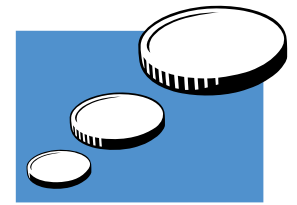


Giving Insights



New
**Philanthropy
Capital**

Spring 2010

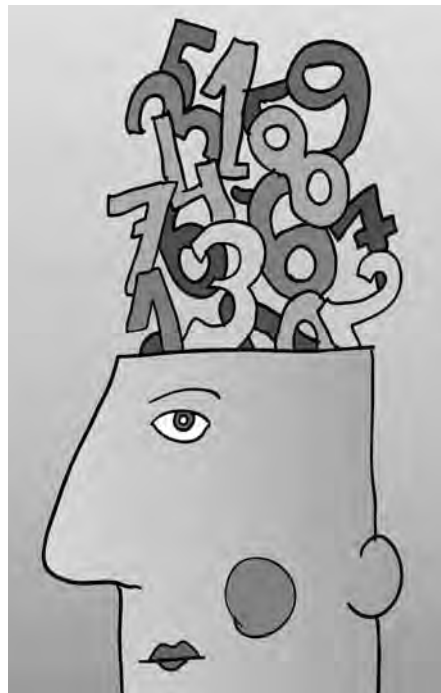
Go figure

Understanding numeracy? Don't count on it

How much? How many? What's the difference? These are questions that people with numeracy problems struggle with.

These are also questions that NPC struggled with when researching adult numeracy. But it wasn't the numbers that were the problem—it was the lack of them. Search as we might, in government reports and dusty filing cabinets, there were few numbers on adult numeracy to be found.

We did find enough numbers to know that poor numeracy is a problem. A report from the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy showed that people with poor maths skills are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than more numerate contemporaries.



We also know from a 2003 survey that England has a numeracy problem. An astounding 21% of adults in England—6.8m people—had numeracy skills below the basic level needed for everyday situations.

Numeracy skills don't add up

Have we improved since 2003? The truth is, we don't know, and we won't know until the government carries out the survey again. We know that government programmes like Skills for Life and Train to Gain increased the number of adults achieving their basic numeracy qualification—from 3,000 in 2002/2003 to 84,000 in 2006/2007. But

taking qualifications doesn't necessarily mean that skills have improved—people may have had the skills before, or tests may not be assessing the skills needed in everyday life.

To make matters worse, no one has even done the maths on how much numeracy teaching for adults is available or what it costs.

Similarly, in the charity world, we know anecdotally that many charities provide some numeracy courses for adults alongside their other work. For example, Crisis offers numeracy courses to homeless people using its services. However, there is no unifying body that maintains standards or keeps track of how many numeracy courses are being delivered.

Counting the costs of poor maths

At NPC, we often talk about getting more 'bang for your buck'—knowing the impact of the money you give. With adult numeracy we don't know the impact of government's or charities' work, or how much is being done. We don't even know the true size of the problem. It just doesn't add up!

In NPC's forthcoming report on numeracy, we suggest setting up a national numeracy trust to unify this fragmented sector. This could create a stronger lobbying voice and improve coordination of services and sharing of best practice. Until then, we can't count the true costs of poor numeracy.

Lucy Heady



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NPC's guide to analysing charities



Wishlists for the next decade

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Jane Asher on the causes she supports