



Literacy: State of the Nation

A picture of literacy in the UK today

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The National Literacy Trust is an independent charity that transforms lives through literacy. Literacy is the combination of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills we all need to fulfil our potential. These life skills are essential to the happiness, health and wealth of individuals and society.

Literacy: State of the Nation provides a coherent picture of literacy in the UK today.¹

Literacy in the UK

- One in six people in the UK struggle with literacy.² This means their literacy is below the level expected of an eleven year old.
- An estimated 370,000 parents in London struggle with literacy – this means that around 1 in 5 mums and dads may not be able to read confidently with their children.

Attitudes towards reading and writing

- 22.2% of young people aged eight to sixteen say they enjoy reading very much and 28.4% say they enjoy it quite a lot. 39.2% say they like it a bit and 10.2% say they do not enjoy reading at all.³
- 66% of adults believe that the ability to read, write and communicate is a fundamental right in modern society.⁴
- 92% of the British public say literacy is vital to the economy, and essential for getting a good job.⁵
- A quarter of children and young people do not recognise a link between reading and success.⁶
- Children and young people who engage in technology based texts, such as blogs, enjoy writing more and have more positive attitudes towards writing – 57% express a general enjoyment of writing vs. 40% who don't have a blog.⁷
- There is a consistent gender difference in attitudes towards writing. Boys do not enjoy writing as much as girls (38% vs.52%), either for family/ friends or for schoolwork and are more likely to rate themselves as 'not very good writers' (48% vs. 42%).⁸
- Technology based materials are the most frequently read, with nearly two-thirds of children and young people reading websites every week, and half of children and young people reading emails and blogs/ networking websites (such as Bebo, MySpace) every week.⁹

Educational attainment over the last ten years

Trends in literacy attainment over the last ten years can be seen in the achievement of children at age eleven.

- At Key Stage 2 (age eleven) the percentage of young people achieving the expected levels for reading increased by 8 percentage points over ten years, from 78% in 1999 to 86% in 2009. In 2010, there was a slight drop of 2 percentage points. Overall levels remained the same in 2011.
- The percentage of young people reaching expected levels for writing increased from 54% in 1999 to 67% in 2006. However, from 2006 to 2009 levels plateaued and the percentage remained the same (67%) three years later. The percentage of young people reaching expected levels for writing increased by 4 percentage points in 2010, and further increased by 4 percentage points in 2011.
- The percentage reaching the expected levels in English increased from 70% in 1999 to 80% in 2009. Levels increased by 1 percentage point in 2010 and again increased by another 1 percentage point in 2011.

Key Stage 2- age eleven¹⁰

% of pupils who reach the expected level

	Reading (Boys/Girls)	Writing (Boys/Girls)	English (Boys/Girls)
2011	84(80/87)	75(68/81)	82(77/86)
2010	84(81/87)	71(64/79)	81(76/85)
2009	86(82/89)	67(60/75)	80(75/85)
2008	87(83/90)	68(61/75)	81(77/86)
2007	84 (81/87)	67 (60/75)	80 (76/85)
2006	83 (79/87)	67 (59/75)	79 (74/85)
2005	84 (82/87)	63 (55/72)	79 (74/84)
2004	83 (79/87)	63 (56/71)	77 (72/83)
2003	81 (78/84)	60 (52/69)	75 (70/80)
2002	80 (77/83)	60 (52/68)	75 (70/79)
2001	82 (78/85)	57 (50/65)	75 (70/80)
2000	83 (80/86)	55 (48/63)	75 (70/79)
1999	78 (75/82)	54 (47/62)	70 (65/76)

Educational attainment – 2008-2010

Children and young people are assessed nationally throughout their school lives. The literacy results or the equivalent for all Key Stages over the last three years are listed below.

Early Years Foundation Stage - age five

	% achieving expected level		
	2009	2010	2011
Language for communication and thinking	82	84	86
Linking sounds and letters	74	77	79
Reading	72	74	76
Writing	62	65	67

- In every assessment area more girls than boys work securely within the target level.¹¹
- Writing has the biggest gender gap with girls 19 percentage points higher than boys in 2011; incidentally, this assessment scale has had the largest gender gap in achievement since the implementation of the statutory EYFS profile in 2009.¹²

Key Stage 1 - age seven¹³

	% achieving expected level		
	2009	2010	2011
Reading (boys/girls)	84 (80/88)	85 (81/89)	85 (82/89)
Writing (boys/girls)	81 (75/87)	81 (76/87)	81 (76/87)
Speaking and listening (boys/girls)	87 (84/90)	87 (84/90)	87 (84/91)

Key Stage 2 - age eleven¹⁴

	% achieving expected level		
	2009	2010	2011
Reading (boys/girls)	86 (82/89)	84 (81/87)	84 (80/87)
Writing (boys/girls)	67 (61/75)	71 (64/79)	75 (68/81)

Key Stage 3 - age fourteen¹⁵

In 2010 and 2011 there were no Key Stage 3 tests, therefore the only data available is teacher assessment in key subjects.

For English the results were:

English 79% (86% for girls, 73% for boys)

The most recent complete results for Key Stage 3 are from 2008:

% of pupils reaching the expected level:

- English 74% (81% for girls, 67% for boys)
- Reading 69% (76% for girls, 62% for boys)

- Writing 78% (85% for girls, 72% for boys)

Key Stage 4 - age sixteen¹⁶

% of pupils achieving grades A*-C in 2010/2011

- 65.6%: 58.7% boys and 72.5% girls achieved A+-C in English in 2011; both of which are up slightly from 2010 (where 63% achieved A+-C in English) but the gap has remained stable.
- Children and young people not reaching expected literacy levels are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁷
- In 2007, only 35% of five year olds in the most deprived areas reached the expected level of attainment, compared to 51% of pupils in other areas.¹⁸
- This gap grows throughout school years so that by GCSE levels only 21% of disadvantaged pupils achieved 5+ A*-C GCSEs including English and maths in 2007 compared to 49% of non-FSM pupils.¹⁹

Literacy in the workplace

- A 2011 CBI /EDI survey of 566 employers shows 42% are not satisfied with the basic use of English by school and college leavers. To address the weaknesses in basic skills, almost half (44%) of employers have had to invest in remedial training for school and college leavers.²⁰
- Of employers who rate the competency of their low-skilled staff as poor or satisfactory, over half report problems with literacy.²¹
- Concern about basic numeracy and literacy is especially acute in retail and manufacturing – 69% of firms in retail and 50% in manufacturing report problems with literacy.²²
- Men and women with poor literacy are least likely to be in full-time employment at the age of thirty.²³
- Poor literacy skills can also be a serious barrier to progressing once in employment. 63% of men and 75% of women with very low literacy skills have never received a promotion.²⁴
- There are too many adults who lack basic literacy skills. In 2006 a Government sponsored review into basic skills, the *Leitch Review*, found that more than five million adults lack functional literacy, the level needed to get by in life and at work.²⁵

Literacy in the home

Reading and writing frequency

- 73% of parents and carers say their child often reads.²⁶
- Age is closely linked to attitudes towards reading and reading behaviour. 30% of five to eight year olds read a book every day compared with only 17% of fifteen to seventeen year olds.²⁷ However, teenagers are more likely to read other materials such as blogs, websites and newspapers.²⁸
- 14% of children and young people in lower income homes rarely or never read their books for pleasure.²⁹

Parents reading with their children

- Parents are the most important reading role models for their children and young people. 71% of young people say that their mothers are their most important role model for reading and 62% say their fathers.³⁰
- One in five parents easily find the opportunity to read to their children, with the rest struggling to read to their children due to fatigue and busy lifestyles. Of the parents that read to the children, 67% are mothers compared to just 17% of fathers.³¹
- Recent research has shown that the likelihood of fathers reading to their children is linked to their socio-economic background.³² Fathers with higher incomes are more likely to read to their children, for example, 21% of dads in £40-50k income homes are the principal reader, compared to just 11% in homes with an annual income of £10-15k.³³

Notes to Editors

¹¹ Literacy: State of the Nation is designed to provide a picture of literacy in the UK. All data and statistics are fully referenced and further information can be sought from the original document.

² DfES (2003) Skills for Life

³ Clark Christina and Douglas Jonathan, *Young People Reading and Writing Today: Whether, what and why*, London: National Literacy Trust, 2010.

⁴ NLT (2009) *Manifesto for Literacy*

⁵ NLT (2009) *Manifesto for Literacy*

⁶ Clark Christina, Osborne Sarah, and Dugdale George, *Reaching out with role models: summary of the study*, London: National Literacy Trust, April 2009, p5

⁷ Clark Christina and Dugdale George, *Young people's writing attitudes, behaviour and the role of technology*, London: National Literacy Trust, 2009, executive summary

⁸ Clark Christina and Dugdale George, *Young people's writing attitudes, behaviour and the role of technology*, London: National Literacy Trust, 2009, executive summary

⁹ Clark Christina, Osborne Sarah and Dugdale George, (2009) *Reaching out with role models: role models and young people's reading*, London: National Literacy Trust, p13

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- ¹⁰ This refers to the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above. *Statistical first release: national curriculum assessments: teacher assessments at key stage 2 and 3 in England*, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2011
- ¹¹ *Statistical first release: foundation stage profile results in England, 2010/2011*, Department for Children, Schools and Families, October 2011
- ¹² *Statistical first release: foundation stage profile results in England, 2010/2011*, Department for Children, Schools and Families, October 2011
- ¹³ *Statistical first release: national curriculum assessments at Key Stage 1 in England*, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2011
- ¹⁴ This refers to the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above. *Statistical first release: national curriculum assessments: teacher assessments at key stage 2 and 3 in England*, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Oct 2009
- ¹⁵ This refers to the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above. *Statistical first release: national curriculum assessments: teacher assessments at key stage 2 and 3 in England*, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Oct 2009
- ¹⁶ *Statistical first release: GCSE and equivalent in England*, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Oct 2008
- ¹⁷ Deprivation is measured by eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)
- ¹⁸ *Deprivation and education: the evidence on pupils in England, Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4*, Schools analysis and research division, Department for Children, Schools and Families, March 2009, p28-32
- ¹⁹ *Deprivation and education: the evidence on pupils in England, Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4*, Schools analysis and research division, Department for Children, Schools and Families, March 2009, p28-32
- ²⁰ CBI (2011) *Building for Growth*, London: CBI
- ²¹ Nathan Simon, (2009) *Emerging stronger: the value of education and skills in turbulent times education and skills survey 2009*, London: CBI, p22-23
- ²² Nathan Simon, (2009) *Emerging stronger: the value of education and skills in turbulent times education and skills survey 2009*, London: CBI, p22-23
- ²³ Dugdale George and Clark Christina (2008) *Literacy changes live: An advocacy resource*. London: National Literacy Trust, p17
- ²⁴ Dugdale George and Clark Christina (2008) *Literacy changes live: An advocacy resource*. London: National Literacy Trust, p16
- ²⁵ Leitch (2006) *Leitch review of skills: prosperity for all in the global economy- world class skills*, London: Crown Copyright, p61
- ²⁶ *Book Time and Booked Up: parents and carer's research 2009*, London: Book Trust, executive summary
- ²⁷ Scholastic (2008). The 2008 Kids and Family Reading Report. Also see Clark Christina & Osborne Sarah *How does age relate to pupils' perceptions of themselves as readers?*
- ²⁸ Clark, C, Osborne, S and Dugdale, G (2009). *Reaching out with role models: role models and young people's reading*. London: National literacy trust
- ²⁹ *Book Time and Booked Up: parents and carer's research 2009*, London: Book Trust, executive summary
- ³⁰ Clark Christina, Osborne Sarah, and Dugdale George, (2009) *Reaching out with role models: role models and young people's reading*, London: National Literacy Trust, p13-14
- ³¹ *Book Time and Booked Up: parents and carer's research 2009*, London: Book Trust, executive summary
- ³² Clark Christina, (2009) *Why fathers matter to their children's literacy*, London: National Literacy Trust, p9-10
- ³³ *Book Time and Booked Up: parents and carer's research 2009*, London: Book Trust, executive summary