

Literacy and numeracy news

Literacy levels in the UK

"Some 7 million adults in England - one in five adults - if given the alphabetical index to the Yellow Pages, cannot locate the page reference for plumbers. That is an examples of functional illiteracy. It means that one in five adults has less literacy than is expected of an 11-year-old."

(A Fresh Start, Improving Literacy and Numeracy. The report of the working group chaired by Sir Claus Moser, 1999)

Quote: DfES findings, based on a survey of nearly 9000 16 to 65 year olds in England, found a strong link between numeracy and literacy and higher wages. Some 68% of full-time workers earning more than £20,000 a year had gained at least one GCSE at grade C or above.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/3227263.stm>

1.9 million adults in London don't have any qualifications, that's a quarter of the population.

Statistics for numeracy

In 2003, the DfES found that 29% of adults - as many as 11 million people - could not calculate the area of a floor, in either square feet or metres. More than 10% were unable to understand the instructions on a packet of seeds. And less than a third of people managed to work out the amount of plastic covering needed to line a pond - even with a calculator, pen and paper. (Source: BBC News website, 1 May 2003)

<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/stats/adultstats.html>

Who knows how many adults have poor literacy?

The research measuring literacy may be flawed, says Alan Wells

Alan Wells

[The Guardian](#), Tuesday 30 January 2007

Four in five of all adults, as many as 82% of adults don't have a A*-C GCSE or equivalent in English and maths.

The research involved getting a sample of adults to do what were referred to as "real life" tasks. A typical example of one of these was being shown an advert and asked to answer questions about it. Adults were assigned to levels based on their performance and these levels have been equated to GCSE qualifications. So level 1 for adults is seen as the equivalent of a GCSE D-G

and level 2 as a GCSE A*-C.

What's alarming about the results is that so many people with what are seen as good qualifications appear to have fairly poor literacy skills. Almost six in 10 people with 5 A*-C grades at GCSE only have level 1 skills in literacy, ie the level that would get them only a D-G at GCSE. Even more alarmingly, about one in eight of those with five A*-Cs didn't seem to have the literacy skills required to get a GCSE at any level.

At A-level the picture was much the same, with more than 50% of those with qualifications only having the literacy skills for a D-G at GCSE. In fact, one in 10 of these adults had such poor literacy skills that they wouldn't be likely to have gained any qualifications. But they have.

It gets worse. According to the research, almost one in three of those who had a degree had the literacy skills to get only a D-G GCSE.

Husbands with poor maths skills cost wives thousands

Husbands take the family decisions over investments in 62 per cent of households and even when men have weak numeracy skills, they are still as likely as their wives to be in control of investments.

But findings from American research, published in the journal of the Royal Economic Society, suggested that handing power over financial matters to the wrong partner can cost a couple more than £50,000.

Literacy study: 1 in 7 U.S. adults are unable to read this story

By **Greg Toppo**, USA TODAY

A long-awaited federal study finds that an estimated 32 million adults in the USA — about one in seven — are saddled with such low literacy skills that it would be tough for them to read anything more challenging than a children's picture book or to understand a medication's side effects listed on a pill bottle.

US alarm over poor literacy

27 January 2006

Jon Marcus, Boston

Fewer and fewer American university graduates, raised on watching TV and surfing the web, know how to read and understand a book, according to a new national study of 19,000 people.

The study, by the Government's National Centre for Education Statistics, found that only 31 per cent of graduates could read a complex book and extrapolate

from it. A decade ago, the proportion was 40 per cent.

Some 3 per cent of adults, or about 7 million people, were nonliterate, meaning that interviewers could not communicate with them in English. Even among graduate students, only 41 per cent could read and understand information in short texts, including product labels, compared with 51 per cent ten years ago.

'Dismal picture' of adult literacy in UK

Despite Labour's £5bn programme, numbers are unacceptably high, says watchdog

The number of adults unable to read or count remains unacceptably high in England despite £5bn spent by Labour trying to improve the situation, according to an influential parliamentary spending watchdog.

Almost 24 million adults with poor numeracy skills, say MPs

MPs have condemned the "dismal" standard of the three-Rs among adults - warning it was putting the British economy under threat.

By Graeme Paton, Education Editor
Published: 12:01AM GMT 29 Jan 2009

A cross-party group said as many as 17.8 million over-18s had poor literacy and 23.8m had numeracy skills below the level needed to get a good GCSE.

UK's 'serious' adult literacy problems

Wednesday, 14 June, 2000, 16:25 GMT 17:25 UKBBC.co.uk

Many people in the UK never read books

A large proportion of adults in the UK have "serious literacy problems", a report says.

The UK has been placed in the bottom half of a 20-nation survey of adult reading and literacy standards.

But researchers found it topped the list when it came to the amount of time people spend watching television.

Illiteracy and innumeracy are the UK's dirty little secrets

The election campaign (2010) is dodging the issue of low basic skills. Prisons provide the most acute examples of this waste

In this election campaign, I haven't heard one word about how it is we intend to achieve a reduction in unemployment when 20% of the adult population is functionally illiterate and a third cannot add up two three-figure numbers.

One in six adults has lower literacy than that

expected of 11-year-old

Nicola Woolcock, Education Correspondent

One in six adults has lower literacy than the level expected of an 11-year-old, new research shows today.

Bright GCSE pupils 'have abandoned grammar'

By SARAH HARRIS

Last updated at 21:59 08 September 2006

Basic punctuation and accurate spelling have been abandoned by even the brightest GCSE English students, a series of damning reports has revealed.

They claim that 'punctuation seems to be disappearing altogether' and full stops followed by capital letters are 'no longer a convention observed by most of this age group'.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-404271/Bright-GCSE-pupils-abandoned-grammar.html>

Shocking GCSE English standards as pupils fail to use a single comma

by SARAH HARRIS

2006'

Punctuation standards at schools are so poor that pupils taking GCSE English are completing entire exams without using a single comma.

Even high-achieving pupils still do not understand basics such as the difference between 'there' and 'they're', the country's largest exam board has revealed

They can't write, spell or present an argument.

University students can't write decent English. Worse, their attempts to do so show that many can't follow a logical train of thought or present a reasoned argument. In fact, growing numbers are not ready for the demands of higher education. (Independent, 25 May 2006)

Patsy Savage, a senior lecturer in English at UEL, said: "The numbers needing help are definitely increasing. We have a few hundred at the start of term.

"Their needs vary from having difficulty with the very basics, such as 'what does a noun do?', to students whose English is fine but they have never constructed a report or written an academic essay."

"The comments we have received from vice-chancellors raise serious questions about the desirability of continuing to expand higher education," he said. "It makes no sense to move to a 50 per cent participation rate when universities are already having to tackle problems of this kind."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/3342827/Half-of-all-universities-have-to-teach-remedial-maths-and-English.html>

Most degrees 'only good for coffee shops'

Most university degrees condemn graduates to menial jobs serving coffee in Starbucks, one of the City's top professional bodies warned today. Teenagers would be better off taking a gap year after school and going straight into work, according to the Chartered Institute for Securities & Investment. The comments echo calls from graduate employers for the Government to scrap its target for half of all young people to go to university this year. The Evening Standard 10 March 2010

Tutors in despair at illiterate freshers

10 February 2006

Jessica Shepherd

Undergraduates are entering university less numerate, literate and knowledgeable than ever before, according to the most comprehensive study undertaken of how university admissions staff view the latest intakes of students.

Admissions tutors bemoaned new students' lack of independent thought, "fear of numbers" and expectations to be "told the answers" in a survey of staff from 16 Oxbridge, Russell Group and post-1992 institutions. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=201232>

Undergraduates let down by week spelling and, punctuation

Anushka Asthana, education correspondent

Grammatically challenged undergraduates from Imperial College London are about to be publicly shamed. Their tutor, Dr Bernard Lamb, was so unimpressed by their poor spelling, punctuation and choice of words that he started to keep a diary of every mistake.

There were so many blunders that in just over a term Lamb - unfortunately for his students, a member of the Queen's English Society - covered 24 sides of A4. In one case, a UK-born, UK-educated student who has just been awarded a first-class degree wrote: 'It initats a undisired non-specific response in mamammals.' In another, a student wrote: 'insemination of these cows at the age of 3 with their fathers seamen.'

"Too many illiterate students at university"

Professor Graham Zellick, vice-chancellor of the [University of London](http://www.universityoflondon.ac.uk), has attacked the spiralling number of students being encouraged to study at university, claiming many are "barely literate". He stated that there was "no rational basis" for the Government's policy aimed at getting half of all 18 to 30-year-olds into higher education.

(Daily Mail, 3 October 2001)

Functionally illiterate university students gaining degrees

The *Telegraph* has reported on some universities who have called for a public debate on functionally illiterate students who are being passed so as to keep drop-out rates low. They argue that even though they obtain degrees their lack of ability to write, spell and punctuate leaves them unemployable. One professor said that secondary schools were failing to teach the importance of accurate written communication, sentence construction and good vocabulary.

(*Telegraph*, 30 March 2007)

Illegible scrawl could get doctors struck off

by BEEZY MARSH, femail.co.uk

Doctors' illegible handwriting may be a standing joke but it could soon lead to them being struck off. Prescriptions which are impossible to read will no longer be tolerated and could result in an appearance before the professional conduct committee of the General Medical Council. Mix-ups caused by pharmacists prescribing the wrong drugs or doctors and nurses giving the wrong dose are thought to lie behind some of the medical errors which affect one in ten Health Service patients and claim 34,000 lives in the UK a year.

One of the key problems is that, under an EU directive of 2004, doctors who qualify in any EU country can move to work in any other EU state without even the most limited examination of their skills, aptitude or language.

In contrast, foreign doctors (ie from outside the EU) must pass a skills and English language test - yes, even the Australians and Americans.

EU countries are also not forced to provide information on their doctors' professional histories - for example, whether they have been struck off for committing a criminal offence or killing a patient through negligence.

There are estimated to be around 20,000 EU doctors registered to work in the NHS, a quarter of them from the former Eastern Bloc countries.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1258782/KAROL-SIKORA-Terrifyingly-inept-foreign-doctors-symptom-sickness-NHS--cause.html#ixzz0iXKf8jDb>

Nurses' poor maths skills 'putting lives at risk'

Published Date: 20 October 2008

NURSES' poor maths is putting patients' lives at risk, a Government report has revealed. A new study carried out in Lothian hospitals reveals "widespread confusion" in the nursing sector over how to calculate correct dosage of powerful intravenous drugs.

Tutors observed 40 nurses in voluntary remedial numeracy workshops at Edinburgh's Western General and Royal Infirmary and at St John's Hospital in Livingston. They found they had difficulty converting doses from larger to smaller units, adapting doses using fractions or multiplication, calculating flow rates, and applying patients' weight to adjust dosages.

The tutors' report says nurses are putting patients in danger by miscalculating doses because they lack basic numeracy.

Nearly half British adults would fail GCSE maths

By Richard Garner, Education Editor

Friday, 31 October 2003

The study revealed that 15 million adults - 47 per cent of the adult population - would not even get low-grade D to G passes if they took the exam today.

Nearly half that figure - 6.8 million - did not even have the basic maths skills of the average 11-year-old and would fail their primary school national curriculum tasks

Would you pass your maths GCSE?

By LAURA CLARK, Daily Mail

The devastating scale of poor English and maths skills in the nation's workforce has been laid bare.

Almost half the British working population lacks the numeracy skills expected of a 14-year-old, Education Secretary Alan Johnson admitted.

Fifteen million adults would not scrape the lowest G grade in the subject at GCSE since they are "not properly numerate".

Another five million "cannot read" despite being of working age, he declared

Literacy tests for trainee teachers show that those who can't spell, teach

Alexandra Freen, Education Editor

October 21, 2008

Thousands of trainee teachers are struggling to pass literacy tests that require them to spell words such as anxiety, relieved and mathematical. More than 11,000 trainee teachers, just over a quarter of the annual intake, failed to pass the literacy test last year at their first attempt, an increase of 16 per cent since 2001.

Half of all trainee teachers are failing basic numeracy test

Half of all trainee teachers are failing a basic numeracy test, according to Government figures.

By Urme Khan Published: 3:18AM BST 20 Oct 2008

Up to 56 per cent of trainee teachers now need multiple attempts before they pass,

according to statistics.

The test is designed to drive up standards in the profession and it must be passed before students can qualify as teachers.

However, the trainee teachers are allowed to sit the test as many times as they need and record numbers are failing. One student reportedly made 27 attempts.

The Economist magazine 19/04/2003 'Hard Numbers' shows some alarming statistics for post-sixteen science education. For teacher qualifications in the A-level sector, taking physics as an example, 'The Council for Science and Technology' says that 78% of those teaching do not have a degree in the subject and astonishingly 30% do not have it at A-level.

Passing GCSE maths 'has become much easier'

By Richard Garner, Education Editor

It is now "substantially easier" to obtain a C-grade GCSE pass in maths compared with 20 years ago, academics said. A report by the think-tank Reform published today reveals pupils only need 20 per cent for a C-grade pass in the top-tier paper – compared with 50 per cent in 1990.

Less than half manage basic GCSE English and Math passes

by LAURA CLARK

2006

As many as 350,000 school-leavers are failing to achieve basic standards in GCSE English and maths, official figures revealed yesterday

Whistleblower warning on degrees

By Sean Coughlan
BBC News education reporter

Degrees are being awarded to overseas students who speak almost no English, claims a whistleblowing academic.

The academic, at a world-famous UK university, says postgraduate degrees are awarded to students lacking in the most basic language skills.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7358528.stm>

English children's literacy levels among the worst in the developed world'

By LAURA CLARK

Last updated at 23:34 28 November 2007

Our schools tumbled from third place five years ago to 19th, eaten by the U.S. and many European nations - including Germany, Italy and Bulgaria.

Only Morocco and Romania suffered a sharper decline in standards since the last global reading study in 2001.

Scotland also slipped down the rankings, falling from 14th to 26th.

In an alarming verdict on standards in England, the study report said the performance of ten-year-olds had deteriorated "significantly", particularly among the brightest children.

Half of primary pupils leave with poor literacy skills

Lindsay McIntosh

Disturbing figures showing that more than half the pupils in Scotland leave primary school unable to read or write properly led to calls yesterday for widespread reform to the country's education system.

Ill-educated, unfit troops' on front lines

Unfit soliders with a reading age of 11 are being used as frontline troops because of a shortage of manpower, a report has claimed. Instructors were under pressure to pass as many candidates as possible and "quality was often sacrificed to quantity", Brigadier Mungo Melvin, the author of the report, said. Of the 2003 intake at the Army's Catterick training camp, 70% had a reading age of 11. There were also problems with heavy drinking among some of the recruits.

(Independent, 11 November 2004)

Teenagers with GCSEs lack basic skills

Teenagers with top-grade GCSE passes in maths and English are having to be tested again when they look for a job because so many lack basic skills. A report reveals a growing number of school-leavers with GCSEs lack the skills even to write a business letter or do basic sums.

(Independent, 29 June 2005)

50% of drivers can't read a map

Research shows that almost 50 per cent of Britain's drivers - an astonishing 15 million - are unable to identify simple map symbols and that about 11million admit they "cannot read a basic

road map". <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-473344/Fifty-cent-drivers-read-map.html>

Pass mark for science GCSE is forced down

News | Published in The TES on 24 October, 2008 | By: Warwick Mansell

The TES can disclose that rival board Edexcel awarded C grades in a paper for one of its new science courses to pupils scoring only 20 per cent.

The Times
September 9, 2005

Call for a GCSE shake-up as pass mark sinks to 16%

By Alexandra Blair and Tony Halpin

The revelation that pupils scoring as low as 16 per cent could be awarded C grades in one Edexcel maths GCSE paper and an A* grade with only 47 per cent in an AQA business studies paper was made after an investigation by *The Times Educational Supplement*.

Retired Teacher Reveals He Was Illiterate Until Age

48 *By: Charisse Yu*

John Corcoran graduated from college and taught high school for 17 years without being able to read, write or spell.

<http://www.10news.com/news/15274005/detail.html>

How to measure US literacy levels

"One measure of literacy in the US is the percentage of adults who perform at four achievement levels: Below Basic, Basic, Intermediate, and Proficient. In each type of literacy, 13 percent of adults were at or above Proficient (indicating they possess the skills necessary to perform complex and challenging literacy activities). Twenty-two percent of adults were Below Basic (indicating they possess no more than the most simple and concrete literacy

skills)." www.begintoread.com/research/literacystatistics.html

Illiteracy and poor numeracy facts in Britain

Today, much of the commentary on numeracy skills focuses on the below-par standards achieved by children in schools, but there is little attention given to the alarming consequences of poor maths teaching on adults. In England, one adult in five is innumerate. These adults can't work out their change when they go shopping, or help their children with homework. And they are twice as likely to be unemployed as people who are numerate. This is the shameful legacy of a system that provides free education to all children from the age of five to at least 16.

A fifth of teenagers leave school so illiterate and innumerate they are incapable of dealing with the challenges of everyday life, a study has found.

Some 22% of 16- to 19-year-olds in England are functionally innumerate – meaning their maths skills are limited to little more than basic arithmetic, researchers from SheffieldUniversity discovered. This means their [numeracy](#) levels are at or below an 11-year-old's.

This is a higher rate of innumeracy than many other industrialised countries, the study of [literacy](#) and numeracy rates over the past 60 years found.

Meanwhile, 17% of 16- to 19-year-olds are functionally illiterate – meaning they cannot handle much more than straightforward questions. It is unlikely, or even impossible, that they will understand allusion and irony, the researchers found. Their reading standard is at or below an 11-year-old's.

Applications filled with mistakes

In June 2010 Sir Michael Rake, chairman of BT, said they had received 26,000 applications for 170 apprenticeships - but 6,000 were not worthy of consideration. He said: "They were unable to complete a form because they could not spell, put it together or read properly - completely illiterate. It's a disgrace. The politicians have a huge amount to answer for over the past 50 to 60 years."

TAIPEI, Taiwan --Up to four in 10 foreign English teachers working in cram schools and universities in Taiwan have fake credentials, Chinese-language media indicated yesterday.