

Mid Wales Regional Committee Mid 03-02 (p2)

Date 17 May 2002

Time 10.30 - 1.30pm

Venue Neuadd Pendre, Tywyn

Basic Skills Agency

- By basic skills we mean, "the ability to read, write and speak in English/Welsh and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general."
- The National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales was adopted by the National Assembly in February 2001 and launched in April 2001. The strategy outlines measures across all age groups and sectors with the aim of "eliminating the basic skills deficit to make Wales a country where no one lacks the literacy and numeracy skills most of us take for granted."¹
- The strategy is "cradle to grave", but this report will concentrate mainly on the work with adults and identified young people.
- The Basic Skills Agency has been charged with the task of overseeing the implementation of the basic skills strategy. The strategy builds on the considerable work already being done in Wales to raise standards of literacy and numeracy. It will work in close partnership with other agencies and organisations such as the National Council – ELWa, Estyn, ACCAC Learndirect, TUC and trades unions, employers and others.
- The basic skills strategy will not be delivered by the Basic Skills Agency alone. Standards of basic skills will only be raised when all concerned parties work together. Those who must play a part include LEAs, schools, FE colleges, adult and community education, training providers, probation and prison services, voluntary and community organisations, early years organisations, CCET's and others in Wales. The Agency will work with these organisations to deliver the aims of the strategy.
- Our research indicates that 28% of adults in Wales need additional literacy and 32% have insufficient numeracy skills to function and progress at work and society in general. In Gwynedd and Powys 28% of the population age 16-60 need additional literacy, and just over 31% have numeracy needs. In Ceredigion adult literacy need is 26.7% and numeracy 29.3%.

- The impact of poor basic skills on the individual is severe. Those with poor basic skills are more likely to be in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. They have more and longer periods of unemployment, are less likely to vote or take part in community organisations and activities. Their children are also more likely to struggle to gain basic skills in school.

¹ Jane Davidson, Foreword, National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales

- The cost of poor basic skills to industry in Wales is also substantial. It is estimated that poor basic skills costs the Welsh economy more than £588 million a year and that every company employing 50 or more loses £165,000 annually in lost orders, mistakes, faulty communication and poor quality control.
- Basic skills underpin all education and training. There is a basic skills element in all learning. Having adequate basic skills is often crucial to the successful completion of a training course or learning experience.
- Improving the basic skills of young people and adults will ensure that Wales has more effective and efficient employees, more adults able to support children's learning, more active communities and individuals better able to fulfil their potential.

Priorities

1. Strategic planning of learning opportunities. Planning needs to be based on a knowledge of local scale of need, current providers and range of basic skills opportunities available locally.
2. Continual promotion will be needed to
 - raise awareness of basic skills demands of jobs and everyday tasks;
 - change attitudes and perceptions;
 - make it acceptable/usual for adults to update and/or

improve their basic skills.

3. Clear focus on the target group and basic skills. Hardly any of those identified as in need are non-readers or non-writers. A majority have basic skills which have not kept up with the increased amount and level of basic skills needed for everyday life and jobs. Their skills are no longer adequate for a 21st century complex, industrialised society.
4. Provide more opportunities for adults and young people to improve their basic skills.

The opportunities need to

- be relevant to the learner
- be embedded in other learning
- take place in workplaces, community venues, voluntary organisations
- be included in all pre-16 alternative curriculum and other youth provision
- involve parents/carers with babies and young children in early years settings.

The range and diversity of opportunities to improve basic needs to expand to include

self-help programmes, intensive courses, more workplace courses and to focus on

those learners currently not undertaking basic skills courses or training.

5. Effectiveness of basic skills programmes, i.e. the quality of teaching and learning must be of the highest standard. Programmes need to achieve the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark. More qualified teachers of basic skills are needed. Current (and new) teachers need access to training to update their skills and knowledge.

6. Additional partnership work to raise basic skills standards needs to be encouraged and

supported. Employers must be brought into the learning partnership so that people in low skill, low paid jobs are given opportunities to improve their basic skills. Voluntary and community organisations should be supported in developing basic skills programmes for their clients who are often surviving in challenging circumstances.

And the cost of developing programmes in these non-traditional settings needs to be recognised.

7. Specialist additional advice and support is needed in the field. This will be provided by the Basic Skills Agency through a series of National Support Projects (NSPs) for basic skills in the following areas:

- in the workplace
- in training organisations
- in Further Education Colleges
- in voluntary and community organisations
- for organisations working towards the Quality Mark
- for disengaged young people
- for people whose first language is neither English nor Welsh.

8. There needs to be continued review and evaluation of strategy activities.

The Way Forward

Though this paper has concentrated on adult basic skills work, the importance of the cross-sector, joined up thinking, lifelong approach cannot be underestimated and will be crucial to success of the strategy. Priorities and activities identified above need to be planned and linked to basic skills work in LEAs and schools, early years, family literacy and numeracy, alternative curriculum, work with disaffected youth etc.

Additional information

The Basic Skills Agency is the national development agency for basic skills in England and Wales and is funded mainly by the National Assembly and the Department for Education and Skills. It is an independent, not for profit organisation, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

The mission of the Basic Skills Agency is to contribute to the raising of standards of basic skills in England and Wales. It aims to advocate the importance of basic skills, to develop approaches that most effectively improve standards of basic skills and to disseminate good practice.

Details of the Basic Skills Strategy for Wales are available from the Basic Skills Agency, Admail 3628, Cardiff CF11 8GY.

For further information on this paper please contact:

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