



National Assembly for **Wales**  
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol **Cymru**

## **Numeracy in Wales - Latest research (January 2006)**

### **Abstract**

This paper outlines:

- ◆ The Welsh Assembly Government's revised strategy for raising standards of numeracy
- ◆ The current advertising campaign to increase adult numeracy, 'Numbers Count'
- ◆ Recent figures released by the Basic Skills Agency on adult confidence and ability with numbers

**April 2006**





# Numeracy in Wales - Latest research (January 2006)

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## **Executive Summary**

In 2005 the Welsh Assembly Government published its second Basic Skills Strategy, *Words Talk – Numbers Count*, taking forward the agenda set out in *The Learning Country*.

The Basic Skills Agency (BSA) on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government are carrying this strategy forward through the current 'Numbers Count' campaign which aims to help adults to improve their numeracy skills and encourage parents to play games with their young children to develop early number skills.

Complementing the campaign, a range of numeracy projects are being rolled out in Communities First areas and other areas of significant disadvantage in Wales.

In January 2006 the BSA published research which indicates that 18% of Welsh adults are not confident with their maths, 25% have trouble working out sums with decimal points, 35% struggle with fractions and 31% have difficulty working out percentages.

## Numeracy in Wales

### Welsh Assembly Government's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy<sup>1 2</sup>

*Words Talk – Numbers Count*, published in 2005 is the Welsh 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 identifies ten priority groups which will receive specific and targeted support. These 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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<sup>1</sup> The Welsh Assembly Government announcement on the publishing of *Words Talk - Numbers Count* can be seen at: [http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/scripts/fe/news\\_details.asp?NewsID=1853](http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/scripts/fe/news_details.asp?NewsID=1853)

*Words Talk - Numbers Count* can be seen in full at:  
<http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/pdfs/c1505-words-talk-e.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Further information on *Words Talk - Numbers Count* is available in the Members' Research Service paper *A revised strategy for literacy and numeracy in Wales* available at:  
<http://assembly.presidingoffic/mrs/briefings/2005/CBE050998%20R%20Literacy%20and%20Numeracy%20strategy.doc>

## **Numbers Count**

The 'Numbers Count' numeracy campaign aims to encourage people to improve their own numeracy skills and to help them to help their children. The bilingual campaign – which ran across Wales for four weeks from 23 January 2006 – was devised by the Basic Skills Agency on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government as part of their National Basic Skills Strategy.

The 'Numbers Count' campaign aimed to help adults to improve their numeracy skills and encourage parents to play games with their young children to develop early number skills.

Adverts, on television, radio and in the press introduced a telephone number and two free 'Numbers Count' information packs – a self-help pack for adults and a separate pack learners can use with their children.

Complementing the campaign, a range of numeracy projects – run by educational and training bodies, libraries, voluntary and community organisations - are being rolled out in Communities First areas and other areas of significant disadvantage in Wales.

The Basic Skills Agency press release states:

Simplicity has been the key to the artistic treatment of the message which the Assembly wished to convey – that those with numeracy problems need not fear taking steps to overcome their difficulties and illustrating how skills can improve their quality of life as well as help to achieve their potential in education and employment. It also illustrates how introducing number into a child's daily life is the best way to ensure that confidence and ability is developed at a young age.<sup>3</sup>

The total cost of the campaign, including packs, is £1.12million. The cost of the TV advertisements is some £490,600.

Information packs are available from the campaign website at:  
<http://www.123.org.uk>

or by calling 0800 123 123

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<sup>3</sup> The Basic Skills Agency press release on the survey results, published 16 January 2006, can be seen at:  
[http://www.basic-skills-wales.org/bsastrategy/en/about\\_us/news/press\\_release\\_1\\_in\\_5\\_adults\\_in\\_wales\\_struggle\\_with\\_basic\\_maths.cfm](http://www.basic-skills-wales.org/bsastrategy/en/about_us/news/press_release_1_in_5_adults_in_wales_struggle_with_basic_maths.cfm)

## **Basic Skills Agency research findings**

In January 2006 the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) published research which indicates that 18% of Welsh adults are not confident with their maths, 25% have trouble working out sums with decimal points, 35% struggle with fractions and 31% have difficulty working out percentages.

The Basic Skills Agency state that:

The figures highlight the need for the 'Numbers Count' numeracy campaign, which aims to encourage people to improve their own numeracy skills and to help them to help their children. The bilingual campaign – which runs across Wales for four weeks from 23 January – has been devised on behalf of the Welsh Assembly's National Basic Skills Strategy by the BSA.

Alan Wells, Director of the Basic Skills Agency, comments:

People think it's OK to be bad at maths but that's just not the case. Poor skills in maths have a significant and sustained impact on adults' lives - on employability, earnings and the ability to manage everyday life. Research shows that adults with low numeracy skills have more difficulty in getting and maintaining full-time employment, and earn significantly less than those with good numeracy skills.<sup>4</sup>

He continues:

It doesn't just stop there. Adults with poor basic skills are more likely to have children who struggle. Whilst our survey showed that 99% of parents felt it was important to try to help their children with their studies 37% didn't help their secondary school aged children with maths. We need creative and imaginative approaches – like the Numbers Count campaign – to motivate adults to tackle their numeracy issues and help ensure that the next generation doesn't suffer from the same problems.

The BSA research was based on interviews with 1,018 adults across Wales aged 16 and over. The research shows that whilst only 6% had difficulty working out how to split a restaurant bill, 21% admitted that they had trouble reading graphs, 35% said they had difficulties in figuring out interest rates and 28% said they would struggle to work out how much money they'd need to pay back on a loan.

The survey results can be seen in Annex A.

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<sup>4</sup> The BSA press release can be seen at [http://www.basic-skills-wales.org/bsastrategy/en/about\\_us/news/press\\_release\\_1\\_in\\_5\\_adults\\_in\\_wales\\_struggle\\_with\\_basic\\_maths.cfm](http://www.basic-skills-wales.org/bsastrategy/en/about_us/news/press_release_1_in_5_adults_in_wales_struggle_with_basic_maths.cfm)

## Annex A

# Welsh Omnibus Survey 2005 – Summary

### Participants were asked:

#### How confident they were with maths nowadays

- 18% said they were not confident.
- 38% rated themselves OK.
- 10% of social classes ABC1s rated themselves not confident compared to 24% of C2DEs.<sup>5</sup>
- 22% of women were 'not confident' compared to 13% of men.

#### How good did they think they were at maths at primary school

- 23% rated themselves as poor.
- 38% rated themselves as average.
- Twice as many in lower social classes considered themselves poor at maths in primary school - 14% of ABC1 participants and 29% of C2DEs.

#### And at secondary school

- 21% rated themselves as poor.
- 43% rated themselves as average.
- Twice as many in lower social classes thought they were poor at maths

#### About the types of maths they found difficult

- Adding up - 4%
- Dividing – 9%
- Subtracting – 7%
- Multiplying – 10%
- Working out sums with decimal points in – 25% (30% of women, 33% of C2DEs)
- Understanding/working out fractions – 36% (43% of women, 46% of C2DEs)
- Working out percentages – 31% (37% of women, 40% of C2DEs)
- Most respondents said they could manage every day numerical tasks such as giving and getting change, measuring and weighing things but:
- 28% had difficulties working out how much money they'd pay back on a loan (24% of men and 32% of women, 22% of ABC1s and 33% of C2DEs).
- 35% reported difficulties in figuring out interest rates (41% of women and 29% of men, 40% of C2DEs and 29% of ABC1s).
- 21% reported having trouble reading a graph (13% of men and 27% of women, 26% of C2DEs and 13% of ABC1s).
- 19% had trouble calculating how much to buy e.g. paint, carpet, knitting wool (26% of women and 12% of men, 14% of ABC1s and 23% of C2DEs).
- 8% had difficulty working out how good a special offer was (5% of ABC1s and 11% of C2DEs).
- 9% reported having trouble understanding a bus or train timetable (11% of women and 7% of men, 5% of ABC1s and 12% of C2DEs).
- 9% had difficulty comparing prices on different sized packs of household goods.

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<sup>5</sup> These codes are the socio-economic classification system used in the UK.

A - high managerial and opinion leaders

B - middle management

C1 - lower management, administrative workforce

C2 - skilled manual workers

D - unskilled/semi-skilled manual workers

E - low waged/unwaged

- 6% had difficulty working out how to split a restaurant or café bill.

**Participants with children were asked:**

**To rate their children's ability at maths**

- 18% of parents of primary school children thought their children or some of their children were poor at maths.
- 16% didn't know how good their primary school children or some of their children were at maths.
- 19% of parents of secondary school aged children thought their children / some of their children were poor at maths; 3% didn't know.

**Whether they tried to help their children with their maths**

- 99% of parents of primary or secondary aged children thought it important for parents to try and help their children with maths, reading and writing.
- 13% of parents with primary school aged children did not try to help their children with maths.
- 37% of parents of secondary aged children didn't try to help them with their maths.
- 16% said they had difficulties helping their primary school aged children with their maths and a further 13% said they sometimes had trouble (8% of parents in social classes ABC1 and 21% of C2DE parents said they had difficulties).
- 27% of parents of secondary school aged children said they sometimes had difficulties helping their children with their maths and a further 13% said they sometimes had trouble (14% of parents in social classes ABC1 and 37% of C2DE parents said they had difficulties).

The survey was carried out by Beaufort Research Ltd on behalf of the Basic Skills Agency. Face to face interviews were carried out with 1,018 adults in Wales aged 16 or over (255 were parents) within their own homes in November 2005. (Using a confidence level of 95% and a finding of 10% results are accurate to + or - 2 for questions given to the total sample and + or -3.5 for questions answered by parents only.)