National Projects and Tools

Week of Reading and Writing

One in six Dutch citizens has difficulty with reading, writing and/or mathematics. That makes it difficult for these people to, for example, use a machine to buy a train ticket, read to their children or understand written safety precautions. Every year the Reading and Writing Foundation organises, together with other organisations in the Netherlands, a week full of awareness around basic skills. This takes place around September 8th (International Literacy Day),and is called the Week of Reading and Writing (in Dutch: Week van Lezen en Schrijven). During this week, the foundation encourages the organisation of events that draw attention to the importance of basic skills.

Regional Approach to Tackle Low Literacy

Since 2020, Dutch councils have been responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring the approach to tackling low literacy. Our foundation provides independent advice to councils in policy development and implementation. We stimulate innovation, knowledge-sharing and best practices to ensure the councils' approach is successful.

"I want to learn" phone number

To help people find the right basic skills education, a free national number is available: 0800 023 4444. People can also sign up via the website: https://www.lezenenschrijven.nl/ik-wil-leren. Everyone can call this number for advice or to register for a course in one of the basic skills: language, mathematics or digital skills. To raise public awareness of the existence of this service a campaign was started in 2014. TV commercials, billboards and leaflets were distributed in several regions in the Netherlands.

Basic Skills Screeners

The Basic Skills Screener is a quick way to trace whether individuals have challenges with reading, mathematics or digital skills. It is an online tool that indicates whether someone's level of basic skills is sufficient to participate in society. Examples of such activities are writing a job application or submitting forms.

The Reading and Writing Foundation developed several Basic Skills Screeners:

- Language screener. This tool can be used to quickly gauge whether a person is having trouble with reading. The indication assesses reading skills at language levels 1F and 2F (Dutch standards, roughly comparable to A2 and B1). It comprises several online assignments and is suitable for clients up to 'mbo 4' level education (Dutch: middelbaar beroepsonderwijs, literally, "middle-level vocational education level 4). The language screener has been validated and empirically tested by the University of Amsterdam.
- Math screener. The Math screener assesses a person's numeracy. The indication assesses numeracy skills around level 1F. It comprises several online assignments and is suitable for clients up to 'mbo 4' level education.
- Digital skills screener. The Digital skills screener assesses a person's digital skills. The tool comprises several online assignments.
- Participation screener. An online questionnaire, which allows respondents to self-assess whether a person's basic skills hinder them from fully in society.

The screeners are free online tools that can identify possible basic skills problems in around 12 minutes. The instrument is designed for organisations that which so have a quick indication of the basic skills of their customers, clients or employees. Between August 2020 and October 2021 more than 6.500 people have completed a Basic Skills Screener. Deploying the Basic Skills Screeners in employment services and businesses shows that literacy is an issue across age groups and employment status. Building on this success, the Reading and Writing Foundation inspired other countries to adopt the tool.

Interested in what the Screeners look like? Click here to see a demonstration.

Literacy Houses

In 2014 a new concept was initiated to help eradicate low literacy: Literacy Houses. A Literacy House is an accessible location in the city where people are helped to find the right course to improve their literacy skills. In most Literacy Houses they can actually work on basic skills such as reading, writing, speaking, numeracy and digital skills. But also broader issues such as debts and language, or health and language are tackled. Learners can simply go to this location to get information and/or support from both volunteers and professionals.

In Literacy Houses volunteers can be informed about voluntary work. When they start helping people with low literacy skills they can get advice and courses from certified teachers. A Literacy House can be set up through a partnership between local stakeholders. In most cases a Literacy House is incorporated in a public library. The Reading and Writing Foundation supports the Literacy houses in the Netherlands.

Over the last few years, many instruments were developed by the Reading and Writing Foundation together with others to support the set-up, running and qualitative improvement of Literacy Houses.

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