

# Evaluation of Adult Basic Skills Pathfinder Extension Activities: *Stage 1 Surveys of Learners and Teachers*

Michael White, John Killeen and Rebecca Taylor  
Policy Studies Institute

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in conjunction with NFO System Three Research (System 3) to carry out an evaluation of the Pathfinder Extension Activities, using a combination of surveys, qualitative interviews and case studies. The evaluation was in two stages. Stage 1 provided descriptive findings on the progress of the Pathfinder Extension. Stage 2 was based on follow-up interviews with the learners surveyed in Stage 1, and estimated the net impacts of the programme on educational and economic outcomes for these participants.

This report is confined to the survey-based elements of Stage 1 of the evaluation. Separately published reports cover (a) the qualitative research – interviews and case studies – at Stage 1 (Barnes et al., 2003), (b) the impact evaluation of Stage 2 (Bonjour and Smeaton, 2003), and (3) an overview of the entire evaluation (White, 2003).

The Executive Summary brings together the chief findings from the three survey-based strands of Stage 1 research:

- A. The survey of learners
- B. The survey of learners in prisons
- C. The survey of teachers

The report of the learner survey also includes extracts of relevant material from the DfES/KPMG Pathfinder Database.

Below, the key findings for A to C are set out in turn.

### **A. The Survey of Learners**

#### ***A.1 Nature and conduct of the survey***

Personal face-to-face interviews were carried out with 826 learners on Residential, Intensive, Highly Structured Prescriptive, Individual Incentives for Learners, and Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses, during the period January-June 2002. Interviewing was carried out at the course venues and during the normal course times. The response rate was approximately 70 per cent. Most non-response resulted from learners not attending on the days when interviewing was taking place.

Interviews were also carried out in a similar way with learners on 'traditional' basic skills courses, of the same entry levels, taking place in the same period and in the same Pathfinder areas. Some 517 interviews were achieved, and these constitute the 'Comparison sample'. Response was again approximately 70 per cent.

The interview obtained basic information about what types of people attended the courses and about their experiences and views of these courses. At Stage 1, the use of this information was confined to providing descriptive information which would be of interest from a policy viewpoint. The information was also later used to help match the Extension and Comparison samples as closely as possible for the Stage 2 analysis, which is reported on in a separate publication.

## ***A.2 Characteristics of participants in Extension courses<sup>1</sup>***

There were more women than men among those interviewed (the ratio was roughly 6 to 4). Somewhat less than half the sample (45 per cent) had dependent children, and single people were in the majority. Nearly one in five of the sample (one in three of women in the sample) was a lone parent.

Seven in 10 of the sample had left school at age 16 or before, but 17 per cent had continued in education beyond age 17. Most of those with post-compulsory education were members of ethnic minorities.

Two thirds of the sample classified their ethnicity as 'White British', while the remaining one third was spread across a wide range of ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minority members were chiefly located in the East London and West Midlands Pathfinders. Two thirds of the sample spoke only English, but one in five had mainly spoken a language other than English up to the age of six. Most of the sample now spoke English at home always or much of the time.

More than one in five of the sample had a long-term health problem or disability which limited the paid work they could do.

## ***A.3 Current and previous employment of Extension course participants***

About one third were in paid work of some type when the interview took place. If those on government training programmes were counted as employed, the figure would rise to 37 per cent. Seven in 10 of the sample had been in paid work at some time, while 29 per cent had never had a paid job.

Some 43 per cent of those currently employed worked part-time hours. A smaller proportion, a little over one third, had worked part-time in their previous job (excluding those currently employed).

Among those not in paid work, and not long-term sick or disabled, one in four had been seeking a job recently. Those not seeking work (excluding long-term sick or disabled) constitute forty-four per cent of the whole sample.

Those currently in paid work mostly appeared to have reasonably stable employment, but a substantial minority regarded their jobs as temporary. Almost one in three described themselves as 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with their current jobs, an unusually high proportion.

The occupations of the currently employed were concentrated in semi-skilled and unskilled categories, with only very small percentages in managerial, professional, clerical/secretarial, or sales occupations.

The average weekly net earnings of those currently in paid work were a little below £150, and the average hourly wage was just over £5. Between 80 and 90 per cent of employees, nationally, earn more.

## ***A.4 Other continuing education and training (CET)***

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the phrase 'Extension course(s)' refers to courses in the Pathfinder Extension programme and not to extension courses in the ordinary sense.

Apart from their current Extension activity courses, about one half of the respondents had taken part in some kind of CET course since leaving school. One in five of the whole sample, or 27 per cent of those with a current or previous job, had received employer-provided training, and a little less than four in 10 had received some other kind of CET. Two thirds of these previous CET courses had been for work-related purposes.

The majority of previous CET courses (63 per cent) were long-period (more than 6 months), and four in five were meant to lead to a certificate or qualification of some kind. However, in one in six cases, respondents had not completed the course but had left early, and this proportion rose to one in five if ongoing courses were excluded.

Information about the main focus of their previous CET course suggested that in around 40 per cent of cases reading, writing or number skills were to the forefront.

### **A.5 Experience of Extension courses**

Nearly four in five of the learners entered the Extension course hoping to get a qualification from it, while 16 per cent were not seeking a qualification and 5 per cent were unsure.

General perceptions of the courses were highly positive. Asked to say what they liked about the courses, the learners particularly referred to course content (mentioned by 57 per cent). The other most frequently used headings concerned the teachers, the other course members, and the teaching methods. There seemed to be a balance, therefore, between learning aspects of the course and social relationship aspects. In addition, nearly one in three of the learners spontaneously mentioned positive effects on their self-confidence.

In response to specific questions,

- 96 per cent regarded their course as 'interesting'.
- 81 per cent regarded the difficulty of the course as 'just right'.
- 96 per cent stated that they would recommend the same course to a relative or friend.
- 77 per cent regarded the length of classes as about right.
- 86 per cent regarded the spacing between classes as about right.
- 64 per cent felt they were learning new skills either very quickly or quite quickly, and a further 20 per cent felt their progress was neither quick nor slow.
- 76 per cent felt they got sufficient personal time with the teacher.
- 77 per cent felt there was sufficient time to practice skills (see below, however).

Learners were asked to suggest how their courses could be improved. Four in 10 either felt their courses needed no improvement, or could not think of any. Suggestions for improvement were diverse and most were made by only a few of the respondents. The one suggestion with wide support (18 per cent of the survey, and one in three of those making suggestions for improvement) was that course or

session length should be increased, especially so as to allow more time to practice skills.

Further questions concerned perceptions of various learning characteristics of the courses. Responses were again predominantly positive concerning these more specific aspects:

- 80 per cent felt that they were always clear about what they should doing on the course.
- 79 per cent felt that they always knew whether they were getting things right or wrong.
- 88 per cent felt they could work in the way that was best for them to learn.

Questions particular to those who went on Residentials indicated that the Residential component was generally seen as increasing the attractiveness of the course. Almost two thirds felt that Residentials required more work from them than the usual classes, and nearly three quarters felt that they made more progress in the Residentials than in the usual classes.

Questions specific to Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses were also asked, but within the sample only 67 respondents had attended these kinds of courses. The responses although based on a small sample appeared to offer some encouragement about the positive motivational impact of this type of provision. The majority felt that the nature of the course made them try harder and most also felt that the course would improve their prospects within the firm.

Similarly, some special questions were asked of those on the Incentives for Learners courses. For seven in 10 of these learners, the incentive payments were not a decisive factor in whether to take the course. However, three in five felt that the payments encouraged their attendance, and one half felt the payment for passing the examination made them put in increased effort while on the course.

#### **A.6 Plans for the future**

Many of these Extension activity participants were hoping to go on to more education and training courses. Nearly three in five hoped to do so during 2002, and a similar proportion wanted more education beyond that time.

Of those respondents hoping to start a course in the current year

- 38 per cent hoped to go on a full-time course.
- 82 per cent wanted a course which would lead to a certificate or qualification.
- 21 per cent wanted a course focusing on reading and writing skills, 8 per cent a course focusing on number skills, 40 per cent a course covering reading, writing and number skills together, and 8 per cent were seeking IT skills. Smaller proportions were thinking of subjects like art and music, creative writing, counselling, nursing, and childcare.

There were also substantial proportions with an employment aim for the future. This included:

- 57 per cent of those currently in paid work, who hoped to change employer (this question was not asked of those on Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses);
- Four in five of those currently not in paid work, who hoped to start work at some time, including 26 per cent hoping that this would be within the current year;
- 58 per cent of the whole sample, whether currently in work or not, who were interested in starting a new type of work in the future.

### ***A.7 Differences between types of Extension courses***

The main analysis of differences between the Extension courses was undertaken as part of Stage 2 of the evaluation. The following points from Stage 1 were preliminary to the Stage 2 analysis.

#### *Residential courses*

The results for the Residential courses were rarely at either a high or low extreme. This is understandable, as they were the only group drawn from all the Pathfinder areas, and from a diverse range of courses to which the residential component was added. They would therefore be expected to approximate a cross-section of basic skills learners. The few distinctive points were as follows:

- A relatively large proportion of course members were lone parents.
- High proportions who had been and were now in part-time jobs.
- In terms of their future plans or wishes, many were thinking about further full-time courses during 2002.

The experiences of Residential courses were generally positive. Learners on these courses particularly liked the course content and the relationships with other learners.

### *Intensive courses*

Learners on the Intensive courses were possibly the most distinctive group. Their characteristics included the following:

- The great majority of them were members of ethnic minorities, reflecting the fact that most of these courses were held in the West Midlands.
- There was a low proportion with children, a high proportion married or living as a couple, and a low proportion of lone parents
- There was a low proportion with a work-limiting disability.
- They had relatively little experience of employment: the lowest proportion currently in jobs, and also a low proportion with any previous job.
- Consistent with this, they were the group which had received the least employer-funded training.
- Their participation in other CET (i.e., not funded by an employer) was also particularly low.
- They had a high level of interest in starting a full-time course in 2002.

Intensive course learners particularly liked the relationships with their teachers, and access to computers provided by the course. But they were less favourable in their views concerning the courses' convenience of access or timetabling, and an above-average proportion of them thought that their course was either too difficult or too easy rather than about right.

### *Highly Structured Prescriptive courses*

In terms of their social and personal characteristics, the learners on these courses had a low proportion with dependent children but were otherwise not very far from the average for the sample. They were however distinctive in their employment patterns:

- They had the highest level of economic activity, with high proportions of currently employed and of current job-seekers.
- The proportion previously (but not currently) employed was low.
- If they had held a previous job, it was more likely to be part-time.
- They were less likely than others to be interested in moving to a new or different kind of work in the future; this may reflect their lack of employment experience.

Learners on these courses particularly liked the relationship with teachers, and the convenience of the courses in terms of access and timetabling. But they were less positive than others about the opportunity for social contact with other learners. They were also more critical than others about not always being clear what they should be doing on the course.

### *Individual Incentives for Learners courses*

Learners on these Incentives courses had the following distinctive characteristics:

- A high proportion was married or living as a couple.
- Many of them were currently in part-time jobs.
- They had the highest proportion of people who had previously been employed but were not now employed.
- A below-average proportion was currently seeking a job.
- A relatively high proportion had previously been on an adult education course which was not provided by an employer.
- A relatively high proportion was thinking of another part-time course during 2002.

These learners had views of their courses which were generally not far from the average for the sample.

#### *Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses*

The participants in these courses had many distinctive features, primarily in terms of employment characteristics. By definition, all were employed, and many came from jobs in the public sector. Relatively few were part-time, but many were in temporary posts.

They also had some distinctive personal attributes.

- A much higher proportion than on other courses was male.
- Lower proportions were from the ethnic minorities.
- A lower proportion had a work-limiting disability.
- They had the highest participation in CET provided by an employer, before coming on the present course. (This may reflect their high proportion of public-sector employment.)
- But few had another CET course continuing in parallel with their participation in the Pathfinder programme.
- They were least likely to be intending to start another course in 2002, and if they did start another it would be part-time rather than full-time.

Learners on these courses were particularly positive about the difficulty of the course being 'just right'. But they were less positive than the others about the spacing of the classes.

#### **A.8 The Comparison sample - how similar to the Extension sample?**

Stage 2 of the evaluation made use of comparisons of outcomes between the learners on the Pathfinder Extension courses and the learners on traditional adult basic skills provision of the same level and within the same providers. Learners on the traditional courses are referred to as the Comparison sample. The task for Stage 2 of the evaluation would be facilitated if the Comparison sample had broadly similar characteristics to the Extension sample. Overall, the Stage 1 analysis was reasonably reassuring on this score.

On most of the background characteristics (sex, marital status, school leaving age etc.), the two samples were closely similar, which is perhaps not surprising as the Comparison sample was drawn from the same areas of the country and from people who were also in basic skills courses. There was also no difference in the previous employment profile of those not currently employed or in previous experience of continuing education and training.

There were however some differences in current employment. On average the Extension sample had a slightly higher level of labour market activity (employment plus job-seeking), and a lower proportion of part-time employees. The Extension sample was also on average more dissatisfied with current jobs.

There were some indications that the Comparison sample were more inclined towards additional CET courses, while the Extension sample were more inclined towards employment steps. But these differences were not great.



## **B. The Survey of Learners in Prisons**

### ***B.1 The survey***

The survey in prisons covered Pathfinder courses (all Intensive) in seven prison establishments. Time constraints and practical considerations limited the achieved sample to 110 interviews. Additionally, 68 interviews were held with learners on traditional basic skills provision in prisons. These may not have been wholly comparable as some prison establishments had gone over entirely to Intensive provision.

### ***B.2 Characteristics and background of the prison learners***

The prison sample was all-male and was largely concentrated in the 20-40 age band. Two thirds were from ethnic minorities, which was similar to the proportion in other Intensive courses. However, the minority learners in prisons were ethnically less diverse and for most of them English appeared to be the primary language.

Unlike the main sample of learners, those in prisons mostly had some employment experience, including a substantial minority of self-employed. Occupations were generally a similar mix to the other Extension learners with jobs, and semi-skilled and unskilled work predominated. Previous experience of training was also at a similar level.

### ***B.3 Experiences and views of Pathfinders in prisons***

The participants in prisons appeared to be reasonably well informed about the courses before starting and the great majority had been keen to take part.

What they liked about the courses was focused particularly on content, and less on social relationships and methods. However they responded favourably to all aspects of the courses.

The learners were asked a series of questions that tapped into their satisfaction with practical and pedagogical aspects of the courses such as whether they felt they had enough time on their own with the teacher. The responses were consistently positive across all Extension courses, but if anything the prison courses scored the highest on these issues. Notably, the learners in prisons felt that they were able to work in a way that was most effective for them as individuals (95 per cent) and that they had enough time to practice during class (83 per cent). They also had positive views about course structure and level of difficulty.

The most common suggestion to improve courses from learners in prisons was to have longer classes or more time to practice. This was the same as in the case of the Extension generally.

### ***B.4 The prison comparison sample***

The small comparison sample from traditional courses in prisons had rather similar characteristics to the prison Pathfinder sample. The main difference was that there was a smaller proportion of ethnic minorities in the comparison sample.

The views of the prison Pathfinder sample about their Intensive courses were consistently more favourable than those of the prison comparison sample. This has to be viewed with some caution as we do not know the sentences and release dates of the offenders in the two groups, which could bias the results. None the less the differences were impressive.

## **C. The Survey of Teachers**

### ***C.1 The survey***

As part of the overall evaluation of the Pathfinder Extension, a postal questionnaire was sent to all teachers known to have taught on these courses. The aim was to obtain their views and experiences concerning the courses, so as to enhance interpretation of the programme's delivery.

Of 74 teachers known to have taught on these courses, 46 replied to the survey, a response rate of 62 per cent. On average teachers had taught on two courses and the information collected related to a total of 94 courses. Four fifths of the teachers who replied made additional open-ended comments at the end of the questionnaire, after answering the detailed questions.

There were some differences in the questions asked of teachers on Residential and Non-residential courses, but the results were broadly comparable. The small sample size made it impracticable to break down the Non-residential results by type of programme.

### ***C.2 Teacher responsibilities***

Teacher involvement in promotion and recruitment for these courses was widespread, including nearly all teachers on Residentials and two-thirds of those on Non-residential courses. Some teachers on both types of course referred to difficulties in recruitment.

There was a wide variation in course numbers. On average, Residential courses had larger numbers than Non-residential, and they also involved a shorter, more intensive teaching requirement. Residentials tended to be taught by teams of teachers while Non-residentials were often delivered by a single teacher.

The overall learner-teacher ratios were 4.5 to 1 in the case of Residentials and 4.8 to 1 in the case of Non-residentials.

Some teachers felt that their courses had been too intensive for the learners, and had also made heavy demands on themselves, in planning and preparation as well as in delivery. The time pressures on Residentials sometimes made it hard to address Individual Learning Plans for learners, and in some instances courses had been adjusted to make them less intensive.

### ***C.3 Types of learners recruited, and course features advertised***

The majority of teachers on Non-residential courses felt that these courses attracted the kinds of learners who are usually more difficult to recruit, but teachers on Residential courses tended to be less sure about this. Teachers considered that the great majority of people on both Residential and Non-residential Pathfinder courses

were disadvantaged, especially in terms of having a low income.

When recruiting, most courses were presented as catering for several different interests, including not only numeracy and literacy skills, but also applications in IT and creative activities.

#### ***C.4 Course activities and methods***

Non-residential courses appeared to make greater use of individual working, whereas the Residential courses tended to make more use of small group working and whole class teaching. About half of both the Residential and Non-residential courses kept learners working in step for at least half the contact time. The overall picture is of a flexible use of a variety of teaching approaches across all types of Pathfinder courses.

Creative activities (such as creative writing, video production, etc.) played a major role in many Residential courses, with half the teachers making use of them for at least half the time on their courses.

Despite the variation in course activities, the great majority of teachers considered that they were able either to maintain coverage of the core curriculum or to extend it in their courses.

#### ***C.5 Learning attributes of the courses***

The majority of teachers, on both Residential and Non-residential courses, felt that there was sufficient time for learners to practice, and also that they were able to provide sufficient individual attention. Nearly all the teachers felt that learners knew what they were meant to be doing, and were getting immediate feedback when practicing skills, at least for 'most of the time'.

Teachers on Non-residential courses were asked how well they got to know the learners, and how well the learners got to know one another. Presumably this was more likely to be a problem on Non-residential than on Residential courses. But nearly all the teachers on Non-residential courses felt that these social aspects developed either 'very well' or 'quite well' on their courses.

#### ***C.6 Ratings of learner performance***

Teachers on both Residential and Non-residential courses were asked how much they thought the course affected learners, on a range of five aspects of performance. These were: effort, interest shown, relationships with other learners, relationships with teachers, and self-confidence.

The majority of teachers considered that performance had improved on each of the aspects of learner performance, relative to traditional courses. The views of teachers were however somewhat more positive in the case of Residential courses than of Non-residential courses. The additional comments of a number of teachers underlined the importance of motivational factors.

Teachers on Non-residential courses were also asked about learner attendance and enthusiasm for taking, and practicing for, their attainment test. About one half of teachers on these courses had seen an improvement in these respects as well.

#### ***C.7 Teachers' overall views of the Pathfinder Extension courses***

The majority of teachers on both Residential and Non-residential courses rated them as 'significantly different' or a 'radical departure' compared with their previous teaching experience.

The majority of teachers found enhanced satisfaction from teaching on Extension, in both Residentials and Non-residentials. Residentials gave teachers a particularly high level of professional satisfaction, compared with their previous experience, with 85 per cent of teachers giving ratings of either 'much more satisfying' or 'more satisfying'. In the case of Non-residentials, this proportion was 57 per cent.

### ***C.8 Other difficulties noted by teachers***

Apart from the difficulties concerning recruitment and course demands, noted in C.2, a variety of other difficulties or issues appeared in the teachers' open-ended comments at the end of the questionnaire. These issues included:

- Insufficient advance notice about the Extension.
- Insufficient initial assessment or diagnostic information concerning learners' levels and needs.
- Difficulties with childcare availability, affecting both Residential and Non-residential courses.
- Providing appropriate activities and care for children accompanying parents to Residentials.
- Possible bias of access to courses against those with caring responsibilities.
- Increased planning requirements for Residential courses.
- Additional administrative load for teachers; these were not always budgeted for.
- Additional set-up and documentation requirements of courses with a financial incentive element for employers or learners.
- The possibility of doubly penalising those who failed their test by withdrawing an incentive payment.

### ***C.9 Conclusions***

Teachers often found their role in Pathfinder Extension a demanding one, and various initial difficulties in planning and delivering the programmes were commented upon. But overall, the great majority of teachers found the Extension courses a professionally rewarding experience which compared favourably with previous basic skills teaching.

This was in part because of their involvement in innovative developments, and in part because they saw improvements resulting for learner motivation and performance.

The general impression given by teachers' comments is that the difficulties or issues identified in the early courses can be addressed successfully in future developments.

## **D. Overview of the Stage 1 Survey Research**

This concluding section of the Executive Summary briefly considers those broad themes which cut across the learner surveys and the teacher survey. A more extensive synthesis on these results, which also takes account of the qualitative research and the Stage 2 findings, is provided in the separate Overview Report.

### ***D.1 Who did the Extension programme reach?***

The Extension programmes reached participants with numerous difficulties and deprivations who were much in need of the educational opportunities provided. Teachers considered that the programmes reached deprived or disadvantaged groups, and especially those on low incomes, to a greater than usual extent. The learner survey added a variety of illustrative statistics: most had left school at the minimum age (and some apparently before), nearly one in five was a lone parent, nearly one in four had a disability. The DfES/KPMG database added that than one in five had a learning difficulty. Two thirds were not currently employed, and of those who had jobs, most were unskilled and low paid.

Within this general picture, there were large variations by area and by type of Extension programme. Teachers thought it very important to adapt the courses they gave to the particular needs of the individuals and groups they recruited. In London and the West Midlands, large proportions of the participants came from ethnic minorities and these tended to be younger with (on average) more schooling but less job experience. There may have been a refugee dimension here, although according to the available information most participants came from partly or wholly English-speaking families. The Residential courses contained high proportions of lone parents, and this may reflect the special efforts made in some areas to provide childcare support or to accommodate children at the residential venue. Employer-based courses were also distinctive: they complemented the remaining programmes precisely because they reached employees, whereas the other courses largely consisted of people who were not in jobs.

Despite the success of the courses in reaching a diversity of client groups, teachers continued to stress the barriers and access problems encountered in providing basic skills education. These are considered in D.3 below.

### ***D.2 What was the response of learners and teachers to the courses?***

The great majority of learners wanted courses that would lead to a qualification. Their reactions to their courses while they were on them were very positive. Course content, teaching methods, and social relations with teachers and other participants were all widely appreciated. Indeed there was a lack of any appreciable criticism.

Teachers, who are skilled at appraising the effectiveness of initiatives, also expressed very positive views of the Extension programmes. They found the courses an enriching professional experience for themselves, despite some feelings of strain or overload in the process, and the majority of them thought that learner motivation and learner outcomes were being positively affected.

### ***D.3 Difficulties and challenges***

In view of these very favourable responses, any difficulties that were pointed out deserve close attention. Most of the survey-based information about difficulties came from teachers. Some of the difficulties or problems were possibly short-term or transitional, others involved more basic or long-term issues.

On the short-term side, it was evident from many of the teachers that courses had been planned and delivered under considerable time-pressures and there had been some adverse consequences. One was recruitment, with sometimes unclear messages (so that learners arrived with false expectations), sometimes insufficient screening of learners' levels and needs, and sometimes inadequate numbers

recruited. The last-named problem was also evident from the shortfall in sample available for the learners' survey. In some cases, whether because of time-pressures or from general inexperience with the type of provision, teachers felt that mistakes had been made with course content or structure. But it had generally been possible to avoid real damage by making quick changes while the course was running. In general, teachers were confident that the experience gained would rapidly feed back into improved performance.

A deeper issue concerned barriers to access. Perhaps because the Extension were reaching out to different client groups, teachers had become more aware of the remaining barriers.

- A particularly clear example concerns childcare barriers. Some Residentials and some Intensive courses made special provision for childcare, but this was not universally possible. The question raised was how many of those potentially in need of basic skills courses had been kept away by lack of (or cost of) childcare services; this question naturally applied particularly to lone parents.
- Another example concerns working hours barriers. Employers, as well as teachers, noted the difficulty of offering work-based courses for those who worked variable shift patterns or other unusual hours.

A related issue is how to promote innovative basic skills provision to those who are further from the existing channels of contact. Indeed, lack of knowledge of what is available can be a particularly high barrier. The survey indicated that about one half of the participants got to their courses through colleges or other providers with which, presumably, they already had some contact, since advertising channels were mentioned by only one in 10. Personal or word-of-mouth contacts were responsible for the remainder, but this too may bias access against the most deprived. There may be a case, therefore, for considering active outreach as part of future programme developments.

Ensuring continuity and follow-through is a challenge which emerged from both learners and teachers. The survey showed that the majority of learners wanted to continue their education, both in the near and the longer-term future, and most also had an employment aim, although the timing for that was often vague. Teachers stressed that however successful the present course, the learners must not be misled into thinking that it was a complete solution; they would need to continue through subsequent steps. Responding to such needs for continuity is likely to be a particular difficulty for government special programmes with their time limits.

# THE SURVEY OF LEARNERS

by Michael White and John Killeen

## **1 Introduction**

This report provides analysis and conclusions from the first stage Learner Survey of the evaluation study concerning Adult Basic Skills Pathfinder Extension Activities. The evaluation study, carried out by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) and NFO System Three Social Research (System 3), was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

The chief overall aim of the study was to estimate the net impact of the Extension Activities, both collectively by comparison with existing 'traditional' basic skills provision, and relative to one another.

The first stage of the evaluation research, covered in this report, did not provide estimates of impacts from the Extension, but laid the foundation for the second stage which provides these estimates. The chief purpose of the present report is to describe and compare the Extension Activities in terms of the characteristics of their participants and in terms of the reactions of the learners to the educational experience provided by the Extension courses. The report also contains information from learners on traditional Basic Skills courses in the Pathfinder areas, referred to as the Comparison sample. In this report, the Comparison sample is chiefly used to assess how similar the learners on Extension Activities were to those in traditional provision. At Stage 2, both the Extension sample and the Comparison sample were followed-up to obtain information on outcomes, and the comparisons between the two groups played the chief role in producing the net impact estimates. These are described in a separate publication.

A part of the Extension Activities took place in HM Prisons and this was included within the scope of the learner survey but was not included in the teacher survey or the qualitative research. The information on this aspect of the evaluation is presented in a separate section following the main report of the learner survey.

The final part of this publication is a report of the findings from a postal questionnaire survey of teachers on Pathfinder Extension courses.

### 1.1 An outline of the Pathfinder Extension courses

The Learner Survey comprised five types of Pathfinder Extension courses, each with innovative features of provision, and the intention was to interview as many of the participants on these Extension courses as were willing to take part.

*Residential courses* constituted the largest Extension programme, both in terms of the number of Pathfinder Areas involved (all areas ran Residentials), and in terms of the number of learners taking part. The activity was designed to explore a particular pedagogical approach. On Residentials, learners were taken to a hotel or conference centre, where typically they stayed over one or two nights to participate in a two to three day, intensive educational experience with 20 hours of learning contact time. The Residential was in all cases added to a course of traditional basic skills education. The intention was that each programme should be focused on a specific skill, either literacy or numeracy, although these might be placed within the context of other activities such as family learning or creative activities.

*Intensive courses* were available in two areas, Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership and the Thanet Basic Skills Project. Like Residentials, they were designed to implement and test a pedagogical approach based on intensified educational experience. The programme was based on 60 hours of teaching and learning provision (i.e. 60 hours of contact time) spread over four weeks, a considerably higher rate than on traditional provision. There was some flexibility of provision around this model. The intention was that each course should be focused on a specific skill, either literacy or numeracy.

*Highly structured and prescriptive* course provision was available in three areas, Tyne & Wear Local Learning & Skills Council, Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership, and Hackney, Islington, Newham & Tower Hamlets Colleges Consortium. The pedagogical approach used in these Extension courses is indicated by their title. Each course was to provide a tightly prescribed programme for each cohort of learners, based on commercially available materials, that focused on pre-agreed and closely monitored targets and outcomes. The medium of the programme, either ICT or paper-based, was permitted to vary as the focus was on skill acquisition and learning style. The programmes were based on 40-60 hours of teaching and learning provision (i.e. 40-60 hours of contact time) of literacy or numeracy, delivered over a period of up to 20 weeks.

*Incentives for individual learners* on basic skills courses were available within two areas, the Leeds Learning Partnership and the Cambridgeshire Learning Partnership. This activity was designed to explore the impact of incentivising learning activity, within an otherwise traditional framework of basic skills education. The focus of the activity was on motivation, attendance and performance of learners when offered a financial incentive. Each participating partnership was required to identify learners attending existing/planned mainstream provision, who could be in receipt of benefits other than those specifically designed to support education and training. Each learner was eligible for a total grant of up to £250, split between payments linked to course attendance, and attendance at and achievement of the National Tests qualifications in literacy and/or numeracy. The breakdown of incentives was as follows: (a) £5 per two-hour session (for between 20 and 30 sessions); (b) £25 for preparing for and then taking the National Test; (c) £75 for passing the National Test at level 1 or 2. Flexibility was built into this provision in terms of the linking and phasing of the incentive payments.

*Fixed rate replacement cost* provision was available in three Pathfinder partnerships: Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership, Nottinghamshire Basic Skills Partnership, and Gloucestershire Basic Skills Partnership. This activity was designed to explore



the impact of incentivising learning activity within the workplace by targeting employers, hence increasing the opportunities for employees to take part in basic skills courses during the normal working day. Each participating partnership was required to negotiate the release of employees by employers, the latter being paid a fixed daily rate intended to offset their costs for reduced output, staff replacement, and National Insurance contributions. The fixed replacement costs were set at £50 per day for up to 13 days.

In addition to these five types of programme activity, the Extension involved two other components, 'Working with other agencies' and 'Use of ICT based teaching and learning'. These were not included within the scope of the survey-based evaluation, but are covered in the linked case study work, and are described further in the separate report of the qualitative evaluation.

## 1.2 The design of the net impact evaluation

Estimates of the net impacts of the programme form an important part of the overall evaluation, and especially of the surveys of learners. Net impact evaluation methods are more fully described in the separate report on the Stage 2 research (Bonjour and Smeaton, 2003). It may however be helpful to consider the nature of net impact evaluation at this point, so as to clarify the role of the Stage 1 research.

Net impact evaluation is concerned with the question "How much difference did the programme make?". Usually, this is interpreted from the viewpoint of the programme's participants. From that viewpoint the question can be elaborated as follows: "How much have participants in the programme benefited, by comparison with what they would have got in the absence of the programme?". The question makes it clear that it is not enough to measure outcomes for the participants after they have taken part in the programme. In addition, it is necessary to estimate what outcomes they would *otherwise* have had. This is often referred to, in the jargon of evaluation, as "the counterfactual case". The counterfactual case also represents programme deadweight: deadweight is the proportion of the achieved outcomes which would *anyway* have taken place if the programme had not been provided.

The outcomes for the participants if they had not taken part cannot of course be directly measured, since they are hypothetical. Net impact evaluation is concerned with providing indirect estimates of these hypothetical outcomes. This can be done in various ways, including for example by looking at outcomes for the individuals before they went on the programme, or by examining outcomes for closely similar people who did not go on the programme although eligible to do so. It must be appreciated that such comparisons are never perfect. However, the more carefully the comparisons are constructed, the more reliable are the results.

For the Pathfinder Extension, the DfES specified that the counterfactual or baseline for evaluation purposes should be the outcomes if participants had instead attended traditional or mainstream basic skills courses. This is different from most evaluations of education or training programmes, where the counterfactual is taken as not doing any education or training. The Department was interested in testing innovative forms of basic skills provision which might produce stronger effects on participants than the traditional provision. From this policy viewpoint, existing provision is the correct counterfactual to use. Additionally, it is of interest to know if the Extension Activities differ from one another in their impacts. This can be assessed, in principle, by treating the Extension as each others' counterfactuals.

For example, it can be asked "Would people who went on Intensive provision have benefited more, or less, if they had instead gone on courses with a Residential component?".

Two main kinds of outcomes were of interest to the DfES for this evaluation. The first type is learning outcomes, measurable by test instruments administered at the start and at the end of the basic skills course or other activity, and subsequently by qualifications gained, further courses entered, and increased use of skills at work. The second type is economic outcomes (improvements in life chances), which may be of various types depending on where the individual is coming from. For those not in jobs, economic outcomes can include becoming an active job-seeker, developing more active job search methods, and ultimately getting a job or increasing income from employment over a period. For those in jobs already, outcomes would include the retention of employment over a period, higher income from earnings, and improved continuing training opportunities and prospects. Increased self-confidence or self-efficacy (confidence based on successful goal achievement) is also likely to be relevant in paving the way for a more successful social and working life.

The method selected for implementing the evaluation's aims is that of *matched comparison groups*. Here, the aim is to select individuals who are very closely similar to the participants but participate in mainstream basic skills provision instead of in the Extension activities. These act as the counterfactual or baseline group against which the performance of the Extension activities is assessed. To make this possible, it is of course necessary first to obtain a sample of the mainstream participants, from which the best-matching individuals are identified. This is referred to as the Comparison sample.

To be effective, this method requires that all factors which are likely to influence both participation in the Extension and subsequent outcomes are taken account of in the matching. Since a sufficient range of information for this purpose can be collected through survey interviews, this method appeared feasible for the present evaluation.

A potential disadvantage of the matching method is that motivational or attitudinal differences between participants and non-participants may affect outcomes, but this kind of information can rarely be collected in advance of the programme. In the present research, however, the aim is to evaluate the programmes relative to the standard provision, and this can reasonably be assumed to eliminate most of this potential problem. The participants in the Pathfinder Extension are to be compared with others who are also participating in the standard Basic Skills provision, and these are likely to have very similar motivations and attitudes. This is likely to make the matched comparison method more effective than in its more usual applications where non-participants are used.

From the viewpoint of the net impact evaluation, the Stage 1 surveys had two main roles. The first was to obtain the samples of participants in Extension courses and in the traditional basic skills provision so that comparisons of outcomes could subsequently be made through a follow-up survey. The second role of the Stage 1 surveys was to gather a range of information about the two kinds of participants, which would be of value in matching the Comparison sample to the Extension learners.

### 1.3 Outline of the Stage 1 survey procedures

The evaluation study was commissioned in late November 2001. Since most of the activities under the Pathfinder Extension were scheduled to take place during January-March 2002, questionnaire development and the planning of survey fieldwork had to be compressed into an unusually short period of time. Following a small-scale pilot of the questionnaire, the first interviews for the Stage 1 survey were held on 15 January 2002.

The interviews took place at the locations where classes were arranged, and in the great majority of cases within normal class times. In the Pathfinder areas, with two exceptions, the courses were administered in a decentralised manner, and the local lead organisations were not in a position to make interviewing arrangements on behalf of the research team or to provide detailed information on the courses to be covered. The information collection about courses, and subsequent arrangements for interviewing, were therefore for the most part carried out by the research team through direct contacts with the various provider organisations to which they were guided by the Pathfinder co-ordinators, and ultimately with the individual teachers. The cooperation and help of all these organisations and teachers was important in achieving coverage of the Extension courses with a satisfactory response rate (see later). However, the process inevitably in some cases gave rise to delays, because of difficulties in identifying and contacting the appropriate teacher. In addition, Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses involved the agreement of employers for their employees to be interviewed on their premises, and this resulted in some further complications. As a result, some of the interviewing which it was originally planned to carry out before the end of March had to be carried over into April or May.

In addition, while it was originally envisaged that all Extension courses would be completed by end March 2002, the Department subsequently arranged for further courses to be included in the programme provided that they started by that date. The addition of such courses necessarily extended the survey fieldwork period. A cut-off for the survey fieldwork of end June 2002 was applied (this corresponds to the end of most course activities prior to the Summer break). By this date interviewing had been carried out at all Extension courses which the research team had identified, with the exception of two Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses where access was not obtained in time.

The original plan of the research was based on an assumption that each of the Pathfinder Extension programmes would have 300-400 participants (pooling across areas). In practice, the inquiries with the Pathfinder areas and their providers yielded lower numbers of learners than this assumption except for the Residential programme. The Residentials produced much the largest number (nearly 500), the Intensive programme about 250, the Highly Structured Prescriptive programme 200, Incentives for Learners nearly 150, and Fixed Rate Replacement Costs about 125. The courses identified and the numbers of learners on those courses were cross-checked with Pathfinder area co-ordinators to ensure, as far as possible, that no eligible courses had been omitted.

Work on arranging interviewing at the Comparison courses commenced in mid-February. Up to this point, the focus was on arrangements for the Extension courses, which in many cases were of short duration, whereas Comparison courses, being of traditional type, would be continuing over a longer period. It was expected that the identification of Comparison courses would be relatively straightforward, since the requirement was only that the courses should be of the same level and currently taking place within the same areas, and that Pathfinder lead organisations would be able to provide details for their own areas. However, the compilation of comparison courses proved to be one of the most difficult practical tasks in

completing the fieldwork. Four areas were able to supply comparison course details in the way expected, but in the other areas there was no centrally held information of the type required, and the co-ordinators lacked the resources to compile it. The Pathfinder co-ordinators were however generally able to point the research team towards contacts in the provider organisations who would be able to assist with identifying traditional basic skills courses. The research team then followed up these leads, together with other contacts developed in arranging the Extension courses, identified appropriate courses through consultation with the providers/teachers, and finally negotiated access through the course teachers. This process often required a considerable period of time to complete.

Because of the delay with the arrangements, the majority of the interviews for the Comparison sample were carried out in May or June. The later average date of interviewing somewhat reduces comparability of outcomes between the samples, although this could to some extent be corrected by statistical methods. A more fundamental problem was that the providers in some areas were unable to identify comparable courses, or were only able to identify comparable courses with relatively small learner numbers. Where the providers initially approached were unable to provide a sample of sufficient size, there was often no time before the fieldwork deadline to seek and arrange interviews from other sources in the same areas. As a result, the number of interviews achieved for the Comparison sample was substantially lower than that for the Extension sample (in fact, two-thirds as large) and this imposed some limitations on the evaluation at Stage 2.

Because of the decentralised way in which Comparison courses were identified, sometimes involving administrators and teachers who were not fully informed about the Extension, the Comparison courses may in some cases not have been appropriately selected. For example, one provider offered ESOL courses as the comparators, although ESOL formed no part of the Extension objectives. In this case, the inappropriateness of the courses offered was obvious, and could be pointed out to the provider. But in other cases, the research team may not have been aware of shortcomings. Part of the purpose of the analysis presented in this report is to check how closely the characteristics of the Comparison course learners match those of the Extension courses.

#### 1.4 Sample sizes and response rates

Table 1 shows the numbers of interviews achieved, by type of Extension course. Part (a) of the Table shows the five types of Extension course included in the terms of reference for the evaluation, with Prisons as an additional category. The Extension courses in Prisons were all of the Intensive type. Part (b) of the table omits the details for Prisons but is otherwise the same. As already noted, results concerning Prisons are described in a separate part of the report, since these are not directly comparable with the other Extension provision.

**Table 1. Extension Activities covered by the survey interviews**

(a) Complete Extension sample, full classification

Type of course	Number	%
Residential	372	40
Intensive training	157	17
Highly structured prescriptive	125	13
Fixed rate replacement cost	67	7
Incentives for learners	105	11
Prisons (intensive)	110	12
Total	936	100

(b) Excluding Prisons

Type of course	Number	%
Residential	372	45
Intensive training	157	19
Highly structured prescriptive	125	15
Fixed rate replacement cost	67	8
Incentives for learners	105	13
Total	826	100

The regional composition of the survey (excluding Prisons) is shown in Table 2, with separate columns for the Pathfinder Extension sample and the Comparison sample. It should be noted that comparator courses were not sought for the Fixed Rate Replacement Cost Extension courses, hence those areas running courses of the FRRC type played a smaller part in the construction of the Comparison sample.

**Table 2. Regional breakdown of interviews**

	Sample		
	Pathfinder	Comparison	Total
Pathfinder region	<i>column percentages</i>		
North West	17	12	15
North East	20	26	22
Yorks & Humberside	12	9	11
East Midlands	3	3	3
West Midlands	21	21	21
East of England	5	5	6
South East	5	8	6
South West	6	2	5
East London	10	14	11
Total = 100%	826	517	1343

Table 3 summarises the response rates for the survey of Extension course participants. There were very few direct refusals to be interviewed. The main reason for non-response was that course members were not present at the time the interviews were held, either because they had dropped out of the course completely or had missed that particular session or sessions. In a few instances, also, course teachers were unable to make sufficient time available for all members of the course to be interviewed. In the original design of the study, it was intended that these 'missing' course members would be approached at their home address and an interview requested. However, it was not possible to carry out this plan because course teachers either did not have contact details for their learners or because Data Protection or other disclosure issues prevented release of the information. If these cases were excluded, the response rates would become considerably higher.

**Table 3. Response rates on Extension programmes**

Type of course	Interviews	Eligible learners	Gross response rate
Residential	372	482	77 %
Intensive training	157	249	63%
Highly structured prescriptive	125	202	62%
Fixed rate replacement cost	67	117	57%
Incentives for learners	105	143	73%
Total	826	1193	69%

In tables in the following sections of the report, the following abbreviations will be used: HSP = Highly structured prescriptive courses; FRRC = Fixed rate replacement cost for employers; IIL = Individual incentives for learners.

### 1.5 Supplementary information from the DfES/KPMG database

In parallel with the evaluation research, the DfES commissioned KPMG to develop a database containing information about Extension course participants, and about participants in traditional provision who could be used for comparison purposes. This will be referred to as the Pathfinder Database. Tabulations from the Database were

kindly made available to the evaluation project by DfES and KPMG. Some results from this source are summarised in an Annex to this report. There are some difficulties in making direct comparisons between the two sources, which are discussed in the Annex. None the less, a particular advantage of the Pathfinder Database is that it contains information about the characteristics of participants in the Extension programme which was not available in the survey. The present section summarises the main points from this supplementary information. This is confined to the Extension courses: data relating to the potential comparison courses was not collected on the same basis as the survey comparison sample (see Annex for further details) and so is not used in this report.

**Table 4. Pathfinder Database: Numbers on Extension Activities**

Type of Extension	Number of learners	% of total
Residential	321	36
Intensive training	106	12
Highly structured prescriptive	131	15
Fixed rate replacement cost	140	16
Incentives for learners	187	21
Total	885	100

Note: Database records deemed invalid by KPMG because of incomplete basic information have not been included.

Table 4 summarizes the numbers on the various types of Extension courses recorded in the Pathfinder Database ('Working with other agencies' is not included in the table; a further 213 under this heading were recorded in the Database). If these figures are compared with the 'eligible learners' column in Table 3, it appears that the survey procedures yielded somewhat larger numbers of Extension participants under the Residential, Intensive and Highly Structured Prescriptive headings, but did not identify all the available Fixed Rate Replacement Cost and Incentives courses or learners. On the whole though the correspondence between the two sets of figures is reasonably good.

In Table 5, the Pathfinder Database is used to indicate the type of courses – literacy, numeracy, or a combination of both - being offered under each Extension programme. Literacy was overall the main focus, with the Intensive and Highly Structured Prescriptive provision especially concentrating on this aspect. Numeracy accounted for roughly one third of provision on Incentives for Learners and on Residentials, while Fixed Rate Replacement Cost provision appeared to have literacy as the focus for about one half of learners, numeracy for one quarter, and a combination of both literacy and numeracy for one quarter. The only other type of Extension on which a mix of literacy and numeracy was offered in any appreciable numbers was Residentials.

**Table 5. Pathfinder Database: Literacy/Numeracy focus by type of Extension**

	Literacy	Numeracy	Both Literacy & Numeracy	Total
	<i>row percentages</i>			
Residential	63	28	9	320
Intensive training	96	1	3	101
Highly structured prescriptive	89	10	1	131
Fixed rate replacement cost	51	24	24	140
Incentives for learners	63	37	*	187

\* less than 0.5 per cent.

In Table 6, the Extension courses are divided according to course level using the standard classification for basic skills. The breakdown shows that the various types of Extension had rather different levels that were typical of them.

- Incentives for Learners were concentrated in Level 1 (77 per cent), with very few learners at Entry levels.
- Residential were also concentrated at Level 1 (63 per cent), but with a larger proportion at Entry levels.
- Highly Structured Prescriptive had one half of learners at Entry level 3, with 11 per cent at the lower Entry levels and 39 per cent at Levels 1 or 2.
- Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses had a broad mix of levels.
- Intensive courses had the majority of learners at Entry level 1 or Entry level 2 (nearly three in five overall), had only 17 per cent at Level 1 and nobody at Level 2.

**Table 6 Pathfinder Database: Level of course by type of Extension**

	Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2	Total
	<i>row percentages</i>					
Residential	5	5	18	63	9	321
Intensive training	38	21	25	17	0	101
Highly structured prescriptive	3	8	50	33	6	131
Fixed rate replacement cost	27	8	26	22	17	140
Incentives for learners	*	2	6	77	14	187

\* less than 0.5 per cent.

There is therefore a fairly clear order of average level of course across the different types of Pathfinder, with Incentives for Learners having the highest average level while Intensive courses had the lowest average level. It should be emphasised, however, that courses were generally conducted in such a way that learners at somewhat different levels could be accommodated within the same class.



## 2 Characteristics of the sample of learners on Extension courses

Differences in the characteristics of learners on the various types of Extension courses were of very great importance for the evaluation. In addition, information of this type may be useful in gauging the attractiveness of the various course-types to different groups, or the success of the programme in reaching the groups it was meant to reach.

### 2.1 Gender

As shown in Table 7, there were more women (59 per cent) than men (41 per cent) in the sample of learners. In the case of Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses, however, this proportion was reversed with more men than women. The proportions by gender on the other types of Extension course were similar to one another.

**Table 7. Gender of learners**

	Type of course					
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Male	38	46	35	64	36	41
Female	62	54	65	36	64	59
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

### 2.2 Age on leaving school

Seven in 10 of the learners had left school at age 16 or before (Table 8). Three in 10, however, had continued at school beyond age 16, and 17 per cent beyond age 17. Although the school-leaving age distributions of those taking the different types of courses were broadly similar, there were somewhat more people whose education had continued to 18 or over on the Intensive courses.

**Table 8. Age on leaving education, by type of Extension course**

	Type of course					
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
Age on leaving education	<i>column percentages</i>					
14 or below	7	18	10	2	11	10
15	24	12	28	18	24	22
16	46	19	38	55	32	38
17	11	16	8	18	18	13
18	4	14	3	4	8	6
19	3	5	3	0	5	3
20	1	9	3	1	2	3
21 or over	4	8	6	0	1	5
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

It may seem surprising that a substantial minority of participants on basic skills courses had been educated to age 18 or over. Table 6 shows that the great majority of the participants with higher levels of initial education were from ethnic minorities. Their participation may therefore have reflected a desire to overcome language disadvantages.

**Table 9. Age of leaving education, by ethnic minority status**

Age on leaving education	Ethnic minority	White
	<i>row percentages</i>	
14 or below	48	52
15	16	84
16	17	83
17	41	59
18	62	38
19	67	33
20	80	20
21 or over	84	16
Total	32	68

### 2.3 Dependent children and marital status

There were slightly fewer of the sample with dependent children (45 per cent) than those without children (55 per cent) (Table 10). The Highly Structured and Prescriptive or Intensive courses were slightly less likely to be taken by those who had children (36 per cent) while those on Incentives for Learners courses were most likely to have children (52 per cent).

**Table 10. Whether respondent has any dependent children, by course type**

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Has child/children	47	41	36	43	52	45
No child/children	53	59	64	57	48	55
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

The largest marital status was single (54 per cent), with 34 per cent married or living with partners, and 12 per cent divorced, separated, or widowed (Table 11). Intensive and Incentive for Learners courses were particularly successful in attracting people who were married or living with partners (44 per cent and 47 per cent respectively).

**Table 11. Marital status of respondent**

	Type of course					
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Married/living with partner	28	44	27	31	47	34
Divorced, separated or widowed	13	9	10	15	15	12
Single	59	47	63	54	38	54
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

With the information about marital status and children, it is possible to infer those learners who were lone parents (this may be an overestimate because some respondents' separations from partners may be temporary). Lone parenthood may pose special issues for childcare arrangements during courses. Table 12 shows lone parents constituted 18 per cent of all participants on Extension courses, and 23 per cent in the case of Residential courses, but only 11 per cent in the case of Intensive courses.

**Table 12. Lone parent status, by type of Extension course**

	Type of course					
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Lone parent	23	11	14	18	15	18
Not lone parent	77	89	86	82	85	82
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

## 2.4 Ethnicity and language

Table 13 shows how the respondents classified their own ethnicity. Just over two thirds of the sample regarded themselves as 'White British', with the remaining one third spread across a wide range of ethnic minority groups.

**Table 13. Self-classified ethnic group of respondents**

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
White British	554	67.07
Black British	15	1.82
Irish	2	0.24
Black African	53	6.42
Black Caribbean	37	4.48
Indian	17	2.06
Pakistani	45	5.45
Bangladeshi	9	1.09
Chinese	7	0.85
West Indian	2	0.24
Sri Lankan	2	0.24
British/Black Caribbean	1	0.12
Iranian	10	1.21
Japanese	1	0.12
Somali	2	0.24
Thai	3	0.36
Arabic	9	1.09
Phillipino	1	0.12
East European	13	1.57
White British/South African	1	0.12
Lebanese	1	0.12
South/Latin American	2	0.24
Black European	1	0.12
White European	6	0.73
Afghani	5	0.61
Iraqi	6	0.73
Other	21	2.54
Total	826	100.00

Three quarters of the total of minority group learners were concentrated in the West Midlands and East London Pathfinders, where they constituted more than eight in 10 of the learners for the Extension. As Table 14 shows, minority group members tended to be particularly concentrated in the Intensive courses, and to some extent also in Highly Structured and Incentives for Learners courses. The great majority of Intensive courses were offered in West Midlands Pathfinder, while many of the Highly Structured courses were offered in East London. Incentives for Learners courses were offered in Leeds and in the East of England Pathfinder (Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire). Grouping all the minorities together may conceal substantial differences in course preferences or requirements between those in different ethnic minority groups, but the numbers are not sufficiently large for further break-down.

**Table 14. Minority group learners, by type of Extension course**

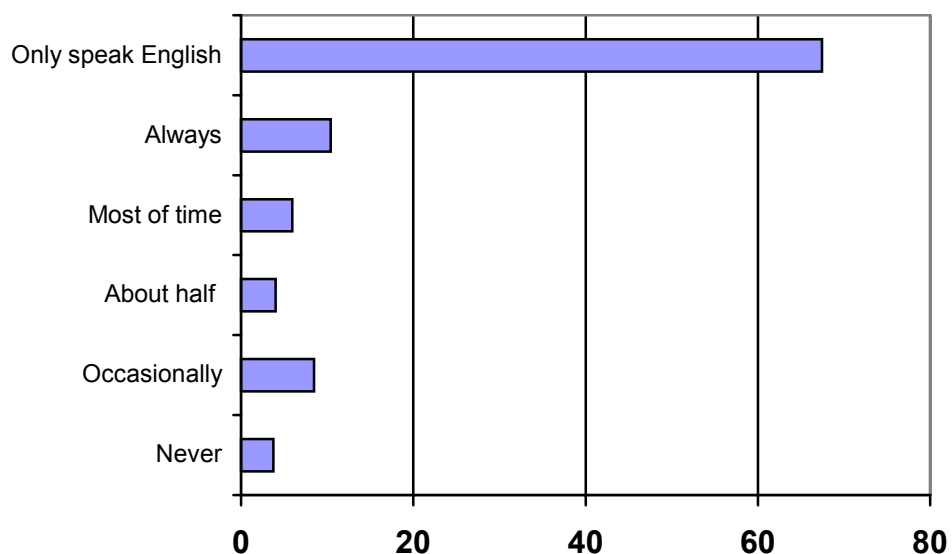
	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Ethnic minority	19	84	28	9	29	33
White British	81	16	72	91	71	67
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

A series of questions concerned the extent to which a language other than English was used in the home of the respondent. The main points revealed were as follows:

- Two thirds (67 per cent) of the sample spoke only English, with one in three speaking another language (or more than one other language) to some extent
- One in five (22 per cent) of the sample mainly spoke a language other than English up to the age of six.
- All except 4 per cent of the sample spoke English at home at least part of the time, and all but 13 per cent did so at least half of the time.

Further details concerning this last question are shown in Chart 1.

**Chart 1. The frequency with which English is spoken at home**



## 2.5 Disability or long-term sickness

Respondents were asked if they had 'a long-term health problem or a disability which limits the paid work you can do'. Twenty-three per cent of the sample said that they did have such a health problem or disability; there appeared to be a slightly lower proportion on Intensive courses and on Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses (Table 15). Two thirds of these (14 per cent of the total sample) also regarded themselves as 'long-term sick or disabled'. None the less, 27 people in this group were currently in paid work.

**Table 15. Whether respondent has a health problem or disability which limits paid work, by type of course**

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Has limiting disability	28	13	22	13	24	23
Does not have	72	87	78	87	76	77
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

## 2.6 Learner characteristics: Summary of policy points

- FRRC courses help to equalize the gender balance in basic skills participation.
- Many ethnic minority participants have attended school beyond age 17 and it is possible that this points to covert ESOL issues.
- Nearly one half of the participants had children, and there was a substantial minority of lone parents. This suggests the importance of childcare issues.

## 3. Current employment, job search and past employment

One of the main outcomes assessed at Stage 2 of the evaluation was gains in employment. At the Stage 1 interview, only basic information about employment was obtained, but this was supplemented with additional work-history information collected at the Stage 2 follow-up survey.

Just under one third (32 per cent) were in paid work of any type when the interview took place (Table 16). A further 42 people (5 per cent of the sample) were on a government training scheme, and if these were to be counted as employed, the figure would rise to 37 per cent.

All participants in Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses were by definition employees. Apart from this, the highest proportion of employed learners was found in the Incentives for Learners courses (39 per cent) and the lowest in the Intensive courses (17 per cent). The latter finding was associated with ethnic minority status: most of the Intensive programme participants were ethnic minority members in the West Midlands, and only 29 per cent of all ethnic minority members were employed,

as against 40 per cent among the white British group.

Nearly all of those in paid work were employees (96 per cent), with just 4 per cent describing themselves as self-employed. Of the employees, 43 per cent were part-time workers, a considerably higher proportion than among all employees nationally even after allowing for the high proportion of women in these courses (Table 17). Residential courses, and Incentives for Learners courses, appeared to be particularly attractive to workers on part-time hours. Relatively few of the participants under Fixed Rate Replacement Costs were part-time employees.

**Table 16. Whether doing any paid work at time of interview, by type of course**

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
In paid work	26	17	30	100	39	32
Not in paid work	74	83	70	0	61	68
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

**Table 17. Part-time or full-time hours of employees, by type of course**

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Less than 30 hours	60	50	39	15	58	43
30 hours or more	40	50	61	85	42	57
Total = 100%	80	24	31	67	33	235

Note: Table excludes self-employed, and 9 people who gave no reply.

Among those not in paid work, and not long-term sick or disabled, one in four (27 per cent) had been seeking a job recently (Table 18). This is equivalent to one in six of the whole sample. Table 16 suggests that the proportion of current job seekers was highest among those taking Highly Structured Prescriptive courses and lowest among those taking Incentives courses (in this table, Fixed Rate Replacement Cost learners are excluded because they are all employed).

Those who were not actively seeking work in Table 18 constituted 44 per cent of the whole sample.

**Table 18. Proportion seeking a job in last 4 weeks, by type of course (employed and long-term sick/disabled excluded from Table)**

	Type of course				
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>				
Seeking work	28	23	33	20	27
Not seeking (and not in work)	72	77	67	80	73
Total = 100%	240	117	81	56	494

### 3.1 'Quality' of current employment

There was not much indication that the employed part of the sample had experienced a lot of job instability. About three in five of current employees were in jobs which had lasted more than two years, in many cases considerably longer. The few self-employed people had, all save one, also been in their present situation for three years or more. Table 19 shows the combined results for employees and self-employed. The numbers were too small for a breakdown by course type to be useful.

Despite the foregoing result, many of the jobs currently held were regarded as temporary (Table 20). More than one in four (28 per cent) of employees felt that their job was for a period of less than one year and a further eight per cent thought it was for a period of 1-3 years. Only 62 per cent felt that they were in a permanent job. It is surprising that many of the employees on Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses regarded themselves as on temporary contracts, since it might be supposed that employers would have no incentive to offer courses to employees whom they did not intend to retain.

**Table 19. Year when current job began (employees and self-employed)**

	Number	Percent	Cumulative %
Before 1980	15	6	6
1980-89	30	13	19
1990-98	66	28	47
1999	27	11	58
2000	17	7	65
2001	63	27	92
2002	18	8	100
Total	236	100	

Note: Table excludes four people who gave no reply.



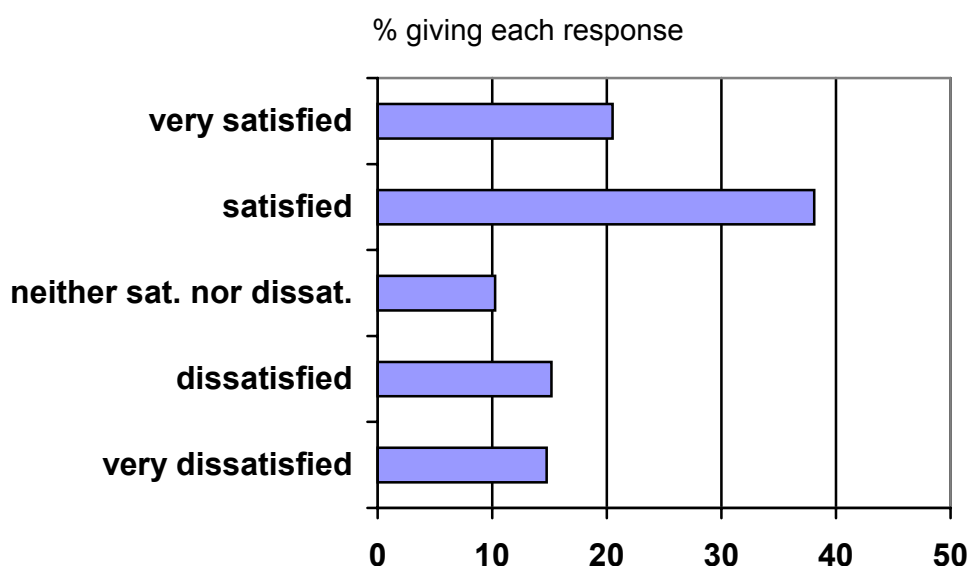
**Table 20. Contractual status of current employees**

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Temporary, less than 1 year	29	25	20	36	21	28
Temporary, 1-3 years	11	4	10	3	12	8
Permanent	58	71	67	60	67	62
Not sure	1	0	3	1	0	1
Total = 100%	79	24	30	67	33	233

Note: Table excludes self-employed.

There was an unusually high level of job dissatisfaction among those currently in work (Chart 2), with almost one in three (30 per cent) describing themselves as 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied'. This suggests that desire to obtain a better job may be an important motive for these learners.

**Chart 2. Overall satisfaction with current job**



The types of occupations in which currently employed participants were situated are shown in Table 21, using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). The table shows that the employed learners were chiefly in low-skilled jobs. The largest group (36 per cent) was in 'Other' occupations, which largely consists of unskilled jobs. One in five were in personal and protective service occupations, which contains a mix of skilled and semi-skilled jobs, and one in eight were in plant and machine operative jobs, a mainly semi-skilled category. There were relatively small numbers in management, professional, clerical or sales occupations.

**Table 21. Occupational groups (SOC) of current jobs**

Occupation	Number	%
Management & administrative	6	2
Professional	1	*
Associate professional	10	4
Clerical & secretarial	12	5
Craft & related	25	10
Personal & protective service	51	21
Sales	13	5
Plant & machine operators	30	12
Other	89	36
Missing	7	3
Total	244	100

### 3.2 Earnings and wages

A very important indicator of job quality is pay; this is also a strong indicator of the level of skill involved in the job. Those who were currently employed at the time of the interview were asked to provide details of both net (take-home) and gross (before deductions) earnings in their latest pay-period. As is usually the case, more people could answer the question in terms of net earnings than in terms of gross, so the following results focus upon net pay. Where however gross earnings were available but net earnings were not, the relationship between gross and net earnings was used to make an estimate of net earnings. A small number of cases was excluded because the recorded values were implausibly high (this can occur through confusions such as giving an annual salary but saying that the period referred to was a month).

Weekly net earnings figures were, as a result of this process, available for 197 members of the Pathfinder sample. The average *weekly net earnings* for this sample were £147.35.

The weekly net earnings were then divided by the hours worked in the latest pay period, to produce an estimate of the hourly wage. An hourly wage was available for 194 people. The average hourly wage for the sample was £5.09 *per hour*.

It is apparent that the employed participants were a low-paid group. By reference to the New Earnings Survey 2001, it can be seen that these figures fall in the interval between the bottom 10<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the earnings and hourly wage distributions, including both full-time and part-time employees. This means that their wages or earnings are lower than those of between 80 and 90 per cent of the employed workforce. The low averages of the Pathfinder sample would be partly influenced by the large proportion of women, and similarly by the large proportion of part-time employees. Even so, there were very few in the Pathfinder sample who were being paid at around the national average: the highest-paid individual in the sample received £375 per week net.

Because of the relatively small size of the sub-sample with current wage information, it would not be reliable to show results separately by type of Extension course.

### 3.3 Previous employment experience if currently not in paid work

Among those not currently in paid work, the majority (58 per cent) had some previous experience of employment, as shown in Table 22. Adding these to the currently employed, seven in 10 of the sample (71 per cent) had some employment experience. Those who had never previously had paid employment constituted just under three in 10 (29 per cent) of all those interviewed.

It can also be seen from Table 22 that learners with *no* previous employment experience were particularly numerous in the Intensive and Highly Structured courses, where they constituted more than half the sample excluding those currently employed. Conversely, four out of five on the Incentive courses, excluding those currently employed, had some previous employment experience. Those on Residential courses occupied an intermediate position.

**Table 22. Previous employment, among those currently not employed**

	Type of course				
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>				
Ever had paid job or been self-employed	63	43	48	82	58
Never had paid job nor been self-employed	37	57	52	18	42
Total = 100%	288	131	92	71	582

The breakdown of previous employment by full-time and part-time jobs was slanted slightly more towards full-time work than in the case of current jobs, and is shown in Table 23.

**Table 23. Type of previous employment (those currently not employed)**

	Type of course				
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>				
Self-employed	4	7	0	7	5
Employee, less than 30 hours	41	20	41	29	35
Employee, 30 hours or more	55	73	59	64	60
Total = 100%	180	56	44	33	233

One half of these previous jobs had come to an end before 1996, so might not be of great value when seeking employment in today's job market. One third had finished in the past two years.

### 3.4 Employer characteristics

Several questions in the interview examined characteristics of the current employer

or, for those not currently but previously in employment, of the most recent employer.

Nearly 7 in 10 of current or most recent employers were in the private sector, with a little below 30 per cent in the public sector including local government, education, health or central government service (Table 24). Private sector employees were somewhat more concentrated in the Incentives for Learners provision. The public sector played the leading role for Fixed Rate Replacement Cost learners, where the figures relate entirely to current employment.

**Table 24. Employer's sector (current or last job), by type of course**

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Private company	75	59	68	43	79	69
Public sector	23	39	27	57	18	29
Other	2	1	5	0	2	2
Total = 100%	252	76	75	67	87	557

Of the private sector jobs, more than one third were in small firms (less than 25 employees) but 27 per cent came from large firms (500 or more employees), as shown in Table 25. On the rough-and-ready assumption that public sector employers are large, it seems that about one half of those currently or previously employed had their most recent experience in a large organisation, with one half from small and medium sized organisations.

**Table 25. Size of private sector employers, by type of course**

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
less than 25	36	35	36	24	28	34
25-99	15	30	16	14	11	16
100-499	10	13	15	31	28	16
500 or more	30	15	20	31	30	27
Not sure	7	7	13	0	3	7
Total = 100%	194	46	55	29	71	395

### 3.5 Employment: Summary of policy points

- Employed people formed a minority of participants for all Extension except FRRC. A possible interpretation is that employed people with basic skills needs had greater access barriers to participation.

- The majority of FRRC provision was with public sector employers. The issue implied by this is how to reach more employees in the private sector.

- Many current and previous jobs were part-time, suggestive of childcare issues.
- The importance of reaching employed people with basic skills needs was underlined by the low wages and other unsatisfactory features of many of the jobs held by participants.
- Three in 10 of the sample had never had a job. For these especially, guidance in considering an employment option may be an important supplement to help through basic skills education.

#### **4. Other continuing education and training (CET)**

The survey interview sought to establish the main details of previous participation in CET, as part of the background to the current Extension course activity.

Just under one in five of the whole sample, and 27 per cent of those with a current or previous job, had received training at an employer's training school, or at an external course paid for by the employer, at some time in their life. These are low proportions by current national standards. Table 26 shows first the results for the whole sample, and then restricted to those with employment experience. Differences by type of Extension course were not large.

**Table 26. Previous training at an employer's training school, or paid for by the employer**

Note: excludes current Extension activity.

(a) whole sample

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Have had training	22	12	14	34	16	19
Had job, no training	49	40	47	66	70	51
Never had job	29	48	38	0	12	29
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

(b) those currently or previously employed

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Have had training	31	23	23	34	18	27
Had job, no training	69	77	77	66	82	73
Total = 100%	265	82	77	67	92	583

Some 37 per cent had received some other kind of CET (i.e., other than provided by an employer) after leaving school (Table 27). Intensive courses had the lowest proportion who had previously accessed CET outside of employment. Incentives for Learners had the highest proportion. Taking account of both employer-provided and other CET, just about one half of all the respondents (48 per cent) had taken part in some kind of CET course since leaving school while one half had received none.

**Table 27. Other (not employer provided) continuing education or training**

Note: excludes current Extension activity.

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Have had other CET	40	23	30	31	56	37
No other CET	60	77	70	69	44	63
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

Two thirds of previous CET courses had been for work-related purposes, with one in three taken for other reasons (Table 28). Incentives for Learners courses had larger proportions of learners who had previously taken CET courses for non-work reasons.

**Table 28. Reason for taking previous CET course**

Note: excludes current Extension activity; covers both employer-provided and other previous CET.

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Work-related reason	70	69	71	77	52	68
Other reason	30	31	29	23	46	32
Total = 100%	193	51	49	35	65	393

One in four (26 per cent) had been on a course within the past three years, and one third had been on a course within the past six years, as shown in Table 29. About one in 12 had been on a course at least 10 years ago. There were no obvious differences between learners on the different types of Extension courses in terms of when previous CET had taken place (table not shown).

Almost 3 in 10 of those with previous CET said they were still currently involved in those courses, in parallel with their Extension activity. These amounted to one in seven (14 per cent) of the full sample. The proportion is higher than might be expected, and there could have been some confusion with current Extension courses in answering the question. The breakdown by Extension course type is shown in Table 30: those on the Incentives for Learners courses were most likely to have an ongoing CET course in parallel.

**Table 29. Year of most recent CET course (excluding current course)**

Year started	Number	Percent	Cumulative %
No course or no date	455	55	55
Before 1990	46	6	61
1990-96	45	5	66
1997	10	1	67
1998	18	2	69
1999	35	4	74
2000	50	6	80
2001	135	16	96
2002	32	4	100
Total	826	100	

**Table 30. Whether CET previous to Extension is still continuing**

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Still continuing	28	24	24	11	45	28
Has ended	72	76	76	89	55	72
Total = 100%	193	51	49	35	65	393

Three in five (63 per cent) of previous CET courses were long-period (more than 6 months), as shown in Table 31, and one in four were for more than one year. There were no clear differences in this respect between learners on the different types of Extension courses (table not shown). Additionally, 82 per cent of these previous CET courses were meant to lead to a certificate or qualification of some kind (table not shown). It seems possible that respondents may have forgotten to mention some shorter courses which they went on in the past, thus biasing the responses towards the longer courses. It is also important to note that not all these previous CET courses were completed: in one in six cases, the person had left the course early, and this rose to 22 per cent if ongoing courses were excluded from the base.

**Table 31. Length of previous CET course**

Length of course	Number	Percent	Cumulative %
Less than a week	26	7	7
1 week	12	3	10
2-3 weeks	10	3	12
4 weeks/1 month	6	2	14
2-3 months	44	11	25
4-6 months	47	12	37
7 months to 1 year	127	32	69
More than 1 year, up to 2 years	50	13	82
More than 2 years	43	11	93
Not sure/don't know	27	7	100
Too long ago to remember	1	*	100
Total	393	100	

\* Less than 0.5 per cent.

To what extent were previous CET courses concerned with basic skills acquisition? Although this question cannot be answered precisely without the full course details, respondents were asked to provide a broad classification of the skills involved in their previous course. Their responses (Table 32) suggested that around four in ten may have had a basic skills emphasis, with a focus on reading, writing and/or number skills. Number skills had mostly been encountered in conjunction with reading/writing skills rather than separately. There were no clear differences in previous course orientation between learners on the different Extension courses.

**Table 32. What was the last CET course mainly concerned with?**

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	



	<i>column percentages</i>					
Mainly number skills	6	0	2	0	6	4
Mainly reading/writing	17	25	18	9	20	18
Reading/writing/number	18	10	18	23	15	17
Something else	59	65	61	69	58	61
Total = 100%	193	51	49	35	65	393

#### 4.1 Previous CET: Summary of policy points

- Only about one in four of those with jobs had ever received CET through their employer. This highlights the gap in training for those employees with the greatest basic skills needs.
- Altogether, nearly one half of the participants had some kind of previous CET and much of this was long-period. An issue is to what extent previous long-period CET had been ineffective because basic skills issues had not been diagnosed and assessed.

### 5. Experience of Extension courses

A major aim of the first stage survey was to obtain learners' perceptions of their courses while these views were fresh. Accordingly, as far as possible people were interviewed while the course was continuing. Consistent with this, most of the learners (91 per cent of those interviewed) were still on their Extension courses at the time of interview.

#### 5.1 Entry to the course

Sixty-seven of the interviewees were on Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses, and in all but one of these cases, they had either applied or had been asked directly by their employer whether they wanted to go on the course (the other person was simply instructed to attend). All were pleased to be on the course.

Respondents were asked who had helped them to apply for the course, and their responses were coded under a range of headings, as shown in Table 33 (they could be coded to more than one heading, so percentages add to more than 100). The Table excludes 27 of the Fixed Rate Replacement Cost learners who did not need to apply because their employers made all the arrangements. As might be expected, the support was in the majority of cases provided through colleges and other adult education centres (52 per cent of learners mentioned these sources: this constituted 47 per cent of all advice and support recorded by learners). However a wide variety of other institutions, and friends, family and personal contacts, also provided assistance in some cases. Advertisements (including at libraries and work) had a relatively minor role, influencing one in 10 of the learners overall.

**Table 33. Sources of information and help to make course application**

Information source	Number of	% of
--------------------	-----------	------

	mentions	learners
At work - Employer/supervisor /training or personnel department	40	5
At work - General advertising AT WORK(e.g. Newsletter or notice at work)	12	2
At work – Friend at work/co-worker	31	4
At college/ adult education centre - Teacher or friend where attending/attended another course	204	26
At college/ adult education centre - Other education-based (education advice or guidance centre /learner support at college, etc.)	207	26
Education/careers information services - Telephone help-line (inc. Learndirect)	7	1
Education/careers information services - Employment Service	39	5
Education/careers information services - Other external careers/education guidance services (e.g. Careers Service)	68	9
Family/friends - Family member or friend outside work	123	15
Community sources/adverts - Citizens Advice Bureau/CAB	5	1
Community sources/adverts - Community/neighbourhood/women’s centre	21	3
Community sources/adverts - Library	17	2
Community sources/adverts - General advertising (not on employer, college or guidance centre premises; e.g. Radio, newspaper, bus, or other advertisement to general public)	50	6
Other	48	6
Total sources of information	872	
Total of learners answering question (base for percentages)		799

Note: Respondents could state more than one source of information, so the percentages sum to more than 100.

## 5.2 Learners' qualification aims

Nearly four in five of learners (79 per cent) entered their course hoping to get a qualification from it, while 16 per cent were not seeking a qualification and five per cent were unsure. As Table 34 shows, the proportion was highest (88 per cent) in Incentives for Learners courses - where of course the incentives were particularly linked with qualifications - and lowest (66 per cent) in Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses.

**Table 34. Whether course entered with a qualification aim**

	Type of course					Total
	Resid-Entail	Intens-ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					

Yes	77	84	77	66	88	79
No	17	11	18	25	10	16
Not sure	5	4	6	9	2	5
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

### 5.3 General perceptions of the course

The respondents were asked to say what they liked about the course. The question was asked 'open-ended', but responses were placed by the interviewers under headings not shown to the respondents (comments not fitting the headings were recorded separately, but were too few for analysis). A feature of the results (see Table 35) is the large number of comments made, with an average of nearly three 'likes' per learner.

The most frequently used heading concerned course content, an area referred to by 57 per cent of the respondents. The other most frequently used headings concerned the teaching methods, the teachers, and the other course members. There seemed to be a balance, therefore, between learning aspects of the course and social relationship aspects. In addition, nearly one in three of the learners spontaneously mentioned positive effects on their self-confidence. A variety of convenience or timeliness aspects of the courses were referred to by smaller proportions. Very few people mentioned financial or cost factors, even in the Incentives for Learners courses.

Residential courses got particularly high 'likes' on course content and relations with other learners. One in four (24 per cent) of the Residential learners specifically mentioned the residential nature of the course as something they liked (this is not shown in the Table as it did not apply to the other types of courses).

The Highly Structured category scored relatively high on relations with teachers, and on the convenience factors. Intensive courses also scored high on relations with teachers, and also on access to computers, but surprisingly were somewhat below average on the convenience and course timeliness factors.

The Incentive and Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses had about the average level of 'likes' on most items, but were relatively low on relations with other learners. This is perhaps understandable in the case of FRRC courses, since all the participants were employed and the courses may have been less of a social opportunity for them.

**Table 35. What learners liked about the Extension courses**

	Resid.	Intens.	HSP.	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>cell percentages</i>					
course content / level	66	50	51	54	47	57
relations with teachers	48	61	64	40	50	52
relations with other learners	56	35	49	19	27	44
teaching or working methods	47	41	39	49	42	44
improved self-confidence etc.	33	29	22	25	41	31
convenient, easy to get to etc.	12	9	22	6	15	13
class frequency/spacing or duration	9	8	13	7	10	9
times/days of classes	6	4	20	3	13	9
use of computers/IT	6	19	11	15	9	11
atmosphere/environment	6	3	2	21	7	6
financial reasons (low cost etc.)	*	0	0	0	2	*
other reasons	3	6	2	6	1	3
Base – no. of learners	372	157	125	67	105	826

Note: \* indicates less than 0.5 per cent in cell.

The learners were also asked how their courses could be improved. Some 31 per cent did not feel that the courses could be improved, while 11 per cent felt unable to give an answer. Suggestions were made by 58 per cent of the learners, but only one idea had wide support: this was to extend the length of the course and/or the length of sessions, and give more time to practice skills. This type of suggestion was made by 18 per cent of the whole sample, or nearly one in three of those making a suggestion. There were no appreciable differences between the different types of Extension course in this respect.

Four suggestions were made by 3-5 per cent of the learners and another two were made by at least 2 per cent but less than 3 per cent. These are listed in Table 36, along with the other suggestions which were offered by less than 2 per cent of the sample.

In addition, a short series of direct questions was posed to evaluate learners' reaction to the Extension courses. The responses to these were extremely positive:

- 96 per cent regarded their course as 'interesting'
- 96 per cent stated that they would recommend the same course to a relative or friend.
- 81 per cent regarded the degree of difficulty as 'just right'. The breakdown of responses to this question is shown in Table 37, which shows that both Fixed Rate

**Table 36. Suggestions for course improvements from learners**

**- longer course/longer classes/more time to practice (18%)**

**3-5%:**

- harder/more difficult/complex work//more work/more homework
- more one-to-one tuition
- smaller classes/more teachers
- slow down/don't rush through lessons

**at least 2% but less than 3%:**

- more breaks/longer breaks between lessons
- more access to computers/IT

**less than 2 %:**

- computers don't always work/takes a long time to log on
- more entertainment/things to do outside class hours
- more practical work/less theory
- shorter classes/shorter sessions
- complete one lesson before starting another/no overlapping
- more opportunities to get to know other people on the course
- more practice on reading and writing/less emphasis on computer work
- more/improved access to computers
- fewer/shorter breaks
- group classes according to ability
- more tests/progress reports throughout the course
- bigger classrooms
- provide creche/childcare facilities
- more information before the course starts/more course details
- have a follow-up course
- no/fewer evening classes
- more/have evening classes
- more group/team work
- more books/pens/equipment
- more variety
- improved pay/methods of payment
- award qualification/certificate at end of course

Replacement Cost courses scored particularly high on this (91 per cent judging their difficulty as 'just right'). However, only 70 per cent of learners on Intensive courses felt they were 'just right', with 13 per cent regarding them as too hard and 13 per cent as too easy.

**Table 37. Perceived difficulty of courses**

	Type of course					
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Too hard	5	13	6	4	8	7
Just right	86	71	78	91	75	81
Too easy	6	13	9	1	8	8
Not sure	3	3	6	3	10	5
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

#### 5.4 Learning characteristics of courses

Specific questions were asked about a variety of learning aspects of the course, relating to some of the main ideas involved in the Extension activities.

Only 41 per cent of respondents had a clear idea before starting the course of what the class length was going to be (but higher on Incentives for Learners courses at 62 per cent; table not shown). However, in the event most of the learners felt that the class length had turned out to be about right (Table 38). Of the minority who would have preferred something different, views were split between longer and shorter classes, with a slight tilt towards longer.

**Table 38. Views of the length of classes**

	Type of course					
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
About right	80	79	82	76	78	79
Too short	6	11	14	9	12	9
Too long	14	10	3	13	9	11
Not sure	1	1	2	1	1	1
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

The time-spacing between classes was also considered, except in the case of Residentials where it was not applicable. Views were fairly similar to the previous question, with 87 per cent feeling that spacing of classes was about right (Table 39).

**Table 39. Views of spacing between classes**

Note: Residentials excluded

	Type of course				
	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>				
About right	85	88	87	87	87
Too far apart	6	5	9	5	6
No- prefer further apart	8	3	3	4	5
Not sure	1	4	1	5	3
Total = 100%	157	125	67	105	454

Almost two thirds of respondents (64 per cent) felt that they were learning new skills either very quickly or quite quickly on the course (Table 40). A further 20 per cent felt their progress was neither quick nor slow, while 15 per cent felt that it was on the slow side. Differences between the various course types were not substantial.

**Table 40. Learners' opinion of how quickly learning is taking place**

	Type of course					
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Very quickly	19	22	18	3	11	17
Quite quickly	51	36	49	63	42	47
Neither quickly nor slowly	19	20	18	18	30	20
Quite slowly	10	17	12	10	12	12
Very slowly	1	4	1	4	5	3
Not sure	1	1	2	1	0	1
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

Three quarters of respondents (77 per cent) felt that they had enough time to practice their skills, with 19 per cent answering this question in the negative (Table 41). Differences between types of course were not large.

**Table 41. Learners' opinion of whether there is enough time for practice**

	Type of course					
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	72	78	82	79	86	77
No	24	19	8	19	11	19
Not sure	4	3	10	1	3	4
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

Views of social relationships on the courses were very positive, with almost everyone feeling that they got to know one another either very well or quite well (Table 42). However, learners on the Highly Structured Prescriptive courses tended to be less at the positive extreme on this than the other courses.

**Table 42. Learners' opinion of how well people get to know one another on the course**

	Type of course					
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Very well	70	64	48	69	61	64
Quite well	27	28	42	28	30	30
Not very well	2	7	3	0	8	4
Not sure	*	1	7	3	1	2
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

Virtually the same overall result was obtained with a question about how well the respondent had got to know the teacher or teachers (Table 43). The differences between the various types of course were slight.

**Table 43. Learners' opinion of how well the respondent gets to know the teacher**

	Type of course					
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Very well	70	66	58	61	67	66
Quite well	29	32	39	37	30	32
Not very well	2	3	2	1	4	2
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

In addition, three in four of the respondents (76 per cent) felt that they got enough of the teacher's time to themselves, although one in five felt that they needed more teacher time (Table 44).

**Table 44. Learners' opinion of whether get enough teacher time to oneself**

	Type of course					
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	77	76	67	81	81	76
No	19	23	26	19	16	20
Not sure	4	1	7	0	3	4
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

A short series of questions concerned the structuring of the course. These questions are of general concern to course design although they are also of particular relevance to the Highly Structured courses. The first concerned the clarity of messages about what the learner should be doing (Table 45). Four fifths felt that they were always clear about what they should be doing, while 20 per cent felt they were not, or were unsure. Unexpectedly, it was the Highly Structured Prescriptive courses where the highest proportion of learners (29 per cent) lacked clarity about what they should be doing.

**Table 45. Learners' opinion of whether always clear about what they should be doing**

	Type of course
--	----------------



	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	80	82	71	85	83	80
No	15	11	17	9	17	14
Not sure	5	7	12	6	0	6
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

In overall terms, similar results were obtained with a question about feedback on course progress (Table 46). Nearly four in five of the individuals felt they always knew whether they were getting things right or wrong. There were about one in five who felt they did not always know about this, or were unsure. Learners on the Highly Structured Prescriptive courses again had slightly less favourable results, with 29 per cent unsure about feedback. However, the differences between types of course were not large.

**Table 46. Learners' opinion about always knowing about getting things right or wrong**

	Type of course					
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	75	86	71	88	84	79
No	18	10	17	9	13	15
Not sure	7	4	12	3	3	6
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

The third question in the series was about being able to learn in the way that is best for oneself. There might for example be some concern that a highly structured or intensive approach could interfere with an individual's natural learning style. However, this question received a particularly positive response (Table 47), with nearly nine in ten feeling that they were able to learn as suited them best, and there was little difference in the responses between the different types of courses.

**Table 47. Opinion about whether can work in the way that is best for learning**

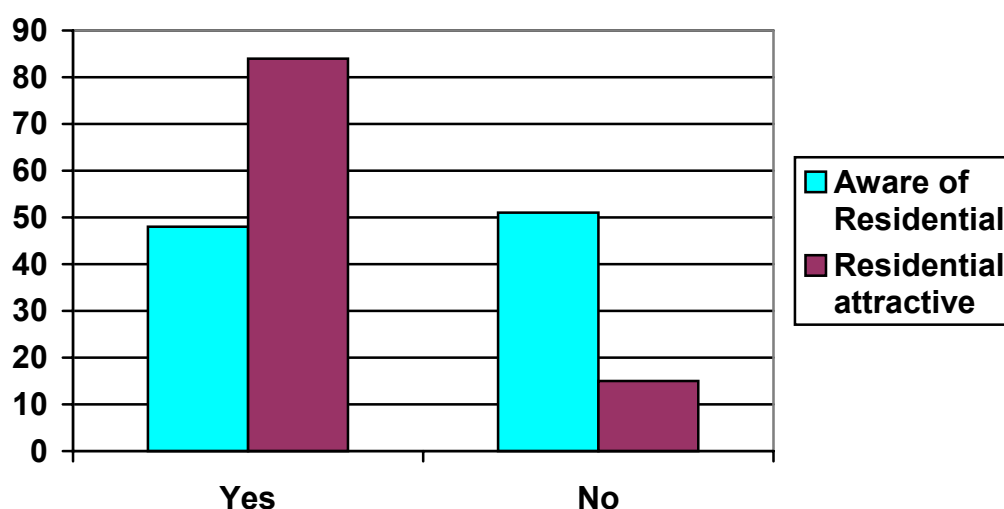
	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	90	85	86	87	90	88
No	5	5	5	7	9	6
Not sure	5	10	10	6	2	6
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

### 5.5 Questions about Residential courses

A set of questions in the interview was specifically directed to those who attended Residential courses.

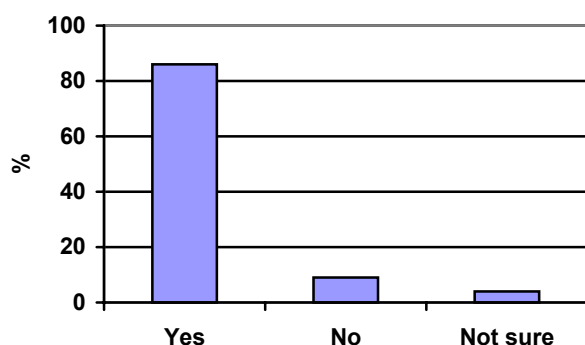
Residentials took place as part of longer courses on which learners were enrolled. A first question probed their awareness of the existence of the Residential component, before they joined the course. Slightly less than one half of those who attended Residentials were aware of them in advance, while the remainder were not, and had therefore chosen to go on the course irrespective of the Residential component. Most of those who were aware of the Residential component in advance also stated that they would have taken the course, even if there had been no Residential. On the other hand, the great majority also said that they considered the Residential component an added attraction. Answers to both questions are shown in Chart 3.

**Chart 3. Awareness of Residential component, and whether it was attractive**  
% responding 'yes' or 'no' (two separate questions)

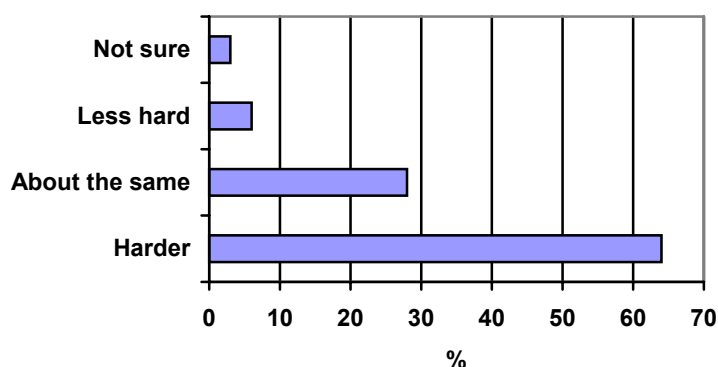


Most of those who went on Residentials agreed that, before going away, it seemed that it would be rather a pleasant break (Chart 4). However, now that they had been on the Residential, nearly two thirds (64 per cent) felt that it required more work from them than the usual classes, and only six per cent felt that it required less work (Chart 5).

**Chart 4. Whether the Residential seemed a pleasant break (before going on it)**



**Chart 5. Amount of work on Residential compared with usual classes (view after going on Residential)**



The great majority (74 per cent) also thought that the Residentials had resulted in them making more progress than through their usual classes (Table 48).

Although these results concerning the impact of Residentials appear very positive, there is a need for some caution since learners were interviewed while the Residentials were in progress, when they may have felt particularly stimulated by the change.

**Table 48. View of how much progress resulted from Residentials, compared with usual classes**

	Number	Per cent
More progress	270	73
Less progress	9	2
About the same	83	22
Not sure	10	3
Base	372	100

## 5.6 Questions about Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses

Specific questions were also directed at the Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses. As there were only 67 survey respondents on this type of Extension activity, the

results must be regarded with particular caution.

Table 49 shows that the great majority of these participants (71 per cent) felt that they would not have been able to take a course like this without the paid time off work which the Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses made possible.

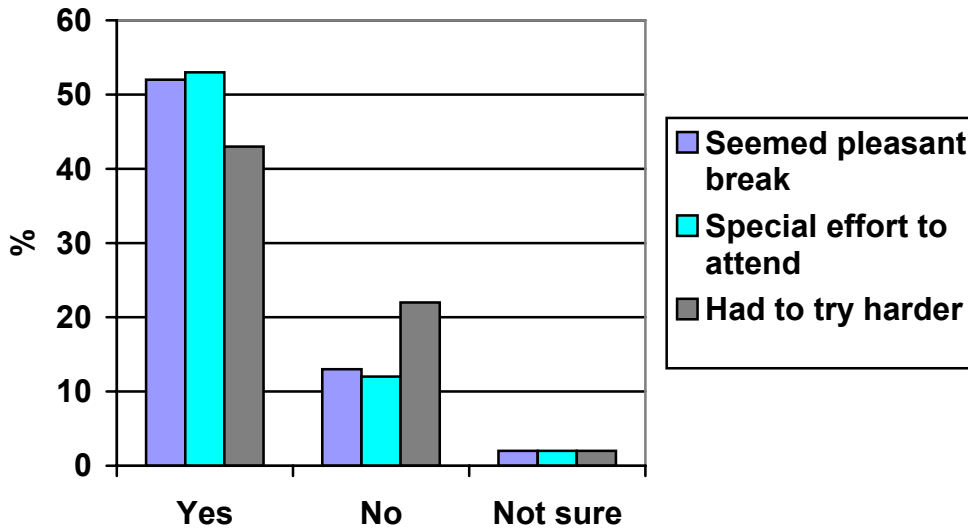
**Table 49. Whether would have been able to do the course without paid time off work**

	Number	Per cent
Yes	13	19
No	50	71
Not sure	7	10
Base	67	100

As was the case with Residentials (see above), the great majority of participants in these courses initially (before starting) regarded them as a pleasant break from ordinary work. However, nearly four in five also said that the nature of the provision made them feel that they had to make a special effort to attend, and nearly two thirds similarly felt that they should put in more effort on the course. These three results are summarised together in Chart 6. So the way the courses were financed appeared to provide a motivational incentive for the participants as well as for the employers.

**Chart 6. Some views of Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses**

Note: 'Pleasant break' refers to the view before the course, the other two bars refer to perceptions during the course.



Another potential aspect of motivation is indicated in Table 50. Nearly two thirds of those taking part (63 per cent) judged that they were improving their prospects with their firm by taking part in the course.

**Table 50. Whether those on Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses felt they were improving their prospects with the firm**

	Number	Per cent
Yes	42	63
No	15	22
Not sure	10	13
Base	67	100

**5.7 Questions about Incentives for Learners courses**

Another set of special questions was put to those on the Incentives for Learners courses. Here the sample size was 105, so results are a little firmer than in the case of Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses.

The first question was whether the individual would have been able to take the course without being paid to attend. More than four in five (86 per cent) of the learners said that they would have been able (Table 51). Of those who said that they would have been able to take the course, 87 per cent felt that they actually would have done so without the financial support (Table 52). On face value, this suggests that about 70 per cent of the financial support was deadweight from the viewpoint of increasing participation in basic skills courses, with about 30 per cent of the learners brought onto courses as a result of the incentive payments.

**Table 51. Whether Incentive course learners would have been able to take the course without being paid to attend**

	Number	Per cent
Yes	90	86
No	14	13
Not sure	1	1
Base	105	100

**Table 52. Whether Incentive course learners, able to take the course without being paid, would have actually done so**

	Number	Per cent
Yes	78	87
No	5	6
Not sure	7	8
Base	90	100

The next question asked 'Is there much left over after the costs of doing the course, like travel?'. One half of the learners thought that there was, and presumably this increased the incentive value of the course to them (Table 53). Following this up, another question asked whether the payments encouraged them to attend on days when it was not easy to do so. This received a positive response from about three in five of the learners on this kind of provision (Table 54).

**Table 53. Is there money left over after the costs of the course? (Incentive courses)**

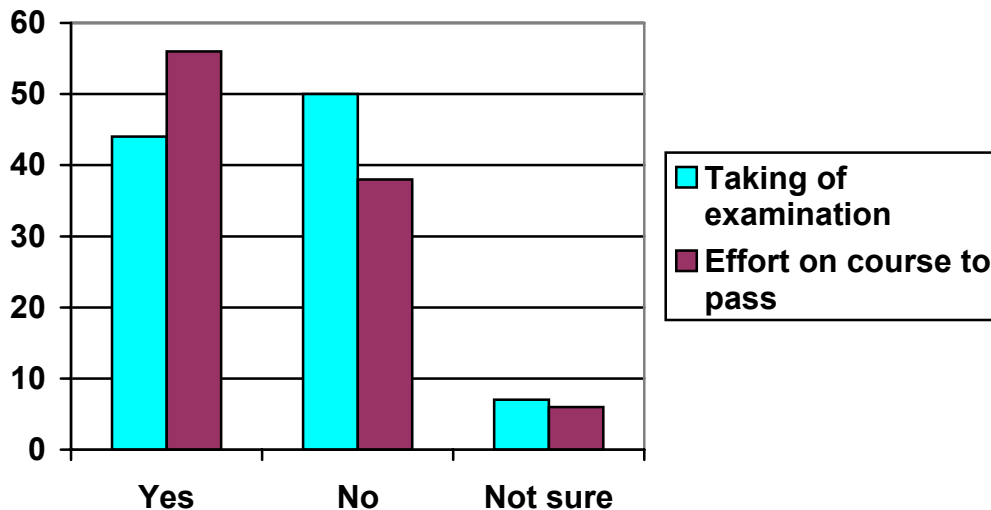
	Number	Per cent
Yes	53	50
No	36	34
Not sure	15	14
Base	105	100

**Table 54. Does payment encourage attendance on days when it is not easy? (Incentive courses)**

	Number	Per cent
Yes	64	61
No	36	34
Not sure	5	5
Base	105	100

Two further questions were aimed at incentives for taking the examination at the end of the course. Most of the respondents were still taking their courses, so the exam was still to come. Somewhat less than half (44 per cent) thought that the additional payment for taking the exam would influence them to take it (Chart 7). Somewhat more than one half (56 per cent) felt that the additional payment for passing the exam was currently an incentive to try harder on the course (also shown in Chart 7).

#### **Chart 7 Influence of incentives for taking and passing examinations**



### 5.8 Learner reactions: Summary of points for policy

- Recruitment to Extension seemed to rely chiefly on individuals contacting providers or word-of-mouth. There may be a need to consider outreach activities to get to potential clients who lack these contact channels.
- Many participants on Residential courses had not been aware of this feature when they enrolled. This suggests some 'under-selling' of distinctive opportunities in recruitment.
- The main suggestion for future improvement made by participants was to offer longer-period basic skills courses or longer sessions.
- Highly Structured Prescriptive courses, although generally very satisfactory to the participants, were less effective than other courses in terms of providing clear instructions and feedback.
- The financial incentive provisions appeared to influence participants positively on both FRRC and IIL courses, but in different ways. The learners on FRRC would not have taken part without them, but this did not apply to IIL courses. However both groups were motivated to work harder on their courses because of the financial arrangements.

## 6. Self-confidence and self-efficacy

It was noted in section 5.3 that about one in three of the interviewees spontaneously mentioned increasing self-confidence as a valued aspect of their Extension course. Additionally, towards the end of the interview the respondents were asked to rate themselves on a series of questions designed to assess self-confidence in a practical way, focusing on common tasks and situations. This type of practical self-confidence is referred to technically as 'self-efficacy' and is believed to be a most important aspect of motivation.

Little could be inferred from the self-efficacy questions at Stage 1, since to develop an interpretation comparisons were needed between groups and between time-points. However, the results may be of some interest in giving a current picture of the participants' feelings about their capacities while the courses were in progress. For example, Table 55 perhaps suggests a somewhat lower level of confidence concerning tasks which involve numbers.

**Table 55. Self-rated self-efficacy (how confident in doing various tasks): whole sample**

	Very confident	Fairly confident	Not very or Not at all confident	Not sure
Finding out about education or training	43%	44%	12%	1%
Job training which involves some reading and writing	42%	39%	18%	1%
Job training that involves some basic maths	35%	39%	25%	1%
Helping a child with school homework	37%	36%	22%	2%
Replying to a letter about a hospital appointment	48%	31%	20%	1%
Checking an electricity bill	47%	27%	23%	3%
Looking for jobs	42%	34%	21%	3%
Filling-out job application forms	37%	39%	23%	2%
Making a good impression in a job interview	40%	36%	20%	3%
Doing a job that involves a small amount of reading and writing	46%	39%	14%	1%
Doing a job that involves a small amount of basic maths	42%	40%	18%	*%

Differences between types of Extension courses are of interest, but these should not be taken as course outcomes since people with different levels of initial self-confidence might be attracted to different kinds of courses. To facilitate comparisons, each of these questions was converted to a scale of 1 to 4, with 'don't know' given the middle value of 2.5, and a high score indicating more self-confidence (that is, 1 means 'not at all confident' while 4 means 'very confident').



Results of this analysis are shown in Table 56. Differences in levels of self-confidence did not appear to vary greatly between types of course and these figures should not be over-interpreted, for the reason given above.

**Table 56. Average self-rated self-efficacy, by type of course**

	Resid.	Intens.	HSP	FRRRC	IIL
Finding out about education or training	3.31	3.27	3.26	3.04	3.29
Job training which involves some reading and writing	3.21	3.15	3.04	3.37	3.16
Job training that involves some basic maths	2.99	3.17	2.86	3.03	3.06
Helping a child with school homework	3.08	3.02	2.88	2.97	3.04
Replying to a letter about a hospital appointment	3.26	3.13	3.13	3.41	3.24
Checking an electricity bill	3.07	3.30	2.76	3.39	3.12
Looking for jobs	3.19	2.90	2.97	3.30	3.05
Filling-out job application forms	3.08	3.01	2.97	2.99	2.91
Making a good impression in a job interview	3.06	3.15	3.02	3.15	2.90
Doing a job that involves a small amount of reading and writing	3.30	3.22	3.23	3.31	3.30
Doing a job that involves a small amount of basic maths	3.16	3.27	3.07	3.24	3.30

## 7. Plans for the future

Some questions were included in the interview concerning future plans for educational activities and employment. Actual progress towards individual goals was assessed in the Stage 2 research which is separately reported.

### 7.1 Plans for more education and training

As Table 57 shows, nearly three in five of these participants (59 per cent) hoped to start another course of education or training during 2002. Others were uncertain about this and less than one in four (22 per cent) gave a firm 'no'. The main difference between the types of courses was that fewer of those on Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses (39 per cent) were definitely planning to start another course.

Looking beyond 2002 (Table 58), a similar proportion (55 per cent) wanted more education and training and a further 14 per cent answered 'perhaps'. Relatively more of the learners on Highly Structured Prescriptive and Intensive courses were either not intending to start a further course in the future (beyond the current year) or were uncertain about their intentions, and correspondingly fewer gave a definite 'yes'.

**Table 57. Hope of starting a new course of education or training in the current year (2002), by type of course now taken**

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	59	58	62	39	67	59
Perhaps	5	15	8	15	9	8
No	26	21	11	28	20	22
Not sure	10	6	19	18	5	11
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

**Table 58. Whether want more education or training after the current year, by type of course now taken**

	Type of course					Total
	Residential	Intensive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	60	43	43	57	68	55
Perhaps	14	17	10	22	11	14
No	11	26	14	9	10	14
Not sure	15	14	34	12	10	17
Total = 100%	372	157	125	67	105	826

The respondents saying that they hoped to start a new course during the current year (including those answering 'perhaps') were asked some further questions about the nature of that course. Thirty-eight per cent of them hoped to go on a full-time course, while 51 per cent would be looking to a part-time course (the remainder

being uncertain). Those on Intensive courses were more likely than those on the other courses to be looking for full-time courses (Table 59), while those on Incentives for Learners or Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses were more often looking for part-time courses in the future.

**Table 59. Whether seeking a full-time course this year**

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes (full-time)	46	49	24	14	24	38
No (part-time)	47	35	49	83	72	51
Not sure	7	17	26	3	4	11
Total = 100%	237	115	87	36	79	554

Most (82 per cent) wanted a course which would lead to a certificate or qualification, and only 3 per cent gave a definite 'no' to this question, with little variation between types of Extension course (table not shown).

Twenty-one per cent of those wishing to go on another course wanted a course focusing on reading and writing skills, eight per cent a course focusing on number skills, 40 per cent a course covering reading, writing and number skills together, eight per cent were looking for IT skills and computing, and small proportions were thinking of subjects like arts and music, counselling, nursing, creative writing, and childcare. Five per cent simply said they wanted a course to help gain other qualifications and there were miscellaneous or unclassifiable replies from six per cent.

## 7.2 Plans about employment

The proportions with an employment objective were not as large as those with an educational objective, but were still substantial. The main points were as follows:

- Nearly three in five (57 per cent) of those currently in paid work hoped to change employer at some time in the future. This question was not asked of those on Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses. This amounted to one in eight of the whole sample. However, only three per cent of the whole sample, or 15 per cent of those currently in paid work (excluding FRRC), were confident this would be within the current year. (Tables are not shown for these two questions.)

- Over one half (56 per cent) of the whole sample, or 79 per cent of those currently not in paid work, hoped to start work at some time in the future. Eighteen per cent of the whole sample, or 26 per cent of those currently not in paid work, hoped that this would be within the current year.

All people currently in paid work, and those not in paid work who expressed a hope of working in the future, were asked whether they hoped 'to do a new or different sort of work in future'. This question included those who intended to stay with their existing employer, but to make an internal job move. Results for this question are given in Table 60, which shows that about two thirds were interested in starting a new or different type of work. Relative to the whole sample, the proportion was 58 per cent. Those on the Highly Structured Prescriptive courses had the lowest

proportion wanting to start a new kind of work.

**Table 60. Whether hope to do a new or different sort of work in future**  
(Those in paid work, or wishing to start paid work at some time)

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	71	67	53	57	72	66
Perhaps	4	9	5	10	7	6
No	14	14	27	24	14	17
Not sure	11	9	15	9	7	11
Total = 100%	320	138	110	67	87	722

Those who said they wanted to start a new kind of work in the future were then asked if they hoped to start that kind of work in the present year. A little more than one quarter of those asked (28 per cent) had a short-term aim of this kind; this corresponds to one in six of the whole sample. More than one in five (22 per cent) were unsure of their intentions this year, and one half definitely did not intend to make such a change in the current year. The differences between the various Extension courses were not large (Table 61).

**Table 61. Whether hope to do a new or different sort of work this year (2002)**  
(Those wishing to start a new kind of work in the future)

	Type of course					Total
	Resid- ential	Intens- ive	HSP	FRRC	IIL	
	<i>column percentages</i>					
Yes	24	34	22	33	30	28
No	55	46	46	44	49	51
Not sure	20	20	32	22	20	22
Total = 100%	240	105	63	45	69	522

### 7.3 Plans for the future: Summary of policy points

- Large proportions of participants wanted to continue their learning, including in the immediate future. This suggests the potential value of arrangements to ensure continuing access to courses.
- Employment intentions were also widespread but tended to be vaguer or further in the future. The implication here is for linking-up with guidance services to help individuals to shape their aspirations into firmer plans.

## 8. Overview of differences between Extension course types

It may be helpful to provide an overview of the main differences between Extension course types which have been indicated in the report's tables. It should be stressed, though, that these differences were subjected to more rigorous analysis, along with

other data collected in the follow-up survey, in Stage 2 of the evaluation. Accordingly, the following points should be regarded as an 'aide-memoire' rather than a set of conclusions.

### *Residential courses*

The results for the Residential courses were rarely at either a high or low extreme. This is understandable, as they were the only group drawn from all the Pathfinder areas, and from a diverse range of courses to which the residential component was added. They would therefore be expected to approximate a cross-section of basic skills learners.

There was however a relatively large proportion of lone parents on the Residential courses. In terms of their employment, the Residential participants had particularly high proportions who had been and were now in part-time jobs. In terms of their future plans or wishes, many of the Residential group were thinking about further full-time courses during 2002.

The experiences of Residential courses were generally positive. Learners on these courses particularly liked the course content and the relationships with other learners.

### *Intensive courses*

Learners on the Intensive courses were possibly the most distinctive group. The great majority of them were members of ethnic minorities, reflecting the fact that most of these courses were held in the West Midlands. Associated with this, they also had a high proportion of learners who had left full-time education at age 18 or over. Other social or personal characteristics in which they were distinctive were a low proportion with children, a high proportion married or living as a couple, a low proportion of lone parents, and low proportion with a work-limiting disability.

The Intensive course learners had relatively little experience of employment; they had the lowest proportion currently in jobs and also a low proportion with any previous job. Consistent with this, they were the group which had received the least employer-funded training. Excluding their current course, their participation in other CET (i.e., not funded by an employer) was also particularly low.

In terms of their future plans or wishes, learners on Intensive courses had a relatively low level of interest in starting courses after 2002. However, this may have been because they had a high level of interest in starting a full-time course in 2002.

Intensive course learners particularly liked the relationships with their teachers, and access to computers provided by the course. But they were less favourable in their views concerning the courses' convenience of access or timetabling, and a greater proportion of them thought that their course was either too difficult or too easy rather than about right.

### *Highly Structured Prescriptive courses*

In terms of their social and personal characteristics, the learners on these courses had a low proportion with dependent children but were otherwise not very far from the average for the sample. They were however distinctive in their employment patterns. They had the highest level of economic activity, with high proportions of currently employed and of current job-seekers. However, the proportion previously (but not currently) employed was low, and if they had held a previous job, it was likely

to be part-time.

These learners were about as likely as others to hope for a new course in the current year, but less likely to be thinking of starting one beyond 2002. They were also less likely than others to be interested in moving to a new or different kind of work in the future.

Learners on these courses particularly liked the relationship with teachers, and the convenience of the courses in terms of access and timetabling. But they were less positive than others about the opportunity for social contact with other learners. They were also more critical than others about not always being clear what they should be doing on the course. This is puzzling as HSP courses should have been particularly strong on this aspect.

#### *Individual Incentives for Learners courses*

Learners on these Incentives courses included a high proportion who were married or living as a couple. Many of them were in part-time jobs currently, and they had the highest proportion who had previously been but were not now employed. They had a particularly low proportion who were currently seeking a job.

They were more likely than people on the other courses to have previously been on an adult education course which was not provided by an employer. They were also more likely than other groups to have another course ongoing in parallel with the Extension course.

Their plans or wishes for the future were not much different from other groups, except that a relatively high proportion was thinking of another part-time course during 2002.

#### *Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses*

The participants in these courses had many distinctive features, primarily in terms of employment characteristics. By definition, all were employed, and many came from jobs in the public sector. Relatively few were part-time, but many were in temporary posts.

They also had some distinctive personal attributes. A much higher proportion than on other courses were male, lower proportions were from the ethnic minorities and a lower proportion had a work-limiting disability.

This group had the highest participation in CET provided by an employer, before coming on the present course. This fits with their high proportion of public-sector employment. On the other hand, few had another CET course continuing in parallel with their participation in the Pathfinder programme. They were least likely to be intending to start another course in 2002, and if they did start another it would be part-time rather than full-time (as would be expected from an employed group).

Learners on these courses were particularly positive about the difficulty of the course being 'just right'. On the other hand, they were less positive than the others about the spacing of the classes.

## **9. Extension sample and Comparison sample: initial comparisons**

The key role of the Comparison sample has been outlined in section 1 of the report. Here initial descriptive findings concerning the Comparison sample are summarised, so as to assess the degree of similarity or dissimilarity with the Pathfinder Extension sample. This information was important in guiding the detailed specification of the evaluation at Stage 2 of the study. In addition, it may be of interest from a policy viewpoint, for example in assessing whether the Extension courses acquired clients that were different in some respects from those attending traditional basic skills courses.

The descriptive findings are set in a series of summary tables. Each table brings together key information from a series of questions in a condensed form. Further details of the questions can be found in the earlier sections of the report.

It should be stressed that, at Stage 1, only a limited range of information was collected about the background of the respondent in terms of personal characteristics, employment and previous education and training. This information was extended in the Stage 2 interview. Accordingly, the Stage 1 comparisons were not complete and merely provided a preliminary indication of the similarity or dissimilarity of the samples.

### 9.1 Social and personal characteristics

Table 62 summarises the comparative information for the two samples on the range of social and personal characteristics which were earlier considered for the Extension sample in section 2. Broadly speaking, the average characteristics of the Comparison sample appeared to be very similar to those of the Extension sample on this full range of questions. Only one of the differences – the proportion of lone parents – was statistically significant at the 5 per cent significance level.

**Table 62. Percentages with various social and personal characteristics**

	Pathfinder Extension sample	Comparison sample
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% female	59	60
% with dependent child	55	55
% married or living with partner	34	37
% divorced separated or widowed	12	9
% single	54	54
% lone parent	18	14
% ethnic minority	33	35
% speak language other than English	34	36
% have work-limiting disability	23	22
% left full-time education <16 years	31	32
% left full-time education at 16	39	41
% left full-time education at 17-19	23	20
% left full-time education at 20 or over	8	8
Sample size = 100%	826	517

## 9.2 Employment

### *Current jobs*

Table 63 shows the proportions in paid work at the time of the survey, and also those not in paid work but actively seeking a job. Combining this information, it appears that the Extension sample had a slightly higher level of labour market activity than the Comparison sample.

**Table 63. Employment and job search at the time of the interview**

	Pathfinder Extension sample	Comparison sample
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% in paid work	32	28
% in paid work plus on govt. scheme	37	32
% actively seeking a job	16	14
Sample size = 100%	826	517

Table 64 summarizes characteristics of current jobs (excluding jobs on government schemes). Several differences of interest were found here.

- The Extension course participants were on average more dissatisfied than those in the Comparison sample.
- There was a considerably higher proportion of part-time workers in the Comparison sample. Referring to Table 17 in section 3, however, it can be seen that the Comparison sample proportion was similar to that for the Residential, Intensive and Incentive for Learners courses, with the lower proportion of part-timers in the Extension sample resulting from the Highly Structured Prescriptive and especially the Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses.



- Another difference mainly arising from the FRRC courses is that there was a higher proportion of current jobs in the public sector within the Extension sample than in the Comparison sample (see also Table 24).

There appeared to be some minor differences in the occupational distribution of jobs, but these differences were not statistically significant. The proportions of temporary or permanent jobs did not differ between the two samples.

In Table 65 are shown the average net weekly earnings and hourly wages of the two samples. The Extension sample appeared to have slightly higher average weekly earnings but a slightly lower average wage, which would be consistent with its higher proportion of full-time employees. However, the sample sizes are small and these differences are not statistically significant.

**Table 64. Characteristics of current jobs**

	Pathfinder Extension sample	Comparison sample
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% part-time hours	43	59
% temporary contract, less than 1 year	28	28
% temporary contract, 1-3 years	8	10
% dissatisfied with job	30	13
% public sector	44	25
% in managerial/professional occupn.	7	13
% in clerical/secretarial occupn.	5	7
% in craft & allied occupn.	11	8
% in personal/protective service occupn.	22	17
% in sales occupn.	5	11
% in plant/machine operator occupn.	13	12
% in 'other' occupn.	38	33
Sample size = 100%	244	138

**Table 65. Average weekly earnings and hourly wages (£)**

	Extension sample			Comparison sample		
	Mean	s.d.	N	Mean	s.d.	N
Weekly earnings	147.35	80.58	197	137.37	90.47	98
Hourly wage	5.09	3.11	194	5.23	3.18	96

s.d. = standard deviation; N = sample size.

#### *Previous employment*

Whereas there were several differences in the current jobs of the two samples, there were no significant differences in their previous jobs (details of these were obtained only from those who did not have a current job). Some selected results from this topic are shown in Table 66. The percentages in this table are based on the whole sample, to make them more easily interpreted and compared.

**Table 66. Selected characteristics of previous jobs (of those not currently employed)**

	Pathfinder Extension sample	Comparison sample
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% not employed but had previous job	41	44
% part-time hours in previous job	15	15
% public sector in previous job	7	7
Sample size = 100%	826	517

### 9.3 Previous experience of continuing education and training (CET)

The experience of CET prior to the present course was closely similar between the two samples, and no statistically significant differences were found. Table 67 summarizes a selection of the results under this heading. As before, the total sample is used as the base to facilitate comparison.

**Table 67. Selected results concerning previous CET**

	Pathfinder Extension sample	Comparison sample
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% who had employer-funded CET	22	19
% who had other CET	37	39
% with qualification aim in CET	39	38
% prior course of up to 6 months	18	14
% prior course of 7-12 months	15	17
% prior course of 1 year or more	11	15
Sample size = 100%	826	517

### 9.4 Plans for the future

The survey's questions about plans for the future were divided into two broad headings, CET-related plans and employment plans. Once again, differences between the two samples on these topics were not great. But there were some indications that the Comparison sample were somewhat more inclined towards additional CET courses, while the Extension sample were somewhat more inclined towards employment steps.

Table 68 summarizes selected results concerning future CET. The main difference was that 66 per cent of the Comparison sample hoped to start a new course during 2002, while the corresponding proportion for the Extension sample was 59 per cent (a statistically significant difference). The two samples were, however, almost level in terms of their wishes about CET after the year 2002.

**Table 68. Plans or desires concerning future courses**

	Pathfinder Extension sample	Comparison sample
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% hope to start new course in 2002	59	66
% new course would be full-time	25	27
% new course would be for qualification	56	61
% want to do more courses in future (beyond 2002)? – 'Yes'	55	53
% want to do more courses in future (beyond 2002)? – 'Yes' + 'Perhaps'	69	68
Sample size = 100%	826	517

Turning to employment, there are two groups to consider, those already in jobs, who were asked if they wanted to move to a new employer, and those not in jobs, who were asked if they were interested in getting a paid job. Table 69 concerns those in jobs; Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses are excluded, since they were not asked the question. A higher proportion of the currently employed Extension participants were interested in changing employer, which is consistent with their higher level of dissatisfaction. However, the proportion thinking that they would make a move in the current year (2002) was relatively small.

**Table 69. Whether intend to move to a new employer (those in job now)**

	Pathfinder Extension sample*	Comparison sample
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% 'Yes', time-scale not specified	57	43
% 'Yes' during 2002	16	10
Sample size = 100%	177	138

\* Note: excludes Fixed Rate Replacement Cost courses.

In Table 70, the corresponding results are summarized for those who were not in paid work. Slightly more of the Extension participants, if currently not employed, were interested in starting work. More of them also hoped to make such a move during 2002, or at least did not rule it out.

**Table 70. Whether hope to start paid work (those not in job now)**

	Pathfinder Extension sample	Comparison sample
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% hoping to start work at some time	80	76
% whether hope to start in 2002 – 'Yes'	26	23
% whether hope to start in 2002 – 'Not sure'	18	11
Sample size = 100%	582	379

## 9.5 Experience of current basic skills courses

Comparisons of experiences on the current basic skills courses are not included in this report. Clearly, such comparisons would be potentially misleading if averaged across all the Extension courses, with their different characteristics and aims. However, in order to make comparisons for each type of Extension course separately, one must first determine which members of the Comparison sample offer the best comparison group. This was part of the work for Stage 2 of the study.

## 9.6 Overview of the initial descriptive comparisons between samples

On most of the items, the two samples were closely similar, which is perhaps not surprising as the Comparison sample was drawn from the same areas of the country and from people in basic skills courses. This conclusion was broadly reassuring in regard to the difficulties in constructing the Comparison sample which were outlined in section 1 of the report.

However, there were some differences in current employment, even within the simple coverage of the Stage 1 interview, and this aspect and the previous history of employment were taken into account in the final impact evaluation at Stage 2.

There were also some differences in the future plans or wishes of the two samples, with those on Extension courses being somewhat more inclined towards employment steps while those in the Comparison sample appeared somewhat more inclined to further CET courses. Such differences might reflect motivations in electing to enter courses, or the influence of the courses themselves in shaping aspirations. While these are interesting possibilities, it must be stressed that the differences were not great.

## ***Annex The DfES/KPMG Pathfinder Database***

### ***Background***

The Pathfinder Database was constructed by KPMG on behalf of the DfES from returns made by the providers within each Pathfinder area. The units or elements of these returns were the individual learners who took part in the courses, and providers were asked to provide information on these under specified headings. KPMG produced a report containing extensive tabulations of the information from the database, and this report was provided to PSI as a further source of information. Some of this information relates directly to the types of course provision which the learners received, and relevant items of that type have been summarised in Tables 4-6 in the main report of the survey.

Other information in the database tables relates to the characteristics of the course participants and is of potential interest from two points of view: (a) where the same characteristics are covered in the survey and the database, there is a possibility of comparison; (b) where the characteristics in the database differ from the survey, there is the possibility of additional information being added to the picture provided by the survey.

There are two main limitations of the Pathfinder Database which have to be borne in mind when considering these types of additional information. The first is that there was a large proportion of missing information in the returns from providers for some of the items of information requested. For example, employment status was missing from 21 per cent of cases and lone parent status was missing from 33 per cent. For these characteristics, the Database does not add much to the survey information, since the missing data create too large an uncertainty about the true proportions.

In addition, an appreciable number of the returns could not be definitely classified as from Extension courses or from Control (that is, traditional basic skills) courses. Of the 2565 entries on the database, this type of missing information applied to 555, somewhat more than one in five (22 per cent). How these records are interpreted makes a considerable difference to the overall conclusions drawn from the database.

Our interpretation is that the majority of these unclassified records are likely to be from traditional provision. There are two reasons for this judgement. First, it seems relatively unlikely that providers would be unclear whether a course was part of their Extension activity or not, as they had to make numerous special arrangements for the Extension courses. On the other hand, our experience in attempting to set up the comparison sample with providers (see main report, section 1) revealed a great deal of uncertainty or confusion about what was required on this issue. It would not be surprising therefore if the providers tended to put in returns for a variety of traditional provision, without providing clear information to designate them as Control courses. The second point in favour of our interpretation is that, when comparing the database returns which could be definitely classified as Extension with the data from the survey relating to Extension, there was a reasonably good correspondence (see Table 4 in main report).

Although the Pathfinder Database is likely to give reasonably good coverage of Extension even after ignoring the unclassifiable cases, there is one probable gap of a substantial size. This relates to Residential courses. Learners who attended

Residential courses were drawn from a variety of traditional courses, with the residential component offered as an addition that was available on a voluntary basis. It would therefore be an inherently more complex record-keeping task for providers to identify those learners who went on Residentials and ensure that they got placed in the correct classification for the purpose of the database returns. Consistent with this, only 321 learners were identified as being on Residentials in the Pathfinder Database, whereas the survey procedures identified 482 such learners (of which 372 were actually interviewed). It seems likely that many of the Residential learners were either placed by providers in the 'Control' group, or described in a way which made them unclassifiable.

In view of these points, it was decided to confine use of the tables from the Pathfinder Database to the information which can clearly be classified as coming from Extension courses. The information relating to the remainder (including the unclassifiable cases) is not utilised: this applies to the tables included in the main report (Tables 4-6) as well as to the figures which are presented in this Annex. A further advantage of confining the analysis to the Extension cases is that these generally have less missing information about individual characteristics. For example, the proportion of missing information on employment status fell from 21 per cent for Extension and Controls combined, to 13 per cent for Extension considered separately.

#### *Working with other agencies*

The tables from the Pathfinder Database include details of those who took part in Extension activities classified under the 'Working with other agencies' heading. These were not covered by the survey of learners although a case study was completed as part of the qualitative evaluation study. In most of the tables available from the Pathfinder Database, it is not possible to separate the results relating to working with other agencies from the other types of Extension. The following summary tables therefore include this type of Extension activity unless stated otherwise.

#### *Comparisons with the survey information*

In this section, the Database information on Extension participants is compared in summary form with the information from the survey, where the characteristics recorded in the two sources are the same or similar. This information is shown in Table A.1.

**Table A.1 Comparison of learner characteristics**

	Pathfinder Database	Survey of learners
Female	57%	59%
Male	43%	41%
Ethnic minority	33%	33%
White	67%	67%
Disability/learning difficulty	23%	---
Work-limiting disability	---	23%
Employed	34%	32%
Lone parent	10%	18%

Note: Missing data are excluded in the calculation of the above percentages.

The correspondence in results is close for three items: gender; whether the learner is a member of an ethnic minority group; and current employment status. The Pathfinder Database measure covering disabilities and learning difficulties also corresponds closely with the survey measure of work-limiting disability, although since the measures are different, the correspondence could be coincidental. The one major discrepancy concerns lone parent status, where the Pathfinder Database provides a lower estimate (10 per cent as against 18 per cent from the survey). This is probably because of a large proportion of missing information in the database on this question (30 per cent of Extension records).

Overall, the figures in Table A.1 suggest that the database and the survey are reporting highly corresponding or overlapping populations of learners when attention is focused on the Extension courses.

#### *Additional database information about learner characteristics*

As already noted, additional information about learner characteristics is available in the database. The most important addition to the survey information concerns the age distribution of learners (for the survey, it was decided to ask participants about their age only at the follow-up stage). The database results are shown in Table A.2. People of widely differing ages took part in the Extension activities, with one in five under 20, one quarter in their 20s, a further quarter in their 30s, and nearly 30 per cent aged 40 or over.

**Table A.2 Age distribution of Extension learners**

Age band	Number	<i>column %</i>
Under 16	11	1
16-19	212	19
20-24	161	14
25-29	121	11
30-39	282	25
40-49	161	14
50-59	122	11
60+	46	4
Not known	17	2
Total	1133	100

In Tables A.3 and A.4, the age distribution is further broken down by gender and by ethnic minority membership, respectively.

**Table A.3 Age group by gender**

Age band	Men	Women	All
	<i>column percentages</i>		
under 20	26	15	20
20-29	25	25	25
30-39	22	27	25
40-49	14	15	14
50+	13	16	15
Not known	1	2	2
Total	490	643	1133

From Table A.3, it can be seen that the age profile of men on the courses was somewhat younger than that of women, with one half of the men being under 30 while this applied to only 40 per cent of the women.

**Table A.4 Age group by whether an ethnic minority group member**

Age band	White	Ethnic minority	All
	<i>column percentages</i>		
under 20	20	20	20
20-29	23	29	25
30-39	25	25	25
40-49	15	13	14
50+	16	13	15
Not known	1	3	1
Total	713	376	1089

Note: Those whose ethnicity is not recorded are not included in table.

Table A.4 indicates that there was no appreciable difference in the age distributions of white and ethnic minority members who took part in Extension courses. Much more detailed information about particular ethnic minority groups is available in the database, but the numbers for these sub-groups are generally too small to provide a reliable basis for making comparisons.

In Table A.5, the age distribution is shown for each type of Extension activity,



including Working with other agencies. Participants under 20 were mainly found in the Residential, Intensive and Highly structured prescriptive courses. Intensive courses had a relatively small proportion who were 40 or over. The Fixed rate replacement, Incentives for learners, and Working with other agencies provision had more people aged 30-39 and also more aged 40 or over.

**Table A.5 Age groups by type of Extension course**

	under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
	<i>row percentages</i>					
Residential	33	22	21	12	13	331
Intensive	26	36	21	7	9	106
Highly structured	32	28	15	10	14	130
Fixed rate replacement cost	5	30	32	22	12	144
Incentives for learners	16	22	29	13	19	187
Working with other agencies	4	22	33	22	19	213

Whereas the survey obtained information about disability as a whole, the Pathfinder Database gathered information specifically about learning difficulties. Information on this question is missing for 18 per cent of the Extension records, and these missing cases have been excluded from Table A.6, on the assumption that learning disabilities arose to the same extent in the missing cases as in those for which information is available. Overall, just over one in five (21 per cent) of the learners were classified as having some learning disability. Dyslexia was the most common difficulty within the classification, accounting for 8 per cent of all learners in the database.

**Table A.6 Learning difficulties among those on Extension courses**

Type of learning difficulty	Number	column %
Moderate	47	5
Severe	14	2
Dyslexia	75	8
Other specific difficulty	5	1
Multiple difficulties	1	*
Other	50	5
No learning difficulty	735	79
Total	927	100

Note: Cases with missing information concerning learning difficulties are not included in the table. \* less than 0.5 per cent in cell.

The survey asked numerous questions about previous education and training courses but did not ask specifically about previous basic skills training. The Pathfinder Database provides information about whether learners have had previous basic skills training (a simple yes/no classification). For a substantial number of Extension records, information was missing here: 26 per cent overall. None the less, it is of particular interest, where the information is available, to examine how this factor relates to the course level taken by the individual. An overall analysis of the course levels of Extension provision is provided in Table 5 of the main report. The breakdown of course levels by previous basic skills training is shown in Table A.7.

**Table A.7 Extension course level by whether had previous basic skills training**

Course level	Had previous basic skills training	No previous basic skills training
	<i>column percentages</i>	
Entry 1	2	14
Entry 2	6	5
Entry 3	24	21
Level 1	58	48
Level 2	10	12
Total	390	438

Note: Records with missing information on either course level or receipt of previous basic skills training are not included in the table.

Those who did not have previous basic skills training were more likely to be doing a course at Entry Level 1 or 2 (19 per cent, as against 8 per cent of those with previous basic skills training). Conversely, those with previous basic skills training were more likely to be on their Extension course at Level 1 (58 per cent as against 48 per cent). These differences presumably reflect the learning gains from previous participation in basic skills training.

It is also of interest to see whether those without previous basic skills training were more likely to be in a particular type of Extension programme. Table A.8 provides this breakdown. From this viewpoint, the courses fell into two distinct groups. Fixed rate replacement costs and Intensive courses had only small minorities who had previously taken part in basic skills training, whereas the other types of Extension had about one half or more who had done so.

**Table A.8 Previous basic skills participation, by type of current Extension course**

Extension	Had previous basic skills training	No previous basic skills training	Total
Residential	63	37	285
Intensive	5	95	20
Highly structured	42	58	118
Fixed rate replacement cost	16	84	145
Incentive for learners	58	42	156
Other agencies	46	54	115
Total	47	53	839

# THE SURVEY OF LEARNERS IN PRISONS

by Rebecca Taylor

## **1. Introduction**

This report provides analysis and conclusions relating to Adult Basic Skills Pathfinders Extension courses that took place in Prisons. All of these courses were of the Intensive type. As explained in more detail in the report of the general survey of learners, this involved a programme based on 60 hours of teaching and learning provision (i.e. 60 hours of contact time) spread over four weeks. The balance of literacy and numeracy skills on these intensive courses was variable and there could be an IT element.

The design of the survey of basic skills learners in Prisons was simpler than for the main evaluation. It was confined to a structured interview survey and did not have a qualitative component. The terms of reference did not include any follow-up beyond the initial interview, which was to be conducted in the prison establishment. The chief aim was to assess the response of prisoners to the Extension courses, and to provide a background description of the characteristics of those who took part.

The sample of learners on basic skills courses in Prisons was also constructed on a different basis to the main sample. This had to take account of the practical requirement that interviews be held within the prison premises and that the prisoners be accompanied by prison staff to and from interviews. A quota-based approach was the only practical possibility within the time available for the research. Initially a target of 150 learners on Extension courses was set, with the same number from traditional basic skills provision in prisons. In practice, these numbers could not be attained in the time available, and the achieved sample consisted of 110 Extension course participants and 68 traditional basic skills participants.

The interviews were obtained from a total of seven prison establishments, mainly located in London and the West Midlands; but nearly one half of the Extension participants came from one large prison. The substantially smaller number of traditional course participants arose because this prison establishment with much the largest basic skills activity had gone over entirely to the Intensive type of course, and so could no longer provide participants from traditional courses. This inevitably means that the comparability between Extension and traditional courses is limited in the case of the Prisons sample.

In addition, the institutional context of the prison courses makes comparisons of motives and practical barriers for participants across different types of Extension course problematic. However, there is scope for exploring the contrasting experiences of those on the prison courses and those on Intensive courses outside prison, in terms of structural and pedagogical issues such as timing, frequency and difficulty of classes. This is facilitated by the fact that Intensive courses in prisons and those in other locations all took place within two regions in London and the West Midlands, and hence these groups of learners tend to share a number of similar characteristics. For example, three quarters of the total of ethnic minority group learners were concentrated in the West Midlands and London Pathfinders, where the participating prisons were mainly located. Additionally, there were similar numbers of

learners interviewed in prison and other Intensive courses (110 and 157 respectively), making comparisons between these groups easier.

## 2. Characteristics of the sample of learners on basic skills courses in prisons

### 2.1 Gender

A crucial difference between the prison courses and other Intensive courses was the male-female ratio. As Table 1 shows, all the learners on the prison courses were men whereas on most Extension activities apart from Fixed Rate Replacement Costs women were in the majority. This gender difference appears to be reflected in some of the cross-course comparisons on issues such as the learners' employment history and self confidence, which are considered later.

**Table 1. Gender of learners**

Gender	Type of course			
	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Male	100	46	40	48
Female	0	54	60	52
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

### 2.2 Age on leaving full time education

A significant body of literature has highlighted the fact that prisoners tend to have few or no qualifications and significant basic skills needs. For example, a DWP report found that 43 per cent of prisoners were without qualifications and one in two had serious problems with literacy (Metcalf, H., Anderson, T. and Rolfe, H. *Barriers to employment for offenders and ex-offenders*, DWP Research Report No. 155, Leeds: CDS, 2001). As Table 2 shows, the data on school leaving age of the learners on basic skills courses provides fairly predictable results in terms of the educational experiences of offenders. Over two thirds had left school at 16 or before and only 7 per cent had stayed in education past the age of 18. However, low levels of education would also be expected of those undertaking basic skills courses generally, and the proportion who had left at 16 or below was even more pronounced within the group of learners on Extension courses other than Intensives (75 per cent). A very different picture, however, was provided by those on Intensive courses outside prison. Less than half of this group had left school by the age of 16 and over a third had stayed in education past the age of 18.

**Table 2. Age on leaving full time education**

Age	Type of course			
	Prison	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
16 and below	68	46	75	69
17 and 18	25	31	17	20
19-21	7	23	8	11
Total = 100%	110	150	664	924

## 2.3 Ethnicity and language

Findings from the main Stage 1 report on the other Extension activities suggested that the larger numbers of participants on Intensive courses who had been educated over the age of 18 might be associated with the fact that the great majority of those with higher levels of initial education were from minority ethnic groups. Their participation may, therefore, have reflected a desire to overcome language disadvantages.

The prison data on school leaving age raises a different issue in relation to ethnicity and language. As Table 3 shows, minority ethnic groups form a substantial proportion of those learners on the Intensive courses in prisons (68 per cent). However, despite a high proportion of minority groups on both groups of Intensive courses their language needs are quite different (Table 4). Of those in prisons almost two thirds had lived in households where English was spoken 'always' or 'most of the time' at home compared to less than a third in the non prison group. On the prison courses 12 per cent spoke English only 'occasionally' at home compared to over half of learners on Intensive courses outside prison who spoke English either never or only occasionally. In other words although many of the prison learners were from minority groups they had quite different ESOL needs to those on other Intensive courses.

**Table 3. Minority group learners**

	Type of course			
	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Minority	68	84	21	37
White	32	16	79	63
Total =100%	110	157	669	936

**Table 4. English spoken at home**

How often is English spoken at home*	Type of course			
	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Never	0	20	5	10
Occasionally	12	38	17	25
About half the time	27	14	11	14
Most of the time	18	13	23	18
Always	43	15	44	33
Total = 100%	33	113	156	302

\* question asked of all those who said they spoke another language.

These differences may be further accounted for by examining the particular ethnic backgrounds that constitute the minority group as a whole. A higher proportion of all those surveyed on the prison Extension classified themselves as black Caribbean (36 per cent) or black British (7 per cent) compared to those who defined themselves as Indian (5 per cent), Pakistani or Bangladeshi (5 per cent) or black African (8 per cent). By contrast on Intensive courses outside prisons the minority group was constituted by a much larger range of ethnicity including those who defined themselves as Somali, Iranian, Iraqi, Chinese and East European as well as Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. Only 4 per cent classified themselves as black

Caribbean. The different profiles of the minority group learners on the Intensive courses inside and outside prison entail quite different language and basic skills needs. English is the first language for most black Caribbeans and this may account for the differences between the two groups in terms of their school leaving age and the nature of their basic skills needs and motivations for taking the course.

#### 2.4 Marital status and dependent children

As shown in Table 5, the largest marital status group amongst the learners in prisons was single (51 per cent) followed by those who were married or living together (40 per cent). As the table below makes clear the proportion of learners in each category married, divorced or separated, single or widowed was fairly similar across all the Extension courses.

**Table 5. Marital status of learners**

	Type of course			
	Prison	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Married or living as	40	44	31	34
Divorced or separated	9	8	10	10
Single	51	47	56	54
Widowed	0	1	3	2
Total =100%	110	157	669	936

More significantly, those in prisons were 1.5 times as likely to have dependent children as those on other Intensive courses and 1.4 times as likely as those on other Extension courses (Table 6).

**Table 6. Dependent children of learners**

Whether have children	Type of course			
	Prison	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Yes	63	41	46	47
No	37	59	54	53
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

By reference to Tables A.2-A.4 in the report on the general survey of learners, it appears that age may be a factor in these differences. Eighty-four per cent of those on the prison courses fell within the 20-39 age range, and 97 per cent were aged 20-49, the group most likely to have dependent children. The ages of those on the other Intensive courses were more broadly distributed, with 26 per cent of male participants aged under 20, and 14 per cent aged 50 or over.

Differences between courses in terms of those with or without dependent children may have been linked to the inaccessibility of basic skills courses for those with children outside prison. As noted in other parts of the present research (see Executive Summary), lack of or cost of childcare can present an obstacle to embarking on basic skills training courses.

It is also possible that the issue of supporting dependent children may have some influence over an individual's future plans for work and training and thus their decisions to undertake basic skills training whilst in prison. It is an issue that will be raised later in relation to the learners' reasons and motives for undertaking the

course.

### 3. Previous employment experience

As part of the background to the learners' participation in the basic skills Extension activity it was interesting to examine their past experiences of employment. This is important partly for understanding their decisions to take basic skills courses and as an indicator of the likelihood that they will find employment when they leave prison. As Table 7 reveals a very high proportion of learners in prison (88 per cent) had had a previous job or been self-employed. For those on Intensive courses outside prisons the figure was slightly less than half that.

**Table 7. Previous employment**

Whether they had ever had a paid job or been self-employed	Type of course			
	Prison	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Yes	88	43	63	63
No	12	57	37	37
Total = 100%	110	131	451	692

This might partly be explained by the gender differential in the samples. Over half of those on the other Intensive course were women and were less likely to have had paid work. The impact of gender on previous employment can also be seen in relation to the fact that a higher proportion of those on Intensive courses outside prison had been in part time employment; an area of work dominated by women. By contrast a much higher proportion of those in prison had been self-employed, a traditionally male type of work (Table 8). (For further information on male and female employment, see Duffield, 2002). The higher proportion of this group indicates the possibility that basic skills courses were attractive to those in prison who might not otherwise have taken up training provision.

**Table 8. Previous employment by type**

The nature of previous work	Type of course			
	Prison	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Registered self employed	23	7	4	9
Paid employment full time	61	73	57	60
Paid employment part time	8	20	39	29
Don't know	8	0	*	2
Total = 100%	97	56	283	436

\* less than 0.5 per cent

The types of occupation in which those with a previous job were situated are shown in Table 9, using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). The table shows that those who had had previous jobs were mostly in semi-skilled jobs and manual work. One in four was in craft and related work and one in six was involved in plant and machine operative jobs which are largely semi-skilled. The largest group was in the 'Other' occupations, which contain the highest proportion of unskilled jobs in the economy. The occupational profile of these previous jobs was broadly similar to that for the Extension sample as a whole.



**Table 9. Occupational group of prison learners**

Occupation	Number	Column %
Management and administrative	5	6
Professional	0	0
Associate professional	1	1
Clerical and secretarial	0	0
Craft and related	27	31
Personal and protective services	3	3
Sales	5	6
Plant and machine operators	13	15
Other	34	39
Total *	88	100
* Those with a previous job giving occupational details		

#### 4. Previous experiences of training

Examining the learners' previous experience of continuing education and training (CET) also highlights some of the background to their participation on basic skills courses in prison. The nature and type of previous employment positions detailed in the previous section may have influenced the extent to which participants had received training. Table 10 shows that only 16 per cent of prison learners had received training at an employer's training school, or an external course paid for by the company and this figure was similar to those on the Intensive courses outside prison. Both were lower than the numbers of those on other Extension courses.

**Table 10. Previous training provided by employers**

Training paid for by employer since leaving full time education	Type of course			Total
	Prison	Intensive	Other	
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Yes	16	17	23	21
No	84	83	76	78
Don't know	0	0	1	1
Total	110	157	669	936

However despite the low levels of employment related training a more significant proportion (38 per cent) of those on the prison Intensive courses had done other forms of training since leaving full time education (Table 11). This was higher than those on other Intensive courses (23 per cent). The majority of those who had undertaken training had done so in the five years prior to the year of the interview. It would be interesting to know the extent to which this training had taken place in prison and thus the extent to which prison provided an environment for training that had not been available to individuals in the past.

**Table 11. Courses since leaving school (apart from employer provision)**

Whether done any other course since leaving full time education	Type of course			Total
	Prison	Intensive	Other	
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Yes	38	23	40	37
No	61	77	60	63
Don't Know	1	0	*	*
Total	110	157	669	936

\* less than 0.5 per cent.

## **5. Experience of Pathfinder**

When asked how they had come to do the courses 54 per cent said they had heard about the course and asked to do it, 35 per cent had been asked if they wanted to do it and agreed and 10 per cent were told they had to do it. So the background details of the prison learners discussed earlier cannot always be used as the basis for inferences about motive: some individuals had no choice over whether they took part in the course. Having said that, of those in the latter two categories who had not volunteered for the course, 61 per cent said they were pleased they had done or were doing the course, and 35 per cent said they did not mind doing the course.

### 5.1 Reasons and motivations for starting the course

The learners were then asked an open-ended question about their reasons and motivations for doing the course and their responses are grouped together and summarised in Table 12. The majority, almost two in five, said they had done the course because they wanted to improve their knowledge and further or better themselves. This was followed by those wanting to improve their maths and English skills (25 and 22 per cent respectively). Improving employment prospects and getting a qualification also scored highly (18 per cent). Issues such as improving confidence and getting out of the cell were mentioned by a small number of participants.

The interviewers probed on a number of possible motives and interestingly amongst these 'meet new people/ make new friends' and 'suffer from dyslexia/learning difficulty/illness' both failed to elicit a positive responses.

**Table 12. Reasons for doing the course**

Reasons/aims	Number	Cell %
Improve knowledge/ to further/better oneself	43	39
Improve English/ English skills	27	25
Improve maths/ maths skills	24	22
Improve employment prospects	18	16
Get a qualification	11	10
Have fun/enjoyment / course interesting	10	9
A challenge/ something new to try	7	6
Want to do a further higher education course	6	5
Other reasons	5	5
Wanted to work in education department not placement in the workshops	5	5
To help keep up with children/grandchildren	4	4
Useful course to do	3	3
Gets me out of my cell	3	3
Improve confidence	1	1
Improve computer skills	1	1

In addition all were asked directly if they had wanted to get a skills qualification, as were those on other courses. More than four out of five of the prison learners responded positively to this question; proportions that were similar to the responses of those on other Intensive courses (Table 13).

**Table 13. Qualification aim in taking the course**

Wanted to get a skills qualification	Type of course			
	Prison	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Yes	83	84	78	79
No	14	11	17	16
Don't know/ not sure	3	5	5	5
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

On the whole the prison groups had a better knowledge and understanding of the course before it started, than those taking Extension courses generally. Table 14 shows that 60 per cent of those in prisons knew how long the classes would be, compared to 46 per cent on other Intensive courses. It seems likely that this was a result of the institutional setting of the prison that implies a more structured daily routine. However there was no difference between prison and other participants in terms of awareness before the course concerning the spacing of classes.

**Table 14. Knowledge of class length and spacing before the course**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>cell percentages</i>			
Knew how long the classes would be	60	46	40	43
Knew how long breaks between classes would be	42	41	37	39
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

## 5.2 Experiences during the course

Once the course was up and running there were few significant differences in the ways prison learners experienced the course compared to those on other courses. All groups reported positively on the degree to which they had got to know other learners on the course (Table 15) and the degree to which they had got to know their teachers (Table 16). With regard to the relationships between learners, 64 per cent of those on Intensive courses outside prison had reported that they had got to know their fellow learners very well compared to 57 per cent inside prison. This slight difference was reversed for the teacher learner relationship: 71 per cent of the prison group said they got to know the teacher well compared to 66 per cent of those on other Intensive courses. On the whole however these proportions were similar across all Extension courses.

**Table 15. How well learners got to know one another**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Very well	57	64	64	64
Quite well	33	28	31	30
Not very well	9	7	3	4
Not at all	1	1	2	2
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

**Table 16. How well learners got to know the teacher**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Very well	71	66	66	67
Quite well	20	32	32	30
Not very well	8	2	2	3
Not at all	1	0	0	0
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

### 5.3 Practical and pedagogical issues

The learners were asked a series of questions that tapped into their satisfaction with practical and pedagogical aspects of the courses such as whether they felt they had enough time on their own with the teacher (Table 17 summarises these results). The responses are notable for their consistently positive character across all Extension courses, but if anything the prison courses scored the highest on most of these issues. Notably, the learners in prisons felt that they were able to work in a way that was most effective for them as individuals (95 per cent) and that they had enough time to practice during class (83 per cent)

**Table 17. Learners' feelings about course methods**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>cell percentages</i>			
Enough time to practice during class	83	78	76	78
Enough time on own with teacher	78	76	76	76
Always clear about what should be doing	86	82	79	81
Always knew when got things right or wrong	84	86	77	79
Able to work in a way that is most effective for the individual	95	85	89	89
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

#### 5.4 Views of course structure

The learners were also asked for their views on aspects of the course structure such as length, frequency and level of classes. The majority (76 per cent) of those on the prison courses like those on other courses felt that the length of each class was just right and, of those that suggested changing it, more felt that it was too short (Table 18). Only a small minority felt the course was too long.

**Table 18. Views on length of classes**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Too long	5	9	11	10
Too Short	17	11	9	10
About right	76	79	79	79
Don't know/not sure	2	1	1	1
Total = 100%	110	157	297	564

Similarly (as shown in Table 19) the majority on the prisons courses felt that the spacing or breaks between classes was about right (87 per cent) with small minorities arguing that the classes were too close together (3 per cent) or too far apart (8 per cent). This was again very similar to the overall picture.

**Table 19. Views on length of breaks between classes**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Too close together	3	8	3	4
Too far apart	8	6	6	6
About right	87	85	87	87
Don't know/not sure	2	1	4	3
	110	157	297	564

A similar majority (85 per cent) also felt that the courses were just right in terms of the level of difficulty (Table 20). A slightly larger proportion than on other courses felt that they were too easy (10 per cent). Very few felt that the course was too hard (2 per cent).

**Table 20. Views on how difficult the course was**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
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	<i>column percentages</i>			
Too hard	2	13	5	6
Just right	85	71	84	82
Too easy	10	13	6	8
Don't know/ not sure	3	3	5	4
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

### 5.5 What they liked about the course

The learners were asked how they felt about the course and what they liked about it. This was an open question in which the answers were coded into categories and these can be compared with the responses of those on other Extension courses. Table 21 shows that the salient attraction for the Intensive Pathfinders in prisons was that of 'course content'. This was mentioned as a liked feature by nearly 70 per cent of the learners as opposed to only 50 per cent of the learners on the other Intensive courses. 'Teaching methods' and 'Positive effects on self' (self-confidence etc.) both scored quite highly across all the Extension activities including prisons with around 40 per cent for the former and 30 per cent for the latter. 'Use of computers' was more important to those on outside Intensive courses (20 per cent) as opposed to prison courses (5 per cent). It would therefore be interesting to know how much the prison courses were IT-based, but the survey did not obtain information about this. Interestingly 'the teacher' as an aspect of the course that learners liked, also scored more highly on non-prison Extension courses (52 per cent) compared to prison courses (25 per cent).

The institutional nature of prison life may have influenced which categories were relevant to prison learners. A highly structured timetable, familiarity with other inmates and the nature of prison life meant that aspects of the classes which had been important to those on other Extension, such as 'relations with other learners', 'location' and 'time of day' failed to be mentioned by those on the prison Extension.

**Table 21. What learners liked about the course**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>cell percentages</i>			
Class times (frequency/spacing/duration of sessions)	3	8	10	9
Time of day/week	0	4	10	8
Course content (appropriate level appropriate to needs/easier than feared demanding/interesting useful)	69	50	59	58
Convenient location/ easy to get to	0	9	14	12
Teaching/working methods (group work, working alone, individual help,)	40	41	45	44
Liked the atmosphere / environment/ surroundings	0	1	4	3
Relaxed atmosphere/environment	1	1	4	3
Use of computers	5	20	9	10
Liked speaking English	0	4	0	1
Relations with other learners	1	35	46	39
The teacher(s)	25	61	50	49
Positive effects on self (raised confidence)	32	29	31	31
Nothing	5	1	1	1
Other	8	7	3	4
Don't know not sure	3	1	0	1
Total = 100%	110	157	669	936

### 5.6 Suggestions for course improvements

Participants were then asked an open-ended question about what they thought could be improved; they could make as many suggestions as they wished. Results are shown overleaf in Table 22. The highest number of responses (34 per cent) was from those who said nothing could be changed to improve the course. The most frequent positive suggestion was from those who wanted longer classes or more time to practice (24 per cent); the same was found with the general survey of learners. Several learners requested more difficult courses and more resources such as books and computers. Surprisingly, although it was an Intensive course, only 2 per cent mentioned that they would prefer a slower or less rushed course. Miscellaneous suggestions were coded as 'other' (14 per cent).

**Table 22. Suggestions for course improvement (those on Pathfinder courses in prisons)**

	Cell %
Longer courses/classes more time to practice	24
Harder more difficult complex work	7
More books pens equipment	6
More one to one tuition	5
More/improved access to computers	4
Group classes according to ability	4
Smaller classes/ more teachers	4
More variety	4
More homework	4
Quiet secluded classrooms less distractions	4
More practical work less theory	2
Slower lessons classes less rushed	2
More practice on reading and writing less on computers	1
More tests and progress reports through out the course	1
More information before the course starts	1
Run a follow up course	1
More/have evening classes	1
More breaks/ longer breaks between lessons	1
Qualification /certificate at end of course	0
Other	14
Nothing (no changes needed)	34
Don't know	5

## **6. Self-efficacy**

Towards the end of the interview respondents were asked to rate themselves on a series of questions designed to assess self confidence in a practical way, focusing on common tasks and situations. This type of practical self confidence is referred to technically as 'self efficacy' and is believed to be a most important aspect of motivation.

The questions are particularly useful when looking for changes over time, which is not possible with this part of the evaluation. However, they do reveal the learners' feelings about their abilities at the end of the course and highlight areas where people who have undertaken a basic skills course feel more or less confident. Differences between those on different Extension courses is also of interest although, as the main report makes clear, these results do not constitute course outcomes since different courses may have attracted those with different levels of confidence.

To facilitate comparisons each of these questions was converted to a scale of 1 to 4, with 'don't know' given the middle value of 2.5 and a high score indicating more self-confidence. Results of this analysis are shown in Table 23. In general the prison sample scored slightly more highly on confidence than the participants of other Extension courses. One possible explanation is that this may reflect the gender difference between the courses, if men are more likely to feel confident about their



abilities or perhaps less likely to admit that they do not feel confident. However, when the analysis was re-run confining it to men in all types of course, the generally higher results for those in prison persisted. In particular the prison group scored highly on doing a 'job that involved a small amount of reading and writing', 'filling out job application forms', 'checking an electricity bill' and 'replying to letters about hospital appointments'. They scored slightly less highly on undertaking 'job training that involves maths'.

**Table 23. Average scores on 'self-efficacy' scales**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other
Finding out about education or training	3.43	3.27	3.26
Job training that involves some reading and writing	3.49	3.15	3.19
Job training that involves some basic maths	3.32	3.16	2.98
Replying to a letter about a hospital appointment	3.51	3.13	3.24
Checking an electricity bill	3.66	3.30	3.05
Looking for jobs	3.53	2.90	3.14
Filling out job application forms	3.56	3.01	3.02
Doing a job that involves a small amount of reading and writing	3.63	3.22	3.29
Doing a job that involves a small amount of basic maths	3.49	3.27	3.17

## 7. Plans for the future

Some questions were included in the interview concerning future plans for training and employment. These provided a way of exploring what kinds of follow up might be appropriate. Training plans are also interesting in that they reflect on the effects of the courses on learners' attitudes to training although this cannot be ascertained in any concrete way from the data. Table 24 reveals that 61 per cent had fairly immediate plans for training and even more (71 per cent) thought they would do some training in the future.

**Table 24. Desire for more CET this year or in the future**

	Prisons	Intensive	Other
	<i>cell percentages</i>		
Hoping to start a new course of education/training this year	61	58	59
Hoping to do more education or training in the future	71	43	58
Total = 100%	110	157	669

### 7.1 Main reason for wanting to do new course

Participants gave a range of answers to the open ended question about why they wanted to do more training and these are outlined in Table 25. There was a strong emphasis on gaining qualifications and certificates, a motive mentioned by 82 per cent of the respondents. Thirty-nine per cent mentioned improving their maths and English and 14 per cent wanted to improve their IT skills.

**Table 25. Main reason for wanting to start a new course (those on Pathfinder**

**courses in prisons, who wanted to start a new course)**

	Cell %
New course would lead to certificate/qualifications	82
Improve reading and writing	10
Improve number skills	8
To improve both of these	39
To improve IT skills / computing	14
Arts and music	3
Engineering	2
To help gain other qualifications	1
Other	22
Don't know / not sure	3
Total = 100%	72

**7.2 Plans concerning employment**

The prison group were also very positive about starting work in the future, with 91 percent saying that they were hoping to start work, compared to just 4 per cent who said they were not (Table 26). This was higher than for other Pathfinder courses, but this is not surprising in view of the all-male, prime-age characteristics of the participants in prisons.

**Table 26. Plans concerning future employment**

Hoping to start work at some point in the future?	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Yes	91	83	79	82
Perhaps	1	3	2	2
No	4	8	15	12
Not sure Don't know	4	6	4	4
Total	110	131	451	692

Interestingly over half of this group said they were hoping to do a new or different sort of work (to what they had previously done) in the future. However, this was a smaller proportion than for other Pathfinder courses (Table 27).

**Table 27. Interest in a new or different sort of work**

Hoping to do a new or different sort of work in the future?	Prisons	Intensive	Other	Total
	<i>column percentages</i>			
Yes	53	67	66	65
Perhaps	3	9	5	5
No	21	15	18	18
Not sure Don't know	14	9	11	11
Had no previous job	9	0	0	1
Total	102	138	584	824

**8. Comparisons with those in prisons taking traditional basic skills courses**

As noted in the Introduction, various circumstances resulted in the comparison sample for prisons shrinking to a size of 68; also, the comparability between the two samples was reduced because some prisons had gone over entirely to Intensive

courses. A further factor which may reduce comparability is if Intensive courses (because of their compressed delivery) tend to be used for those with short sentences or those near to release. Information about the length of sentences or release dates of the prison samples was not obtained by the study.

For these reasons, comparisons between the two prison samples are considerably weakened. However, some brief points may be of interest, although these must be regarded with considerable caution.

*Characteristics/background.* There was a close similarity between the samples in several important respects, in addition to the fact that both were all-male. They were similar in terms of their average age, the proportions who had children, the proportions whose marital status was single, and the proportions who had previously been employed. The main dissimilarity was that whereas two thirds of the prisons Pathfinder sample were from ethnic minorities, this applied to only 42 per cent of the prisons comparison sample, the majority of whom were white. Another difference was that more of the comparison sample had received training from a previous employer (38 per cent against 16 per cent). In terms of other (non-employer) courses, they were again closely similar in their previous experience.

*Views about current basic skills courses.* The main purpose of the prisons comparison group was to help in assessing the response to the Intensive courses. In Table 28, relevant results from nine questions are summarised. These show that, on every aspect of their response to the courses, those on the Intensive provision had more favourable views than those on the traditional basic skills provision. Of course, if those taking part in the Intensive provision are on average closer to being released, this may make them more enthusiastic about training and so more likely to give positive replies. None the less, the consistency of the result is impressive and some of the differences are large.

## **9. Conclusions**

The prison sample differed in many ways from the general sample of Pathfinder Extension participants. The most important differences were that the prison sample was all-male and mostly aged between 20 and 40. Many of the other differences probably followed from this. Apart from the fact of being in prison, the prison sample did not appear to be more disadvantaged than the general sample of learners on Extension courses, or than other learners on Intensive courses. Most of the prison learners had some employment experience and nearly all of them had the aim of resuming employment on release.

**Table 28. Reactions to current courses by those on Extension (Intensive) provision and those on traditional provision in prisons**

	Prison Intensive	Prison traditional
	<i>cell percentages</i>	
% length of class suited respondent	77	65
% length of breaks between classes suited respondent	87	75
% feel learning new skills 'very' or 'quite' quickly	69	65
% feel learning new skills 'very' or 'quite' slowly	7	14
% learners have got to know one another 'very well'	57	40
% got to know teacher 'very well'	71	46
% have enough time on own with teacher	78	68
% always clear about what should be doing	86	75
% always know when get things right or wrong	84	71
% can work in the way can learn best	95	68
Total = 100%	110	68

Some of the reactions of the prison sample to the Intensive courses seemed to be affected by the constraints of prison routine. It was probably because of this that they were less interested in the convenience of the course arrangements and also less responsive to the social aspects of participation. They appeared to be more focused on the content of the courses and were also keen to obtain qualifications. Otherwise, their response to the Intensive courses was broadly similar to that of the participants in the non-prison courses. On the whole, indeed, their response was slightly more favourable, although none of the differences was large.

Another type of comparison was with learners on traditional basic skills courses in prisons. However, the sample obtained for this purpose was small and the degree of comparability is uncertain. At face value, the learners on the Intensive courses in prisons responded in a consistently more favourable way to them than those who were on traditional basic skills courses in prisons. There could be some bias in these comparisons, for example if learners on the Intensive courses were closer to release. None the less, these comparisons were impressive.

Overall, the Pathfinder Extension courses in prisons were highly successful if judged by the response from their participants.

## THE SURVEY OF TEACHERS

by Michael White and John Killeen

### **1 Introduction**

An important source of information for the overall evaluation of the Pathfinder Extension programme consists of the views and experiences of those teachers who took part in them. Teachers are able to form their own assessments of how their Extension courses worked in practice, and how they differed from mainstream basic skills provision with which they are familiar. In-depth qualitative interviews were held with a small number of teachers, and these are included in the separate report on the qualitative research. However, it was also desired to get a wider coverage of teachers' views and experiences, and for this purpose a postal questionnaire survey was devised. It is the results of this postal survey which are reported here.

#### 1.1 The survey method and procedure

Postal questionnaires are generally effective when the people being asked to reply feel that the subject-matter is relevant and interesting to themselves, and when they have the capacity to answer the questions being posed without undue difficulty. These conditions were evidently met in the present case, since the questionnaire dealt entirely with Extension courses in which the teachers had recently been involved.

Two slightly differing versions of the questionnaire were designed, one relating to Residential courses and the other to the remaining four types of Extension courses (excluding Working with Other Agencies, which was outside the scope of the evaluation). Each version of the questionnaire contained eight pages of questions in fixed-response format, and also provided an opportunity for teachers to add comments in their own words about any aspect of the courses. A pre-test of the questionnaires was carried out with three teachers, from which it appeared that the form could be completed without undue difficulty and in a reasonably short time.

The intention was to send the questionnaire to all teachers who had taken part in Extension courses. There was however no central list of participating teachers. The research team compiled a list of teacher contacts made in setting up the interviewing of learners on the Extension courses, and the contact list for each Pathfinder Area was sent to the Pathfinder coordinator requesting that any known omissions or mistakes should be notified. However, it appears that not all co-ordinators had lists of teachers participating in their Pathfinder Extension: only a few areas notified omissions. Accordingly, it remains uncertain whether full coverage was achieved.

The procedure followed was to mail both versions of the questionnaire to each teacher, with a letter explaining the survey's purpose and the confidential treatment of replies. A postage-paid envelope was enclosed for return. Approximately one month later, a reminder letter was sent to those who had not replied, together with further copies of the questionnaires in case the originals had been mislaid.

Approximately one month later, a final reminder letter was sent. In a few cases where details of teachers were provided at a late stage, only one follow-up letter was sent.

## 1.2 Response rate

Altogether, questionnaires were mailed to 86 teachers. Twelve wrote back explaining that they had only been involved in arranging courses, and had not taught on any of them, so that the effective sample was 74 teachers. Completed questionnaires were received from 46 teachers, a response rate of 62 per cent. Of these, 13 returned both Residential and Non-residential questionnaires, 15 returned Residential questionnaires only, and 18 returned Non-residential questionnaires only. Many teachers taught on more than one Extension course, and their replies related to a total of 94 courses (an average of two per teacher).

## 1.3 Presentation of results

In the following results, teachers' responses are described separately for Residential and Non-residential courses. Numbers are too small for the Non-residential courses to be broken down into the various types of Extension programmes. Because of the small numbers, apparent differences in percentage results between Residential and Non-residential courses should be regarded with considerable caution. It is only where these differences are both large and consistent across questions that they may be interpreted as a point of substance.

The statistical information from the fixed-response questions is complemented, wherever possible, by quotations from the teachers' open-response comments which help to amplify or qualify the findings: 80 per cent of the teachers who replied to the survey provided some comments. Teachers' comments also contained many suggestions for improvements in the design or delivery of courses of these types. These comments were too varied to be easily summarised within the format of this report, so they are not presented here. Instead, they have been fully transcribed (except for removing details which might make their origin identifiable) and passed to the Department for Education and Skills as a separate document.

## **2 Teacher responsibilities**

This section looks at teacher responsibilities for Extension courses, first in relation to course promotion and recruitment, and then in relation to the teaching demands of delivering the courses.

### 2.1 Promotion and recruitment

Teachers were asked what their role had been in course promotion and learner recruitment. The majority said they had been heavily involved (Table 1). Nearly all teachers on Residential courses had been involved in promotion and recruitment, but nearly one in three on the Non-residential courses had not been involved in these

aspects. This seems plausible, as those going on Residentials were already taking part in longer basic skills courses and their teachers would be in a position to recruit them. Another question established that in 43 of the 47 Residential courses covered, all the learners came from an on-going basic skills course.

**Table 1. Teachers' involvement in course promotion and learner recruitment**

	Residentials		Non-residentials	
	Number	%	Number	%
Heavily involved	18	67	17	57
A limited role	6	22	4	13
No involvement	3	11	9	30
Base = 100%	27		30	

This picture of the additional teacher involvement in promotion and recruitment for Residentials was supported by some of the comments added at the end of the questionnaires. Several teachers on Residentials remarked on the extra effort required to encourage learners to sign up for this component, and to counteract their nervousness of something unfamiliar, although they also tended to say that if Residentials became a more standard part of basic skills courses, recruitment would be eased. For example, one teacher commented:

“Recruitment [was] initially difficult, as there was no feedback available from other similar programs which could be used as a selling point to other learners. The second residential attracted more interest because of comments made by learners who had attended the first one.”

One or two teachers on Residentials felt that teachers in general were not sufficiently involved in recruitment. They were suggesting that recruitment could have been improved through providing more information about the opportunities to the teachers as a whole.

Some teachers on Non-residential courses also commented on recruitment difficulties, but this was more often in terms of the overall course planning and administration, rather than in terms of their personal involvement. One teacher made the following comments about the Fixed Rate Replacement programme:

“Insufficient time to recruit appropriately with original deadlines. Christmas proved a real difficulty with many companies because they start feeling the impact in Oct[ober] so refused to get involved when we weren't able to extend the programme. Later because the recruitment was poor Pathfinder extended the times to after Christmas, but by then they had already made a decision. Confusion over the dates for completion of programmes caused a lot of difficulty and meant we lost a lot of custom.”

Another, also involved in Non-residential courses, made a more general criticism of the recruitment procedures:

“Initial problems related to partnership arrangements + setting up systems, especially for claims + stats. ... Without wanting to go into details, recruitment and selection was a mess - which meant we enrolled learners for whom the course was not suited - hence a high drop-out rate.”

## 2.2 Teaching demands

The number of learners enrolled on Residential courses was on average larger than on Non-residential courses: 14 as opposed to 9. However, Non-residential courses were more varied in their learner numbers, with a range from 1 to 50 learners, while the range on Residential courses was from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 34.

Although Residential courses tended to have more learners, they also generally had higher teacher numbers: typically around 4-5, while Non-residential courses were mostly taught either by a single teacher or by two teachers. The overall learner-teacher ratio was not much different on average: 4.5 to 1 in the case of Residentials and 4.8 to 1 in the case of Non-residentials. Several of the teachers stressed, in their open-response comments, the importance of team planning for the Residential courses, as well as for team delivery of the learning experience.

Residentials involved more concentrated periods of teaching, on average, than Non-residential courses (although there was overlap with the Intensive provision). The average (and the most typical) number of contact hours on Residentials was 20, and in most cases these were achieved over three days. In the case of Non-residential courses, the average contact hours per week were 5, with the courses extending typically over 10 weeks. The largest number of weekly contact hours on a Non-residential course was 30, and this course was compressed into two weeks; the teacher on this course commented that this intensity of contact was excessive.

In the open-response comments, several teachers on Residentials remarked on the work pressures involved for them or the learners. The following are examples:

"The programme was too intensive. The learners didn't have any time to relax. We didn't see any of the countryside. The learners were unhappy that they couldn't do any shopping. As a teacher I was on call 24 hours a day, even when I went to my room learners still found me."

"A slightly longer course with a more relaxed pace would have benefited both staff and learners."

"There was a very high input of pastoral care on the part of the teachers which was exhausting for them."

"Very intensive as teachers try to cover as much of the curriculum as possible over the three days, which allows little time for feedback or practice."

The point about pastoral care was echoed in several of the other comments, and one of these comments linked it to the issue of learner/teacher ratios: "It is important to have a good learner / teacher ratio because you are 'on duty' much of the time". Because of this factor, the teaching contact hours probably under-state the amount of time some or all teachers were actually spending with learners in the Residential courses.

Two teachers also specifically referred to the difficulty of addressing Individual Learning Programmes because of the learner numbers and time pressures. Insufficient information about learners who had come to Residentials from courses other than the teachers' own courses, was another complication referred to several times. These comments however were often accompanied by others which stressed the enjoyable and rewarding nature of the teaching experience, which will be



considered later in this report.

There were fewer comments about teaching pressures from teachers on Non-residential courses, and these referred to the Intensive or Highly Structured programmes.

“This highly structured and intensive course really taxed the mental stamina of some of the older learners.” (This teacher also gave a clear summary of the steps taken to overcome this type of difficulty.)

“The speed at which work was covered was much faster than a normal course. This type of course would not be practical if the learners were of wide ranging ability but is very good if the learners are equally able.”

### **3. The types of learners recruited, and course features advertised**

The majority of teachers on Non-residential courses felt that these courses attracted the kinds of learners who are usually more difficult to recruit. Teachers on Residential courses tended to be less sure about this (Table 2). The teachers were also asked to assess whether their courses attracted people in certain circumstances. Their replies suggested that the great majority of people on both Residential and Non-residential Pathfinder courses were disadvantaged, especially in terms of having a low income (Table 3).

**Table 2. “Does this sort of course attract the kinds of learners who are usually more difficult to recruit?”**

	Residentials		Non-residentials	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	7	26	16	53
No	7	26	8	27
Not sure	12	44	5	17
(not answered)	1	4	1	3
Base = 100%	27		30	

**Table 3. “Did the course attract these kinds of people?”**

	Residentials		Non-residentials	
	Number	cell %	Number	cell %
People in full-time work	12	44	19	61
People with caring responsibilities	16	57	17	53
People on very low incomes	23	92	19	61
People who usually feel stigmatised by attending a basic skills course	13	48	16	53
Base = 100%	27		30	

Teachers were asked to indicate which of a list of course content features were used to describe their courses to learners when they were being recruited. Their responses (Table 4) suggest that most courses were presented as catering for several different interests, including not only numeracy and literacy skills, but also applications in IT and creative activities. In fact, the average number of features was over three, both for Residential and Non-residential courses. Non-residential courses were presented in a more traditional way, with the emphasis on numeracy, literacy and communication skills, but also on IT, whereas Residential courses tended to have a greater diversity of features. This suggests that they may have been attractive to a greater diversity of learners, including to some who were less focused on basic skills.

**Table 4. “To the best of your knowledge, which of the following features were used to describe the courses to prospective learners?”**

	Residentials	Non-residentials
	<i>Number (%) responding ‘Yes’ to each type</i>	
Number/maths skills	14 (52%)	19 (63%)
Financial skills/dealing with money	5 (19%)	9 (30%)
Writing skills	12 (44%)	20 (67%)
Reading skills	10 (37%)	20 (67%)
Effective communication	12 (44%)	14 (47%)
Creative writing	6 (22%)	2 ( 7%)
Information Technology and/or computer skills	10 (37%)	16 (53%)
Use of the Internet	2 ( 7%)	6 (20%)
*Film or video making	3 (11%)	---
*Family learning	3 (11%)	---
Other	12 (44%)	2 (7%)

\* Not listed on the question to Non-residential teachers, and also not mentioned under the ‘other’ heading.

#### 4 Course activities and methods

Teachers were asked to assess what proportion of contact hours had been given over to four types of ‘activities’ (which could equally be thought of as teaching methods). These were individual working, small-group working, whole class teaching, and all learners working ‘in step’ (e.g., all working on percentages at the same time). The replies to this question were ‘none’, ‘a little’, ‘a fair amount, but less than half’, ‘about half’, ‘more than half’, and ‘most of the time available’. All four activities/teaching methods were used at least some of the time by nearly all the teachers on these courses, both Residential and Non-residential. To simplify the presentation of results, Table 5 focuses on the proportions who said an activity took up one half or more of the available contact time on the courses.

The main feature of this table is that Non-residential courses appeared to make greater use of individual working, whereas the Residentials tended to make more use of small group working and whole class teaching. About half of both the Residentials and Non-residentials kept learners working in step for at least half the contact time.

**Table 5. “Approximately what proportion of the class-contact hours has been given to each of these activities?”**

*Number (%) responding ‘About half’ or a higher proportion*

	Residentials		Non-residentials	
	Number	%	Number	%
Individual working	8	30	18	60
Small group working	14	52	7	23
Whole class teaching	11	41	7	23
All learners work in step	14	53	14	43
Base = 100%	27		30	

Some teachers’ open-ended comments tallied with the result in the table about less individual working in Residentials. One teacher described Residentials in the following way:

“Difficult to pace and balance set contact time for structured program against need for learners to reflect and have time to fulfil their individual needs”

and then went on to say that provision could be improved by

“reducing the amount of structured contact time to allow for any individual extension of work that would benefit particular needs of learner.”

Another commented that “Particular difficulties [included] organising staffing to accommodate learners’ individual needs”.

However, the overall picture is of a flexible use of a variety of activities and teaching approaches across all types of Pathfinder courses.

#### 4.1 IT and paper-based packages

Questions were posed about the emphasis on IT/computers, and on commercially published paper-based teaching packages, in delivering the courses. Very few courses depended on either of these for as much as half the time on the course, and quite substantial proportions did not use them at all. Where they were used, they tended to be applied for 'a little' of the time, or for 'a fair amount, but less than half'. As shown in Table 6, IT was more widely used than paper-based teaching packages.

**Table 6. Proportion of course time based on ICT or paper-based teaching packages**

*Number (%) responding 'A little' or 'A fair amount, less than half'*

	Residentials		Non-residentials	
	Number	%	Number	%
ICT/computers	19	70	18	60
Commercially published paper-based teaching programs	6	22	14	47
Base = 100%	27		30	

If teachers said that they used IT on the course, they were asked 'to what extent has inadequate availability of ICT resources or technical backup limited what you could do?'. Only one teacher on a Residential and one on a Non-residential felt that this had affected their course 'a great deal'. But the majority of those using IT felt that lack of resources or backup had affected what they could do 'somewhat' or 'a little'. The actual numbers were 15 on Residentials (two thirds of those using IT) and 12 on Non-residentials (just over one half of IT users). One teacher commented, in the open-response question, that use of IT had complicated the course preparation process:

"As the residential was predominantly ICT based, the review of suitable materials was very time consuming. The ICT use limited the number of choices of residential venues."

Teachers on Non-residential courses (but not those on Residentials) were also asked whether the learners had access to the IT resources outside class times. Answers to this question were split about 50-50 between 'yes' and 'no'. From comments that some teachers added, it seems that the question was sometimes taken to include home PCs as well as resources available at the teaching centre.

A similar question concerned learners' access to paper-based teaching programmes out of course time. Ten of the 14 teachers on Non-residential courses which made some use of these programmes stated that it was not possible for learners to access the materials out of class time.

## 4.2 Creative activities on Residentials

Teachers on Residential courses were asked about the place of creative activities (such as creative writing, video production, etc.). Most of the Residentials made some use of these activities. Eight of the teachers (30 per cent of those on Residentials) said they were used for more than half the time, and a further five (19 per cent) said that they were used for most of the available time. In all, therefore, one half of the teachers were using creative activities as the mainstay of the Residential courses.

## 4.3 Curriculum emphasis

Considering the varied contents of the Pathfinder Extension courses, was it still possible for teachers to achieve a coverage of the core curriculum that was at least as good as usual? This question was asked in a slightly different way for the teachers on Residentials, which were only part of wider courses. For these, the question was asked 'relative to the same number of teaching hours on a non-residential basis'.

One half of the teachers on Non-residential courses considered that their coverage of the core curriculum was 'about the same as usual', and one third considered that it was 'fuller than usually possible', while one in six thought it was 'less full than usually possible'.

On the Residential courses, seven in 10 teachers considered that they covered the core curriculum 'fuller than usually possible', given the same number of teaching hours in a non-residential setting, and a further 22 per cent thought the coverage was 'about the same as usual'. Only 2 out of 27 teachers (7 per cent) thought that coverage was 'less full than usually possible'.

Overall, then, the great majority of teachers considered that they were able either to maintain coverage of the core curriculum or to extend it in their courses.

Teachers were also asked how free they felt to devote time to aspects of skills which are not tested for basic skills qualifications. In the case of Residential courses, they were asked to answer this by comparison to non-residential courses. In the case of Non-residential courses, they were asked to compare experience with courses they had taught in the past. The responses are shown in Table 7 (a) and (b). The majority of teachers on Residential courses felt freer to devote time to non-tested skills, whereas the most common reply among those on Non-residential courses was 'same as usual'.

**Table 7. “How free have you felt to devote time to aspects of skill which are not tested?”**

	<i>Number (%) giving the replies below</i>		
	<i>‘Much more’ or ‘somewhat more’</i>	<i>‘About the same as usual’</i>	<i>‘Somewhat less’ or ‘much less’</i>
(a) Residential courses	22 (81%)	4 (15%)	1 (4%)
Note: asked ‘compared to non-residential courses’			
(b) Non-residential courses	7 (23%)	13 (43%)	7 (23%)
Note: asked ‘compared to other courses you have taught’. Three teachers (10%) felt they did not have enough experience of the courses to give a reliable answer.			

### **5. Learning attributes of the courses**

A series of questions asked teachers to rate their courses on a number of attributes which would usually be regarded as desirable. The questions were in part common to the questionnaires for Residential and Non-residential courses, but there were also some questions asked of one type of course only, since they were less relevant to the other. Results from the common questions will be reviewed first.

Two questions concerned individual learning, a topic which has already been looked at in different ways earlier in this report. The majority of teachers, on both Residential and Non-residential courses, felt that there was sufficient time for learners to practice, and also that they were able to provide sufficient individual attention. However, the replies were perhaps slightly more positive for the former question on the Non-residential courses, while they were perhaps slightly more positive for the latter question on the Residential courses. Table 8 summarises these results.

**Table 8. Individual practice and individual attention from teachers**

	<i>Number (%) giving the replies below</i>		
	<b>Sufficient</b>	<b>Insufficient</b>	<b>Hard to say/ no answer</b>
<b>(a) Residential courses</b>			
<b>Time which individuals have for practice in class</b>	16 (59%)	8 (30%)	3 (11%)
<b>Amount of attention which teachers can give learners</b>	21 (78%)	3 (11%)	3 (11%)
<b>(b) Non-residential courses</b>			
<b>Time which individuals have for practice in class</b>	21 (70%)	5 (17%)	4 (13%)
<b>Amount of attention which teachers can give learners</b>	16 (53%)	9 (30%)	5 (17%)

Another pair of questions concerned instructional clarity and immediate feedback of results. Nearly all the teachers felt that these were being achieved 'most of the time', though fewer felt that they were being achieved 'always' (Table 9). There was no discernible difference in replies between teachers on Residential and Non-residential courses.

**Table 9. Instructional clarity and immediacy of feedback**

(a) Residential courses	<i>Number (%) giving replies below</i>		
	<b>Always</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Less than this</b>
<b>How far are learners clear about what they should be doing</b>	<b>7 (26%)</b>	<b>17 (63%)</b>	<b>1 (4%)</b>
<b>When actively practicing skills, how far do learners get immediate feedback and reinforcement</b>	<b>15 (56%)</b>	<b>11 (41%)</b>	<b>1 (4%)</b>
(b) Non-residential courses	<b>Always</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Less than this</b>
<b>How far are learners clear about what they should be doing</b>	<b>8 (27%)</b>	<b>20 (67%)</b>	<b>1 (3%)</b>
<b>When actively practicing skills, how far do learners get immediate feedback and reinforcement</b>	<b>18 (60%)</b>	<b>10 (33%)</b>	<b>1 (3%)</b>

**Note: Those not answering the question are not shown in the table.**

### 5.1 Questions for Residentials only

Teachers on Residential courses were asked to rate their 'intensity'. The great majority (20 teachers; 74%) thought that they were 'about right' in this respect, but six teachers (22%) thought that they were 'too intensive' and none thought that they were 'not intensive enough'. In the open-response comments, one teacher on Residentials said that it had been necessary to reduce the intensity on a course to make it work better:

“The team learned, having done one previous residential, that we were probably asking too much of the learners. We trimmed the activities so as not to make the course too intensive (see below) the second time around.”

Other comments relating to course intensity on Residentials have been reported in section 2.

A related question was posed about the difficulty of the Residential courses for learners. Most (24 teachers; 89 per cent) thought that the courses were 'about right in terms of their demands', and only three (11 per cent) thought that they were too hard. Nobody thought they were too easy.

## 5.2 Questions for Non-residentials only

The duration and spacing of classes within a course are issues for Non-residentials, and especially perhaps for the Intensive programme. On both issues, a clear majority of teachers thought that the existing courses had got things about right: 20 teachers (67%) in the case of class duration, and 19 teachers (64%) in the case of class spacing. There were minorities thinking that their courses were too long, too short, too closely spaced, or too widely spaced.

Teachers on Non-residential courses were asked how well they got to know the learners, and how well the learners got to know one another. It was presumed that this was more likely to be a problem on Non-residential than on Residential courses. But nearly all the teachers on Non-residentials felt that these social aspects developed either 'very well' or 'quite well' on their courses. The results are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10. Getting to know one another on Non-residential courses**

	<i>Number (%) giving the replies below</i>			
	Very well	Quite well	Not very well	No answer
How well learners get to know one another	14 (47%)	12 (40%)	1 (3%)	3 (10%)
How well teachers get to know the learners	15 (50%)	13 (43%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)

Although the above questions were not asked of teachers on Residential courses, other questions about relationships on the courses were asked and these are considered in the next section of results.

## 6. Ratings of learner performance

Teachers on both Residential and Non-residential courses were asked how much they thought the course affected learners, on a range of five aspects of behaviour or performance. Teachers on Residentials were asked to assess these in comparison to non-residential provision, while teachers on Non-residential Extension courses were asked to make a comparison with 'traditional numeracy and literacy courses'. Ratings were on a five-point scale from 'much worse' to 'much better', but scarcely any of the teachers ever gave a response that was below 'average'. Accordingly, Table 11 below focuses on those who replied 'better' or 'much better'.

There are two main points to be drawn from this table. First, a majority of teachers thought performance had improved on each of the five aspects of learner performance. Second, this majority was somewhat larger in the case of Residential courses than of Non-residentials.



**Table 11. Residential and Non-residential teachers' ratings of the comparative performance of learners on their courses**

*Number (%) rating courses 'better' or 'much better' on each aspect*

	Residentials		Non-residentials	
	Number	%	Number	%
Effort	23	85	17	57
Interest shown	25	93	16	53
Relationships with other learners	23	85	17	57
Relationships with teachers / assistants	23	85	14	47
Self-confidence	25	93	20	67
Base = 100%	27		30	

The apparent differences between the performance of Residential and Non-residential courses should be treated with some caution. It could be, for example, that the Residential courses get more motivated groups attending, because they have greater practical difficulties (such as childcare) to overcome. This, rather than the nature of the Residential experience, could lead to the positive observations made by the teachers. However, several teachers made additional comments which indicated why they thought this type of provision could be particularly valuable. One teacher, for example, pointed toward a change of attitude brought about by the experience:

“A residential course differs from good basic skills provision in so far as it allows for a different experience - in our case being in the country in a stately home instead of an inner city area. The effect of the residential was not as apparent whilst on the course as on their attitude to learning later in their courses.”

This was supported by another teacher with a brief comment:

“The change of scene and change in relationship between teacher and learner is motivating for learners.”

Comments about the importance of learner motivation were also made by some teachers on Non-residential courses, for example:

“We have a high retention rate and motivation ... The main reason our learners stay is because we are able to give them individual help, and because of our flexibility.”

“The speed at which work was covered was much fast[er] than a normal course. This type of course would not be practical if the learners were of wide ranging ability but is very good if the learners are equally able.”

A teacher on a Highly Structured programme described some of the steps taken to help and motivate learners:

“Every effort was made to keep the group together so Extension activities had to be built in for faster learners which slower learners took away as

homework. Extension activities and homework were marked and feedback given as rapidly as possible to ensure that learners were 'tracked' the whole time and were ready for the material prepared for the following week. [Some of the] learners attended my Basic Skills class later in the week and benefited from explanations given under less pressure of time and ongoing monitoring. Through preparation for the multi-choice format of the level 1 test and doing an example paper beforehand gave the learners the confidence to take the test in their stride."

## 6.1 Questions for Non-residential courses

Three further questions were asked only of teachers on Non-residential courses. These related to course attendance, learners' enthusiasm for taking the test at the end of the course, and their enthusiasm about practicing for the test. These aspects were less relevant to Residentials.

Table 12 summarises these results, and shows a similar picture to Non-residentials in the previous table, with around one half of teachers rating their courses as producing an improvement relative to traditional basic skills provision

**Table 12. Teachers' ratings of attendance and attitudes to skills tests on Non-residential courses (compared to traditional basic skills courses)**

***Number (row %) rating courses under each heading***

	'better' or 'much better'		'about average'	
	Number	row %	Number	row %
Attendance	16	53	13	43
Enthusiasm for taking the test	14	47	6	20
Enthusiasm for practicing the test	13	43	8	27

## 7. Teachers' overall views of the Pathfinder Extension courses

Two questions were designed to assess teachers' overall views or assessments of their Residential or Non-residential courses within the Pathfinder Extension. The first of these asked them how similar or different the courses were to those which they had taught in the past. The second asked what was the degree of professional satisfaction they obtained from their Residential or Non-residential course, comparing against their previous experience of teaching basic skills courses.

Both when considering Residential courses and when considering Non-residential courses, the majority of teachers regarded the Pathfinder Extension as 'significantly different' from previous courses, and some went further to classify them as a 'radical departure'. There was no clear difference in responses between Residential and Non-residential courses on this question. So teachers for the most part did see the overall programme as innovative. The results are summarised in Table 13.

**Table 13. "Compared to courses you have taught in the past, how would you describe this course or type of course?"**

	Residentials		Non-residentials	
	Number	%	Number	%
Very similar	3	11	4	13
Fairly similar	2	7	6	20
Significantly different	16	59	16	53
Radical departure from previous experience	6	22	4	13
Base = 100%	27		30	

The question about overall professional satisfaction with teaching on the Extension had slightly different wording for the Residential and Non-residential courses, but not so different as to affect the meaning of the replies. The majority of teachers found enhanced satisfaction from teaching on Extension, in both Residentials and Non-residentials. However, the Residentials gave teachers a particularly high level of professional satisfaction, compared with their previous experience, with 85 per cent of teachers giving ratings of either 'much more satisfying' or 'more satisfying' (Table 14). The corresponding figure for Non-residentials was 57 per cent.

**Table 14. Professional satisfaction in teaching on Pathfinder Extension**

(a) Residentials: "Compared to the literacy and numeracy courses you have taught in the past, how would you rate the degree of professional satisfaction you obtained from residential teaching?"

Much more satisfying	13 (48%)
More satisfying	10 (37%)
About average	2 (7%)
Less satisfying	2 (7%)
Much less satisfying	0
Base = 100%	27

(b) Non-residentials: "Compared to the literacy and numeracy courses you have taught in the past, how would you rate the degree of professional satisfaction you obtained from teaching type of course, or learners recruited on this basis?"

Much more satisfying	3 (10%)
More satisfying	14 (47%)
About average	11 (37%)
Less satisfying	2 (7%)
Much less satisfying	0
Base = 100%	30

A number of the open-response comments made by teachers on Residentials underlined the overall positive nature of the experience, alongside the demanding nature of these courses and other difficulties which had to be overcome:

"The residential I taught on was a huge success. It gave a chance for the learners to study unencumbered by the problems of their lives at home."

"The only difficulty we encountered was that we did not receive much notice about the residential. Otherwise the whole experience was very positive."

“I enjoyed teaching on them even though it was much more demanding than usual work.”

“It was one of the most valuable / enjoyable experiences of my teaching career. [The] bigger emphasis on group work allowed learners to bond and grow in confidence.”

## **8. Other difficulties noted by teachers**

The open-response comments provided by teachers alluded to various difficulties in the preparation and delivery of their Pathfinder Extension courses. Earlier sections have noted cases where there were difficulties in recruiting learners, where demands on teachers or learners were felt to be too heavy, or where it was difficult to follow ILPs or provide sufficient individual attention. Other difficulties remarked on by teachers are briefly summarised below.

- Insufficient advance notice to teachers about the Extension was mentioned as a problem by several teachers. This had repercussions not only on recruitment but also on the capacity to plan and prepare for the course.
- Some teachers, partly in connection with the previous point, felt their courses had suffered from insufficient initial assessment/diagnostics concerning the learners. There were sometimes delays in getting assessment information, and there could also be resistance to assessment from learners.
- Difficulties with childcare availability affected some learners on both Residential and Non-residential courses. In the case of Residentials, this sometimes affected recruitment, and in other cases resulted in late drop-out, or anxiety and distraction while on the course. In the case of Non-residentials, recruitment or attendance could also be affected.
- Where children accompanied their parents to a Residential (some of which involved family learning), providing appropriate activities as well as care for the children was an important issue. However, the opportunities for family learning were seen as a potentially valuable 'plus' for Residentials.
- There was some concern that access could be biased against those with caring responsibilities.
- Residentials required that additional aspects had to be planned, by comparison with traditional provision. These included transport to and from the residential centre, dietary requirements, awareness of individuals' health problems, and leisure or relaxation activities to complement learning sessions.
- The additional planning and administrative load for teachers on Residentials was in some cases insufficiently budgeted or provided for.
- The financial incentive aspects within some types of Non-residential courses

also created some administrative complications. These included additional time to set up the course (especially when employers were involved), and additional documentation.

- Where individuals failed the test, they could feel doubly penalised when they also as a result missed an incentive payment.

## **9. Conclusions**

Teachers often found their role in Pathfinder Extension a demanding one, and they commented on various initial difficulties in planning and delivering the programmes. But it was also clear that, overall, the great majority of teachers found the Extension courses a professionally rewarding experience which compared favourably with previous basic skills teaching.

This was probably in part because of their involvement in innovative developments, and in part because they saw improvements resulting for learner motivation and performance.

The general impression given by teachers' comments is that the difficulties or issues identified in the early courses can be addressed successfully in future developments.

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