



National Assembly for Wales
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru

A revised strategy for Literacy and Numeracy in Wales

Abstract

This paper provides background briefing on the Welsh Assembly Government's revised strategy for raising standards of literacy and numeracy in Wales. The strategy *Words Talk – Numbers Count* was published on 22 April 2005.

The strategy aims to take forward the agenda set in *The Learning Country* and introduces some new targets.

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A revised strategy for Literacy and Numeracy in Wales

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Overview

Words Talk – Numbers Count is the Assembly Government's second Basic Skills Strategy. It aims to take forward the agenda set in *The Learning Country* and has the same fundamental aims as the first Strategy. These are that:

- ◆ all young children should be prepared for learning when they begin school;
- ◆ the number of children leaving primary school struggling over reading, writing and the use of number should be further reduced;
- ◆ fewer young people should leave compulsory education still struggling with basic skills; and
- ◆ the number of adults with poor basic skills should be diminished significantly.

The report states that:

“Good progress has been made over the past four years towards meeting these aims. Innovative and exciting programmes have been started, and a wealth of essential capacity-building and support work undertaken. We shall build on this work under this new Strategy, which will apply until April 2010. In particular we shall:

- ◆ ensure that the Strategy remains relevant and fresh;
- ◆ overcome the key barriers that are holding back progress; and
- ◆ embed successful developments into mainstream programmes”

The Strategy is structured into horizontal themes and vertical priority groups. The horizontal themes address issues and barriers that face all those with a basic skills need - such as the quality of learning provision, and the sufficiency of help and support. The Strategy identifies ten priority groups which will receive specific and targeted support.

The ten priority groups are:

- ◆ early years and foundation stage
- ◆ pupils under-attaining in school
- ◆ families
- ◆ young people
- ◆ adult learners
- ◆ low-skilled people in the workforce
- ◆ jobseekers
- ◆ offenders and ex-offenders
- ◆ other groups at risk of social exclusion
- ◆ speakers of other languages

The Plan will be developed and adapted over the next five years in conjunction with the Basic Skills Agency.

The Strategy introduces a range of new targets:

- ◆ by 2010, 80% of working-age adults to have at least Level 1 literacy skills, and 55% to have at least Level 1 numeracy skills.
- ◆ all schools to maintain the Basic Skills Quality Mark standards, and all post-16 learning providers to hold the Quality Mark by 2006.
- ◆ 50% of employees working for employers that have signed the Employer Pledge by 2010

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The story so far

The first National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales was published in April 2001. It was delivered in close partnership with the Basic Skills Agency. A key feature of the Strategy was to address the needs of all age groups. Expenditure on the Strategy over its four years was about £40m.

Key achievements:

- ◆ Most primary and secondary schools, FE colleges and other learning providers have achieved the Basic Skills Quality Marks.
- ◆ Training modules have been developed for teachers.
- ◆ The Language and Play programme for young children was introduced.
- ◆ All babies received free book bags.
- ◆ Grants were provided to schools to improve the help they give to pupils with basic skills needs.
- ◆ The Employer Pledge programme was introduced to help those in employment and strengthened provision by post-16 providers, including basic skills screening for all post-16 learners.
- ◆ A new basic skills learning programme was piloted - the Tripartite Course.
- ◆ An external evaluation was undertaken of the Strategy's overall approach.

What's New

The revised Strategy aims to take forward the agenda set in *The Learning Country* and has the same fundamental aims as the first Strategy. The Assembly Government has committed a further £40m over the next three years to support this Strategy. This second Basic Skills Strategy includes a number of new features:

- ◆ An all-age approach that concentrates on ten horizontal themes and ten priority groups.
- ◆ An expanded Language and Play programme, together with an innovative Number and Play programme, targeting Communities First areas.
- ◆ Recognition of basic skills as a core part of the 14-19 agenda under *Learning Country: Learning Pathways*.
- ◆ A requirement that all learning providers assess the basic skills needs of all learners and take follow-up action to support their needs.
- ◆ An expanded Employer Pledge scheme, plus more support for employers.
- ◆ A fit-for-purpose suite of qualifications and associated assessment tools.
- ◆ New learning programmes developed to be flexible and attractive to learners across all settings.
- ◆ An integrated programme of basic skills support for offenders.
- ◆ Enhanced support for ESOL learners.
- ◆ A new best practice programme plus dissemination support - notably through the Strategy website.

- ◆ A range of new targets:
 - ◆ By 2010, 80% of working-age adults to have at least Level 1 literacy skills, and 55% to have at least Level 1 numeracy skills.
 - ◆ All schools to maintain the Basic Skills Quality Mark standards, and all post-16 learning providers to hold the Quality Mark by 2006.
 - ◆ 50% of employees working for employers that have signed the Employer Pledge by 2010.
- ◆ An integrated programme of practitioner development.
- ◆ An extensive research programme into what works, to assist mainstreaming of good practice.

The revised Strategy builds on the first and shares the same fundamental aims. However, in addition, the new Strategy will aim to achieve a number of things:

- ◆ “It will be more inclusive of our partner organisations who have significant expertise and involvement in basic skills. These include Local Education Authorities, ELWa, Jobcentre Plus, Careers Wales, Youth Offending Teams and the Probation and Prison Services, Sector Skills Councils, employer organisations, trades unions, and the voluntary sector. We will make the Strategy more relevant to their needs.
- ◆ It will aim to integrate strategic developments into all relevant programmes so that basic skills issues are addressed routinely and are sustainable in the longer term. We shall also use opportunities to make good links with other Assembly Government strategies, such as those for health, community and economic development. We have subjected this Strategy to a Rapid Health Impact Assessment which identified the close connection between basic skills and health and well-being issues as well as the need to co-ordinate interventions particularly at the community level.
- ◆ It will introduce better systems to research and monitor progress and examine ways in which good practice can be encouraged and rewarded”.

The report states that:

“We shall take a rigorous approach to measuring the effectiveness of this Strategy. We shall publish research and evaluation reports, as well as supporting a major programme to identify and disseminate best practice. We shall also publish an annual progress report.”

Further reading

- ◆ The Strategy document *Words Talk – Numbers Count* is available in full on the Learning Wales website at:

<http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/pdfs/c1505-words-talk-e.pdf>

- ◆ The Strategy document includes summary details of a recent baseline survey of basic skills in the adult population in Wales. The results are published in full separately on the Basic Skills Strategy website at:

<http://www.basic-skills-wales.org>