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# Challenges to Policy Cohesion: The Skills for Life Story

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## The Skills for Life Strategy – What was it?

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- 9 year strategic commitment
- £9 bn funding (€12.5bn)
- National targets to improve the skills of 2.25 million adults
- National standards and qualifications
- Substantial increase in the teaching workforce and its qualifications
- Literacy, numeracy and language as part of all adult and skills education
- New programmes for families, workplace, communities, adults not in work, offenders, refugees and asylum seekers
- Similar programmes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

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## Achievements

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- Central place of adult literacy in government policy
- Adult literacy understood by government & society
- Engagement of employers, unions, employees
- National promotion & recruitment campaigns
- 5.7 million learners
- 2.8 million achieving qualifications
- 40%+ increase in teachers
- Library of paper-based & on-line resources
- National research base (NRDC)
- Improvements in quality

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## Successful Policy Story – the government view

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- Targets achieved – national tests in literacy and numeracy
- Progress against other countries (IALS, OECD)
- Inspection and quality grades
- Human capital – greater workforce skills
- Impact on wider government targets (unemployment, child literacy, offending)
- Financial value (National Audit Office, Parliament Public Affairs Accounts Committee)

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## Meeting the challenge - what was missing (1)

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- Systematic evaluation – collecting the evidence
  - What works and why
  - Progression and destination tracking
- An equal focus on:
  - Numeracy (NCETM 2006)
  - Family and intergenerational programmes
  - Reaching those with greatest needs (still)
  - Social and community based programmes
  - Diversity in provision

## Meeting the challenge – what was missing (2)

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- Recognising other success measures – Social Return on Investment (SROI) to balance 'skills measures'
  - Motivation, behaviours, attitude
  - Health improvements including mental health
  - Community participation
  - Reduction in offending
  - Family cohesion
  - Improved quality of life
  - Reduction in the effects of ageing

## Meeting the challenge – what was missing (3)

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- Cross government collaboration - common policy goals
  - Work & Pensions (welfare and employment programmes)
  - Local Communities (community cohesion, family learning)
  - Justice (offender learning)
  
- Implementation and funding policy and planning based on local/regional demand rather than qualification targets

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## Meeting the Policy Challenge – where are we now?

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### **Skills for Life Survey, 2011**

- Around 1 in 6 adults struggle with literacy
- Around 1 in 4 adults struggle with numeracy

### **OECD survey of adult skills, 2013**

- 24 countries took part
- England ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in numeracy and 12<sup>th</sup> in literacy

"These results confirm the vicious cycle in which low-skilled workers risk being trapped in a situation in which they rarely benefit from adult learning and their skills remain weak or deteriorate over time, making it even harder for these individuals to participate in learning activities. The key priority challenge is to help low-skilled adults break this cycle."

OECD, 2013

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