

MOVING THE MOUNTAIN – PART TWO

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

What a Nation can do

Delivering *Skills for Life*:
The Government's strategy for improving
adult literacy and numeracy skills

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The Journey so far the adventure to come

Department for
education and skills
creating opportunity, raising potential, achieving excellence

Ladies, Gentlemen, Colleagues, Champions of Family Literacy, Premier Campbell, Thank you for the opportunity to share this event with you.

Thank you also for inviting me to give you an overview of what we are doing in England to eradicate and eliminate what has been described as a 'National Disgrace'.

I like the title given to this piece 'What a Nation can do'. Let me say from the outset as the person charged with delivering our policy ***Skills for Life***.

'The Government can't do it all!'

As I regularly tell the 'movers and shakers' – college principals, employers, trade unionists.

I am a senior civil servant – I write policy – I am responsible for the strategy.

I don't actually **do** anything – that's their role.

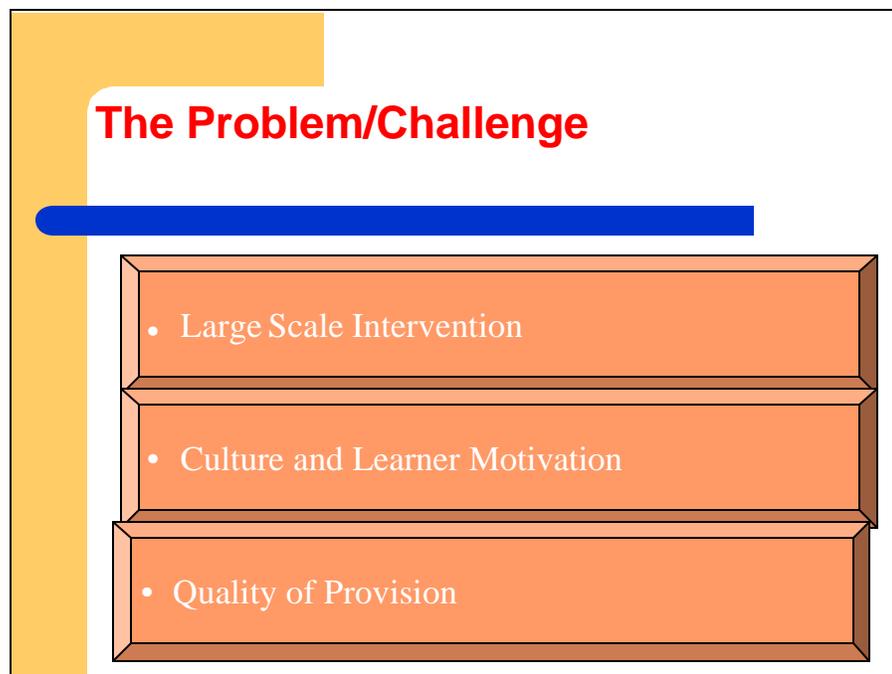
What I can do though is set the agenda, create the framework, develop the infrastructures, remove the barriers and allow the **real** people to do what they do best, get on and do the **real** job of helping young people and adults to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills.

Why would a Government do this?

My Government believes it is a fundamental human right for every adult to be literate and numerate. Ministers want all individuals to have the dignity that these essential skills provide.

This is more than an economic argument it is about social inclusion and ensuring that those most at risk of social exclusion are better able to lead full, active, meaningful and purposeful lives at home, at work, within their communities and families and in society as a whole.

Before looking at what we've done I want to pause for a moment to look at what the landscape looked like when it was described as 'A National Disgrace'.



The history of adult basic skills in England before the strategy was not a glorious one – not because good work had not been done – Government interventions can be charted as far back as the 1970s when the Adult Literacy campaign was designed to sweep away the million or so adults with poor levels of literacy.

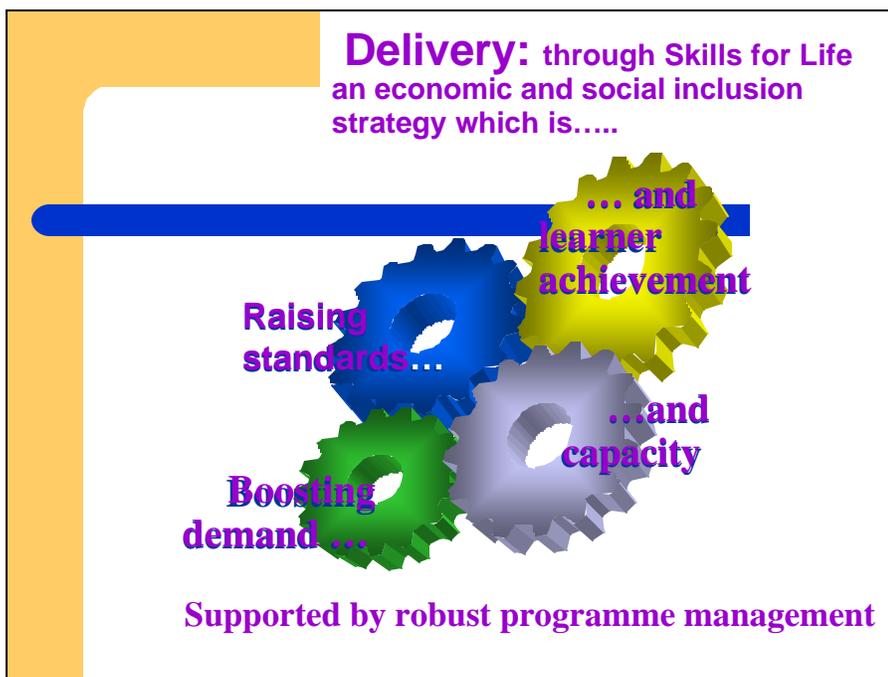
However, this history is littered with short term initiatives, pilots, projects – like some wild west gold rush that comes and goes too quickly – this boom and bust approach raised expectations, provided pump priming money but never sought sustainability so when the money was spent, the project was over – too often leaving disappointment, confusion and resentment in its wake.

In 1999 Lord Moser presented his report on adult literacy and numeracy to Ministers. 'A Fresh Start' as it was called highlighted the need for a clear, coherent and consistent national approach. He wanted to improve the quality of provision and thereby realise and release the potential of what was thought then to be around 7 million adults without functional levels of literacy and numeracy.

'The National Disgrace' he spoke of was the variation available to learners.

What each learner could expect to receive in terms of advice, guidance and learning opportunities did not just depend upon who they were, what skills they lacked but also where they lived or – more frighteningly – who managed and determined local provision.

Unfortunately, not everyone lived in Birmingham!



In March 2001 the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, launched *Skills for Life, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy*.

To ensure implementation the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit was set up. The Unit, although based in the then Department for Education and Employment was given the remit to work across all government Departments.

This is not just an Education, Employment or Skills strategy – it is at the heart of the Government's social policy agenda.

The strategy is framed around 4 interrelated themes or pillars –

1. Boosting the demand for earning and improved skills.
2. Ensuring the capacity to meet this demand through planning and resource management.
3. Raising the standards and the quality of teaching and learning.
4. Increasing learner achievement of nationally recognised qualifications and their continued progression as lifelong learners.

How is this being done? – Well we have a strategy, a delivery plan for this strategy and all of our key partners also have plans that map in to our delivery plan And of course this is a key delivery programme for Government and as such we report regularly to Ministers and the Prime Minister – this in itself is a wonderful incentive and lever!



The Prime Minister's approach is an interesting one – he believes in 'something for something'. In our case the resource was triggered by a Public Service Agreement (PSA) Target.

Our first target was to ensure that 750,000 individuals achieved a qualification in literacy, language or numeracy by 2004.

The Treasury thought this was such a good idea that they have set us a further target of 750,000 by 2007 – making 1.5 million individuals achieving qualifications by 2007.

This is 1.5 different people – an individual only counts once. Given the past history of these skills where many providers did not even monitor learner progress let alone consider the possibility of qualifications, this is seen as a very challenging target.

However, the lever and driver for this change has been the resource – over £3 billion pounds of public money has been made available between 2001 and 2007.

The Learner
The strategy covers all 16 plus learners

- Pre - Entry to Level 2 (including ESOL, LLD, Key Skills)
- Delivered discretely or as part of a vocational programme
- Whether the mode of attendance is full time, part time or self study
- Learning in the community, college, work place or by ICT

Of course this level of resource would have been irrelevant if we had not been able to engage learners. The strategy specified key priority groups:

- Unemployed people and those on benefit
- Prisoners and those supervised in the community
- Public sector employees

- Low skilled people in employment
- Other groups at risk of social exclusion including parents and carers and those living in disadvantaged communities

In reality though *Skills for Life's* expectations have been so dramatic and the culture change demanded so great I believe we are in a policy area where we are all learners:

- Those seeking to improve their skills
- Those charged with teaching them
- Those with responsibility for managing provision and resources
- Those like me devising the policy

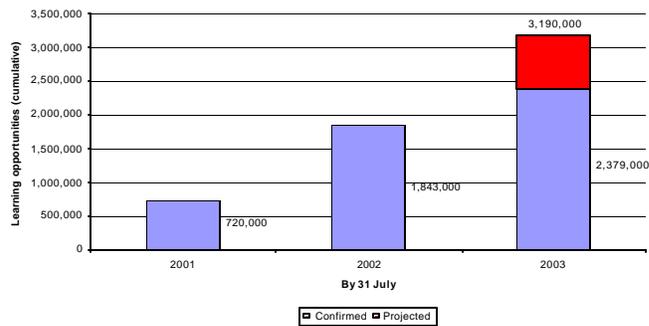
Such a root and branch reform requires partnership and this is an essential element of our successful progress to date.

Also *Skills for Life* is not just Government's implementation of Lord Moser's recommendations – it is a much more ambitious and wide-ranging reform of adult learning in general and of adult skills in particular.

A key element of engagement is the determination to meet all learners where they feel most comfortable and secure – through family learning, learning in the community, learning at college or learning in the workplace.

A further but related bonus has been the role played by computers – information and communication technology has helped to eliminate the stigma of basic skills learning. For adults in particular it doesn't bring with it the baggage of failure at school, for some it allows them to build confidence but for many it is the catalyst for engagement and sustainable achievement.

Success so far - Learning Opportunities taken up (enrolments)

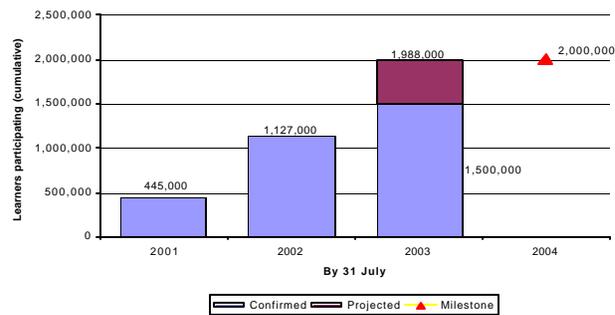


So how are we doing? The analysts, researchers and statisticians say, 'pretty well actually'.

Last year we provided over 3 million learning opportunities to young people and adults.

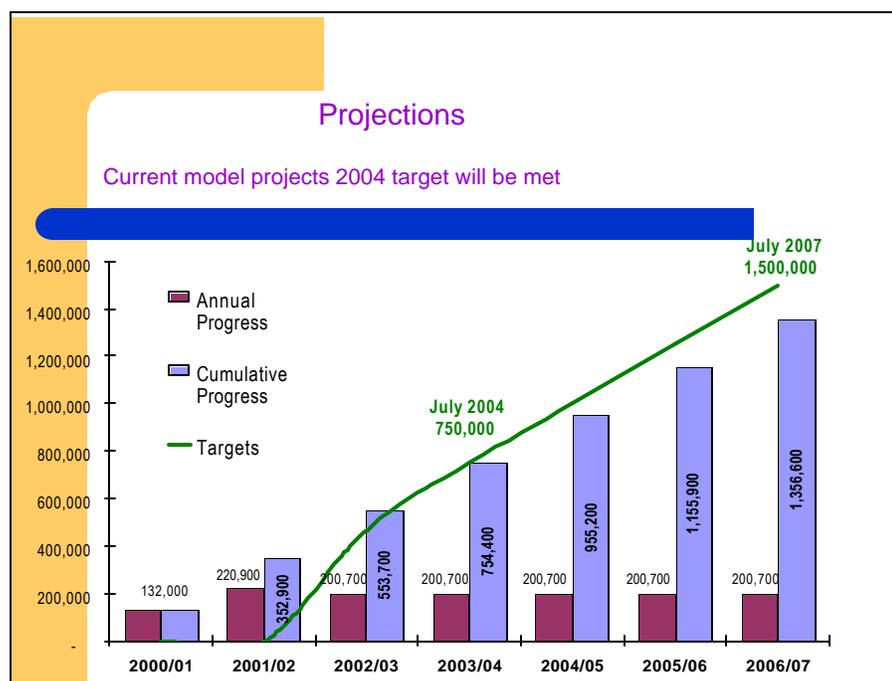
The difference in colours in the graph shows estimated plus confirmed learner numbers but we are now pretty confident that these figures are real.

Learners Participating



This slide shows the number of individuals now in the system – you can see the growth from the start of the strategy in 2001.

This means that around 2 million learners have taken over 3 million courses and programmes.



So what about the Public Service Agreement target and the progress towards it. My advice to colleagues here is never underestimate the importance of keeping the Treasury happy.

Here too progress is good – we are on track for the 2004 target.

Notice also how the trajectory beyond 2004 becomes a challenging one and one where we remain cautious.

Remember we can only count a learner's achievement once so although there will be more learners in the system – each year we need wider and wider participation to maintain the momentum towards the target as more and more learners achieve their first literacy, language or numeracy qualification.

It is worthwhile saying here that this aspect of the strategy, the targets, is only relevant to policy makers and practitioners. The target is not relevant to the learners – they should not even be aware of it – the target underpins access to resource and resource in turn supports learning and increases quality.

An individual learner's target is to improve their skills, become more competent and confident and progress – that is sufficient challenge for them. PSA targets and policy issues are not and should not be the learner's concern. Birds aren't interested in ornithology!



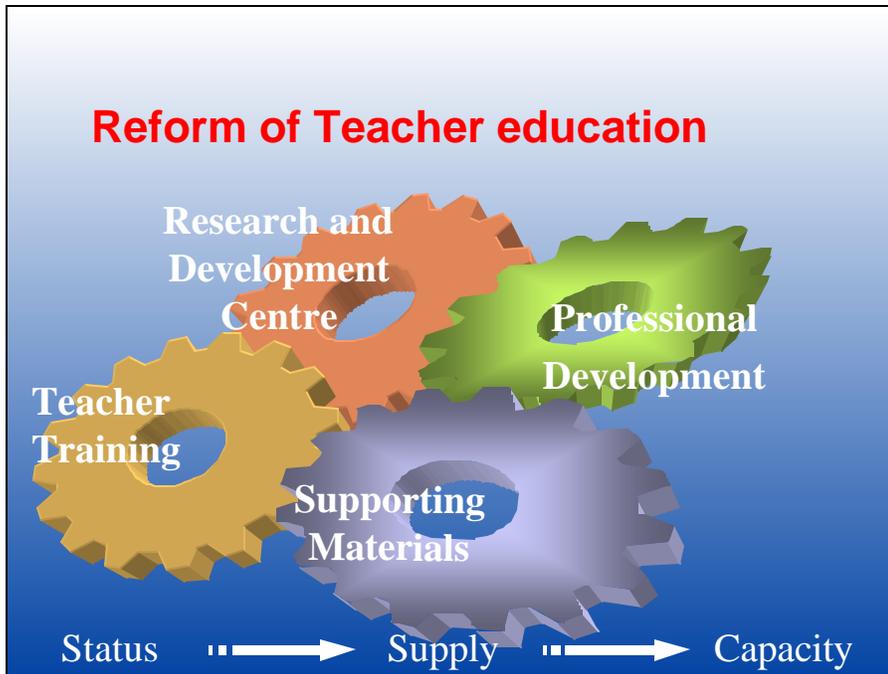
I want now to turn to the key reason why we are achieving this progress. I want to look at the learning infrastructure.

Every learning provider who receives Government funding through our funding agency, the Learning and Skills Council, must use this infrastructure. This is both the touchstone of consistency and the access to quality.

This is so we can be sure that each learner, irrespective of where they begin their journey, has equal access to learning and achievement at the right level and in the right form.

The quality of provision is monitored by our inspectorates which are independent of Government and by the Learning and Skills Council through their contracting process and evaluation known as provider reviews.

This infrastructure has been universally welcomed as for the first time it provides teachers with high quality support materials and a framework for teaching and learning. Some teachers have been worried by the national tests but in most cases the positive response of learners and the increasing use of ICT has helped increase the flexibility of assessment opportunities and has persuaded teachers that the benefits far outweigh the threats.



But how can you raise quality in learning if those delivering the learning are not themselves adequately and appropriately trained?

This challenge has been addressed through a new teacher qualifications framework. This framework specifies training and qualifications for those who:

- Support learners (volunteers and mentors)
- Support the learning process (assistants)
- Lead and manage the learning process (teachers)

Why this differentiation? Because we know that how people are described in different contexts differs dramatically. We wanted to eliminate confusion and be absolutely clear what we mean and what roles people have.

New entrants to the profession must now do so at graduate level – our level 4.

Existing teachers have a properly funded in-service training programme designed to help them update their skills and if necessary achieve a professional qualification.

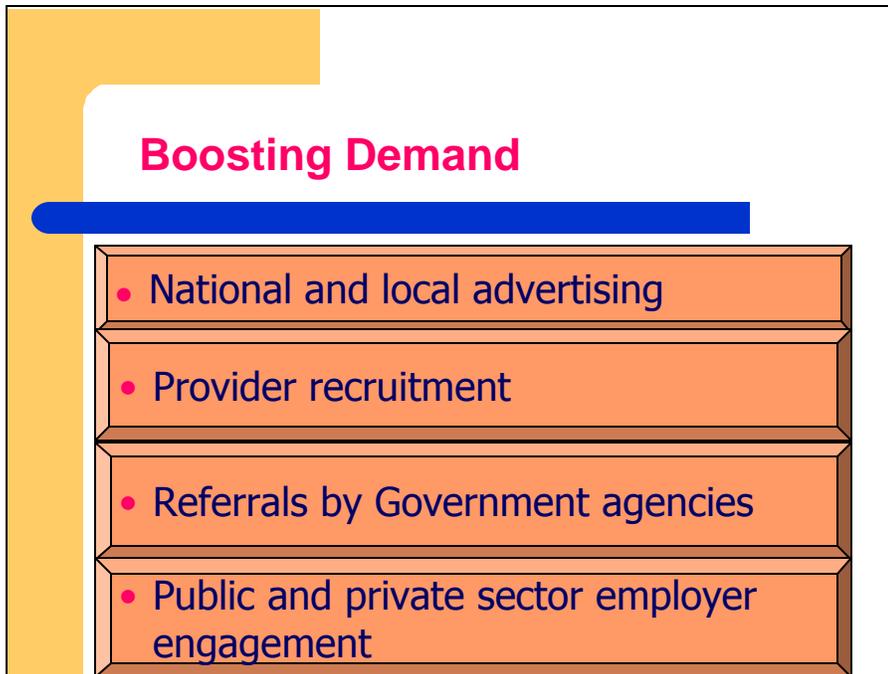
This year alone we have spent over £14 million on in-service training – in the regions other partners have more than matched this development to improve their local teaching workforce.

In addition from this September **all** teachers in further education will have a core module on literacy, language and numeracy in their general teacher programmes. This is to ensure that all learners, especially those on

vocational programmes with literacy, language or numeracy problems, are properly supported both to achieve their vocational goals as well as improve their essential skills.

Why spend so much on teachers and teacher training? We regard this as a good investment.

The policy is 'Invest to Save'. By spending now we will improve quality, minimise drop out and raise achievement.



We are also continuing with an extensive programme to Boost Demand. As I have shown we have engaged many new learners from a range of different contexts and settings but we continue to seek those hardest to reach.

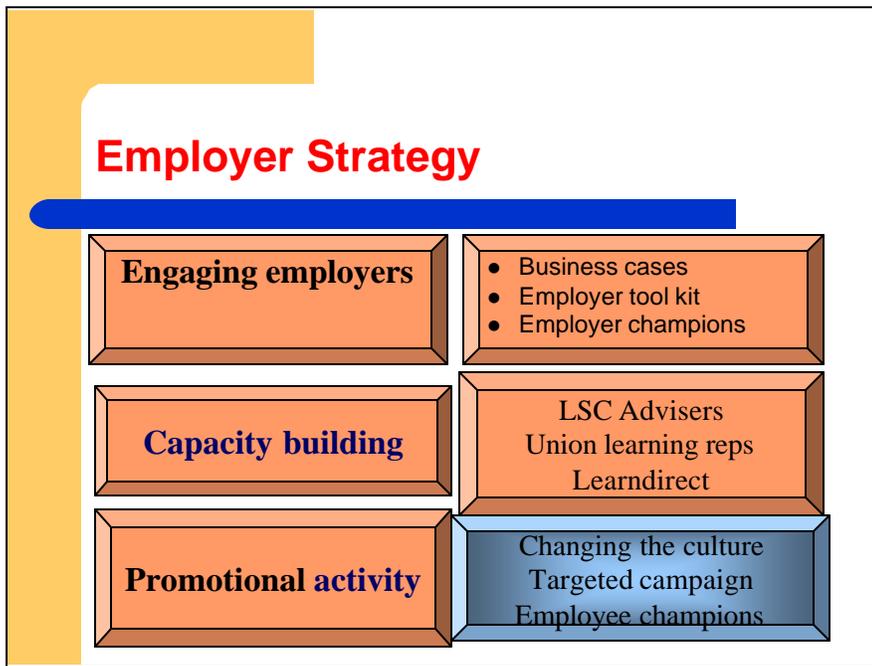
Some people have been shocked by our methods – the aggressive Gremlin campaign on television and in the newspapers has upset many intermediaries but were welcomed by learners – some even asking where they could join Gremlin courses!

We are now seeking to embed our work at a regional and local level by working with other Government Agencies who can spot and support adults in need:

- The Department for Work and Pensions – job seekers and those on benefits
- Those responsible for Children and Family Policy with the Department for Education and Employment – especially in neighbourhood nurseries and Sure Start Units

- The National Health Service where the new National Health Service University is developing literacy, language and numeracy programmes called 'Skilled for Health'
- The Home Office and Prison and probation services to ensure that those in prison or released into the community can improve their skills, gain employment and reduce the likelihood of re-offending
- The Ministry of Defence – supporting servicemen and women to improve literacy and numeracy skills

With over half of our target audience in employment we are working in partnership with employers and Sector Skills Councils to do more.



Traditionally there has been a disjuncture between how and when employers wanted training and how and when some colleges wanted to provide it.

Our policy is based on the fact that learners have problems 24 hours a day for 365 days of the year not just between 10.00 a.m. and 9.00 p.m. Monday to Friday for 35 weeks of the year to match traditional college terms.

Increasingly we have colleges and private providers putting on programmes to match the rhythm of the workplace not the rhythm of the academic day or term. Many employers have extended their offer to workers' families and to the wider community.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) through their learning representatives has been instrumental in breaking down barriers, establishing trust with employees and breaking new ground in workplace learning by negotiating release time with employers.

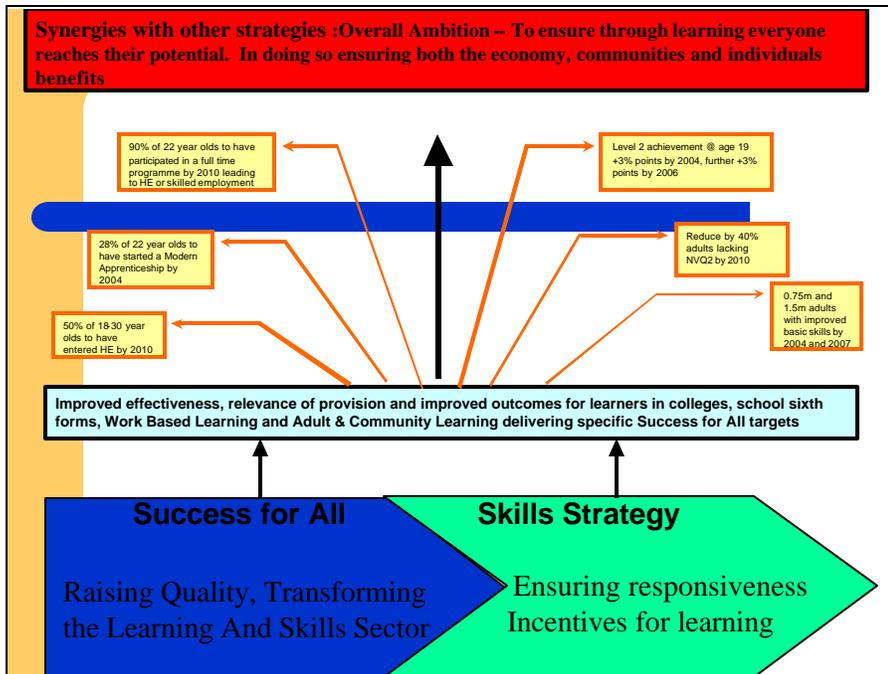
The Treasury has also put over £130 million pounds into Employer Training Pilots designed to reimburse employers for time taken off by employees during work time to enable them to improve vocational and basic skills. We see this as setting the foundations for a National Training Programme where work-based learning is the norm not the exception.

Has the Strategy made a difference?	
Weaknesses 2000	Achievements 2003
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No national standards or agreed pedagogy • Poorly trained teachers • Ineffective management • Reluctant Learners • No national coordination • Employers not engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards in place with agreed learning infrastructure • 33,000 teachers trained/new teacher qualification's in place • Management training in place • Campaign working 220,000 rang the help line • 1.2 million in learning per year • 470,000 passed a national certificate • National Plan and 47 local plans • New strategy launched employer tool Kit launched by PM

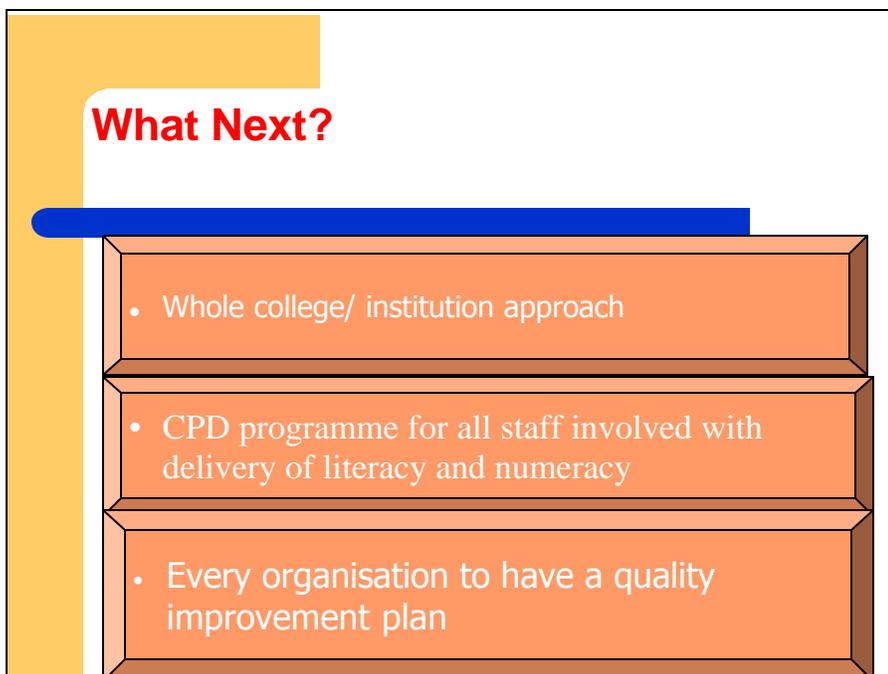
What I hope I have shown you is that we have a strategy that we are seeking to implement in partnership with key stakeholders.

We listen, we respond, we negotiate, we plan and we implement. This is a living, breathing strategy. It is not a straight jacket – it needs to expand and grow, it needs to be owned and sustained by others.

Our aim is irreversible change and we are determined to see it through even though we recognise it will be a long haul and there is no quick fix after decades of inconsistency.



.....but we need to embed our work across all of the Government's education and training policies– our intention is to give all of our work away and eventually disband the Unit eventually. What you see behind me is the Government's overall ambition for all young people and adults in my country – but that is for another presentation. Success for All sets out a demanding agenda for all learning within the further education sector and the Skills Strategy seeks to build on *Skills for Life* and improve all of the skills of our adult workforce.

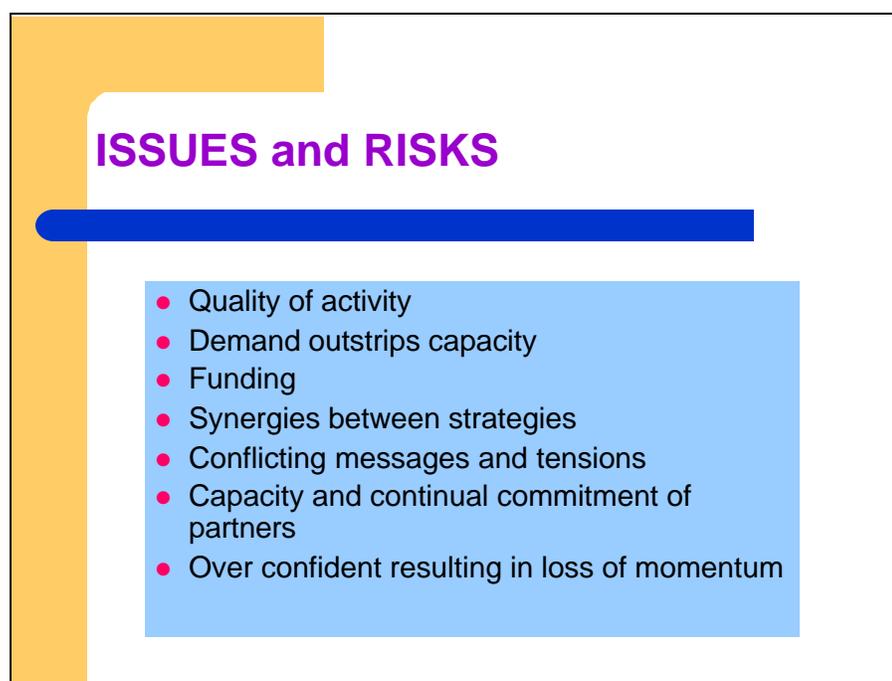


As I have said earlier we are seeking irreversible change. For me this means embedding literacy, language and numeracy in all contexts and settings, in all programmes and qualifications.

I want all young people and adults who are capable to have a national qualification in literacy, language and numeracy and the confidence that this achievement will bring.

I want to improve the quality of all those who lead and support learning wherever it takes place: in the workplace, the college, in the community or in the family.

I want every learning provider to recognise their role in delivering *Skills for Life* and have a plan and the resource to deliver it.



ISSUES and RISKS

- Quality of activity
- Demand outstrips capacity
- Funding
- Synergies between strategies
- Conflicting messages and tensions
- Capacity and continual commitment of partners
- Over confident resulting in loss of momentum

Of course there are challenges and here is today's list, tomorrow there may be a different set and there certainly was a different one last week.

In reality it is not the list itself it is how you respond to the issues it identifies and the determination you have to eliminate barriers to progress. In England we have a Government with that determination.

So in conclusion in considering what a nation can do I leave you with these prerequisites:

- You need leadership from the very top –the Prime Minister and Premier would be good.

- You need to be prepared to challenge and change the culture – this means believing in what you are doing and driving for change.
- You need to work in partnership – involve all key stakeholders from the outset.
- You need to secure quality – look at what is good already then add to it – don't re-invent wheels.
- You need from the outset to seek to mainstream and embed – irreversible change needs sustainability and mainstreaming.
- You need resources – not unlimited resources, just sufficient long term investment. This work is about investing to save. By up-skilling those with the lowest skills you eliminate the skills gap, you move more people out of the cycle of low wage, low security of employment. By helping parents and carers you help the children. This is social and economic policy in action. When it works, as I hope I have demonstrated, it's a win-win for everyone.

Thank you for listening.

Barry Brooks
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