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# National Policy UK

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"Education costs money, but then so does ignorance."

— Sir Claus Moser, Warden of Wadham College, Oxford.



Sir Claus Moser,  
A credible champion

## Champion of a cause: Adult literacy and political commitment

**A key factor in moving the UK adult literacy agenda forward was in finding a credible champion who would have the trust of the field as well as the ear of politicians – no easy task.**

The British government found the ideal person in Sir Claus Moser. A young refugee from the holocaust, Moser eventually became the Chief Statistician of England. So he has credentials as an empiricist, a man who understands numbers, and the way that numbers can influence policy. Moser is also an amateur musician of sufficient talent to have given concerts in The Royal Albert Hall. He is an artist and humanist. And, among his long list of community endeavours, education is a passion. He is Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, but also Chair of the Basic Skill Agency. He knows the education world from its foundations to its apex. An administrator in the basic skills field said, "Sir Claus is the only person I know who can talk to an adult learner, then pick up the phone and call Tony Blair, and be put straight through." Reinforcing the image of a Renaissance Man is his Chairmanship of the British Museum Development Trust which had to fundraise almost £100,000,000 to remodel and design a dome over the Great Court of the museum, unveiled in 2000.

Despite his huge involvement with the museum, Sir Claus agreed to chair the commission that investigated the state of adult basic skills in the UK. The commission's 1999 report, *A Fresh Start*, drew national attention and support. It contained [recommendations](#) that underpin the new UK national strategy unveiled in March 2001. Sir Claus continues to follow every development in the evolution of the strategy.

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## An empathetic empiricist, a sensitive statistician

### An interview with Sir Claus Moser

(Sir Claus spoke by telephone with Linda Shohet on February 9, 2001, just weeks before the official launch of the strategy.)



Q.: Why did the government create a commission to investigate adult literacy and numeracy?

A: The OECD publication of IALS initially stirred the government. They were dismayed at the poor showing. Then the Labour government in 1997 was giving a high priority to improving literacy and numeracy in the schools. Addressing adult needs was an extension. The decision was taken at a high level. I was invited by the Secretary of State to chair the commission.



Q: Were you invited because of your role as Chairman of the Basic Skills Agency or your stature in the community?

A: I don't think it was because of my role at the BSA. It was important that the chair be independent. I had often spoken in public about literacy and numeracy. The government was serious enough about the perceived problem to want a high level report. They were looking for someone with background in the empirical world. They also wanted an authoritative powerful committee. The choices were made by the Secretary of State.



Q: How was the Report received?

A: It had a powerful impact on public opinion and on the government, largely due to the facts we reported. You know on the day we released the report in March 1999, the Kosovo war broke out, yet we still made the front pages. We had high profile.



Q: What is your reaction to the Strategy that has been developed?

A: We are talking about a draft [N.B. at the time of the interview, the final strategy had not been released.] It's still open to some revision. But I am very pleased with the Strategy. It's been addressed by the government in a very clear way. Mr. Blair means business. He's given it a high priority. It's headed for action. The resources are immense. There is no shortage of money.



Q: Do you have any concerns about the way your recommendations have been used?

A: Well, it's taken too long. It's been two years since we made the report. The short-term targets are disappointing, a quarter to half a million now and 750,000 by 2004. Such a major problem among the adult population cannot be tolerated. Our passion to eliminate the problem is missing from the consultation document. The most important single sentence in our Report was that by 2010 the problem should be halved. But there are reasons for the reduction. Targets are difficult to meet. Still, they've caught the essence of the report. It is not the short term, but the long term that matters. Overall, I find the strategy extremely satisfying.



Q: Why did you recommend creating a new national unit to implement the strategy rather than asking the Basic Skills Agency?

A: The Report was independent, created by a committee. We recommended new qualifications, new teaching. We took the view that teaching has to happen everywhere, that we need many partners. And we made suggestions on how to get to the goals. I'm elderly. I'd like to see some progress while I'm alive. The Basic Skills Agency is a small agency. So it was partly out of my impatience and partly out of government commitment that we felt we needed a new agency to bring all the pieces together. But the new Unit will need every bit of help from the BSA that they can get.

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## THE MOSER GROUP REPORT

### RECOMMENDATIONS



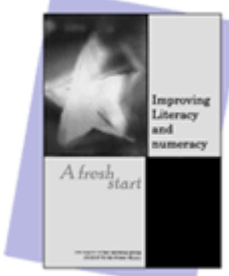
The Moser Group tabled a series of 21 recommendations touching on national strategy, targets, and campaign; entitlement with specific groups singled out; quality; teacher training; use of new technologies (ICT); core curriculum and qualifications; delivery mechanisms; national coordination; funding; and research and development. The recommendations are grouped and summarized below:

- Create a National Strategy and National Targets for adults and young people until the year 2010.

- Create a continuous high-profile national campaign to increase participation
- Create conditions of entitlement for adults with basic skills below Level 2.\* This includes confidential skills assessment on demand, access to high quality information, advice and guidance, and access to a variety of programmes – all free of charge. People who successfully complete basic skills courses should be a priority target for the first million Individual Learning Accounts learners.
- Expand and Improve Opportunities for
  - The Unemployed
  - Workplace Programmes
  - Trade Unions
  - The University for Industry
  - Community Based Programmes
  - Basic Skills Support in Colleges
  - Family-Based Programmes
- Create a national quality framework of standards for basic skills programmes and common inspection standards across agencies.
- Create new qualifications for all teachers of basic skills, develop diploma courses in university education departments and mount in-service courses to familiarize teachers with the new curriculum.
- Support the use of information and communications technology in basic skills programmes.
- Create a new Core Curriculum and Qualifications at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2. Develop new National Literacy and Numeracy Tests. Only programmes using these standards should qualify for funding.
- Implement the strategy through local Lifelong Learning Partnerships, including representatives of those concerned with adult basic skills. Each Partnership should be required to submit an Action Plan for the approval of the Secretary of State.
- Establish a new National Adult Basic Skills Strategy Group, with Ministerial Chairmanship, to oversee the implementation of the National Strategy.
- Revise the role and responsibility of the Basic Skills Agency to advise, promote, coordinate and monitor progress against targets.
- Produce more definitive estimates of all costs, and have all major funding bodies provide incentives for providers to increase the scale of adult basic skills provision. Funds should be made available for outreach and assessment.
- Maintain a research programme to systematically monitor all action plans in

collaboration with the Basic Skills Agency.

\* Note: Level 2 is not an IALS measurement, but a UK literacy level.



The full report of *A Fresh Start*, can be accessed on the DfEE website at [www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/links/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/links/)  
Click on **Key documents** icon.

The background and composition of the Moser group can be found at [www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/mosergroup/index.htm](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/mosergroup/index.htm)

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## A coherent national literacy policy: THE BRITISH STRATEGY

The British have taken a positive, aggressive stance in developing their new National Strategy on Adult Literacy and Numeracy. Over the past three years, they have systematically worked toward building consensus in the field and creating a climate of public support for the Strategy unveiled in early spring 2001.

The Labour government soon after winning its first mandate made a strong commitment to improving literacy in the schools. Some of their policies, such as institution of a mandatory daily Literacy Hour in every school, raised the ire of teachers and the suspicion of researchers, but won considerable public support. Looking at needs in the adult population seemed a logical next step, particularly since the International Adult Literacy Survey had shown an alarming number of people at Level 1. Key to success in building support was having the Prime Minister affirm his concern and pledge to investigate the extent of need and to act on the findings. He asked the Secretary of State to form a committee. This became The Moser Group, named for Sir Claus Moser, the well-known and highly respected statistician and supporter of the arts and education, who agreed to chair the committee [see [Moser interview](#)].



The recommendations of the Moser Group were coherent and called for investment of human resources and funding over the long term. [See [Moser recommendations](#)]. The

National Strategy, entitled Skills for Life, launched in 2001 and funded to more than a £billion sterling over the next seven years, incorporates many of the recommendations.

### Strengths of the Skills for Life policy

- It takes the issue beyond reading and writing to include numeracy and ICT
- It embeds basic skills in the larger context of lifelong learning.
- It is far-reaching, linking basic skills to a policy of social inclusion.
- It builds on the expertise developed over more than three decades of UK adult literacy initiatives.
- It is coherent, connecting all the pieces — provision, partnerships, outreach, awareness, teacher training, curriculum, quality control, qualifications, evaluation and research.
- Specific target populations have been identified.
- “Pathfinder projects” have been designed to monitor and adjust initiatives.
- It attaches dollar values to every initiative.



### Challenges for the Skills for Life policy

- Targets are difficult to achieve.
- Many of the achievements of ABE learning are intangible and do not lend themselves to formal testing.
- It is difficult to attract and train large numbers of teachers quickly enough to meet the time lines.
- There is some dissonance between the rhetoric of “skills for life” and the testing and use of a national curriculum. These can leave too little space for a student’s personal motivation and goals or a teacher’s philosophy, both of which have been shown to be critical in practice.
- There is a tendency to overemphasize the failure of past British initiatives rather than the many models of practice that have inspired practitioners worldwide.
- With the commitment comes a fear among politicians about how quickly and how

well targets can be achieved. There are also some who still believe there is an easier answer, a “quick-fix” model somewhere else. There is a danger that some initiatives could be cut short because early results are disappointing.

Overall –Kudos to the British!

The British deserve accolades for creating the most far-reaching coherent adult literacy/basic skills policy ever undertaken. The eyes of the world are watching to see if the human and social need can be addressed within the bounds of political will and ample resources. Despite the concerns, no other world government has come close to creating the vision or the implementation plan of their National Strategy.

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## ASSEMBLING THE FRAGMENTS: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON ADULT BASIC SKILLS

Greg Brooks, Kerry Giles, John Harman, Sally Kendall, Felicity Rees, Sara Whittaker  
**National Foundation for Educational Research**

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### **Background**

In the autumn of 1999, following the publication of *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy* (the Moser Report), the Department for Education and Employment commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to carry out a review of research on adult basic skills.

The review was to cover literacy, numeracy, oracy (speaking and listening skills), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to teach basic skills to adults. The age range to be covered was from 18 upwards, and it was envisaged that most evidence would come from Britain and then from other parts of the English-speaking world.

There was most information on literacy, then numeracy, ESOL, and ICT, with least on oracy. Oracy skills for mono-lingual English speakers and numeracy skills for speakers of other languages seem to be almost entirely overlooked.

The history of adult basic education in the UK since the 1970s has been one of swift growth and subtly changing philosophies.

## Key Findings

- There is an absence of intervention studies exploring what factors in teaching basic skills cause progress in learning basic skills.
- Very little is known about adults with special educational needs in basic skills provision.
- The major motive for attending basic skills provision is a desire for self-development. Whereas the main reason for parents attending family learning is to help their children.
- Adults involved in family learning have higher attendance, retention and completion rates than adults in general provision and their progression to further study and/or employment is high.
- Little is known about what basic skills teaching is like on the ground.

Copies of the full report (RR220) are available from DfEE Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ. Check for prices. Copies of the Research Brief (RB220) are available free of charge from the above address. Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at <http://www.dfee.gov.uk/research/>

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