

Vision for Literacy 2025



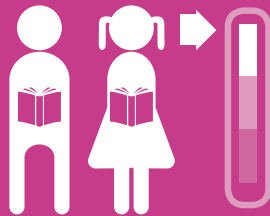
Created by the National Literacy Forum.

A vision of a literate nation

The UK is the only economically developed country where 16 to 24-year-olds have the lowest literacy skills of any age group in society.¹ In England 14.9% of adults aged 16-65 lack functional literacy skills. This equates to 5.1 million people.²

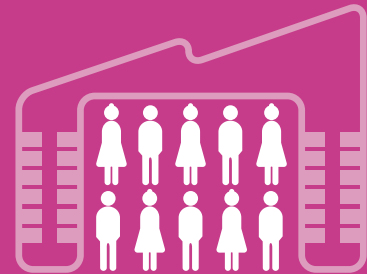
The UK's literacy gap undermines our economic competitiveness and sustainability. It creates obstacles to fairness across society. It is at the heart of economic and cultural inequalities and is creating a divided society. We can't afford to allow this to continue. We must act now.

The challenge is intergenerational and closely linked to poverty. Up to 40% of the adult population in the UK's most deprived wards lack the literacy skills expected of an 11-year-old.



2020

By 2020 all children are reaching the expected level in early language and literacy development by the age of 5



2025

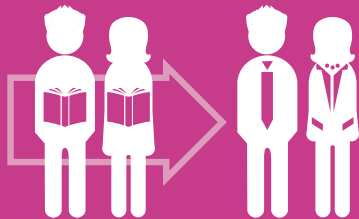
By 2025 every 11-year-old will have the literacy skills they need to fulfil their potential in secondary school*

To tackle this issue a new approach is needed.

An intergenerational pattern can only be broken by a sustained campaign which lasts a generation. Chopping and changing in literacy policy has undermined the sustained policy push which is needed. Literacy needs to become an all party consensus issue. It needs to be elevated beyond party politics. Government needs to lead this campaign but the whole of society must play its part.

In the run up to the 2015 election we challenge all parties to sign up to a target to ensure that no child is left behind.

We urge all parties to commit to the following goals which we share with the Read On, Get On Campaign, the Fair Education Alliance and The Communication Trust.



2032

By 2032 every young person will leave secondary school with the literacy skills they need to fulfil their potential and access employment**

To achieve this, the National Literacy Forum, which represents the leading UK literacy charities, has recommended four areas which we see as Pathways to Literacy. These are areas in which sustained policy consensus is required to build a literate nation.



*the equivalent of a National Curriculum level 4b in reading

**the equivalent of a good GCSE in English³

1. Improve early language and literacy provision • in homes and early years settings

The foundation for literacy skills are laid in the first years, months and even weeks of life. Inequalities in these experiences are frequently related to socio-economic status. By age five, children from low-income households are over a year behind in vocabulary compared with children from high-income households.⁴ Given the importance of spoken language in underpinning literacy skills, effective support is required to ensure that the early literacy experience of all children is strong and that all children are brought up in language rich environments.

Poor literacy is frequently intergenerational: parents with lower literacy skills often lack the confidence and skills to help their children with reading and writing, which reinforces the cycle of disadvantage as literacy skills are passed on through the generations.⁵ The cycle must be broken. Innovative approaches using social marketing and other strategies to influence parental behaviour need to be used. Approaches also need to be adapted to individuals; there are many complex reasons why parents don't engage and we need to work one-to-one to unpick them. No child deserves to be left behind.

Literacy support services should be embedded within a range of existing services (crucially antenatal care and health visitors), with staff trained to identify low literacy in parents and to offer appropriate advice and support.

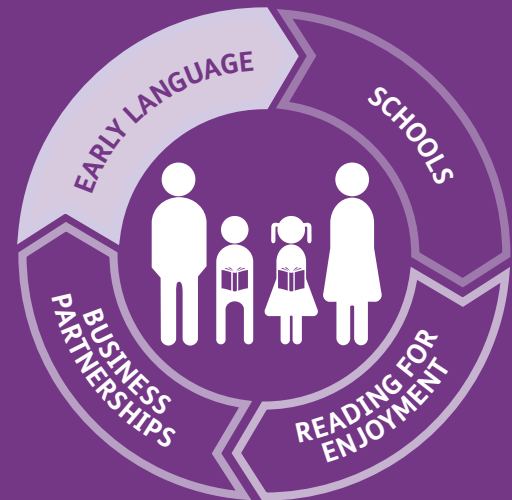
Many programmes already do this. It is crucial that there is Government support for this to continue to ensure that all children and parents have access to high quality, effective provision through a strong partnership model.

Improved early language outcomes must be the key outcome for all parties' childcare policies. Providers must work in partnership with parents to support early language and literacy skills, they must offer communication-rich environments and early years professionals must have strong language and literacy skills themselves and be equipped to support early literacy development.

Children at risk of developing weak language and literacy skills for social or developmental reasons need to be identified and supported before starting school. Children's centres need to be equipped with strategies and partnerships to engage local families in need of literacy and early language support. This requires the pooling of data collected by local agencies to identify the children most in need of support. The commissioning of effective targeted interventions, that take into account individual needs and strengths, need to be improved so that it is truly evidence-based.

Recommendation 1:

Government should create the role of a cross-departmental **Early Years Minister** to drive forward an **integrated education, health, welfare and business** approach to childcare and early years policy to ensure that data and information is pooled effectively to reach children and families most in need of support.



Case study:

Bookstart Corner is a targeted reading programme run by Booktrust for families with 12-24 month olds that has a measurable impact on improving reading behaviours in the home:

“ I think it’s a brilliant programme. I go into children’s homes and some of these children are in real poverty and parents don’t read to them so we’re showing parents how to look at and share a book with their child. ”

(Children’s Centre Practitioner, 2014)

This intervention builds on the universal Bookstart programme for babies managed locally by libraries and health partners.

2 • More effective teaching of reading, writing and spoken language skills in schools

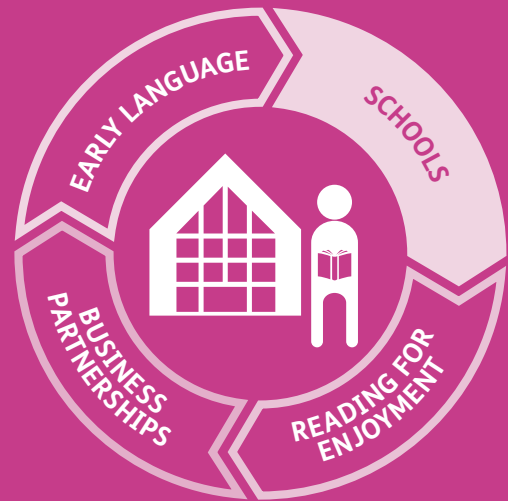
The new freedoms which schools and teachers are enjoying as a result of recent educational reforms need to be used to ensure that core literacy skills are taught in ways which are demonstrably effective. School leaders and teachers need to be supported in making decisions about the curriculum and teaching which are based on evidence of effectiveness and on the expertise within the sector around improving motivation and linking achievement with the home environment. The Education Endowment Foundation has begun to create an evidence centre for the education sector but this is currently limited in scope to children on free school meals and doesn't cover issues relating to gender and ethnicity. We feel that the proposal for a Royal College of Teachers could provide a strong framework for promoting evidence-based practice in schools and for supporting teachers to understand the impact of a range of programmes with both hard and soft outcomes.

The strong push on phonics in schools has increased the level of decoding skills amongst children in the first two years of school.⁶ However, children are failing to gain the equivalent of level 4b in reading at the age of 11 predominantly because of poor comprehension skills. This highlights the importance of spoken language in relation to literacy. Government must signal that it takes this challenge seriously.

Attention also needs to be focused on secondary schools. Not enough children reach the expected level at the end of primary school (86%), but even less go on to achieve the equivalent of a good English GCSE by the time they leave school (62%). There needs to be continuity in the teaching of literacy between primary and secondary schools to avoid alienating pupils with weaker literacy skills. Spoken language skills should also continue to be valued as an essential element of literacy; the fact that spoken language assessments do not count towards GCSE English grades misrepresents the importance of these skills.

Recommendation 2:

Government should invest in **new support for teachers, school leaders and governors** to make decisions about the best ways of teaching literacy skills by giving them access to evidence of effectiveness of approaches, resources and interventions. This should include the creation of a **Royal College of Teachers**.



Case study:

A Lambeth primary school used one-to-one multi-sensory teaching from Springboard to improve vulnerable children's literacy. Pupils were on average 25 months behind in their reading and comprehension. Individualised tutoring based on the best available evidence of what works closed reading age gap to 6 months and comprehension age gap to 1 month.

Case study:

A primary school in London chose to participate in the CLPE Power of Reading project, an evidence-based programme supporting teachers to improve reading and writing through 'in depth' responses to whole texts. Their 2014 Ofsted report said:

“ The school has introduced 'Power of Reading' to engender a love of reading, and there is a strong focus on extended writing which has raised standards. ”

3. Universal access to reading materials and programmes is required to ensure that children read for enjoyment

Reading for enjoyment raises literacy: regularly reading outside of school is associated with higher scores in reading assessments.⁷ Evidence suggests that there is a positive relationship between reading frequency, reading enjoyment and attainment.⁸ It is also strongly related to other learning outcomes: reading enjoyment is more important in determining a child's educational success than their family's socio-economic status.⁹

Recent evidence has suggested that the medium-term downward trend in children's reading for enjoyment has been halted.¹⁰ However, more needs to be done if the 20.2% of children who say they rarely or never read for enjoyment are to be engaged. It is particularly important to devise imaginative and inspiring ways to engage boys, since nearly twice as many boys as girls say that they don't enjoy reading at all.¹¹

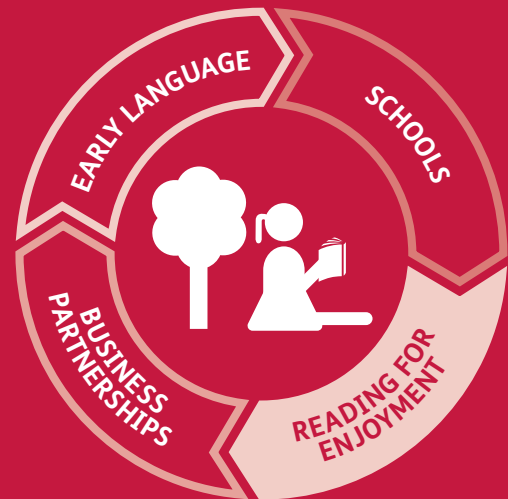
Children's literacy is strongly influenced by the number of books they are exposed to in the home, irrespective of household income or parental education.¹² It is therefore vital to get books into the homes of disadvantaged families to drive up literacy levels. The home environment and parental attitudes to books and reading are also key in determining children's attitudes, with young people more likely to enjoy reading at home when books and reading are valued.¹³

Libraries play an important role in promoting reading for enjoyment. Young people who use their public library are nearly twice as likely to read outside class every day.¹⁴ Libraries also provide children with a choice over what they read and choice and interest are closely related.¹⁵ Libraries in schools increase children's access to books and the role of the school librarian is central in stimulating an increase in pupils' reading for enjoyment. Yet recent surveys show that 40% of primary schools with designated library space have seen their budgets reduced and the number of librarians in English schools fell by 280 between 2011 and 2013.¹⁶

We should also harness the power of digital technology. Access to technology is widespread, with more children having a personal computer than a desk of their own.¹⁷ While the majority of fiction read by young people is still paper-based, more children read each day using technology than paper-based materials.¹⁸

Recommendation 3:

Government should instruct Ofsted to examine the **reading for pleasure strategy** in every school inspection, to include consideration of **school library provision**.



Case study:

The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge inspires children aged 4-12 to join their local library and read six books in the summer holidays. 99% of UK library authorities run the programme and in 2013 8,000,000 children took part, supported by 6,000 young volunteers. 46% of participants were boys. UKLA's 2009 research showed that taking part in the challenge helped to mitigate the summer dip in reading levels. One participant commented:

“ Because of the Summer Reading Challenge, my children started reading. Now we are regular visitors to the library. It's a lifelong gift. Thank-you. ”

4. Partnerships between education and business need to be enacted to ensure that all school leavers have literacy fit for employment

Good communication and literacy skills are essential for meeting rising demand as the economic recovery gains pace, but many businesses are worried that the UK's language and literacy levels cannot meet these demands. KPMG conservatively estimated that failure to master basic literacy skills costs the public purse £5,000 to £64,000 over an individual's lifetime. This amounts to between £198 million and £2.5 billion every year.¹⁹

Young people are bearing the brunt of the problem. Following the financial crisis in 2007, youth unemployment increased exponentially, with almost one in four unemployed in 2012. Since then levels have fallen to 17.8%, but this is still above the 2007 level.²⁰ Within this tough economic environment, good literacy skills are essential to young people's employment prospects.

The 2013 CBI Education and Skills survey found that 32% of employers expressed dissatisfaction at the literacy levels of employees, with 16% of employers offering remedial literacy training to adult employees, 15% to school and college leavers, and 5% to graduates.²¹ This suggests that the education system is failing to properly prepare all young people for the demands of the workplace.

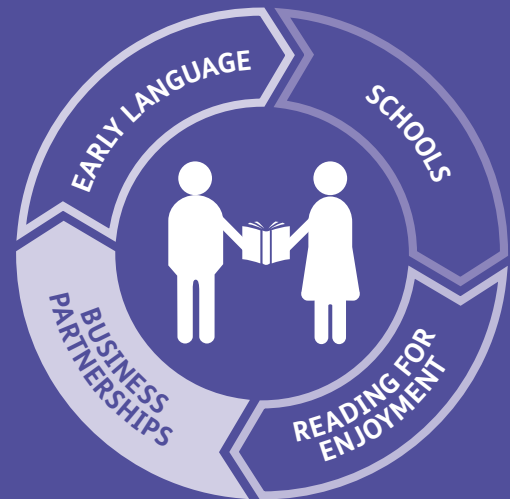
Improved communication and literacy skills for school leavers are key to addressing youth unemployment. The National Careers Service cites communication skills as the most important 'soft skill' that employers want.²² However, there appears to have been an increased difficulty in finding candidates with these. Core generic skills amongst applicants were cited as lacking by greater proportions of employers reporting skill-shortage vacancies in 2013 compared to 2011.²³

Business is part of the solution to this problem. Stronger partnerships between education and business will drive up standards through the sharing of expertise and knowledge, raise pupils' aspirations and ensure that young people leave school with the literacy and employability skills they need to access employment. We believe that these partnerships can be facilitated through Local Brokers, built on a shared understanding of the centrality of literacy to employment and the sustainability and growth of British business. Local Brokers would be a single point of contact for business and facilitate links between schools, colleges and industry.



Recommendation 4:

Government should encourage the creation of **Local Brokers** to build links between schools and their local business community, focussing on **business volunteering** to support young people's literacy and employability skills.



Case study:

Jordana, 15, took part in the National Literacy Trust's Words for Work programme:

“ Words for Work is the best thing I have done at school. It changed the way I see school and it made me want to be more successful. Everything about it was really useful to me. After the project, I was moved up a grade in my speaking and listening, because I felt more confident presenting in front of my teacher. Working in small groups with volunteers was really good, because the communication was two-way.

”

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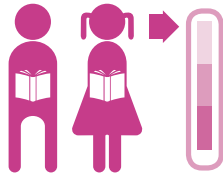
More effective teaching of reading, writing and spoken language skills in schools

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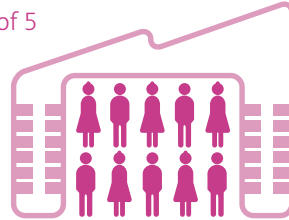
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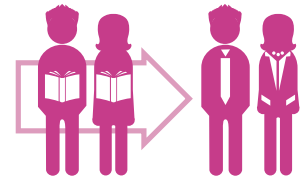
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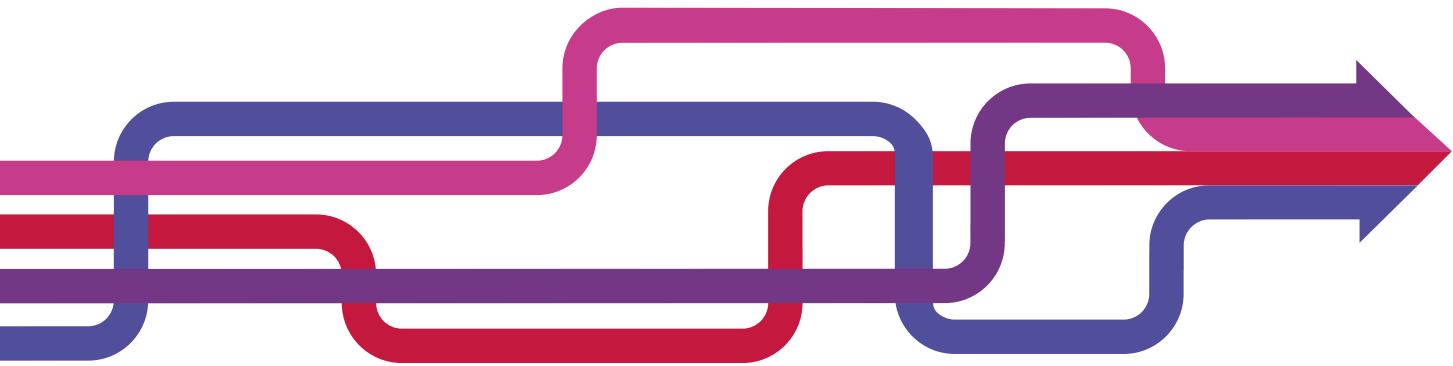
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The Vision for Literacy 2025 was developed by the following members and supporters of the National Literacy Forum:

- › Arts Council
 - › Barnados
 - › Beanstalk
 - › BITC
 - › Booktrust
 - › Booker Prize Foundation
 - › Campaign for Learning
 - › CLPE
 - › The Communication Trust
 - › I CAN
 - › National Literacy Trust
 - › NIACE
 - › Publishers Association
 - › Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
 - › Save the Children
 - › Springboard for Children
 - › The Reading Agency
 - › UKLA
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