

british association of settlements



A RIGHT TO READ

Action for a Literate Britain



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FOREWORD

Since their foundation at the end of the last century Settlements have concerned themselves with the needs of those living in deprived urban areas. More recently this long standing tradition of voluntary social work and human care has been expanded and enriched through new ideas and new ventures aimed at helping people to overcome various forms of powerlessness. In co-operation as the British Association of Settlements they have now defined the purpose of a Settlement as being:

'to encourage and enable people to move towards the vision of a caring, sharing society, to bring about the maximum involvement of the group, neighbourhood or community in solving the problems that concern them, in participating in the decisions that affect them, and in running their own affairs.'

We believe that the power for social action depends on the ability to handle communications. In order to participate, to exercise certain rights, to choose between alternatives and to solve problems, people need certain basic skills: listening, talking, reading and writing. It is because we believe so passionately that people have the right to have access to the information which affects their lives and to make their own decisions that Settlements have felt obliged to attempt some provision for people in their neighbourhoods who do not have adequate literacy skills. Together we decided to use this experience to publicise the extent of the problem of adult illiteracy in Britain and to press for the formulation of a national solution to this problem using all the independent and statutory skills and resources necessary.

Geoffrey Clarkson,
Development Officer,
British Association of Settlements.
May 1974.

Part One

ILLITERATE ADULTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

THREE are at least two million functionally illiterate adults in England and Wales.

That means that something like six per cent of the adult population is either unable to read or write at all or has a literacy level below that which you might expect to find in a nine year-old child.

Two million people who are at a chronic disadvantage in their work and their leisure.

Two million people effectively isolated from many of the benefits, pleasures and experiences that the rest of us take for granted: people who cannot participate fully in our predominantly literate society.

This figure is not based on direct research because none is available; there has never been a national survey. It is based on the best related evidence, and on the firm opinions of acknowledged experts in the field.

BAS has accepted this figure of two million with caution, and only after critically examining all the available evidence. First we tried to arrive at the lowest figure the statistics might imply.

THE LOW FIGURE

The 1971 Census returns indicate that there are around 36,800,000 men and women over the age of eighteen in England and Wales.

The National Foundation for Educational Research has made six surveys of reading ability since 1948. The results are summarised in 'The Trend of Reading Standards' (Slough: NFER, 1972).

A figure rather more modest than the average of all these results indicates that at least 0.5 per cent of the adult population is completely illiterate, and at least 2.5 per cent is semi-literate.

These figures suggest at least a million adults with a reading age lower than that of the average nine year-old child.

There are a number of reasons why this line of inquiry almost certainly results in a gross underestimate of the numbers of illiterate adults, even within its own terms:

1. It only takes into account people of eighteen and over, ignoring the sixteen and seventeen year-olds, who are also part of the adult population.
2. Literacy levels have improved since 1948, when the first study was undertaken, so that it is obviously an underestimate to apply its ratios to those who were educated before the war and therefore not included in the studies.
3. We have applied the same ratios to Wales as to England, though Welsh children at eleven and fifteen have been found to be less literate than their English contemporaries.
4. Special schools were not included in the surveys. They are bound to contain a relatively high proportion of the worst readers for their age.

THE REALISTIC FIGURE

Two authorities have persuaded us to accept that a more realistic figure for functionally illiterate adults is two million at least.

At the BAS conference, 'Status: Illiterate', held in London on 7th November 1973, Dr. Joyce Morris, the principal speaker, gave two reasons for supporting a higher figure:

That the results of the most recent NFER Survey indicated that 'reading standards are not better today than they were a decade ago'. This statement suggests that as many as seven to ten per cent of teenagers leaving school have a very poor reading ability. That implies a figure of two million at least in the adult population.

A figure of one million suggests that reading standards in the United States, which have been far more thoroughly researched than they have in this country, are five times lower than our own. This seems highly improbable. An estimate of two million functionally illiterate adults in this country still allows the Americans more than twice the illiteracy rate that we suffer from.

Our second authority is Peter Clyne in his 'The Disadvantaged Adult: Educational and Social Needs of Minority Groups' (London: Longman, 1973). He believes that two million English and Welsh adults are functionally illiterate.

BAS now accepts this figure as a basis for discussion and reform. And every single expert and educationalist we have questioned on the matter accepts it too.

It is a figure we should find quite horrifying. A figure that must shake our confidence in the basic thoroughness of our education process.

A further pointer towards an even higher figure, if we are to talk realistically about functional literacy, is that UNESCO draws the line not at nine year-old reading levels as the English and Welsh research does, but at thirteen year-old reading levels. How many more do we add if we accept that extra four year gap?

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY

We use the term functionally literate because we cannot simply be concerned about the people who can read or write nothing at all. There are probably five times as many who can read a little but whose attainment is so low that in practical terms it is more or less useless to them. They are functionally illiterate.

The United States National Reading Center provides a good working definition of functional literacy:

'A person is functionally literate when he has command of reading skills that permit him to go about his daily activities successfully on the job, or to move about society normally with comprehension of the usual printed expressions and messages he encounters.' Mimeographed (Washington NRC, 1971).

The best way to illustrate the practical effects of functional illiteracy is to show how many familiar and commonplace pieces of writing are beyond the reach of the person with a reading age of less than thirteen years.

We present a series of examples, but with the following reservation: there are a number of ways of measuring the readability of a piece of writing and none of them are entirely accurate, they should be taken simply as a useful and generally reliable guide.

For the purposes of our research we have elected to use a method employed by the US Army to test the readability of its training manuals. It is called FORCAST, and has the virtue of being the simplest test we have so far encountered. It is based on analysing the number of monosyllabic words

in any passage of exactly 150 words (it cannot be used on shorter passages). The method is fully explained on pp. 339-369 of 'Literacy Discussion Vol. IV No. 3 Sept. 1973' (International Institute for Adult Literacy Methods, UNESCO).

Some of the results of these exercises surprised us, as they will probably surprise the reader. Many commonplace things are just not as simple as perhaps their producers think they are.

One thing must be clear, though: this is in no sense a plea for simplification. There may be cases where that is appropriate, but our concern is for a raising of the number of literate people, not the lowering of readability levels. Nor is it a criticism of the commercial products we have looked at.

SOME EXAMPLES OF READABILITY

We took the label off a bottle of household disinfectant. We looked at two separate parts of the label, one of them the warning to keep the product out of the reach of children, and also the instructions in case some of the disinfectant should accidentally be swallowed.

In both the samples we took the reading age required to understand them was just over sixteen years.

EXTRA GRIP - STRONGEST AGAINST DIRT & GERMS

THE THICKER BLEACH CLEANSER

New **EXTRA GRIP** is thicker so it clings more effectively to slippery surfaces. Cleans thoroughly above the water-line as well as below. Sure because Sodium Hypochlorite and germ problems. Sure because Sodium Hypochlorite, the strongest known germ killer for home use. Ideal for—

LAVATORIES

Pour undiluted **EXTRA GRIP** round the bowl every night to kill all germs and remove stains—even round the bend.

SINKS

$\frac{1}{2}$ eggcup **EXTRA GRIP** to washing-up bowl of water. Wipe down sinks and working surfaces. Rinse.

WASTEPIPES

Pour undiluted **EXTRA GRIP** down sink wastepipe. Leave 2 to 3 minutes then rinse thoroughly.

OUTSIDE DRAINS

Pour undiluted **EXTRA GRIP** down drains. This will disinfect and destroy the waste matter which causes unpleasant smells.

BLEACHING

Cold bleach: $\frac{1}{2}$ eggcup **EXTRA GRIP** per gallon of water. Steep 45 minutes. Use half strength solution if steeping overnight.

Stain removal: 1 eggcup **EXTRA GRIP** per gallon of cold water. Steep 15 minutes. This will remove most ordinary stains.

CAUTION

Do not use undiluted **EXTRA GRIP** on clothes. Always mix with water first and rinse well after use. **EXTRA GRIP** should not be used for silk, wool, coloureds, crease-resistant, drip-dry, embossed or pique fabrics unless resistant to bleaching. Do not use **EXTRA GRIP** for cleaning baths.

KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN

Wash off accidental splashes of undiluted **EXTRA GRIP** promptly. If in the eyes or on the skin wash immediately in water. If swallowed, drink plenty of milk (or water) and then seek medical advice.

Do not use **EXTRA GRIP** with other lavatory cleansers. Store in a cool place — keep upright. Do not over-tighten cap.

SCRAP INDUSTRIAL ACT, SAYS TOP BOSS

By KEITH MASON
The Industrial Relations Act must be repealed, says Mr Campbell Adamson

CBI chief calls for unions Act repeal

By Raymond Perman

Mr Campbell Adamson, director of the Confederation of British Industry, called yesterday for the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, which he said had sullied every relationship between employers and unions at national level.

His remarks went much further than previous CBI policy on the Act, which was broadly as outlined in the Conservative Party election manifesto. That document was amended but not repealed.

In a statement to a conference of industrial managers organized by the Industrial Society, Mr Adamson said: "I should like to see the next government repeal the Act so that we can get on with our business."

He thought the unions would then be willing to discuss the place of law in industrial relations.

"We should go further than the present position," he said, "and try to get a more honest try at another Act. I have a feeling that the sort of situation we are in now would give us a chance to start from a position where every relationship at a national level

told this to an industrial conference yesterday. The next Government must do it, he said, but there must be something in it that if unions and employers could agree on a new Act to start again, so that every relationship at national level is not sullied."

"I would like to see the next Government say: 'The Industrial Relations Act is wrong from the beginning but we will repeal it only when we have some other Act which we think would succeed it,'" he said.

Hated

It was the first of a 200-page report on the Act which has been a failure. The Labour Party have promised to repeal it immediately and seek a new deal with the unions returned to power.

The Tories have so far offered only to amend the Act and to give the unions and employers the right to negotiate with Mr Adamson, director-general of the Confederation of British Industry.



CAMPBELL ADAMSON "Let's start again."

tion of British Industry, told the Industrial Society conference in London that the Act had been successful in that it had brought the industry and management in line. He said that the balance of payments, the government's foreign trade, productivity and appetizing a new deal with the unions and employers. He said that the previous five years had been a challenge in the European context.

The Sun

was not sullied by this Act." He added that some of the Act's provisions had made employers think more deeply about their relationships with employees.

Earlier, Mr Adamson said that if the unions were to recover, quite quickly. But it would still have to face production control difficulties in the face of continuing inflation. He said that the effects of the crisis on the investment programme and the need to keep prices low.

The Times

Then we looked at a selection of newspaper stories. To be accurate as possible we selected a single story and analysed several newspapers' treatment of it to see how the readability varied from paper to paper. In this case we selected The Times, The Guardian, the Daily Express, The Sun and the Daily Mirror.

There was not the slightest difference in the reading ability required to understand The Times and the Mirror stories, though the FORCAST test can take no account of the effect of presentation and layout. Analysis of other stories on different topics seemed to confirm these examples as fairly typical. For instance, though we did find a Mirror leading article that required a reading age of no more than fourteen, a football story on the sports page of the same issue required a reading age of sixteen and a half. A story in The Sun, this time about a kidney transplant, required a reading age of more than sixteen.

Then we looked at the instructions on the back of a pastry mix packet. They were among the simplest items we analysed, but still required a reading age of just over fourteen years before they could be applied.

short pastry mix



Mixing Instructions

Empty pastry mix into a bowl crushing any lumps with a fork. Sprinkle on 2 fl. oz. (4 dessertspoons) cold water for the 12 oz packet or 1 1/2 fl. oz. (3 dessertspoons) cold water for the 8 oz packet and mix with a fork. Press into a ball with the fingers.

Serving Suggestion — Steak & Kidney Pie

Meat Filling: 1 1/2 lb braising or stewing beef, 1/2 lb kidneys, 1 tablespoon flour, 1 level teaspoon salt, 1/2 level teaspoon pepper, 1 small onion, 1/2 pint stock (made from beef stock cube)

Step 1 Trim and cut meat into cubes. Remove skin from kidneys and chop into pieces. Toss meat and kidneys in the flour, salt and pepper mixed. Place in casserole dish with the onion and pour on boiling beef stock. Cover with lid and cook in oven for 2 1/2 — 3 hours or until the meat is tender at 275°F—Mark 1. Transfer the meat into a 1 1/2 pint pie dish with some of the gravy. Arrange the meat slightly domed to prevent pastry from falling in whilst cooking. Leave until the meat is cold.

Step 2 Preheat oven to 400°F—Mark 6. Mix the contents of this packet as per mixing instructions above. Turn pastry out onto lightly floured board and knead until smooth; roll out 1 inch larger than the pie dish. Cut off a strip all round 1 inch wide and press this into dampened rim of pie dish, then brush with cold water.

Step 3 Lift rest of pastry and place it over pie dish. Press down well and trim edge. Flute the edge at 1 inch intervals with back of a knife. Make a hole in pie centre to allow steam to escape.

Step 4 Roll out pastry trimmings and cut into leaves; decorate the centre and brush pastry with beaten egg. Bake in centre of oven for 20 — 25 minutes until golden brown. Reheat remainder of gravy to serve with pie.

Leaflet FIS 1, issued by the Department of Health and Social Security: Family Income Supplement.

The readability of this leaflet varied a good deal from paragraph to paragraph. One section required a reading age of fourteen years, another a reading age of nearly fourteen and a half. But the most important part of the leaflet, dealing with how to make a claim, required a reading age of just over seventeen years.

Prescribed amounts

Number of children in your family	Levels of income below which you qualify	Maximum supplement payable
1	£21.50	£5
2	24.00	5
3	26.50	6
4	29.00	6
5	31.50	6
6	34.00	6

For each additional child the level in the second column is increased by £2.50

Other benefits you will be entitled to

- If you get FIS you will also be entitled to:—
- Free prescriptions, free dental treatment and glasses under the National Health Service
 - Free milk and vitamins—for expectant mothers and children under school age.
 - Free school meals—for children at school.
 - Remund of fares for members of your family attending hospital for treatment.
 - New legal aid—subject to certain capital limits.
- Further information about these benefits will be given when your supplement is paid.

How to claim

Just complete the claim form, tear it off and send it to the Department of Health and Social Security, Family Income Supplements, Novercross, Blackpool FY3 5TD. You can get a franked addressed envelope at Post Offices or local Social Security offices. You should send the claim form and there should be no need for individual interviews. Any information you give will be treated as confidential. We will need to know your earnings, and it will help if you can send pay slips with your claim form for the last five weeks before the date you claim; if you are monthly paid you should send two monthly pay slips. Don't delay sending in your claim because you haven't enough pay slips. If necessary, we will accept a statement from you that you are employed. If you are self-employed you should send your latest profit and loss account. Don't delay sending in your claim if this is not available.

continued on page 4

Family Income Supplement

Family Income Supplement (FIS) is a benefit of up to £5 a week for families with one or two children and up to £6 a week for families of three or more children if you are living in England, Scotland or Wales and

- your total family income is below a certain level and
 - you have at least one child in your family, and
 - you are in full-time work.
- In the case of a couple it must be the man who is in full-time work.

Income*
The level of income below which you can get FIS is called the 'prescribed amount'. The level depends on the number of children in your family, and is the same if there is only one parent in the family. See the table on page 3. You can claim the supplement if your total income, including gross earnings (which include basic pay, regular overtime and/or bonuses), family allowances and wife's earnings is below this level; the income of children is disregarded. Some forms of other income are also disregarded, including £2 of some forms of state pension and the whole of any attendance allowance.

Children in the Family

Anyone, including single people, whose family includes at least one dependent child can claim. All children under 16, and those aged 16 or 17 who are in full-time education, are included in your family if they live with you.

Full-time work

You must be, and must normally be, in full-time work, and in the case of a couple this means the man. Full-time work means 30 or more hours a week. This applies to both employed and self-employed people.

The amount you get

The supplement you get is one half of the amount by which your family's total income falls below the prescribed amount. If the family's total income is 100% above the prescribed amount, the supplement is rounded up to the next 10p above, and the minimum amount payable is 20p a week. The maximum payment is £5 for families with one or two children and £6 for larger families. Some examples of how the supplement is worked out are shown on page 4. Usually the supplement is awarded for 52 weeks and is not affected if your circumstances change during that time. *Increased rates from 2 October 1973 subject to approval of Regulations by Parliament.

Leaflet PC 11, issued by the Department of Health and Social Security: Free Prescriptions.

This was by far the least accessible of the leaflets we analysed. Analysed at three separate points, the reading ages FORCAST indicated were, in the first one, well over seventeen years, in the second, fifteen and a half years, and in the third, sixteen and a half years.

certificate because of your income, you will be able to get free prescriptions for up to 12 months. If you have already paid the prescription charge, attach the chemist's receipt form EC57 to the claim form. If you intend to claim a refund you must get the receipt form when you pay the charge. If you are unable to pay for the prescription, take the prescription form to your local Social Security Office, where you will be given an exemption certificate if you are entitled to it.

How you qualify on grounds of income

The way in which your entitlement is worked out for free prescriptions or refund of charges is explained on pages 4 and 5. Some examples of the income limits up to which people may qualify for free prescriptions or refund of charges are given below. *The examples, which relate to people at work, are a general guide only. The income limits are gross incomes i.e. before the deduction of income tax and national insurance contributions.* The limits also include the amounts shown for rent and rates, and fares to work. If your rent and rates or expenses connected with your work, e.g. fares, are higher or lower than those shown, then the limits would also be higher or lower.

If you are not working, then the income limits would be lower than the gross limits shown, and you should look at the fuller explanation on pages 4 and 5 of how entitlement is calculated.

Income guide for people at work

Size of family	Estimated rent and rates actually paid after deducting any rebates	Estimated employment expenses (e.g. bus or train fares)	Gross income limits i.e. gross earnings including family allowance where applicable but before deducting tax and NI contributions.
Single householder	£2.80	60p	£15.40
Married couple	£2.80	60p	£20.75
with child aged 4	£3.10	60p	£22.60
aged 4 and 8	£3.45	60p	£25.55
with 3 children aged 4, 8 and 11	£3.45	60p	£28.55
with 4 children aged 4, 8, 11 and 16	£4.45	60p	£34.95
with 5 children aged 4, 8, 11, 14 and 16	£4.45	60p	£39.05

PEOPLE AND READING

This kind of analysis only begins to mean something when it is related to individuals and the specific difficulties.

Illiterate adults can be grouped according to their reading levels as follows:

complete beginners who cannot read or write anything beyond a few words of two or three letters and perhaps their own names and addresses;

intermediates whose basic reading ability is that of the average seven to nine year-old, and who need help to master the skills of phonic analysis, fluency and basic spelling;

poor spellers who can read quite fluently but spell only the simplest words.

It is a common misconception that all people with chronic reading problems are at least educationally sub-normal, if not mentally defective.

But none of the statistics we have quoted in this report have included adults from either of those categories, though, of course, they suffer from a high level of illiteracy.

The statistics we have made use of refer to adults whose disability is illiteracy, which may stem from a variety of causes but cannot be explained away by mental incapacity.

Most of them are extremely ashamed of their handicap. Many develop the most elaborate deceptions to conceal their inability to read. Some go as far as carrying pairs of broken glasses in their pockets as an excuse for not being able to read, others avoid writing by wearing permanent bandages on their hands.

Many turn concealment into a way of life, and only a tiny minority seem to realise that there are classes which might be able to help them.

Very few dare expose themselves to the possibility of ridicule by coming forward and asking for help.

When they do come forward it is often because they fear that someone is about to find them out anyway. Perhaps a son or daughter is constantly pestering to be read to, or for help with homework.

Perhaps an employer is encouraging a man or woman to go for promotion which will mean filling in an application form, going on a training course, or even just making a few notes from time to time.

Only the most determined, or the luckiest find help at the moment. This is clear from the experiences of the illiterate adults we interviewed for this report, all of whom are now receiving, or are about to receive help.

ILLITERATE ADULTS

Who are the illiterate adults? They are a wide variety of men and women doing all sorts of different jobs, suffering from their inability to read in different ways.

Here are six of them. We have respected their general wish for anonymity and altered their Christian and surnames.

Brian Marks is twenty five. He's a London motor fitter and has been married for four years. He is quite articulate but can neither read nor write.

'If someone asks me to spell something', he explains, 'I can get the first letters and sometimes the end, but not the middle.'

'If I pick a paper up there are things I've seen lots of times and I have no problem. But if it's different I'm beaten. If I see a word like "police" or "ambulance" I know what it is because I've seen it so many times before. But if somebody just asked me to spell it I couldn't. It doesn't really matter about the length either, some of the smallest words can beat me.'

'I just look at the front of the paper and maybe the TV pages. But it's only in the last two years that I've really bothered.'

'But now we're buying a house and I've found it very awkward.'

'Sometimes letters come and they're important, and I come home for lunch and my wife doesn't, so I can't read them. I just have to wait for her to come home.'

As a motor fitter Brian earns about £33 a week. He's a skilled man, but his reading difficulties have prevented him changing to a better job and could well have prevented him getting as far as he has.

'It was awkward at first. We had time sheets to fill in every day. When the fitter I was working with first found out he hit the roof. Then he did them for me.'

'Now I'm a fitter I have to do them myself. But where I work there are quite a few like me, and one word that one of us doesn't know another will. And you use the same words every day and get to know them.'

'There was a job vacant for a receptionist/letter, but I couldn't go for that. It would have meant about another £15 a week.'

'And the people who make the automatic gearboxes we fit have offered me a job as a representative. But at the moment I just couldn't do that.'

Brian puts his illiteracy down to bad school attendance. He blames it on his mother who, he says, was always keeping him at home to look after her in imaginary illnesses.

'I kept it from my wife', he says, 'more or less until we got married. She gradually got to know over quite a long period.'

'The main thing is that if we went out in the car I couldn't read the map and had to give it to her. That's a giveaway.'

'Before I met her I always used to go to Herne Bay year after year for my holidays, simply because I knew how to get there.'

'And my driving test itself. That was a hard one. I didn't pass until third time. I was really frightened about the Highway Code.'

'Another bad one was when Dad died. I had everything to do. Especially the Town Hall—I had to fill in the Death Certificate. I was in a right state over that. Luckily one of my aunts came with me.'

'Even getting the colour TV, when we rented that I had to wait for my wife to do it. And the log book and insurance for the car are in her name.'

Brian has taken the step of asking for help and is waiting to start work with a tutor in an independent literacy scheme. He says he comes across plenty of other people who can't read either. 'For a start there's my two

brothers. The best man at my wedding. A couple of youngsters at work, and a couple of the older ones too.'

Tony Dawes is a seventeen year-old interior and exterior decorator in Birmingham.

'When I left school I was fifteen', he says. 'I couldn't read at all then. Well, there'd be bits here and there, just the odd word I could pick out.'

'I could write my name. I couldn't write my address at all.'

'At school they put me on those tape recording machines for about half an hour a day. You were left on your own in a corner of the room with a tape recorder and a book, and nobody helped you.'

'You just tried to work out what it was and then play it back to yourself. If it didn't sound right you'd read it again. Then the teacher listened to it. You got fed up of it because you didn't know what you were reading.'

Tony has now been receiving individual tuition one night a week for four months. 'I think there's been a great improvement since I started. I've got some faith now and I can pick up a paper and read a lot better than I did.'

'I've got the confidence now. I can see what's on TV, and I can fill my timesheet in at work. I used to have to take it home to my parents.'

'Nobody knows about it at work now. But I'm not ashamed of it. I used to be, but I'm not now. I stopped being ashamed of it as soon as I realised I wasn't the only one.'

'I tell my girlfriends about it, and I haven't really got that many mates, just a few. Some of them laugh at me, and some of them just say, "So what?"'

Tony found help through the Samaritans: 'I got fed up because I couldn't fill in my tax forms or anything.'

'If I went on holiday I couldn't write to my girlfriends. And if I got letters my parents had to read them for me. Now I can read them for myself.'

Mary Timms, a thirty-two year-old Liverpool housewife struggled for years with the reading ability of a seven year-old and without really being able to write at all.

In her case it has actually cost the family money: 'My husband works for himself as a plasterer and I have to take phone calls, and I have to write people's names down. You wouldn't believe the things I do. If I'm given the name of a road and I can't get it I'll just try and draw something that resembles the name.'

'I'll say, "It's an awfully bad line on part and can you spell it out please?", and they go, "ta-tum ta-tum ta-tum", and I have to say, "Sorry can you repeat that please?"'

'I've lost many jobs for him.'

She explains: 'Mine's spelling problem rather than a reading problem now. When I left school it was both.'

'But I never went to school hardly at all when I was a child, and I had to go in a home because my parents were separated and then my mother had TB and she died.'

'I was just beginning to catch up when I finally left school. I went into a factory because there was nothing else I could do, and I went from factory to factory.'

If she thought she might have to fill in a form somewhere she carried a list around with her so that she could copy out all her personal particulars if she needed them.

'If I went somewhere like the Housing Department I wouldn't need that because they do most of the writing. But if I went for a panel, or for the grant for having a baby I'd try and take someone with me to make sure.

Usually my auntie.

'I even took her with me on my first job, not knowing what to expect.'

When she got married she found that her husband had a similar problem, though he was a rather better reader than Mary. They set out to do something about it.

'We used to get little books and start reading, especially the things that interested us like articles about saving for the home and things like that. I'd start learning from them and he'd help me with the words.

'I always concentrated on the reading, and I thought that if I could read I'd be able to spell. But I couldn't.' She found that she just couldn't relate the sounds of words to the order the letters should be in.

Then, eventually, watching Granada's 'This is Your Right' programme she heard about the scheme at Liverpool University Settlement, got in touch and was given a tutor. For a time she and her husband both went but felt they were getting nowhere. The scheme's organiser found her another tutor, but her husband had been put off by the experience and hasn't been prepared to try again. Now she's pleased with her progress.

'I have lessons twice a week. I can spell my name and address now. Not at first. It took a lot of practise.' And she can now start to make a much better job of other things that gave her real trouble before.

'The most frustrating things were writing notes for school and "No milk today", which I can now do.

'I suppose I could do them before if I looked up and made sure in the dictionary, but now I know how to do it. I've got more confidence in myself.'

Her children, she says, have always known that their parents had reading and writing problems. 'I can't say there's ever been a time when I had to sit down and say, "I'm sorry I can't spell". I've always drummed into them the fact that if they don't want to end up the way we are they've got to pull hard. And the only way to do that is to keep on going to school and learning.

'And then we started to look to them to help us, especially my daughter who's fifteen this year.

'But it's when you can't help your children, that's when it really hits you. That's the hard part. Especially if you've got one that's slow, and my son's slow. He needs extra help and I can't give it him. That's what made me go for help.'

Keith James is a successful forty-five year-old London shopkeeper. He is quite sure he would have been a good deal more successful if only he could

have learned to read and write.

'I've done well for myself, but if I could have read and written I could have done a lot better, I'm positive. I know I could have gone a lot further than I have done.

'There were a lot of jobs I'd have liked to have taken, but I couldn't. I think if I'd learned to read and write I could have gone in for any job.'

He's had four jobs since he left school at fourteen. He's been a plasterer, done National Service in the Army, worked in a cement factory and run his shop.

He just never learned while he was at school, though he enjoyed being there and was good at other things. 'I think it could have been bad teaching.

'We were taught in a class altogether, and instead of taking the four or five of us who couldn't read out and giving us private lessons they left us. They just sort of left you to poodle along with what you could do.'

He agrees that when he left he could probably read a bit. 'But I think if you could read just a little bit when you left school you sort of forgot it afterwards. You never got in the sort of position where you had to use it. It was the sort of thing you let die away.

'Then you actually start to worry about it when you start getting adult and realise it more. While you're young—seventeen or eighteen—you don't really worry about it.

'Then if you get married and things like that you realise that you've got to sort of cover it up some way.'

Harry covered very well. He says none of his friends know. Neither do his children.

'The children did ask me to read things for them at times, but I always said, "Ask Mum, she'll tell you". When I was sitting doing something they didn't seem to interrupt me because I'd got them into that habit of not asking me. I'd make out I was interested in whatever it was I was doing.'

Now he takes lessons twice a week, and they still don't know. 'I just say I'm going to a friend's,' he says, 'going out for a drink.'

'I think it's too embarrassing to tell them. I don't suppose they'd take any notice, but all the same you feel that you'd be embarrassed for them to know.'

He finally went to the Cambridge House Literacy Scheme in Camberwell when his wife read an article in Woman's Own. He started to visit a tutor seventeen months ago.

'I could do very little when I first came. I had the newspapers and read what little bits I could make out. I suppose I could write, but I couldn't spell. I could copy anything out, but as for writing it myself and spelling it, I couldn't.'

After a few months he had a reading age of about seven years. Now his reading age is above the functional level of thirteen years. But his vocabulary is still small.

'I could just about write my own name and address when I started. Now I can do the books for my business. I do all my own cheques, I do practically everything now.

'I read what I can of books. I can't read them all. I read slow, and I can get most of it if I read slow.

'I just want to be so that if someone's looking at something and they say, "Look at this", I can just read it and be the same as them. It isn't that I expect to get a degree or anything like that. I just want to be natural like anyone else. I just want to be ordinary.'

Susan Anstey, a Birmingham housewife with two children, a nine year-old daughter and a six year-old son, is separated from her husband.

She is thirty-two and describes herself as always having been 'slow' when she was at school. She comes from a family of nine, but says she was the only one to suffer reading difficulties.

'They said in my school reports that if I could put my mind to it I could do it. But I didn't put my mind to anything while I was at school.

'My mind was on children. The nursery and that. But when I left school and started working the firm knew about my reading. They said I had no problem so long as I could reckon up my wages and write my name down.' She could do that. In fact she says she never had any problem with money until it was decimalised. She still hasn't picked that up. 'But I've been trying to pick up my reading and my spelling ever since I left school.' She puts her inability to learn to read there down to a very bad scald she received before she was ten.

'Then when I did leave school when I was fourteen I said I'd like to go somewhere to learn to read.' But she couldn't find anywhere. When she got married her husband helped her.

'Then one day I said I'd really get my courage and find a place and tell them I can't read and spell very good and I'd like to pick up. And that's how I did it.

'I could read just a little bit. I could read the words "Birmingham Mail" or something like that, but no more.

'I could write a little bit, but not the words I really wanted to put in.' She's now had individual tuition for just over a year, and there has been improvement.

'For a start I can read a lot of a newspaper. I can find out what's on TV. But only the children's programmes.

'When I get letters addressed to me—well, I know my own name and address—I can get my letters now and read them. But when I come to a really big word I try my hardest, but if I don't know what it is I have to push it to one side.

'Now I'm beginning to fill in a few forms on my own. I can write my address if I copy it. But I don't want it that way. I want to remember the spelling in my mind.

'I'd never gone shopping on my own before. My sister always used to come with me. I was too nervous. But now I go to the shops and everything on my own.'

Andrew Smith is thirty-seven, lives in Liverpool and works as a rectifier on a car assembly line. He's afraid he may have to leave that job as he left his last job at a printer's if he is pushed towards promotion.

'I was ten years on the printing. I worked my way up onto all the machines,

and then eventually it would have meant promotion. When the supervisor was off I was his stand-in. That started to frighten me.

'Eventually I thought I'd better get out because if I got stuck in this foreman's job I'd look a right Charlie. So a chance of redundancy came along and I took it.

'I'm still frightened of people finding out. I don't know why.'

Andrew's other jobs have been as a milkman, which he started as soon as he left school, and in the Army, which he served in for three years.

'I was fourteen when I left school. I couldn't read very well. I could write my name. I had to learn my address off by heart, and as soon as I had to write it down I'd forget it.

'I was an orphan. I had very little home life at the back of me. My grandmother was always out working and my grandfather had died. There was no one to encourage me. They didn't care whether I was at school or not. I wasn't too bad at sums and other things, but when English came round, and as I got older, I started to get more and more frightened of it, and drew back.

'When I left school it was fear all the way along when I went for my first job—I went as a lad on the milk. But it wasn't too bad, though it took a long while to get used to, a very long while.

'But as I got older I wasn't doing very well at work and eventually left home. Knowing I had to go in the Army some time for my National Service, I joined up.

'It wasn't too bad in the Army because you were told what to do. They did try a little bit to teach me. I think I went on a course for a couple of weeks, only a basic course. I don't think I learned nothing on it, though I must have learned something of course.

'But I became an NCO. I could instruct men. I could learn something, but it would take me something like a month to get through a little course, to prepare a lesson on a new subject.

'I couldn't read an instruction manual. It was pure guesswork. When I went on to parade, if I was Company Orderly Sergeant, I had to have all the names on a piece of paper in case I had to take a person's name. Then if that happened I could always tick it off.

'I first told my wife about my problem when I first met her. How she read my letters from the army I'll never know. I was telling her nothing. She got a big letter and there was nothing in it. I'd miss words out and everything.'

His children know too: 'They've not always known, but when they began to become aware at about ten or twelve I had to tell them. They just accepted it and they understood. But nobody else knew. Not even my own family.'

Twelve months ago he started tuition after his wife had heard about the Liverpool University Settlement scheme and rung up on his behalf. Eventually he managed to force himself to come forward.

'Before I started I always used to buy a newspaper because I wanted to learn to read it, and I felt I didn't look a fool if I had one. But I was always frightened of pulling it out of my pocket in case someone leaned over my shoulder and said, "What's that?" Now it's not so bad. I can actually open a paper and read it.'

PRESENT PROVISION

The present provision for illiterate adults is quite inadequate. This fact is not in dispute. The only argument is about the true nature and extent of the deficiency.

Some remedial provision is made in the following ways:

- by local authorities as a part of their adult education provision, or, very occasionally, as a part of the work of social services departments;
- by independent bodies in partnership with local authorities or financed by them either in part or in whole;
- by entirely independent bodies;
- by the education department of the Home Office in prisons and other penal institutions;
- by the Department of Employment in a few rehabilitation units;
- by the Armed Forces.

BAS has found that there are grave deficiencies in the nature and quality of much of this.

It varies wildly between the relatively high standards of the few deeply sensitive local authorities and independent schemes that lead the field, and the well-meaning majority whose activities tend to be unco-ordinated and ill-thought out.

The lack of national direction of literacy teaching detracts from the efficacy of everyone working in the field.

A number of serious general criticisms have to be made of the bulk of the present effort:

1. There is no co-ordinated national move to identify and tackle adult illiteracy, nor any accurate means of assessing either the true size of the problem or the effect of remedial measures.
2. The whole of the present provision lacks flexibility. Many local authorities offer no alternatives to classes within their conventional adult education provision, and these generally involve a teacher/student ratio too high for effective remedial work. Many authorities offer no more than one or two classes to serve a large area. A student fortunate enough to find a class in one locality is almost certain to find it impossible to continue to learn to read if he moves elsewhere. He will find the same difficulty if he has begun to learn in prison or the Armed Forces.
3. Far too many illiterate adults find themselves directed to classes which were actually set up for quite different purposes: perhaps 'English for Immigrants', or even 'English for O Level'. This is pointless. It does not constitute proper provision.
4. At the moment there is very little special training available for adult literacy teachers. Because it is a relatively new field with very little relevant literature available it is vital that training schemes be set up, and teachers enabled and encouraged to get together to discuss their methodology.

5. Lack of provision is often excused on the grounds that there is no obvious demand for literacy classes. This argument is fortified by the negative results of the unimaginative and inaccessible advertising methods local authorities generally use, and the deep shame illiterate adults commonly feel at the handicap they spend so much time trying to hide.

6. The regulations generally in force for adult education are irrelevant and often harmful to literacy teaching. For instance, it is unreasonable to expect illiterate adults to fill in forms, it is unreasonable to expect them to enrol for classes only in September each year instead of at the moment they come forward for help.

7. In many classes, both local authority and independent, there is seldom proper diagnosis of students' reading difficulties. This means that they cannot possibly be grouped in a way that will offer them the most effective tuition.

8. In many independent schemes aims and objectives are never stated, perhaps never properly considered. Some make no attempt to contact their local authorities either to seek help or to find out if literacy work is already being done in their area. The result of this is that many schemes are begun and conducted with neither priorities nor a timescale written into them.

We have already said that we believe that at least two million adults in England and Wales urgently need tuition.

To set against that figure, we also know from Peter Clyne's 'The Disadvantaged Adult: Educational and Social Needs of Minority Groups' (London: Longman, 1973) that local education authority provision for teaching that two million is grossly inadequate and unevenly spread.

Clyne found that only about half the authorities in the country were making any kind of provision at all:

County Authorities	County Boroughs	Greater London	Total
61%	40%	75%	52%

The nature of what the 52 per cent provides is extremely variable. And not a single authority can claim to be making anything like adequate provision for the illiterate adults in its area. Very few even have plans which might eventually carry them anywhere near adequate provision.

In his 'Survey of Provision for Adult Literacy in England' (University of Reading, 1973) R. Michael Haviland supported Clyne's view. He concluded that no more than 10,000, and perhaps as few as 5,000 adults receive some kind of tuition at any one time.

These estimates imply that at best we are managing to help around half a per cent of the people in need, and at worst no more than one quarter of a per cent.

A sad conclusion.

It is difficult to think of any similarly basic social provision in respect of which so much need is answered by so little useful help. BAS firmly believes in a right to read. Nobody who is capable of reading

should have the opportunity to do so denied them. Those who cannot read should have the opportunity to learn presented to them.

This requires a policy where at present there is none.

The second part of this publication is the comprehensive national policy that BAS and its companions in this campaign have formulated and will now present to the Secretary of State for Education.

Part Two

A POLICY FOR TWO MILLION ILLITERATE MEN AND WOMEN

THERE are at least two million functionally illiterate adults in England and Wales. They are either quite unable to read or write, or they have a reading age of less than that you would expect in a nine year-old child. More still have a reading age of between nine and thirteen years. Thirteen years is functional literacy level as defined by UNESCO.

Present statutory and independent provision gives some sort of help to no more than between a quarter and one half a per cent of them. The quality of this provision is variable, and, more often than not, low.

We live in a society geared to the abilities of the literate majority. A society where the ability to write, the ability to read pamphlets, agreements and the labels on potentially dangerous household goods is vital.

We urgently need a national policy that supports a determined attack on illiteracy and that, combined with essential improvements in the schools' literacy record, can ensure that within the foreseeable future we are a literate society.

We offer this policy document from the knowledge, the experience and the ideas of people employed full-time in independent and local authority backed schemes for illiterate adults. It also makes considerable use of the views expressed by voluntary workers, representatives of local authorities and interested national bodies who attended the BAS 'Status: Illiterate' conference in London during November 1973. It reflects their common view that there should be a right to read.

This is the policy we promised to that conference. Insofar as we can determine it is a moderate and realistic set of proposals.

If, in parts, it seems to pull against the ways in which education is currently organised and administered in England and Wales, we have been assured that it does not conflict with the ways in which those traditions are likely to change.

Above all, it is a comprehensive policy not a piecemeal assortment of the changes and improvement we happen to think might most readily find ministerial approval.

We are proposing an entirely fresh framework within which to tackle illiteracy. There must be an element of research in it because our present knowledge is pitifully thin. There must be self-critical action research connected with teaching projects. We must also know the size and exact nature and implications of illiteracy, though enough is already known to support an immeasurably improved teaching effort. Reform must not be made to wait for research. They can progress together. This is our policy:

1. The Government should enter into a firm commitment to eradicate adult illiteracy. There is no reason why it should be afraid of setting a target date, say 1985, by which time the incidence could be reduced to a fraction of its present level. At the end of this period there could be a fresh plan geared to eradicating the remainder. A key factor in the success of any plan would be a radical improvement in the literacy

record of the schools. It is for the Bullock Committee, when it reports, to tackle this issue. In the meantime it would be wrong for us to make specific proposals for re-organisation of schools' training and remedial provisions.

2. The Government must use its powers to direct the course and content of adult education to help local education authorities improve their facilities for illiterate adults. Local authorities cannot do a proper job on existing resources, so we believe they should be supplemented by a special Adult Literacy Fund. This should be established by the Government as an emergency measure along the lines of Urban Aid. Local authorities would be asked to submit schemes which, if acceptable, would qualify them for a three year allocation of 75 per cent of their expenditure.

3. This fund would be best administered by a National Resource Council for Adult Literacy. The Council would also have the job of overseeing co-ordination of resources, development of teaching techniques and the establishment of training programmes to teach the variety of skills people need if they are to staff literacy projects. It would also co-ordinate the adult remedial provision with the fresh efforts that are bound to be required from the schools.

4. Every local authority in England and Wales must immediately begin to make some kind of provision for its illiterate adults. To this end all local authorities, whether or not they proposed to submit plans to the National Resource Council, should be required within a set time to give the Department of Education their assessment of their present needs, the state of remedial provision, and their plans and budgets.

5. Illiterate adults must be persuaded and encouraged to come forward and be helped. A high priority is a Government advertising campaign to educate the public in the facts of illiteracy, and to reassure illiterate adults that they can be helped and that they should feel no shame at being unable to read.

6. Local authorities must ensure that their remedial classes for illiterate adults are free from the normal adult education practices relating to minimum class size, normal student hours and term times and formal enrolment procedures. These all obstruct the sensitive and intensive process that illiterate adults need to be involved in. Class sizes should be flexible. Teaching should be spread over twelve months of the year because continuity is vital. New students should always be greeted with a comprehensive interview resulting in a proper diagnosis of their reading difficulties. Even the modest fees charged for adult education should be waived because they may deter a few people from seeking the help they need.

7. Local authorities must stop making adult literacy classes the poor relations in adult education institutes, and should review their financial priorities wherever these conflict with this principal. Most classes are at present blighted by a chronic shortage of cash for all necessary teaching materials.

8. Literacy classes should be graded in Burrough terms above the lowest level so that part-time staff can be paid at a realistic rate for the vital work they do. Pay for full-time staff need not be dictated by the grading of classes, so institutes of adult education already have discretion in the rates they pay, if they care to use it. They should make quite sure that pay for full-time staff recognises the special qualities literacy teaching requires, and the arduous nature of the work. Classes must not founder for lack of reasonable financing.
9. Every local authority should appoint a full-time officer responsible to the Chief Education Officer for the co-ordination, development and administration of all local efforts. Very few local authorities have made an appointment along these lines so far, and this is an important reason for the under-developed nature of a lot of provision that exists. We recommend this appointment be at 'advisor' level, with appropriate supporting staff. This officer would also be responsible for developing local publicity and advertising.
10. In the short-term, independent bodies and individual volunteers are vital to literacy teaching. But only the Government can eradicate illiteracy. Volunteers must remember this, and should seek to integrate or hand over their scheme to their local authorities as soon as those authorities are sufficiently professional to manage and develop them.
11. Independent groups have proved that they can often respond swiftly to need. They have proved it in the field of literacy teaching. But it is not always right for volunteers just to set up a scheme and begin to teach. Independent groups intending to teach must first find out what statutory provision there is in their area. If this is non-existent or inadequate they should campaign for improvement and seek co-operation. BAS will not co-operate with independent organisations intent on setting up self-perpetuating literacy services, or who are in the field simply in order to attract the charitable money that is beginning to become available now that literacy teaching is seen as a fashionable project.
12. Independent grassroots organisations have unique opportunities to identify illiterate adults in the community and refer them for tuition. They should see this as a normal part of their social work referral.
13. The encouragement and support of the CBI is needed to make sure that employers and managers take a lead in assessing the effects of illiteracy on the standard of industrial work and the ability of employees to take proper advantage of promotion opportunities.
14. A vital means of tackling illiteracy in industry may be through 'Wider Opportunities Courses'. We urge the Government to explore this and other possibilities with the expert advice of the Manpower Services Commission.
15. Trade unions can play a part in identifying the incidence of functional illiteracy among working people insofar as its effects become apparent in the working situation. When suitable facilities become more generally

available the TUC and trade unions could assist in bringing them to the notice of trade union members and in encouraging members to take advantage of them.

16. We urge major publishers to begin to produce books suitable for adults with very low reading ages and libraries to make sure that they stock what little material is now available. Too often adults are expected to practise on children's stories. There is a great demand for more interesting and mature material.

17. We urge the media, and in particular radio and television, both of which are uniquely accessible to men and women who cannot read, to accept that they have a responsibility to give help to illiterate adults as well as publicity to their problems. Television, in particular, should turn out to be an invaluable teaching medium for people who will not, or cannot seek more personal involvements. In the immediate future it can provide an invaluable means of referral for people who would never otherwise get to hear of the help that is already available.

A NATIONAL EFFORT

BAS will now seek with other independent bodies and individuals who have already pledged their support to form a national Right to Read Campaign with the following objectives:

- to maintain pressure for the full implementation of the policies put forward in this report;
- to promote and sponsor discussion of the facts of functional literacy and to expand present knowledge of the problem;
- to help develop and co-ordinate action research and information about teaching techniques;
- to establish the ability to read as a right offered free of charge to every man and woman in this country.

BAS will not lead this campaign but will accept its responsibility to take the lead in setting it up.

If you believe in a Right to Read and you represent an organisation or simply want to help as an individual please write to us at

'Right to Read',
British Association of Settlements,
7 Exton Street,
London SE1 8UE.

A RIGHT TO READ

Further copies of 'A Right to Read—action for a literate Britain' are available from BAS at 20p.

Part II—Policy is also published in broadsheet at 2p—minimum orders for fifty copies at £1 including postage would be preferred.

To: BAS
7 EXTON STREET
LONDON SE1 8UE

I enclose £ for copies of A Right to Read at 20p.

I enclose £ for copies of Policy—£1 for fifty copies.

Please complete the address to which order should be sent in BLOCK CAPITALS.

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