

# Review of Evidence

Research



**Skills for Life: effective strategies to support learner persistence, progress and progression**

# Introduction

This review is an updated version, commissioned by LSIS, of part of a research project originally commissioned by the QIA. The project aimed to support QIA in adopting an evidence-based approach to the development of programmes and materials to support improvement in the post-16 system, and to ensure that future research, development and practice are based on awareness and understanding of the issues facing the further education system.

This review is one of a series which are intended to be useful to managers, practitioners and others working in the learning and skills sector. A thematic review was undertaken of current and recent research findings, relevant materials and resources. Items were selected that inform and support improvement.

Section one contains the key messages for improvement that emerge from the materials identified by the review. Section two contains a catalogue of those materials from which these messages have been drawn.

One of a series of reviews of evidence commissioned by LSIS in 2009. Produced by NIACE on behalf of LSIS  
**All the links in this document were checked in October 2010.**

## Section 1

# Summary of Key Messages for Improvement

## Improvement Messages for Providers

A description of the policy context for this theme follows the summary of key improvement messages. The numbers in brackets refer to items in the catalogue of materials containing improvement messages in relation to this theme, also created as part of the project, and which is contained in section 2 of this review.

### Strategic, operational and quality managers

- Providers should adopt a strategic approach to planning to meet language literacy and numeracy (LLN) needs and develop mechanisms to ensure that this is implemented across the whole organisation (3);
- Provision generally needs to be more flexible and individualised. In particular, a range of provision and progression pathways should be developed to offer adequate responses to the diverse requirements of ESOL learners, including spouses and relatives of settled migrants who are not eligible to access state funded provision for at least one year. Newer arrivals, including asylum seekers, need adequate provision as soon as possible after their arrival, in order to minimise barriers to effective learning which may accumulate. Classes in community settings should be better supported (27, 4, 6, 29, 18);
- Organisations should improve data collection to track both internal and external progression (11, 18);
- Long-term strategies should be developed to support learner persistence, rather than short-term quick-fix approaches (1, 18, 17);
- Continuing non-intensive provision should be planned for learners completing learning goals, so that they are supported in maintaining and using their skills (22, 12);
- Embedded LLN provision should be recognised and implemented as the norm not the exception for levels 1 and 2 vocational courses. It contributes to raising achievement and is the most effective approach for working with young adults. Vocational and LLN teachers must be given time to plan and work together on embedding (3, 6, 5);
- Listening to learners' experiences of literacy and English language education could contribute significant insights into the development of practice and policy. Learners should be supported in making their voices heard (21, 17);
- The use of electronic online testing (e-testing) for underpinning knowledge and skills for life tests could improve completion rates, success rates and speed of progression (8);
- Creating a learner-friendly, informal environment, with small classes, and recognising that learners have other commitments which may conflict are critical to enabling learners to persist and progress (5, 18, 13, 17);

- Organisations should be aware that socio-economic status may play less of a role in progression and achievement for adults; attitudes towards learning are more important (14);
- For organisations, it is important to ask participants what progression means to them (12);
- Action and support are required at the organisational level to enable changes of practice. Small interventions can make significant differences for learners and can act as catalyst for wider change (17).

### **Staff development managers, teacher trainers and practitioners**

- Initial teacher training and continuing professional development (CPD) should be designed to reflect the importance of current practitioners' expertise and professional vision (27, 13, 24);
- Initial teacher training should place greater emphasis on subject knowledge and subject specific pedagogy (27, 13);
- Teachers should be provided with:
  - understanding of varied teaching and learning strategies (4, 13);
  - knowledge of the practicalities of teaching literacy (22);
  - strategies to plan and structure opportunities for learners to improve writing, where this is a significant goal (20);
  - specific and general strategies for teaching reading, and for assessing learners' needs in order to adapt to them (19);
  - strategies for balancing pair and group work, with time allocated to learners working alone (19);
  - an understanding of, and strategies for teaching, maths, so that they can be flexible in their approaches and cater to the diversity of learners and provision in adult numeracy (23, 25, 26, 24);
  - strategies for supporting learners to develop the skills they need for critical enquiry, reflection and analysis and to view their learning in a more holistic way (9, 12, 17).
- Professional development for both vocational and LLN teachers to support embedding LLN should be more widely available (3);
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) should place greater emphasis on reflective practice (27);
- As talk is important in ESOL, those who observe and evaluate teachers require understanding of language processes in order to develop criteria for observing talk (27).

Continuing professional development for teachers helps to support persistence (13).

For numeracy practitioners, subject knowledge is of prime importance in relation to learners' progress in this subject. There is evidence that learners make more progress when practitioners hold a Level 3 or above qualification in numeracy (24).

The timing of progress, allowing engagement in learning is highlighted to be associated with learner progress (12)

### Practitioners

- Learners should be supported in making their experience of learning available to managers and teacher trainers, so that their insights inform the development of practice and policy (21);
- More consideration should be given to how learning is assessed, both formatively and summatively. Goals should be realistic to raise learners' confidence. Small steps and 'softer' gains should be valued. Formative assessment methods which include active feedback contribute to improving retention and raising achievement, whereas summative assessment carried out too early can affect motivation. Ways of recognising and validating learning gain that reflect learners' perspectives should be developed (21, 1, 5, 10, 9, 18, 12);
- The achievement of learners on long term programmes (one or two years) could be improved by procedures and strategies to help them accumulate credit, such as exam coaching and practice, drafting and redrafting of assignments, asking leading questions during workplace observations and identifying appropriate evidence to record in portfolios (8);
- Tutors should develop equal working relationships with learners that recognise and value the strengths and knowledge they can each bring to the process (9);
- Learning programmes should integrate learning aims related to everyday life, personal and technical skills (1, 9, 18);
- ICT skills are most effectively developed by interactive learning and collaboration. Practitioners should use a wide variety of new technologies and enable learners to use them, in the interests of greater flexibility (2, 17);
- Young adult learners may require a distinctive non-academic approach, adapted to their preferred learning styles and with tailored provision (6);
- ESOL tutors should
  - employ multiple approaches;
  - provide a range of tasks;
  - recognise the importance of group learning processes;
  - be aware of the experiences and knowledge of learners as a strength they bring;
  - create a safe environment for learning (28).

For numeracy practitioners; experience matters. Learners' progress in numeracy is most positively associated with numeracy practitioners holding a Level 3 qualification (24)

It is important to understand progression within the context of individual learner's lives (12).

It is important to adult learners that they are treated as adults; being allowed to express an opinion and learning with others who have something in common (12).

Success drives success. A sense of achievement motivates learners to persist with their learning; recognition of small steps in learning is important (17).

## The Policy Context

Adult literacy, language, and numeracy learning has moved from being considered something of a fringe activity within the field of adult education to holding a central and pivotal role in England during the latter part of the 20th century. Government has given priority in successive policy initiatives, including the series of skills and further education white papers, to tackling the extent of low literacy, numeracy and language skills in the adult population and has reflected this in the funding priorities set for the LSC.

Raising the levels of 'Skills for life' (the current official portmanteau term) is considered essential to improving the skills level and therefore the performance of the UK economy, as set out in the Leitch report *Prosperity for all in the global economy; world class skills* (HM Treasury, 2006). There has been also continuing attention to the impact of low language, literacy and numeracy skills on personal and social well-being and community cohesion.

A review of the literacy and numeracy capabilities of the adult workforce in England, chaired by Sir Claus Moser in 1999, reported that as many as seven million adults in England had literacy and numeracy needs which did not meet the definition of functional literacy used for the review: 'the ability to read, write and speak in English and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general'.

As a response to these findings the Skills for Life strategy (DfEE, 2001) was launched in March 2001. The rationale underpinning the strategy was to tackle and eradicate the incidence of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy through the introduction of a suite of interventions intended to initiate radical changes to the education and training system for those learning literacy and numeracy skills in order to raise standards and boost levels of achievement. These included:

- new national standards and a common core curriculum supported by new materials and leading to national tests;
- new approaches to assessing need;
- new teacher training qualifications;
- a new research centre;
- rigorous national inspections to monitor standards.

Following the implementation of the Skills for Life strategy, there has been a plethora of activities, including intense research activity, the development of new curriculum models, capacity-building and continuing professional development, to ensure the robust implementation, and success, of the strategy. However, *More than a language*, the report of the NIACE Committee of Enquiry on English for Speakers of Other Languages (NIACE, 2006) argued that insufficient attention has been paid to the distinctive and different features of ESOL. This is demonstrated in the relatively smaller number of research studies specifically on ESOL, and in studies that address literacy, language and numeracy without drawing out any differences between the areas.

The literature suggests that there is not uniform agreement between policy-makers, practitioners and learners as to what constitutes persistence, progress and achievement within Skills for Life. In policy terms, these are largely associated with tangible outcomes, such as National Tests or movement onto higher-level qualification-based courses. For learners, however, persistence, progress and achievement are also associated with less tangible elements such as increases in self-confidence, or being able to undertake literacy or numeracy activities more ably in their day to day activities.

Persistence clearly plays a significant role in supporting progress and achievement. Persistence is related to stickability and there is now recognition that providers need to find ways of supporting the learner in continuing with their learning as a key aspect of improving performance in Skills for Life delivery.

As the policy landscape evolves and develops the role and position of *Skills for Life* increases in complexity. Over the last eighteen months, there has been the presentation of the Functional Skills pilots, significant work towards the implementation of the Foundation Learning Tier and the development of the Qualification Credit Framework, replacing the National Qualification Framework. We have seen a national consultation on both ESOL for community cohesion and on Informal Adult Learning more broadly and are currently awaiting government responses to both these consultations. In addition, there has been the publication of *Skills for Life; changing lives* by DIUS in March 2009 that refreshes the Skills for Life strategy with a new focus on employability with new associated target achievements and outcomes.



We now also know that the Learning and Skills Council, the body responsible for funding learning across the post-16 sector of education will be dissolved and a new body; the Skills Funding Agency, will take a new, more focussed, role in supporting learning amongst the post-19 sector. There have been new requirements placed on the teaching workforce of this sector by the Institute for Learning for continuing professional development and the replacement of the QIA by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service.

This complexity requires further consideration to the implementation and understanding of the position of Skills for Life and how to support learners' persistence, progress and progression. It is clear that the sector does not stand still and needs to constantly rebalance and position itself by being responsive to these developments, ensuring that they create an improved learning experience for those engaging in Skills for Life learning.

There has been much discussion over the last eighteen months regarding the future of Skills for Life. To date (March 2009) the sector has received no decision regarding its future as an independent curriculum area of study. This has had significant influence on the development of strategies and frameworks by organisations to support persistence, progress and progression amongst Skills for Life learners.

The literature reviewed and presented in this catalogues provides a wealth of opportunities to enable organisations, practitioners and learners to reflect on the frameworks they currently have in place for persistence, progress and progression and to consider how these might be developed to further enable learner persistence.

It will be important, going forward, for organisations and practitioners to consider their practices in light of the newly emerging landscape and ask questions about how persistence can be achieved for Skills for Life learners within the Foundation Learning Tier or the Qualification Credit Framework? How can progress and progression be evidenced and demonstrated within a Functional Skills programme, where mastery must be demonstrated; rather than the very recognised notion of a 'spiky' profile amongst this group of learners, where progress can be recognised for elements of a subject, such as speaking and listening for ESOL learners? Will the new Skills Funding Agency embrace a funding methodology that enables learners to persist with their learning in a useful and meaningful way, using a variety of delivery models? And how will the role of Train to Gain support the development persistence, progress and progression for Skills for Life subjects within broader vocational curriculum learning?

The release of *Skills for Life: changing lives* (DIUS, 2009) repositions Skills for Life under three main themes:

- Focusing Skills for Life on employability
- Raising demand
- Delivering flexible and responsive Skills for Life provision

It is clear that the new document aims to work with the field to ensure that those who need to raise their language, literacy and numeracy capabilities are able to in a way that is appropriate for them and enables them to continue in work or move into work. By encouraging and supporting providers to deliver flexible, responsive Skills for Life learning, persistence, progress and progression amongst these learners should be achieved.

## Section 2

# Catalogue of research, materials and resources

This catalogue lists the materials identified by the thematic review of current and recent research findings, relevant materials and resources. Items were selected that inform and support improvement.

### Scope of the research

For all themes, the focus was on research, policy or policy-related documents and materials produced since 2000, in English, relevant to the post-16 further education system in England, and readily accessible to provider organisations and other interested parties. Materials from other sectors and countries were not included, and all materials selected had to have been subject to quality assurance. Each review is designed to stand alone.

### Skills for Life: effective strategies to support learner persistence, progress and progression

This catalogue is concerned with the effective delivery of learning programmes and provision of support to enable learners to persist, make progress and move on in their learning. The provision of learning opportunities to raise young people's and adults' skill levels in relation to literacy, numeracy and the acquisition of the English language is a major policy priority. New national standards, new materials, a common core curriculum, new national tests, new teacher training programmes and qualifications have been introduced and extensive research has been undertaken to support improvements in teaching and learning processes and outcomes.

## General

**Item no: 1**

**Reference type:**

Research report

**Authors:**

Hamilton M.,  
Davies P. and James K.

**Year: 2007**

**Title:**

Practitioners leading research:  
a report of action research  
projects from the NRDC  
Practitioner-Led Research  
(PLRI) Initiative

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

## Notes:

This is a report of series of action research projects from the NRDC Practitioner-Led Research Initiative (PLRI), which included the following themes:

- Attracting new learners;
- Understanding purpose and perseverance in learners;
- How practitioners can engage in research;
- Creativity in the Skills for Life classroom;
- Resources to support practitioner research.

17 projects were undertaken between 2004 and 2006, using a range of methodologies.

The reports in this publication show that the findings of the research chime with those from larger empirical data. They are particularly relevant in terms of reaching people who have been turned off by formal learning for example by showing how to make numeracy an attractive option for learners; demonstrating the positive possibilities of creativity in the classroom alongside formal curricula; and identifying approaches which support progress and persistence.

## Findings relevant to improvement

### Engaging and retaining learners

Many adult learners have major barriers that need to be overcome before they can engage, or sign up to a course. Long-term strategies to support persistence need to be developed, rather than a short-term quick fix approach.

Softer gains, especially among more vulnerable members of society, should be valued as much as more measurable achievements.

Effective teaching can be a major factor in influencing adults to commit and persevere with learning.

Matching activities to learners' interests, goals and motivational needs is a highly successful teaching strategy.

Learners who can be shown that progress has been made in one aspect of their life are more likely to view the next learning target positively.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=94](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=94)

**Item no: 2****Reference Type:**

Research report

**Authors:**

Mellar H., Kambouri M.,  
Logan K., Betts S.,  
Nance B. and Moriarty V.

**Year:** 2007

**Title:**

Effective Teaching and  
Learning using ICT

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

**Notes:**

This is one in a series of five NRDC Effective Practice Studies constructed to respond to the following questions:

- How can teaching and learning literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT be improved?
- Which factors contribute to successful learning?

This study aimed to develop and test the effectiveness of ICT-based teaching strategies and subsequently evaluate the effectiveness of the designs.

The research was undertaken between July 2003 and March 2006. The study assessed learners' attainment and attitudes at two points during the year in which they were undertaking their study, and worked with nine tutors to develop teaching interventions based on recommendations from earlier research. 150 students participated in the evaluation phase of the study. 80 students completed pre-tests and post-tests following 40 hours of class time. Each classroom was observed four times and a sample of learners were observed to identify how they carried out the tasks assigned to them.

The study found that most users found ICT motivating, with mobile technologies being found to be particularly motivating, enabling greater flexibility in teaching. Older learners made most progress in gaining ICT skills and confidence. Learners with initial ICT confidence were more persistent. Increased ICT skills and confidence was related to the amount of time spent using technology in the classroom.

Classes where individual learners spent more time working on their own showed better gains in ICT skills than those classes where more time was spent working in small groups.

Using ICT in literacy language and numeracy enables learners to double the value of their study time. Further research will be needed on the best ways of using changing technologies.

**Findings relevant to improvement****Effective practice to improve ICT skills**

Discussion, instructing, listening and modelling are teaching strategies which lead to improvement in ICT skills. Explaining does not bring about improvement in ICT skills and confidence, but demonstrating ('modelling') does. Using the whiteboard also contributes.

### Item no: 2 *Continued*

Practitioners should develop ICT skills and confidence by:

- encouraging collaborative learning;
- encouraging learner autonomy, thus releasing teacher time to support more individualised learning;
- using a wide variety of technologies and enable learners to use them, including mobile technologies to support greater flexibility;
- using technology to construct artefacts, thus allowing learners to adopt a variety of roles and allowing differentiation of activities.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=87](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=87)

### Item no: 3

#### Reference type:

Research report

#### Authors:

Casey H., Cara O., Eldred J., Grief S., Hodge R., Ivanic R., Jupp T., Lopez D. and McNeil B.

Year: 2006

#### Title:

“You wouldn’t expect a maths teacher to teach plastering...” Embedding literacy, language and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes – the impact on learning and achievement

**Place of publication:** London

#### Publisher:

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)

#### Commissioning body:

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)

#### Notes:

This research explored the impact on learner success of embedded approaches to literacy, language and numeracy. The study adopted a broad definition of embedded to include all provision that combines subject teaching with literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) teaching. Literacy and ESOL were grouped together for the purposes of the analysis of success rates as the majority of learners undertook qualifications in literacy or communication.

The research found that models of literacy, language and numeracy support for learners on vocation provision ranged from totally separate support provision, through partial integration of support to full embedding. It concluded that in most cases, full embedding resulted in the highest levels of retention and achievement.

The research studied a sample of 1916 learners studying on 79 vocational courses provided by further education colleges and one large training provider in the academic year 2004/5. The courses covered five curriculum areas at levels 1 and 2: health and social care, construction, business studies, engineering and hair and beauty therapy. Quantitative data was collected from sources that included individual learner records and college assessment records. Qualitative data was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus groups, class observations and document analysis. The data is statistically significant and the conclusions triangulated. The authors caution that conclusions drawn from analysis of subsets of the data could be less reliable because of the smaller sample sizes. Nevertheless they are of interest and signal areas for further investigation.

### Item no: 3 *Continued*

Learners on vocational courses with embedded LLN support had higher retention rates, especially at Level 2. The report suggests that embedded provision not only supports skills development but can help to overcome the stigma associated with LLN classes, which may be more marked for learners at level 2. Embedding appeared to have a different impact on retention in the different vocational areas, with the most significant improvement in engineering. The success rates in embedded courses were 15% higher than in the non-embedded courses in the research sample. They were also significantly higher than the national average.

Embedding also resulted in high rates of achievement of qualifications in literacy and numeracy at all levels. The proportion of learners gaining a literacy qualification was more than 35% higher where there was some degree of embedding as compared with provision where LLN was provided separately. This rose to over 42% where LLN was fully integrated. Over 20% more learners achieved a numeracy qualification in courses where numeracy was fully embedded. Learners on vocational courses appear to engage successfully with literacy and numeracy when it is integrated and they see it as relevant to their vocational study.

Learners who received additional learning support had a higher probability of completing their courses than those who did not. This was usually most effective when integrated with the vocational teaching and learning.

Learner outcomes in terms of course completion and success in both vocational and literacy and numeracy qualifications varied according to the vocational area, although the relatively small sample size may affect this finding.

Learners valued most highly LLN support that was fully integrated with their vocational course. It was important to them that the LLN teacher understood the demands of the vocational subject.

Other than where there are exceptional teachers who are dual qualified, giving one teacher responsibility for both vocational teaching and LLN teaching has a negative impact on success rates. Learners taught by non-specialist LLN teachers were twice as likely to be unsuccessful with LLN qualifications. Vocational and LLN specialists working together are likely to be more effective in most contexts.

## Findings relevant to improvement

### Effective embedded provision

Features of embedded provision associated with achievement in literacy and numeracy are:

- formal shared planning;
- management structures that support the integration of LLN in vocational teaching;
- staff development policy to support the integration of LLN in vocational teaching;
- LLN teachers are viewed by staff and learners as contributing to learners' vocational aspirations;
- LLN teachers understand and engage with the vocational area;
- LLN staff are willing to develop their skills in relation to the vocational area;
- vocational teachers are willing to develop their skills in relation to LLN;
- initial/diagnostic assessment is used to contribute to the integration of LLN into vocational teaching;
- on-going assessment contributes to the integration of LLN into vocational teaching.

The underpinning requirements for effective embedded provision are:

- teamwork between LLN teachers and vocational teachers;
- staff understanding, beliefs and values;
- teaching that connects LLN to the vocational context;
- policies and organisational features at institutional level.

Embedded LLN provision should be recognised and implemented as the norm not the exception for level 1 and 2 vocational courses.

The current emphasis on whole organisational approaches to LLN should be strengthened and continued.

Professional development for vocational and LLN teachers to support embedding should be more widely available.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=73](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=73)



**Item no: 4****Reference type:**

Research report

**Authors:**

Drummond J. and Gawn J.

**Year:** 2006

**Title:**

What works for Entry  
Level Skills for Life Learners?  
A SKEIN Pilot Research Report  
Adult Literacy & Numeracy  
Provision in Hackney and  
Brent: A Comparative Study of  
Factors Enabling Progression

**Place of publication:** Leicester

**Publisher:**

National Institute of Adult  
Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Commissioning body:**

Skills for Economic  
Inclusion Network

**Notes:**

This pilot research programme commenced in May 2006, focusing on adult literacy and numeracy learning provision in the London Boroughs of Hackney and Brent. The aim of the project was to find out what types of learning provision were the most effective in terms of facilitating learner progression into mainstream education and training (above entry level).

This was a predominantly qualitative study with a range of literacy and numeracy learners, practitioners and managers being interviewed, using a semi-structured questionnaire, both individually and in groups. Whilst the study attempted to develop a quantitative strand, through the collation of data from a range of key stakeholders, it was clear that data on progression was not routinely collated and therefore not available for inclusion in the study analysis.

The study found that many literacy and numeracy learners come from backgrounds where learning is not a priority, and many encounter resistance within the home or from peers. Lack of on-site childcare will prevent many from engaging, sustaining and progressing in their education. Many learners are forced to leave their provision because of welfare benefits rules. However, where barriers are successfully overcome, engagement and progress in learning can impact upon the confidence of other family members.

Where provision is consistent and requires a high number of class contact hours, swift progress can be made. However, much provision is part-time and there is a higher amount of contact time for literacy than for numeracy provision. Where only a few hours of provision are offered each week, it may take several years for learners to progress. However, whilst a higher number of hours may be needed to allow people to progress, peoples' prior responsibilities and problems may prevent this.

In some cases it is entirely unrealistic to expect any significant progression in terms of Skills for Life level. The idea of progressing 'up' a level may be problematic and it may be necessary to take into account the existence of possible 'intermediate' stages between levels. Learners face particular hurdles when progressing from entry 3 to level 1. Progression within and out of entry level literacy and numeracy provision is circumscribed by a range of factors that in some cases apply to all aspects of adult learning, rather than being specific to literacy and numeracy. However, there is no consistent tracking of learners, so it is very difficult to arrive at a definitive picture of what factors enable and disable progression.

Summative testing does not always take place when learners are ready and is dictated by institutional and funding constraints. The need to get students to pass tests means that teaching is often based on ‘teaching to the test’ rather than teaching the learner. The tests (National Tests) do not assess each component skill with enough rigour to be a reliable benchmark for progression.

Key themes that emerged from the provision include: the need for more flexible provision; less prescriptive funding regimes; varied teaching and learning strategies.

### **Findings relevant to improvement**

#### **Supporting learner progress**

Diagnostic assessment is required in order to ensure that teaching engages the learners, and students are therefore given the maximum chance to progress.

Ongoing formative assessment is essential in order for learners to be aware of their skills gaps, and thereby to overcome them.

Tutors are important for setting and negotiating goals, and finding out what students want (and need) to learn.

Individual learning Plans can be a useful tool to set, review and monitor goals and progress, although their use should be guided by the learner’s needs.

Facilitated group and pair work allows learners to progress faster than individual tasks and worksheet-based teaching.

Good teaching – and therefore learner progress – is underpinned by thorough teacher training and professional development.

Good teaching and learning is absolutely fundamental to ensuring that learners learn quickly, build on their strengths and make progress.

Teaching needs to be highly structured with attention to the details of each skill, allowing all the building blocks to be put in place.

The learners, using relevant and contextualized examples drawn from real-life experience, should determine the content of the lessons.

Organisations need to plan sufficiently to meet their learners’ support needs. If these are not considered, and met, learners are more like to drop out of their chosen provision.

**Item no: 4** *Continued*

Whilst some learners often feel most comfortable in small community venues, this is not universally the case. There is therefore a need for mixing campus provision with elements of community-based provision.

Link: [http://www.lvstc.org.uk/docs/skein/NIACE\\_HTEN\\_SKEIN\\_Pilot\\_Final\\_Report%20.pdf](http://www.lvstc.org.uk/docs/skein/NIACE_HTEN_SKEIN_Pilot_Final_Report%20.pdf)

**Item no: 5**

**Reference type:**

Research report

**Authors:**

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Year:** 2006

**Title:**

Say what you like! The report

**Place of publication:** Leicester

**Publisher:**

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Commissioning body:**

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

**Notes:**

This reports a research study into learners' views on barriers to learning and the ways in which they have responded to them. It includes sections on progress and achievement. The study takes the view that learners' first-hand experience of difficulties and barriers to learning equips them with knowledge and understanding of how to overcome them to succeed in learning and enables them to articulate the positive differences that learning can make.

The project employed action research methodology. A do –it – yourself guide to Participatory Action Research was developed and distributed to enable learners from literacy, language and numeracy provision, with tutor support, to contribute. This method was selected as it enables researchers, tutors and learners to work together in a democratic way, and is inclusive as it is suitable for adaptation to work well with a wide range of different learners. The study also spoke to 250 learners in a series of 27 learner focus groups.

The research found differing attitudes to qualifications and achievement. Gaining qualifications was sometimes seen as a means to an end such as a job or career change. Other learners wanted 'some kind of certificate' as proof of what they had achieved and to show family and friends. Some had not considered qualifications before starting their course but liked the idea once they started learning. Some learners with mental health difficulties were not currently interested in gaining a qualification and preferred learning for other reasons. Some said that the stress of taking an exam was counter-productive to the benefits of taking the course. Learners often described improving skills and knowledge in terms of improving communication skills or 'to get their brains working'. The pressure associated with assessment varied. Some learners were easily put off by examinations, especially if they had bad experiences in the past. For others, gaining a qualification was a great source of pride and achievement.

Learners said they kept coming because they were interested in what they were learning and could see positive benefits to their lives. This motivated them to continue their course and progress on to other learning.

They liked the camaraderie with other learners. They helped, supported and encouraged each other. Some were inspired by the efforts and achievements of other learners and others encouraged by their peers to continue attending.

Costs were important. Free courses were the reason some students were able to attend. Some said they would be unable to enrol on fee-paying courses. Others would have to restrict the number of courses they took up.

The views of policy makers about what constitutes valuable learning outcomes often differ quite significantly from what learners say they value most. Some mention qualifications and skills. Learners also reported that learning helped them develop skills they used in everyday life. They are more likely to mention softer outcomes to do with feelings and attitudes, especially enhancement of self-confidence. This can contribute to healthier lifestyles, greater well-being, more open-minded attitudes and greater respect for people with different backgrounds.

Progression means different things to different learners, depending on their characteristics and starting points. For some, progression is a gradual and intermittent process and may mean extremely small steps. Standing still, recovering skills or maintaining skills is also a kind of progression for some learners, for instance mental health service users, and people who have had strokes.

### **Findings relevant to improvement**

#### **Creating a learner-friendly learning environment**

Factors enabling learners to stay on course and progress include:

- flexible provision;
- courses with times which make it easier to fit learning round other commitments;
- acceptance that learners would miss a class at short notice if they are ill or have other commitments;
- help with childcare and transport;
- bilingual teachers;
- accessible advice and guidance.

Providers should offer informal and comfortable learning environments with a welcoming and friendly, which encourage learners to continue attending. They should recognise that learners feel more relaxed and able to have their voices heard in small classes.

## Item no: 5 *Continued*

Practitioners should:

- make learning enjoyable and understandable;
- treat learners with respect, put them at ease and not make them feel ashamed because of their abilities;
- use different styles of teaching to suit different learners;
- give sufficient time and allow learners to work at their own pace;
- offer one to one support;
- be good listeners and have the patience to revisit areas and explain problems different ways.

### **Effective Assessment**

Formative assessment is vital to providing feedback on progress and setting new learning aims and goals. Summative assessment carried out too early can affect motivation and precipitate dropout. Learners prefer coursework assessment and practical assessment to end-of-course tests.

Assessment policies and methods that encourage active feedback by tutors to learners are more effective in improving retention and raising achievement.

Appropriately designed accreditation can give satisfaction, empower learners and lead to progression.

Link: <http://archive.niace.org.uk/saywhatyoulike/Default.htm>

**Item no: 6****Reference type:**

Research report

**Authors:**

McNeil B. and Dixon L.

**Year:** 2005

**Title:**

Success factors in informal learning; young adults' experiences of literacy, language and Numeracy

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)

**Notes:**

This study sought to gather information which could inform the generation of criteria for successful practice when working with young adults on literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills. The target group for the project was young adults, aged between 16 and 25, a priority group recognised within the *Skills for Life* strategy. It was undertaken between August 2003 and December 2004. 150 projects were involved with 30 visits to different projects being undertaken. 300 questionnaires were distributed through the project and 30 follow-up telephone interviews were carried out to further develop the data.

The key research questions developed for this study were:

- Can provision be categorised as formal, non-formal or informal?
- Does an embedded approach work best with young adults, and what do we mean when we talk about embedded?
- How are practitioners accrediting their work with young adults?
- Are youth work and teaching separate vocations?
- Is there a lack of teaching and learning resources for this cohort, or do practitioners just not know where to find them?

Most provision was concerned with engaging with young adults not in employment, education or training. The priority for practitioners was learners' progression into employment or formal education. Engaging young adults was found to be a more pressing issue than the LLN elements of provision. The key finding is that literacy, language and numeracy provision for young adults should be based on a learner-centred approach; taking their interests and needs as a starting point. Some groups see accreditation as a motivating framework for this provision whilst others find that accreditation is an added pressure with little meaning for those involved in the provision.

**Findings relevant to improvement****Successful strategies for working with young adult learners**

Use 'hooks': start by using young adults' interests and then progress to wider issues. Offer tangible and quick prizes to reward attendance, behaviour, etc.

Use non-academic approaches to teaching and learning, such as the individualisation of programmes through non-generic teaching, retaining as much of a one-to-one approach as possible. This should include the use of questionnaires on learning styles and recognition that the dominant learning style for this client group is likely to be kinaesthetic.

### Item no: 6 *Continued*

Recognise that accreditation/certification may hold differing significance for different groups, in some cases being a motivating factor but in others not. The way in which accreditation is introduced to young adult learners, and the support offered to them, is central to its success.

Tailored provision that adopts young adults' communication styles and starts from the standpoint of the individual is more likely to engage the client group in learning opportunities.

Embedding LLN is the most effective approach in working with young adults.

Regular praise, positive feedback and presentation of certificates are effective ways of recognising achievement.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=40](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=40)

### Item no: 7

#### Reference type:

Research report

#### Authors:

Roberts C., Baynham M.,  
Shrubshall P., Brittan J.,  
Cooper B., Gidley N.,  
Windsor V., Eldred J., Grief S.,  
Castillino C., Walsh M.

**Year:** 2005

#### Title:

Embedded teaching and  
learning of adult literacy,  
numeracy and ESOL; seven  
case studies

**Place of publication:** London

#### Publisher:

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

#### Commissioning body:

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

#### Notes:

This project aimed to gather evidence about the characteristics of embedded literacy, language and numeracy (LLN), teaching and learning. In particular, it aimed to:

- establish what is meant by embedded teaching and learning;
- explore how vocational subjects and LLN skills relate on such programmes, and how subject tutors and LLN tutors work together;
- consider what implications can be drawn for policy and practice.

Using an ethnographic methodology, the project involved a variety of embedded LLN provision. Case studies were selected from the areas of construction; entry to employment (E2E); engineering; childcare; land-based industries; complementary therapy; sports; nursing. The courses were either standard vocational programmes for young people or specially designed preparatory vocational programmes for adults. Fieldwork took the form of classroom observations, learner interviews and interviews with teachers.

The study found that through the acquisition of new vocational skills, students are provided with a pathway to a 'community of practice', the creation of a professional identity. The desire to become a member of this community is the key motivator underpinning the learning of skills associated with this profession. Understanding the culture of the profession (values and beliefs) and recognising the vocational skills and LLN capabilities associated with the new identity is what drives attitudes towards learning LLN skills and progress and progression with these skills.



## Item no: 7 *Continued*

Whilst vocational teachers have a natural legitimacy in the eyes of their learners as they represent the role to which the learner aspires; the LLN teachers do not. It is necessary for learners to develop recognition of the value of the LLN teachers to their aspirations.

### Findings relevant to improvement

#### Effective practice in embedding LLN

Both vocational and LLN teachers need to be strongly motivated to provide embedded provision and have time to work and plan together.

LLN learning often takes place when speaking, listening, reading and writing or calculating is directly linked to a practical task.

#### Benefits of embedding LLN

Embedded LLN provision in vocational courses offers a way of raising achievement and may be the key to widening participation.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=21](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=21)

## Item no: 8

### Reference type:

Research report

### Authors:

Torrance H., Colley H.,  
Garratt D., Jarvis J., Piper H.,  
Ecclestone K., James D.

**Year:** 2005

### Title:

The impact of different  
modes of assessment on  
achievement and progress in  
the learning and skills sector

**Place of publication:** London

### Publisher:

Learning and Skills  
Research Centre (LSRC)

### Commissioning body:

Learning and Skills  
Research Centre (LSRC)

### Notes:

The aim of this two-year study, undertaken between November 2003 and July 2005, was to explore how far the use of different assessment methods makes a difference to learner achievements and progress in the learning and skills sector. Using a compare and contrast framework, the research explored the experience of assessment of learners in a range of contexts, to identify which assessment regime worked best in enabling learners to progress, in which contexts and in which sectors.

The study identified an enduring divide between post-16 academic and vocational pathways, with different methods of assessment being employed in each. More practical forms of learning and assessment were favoured in the vocational pathway with achievements attained by these methods continuing to be regarded as of a lower status than more 'traditional' examination outcomes.

The study conceptualises progression as both a 'horizontal' aggregator process and a 'vertical' developmental process. These can be further subdivided into intrinsic progress towards a learning goal, and extrinsic progression from one accomplished achievement or qualification to another. Because, within pathways, awards and levels, there is an aggregatory acquisition of modules and evidence at the same level of difficulty and there is no clear change in marking criteria, some tutors do not recognize either progress, or progression.



There is also accumulation of credits and awards across subjects within the same level of difficulty, as in literacy and numeracy, where success then maps onto progression in others. However whether this progression signals actual acquisition of knowledge and competence, as opposed to simply gaining accreditation for access to another course, is a moot point. Aggregatory accumulation creates problems if the amount of evidence required within a level is too great. The acknowledgment of small positive steps is considered extremely important in some adult education settings.

Progression can be identified as moving from education or training into employment. It can also be conceptualized in terms of acquisition of social capital – personal confidence, social engagement, increased personal networks, community development and vitality – with more choices available to individuals. Such progression is very apparent in the adult and community education sector, though very difficult to capture in terms of specific achievements and outcomes – for individuals and institutions alike.

Achievement is routinely interpreted as securing the evidence to complete a portfolio, or the necessary or expected grade to accomplish an award and proceed to further study. It is not necessarily linked to the accomplishment of any additional, or even actual, practical competence(s), even though these may well have been acquired.

There is some evidence of the importance of a self-referenced, intrinsic student sense of achievement. Some learners, however, comment on a wide range of achievements, especially with respect to personal development, or observe that they are getting better at certain tasks when asked about how they know they are doing well. This is especially the case in the adult and community education sector, where such achievement is also linked to developing self-confidence and overcoming previous fears and failures deriving from school experience. This sense of achievement is often derived from the second chance element of post-compulsory education. Adult basic skills tutors and learners often construe achievement in terms of related skills, such as preparing a CV and/or applying (successfully) for jobs, rather than just passing literacy and numeracy tests. Individuals and institutions alike also regard straightforward retention and completion as achievement.

Overall, the study found that assessment methods *per se* do not directly affect learners' choice of award, or likelihood of success. However, the association of certain awards with the assessment methods that employ extensive writing does. E-testing of basic skills is popular with basic skills learners who reported liking the multiple choice format of the online National Test because it limited the need for extended writing and (they thought) was open to guessing.

## Item no: 8 *Continued*

Clarity in assessment procedures, processes and criteria has underpinned the widespread use of coaching, practice and provision of formative feedback to boost individual and institutional achievement. Detailed tutor and assessor support was found to be widespread throughout the sector and was effective in facilitating learner achievement and progression.

### Findings relevant to improvement

#### Improving assessment strategies

Further development of procedures and strategies, such as exam coaching and practice, drafting and redrafting of assignments, asking leading questions during workplace observations and identifying appropriate evidence to record in portfolios, would improve learners' ability to accumulate credit on programmes lasting for a year or longer.

The use of electronic online testing (e-testing) could improve completion rates, pass rates and speed of progression in underpinning knowledge tests and adult basic skills tests.

Link: <http://www.itslifejimbutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/AssessmentModesImpact.pdf>

## Item no: 9

### Reference type:

Research report

### Authors:

Ward J. and Edwards J.

Year: 2002

### Title:

Learning journeys: learners' voices; learners' views on progress and achievement in literacy and numeracy

**Place of publication:** London

### Publisher:

Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)

### Commissioning body:

Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)

### Notes:

This is a report of a collaborative practitioner research project carried out between November 2001 and June 2002. The research investigated how learners view their own progress and achievement in the acquisition of literacy and numeracy, thus adding learners' perspectives to developing knowledge of success factors relating to their achievement and progress in literacy and numeracy.

The research adopted a qualitative approach, using individual and group semi-structured interviews to interview 70 adult learners from literacy, language and numeracy classes. It was carried out by trained practitioners who used the metaphor of a learning journey to facilitate discussion between learners and researchers. The aim of using the metaphor as a research tool was to generate a shared language and conceptual framework for the research interviews in order to provide common starting points and language for the researchers and the learners.

Learners overwhelmingly preferred ongoing assessment based on discussion and portfolio building supported by teacher feedback and individual reflection. Some wanted formal assessment through tests and external exams, seeing them as motivating and boosting confidence. Some learners said that they would leave a course to avoid testing, whereas others built up their confidence to face formal tests as the course progressed.

Learners reported that taking part in and achieving in learning resulted in a massive enhancement of their confidence and self esteem. This in turn had a significant impact on their learning achievements, attitudes to learning, aims and aspirations, ability to do real life activities and their social interactions with other people. It enabled them to break through barriers that had hindered progress. One of the most significant of these was that fear of looking stupid inhibited learners from asking for explanations or help. Increased confidence also supported learners to become more autonomous and facilitated learning outside the classroom.

Overt appreciation of the effort devoted to gaining achievement was a significant factor in learning. Learners stressed the value of tutor praise as a motivational tool and a key factor in building confidence and self-esteem. Conversely, perceived lack of interest or negative attitudes from teachers caused some learners to consider leaving or actually leave their courses.

Learners' aims and aspirations changed and broadened as their learning journeys progressed and they developed their identities as learners. The report suggests that more research should be carried out into the development, demonstration and validation of the achievement of learning outcomes related to real life and personal skills, the interplay between increased confidence and learning, and the roles, trust and dynamics of peer recognition, as well as into good practice in learner involvement.

### **Findings relevant to improvement**

#### **Benefits of peer support**

Group approaches enable learners to articulate, compare and reflect on their experiences and thus recognise progress and achievement. Learners use groups to pool knowledge, use each other as mutual experts and work out whether they have succeeded in learning tasks, using the tutor to confirm these judgements. This process also helped build their confidence and sense of self- worth.

Peer support is a significant factor in achievement as learners place great value on collaborative peer assessment.

#### **Learner involvement in planning and recognising progress and achievement**

Learners are most satisfied with progress where they have been actively involved in negotiating their learning and recognising learning gains. Teachers should therefore take deliberate steps to try to develop equal working relationships with learners. They should work with learners to identify their learning preferences, including pace (a significant factor in staying the course), relationships with tutors and peers, and methods of recognising progress and achievement.

### **Defining learning gain**

Many learners want to take the lead in assessing their own learning and consider that they are able to recognise when they had learned something. They use their files and records of learning to inform themselves how far they have travelled and this recognition helps them to persist with their learning.

Most learners describe learning gain and progress in terms of what their learning enabled them to do in real life situations. Some learners define their achievements in terms of specific skills they had acquired. Practitioners need to develop processes to support learners in recognising and reflecting on learning gain and identifying their next learning challenges and to validate learners' self-assessment.

### **Learning aims**

Learning programmes should integrate learning aims related to everyday life, personal and technical skills.

### **Developing critical enquiry**

There is a need to develop, disseminate and evaluate strategies for supporting learners to develop the skills they need for critical enquiry, reflection and analysis and to view their learning in a more holistic way.

### **Tutors' relationships with learners**

Tutors should develop equal working relationships with learners that recognise and value the strengths and knowledge they can each bring to the process.

Link: <http://www.itslifejimbutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/LSDA%20learning%20journeys.pdf>

**Item no: 10**

**Reference type:**

Research report

**Author:** Scottish Executive

**Year:** 2001

**Title:**

Recognising progress  
research report

**Place of publication:**

Edinburgh

**Publisher:**

The Stationery  
Office Bookshop

**Commissioning body:**

Scottish Executive

**Notes:**

Whilst concerned with Scotland, it includes comparative evidence with the English *Skills for Life* framework. Scotland has developed its response to the language, literacy and numeracy needs of their population through a social practice model, rather than the functional model adopted in England. A social practice model approach supports the development of individual capabilities within the context of learners' own lives with less focus on economic requirements and measurable, tangible outcomes and a greater focus on the wider benefits of learning.

The aim of the project was for experienced literacy and numeracy practitioners to investigate the usefulness of Progress Profiling and the Scottish Core Skills Framework (frameworks introduced in Scotland to support adult literacy, language and numeracy learners) in recognising the progress of learners in literacy and numeracy programmes. To support this project, the following research questions were developed:

- If there are issues or barriers to using Progress Profiling, to what extent are they inherent in the nature of portfolio approaches or in the funding and contracting arrangements or type of learners in particular settings?
- If there are issues or barriers in using Core Skills Framework, to what extent are they inherent in the framework design or procedures or in the funding and contract arrangements or types of learners in particular settings?
- Is either Progress Profiling or Core Skills Framework perceived by learners and/or practitioners as more likely to promote learners' ownership of goals and progress achieved?
- How far do learners and practitioners perceive Progress Profiling and/or the Core Skills Framework as providing reliable evidence of their ability to transfer learning to real-life contexts?
- Can learners' real-life tasks entered into Progress Profiling provide summative assessment material for Core Skills Units?

The study used structured interviews to collect quantitative data.

**Findings relevant to improvement**

**Understanding and recording progress**

Whilst practitioners are aware of the importance of recognising and recording learner progress, there is some confusion regarding what constituted progress and how this can be recorded.

The Progress Profiling model is seen as concerned with learners' own goals, and encourages dialogue about targets and review of targets between tutor and learner.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/anr\\_details.asp?ID=3839](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/anr_details.asp?ID=3839)

**Item no: 11**

**Reference type:**

Journal article

**Authors:** Bathmaker A.M.

**Year:** 2007

**Title:**

The Impact of *Skills for Life* on adult basic skills in England; how should we interpret trends in participant and achievement?

**Journal volume:** 26

**Journal number:** 3

**Page numbers:** 295-313

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:** Routledge

**Commissioning body:**

International Journal of Lifelong Education

**Notes:**

This paper explores what can be learned about the impact of the Skills for Life strategy through an analysis of statistical data. It identifies trends in participation and achievement over the first four years of the strategy, which indicate a pattern of diminishing returns. This, in turn, may reflect the growing difficulties the policy will face in engaging hard to reach learners. The paper also raises a number of issues concerning the limitations of available statistical data in providing answers to questions such as the progress made by learners and their subsequent progression, both within and beyond adult basic skills provision. The paper goes on to argue that the strong emphasis on a numerical targets related to qualification outcomes may serve to focus both practitioners' and policy makers' attention on this aspect alone. This may serve the interests of international benchmarking of skill levels in the population, but may do rather less to improve learners' lives and capabilities.

Three strands of statistical data have been collected to quantify *Skills for Life* achievement outcomes: data on scale of need, very limited data on learners' progress and data on learners' levels of achievement.

Two studies have been undertaken specifically to assess learners' progress, with learners being tested on their skill level, and then re-tested at a later date to evaluate progress. Two further studies, which form part of the lifetime cohort studies, have collected comparable data over time. However, data used to evaluate progress in relation to the Skills for Life strategy does not actually assess learners' progress, but learners' achievements – not the same thing. Data is not routinely collected on learners' starting level and subsequent outcome level; therefore data that identifies measures of progress are inaccurate. More extensive data is available on levels of achievement, with achievement being understood as completion of certificated outcomes.

Bathmaker identifies an upward trend for participation, completion and achievement between 2000 and 2004 for Skills for Life learners. However, a downward trend is evidenced in the data on the proportion of opportunities taken up to those completed, and the proportion of opportunities taken up to aims achieved. She suggests that whilst efforts to increase participation rates appear successful, there is evidence of considerable attrition between enrolment, completion and achievement of qualification, and this trend is increasing. But she also asks whether completing a course but not having a certificated outcome means that a person has not improved their skills.

### Item no: 11 *Continued*

Qualification outcomes, on their own, do not provide a complete picture of evidence in relation to progress and improvement by individual learners. The paper questions whether a strategy which is based on narrowly-defined functional definitions of literacy, language and numeracy, and which centres around the pursuit of targets related to qualification outcomes, best serves the long term improvement of adults' capabilities in basic skills or their participation in society as citizens as well as workers.

#### Findings relevant to improvement

##### Data

There is a need to improve the way that individual learners' progress and progression are recorded.

Link: [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ765924&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ765924](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ765924&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ765924)

##### Notes:

This article reports on a small-scale pilot study, which aims to enhance understanding of participation in community-based adult learning and to investigate the meaning of progression from learner participants' points of view. The learners' stories, their description of the experience of participation in community-based adult learning and their perceptions of progression are likely to be of interest to practitioners who are striving to provide positive learning opportunities meeting the needs of adults in local communities.

Using a qualitative approach the researcher spoke to women learners engaged in this type of learning to understand their views on progression.

#### Findings relevant to improvement

There is evidence from the learners involved in this study of the importance of being treated as an adult: being allowed to express an opinion and learning with others who share something in common.

- A link between career development goals and using learning to achieve these goals was a further important element in progression.
- The timing of programmes, allowing engagement in learning and subsequent progress was also highlighted in the research as important.

### Item no: 12

#### Reference type:

Journal article

**Author:** McIntyre, J.

**Year:** 2008

#### Title:

Community-based adult learning: learner's perceptions of participation and progression

**Place of publication:** London

#### Publisher:

Concept 18 (2): 11-14



### Item no: 12 *Continued*

- Progression for these learners included:
  - Continuing involvement with learning at the same level;
  - Making changes in family relationships;
  - Engaging in volunteering activities;
  - A continuous process.
- For organisations, it is important to ask participants what progression means to them; this avoids making assumptions about learning goals.
- Progression in this study suggests that participants can move from different starting points backwards and forwards through a variety of learning opportunities, suggesting progression is a much more fluid and dynamic concept than the sometimes rigid vertical movement through levels of qualifications often associated with the concept of progression.
- It is important to understand progression within the context of individual learner's lives.

### Item no: 13

#### **Reference Type:**

Briefing paper

**Authors:** National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

**Year:** 2008

**Title:** Persistence

**Place of Publication:** London

**Publisher:** National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

**Commissioning Body:** National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

#### **Notes:**

In this research briefing, the concept of persistence is discussed. Particularly, the paper grapples with this concept and works hard to distinguish persistence as a learner-centred concept different from retention which is considered as an organisation-based concept.

Positioning learners at the centre of learning helps to illuminate the complex nature of persistence. Where retention, a provider-centred concept, may focus on a non-continuing learner as dropping out; persistence would view non-continuing learners as dipping out of learning for a while – often because of other more pressing responsibilities, such as family or work commitments. The research evidence demonstrates that breaks in attendance do not necessarily equate to dropping out completely, with inconsistent participation or attendance meaning non-persistence. For learners, periods of formal provision sandwiched by breaks of self-directed study, or even non-study at all, may be natural and logical components of a lifelong learning journey.

Barriers, or obstacles, to persistence identified in the research include situational, institutional and dispositional. Situation barriers include problems of day-to-day life, such as illness, childcare or family issues, employment issues and practical concerns such as time, cost and distance to travel. Institutional barriers relate to rules and procedures of the organisation, such as inconvenient class times or limited ranges of provision; accreditation or funding issues. Dispositional barriers consider learners' attitudes to learning and are often informed by previous poor experiences and issues associated with learning, such as low self-confidence, lack of motivation and emotional constraints. It is this category of barriers that is likely to have the largest influence and impact on the learners' ability to persist with their learning.



### Other challenges associated with barriers include:

Time on task:	The time needed to achieve progress from one level to another is suggested at between 150-200 hours and may be viewed as daunting for learners.
Subject differences:	The hurdles associated with some subjects are greater than others; for example numeracy learners cite barriers such as psychological and academic, whereas ESOL learners are lack to face difficulties accessing appropriate provision.
Demographic characteristics:	There is limited evidence to indicate that demographic characteristics may affect persistence; however immigrants, those over 30, and parents of teenage or grown-up children appear more likely to persist.
Non-traditional learners:	This group appear to be the least likely to persist with formal learning. For this group, engagement with learning has to occur at the right time with an emphasis on small steps, such as improvement in self-confidence, rather than a focus on qualifications.

### Findings relevant to improvement

Whilst a range of strategies to encourage and support learners to persist can be identified, an awareness of this concept needs to underlie these strategies. It is important for teachers, support staff and managers to be aware of the complex lives led by most learners and of the positive and negative forces that support and hinder persistence.

- Whereas retention is a provider-centred concept, persistence puts the learner at the heart of the equation – in effect, turning retention inside out.
- Research shows that learners who appear to be dropping out of provision may only be ‘dipping out’ for a while, generally to meet other commitments.
- Despite the complex combination of barriers to persistence, there appear to be few differences in the demographic characteristics of adults who persist in their studies and those who do not.
- To encourage persistence by vulnerable learners, the emphasis should be on small steps, such as an improvement in self-confidence, rather than on qualifications.
- Among the range of strategies that can help learners to persist, a particularly important factor appears to be the presence of a ‘sponsor’: someone in the learner’s social network who supports and encourages their learning goals.

### Item no: 13 *Continued*

- Promoting a sense of learner satisfaction and achievement can be particularly important for vulnerable learners. Setting and revisiting goals helps to improve persistence, with learners being involved in measuring their own progress along the way.
- Effective pedagogy and supportive teacher-learner relations further encourage learner motivation and persistence.
- Organisational cultures play a key role in supporting persistence and include appropriate support strategies and a consideration of their operational procedures and curriculum offer.
- Continuing professional development for teachers can also help to support persistence.

### Item no: 14

**Reference type:**

Briefing paper

**Authors:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

**Year:** 2008

**Title:** Progression

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

**Link:** [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)

### Notes:

This research briefing summarises recent research undertaken on the concept of progression by the NRDC and associated research centres and partner organisations. Progression is identified as a central concept in the Skills for Life strategy (2001), considering how much progression there has been amongst Skills for Life learners and what barriers may contribute to progression.

From statistical data obtained from the British Household Panel Survey, there is evidence of an 11% increase between 1991 and 2003 of people moving from no qualification achievement to the achievement of some form of Level 2 qualification; additionally, there was a 22% increase amongst the population moving from Level 1 to Level 2 qualifications. Since the implementation of the Skills for Life strategy (2001), statistical comparisons of cohort groups demonstrate there is a further value-added increase of 3%.

There is some evidence that the implementation of the strategy may have increased progression, although it is too early to offer robust confirmation of this. The introduction of the strategy does coincide with statistical evidence of increase in progression for adults with low qualifications. However, it is important to acknowledge that other factors may play a role, such as an increased tendency to certify learning.

A key barrier to learning identified across a range of research is time. There is evidence that Skills for Life learners are likely to need, on average, 150-200 hours of time on task to improve their literacy by one level.

Other barriers to progression identified include attitudinal barriers, which may play a larger role in non-progression than socio-economic constraints (which may be more significant in childhood than in adulthood). Additionally, there are age-related differences in adulthood, with research evidence suggesting that as adults get older, their past and its influence recedes in importance in relation to progression.

### Item no: 14 *Continued*

Exploring pathways to progression, no typical route towards Level 2 qualifications could be identified amongst the research. Some adults went from holding no formal qualifications to achieving some form of Level 2 qualification. However, learners who already had a Level 1 qualification were more likely to take additional Level 1 qualifications before progressing to Level 2.

Further consideration of the research undertaken on progression notes that there is little evidence of progression of learners enrolled on non-target programmes onto target, qualification-outcome based courses. Where there was evidence of movement of learners from non-target programmes onto target-based programmes the mean length of time taken to progress from the first course to the second was 7.5 months. Significantly, however, the most common time for movement was one month, the second most common length of time was one year and by 24 months there was very little evidence of progression.

### Findings relevant to improvement

Socio-economic status may play less of a role in progression and achievement for adults than for children. For adults, attitudes towards learning may be more important than socio-economic status.

### Item no: 15

#### Reference type:

Briefing paper

#### Authors:

Lavender P., Derrick J.  
and Brooks B.

Year: 2004

#### Title:

'Testing, Testing ...123'  
Assessment in adult literacy,  
language and numeracy

Place of publication: Leicester

#### Publisher:

National Institute of Adult  
Continuing Education (NIACE)

#### Commissioning body:

National Institute of Adult  
Continuing Education (NIACE)

### Notes:

This publication considers the role of testing and targets. It argues that targets are a useful measure when securing resources or aiming to secure a change in practice, but that working towards externally determined targets can distort behaviour. It is recognised that in order for the *Skills for Life* strategy to succeed, teaching needs to address the full range of learner needs. It is also acknowledged that assessment plays a vital role in recognising and recording the full range of learner progress, progression and achievement, but notes there is a danger of teaching to the test. The publication contributes to the debate on how best the skills and confidence in literacy, language and numeracy among all adults in Britain who need to support and encouragement can be developed.

### Tests, targets and ptarmigans

This paper explores the introduction of government targets and national tests within literacy, language and numeracy teaching and learning following *A Fresh Start* (1999) and subsequently the *Skills for Life strategy* (2001, 2003) which had qualifications linked to learner by level, rather than by participation attached to it. Whilst there is recognition of the importance of formative and summative assessment (discussed in the next paper) these have not been carried into policy implementation and funding favours qualification-bearing courses in adult literacy, language and numeracy classes.

The paper argues that the numbers of people passing tests is only a proxy for the measurement of achievement and does not record or measure progress. This measures only achievement which is free of context and of any link with formative assessment. However, it is recognised that the national tests do offer an easy way to create a target and draw down welcome resources, without which even less progress towards a lifelong learning culture would have been made. A focus on tests may well distract attention from participation, from real measures of achievement and from a learner-centred curriculum.

### **Making the grade: assessment and achievement in adult literacy, numeracy and language**

This paper surveys the arrangements for assessment and the measurement of achievement in adult literacy, language and numeracy in England and Wales. It identifies two fundamental problems produced by the organisational complexity of the field: that using measured outcomes of learning for funding can ultimately lead to measuring one's effectiveness as passing an assessment, rather than learning; and that such a cyclical process does not have the learner at the heart, consequently resulting in increasing likelihood of de-motivated learners. Drawing on a range of research, the paper concludes that the current system in place for measuring achievement in adult literacy, language and numeracy, needs to be more coherent, consistent and transparent – and in the interests of learners. It calls for an end to the linkage between assessment of students' achievements, and assessment of providers' performance and funding, arguing that this has an unintended negative effect of the breadth and sustainability of learning itself.

The paper recommends that:

- The national target for achievement should be propped up and enriched by a national target for participation;
- Achievements of literacy, language and numeracy learners at all levels should contribute to the national target;
- There should be more consistency in the regulations for summative assessment in adult literacy, language and numeracy, particularly in relation to the transition from entry level 3 to level 1;
- There should be further research and development on approaches, techniques and tools that support assessment for learning;
- A toolkit on formative assessment in adult literacy, language and numeracy should be produced; this production should be organised as a collaborative professional development activity;

**Item no: 15** *Continued*

- The 'Black Box' studies' findings, that using standardised tests for summative assessment can demotivate learners, should be investigated for adult learners of literacy, language and numeracy.

**D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?**  
**('Where Do We Come From? What Are We?**  
**Where Are We Going?')**

The third paper argues that the vision of lifelong learning and the relationship between policy and practice can often seem opaque. It discusses the implementation of the *Skills for Life* strategy, at a pace and cost that was manageable, relevant and realistic to the sector and concludes that learners must be at the heart of the *Skills for Life* strategy and it is their experiences that matter, whilst acknowledging that in reality we are all learners within the strategy.

**Findings relevant to improvement**

**Formative assessment**

The most effective and practical way to improve learners' achievement is to improve the practice of formative assessment.

Link: <http://shop.niace.org.uk/testing-123.html>

**Item no: 16**

**Reference type:**

Guidance handbook

**Authors:**

Department for  
Education and Skills (DfES)

**Year:** 2003

**Title:**

Delivery of Skills for Life:  
the national strategy for  
improving adult literacy and  
numeracy skills. Planning  
learning and recording  
progress and achievement;  
a guide for practitioners

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

Department for  
Education and Skills (DfES)

**Commissioning body:**

Department for  
Education and Skills (DfES)

**Notes:**

This guide for those involved in the teaching and management of *Skills for Life* provision provides a framework which, at its simplest, describes a process in which both the teacher and the learner need to be involved in order to ensure that learning programmes meet the learners' needs and that learners' progress and achievements are recognised. It was developed drawing on the experience and expertise of a large number of practitioners and places the learner at the heart of the learning process. In doing so, the guide also addresses the ways in which the processes of planning learning and recording progress and achievement are related to quality assurance, self-assessment, inspection, funding and audit.

Whilst this is not a research report, based on empirically drawn evidence; it has been constructed drawing on the knowledge and skills of experienced practitioners.

The guide adopts a layered approach allowing practitioners with differing levels of experience to identify areas that they will find most useful. Case studies are used to support each of the topics and exemplar tools are provided where appropriate.

## Findings relevant to improvement

### Features of good practice in Skills for Life

Layer 1 of the guide starts out with what is essential and identifies the necessary features of good practice for planning, learning and recording progress and achievement at each stage of the learning cycle. These 'essentials' are identified as:

- establishing a starting point;
- setting goals and targets;
- planning teaching and learning activities;
- reviewing progress;
- final assessment and review;
- planning the next step;
- setting new goals for returning learners.

Layer 2 provides more detail for each element identified in Layer 1 with a range of templates to support the evidencing and mapping of this activity provided.

Layer 3 provides further detailed guidance on each on the topics discussed, covering:

- setting SMART goals and targets;
- 'other' learning goals and achievements;
- involving the learner;
- individual learning plans (ILPs);
- planning learning and recording progress and achievement with learners with learning difficulties working at pre-entry level;
- using ILPs with ESOL beginners;
- using a learning-styles approach to plan learning;
- progression;
- learning that does not lead to a qualification: frequently asked questions about LSC funding;
- ensuring that records of achievement are fair and reliable in learning that does not lead to a qualification;
- developments in recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) in all LSC-funded, non-accredited learning;
- evaluating the effectiveness of programmes: self-assessment and inspection;
- paperwork;
- managing the process.

Link: [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/Deliver\\_Skills\\_for\\_Life](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/Deliver_Skills_for_Life)



**Item no: 17****Reference type:**

Guidance materials/  
handbooks

**Authors:**

National Research  
and Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy

**Year:** 2008

**Title:**

Stick With It: Messages from  
the development projects

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research  
and Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy

**Commissioning body:**

Quality Improvement  
Agency (QIA)

**Notes:**

This is a report that outlines the development work undertaken during the second year of the two-year QIA project: 'Motivating Skills for Life learners to persist, progress and achieve', described elsewhere in this catalogue. The development activity discussed in this report engaged 14 organisations across a wide range of adult learning providers, and shares the lessons learned by practitioners and organisations that made changes to their practices that made a real difference for their learners. The publication has messages for managers, MIS specialists, teachers and support staff. Examples are provided of the types of changes organisations made, and share both their experiences and the experiences of their learners. The aim of the development projects was to review and change practice in ways that encouraged learners to persist with their learning, in turn enabling them to progress and, ultimately, achieve. Resulting from this project are some key messages and lessons that can lead to improvements in persistence, progression and achievement amongst learners. These are provided below.

**Findings relevant to improvement**

Organisations who are keen to support learners to persist with learning may benefit from considering the following:

- The value of considering your organisation from the viewpoint of the learner.
- Learners in this project were very firm in their belief that teachers, tutors and trainers were important. Findings from the development projects suggest it is important to have teachers who:
  - Have the attitudes, knowledge and interpersonal skills that enable them to respond proactively, sensitively and effectively to learners' wider social, economic and cultural needs;
  - Have time and resources to listen and to help the learner to access other sources of support where necessary;
  - Have time and resources to provide IAG or help the learner to find appropriate guidance elsewhere;
  - Can adjust their approach to teaching to the needs of the specific learners.
- The potential of technology. Technology can be fun and motivating, increase confidence, offer new ways of learning and make it possible to learn in new places and at new times. It can foster new networks of support. However, technology on its own is not enough. Learners identified that they needed good introductions to applications, access to technical support and opportunity to engage personally with a teacher, face-to-face, or by phone or email.

**Item no: 17** *Continued*

- Incentives play a role in encouraging learners to attend regularly. Learners were less motivated by less immediate or tangible rewards, such as getting a job, but carefully chosen rewards for sticking with learning played a part in keeping learners engaged. Particularly, they may encourage learners to stay beyond the crucial first few weeks of their course.
- Success drives success. A sense of achievement motivates learners to stick with learning. This can be achieved by recognising small steps of learning, such as growth in confidence.
- It is helpful to reposition thinking from dropping out to taking time out from study. A focus on ways to enable learners to keep in touch with learning, even when not attending class, becomes impossible because of real-life issues, and developing a culture of welcoming learners back into learning when they are able to return enables persistence, progression and achievement.
- Small changes in defining data collection and records have huge potential to change practices in ways that can encourage learner persistence.
- Action and support are required at the organisational level to enable changes of practice.
- Small interventions, such as access to pastoral support, e-learning and an enhanced initial assessment, can make significant differences for learners and have the potential to act as a catalyst for wider change.

The summary observation resulting from this project, that is relevant to improvement, is identified as the most important. Making such changes requires us to initially take a step back and look at the learner's experience through the lens of persistence; considering what we do as an organisation or as an individual, enables or impedes persistence. Changes to practice do not have to be huge or resource intensive; it is clear from the development projects that small changes had significant influences on the ability of learners to persist, progress and achieve.

Link: [http://excellence.qia.org.uk/pdf/PPA\\_final.pdf](http://excellence.qia.org.uk/pdf/PPA_final.pdf)



**Item no: 18****Reference type:**

Other: Literature review

**Author:** Litster J.

**Year:** 2007

**Title:**

Motivating Skills for  
Life Learners to Persist,  
Progress and Achieve.  
Final Report to the Quality  
Improvement Agency

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

Quality Improvement Agency

**Commissioning body:**

Quality Improvement Agency

**Notes:**

This report outlines key findings from existing research on adult learner persistence. Its starting point was an initial analysis of research from the United States and particularly the National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy's (NCSALL) Learner Persistence Study, the largest and most systematic examination of the topic, which explored factors that support and inhibit persistence for language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) learners. The review created a conceptual framework to be used in the 'Stick with It' project: motivating LLN learners to persist, progress and achieve. The review also drew on research from related topics, including motivation, barriers and progression.

Persistence is a learner-centred concept that focuses on how, from the learner's point of view, he or she is supported into learning and throughout the learning career. Persistent learners engage in learning that is intensive enough and long enough to ensure significant progress towards their learning goal. Learner persistence is not the same as learner retention. Adults who are engaging in LLN learning for specific objectives, for example to obtain a particular qualification for employment, may consider persistence as not relevant to them. Non-completion is not necessarily negative: learners can leave having improved their skills sufficiently to get a job, for example.

Funding systems that are based on the assumption that all learners progress by one level during an academic year uniformly can undermine persistence for some learners. Time restrictions on achieving a qualification may lead to learners being counselled out of learning and progression points can, alternatively, be markers for when learners dropout of provision. Successful persistence and progression is linked not only to learners knowing what they want to achieve, and having signposting for clear pathways this but also to there being realistic and achievable pathways for learners to follow.

It should be recognised LLN learners are a diverse cohort. Delivery, pedagogies, goals and achievements need to be as diverse as the learner body. Different outcomes are reasonable for different learners, and learners should be supported accordingly. A broader definition of achievement than qualifications is essential for LLN learners.

Persistence is enabled by careful placement on courses that are appropriate and at the right level. Learners are more likely to stay on programme when the rationale is clearly explained and understood, with an achievable and appropriate outcome. There is a range of barriers to persistence, including lack of childcare and, for ESOL learners, financial barriers.

Interventions to support persistence should increase positive forces (i.e. motivation and goals) and minimise negative forces (i.e. barriers).

Many younger learners in the at risk group do not easily engage in self-directed learning. Some vulnerable young people, particularly those who have been in care, are not used to making their own decisions and taking responsibility for themselves.

For many learners, motivation and persistence are linked. Motivation is not only a personal trait, but conditioned by how learners see themselves and their possibilities, and how they are positioned in society. Adults in learning programmes organised on a compulsory basis are generally considered less motivated to attend. Groups of learners who do not want to learn are particularly difficult for teachers to support.

Standards of teachers and good teaching are by far the most important factor in the enjoyment of learning, and therefore in motivation, and persistence in the classroom. Class atmosphere is crucial to persistence, especially the creation of an adult learning environment. Learners who feel marginalised by the learning environment, specifically by a traditional college environment, may not persist.

ESOL learners differ from other LLN learners in that they do not have to be coaxed into learning or encouraged to stay in classes. Many ESOL students suffer a dramatic loss of cultural capital, often studying at level(s) below their educational/professional experience.

Numeracy learners whose school experiences have been particularly poor, are likely to be more persistent where their post-16 experience does not reflect their school experience.

An emphasis on punctuality and attendance is often at odds with the realities of adult learners' lives. Classes need to be held at times, in place and in ways that fit with the patterns of adult lives.

The life stage of learners is important in terms of the systems necessary to support persistence. Each stage requires different support interventions.

For ESOL, demand outstrips supply, with courses often having long waiting lists. This creates a situation in which the desire to support enrolled learners to persist is offset by the knowledge that keen students are waiting to take their place.

There is often a lack of progression pathways for those living in more geographically isolated places, particularly for those from low socio-economic groups.

The study suggests that more research is required to increase understanding, awareness and acceptance of persistence and to understand how study outside the classroom can support persistence, progress and progression within formal education pathways.

### **Findings relevant to improvement**

#### **Encouraging persistence, progress and progression**

Practitioners should communicate a clear sense of what learners can achieve in the light of the support available and the likely barriers, so that learners can be confident their plans are realistic.

Course design should link learning to everyday life or embed LLN skills to improve motivation, engagement and persistence. The use of ICT should be maximised.

Learner sponsors, including employers should be identified and offer encouragement and practical support to help learners persist.

Providers should support learner persistence into employment by strengthening links with local businesses, and providing the investment and training to enable teachers to develop their expertise in teaching job-related skills, and in work-related language.

Managers and practitioners should be flexible in accepting that learners may miss classes, need to change classes or choose the days in which they attend. They should also enable learners who have to leave a course to return at a later date.

Organisations should improve data collection to track internal and external progression.

Teacher training should focus less on inducting teachers into the use of complicated technology and more on how to use ICT for particular subject areas.

Providers should plan to ensure that horizontal and diagonal as well as vertical progression is available to meet the needs of diverse learner cohorts.

Link: <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=165167>

# Literacy

## Item no: 19

### Reference type:

Research report

### Authors:

Brooks G., Burton M.,  
Cole, P. and Szczerbinski M.

Year: 2007

### Title:

Effective Teaching and  
Learning – Reading

Place of publication: London

### Publisher:

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

### Commissioning body:

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

## Notes:

This is one in a series of five NRDC Effective Practice Studies constructed to respond to the following questions:

- How can teaching and learning literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT be improved?
- Which factors contribute to successful learning?

The reading study was the largest to date in Britain to explore the strategies used to teach reading in adult literacy classes. It also attempted to correlate the evidence with measures of change in learners' reading attainment and attitudes to literacy. The research was undertaken between July 2003 and March 2006.

It assessed learners' attainment and attitudes at two points during the year in which they were undertaking their study, interviewed both learners and teachers, observed the strategies used by teachers and correlated those strategies with changes in learners' attainment and attitude. 472 hours of teaching and learning were observed with data being gathered on 454 learners in 59 classes. The study found that 163 out of the 265 learners in the study achieved externally accredited qualifications and 171 went on to further study. Progress was not found to be affected or inhibited by factors which might otherwise be thought of as having an impact on achievement: age, ethnicity; whether English is the first or additional language; age of leaving full-time education; time since the last course; dyslexia; pre-test scores in reading.

## Findings relevant to improvement progression

### Factors supporting learners' progress

Regular attendance is an important factor in learners' progress.

Pair and group work encourages progress.

In addition to taught hours and contact time, self-study is essential for learners to persist and progress.

### Developing effective pedagogy

Teachers should be provided with specific and general strategies for teaching reading, and in particular: oral fluency; explicit comprehension strategies; reciprocal teaching; phonics; language experience approaches.

Teachers need to be shown in more detail how to teach reading in ways adapted to their learners' needs and therefore how to assess those needs, especially where learners have a 'spiky profile' of achievement.

**Item no: 19** *Continued*

There is a need to support teachers in developing strategies for balancing pair and group work with time given over to learners working alone.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=90](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=90)

**Item no: 20**

**Reference type:**

Research report

**Authors:**

Grief S., Meyer B.  
and Burgess A.

**Year:** 2007

**Title:**

Effective Teaching  
and Learning – Writing

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

**Notes:**

This is one in a series of five NRDC Effective Practice Studies constructed to respond to the following questions:

- How can teaching and learning literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT be improved?
- Which factors contribute to successful learning?

This study analysed the relationship between classroom practice in the teaching of writing changes in learners' competence in free writing and in learner's confidence in writing and their uses of writing in their everyday lives.

The research was undertaken between July 2003 and March 2006. Each study aimed to gather information on learners, assess their attainment and attitudes at two points during the year in which they were undertaking their study, interview both learners and teachers, observe the strategies used by teachers and correlate those strategies with changes in learners' attainment and attitude. 341 learners across 49 classes in 25 organisations were involved in the study with complete data for 199 learners across 40 classes in 20 organisations being gathered. Each learner undertook a writing assessment, created by the National Foundation for Education Research, at the beginning of each course and again at the end of the course. Each class was observed three times.

The study found that learners made small but significant improvement in their writing. However, demonstrable progress in writing cannot be achieved quickly. Small increases in confidence in writing and uses of writing outside the class were observed. Learners' confidence in writing tends to be higher at home, as compared to writing in the classroom or a public space.

Learners placed considerable importance on the technical skills of writing, handwriting, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and tended to measure their progress in writing to these aspects.

No statistical correlation was found, in this study, between teachers' qualifications and experience on the one hand, and measure of learners' progress on the other. However, when nine classes were examined in which learners had made the greatest progress, and compared with the nine classes that made the least progress, teachers of the top nine classes were all trained and most had substantial experience, whilst those in the lower classes were not trained and overall had less experience.

## Findings relevant to improvement

### Effective practice in supporting writing

A flexible approach to teaching which is responsive to learners' concerns as they arise, and a willingness to go with the teachable moment have positive impacts on learners' progress in writing.

Practice that makes a strong link with the real world beyond the class may help learners to feel more confidence, particularly in the everyday writing tasks they undertake at home.

Teaching should include planned and structured opportunities for the learner to achieve improvements in writing if this is a significant goal for the class.

Teachers should:

- place the focus first and foremost on writing as communication;
- encourage learners to compose their own texts and support learners in doing this through the careful setting up of writing tasks and use of talk;
- approach the technical aspects of writing (spelling, grammatical correctness and punctuation) within the contexts of meaningful writing tasks rather than through de-contextualised exercises;
- be flexible and responsive to learners needs, supporting learners as they draft, revise and proofread their work.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=88](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=88)

**Item no: 21****Reference type:**

Research report

**Author:** Eldred J.**Year:** 2002**Title:**

Moving on with confidence:  
Perceptions of success  
in teaching and learning  
adult literacy

**Place of publication:** Leicester**Publisher:**

National Institute of Adult  
Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Commissioning body:**

National Institute of Adult  
Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Notes:**

This report explores changing perceptions of success in teaching and learning in adult literacy in England. A range of indicators of success is considered, and the author questions whether an increase in confidence is a key measure of success. Questions emerging from the study include how to assess and record learner achievements.

Conceptually, success is concerned with a growth in confidence, with changes in behaviour and relationships being characteristics of such growth. Within adult literacy programmes success is measured against externally set standards, or by accreditation and qualifications set by external bodies. Equally, much research suggests that setting personal goals, and monitoring the movement towards their achievement with learners are further indicators of success.

The study used a mixed methodology. Interviews were undertaken with learners and tutors to form the substantive evidence base.

Tutors identified what they considered led to success; the most common responses were:

- basing tuition on individual interests/relevance;
- providing personal and social support for each student;
- using a variety of teaching styles;
- a cycle of assess, plan and review;
- using computer-assisted learning;
- using a range of spelling strategies;
- using real print.

Tutors were asked what they considered to be indicators of success. Their responses fell into three categories:

- student-centred, individual programmes of learning;
- confidence in the relationship with the tutor;
- time, for students to attend and learn and for tutors to plan and prepare.

Learners reported a range of ways in which they recognised their success including reading, writing and speaking activities, increased confidence and independence and notice from others. Overwhelmingly they believed that the skills of the tutor or volunteer tutor and the fact that tuition was not like school had contributed to their success.



**Item no: 21** *Continued*

The study shows that there are some differences and some areas of commonality between learners and tutors as to what constitutes success, or progress, progression and achievements. Both groups saw receiving a certificate and taking responsibility for learning and how to learn as an indicator of success. For tutors was the review of Individual learning plans to, the use of tests and assessment results as well as student feedback were important. For students, success was measured in terms of improved writing, reading, and spelling, using a dictionary, using punctuation and speaking up. All these indicators impacted on students' lives more widely and enabled them to feel more confident to undertake tasks both within and outside the home. Listening to learners' experiences of literacy education contributes significant insights into the development of practice and policy.

**Findings relevant to improvement**

**Assessment of learning**

Tutors and organisations should value the experience of learners who have intimate understanding of the daily struggles to engage in complex literacy processes.

Practitioners should be involved in considering how they assess learning, both formatively and summatively.

Link: [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=ED476518&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=ED476518](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED476518&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED476518)

**Item no: 22****Reference type:**

Research report

**Authors:**Brooks G., Davies R.,  
Ducke L., Hutchinson D.,  
Kendall S., Wilkin A.**Year:** 2001**Title:**Progress in adult literacy:  
do learners learn?**Place of publication:** London**Publisher:** Basic Skills Agency**Commissioning body:**

Basic Skills Agency

**Notes:**

This was a large scale two year study, running from 1998, with 2,135 students undertaking a pre-test and 1,224 undertaking a post-test. For the writing tests 1,724 students undertook the pre-test and 937, the post-test. Additionally 177 adult literacy tutors responded to a questionnaire. A set of reading tests were designed, drawing on tools used in previous studies, to provide national data against which benchmarks could be made. Two main reading tests were devised, to form a pre- and post- test activity. Additionally, one-sentence writing prompts were used in this process.

The study found that adults in dedicated mainstream basic skills provision in England and Wales made undramatic but worthwhile progress in both reading and writing. Three factors were associated with differential progress in reading: regular attendance; all tutors in an area having qualified teacher status; and tutors having help in the classroom. Learner gains were found to be related to their background characteristics; the amount of tuition that they had received between pre- and post-tests; and to important variables identified from the tutor questionnaire.

No clear pattern of factors associated with progress in writing emerged from this study.

**Findings relevant to improvement****Factors supporting learner progress**

The finding on the impact of regular attendance on progress suggests that intensive courses could be particularly effective.

Learners should be encouraged to attend very regularly.

Learners require maintenance of their skills and support for their literacy dealings with the world if they are not to lose skills they have gained. They will therefore continue to need non-intensive provision.

Instruments for assessing students' progress need to be able to detect very small steps of progress at the lowest levels.

**Professional development**

In-service professional development for tutors should embed focus on the practicalities of teaching literacy.

Link: [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=ED457365&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=ED457365](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED457365&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED457365)

# Numeracy

**Item no: 23**

**Reference type:**

Research report

**Authors:**

Coben D., Brown M.,  
Rhodes V., Swain J.,  
Ananiadou K., Brown P.,  
Ashton J., Holder D., Lowe S.,  
Magee C., Nieduszynska S.  
and Storey V.

**Year:** 2007

**Title:**

Effective Teaching and  
Learning – Numeracy

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

## Notes:

This is one in a series of five NRDC Effective Practice Studies constructed to respond to the following questions:

- How can teaching and learning literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT be improved?
- Which factors contribute to successful learning?

This study investigated approaches to the teaching of numeracy, aiming to identify the extent of learners' progress, and to establish correlations between this progress and the strategies and practices used by teachers.

The research was undertaken between July 2003 and March 2006. 412 learners were involved, with 34 teachers in 47 classes. 250 learners were assessed in the study, with 243 completing attitude surveys, at two points during the year. Classes were observed between one and four times during each course. Interviews were carried out with 33 teachers and 112 learners.

The study found evidence of significant progress, with an average gain of 9 per cent in test scores. Others, however, needed longer to consolidate their learning. For some learners, to maintain their level of skills, knowledge and understanding was a sign of personal progress.

Learners' attitudes were more positive at the end of the course. Learners recognised that the relationship between the teacher and effective learning was critical. It was clearly important for teachers to develop good relationships with learners.

## Findings relevant to improvement

### Teachers' professional knowledge

Teachers need to have both have a firm understanding of basic concepts in mathematics and the pedagogical knowledge to enable them to be flexible in their approaches and to cater to the diversity of learners and provision in adult numeracy.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=86](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=86)

**Item no: 24****Reference type:**

Journal article

**Authors:** Cara, O.,  
and de Coulon, A.**Year:** 2008**Title:**Skills for Life Teachers'  
Qualifications and their  
Learners' Progress in  
Adult Numeracy**Place of publication:** London**Publisher:**National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy**Commissioning body:**National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy**Link:** [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)**Notes:**

This report considers the relationship between teacher qualifications and learner progress in adult numeracy. Since the instigation of the Skills for Life strategy (2001) there has been a focus on up-skilling the workforce and supporting teachers to attain a range of professional qualifications. There is an implicit assumption that better qualified teachers will deliver higher quality teaching, resulting in increased achievements in numeracy.

This project focused on the teaching qualifications of numeracy teachers, their personal skill levels in Maths and English, and how these qualifications related to the progress of their learners. The report focused on 84 numeracy teachers and 237 of their learners. Learners were tested for their numerical skills before and after their course of study. Whilst description of the mean scores achieved pre- and post-course demonstrated progress was made by learners, further analysis identified that whilst some learners did progress, others regressed.

On analysis of the 84 teachers considered in this study, the team identified that 15% of the cohort were fully qualified, 52% were part-qualified and 33% were unqualified.

**Findings relevant to improvement**

- Experience matters. The number of years experience in teaching numeracy was found to positively affect learners' progress in, and attitude to, numeracy.
- Subject knowledge is of prime importance. The findings of this study strongly endorse the need for subject teachers to have personal Maths skills at Level 3 as an entry requirement for courses leading to numeracy teaching qualifications.
- Learners' improvements in numeracy were mostly associated with teachers who held qualifications in Maths at Level 3 and above. Significantly, no effects on improvements were detected for numeracy teachers holding qualifications at Level 2, compared to those teachers who did not hold this qualification.
- A positive impact on learner progress was identified where teachers held numeracy qualifications at Level 6 or above. These teachers influenced positively the attitude of their learners to Maths use in their everyday life. However, they also appear to impact negatively on the confidence of their learners in the numeracy skills after their course finished.

**Item no: 25**

**Reference type:**

Other: Book

**Author:** Swan M.

**Year:** 2006

**Title:**

Collaborative Learning in Mathematics. A challenge to our beliefs and practices

**Place of publication:**

London, Leicester

**Publisher:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), and National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), and National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Notes:**

This book describes the design and evaluation of innovative approaches to mathematics teaching. These were undertaken in an iterative manner with outcomes leading to further refinement of theories and approaches.

Much of the research was carried out with lower-attaining students aged 16-19 on one-year examination courses in further education institutions. The author recognises the challenging context in which to implement change – time is short and the stakes are high. Students are identified as often being passive; poorly motivated with a history of failure. Teachers feel under-resourced and under pressure to deliver results. This book shows how the systematic research-based design of teaching situations can help to improve the teaching and learning of mathematics in such a context.

### **Findings relevant to improvement**

#### **Improving learning in mathematics**

Learning activities should be designed to:

- focus on particular conceptual obstacles;
- focus on general, structural features rather than task-specific features;
- pose, or allow students to pose, significant and challenging questions;
- encourage a variety of interpretations;
- create tensions that require resolution, through careful juxtaposition of experiences;
- provide meaningful feedback to the student on his or her interpretations;
- be followed by some form of whole-class discussion in which new ideas and concepts are made explicit and institutionalised;
- allow consolidation of what has been learned through the application of the students' constructed concepts.

A learner-centred approach to the teaching and learning of mathematics should be used to enable learners to take much greater responsibility for directing the pace and direction of their own learning.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/news\\_details.asp?NewsID=229](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=229)

**Item no: 26****Reference type:**

Other: Literature review

**Author:** Coben D.

**Year:** 2003

**Title:**

Adult numeracy: review of research and related literature

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)

**Notes:**

This report is a review of what is known about adult numeracy, in order to identify gaps in our knowledge and understanding, draw out the implications for practice and make recommendations for further research. The review spans English language sources from around the world relevant to, as well as directly about, adult numeracy/mathematics teaching and learning and teacher education, mainly at the levels encompassed by the Adult Numeracy Core Curriculum.

The report covers qualitative and quantitative investigations with a critical commentary. There is an annotated bibliography with approximately 2500, to be available as a searchable database.

Numeracy is a deeply contested concept. It may be considered as mathematical (rather than solely numerical) activity rooted (situated) in its social, economic, cultural and historical context.

Surveys reveal low levels of adult numeracy in England, with deleterious effects on individuals, the economy and society. However, the measurement of adult numeracy skills is problematic, especially for adults with lower ability levels (including special educational needs and dyscalculia) and/or reading or language difficulties.

The need for adult numeracy/mathematical skills, including the communication of information based on mathematical data, is being progressively extended throughout the workforce as a result of the pressure of business goals and the introduction of IT. Employees increasingly need to have broader general problem-solving skills, inter-relating IT with mathematics.

Research on adults' uses of mathematics suggests that they are diverse – as are learners themselves – and deeply embedded in the contexts in which they occur. Transfer of learning between contexts may be problematic, posing a challenge for teachers attempting to relate the curriculum to learners' contexts.

The UK *Skills for Life* strategy has transformed the landscape of adult basic skills in England and significantly raised the profile of adult numeracy. The Adult Numeracy Core Curriculum is deliberately context-free. While most experienced numeracy teachers may have no difficulty in relating the Curriculum to the learner's context, this may pose a challenge for less experienced teachers, especially given the issues around transfer noted above. The adult numeracy/mathematics curriculum must meet the needs of students with diverse goals. This means it must be vertically progressive in terms of development of content as well as horizontally supportive with respect to the mathematical aspects of other subjects. Limited number skills are not enough.

Evidence on the impact of adult numeracy tuition is sparse and unreliable. Projects in the school sector making mathematics more experiential and less rule-bound, with more problem-solving experiences and employing constructivist theories of learning, have uniformly demonstrated improvements in attitude and attainment. Errors and misconceptions learned in childhood are likely to persist into adulthood and adult numeracy teachers should be aware of research in this area. Research suggests that students can build successfully on their informal knowledge to construct meaning from formal representations, although a clear relation must exist between the two for this to happen. Small-scale teacher-researcher studies in the USA on adults' multiple intelligences with respect to adult numeracy suggest that this approach may be worth pursuing, amongst others.

Research and development work on financial literacy has developed apace since the 1990s in response to changing demands on adults; these pressures are unlikely to diminish.

Adult numeracy teacher education is currently undergoing major transformation. Data on those currently teaching adult numeracy will become available through the NRDC longitudinal panel study of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers. There is an urgent need to build capacity in all aspects of adult numeracy. Some teachers' inadequate subject knowledge is a continuing concern although studies of mathematics education for children suggest that, rather than high levels of mathematical qualifications, it is teachers' engagement in continuing professional development in mathematics education that matters. Practitioners need time and support to work collaboratively, to train, study and reflect on their work and to undertake research.

The report notes a wide number of areas for further research.

### **Findings relevant to improvement**

#### **Developing new approaches in adult numeracy**

Curriculum resources appropriate to changing conceptions of adult numeracy need to be developed.

Practitioners should consider the value of assessment methods developed within the Realistic Mathematics approach in The Netherlands, in which adult learners write and publish their own mathematical problems, using a process of generating ideas, drafting, peer and teacher review and redrafting, enabling them to develop conceptual understandings of mathematical topics as well as their communication skills.

Developing skills in generalising, conjecturing and enquiring are likely to be effective in engaging learners. Teachers should be aware of different methods of calculation and able to choose an appropriate strategy. They need make explicit the links between different aspects of mathematics.



Practitioners need to learn from adults learning – and doing – mathematics.

### Teacher Education and CPD

Teacher education and continuing professional development should include awareness of factors affecting mathematics learning. Teachers should be made aware of current research on dyscalculia and on the functioning of the brain in mathematical activity.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=35](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=35)

## ESOL

### Item no: 27

**Reference type:**  
Research report

**Authors:**

Baynham M., Roberts C., Cooke M., Simpson J., Ananiadou K., Callaghan J., McGoldrick J. and Wallace C.

**Year:** 2007

**Title:**

Effective Teaching and Learning ESOL

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)

### Notes:

This research project was one of a suite of five research projects conducted by the NRDC with the common aim of investigating effective practice in teaching language, literacy, numeracy and ICT to adults. The aims of the ESOL project were to:

- establish what are currently held to be principles of effective practice in language teaching and learning and to evaluate their effectiveness for ESOL;
- observe the range of practices in ESOL classrooms and to identify and document effective practice from both theoretical and practice oriented perspectives;
- document the progress made by adult ESOL students in these classroom settings;
- where possible, to establish correlations between particular pedagogical practices and student progress;
- to draw implications for policy, provision and further professional development of ESOL practitioners.

The study focuses on teaching speaking at entry levels 1 and 2. The research was carried out between 2003 and 2005. The research team adopted a multi-method approach that encompassed a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. This included a speaking test designed to measure learners' progress. 40 entry level classes were observed and recorded on three occasions on diverse sites: further education colleges (18), further education community-based (14), local authority service (2), charities (3), Jobcentre Plus (1), school 6th form centre (1), work-based class in a hotel (1). There was an initial cohort of 509 students, of whom 256 completed pre- and post-assessments, thus comprising the core sample. 76 of these students and 40 classroom teachers were interviewed. Students were from very diverse cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds.

## Findings relevant to improvement

**Teachers' professional vision and expertise are amongst the most important determinants of effective teaching and learner progress.**

### Meeting the needs of ESOL learners

ESOL learners are super-diverse and classes tend to be large. Provision must be varied to respond to this diversity of learning needs and styles. One size fits all approaches are not effective.

Many ESOL classes are general and do not respond adequately to the complexity of requirements of adults wishing to enter the UK labour market.

Different types of provision and progression pathways are needed to meet the diverse requirements of ESOL learners, including fast track ESOL and specific literacy provision from teachers trained to develop literacy skills.

Newer arrivals, including asylum seekers need adequate provision on arrival so they do not store up barriers to learning and achievement in the future.

Achieving autonomy is a key objective for learners: learners talk of their achievements in terms of breaking their dependency on others to help them negotiate bureaucratic encounters, and managing real life situations that were impossible for them before.

### Effective ESOL practice

Achievement and progress result from a balance between a focus on grammar and vocabulary and other teaching strategies, particularly ones that draw on classroom talk to create learning, use materials relevant to learners' lives and interests, and encourage learner initiated activities.

Elements of effective ESOL practice include clear planning, explicit framing and meta-language, a range of creative and responsive teaching strategies and resources, encouraging and supporting extended talk activities from within and outside the classroom, collaborative group work, constant re-visiting and re-working of linguistic items, safe and fun learning.

Teachers need to be aware of second language learning and pedagogy when planning courses and activities. For example language development is incremental and requires repetition and recycling over extended periods, rather than being sequential. Effective practitioners must recognise that talk is the main medium of learning and what is being learnt, and be able to turn talk into learning by offering on the spot analysis and responsiveness to learner talk.

Group processes are important in supporting the development of communication skills. Focus on individual learning can undermine group processes, particularly where inappropriate individual learning plan (ILP) approaches are demanded.

### **Factors affecting progress and achievement in ESOL**

Attendance rates and the length of time spent in the UK. are significant for progress. Adults who have lived in the UK for five years or less are more likely to make greater and faster progress than longer-term residents, many of whom have little experience of schooling and little or no literacy in any language. New arrivals tend to be younger, have higher levels of schooling and attend more intensive provision. Placing learners with low levels of literacy in with learners who are literate slows the progress of all.

Many ESOL learners experience life circumstances that reduce their ability to learn and progress.

ESOL learners are on the whole keen to meet and speak with English speakers but few have opportunities to do so, and therefore limited opportunities to practice outside their classes slows progress.

### **Community- based ESOL provision**

The challenges of working in community settings, where much provision is isolated, small-scale and poorly resourced mean that more experienced staff should be placed there and classes should be better supported.

Community-based provision is often accessed by long-term residents and offers limited opportunities for progression. Strategies and resources are needed to bridge the gap between this group and more recent arrivals by strengthening the links between community and college based provision.

### **Training and professional development**

There should be greater emphasis on subject knowledge and subject specific pedagogy built into initial teacher training and reflective practice built into continuing professional development.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=19](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=19)

**Item no: 28****Reference type:**

Research report

**Authors:**

Roberts C., Baynham M.,  
Shrubshall P., Barton D.,  
Chopra P., Cooke M., Hodge R.,  
Pitt K., Shellkens P.

**Year:** 2004

**Title:**

English for Speakers of Other  
Languages (ESOL) – case  
studies of provision, learners’  
needs and resources

**Place of publication:** London

**Publisher:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

**Commissioning body:**

National Research and  
Development Centre  
for Adult Literacy and  
Numeracy (NRDC)

**Notes:**

This is one in a series of five NRDC Effective Practice Studies constructed to respond to the following questions:

- How can teaching and learning literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT be improved?
- Which factors contribute to successful learning?

This report is an in–depth study of ESOL learners and provision. It sets out to identify some of the distinctive features of ESOL, and to examine classroom practices. Case study methodology was adopted and five case studies were used to illustrate diversity in ESOL. Researchers used questionnaires and ethnographic interviews to gather data from learners and teachers, and community interpreters were trained to carry out interviews so that learners with less well-developed English could contribute through their first languages. Classroom observations were also used and learners were assessed twice using a test designed to test spoken English. The research took place between January and September 2003.

The study found that many learners face multiple and complex challenges and disadvantages in their lives outside the classroom. These matters, and the physical or mental ill health sometimes experienced by ESOL learners, can have a negative impact on attendance, retention, learning, progress and achievement. Teachers need more training and support to formulate adequate responses. However, many support needs are beyond the remit and expertise of teachers. Multi-agency responses were not in place in the cases studied, but were considered to be the most effective support for these learners.

**Findings relevant to improvement****Effective practice in ESOL**

Employing multiple approaches in classroom practice is most effective to facilitate progress.

Learners learn best when the content is relevant, interesting, stretches them to use language in real ways, is flexible and highly responsive to their needs. Often tasks in the ESOL classroom are very narrow and constrain learners opportunities to develop and extend their learning.

Practitioners should recognise that:

- talk is work in the ESOL classroom and that group learning processes are therefore highly important;
- language learning is a complex, multi-layered and non – linear process that involves developing awareness of the cultural and social situations in which communication takes place;

**Item no: 28** *Continued*

- learners use their other languages in concrete and strategic ways to help them to learn English;
- learners bring sophisticated experiences and knowledge into the classroom, and are often more resourceful than teachers allow for;
- learning is more meaningful when learners are involved in determining the direction and content of their learning, including the use of first languages to assist learning.

Teachers need to create safe classroom environments that facilitate learning by:

- taking account of the traumatic pasts of the learners in their classroom practice and the content of the learning;
- enabling learners to feel safe to expose lack of understanding and ask for clarification and further explanation.

In numeracy, the use of everyday, culturally specific situations to contextualise maths problems may act as a barrier to attainment by ESOL learners.

Link: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=89](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=89)

**Item no: 29**

**Reference type:**

Other: Book

**Authors:** Ward J.

**Year:** 2007

**Title:**

ESOL: The context  
for the UK today

**Place of publication:** Leicester

**Publisher:**

National Institute of Adult  
Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Commissioning body:**

National Institute of Adult  
Continuing Education (NIACE)

**Notes:**

This book critically explores the literature on the context of teaching and learning for ESOL within *Skills for Life* and questions whether the current provision provides the necessary language skills to enable individuals to make life choices and contribute fully, economically, socially, culturally and politically in England in the 21st century. The report recommends an enquiry into the extent to which current models of provision provide adequate responses to learners' numerous and disparate priorities, attitudes, skills, learning style and expectations, and further research into the needs of particular cohorts.

Research evidence shows that ESOL needs are distinctly different from basic literacy and numeracy needs, although they sit alongside such provision within the adult basic skills strategy. ESOL learners are not a homogenous group and a range of focussed responses are required to support these needs to enable learners to progress and achieve.

Delays in starting to learn English can have a detrimental effect on the rate at which adults learn and progress in ESOL programmes. Most recently arrived adult speakers of other languages have a fierce desire to learn English.

**Item no: 29** *Continued*

There is a need to recognise the varying background of ESOL learners, from those with high-level qualifications in their country of origin to those with no formal experience of education. Factors, such as the length of time in the UK or first language literacy, are significant for progress and achievement.

Pedagogic practice is strongest when informed by an understanding of the circumstances of learners' lives and the contexts in which they learn and use language. Whilst research shows no direct link between embedded techniques and learner progress and achievement, such an approach to teaching language and subject knowledge can increase motivation for learners as they make progress.

ESOL learners may make more progress if bilingual staff and practitioners are available to learners. Further research on this is recommended.

There is a clear need for a differentiated approach to the range of training provision made available and accessible for ESOL learners, which is not determined by funding streams or residential status. There should be structured fast-track courses for learners with developed language learning and study skills who want to gain entry to the employment market, or higher level study; whilst other courses should offer a slower pace of learning for learners with lower levels of literacy or less well-developed skills for learning. For the latter group it is especially difficult to develop literacy skills in a group environment or mixed-level classes.

The core curriculum to support the delivery of ESOL should be used as a guide for delivery, rather than a prescriptive text. The latter approach may not address all a learner's needs. Using the core curriculum as a linear programme may also lead to overlooking 'soft' skills that are shown to support learning progress.

The use of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) has limited use: many practitioners view ILPs as time consuming and bureaucratic, taking time from teaching, and not contributing significantly to progress, progression and achievement.

Using learners' first language has a positive impact on achievement. Language isolation can be detrimental to progress in language acquisition. Exposure to English outside the class and social interactions have a positive effect on progression.

There are dangers in using qualifications as a proxy for progress and achievement. External examinations are not a significant motivator for ESOL learners. Learning is prioritised for a particular purpose and once this is achieved, learners may leave a programme without taking examinations to record their achievement. Recognising achievement in ways that are meaningful and relevant in relation to real situations is challenging. Whilst ESOL learners do not always progress evenly and sometimes may regress, there is general acceptance that is important for all learners to recognise and reflect on their progress, whether or not their achievements are externally certificated.

Restricted funding streams for ESOL learners may jeopardise progression ladders for ESOL learners and compromise their ability to move from lower level learning programmes to higher level programme, vocational pathways or to enter employment. A strong range of provision is needed to enable them to progress through and beyond entry levels.

### **Findings relevant to improvement**

#### **Responding to the diversity of ESOL learners**

Providers and practitioners should recognise the diversity of ESOL learners and design a variety of courses accordingly.

The ESOL core curriculum should be used as a guide rather than prescription.

Specific provision should be made for ESOL learners with low levels of literacy.

Providers should recognise the value of using learners' first language and consider employing bilingual staff.

Link: <http://shop.niace.org.uk/esol-context-uk.html>



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