

Numeracy Counts for Adults

NIACE is carrying out a national review of adult numeracy teaching and learning that will draw on policy papers, research, and current practice in preparation for a national seminar in April. The seminar will give experts in numeracy learning, including learners, the chance to contribute to the review's final report, which will be published in June. It will be attended by Lord Moser, whose landmark 1999 review of basic skills - A Fresh Start - led to the government's Skills for Life strategy, and chaired by Dame Mary Marsh, Director of the Clore Social Leadership Programme.

“Adult numeracy remains one of the most crucial priorities for the government and, because of how it impacts on individuals, families and communities, the whole of society. This review is essential at a crucial time for the economy and the many challenges that lie ahead.” Lord Moser (2010)

Eleven years on from the Moser report and despite the impressive successes of the *Skills for Life* strategy, improving the numeracy skills of adults still creates a particular challenge. While things are certainly moving in the right direction, this review will support key players to create the step change called for in *Skills for Growth*. We know that Government will be interested in the findings and recommendations from the review.

“Achieving our long-term ambition for numeracy will be challenging. It will require a step change in the number of adults taking courses to improve their numeracy skills and a change in culture and attitudes regarding numeracy.” *Skills for Growth – the national skills strategy*, BIS (2009)

Numeracy skills and the ability to think mathematically are fundamental for life, work, active citizenship, digital inclusion and effective lifelong learning for all. Improving numeracy can contribute to the development of the four key capabilities identified in *Learning through Life* digital; health; financial; civic.¹ It can also contribute to finding, sustaining, developing and progressing into and within work (including vocational training and volunteering). Key to the government's employment and skills agenda, and underpinned by the refreshed *Skills for Life Strategy*, is the need to widen

¹ NIACE 2009

participation in numeracy learning. Improving numeracy can have a powerful effect on learners' lives:

*"It's made me see myself very differently, it's made me see my potential very differently, it's made me see my having a potential [...] I've always just assumed that these are my limits and that's it, ... that's what those maths lessons have done; they've changed the whole ball game really of the rest of my life. And at the same time that I've completely changed my career, I've completely changed my view of myself in terms of what I can learn."*²

We believe there is an urgent need to galvanise key stakeholders in the drive to increase opportunities for the 17 million adults in the UK who have difficulty with numbers and tackle the culture which says *"it's OK to be bad at maths"*.

The review is interested in:

- What the evidence tells us about the **current situation regarding numeracy learning – what more can we do? What changes would we like to see?**
- Where the **gaps** are in current numeracy provision and how can we fill them?
- What the **key messages** are for numeracy learning – for policy makers, practitioners, funders, learners and intermediaries?

Papers are welcome from individuals and organizations to reflect on the current state of numeracy and envision a future where adults' numeracy skills are stronger. We are taking a broad view of what constitutes evidence. It might include research evidence; information about your organisation's learning provision; or personal/organisational experience or views about wider issues connected with numeracy. We hope this review will act as a catalyst for enthusing and generating interest in this critical area, please send thoughts and papers to numeracyreview@niace.org.uk by 26th March 2010.

² Baker, E., Coben, D., Holder, D., Newmarch, B. and Swain, J. (2005), *Beyond the daily application: making numeracy teaching meaningful to adult learners*. London: NRDC