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Eóin Murphy

Adult Literacy Strategies in Northern Ireland, the UK and ROI

1 Introduction

This paper was commissioned by the Committee for Employment and Learning in order to examine the levels of adult literacy in Northern Ireland (NI). The paper also provides details on the literacy and numeracy strategies of NI, Wales, Scotland, England and the Republic of Ireland (ROI). For the purposes of this paper 'literacy' refers to both literacy and numeracy.

Please note literacy and numeracy are referred to under different names in each of the strategies for the UK regions:

- Northern Ireland: Essential Skills;
- Scotland: Adult Literacy;
- Wales: Basic Skills; and
- England: Skills for Life.

2 Key Points

- The first, and to date most comprehensive, study carried out on Literacy in NI was the International Adult Literacy Survey in 1996;
- The study found that around 250,000 people of working age in NI had very low literacy and numeracy skills;
- DFP produces a bi-annual survey (NI Omnibus) that examines a number of topics including adult literacy. It has found that the percentage of people reporting being “not very comfortable” with literacy and numeracy has been falling consistently since 2004;
- However, the omnibus survey is based on self-reporting and as such the applicability of its results are limited;
- An Oxford Economics study in 2009 extrapolated indicative results of a future IALS based on the 1996 study and annual changes in educational attainment;
- It found that there has been an overall improvement in literacy skills, the rate of improvement is slow and that NI is still lagging behind the best international literacy standards;
- NI’s latest strategy on Literacy, “Success Through Skills”, is a continuation of the original 2002 strategy and has four strategic goals, including to increase the proportion of people in employment with level 2 skills to 84 – 90% by 2020 from a baseline of 71.2%;
- The Scottish Strategy “Adult Literacy in Scotland 2020” focuses on four outcomes including improved infrastructure and a high quality of learning and teaching;
- The most recent Welsh strategy on literacy is “Words talk, numbers count” 2005. The main purpose of the strategy is to get the maximum number of people up to level 1 literacy and numeracy;
- The 2009 strategy for England focuses on getting learners to meet a minimum threshold level of literacy and numeracy, with the intention of having 597,000 people of working age achieving level 1 or above in literacy;
- The ROI strategy “the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016” seeks to reduce the proportion of the population with restricted literacy to between 10-15% by 2016, from a level of 25% in 1997.

3 Levels of Adult Literacy in NI, GB, ROI and the EU

Data on the levels of literacy in Northern Ireland is limited as the most recent comprehensive study took place in 1996. The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) which was carried out by the OECD in 1996, examined literacy levels in a number of countries. It defined literacy as:

Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.

IALs measured three types of literacy:

- **Prose:** the knowledge and skills required to understand and use information from texts such as prose, newspaper articles and passages of fiction;
- **Document:** the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats such as timetables, graphs, charts and forms; and
- **Quantitative:** the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, to numbers embedded in printed materials.

The study found that there were around 250,000 people of working age in NI with very low literacy and numeracy skills¹.

Table 1 below shows the levels of each of these types of literacy in NI in 1996.

Table 1: Northern Ireland Prose, Document and Quantitative Literacy Level²

	Level ³ 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5
Prose	24%	30%	31%	15%
Document	26%	28%	31%	15%
Quantitative	23%	27%	31%	19%

The IALs also provided an international and NI comparison of prose literacy:

Table 2: Prose Literacy level by country (1996)

Country	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5
Poland	43%	35%	20%	3%
Northern Ireland	24%	30%	31%	15%
Republic of Ireland	23%	30%	34%	14%
Great Britain	22%	30%	31%	17%
United Kingdom	22%	30%	31%	17%
USA	21%	26%	32%	21%
Belgium	18%	28%	39%	14%
New Zealand	18%	27%	35%	19%
Australia	17%	27%	37%	19%
Canada	17%	26%	35%	23%
Germany	14%	34%	38%	13%
Netherlands	11%	30%	44%	15%
Sweden	8%	20%	40%	32%

¹ Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2009, Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy

² Please note, the IALS study combines the findings for levels 4 and 5 due to the smaller percentage returns

³ Key to Skill bands – Level 1: people with very low literacy skills, Level 2: people who can only deal with simple material; Level 3: people with roughly the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and college entry; and Level 4/5: people who demonstrate command of “higher order information processing skills”.

As can be seen above, Northern Ireland had the second-highest proportion of the population with level 1 prose literacy of the countries shown. Importantly the study found that there were no significant differences in literacy levels across the UK, with NI only varying slightly from the UK average.

The IALS report also found that those who were unemployed were almost twice as likely as those in employment to be at Level 1. It explains this by stating:

Part of this is explained by the underlying association between employment status and educational attainment level. Those with no qualifications are less likely to be employed than those with A-level or higher qualifications.

The Department of Finance and Personnel carries out a bi-annual survey (The NI Omnibus study) that covers a number of topics. The survey is based on self-reporting and as such there will be some subjective bias attached. A second method for establishing literacy levels is based upon qualifications, whilst there is an association between educational achievement and literacy, it is not directly related. For example, the IALS found evidence of individual's with HE qualifications but with low literacy levels and vice versa.

The DEL Labour Market Bulletin 23 produced an update on research into literacy skills since the IALS. As part of this it published the table below which shows the results from the Omnibus survey regarding Essential Skills. It should be noted that the table only shows responses for those who stated they were "not very comfortable" or "not at all comfortable".

Also that:

It is encouraging to note that the percentages for those self-reporting to be 'not very comfortable' or 'not at all comfortable' in carrying out a number of 'everyday' tasks has decreased since the survey began⁴.

⁴ Department for Employment and Learning, Labour Market Bulletin 23 Chapter 7, Literacy Levels in NI

Table 3: NI Omnibus Survey responses

Survey Date	How comfortable are you reading information on your own	How comfortable are you filling out forms on your own	How comfortable are you when you have to use basic maths?	How comfortable are you when you have to use computer software packages, for example using the internet, email, word processing or spreadsheets? ⁵
June 2004	7%	16%	8%	-
October 2004	7%	14%	8%	-
April 2005	6%	13%	6%	-
October 2005	6%	13%	8%	-
March 2006	7%	14%	9%	-
September 2006	4%	12%	6%	-
April 2007	6%	15%	8%	-
October 2007	5%	11%	7%	-
April 2008	5%	13%	7%	-
September 2008	5%	13%	9%	-
April 2009	4%	12%	7%	-
September 2009	5%	13%	8%	37%
April 2010	5%	13%	7%	36%

An interim study commissioned by DEL and carried out by Oxford Economics⁶, provided indicative results of the literacy level in NI.

The study provides an estimate of literacy levels in NI based upon the annual changes in educational attainment. These results are converted to correspond with the 'levels' used in the IALS study.

The study found that:

- **Overall improvement in 'literacy' standards** – across all three IALS categories, the estimated trends indicate a rise, between 1996 and 2009, in the proportion of persons aged 16-65 performing at IALS Level 4/5 (+4%) and a fall in the proportion at IALS Level 1 (-3%). There is also an estimated fall in the proportion at IALS level 2 (-2% to -3%) but rise at IALS level 3 (+1 to +2%).
- **Good relative improvement by UK standards** – the report's estimates indicate that 'literacy' standards between 1996 and 2009 have improved faster in NI than the

⁵ Question only added in September 2009

⁶ Department for Employment and Learning and Oxford Economics, Study to Identify how literacy levels have developed over time, http://www.delni.gov.uk/del_ni_literacy_trends_final_report_11_02_2010_-_final_report_9_7_10-2.pdf

other UK countries, across each of the three IALS literacy categories. Wales however is estimated to have had greater success in reducing the proportion of persons aged 16-65 performing at IALS Level 1 (this is due to Wales having the largest decline in the share of persons with no qualifications according to the Annual Population Survey). Wales has also increased the proportion of persons at IALS Level 3.

Table 4: Percentage Point Change from the 1996 IALs to the 2009 estimate

	pp change (1996 IALS - 2009 OE estimate)			
	NI	England	Scotland	Wales
Prose				
Level 1	-3.2	-2.4	-2.8	-3.9
Level 2	-2.8	-1.9	-1.9	-1.2
Level 3	2.1	1.3	1.9	2.5
Level 4/5	3.9	3.0	2.8	2.6
Document				
Level 1	-3.5	-2.6	-2.7	-3.7
Level 2	-2.1	-1.5	-2.5	-1.3
Level 3	2.0	1.0	2.8	2.0
Level 4/5	3.5	3.2	2.4	3.0
Quantitative				
Level 1	-3.0	-2.7	-2.9	-3.8
Level 2	-2.6	-1.6	-1.0	-1.7
Level 3	1.4	0.4	1.3	2.2
Level 4/5	4.2	3.9	2.6	3.3

- **The overall pace of improvement is slow** – the study estimated that roughly 4 in 5 persons aged 16-65 in 1996 in NI will still be in this group in 2009. This means that unless a large share of this existing group is up-skilling and raising their ‘literacy’ standards (e.g. by participating in the Essential Skills Programme), the impact of more literate young people coming through to the cohort and less literate older persons exiting will be limited.
- **Internationally still lagging behind the best** – Estimates for NI ‘literacy’ standards in 2009 indicate that the region still lags a long way behind the best performers such as Sweden, even when comparing to their proportions at each IALS level in 1996. For example in 1996, 36% of Swedish people aged 16-65 performed at IALS Level 4/5 in quantitative literacy – for NI in 2009 it was estimated that this proportion is still only 23%.
- **‘Absolute’ versus ‘share’ trends** – as the 16-65 population in NI has grown from 1.04m in 1996 to an estimated 1.17m in 2009, a fall in the proportion at a particular IALS level does not automatically equate to a fall in absolute numbers at that same

level. This holds true for IALS Level 2 for which overall between 1996 and 2009, there has been an increase in numbers estimated to perform at this level (despite a fall in its share). This is not necessarily a negative development as it may reflect the up-skilling of persons from IALS Level 1.

Northern Ireland is taking part in the 2011 IALS study, although results will not be available until 2013.

4 Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in the UK and ROI

Each of the regional governments has set out their own strategies for tackling adult literacy and numeracy. This section of the paper will discuss the main aspects of the devolved regions strategies. It will also briefly discuss the ROI strategy.

4.1 Northern Ireland

Since devolution there have been two main strategies developed in Northern Ireland in order to deal with Literacy and Numeracy issue. These are the Essential Skills for Living (2002) and its replacement strategy Success Through Skills (2006).

The first strategy⁷ was launched in October 2002 following the results of the 1996 IALS report. The strategy planned the introduction of a regional curriculum, accreditation for adult learners and improved tutor qualifications.

In order to meet its aims, the strategy first identified a target group:

Those who had not yet reached Level 2 in the National Qualifications Framework (Level 2 is set at achievement of four or more GCSEs at Grades A, B or C).

In order to improve the skills of this group the strategy had five key strands:

- **Leadership:** Strong leadership was required at all levels for the strategy to be successful;
- **Building a structured framework:** the regime should be based on curriculum stands and rigorous assessment and accreditation procedures specifically designed to meet the needs and aspirations of the learners;
- **Building quality:** a single set of quality assurance indicators and a framework of qualifications should be developed to improve the professionalism of tutors;
- **Building capacity:** the provision of adult education should be expanded; and
- **Engaging learners:** a comprehensive promotional campaign should be developed and implemented to increase awareness and drive up demands among adults for Essential Skills.

⁷ Department for Employment and Learning, 2002, Essential Skills for Living <http://www.delni.gov.uk/essential-skills-for-living-strategy>

The report set a target of supporting 14,500 Essential Skills learners by March 2004.

An evaluation of the strategy was carried out in 2006, commissioned by DEL and conducted by Frontline Consultants. The study found that there were 21,190 enrolments onto Essential Skills Courses from 2002 – 05⁸.

Table 5: Enrolments on Essential Skills Courses

Year	Number of Enrolments
2002-03	4,580
2003-04	7,077
2004-05	9,533
Total	21,190

Of those that enrolled, 10,072 (47%) achieved qualifications by September 2005. As well as the quantitative results, participants were asked how the course had impacted on other areas of their lives. The report found a number of changes, including:

- Increased confidence;
- Employability;
- Improved quality and security of employment;
- Educational engagement and progression;
- Educational support;
- Positive personality changes;
- Greater engagement in society; and
- Reduced stigma and fear.

The evaluation found that the strategy had been an overall success and was likely to meet its overall targets.

In February 2006, the Essential Skills Programme was incorporated into an overall strategy entitled “Success Through Skills”⁹.

The strategy had four key Themes. Of these, Theme 2, *improving the skill levels of the workforce*, has the most impact on this paper. It carries on the objectives of the Essential Skills strategy by focusing on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and the development of individuals. It has a number of component strands:

⁸ Department for Employment and Learning, Frontline Consultants Appraisal of Essential Skills for Living, October 2006, http://www.delni.gov.uk/essential_skills_final_report_-_frontline_30.10.06.pdf (first accessed 15 September 2011)

⁹ Department for Employment and Learning, Success Through Skills, http://www.delni.gov.uk/skills_strategy_2006.pdf

- Essential Skills Programme;
- Careers education, information and guidance;
- Adult skills project;
- Management and Leadership skills; and
- Investors in People.

Of these, two have direct significance to this paper.

The Essential Skills programme is a continuation of the 2002 strategy, described as being a critically important part of the skills strategy. Under the 2006 strategy it was expanded to include IT training. A key target for the programme was to have 18,500 people achieving a recognised qualification by 2007.

In addition, the Adult skills project focuses on the upskilling of employees with its key target focused on the development and commencement of an Adult skills programme in September 2006.

This strategy was since updated in May 2011.

The latest skills strategy launched by DEL is a continuation of the original strategy, and whilst it acknowledges the improvement in the skills base in NI, it states that 'transformational change is required'¹⁰. The update of the strategy again focuses on five broad themes:

- Understanding the demand for skills;
- Improving the quality and relevance of education and training;
- Improving productivity by increasing the skill levels of the workforce;
- Tracking the skills barriers to employment and employability; and
- Engaging stakeholders.

Within these themes there are four strategic goals:

1. Increase the proportion of those people in employment with Level 2 skills and above to 84% - 90% by 2020, from a baseline of 71.2% in 2008;
2. Increase the proportion of those people in employment with Level 3 skills and above to 68-76% by 2020, from a baseline of 55.6% in 2008;
3. Increase the proportion of those people in employment with level 4-8 skills and above the 44-52% by 2020 from a baseline of 33.2% in 2008;
4. To increase the proportion of those qualifying from NI Higher Education Institutions with graduate and post graduate level courses in STEM subjects (with an emphasis on physical and biological sciences, mathematical and computer science engineering and technology) by 25-30% in 2020 from a baseline of 18% in 2008.

¹⁰ Department for Employment and Learning, Success through Skills: Transforming Futures <http://www.delni.gov.uk/success-through-skills-transforming-futures.pdf>

4.2 Scotland

The Scottish Government has developed an action plan regarding literacy in the region, with a targeted focus for improving literacy skills through better co-ordination and partnership working focused on clear objectives.

The main strategy covers¹¹:

- Early years and pre-school;
- School aged children and young people; and
- Adults.

Under the Adults strategy, it intends to:

- Work with service providers and delivery partners to ensure that adults are aware of and have access to appropriate opportunities for literacy learning, with a particular focus on economic and social inclusion as well as health and well-being and family learning;
- Ensure learners experience high quality learning and teaching which enables them to progress towards their goal and receive recognition for their achievements;
- Produce and implement a professional development framework for practitioners in a range of roles, including volunteers and those involved in workforce development and family support. This will include working with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to ensure qualifications for practitioners as professionals continue to focus on delivering literacy learning;
- Continue to improve the infrastructure of adult provision;
- Research and monitor the impact of literacies development on adults, their families, communities and the country, to inform and improve future practice;
- Work with partners to increase literacy learning opportunities for and within the workplace;
- Options for Improvement encourage all agencies who work with young people and adults in the justice system to ensure resources are directed to identify and support those with specific literacy needs;
- Continue to work with the Scottish Prison Service to refine a new literacy screening tool for offenders; and
- Continue to work with SQA to provide a range of literacy qualifications for adults, including those in the workplace.

In addition, there is a strategy directly targeted at Adult literacy and Numeracy¹². This was reassessed in light of a survey carried out in Scotland to examine adult literacy.

The new strategy, titled Adult Literacy¹³ in Scotland 2020, focuses on four outcomes:

¹¹ Scottish Government, Literacy Action Plan <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/328493/0106197.pdf>

¹² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/339854/0112382.pdf>

¹³ Please note, 'literacy' in the action plan refers to both literacy and numeracy.

- Improved access to literacies learning opportunities;
- High quality of learning and teaching;
- Improved infrastructure; and
- Evidence of impact.

The action plan encourages local authorities to institute their own literacy programmes.

4.3 Wales

The most recent Welsh strategy on adult literacy and numeracy is “Words Talk – Numbers Count” (2005). In 2005 approximately 440,000 adults in Wales did not have Level 1 literacy skills with a further 990,000 not holding level 1 numeracy skills.

It is a follow up to the 2001 “National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales” which targeted all age groups.

During the four year period of its operation the strategy introduced training modules for teachers the Employer Pledge Programme (to help people in employment) and strengthened post 16 provision. In addition a new basic skills learning programme was introduced (the “Tripartite Course”).

The strategy acknowledges that adult numeracy and literacy is a long term issue and it aims to further develop the progress made.

The strategy recognises four particular challenges in Wales:

- Accelerating progress in preparing children for school;
- Ensuring all children are competent in basic literacy and numeracy;
- Reducing the number of adults with low literacy and numeracy; and
- Overcoming gaps and improving quality in post 16 provision.

The purpose of the Strategy is to get the maximum number of people up to Level 1 literacy and numeracy. For young children, therefore, the Strategy is relevant to the whole cohort, but in later years it focuses on those who are falling behind.

The aims of the strategy related to adult learning are that *the number of adults with poor basic skills should be diminished significantly.*

For adult learners, the Welsh strategy has two core aims:

- To help people with low basic skills to identify their needs and to tackle them; and
- to make sure that effective learning provision is in place and that learners receive sufficient support over both participation and completion.

The strategy has the following objectives and performance indicators for adult learning.

Table 6: Welsh Literacy strategy objectives and performance indicators

Objectives	Performance Indicators	Measure
Raise the levels of basic skills in the adult population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of working-age adults with literacy and numeracy skills at Level 1 and above; ▪ Number of employees covered by Employer Pledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Repeat scale of need survey in 2008-09 and benchmark progress; ▪ Employer Pledge data.
Improve the effectiveness of post-16 dedicated basic skills learning provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers starting courses in: Literacy, Numeracy, ESOL; ▪ Qualification outcomes; ▪ Non-qualification outcomes; and ▪ Quality of Provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lifelong Learning Wales Record; ▪ Pupil Level Annual School Census; ▪ Post-learning assessment; ▪ Quality Mark data; ▪ Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales reports; and ▪ Education and Learning in Wales (ELW) assessment.
Improve the effectiveness of embedded basic skills support for post-16 learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers receiving support; ▪ Of which numbers successfully completing their main qualification aim; and ▪ Quality of provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lifelong Learning Wales Record; ▪ Quality Mark data; ▪ Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales reports; and ▪ Education and Learning in Wales (ELW) assessment.

4.4 England

Literacy and Numeracy programmes in England are based around the 2001 Skills for Life strategy. The initial strategy focused on these priority groups¹⁴:

- Unemployed people and other benefit claimants;
- Prisoners and those supervised in the community;
- Public sector employees;
- Workers in low skilled jobs; and
- Other groups at risk of exclusion (such as those who are homeless, cannot speak English and the elderly).

The strategy set out a number of aims as seen in Table 7.

¹⁴ Department for Education and Employment, 2001, Skills for life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

Table 7: Skills for Life aims

Aim	Time scale ¹⁵	Result?
750,000 adults improve literacy and numeracy	By 2004	Met
1.5 million adults improve literacy and numeracy	By 2007	Exceeded
2.25 million adults improve literacy and numeracy	By 2010	Exceeded

As well as targeting learners, the strategy acknowledged that in order to embed basic skills development in the system it would be necessary to develop the infrastructure around adult literacy and numeracy. The Government put in place steps to improve the consistency and quality of adult skills and learning better management of learning and a national framework of standards, curriculum and assessment.

The National Audit Office carried out a review of the strategy in 2004 and found that whilst it had met its 2004 targets, over half of the qualifications that were recorded as improvements in literacy and numeracy were gained by 16-18 year olds and most of these qualifications were Key Skills¹⁶ or GCSE's.

In addition, Lloyd-Jones and Shaw found that of the 2.25 million enrolled on courses in July 2004, 2.1 million were on Further Education College courses. The remaining 150,000 enrolments were through prisons, probation, Job Centre Plus, work based learning and adult and community education.

The strategy was revised and launched in 2009, and focused on three central themes¹⁷:

- Focusing Skills for Life on employability, ensuring that the literacy, language and numeracy skills people develop will support them to find, stay and progress in work;
- Raising demand for literacy, language and particularly numeracy skills among individuals and employers, changing the culture and attitudes to Skills for Life that prevent people from embarking on learning; and
- Delivering flexible and responsive Skills for Life provision which meets learner and employer needs, is high quality, delivered in innovative ways and embedded in wider skills provision where that is the best way to meet individual learners' needs.

The priority learner groups have also changed:

¹⁵ National Adult Literacy Agency, March 2011, A literature review of international adult literacy policies

<http://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/documents/cmcnally/A%20Literature%20Review%20of%20International%20Adult%20Literacy%20Policies%20110311.pdf>

¹⁶ Key Skills are refer to the skills that are commonly needed in a range of activities in education and training, work and life in general – qualifications range from NQF 1-4 and include ICT, Communication and Identification of Numbers

¹⁷ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, March 2009, Skills for Life: Changing Lives

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedD/publications/S/SkillsforLifeChangingLives>

- People who are unemployed and on benefits;
- Low-skilled adults in employment;
- Prisoners and those supervised in the community; and
- Other groups at risk of social exclusion, including some ethnic minorities and those living in the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

The 2009 strategy takes a different focus for its targets. Rather than focusing on moving learners up a level in their skills for life, it instead provides a minimum threshold level for literacy and numeracy. The Public Service Agreement for 2008 – 2011 states that the Government intends to have:

- 597,000 people of working age achieving a first level 1 or above literacy qualification; and
- 390,000 people to achieve a first entry level 3 or above numeracy qualification.

In 2011, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)¹⁸ produced a literature review of various international policies for improving adult literacy and numeracy and concluded that:

Skills for Life is the most comprehensive and well-funded adult literacy strategy the world has ever seen.

4.5 Republic of Ireland

As in Northern Ireland, the results of the IALS acted as a catalyst for investment in Adult Literacy in the ROI. A green paper on adult education, the first in the history of the region, was produced in 1998.

Subsequently, the overall strategy for adult literacy was introduced via the “White Paper on Adult Education”, developed by the Department of Education and Science in 2000. The White Paper had five top priorities:

- To allocate priority resources to addressing adult literacy needs;
- To systematically increase opportunities for adult learners within the system, prioritising the needs of those with less than upper secondary education;
- To develop supporting services such as adult guidance and counselling and childcare services;
- To enhance the responsiveness, relevance and flexibility of education and training provision to meet the needs of young people and adults alike, optimising participation of and benefit to, those at risk; and
- To promote and develop a co-ordinated integrated role for adult education and training as a vital component within an over-arching framework for lifelong learning.

¹⁸ National Adult Literacy Agency, March 2011, A Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policy
<http://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/documents/cmcnally/A%20Literature%20Review%20of%20International%20Adult%20Literacy%20Policies%20110311.pdf>

The White Paper was subsequently used to develop targets and objectives for developing adult literacy in the ROI, with the National Development Plan used as the main funding method. For 2007-13 £7.7bn was set aside for upskilling the workforce.

The most recent strategy for adult literacy was the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. The action plan covered a variety of areas and focused on the following regarding adult literacy:

- The proportion of the population aged 16-64 with restricted literacy will be reduced to between 10 – 15% by 2016, from the level of 25% found in 1997;
- As part of the general national literacy service, the Vocational Education Committees will provide an additional 7,000 places by 2009, from the current level of 35,000 participants annually. There will be a particular focus on increasing the number of migrants participating in an English language service;
- The workplace basic education fund will register 2,000 learners during the period 1997-2000; and
- A family literacy policy is also being put in place under the Departmental action plan.

Adult literacy services in the ROI are delivered through the Vocational Education Committees, with a VEC previously operating in each county with (although an on-going programme intends to reduce the overall number of VECs to 16). The VECs are funded via the Department for Education and Science (DES) and the European Social Fund.

In addition, DES provides funding for NALA, a charity that helps individuals access adult literacy courses through promotion, policy lobbying and removal of barriers.

5 Conclusion

Studies regarding the success of the Essential Skills programmes in Northern Ireland and the UK are thin on the ground. However, in 2013 the results of the current IALS will be known allowing for an accurate appraisal of the success of the literacy and numeracy strategies in operation in the UK.

However, for future strategies it may of note to benchmark against international best practice. The NALA¹⁹ review found that in the US, the state of Massachusetts has been particularly successful at improving adult literacy provision. Researchers have argued that five primary lessons can be learned from Massachusetts' success:

- Reform requires long-term leadership and advocacy;
- Policymakers must focus on programme quality before quantity;
- Programme improvement depends on staff development;

¹⁹ National Adult Literacy Agency, March 2011, A Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policy
<http://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/documents/cmcnally/A%20Literature%20Review%20of%20International%20Adult%20Literacy%20Policies%20110311.pdf>

- An expanded range of education providers should be utilised, so long as they are all working to a common set of standards; and
- Change takes time. Policies and programmes need time to have an impact, and to refine and improve through internal and external evaluation.

Appendix 1: National Qualifications Framework and Qualifications and Credit Framework²⁰

Qualifications by level across the NQF and QCF		
Level	Examples of NQF qualifications	Examples of QCF qualifications
Entry	- Entry level certificates	- Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at entry level
	- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)	- Foundation Learning at entry level
	- Skills for Life	- Functional Skills at entry level
	- Functional Skills at entry level (English, maths and ICT)	
1	- GCSEs grades D-G	- BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 1
	- BTEC Introductory Diplomas and Certificates	- Functional Skills at level 1
	- OCR Nationals	- Foundation Learning Tier pathways
	- Key Skills at level 1	- NVQs at level 1
	- Skills for Life	
2	- Functional Skills at Level 1	
	- GCSEs grades A*-C	- BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 2
	- Key Skills level 2	- Functional Skills at level 2
	- Skills for Life	- OCR Nationals
3	- Functional Skills at Level 1	- NVQs at level 2
	- A levels	- BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 3
	- GCE in applied subjects	- BTEC Nationals
5	- International Baccalaureate	- OCR Nationals
	- HNCs and HNDs	- HNDs
	- Other higher diplomas	- BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards
6		- NVQs at level 5
	- National Diploma in Professional Production Skills	- BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards
7	- BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards	
	- Diploma in Translation	- BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards
8	- BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards	
	- specialist awards	- Award, Certificate and Diploma in strategic direction

²⁰ Directgov Qualifications: What the different levels mean

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG_10039017