Making it Count: Numeracy for Life, slide text

Slide 1: Making it Count: Numeracy for Life

The House of Lords Numeracy for Life Committee published its final report, Making it Count: Numeracy for Life, on 3 November 2026. The Committee took a “for life” approach, looking at numeracy from the early years and school through to working life and retirement. These slides summarise the key challenges and recommendations at each stage.

Slide 2: The challenge: progress and gaps

The report recognises real progress over the past decade. The proportion of adults with low numeracy fell from 25% to 14% between 2012 and 2023, and England rose from 27th in 2009 to 10th in PISA 2025.

However, this improvement was driven mainly by 16 to 24-year-olds, and the skills of the lowest achievers “have not improved at all”.

Around 16 million adults still have low numeracy skills, 8 million of them below the level expected of a nine-year-old.

Slide 3: The challenge: cost and confidence

National Numeracy identifies socio-economic background as the primary indicator of low numeracy.

Low numeracy has a significant economic cost. Workers with low numeracy are estimated to earn around 6.5% less than they might with basic skills, an income difference of up to £25 billion a year across the UK.

Confidence is a challenge at every life stage. PISA 2022 found that 40% of students feel nervous, helpless or anxious in everyday maths situations, and Professor Hannah Fry reported dislike of maths rising from about 23% at age 10 to 50% at age 14.

Slide 4: Early years (0 to 5): the challenge

The early years are pivotal for numeracy, and the developmental window for learning to count is between ages two and four.

Gaps open early, with disadvantaged children starting school 4.7 months behind their peers.

Numeracy receives less attention at home than literacy. Parents report reading with young children five to seven times a week, but numbers-related play only once a week on average.

60% of children in the most deprived areas achieve a good level of development in maths by age 5, compared with 80% in the least deprived.

Slide 5: Early years (0 to 5): recommendations

Numeracy should be treated as the equal of literacy in government education policy.

The Best Start in Life website and NHS child development guidance should include numeracy milestones and activities for parents and carers.

Early numeracy support should form part of the core offer in Best Start hubs, building on the evidence from Sure Start.

Funding should continue for early years practitioners to attend maths leadership programmes such as Maths Champions, with a focus on private, voluntary and independent settings.

Slide 6: School years (5 to 16): the challenge

The Committee does not support wholesale change to maths education, given England's improved performance, but identifies a need to better support low achievers.

Teacher capacity is a central concern. The vacancy rate for secondary maths teachers peaked at 2.3% in 2023/24, and although it has since fallen to 1.0%, it remains above its 2010/11 level.

Dyscalculia affects around 6% of the population but remains under-recognised and under-diagnosed.

The Committee argues that AI makes numeracy more important, not less, citing our 'Count on It' report.

Slide 7: School years (5 to 16): recommendations

The Government should sustain investment in specialist maths teachers and in the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM) and maths hubs.

A diagnostic assessment should be piloted in Year 8 to identify gaps before pupils begin GCSE

study.

Teachers should receive pre- and in-service training on dyscalculia.

A National Year of Numeracy should be established, equivalent to the existing National Year of Reading.

AI-enabled maths tutoring tools should be evaluated to identify which approaches support reasoning and what safeguards are needed.

Slide 8: Young adults (16 to 19): the challenge

A grade 4 in GCSE maths is a gateway to further study, apprenticeships and employment, and a one-grade improvement is associated with an estimated £14,500 increase in lifetime earnings.

In 2026, 71.8% of 16-year-olds achieved grade 4 or above, but only one in seven (15%) of those resitting passed. The Committee describes “a growing and dispiriting spiral of re-sits”.

Information about a pupil’s specific strengths and gaps is often lost when they move from school to further education.

Functional Skills is formally equivalent to GCSE at Level 2, but it is less well known and less valued by employers.

Slide 9: Young adults (16 to 19): recommendations

The Government should publish a post-16 maths and numeracy framework setting out what each qualification is for and who it is designed for.

More should be done to promote Functional Skills as a Level 2 equivalent to GCSE maths.

Resit entry should be based on individual readiness and diagnostic assessment, with schools passing information about learners’ gaps to their post-16 provider.

Apprenticeships, technical qualifications and occupational standards should make numeracy expectations explicit, in proportion to the genuine demands of each role.

Slide 10: Working years (19+): the challenge

Unlike children, adults do not pass through a single institution that can identify and address weak numeracy, so many have no clear pathway to improve.

Responsibility is fragmented, with around 70% of the Adult Skills Fund now devolved. The Committee warns that numeracy risks being “everyone’s concern but nobody’s responsibility”.

The Multiply programme showed promise, with 58% of learners going on to further learning, but the Committee criticises the absence of any evaluation of skills gains.

Around one-quarter of vacancies caused by skills shortages are due to a lack of numeracy skills.

Slide 11: Working years (19+): recommendations

Adult numeracy should be part of an existing ministerial brief, with a cross-government adult numeracy strategy for England and annual reports on progress.

Provision should be “nationally guaranteed but locally delivered”, with the Government setting objectives and outcome measures and devolved authorities delivering the strategy.

Funding rules should be reviewed so that approved online and blended providers can deliver the Level 2 maths entitlement.

A “no wrong door” approach should mean jobcentres, primary care, housing services and probation routinely signpost adults to numeracy support.

Slide 12: What comes next

The Government’s response to the report is expected in early 2027. Revised programmes of study following the Curriculum and Assessment Review are still being developed, and the final recommendations of the Milburn Review on young people and work are also expected.

The Committee’s report cites our own research, Count on It: AI, Numeracy, and Social Mobility, on the importance of numeracy for engaging critically with AI. Our report found that relying on AI for numeracy tasks may weaken the skills needed to assess its outputs, and recommended embedding critical AI literacy and numeracy skills in formal education.

Follow the link in our bio for our full analysis of the Committee’s report and to read Count on It. To find out more or get involved in our work, please get in touch (rhiannon.tuckett-jones@policyconnect.org.uk).