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A nightmare before Christmas?

Brushing up on maths and English could hold the key to a calmer Christmas

The run-up to Christmas is stressful for everyone but for the 7 million people in England who struggle with basic English or maths, tasks like writing Christmas cards, budgeting for gifts and cooking a turkey can become a Yule time nightmare.

With purse strings getting tighter, good maths skills are essential for helping people to make the most out of their money. Research shows that when hitting the high street one in four adults will struggle working out what '25 per cent off' actually means.

Christmas dinners across the South West could be in danger this year. Long sentences, too many adjectives, and extra commentary mean that 5.2 million adults in England could struggle to follow the cooking methods in the most popular Christmas recipes crafted by Delia and Nigella.

Corrie Street star and busy mum of two Kym Ryder said: "Christmas this year is going to be tight for many families and if parents struggle with their maths and English skills, the magic of Christmas could easily be lost. I love making and writing Christmas cards with my kids, baking mince pies for Santa and bargain hunting for presents but all these tasks have their own hazards."

"I would encourage people who think they could do with brushing up on their maths and English skills to take advantage of the free courses available by **ringing 0800 66 0800**."

Sion Simon, Minister for Further Education said, "This can be a busy and stressful time of the year, especially for the millions in England who need to brush up their English and maths skills. Taking a free maths or English course can make the festive period much easier, and help you at home or in work. And the skills that you learn will last you for life, not just for Christmas!"

Funded by the Learning and Skills Council, the Get On campaign is also encouraging people to make learning their number one New Year's resolution. With free courses available across the country, people can call **0800 66 0800** or visit www.direct.gov.uk/geton for more information.

- Ends -

For further information please call:

- Richard Cook, Bray Leino, cook@brayleino.co.uk, on 0117 9731173
- Joanna Clarke/Phillipa Jose/Hannah Ashby, Fishburn Hedges, on 020 7544 3130

Notes to editors

About Get On

1. The LSC's "Get On" campaign, which was first launched by the then Department for Education and Skills in 2001, is part of the Government's Skills for Life strategy. The campaign encourages the millions of people in England who experience difficulties with literacy and numeracy skills, or would benefit from 'brushing up' on these skills, to enrol on a free course by calling **0800 66 0800**.

2. Help is at hand with free courses which offer an entirely different experience from school days, focus on helping adults improve their skills so they can deal with practical, everyday situations in life and work. As an added incentive the courses can also lead to a nationally recognised qualification.

3. It is estimated that an individual with good literacy and numeracy could earn £50,000 more over a working life than someone with poorer skills. The increased self-confidence and motivation learners gain from completing a course is of huge personal value and helps them start the process of transforming their lives.

About Skills for Life

4. The Skills for Life Strategy was launched in 2001 to tackle the legacy of adults with poor literacy, language and numeracy skills within England. The strategy aims to help create a society where adults have the basic skills they need to find and keep work and participate fully in society, through:

- * Boosting demand for learning
- * Ensuring capacity of the learning provider delivery system
- * Improving standards of teaching and learning
- * Increasing learner achievement

5. In 2008 the Government exceeded the target to ensure that 2.25 million adults improved their skills and gained a qualification by 2010 – two years early. The Government plans to improve the literacy skills of 597,000 adults, and numeracy skills of 390,000 adults, over the next three years. This will be backed by a further £3.9 billion in Government funding between 2007/08 and 2010/11. The Government's long term ambition is for 95 per cent of adults to have functional literacy and numeracy skills, up from 85 per cent and 79 per cent respectively in 2005.

6. The Skills for Life National Needs and Impact Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and IT skills, published in October 2003, estimated that in England, 5.2 million adults aged 16-65 have literacy levels below Level 1 (broadly equivalent in difficulty to an English GCSE at grades D-G), and 6.8 million have numeracy skills below Entry Level 3 (the level expected of 11 year olds). The full survey is available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research>.