

# **MANIFESTO FOR LITERACY**

National Literacy Trust  
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# Foreword

The next government will be faced with the enormous challenge of rebuilding the economy and improving social mobility, while making efficiency savings across Whitehall and local government. This challenge won't be easy, but it will be even harder without the basics in place.

In the UK today one in six people struggle with literacy.<sup>1</sup> With literacy skills, an individual gains control over their life, but without literacy, life experience is dramatically narrowed and opportunities are lost. This not only impacts upon an individual's personal success and happiness, but also affects their family, the community they live in, and society as a whole.

In September 2008 the National Literacy Trust published *Literacy changes lives*<sup>2</sup> which showed the difference in a range of outcomes between those with poor and good literacy levels. These outcomes were:

- **Economic well-being**
- **Aspirations**
- **Family life**
- **Health**
- **Civic and cultural participation**

In every one of these areas, those with poor literacy had significantly worse outcomes. They earned less, voted less, had lower aspirations, higher rates of family breakdown, and poorer mental and physical health.

*Literacy changes lives* also showed that improved literacy levels are associated with improved outcomes and does indeed change

- 1 DfES (2003). *The Skills for Life survey: A national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills*. London: DfES
- 2 Dugdale, G. & Clark, C. (2008). *Literacy changes lives: An advocacy resource*. London: National Literacy Trust

lives, often for those who are most at risk of exclusion. Literacy difficulties are not spread evenly across the population; they are disproportionately focused amongst certain groups, in particular groups with lower socio-economic status.

The National Literacy Trust believes a wider and deeper debate on literacy is required. The relationship between literacy levels and social outcomes is strong but complex: through the intergenerational transfer of skills and aspirations, low literacy levels are both a cause of poor social outcomes and an effect. If this relationship is to be addressed, literacy policy needs to move beyond the classroom, to engage individuals and involve families, communities and a range of services, both statutory and non-statutory.

With an anticipated May 2010 election, there has never been a better time to tackle the poor literacy levels that stunt individuals' life aspirations and life chances. By improving these skills, we can dramatically boost outcomes for individuals and society.

**Jonathan Douglas**

Director, National Literacy Trust

# Summary

Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen to such a level that an individual can fulfil their potential.

Low literacy skills compromise the ability of the individual to access their rights, participate in civil, social and economic society and ultimately can undermine the community itself. Literacy is therefore not only an issue for the education sector but for all who believe in equality. Everyone in society has a communal as well as personal interest in raising literacy standards.

Schools sit at the heart of the challenge. However they alone do not hold the solution. They need to operate within a partnership that supports literacy in the family home, the workplace and wider society.

This manifesto lays out four literacy challenges for government and a series of recommendations for each.

## **1. Ensure that every child develops the speaking and listening skills they need.**

**To do this government must implement all the recommendations of the Bercow review of speech, language and communication. In particular:**

- ✓ Speech, language and communication to be prioritised by all Children's Centres and health visitors, as the primary focus for measuring every child's progress
- ✓ All parents to receive information which emphasises the importance of speech, language and communication to all children through the Healthy Child Programme

## **2. Enable every parent to be their child's first and best teacher.**

### **To do this government must:**

- ✓ Embed family literacy across parenting strategies within local authorities
- ✓ Dedicate funding for parent groups to buy books and reading materials for local school libraries

## **3. Ensure that every pupil is a motivated reader, and uses their skills to interact in a digital age.**

### **To do this government must:**

- ✓ Supplement phonics-based teaching of reading with approaches that increase children's enjoyment of reading and writing
- ✓ Incorporate new media into the development of children's literacy in the new primary curriculum
- ✓ Ask schools to include evidence of improved reading skills and enjoyment in the new school report cards

## **4. Every individual must know that literacy can change their life and bring new opportunities.**

### **To address this government must:**

- ✓ Run a UK-wide repeat of the Skills for Life survey to establish which groups are most in need of literacy support
- ✓ Launch a national campaign to show those most in need why literacy is important to them, and provide them with the tools to take action

# Introduction

**Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen to such a level that an individual can fulfil their potential.**

One in six people in the UK struggle with literacy.<sup>3</sup> This means that they live without the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills they need to fulfil their potential. The impact of this is significant; literacy problems cause acute social, economic and cultural problems that undermine and divide communities. This is therefore an urgent issue not only for the education sector but for all who care about equality, and the future economic and social welfare of our nation.

The National Literacy Trust is launching this manifesto to inform and inspire a stronger political commitment to literacy. An opinion poll commissioned to support this manifesto suggests that the issue ranks highly as a priority for the electorate:

- 69 per cent of voters say that their vote would be influenced by a political party that has an effective policy on literacy
- 87 per cent believe that literacy skills are essential for children to cope in today's multimedia society
- 92 per cent say literacy is vital to the economy

Our *Manifesto for literacy* makes recommendations to the political parties as they develop their manifestos about how they can improve literacy in the UK, and ensure that UK citizens aspire, and have opportunities to attain, high levels of literacy.

The recommendations have been developed in consultation with practitioners and over 30 national organisations from business, the third sector, education, publicly sponsored bodies and the arts, and are based on the National Literacy Trust's 15 years of experience working with those most in need.

3 DfES (2003)

During the consultation period, four key themes emerged:

- Breaking down barriers: the importance of speech, language and communication in the early years
- Better literacy begins at home: the role of the family in developing a child's literacy
- Literacy is the key to the digital age: the need to modernise literacy in the school curriculum to include new forms of literacy and promote the enjoyment of literacy
- Brighter futures: to raise awareness of the importance of literacy skills where they are lowest

These themes highlight that whilst the school is the principle agent in raising literacy standards, a broad range of community, business and statutory agencies need to be mobilised to address the national literacy challenge. Creating literate citizens begins in the early years, well before a child enters a classroom.

Though the education system is the key vehicle for addressing and instilling literacy skills, there are a range of other factors beyond education that are also vital for improving literacy.

This is why partnerships with agencies that extend beyond the classroom are required.

Low literacy has long been seen as a symptom of low economic status. However, this manifesto asserts that the two issues are dynamically interdependent. Through the intergenerational transfer of skills and aspirations, low literacy levels are as much a cause of poor social outcomes as they are a result.

All major parties have spoken publicly of a desire to improve social mobility and to create a fairer Britain. Literacy levels are a key indicator of school standards and all parties will make manifesto pledges to improve school standards. However, political discourse has failed to adequately tie these aims together, and to recognise that they are intrinsically linked. In failing to take into account the sheer range of outcomes that better literacy can

deliver, politicians are failing to make the most of the one of the cheapest, most sustainable, most powerful and achievable weapons available to combat poverty and inequality in the UK.

Increasing literacy skills sits at the heart of rebuilding the UK economy, supporting routes to social mobility and increasing opportunities for all. Literacy changes lives.

# 1: Breaking down barriers

**Ensure that every child develops the speaking and listening skills they need.**

*“Because my son has a speech and language impediment, when I had my daughter Louise, I wanted to do what I could to make an impact on her language development. Now I know what steps I can take to help her develop speech, she has come on in leaps and bounds. The two of us share stories together and we’re always having a conversation. I’d really encourage every mum to talk and read more together at home.”*

*Mum, Charlotte Colwell-Treacy, 30, and Louise, 2, are from Greenwich.*

Effective policy to improve social mobility must be based on a strong commitment to the early years. Children who begin their lives in a language-rich environment will enter formal education more sociable, more able to learn, and quicker to develop literacy skills.<sup>4</sup> Speech, language and communication skills (SLC) are the first literacy skills and children who do not develop these skills suffer disadvantages that are compounded throughout their lives.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of early years communication is evidenced by substantial research. The study conducted in the US by Betty Hart and Todd Risley found significant differences in the number of words that different groups of children heard in their early years.<sup>6</sup>

4 Lybolt, J. and Gottfried, C (2003). *Promoting pre-school language*. Belgium: International Academy of Education

5 Feinstein, L. (2003). Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort. *Economica* 70 (1): pp. 73-97

6 Risley, T. R & Hart, B. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co

Extrapolating from observed parental talk, the study estimated that upon entering school, children with parents who had professional jobs had heard over 33 million words, while children from more disadvantaged groups had heard fewer than 10 million. There were also significant differences in the number of words a child spoke before starting school, with the most talkative children speaking over 12 million words and the most taciturn less than 4 million. The implications of this early experience are far-reaching. The research found that these differences were powerfully related to both vocabulary growth and standardised test scores at age 3 and then later at age 9.<sup>7</sup>

Strong communication skills are a vital factor in determining an individual's economic success. A Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) survey in 1999 found that a significant number of employers from all sectors reported employing people on the strength of their communication skills rather than more formal qualifications.<sup>8</sup> This was backed up by a CBI study which found that 41 per cent of employers in the UK are concerned about the basic skills of their employees. Employers across a range of sectors share concerns about employees basic communication and presentation skills.<sup>9</sup>

The importance of communication skills in the workplace was a strong theme in a National Literacy Trust consultation event for business and education.<sup>10</sup> Many employers present talked of a mistakenly held belief that speaking and listening skills develop organically and do not need to be taught in the same way as

7 Risley, T. R & Hart, B. (2006). Promoting early language development. In N. F. Watt, C. Ayoub, R. H. Bradley, J. E. Puma & W. A. LeBoeuf (Eds.), *The crisis in youth mental health: Critical issues and effective programs, Volume 4, Early intervention programs and policies* (pp. 83-88). Westport, CT: Praeger

8 QCA (1999), *Talking, Reading and Writing at work*. London: QCA

9 CBI (2008), *Taking Stock: CBI Education and Skills survey*. London: CBI

10 NLT (2008), *Bridging the literacy gap between education and business*. London: National Literacy Trust

other literacy skills. While some sectors require higher levels of speaking and listening skills than others, an employee's ability to present themselves well in any job through speech, language and communication will determine the scope of their success.

Awareness of the importance of SLC skills has grown and recent government initiatives have attempted to address the issue. Every Child A Talker is a £40 million government programme to provide training and support to those working with young children in early years language development. The programme aims to improve practitioners' knowledge and understanding, enabling them to support the development of children's speaking and listening skills and to spot any children with problems at an early age.<sup>11</sup>

In secondary education, the Government announced in the 2007 Children's Plan<sup>12</sup> that 'functional skills' would become a compulsory requirement of the GCSE curriculum. Functional skills were designed to be a practical application of learned skills, with part of the assessment focusing on effective communication in real life situations. The suggested benchmark was that no student who failed functional skills GCSE could get a C grade at GCSE. In April 2009 it was announced that functional skills testing will no longer be compulsory, but the curriculum will still go ahead as planned. This seems to suggest issues with assessment rather than a change of policy. However, the focus on developing practical communication skills is important and new ways to support them must be developed.

Despite moves such as these, Government policies do not strongly and universally embed SLC support from birth onwards. The importance of early years language experience demands that strategic approaches should be developed from birth, where their

11 DCSF (2008). *Every Child A Talker*  
[http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2008\\_0146](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0146)

12 DCSF (2007). *The Children's Plan: building brighter futures*.  
London: DCSF

impact will be greatest and most cost-effective. Fortunately, the Government already has a strong analysis of current levels of provision and clear recommendations to improve them.

*The Bercow Report: A review of services for children and young people (0-19) with speech, language and communication needs*<sup>13</sup> was jointly commissioned by the Department for Health and the Department for Children, Schools and Families, its implementation needs to be the foundation of future literacy policy.

Chapter 1.1 of the Bercow Report highlights the importance of good SLC skills, and the need to impress them across all children's services:

*'The ability to communicate is an essential life skill for all children and young people in the twenty-first century. It is at the core of all social interaction. With effective communication skills, children can engage and thrive. Without them, children will struggle to learn, achieve, make friends and interact with the world around them. The centrality of communication is not simply a personal statement of value. It is a formal, public, and multilateral declaration by UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Health Organization, which lists communication as one of the ten core life skills. Communication is a fundamental human right.'*<sup>14</sup>

The original remit of the report was to look at SLC services for 0-19 year olds with special educational needs. However, following widespread consultation and research into the state of current SLC provision in the UK, many of the final recommendations have a universal application, and provide an important platform for the redevelopment of SLC services in the UK. The report has the potential to mark a watershed in UK literacy policy. From this

13 DCSF, DoH (2008), *The Bercow Report: A review of services for children and young people (0-19) with speech, language and communication needs* London: DCSF

14 Ibid. p.16

point all literacy strategies, interventions and policy directives must take account of the fundamental importance of early years SLC in raising literacy standards.

Following the release of the Bercow report, the Government accepted the recommendations and has begun acting upon some of them. However, a systematic implementation of all the recommendations must be undertaken if every child is to become an effective communicator. The current danger is that in implementation the review reverts to a Special Educational Needs agenda. Its significance is wider. Government must use it to prioritise SLC skills for all children, and so potentially improve all children's opportunities in life.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**To ensure that every child develops the speaking and listening skills they need, government must implement all the recommendations of the Bercow review of speech, language and communication. In particular:**

- ✓ Speech, language and communication to be prioritised by all Children's Centres and health visitors, as the primary focus for measuring every child's progress
- ✓ All parents to receive information which emphasises the importance of speech, language and communication to all children through the Healthy Child Programme

## 2: Better literacy begins at home

**Enable every parent to be their child's first and best teacher.**

*"We started going to the events mostly because there's a free breakfast - I didn't know what else to expect. I'd never heard of all the ways you can choose books for your children, and now I feel like I can choose a book that Millie would like. The best part of it was that it's something we've done together, the two of us doing something new. Now I know what she is learning and I am a part of it for the first time."*

*Kim Ridout, 28, is from Southampton. Kim has three children, and took part in family literacy sessions with her daughter, Millie Brooks, 8.*

Supporting literacy at home can be instrumental in breaking down barriers to achievement. Research shows that parental support for young children not only makes a real difference to their development, but can also outweigh the impact of other factors such as socio-economic status, or parental educational attainment.<sup>15</sup>

Parental influence on a child's language and literacy development is strongest in the early years, when it can have a more profound and longer lasting effect.<sup>16</sup> However, this does not mean that family involvement becomes less important as a child grows older.

Children spend far more time with their family than with teachers. Throughout their school years children spend just 15 per cent of their time at school and the rest with their families, friends and

15 Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, et al. (2002) The Effective Provision for Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Technical Paper 8a - *Measuring the impact of Pre-School on Children's Cognitive Progress over the Pre School Period*. London: DFES/Institute of Education, University of London

16 Mullis, Mullis, Cornille et al (2004), *Early literacy outcomes and parent involvement*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University

communities.<sup>17</sup> Despite common perceptions that celebrities and film stars are key role models for young people, National Literacy Trust research has shown that the majority of children (regardless of age, socio-economic background or a range of other factors) name family members, most often their mother, as their role model.<sup>18</sup> Young people said that mothers (72 per cent) and fathers (69 per cent) were the most important reading role models, followed by other family members and friends. Children who enjoy reading are also most likely to name family members as their role models for reading.<sup>19</sup> That the importance of family members as role models is consistent regardless of the child's age, further demonstrates the influence of the family on children as they enter their teenage years. Indeed, one piece of UK research has found that parental interest in a child's education was the single most powerful predictor of achievement even at the age of 16.<sup>20</sup>

Ensuring the message about the importance of family involvement gets through to parents is essential for educational success. However, there has not, as yet, been a fully coordinated national approach from government to help parents to support their children. Major policy drives in recent years including Every Child Matters, Every Parent Matters, The Childcare Act and the Children's Plan, have all stressed the role and duty of parents. Other recent Government policy releases have sought to increase parental input into education. The DCSF Schools White Paper, released in July 2009, announced plans to use parental views on

17 Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council (2006) *Literacy Changes Lives: Rochdale Borough Literacy Policy* RMBC

18 Clark, C. Osborne, S. and Dugdale, G. (2009) *Reaching out with role models: role models and young people's reading*. London: National Literacy Trust

19 Ibid

20 Feinstein, L. and Symons, J. (1999), Attainment at secondary school. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 51, 300-321

their children's school as part of the assessment criteria for school report cards.<sup>21</sup> At local authority level support for literacy in the family home is often inconsistent in coverage and quality.

The need for a formal and systemic approach to family literacy is especially significant because research has shown that family involvement in school matters most for children whose mothers have less formal education,<sup>22</sup> and that it is the parents with lower educational achievement who often find schools alienating.<sup>23</sup> Poor experiences of formal education in childhood can make parents nervous when helping their children and effective support and assistance for these parents could make a huge difference to their children's education.

Like the current Labour Government, the Conservative Party has shown an interest in the importance of family learning. Iain Duncan Smith's Social Justice Policy Group strongly promoted family literacy in their Breakthrough Britain report.<sup>24</sup> This report was strongly in favour of family literacy classes as a way of creating a wider culture of learning that could help empower individuals and raise aspirations. However, providing effective support for families must involve a wide range of stakeholders, and this has yet to be achieved on a national level.

There are various examples of family literacy good practice around the country, ranging from small local projects to whole local authority strategies, such as Rochdale Borough Council's

21 DCSF (2009a), *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system* London: DCSF

22 Dearing, E., Kreider, H. et al. (2006) Family involvement in school and low income children's literacy performance: Longitudinal associations between and within families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98, 653-664

23 DCSF (2009b) *Parents as partners: harder to engage parents* London: DCSF

24 Social Justice Policy Group (2007), *Breakthrough Britain: Ending the costs of social breakdown volume 2*. London: Social Justice Policy Group

programme of family literacy. However, local authorities who have developed a strategic approach are the exception rather than the rule. The National Literacy Trust is currently piloting a local authority wide family literacy strategy with DCSF support in a number of local authorities and is examining how this approach might be scaled up.

In early 2008 the Government made it compulsory for every local authority to publish a parenting strategy to bring together all services that deal with parents. Embedding literacy across parenting strategies could provide a strong statutory framework to ensure local authorities are systematically helping families to support their children's literacy, and that there is a coordinated approach to family involvement in raising literacy standards.

All parents need to be aware of the influence they have over their children's educational development, and need to feel involved in the education that their children receive at school. Excellent skills are the result of partnership between parents and the education system and this partnership needs to be strengthened.

For many families, the library is a vital community hub of literacy activity, where reading activities are modelled and reading resources are freely available. The inclusion of a library membership target within the first form of Sure Start was a sign that public family policy, with a bias to need, could incorporate libraries in an imaginative and interesting way. Literacy and education policy has been nervous of using the school library, perhaps related to their non-statutory status. The Key Stage 3 Strategy documents on the school library being a significant exception. Yet school libraries provide a useful hook for generating family involvement building on the fact that resources borrowed from the school library are taken into the home.

Relatively simple mechanisms that build parental engagement with the school library, and the books within it, could result in growing the sense of family engagement and support for

children's reading after they start school. Based on international examples,<sup>25</sup> a model which empowered parents with a role in purchasing stock for the school library could prove powerful.

The Government's recent Schools White Paper has laid out their vision of a less centralised schools system with parent and pupil guarantees, ensuring that both parents and schools know their duties and responsibilities.<sup>26</sup> Parental input into the stocking of school libraries would ensure that parent guarantees had a practical application.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**To enable every parent to be their child's first and best teacher, government must:**

- ✓ Embed family literacy across parenting strategies within local authorities
- ✓ Dedicate funding for parent groups to buy books and reading materials for local school libraries

25 In Ireland parents and schools buy text books for schools. This brings parents into contact with books and bookshops and helps familiarise them with book purchasing.

26 DCSF (2009a)

### 3: Literacy is the key to the digital age

**Ensure that every pupil is a motivated reader, and uses their skills to interact in a digital age.**

*“It was the World Wrestling Entertainment competition that really got me reading again. I like reading magazines the best, like WWE magazine, Match and GamesMaster. I like information books more than stories, especially facts about wrestlers, and going online to websites to read about games cheats and cars.”*

*Sam, 14, Staffordshire*

With the revolution in communication, stimulated by the ubiquity of the Internet, young people are engaging with reading and writing more than ever before. Social networking sites, emails and text messaging have shifted written communication from page to screen, while the rise in personal computer ownership means more children spend their leisure time reading and writing.

Confusingly, international comparisons have suggested that while schoolchildren in England have increased the amount of time they spend reading and writing, their attitudes to reading have become increasingly negative.<sup>27</sup> These falling attitudes have corresponded with a plateau in reading and writing standards. Following an initial rise in literacy levels after the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, standards over the last five years have not risen.

To further improve attainment the relationship between pupils' practice, attitudes and skills needs to be better understood. Any strategy that aims to raise young people's literacy levels has to ensure there is a positive dynamic between these three factors.

<sup>27</sup> Twist, L. Schagen, I. and Hodgson, C. (2007) *Readers and Reading: the National Report for England 2006* PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) Slough: NFER

Underpinning the current relationship between attitudes, behaviour and skills is the lack of connection between young people's personal and social experience of literacy outside the classroom, and the way in which it is experienced in the classroom. There is a damaging implicit hierarchy of literacy activity. National Literacy Trust research found that while young people read regularly outside of school, many of them do not consider the reading they do to be 'real reading'.<sup>28</sup> Most young people surveyed considered 'real reading' to be fiction books and poetry; the materials they felt were promoted in school. The lack of connection between reading of choice and reading at school encourages young people to see literacy in the classroom as irrelevant to their personal and social interests and therefore boring.

Given the link between reading enjoyment and reading attainment,<sup>29</sup> it is vital that schools offer literacy activities that are enjoyable and that motivate young readers. Bridging the gap between personal and school experiences of literacy is essential for maintaining the interest of pupils. It is vital that pupils bring their personal and social capital into the classroom. Building on the combination of phonics-based teaching of reading, support for literacy embedded in classrooms by the Strategies and the vital role of interventions like Every Child a Reader, teachers now need to empower themselves to promote reading as an enjoyable activity that can enhance children's reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. This will motivate skill acquisition and create the positive attitude to reading that the OECD found so powerful as a determinant of social mobility among fifteen year olds.<sup>30</sup>

28 Clark, C. Osborne, S. and Akerman, R. (2008), *Young people's self-perceptions as readers: An investigation including family, peer and school influences*. London: National Literacy Trust

29 Twist, L. Schagen, I. and Hodgson, C. (2007)

30 OECD (2002) *Reading for Change: Performance and engagement across countries. Results from PISA 2000*. New York: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

This will embed the intrinsic motivation to read and learn and develop the disposition to lifelong learning. The promotion of literacy that stimulates enjoyment has the potential to change the lives of young people. It needs to be a priority in every classroom, not replacing other more formal and traditional experiences of literacy but demonstrating the rich cultural experience of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Many young people experience literacy outside of school almost entirely on computer screens and many will go into careers in which they read and write on computers every day. However, there is significant concern that this reality is not reflected in the school curriculum. At a National Literacy Trust consultation event on literacy in the digital age, some attendees expressed concern that the interpretation of the curriculum by teachers still reflects literacy as it was before the widespread use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).<sup>31</sup>

If the literacy that pupils are taught in school does not engage young people and is delivered almost exclusively through a medium children use less frequently, then it is unsurprising that standards are not rising. Literacy needs to be more broadly defined in classroom practice, in a way in which it is relevant to the twenty-first century lived experience. Teachers must tap into the interests and passions of their pupils and the curriculum must evolve in order to embrace non-traditional forms of literacy.

Excellent examples of good practice in this field already exist. In June 2008, the British Film Institute (BFI) launched Reframing Literacy, a programme that embeds the study of film into the school curriculum.<sup>32</sup> The idea behind the programme is that film should not be considered as a curriculum afterthought but as an essential component of the syllabus. Children are taught critical

31 NLT (2009), *The future of literacy in the digital age*. London: National Literacy Trust

32 BFI (2008), *Reframing literacy*. London: British Film Institute

literacy skills using film, rather than using a film as an illustration of a book. The programme has received excellent qualitative feedback from teachers and local authorities, and has provided a new and important way of enriching literacy teaching.<sup>33</sup>

Given the curriculum possibilities of non-traditional literacy, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has increasingly sought to make the curriculum more flexible, and to empower teachers to use a range of materials that connect with the interests of their pupils.<sup>34</sup> The recent review of the primary curriculum by Sir Jim Rose has proposed that ICT should be a cross-curricular discipline; this should ensure that more literacy learning takes place onscreen.<sup>35</sup> Programmes such as Reframing Literacy have shown the potential of new media in literacy teaching and the curriculum must be open to such innovations.

In recent years the Government has launched a widespread programme of school reform. The recent White Paper<sup>36</sup> for schools provides an overarching vision of the next stage of this programme. It strengthens the accountability of the education system to parents and continues the movement of devolution of responsibility to schools. Among the major reforms is the announcement of School Report Cards, which will replace SATs results as the primary means of assessing school standards.

In these report cards, schools will be graded from A-F on a number of criteria. The criteria will include pupil progress, attainment and wellbeing, parental and pupil perceptions of the school and how well schools are 'narrowing the gap' between pupils from different backgrounds. The report card is designed to

33 Twist, L. Schagen, I. and Hodgson, C. (2003) *Readers and Reading: the National Report for England* (PIRLS) Slough: NFER

34 QCA (2007). *The new secondary curriculum: what has changed and why?* London: QCA/National Curriculum

35 DCSF (2009c). *Independent review of the primary curriculum: Final Report*. London: DCSF

36 DCSF (2009a)

give parents and Ofsted a more complete picture of a successful school. For this picture to be accurate and for the links between home and school literacy to be fully realised, the school report card must include literacy indicators. Parents must be told how much progress their child makes in literacy, but also the different forms of literacy support in place. This should include not only a report on how children's literacy skills are being addressed but a consideration of how children's enjoyment of reading, writing, speaking and listening is being boosted in all media. Literacy is now frequently described as a multimodal experience, in which success is dependent on both skills and enjoyment. School curricula and reporting must reflect this twenty-first century reality.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**To ensure that every pupil is a motivated reader, and uses their skills to interact in a digital age, government must:**

- ✓ Supplement phonics-based teaching of reading with approaches that increase children's enjoyment of reading and writing
- ✓ Incorporate new media into the development of children's literacy in the new primary curriculum
- ✓ Ask schools to include evidence of improved reading skills and enjoyment in the new school report cards

## 4: Building brighter futures

**Every individual must know that literacy can change their life and bring new opportunities.**

*“Everybody has the right to read, so that they can read prescriptions, read instructions. It ain’t this big scary thing, it is enjoyable and it can change your life.”*

*Matt is a 37 year old reformed offender, from Walsall. His youth was dominated by football, drink and drugs – education didn’t seem important. Matt took part in an education project through his local football club – not school, library or any other institution that he had felt isolated from throughout his life. Matt now works with young offenders, has completed his access course and will study history at university later this year.*

The value of good literacy skills is obvious to those with strong abilities.<sup>37</sup> However, this belief is not always shared by those with weaker skills who often do not see the relevance of literacy to their lives.<sup>38</sup> For many with lower levels of skills, literacy is associated with schools, colleges and libraries; settings associated with personal failure and in which they don’t feel confident.

This problem is highlighted in research carried out for the 2008 National Year of Reading. A study into the attitudes of C2DE<sup>39</sup> households found that 76 per cent did not equate reading with success.<sup>40</sup> This is particularly worrying because it is these audiences that could benefit most from improving their skills. The personal and social benefits that are realised by raising skills among those groups who have the lowest levels of literacy are disproportionate. For example, a small rise in literacy levels for

37 Dugdale, G. & Clark, C. (2008)

38 TNS consumer (2008), *National Year of Reading Pre-Wave 2008*

39 Lower income social grades, non professional households and those dependent on welfare

40 TNS consumer (2008)

men with the lowest skills results reduces the likelihood of being on state benefits from 19 per cent to 6 per cent.<sup>41</sup>

The range of outcomes influenced by levels of literacy is broad and relates to individuals, communities and the nation.

Aspirations, community and civic participation, family life and employment are all linked to literacy levels. At a societal level, research from the KPMG Foundation estimated that poor literacy levels cost the UK economy £2 billion a year.<sup>42</sup>

Low literacy levels are damaging UK society and they are also compromising the competitiveness of the UK economy. In 2006 the Leitch Report warned that if the UK does not increase its basic skills base dramatically it will become uncompetitive in a global market. The report stated that 95 per cent of the population needs to be functionally literate by 2020 in order to bring the UK in line with other OECD countries – a rise of 15 per cent from 2006 levels.<sup>43</sup>

This stark assessment encouraged the Government to make adult basic skills a key policy focus in building the framework for the future of UK plc and in addressing absolute social mobility. Building on the Skills for Life Strategy<sup>44</sup> which had been stimulated by the Moser Report,<sup>45</sup> the Leitch Report contained a number of recommendations which Government adopted. The most prominent example of this is *Train to Gain*, the Government's flagship employer-led training programme.<sup>46</sup>

41 Dugdale, G. & Clark, C. (2008)

42 KPMG (2006). *The long term costs of literacy levels*. London: KPMG Foundation

43 Leitch review of skills (2006), *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. Final Report. London: HMSO

44 DfES (2003)

45 DfEE (1999) *A fresh start Improving adult literacy and numeracy. The report of the Working Group chaired by Sir Claus Moser*. London: DfEE. This report is commonly referred to as the Moser Report

46 <http://www.traintogain.gov.uk/>

Despite the considerable time and effort invested in employment based training, progress has been slow and the programme has been criticised throughout its three year existence. Initially criticism focused on poor take-up of the scheme. A Commons Select Committee report found that during the first two years of the programme, the opportunities on offer were often being ignored.<sup>47</sup> In the past year *Train to Gain* has grown rapidly and the scheme is now in a position of overspend.<sup>48</sup> However the funding rules now allow employees who have an existing Level 2 qualification (equivalent to a GCSE) to retrain using *Train to Gain*. This suggests that the upsurge in take-up is not necessarily among the initial target audience.<sup>49</sup>

One of the major structural issues with *Train to Gain* is that it relies on the commitment of employers to raise the skills of their workforces. This approach therefore does not address those who have no employer and also fails to take into account the deeply ingrained belief that literacy is irrelevant. Before schemes such as Train to Gain can become successful, we must increase awareness of the wider benefits of literacy. There needs to be a national campaign to show those most in need why literacy is important to them. This must be supported by appropriate and appealing literacy provision.

A campaign of this kind is possible. The 2008 National Year of Reading addressed specific audiences who had low levels of literacy, where there was evidence that these were associated

47 House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee (2008). *Re-skilling for recovery: After Leitch, implementing skills and training policies: First Report of Session 2008-09. Volume It.* London: House of Commons

48 Lee, J. (2009). Year of boom and Train to Gain is bust. *Times Education Supplement*, 3rd July 2009  
<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6016421>

49 Lee, J. (2009). Train to Gain boosted by 'inappropriate' incentives. *Times Education Supplement*, 3rd July 2009  
<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6016412>

with low perceptions of the value of literacy. Messages highlighting how literacy links to personal success were delivered through consumer activities. These aimed to shift attitudes, with attendant access to opportunities to take action around improving and increasing reading activity – generally in families. The impact of this approach was significant. The campaign reached 12,622,396 individuals in social groups C2DE, 57 per cent of the total C2DE adult population and by the end of the campaign there had been a significant increase in the proportion of C2DE parents reading to their child everyday (from 15 per cent to 20 per cent).

In 2009 the Reading for Life campaign was launched to build on the National Year of Reading's attitudes/access/action model. In spring 2009, the campaign partnered with Iceland supermarkets with support from the DCSF, offering free books with information to support literacy to customers. This innovative partnership saw 100,000 books reach less affluent families across the UK. Although the idea of marketing literacy to specific target audiences is not new, it is essential if the UK is to improve its skill base and become internationally competitive.

A key factor in the success of the Reading for Life and Iceland campaign was the understanding of the target audience. Before any large campaign can be undertaken, accurate data is needed to ensure understanding of exactly who needs literacy support. Much current provision and planning is predicated on the 2003 Skills for Life report which was carried out by the then Department for Education and Skills.

The Skills for Life report, based on surveys carried out before 2003, is almost a decade old and as such may be unreliable. The concerted effort of the past decade may have impacted upon literacy levels in the UK, while the age, gender, socio-economic and ethnic profile of those most in need may also have changed. In addition to this, the survey was also relatively small and may

not accurately represent the skills of all groups. The next parliamentary term is the ideal time to re-evaluate which communities are most in need of literacy support.

Once needs are accurately assessed and the benefits of literacy are made clear, local resources will need to be configured so that they effectively support the interests and needs of local populations. This includes all local services from libraries, extended schools and youth groups, to Job Centre Plus services and other Information, Advice and Guidance services.

Wider community partners such as business, faith communities and a range of public sector local services also have a role to play in stimulating demand and making literacy relevant. Recent National Literacy Trust research found that, outside of families, footballers were the most likely role models for young people.<sup>50</sup> The use of non-traditional literacy partners is vital as many people have had poor experiences of formal education, and may be unwilling to go back to more formal education settings.

Strong literacy is an economic and social imperative for the UK. Without excellent and universal literacy, individuals will suffer poor outcomes and the country will become economically uncompetitive. With good literacy the UK can grow and prosper. It is essential that literacy is valued and embedded across services for all ages. Literacy should be a priority regardless of which party forms the next Government. Our future national and international success depends on it.

<sup>50</sup> Clark, Osborne and Dugdale (2009)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Every individual needs to know that literacy can change their life and bring new opportunities. To achieve this, government must:**

- ✓ Run a UK-wide repeat of the Skills for Life survey to establish which groups are most in need of literacy support
- ✓ Run a national campaign to show those most in need why literacy is important to them and provide them with the tools to take action

# Appendix 1: Costing the proposals

## **Breaking down barriers**

- **Speech, language and communication to be prioritised by all Children’s Centres and health visitors, as the primary focus for measuring every child’s progress**

**Within existing budgets:** The government has already announced a speech, language and communication target against which children’s centres will be measured. Ensuring this target is the primary focus for measuring children’s progress will require no extra funding.

- **All parents to receive information which emphasises the importance of speech language and communication to all children through the Healthy Child Programme**

**Within existing budgets:** In February 2009 the Government updated the Healthy Child Promotion Programme and renamed it the Healthy Child Programme. This placed an emphasis on social, as well as clinical, outcomes.

As part of the ‘*Healthy Lives, Brighter Futures*’ initiative all practitioners will receive e-training in speech, language and communication development. Ensuring professionals pass on this knowledge to practitioners should be delivered as standard in the training programme and should require no additional cost.

## **Better literacy begins at home**

- **Embed family literacy across parenting strategies within local authorities**

**Within existing budgets:** Currently every local authority is required to have a parenting strategy. There is no statutory cost to a strategy, however, to make it more effective there are cost implications e.g. full time post, training. The cost of embedding literacy should not incur costs as it should be integrated into existing planning and practice.

- **Dedicate funding for parent groups to buy books for school libraries**

**Within existing budgets:** School library funding is locally controlled and money comes from local authority budgets. Schools involving parents in the process of stocking libraries will incur no significant extra costs for each school.

### **Literacy is the key to a digital age**

- **Supplement phonics-based teaching of reading with approaches that increase children’s enjoyment of reading and writing**

**Within existing budgets:** Raising the amount of time teachers can spend on approaches that increase children’s enjoyment of reading is dependent on time and flexibility in the curriculum. Additional costs are not required, instead the Government must ensure that teachers are given the time.

- **Incorporate new media into the development of children’s literacy in the new primary curriculum**

**Within existing budgets:** The independent review of the primary curriculum, led by Sir Jim Rose, has already recommended that new media be incorporated as a cross curricular discipline. The Government has accepted the recommendations of the review, subject to consultation, so the resourcing of ICT equipment in schools is already planned for.

Moreover, implementing the recommendation is a pedagogical shift rather than additional cost requirement.

- **Asks schools to include evidence of improved reading skills and enjoyment in the new school report cards**

**Within existing budgets:** As the Government is planning to introduce school report cards and already requires schools to keep records of pupils’ reading skills, ensuring that skills assessments are included in the report card will require no additional funds.

## **Building brighter futures**

- **Run a UK-wide repeat of the Skills for Life survey to establish which groups are most in need of literacy support**

**Estimated cost: £2.368 million**

**Breakdown:** The 2003 Skills for Life survey cost £1.572 million to run. A rough adjustment for inflation (4 per cent per annum) would mean a re-run for England would cost **£1.989 million** in 2009.

The 2003 study was only for England and expansion to a UK-wide survey would require additional respondents. According to the Office of National Statistics, the UK population is roughly 61.5 million, 84 per cent of which live in England.<sup>1</sup> Therefore 16 per cent more respondents would be required.

In 2003 8,730 adults in England were surveyed. To make the survey UK-wide, a sample size of 10,393 would be required. As £1.989 million is the estimated cost for England the estimated cost for the UK would be **£2.368 million**

- **Run a national campaign to show those most in need why literacy is important to them and provide them with the tools they need to take action**

**Estimated cost: £624,000 first year**

**£590,000 each additional year**

**Breakdown:** the above costs are based on costs for the 2008 National Year of Reading and the National Literacy Trust's Reading for Life campaign. As these are the closest relevant campaigns to the proposal in terms of content and structure, their costs should be used as a guideline.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?ID=6>

The National Year of Reading ran a nine month campaign, the costs extrapolated to a full year would be **£437,000**. The staff costs and web resources for Reading for Life are **£102,000**, with evaluation costing **£85,000**.<sup>2</sup> This gives a total first year cost of **£624,000**.

2 Evaluation costs would be lower after year one as £35,000 is required for an initial benchmarking activity

## Appendix 2: YouGov poll

### Overview

As part of the development process the National Literacy Trust commissioned YouGov to run a poll in June 2009.

The fieldwork was carried out between 5th and 8th June 2009, when 2105 adults were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following five statements:

- **Good literacy skills are essential to getting a good job**
- **Ensuring the nation has strong literacy skills is vital to the future success of our economy**
- **Good literacy skills are essential for children to cope in today's multimedia society**
- **The ability to read, write and communicate is a fundamental right in modern society**
- **Would a political party having an effective policy on improving literacy in the UK influence you to vote for them?**

The full results can be found overleaf.

The majority of respondents agreed with the statements. However, there were key differences in the percentage of individuals in different groups who strongly agreed with each statement.

### Age

Over-55s more often strongly agreed with the four statements than did those from the lower age groups. This was particularly pronounced with regard to the statement that **“The ability to read, write and communicate is a fundamental right in modern society”**, with 75 per cent of those over 55 strongly agreeing compared to just 47 per cent of those aged 18-24. Age was also one of the only two groupings that saw a marked difference in agreement with the statement: ‘Would a political party having an

effective policy on improving literacy in the UK influence you to vote for them?’

As well as the noticeable difference in attitude between those in the oldest and youngest cohorts, there was a general trend of increasing agreement as age increased. The one exception to this was the 35–44 age group who agreed more strongly than the 45–54 age range. This anomaly was most significant when asked about the importance of literacy for ensuring the future success of the nation.

### **Gender**

A higher percentage of women than men strongly agreed with all five statements in the poll. This difference was most pronounced when asked if ‘reading and writing is a fundamental right in modern society’, with 71 per cent of women and 60 per cent of men strongly agreeing.

The difference was least pronounced when asked whether effective literacy policies would change voting behaviour. In answer to this question 18 per cent of women strongly agreed compared to 17 per cent of men.

### **Region**

The poll also revealed very interesting regional differences. Generally those in Wales and in Scotland agreed most often with the statements, while those in the North of England were least likely to strongly agree. For all statements, except literacy affecting voting behaviour, the highest percentage of agreements came from Wales or Scotland.

### **Social Grade**

The differences in agreement between those from ABC1 social grades and those from C2DE were consistent across all four statements, with a higher percentage of ABC1 adults strongly agreeing with every statement. The greatest difference was

13 per cent between those who strongly agreed with the statement ‘ensuring the nation has strong literacy skills is vital to the future success of our economy.’

The lowest difference was again for the statement around voting behaviour, although the 5 per cent difference in those who strongly agreed meant that social grade was the only variable other than age which saw a significant gap in agreement.

## YouGov Survey Results

Sample Size: 2105

Fieldwork: 5th–8th June 2009

### “Good literacy skills are essential to getting a good job”

	Total	Gender		Age					Social Grade		Region						
	Base	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	North	Midlands	East	London	South	Wales	Scotland
<b>Unweighted Base</b>	2105	973	1132	136	325	383	361	900	1271	834	471	297	214	314	467	123	219
<b>All GB Adults</b>	2105	1010	1095	253	343	396	377	737	1158	947	518	345	202	269	482	105	183
Strongly agree	54%	52%	56%	39%	51%	59%	53%	60%	58%	50%	51%	56%	55%	57%	55%	52%	58%
Agree	37%	39%	36%	44%	38%	34%	40%	35%	35%	40%	39%	36%	34%	37%	38%	40%	35%
Neither agree nor disagree	5%	5%	5%	9%	6%	5%	5%	4%	4%	7%	7%	5%	6%	3%	5%	3%	4%
Disagree	2%	2%	1%	4%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	3%	1%	1%	3%	2%
Strongly disagree	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	-	-	-	-
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	4%	2%	1%	-	0%	1%	1%	1%	-	0%	2%	1%	2%	1%

### “Ensuring the nation has strong literacy skills is vital to the future success of our economy”

	Total	Gender		Age					Social Grade		Region						
	Base	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	North	Midlands	East	London	South	Wales	Scotland
<b>Unweighted Base</b>	2105	973	1132	136	325	383	361	900	1271	834	471	297	214	314	467	123	219
<b>All GB Adults</b>	2105	1010	1095	253	343	396	377	737	1158	947	518	345	202	269	482	105	183
Strongly agree	57%	56%	59%	40%	52%	61%	53%	66%	63%	50%	55%	55%	58%	60%	58%	58%	62%
Agree	35%	38%	32%	42%	38%	31%	40%	30%	30%	40%	36%	38%	31%	33%	34%	35%	32%
Neither agree nor disagree	5%	4%	7%	10%	6%	5%	6%	3%	4%	7%	6%	5%	5%	4%	6%	6%	4%
Disagree	1%	1%	1%	4%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	-	1%	-	1%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%	0%	-	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	-	-	-
Don't know	1%	1%	2%	4%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%

**“Good literacy skills are essential for children to cope in today’s multimedia society (by ‘multimedia’ we mean the use of computers, social networking sites, mobile phones etc.)”**

	Total	Gender		Age					Social Grade		Region						
	Base	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	North	Midlands	East	London	South	Wales	Scotland
<b>Unweighted Base</b>	2105	973	1132	136	325	383	361	900	1271	834	471	297	214	314	467	123	219
<b>All GB Adults</b>	2105	1010	1095	253	343	396	377	737	1158	947	518	345	202	269	482	105	183
Strongly agree	50%	47%	53%	36%	42%	51%	49%	59%	52%	48%	47%	48%	50%	54%	49%	57%	54%
Agree	37%	40%	34%	39%	41%	36%	39%	34%	36%	37%	39%	35%	35%	36%	39%	32%	34%
Neither agree nor disagree	7%	7%	7%	10%	8%	6%	9%	5%	6%	8%	7%	7%	9%	2%	8%	6%	8%
Disagree	5%	4%	5%	9%	7%	5%	3%	3%	4%	5%	5%	9%	5%	6%	3%	2%	3%
Strongly disagree	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	-	0%	0%	1%	-
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	5%	2%	1%	-	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	0%

**“The ability to read, write and communicate is a fundamental right in modern society”**

	Total	Gender		Age					Social Grade		Region						
	Base	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	North	Midlands	East	London	South	Wales	Scotland
<b>Unweighted Base</b>	2105	973	1132	136	325	383	361	900	1271	834	471	297	214	314	467	123	219
<b>All GB Adults</b>	2105	1010	1095	253	343	396	377	737	1158	947	518	345	202	269	482	105	183
Strongly agree	66%	60%	71%	47%	56%	68%	67%	75%	68%	63%	64%	65%	67%	67%	63%	74%	69%
Agree	29%	32%	25%	40%	36%	26%	29%	22%	27%	30%	30%	28%	26%	26%	31%	23%	28%
Neither agree nor disagree	4%	5%	3%	6%	6%	4%	4%	2%	3%	4%	4%	6%	4%	3%	4%	1%	3%
Disagree	1%	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	-	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	3%	1%	0%	-	1%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%	-	-	0%	1%	-	0%	0%	0%	-	0%	0%	1%	0%	-	-
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	5%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	0%

**“Would a political party having an effective policy on improving literacy in the UK influence you to vote for them?”**

	Total	Gender		Age					Social Grade		Region						
	Base	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	North	Midlands	East	London	South	Wales	Scotland
<b>Unweighted Base</b>	2105	973	1132	136	325	383	361	900	1271	834	471	297	214	314	467	123	219
<b>All GB Adults</b>	2105	1010	1095	253	343	396	377	737	1158	947	518	345	202	269	482	105	183
Yes, a lot	17%	17%	18%	11%	12%	16%	17%	22%	19%	15%	19%	14%	17%	18%	18%	13%	17%
Yes, a little	52%	53%	51%	53%	52%	53%	49%	52%	53%	51%	48%	52%	52%	58%	50%	57%	56%
No, not at all	22%	24%	21%	18%	24%	22%	27%	20%	21%	23%	22%	21%	24%	18%	24%	23%	23%
Don't know/ don't vote	9%	7%	11%	18%	12%	8%	7%	5%	6%	12%	11%	13%	6%	6%	8%	7%	3%

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc

# Contributing organisations

**The development of this manifesto was supported through consultation with:**

Booksellers Association

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Confederation of British Industries

EdComs

Every Child A Chance Trust

Exchange Group

If:Book

JJ Charitable Trust

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

National Association of Writers in Education

National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education

National Strategies

Publishers Association

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Radio in Schools

Radiowaves

Reading Matters

Renaissance Learning

School Library Association

Slaughter and May

St Matthew Academy

The Reader Organisation

The Reading Agency

UBS

United Kingdom Literacy Association

Wordia