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## **National Numeracy Trust needed to lead the way in improving maths skills**

A new National Numeracy Trust is needed to tackle the problem of poor maths skills amongst children and adults. *Count me in*, a new report by charity think tank and consultancy New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), finds that government intervention is not enough and that more needs to be done to change public attitudes to maths and improve standards in schools.

The research finds that many people are happy to admit that they dislike numbers and struggle with them, which is a major barrier to improving skills. A fifth of children leave primary school without passing the maths test at the expected level, and a fifth of adults do not have the basic numeracy skills needed for everyday life.

*'Poor numeracy can affect people throughout their lives. People who struggle with numbers are twice as likely to be unemployed as those who are competent,' says report author Belinda Vernon. 'Changing negative attitudes to numbers is crucial if we are to see a real, sustained improvement in numeracy skills. We believe a National Numeracy Trust, along the lines of that launched for literacy nearly twenty years ago, could do that.'*

Professor Celia Hoyles from the Institute of Education agrees that poor numeracy is a serious problem in the UK. *'All the economic studies show that numeracy is even more important than literacy when it comes to getting a job and future prospects. Over and over again we are seeing life chances really disadvantaged by a lack of numeracy skills, so it's really important that we address the challenge of engaging everybody in numeracy by all means available. A forum which would bring charities together and fill any gaps in what the government is doing when it comes to numeracy would be very helpful.'*

While NPC's research acknowledges the efforts made by government to improve numeracy in the last ten years, it points to the lack of an overarching strategy to improve teaching, attitudes and skills across all the different age groups in a co-ordinated way. It also highlights the concern over the lack of specialist maths teachers in both primary and secondary schools and the lack of co-ordination when pupils move from primary to secondary school.

Nick Bowes from the Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education agrees that more needs to be done: *'There has been an issue in primary schools in terms of maths teaching because primary teachers may not have done maths since they did their GCSEs and we need to raise the maths ability of the workforce. We need to see a maths specialist in every school. There has been a lot of progress and the teaching of maths will get better, but we are still at an early stage.'*

NPC's report finds there are far fewer charities working in the area of numeracy than in literacy. The research shows that some charities supporting maths in schools are innovative and effective, but funding is patchy and the work fragmented across many different organisations. It highlights the need for charities to do more in this field, especially in re-engaging hard to reach adults and children and in developing innovative approaches to teaching numeracy.

One charitable programme is Catch Up Numeracy, which was launched nearly two years ago following the success of its literacy programme. It has worked with more than 800 schools across the country. Dr Graham Sigley, Catch Up's Deputy Director, says the demand came directly from headteachers at primary schools who recognised some children were struggling

with maths. *'We have six and seven year olds who don't know how to order their numbers to twenty and that causes real problems for them. We have to make sure that they have the basic foundations, find any gaps they have and learn how to fill those gaps. By training teaching assistants to assess a child and then work with them on a one-to-one basis for a couple of sessions a week, we are able to help children make progress very quickly.'*

The report concludes that the time is right for the development of a national numeracy trust to campaign and coordinate the efforts to improve the numeracy of children and adults.

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For further information, or to arrange an interview with one of the authors of the report please contact Gemma Davidson (PR Manager) on [gdaavidson@philanthropycapital.org](mailto:gdaavidson@philanthropycapital.org), or Esther Paterson (PR Executive) on [epaterson@philanthropycapital.org](mailto:epaterson@philanthropycapital.org) or +44 (0)207 785 6300. [www.philanthropycapital.org](http://www.philanthropycapital.org).

## **Notes to Editors**

### **1. Case studies**

#### **Mairi and Catch Up Numeracy**

Mairi was eight years old when the school she'd just moved to realised she was having problems with maths. There were lots of gaps in her knowledge and she had little confidence. Her mum, Dorothy, had also noticed that Mairi was finding maths difficult: *'I could tell she was struggling. She was reluctant to sit down and do her work and I really didn't know what to do.'*

Mairi's school started to help her using the Catch Up Numeracy scheme. The assessments showed that her basic knowledge was poor, causing her problems as numeracy lessons moved on to cover new areas. Angela, a teaching assistant, started working with Mairi in fifteen-minute sessions, twice a week. Angela had been trained by Catch Up Numeracy and used the sessions to play lots of 'numeracy games' to make the work fun and build Mairi's confidence. *'When we started the sessions, Mairi really didn't like maths at all. She wouldn't get on with her work and she was very unhappy about it. I found that she had a lot of gaps with her maths facts and there were a lot of areas that needed improvement. She was also very disengaged and had no enthusiasm.'*

After only three months of working with Angela, Mairi's numeracy skills had improved so much that she jumped from a National Curriculum level 1 to a level 2—three times the expected rate of progress. Mairi so enjoyed the sessions with Angela that she asked if she could carry on. Angela says the difference in Mairi is amazing: *'She's now a very confident young lady who will have a go at anything. She's happy to work independently, will put her hand up in class, and really smiles when she gets it right.'*

Mairi says she likes maths now and finds it fun: *'I used to find maths very hard and I felt I was going to get told off if I couldn't do it. I've got a lot better and I can do my five and ten times tables. My teachers and my mum think I've done really well and it makes me very happy.'*

Mairi's mum Dorothy is also delighted with the change in her daughter. *'I don't want Mairi to struggle with maths because you need it when you go out in the real world. Mairi now has the confidence to sit down and have a go and we know the support is there if she's struggling.'*

#### **Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership**

For over ten years, the charity Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership (THEBP) has been sending employees from local businesses into schools to help children with their

maths, through its Number Partners programme. Over 500 volunteers currently visit over 40 schools (mostly primary, but some secondary) across the deprived London borough of Tower Hamlets. Catherine Myers, headteacher of Bishop Challoner Secondary School, believes the scheme helps her pupils see how maths can be used in the real world. *'The children start to see a use for the numeracy work they do in terms of a job or university and it helps to bring maths to life. They see what doing well at maths can bring them and it gives them a reason to work hard.'*

2. **New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)** is a charity think tank and consultancy dedicated to helping funders and charities to achieve a greater impact. We provide independent research, tools and advice for both charities and funders in the UK and internationally. We have an ambitious vision: to create a world in which charities and their funders are as effective as possible in changing people's lives and in tackling social problems. For charities, this means measuring the results of their work and using evidence to learn and improve, as well as to attract support. For funders, it means using evidence of charities' results to make funding decisions and to measure their own impact. For further information, see [www.philanthropycapital.org](http://www.philanthropycapital.org).
3. NPC's research into numeracy has been commissioned by a group of funders, led by **The Rayne Foundation**, together with **The Clothworkers' Foundation**, **John Lyon's Charity**, **Man Group plc Charitable Trust**, and **John Griffith-Jones, KPMG Chairman**. They have supported this research because they are concerned about the proportion of people who struggle with numeracy, and want to understand what charitable funders could do to improve the situation.
4. **Government initiatives:** Over the past decade, there has been an increased policy focus on raising the numeracy standards of children and adults.

The most significant development for children was the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy for primary schools in 1999. This gave teachers detailed frameworks and guidance on how they should be teaching children numeracy. The numeracy strategy has since been subsumed into more general National Strategies, and it was announced in 2009 that the government will be dismantling the Strategies, having had success in raising awareness and improving primary school mathematics results.

In 2007, the government commissioned a review of primary school mathematics teaching, headed by Sir Peter Williams. The final report of the Williams Review was published in 2008, and one of its major recommendations was that the government should provide training so that each primary school has a 'maths specialist', whose job is to promote good maths teaching within schools. This programme is underway.

Government is also funding the Every Child Counts programme, developed with the Every Child a Chance Trust, to provide specialist numeracy tuition for 30,000 children aged six and seven who are significantly underachieving.