

# Literacy Action Plan

**An Action Plan to Improve Literacy in Scotland**

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## MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



For hundreds of years Scotland has valued the role of education and the vital contribution literacy makes towards educating our citizens. We recognise without question that a strong, successful country requires strong and secure literacy skills for every citizen. We know that literacy is fundamentally about every citizen having the means to understand our world and to improve and shape our lives and communities for the better. Literacy skills are fundamental requirements for learning, and are essential for work and life. On a personal level, they provide a key route for enjoyment, through reading, writing and exploring our, and others', cultures. Literacy skills enable every citizen to engage effectively and fully in society, to use services, to communicate and to express and share ideas.

We also know well the consequences of low levels of literacy which are associated with poor educational attainment, limited employment prospects, poverty, health inequalities and lower social and political participation in our society. These result in costs which are borne by the whole country, with poor literacy skills being strongly associated with social and material deprivation.

The literacy skills of the majority of people in Scotland compare well across the world, but poor literacy among a minority is unacceptable. This plan is designed to improve the literacy of all who would benefit from support. The financial climate is challenging but this makes it even more imperative that we have a determined ambition to support the most vulnerable – many of whom will have few or unacceptably low literacy skills. This is ambitious but we know we can achieve this goal. This plan, the first by a Scottish Government since devolution, sets out how.

The Scottish Government is grateful to the Literacy Commission and others who have worked with us to clarify the challenges and identify the action contained in this plan. We look forward to working with them as we move ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Russell', written over a horizontal line.

**Michael Russell MSP**  
**Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning**

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## OUR VISION

This action plan signals our commitment to a heightened, more targeted focus for improving literacy skills in Scotland through better co-ordination and partnership working focused on clear objectives.

Improvements cannot be confined to a particular sector or point in a learner's journey. Literacy development starts from birth. Early years settings and schools develop children and young people's basic and advanced literacy skills and in adulthood the ongoing development of literacy skills helps to advance personal achievements, employment prospects and participation in society.

**Our overarching vision is therefore to raise standards of literacy for all from the early years to adulthood.** This will require sustained commitment and continuing action at all levels of government, and through support at all points of the education system and wider public services. There will be a particular focus on those with the lowest levels of literacy.

The purpose of this Literacy Action Plan is to deliver this vision.

This action plan will build on existing good practice and ensure that literacy will have a central and continuing focus in education and related Government policies. It provides the strategic direction for improving literacy across the Scottish population while each local authority, working with relevant partners will, we trust, develop local literacy strategies which reflect their own needs.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

Early years settings and schools are only some of the many settings where action is needed and a focus on the full learning continuum is important if we are to achieve our ambitions for literacy. We will continue to take action to support individuals to develop literacy skills at different stages of learning, and within different contexts – in the early years, the school years and throughout adulthood.

In Scotland we have well established policy frameworks through which action to improve literacy across the key life stages in Scotland is focused: The *Early Years Framework* and *Curriculum for Excellence* being of central importance. *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC) is the national programme for all who work with children and young people which underpins these and broader related frameworks.

Within these frameworks, as well as building reading, writing and communication skills, learners will be supported to move on to the development of advanced literacy skills, including critical thinking, analysis, evaluating and interpretation.

## TRENDS IN LITERACY IN SCOTLAND

The key national and international surveys that monitor aspects of literacy in Scotland are the *Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies 2009*, the *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, and the previous *Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA)* which will be replaced by the *Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy*<sup>1</sup>.

We know from the SSA that the majority of children develop a good grounding in literacy skills in early primary. However, a minority do not and the SSA also shows that as pupils progress through primary and into secondary the proportion achieving expected levels decreases.

In terms of international benchmarks for those of school age we compare relatively well on reading standards, achieving similar results to the OECD average in 2006.

The *Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies 2009* provided a baseline picture of adult literacy and numeracy capabilities in Scotland and found that overall the Scottish population has a good level of literacy skills in line with international expectations. While around 25% of the adult population would benefit from improving their literacy skills, only around 3.6% of the Scottish population has very limited capabilities.

### *Socio-economic link*

Recent surveys have confirmed that literacy skills are linked to socio-economic status and level of deprivation, with those from more deprived areas achieving lower scores. In primary education, those from more deprived areas often fail to reach even basic standards of literacy. This continues into secondary, coming to the fore in the later stages of school-based learning. For example, S2 pupils from more advantaged areas are around twice as likely to perform above the expected level in reading.

The results for the 2006 *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* suggests that compared to other countries, socio-economic status is a more major determinant of attainment in Scotland.

The *Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies 2009* reinforced this, stating that adults with literacies issues are more likely to have low income and lower level employment.

Our ambition is to break this link in order to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish. Clearly our anti-poverty strategies are of importance, but we must also focus action on ensuring people in deprived areas get the support they need to develop literacy skills, which will help them to improve their circumstances and that of their families and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The first results on the SSLN are due to be published in February 2012.

The evidence shows a number of priorities across learning:

- Breaking the link between poor literacy levels and deprivation
- Improving the skills of the few who have difficulties with basic literacy, particularly those who are vulnerable
- Ensuring young people progress successfully from basic to advanced literacy skills
- Raising advanced literacy skills for all

## THE ACTION PLAN

### The early years and pre-school

What happens to children in their earliest years is key to outcomes, including the improvement of educational attainment in childhood, adolescence and in adult life. There is a strong relationship between early life experiences and how children learn. The importance of positive influences in the early years will improve a child's life chances. These early learning experiences are vital in forming the building blocks from which more formal literacy learning can be developed.

In the very early years, the home learning environment for children from birth to three has a significant impact on cognitive development, willingness to learn and literacy and language development. Parents, irrespective of socio-economic group or where they live, can make a real difference to their children's outcomes by talking to them, playing with them and ensuring they engage in different experiences.

Early years education plays a direct role in childhood development, particularly for the most vulnerable children. *Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families* and *Curriculum for Excellence* enable early years practitioners to provide stimulating, active learning environments and build strong foundations for the development of literacy skills. They also encourage staff to support families to provide a rich home learning environment.

Early intervention is the philosophy at the heart of our *Early Years Framework*. During these critical years, it is parents who will have the greatest impact on their child's literacy skills. Where parents need additional support, GIRFEC, alongside guidance on supporting adult learners, will aim to ensure early and co-ordinated intervention by agencies who work together to meet the needs of children and their families.

Within Government, we will work to ensure that GIRFEC and the implementation of the *Early Years Framework* will enable parents to be the best parents they can be for their children, promoting the importance of early learning and developing literacy skills.

- We will work with our partners who are implementing GIRFEC to ensure the development of literacy skills features in the work being carried out to improve outcomes for children.
- We will strengthen connections with health partnerships, promoting the importance of literacy to parents through our shared networks.
- We will work with the Scottish Book Trust to target vulnerable families in the second year of our Play Talk Read campaign, emphasising the importance of building literacy and language skills in the early years.

- We will continue to promote the benefits of play, encouraging the provision for high quality play experiences both indoors and outdoors which build on early literacy and numeracy skills.
- We will work with our partners to identify and share good practice around literacy in the early years and encourage practitioners to learn from this, work collegiately, and develop new and innovative approaches.
- Early years practitioners will use *Curriculum for Excellence* as the basis for supporting a child's development of their early literacy skills.
- As part of ongoing assessment, when a child is moving to P1 early years practitioners will provide information to the school on the child's progress in learning, including their literacy. This will help the school assess the child's progress and identify and address any additional support needs. Practitioners will be supported in their judgements of expectations and standards through moderation, and quality assured materials on the National Assessment Resource.
- We will work with Scottish Qualifications Authority and Scotland's Colleges to ensure qualifications for early years practitioners continue to have a focus on literacy skills.
- We will continue to pilot the Family Nursing Partnership which facilitates literacy development in the early years through its focus on family health and wellbeing, including through supporting access to education and employment.
- We will work with our adult literacy and numeracy partners to ensure that parents with their own literacy difficulties can access support

## School aged children and young people

The new curriculum, *Curriculum for Excellence*, will drive up literacy standards for all learners from 3 to 18. It will make improvements in learning and teaching to ensure all our young people, including those from disadvantaged communities, gain the literacy skills they need for learning, life and work and to thrive in the 21st century.

All teachers now have a responsibility to help develop literacy skills. Importantly, *Curriculum for Excellence* allows space for innovation and local practice to develop. Practice should be tailored to the local context and the individual needs of the learner, with more targeted support offered to those young people who need it, so that all children and young people can reach their potential. The curriculum also allows a diverse range of approaches to emerge, within the framework, with practitioners learning from each other's experience.

In the early years of schooling the focus is on acquiring basic literacy skills but our objective is to ensure more of our young people develop their advanced literacy skills. Many pupils cope well with functional literacy development, but the skills of understanding, interpreting and analysing texts are more challenging. The development of these advanced literacy skills which will assist learning across a range of curricular areas is a key focus within *Curriculum for Excellence*.

We will ensure a continued and ongoing focus on literacy within *Curriculum for Excellence* as it develops. Teachers will be supported on literacy development across all curricular areas and assessment from P1 onwards will focus on identifying individual learning needs, improving learning and raising standards. Reporting of achievement will provide reliable information to parents, young people and others about progress being made. National Qualifications will support the development of literacy skills across the curriculum and provide valuable formal recognition.

We also need to accept that the early identification of additional support needs and the diagnosis of learning difficulties are of great importance in breaking down barriers to literacy and attainment. We will therefore:

- Encourage all local authorities to introduce personalised assessments and diagnosis at P1 and at other appropriate stages.
- Encourage all local authorities to put in place early identification of support needs.
- Encourage all early years practitioners to be aware of and act on both the personalised assessment and learning and support needs information.

We will support the effective implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* and its role in literacy development through the following:

- We will ensure literacy will feature as a priority in training, both in terms of initial teacher education and ongoing professional development. At the local level, CPD opportunities focused on literacy need to be provided systematically, and on an ongoing basis.
- All children and young people will have their literacy skills assessed on an ongoing basis from P1 onwards. Quality assured materials, which will be provided in the National Assessment Resource, will support teaching staff in their judgements of expectations and standards.
- From P1 onwards reports to parents will include information on children and young people's achievement in all curriculum areas, including literacy, and their development needs for the next year.

- Teachers will be supported to share practice, working collegiately to develop effective approaches to literacy development. This will include quality assurance and moderation of assessment to ensure consistency of standards across the system.
- The focus on raising standards of literacy skills will continue into and throughout every stage in secondary school. Learners need to be supported in moving beyond basic literacy skills, to develop the advanced skills set out within the guidance on levels 3 and 4 of the CfE experience and outcomes.
- All new National Qualifications will support the development of literacy skills across the curriculum and help raise overall standards. In addition, new Units in literacy at SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5 will be developed to provide formal recognition of the skills developed through *Curriculum for Excellence*. These Units will also be available to adult learners.
- There will be a continued focus by schools and teachers in involving parents in the literacy development of their children, involving Parent Councils where appropriate.

Keeping young people in learning is the best way of ensuring they get the skills they need for life and work. Every young person is entitled to a senior phase of education, which broadly takes place around the ages of 15-18. Young people entering this senior phase will have a range of options including staying on at school, going to college or university, entering work-based or community-based learning, volunteering or a combination of these. These options all offer young people the opportunity to continue to develop their literacy skills.

Schools will work closely with their partners to plan a personalised learning experience including literacy support where required.

- We will ensure all young people are given an appropriate offer of post-16 learning with opportunities to continue to develop literacy skills.

Activity Agreements, currently being piloted in 10 local authorities, offer tailored support for those young people in danger of not making a positive transition to employment, education or training. Provision of an Educational Maintenance Allowance may be considered as part of this support, offering a financial incentive. The pilot will be assessed by an external evaluator and we expect that literacy skills will be identified as a key area where support is needed.

- The results of the Activity Agreement pilot, including those relating to literacy, will inform guidance for local authorities that we will issue in summer 2011.

## *Inclusion*

We will expect all educational practitioners to be able to use appropriate assessment approaches in order to recognise then assist pupils with a range of literacy support needs. To support this practice, there is a wealth of excellent training and materials available as well as support from specialist teachers and agencies. Local authorities, schools and practitioners should be able to demonstrate in their planning how they will draw effectively on these resources to provide additional help to those who need it to advance their literacy skills. To support this:

- We will continue to promote the *National Framework for Inclusion* which identifies the values, professional knowledge and understanding, in terms of inclusive education, that is expected of all teachers.
- We will work with Dyslexia Scotland to promote their web-based resource for teachers for the assessment of a range of literacy difficulties and dyslexia – the Assessing Dyslexia Toolkit.

## **Adults**

Some adults will continue to need support for ongoing development of their literacy skills. The *Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies* showed that adult learners are not a homogenous group. Learners have different needs, motivations and personal circumstances. There will be critical transition points where the provision of support will be of increased importance, including leaving formal education, finding a job, re-entering a community after a period in prison, or becoming a parent. To reach the diverse range of adult learners, we must continue to offer a variety of learning opportunities, with flexible delivery methods and learning programmes which are relevant to learners' lives.

There are key service providers who support adults in their learning, including in their literacy development.

The role of colleges and other adult learning providers in preparing learners for and offering qualifications, including the forthcoming literacy Units, is important for driving up literacy standards. Within further and higher education, it is essential that the development of literacy skills is promoted across all courses and qualifications.

For those undertaking learning in more informal settings, community based learning services need to have a strong focus on literacy development in the provision they offer.

Employers also have a responsibility to provide ongoing support for learning, and professional development opportunities for their employees. Employees should be supported to develop the literacy skills they need to do their job and to advance their career.

For those people who receive a custodial sentence, we want to make sure that opportunities to learn and develop literacy skills continue. This will assist offenders in preparing for the future.

The key national policy framework for action to improve adults' literacy skills is the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*. Following the recent publication of the *Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies 2009*, we are reassessing this strategy to re-affirm the successful core elements and to challenge ourselves to achieve more, particularly in deprived communities<sup>2</sup>. This will require a genuine collaboration between referral agencies, delivery partners and national and local service providers.

Specifically:

- We will work with service providers and delivery partners to ensure that adults are aware of and have access to appropriate opportunities for literacy learning, with a particular focus on economic and social inclusion as well as health and well-being and family learning.
- We will ensure learners experience high quality learning and teaching which enables them to progress towards their goal and receive recognition for their achievements.
- We will produce and implement a professional development framework for practitioners in a range of roles, including volunteers and those involved in workforce development and family support. This will include working with SQA to ensure qualifications for practitioners as professionals continue to focus on delivering literacy learning.
- We will continue to improve the infrastructure of adult provision.
- We will research and monitor the impact of literacies development on adults, their families, communities and the country, to inform and improve future practice.
- We will work with partners to increase literacy learning opportunities for and within the workplace.
- As part of our response to *Offender Learning: Options for Improvement* we are encouraging all agencies who work with young people and adults in the justice system to ensure resources are directed to identify and support those with specific literacy needs.
- We will continue to work with the Scottish Prison Service to refine a new literacy screening tool for offenders.
- We will continue to work with SQA to provide a range of literacy qualifications for adults, including those in the workplace.

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<sup>2</sup> We will publish the new refreshed adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice framework, providing further detail on these actions, later this year.

## Effective lifelong literacy strategies

In light of their key role in raising literacy standards, we expect all local authorities to have effective literacy strategies in place, spanning the stages of learning which are suited to local circumstances. These strategies should reflect a sustained ongoing commitment to raise standards through local service provision and should be informed by good practice elsewhere. There are, however, some key attributes which all effective strategies should encompass:

### *Targeted approaches*

Local authorities and practitioners should make use of all proven teaching methods to develop an appropriate approach for each learner. For example, in primary schools, the use of synthetic phonics can be an effective method for raising achievement at the point of acquiring basic literacy skills. Paired reading has also proven effective, as has small group and individual work, to deliver support for those who need it. For adults, the social practice approach offers a model where learning goals come from the individual's life and aspirations, recognising existing capabilities.

### *CPD*

Local authorities should lead in developing CPD programmes that are provided systematically and on an ongoing basis to support their literacy strategies. Likewise, further education providers should support their staff to develop, enhance and extend their literacy teaching skills.

### *Evaluation*

Effective literacy strategies have good quality, systematic evaluation built in, and we expect all local authorities to evaluate the impact of their strategies and to modify them in light of findings. It is for authorities to determine how to evaluate impact but some have involved educational psychologists to good effect in developing, evaluating and modifying their strategies. Practitioners should be encouraged to reflect on the impact of their teaching approaches on their learners' literacy and, in light of this, adapt and refine practice.

### *Working together*

While this action plan provides national direction, the work of a wide variety of organisations and agencies is needed to make appropriate and timely interventions, particularly at the local level. Involving a wide range of partners would benefit local literacy strategies.

## **The media**

We need to recognise that the media, and the broadcast media in particular, can have a strong influence on how we use language and its broader impacts on literacy. We will therefore engage with representatives of the media to discuss their responsibility in contributing to our vision for literacy in Scotland and their duty to observe and disseminate the highest standards.

## **Reading**

We want to develop a strong reading culture in Scotland where reading is a valued activity from the earliest age. The social, educational and familial benefits of 'reading-rich' homes are well documented. But the enormous social and individual costs of low levels of literacy, compounded by no access to books, is equally well known. Sharing books in a family environment and the love of reading it creates enriches the family experience immeasurably, is likely to be passed from generation to generation and has a major beneficial impact on individual outcomes. This has implications for the whole of our society and we will continue to work with partners to support measures to develop Scotland as a literate, reading nation and the Scottish Government will continue to encourage Scottish writing and publishing activities on which much Scottish reading depends.

## **WORKING TOGETHER**

At this time of challenging circumstances and huge pressure on resources, it is more important than ever for all of us to work together to improve literacy for all, with a determined focus on the most vulnerable. We must use our combined resources productively to ensure we achieve our vision for literacy in Scotland.

We recognise that much of the impetus and resource is provided by central government and our educational delivery agencies. However, we will also facilitate broader partnerships including with those agencies outwith the formal educational sector. We need involvement from all services which can make a positive contribution to improving literacy to help deliver our vision. Services impacting on health, justice and employment, for instance, can all have a role.

To support efforts to work together and use resources effectively, we will identify the key support relating to literacy currently being delivered by agencies and institutions. If those with a broader contribution to make on literacy development are to do so, they must be aware of the delivery frameworks and the provision which currently exists in order to identify the gaps, potential overlaps and where efficiencies can be achieved. This in turn will help to target future work more effectively on priorities and encourage inter-agency working throughout the country.

Locally, it will be important to develop partnerships to support literacy improvement. Involving a wide range of partners would benefit local approaches to ensure that policies and plans which promote literacy are inclusive and consistent, and are embedded across schools and their communities. These local partnerships could involve early years providers, childcare centres, adult providers, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, employers, local libraries, and local health partnerships, alongside schools and the national education agencies.

## EVALUATING PROGRESS

If we are to improve literacy standards through the system, progress of Scotland's learners, at both the individual and collective level, must be evaluated. The approaches used by practitioners and educational establishments to raise standards in literacy must also be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in supporting learners of differing abilities. It is only through this reflection that we will be able to identify approaches which are successful, and those which need to be refined or changed.

A key measure for adults is offered through the National Performance Framework, which includes the National Indicator: 'Reduce the number of working age people with severe literacy and numeracy problems'.

The newly refocused *Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy* (SSLN) will allow us to monitor the progress of pupils' literacy skills over time at the national level at key points in primary and secondary schooling – at P4, P7 and S2.

We will also ensure we continue to benchmark our progress internationally through continued involvement in the OECD's *Programme in International Student Assessment* (PISA), with data collection taking place every three years.

HMIE has a key role in evaluating the literacy skills of learners and making recommendations where improvements are needed. HMIE also has a role in identifying and disseminating good practice, and the newly merged Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency will be of even greater relevance to taking this issue forward.

We will promote and share good evaluation practice and encourage others to learn from it and offer advice on effective evaluation to those authorities that wish it as they develop new literacy initiatives and pilot projects.

We will establish a Standing Literacy Commission to facilitate and oversee the delivery of the actions contained within this plan.

We will report to the Parliament on progress over three years.



**The Scottish  
Government**

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