

EU HIGH LEVEL GROUP OF EXPERTS ON LITERACY Final Report

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Context of the report

- The May 2009 Council of Education Ministers renewed the target of having no more than 15% of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading literacy by 2020.
- In 2010, the EU's "Europe 2020" Strategy set ambitious objectives for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth for the entire EU. Quality of education and training, successful labour market integration and more mobility of young people are key to achieving the Europe 2020 objectives.
- On 1 February 2011, Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou asked H.R.H Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands to chair a group of renowned experts in the field of literacy, to examine how to support literacy throughout lifelong learning.

Members of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy

H.R.H. Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands (Chair) – Founder and Chair of the Reading & Writing foundation (Stichting Lezen & Schrijven) in the Netherlands, UNESCO Special Envoy on Literacy for Development.

Prof. Greg Brooks - Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Sheffield, UK, where he worked 2001-07. For the previous 20 years he worked for the National Foundation for Educational Research.

Prof. Roberto Carneiro - Former Minister of Education of Portugal (1987-91). Professor at the Portuguese Catholic University and Chair of the Editorial Board of the European Journal of Education.

Prof. Marie Thérèse Geffroy - President of the French National Agency to Fight Illiteracy (ANLCI), former Director, General Inspector of National Education.

Dr. Attila Nagy - PhD in psychology and sociology in 1997 at the Lorand Eotvos University in Budapest, founder of the Hungarian Reading Association.

Members of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy

Dr. Sari Sulkunen - Senior researcher at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research and at the Department of Languages at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Prof. Karin Taube - Professor of Education (emerita) Umeå University, Sweden.

Prof. Georgios Tsiakalos - Professor of Pedagogy at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Prof. Renate Valtin - Professor of primary education (emerita), Humboldt University Berlin, Germany.

Jerzy Wiśniewski - Education policy expert from Poland, member of the Governing Board of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation CERI (OECD).

Why literacy is a big deal?

■ Large numbers of citizens lack the necessary literacy skills

- PISA 2009: one in five EU 15-year-olds had poor reading skills
- An estimated 20% of adults lack the literacy skills they need to fully function in a modern society

■ Literacy is key for important socio-economic trends and ambitions

- The digital world is centred around the written word
- Writing is increasingly important
- The labour market requires ever higher literacy skills
- Social and civic participation are more literacy-dependent

■ Investments in literacy make economic sense

Framing the solutions: a cooperative approach

- Acknowledge that everyone can and will learn to read and write given the appropriate methods of learning, support based on individual needs and enough time.
- The need for a substantial improvement in literacy levels is driven to a large extent by a number of important socio-economic trends, now and in the future. So literacy is an issue for which both the causes and the solutions should be sought **in society as a whole**.
 - Create partnerships for literacy development between education and societal players such as municipalities, businesses, trade unions and NGOs

Develop visions and strategies for literacy development with wide ownership

Across government:

The main ministry responsible for developing an integrated vision and strategy on literacy should develop a “joined-up” literacy approach, actively involving other ministries, such as Culture, Health, Employment and Finance. Within European institutions, initiate a dialogue between different services and institutions with policies relating to literacy in order to raise awareness of literacy in European policymaking.

Across ages:

Adopt literacy strategies with a lifelong time-span.

Independent of political timetables:

Literacy development and politics move at different speeds. The delivery and funding of literacy strategies need to persist across electoral cycles. Political commitment from the top to keep the issue visibly alive across society is crucial to maintain momentum for initiatives on the ground.

Preconditions for success

A literate environment

Quality of learning and teaching

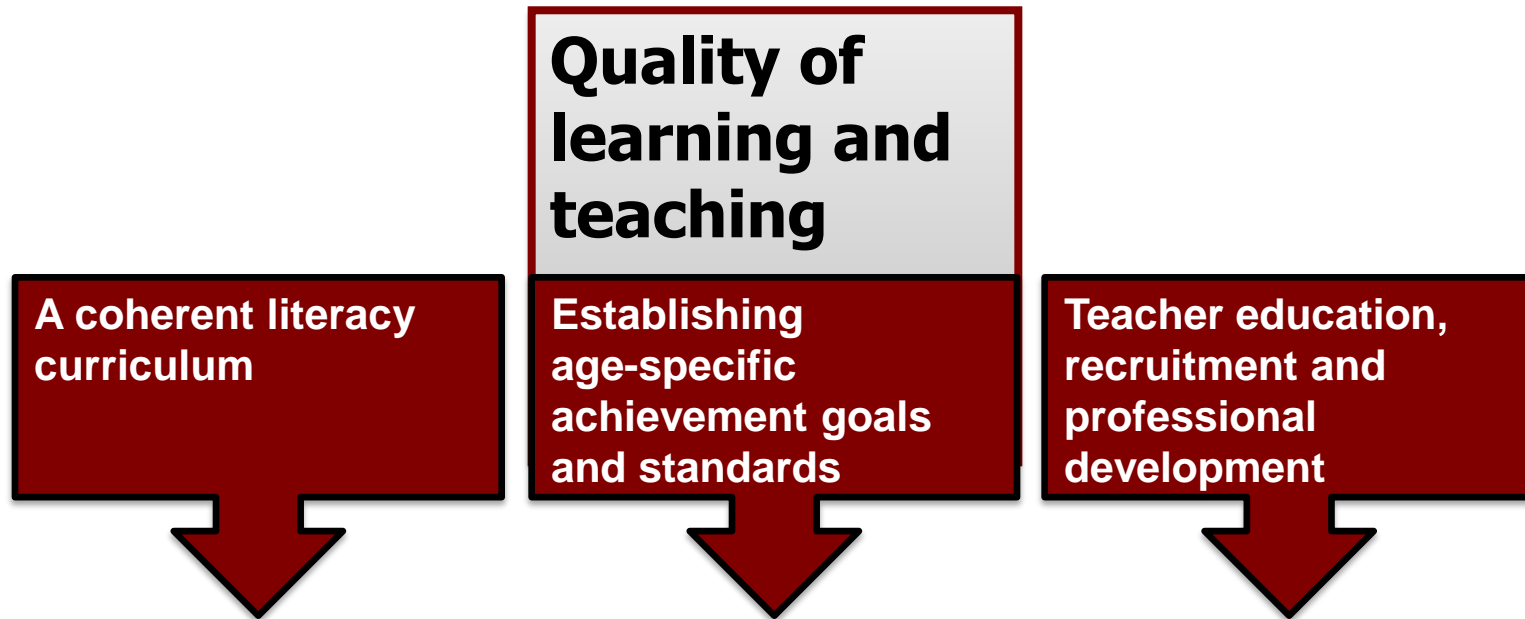
Participation and inclusion

Preconditions for success



A literate environment is one that **acknowledges the importance of language** and **encourages and supports the literacy development** of all, no matter what their age or background. The primary objective of a literate environment is to increase literacy motivation and engagement by encouraging and supporting reading and writing for pleasure. This means cultivating a culture of reading, increasing the visibility and availability of reading materials and promoting reading in all its forms, through diverse materials, online and offline.

Preconditions for success



Learning to read and write does not just happen – people need to be motivated to learn. Similarly, high quality teaching does not just happen - it requires **high quality teachers** and instructors. In addition the context in which learning and teaching takes place also helps determine the effect on both learners and teachers. In other words, all elements are interrelated and no one aspect is sufficient in itself.

Preconditions for success

Participation and inclusion

Access to education means little without high-quality provision and specialised support targeted at those who most need it. Almost all children participate in formal education for at least 10 years, yet, as we have seen, nearly one in five reaches the age of 15 without having developed good reading skills.

To close the gaps between those who have good literacy skills and those who struggle, Europe needs to place greater emphasis on inclusion and fair access: participation coupled with quality, and bolstered by specialised support for everyone who needs it.

Preconditions for success

There are four main literacy achievement gaps that Europe must address:

**Socio-
economic
gap**

**Gender
gap**

**Migrant
gap**

**Digital
gap**

Age-specific recommendations

**Young
children**

**Primary
school
years**

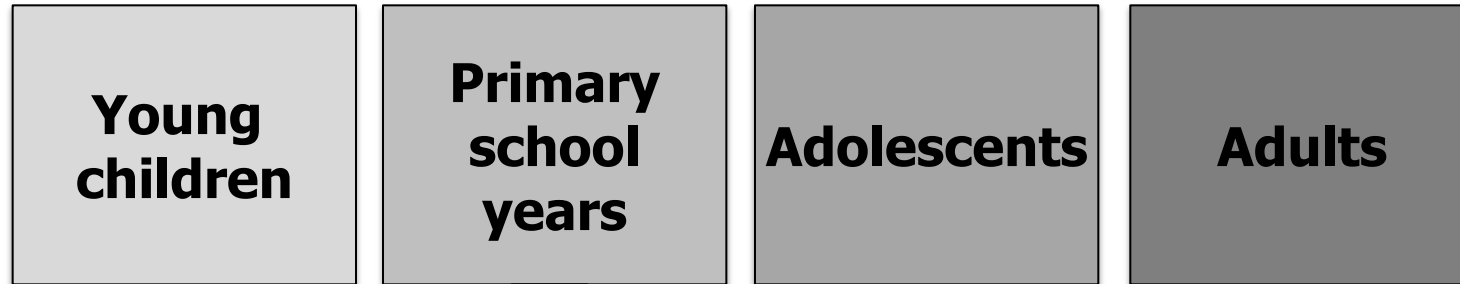
Adolescents

Adults



1. Stimulate and support the family
2. Increase the quality of Early Childhood Education and Care and provide for access
3. Ensure early screening for emerging literacy problems
4. Cooperate among stakeholders from a child-centred perspective

Age-specific recommendations



1. Establish specialist reading teachers and higher qualifications for all primary teachers
2. Early intervention
3. Inspire the motivation to read

Age-specific recommendations

**Young
children**

**Primary
school
years**

Adolescents

Adults



1. Make every teacher a teacher of literacy
2. Provide the right material to motivate all readers, especially boys
3. Stimulate school-business cooperation

Age-specific recommendations

**Young
children**

**Primary
school
years**

Adolescents

Adults



1. Establish systems to monitor adult literacy levels and practices
2. Communicate widely about the need for adult literacy development
3. Strengthen the profession of adult literacy teachers
4. Ensure broad and varied access to learning opportunities

Thank you for your attention!