults from supporting their children, participating in social and civic activities and accessing support from health and other government agencies.
- 7 In recognising this fact the North West Region, led by the LSC, has developed this evolving three-year Skills for Life strategy and implementation plan.

Performance

- 8 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 is 109,670. By October 2006, the region had already achieved 117% (128,063) of this target. (Annex 1 outlines which qualifications are counted as part of the PSA target.)
- 9 Between August 2004 and July 2006 there were 706,342 learning opportunities taken up by 359,270 learners. Of these learners, 64% were over 19 years old. However when looking at the age profile of those learners contributing to the Skills for Life PSA target, only 51% were over 19 (65,375 learners). More needs to be done to encourage adults to enrol onto and achieve Skills for Life qualifications which contribute towards target as recommended by the Public Accounts Committee Report and the original Skills for Life Strategy.
- 10 Latest data would suggest that only 43% of learners enrolling onto Skills for Life programmes were following those which count directly towards the PSA target, with a further 18% of learners following first rung provision that leads to target qualifications. Therefore 39% of learners are following Skills for Life "other provision" More needs to be done to ensure that these learners are given the opportunity to progress onto approved qualifications, including those which contribute directly to the governments PSA target. Skills for Life should not be seen as an end in itself but a vehicle to progression onto other learning opportunities. To support this aim, from August 2007, only approved

level 1 and 2 provision will be funded as Skills for Life through the mainstream LSC funding. "Other provision" level 1 and two literacy, language and numeracy programmes will not.

Level of need in the region

- 11 In October 2003, the DfES carried out a survey on Skills for Life needs (for adults aged 16-64) across England. Annex 2 shows the level of need across the North West for literacy, numeracy and ESOL skills.
- 12 The data shows that the majority of adults in the North West have **literacy** skills at level 1. When comparing Local LSC areas, the data indicates that Greater Merseyside has the greatest number of adults with entry level literacy skills and that Cumbria has the greatest number of adults with level 2 literacy skills.
- 13 The survey highlighted the fact that **numeracy** needs are much greater than literacy needs across the whole of the North West. In Greater Merseyside 61% of the population have numeracy skills at entry level. Cheshire and Warrington has the highest proportion of the population with numeracy skills at level 2 (21%).
- 14 Greater Manchester has the highest number of adults with **ESOL** needs, followed by Lancashire. The number of adults requiring ESOL support however is likely to have increased since 2003 as a result of the increase in migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees coming into the North West.
- 15 The region will be working with NIACE in response to their Committee of Enquiry Report on ESOL (published in October 2006) and will consider appropriate actions to be taken as a result through the North West ESOL Task Group.
- 16 The results of the survey would suggest that the region needs to ensure more is being done to address numeracy needs, whilst monitoring the expected change in ESOL (language) need and demand.
- 17 The region acknowledges the fact that this baseline data is four years old and is awaiting a national approach to estimating level of need in line with Leitch report recommendations.

Going forward

- 18 The North West has identified the following key objectives for Skills for Life over the next three years;
 - Ensure achievement of PSA target for Skills for Life.
 - Increase the contribution from adults to this target and ensure the curriculum being delivered is appropriate to the level of need.
 - Influence the embedding of Skills for Life across North West employer engagement strategies.
 - Supporting the on-going quality improvement of Skills for Life delivery in the North West.

- Improve the understanding of ESOL needs and delivery of appropriate training across the North West – to include meeting the needs of migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees.
- Increase the number of numeracy qualifications contributing to the Skills for Life PSA target.
- Meet the needs of those target groups identified in the Skills for Life Strategy.

19 The region is looking forward to the development of a new programme aimed at specifically meeting the needs of those adults looking for work, through the transfer of the voluntary Skills for Life provision from Jobcentre Plus to the LSC and the development of other employability models. The region will also be looking to support the Skills for Life needs of offenders through the on-going progress of the Offender Learning and Skills Service.

The North West Skills for Life implementation plan

20 The plan will be delivered through partners in the region. It is envisaged that the plan will evolve over time and it will be monitored on a quarterly basis 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.

Conclusion

21 The success of the strategy and action plan is dependent on key partners across the region working more coherently and hence needs to be endorsed by the North West Skills for Life Strategy Group who are made up of key stakeholders including North West Development Agency, Jobcentre Plus, LSC, Association of Colleges, Association of Learning Providers, Unionlearn, North West Employers Organisation, Sector Skills Development Agency, Ufl, NIACE, Government Office North West, Business in the Community, Lifelong Learning UK and Quality Improvement Agency. This plan will therefore act as a guide for future commissioning and planning for the region. It will also aim to raise the profile of Skills for Life so that it is embedded across other strategies and activities, including sector skills developments, offender learning and 14-19 planning.

22 The North West Region will review this strategy in September 2007 to reflect Government priorities outlined in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 and the response to the Leitch Report.

Creator Leah Maltby Development Manager - Skills for Life
Pauline Heron Skills Support Advisor - Skills for Life

Email leah.maltby@lsc.gov.uk or pauline.heron@lsc.gov.uk

Phone 0161 261 0303 or 0161 261 0481

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LSC office Learning and Skills Council North West Region
Arndale House Arndale Centre Manchester M4 3AQ
Tel: 0845 019 4142 Fax: 0161 261 0370 www.lsc.gov.uk

Annex 1

Counting Achievements

Achievements that can be counted towards meeting the PSA target fall into 3 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).

Annex 2

Tables showing level of need for literacy, language and ESOL across the North West

Table 1 Estimated literacy needs in the NW by LLSC area

LLSC area	Total entry level		Total level 1		Total level 2	
	Number of adults	Proportion	Number of adults	Proportion	Number of adults	Proportion
Cheshire and Warrington	51,610	9%	276,300	50%	219,900	40%
Cumbria	35,450	12%	137,700	46%	129,200	43%
Greater Manchester	208,800	13%	725,200	46%	630,600	40%
Greater Merseyside	139,800	15%	440,800	48%	336,500	37%
Lancashire	101,100	12%	411,600	47%	358,600	41%
North West	536,760		1,991,600		1,674,800	

Table 2 Estimated numeracy needs in the NW by LLSC area

LLSC area	Total entry level		Total level 1		Total level 2	
	Number of adults	Proportion	Number of adults	Proportion	Number of adults	Proportion
Cheshire and Warrington	266,500	49%	163,800	30%	117,600	21%
Cumbria	142,600	47%	100,500	33%	59,220	20%
Greater Manchester	834,600	53%	479,900	31%	250,400	16%
Greater Merseyside	559,000	61%	241,300	26%	116,900	13%
Lancashire	426,500	49%	278,800	32%	166,100	19%
North West	2,229,200		1,264,300		710,220	

Annex 2 (cont)

Table 3 ESOL needs in the North West

LLSC area	Number of adults with ESOL needs
Cheshire and Warrington	6,595
Cumbria	1,870
Greater Manchester	102,780
Greater Merseyside	14,625
Lancashire	48,045
North West	173,915

Source; DfES Survey, October 2003