SUMMARY REPORT

Illuminating disadvantage: Profiling the experiences of adults with Entry level literacy or numeracy over the lifecourse

Samantha Parsons and John Bynner
February 2008
Contents

4 Preface
5 Acknowledgements
6 1. Introduction
8 2. Assessment and distribution of skills
12 3. Early life experiences
15 4. Early education performance and school environment
17 5. Preparing for life after school
19 6. Post-16 education and learning
21 7. Working life and occupational disadvantage
26 8. Home and family life
28 9. Conclusions and recommendations
32 References and further reading
33 Appendix
Preface

The 1958 and 1970 British birth cohort studies are among the best sources of information that we have about the role of literacy and numeracy in adult lives. Through their capacity to trace life back to birth, we are able to uncover the history of experience and circumstances that lie behind poor skills in adulthood and their consequences for life chances and adult functioning.

The first report of results from our age 34 survey of the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70), reported in *New Light on Literacy and Numeracy* (Bynner and Parsons, 2006), demonstrated the strong relationship between poor basic skills and a number of disadvantaged outcomes in adult life. These were particularly evident for adults whose skills were at Entry 2 or below. Problems identified earlier, at age 21, when basic skills were also assessed, had not receded for the 34-year-olds; in fact they had, if anything, become more entrenched.

In this report we go much further in illuminating the basic skills problem, examining the lives of 34-year-olds with Entry level literacy and numeracy, with particular emphasis on adults whose skills are at Entry 2 or below. The results give a disturbing picture of limited life chances. The trajectory of disadvantage begins early, characterised by poor family circumstances, limited educational achievement and low aspirations. But it is by no means inevitable. Many individuals who start their lives on an ‘exclusion path’ are of course able, through effective support at home, in the community, at school or college and in the workplace, to turn their lives round.

Solving the basic skills problem requires proper understanding of where it comes from and what its consequences are. This report supplies such information and therefore will be of great assistance to policy-makers and practitioners at every level of education and the social services. The findings need the widest possible consideration and debate.
We would like to thank Tamjid Mujtaba for the research contributions she made in the early stages of the analyses. We would also like to acknowledge all members of the research team at the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) involved with the 2004 BCS70 survey, without whom this report could not have been produced. Our special thanks to Carli Lessof, Liz Fuller, Nadine Simmonds and Vanessa Foudouli. We would like to express our gratitude to the NatCen interviewers whose feedback and enthusiasm throughout the main fieldwork was of vital importance to the success of the survey. The cohort studies support team led by Peter Shepherd again played a vital role in all stages of the survey, as did Neville Butler, the founder of BCS70, whose extensive knowledge and experience of the earlier stages of the cohort study was critical to its success. The tracing team at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS), Institute of Education, put in tremendous work to maximise response rates. Our biggest thanks are, of course, to the BCS70 cohort members and their children who took part in the 2004 survey. They freely gave up some of their precious time to take part in our assessments and to provide us once again with vital information about their lives.

We thank the DIUS (then DfES) Skills for Life team, and Barry Brooks in particular, for commissioning this research which deepens the NRDC study *New Light on Literacy and Numeracy* (2006).
In 2004 the latest survey of the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) took place, with a special emphasis on assessing the literacy and numeracy skills of all participating cohort members, now aged 34. The initial report on the results of this survey, *New Light on Literacy and Numeracy*, compared distributions of cohort members across literacy and numeracy levels. Substantial differences in life chances, quality of life and social inclusion were evident between individuals at or below Entry 2 (and often those with Entry 3 literacy) compared with others at higher levels of literacy and numeracy competence as identified in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Earlier work, based on smaller samples of English and Welsh cohort members, showed that these poor basic skills had foundations in poor family background and bad educational experience, pointing to continuing *trajectories of disadvantage* in which weak basic skills had a central part. Entry 2 or below skills were associated with lack of qualifications, poor labour market experience and prospects, poor material and financial circumstances, poor health prospects and lack of social and political participation.

This report maps out the distinctive features of the lifecourse and current situation of individuals with qualifications at Entry 2 and below. We contrast the experiences from birth through to age 34 of men and women with Entry 2 skills against the experiences of those with Entry 3 and Level 1 or higher skills. In the earlier analyses included in *New Light*, cohort members with Entry 3 skills held an intermediate position in terms of socio-economic and other characteristics, sometimes lying closer in their attributes to Entry 2 and below, but more frequently lying closer to those with Level 1 or higher skills. By comparing experiences of cohort members with Entry 2 skills against those of cohort members with Level 1 and higher skills, and not differentiating between Level 1 or Level 2 or higher skills as previously, we will see the increase in options and opportunities that accompany a relatively basic competence in literacy and numeracy. Level 1 literacy and numeracy skills is equivalent to GCSE grades D-G in the NQF. GCSE qualifications grades A*-C are at Level 2.

**Introduction to Britain’s birth cohort studies**

Britain’s nationwide birth cohort studies follow the same group of people from birth into and through adulthood, thus giving a picture of whole generations. By following up people from birth it is possible to find how present situations relate to past circumstances and to predict future functioning. Cohort studies are one of the richest resources for the study of human development, covering all aspects of life. They are widely used by government and in academic research, both nationally and internationally. There are four such surveys in Britain:

- National Survey of Health and Development (NSHD), which began in 1946;
- National Child Development Study (NCDS), which began in 1958;
- 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70), which began in 1970;
- Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), which began in 2000.
The first three are based on all births in Great Britain in one week in 1946, 1958 and 1970 respectively, whereas the MCS is based on births over a period of 12 months in 400 wards in the United Kingdom. There were more than 17,000 births in each study, other than NSHD, which took a sample of 5,500 births. NCDS, BCS70 and MCS are all managed by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at the Institute of Education, University of London. NSHD is based in the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College, London.

BCS70 in detail

BCS70 began in 1970, when data were collected about all the babies born in England, Scotland and Wales in one week of April 1970. Cohort members have since been followed up six times, at ages 5, 10, 16, 26, 30 and, most recently, 34, to collect data about their health, educational, social and economic circumstances. Additionally, a 10 per cent representative sample was followed up at age 21. In the early years, information was collected from parents, health professionals and teachers; the questionnaires were generally cross-sectional in design. As the cohort members became the primary source of the information gathered, the focus shifted to obtaining the ‘complete history’ of a cohort member’s experience or involvement in, for example, education, full-time employment, independent living and home ownership, marriage, pregnancies and having children. Current statuses that provide a snapshot of British life for the cohort members are also routinely collected in all surveys. In the most recent (sixth) follow-up, carried out in 2004 when most cohort members were aged 34, histories were updated and a wide variety of current information relating to all domains of adult life was gathered. The final 2004 sample size was 9,665 – 56 per cent of the original birth cohort and 74 per cent of the first (age 5) follow-up sample.

Focus of the report

Although the report focuses on disadvantages in early life associated with Entry level adult literacy and numeracy and their consequences in adult life, it should be recognised that these are based on statistical tendencies not causal inevitability. Given the right opportunities, motivational triggers and educational support, many adults transcend their early difficulties, and many of those who do not, manage to cope with their basic skills problems in adulthood and lead satisfying lives. Focusing mainly on the ‘negative’ merely highlights where the risks to life chances and the forms of adult disadvantage related to poor basic skills are to be found. Such information supplies the pointers to where policy interventions are most needed.

3 Data were collected about children born in Northern Ireland, but these children were not subsequently followed up.
4 Cohort members interviewed during February/March 2004 were still age 33; cohort members interviewed after their birthday in April 2005 were age 35.
5 For more detailed information on BCS70, NCDS or MCS, refer to the Centre for Longitudinal Studies website www.cls.ioe.ac.uk
2

Assessment and distribution of skills

In 2004, new literacy and numeracy assessments were designed for assessing 1970 cohort members. These combined questions previously used to assess their functional literacy and numeracy skills at age 21 with questions extracted from the 2002 Skills for Life Survey. In this report we will be concentrating on performance in the latter assessments allocating respondents to NQF literacy and numeracy levels as used in the Skills for Life Survey (Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2)

Literacy and Numeracy assessment
For literacy 30 multiple-choice literacy questions made up the final assessment. For numeracy there were 17 multiple-choice questions. Both sets of assessments are described on the opposite page.

Literacy and numeracy levels across Great Britain
After classifying performance on the number of correct answers to the multiple-choice questions in terms of the literacy and numeracy levels used in the Skills for Life Survey (Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2), we now compare the distribution of men and women in the 2004 survey across the four levels of literacy and numeracy. We also compare skills levels for men and women in Wales and Scotland, and by region within England.

For literacy, there was no difference in the distribution of skills across the levels for men and women.

• Cohort members living in the South East were most likely to have Level 2 literacy skills (67 per cent men, 66 per cent women).
• Those living in Wales were the least likely to have Level 2 literacy skills (52 per cent men and women).

See Figure 1

For numeracy, men had stronger numeracy skills than women. Differences in the distribution of cohort members over the skills levels across Great Britain and the regions within England were very apparent, particularly for men:

• Men in Wales were the most likely to have Entry 2 skills (19 per cent), and least likely to have Level 2 skills (23 per cent).
• Conversely, men in the South East were the least likely to have Entry 2 skills (9 per cent) and most likely to have Level 2 skills (36 per cent).
• Women in the South East and East Anglia were the least likely to have Entry 2 numeracy (16 per cent and 14 per cent respectively) and most likely to have Level 2 skills (25 per cent).
• Women living in the North, Yorkshire and Humberside or the East Midlands were most likely to have Entry 2 skills (21 per cent).
• Women in the East Midlands, the North or Wales were the least likely to have Level 2 skills (14 per cent, 16 per cent and 18 per cent respectively).

See Figure 2
LITERACY
Of the 30 multiple-choice literacy questions which made up the final assessment, ten were screening questions (Entry 3). Respondents failing to answer at least six of these questions correctly went on to answer ten Entry 2 questions on the lower tier. Respondents who answered between six and ten screening questions correctly proceeded to the upper tier and answered five Level 1 and five Level 2 questions. Question selection was heavily concentrated on the many aspects of ’Reading Comprehension’, but ’Writing Composition’, ’Grammar and Punctuation’ and ’Spelling and Handwriting’ were also covered by items on both the lower and upper tiers.

NUMERACY
The widespread and diverse nature of difficulties associated with numeracy – that people can be good at some numerical tasks and not others at the same level of difficulty – suggested that allowing a ‘spiky profile’ for number skills at the population level would have more value. There were 17 questions in the final version of the assessment. To obtain as balanced a set of questions as possible in relation to curriculum coverage and difficulty levels, the final instrument was made up of five questions set at Entry 2, four at Entry 3, five at Level 1 and three at Level 2. Seven aspects of number skill from the numeracy curriculum were assessed by the selected items. These were:

- Basic Money (BM)
- Whole Numbers and Time (NT)
- Measures and Proportion (MP)
- Weights and Scales (WS)
- Length and Scaling (LS)
- Charts and Data (CD)
- Money Calculations (MC).

The 17 selected questions were presented in order of difficulty within each curriculum topic, e.g. all questions set at different levels of ‘Money Calculations’ were attempted before moving to the next set of questions on ‘Whole Numbers and Time’. This method was adopted because of its potential for capturing more of the elements of numeracy that an individual respondent could and could not do. The assessment started and ended with an Entry 3 question.

Converting performance in literacy and numeracy assessments into levels
By converting performance answers in the multiple-choice assessment into levels, we were able to classify respondents by their achieved level. The classification by levels that was employed is based on the principle that, to pass a level, at least half the test questions at the given level had to be answered correctly.

---

7 Williams, J., Clerveric, S., Oleinikova, K. and Tarvin, K. (2003). The baseline survey was devised by the Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Lifelong Learning (CDELL) at the University of Nottingham, for the Department for Education and Skills. Special thanks are reserved for Peter Burke, John Gillespie and Bob Rainbow, consultants at CDELL, for their help and guidance in all stages of development.
9 National Qualification Framework (NQF) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as used in the Skills for Life survey.
Figure 1: Profiles of competence based on national standards

(a) Literacy performance of men in BCS70 by region in 2004

(b) Literacy performance of women in BCS70 by region in 2004
a) Numeracy performance of men in BCS70 by region in 2004

b) Numeracy performance of women in BCS70 by region in 2004
At each stage of development, a certain level of literacy and numeracy competence is achieved, which in turn influences later skills acquisition. There is a progressive build-up of skills, or indeed difficulties, that occur throughout childhood. Adult literacy and numeracy acquisition can be seen as being underpinned by a number of interrelated family, socio-economic and later educational experiences. In difficult, disadvantaged home and family circumstances, and if parents’ own educational achievements have been poor, a crucial element of learning support may be missing in the early years, and it then falls to teachers to play an increased role in the skills development of children.

Fixed characteristics present at birth, such as sex and birth weight, together with social and economic factors in childhood, teenage motherhood and family social class, etc., cannot be changed, but it is important they are accounted for as research has shown that they relate to cognitive development. Such variables are not direct influences on basic skills but indicators reflecting social background or the economic conditions of the child’s home-life. They build up a picture of the type of home environment which works for or against the learning process.

**Family background and socio-economic disadvantage**

There were no differences across groups in average birth weight, but cohort members with Entry level literacy or numeracy were more likely to be born into larger families. More than a third of men and women with Entry level literacy (37 per cent at Entry 2, 36 per cent at Entry 3) were the third or later child born, in comparison to 25 per cent of those with Level 1 or higher skills. Comparable figures for numeracy were 32 per cent (Entry 2) and 23 per cent (Level 1+) respectively. The mothers of cohort members with Entry level literacy or Entry 2 numeracy were also the most likely to have been a teenager when they had their first child.

Many measures directly or indirectly measured the financial circumstances of cohort members during early childhood. Those with the poorest grasp of literacy or numeracy - particularly literacy - had, in relative terms, an economically disadvantaged home life, living in overcrowded, rented accommodation, without a telephone or car. They were far more likely to have come from a low income family and to have received free school meals. Their families were also more likely to have received state benefits or to have reported experiencing financial hardship.

The educational level of parents also had an obvious relationship with the literacy and numeracy development in their children. Cohort members with the poorest skills were the most likely to have parents who had left school without any qualifications at the end of compulsory education. 76 per cent of mothers and 71 per cent of fathers of those with Entry 2 literacy had no qualifications, in comparison with 50 per cent of mothers and 42 per cent of fathers of cohort members with Level 1 or higher literacy.
At the other end of the qualification scale, just 3 per cent of all mothers held a degree (or equivalent), the lowest percentage being for mothers of cohort members with Entry level literacy or numeracy. Differences across groups were more apparent for fathers. Twenty per cent of fathers of cohort members with Level 1 or higher numeracy had a degree (or equivalent) qualification, compared to just 5 and 4 per cent respectively for fathers of cohort members with Entry 2 or 3 literacy.

**FIGURE 3** MEASURES OF ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE IN CHILDHOOD BY COHORT MEMBERS’ GRASP OF LITERACY OR NUMERACY AT AGE 34

(a) Literacy  ● E2  ● E3  ● L1+

(b) Numeracy  ● E2  ● E3  ● L1+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>E2</th>
<th>E3</th>
<th>L1+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone at home (age 5)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s) own a car (age 5)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income &lt; £100 (age 10)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free school meals (age 10)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unem/supp bens (age 16)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial hardship (age 16)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>E2</th>
<th>E3</th>
<th>L1+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone at home (age 5)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s) own a car (age 5)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income &lt; £100 (age 10)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free school meals (age 10)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unem/supp bens (age 16)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial hardship (age 16)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family support
Fewer parents of cohort members with Entry level skills had read to their children every day when they were young (22 per cent Entry 2 literacy, 40 per cent Level 1 or higher literacy) or had been viewed by teachers as interested in their children’s education towards the end of primary school.

> SEE FIGURE 4

Just 12 per cent of cohort members with Entry 2 literacy had been considered to have two parents who were ‘very interested’ in their education, compared with 36 per cent of those with Level 1 or higher literacy skills.

Reflecting their own poor educational experiences, parents of those with Entry 2 literacy were nearly three times more likely to report having current or previous reading difficulties than parents of those who went on to have competent literacy skills (17 per cent to 6 per cent). And far fewer parents of those with Entry 2 literacy wanted their children to continue in education after age 16 – 27 per cent compared with 51 per cent with Level 1 or higher skills.
Previous research has shown that early measures of cognitive development and educational attainment are closely related to performance in the adult literacy and numeracy assessments (Bynner and Steedman, 1995; Parsons and Bynner, 1998). Many assessments were undertaken by the children at ages 5 and 10. We explored performance in all of the assessments and found the same pattern of results was replicated across the adult skills groups. Adults with the poorest grasp of literacy or numeracy had been less likely to have had formal pre-school experiences and had the lowest average scores in childhood (see Appendix). As early as age 5 they had performed less well in cognitive assessments, and by age 10, they had fallen further behind, as revealed by scores in the reading and maths assessments. By contrast, adults with Level 1 or higher skills had the highest average scores in childhood.

Although half of cohort members with poor skills had been identified as such by their parents, and indeed identified themselves as having had poor skills in childhood (a far cry from the small percentages in adulthood), that still meant that the needs of half of them remained invisible.

Teachers seemed also likely to recognise these difficulties in no more than half of those with the poorest skills. Eighty-six per cent of all children received no special help at all and only 14 per cent were either in a remedial class or received some kind of remedial help. Such help, where received, was highest at 38 per cent for those with Entry 2 literacy, lowest at 11 per cent for those with Entry 2 numeracy. Nearly three-quarters of teachers had correctly identified among those with the poorest literacy, if not a learning difficulty, then at least a limitation in wider learning experiences. It was the more specific needs of the children – for help with reading or numbers – that teachers were less able to correctly identify.

School factors
School intake somewhat reflected the poorer socio-economic background and local area of cohort members with the poorest grasp of skills in adulthood. At age 10, 73 per cent of all cohort members went to a (government) maintained school, 23 per cent to a voluntary controlled or voluntary aided school, and 3 per cent to an independent school. There was little difference across adult numeracy skills groups, although 10 per cent more children with the poorest literacy went to a maintained school in comparison with those with Level 1 or higher skills (82 per cent to 72 per cent).

Adults with Entry 2 literacy were more likely, at age 10, to have attended a school where twice as many children had been rated with ‘low’ academic ability, where there was a higher proportion of children whose fathers were occupied in semi-skilled manual work, or which was from a ‘council estate’ or ‘closely-packed, multiple-occupied houses’ catchment area (56 per cent to 44 per cent).

However, other data collected from schools...
revealed relatively little association between school characteristics and the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy. The style of teaching approaches employed in the classroom, such as open or traditional teaching, didactic or exploratory, planned lessons, etc., did not differ between adult skills groups, and all children spent an average of 4.7 hours developing reading skills and 5.4 hours on maths and number work. The average class size and the overall academic ability of children in schools also did not differ widely across skills groups.

**FIGURE 5** COHORT MEMBERS WHOSE TEACHER REPORTED THAT THEY HAD BELOW-AVERAGE READING SKILLS BY COHORT MEMBERS’ GRASP OF LITERACY OR NUMERACY AT AGE 34

- severely impaired
- moderately impaired
- slightly impaired
Given the relatively poor identification of early literacy and numeracy difficulties, it is perhaps not surprising that, when questioned at age 16 about their attitudes to education, cohort members with the poorest grasp of literacy or numeracy expressed the most negative views on school and were the most likely to want to leave at the earliest opportunity.

Men and women with Entry level skills were four times more likely than those with Level 1 or higher skills to hold negative views on the value of education for future employment, tending to agree with the view that ‘full-time education only puts off unemployment’, that it was ‘best to leave school as soon as possible to get some experience’, that ‘job experience was more important than qualifications’ and that it was ‘no good planning a career as there were not enough jobs’.

What, then, did the 16-year-olds questioned in April 1986 imagine they would be doing the following September? In comparison with men who had Level 1 or higher skills, men with Entry level skills were more likely to hold low career aspirations and far less likely – though perhaps realistically – to hold professional or managerial job hopes.
Men with Entry 2 literacy were the most disillusioned and disappointed group of all. Reflecting their lack of skills and poorer socio-economic background, they were one-third as likely to have aspirations towards a managerial or professional career in comparison with men with Level 1 or higher literacy skills. Differences for women across skills groups were not as apparent, perhaps reflecting the ‘white-collar’ job aspirations of many.

**Early career aspirations**

More generally, at age 16, cohort members answered questions about what sort of job they wanted in terms of content, environment and economic return. In comparison with men with Level 1 or higher skills, aspects of future work that mattered very much for men with Entry 2 literacy skills were working outside in the open (38 per cent to 9 per cent), doing work that involved making or building something (40 per cent to 15 per cent) and working for themselves (38 per cent to 9 per cent) — an early acknowledgement, perhaps, that the best chance of employment and economic success may be outside the regular employment market. Long-term job security also mattered less to men with Entry 2 literacy (43 percent to 63 percent).

Compared with women with Level 1 or higher skills, women with Entry 2 literacy were least likely to be seeking an interesting job (53 per cent to 75 per cent) or one that offered long-term security (27 per cent to 53 per cent). They were most likely to want regular hours and a ‘quiet life’ (25 per cent to 5 per cent).
The low educational aspirations of both parents and cohort members are reflected in the age when they actually left full-time education. Men and women with the poorest grasp of literacy or numeracy were by far the most likely to have left full-time education at the earliest opportunity with no qualifications. This combined educational disadvantage was most apparent among those with Entry 2 literacy: 48 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women had no qualifications, and just 4 per cent of men and 7 per cent of women had a degree or higher. In contrast, among those with Level 1 or higher literacy, only 8 per cent of men and 6 per cent of women had no qualifications. One in four men and women (26 and 29 per cent respectively) had a degree or higher. Differences by numeracy for those holding a degree-level qualification were even greater: 33 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women with Level 1 or higher numeracy held a degree, compared with 5 per cent of men and 8 per cent of women with Entry 2 numeracy. The numbers of those with no qualifications were smaller for numeracy than for literacy: 5 per cent for men and 3 per cent for women with Level 1 or higher numeracy, 29 per cent for men and 19 per cent for women (less than a third and one-fifth respectively) with Entry 2 numeracy.

While more than half of men and women with Entry level literacy or numeracy did have qualifications, they were the most likely to have gained them exclusively in their teenage years. However, a sizeable proportion of men with Entry 2 skills did gain their first qualification(s) when in their 20s or 30s. They were motivated to return to learning at a later date, despite the negative views on school and education the majority reported when in their teenage years. By contrast, men and women with Level 1 or higher skills had a more continuous relationship with education, accruing qualifications over three decades — their teens, their 20s and their 30s.

**Reading practices at age 34**

We asked all men and women how often they read magazines, newspapers and books. Although men and women with Entry level skills were as likely as those with higher skills to read newspapers and/or magazines every day, they were the least likely ever to pick up a book: 52 per cent of men and 38 per cent of women with Entry 2 literacy reported that they never read a book, compared with 11 per cent of men and 7 per cent of women at Level 1. However, the fact that nearly half of men and just over half of women with Entry 2 skills did occasionally pick up a book for enjoyment or information is encouraging.

**The digital divide**

Perhaps of more concern, however, was the exclusion of adults with the poorest skills, particularly literacy, from the digital revolution. Forty-eight per cent of men and 40 per cent of women with Entry 2 literacy did not have a computer in their home, compared with just 16 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women with Level 1 or higher literacy. Even if there was a computer in the home, they were the least likely to use it on a
regular basis. Overall, around 25 per cent did not have access to the internet, but this increased to 62 per cent for men and women with Entry 2 literacy. Inclusion of a digital element within a basic skills class may be another way to interest adults to come to classes to improve their literacy or numeracy.

**FIGURE 7 EVIDENCE OF THE ‘DIGITAL DIVIDE’ BY GRASP OF LITERACY OR NUMERACY**

*a) Literacy  ● E2  ● E3  ● L1+  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no PC at home</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no internet access</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*b) Numeracy  ● E2  ● E3  ● L1+  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no PC at home</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no internet access</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SEE FIGURE 7
Working life and occupational disadvantage

In line with their earlier exit from full-time education, cohort members with below Level 1 literacy or numeracy were the first to enter the labour market, with at least half of those with Entry 2 or 3 literacy working at 16. But when compared with people who also left school at 16, in other skill groups those with the poorest literacy had spent the least amount of time in full-time or part-time employment by age 34.

**Men’s experiences**

Men with Entry 2 literacy spent more time unemployed or sick than those with higher skills. They were thrice as likely to have experienced three or more spells of unemployment by age 34. Men with Entry 3 or higher skills who left school at 16 had spent 14 of the following 18 years in full-time employment, while those with Entry 2 literacy had, on average, spent just 12 years in full-time employment.

**Women’s experiences**

The earlier entrance to motherhood for women with Entry level skills was evident in their exit from full-time employment, starting almost as soon as it had begun in their teens. Around four-fifths of women with Level 1 or higher skills were in paid employment from age 23, compared with around two-thirds of women with Entry 2 numeracy and just half of women with Entry 2 literacy. Women with Entry 2 literacy had experienced almost twice as much unemployment as women with Entry 3 skills and nearly four times as much as women with Level 1 or higher skills. Many women with Entry 2 skills had spent at least twice as much time in a full-time home-care role as women with Level 1 or higher skills by age 34. Fuller analysis showed that number of children and poor grasp of literacy both predicted time away from employment.

**What sort of job?**

Whether in their first job at age 16 or current job at age 34, cohort members with Entry level skills had very different occupational profiles from those with a better grasp of the basic skills. They were far more likely to be in labour-intensive, low-skilled jobs, often in the less secure, unregulated ‘Other’ parts of the labour market. Even when the impact of further education and qualifications was minimised by restricting comparisons to those who left full-time education at 16, these differences did not disappear.

**Men at work**

Compared with men who had Level 1 or higher skills, men with Entry 2 literacy were almost one-third as likely to have used a computer at work or to have received work-related training from their current employer. They were also half as likely to have been promoted.

**Women at work**

In terms of modern skills, women with Entry 2 literacy were the most disadvantaged of all. Relatively few used a computer at work – 39 per cent compared with 78 per cent of women with Level 1 or higher literacy. Investment by employers in women in terms of training was lower than for men overall, but women with Entry 2 literacy were the least likely to have been on a course provided by their current employer. A third of women with Entry level skills had been promoted compared with more than half of women with Level 1 or higher skills.
FIGURE 8 PERCENTAGE OF MEN IN FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT FROM APRIL 1986 (AGE 16) UP TO MARCH 2004 (AGE 33) BY LITERACY AND NUMERACY

a) Literacy

b) Numeracy
FIGURE 9 PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT BETWEEN APRIL 1986 (AGE 16) AND MARCH 2004 (AGE 33) BY GRASP OF LITERACY OR NUMERACY

a) Literacy

b) Numeracy
FIGURE 10 CURRENT OCCUPATION AT AGE 34 FOR MEN BY GRASP OF LITERACY AND NUMERACY

a) All men

b) Early school-leavers
**FIGURE 11 CURRENT OCCUPATION AT AGE 34 FOR WOMEN BY GRASP OF LITERACY AND NUMERACY**

- **a) All women**

- **b) Early school-leavers**
Unsurprisingly, men with Entry 2 skills had lived in the fewest different homes since age 16 and they were the least likely ever to have moved for reasons to do with work. Both men and women with Entry level skills were also the most likely to live in disadvantaged housing conditions – rented and/or overcrowded accommodation – at age 34. As many as 13 per cent of women with Entry 2 literacy and 10 per cent with Entry 2 numeracy had experienced a spell of homelessness.

First live-in partnership
To emphasise the different nature of the move to independent living by men and women in the different skills groups, we looked at the age at which they first lived with a partner. Men and women with Entry 2 literacy were the most likely of all groups to have never lived with a partner by age 34. However, early live-in partnerships were also most practised among women with Entry 2 skills. Early live-in partnerships were generally twice as likely among women as men.

Both men and women with Entry level skills were also the most likely to live in disadvantaged housing conditions – rented and/or overcrowded accommodation – at age 34.
Approximately half of men with Entry 2 skills (45 per cent literacy, 51 per cent numeracy) had not married by age 34. But among those who had married, men with Entry level literacy were the most likely to have experienced marital breakdown (26 per cent Entry 2, 29 per cent Entry 3). There were no differences across skills groups for women.

**Parenthood**
Women with Entry level skills were more than twice as likely as women with Level 1 or higher skills to have been a teenage mother and three times more likely to have 4+ children at age 34. Forty-five per cent of all men had yet to become a father by the age of 34. Teenage fatherhood – or the reporting of it – was relatively rare, but highest among those with Entry 2 literacy or numeracy. Until they reached their early 30s, men with Level 1 or higher skills were least likely to have become a father.

**Different partnerships**
A possible indicator of a less stable family environment is the number of partners a cohort member has had, or how many of their children are a result of different partnerships. Men and women with Entry 2 skills were more than twice as likely to have children with more than one partner. For example, 18 per cent of women with Entry 2 skills who had children, had them with different partners, compared with 8 per cent of women with Level 1 or higher skills. Comparable figures for men were 11 per cent and 5 per cent. However, the figures in all likelihood would even out later as men and women with higher level skills entered parenthood at a later age.

**Helping children learn**
In 2004 a representative 1-in-2 sample of cohort members with children of their own also took part in an additional component of the survey, *The Parent and Child Interview*. This revealed some differences in supporting the educational development of their own children across skills groups. Cohort members with young children were no more or less likely to help them learn to recognise numbers, the alphabet, shapes or colours, whatever their grasp of numeracy or literacy. However, cohort members with Entry 2 literacy were less likely to read to, or with, their child(ren) regularly. Their children had fewer books in the home than other children, and according to reports from cohort members and the children (age 10+) themselves, they were less likely to read for enjoyment. Boys of cohort members with Entry level literacy or numeracy were also less likely to report that they enjoyed school, and most likely to have stunted educational aspirations. The differences for girls were not as marked.

Women with Entry level skills were more than twice as likely as women with Level 1 or higher skills to have been a teenage mother and three times more likely to have 4+ children at age 34.
The findings presented in the preceding chapters set out the particular challenges faced in lives characterised by very poor acquisition of literacy and numeracy. By drawing on the full range of data collected about the cohort’s lives, we have been able to see more clearly the ‘staging posts’ in life chances where opportunities arise, or obstacles get in the way. We started with the relationship between poor skills, family background and literacy and numeracy development in early life. Next we moved to compulsory schooling, further education and labour market entry and performance. We completed the story with partnership and family life. All need to be contextualised in terms of another factor – geography. The varying qualifications distribution of the population across the NQF levels from one region of the country to another raises another set of questions about life chances and educational provision that national policy needs to address – as does the much higher percentage of women than men with only Entry level numeracy skills.

The picture gained is one of stumbling blocks to progress early on and relatively little amelioration, at the level of the population as a whole, later. This finding is particularly prominent for literacy, but numeracy difficulties also carry penalties in people’s lives.

The trajectories of advantage and disadvantage can be clearly seen, with poor basic skills playing a key/central role in the re-enforcement of exclusion which is repeated from one generation to the next. Against a background of material disadvantage and lack of parental aspiration and support, the childhood stage of such trajectories is characterised typically by the constant struggle to keep up educationally. The adulthood that often follows is marred by poor opportunities and limited progression towards desired goals and a fulfilling life. In a high-tech world that is increasingly automated and globalised, with a massive growth of service industry and a decline in unskilled manufacturing work, life chances are seriously curtailed. And progress to what were at one time realisable goals in the workplace, the family and the community is seriously impeded, especially for those with poor basic skills. The relative lack of access to ICT at work or at home of adults with Entry level literacy is a particularly striking finding in this respect.

The early signals of future difficulties are manifested in poor educational outcomes, including weak cognitive skills in early childhood, remedial provision, lack of qualifications and exit from the education system at the earliest possible age. A poor labour market experience typically follows in the form of difficulties in getting the first job and retaining it. Training opportunities are rare and the work entered unskilled. Aspirations remain low, especially among men. Unemployment and casual work is the common experience. In all these features, a growing gap compared to earlier cohorts across the skills levels is apparent, with those at Entry level becoming the most marginalised.

But the problem is not just about exclusion from educational achievement and stable and satisfying employment. Progress to family life may be problematic as well. Adults with Entry level skills – especially women – are the first to leave home, only being overtaken by others at...
higher skill levels when the latter groups go on to higher education. Women at Entry 2 are ahead of their peers in their entry into partnerships and in the timing of their first child. They are also much more likely than men to have made this transition before the age of 18.

From the early 20s onward there is a reversal as those with higher level skills on the more extended transition increasingly catch up. In the case of men at Entry 2, a strong polarising effect is also apparent. More men with Entry level skills had never married by age 34, and those who had married were more likely than other men to have experienced marital breakdown. Many more such men than women at the age of 34 were also likely to be found living at home with their parents.

This is not to say that all individuals with poor basic skills follow a path of exclusion or disadvantage. Through opportunities encountered in education, in the workplace and in the community, many are able to turn their lives around. Hence poor literacy and numeracy acquisition in childhood is not an irreversible contributor to problems in adulthood. The fact that substantial minorities stay on at school past the minimum age, gain qualifications and progress in their careers shows that, given the right circumstances, personal resilience can overcome adversity of the kind that poor basic skills present.

What is clear, however, is that from an early age, for those with Entry level skills, obstacles against getting on to the achievement track keep accumulating over time, making progression in education and employment increasingly difficult. What may matter then is whether the individual's relationships, family, community and workplace re-enforce the difficulties or supply the support needed to overcome them.

In this respect, careers tend to diverge between men and women with men, in many respects, having the least opportunities and often the poorest outcomes. Thus the role of male partner and provider is weakened by the poor job prospects and marginalised labour market statuses that poor basic skills can lead to. A sizeable proportion of Entry 2 men tend to be without partners and children. On the other hand, those who had children tend to have had them with more than one partner.

For women, poor educational achievement underpins poor employment prospects, especially in the non-manual office jobs that young women tend to favour. In contrast to men in this situation, the outcome for low-skilled women is frequently early partnership and parenthood, offering the alternative career path of mother and carer. Though such young women – particularly following partnership breakdown – may be isolated and stressed through poverty and ill health, they are often more able to cope with the help of other women in comparable situations. The problem arises when the static nature of the situation offers no chance to move out of it, even when changing lifecourse pressures demand it. New challenges of children entering school, redundancy and ill health can break the status quo, which brings the skills difficulty back into prominence as an obstacle to personal and social well-being.

This is where the ‘Choice Agenda’ has the least chance of being realised, not only by parents but also, by extension, their children. Our analysis revealed that parents with Entry level skills supply the least support for their children, both in terms of helping them learn to read and their general educational development. They were less likely to read to or with their child(ren) regularly, there were fewer books available in the home for their children to read, and the children in turn were less likely to read for enjoyment. Boys of cohort members with Entry 2 literacy were also the most likely to have stunted educational aspirations. Hence the pattern of poor
performance is likely to be repeated across the generations.

**Recommendations**

The antidote must be education in whatever form it can be offered to adults in the community, in the classroom and in the workplace. Entry level literacy and numeracy can never be an acceptable level of capability, which is why programmes such as Skills for Life will continue to be necessary for a long time to come.

The main messages from this report suggest that, given the right circumstances and the motivation to succeed, adults who started their lives on the worst form of disadvantaged trajectory can, with proper support, transform their opportunities and ultimately their life chances. But the problem remains that such an achievement is still restricted to relatively small numbers, suggesting that a significant minority of adults will continue to lead marginalised and unfulfilling lives. As noted earlier, the problem is likely to come to a head when major lifecourse events in the family and the workplace present challenges that can no longer be met. This is likely to be the time of most difficulty for such adults, but it is also when motivation may be stimulated in the most effective way.

It is therefore all the more important that remedial programmes and the pedagogy that takes place in them are based on understanding of the problems that adults can have and what it is in their lives that will produce the most significant motivational change. This makes the case for embedded approaches that contextualise the teaching in subject matter closest to the learner’s situation and interests, relating learning to what individuals recognise as their most pressing needs. The cost of not getting it right is enormous, not only in personal but also in economic terms, as the research following the Moser Report that established the Skills for Life policy showed.

Skills for Life was seen as a relatively temporary measure to restore life chances to adults through skills acquisition, after which, for subsequent generations, the education system would ensure that the problem no longer arose. We now know that quick solutions to such longstanding problems are unlikely to be totally effective. Education through such initiatives as ‘Family literacy’ and ‘Literacy and numeracy hours’ can achieve a lot in reducing the skills deficit for school-leavers. However, a proportion of individuals in a mass education system are always going to miss out. Furthermore, as expectations of what is needed rise, the pressure towards marginalisation grows. This means that Skills for Life should be seen, not as a stop-gap, but as an essential part of the education system. The next step needs to be widespread debate about the issues exposed in this report and the policy options for resolving them. Skills for Life has moved the agenda in the right direction. What needs to follow is commitment to a comprehensive educational strategy that extends throughout life so that everyone who needs to enhance their skills has the opportunity to do so.

---


MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Adult education must be available in whatever form it can be offered: in the community, classroom and workplace, and through such initiatives as ‘Family literacy’ and ‘Literacy and numeracy hours’.

• Remedial programmes and their pedagogy must be based on understanding of adults’ lives: both of their problems and of what best stimulates significant motivational change. Embedded approaches that relate learning to individuals’ own recognised needs can be very effective. Inclusion of a digital element within a basic skills class may be another powerful motivator.

• Skills for Life should be an essential part of the education system and not a stop-gap. Longstanding, intergenerational problems require long-term measures, especially as pressure towards marginalisation continues to grow as expectations of minimum skills requirements rise.

• The issues exposed in this report require urgent discussion, with a view to policy options for resolving them. What needs to follow is commitment to a comprehensive educational strategy that extends throughout people’s lives.
References and Further Reading


### Appendix

**TABLE A1a: AVERAGE SCORES IN COGNITIVE TESTS TAKEN AT AGE 5 BY COHORT MEMBERS' GRASP OF LITERACY AT AGE 34**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Picture Vocabulary Test</th>
<th>Copying Designs</th>
<th>Profile Test</th>
<th>Draw-a-Man Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>4.9 (sd 2.0) [n=144]</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>5.7 (sd 1.8) [n=114]</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1+</td>
<td>6.8 (sd 1.7) [n=3,277]</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>5.1 (sd 2.0) [n=139]</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>5.2 (sd 1.9) [n=163]</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1+</td>
<td>6.4 (sd 1.8) [n=3,555]</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Max Score</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*sd=standard deviation; n=number of cohort members

**TABLE A1b: AVERAGE SCORES IN COGNITIVE TESTS TAKEN AT AGE 5 BY COHORT MEMBERS' GRASP OF NUMERACY AT AGE 34**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Picture Vocabulary Test</th>
<th>Copying Designs</th>
<th>Profile Test</th>
<th>Draw-a-Man Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>5.7 (sd 2.0) [n=410]</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>6.2 (sd 1.9) [n=632]</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1+</td>
<td>7.0 (sd 1.7) [n=2,491]</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>5.6 (sd 1.9) [n=661]</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>6.0 (sd 1.8) [n=1,158]</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1+</td>
<td>6.7 (sd 1.7) [n=2,037]</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Max Score</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*sd=standard deviation; n=number of cohort members
TABLE A2a: AVERAGE SCORES IN COGNITIVE TESTS TAKEN AT AGE 10 BY COHORT MEMBERS' GRASP OF LITERACY AT AGE 34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Edinburgh Reading Test</th>
<th>BAS Word Definitions</th>
<th>BAS Similarities</th>
<th>BAS Matrices</th>
<th>Friendly Maths Test</th>
<th>BAS Recall of Digits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>3.5 (sd 1.7) (n=124)</td>
<td>1.7 (sd 1.1) (n=124)</td>
<td>5.8 (sd 1.2) (n=123)</td>
<td>3.4 (sd 1.7) (n=120)</td>
<td>4.0 (sd 1.6) (n=124)</td>
<td>5.6 (sd 1.3) (n=124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>4.5 (sd 1.7) (n=117)</td>
<td>2.3 (sd 1.3) (n=117)</td>
<td>6.3 (sd 1.0) (n=116)</td>
<td>4.4 (sd 1.9) (n=117)</td>
<td>5.0 (sd 1.5) (n=117)</td>
<td>6.0 (sd 1.3) (n=117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 or 2</td>
<td>6.5 (sd 1.8) (n=3,154)</td>
<td>3.6 (sd 1.6) (n=3,123)</td>
<td>7.1 (sd 0.9) (n=3,102)</td>
<td>5.7 (sd 1.9) (n=3,127)</td>
<td>6.6 (sd 1.6) (n=3,155)</td>
<td>6.7 (sd 1.2) (n=3,119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>4.3 (sd 1.9) (n=140)</td>
<td>2.0 (sd 1.3) (n=137)</td>
<td>5.9 (sd 1.2) (n=136)</td>
<td>4.1 (sd 1.9) (n=135)</td>
<td>4.4 (sd 1.7) (n=140)</td>
<td>6.0 (sd 1.3) (n=137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>5.0 (sd 1.6) (n=171)</td>
<td>2.2 (sd 1.3) (n=167)</td>
<td>6.2 (sd 1.0) (n=164)</td>
<td>4.4 (sd 1.7) (n=165)</td>
<td>5.0 (sd 1.4) (n=171)</td>
<td>6.1 (sd 1.1) (n=167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 or 2</td>
<td>6.7 (sd 1.7) (n=3,456)</td>
<td>3.2 (sd 1.5) (n=3,437)</td>
<td>6.9 (sd 0.9) (n=3,428)</td>
<td>6.0 (sd 1.8) (n=3,425)</td>
<td>6.4 (sd 1.5) (n=3,457)</td>
<td>6.7 (sd 1.2) (n=3,430)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Max Score</strong></td>
<td>10 (sd 0.9)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.5)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.0)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.9)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.6)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*sd=standard deviation; n=number of cohort members; BAS=British Ability Scales II

TABLE A2a: AVERAGE SCORES IN COGNITIVE TESTS TAKEN AT AGE 10 BY COHORT MEMBERS' GRASP OF NUMERACY AT AGE 34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Edinburgh Reading Test</th>
<th>BAS Word Definitions</th>
<th>BAS Similarities</th>
<th>BAS Matrices</th>
<th>Friendly Maths Test</th>
<th>BAS Recall of Digits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>4.5 (sd 1.8) (n=393)</td>
<td>2.4 (sd 1.4) (n=389)</td>
<td>6.4 (sd 1.1) (n=382)</td>
<td>4.0 (sd 1.8) (n=387)</td>
<td>4.8 (sd 1.4) (n=392)</td>
<td>6.0 (sd 1.3) (n=390)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>5.2 (sd 1.6) (n=628)</td>
<td>2.8 (sd 1.4) (n=619)</td>
<td>6.6 (sd 0.9) (n=616)</td>
<td>4.6 (sd 1.8) (n=620)</td>
<td>5.4 (sd 1.5) (n=627)</td>
<td>6.3 (sd 1.3) (n=620)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 or 2</td>
<td>6.9 (sd 1.6) (n=2,372)</td>
<td>3.8 (sd 1.5) (n=2,354)</td>
<td>7.3 (sd 0.9) (n=2,341)</td>
<td>7.0 (sd 1.7) (n=2,355)</td>
<td>7.0 (sd 1.5) (n=2,375)</td>
<td>6.8 (sd 1.2) (n=2,348)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>5.2 (sd 1.7) (n=655)</td>
<td>2.3 (sd 1.2) (n=650)</td>
<td>6.3 (sd 1.0) (n=643)</td>
<td>4.6 (sd 1.8) (n=644)</td>
<td>5.1 (sd 1.4) (n=656)</td>
<td>6.2 (sd 1.2) (n=648)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>6.0 (sd 1.7) (n=1,122)</td>
<td>2.7 (sd 1.3) (n=1,110)</td>
<td>6.6 (sd 1.0) (n=1,108)</td>
<td>5.3 (sd 1.8) (n=1,106)</td>
<td>5.7 (sd 1.4) (n=1,123)</td>
<td>6.4 (sd 1.2) (n=1,109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 or 2</td>
<td>7.3 (sd 1.5) (n=1,990)</td>
<td>3.6 (sd 1.5) (n=1,981)</td>
<td>7.2 (sd 0.9) (n=1,977)</td>
<td>6.5 (sd 1.6) (n=1,975)</td>
<td>6.9 (sd 1.3) (n=1,989)</td>
<td>6.9 (sd 1.2) (n=1,977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Max Score</strong></td>
<td>10 (sd 0.9)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.5)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.0)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.9)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.6)</td>
<td>10 (sd 1.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*sd=standard deviation; n=number of cohort members; BAS=British Ability Scales II
ILLUMINATING DISADVANTAGE: PROFILING THE EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS WITH ENTRY LEVEL LITERACY OR NUMERACY OVER THE LIFECOURSE
SAMANTHA PARSONS AND JOHN BYNNER

www.nrdc.org.uk

NRDC is a consortium of partners led by the Institute of Education, University of London with:
• Lancaster University
• The University of Nottingham
• The University of Sheffield
• East London Pathfinder
• Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership
• Basic Skills Agency at NIACE
• Learning and Skills Network
• LLL+, London South Bank University
• National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
• King’s College London
• University of Leeds

This report is funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills as part of Skills for Life: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills.