



research on literacy at the NFER



NFER is Britain's largest independent educational research body and is responsible for a wide portfolio of work commissioned by a range of clients. NFER is adept at delivering research and development projects on literacy and has an exceptionally strong track record in this area.

This leaflet demonstrates our expertise and what we offer, and gives some examples of our work. This profile, coupled with NFER's longstanding research expertise in the area of education, local authorities and Children's Services, demonstrates our distinctive perspective and a unique research, assessment and evaluation service.

Our experience and expertise

Research and development projects are customised to our clients' needs and are methodologically diverse. Our literacy projects range from very small to very large and we are able to meet the needs of a wide variety of clients. We have experienced and highly qualified staff and are able to draw on extensive research and development techniques and dedicated support services to ensure the quality and validity of all projects undertaken.

At NFER we have:

- a longstanding reputation and extensive portfolio of research into literacy teaching, learning and assessment across the full range of age groups, including early years, primary, secondary and adult
- successful experience of a wide range of research and evaluation work, from major government literacy programmes to small projects for charities or publishers
- unparalleled expertise in the development of literacy assessments, including national tests, informal classroom tasks, e-assessments and published tests
- a dedicated team with a range of expertise and specialist skills, led by nationally and internationally recognised experts in the field.

NFER carries out research and evaluation studies into reading, writing, speaking, listening and wider communication with all age groups, in schools and other contexts. We develop tests and informal assessments of literacy, both those requiring rigorous statistical analysis of test functioning and others where the qualitative exploration of learners' knowledge and understanding is necessary.

We help clients to:

- define their research questions
- situate their research and development in the context of up-to-date evidence
- find out what works
- evaluate initiatives and programmes
- build in validity and reliability to suit a test's purpose
- develop informal assessments that maximise information for teachers
- support good practice in teaching, learning and assessment.



Examples of our work

These selected examples show the wide range and scale of our literacy projects, both large and small.

Evaluations of literacy interventions

Evaluation of Every Child A Writer

(DCSF/DfE, 2009-10)

A major evaluation of the national strategy initiative to improve writing skills amongst primary school pupils, involving both qualitative and quantitative research, undertaken in collaboration with the University of Exeter.

Partners in Literacy

(National Literacy Trust, 2009-10)

The mid-point review of progress for this pilot project, which aims to involve a wide range of agencies in local initiatives to develop literacy in the hardest-to-reach families.

Attitudes to reading

Attitudes to Reading Surveys

(NFER, 1998, 2003, 2007)

A series of surveys of primary-aged children, tracking their enjoyment of and confidence in reading as it changes over the years.

Research reviews

Effective Teaching of Inference Skills for Reading (DCSF, 2008)

A literature review pulling together what is known about the inference skills that are necessary for effective reading and drawing out implications for classroom practice.

Developing Writing in a High-Stakes Environment (NFER, 2008)

A review of international practice and research on the teaching, learning and assessment of writing in high-stakes accountability systems, for the Sage *Handbook of Writing Development*.

International work

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

(DfE and Boston College, ongoing from 2001)

A major international study assessing the reading literacy of ten-year-olds in over 40 countries, together with their reading habits and attitudes and educational experiences. NFER administers the survey in England and Northern Ireland and provides the National Research Coordinator and the PIRLS International Reading Coordinator.

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIAAC) (DfE, 2009-2013)

A survey of adult competences in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland aimed at establishing future needs across a range of countries. NFER is part of a consortium administering the survey and provides the National Project Manager.

A Comparison of the Core Primary Curriculum in England to those of other High Performing Countries (DCSF, 2008)

A systematic mapping of the English national curriculum to those of countries whose performance in international studies is outstanding, to identify similarities and differences.

Advice on the National Assessments in Lithuania (Anglia Assessment, 2010-11)

Presentations, workshops and discussions to assist the examinations agency in Lithuania as they develop their new national assessments of reading and writing.

Literacy Assessment Framework for Use in Developing Countries

(Room to Read, 2010-11).

Advice and development for a charitable foundation working in a number of developing countries, for a prototype literacy assessment which, when adapted into local languages, contributes to the evaluation of their programmes.

Literacy assessment resources for teachers

Assessment for Learning - Literacy

(NFER, 2006)

A series of resource books for teachers and children presenting structured learning of peer- and self-assessment skills in the context of literacy activities.

i-nfer plan (NFER, 2008)

NFER's e-assessment includes a suite of reading assessments covering stories, poems and information for the full primary age range, with unique formative reports for teachers.

Development of Assess and Progress

(Oxford University Press, 2009)

Development of an observational assessment for young children, involving close observation of the way comprehension skills are demonstrated when a child reads and discusses a book.

Test development

Development of National Tests in English

(QCDA and its predecessors, ongoing from 1989)

Development and pre-testing of national English tests for key stages 1 and 2, optional tests for years 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 and single level tests.

Development of Progress in English

(GL Assessment, 2006)

Development, trialling and standardisation of a major series of literacy tests for publication.

Informal assessments

Optional Assessment Materials and Optional Skills Assessment Materials

(Welsh Assembly Government, 2006-9)

Development and trialling of optional assessment materials to support the assessment of English in Wales, and to support the assessment of Communication Skills in English and Welsh within the new skills framework.

Our complete research service

We can provide:

- a wide range of research techniques and methodologies, including online surveys and evaluations
- expertise in the development of tests and assessment and in research into assessment topics
- a survey and data collection service for large-scale questionnaire surveys, test trialling and data-collection exercises
- highly experienced statisticians with expertise in all types of statistical analysis techniques
- specialist literature searching service
- dedicated service (EMIE) for local authorities on Children's Services and education issues, including engaging them in research
- information unit specialising in international education systems and policy
- a range of publishing, web and marketing services aimed at letting people know about the results of research.

For further information

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