Inverclyde council

Report To:	**Education & Lifelong Learning Committee**	**Date**: **19 January 2010**
Report By:	**Acting Director of Education**	**Report No: EDUC/15/10/JC**
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Subject:	**Literacy Commission Report**	

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the Inverclyde Council Education & Lifelong Learning Committee of the publication of 'A Vision for Scotland' the Report and Final Recommendations of the Literacy Commission.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 The report was published by Scottish Parent Teacher Council on 4 December 2009.

2.2 The report acknowledges that literacy is not confined to reading and writing and poor literacy affects all ages of our population.

2.3 The focus of the report is on improving literacy levels in those children who have the capacity to learn but are currently failing to do so.

2.4 The report identifies causes and impact of poor literacy and goes on to discuss successful intervention action through analysis of various projects.

2.5 Finally the report sets out eleven recommendations that the commission believe, if adopted, can address the problem of poor basic literacy leading to a fully literate nation.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the attached paper.

3.2 The recommendations in the report are used to update our literacy strategy and then reported back to a future committee.

Albert Henderson
Acting Director of Education

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 The Literacy Commission was set up in response to concerns about the persistent low levels of literacy among a significant minority of Scottish school leavers. For the past 18 months the Commission, whose membership was drawn from a cross section of Scottish society, has reviewed evidence from variety of sources about the problem of poor literacy in Scotland.

4.2 The report attempts to quantify the scope of the problem without the benefit of national statistics and acknowledges considerable local variation.

4.3 It highlights the major impact of socio-economic disadvantage on the development of literacy skills and identifies the need to begin addressing socio-economic disadvantage from an early age involving parents to build up the preconditions for later learning

4.4 A particularly vulnerable group are children looked after by local authorities both in children's homes and in their own homes.

4.5 There is a need to move children beyond a basic level of literacy to allow them to engage with higher order skills necessary for life in 21st century.

4.6 The report highlights four features of successful literacy schemes as
- National leadership
- Starting early with formal literacy
- Teaching approaches – careful monitoring and continuous professional development
- Intervention strategies

4.7 The eleven recommendations of the Literacy Commission are grouped under headings
- Four dealing with **Commitment** to zero tolerance of illiteracy
- **Pre-requisites for Learning** broken down into six subdivisions
- Two detailing the **Acquiring of Basic Skills** sub divided into seven statements
- Four recommendations on how to move **Beyond Basic Skills**

5.0 PROPOSALS

5.1 The information contained in this document will be used to audit current practice and inform Inverclyde's future literacy strategy.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Finance

N/A

6.2 Legal

N/A

6.3 Human Resources

N/A

6.4 Equalities

N/A

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Appended 'A Vision for Scotland' The Report and Final Recommendations of the Literacy Commission   December 2009

A Vision for Scotland

The Report and Final Recommendations of the Literacy Commission

December 2009

Preface

It was a privilege to be asked to Chair the Literacy Commission and, along with my colleagues, to produce a report and series of recommendations that we believe can help to address the low levels of avoidable illiteracy that still exist in Scotland today.

From the outset, the Commission has operated on an independent and impartial basis using its own, limited resources. The findings that we have produced are not intended to support the aims and objectives of any individual political party or organisation and, it is with this in mind, that we offer our report to Scottish society as a whole.

Literacy is a massive topic that covers not just the traditional skills of reading and writing but other literacy skill sets, such as emotional and financial literacy. Poor literacy affects not just school children; it also affects adults and those with learning difficulties. The Commission considered these different aspects and decided from the outset to focus its work on those children who have the capacity to learn and develop their literacy skills but who are currently failing to do so.

For the past 18 months, the Commission has reviewed evidence from a variety of individuals and organisations with first hand experience of dealing with the problem of poor literacy, and considered very closely the factors that can contribute to this. Our report sets out eleven clear recommendations that we believe can address the problem of poor basic literacy and, if adopted by Scottish society, will place us in the enviable position of being the developed world's first fully literate nation.

The membership of the Commission was drawn from a cross-section of Scottish society and includes respected figures from the worlds of academe, business, politics, culture and education. (For more information on members of the Commission, please see the end of the Report.) It is sufficient here to say that the insights, experiences and thought-provoking debate that this mix of people produced greatly enhanced the Commission's work and I am very grateful for the time and effort each of my Commission colleagues has devoted to this project.

Judith Gillespie
Convener

Introduction: The Vision – Zero Tolerance of Illiteracy

The introduction sets out the vision for the report - zero-tolerance of illiteracy - and sets out the problems currently facing Scotland.

This report sets out a vision which would give Scotland a position of world leadership: zero tolerance of illiteracy. For years in Scotland, as in other nations across the world, we have tolerated the intolerable. We have accepted a situation in which thousands of our young people leave school every year with correctable problems that leave them functionally illiterate – that is, without the basic literacy skills to function in a modern society.

The Commission was set up in response to concerns about the persistence of very low levels of literacy among a significant minority of Scottish school leavers. From the outset the Commission acknowledged that there is a very small number of children for whom basic literacy is an unachievable objective because of physiological factors or severe learning difficulties. The focus of this report is not on these problems, important as they are, but on the issue of low achievement among those youngsters at school for whom there is no apparent barrier to acquiring adequate literacy skills.

The consequence of this failure is shown in the number of adults in Scotland without such skills. The available evidence suggests the total may be approaching a million. Not only does this represent a vast economic cost to our society, it also constitutes an unacceptable social cost in terms of quality of life and well-being, the more so as the steps that are required to ensure that every young person becomes literate prior to leaving school are already established in research and practice. But, the vision cannot be fulfilled nationally unless there is total commitment to a zero tolerance policy and the actions necessary to achieve this.

However, this is only the starting point because, although acquisition of the basic skills of literacy is absolutely essential, it is not a sufficient definition of a fully literate nation.

The Scope of the Problem

This section highlights the problems currently faced in the UK through the use of statistical evidence and compares this with evidence from abroad.

UK Data
There is no national/official measure of how many children are going through the school system without acquiring basic literacy skills but, using what information is available, a good estimate would be that in Scotland 18.5% leave primary school without being functionally literate – some 13,000 youngsters a year at current population levels. However, there is considerable local variation with a range of between 10% and 26% correlating to different levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

Primary and early secondary national test scores are another source of evidence and, whilst these are not immune to question, when aggregated to local authority level, some significance can be attached to them. In relation to both reading and writing, the proportion of children failing to achieve the expected standards, as defined in the 5 – 14 programme, varies enormously. For example, by the age of 14, the percentage of children not achieving level E in reading in 2008 exceeded 20% in two authorities, ranged between 10% and 19% in six others, and was reported as 0% in 14 authorities, although it is not clear what this "0%" means. Figures relating to writing were less satisfactory. Only in 3 areas were all children said to have achieved the expected standard while, in 2 areas, half the children did not and, in a further 6, at least 30% fell below the expected level.

Levels of success in national tests broadly follow socio-economic factors with poorer areas faring badly, although a small number of partial exceptions is evident. However, many youngsters do not overcome their lack of literacy skill in secondary school and, taking the more objective SQA performance of general educational success as an indicator of literacy standards, then exceptions disappear and achievement follows social circumstances to an alarming degree.

There are no official national statistics on literacy levels for secondary school leavers, and those that exist are hard to interpret, but an indication of the scale and impact of the problem across the United Kingdom can be found in statistics on adult literacy presented by the National Literacy Trust[1]. In England, the 2003 "Skills for Life" survey found that 5.2 million adults (or 16% of the 16-65 population) had literacy levels at or below 'Entry Level 3', the standard expected of an 11 year old child. The figure for Wales was higher at 25%. No comparable figures are given for Scotland; however a 2001 report by the Scottish Executive indicated that 23% of the adult population may have low literacy and numeracy skills.

International Comparisons
The Commission was interested to know how reading standards in Scotland compare with other countries but found this surprisingly difficult to establish. There is no answer that can be regarded as truly authoritative.

There are currently two major international surveys that cover standards in literacy - Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Both have the merit of being repeated at regular intervals but the findings are open to question, with the tests more attuned to the cultures of some countries than others.   However, these international comparisons do give valuable information and at least an indication of standards of performance.

Whilst Scotland did well in both the 2000 and 2003 PISA studies, Scottish performance in the 2006 study was less encouraging and was not much above the average (499 points against an average of 492). Five countries (Canada, Finland, Ireland, Korea and New Zealand) did better and a further 14 (including England) performed at much the same level.

The PIRLS study showed a similar decline; in 2006 Scotland was ranked 26th out of 45, compared with 14th in the previous study. The international evidence, despite problems of interpretation arising from the definition of literacy and the attainment measures used, does not support the idea that Scotland is a world leader. Furthermore, there is a worrying suggestion in both PISA and PIRLS that other countries may be progressing faster than Scotland.

The Impact of Poor Literacy

This section sets out the impact of poor literacy on individuals and society, drawing upon the findings of a CBI report into the impact of low reading/writing skills.

Poor literacy levels matter because they have an impact both on individuals and on society.   A very powerful report by the National Literacy Trust (September 2008), which pulls together existing research about the relationship between literacy and five areas of life: economic status, aspirations, family life, health and civic/cultural engagement, highlights not just the impact of socio-economic factors on low literacy levels but also how those low literacy levels, in turn, affect life chances and further exclude people from participating in society[2].

The scope and seriousness of these problems is indicated further by figures from the Office of National Statistics which show that in the 50-65 age group, 31% of males and 40% of females have a literacy standard normally achieved by the end of early primary years. Moreover, a Scottish Executive report in 2001 found that some 800,000 adults, of whom 500,000 were in work, had significant literacy problems, whilst a subsequent report in 2008[3] revealed that 39% of men and 36% of women of working age had literacy abilities at a level that was likely to impact on their employment and life chances.

The view from employers is shown in a CBI survey on the impact of illiteracy/poor reading/writing skills in the work place[4].   This gave evidence (see below) that the major concern about literacy, shared by 72% of respondents, was the quality of written English – constructing properly spelt sentences with accurate grammar.   Moreover, this concern applied to graduates as well as to school leavers.

Leading areas of concern.

Area of concern	% of respondents
Constructing properly spelt, grammatically correct writing	72
More complex literacy tasks	46
Understanding oral communication and articulating a clear response	39
Reading and understanding basic texts	32

It is clear that many of the concerns identified relate to higher levels of skill than basic decoding. This accords with the Commission's opinion that literacy is a continuum with significant points relating to key skill levels at different stages along it. This view does not minimise the importance of ensuring that all children attain basic literacy skills as timeously as possible, but it does mean that they should not be left at this level.   It is a purpose of education to move youngsters as far along the continuum as possible.

Defining Basic Literacy

This section defines a level of 'basic literacy' for the purposes of the report, bearing in mind that there is no official definition of literacy and recognising that the simple process of decoding is insufficient by itself.

The Commission spent some time discussing what constituted a basic level of literacy and what this enabled someone to do.   Although the Scottish Government is keen to emphasise that literacy is central to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and that every teacher is to become a teacher of literacy, there is no official definition. In 2008, in answer to a Parliamentary Question, the Minister for Schools and Skills confirmed that "The Scottish Government does not have a definition of functional literacy".

In fact, literacy is a very complex concept, involving, at a more advanced level, a range of higher order skills such as critical thinking, creative writing, appraising style or detecting bias, and this complex view - that literacy is a continuum, covering advanced skills as well as basic - is the one laid out in the CfE *Experiences and Outcomes.* At its most basic level, literacy crucially involves competence in reading/decoding (defined as the process of deriving meaning from systematised graphic shapes) and in writing.   The realisation that text conveys meaning is itself an important skill and one that only has to be learnt once.   However, basic skills of decoding and writing are, on their own, not sufficient to enable someone to function in adult society and the Commission felt that it was this ability (to function in an adult society) that should be used to define "basic literacy".   In West Dunbartonshire, the age standard identified as delivering this was 9 years 6 months which is illustrated in the reading example below.

Text of Level 4 reading passage
Jan buckled on her diving belt of metal weights and dropped from the launch. Skipper Kells supervised her air-hose to prevent tangling. Leo, following the bubbles, guided the dinghy above the diver as she searched the mysterious underwater world.

Jan surfaced frequently, clutching crayfish.   The required number of specimens was almost obtained when the grey nurse shark advanced directly towards her. Jan retreated cautiously without signalling for assistance. The creature brushed by, ignoring her, as baby sharks emerged from some rocky grooves. Their welfare was more important to the shark than the diver's now motionless figure. [5]

Anyone mastering this stage should be able to read the passage aloud, following its meaning with few errors in accuracy. It equates to a midpoint between levels C and D in the 5-14 programme and the beginning of stage 2 in Curriculum for Excellence. It provides an adequate level of literacy to start engaging with the secondary school curriculum, complete a basic form, read a tabloid newspaper and function at a basic level in society; it is an important staging post on the literacy continuum. However, it would not allow a youngster to complete the secondary curriculum or function at a higher level in society and should not be regarded as the end point. (For comparable examples of writing, see footnote [6].)

Social and Economic Disadvantage

These paragraphs define socio-economic disadvantage as the most important cause of correctable poor literacy and describes the negative effects that this has on the life chances and achievement of children.

In order to find an appropriate solution to the problem of poor literacy levels, it is necessary to look at causes. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that, whilst other factors have a modest impact, the most important cause of correctable poor literacy is socio-economic disadvantage. Figures given earlier in the report show that, whether the measure used is National Test scores or the more objective SQA results, children in less affluent areas tend to be less successful. While individuals may defy this trend, no school in a deprived neighbourhood is able to record a similar level of success to that achieved by almost all schools in the most affluent areas. It is evident that socio-economic circumstances continue to outweigh other factors such as quality of teaching, a point made forcibly by the OECD 2007 report *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland -* "Not all schools work equally well in Scotland. But the gaps between them are far less important than differences between students. In Scotland, **who you are** is far more important than **what school you attend**".

Material disadvantage can have a simple and direct effect on educational opportunity. Housing is more likely to be crowded with no quiet place for study. Families are often unable to afford the trips and other experiences that enrich the developing mind. Lack of money can be an important factor in deciding whether a child has to leave school at 16 or is able to continue further. However, less obvious effects of socio-economic circumstances are even more influential and, as is now widely recognised, cumulative. The same groups suffer from poorer health, less adequate housing, exposure to crime and violence and lower chances of educational success. These disadvantages are not merely correlated, they are causally related. The Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, Dr. Harry Burns, has recently presented research which offers persuasive arguments that a child's whole circumstances affect life-chances in a way that is generally decisive.

Medical evidence suggests that disadvantage has a physiological impact on the human body that not only makes children more liable to disease and early death but also inhibits their brain development and makes them less able to

learn. It is widely recognised that children who experience chaotic family circumstances or who do not receive the appropriate responses to cries of discomfort or smiles of happiness experience problems in their development. If these are not redressed early, they may have lasting consequences because the first few years of a child's life are when many key stages in brain development happen. Such children are not only likely to make a poor start in education but also rapidly fall further behind. Moreover, the disadvantage is generally long-lasting, impairing their capacity to make progress at later stages.

Disadvantage in this extreme form is illustrated by evidence from Glasgow. In one P6/7 class, 21 out of 24 children had faced severe problems in their lives including drug/alcohol abuse by a parent, family death and violence. More generally, some children arrive at nursery at the age of three or even four with barely any language and poorly developed social and motor skills. It is self-evident that such children lack the prior experiences that would equip them to learn.

A particularly vulnerable group are children looked after by local authorities, both in children's homes and in their own homes. The overall number has doubled in most local authorities over the past four years, largely because of social problems such as parental drug/alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Often, the focus on education takes second place to their more immediate social and behavioural needs. Many, through no fault of their own, have become disengaged from mainstream schooling, suffer from complex needs and are well known to a variety of different support services, such as social work.

However, the effects of disadvantage are more widespread than even these examples might suggest. The statistical evidence cited earlier indicates clearly that, even if children have supportive and loving families, socio-economic disadvantage will severely reduce their likelihood of success.

The reasons for this have received less attention than they merit. However, it seems clear that the awareness of living at a low point in a social hierarchy is itself very damaging. It is liable to reduce self-esteem, morale and motivation. Meanwhile, being excluded from the culture and discourse of more privileged groups may reduce competence in activities that are socially and educationally valued. There is again medical evidence that such exclusion increases stress and precipitates a number of potentially damaging physiological responses.

Furthermore, so pervasive is the effect of disadvantage that it tends to subsume other factors. In recent years girls have out-performed boys in most aspects of school work (although not in later success in life). Theories have been developed indicating that sedentary literacy-based activities better suit girls' preferred styles of learning. Although there is truth in such views, it is even more significant that changes in society have left traditional male manual employment highly marginalised. The result is a merging of gender-related factors with the more powerful issue of disadvantage. Such a view is supported by a variety of evidence, including from the Clackmannanshire project (see Page 13 *et seq*), that gender differences can be substantially

reduced or even eliminated by well-conceived and systematic policies combined with sound teaching.

Experiences of the Past

This section points out that there has been no 'golden age' of literacy and to exemplify this draws on the school experiences of adults presently engaged in adult literacy schemes.

There is no evidence to suggest that there has ever been some literacy "golden age" and figures from the Office of National Statistics reveal higher levels of poor literacy among the 50-65 age group than the 16-24 age group. The Commission itself considered evidence from adults who were participating in adult literacy and numeracy schemes. Personal reflections by this group identified the following as impediments to learning:-

- Missing school – often because of problems at home – resulted in learning gaps that were hard to make up. Youngsters then lost confidence in their ability to learn.
- Learning difficulties that were not identified early enough
- A lack of appropriate and sustained help as and when it was needed
- Their own behaviour e.g. being easily distracted and/or truanting
- Parents who did not push them to learn/stay on task
- A learning-support curriculum that did not match the classroom curriculum
- Confidence undermined by being removed from the class (and separated from friends) for learning-support.

It is noteworthy that this group identified personal failure – either their own or others in terms of the lack of support they received – as the cause of their problem and appeared to be largely unaware of systemic problems arising from their social and economic circumstances.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

This section does not claim EAL to be a factor in poor literacy but identifies findings from a report on EAL teaching that identified the issues associated with helping children with poorly-developed English language skills and the importance of wider community support.

The Commission took time to consider English as an Additional Language (EAL). It is not itself a factor in poor literacy - indeed a number of Glasgow schools with a high percentage of asylum seeker or recently arrived children for whom English is not their first language are out-performing other local schools. However, a report on EAL teaching provided some very instructive insight into both the problems of helping youngsters with poorly-developed English language skills and the importance of community support.

It is clear that the concept of decoding is a bit like riding a bike - once a youngster has learnt that reading a written script is possible, this *awareness*

can be transferred from language to language even when the "graphic shapes" used are quite different e.g. from Chinese to English.

It is necessary for someone to have language to think in before they can read. In the EAL setting this means that it is more important for parents to develop a child's use of their own language than teach him/her English, if the parents' own English language is limited. Moreover, there is a need to overcome potential difficulties arising from a mismatch between the cultures of the learners (whether EAL or those from socio-economically disadvantaged areas) and the education they receive.

The Role of Testing

This section identifies the Commission's view on testing as having two purposes; to certify student progress and to identify struggling schoolchildren.

The Commission considered the current focus on testing for literacy and a proposal within *Curriculum for Excellence* that all youngsters should acquire a formal qualification, establishing their literacy level, in their third year of secondary school. For its part, the Commission recognised the value and use of testing and saw it as having two particular purposes – certification and diagnosis. Testing highlights the importance of the area to be tested – in this case, literacy. It gives evidence of standards to employers and those in more advanced levels of education. It provides baseline data which are useful for establishing what is happening in Scotland and for showing how achievement has changed over time. It is also important as a means of holding those responsible for education to account for what they deliver.

However, the Commission sees that a central purpose of testing is to provide diagnostic information about students who are struggling, and for working out what steps should be taken to help them progress. The methodology and timing of such tests are crucial for identifying the scale of literacy difficulties. Such tests do not have to be applied to all youngsters but can be used in an increasingly focused way to help those who have been identified as having problems.

Improving Literacy – the Evidence

i) Addressing the Consequences of Social and Economic Disadvantage

At this point, the report identifies the need to begin addressing socio-economic disadvantage from an early-age and also draws on evidence from local government in Italy.

The medical evidence on the impact of very early experience on brain development and the consequences of disadvantage would indicate that redress has to begin from birth or, indeed, before. The quality of antenatal care and the behaviour of women during pregnancy have far-reaching consequences for children but do not fall within the Commission's remit, which was concerned with the years after birth. However, this should in no way

detract from the considerable importance of providing quality services in the earliest years.

In terms of the very young, the best developed services are to be found in northern Italy, particularly in those *commune*[7] that have been influenced by the pioneering work in Reggio Emilia over a period of more than forty years. In San Miniato, for example, over 40% of very young children between birth and the age of three receive one of a variety of education and care services, such as attending a *nido* or nursery for the very young, run by the *commune*. A common feature of these services is direct support to parents (including many fathers) to help them feel more confident and competent in supporting their children. San Miniato's services, all paid for through local taxes with means-tested contributions from parents, express the notion of support by the whole community for families in the task of raising children.

Thus, building family capacity has to be a central feature of any systematic attempt to redress the cultural disadvantage that some young children otherwise encounter from the outset of formal education. Children coming from homes where conversation centres on ideas and where adults demonstrate by their habits that literacy is valued, arrive at school equipped to benefit from what teachers have to offer. It is as if they already have the outline of a mental jigsaw in place. When the teacher offers a new piece, they can see where it fits; it becomes meaningful and memorable. Unless steps are taken to counteract cultural disadvantage, many other children, particularly those who are looked after by local authorities, will never build their mental jigsaws. New learning will have nowhere to fit in and will be quickly forgotten.

In the UK, increasing understanding of the importance of the early years (together with a desire to give mothers easier access to the labour market) has led to a huge expansion in services for pre-school children. In the late 1990s public money was invested on a massive scale in a variety of public and private nursery provision.

However, these new services were devoted almost entirely to the 3-5 age-group and provision for younger children was very modest. But, by the age of three the most prolific stage of brain development has been completed and a child's environment in terms of the ethos of the family and local community will already have had a significant and lasting effect.

This is not an argument to do nothing because a child's fate is determined by the age of three. Services for the young that directly enrich the experience of children, whilst not a substitute for what the parents can offer, can go a considerable way towards alleviating disadvantage. So, mindful of the evidence on poverty, including much from Glasgow, and of the importance of building support within the child's home and community, the Commission was very interested to learn of the success of nurture groups, an early years' programme that takes youngsters from the most problematic backgrounds and places them in small groups with a specially trained teacher and support staff. The emphasis is on providing care for the children, and on developing their social and emotional skills. The groups work closely with the parents to help them understand how they in turn might better support their children's

development. A recent research evaluation of the nurture groups[8] found not only that they were successful in their original purpose, but that they have also raised the attainment levels of the children involved.

In the very early years, formal education is of no relevance. The important action is to build the preconditions for later learning. Good services for the youngest age group bring together health, care and education in a seamless way. Effective support for potentially disadvantaged children requires a continuity that is currently not offered and a focus on the whole family and the whole process of development. In this way a basis is laid for success in later learning including acquisition of the fundamental learning skill of literacy.

In terms of looked-after children, there are examples of successful practice across the country. For example, in West Lothian, a multi-agency approach has helped to raise achievement by focusing on the educational, social and health needs of the children. For older children, Glasgow's Enhanced Vocational Inclusion Programme (EVIP) has provided looked-after children with an alternative to mainstream schooling. The programme is designed to allow the children and young people the chance to study a vocational qualification while at the same time developing core life skills.

ii) Successful Action - Evidence from School Projects

This section highlights four features of successful literacy schemes adopted after 1997 and also describes further evidence from adult learners.

Within the school context, there is a lot of evidence on how to overcome literacy problems through focused teaching. From its inception, the Commission has attracted a lot of information from individuals and groups/organisations who have developed successful schemes for teaching literacy. Indeed, in 1997 Scotland itself was as close to a complete commitment to literacy-for-all as it has ever been. The *Early Years' Initiative* was a national policy that both required and allowed the 32 authorities to develop their own schemes. However, although the scheme was generously funded by central government, only some of the projects were really successful, demonstrating that whilst having the necessary resources for any programme is important, resources alone are not a sufficient guarantee of success. In order to understand how to overcome the problem of poor literacy, it is helpful to look more closely at the key features in those programmes that peer-reviewed research has shown did succeed.

1) National Leadership
Successive Governments have made literacy a priority and provided funding but there has been a lack of consistency and constancy. To be successful, a zero-tolerance literacy policy has to be adopted for the long term. However, whilst leadership from the top is important, this has to be balanced by the essential ingredients of local ownership, differentiation and commitment. There needs to be commitment at every level from First Minister, through Council leaders, educational directorate, head teachers and all parties including teachers, volunteers, parents and pupils. The West Dunbartonshire project, which has lasted 12 years to date, was supported by such commitment so that it survived several changes of Director of Education,

three changes of the education officer responsible for the project, three changes of project leader, 90% change of staff in the specialist early intervention team and several changes of Council Leader, accompanied at times by changes in the political balance of power in the Council.

2) Starting Early with Formal Literacy

In order to address the problems that youngsters bring to school, whether in terms of social disadvantage or learning difficulties, it is necessary to start literacy programmes from a very early age. This was true of successful *Early Years' Initiative* projects. In Clackmannanshire, the Synthetic Phonics experiment began with a cohort of children at the P1 level and followed them through the course of their primary education. In West Dunbartonshire, children were targeted from pre-school age and support has continued into the secondary stage. A recently completed pilot writing project in North Lanarkshire similarly focused on children in the early years of primary school.

In line with comments from some adult returners, that they had addressed their own literacy problems when faced with helping their children, the Commission noted the impact (sometimes unexpected) that the literacy initiatives had on the parents of children involved. For example, there were cases in West Dunbartonshire where parents at parents' evenings confided to teachers that they had reading difficulties. Education officials in North Lanarkshire also reported similar situations, and in both cases the authorities in question were able to provide advice and direct parents to support structures. Overcoming poor literacy cannot be left solely to schools. Success also depends on support and commitment from the home and community. Picking up on this aspect, a new and as yet unreviewed project in Glasgow places an emphasis on literacy across generations in a continuum from early-years to the workplace and the wider community.

3) Teaching Approaches – Careful Monitoring and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

All successful schemes have relied heavily on synthetic phonics but have used a variety of approaches to ensure that the necessary measures of literacy were available at the right time for children experiencing difficulties. The requirement to switch approaches as appropriate means it is necessary and important to use diagnostic tests to identify the exact position of every child vulnerable to reading failure, and to monitor the progress of all children.

It also means that good CPD is an essential element of any successful programme, as it develops teachers' skills, puts the teacher in charge and so helps build the necessary commitment at school level. If a project is to maximise its potential, there needs to be evidence of professional buy-in for its aims and objectives at the local level. While government may choose to direct funding to advance a particular vision or strategy, successful projects tend to be those that have been formulated at a local level, giving teachers and education officials maximum input into designing and implementing a project. If teachers are made to feel as though they are supporting a remote reform agenda, then these projects are the most likely to fail.

4) Intervention Strategies

For some youngsters good teaching is not enough. Intensive support is necessary if they are to make progress, and there are a number of reading-recovery/support schemes that have been developed. However, some of these are dedicated programmes which take the child out of school, often isolate the pupil from his/her peers and are expensive. It is more inclusive and less expensive to run in-school schemes. West Dunbartonshire's project aimed to ensure that no child was left behind, using initiatives such as intensive daily one-to-one work with children and the "Toe By Toe" programme[9] which intervened with children who were clearly still struggling further up primary school. The Clackmannanshire project similarly provided rigorous pupil monitoring and intervention where required through catch-up groups and homework clubs.

What Needs to be Done - the Views of Adult Learners

The adult returners who identified impediments to their learning were also quite clear about what they felt would have made a difference. It was noteworthy that the steps that they identified as being desirable/necessary matched very closely the steps taken in the school projects that were studied:-

- Better identification of learning difficulties
- Early intervention so that youngsters do not fall behind
- Necessary help in terms of more time for explanation, more reinforcing of explanations and more effort by the teacher to ensure that real understanding has taken place
- One-to one help when necessary
- Involving parents and supporting them (A number of the adults reported that they had got involved in literacy programmes to help their own children's learning and that their classes had then helped them understand their children's difficulties.)
- More pressure on youngsters to attend school and to keep on task - youngsters should not be just left to get on with things.
- Motivation - youngsters should be helped to understand why reading matters and their interest encouraged by good reading material at the appropriate level.
- The learning support curriculum should match the regular curriculum so that youngsters can keep in step with their peers.

Moving Beyond Basic Literacy

In this section, the report highlights the need to move children beyond a basic level of literacy in order that they can fully engage with modern society and the workplace.

As indicated earlier, the Commission agreed from the outset that literacy is a continuum that extends beyond basic literacy skills. Different levels of literacy are needed; for example, for undertaking a modern apprenticeship, for most jobs (SCQF level 5) and for Further and Higher Education. In this age of information overload via the Internet, it is important that all youngsters are equipped with analytical skills so that they can understand not just the

information that is provided but also its validity. Did the author of the information have a vested interest in persuading the reader of a particular version of the truth? Literacy is also not the sole responsibility of local authorities and schools. Literacy should go beyond the remit of formal education and become embedded across society in order to ensure continuous development. Partnership working, involving the public, private and voluntary sectors, is key if poor literacy across society is to be challenged.

In looking at how youngsters can be helped to move beyond basic literacy, the Commission began by considering the significant number of young people who acquire basic skills of decoding but do not go on to become independent readers. Indeed, in some cases, skills are gradually lost and youngsters become, at best, reluctant and marginally competent readers. Why do some children not progress beyond early literacy skills and what can be done to help them?

On a totally practical level, it is important to ensure that the reading material offered to reluctant readers matches their interests and maturity. On this score, *Project X,* which has just been launched in England, provides an interesting example. It uses the "playstation approach" to attract boys in particular to reading. A recent parent-led research project in Aberdeen identified the Guinness Book of Records and comics as items that kept children reading. Schools must not be prescriptive in what constitutes suitable reading material and should accept what interests the child whilst trying to move on to more ambitious material.

However, one of the most significant facts to emerge from the evaluation of the Clackmannanshire literacy project related to a loss of impetus somewhere around the middle of primary schooling. Whereas in P1-3 almost all of the traditional differences in attainment between girls and boys and between schools with socially different catchment area disappeared, by P7 socio-economic disadvantage had begun to reassert itself, although overall standards remained higher and gender differences lower than before.

It is reasonable to conclude that, as the element of comprehension becomes more significant than the mechanical skill of decoding, cultural and environmental factors begin to impede the progress of some learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. If these children are to build on their early success in the acquisition of basic literacy skills, these factors must be tackled.

Returning to the correlation of educational failure and socio-economic disadvantage, there is no instance in Scotland of a school serving a poor neighbourhood and achieving results comparable to those of schools in the most affluent areas. Moreover, as has already been indicated, a child's early experience of life largely determines the speed and accuracy with which they form fundamental concepts. If the framework is well-developed, the child is better able to integrate into it the new information and ideas that the school presents. Early experience relevant to the processes of school learning constitutes an overwhelming advantage. This is why the Commission places such emphasis on supporting parents and redressing the effects of social and

economic disadvantage at an early stage. But there is also a need for schools to increase their efforts to enrich the experience of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and for government to adopt a similar approach to the problem of stalled or regressing literacy as was adopted for early stages around ten years ago.

Finally, turning to the issue of how to develop higher literacy skills, it is important to define what those skills are. The CfE *Experiences and Outcomes* take us part of the way. Skills, such as organising information, distinguishing fact from opinion and summarising, are mentioned and could contribute to an approach to higher literacy based on progression in skills. Communicating at an advanced level through the written word is heavily dependent on skills such as these. However, their use is by no means confined to traditional printed media. At this level, the development of literacy-related skills merges into a more general form of intellectual development.

If young people are to develop these higher-order intellectual skills, it is crucial that they are explicitly taught. Young people should be made aware at the outset what skills they are going to acquire and why they are important. At the conclusion of any unit of work, they should be reminded of what they have learned and be made aware of its application. This element of metacognition is a crucial part of sound learning at any level. It is no less significant when dealing with learning at an advanced level.

It is important that the skill is seen as being of widespread application. The ability to use knowledge, understanding and skills in areas other than the one in which they were acquired is essential. In some highly specialised areas of learning, skills may be needed for very specific purposes and have few applications in other contexts. The higher-order skills, like analysis and critical thinking, which are associated with advanced literacy, are not like this; they have everyday significance in much the same way as basic decoding. They are the transferable skills of the 21st century.

It may seem a long journey from the earliest stages of familiarity with letters to the application of critical understanding at advanced levels but, as has been stated, all literacy-related skills are part of a continuum. Schools have the task of trying to ensure that every young person progresses as far along it as possible. An effective national strategy for literacy must take this as its objective.

Recommendations

If the problems of poor basic literacy are to be addressed, there has to be a recognition that socio-economic issues are the main underlying cause and there need to be programmes that focus on addressing these problems. As the report by the National Literacy Trust makes clear, only in this way will it be possible to create a virtuous upward spiral that enables everyone to participate in the literate society and lifts people out of disadvantage. This leads us to make the following clear recommendations.

The Commitment

1. As a nation, Scotland should make a formal commitment to zero tolerance of illiteracy.
2. There should be a sustained policy commitment from all levels of government and educational management to address the issue of improving standards of literacy at all levels.
3. A focus for local authorities should be to ensure that best practice is shared in order to develop consistent, effective, multi-agency strategies that meet the emotional as well as literacy needs of the children in their care.
4. The allocation of education resources should reflect the priority of improving literacy levels.

Pre-requisites for Learning

5. There should be a focus on early years to address the negative effects of socio-economic disadvantage on learning. This should include:-
    a. Pilot schemes in a number of local authorities serving areas of socio-economic disadvantage to provide continuous and systematic support for families with children in the birth-to-three age group
    b. Local authorities, as corporate parents, taking responsibility for a more holistic approach to ensure that the very specific educational, behavioural and social needs of looked-after children are properly addressed
    c. Systematic support for parents in assisting their children's early learning
    d. Sustained efforts by nurseries and schools to enrich the life experience of children from disadvantaged circumstances
    e. Use of nurture groups in primary schools in areas of disadvantage
    f. Professional development to support these initiatives including the necessary changes to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and subsequent CPD

Acquiring Basic Skills

6. Within the context of an overall national strategy, each local authority and every school should develop local literacy plans suited to their individual circumstances. These plans should involve:-
    a. Systematic and supportive monitoring of outcomes both by HMIe and by local authorities
    b. Modification of policy and practice in the light of the findings
    c. A commitment to effective and appropriate action to support every individual child at every stage of learning.

7. Successful schemes should involve the following elements:-
    a. Commencement at an early age
    b. Reliance on a highly structured phonics programme (normally involving synthetic phonics) as the approach to getting the great majority of children decoding successfully

c. Use of a range of other approaches to tackle cases of difficulty up to and including intensive individual tuition for children who continue to experience significant reading problems

   d. Programmes of high quality professional development, regularly updated and consistently available.

Beyond Basic Skills

8. A national strategy should set priorities for assisting children to move beyond basic literacy by improving standards of comprehension and higher-order literacy skills. This strategy should be informed by research and by good practice.

9. Within the national strategy each local authority should develop a local scheme in the same way as was done after 1997 in relation to basic literacy.

10. Progress of local schemes should be carefully monitored and good practice shared in a systematic process of continuous improvement and professional development.

11. Raising levels of higher-order literacy-related skills should be a priority objective within the *Curriculum for Excellence* development programme.

Commission Membership

Judith Gillespie (Chair)

Judith Gillespie first became actively involved in Scottish Education during the teachers' strike in 1985. Since then, she has been constantly involved both at national and local authority level. In 1989 she became a Director of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, moving on to become its Convener and then Development Manager, a post she currently holds.

Judith was a Director of Moray House at the time of its merger with Edinburgh University and, from 2001 to June 2009, on the Board of the Scottish Qualifications Authority. She has served on numerous Government committees, including the Higher Still Development Group and the Curriculum Review Group. As a spokesperson for parents, Judith has frequently contributed to radio and television programmes, written letters and articles for the press and contributed to a number of educational publications.

Keir Bloomer

Keir Bloomer is an independent education consultant. He is also Chair of the Tapestry Partnership, Vice-convenor of Children in Scotland and Vice-Chair of the Court of Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh.

Between 2000 and 2007, he served as Chief Executive of Clackmannanshire Council and prior to this, served as the Director of Education and Community Services for the authority.

He was a member of the review group which wrote "A Curriculum for Excellence", Scotland's national curriculum policy statement, and at various times during his career has served as the Vice-Chair of Learning and Teaching Scotland, Depute General Secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland and a member of the General Teaching Council.

He is well-known in Scotland as a speaker and writer on a wide variety of educational topics.

Geraldine Gammell

Geraldine Gammell is the Director of the Prince's Trust in Scotland, the youth charity which helps young people get their lives on track and move into education, employment and training.

She is a Chartered Accountant by trade and an English Literature graduate from Glasgow University.

John Loughton

Born in Edinburgh, John is the youngest member of the Commission and studied at the University of Stirling. A committed champion for young people's rights, John has been extremely active at a local, national and international level to safeguard and ensure young people's voices and ideas are central to the political process as well as across society. At 19, John was elected as the chairman of the Scottish Youth Parliament and during this time was also appointed as Vice Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Children and Young People, a Board Director for

YouthLink Scotland, the national youth work agency, and represented young people across the United Kingdom at a number of international platforms such as the UK European Presidency Summit.

In January 2008, John appeared on and won the reality TV show *Big Brother: Celebrity Hijack* where he aimed to spread a positive message of young people and promoted a number of important campaigns affecting young people.

John also served as a member of the Commission on Scottish Devolution (Calman Commission) and currently works as a Policy Manager and lobbyist for a national voluntary organisation.

Donald MacKay

Donald MacKay is the Director of Education and Communities with Midlothian Council.

His teaching career began in 1971 and following spells as an Assistant Headteacher and Headteacher became Curriculum Development Officer for Fife Council. Donald's subsequent career accomplishments as an adviser in Primary Education and Assistant Director of Education with Lothian Council led to his appointment in 1995 as Director of Education with Midlothian Council.

In his current remit, Donald is responsible for bringing together a wide range of Council activities offering opportunities for the development of literacy across the community.

Gillian MacKay

Gillian Mackay is Headteacher at Scotstoun Primary School in Glasgow, a city that she has taught in for the past seventeen years. She has taught all stages and holds her PGCE Primary Science and her Teaching French as a Modern Language in Primary Schools. Before being appointed to lead Scotstoun Primary she was the Headteacher of Wyndford and Maryhill Primary Schools. Gill was a member of the McCabe Committee set up by the Scottish Parliament to look into the teaching of sexual health and relationship education.

Before teaching in Primary schools, Gillian worked as an Education Officer for the trade union MSF, and as a Training Officer for the National Union of Students. Prior to this, Gill graduated as a Geologist and spent eight years as a research analytical geologist running analytical laboratories at Swansea and Reading Universities.

Tommy MacKay

Professor Tommy MacKay is an educational and child psychologist. He is the author of over 100 publications and has published in the field of literacy for the last 15 years.

Tommy is widely known as the architect of the West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative, a 10-year research project which saw the authority become the first in the world to eradicate illiteracy among school-leavers and which transformed the landscape of reading across West Dunbartonshire.

Tommy's work has been the subject of a chapter in the Prime Minister's book, *Britain's Everyday Heroes*, published in 2007, and his honours and awards include fellowship of the British Psychological Society for an outstanding and original contribution to psychology, an honorary doctorate from the University of Glasgow for his contribution to educational psychology in Scotland, a Business Enterprise Award

for innovations and new applications, and national awards for challenging inequality of opportunity and for distinguished contributions to professional psychology.

Iain McMillan CBE

Iain McMillan is the Director of CBI Scotland. He was appointed in 1995 and has full executive responsibility for the CBI's Scottish operations. He leads Scottish business representation and communicates Scottish business interests in Scotland, the United Kingdom, the European Union and beyond. He is the author and co-author of a number of publications on public policy as it relates to the business, economic and legislative environment.

Iain is also Chairman of The University of Strathclyde Business School's Advisory Board, Chairman of the Industrial Mission Trust, Chairman of the Scottish North American Business Council and a Trustee of the Teaching Awards Trust. In 2008 and 2009, he served as a member of the Commission on Scottish Devolution (the Calman Commission).

Iain is married to Giuseppina and they have three sons. He was educated at Bearsden Academy and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Bankers; Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland; Fellow of the Association of International Accountants; Companion of the Chartered Management Institute; Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts; and Fellow of the Scottish Qualifications Authority. In 2003, Iain was awarded the CBE for services to lifelong learning in Scotland.

Gordon Matheson

Gordon Matheson is a senior Elected Member of Glasgow City Council. When the Commission started its deliberations he was the Council's Executive Member for Education and earlier this year was appointed to the post of City Treasurer.

Gordon is a graduate of both Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities and has been a board member of a variety of organisations and institutions including the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Court of Strathclyde University. He has a professional background in both economic and personnel development and has experience as a political lobbyist within the charitable sector.

Ian Rankin

Ian Rankin is a full-time novelist. His novella 'A Cool Head', part of the Quick Reads campaign aimed at reluctant readers and readers with literacy problems, was published in 2009.

Gavin Reid

Gavin Reid Ph.D is an international author and educational psychologist. He was formerly senior lecturer in educational studies at the University of Edinburgh, has considerable experience as a classroom teacher and is the parent of a child with special needs.

Gavin is currently Visiting Professor to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and is a consultant to the Center for Child Evaluation and Teaching in Kuwait. He has lectured internationally in over fifty countries and has authored twenty-four books on dyslexia and learning.

Lindsay Roy CBE

Lindsay Roy is the Member of Parliament for Glenrothes and Central Fife.

Prior to his election in November 2008, Lindsay was Rector of Inverkeithing High School and Kirkcaldy High School and has held numerous education-related positions including President of School Leaders Scotland (2004-2005) and Executive Member of the International Confederation of Principals.

Graeme Waddell

Graeme Waddell is a former Business Director of Rolls-Royce Aero Repair and Overhaul in East Kilbride. He is a product of the Rolls-Royce Management Development Programme and his career over the past twenty years has covered senior positions in operations management, marketing and sales, facilities management and human resources.

Since leaving Rolls Royce in 2008, Graeme has formed his own company, Energen Biogas, which deals in the field of renewable energy. In the public sector he is a main board member of Scottish Enterprise, chairs the West Regional Advisory Board and also chairs the Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Board.

Graeme is a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and Holds a BA and an MBA from the University of Strathclyde.

Margaret Ward

Margaret is currently Head Teacher of Braidbar Primary School in Giffnock, a position that she has held since 1994. Prior to this appointment, Margaret was Depute Head and a senior teacher within the same school.

Between 2000 and 2007, Margaret served as a Part Time Associate Assessor with HMIe and from 2004 was a member of the East Renfrewshire Team for Quality Review of Schools.

Chris Young

Chris is a Policy Officer with Glasgow City Council who has provided research support to the work of the Literacy Commission.

Chris joined Glasgow City Council in October 2007 following a period working as an Associate Project Manager for a non-profit organisation in Washington, DC where he helped to oversee the development of a major project with a national government. He is a graduate of the University of Glasgow where he obtained his MA (Hons.) in 2005.

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[1] http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/stats/adultstats.html

[2] www.literacytrust.org.uk/research

[3] *New Light on Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland,*

[4] From *Taking Stock*, CBI's 2008 Education and Skills Survey*.*

[5] From *The Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, Revised British Edition*. Used with permission of Granada Learning.

[6] In terms of writing, the appropriate level falls somewhere between the following two examples of pupils' work, the first is a *Personal Account at 5-14 level C*.

I went to Falkirk one day and I was walking along the High Street by Asda and I tripped over a brick and split my head. I was crying and mum took me to the hospital I was put in surgery and then I had an operashin. I was still crying and my mum calmed me down and the people stitched my head back together. I felt dizzy and I was glad to get out of hospital. I was happy to be home and I was tired so I went to bed. When I was asleep I had a dream about being in hospital.   When I woke up I washed all the blood off my hands and I was angry with myself because I was not looking were I was going.

The spelling and punctuation have been faithfully copied.   The handwriting of the original is untidy but perfectly legible.

The second example is *imagined personal" – the response to a given topic/context at 5-14 level D.*

I woke up feeling all hot and bothered. That is when I noticed the dry sand around me. I started to panic. I opened one eye and to my horror the tide was just touching me. I started to flap to see if I was well and truely stuck. Unfortunately I was. I started to get so sleepy because of the heat so I fell asleep.
The next thing I knew I was itching all over so I blew out water all over my body to see if, it would help, it did wonders.
I opened my eyes to see a small boy staring at me as if I was some sort of exhibit. I felt threatened by him for some reason as if he was about to hurt me though I knew deep down in my heart that such a small boy could ^ do much to hurt me. Then the boy did something to change my mind. He scooped up some lovely cool water and poured it over my dry hide. It felt wonderful. I shook my flipper to thank the boy and he layed some wet green seaweed on my back.
I started to be much less tense towards the boy since he had helped my. A wave lashed against my large body I began to feel a bit happyer and I knew I wouldn't be stuck for much longer.

Again, the spelling and punctuation have been faithfully copied.   The handwriting of the original is clear and tidy.

[7] The most local unit of Italian local government, comparable to a town council.

[8] Reynolds, S., MacKay, T. & Kearney, M. (in press). *Nurture groups: a large-scale, controlled study of effects on development and academic attainment.* British Journal of Special Education.

[9] Cowling, K. & Cowling, H. (1993). *Toe By Toe: A Highly Structured Multi-Sensory Reading Manual for Teachers and Parents.* Baildon, West Yorks: