


CHANGING LIVES: ADULT LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN SCOTLAND

A REPORT BY HM INSPECTORATE
OF EDUCATION



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HM Inspectorate of Education
Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston
EH54 6GA

Tel: 01506 600 200

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FOREWORD

One of the recommendations of the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland* report (ALNIS), published in 2001, was that progress against its recommendations should be reviewed at the end of the third year of the national initiative. This HMIE report contributes to that review of progress.

The report confirms that the initiative is having a positive impact on individuals' lives, and includes impressive personal testimony from many learners. Literacies programmes are making important contributions to individuals' sense of self-worth and self-confidence. They are making a significant difference to participants' capacity to contribute within the family, at work and in the community. More focused monitoring of learners' progress and achievement is now needed to enable quantification of the specific literacy gains across the large group of learners and to provide assurance that the national initiative is having the effect that Ministers intended.

Across all providers, teaching, learning and most aspects of support are generally effective. Tutors are very committed to their learners and to playing their full part as professionals in progressing the adult literacy and numeracy strategy. Relationships between tutors and learners, and among learners, are warm, supportive and characterised by good humour and a concern for the welfare of others. However, there is scope for individual providers to improve in areas such as initial assessment of learners, the use of learning plans and quality assurance. The main emphasis has been on literacy, and attention should be given to developing numeracy skills.

Further development of adult literacies in Scotland will require clearer direction and impetus at both national and local levels to build on the progress and developing good practice described in this report. Improved central arrangements are needed to promote a wider range of training opportunities for practitioners.



Graham Donaldson
HM Senior Chief Inspector
June 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Learners were very positive in their perception of their learning experience and of the impact that their developing literacy and numeracy capabilities had made on their lives. People from a very wide range of backgrounds gave many examples of everyday activities that had opened up to them as a result of the programmes they had followed. Their increased capacity to contribute within the family, the community and in work was accompanied and sustained by substantial gains in self-esteem and confidence. Large numbers had progressed from literacies provision into other forms of learning, and some to employment. Many contrasted their positive experience of adult literacies provision with a negative school experience.

The warm relationships between learners and tutors facilitated constructive interaction in classrooms and other learning environments. They also helped to draw out evidence of impact through focus group discussions and other contributions from learners.

Despite the findings of the ALNIS 2001 report that a major need among the Scottish population was numeracy, literacy programmes dominated provision. Programmes themselves were generally good. They were constructed with reference to learners' individual needs and to their desired outcomes. Many were designed for and targeted effectively upon groups of learners with specific common needs, for example, long-term unemployed adults. In many cases the programmes also sought other outcomes such as a sense of self-worth and self-confidence. In further education, they developed skills that were necessary for success in formal and award-bearing programmes.

Most teaching was of a good standard, and some was of high quality, but there were examples of unsatisfactory practice. The best examples combined individual approaches with social and interactive ones. Tutors were highly committed to the progress of learners, and prepared lessons thoroughly. In general, teaching provided appropriate challenge for individual learners. One exception was for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities in local authority provision. Another was that many learners in further education did not have individual learning programmes that built effectively on their existing experience and skills.

Literacy and numeracy programmes were delivered in a wide range of locations. Accommodation was of high quality in dedicated learning centres and in FE, but in many other cases its deficiencies reduced the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

New funding for the initiative had ensured that almost all programmes were very well resourced. Most resources were appropriate and engaging but not all tutors had easy access to resources because of poor communication and distribution systems. There had been good developments in the provision of ICT equipment for learners and in central support for staff to develop their technical skills to maximise its potential.

Assessment arrangements were generally inadequate for monitoring progress, assessing achievement and tracking learners including those who progressed into award-bearing programmes and further study. There were too few structured opportunities for learners to progress into award-bearing programmes where this was appropriate. Greater emphasis on real life situations was needed. Information on learners' progress and achievement focused too much on wider outcomes such as the development of self-confidence.

Arrangements for the initial assessment of learners' needs involved initial interviews or other structured processes. However, in the majority of cases, arrangements were not fully effective. The interviews did not focus sufficiently on current skills and their application in life contexts. In FE, tutors' identification of literacies and wider needs was often reactive and did not impact early enough in programmes. Almost all learners had learning plans but learners and tutors were unclear about how to use them to best effect. In many cases, learners had limited awareness of the plans and of their progress towards goals. Providers did not make consistent use of learning plans to monitor and track progress, and assess overall achievement. Learners received good pastoral and curricular support once they embarked on their programmes but not enough advice and encouragement about progression to more advanced learning.

Relationships within almost all learning settings across the range of provision were encouraging. Staff were committed to learners, knew them well, and were responsive in helping them to deal with obstacles and barriers to learning. Learners worked well together in groups. There were insufficient structured opportunities for learners in different centres to provide peer support for each other through local informal networks and mentoring.

The majority of staff had appropriate experience as tutors within community settings, as group tutors or as volunteers. A substantial minority had a recognised teaching qualification, or were qualified to teach adult literacies or English as a second or other language (ESOL). Staffing levels had increased to meet demand and there was effective use of part-time group tutors, volunteer group tutors and classroom assistants. In local authorities, uptake of Introduction to Adult Literacies Learning (ITALL) initial training had been good for volunteer tutors working in one-to-one settings or as tutor assistants. However, overall there were insufficient training opportunities for literacies staff to improve their skills. Staff in FE had undergone Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education (BRITE) training for teaching learners with learning difficulties and disabilities but local authorities had too few tutors with appropriate expertise in this area.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local authorities had adopted the Literacies in the Community (LIC) framework as a common tool for quality assurance of literacies programmes but, in most cases, self-evaluation did not focus sufficiently on learning and teaching and assessment. The application of LIC was not rigorous enough to identify actions for improvement. FE colleges made very little use of LIC and generally did not apply their other quality assurance arrangements effectively to literacies provision.

A few partnerships provided good support for adult literacy and numeracy provision. They met regularly, collaborated well, had wide representation at an appropriate level and were effective in planning to meet local and future needs. However, in most cases planning was not sufficiently strategic or responsive, meetings were not sufficiently frequent and arrangements for providers to access funds were unhelpful. Representation did not always include all providers within the area, and collaborative working was impeded by a lack of understanding of and confidence in other sectors. Partnerships were not working in the context of a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of the respective roles and competencies of different providers and did not have sufficiently comprehensive national guidance to support the infrastructure for provision. These deficiencies impeded the progress of the national ALN initiative and diminished its impact.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This report is mainly about the quality of adult literacy and numeracy (ALN) provision in Scotland funded by ALN partnerships, and delivered “in-house” by local authorities and by further education (FE) colleges. These programmes represent the bulk of partnership provision. Other partnership provision is delivered by voluntary organisations and private providers.

The report also refers to literacies and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision within FE which is not directly funded through ALN partnerships. Discrete or contextualised core skill units from Access to Intermediate 1 and 2 are important components of the full spectrum of adult literacies provision from first level through to Higher *communication* and *numeracy*. Local authorities and others have also continued their pre-existing initiatives in this area.

Where there are clear differences between the organisation and delivery of programmes in local authorities and the FE sector, the report considers them separately. It uses the term “literacies” in cases where there is no need to distinguish between literacy and numeracy.

Context

This report contributes to evaluation and reporting on progress made following the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland* (ALNIS) report published in July 2001. That report was produced by an Adult Literacy and Numeracy Team appointed in 2000 by the then Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning with a remit to provide “a focus for the development of national policy and strategy on adult literacy and numeracy”. In the ALNIS report, the definition of adult literacies is:

the ability to read, write and use numeracy, to handle information, to express ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners.

As well as the main report, the Scottish Executive also published seven pieces of research¹ that were the outcomes of specific projects to address the team’s remit. The conclusions of these publications were included in the recommendations within the main report.

Another significant piece of research that informed the work of the team was the 1996 *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS). Analysis of the Scottish cohort of IALS suggested that there were around 800,000 (23% of the total) adults in Scotland whose level of literacy and numeracy precluded their being able to function effectively in their personal lives, as family members, in work and as lifelong learners. The audit of provision commissioned by the team demonstrated that at that time, FE colleges provided for around 6,000 learners, local authorities provided for around 6,500 learners and voluntary organisations provided for 2,500 learners. This provision represented about 2% of the 800,000 adults with literacies needs. The team concluded that efforts to raise literacy and numeracy levels within the post-school education and training system had been hampered by the lack of priority attached to the issue, declining resources and insufficient co-ordination and support.

¹ These publications are listed in the Bibliography of this report.

INTRODUCTION

The ALNIS report stated that literacy and numeracy are essential for the health and well-being of individuals as well as economic prosperity and to realising a vision of a modern vibrant Scotland. It proposed that increased competence in literacy and numeracy could provide a secure route into qualifications and training as part of lifelong learning. The report recommended that this work should be supported by a realistic funding stream and a national and local infrastructure, creating a framework for the identification of requirements, planning for appropriate provision and encouragement of participation.

Another distinctive feature of the Scottish “social practice” approach was that all developments should take full account of the collective and individual voice of learners and that collaboration between policy makers, practitioners and learners, should be an inbuilt feature of all provision.

Although it was recognised that it would take at least ten years to turn the situation around, the report set targets to more than double capacity within three years of the starting date. Some of the key recommendations within ALNIS were that:

- a total of £24m should be allocated to adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland over a three-year period, channelled through Community Learning Strategy Partnerships.
- 80,000 people should receive help with literacies over the following three years.
- a new adult curriculum framework should be developed by March 2002.
- a pilot training programme for “spotters”, “referrers” and “supporters” should be set up by April 2002.
- e-learning options should be available by April 2002.
- a national development engine should be established to drive the creation of quality ALN provision in all sectors in partnership with Community Learning Strategy partners and national organisations.
- a fully accredited national training programme should be launched to increase the number of trained practitioners by 2003.
- 70% of learners should achieve their agreed targets in individual learning plan goals by 2003, with an additional 20% making some progress.

The report also recommended that progress should be reviewed at the end of the third year of the strategy to assess whether changes should be made to the strategy, funding and targets.

Following the publication of the ALNIS report, the Scottish Executive (SE) set up *Learning Connections* within the SE Executive Agency *Communities Scotland* in 2003, with responsibility to implement and support the strategy. Funding for ALN is channelled through local authorities through Community Learning Strategy Partnerships, whose remit is to decide and demonstrate collectively how the new resources can be used most effectively.

The recent *Learning Connections* report on the *Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2001 to 2004* describes progress towards ALNIS targets: the setting up of adult literacy and numeracy partnerships in each of the 32 local authorities; free provision of literacies tuition and support to all learners; a national training qualification for volunteer tutors; 12 pathfinder projects; the *Big Plus*, an awareness raising campaign; and annual international Literacy Day conferences. *Learning Connections* has also overseen the development of curriculum guidelines for adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland. This development work is now complete and the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland* was launched in May 2005.

These initial targets were ambitious, and progress towards them was held back by a delay in setting up the national development engine. A subsequent target was set by the Scottish Executive of 150,000 new learners by March 2006. It committed additional funds to support this provision. The total funding currently allocated for five years from 2001 to 2006 is £51m, which includes resources for *Learning Connections*.

The ALNIS report also emphasised the importance of working with public and private sector employers, business networks and organisations such as Investors in People (IiP). Increasingly, *Learning Connections*, in consultation with the Scottish Executive has been targeting employers through awareness-raising campaigns and the production of materials. The main purpose of this initiative is to support the development of literacies among employees and to raise the awareness of their own “invisible” and unacknowledged literacy and numeracy needs.

Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities have been contracted by the Scottish Executive Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department (SEETLLD) to consult learners about their experience of literacies provision. A report is due in June 2005. The Scottish Executive also monitors and evaluates partnerships’ adult literacy and numeracy action plans annually, using external consultants.

In order to complement these and other monitoring and evaluation activities, HMIE focused in particular on the impact of literacies on learners’ wider lives, on what learners perceived about their learning experience, and on learning and teaching. In addition, HMIE looked at the impact upon these aspects of the context in which learning takes place, support for learners, and support for providers and provision at local and national level.

Methodology and scope

HMIE carried out fieldwork and gathered further evidence between September and October 2004 through observations of learning and teaching that covered seven ALN partnerships, six local authorities and eleven colleges. They conducted interviews with over 150 literacies learners, analysed completed questionnaires and interviewed key personnel. HMIE sampled and evaluated provision that was available at the time of the visits. The sample did not include classes within the voluntary sector. However, the types of provision sampled represented a very high proportion of all ALN provision.

The evaluations in the report also take account of the published findings over 2003-04 of HMIE inspections of community learning and development, and reviews of FE colleges.

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THE IMPACT ON LEARNERS

Adult literacies have been given a high profile in Scotland since the ALNIS report, and providers have had additional funding to allow them to meet the demand and make progress towards the targets for participation set by the Scottish Executive. These factors have led to increased learning opportunities within local authorities, FE colleges and the voluntary sector. Against the stated original target of 80,000 learners, by 2004 some 71,000 learners had received literacy and numeracy tuition and support, and there had been good progress in engaging new learners.

Learners had very positive perceptions of the impact of their literacy and numeracy learning experience and how it had changed their attitude to learning.

This learning experience was the first time that almost all learners had received help with their literacies since leaving school. They were all deeply appreciative of the care and attention they were receiving from their tutors. Many interviewees described their tuition as their most positive educational experience. Many learners spoke of the impact of literacies learning on their lives. They mentioned the pleasure of being able to read books, understand labels when shopping, interpret cooking instructions and cook for themselves and the family, prepare for and contribute to meetings in the community, and use time productively rather than spending entire days watching television. Many learners were pleased now to be able to help their children and grandchildren with homework.

In many cases, learners spoke of being able to play a more active part in their communities. A majority of learners had moved on into or were considering continuing with their learning although progression to award-bearing programmes was not widespread. Some had found employment. Many identified a new facility with information and communications technologies (ICT) as a particularly beneficial byproduct of their programmes. Some spoke of the benefits, including promotion, that improved literacies levels had made to their working situation.

Within all provision, learners were making good progress in personal growth and development. They engaged readily in discussion about their experiences. Many learners gave examples of increases in self-confidence and improvements in their life situation through application of their literacy learning, and were focused on the next stages. They recounted how they felt that through their learning experience they had made a transition into lifestyles that were positive, meaningful and rewarding. Many now had a more active life with new interests, were contented and optimistic, and reported better family relationships because of their own feelings of self-worth. These learners no longer felt stigmatised but expressed feelings of joy and pride in their achievements.

What some learners told HMI

"The teaching has saved our future."

"Lecturers go over it until you get it."

"The help I got changed everything."

"I can ask for help and I'm not frightened. Teachers are helpful and keep going over things and don't get bored with you. I wish I had been taught like this before."

"Classroom assistants...they give us extra help when we need it."

"The support is brilliant. I was assessed as dyslexic and support was put in place for me."

"What I'm doing at college is making a difference."

"Through my literacy course, I feel more confident about being in this country..."

"I found out I was dyslexic...big relief, I'm not as stupid as I thought I was all these years."

"Being a brain surgeon is beyond me but I now have the self belief that I can become a social care worker."

"I won an award and was featured in the local press. I am bursting with pride."

"I've joined the School Board for my child's school."

"I moved from a low-paid job into my first ever administration job."

"I had to rely on relatives to get around but now I can read a bus timetable and I have the freedom of the city."

"The teachers are brilliant here. They take time to show me how to do things. It's enjoyable to come here. I'm going on to do Social Care."

"When I was at school I never thought I would be able to do anything like this. It's more fun than schools and has given me confidence. I'm going on to do an access course."

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THE IMPACT ON LEARNERS

"Helped me to read books I would never have been able to read before. Helped me to pick up and buy foods and understand things."

"Mind mapping helps me to arrange my thoughts and presentations. It has been critical in helping me to think things through."

"I can now write letters to my friends and relations."

"My wife dealt with all our bills and official communications. After she died I had great difficulty. Thanks to my literacy group I am now able to do this and getting better all the time."

"I didn't ask for extra help at school because I would get laughed at."

"At school I didn't get enough time to get things down."

"I felt left out at school because I couldn't keep up."

"Yes, I was disruptive at school because it took too long to get help from the teacher."

"I was bullied at school and didn't like to ask the teachers for help as it would draw attention to me. I was scared of some teachers... This literacy class is making a big difference to me."

Across all provision, many learners who had low levels of literacies spoke about their perceptions of the effect that a negative school experience and other inhibiting factors such as ill health and family instability had had on aspects such as relationships, achievement, confidence levels and self-image. Learners contrasted such school and other early experiences with their more positive recent experiences of the respect, attention and approachability of their tutors. Learners had formed and sustained warm relationships within their learning groups and with their tutors and were at ease in their interactions in the classroom. They appreciated opportunities to work at their own pace and to request individual help.

These perceptions were common across learners with limited initial education, unemployed people and workers who had faced redundancy, people with English as a second or additional language, people who lived in disadvantaged areas, workers in low-skill jobs and with low incomes, and people with health problems and disabilities. Within local authorities there was very good practice in engaging with learners. Tutors gathered evidence of impact through focus group discussions, self-evaluation, exit forms and learners' written contributions to case studies. There were some very good examples of how to celebrate learners' achievements. These approaches provided testimony to the impact that literacies learning had made to learners' ability to make a full contribution to society and their growth in confidence. However, there was insufficient focus in local authority settings on recording achievement for learners with learning difficulties.

In FE colleges, the majority of learners with low literacies levels progressed successfully into further education or employment. In other provision, little hard information was available on achievement and progression. In all local authorities, there were some examples of progression from informal literacies provision into FE. However, tracking of success was unsystematic. Tutors did not take sufficient account of prior learning and systematically built skills to help learners make appropriate progress. Requirements of different funding streams for different groups of learners within FE colleges necessitated different individual learning plans. The resulting duplication was burdensome and repetitive for learners and confusing for college staff. Tutors also found that core skills profiles of embedded *communication* and *numeracy* within specialist qualifications were not reliable and that many learners' competences were well below the levels recorded on the Scottish Qualifications Certificate. (SQC)



DESIGNING, DELIVERING AND ASSESSING LITERACY AND NUMERACY PROGRAMMES

Designing and delivering programmes

Despite the conclusions of the ALNIS 2000 team that a major need among the Scottish population was both literacy and numeracy, literacy programmes had dominated provision. Opportunities for learners to improve their numeracy were severely underdeveloped but *Learning Connections* has recently focussed its attention on numeracy provision.

Literacy and numeracy programmes across all providers were constructed with reference to learners' needs. Learners had control of what they learned and when they attended classes. The programmes aimed to bridge the gap between the learner's literacy or numeracy capabilities on entering tuition and his or her desired learning outcomes. They sought to apply literacy or numeracy in handling information, problem solving, decision making, using ICT and working with others. The best examples of literacy and numeracy programmes also sought to develop learners' sense of self-worth and self-confidence as a solid basis on which to build specific reading, writing and numerical skills and to make learners aware of the wider application of these skills in their daily lives.

The range of learners in local authority provision was very wide, including:

- adults with learning difficulties;
- people with very low current levels of literacy or numeracy;
- those needing help with specific problems such as punctuation; and
- learners undertaking SQA core skills units.

Provision included learning groups open to any learners, and also initiatives targeted at specific groups, such as parents wishing to help their children with homework. There were programmes for vulnerable young people and initiatives for long-term unemployed adults. Some local authorities made provision to meet the needs of specific groups of learners such as carers working in a social work department, who needed to develop their report-writing skills. Group tutors provided individualised tuition for members of their groups, who usually spanned a wide range of capabilities. The tutors coped well overall with this complex teaching environment. They were particularly effective when supported by literacy volunteers.

Some providers had developed imaginative initiatives for attracting and engaging specific learners in literacies development, including the use of ICT for vulnerable and disaffected young people. One partnership was working with learners recovering from strokes and other brain injuries and relearning to read. It had specifically targeted this group in its Community Learning Plan. Providers within the partnership had collaborated effectively in developing the ICT skills of these learners in order to equip them with means for more effective communication.

In FE colleges, a range of variously funded programmes developed literacy and numeracy for vulnerable learners preparing to embark on formal award-bearing programmes. Almost all programmes for mainstream full-time and part-time learners paid good attention to developing core skills, especially *communication* and *numeracy* at Intermediate 1 and 2. Almost all of these programmes developed learners' literacy and numeracy very well. They were tailored to suit learners' needs and were designed well to address learners' wider learning and developmental needs.

One college involved in a Pathfinder project targeted young disengaged learners and others at risk of disengagement with effective interventions to develop core skills and build their confidence. The programme carefully constructed content around individual needs. Staff made good use of confidence-building activities to consolidate skills and encourage progression to NQ programmes. In another college, a very good programme for disengaged adults with alcohol and substance-related issues or who had chaotic lifestyles provided intensive development of IT skills in addition to literacy. One college encouraged parents to attend a homework club with their children. This provision motivated the adult learners and helped to remove any barriers to their own participation in specific literacies classes.

All staff who had been recruited for this work, including part-time and voluntary tutors, were highly committed to the specific and wider progress of their learners. Teaching staff had warm relationships with learners. They were supportive and prepared their lessons carefully and thoughtfully. Staff communicated well with learners, who appreciated their help. They generally took good account of the particular needs of their learners and used an effective range of strategies to encourage learners to continue to take part in learning. Many adapted their teaching approaches to meet individual preferences and needs. Learners played an active part in the learning process and tutors generally encouraged them to interact with other learners. Many lessons were characterised by a high level of mutual support and regard between learners. Most learners were highly motivated and were making good progress in their learning.

Most teaching was good but there were examples of both very good and unsatisfactory lessons. In all learning groups, the ethos was positive and affirming, and learners developed self-confidence and self-esteem. The best examples of teaching and learning were where learning was individual as well as social and interactive. In these learning settings, tutors took good account of the obstacles that learners faced in taking their first steps towards participating and thereafter in completing their agreed learning programmes. Tutors saw their role as ensuring sustained guidance and support for every individual.

Generally, teaching provided appropriate challenge for individual learners. However, in most local authority provision, many learners with significant learning difficulties made poor or inconsistent progress because of insufficient continuity or intensity of engagement, and the non-availability of staff with special needs expertise.

Across all provision, staff encouraged learners to make good use of resources. Learning was primarily individual but there were examples of learning in groups in most local authorities.

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DESIGNING, DELIVERING AND ASSESSING LITERACY AND NUMERACY PROGRAMMES

In FE colleges, discrete literacy teaching was most frequently provided reactively, as support for specific and evolving needs, rather than as a planned and sequenced experience. Individual learning programmes were insufficiently coherent and progressive. Such programmes did not provide systematic and sustained development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Few lessons were pitched at a level that was both challenging and accessible to every learner. In general, teachers in FE did not build sufficiently on learners' experience and skills.

In more than a few cases in local authority provision, teaching was mechanistic because of over-reliance on commercially-produced worksheets, with lesson content that did not always meet the identified needs of the learners.

Assessment

While describing the tensions surrounding assessment within literacies provision, the ALNIS report emphasised the importance of formal accreditation of literacy and numeracy achievement where relevant to the learner. It recommended that accreditation in literacies should be expressed in terms of core skills levels achieved, to support progression to further learning and qualifications. The report also highlighted the importance of accreditation for affirming effort.

In those FE colleges where literacies or core skills were embedded or integrated into existing mainstream programmes, they were formally assessed as part of the vocational course. In provision such as *first steps* or access programmes, ESOL or in areas of provision where the emphasis was on support rather than tuition, progress was measured through the achievement of agreed targets identified within individual learning plans.

In all but a few cases, "placing" and diagnostic procedures were generally good and providers took account of the diversity of learners. However, monitoring of progress and final assessment were not sufficiently rigorous or standardised to support reliable evaluation of learners' progress. Tutors focused well on the outcomes of self-esteem and self-confidence but some did not measure sufficiently those literacy and numeracy skills required for learners to attain their desired learning outcomes. They also gave learners on informal programmes too little encouragement to progress, where appropriate, beyond agreed learning outcomes into formal award-bearing programmes.

The ALNIS report emphasised the key role that literacies play in personal growth and in enabling engagement in family, community and social life as well as employment. However, providers did not sufficiently focus on assessing the success with which learners applied in real-life situations the skills they gained or apply consistent practice in this area. This deficiency in assessment practice made it difficult to measure the levels of achievement of individuals, and to quantify improved possibilities for progression provided by literacies learning. Consequently, the overall extent of the gains in specific literacies competence of the Scottish population as an outcome of the Ministerial initiative cannot be established with confidence.

4



LEARNING SETTINGS AND RESOURCES

Learning settings

Local authorities used a range of accommodation including dedicated adult learning centres, libraries, school classrooms and community centres. This accommodation varied in the quality of learning environment it provided for adult learners. Dedicated learning centres provided a high quality learning environment, with resources easily available to tutors and very good ICT access for learners. In other accommodation, space was often severely constricted and in some cases the learning environment was bleak and uncomfortable. These deficiencies reduced the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and did not promote learners' self-esteem or enjoyment of learning.

Within FE colleges, accommodation was of a high standard in almost all centres. In the best examples, the layout, size and organisation of most classrooms provided very good opportunities for individual and group work, access to computers for independent learning, and paper-based work. One college's outreach centres all had ICT suites and access to wireless laptops that students used extensively. In many cases, these classrooms were near to where student support and guidance staff were based. Learners with visual or hearing impairments or who had learning difficulties and disabilities were very well supported in their learning by highly skilled specialist staff and had access to BRITE² assistive technology. Some centres provided crèche facilities.

Resources

Most programmes were well resourced, a considerable advance on the situation prior to the Ministerial initiative. Some materials had been acquired through increased central funding or directly from *Learning Connections*. Staff had also been active in developing their own materials or using materials from the increasing number of relevant Internet websites.

In some local authorities, materials were of high quality and easily accessible by tutors. One local authority had a particularly well-stocked, organised and catalogued literacies resource centre with very good access for tutors and learners. In this case, professional literacies staff helped users select materials appropriate to their needs. Almost all authorities were expanding their stock of resources and increasing their accessibility to tutors and learners. However, tutors in some authorities currently had difficulty in accessing an appropriate range of teaching resources including ICT and in one authority they found it impossible to do so because communication and distribution systems were poor. A good proportion of learning resources provided positive images of social and cultural diversity. ESOL materials were not always attractive, stimulating and well presented.

²

Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education.

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LEARNING SETTINGS AND RESOURCES

In FE colleges, materials were generally of high quality and were used to good effect. Many departments drew on a well-stocked library and staff took care to source appropriate texts and stimuli for learning activities. In most cases, resources which had been provided by *Learning Connections* for the use of learners in colleges were neither appropriate nor challenging for adult learners, and did not reflect the age and interests of the diverse client group. However, most learners had good access to materials to support their learning. In all colleges there were sufficient and helpful resources to support learners with learning difficulties. In a few colleges, staff had made good use of BRITE software to help mainstream learners improve literacy skills.

The ALNIS report emphasised the need to “maximise the potential of information and communications technology” in adult literacies in Scotland. The availability of e-learning options was a key target within the report. *Learning Connections* had begun a programme of workshops for tutors to develop their skills in using ICT as a teaching tool. The first series of workshops “Using Digital Cameras in Adult Literacies Learning” took place in November and December 2004. *Learning Connections* had also established an ICT and adult literacies practitioner network and had provided each literacies partnership with a laptop computer and printer in order to encourage the use of ICT as part of learning. It was also providing additional funding to support specific ICT learning projects.

In FE colleges, a wide range of technology was readily available including laptops, digital cameras and scanners. Some audio equipment was especially useful for ESOL provision. Facilities for self-access helped to build learners’ self-esteem. Learners in the community had very good access to ICT in a few areas. However, in other areas access was limited to a few centres.

5



SUPPORTING LEARNING

Learning plans and initial assessment

ALNIS saw the learning plan as an essential feature of the learning programme and as a vehicle for setting out appropriate learning goals. In this context, learning plans detail agreed learning outcomes, the learning necessary to achieve them and the sequence that tutors and learners should follow towards their achievement. They also enable providers to collect management information on the number and type of learners in the system and their progress.

Within local authority provision, all providers conducted extended initial interviews where learners discussed their needs and agreed an individual learning plan. In the best cases, these interviews were an effective means of identifying literacy and numeracy needs and building an individual curriculum. Such cases were few in number. More often, the assessment process was not sufficiently focused on the skills within learners' current literacy and numeracy practices and their application to life contexts. Literacies workers within local authorities made effective use of community learning and development workers as *spotters* and *referrers*. Some authorities made good use of demographic information from the census and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to identify geographical areas and specific groups within the population where there was likely to be a need for literacy and numeracy provision. They then targeted resources towards these areas and groups.

In almost all FE colleges, arrangements for assessing learners' core skills levels in *communication* and *numeracy* were systematic and thorough. Most colleges had assessed that between 40% and 50% of new learners undertaking full-time FE programmes were at Intermediate 1 or below in the core skill of *communication*. These colleges used various forms of screening for new learners as part of a thorough induction process. There was widespread use of commercial tools, as well as the SQA core skills profile recorded on the SQC. However, colleges had too few *spotters*, their training was inadequate, and the agencies targeted were too limited. In addition, ongoing interaction between literacy practitioners, *spotters* and *referrers* was insufficiently effective. Many *spotters* and *referrers* did not have the range of skills needed to intervene with potential literacy learners and support them in referring themselves for tuition. The majority of FE colleges invited learners to declare a literacies need before the start of their programme or to self-refer after the start of their programme. Approaches took too little account of the reluctance of learners with a literacies deficit to disclose their needs readily, often preferring to do their utmost to disguise them. In many cases, the pre-entry stage was too short and unfocused, and class tutors subsequently identified needs at too late a stage for learners to achieve their potential. The reactive approach to uncovering literacies needs set some learners up for non-completion or failure in their chosen college programmes. Across all colleges, there were deficiencies in matching new adult and ESOL learners to programmes where their literacy and numeracy skills were adequate for them to be able to progress. This issue also applied to entrants from schools.

5

SUPPORTING LEARNING

Local authority arrangements for setting targets and reviewing progress through individual learning planning were good in a few areas. However, in most cases the plans were not fully appropriate and there were deficiencies in the learning experience as a consequence. All learners receiving literacies support and tuition had a learning plan that was regularly updated and reviewed. However, some tutors and learners were unclear about what was appropriate information to be recorded in the plan. Tutors allocated sufficient time to ensure that individuals could have meaningful face-to-face discussions. In the best practice, all learners felt included and tutors took good account of lack of confidence and nervousness. However, the range of approaches that tutors and learners used for planning learning and for review did not focus sufficiently on the skills required for learners to achieve their desired learning outcomes.

In FE colleges, there were structured arrangements for setting targets and reviewing progress. Most tutors met learners twice or three times in the course of their programmes to discuss their learning plans, which were continually updated and reviewed. Almost all learners had a learning plan and all sections of the learning plans were completed. However, the content was not sufficiently detailed to inform learners about how they should approach their learning and what the outcomes should be. These plans were in almost all cases kept centrally by college staff rather than by the learners themselves. Consequently, learners could not plan their learning from day to day or track their own progress regularly against agreed actions and skills to be acquired. The amount of time that tutors and learners spent discussing plans was often too short to constitute a reflective process. As was the case for local authority providers, some tutors and learners were unclear about what was appropriate information to be recorded in the plan.

Guidance and support

Ongoing guidance and support was good overall. In local authority provision, pastoral support was very effective, but systematic guidance in relation to literacies learning and exit guidance was less well developed. In almost all of the colleges, academic and personal support available to learners was good or better. They were able to access the kind and level of support they required to sustain their learning or to move on. Every college learner had a guidance tutor and effective access to a range of appropriate support services including information about finance and childcare. Generally, there were effective referral systems within the college between departments and specialists. Learners with additional support needs received a very high level of support from their classroom teachers as well as from central guidance staff within the college.

In almost all learning groups, relationships between tutors and learners, and between learners, were encouraging. Staff communicated warmth, and an interest in and commitment to the wider achievements of their learners. They showed that they knew their learners well. Staff could anticipate learners' needs and help them to overcome their inhibitions. They were responsive and quick to identify and deal with barriers and obstacles to participation or progress. Interaction was very good. Lecturers and tutors used humour and made very good use of meaningful and informal language to draw out what learners wanted to say and to support quieter learners who were reluctant to speak.

Most learners made very good contributions to group discussions about their learning and its impact on their wider lives. They engaged in meaningful discussions as a learner group, listened and built on the individual contributions of their fellow learners, and were able to articulate joint views.

The ALNIS report recommended the use of mentoring, pairing learners with members of the local community who had overcome similar problems in order to counter learners' sense of isolation and support their learning. Many FE colleges had relevant internal arrangements, especially for younger learners, but there were not enough external arrangements to promote supported networking of learners within different settings across the area. Learners generally did not have sufficient access to others elsewhere. These were missed opportunities for more confident learners to act as role models to vulnerable, less experienced learners and for less experienced learners in different settings to share experiences and encourage and support one another.

6



STAFFING ALN PROGRAMMES

All local authorities had appointed dedicated staff to support literacy and numeracy tuition. Almost all had increased the deployment of part-time group tutors and were using volunteer tutors as assistants to group tutors.

All local authority literacies practitioners were qualified community learning and development workers, teachers or trainers and almost all had previous experience as group tutors and volunteers. Providers in all areas were using the ITALL course to train volunteer tutors to be deployed as tutor assistants or in one-to-one settings. Some had developed their own initial training courses for group tutors. One authority had developed a fast-track training programme in order to speed up its growth in deployment of group tutors. Most ALN partnerships had trained staff in dyslexia awareness and had provided some training in supporting dyslexic learners. In general, local authorities did not have staff with the expertise required to provide effective tuition to learners with challenging learning difficulties and disabilities.

Some local authorities ensured good professional support to part-time group and voluntary tutors. This support was not always systematic or comprehensive. It included observation of practice and structured feedback on performance in only a few cases.

In FE colleges, the range, availability and qualifications of staff were very good. Tutors made effective use of classroom assistants. Some FE colleges had appointed additional staff to provide literacy and numeracy support. Almost all staff had an appropriate teaching qualification and most had additional qualifications in adult literacies or ESOL. A few had experience of teaching in community locations. Staff who taught learners with additional needs had relevant qualifications and had undergone BRITE training. In two colleges, most staff who taught learners with literacies needs had attended events on inclusive teaching for low levels of literacy. In all colleges, managers had raised staff awareness of requirements in relation to disability, including dyslexia. In one college, a large number of staff had volunteered for *spotter* and *referrer* training. Generally, in colleges, staff providing literacy tuition and support, core skills staff, and guidance and support staff all worked very well as a team. While colleges were aware of ITALL training, most had not taken up the opportunity because the level of training did not meet the needs of staff who already had a teaching qualification.

Across the spectrum of tutors in both sectors there was generally a strong professional commitment to adult literacies in Scotland. However, many were apprehensive about the future. They did not have a clear understanding of the strategic vision for literacies in Scotland, and had concerns about continuation of funding, access to training, and the shortage of qualified practitioners.

7



IMPROVING QUALITY

Within local authorities, provision was quality assured through self-evaluation and overall monitoring using the *Literacies in the Community* (LIC) framework, which they had adopted within quality assurance procedures. However, self-evaluation was not sufficiently focused and rigorous in relation to the quality of learning and teaching, and initial assessment. There was insufficient consultation with learners about future programme planning and they were unsure about their role in evaluation and consultation.

In FE colleges, the application of quality assurance arrangements to literacy provision often had important weaknesses because in this area they lacked robustness, consistency and coherence. The effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and planning for improvement varied from college to college. Some colleges used the SFEFC/HMIE review framework for self-evaluation of literacies provision. Practitioners were either unaware of the LIC standards or regarded them as appropriate only in a community setting. Almost all colleges provided information based on individual learning plans to ALN partnerships for monitoring purposes. In too many cases, internal quality procedures did not include all literacies provision within the college.

8



SUPPORTING PROVIDERS

The national consultation exercise in 2000 emphasised the need for a collective effort at local level. It was critical of lack of co-ordination and co-operation between sectors and recommended that in order to serve community interests best, providers should work together to provide learners with sustained opportunities for lifelong learning. A key message was that the success of the national adult literacy and numeracy strategy would depend not only on the capacity of individual institutions to make high quality and appropriate provision. Local authorities and colleges would need to draw upon the partnership infrastructure to support delivery. Community Learning Strategies were to be the principal vehicle for the implementation of the strategy. ALNIS said that they should ideally “build on the work that is already in progress” and encourage local partnerships to develop.

Two literacy and numeracy partnerships visited by HMIE provided good support for the provision sampled, but there were important weaknesses in the others. The best examples of partnership included wide and appropriate representation within ALN partnerships including FE colleges, and close working and collaboration between practitioners. These best partnerships met regularly. Those who attended were responsive to identified and changing local needs and made a full contribution to innovative future planning as part of an open and trusting relationship between all providers. The box on the facing page provides an illustration of the positive development of partnership working, in this case from the perspective of an FE college.

There were wide differences in planning, representation and focus across partnerships. In most partnerships the quality of planning was poor and it did not develop innovative approaches to providing new programmes that would suit more and more new learners. Planning generally focused too much on short-term goals rather than broader strategic aims. There was too little collaboration across sectors, often through lack of mutual confidence and understanding among providers. Not all partnerships included the local FE college. One partnership had not met for a year.

Most partnerships did not allocate funding to support an agreed development strategy but instead operated a bidding system through which providers accessed funds for specific programmes. Arrangements for accessing funds from the partnerships were often cumbersome and bureaucratic. Over-long decision making reduced the responsiveness of providers to meet emerging needs. Planning focused predominantly on literacy, and insufficiently on numeracy in almost all partnerships. There was not enough clear guidance and discussions within partnerships about how to:

- encourage co-ordination and collaboration between the sectors;
- build teams of providers locally;
- ensure a meaningful, current, local map of sustainable and progressive learning opportunities with progression; and
- support learners moving from sector to sector.

Developing Partnership Working

The story of the relationship between the college and the partnership takes two different routes initially, the strategic road and the practitioners' road. At strategic level there was a commitment to work together, share resources and practice which was evidenced by good communication and the funding of a literacy worker. On a practitioner level it would be fair to say that there was some suspicion over 'external' workers coming into the college to work with 'our' students which lead to isolated working and a lack of sharing information. This lack of cohesion in the support offered within the college meant there were a number of individuals delivering literacy/learning support which appeared fragmented rather than a team working together to support our students together.

As staffing changed we seized the opportunity to review the work closely with the partnership co-ordinator and seek a more focused approach that would offer our students a better service. It was during this time we broke down some of the myths between staff and the partnership after conducting a needs literacy/learning support review involving student development (learning support) staff, lecturers, team leaders and the partnership co-ordinator. Out of this came two key points that have transformed the support and the relationships.

Firstly, a shift in emphasis of how the post was funded made a big impact on the team dynamics. Originally, the literacy worker was funded to only work with students at Intermediate 1 or below and the rest of the team with Intermediate 2 and above. This meant that the staff were divided by who they could and couldn't work with. After the change in emphasis, all of the team can work with all students and work together where necessary without 'false' divides. This has clearly benefited everyone but was not without challenges or potential barriers. For example, the college worked with the partnership to change its paperwork and database so we could capture the information they needed, thus removing the need to record twice.

Secondly, we piloted a co-ordinator role for three months with the partnership's support and they agreed to fund this on an ongoing basis as it made a real visible impact on the quality, consistency and range of services delivered.

Now the two roads have merged. The strategic road continues to work well while the practitioners' road has now joined it. The practitioners now feel a sense of team and genuine openness within the college and are also developing this with the other literacy workers in the community.

8

SUPPORTING PROVIDERS

Some partnerships had developed effective learners' forums to provide opportunities for learners to give feedback on their learning and to articulate their needs. These partnerships used the insights from these exercises to guide their planning of provision, the design of courses and promotion of learning initiatives. *Learning Connections* had put in place training for *spotters* and *referrers* to promote participation in literacies programmes. It had developed introductory programmes for literacies tutors through Introduction to Adult Literacies Learning (ITALL). It had supported e-learning within ALN partnerships and had developed software, *Digital Learning*, which could be adapted to e-learning programmes within centres. *Learning Connections* had also overseen the curriculum and assessment framework project.

However, there was no sufficiently comprehensive understanding of the roles and contributions of providers within partnerships in implementing these initiatives and inadequate guidance on effective partnership to ensure appropriate provision to improve the literacies competences of the local community. The Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) commissioned by the Scottish Executive, had mature plans to provide joint support through the *Communities of Practice* project. However, this support was not yet available to inform the implementation of provision within FE. This was a factor in the differing quality of local strategies for implementing literacies provision within partnerships and centres. Most strategies were not of a consistently high or appropriate standard to meet the diverse needs of all learners including learners with learning difficulties and disabilities or to provide seamless curriculum pathways with support at local level. SFEU was developing guidelines for ALN provision in FE colleges, but this advice was not yet available to colleges to assist them in improving the quality of their provision.

9



RECOMMENDATIONS

This report identifies a number of issues in relation to the need for an appropriate literacies curriculum framework which provides progression, and is constructed around the needs of individual learners. This need will be addressed through implementation by managers and practitioners of the recent curriculum guidelines contained in the “Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) Curriculum Framework for Scotland”. A Scottish Executive project being conducted by SFEU will shortly provide guidance with regard to quality and the use of LIC as a self-evaluation tool. This development, together with the SFEFC/HMIE revised quality framework has the potential to improve quality assurance practice in FE colleges. HMIE, in revising its self-evaluation framework for community learning and development, *How good is our community learning and development?*, is also developing specific guidance for literacies work within community-based adult learning. In addition to implementing these guidelines and other forthcoming advice when available, providers, ALN partnerships and national organisations should consider the following recommendations.

Recommendations for providers

1. Providers should improve the effectiveness of their arrangements for monitoring progress, assessing achievement and tracking learners including those who have progressed into award-bearing programmes and further study.
2. Where appropriate, ALN programmes should provide structured opportunities and encouragement to learners to progress to award-bearing programmes.
3. FE colleges should develop improved arrangements to help learners identify their literacy and numeracy needs before embarking on full-time formal and informal programmes. These arrangements should include training for appropriate staff in interviewing learners and assessing their literacy and numeracy needs and other barriers to learning.
4. Local authorities should ensure that training programmes for group and voluntary tutors are comprehensive and effective.
5. Local authorities should provide literacies practitioners and tutors with easy access to an appropriate range of teaching resources, including ICT resources.
6. Local authorities should select or adapt accommodation used for ALN provision to support effective teaching and learning.
7. Managers in local authorities and FE colleges should incorporate the use of LIC within their existing arrangements for assuring quality and reviewing progress, and they should ensure that practitioners comply with these arrangements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Adult Literacy and Numeracy Partnerships

8. Partnerships should undertake more systematic and effective strategic planning and partnership working, and improve their decision-making processes and their arrangements for allocating resources to partners.
9. Partnerships should create sufficient opportunities across all provision to meet the numeracy needs of learners.
10. Partnerships should review and improve the effectiveness of their ALN provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Recommendations for national bodies

11. The Scottish Executive should provide clearer direction and impetus to promote the roles and responsibilities of providers across all sectors. This central direction should include principles for effective partnership working.
12. *Learning Connections* within its promotion of strategies for literacies should provide explicit guidance on effective partnerships, representation, strategic planning and responsive decision making.
13. *Learning Connections* should develop further training for practitioners at all stages of professional development, in the context of current national initiatives in training.
14. *Learning Connections* should provide advice to providers on initial assessment, the construction and use of learning plans, and effective arrangements for assessing achievement and tracking learners' progress.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALN	Adult literacy and numeracy
ALNIS	Adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland
ALNP	Adult literacy and numeracy partnership
BRITE	Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
HMIE	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
IiP	Investors in People
ICT	Information and Communications technology
ITALL	Introduction to Adult Literacies Learning
LIC	Literacies in the Community
NQ	National Qualifications
Pathfinder	Funded project to develop good practice
PDA	Professional Development Award
SFEU	Scottish Further Education Unit
"spotters" and "referrers"	People within local communities who encourage others to participate in learning programmes
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SQC	Scottish Qualifications Certificate

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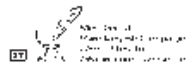
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