European Multiplier Seminar
Labour Office & Clients

Education and Culture
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Target Groups

GUIDING CLIENTS WITH BASIC SKILLS DEFICITS

Labour Office and Clients – Improving the communication
between labour office advisers and their clients

European Employment Strategy

◆ In the past years, the issue of "Basic Skills" has gained particular attention in most European countries. Of particular concern are what is generally called "functional literacy" and "functional numeracy".

◆ Respective numbers are alarming: At least one out of four adults in Europe fails to reach minimum literacy levels for coping with everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society.

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European Employment Strategy

- In it's Communication on the Future of the European Employment Strategy the Commission outlines the key link played by lifelong learning in improving quality at work and productivity, and as a factor promoting labour force participation and social inclusion.

- In particular the growing inequality in access to training, to the disadvantage of less skilled and older workers, is a priority.
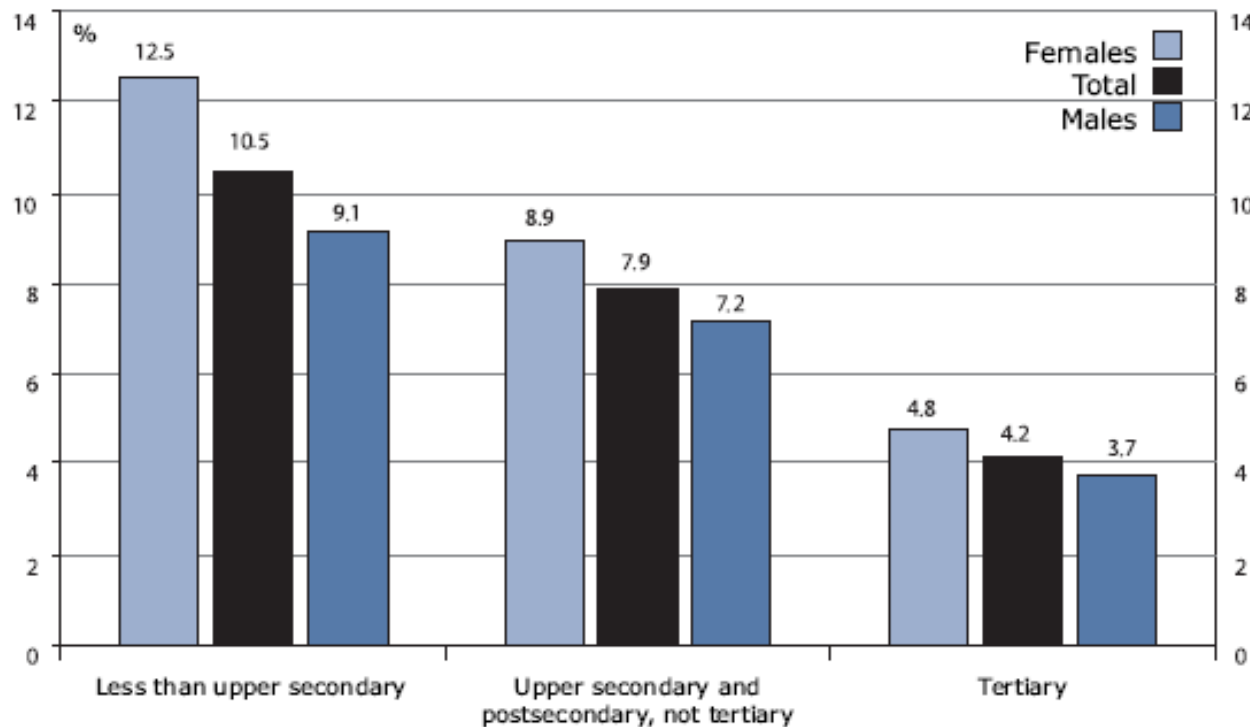
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Unemployment rate by level of education and sex, EU-25
Unemployed persons as a percentage of the total active population of the same group

	Less than upper secondary	Upper secondary and postsecondary, not tertiary	Tertiary
Females	12.5	8.9	4.8
Total	10.5	7.9	4.2
Males	9.1	7.2	3.7

Source: Eurostat - European Union Labour Force Survey

Functional illiteracy

- What are we dealing with?

- ◆ Definition of Basic Skills and Functional Illiteracy

- ◆ Who is Affected?

- ◆ Risk Factors

- ◆ Functional Illiteracy as a Social Phenomenon

- ◆ Hiding and Avoidance Strategies

- ◆ Criteria and Indicators for Detecting Basic Skills Deficits

- ◆ Working with the Target Group

- ◆ Escort and Ongoing Motivation

- ◆ Helpful Tips and References

Definition: Basic Skills

The ability to read and write (literacy), as well as to speak a respective language, and to use mathematics (numeracy) at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general.

Inclusion of basic IT-skills, foreign languages, technological culture, social skills and spirit of enterprise

Definition: Functional Illiteracy

A person is functionally illiterate who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development.

(according to a definition by the UNESCO)

Who is Affected?

◆ No "typical illiterate"

◆ But: main tendencies and common aspects (e.g. family background, educational experience)

All age groups

◆ up to 35: more male than female students in basic skills courses

◆ older than 35: vice versa

Educational Background

Most affected people:

◆ Special needs school or (partly) primary/secondary school

◆ 80% not finished school

Social/Professional Status

◆ Connection:
functional illiteracy – disadvantage in the labour market/unemployment

◆ manual work, low-skilled jobs,
low wages

◆ problem of more and more demands/competition

Typical Jobs

Women

- Cleaner
- Housekeeper
- Factory worker (e.g. packaging)
- Dressmaker, sewer
- Ironer
- Auxiliary nurse, assistant in kindergartens
- Hotel/catering employee
- Shop assistant

Men

- Factory worker
- Builder, bricklayer
- Installation worker
- Agricultural worker
- Cleaner
- Locksmith
- Machine operator
- ...

Risk factors:

Familiy Situation

- Parents with little interest in education

- Permanent crises, crucial events

- Alcohol abuse and violence within the family

- Discrimination, humiliation, demoralization

- Poor social status of the family

- Communicative poverty within the family

School

- Discrimination

- Humiliation (by teachers and/or fellow students)

- Experience of being an outcast

- Psychological pressure

Negative self-image

◆ "I cannot do this"

◆ "I am not clever enough for this"

◆ "I'll never be able to learn this"

◆ lack of self-confidence

◆ feeling of inferiority

◆ resignation

Functional Illiteracy as a Social Phenomenon

◆ Unemployment – a permanent threat

◆ Obstacles in everyday life

- reduced possibilities to make use of modern means of information and communication

- low level of personal mobility in terms of the use of public transport, cars

- low level of participation in processes of democratic life

- reduced possibilities of participation in any community activities

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Hiding and Avoidance Strategies

- ◆ Fear of being detected

- ◆ Dependence on others

- ◆ Deceiving close persons

Typical Behavioural Patterns and Excuses

- People say that they have forgotten their glasses. They then ask the person who gave them the form to complete it.

- If they know that their inability to read or to write is going to become apparent they may bring distractions with them, e.g. a dog, a child or a mobile phone that keeps ringing.

- They say that they are in a hurry and ask if they can take the form or document away and bring it back later. They then get someone else to complete it.

Typical Behavioural Patterns and Excuses

◆ They may say something like, "I will have to ask my husband/wife about this before I fill it in, so please can I take it away and bring it back later"?

◆ They bring a friend, partner or parent who 'does this sort of thing'.

◆ They ask where to sign a form with no attempt at reading what they are signing.

◆ They become evasive and distracted if asked questions about qualifications, certificates etc.

Typical Behavioural Patterns and Excuses

◆ People become aggressive or frustrated, pretending that this is because of the interview process.

◆ They say that they only want to go on courses where they do not have to fill in forms.

◆ They keep on being late or missing appointments.

◆ They are unsure about when they did things in the past, e.g. previous jobs etc.

◆ Having to deal with institutions like banks, people with low literacy levels have a strong preference for face-to-face contacts and prefer to return to the same branch and the same member of staff.

Typical Behavioural Patterns and Excuses

◆ They are very reluctant to use automated phone systems and computerized kiosks or workstations.

◆ People are happier dealing with a company when they can develop a good relationship with the one person who they meet on each visit.

◆ The first contact with an official in an organization is often critical, but if they show sensitivity and are not condescending, the relationship is likely to develop.

◆ Many use avoidance as a coping mechanism, hoping that if they avoid something it will go away.

Typical Behavioural Patterns and Excuses

◆ They never do written things right there, but take forms etc. with them
to bring them back when they come next time.

◆ They repeatedly ask you to explain what they have just read.

◆ Their eyes fail to move right while "reading".

◆ They fail to respond to mailed notices, bills etc.

◆ They ask you to call rather than mail the information to them.

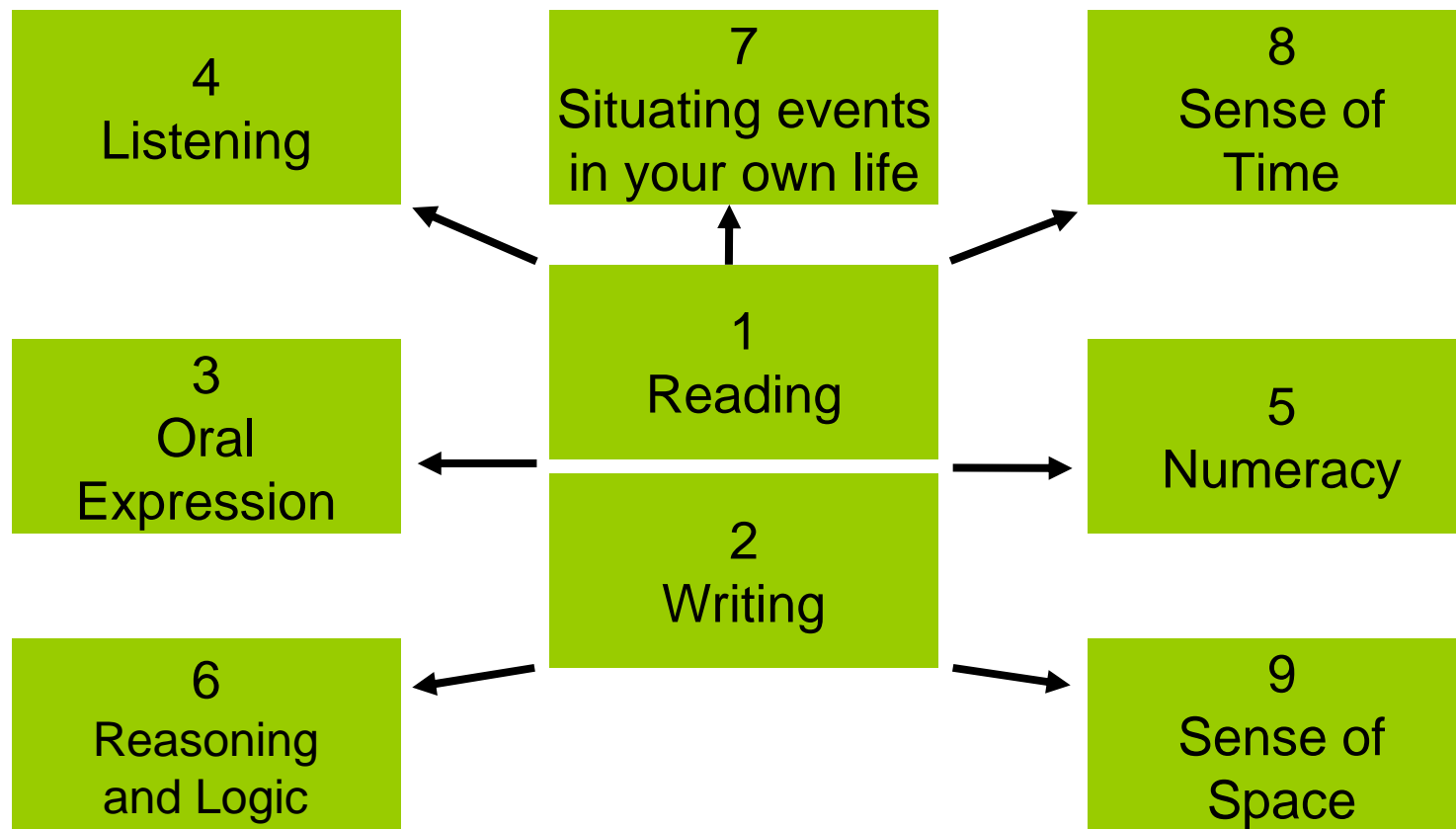◆ They generally turn down opportunities that require reading and/or
writing.

Typical Behavioural Patterns and Excuses

◆ From a social point of view, they often appear shy, awkward and may be tongue-tied.

◆ They may act aggressively or continously make jokes to cover low levels of confidence.

◆ If they do write something, they make spelling errors, there are reversals of letters and words, omissions of letters.

◆ People say that they have hurt their arm or hand, sometimes even to the extent of having it bandaged or in a sling.

Criteria and Indicators for Detecting Basic Skills Deficits

4 Listening	7 Situating events in your own life	8 Sense of Time
3 Oral Expression	1 Reading	5 Numeracy
6 Reasoning and Logic	2 Writing	9 Sense of Space

Reading

Signs which make us think there may be reading difficulties:

- Carries no written documents

- Avoidance of reading situations

- Does not refer to information which he/ she could have read in a written document.

Reading

Criteria: recognizable behaviour

- States he/ she cannot read or has great difficulty in doing so

- Deciphers a word at a time without understanding

- Reads hesitantly and slowly

- Does not seem to understand the information contained in the document

- Cannot find information in a document (diagrams, timetables, leaflets…) without resorting to going through the whole document

- Has to read aloud or uses lip movements, murmurs …

Writing

Signs which may indicate difficulties in this area:

- Does not carry around a pen or pencil

- Handwriting is babyish

- Cannot write on lines

- Does not spontaneously write anything down

Writing

Criteria: recognizable behaviour

◆ Cannot form letters or does so very slowly - holds pen awkwardly

◆ Everyday words (name, address, familiar place names) are barely recognizable when written spontaneously or copied

◆ Form filling causes difficulty

◆ Numerous spelling mistakes

◆ States he/she cannot write or does so with difficulty

Oral Expression

Signs indicating difficulties in this area:

- ◆ Unable to speak spontaneously and with ease

- ◆ Difficult to understand

- ◆ Has problems when introducing himself/herself

Oral Expression

Criteria: recognizable behaviour

- Uses a limited vocabulary and substitute words

- Uses only the present tense

- Confuses certain sounds and words (may need speech therapy)

- Makes basic grammatical errors

Listening

Signs indicating difficulties in this area:

◆ Seems agitated and restless

◆ Lacks concentration

◆ Does not seem attentive when spoken to

Listening

Criteria: recognizable behaviour

◆ Mishears sounds and words (may have hearing problems)

◆ Inappropriate responses to questions and instructions

◆ Often asks to have questions and directions repeated

◆ Inaccurate understanding of questions, instructions and information

Numeracy

Signs indicating difficulties in this area:

- Avoids situations in which counting or arithmetic are necessary
- Claims not to understand figures and numbers or says they are too difficult

Numeracy

Criteria: recognizable behaviour

◆ Cannot read or write figures

◆ Cannot count

◆ Cannot add or subtract

◆ Simple mental arithmetic seems impossible or is a source of frequent error

Logical Reasoning

Signs indicating difficulties in this area:

- ◆ Attitudes appear contradictory

- ◆ Has difficulty arguing

- ◆ Speech that does not make sense

Logical Reasoning

Criteria: recognizable behaviour

- Is incapable of making comparisons between two or more elements

- Cannot take account of various aspects of a problem simultaneously

- Cannot identify the different aspects of a question

- Cannot imagine different possibilities

- Cannot formulate hypotheses

- Makes no link between cause and effect

- Does not use the conditional tense

- Is unable to combine dual notions (place/time; time span/distance ...)

Sense of Time

Signs indicating difficulties in this area:

- Unable to reconstitute events in past life/in
  the news/in recent history

- Turns up too late or too early for appointments without reason

Sense of Time

Criteria: recognizable behaviour

- Cannot situate events in relation to the present moment (notions of before, during, after)

- Cannot assess whether he/she will be on time (too early, too late)

- Does not grasp the notion of chronological order or divisions of time (hour, day, month, year)

- Cannot read and write the time in different ways

- Cannot estimate how long something will last

- Is unable to look ahead to the future

Sense of Space

Signs indicating difficulties in this area:

- Factors in the person's speech that indicate distortions and errors with regard to space

Sense of Space

Criteria: recognizable behaviour

◆ Unable to give details of places mentioned

◆ Cannot distinguish top/bottom, right/left, front /back , far/near

◆ Cannot place writing correctly on a page or board

◆ Incapable of estimating distances

◆ Unable to identify features on a town or road map

Working with the Target Group

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Some Pieces of Advice

◆ No direct questions

◆ Provide security and trust

◆ Encourage to attend basic skills trainings

Motivation

- ◆ They do not want to depend on somebody else any longer

- ◆ They want to get (or keep) a job, or improve their professional situation.

- ◆ They would at last like to be able to read papers and books, that means to make use of society's information offers.

- ◆ They would like to help their children with their homework.

- ◆ At last, they would like to go through life without having to hide something from their surroundings.

Escort and Ongoing Motivation

- Confidence building

- General reflection and practical support

- Motivation to engage in social contacts

- Pedagogical and personal escort

Helpful tips and references

◆ Have a look at the LOC-Handbook, and the LOC-Manual&Curriculum
in your language
version!
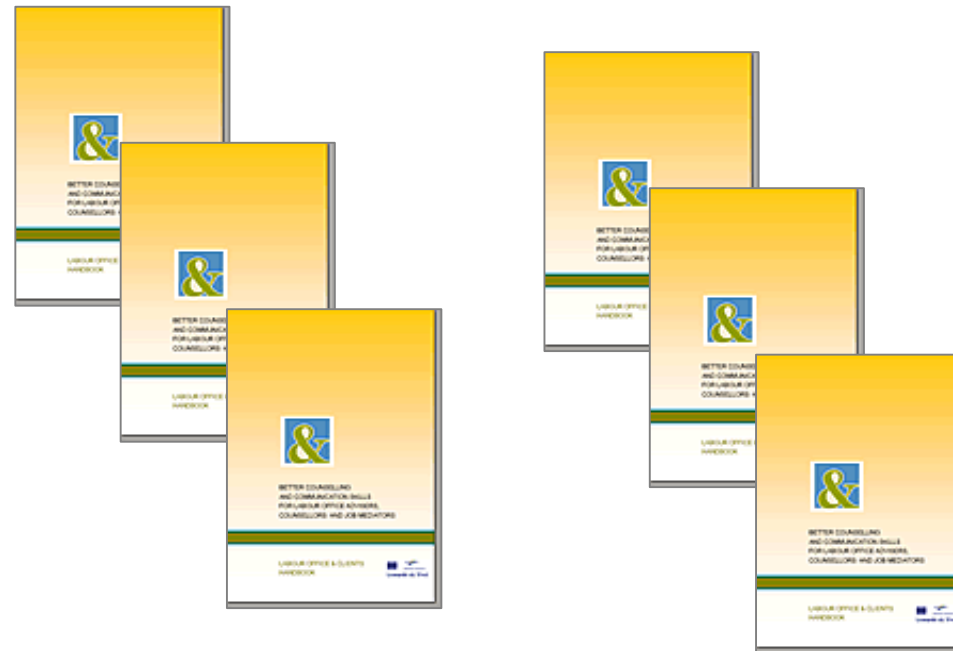
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Thank you for your attention!