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# Why leadership matters: putting basic skills at the heart of adult learning

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# Introduction to the book

- Ten years on from SfL strategy, refreshed in 2009 'Skills for Life: Changing lives'
- Little focus previously on leadership of literacy, language and numeracy learning (LLN) either in UK or internationally and most is school focused
- Critical for future positioning of LLN
- Consideration of instructional leadership
- Comparison with national literacy and numeracy strategies in primary curriculum, echo findings in further education
- Produced jointly by NRDC, CEL (Centre for Excellence in Leadership, now LSIS) and LCLL (London Centre for Leadership in Learning)



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# Why basic skills

- Research consistently shows that a skilled workforce is a productive workforce, better able to respond to the challenges and opportunities: conversely research shows that low basic skills correlates to lower employment opportunities, health and welfare (The Spirit Level, Wilkinson and Pickett 2009)
- NRDC research has highlighted importance of LLN learning to society and the economy (Bynner and Parsons 2006)
- Fundamental to inclusive approaches in teaching and learning
- Still high ambitions of government to improve population's basic skills in light of continuing deficit (World Class Skills, Leitch 2006)



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# What does effective leadership of LLN look like

- Ability to uphold values and principles
- College wide strategic plan inclusive of LLN, clear measurable targets
- SMT responsibility for LLN
- Rigorous quality assurance
- Effective liaison with other providers
- Regular staff meetings
- Encourage staff to attend external training
- Sharing across teams



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# Examples from seminar papers

## Stubbing Court Training WBL

- Recognition at senior level of the need for improving learner LLN skills in order to achieve apprenticeship frameworks
- Leadership qualities include enthusiasm, motivation and ability to inspire
- LLN as part of the organisation culture
- Training and development for staff and employers includes improving awareness of LLN
- LLN as an important aspect of quality of provision



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# Examples from seminar papers

Birmingham City Council (with case study of Family Learning LLN provision)

- Distributed leadership from the 'top' across Birmingham providers
- A strong clearly stated vision
- Sustained focus on outcomes and rigorous evaluation collection
- Consistent core principles
- Ability to adapt to emerging shifts in context
- Challenging problems

In Birmingham there has been a 'relentless focus on learner achievement and learner experience..'

'Managers and practitioners within the city .. had something to say and ...were able to influence developments...'



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# Examples from seminar papers

## Buckinghamshire Adult Learning

- Importance of partnership working and the right skills sets for this
- Matching quality improvement to the needs of people with (multiple) disadvantages rather than seeing these as opposing issues
- Modelling expected practice in support of tutors
- Recognition at top level that LLN needs underpin many other needs, disadvantages
- LLN progression must be aligned to learning contexts



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# Examples from seminar papers

## Dudley College

- Trusting the staff and recognising strength of LLN teachers (often best qualified teachers!)
- Need for cross organisation understanding of LLN provision (especially by SMT)
- Integrated rather than silo approach to LLN
- Engagement of non-LLN teachers to develop their own LLN capacity and to working with LLN colleagues
- LLN as a deficit model needs to be challenged
- Battle to achieve outstanding is attitudinal as much as operational



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# Future sustainability

- Effective bold leadership needed now more than ever
- Embed values across the organisation
- Proactive strategy that takes account of local needs and educational levels of learners
- Whole organisation approach and informed embedding of LLN across programmes adopted at senior level as necessary practice
- Basic skills must form part of organisation's mission and values
- Blended leadership – the pathway between management and leadership
- ‘Further Education is not in the main where sons and daughters of the powerful go’ – LLN central to the vocation of FE



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