

2012/56

23 October 2012

Pocket Watch – ‘I can do maths’

Introduction

Next spring, employers and learning providers will be invited to sign up to a new initiative designed to tackle the long-standing concerns in this country about levels of maths/numeracy. The National Numeracy Challenge which was announced this week has been drawn up by a new charity set up earlier in the year by a number of leading lights determined to improve not just performance but also attitudes about maths. *"Over the first three years of the project, we will seek to produce a positive transformation of public attitudes to maths in the UK and create an 'I can do maths' approach."* The 'I can do maths' mantra lies at the heart of the Challenge and is part of the positive message; it will no doubt appear on cars soon

What's it aiming to achieve?

The aim over a five year period is to reduce by over a million the number of adults with low levels of numeracy, focusing in the first instance on those whose levels of numeracy are roughly at end of primary school level, trying to raise them to the level of a standard GCSE. To achieve this, the Challenge will work closely with employer and community organisations and with learning and training providers, developing new learning options, new materials and new ways of raising performance including notably, new technology in the form of an online diagnostic tool

How big is the problem?

The adjective 'shocking' has been used on numerous occasions to describe our levels of numeracy and was used again by Stephen Twigg at this week's launch. A few stats prove the point: 30,000 children leaving primary school each year without basic maths skills, 42% of pupils failing to achieve GCSE A*-C in maths, 17m adults at Entry level in maths. What's worse, things don't seem to be improving as indicated by a 4% drop in the latest Skills for Life survey and that much cited fall to 27th position in recent international maths rankings for 15 year olds

What happens now?

Work goes on to develop the components of the Challenge. The Challenge itself goes live next spring and will be delivered through a number of strands including an Employer Challenge, an Education Challenge and an Outreach Challenge, all essentially aimed at identifying those most in need and committed to doing something about it, typically by developing a personalised learning programme. The whole thing will be backed up with extensive publicity and promotional material and while aimed primarily at adults, will roll back into the school system for groups such as NEETs and others seeking to bridge the transition to work

Nor should we forget activity happening elsewhere in the system including the emphasis on English and maths in the proposed reforms to the school curriculum, the potential changes to qualifications at age 16 and 18 and the desire from both political Parties to see maths in some form extended beyond the age of 16. Further developments on all of these are expected in the coming months



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National Numeracy Challenge Oct 2012