

Engaging adult learners in numeracy: What works from the **Multiply** programme

This document summarises what works in engaging adult learners in numeracy, drawing on the evaluation of the **Multiply** programme. It offers practical insights for practitioners, learning providers and local areas commissioning and delivering adult numeracy provision

The evidence presented here comes from a combination of different sources:

- analysis of data about learners in the Individualised Learner Record (ILR)
- surveys and interviews with learners, learning providers, practitioners, and Local Area staff

The evaluation was commissioned by DfE.

You can find the full evaluation report on the [gov.uk website](https://gov.uk). You can also find examples of what local authorities, practitioners and providers thought was especially innovative or impactful on the [Association of Colleges website](https://www.colleges.org.uk).



What was Multiply?

Multiply was funded from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and ran for three years, from April 2022 to March 2025.

The programme boosted existing efforts to address low levels of adult numeracy in England. It sought to create new courses tailored to meet local needs. Local areas and providers shaped their own offer in terms of flexibility, duration and methods of delivery.

There are several key insights from the programme which may be useful when designing adult numeracy provision in future.



Multiply provision mainly focused on engagement and confidence-building.

This approach was successful reaching hard to reach groups.

Multiply effectively engaged a wide range of learners:

47%

had no GCSEs or equivalent qualifications

24%

were looking for work

43%

were from an ethnic minority background, and 48% said English was not their first language

15%

had caring responsibilities

41%

had parental responsibilities, and 13% were single parents

5%

were ex-offenders



(Source: Survey of Multiply learners)

Learners, providers and practitioners were enthusiastic about the programme



83% of Multiply learners said they were satisfied with their course



88% of providers said Multiply was an effective way of improving learners' numeracy skills



54% of Multiply learners said they had either started or intended to go on to further study or training because of Multiply

(Source: Survey of Multiply learners)

There are several key lessons discovered through the evaluation that are useful for practitioners, learning providers and local area commissioners to consider when designing adult numeracy provision.

What is effective in engaging adult numeracy learners?



Short, informal, non-accredited courses attract new learners and boost confidence.

Key stats:



97% of Multiply courses were non-regulated



43% were shorter than 5 hours

Providers reported that a friendly, informal tone reduced anxiety and encouraged participation. Short courses and 'taster' sessions helped learners overcome barriers and acted as stepping stones to formal qualifications.

(Source: ILR)

“ Our key focus really is about whetting people's appetites that learning can be good for you, and then using that as an opportunity to lace it with other opportunities that are available to people if they so wish.”

– Local area staff member



Embedding maths in everyday contexts or non-numeracy courses can help engage people who would otherwise not take part in numeracy learning.

Practitioners said that Multiply enabled them to experiment with new learner-centred approaches such as:

- developing maths skills through real-life contexts like budgeting, cooking, sports and crafts
- embedding numeracy in other types of learning, such as English language courses, family learning and vocational courses
- delivering courses in more informal and community-based settings, such as libraries, foodbanks and housing associations

They said these techniques helped reduce maths anxiety and reach learners who had previously disengaged from formal education.

“ It's more attractive to the participant, particularly if you haven't done maths since you were 16. It's a scary concept, isn't it? So being able to build [numeracy] into a cookery class or a knitting class...as part of outreach, it's more attractive to them and that's why I think we're getting so many [learners].”

– Provider



Incentives can be a key enabler of participation

Some Multiply courses offered incentives such as vouchers, food and stationery.

Providers said that these kind of incentives were especially important for supporting learners who faced financial or logistical barriers to taking part.

“ We set a limit [...] per learner. The money is enough to enable [partners] to be creative to meet the costs, but also to have some kind of incentives for the clients that they're working with, whether it be buying ingredients for healthy eating or funding free physical health activities”

– Local area staff member



Investing in local networks and partnerships is valuable for engaging with people who wouldn't normally consider numeracy learning

Providers and local areas said that strong partnerships were an important ingredient for success, especially for reaching learners with low confidence, maths anxiety, or from marginalised groups. The use of less traditional providers allowed for greater outreach into communities that were previously difficult to reach.

Community groups and voluntary organisations often acted as referral partners or co-delivery partners. They helped providers and local areas understand challenges and tailor support. Sometimes this led to bespoke courses being developed to respond to the needs of specific learner groups.

“ The people who are putting their arm around them and bringing them into this are people they trust.”

– Local area staff member

However, some local areas and providers said they had underestimated the time and resource needed to deliver courses in new settings, especially where they didn't have existing relationships.



Numeracy learning in the workplace relies on providers and employers working closely together.

Local areas said it was important to engage with employers to identify skills gaps and to develop course materials that better meet the needs of the labour market.

Successful examples of workplace provision tended to be where providers or local areas had existing relationships with employers, and where courses were designed in collaboration with employers to focus on the organisation's needs.

“ We created the course in partnership with the NHS. Logistically that's a big deal for an employer to ringfence 2 hours a week for their employees to attend. And starting with Multiply prior to Level 2 Maths was a really good approach, as going straight into Level 2 didn't work well for all staff. Multiply helped to build their confidence before progressing onto Level 2.”

– Local area staff member

Multiply expanded adult numeracy participation and had very high completion rates

288,604

288,604 enrolments between 2022–2025, making up 45% of adult numeracy provision nationally.

85% 3%

85% of Multiply learners are estimated to be additional – i.e., they would not otherwise have undertaken a numeracy course.

Only 3% of Multiply learners dropped out of their course.

