

Summary of proposals

Poor numeracy is a massive challenge for the UK and the arguments for change are overwhelming. Here we set out some of the measures that could help to achieve this change.

We know from evidence that people's mathematical understanding and skills can radically improve, if certain barriers are removed. These proposals aim both to transform attitudes and to establish a coherent pathway for numeracy throughout school and beyond. This is not an exhaustive list of what needs doing but it does offer a series of essential steps that should be embarked on after the next general election – if not sooner.

A new drive is needed to spread the positive messages that numeracy is a vital life skill, that it can be learnt and that dismissive attitudes are harmful. Backing for this must come from politicians, business, education, the media and individuals, including parents and teachers. Government should support practical projects designed to understand and change public attitudes.

Every teacher must become a teacher of numeracy. That does not mean that every teacher becomes a maths teacher but that numeracy – just like literacy – is recognised as an intrinsic part of every subject across the school curriculum.

A new measure of numeracy proficiency should be introduced for all young people at the age of 14. This would establish a national benchmark for the level of numeracy needed for further study in all subjects between the ages of 14 and 19.

An additional and universally respected qualification in numeracy (or core maths) is needed alongside GCSE maths. Politicians and curriculum and qualification regulators must give serious and urgent consideration to the introduction of dual GCSEs in maths and numeracy.

A new adult numeracy core curriculum is needed. This should put at its centre the very concept of being numerate – that is, being able to use maths to solve everyday problems, make decisions and reason, knowing which maths to use and being ready to persist with different approaches.

New forms of adult assessment are required to measure not just the end result but the 'distance travelled' by learners – and thus provide evidence of both individual improvement and collective progress across the adult population.

More behavioural research is needed into how people – both adults and children – can be encouraged to improve their numeracy skills and how they can develop resilience and persistence. At the same time more evidence is required on the practice of adult numeracy teaching and learning to find out which approaches work best.

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