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Bringing  
Learning  
to LIFE

# Bringing Learning to Life: Evaluation of *Everyday Skills in maths and English*

23<sup>rd</sup> October 2019

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## Executive Summary

This report describes and analyses survey data responses, web analytics and other data relating to the *Bringing Learning to Life* project. *Bringing Learning to Life* was funded by the Department for Education's Flexible Learning Fund to offer functional skills courses in English and mathematics through the OpenLearn online learning platform.

OpenLearn is The Open University (UK) repository for openly licensed learning materials that supports flexible delivery of structured content. The Bedford College Group, Middlesbrough College and West Herts College worked with The Open University to develop the online courses and offer validation of learning through qualifications.

The goals of the evaluation study were to:

- Establish baseline data about learners in *Bringing Learning to Life*
- Describe levels of confidence and key challenges
- Identify opportunities for flexible, open and online delivery of foundational courses
- Develop an understanding of how learners and educators understand the issues
- Compare between further education college and non-formal flexible learning contexts

In the first round of research activity, learners and staff at the three further education colleges were surveyed. Three institutions (Bedford College Group; Middlesbrough College; West Herts. College) provided data and a small number of non-formal learners also completed the survey. The instrument focused on the challenges faced by learners; the approaches they think would facilitate learning; and the potential for online and flexible delivery of educational materials. This data was collected before beginning to use *Bringing Learning to Life* materials; or at the beginning of the course. These activities are reported in Section I.

*Everyday English* and *Everyday Maths* were the courses were initially offered, with each representing about 48 hours of study. Level 2 courses became available later in the presentation. The courses together were branded as *Everyday Skills in maths and English*.<sup>1</sup> Course content was made available on an open licence to facilitate repurposing and reuse of the course content.

During the presentation of the course materials for English and mathematics on the OpenLearn repository, analytic data about their activity and performance was collected. This data is interpreted in Section II. Compared with other courses on OpenLearn, *Everyday Skills* attracted a higher rate of enrolment but a lower rate of completion, possibly reflecting the interest and experiences of the intended audience. It was found that English courses attract more interest but mathematics courses are more likely to be completed and a badge awarded. OpenLearn analytics also provide evidence of re-use of the *Everyday Skills* courses by institutions and learners not associated with the

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<sup>1</sup> The courses may be accessed from <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/education/everyday-skills-maths-and-english>



project (including from outside the UK). There is evidence of further use of the open resources in the private sector and in the classroom.

A final phase of evaluation activity took place with a second survey involving learners had completed their course (or withdrawn). This survey combined some of the measures used the first survey for confidence and perceived barriers but also included some questions designed to evaluate the materials used on OpenLearn. The results of this survey can be found in Section III.

The key findings for those who had studied an *Everyday Skills* course were as follows:

- Learners responded highly positively to both the course materials and their flexible and open delivery.
- 78.7% of those who took an *Everyday Skills* course would recommend it to others
- Similarly, 71% reported that taking the course made them want to study more
- More than half the sample (51.3%) felt they had seen improved performance at work or in their studies as result of taking *Everyday Skills*. 43.5% felt they now had improved employment prospects.
- Improved job/career prospects are an important motivation for many, but not all
- Financial concerns were seen as the greatest barrier to learning, followed by lack of confidence, work-life balance and time management
- Disability was seen as the least serious barrier (including by disabled learners)
- There were higher level of interest in the English courses but the Maths courses attracted learners who were more likely to go on to complete the course and be awarded a badge
- Not knowing where to begin or lacking study skills were seen as barriers by more than half the sample

Data gathered about the learners on *Everyday Skills* reveal that they have diverse experiences and expectations. Survey 2 showed that more than half are already in work while a third are claiming some form of benefit. More than a third indicated a desire to go on to formal higher education, but these learners often have no qualifications (or are unsure how to navigate a pathway towards their goal). Supporting these learners in finding their pathway to skills and education – especially when they have taken a step towards formal learning – is crucial. Working in conjunction with college partners has been extremely effective for establishing a shared approach and body of knowledge. *Bringing Learning to Life* has shown that there is much potential to further engage adult learners thorough flexible, open delivery.

Part I (sections 1-9) presents and offers interpretation of results from the first phase of the evaluation (Q1, 2019). Part II (sections 10-12) describes patterns of web activity observed with learners on the *Everyday Skills* courses (Q1-Q6, 2019). Part III (sections 13-20) reports on the results from the final phase of evaluation (Q2-3, 2019). In the final part there follows a discussion and interpretation of results as a whole along with recommendations for further activity in this area.



Bringing  
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## I. Survey 1 (Jan-Mar 2019)

### 1. Summary

The evaluation programme began with a survey of both learners and staff associated with the colleges involved with the project. The key findings from this phase of activity were as follows:

- Improved employment prospects, professional development and job/study performance were seen as the most important or likely impacts of meeting current learning goals.
- Learners reported that the most significant factors in terms of impact on learning were work life balance; financial concerns and time management. More common (but lower impact) challenges were caring or family commitment; lack of confidence; and not knowing where to begin
- Staff perceive the most serious challenges for their students to cluster around lack of confidence, work/life balance, lack of study skills, and fear of failure. Access to technology and Internet were thought least significant.
- The majority of the learners who answered the survey are in work
- Most are not studying formally at the moment, but a majority (36%) expressed an interest in studying towards a qualification. Many (27%) are enrolled in part time study. Only 2.9% said they were in full time study. 13% are non-formal self-directed learners. 8% were interested in study but not towards a qualification.
- On the whole learners expressed high confidence in their abilities with the English language.
- Generally, the respondents expressed a high degree of confidence with their ability to use mathematics, but with less confidence expressed around mathematical symbols and formula.
- There is evidence to suggest that formal qualification systems are not well understood by many learners at entry level.
- Learners commonly have access to the Internet and often have a smartphone or other personal device. However, it should be noted that those who lack access often lack access across the range of technologies: around 10% of the cohort appear not to have regular or consistent access to the Internet and related technologies.

#### 1.1 Rationale & Method

The survey instrument was designed to collect data from learners in the earlier phases of their engagement with the English and Maths content made available through OpenLearn. The draft survey was piloted with the project team and refined before distribution. The survey questions were approved by The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC/2008/Farrow: Bringing Learning to Life).





The JISC Online Surveys platform was used to distribute the survey and collect responses. There were two surveys. Both categories were intended to be flexible and inclusive.

- “Learner” survey – for those involved (or potentially involved) in formal or informal learning from the perspective of the learner
- “Staff” survey – for those involved in formal learning from the perspective of the educator or service provider

In this report results are presented for the cohorts who took part in different elements. It should be noted that this means that responses from learners and staff do not necessarily correspond to the same institution. Similarly, there were two rounds of surveys which correspond approximately to a pre- and post- intervention study, but the samples are not the same. Since no personal data was held on participants, a codeword system was used to identify people who took part in both phases of evaluation.

The questions asked were often thematically the same but rephrased for the different audiences. The language was honed towards simple expression to encourage engagement. Typically, questions were either multiple choice for demographic information and information about learning; Likert scales for collecting attitudinal data; and free text fields for collecting qualitative data. There were 20 questions in the learner survey and 24 questions in the staff survey. The staff survey contained more open-ended questions to encourage richer qualitative data.

Links to the surveys were distributed by project partners to college audiences through email and shared on relevant Facebook pages. Some collectors were ultimately unused. All colleges contributed data for learners. Though a range of collectors were made available to isolate particular learner populations in the analysis, the majority of learner data came from three collectors (one for each college).

The data was exported from the survey platform for compilation, cleaning and analysis in Excel. 7 learner surveys were incomplete or otherwise unusable.

## 1.2 Data Collection

Survey data was collected between 9th January and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019 through the JISC Online Surveys platform. The table below summarises responses for the “Learners” survey by collector.

*Table 1. Learner Survey Collectors (Survey 1)*

<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Collector</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Bedford College Group)	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-1">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-1</a>	Access to HE	1
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-2">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-2</a>	Learning Centre Tresham	82
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-3">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-3</a>	Interested New Learners Tresham	1



	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-4">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-4</a>	Interested New Learners Bedford	5
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-5">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-bedford-5</a>		n.d.
Middlesbrough College	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-1">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-1</a>	19+ Adult Provision	n.d.
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-2">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-2</a>	19+ Infills	n.d.
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-3">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-3</a>	Potential New Students	48
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-4">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-4</a>		n.d.
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2018-middlesbrough-5">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2018-middlesbrough-5</a>		n.d.
West Herts. College	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-west-herts-1">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/learner-survey-jan-2019-west-herts-1</a>		26
Non-formal Learners	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-learner-survey-facebook-1">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-learner-survey-facebook-1</a>	Bedford and Tresham	5
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-learner-survey-facebook-2">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-learner-survey-facebook-2</a>	Middlesbrough	2
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-learner-survey-facebook-3">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-learner-survey-facebook-3</a>	West Herts	0
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-learner-survey-facebook-4">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-learner-survey-facebook-4</a>	The Open University	7
		<b>Total Learners</b>	<b>174</b>

A smaller number of responses was received from staff (as might be expected). This table summarises the data collected for staff.

Table 2. Staff Survey Collectors (Survey 1)

<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Collector</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Bedford College	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-bedford-1">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-bedford-1</a>	English & Maths Tutors TRESHAM	8
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-bedford-2">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-bedford-2</a>	English & Maths Tutors BEDFORD	6
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-bedford-3">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-bedford-3</a>	Student Recruitment Team	4
Middlesbrough College	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-1">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-1</a>	Primary Staff	n.d.
	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-2">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-middlesbrough-2</a>	Support Staff	n.d.
West Herts. College	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-west-herts-1">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staff-survey-jan-2019-west-herts-1</a>		5
Employers/ Trade Unions	<a href="https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-employer-survey-1">https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bringing-learning-to-life-employer-survey-1</a>		n.d.
		<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>23</b>



## 2. Demographics

This section describes the populations who took part in Survey 1.

### 2.1 Learner Demographics

#### Age

The age of learners follows a standard distribution with the most common response being 35-44 years.

Table 3. Age of Learners (Survey 1)

Age	Responses	%
12-17 years	1	0.6%
18-24 years	18	10.3%
25-34 years	39	22.4%
35-44 years	46	26.4%
45-54 years	37	21.3%
55-64 years	26	14.9%
65-74 years	7	4.0%
75+ years	0	0.0%

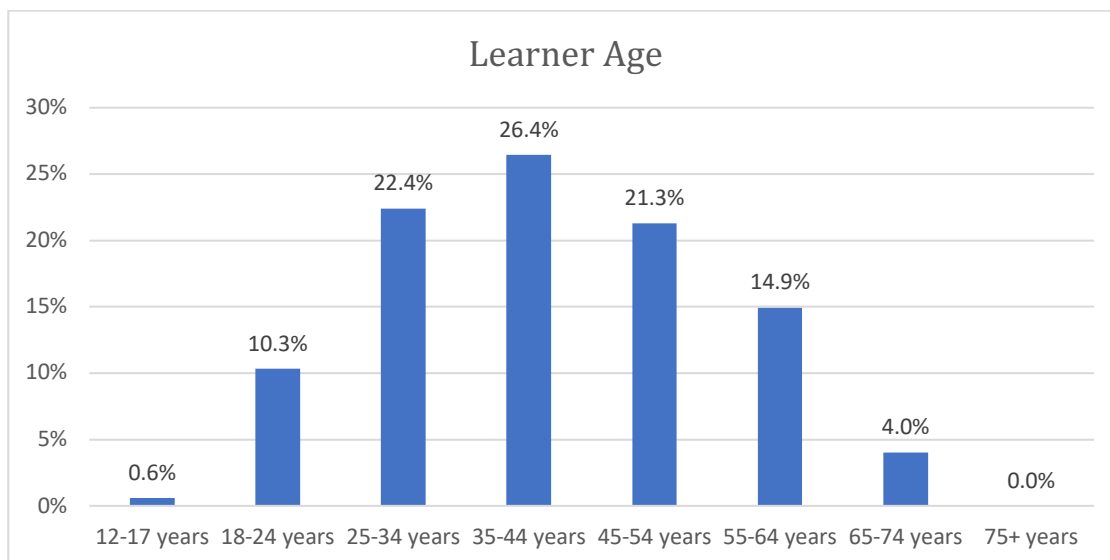


Figure 1. Distribution of Learner Ages (Survey 1, n=174)

#### Gender

Most learners who responded to the survey were female, as shown in Table 4.



Table 4. Learner Gender (Survey 1, n=174)

Gender	Responses	%
Male	39	22.4%
Female	133	76.4%
Trans	1	0.6%
Other	1	0.6%

## Ethnicity

Almost three quarters (77.3%) responses came from people who identify as White or White British. The remaining 20% comprised a range of ethnicities.

Table 5. Learner Ethnicity (Survey 1, n=171)

Ethnic Group (UK Census Categories)	%
English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	59.3%
Any other White background	18.0%
African	5.2%
Indian	2.9%
White and Asian	1.7%
Pakistani	1.7%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	1.7%
Other	1.7%
Irish	1.2%
Caribbean	1.2%
Any other ethnic group	1.2%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.6%
White and Black African	0.6%
Bangladeshi	0.6%
Chinese	0.6%
Any other Asian background	0.6%
White and Black Caribbean	0.0%
Arab	0.0%
Mixed / Multiple ethnic background	0.0%
n.d.	1.2%

## Disability

14 learners (8% of sample) declared some form of disability that affects their ability to work or study. (This compares to 19% of working age adults <https://www.scope.org.uk/media/disability-facts-figures>).



Table 6. Disabilities declared by Learners (Survey 1, n=14)

<i>Disability</i>	<i>%</i>
Learning disability	35.7%
Mental disability	21.4%
Physical or motor disability	21.4%
Other	14.3%
Developmental disability	7.1%

No learners declared a visual, hearing or neurocognitive disability.

Conditions reported under “other” were diabetes and emphysema.

## 2.2 Learner Profiles

### *Employment Status*

Table 7. Learner Employment Status (Survey 1, n=172)

<i>Status</i>	<i>%</i>
Full-time employment	48.8%
Part-time employment	25.0%
Seeking employment	14.5%
Not seeking employment	11.6%
	100.0%

Just under three quarters of the sample (73.8%) are currently in work (either full- or part-time).

### *Existing Qualifications*

Data was collected on pre-existing qualifications according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 2011).

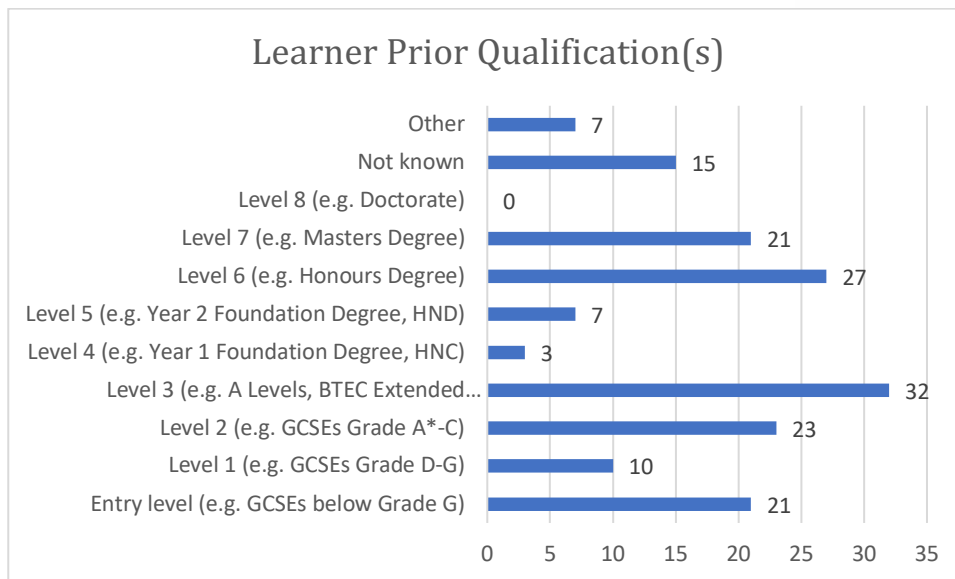


Figure 2. Learner Prior Qualification (Survey 1, n=172)

The immediately striking feature of these responses is that the vast majority reported having GCSE or equivalent qualifications. There were fewer responses for Levels 4/5; this could reflect lower familiarity with qualifications at these levels in the UK system. In the comments, some of the people who answered “Other” said they had a CSE, an overseas or NVQ/BTEC level qualification.

There are perhaps a surprisingly large number of learners interested in basic Maths and English who reported already having a degree or postgraduate degree. 48 of the 172 who responded said that they already had a degree or postgraduate qualification. In many cases this is likely to be down to a professional who has relocated to the UK who is interested in improving their English (and this is supported anecdotally by the experiences of Further Education colleges involved in the study). However, comparing this data with Table 5 that there may also be some learners who have misinterpreted the question or the qualifications ranking: the number who declared entry level qualifications was the same as the number who declared a Master’s degree or equivalent.

### Learning Goals

Respondents were asked about their learning status and aspirations. Most are not studying formally at the moment, but a majority (36%) expressed an interest in studying towards a qualification. Many (27%) are enrolled in part time study. Only 2.9% said they were in full time study. 13% are non-formal self-directed learners. 8% were interested in study but not towards a qualification.

Seven people in formal education (FT/PT) did not know whether they were working towards a qualification, and one said that they were not working towards a qualification. Conversely, four people who are not in formal study said they were working towards a qualification. Two people in training schemes did not know whether



it led to formal qualification. Of the seven people who said they had no interest in studying, two said they were nonetheless working towards a qualification. Similarly, 34 of the 63 who expressed an interest in formal qualifications said they either were working towards a qualification or “didn’t know”. The overall impression is that systems of formal qualification are not well understood by many respondents.

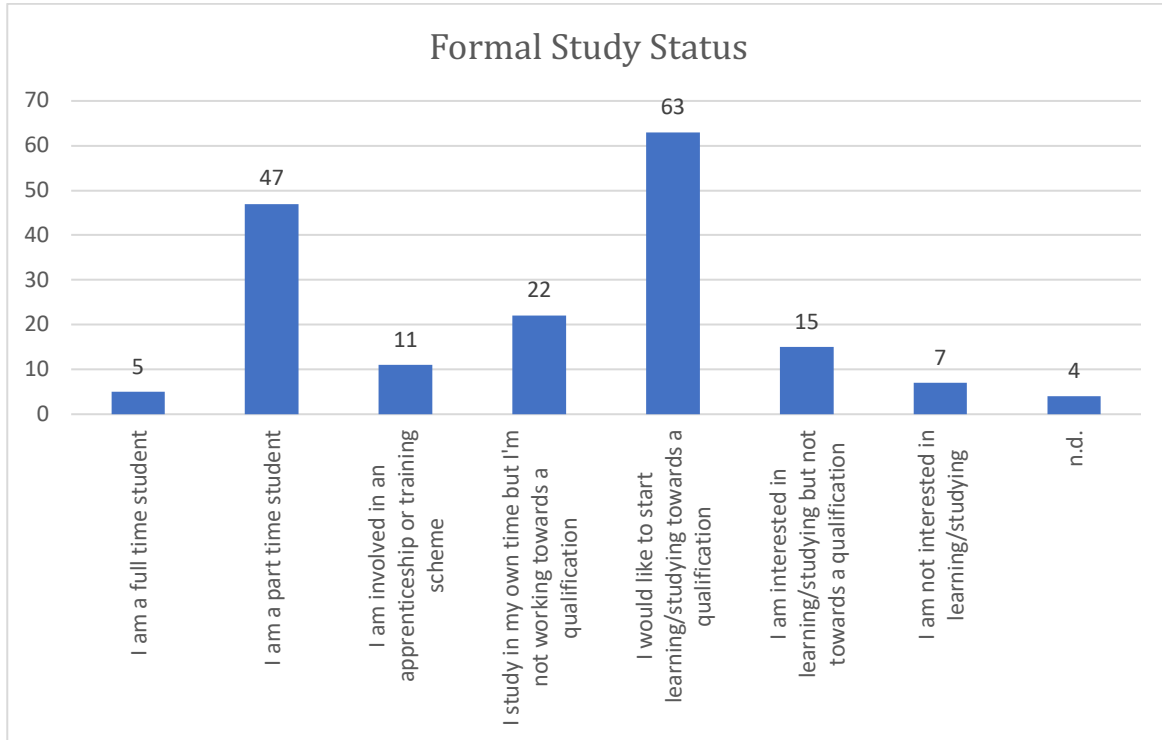


Figure 3. Formal Study Status (Survey 1, n=170)

### Learner Motivation

Table 8. Learner Motivation (Survey 1, n=170)

Learner Motivation	f	%
Improve my job or career prospects	90	52.9%
Qualify for a particular job	14	8.2%
Promotion Case	0	0.0%
Further study (Tertiary)	26	15.3%
Interest or hobby	7	4.1%
Enjoyment of learning	8	4.7%
Sense of pride/achievement	18	10.6%
Other	7	4.1%



Improved employment prospects were the most reported reason for study, with preparation for tertiary education the second most popular. There seemed little interest in improving a current position through promotion.

Reasons given for “Other”:

- *to give my kids everything*
- *although I own and use a computer and I-pad ,I only perform basic tasks and would like to feel more confident in using all the other advances of computer technology.*
- *All of the above equally!*
- *Want a qualification in maths.*
- *I need to keep up with modern ways of communicating*
- *I want to be more computer literate and confident using it*

## 2.3 Staff Demographics

### Age

Table 9. Staff Age (Survey 1, n=23)

12-17 years	0	0.0%
18-24 years	2	9.5%
25-34 years	3	14.3%
35-44 years	5	23.8%
45-54 years	5	23.8%
55-64 years	5	23.8%
65-74 years	1	4.8%
75+ years	0	0.0%
	21	100.0%

Staff data suggests they are typically older than learners – though the sample is small.



## Gender

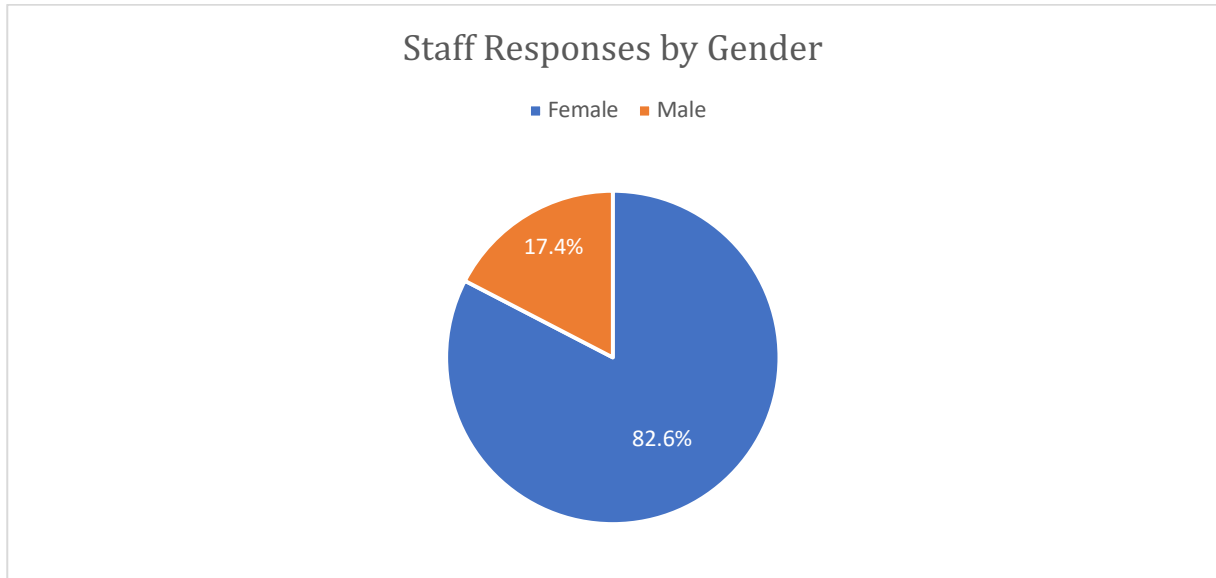


Figure 4. Staff Gender (Survey 1, n=23)

Staff answering the survey were predominantly female.

## Ethnicity

All of the 23 staff responding to the survey identified as native white British (“English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British”). This compares with 59% of the learner populations described in Table 5.

## Disability

3 out of 23 respondents to the staff survey identified as having a disability that affects their work or study. (Two reported a physical or motor disability and one reported an endocrinal disorder.)

## 2.4 Staff Profiles

Table 10. Staff Roles (Survey 1, n=17)

<i>Role</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
IAG / Careers Advisor	4
Library Services	1
Manager / Administrator	1
Educator / Teacher / Tutor	17



The survey was mostly answered by educators. Though some other roles are represented we do not have enough data to generalise about patterns based on job role.

### Years of Experience



Figure 5. Staff Experience (Survey 1, n=23)

We see that there were a significant number of staff with high levels of experience that answered the survey. Rather than a standard distribution we see clustering of responses for less than five years or more than 16 years. This may reflect recruitment patterns for FE staff.

### Employment Status

Table 11. Staff Employment Status (Survey 1, n=23)

Full-time employment	17	73.9%
Part-time employment	6	26.1%
	<b>23</b>	100.0%

As expected, all respondents reported being employed. Most are employed full-time.



## Qualifications

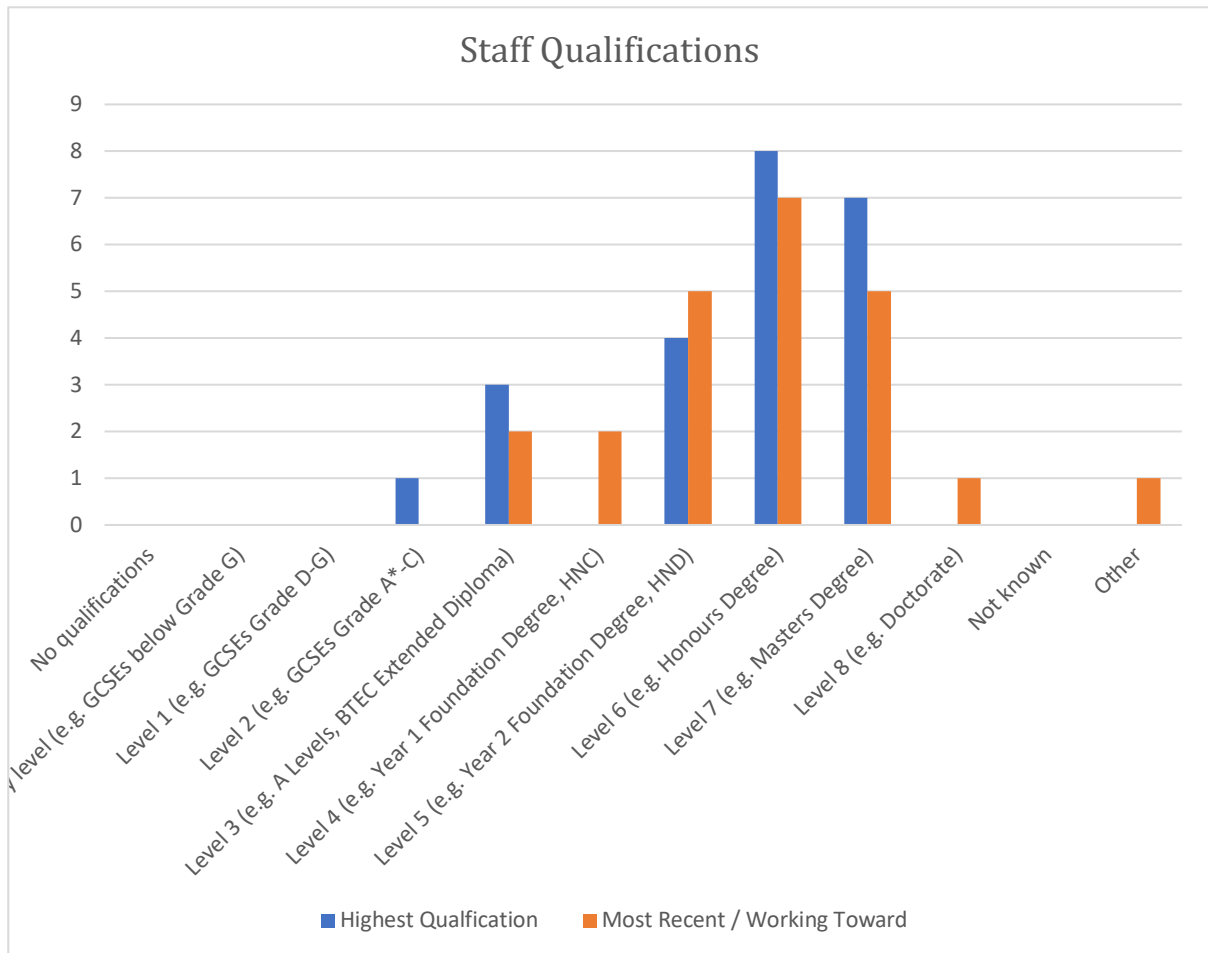


Figure 6. Staff Qualifications (Survey 1, n=23)

Many staff are highly qualified, with evidence of ongoing professional development.

The suggestion from this data is that for most staff have not obtained a qualification subsequent to their main or highest qualification. (NB many are highly experienced.) It was more likely that they would work towards a professional qualification than a degree, though again the sample is too small to support generalised conclusion.

“Other” referred here to a teaching qualification.



## Subject and Level

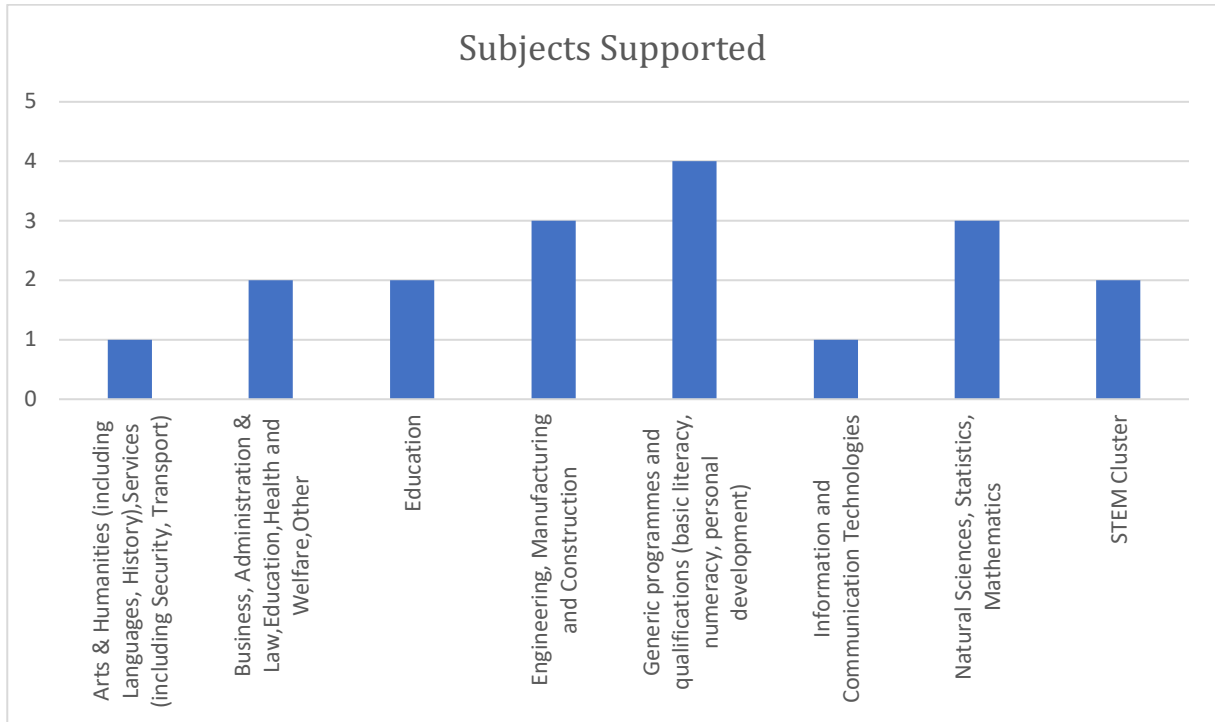


Figure 7. Subject supported by Staff (Survey 1, n=23)

Two respondents are responsible for supporting in learning in a range of subjects (including Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Information and Communication Technologies, Natural Sciences, Statistics, mathematics, Services (including Security, Transport). They are included here on the right of the chart as 'STEM Cluster'. One of these responses is from a Librarian who is perhaps a specialist working across several subjects.

### 3. Learner Confidence

Likert scales were used to assess attitudes of learners towards their own abilities and strengths/weaknesses as a learner. Each scale was on a point of 1 (lowest confidence) and 10 (highest confidence).

The tables below summarise average values reported. Any of these could be analysed for comparing FE colleges.



### 3.1 Confidence with English

Table 12. Learner Confidence (English) (Survey 1, n=167)

<i>Reading</i>	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Writing</i>
8.3	8.1	8.1	7.6

Scores are marked on scale of 1 (least confident) to 10 (most confident).

On the whole learners were highly confident in their abilities with the English language. Some learners scored themselves lowly across the board. (In one case this was attributed to dyslexia.) In comments, some learners expressed less confidence with writing than with other elements which might explain the lower average score.

### 3.2 Confidence with mathematics

Table 13. Learner Confidence (mathematics) (Survey 1, n=168)

	<i>Confidence</i>
Addition & subtraction	8.2
Multiplication & division	7.5
Understanding information about temperature, weights and measures	7.1
Double checking someone else's calculations	7
Understanding mathematical information and symbols	6.9
Working with measurements like height, weight, length and width	6.9
Converting units (e.g. currency exchange)	6.8
Using maths to solve real-world problems	6.7
Using mathematical formulas / algebra	5.7

Generally, the respondents expressed a high degree of confidence with their ability to use mathematics, but with less confidence expressed around mathematical symbols and formula.

### 3.3 Confidence with Learning Skills

Table 14. Learner Confidence (Survey 1, n=165)

	<i>Confidence</i>
Ability to learn new skills	8.1
Respond to new challenges	8.1
Self-management	8
Solve new problems	7.9
Professional development	7.8
Deal with social situations or challenging behaviour	7.7
Using technology	7.7
Academic study	7.6



On the whole learners expressed a high level of confidence in their own ability to engage in behaviours associated with learning and development. Academic study was the lowest ranked confidence measure. This could be interpreted to suggest that learners do not see academic study as supported by learning new skills (when this is not in fact the case). A similar point could be made about technology use although it should be noted that the range of responses here is quite narrow.

## 4. Technology Use

### 4.1 Confidence with Technology

Table 15. Learner Technology Confidence (Survey 1, n=165)

	<i>Confidence</i>
Desktop computer	8.6
Internet connection	8.5
Laptop computer	8.5
Smartphone	8.5
Wireless networking	8.4
Tablet computer	8.3
Social media	8

Respondents were generally confident with using technology, with high scores across the range of devices that could be used for learning. Social media was the technology aspect where learners showed least confidence, perhaps reflecting concerns about privacy and sharing. Learners rated their confidence for using specific technologies higher than for technology use in general (see 5.3)

### 4.2 Access to Technology

Table 16. Learner access to technologies (Survey 1)

	<i>I have access frequently</i>	<i>I have access, but not all the time</i>	<i>I have very limited access</i>	<i>I have no access</i>	
Internet Connection	85.9%	5.3%	6.5%	2.4%	n=170
Laptop Computer	71.0%	13.0%	9.9%	6.2%	n=162
Desktop Computer	61.9%	16.3%	3.1%	18.8%	n=160
Social Media	74.7%	9.6%	4.8%	10.8%	n=166
Smartphone	87.8%	1.2%	2.4%	8.5%	n=164
Tablet Computer	62.2%	14.0%	4.9%	18.9%	n=164
Wireless Network	80.8%	10.2%	1.8%	7.2%	n=167



Only 2.4% of learners said they had no Internet access.

Learners commonly have frequent access to the Internet and often have a smartphone or other personal device.

However, it should be noted that those who lack access often lack access across the range of technologies: approximately 10% of the learner cohort appear not to have regular or consistent access to the Internet and related technologies. Furthermore, since the survey was completed electronically there is arguably a risk of omitting those who don't use digital technologies.

## 5. Barriers to Learning

Learners were invited to provide categorical data about what they perceive as the main barriers or challenges that affect their learning. A 5-point Likert scale was used to record sentiment. Their responses are presented in Table 16.

Table 17. Learner Perception of Barriers to Learning (Survey 1)

	<i>Not an issue for me</i>	<i>Some relevance</i>	<i>It causes me problems</i>	<i>Significant issues</i>	<i>Major barrier to my learning</i>	
Access to technology	138	11	8	2	2	n=161
Access to Internet	157	6	3	2	2	n=170
Caring or family commitments	73	43	20	10	14	n=160
Disability	146	5	5	3	2	n=161
Fear of failure	89	28	21	12	8	n=158
Financial Concerns	60	34	28	23	15	n=160
Lack of confidence	84	27	30	9	11	n=161
Lack of study skills	96	19	27	8	8	n=158



Lack of technology skills	106	12	25	8	6	n=157
Language & communication skills	113	20	20	3	5	n=161
Not knowing where to begin	78	28	38	11	4	n=159
Pressure from others	116	19	14	5	2	n=156
Social interactions	123	14	14	6	1	n=158
Time management	66	39	33	12	10	n=160
Work/life balance	55	42	30	17	18	n=162

The most significant factors here in terms of impact are:

- Work life balance (weighted 332)<sup>2</sup>
- Financial concerns (319)
- Time management (275)

More common (but perhaps lower impact) challenges:

- Caring or family commitment (256)
- Lack of confidence (235)
- Not knowing where to begin (234)

One interesting aspect of this data is the discrepancy between confidence in own study skills expressed in “Learner Confidence” section. Learners seem to have confidence in their own ability to learn and study, but also state that lack of confidence is an issue. This may reflect a degree of belief in self and ability that is tempered by external factors (financial, caring, time, etc.).

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<sup>2</sup> Weighting process: disregard leftmost column and then multiply value 2X for “Some relevance”; 3X for “It causes me problems”; 4X for “Significant issues”; 5X for “Major barrier to my learning” to provide total for variable.





Access to Internet is not generally seen as an issue; this is consistent with what is reported elsewhere (6.2).

## 6. Learning Preference

Learners were asked to perform a similar categorisation with respect to learning approaches and their perception of whether they as a learner would benefit. These variables focused on flexible, open and technology-enhanced approaches. A five point Likert scale was used to capture sentiment.

Table 18. Learner Perception of Potential Approaches (Survey 1)

	<i>Would not benefit me</i>	<i>Unlikely to benefit me</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Likely to benefit me</i>	<i>Highly likely to benefit me</i>	
Accessing learning resources online	6	4	9	75	65	n=159
Accessing learning resources for free	5	2	5	48	79	n=139
Accessing learning resources 'anywhere, anytime'	5	5	7	48	66	n=131
Being able to learn at my own pace	4	4	4	56	96	n=164
Close support from other learners	11	8	37	63	41	n=160
Close support from tutors/teachers	4	1	16	71	66	n=158



Learning that takes account of my particular needs	12	2	21	65	59	n=159
Less text and more audio/visual resources	14	15	51	46	38	n=164
Managing my own learning	9	9	28	65	47	n=158
Using assistive technologies (e.g. screen readers, hearing devices, memory aids, etc.)	46	18	30	31	35	n=160

On the whole, we observe high levels of enthusiasm for flexible and supported use of online learning resources. Figure 8 presents these values in order of perceived relevance.

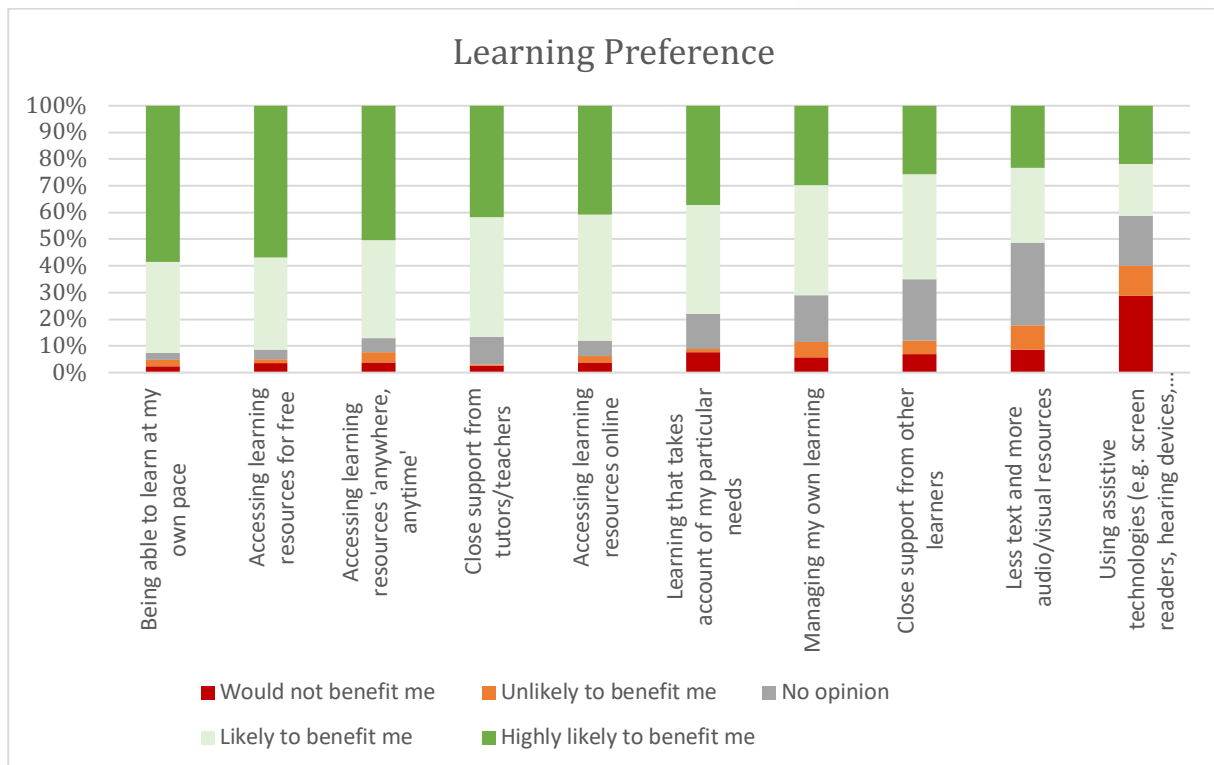


Figure 8. Learner Perception of Potential Approaches (Survey 1)

There was most enthusiasm (left side of graph) for learning at one’s own pace and accessing resources for free. Taken in conjunction with data about learner confidence it could be that people feel they could succeed with more time rather than more close support from staff or peers.

There was least preference for using assistive technologies, though this is perhaps to be expected since these are used in response to a specific need.

There was most uncertainty around peer-supported learning and preference for text/audio-visual resources.



## 7. Anticipated Impact

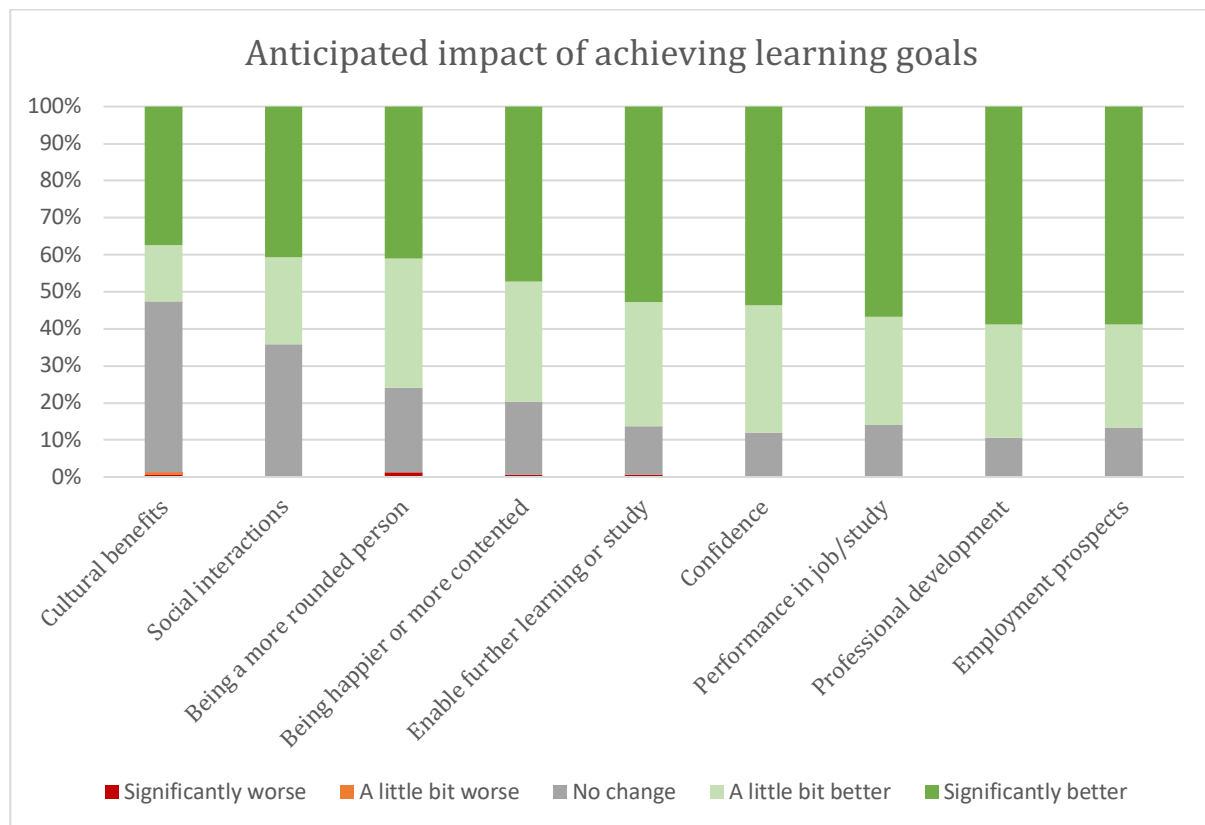
Learners were asked to think about the impact on their life if they were able to meet their learning goals. Which aspects of their life do they think would change?

Table 19. Anticipated Impact of Achieving Learning Goals (Learners, Survey 1)

	<i>Significantly worse</i>	<i>A little bit worse</i>	<i>No change</i>	<i>A little bit better</i>	<i>Significantly better</i>	
Cultural benefits	1	1	73	24	59	n=158
Social interactions	0	0	59	39	67	n=165
Being a more rounded person	2	0	38	58	68	n=166
Being happier or more contented	1	0	32	53	77	n=163
Enable further learning or study	1	0	21	54	85	n=161
Confidence	0	0	20	57	89	n=166
Performance in job/study	0	0	23	48	93	n=164
Professional development	0	0	17	49	94	n=160
Employment prospects	0	0	22	46	97	n=165



Table 20. Anticipated Impact of Achieving Learning Goals (Learners, Survey 1)



Improved employment prospects, professional development and job/study performance were seen as the most important or likely impacts of meeting current learning goals.

Cultural and social benefits were seen as less likely or important, though, on the whole.

### 7.1 Comments by Learners

Learner comments are presented here, organised by the themes of attitudes towards learning; professional development; and challenges faced.

#### Attitude towards learning

- *I find that open learning is the best way for me to learn and I don't have to worry about the restrictions of my disability.*
- *Anyone can sit and learn skills but these don't bring resilience and the ability to carry out these skills in real life - this causes some issues as I believe the point in learning is to share knowledge and sometimes it is hard to do this with hidden disabilities.*
- *To be able to achieve all modules and achieve success threw understanding all that i am given to do as i find all very up lifting. I like the idea of moving with the times. I also like the teaching staff.*
- *There could be more free online courses, which could help me to study more and achieve more.*
- *I am happy in my life if I learn better computer*



Comments received about learning highlight that disabled learners often see open online learning as a route to learning with a disability. There is also the suggestion that opportunities to learn can have a deep emotional impact.

### **Professional Development**

- *I am learning to be a motivator for my children, get professional qualification and get a better job to give back to my community. challenges I am facing now is family commitment and finance.*
- *I would like to learn more about Accountant jobs and IT.*
- *I would like to have more time to study. As I work part time. Mainly night shifts. I hope I can study on my own time if it's possible.*
- *I came to the UK in 2011 and joined Biddenham School at the end of year 9. After completing my GCSEs in year 11, I stayed for Biddenham sixth form to do a retake year, improving my English. Then I went to Jamia\_Al\_Karam in Retford to study a Diploma in Islamic Sciences, which I will complete in July 2018. This course was taught and tested in the English language. currently I'm a student at Bedford collage and I'm doing pre access course in health profession. my goal is to pass my maths and english this year to go to level 3 access course in Early years teaching*
- *I want to learn English*
- *i wish to be assisted with a job placement after studying because most firm\job vacancies usually ask for some previous experience. which i do not have, so this is my biggest worry.*
- *Lack of BPS approved postgraduate courses presented part time over more than two years. OU course not recognised. Salary drop needed to undertake taught Doctorate (after postgraduate). Age discrimination by local university to over 40s.*

Comments received around the theme of professional development reflect the wide range of experiences of these learners. Recognition of learning is a key element here: for learning undertaken towards this aim to be effective it should align and be validated in ways that are mutually recognised.

### **Challenges Faced**

- *I'm quite worried I won't be clever enough for this course*
- *I have a few problems in absorbing the information I read and remembering it*
- *Qualifications making me over-qualified for jobs, or not providing the experience I would need to enter a new profession.*
- *I feel I have a phobia to maths. I want to overcome this.*
- *just family commitment. my husband works very long hours.*
- *After some severe Crisis ten years ago that interrupted learning with you. So far not one of you can help me pick it up again.*
- *currently I have no one at hand to help if I get stuck on my laptop, so my computer skill stays limited*
- *Need more time and resources*
- *I belong to a creative writing class and would like to be able to produce my work on the computer but it takes me so long!*
- *I feel as I am getting older that my memory is not so great and that information is changing/ developing at such a rate it's hard to keep up!*



Challenges identified by learners echo common patterns seen in other learners. Time and resources are crucial for all learners, but for adult learners there can also be considerable anxiety and confidence issues. Online learning environments also bring their own challenges, particularly for those who are less confident.

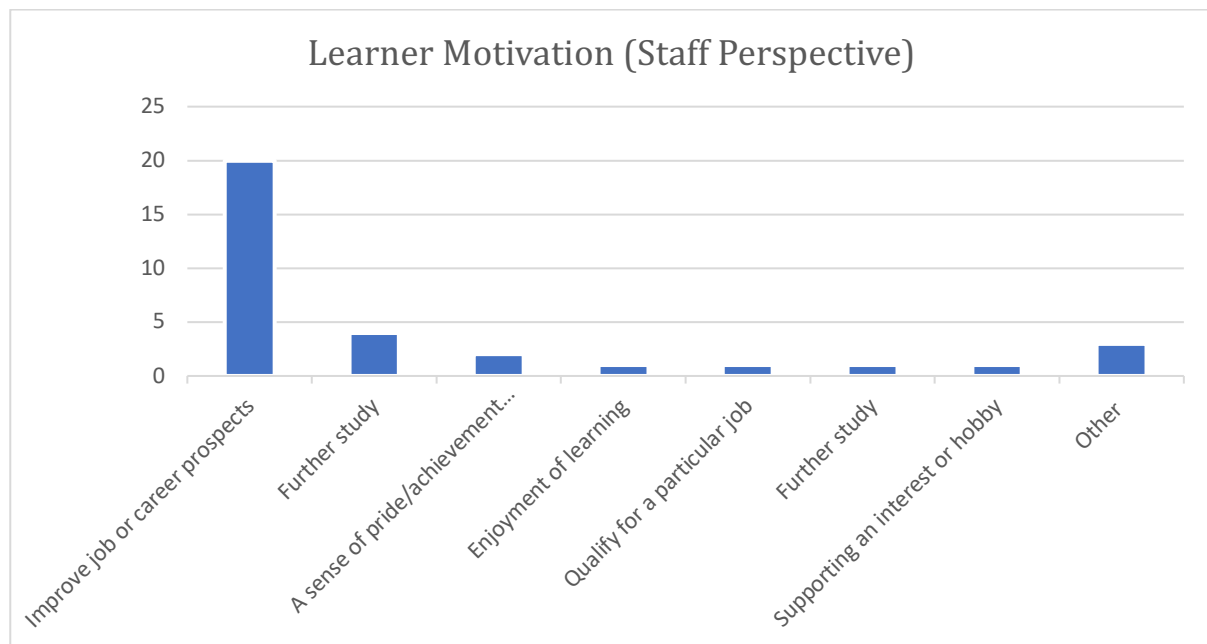
## 8. Staff Perception

Many of the survey questions used for “staff” (those who support learning) were based on those asked to learners. This allows us to describe possible differences in how learning challenges are perceived.

### 8.1 Perception of Learner Motivation

Staff (n=23) were asked about the motivation of their learners. Improved job or career prospects were seen as the predominant motivation.<sup>3</sup>

Table 21. Staff Perception of Learner Motivation (Survey 1, n=23)



Reasons given under “Other”:

- *Required for funding of main qualification, therefore not always motivated*
- *They have to study English if they have not achieved a higher grade pass for GCSE*
- *Compulsory*

<sup>3</sup> The number of measurements is greater than 23 because multiple categories could be selected.



## 8.2 Perception of Technology Use

Table 22. Staff Perception of Learner Technology Use (Survey 1)

	<i>Frequent access</i>	<i>Accessible, but not all the time</i>	<i>Limited access</i>	<i>No access</i>	
Internet Connection	81.8%	13.6%	4.5%	0.0%	n=22
Laptop Computer	21.1%	47.4%	15.8%	15.8%	n=19
Desktop Computer	10.0%	45.0%	35.0%	10.0%	n=20
Social Media	45.0%	25.0%	15.0%	15.0%	n=20
Smartphone	63.6%	9.1%	9.1%	18.2%	n=22
Tablet Computer	5.3%	36.8%	15.8%	42.1%	n=19
Wireless Network	71.4%	23.8%	4.8%	0.0%	n=21

Staff tended to believe that learners had lower levels of access to digital and networked technologies. This may reflect the fact that they deal with a wider number of learners than those who completed the survey (which was distributed electronically).

## 8.3 Perception of Challenges Faced by Learners

Table 23. Staff Perception of Learner Challenges (Survey 1)

	<i>Not an issue for learners I support</i>	<i>It causes the learners I support some problems</i>	<i>Some relevance for the learners I support</i>	<i>Significant issues for the learners I support</i>	<i>Major barrier for the learners I support</i>	
Lack of confidence	4.8%	19.0%	4.8%	33.3%	38.1%	n=21
Work/life balance	13.6%	13.6%	31.8%	9.1%	31.8%	n=22
Lack of study skills	0.0%	13.0%	30.4%	26.1%	30.4%	n=23
Fear of failure	5.0%	15.0%	35.0%	20.0%	30.0%	n=21
Time management	4.5%	13.6%	27.3%	31.8%	22.7%	n=22
Not knowing where to begin	5.0%	15.0%	45.0%	20.0%	15.0%	n=20





Language & communication skills	4.5%	23.8%	52.4%	14.3%	9.5%	n=22
Financial concerns	13.6%	18.2%	50.0%	9.1%	9.1%	n=22
Social interactions	21.1%	31.6%	26.3%	15.8%	5.3%	n=19
Lack of technology skills	20.0%	25.0%	40.0%	10.0%	5.0%	n=20
Pressure from others	25.0%	10.0%	35.0%	25.0%	5.0%	n=20
Caring or family commitments	4.8%	23.8%	42.9%	23.8%	4.8%	n=21
Disability	19.0%	27.3%	36.4%	9.1%	4.5%	n=21
Access to technology	55.0%	15.0%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%	n=20
Access to Internet	70.0%	10.0%	15.0%	5.0%	0.0%	n=20

Figure 9 presents this data according to the perceived severity of the challenge.

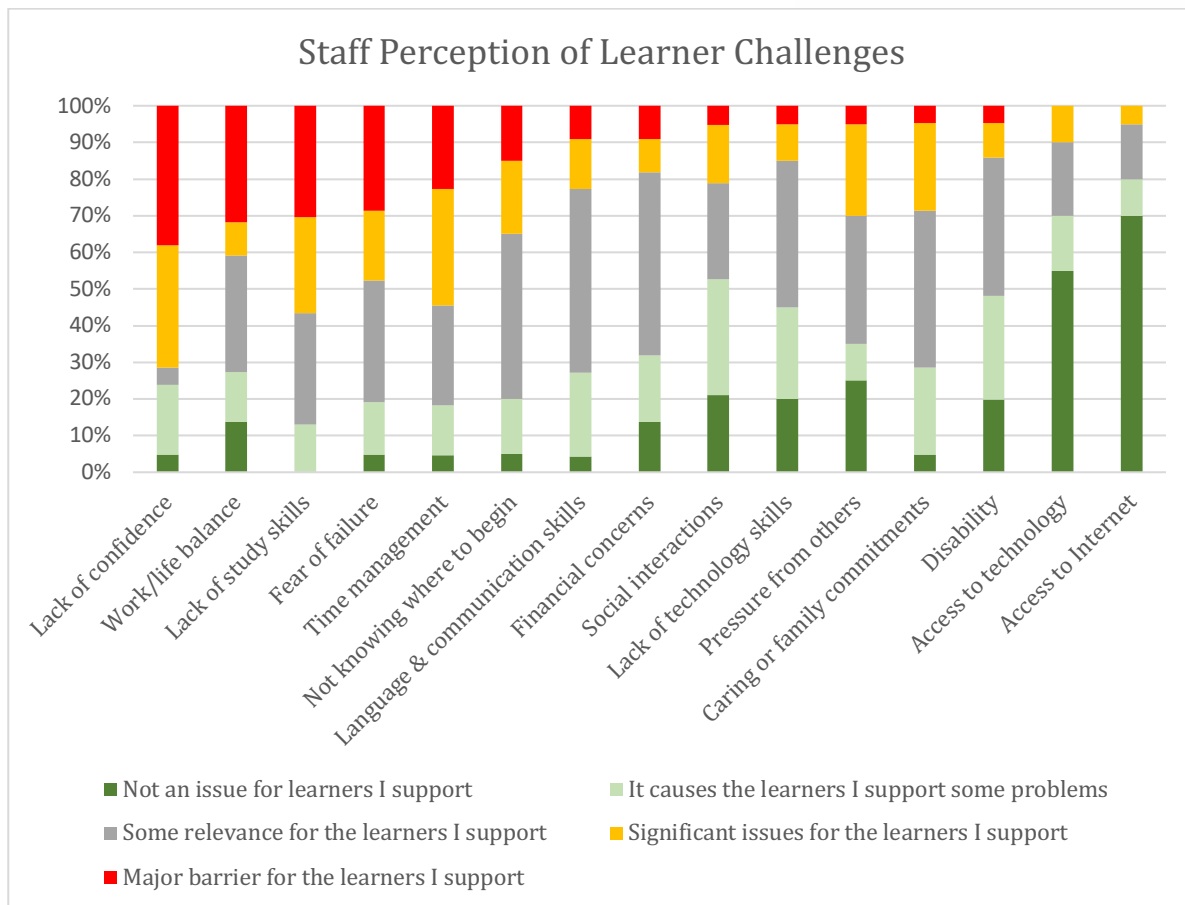


Figure 9. Staff Perception of Learner Challenges (Survey 1)

Staff perceive the most serious challenges for their students to cluster around lack of confidence, work/life balance, lack of study skills, and fear of failure. Access to technology and Internet were thought least significant.

It is interesting to note that, despite the high confidence scores recorded for English (5.1), mathematics (5.2) and learning skills (5.3) from learners, staff thought lack of confidence was the most serious barrier.

Comments received from those who support learning about the challenges faced grouped by theme are listed below. The main themes to emerge were work/life balance; motivation; lifestyle; and skills & confidence.

**Work/Life Balance**

- *Time to fit in studies alongside work/family commitments.*
- *I feel that a lot of students enrolled in college are not here because they want to be but because they have to be. I see many of them lack motivation/ have no interest in what they are studying. Having to choose a university course at the age of 18 is a lot of pressure, and I believe that not all of the students that submit applications are passionate about what they study. I think pressure not only comes from educational institutions but also parents.*
- *Earning a living, studying and family commitments.*



### Motivation

- *They're de-motivated as they've failed before, maybe several times*
- *Working with Adults in FE is a difficult group as the motivators are so diverse, everyone is studying for a different reason. Major changes in circumstances happen regularly so can have a massive impact on the groups as a whole*
- *They are reluctant students for mathematics in the main as they are re-taking examinations.*
- *Behaviour, motivation and ability.*

### Lifestyle

- *Most students when asking about this course will ask if they are unable to complete college courses due to lifestyle*
- *A real mix of challenges both learning difficulties and external factors. Some are young careers, some have financial difficulties, many parents are not engaged in their education, health issues, addictions, massive social and behavioural issues.*

### Skills & Confidence

- *Many lack confidence and the "habit" of studying. There are also significant issues around childcare for many.*
- *The majority of my students have a form of learning difficulty or disability and they are being made to complete qualifications that are above their ability in order to meet requirements of the government resulting in a severe lack of motivation and self belief having failed the said qualifications numerous times previously.*
- *Having failed once they lack confidence and self belief*
- *Because they have to study a subject they have already failed at school they lack skills, confidence and motivation to progress as much as they could or should. Attendance is often poor as are behaviour and engagement.*
- *Not been in education for a long time so lack of confidence, embarrassment.*
- *Some learners do not have English as their first language which makes it difficult for them.*
- *Negative experiences from school mean that we spend first term changing mind-sets.*

## 8.4 Potential Strategies

Table 24. Perception of Potential Learning Strategies (Staff, Survey 1)

	<i>Would not benefit the learners I support</i>	<i>Unlikely to benefit the learners I support</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Likely to benefit the learners I support</i>	<i>Highly likely to benefit the learners I support</i>
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Accessing learning resources online	4.8%	14.3%	4.8%	42.9%	33.30%	n=21
Accessing learning resources for free	4.8%	14.3%	0.0%	38.1%	42.90%	n=21
Accessing learning resources 'anywhere, anytime'	0.0%	9.5%	0.0%	57.1%	33.30%	n=21
Being able to learn at own pace	4.8%	4.8%	19.0%	28.6%	42.90%	n=21
Close support from other learners	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	59.1%	22.70%	n=22
Close support from tutors/teachers	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	31.8%	63.60%	n=22
Learning that takes account of particular needs	4.5%	4.5%	0.0%	36.4%	54.50%	n=22
Less text and more audio/visual resources	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	57.1%	38.10%	n=21
Managing one's own learning	0.0%	13.6%	27.3%	40.9%	18.20%	n=22

Using assistive technologies (e.g. screen readers, hearing devices, memory aids, etc.)	4.5%	13.6%	4.5%	50.0%	27.30%	n=22
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Figure 10 presents this data according to the perceived usefulness of the intervention. Staff were more likely to assert that close support would be highly beneficial to learners than learners themselves. They were also more likely to be sceptical about the value of self-managed learning, or learning at one’s own pace. On the whole, however, college staff were highly positive about the likelihood of a particular approach to be of benefit to their learners.

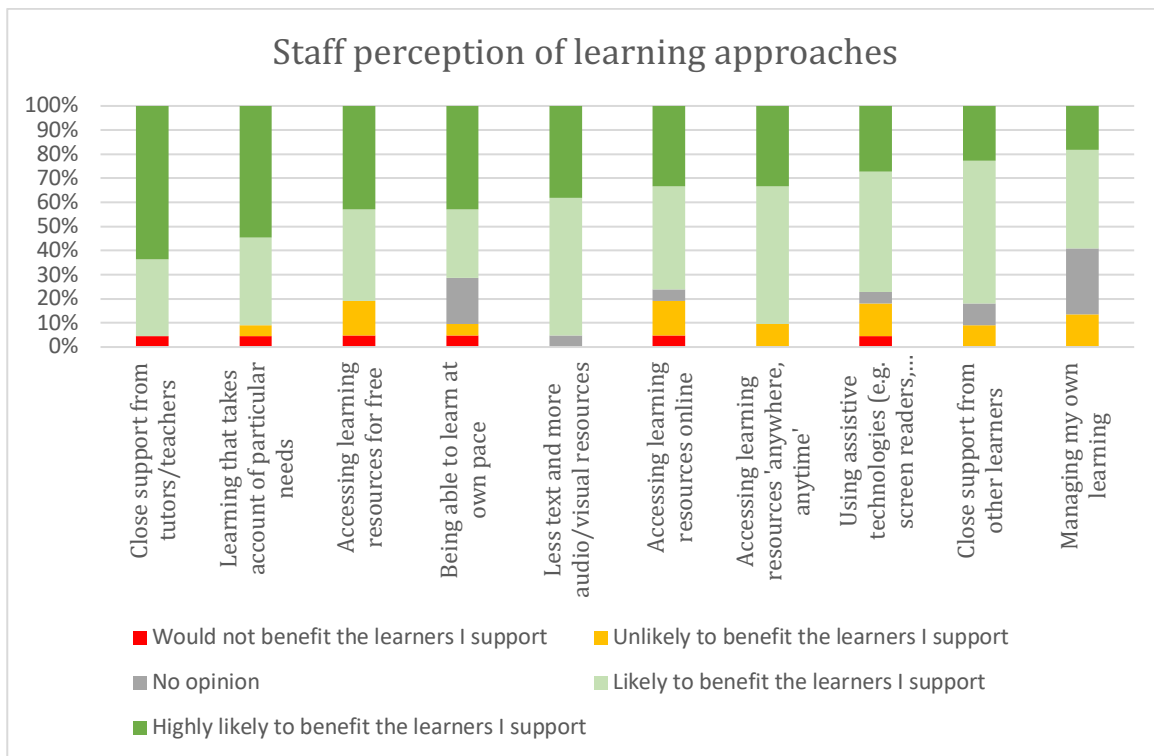


Figure 10. Perception of Potential Learning Strategies (Staff, Survey 1)

### 8.5 Challenges faced by Staff

Staff were provided with a free-text field to explain the challenges they face in their role. These comments are presented here, organised by theme. The impression given is that



resourcing is seen as the primary issue affecting their role, and this often affects their ability to engage learners – which is seen as crucial.

### **Resourcing**

- *The biggest challenge for me relating to technology is institutional budgeting. We have to use next gen technology but the college isn't willing to invest as the technology is outdated as soon as installed.*
- *I struggle to know how to engage students studying at all different levels in the resources we have without the support of the teaching staff.*
- *Time management not having appropriate time to plan lessons, provide feedback and all other responsibilities connected to my role. Planning lessons appears to be a second thought when it should be the most important.*
- *Class sizes of 35 often.*
- *Lack of IT for all students in every classroom.*
- *Time constraints*
- *Temporary staff - not a job that you can learn quickly. Staff shortages.*
- *Uneven work-life balance - lots of marking required.*

### **Discipline**

- *Students having a disregard for college policies. Managing student behaviour in the library.*
- *Discipline due to smart phone bullying by those with of those without by distracting focus.*
- *Colleagues not understanding the level of assistance required by the learners and the learners being deemed as "lazy". Also the vocational departments not disciplining students adequately which affects students who want to learn.*
- *Attendance of students in lessons*

### **Skills & Confidence**

- *Learners have taken the exam many times before they get to college, have very negative attitude and extremely low confidence. Taught entire GCSE program (2 years work) in 30 weeks with 2 x 1.5hr sessions. Many learners arrive not able to subtract, multiply and divide so time constraints are huge. Classes are not streamed so learners who missed by 1 mark are in with learners who have scraped a level 1 functional skills.*

### **Engagement**

- *Setting an appropriate pace for learning for the different learners' needs. To ensure cover all topics in the necessary depth in the time given.*
- *Motivating learners to study a subject they did not choose to study and have not studied successfully in the past*
- *Not knowing how the course will be run*
- *Trying to get students to engage. Attendance*
- *Esol students, Students not attending regularly because of other commitments, low confidence in the students*



- *I have a different cohort every week for a one week block. Sometimes this is not conducive to learning*
- *Students dislike Maths and English so find it a chore.*
- *Poor management*
- *Learners are keen to succeed but most struggle to find the time to commit to their studies. Contact time is also very limited.*

## 8.6 Challenges faced by Educational Institutions

Staff were also asked to describe what they see as the main challenges faced by their organisation. These comments surfaced similar themes around lack of resources and a perception that poor leadership and management represent a challenge for their institutions. (It should be noted that the survey did not ask about what their institution does well as the focus was on identifying barriers.)

### Comments

- *Lack of funds to appropriately support learners eg small groups, technology in all classrooms,*
- *Lack of adequate resources to aid students*
- *They see smart phones as necessary, which they are not.*
- *Results focused learning. Budget constraints.*
- *Funding cuts.*
- *Financial overheads.*
- *cost/funding*
- *Funding of FE*
- *Merger with another college.*
- *Not knowing how the course will be run Not all students have Internet access*
- *Lack of teachers as they constantly undermine those that they have. Funding*
- *Poor management*
- *Funding and meeting retention targets*
- *Funding, limited portable ICT*

## 8.7 Organisational Strategy

Staff were asked to describe the strategic approach of their institution. Most responses here identified tensions in the perception of institutional strategies.

### Comments

- *Put learners first as long as it doesn't cost us anything*
- *At the heart learner led but in reality it is dictated by funding, numbers and data.*
- *Too reliant on a customer focus instead of heeding teachers.*
- *To get as many learners enrolled for maximum funding.*
- *Shaping learning together.*
- *Varied to meet individuals needs*
- *Inclusive but inconsistent*
- *Flexible for individual student needs*
- *All equal and to be included*



- *Detached from reality*
- *Fairly traditional classroom based*

## 8.8 Improving strategy

Finally, staff were asked how they think that their institution could improve the offer it makes to its learners. These suggestions included investing in staff and technology resources; providing better support to staff; improving discipline; and offering more personalised learning.

### Comments

- *Investment in technology and assistive aides*
- *Find a way to improve communications between different departments*
- *Smaller classes which are appropriately mixed. Time to plan lessons which truly are individualized.*
- *Provide increased additional support. Stop requiring people to do multiple jobs to give staff the time to focus on the learners.*
- *Strict behaviour enforcement in line with what they will find in the workplace.*
- *Streamline groups, offer more 1:1 or small group support. Reduce class sizes. Offer 2 year GCSE program. Provide more learning support for in class.*
- *IT in every classroom. More full time staff rather than hourly paid.*
- *Give more time for tuition and lower fees*
- *Smaller classes, more flexibility in delivery*
- *More informal drop in sessions with personal achievement tutors.*
- *Provide laptops for those unable to access the internet*
- *Better support of teachers, so that we can get on with our jobs without being questioned.*
- *Have more resources available to them at home*
- *course to suit the learner, rather than learners to suit the course. (right student, right level, right course)*
- *Be tougher on those that don't work as hard, as it frustrates those that do.*
- *Open the various sites at a wider variety of times.*

## 9. Lessons Learned from Survey 1

Survey 1 was planned and conducted while the *Everyday Skills* courses were under development and in the early phases of launch.

From a research perspective a number of lessons were learned from the activities which took place to support Survey 1.

- Some students required extra support in completing surveys because they needed help using a computer. This wasn't really taken account of in the planning. It might be a good idea to offer a paper version in the evaluation surveys.





- The use of a code to avoid collecting respondent personal data seems to have worked quite well.
- One collector per college per survey is probably sufficient as there aren't enough responses to justify separate collectors (e.g. for different subjects or classes).
- Learners may not fully understand ISCED classification levels, or may misunderstand their own formal study classification. Alternately, highly educated people from overseas might be taking courses to improve English with a skewing effect on the data.

These insights were accommodated into the design and process for Survey 2.



## II. OpenLearn Analytics (Jan-Aug 2019)

### 10. Summary

This section describes and interprets data from the web analytics produced by the *Everyday Skills* courses. The key insights derived from OpenLearn analytics were as follows:

- A significant proportion of those who visit *Everyday Skills* can be expected to enrol for study
- Compared with other OpenLearn courses, *Everyday Skills* courses attracted a higher rate of enrolment but a lower rate of completion. This may reflect the high levels of interest and inexperience with formal study among the audience for *Everyday Skills*.
- English attracts more interest, but Maths learners were more likely to complete and be awarded a badge
- There is evidence that the course materials were being used in the private sector, in UK colleges not directly associated with the project
- There were significant numbers of learners who were not connected with the colleges taking place in the project
- Urban centres were the biggest sources of visitors from the UK
- The courses also attracted visitors from outside the UK

#### 10.1 OpenLearn in Bringing Learning to Life

OpenLearn is a free repository and learning management system provided by The Open University (UK). During *Bringing Learning to Life* course materials for English and mathematics were hosted and accessed through the OpenLearn platform by a variety of formal and non-formal learners. The English module was named “Everyday Skills in English” and the mathematics module “Everyday Skills in maths”. Analytic information which describes patterns of activity for those accessing the course materials are presented in this section.<sup>4</sup>

Initially only Level 1 courses were released as part of *Everyday Skills*, but Level 2 courses became available mid-way through presentation. Each course comprised 48 hours of elearning.

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<sup>4</sup> OpenLearn analytics data provided by Sue Mann and Ben Wood of the Open Media and Informal Learning unit at The Open University, UK.



In June 2019 a series of additional courses with vocational focus were released. These comprised:

- Everyday Maths for Construction and Engineering 1
- Everyday Maths for Construction and Engineering 2
- Everyday Maths for Health and Social Care and Education Support 1
- Everyday Maths for Health and Social Care and Education Support 2
- Everyday English for Construction and Engineering 1
- Everyday English for Construction and Engineering 2
- Everyday English for Health and Social Care and Education Support 1
- Everyday English for Health and Social Care and Education Support 2

## 10.2 Method & Limitations

Data was extracted directly from the OpenLearn platform using Adobe Analytics at regular intervals over the course of the project as part of a regular reporting cycle. The data reported below pertains to the period Jan-Jul 2019.

While these analytics provide certain insights into the access and use patterns of learners, there are some limitations that should be noted. For instance, it is not currently possible to cross-reference survey responses and learner analytics. The analytics provide no insights into the demographics or study approaches of different learners. It was not possible to distinguish college learners from other learners using the platform.

As a consequence, analytics give us only a “big picture” account of what is happening across course presentations as a whole rather than describing individual learning pathways or experiences. However, these patterns provide evidence of engagement and can be compared with similar course presentations.



## 11. Number of Learners, Access Patterns and Enrolments

From January 2019 (Month 1) the number of learners accessing materials for Essential English and Essential Maths were recorded along with the number of enrolments for that course. This information is presented in Figure 11.

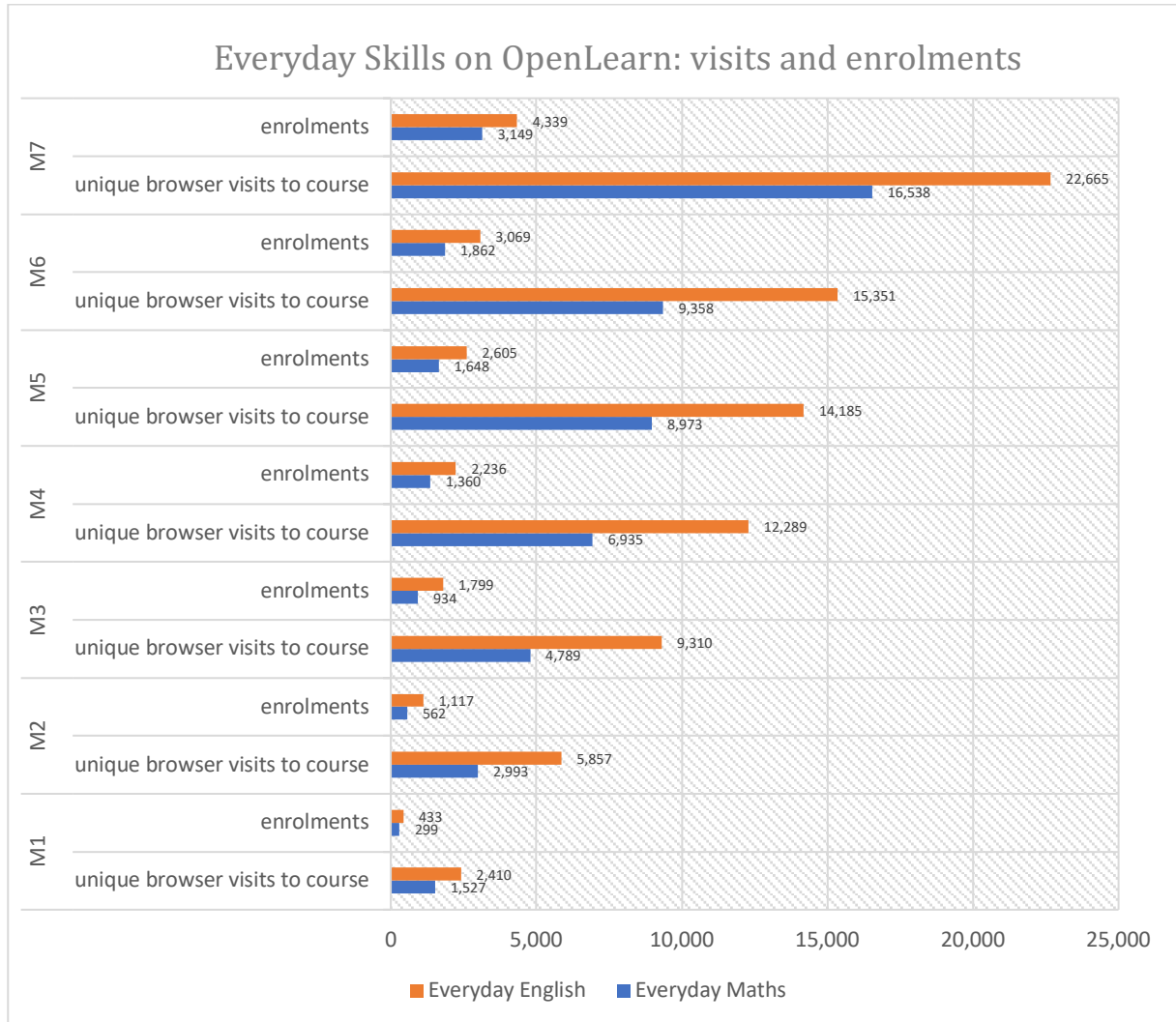


Figure 11. Everyday Skills on OpenLearn: visits and enrolments (cumulative)

We observe a fairly consistent pattern of enrolments relative to site visits, at a rate of between 15% and 30%. The steady growth of interest and enrolments suggests that the resources are being accessed and used by a wider base than the colleges directly involved with the project.

We see a similar pattern (Figure 12) with the number of badges earned over the same period, confirming that a consistent proportion of those who visit the site enroll and then go on to complete the course.

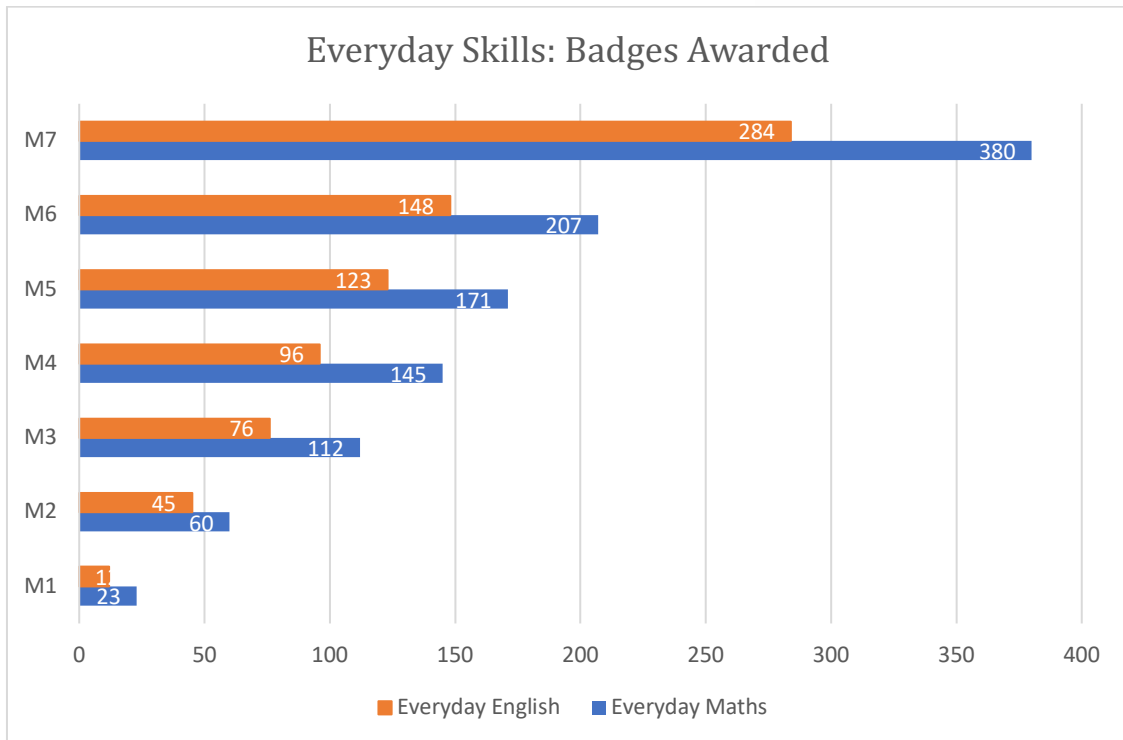


Figure 12. *Everyday Skills: Badges Awarded (cumulative)*

Together, Figs. 11 & 12 show that there is a higher level of interest in the English courses but the Maths courses attracts learners who are more likely to go on to complete the course and be awarded a badge.

It should be noted that for the colleges involved in the project would be expected to encourage learners to register in the earlier phase of the presentation of the courses. The enrolments and badges awarded in the later part are likely to be from non-formal learners outside the project orbit, suggesting that promotion was effective.

Evidence for this can be seen in the analytics. By July 2019, 15% of all site referrals were coming from reed.co.uk, a recruitment agency which offers a range of services to job seekers including training and career advice. They provided a link to the *Everyday Skills* courses and a review system that allows users to provide feedback. Table 24 presents data about site referrals as a whole.



Table 25. Referrals to Everyday Skills (31<sup>st</sup> July 2019)

<i>Referring Domain</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Visits</i>	<i>%</i>
typed/bookmarked	Typed into browser or bookmarked previously	15,555	45.9%
google.com	Google Search	9,103	26.9%
reed.co.uk	Reed	5,435	16.1%
google.co.uk	Google Search	2,806	8.3%
facebook.com	Facebook	2,325	6.9%
westherts.ac.uk	West Herts College	1,853	5.5%
bing.com	Bing Search	1,006	3.0%
com.google	Google Android Search	656	1.9%
bradfordcollege.ac.uk	Bradford College	596	1.8%
mboro.ac.uk	Middlesbrough College	584	1.7%
youtube.com	YouTube	344	1.0%
yahoo.com	Yahoo! Search	331	1.0%
bbc.co.uk	BBC	310	0.9%
bedford.ac.uk	Bedford College	287	0.8%
tresham.ac.uk	Tresham College (Bedford College Group)	261	0.8%
ounews.co	Open University News	221	0.7%
boston.ac.uk	Boston College	131	0.4%
sharepoint.com	SharePoint collaboration platform	109	0.3%
vk.com	VK Social Media (Russia)	109	0.3%
t.co	Twitter	102	0.3%
ccsw.ac.uk	Cheshire College - South & West	84	0.2%
live.com	Microsoft Outlook	83	0.2%
msn.com	Microsoft Web Portal	75	0.2%
google.com.au	Google Search Australia	67	0.2%
google.co.in	Google Search India	64	0.2%

Most of the traffic to the courses came through search engine referral from a variety of countries and platforms. Also represented are the colleges involved in the project (Bedford College Group; Middlesbrough College; West Herts College) as well as other educational institutions (Boston College; Bradford College) evidently using or recommending the course materials. (It should be noted that colleges were also free to install a version of the courses within their own Learning Management Systems, so the number of referrals need not correlate with use.) We also have some evidence that the materials were being discovered and accessed from learners outside the UK. Only 76.7% of visitors were based in the UK. The other countries with the highest number of



referrals were the USA (3.1%), India (2.7%), Australia (0.8%) and Russian Federation (0.8%).

The breakdown of visitors from UK countries was as follows:

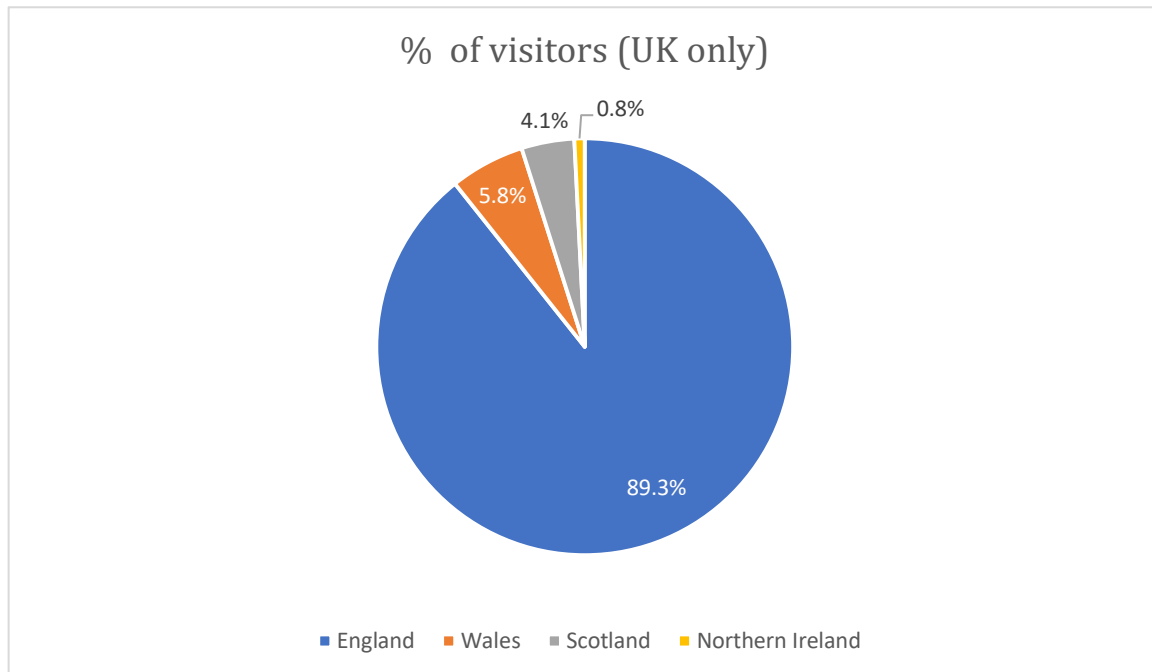


Figure 13. UK Visitors to Everyday Skills by Country (n=23,766)

This pattern is expected because of the location of the project and the institutions collaborating as part of *Bringing Learning to Life*. There were significant number of visitors from Scotland and Wales. (The Open University in Wales is developing versions of the *Everyday Skills* courses for Welsh colleges.)

Although the majority of hits came from England, there was more geographical coverage within England than might be expected. While there were clear clusters of visitors from the locations associated with the colleges – predominantly Bedfordshire, Yorkshire, Hertfordshire – most visitors came from elsewhere, as the following table shows.

Table 26. UK Visitors by City

Rank	UK City	Frequency	%
1	London	996	4.2%
2	Birmingham	922	3.9%
3	Manchester	692	2.9%
4	Southwark	639	2.7%
5	Watford	600	2.5%
6	Nottingham	492	2.1%
7	Islington	473	2.0%
8	Bedford	457	1.9%
9	Bradford	444	1.9%
10	Milton Keynes	441	1.9%

The top positions of the biggest UK cities suggests that demand for basic English and Maths courses may be distributed evenly by population (or that urban centres may have increased demand for these services on account of their populations). The most visitors came from urban centres with no institutional link to the project. This also suggests that project marketing and promotion to a general audience has been effective.

## 12. Comparison with other badged courses on OpenLearn

### 12.1 All Badged Open Courses

Learners who visit the website are around 25% more likely to enrol on the Everyday Skills courses than the average of all “badged open courses” or BOCs.<sup>5</sup> However, the completion rate is considerably lower (4%) for the English course than for BOCs as a whole.

Table 27. Comparing Everyday Maths/English with other OpenLearn BOCs

	<i>unique browser visits to course</i>	<i>enrolments</i>	<i>% enrolling</i>	<i>badges earned</i>	<i>% completion</i>
all badged courses (Jan 2019)	1,114,792	161,814	15%	21,383	13%
<i>Everyday Maths</i>	4789	934	20%	112	12%
<i>Everyday English</i>	9310	1,799	19%	76	4%

This higher level of interest at the start of a programme of study could be interpreted as consistent with the high levels of confidence expressed by learners in Survey 1.

Overall there was more interest in *Everyday English* than *Everyday Maths* but learners on the Maths course were more likely to complete and/or be awarded a badge. The lower completion rate for *Everyday English* could be reflective of a lower level of interest in receiving informal recognition of learning through digital badging. It should also be remembered that the learners taking *Everyday Skills* courses are often inexperienced learners and this can easily result in a lower rate of completion than seen in other badged courses on OpenLearn.

<sup>5</sup> Badged Open Courses (BOCs) are OpenLearn courses that award a free Statement of Participation on completion and an OU-branded digital badge. They contain rich media, robust online assessments and are usually 24 hours long. Their popularity and high impact (click-throughs) mean that they form a business-as-usual activity for OpenLearn in support of the outreach of the platform and increasingly, as a means to motivate and reward OU students for induction and participating in additional career development activities. <http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/learning-teaching-innovation/main/badged-open-courses>





## 12.2 Benchmark: “Managing My Money...”

A useful point of comparison may be made with the *Managing my money for young adults* badged course on OpenLearn – which also has inexperienced adult learners as a core audience. Similarly, learners may not have found the course themselves, but were encouraged/persuaded by schools, colleges, and parents to visit the course through a high-profile promotion campaign. This course received a lot of publicity, hence the large numbers coming to the website, but there has not been a corresponding high number of enrolments and badges earned. *Managing my money...* therefore provides a helpful benchmark. Table 25 compares statistics for the first three months of *Managing my money...* and *Everyday Skills*. It shows that visitors to the *Everyday Skills* courses were more likely to enrol as a result of their visit by the end of month 3 compared with *Managing my money...*

Table 28. Comparison with “Managing my Money...”

Course	Month 1			Month 2			Month 3		
	unique browser visits	Enrolments	badges earned	unique browser visits	Enrolments	badges earned	unique browser visits	Enrolments	badges earned
<i>Managing my money for young adults</i>	12,106	766	20	13,776	898	25	15,889	1,047	33
<i>Everyday Maths</i>	1,527	299	23	2,993	562	60	4,789	934	112
<i>Everyday English</i>	2,410	433	12	5,857	1,117	45	9,310	1,799	76

Comparing the conversion rates of these courses (the proportion of unique browser visits compared with enrolment) we see that the *Everyday Skills* experienced a very high level of interest which translated to registration. This could be taken to mean that there is genuine demand for these courses and the promotion activities conducted by the project were effective. However, the rate of badges earned was also much higher in the *Everyday Skills* courses which indicates that many were able to maintain interest through delivery and assessment.



## III. Survey 2 (Jun-Jul 2019)

### 13. Summary

While analytic data represents the actions of all learners on *Everyday Skills* there are limits to what data patterns can tell us. A second round of survey activity was used to generate a more detailed account of learner experiences.

The second round of survey activity took place in June and July 2019. The surveys included repeat versions of some questions from Survey 1 in addition to evaluation questions routinely asked in OpenLearn evaluations. The focus was on the impact of the *Everyday Skills* courses and the experience of online and flexible delivery.

Key findings from this phase were:

- Evaluation of the *Everyday Skills* courses was overwhelmingly positive: a significant majority would recommend the course to others; said it made them want to learn; and felt that the quality of materials was appropriate
- The highest rate of attrition among those answering this survey was seen for English (Level 1) where 54% of those who attempted it did not complete (by contrast, almost two thirds (63.6%) of those who attempted Maths (Level 1) completed it)
- Where people did not complete the course, it was typically because of time and workload issues (though some thought the courses too easy or difficult)
- The impact of *Everyday Skills* on learners was measured in terms of improved confidence, improved performance in job/study, professional development and personal fulfilment.
- Most *Everyday Skills* learners (53.5%) are in work with around a quarter (27.1%) not seeking work.
- Just under two thirds (65.3%) are claiming no benefits
- Many adult learners report either having no qualifications or not knowing what their qualifications are.
- Around a third (36.8%) indicate a desire to go on to formal higher education
- Though not matched samples, confidence scores relating to English, Maths and studying skills were lower
- It's common for learners in this audience to rate themselves either consistently high or low in terms of self-confidence
- Improving job or career prospects are an important motivation for many, but less so than in Survey 1.
- Financial concerns were seen as the greatest barrier to learning, followed by lack of confidence, work-life balance and time management
- Disability was seen as the least serious barrier (including by disabled learners)
- Not knowing where to begin or lacking study skills were seen as barriers by more than half the sample.

### 13.1 Rationale & Method

It was found from Survey 1 that there was little point in having lots of separate collectors for different classes, potentially interested groups, and so on. In addition, because of the way that the link to the survey was shared by emailing learners registered for the courses directly, it was not possible to use a range of collectors. Consequently, there were some additional filter questions added to the survey to compensate for only having one collector. For instance, there were filters designed to identify learners from any of the colleges involved with the project. All questions were optional.

For Survey 2 the focus was on evaluating the OpenLearn materials, their delivery, use and impact. Several questions were taken from the questionnaire that is routinely used in evaluation of OpenLearn courses to provide possible points of triangulation or comparison. Several questions were also re-used from Survey 1 in order to align with the same variables, and to measure any possible uplift in confidence and motivation as a result of taking the courses.<sup>6</sup> In addition, some additional demographic questions were added to support the national evaluation of the Flexible Learning Fund conducted by Kantar Public.

Staff were not surveyed as part of the second round of evaluation. This was mainly due to the desire to focus on (particularly non-formal) learners, but also reflected the lower response rate of the staff survey. Impact statements from the colleges involved in the project can be found in section 19.

### 13.2 Data Collection

Survey 2 was shared by email link with learners on the OpenLearn platform who had registered for at least one of the four Everyday Skills courses (English 1; English 2; Maths 1; Maths 2). Data collection began on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and the collector was closed on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019. This was timed to encourage responses from those who had completed the *Everyday Skills* courses. The JISC Online Surveys platform was again used to collect the data. There were 131 recorded responses. Two of these were blank/unusable, giving a sample of N=129.

## 14. Learner Demographics

### Age

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the populations who participated in Survey 1 and Survey 2 were not matched, and any generalizable claims about the impact of the course materials on learners should be carefully qualified. However, learners who used the same participation code for Survey 1 and Survey 2 can be assumed to be part of a consistent cohort.



Table 29. Age distribution (Survey 2, n=129)

Age	Responses	%
12-17 years	3	2.3%
18-24 years	9	7%
25-34 years	18	14.1%
35-44 years	25	19.5%
45-54 years	32	25%
55-64 years	24	18.8%
65-74 years	13	10.2%
75+ years	4	3.1%

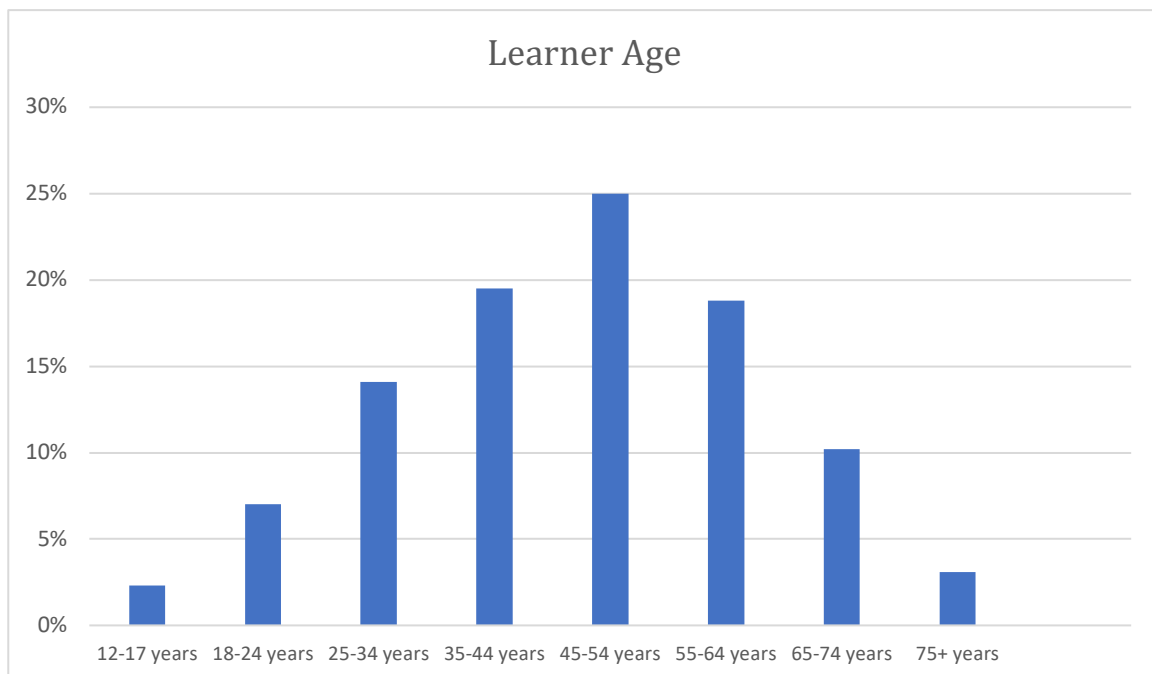


Figure 14. Distribution of Learner Ages (Survey 2, n=128)

We observe here a very similar pattern to that seen in Survey 1 (Figure 1). There is a clear standard deviation although compared with Survey 1 there were relatively more older learners.

## Gender

Table 30. Gender (Survey 2, n=127)

Gender	Responses	%
Male	43	33.9%
Female	84	66.1%
Trans	0	0%
Other	0	0%

The proportion of male learners was slightly higher in Survey 2. (In Survey 1, 76% responded 'Female'.)

## Ethnicity

Table 31. Responses by Ethnicity (Survey 2, n=120)

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	73	56.6%
Any other White background	21	16.3%
Indian	6	4.7%
African	6	4.7%
Any other Asian background	4	3.1%
Any other ethnic group	4	3.1%
Other	4	3.1%
Caribbean	2	1.6%
Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Background	2	1.6%
Irish	1	0.8%
White and Black Caribbean	1	0.8%
White and Black African	1	0.8%
White and Asian	1	0.8%
Pakistani	1	0.8%
Chinese	1	0.8%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean Background	1	0.8%

These results are highly similar to those from Survey 1 (Table 5) with a clear majority of White British and other White ethnicity alongside a diverse range of other ethnicities making up 20-30% of the sample.

## Disability

25 out of 129 respondents reported having a disability that affects their ability to work or study.



Table 32. Disabilities declared by Learners (Survey 2, n=25)

<i>Disability</i>	<i>%</i>
Learning disability	27.6%
Physical or motor disability	24.1%
Mental disability	20.7%
Other	20.7%
Neuro-cognitive disability	13.8%
Hearing disability	10.3%
Visual disability	6.9%
Developmental disability	3.4%

Conditions reported under ‘Other’ included motor neurone disease, dyslexia, and “illness”. This was a more diverse range of disabilities than reported in Survey 1, and the proportion of the sample who reported having a disability was also much higher. This is not easily explained by a significant difference in age between the two samples, and may reflect the use by disabled learners of platforms like OpenLearn.

## 15. Learner Profiles

Survey 2 asked the same questions about learners and their main occupation(s) as Survey 1.

### 15.1 Employment Status & Family Commitments

Table 33. Learner Employment Status (Survey 2, n=129)

<i>Status</i>	<i>%</i>
Full-time employment	30.2%
Part-time employment (16-30 hours/week)	17.1%
Part-time employment (1-15 hours/week)	6.2%
Seeking employment	19.4%
Not seeking employment	27.1%

The part-time category was split into two for this survey as a way of accommodating a request from the national evaluators. The data suggests that most of those working part time are working more than 16 hours and some may be close to full-time hours.

A much higher proportion of this sample reported that they are not currently seeking work compared with Survey 1 (11.6%). This could reflect the higher proportion of disabled and/or older learners in this sample. However, there was also a slightly higher proportion of those who reported actively seeking work. A smaller proportion of those who answered Survey 2 were in full time work. For Survey 1, 73% were in full-time or part-time work (see Table 7).



An additional question asked about any state support the learner might be in receipt of. It asked: “At the time you began your studies, were you claiming any of the following benefits or tax credits? Select all that apply.”

Table 34. Benefit/Tax Credit Status (Survey 2, n=124)

Status	f	%
No benefits	79	65.3%
Universal Credit	14	11.6%
Other	12	9.9%
Don't know	8	6.6%
Working Tax Credit	6	5%
Employment & Support Allowance	5	4.1%
Job Seekers Allowance	0	0.0%

Approximately 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the sample answered ‘Other’ or ‘Don’t know’. Some of this may reflect confusion with the system of benefits offered. Answers given under ‘Other’ included PIP, income support, housing benefit, pension and ‘no comment’.

Approximately 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the sample is in work and not claiming benefits of any kind. Note that in Table 31, 53.5% said that they were in either full-time or part-time work. Taken together this may suggest that there are some learners who are neither working nor claiming benefits.

27.3% (n=35) reported having a child under 16 who lives with them in their household. Conversely, 72.7% (n=93) reported that they did not live with a child. Respondents were also asked whether they had additional caring responsibilities for an immediate family member or close relative. 12.5% (n=16) reported that they did while the remaining 87.5% (n=112) said that they did not.



## 15.2 Existing Qualifications

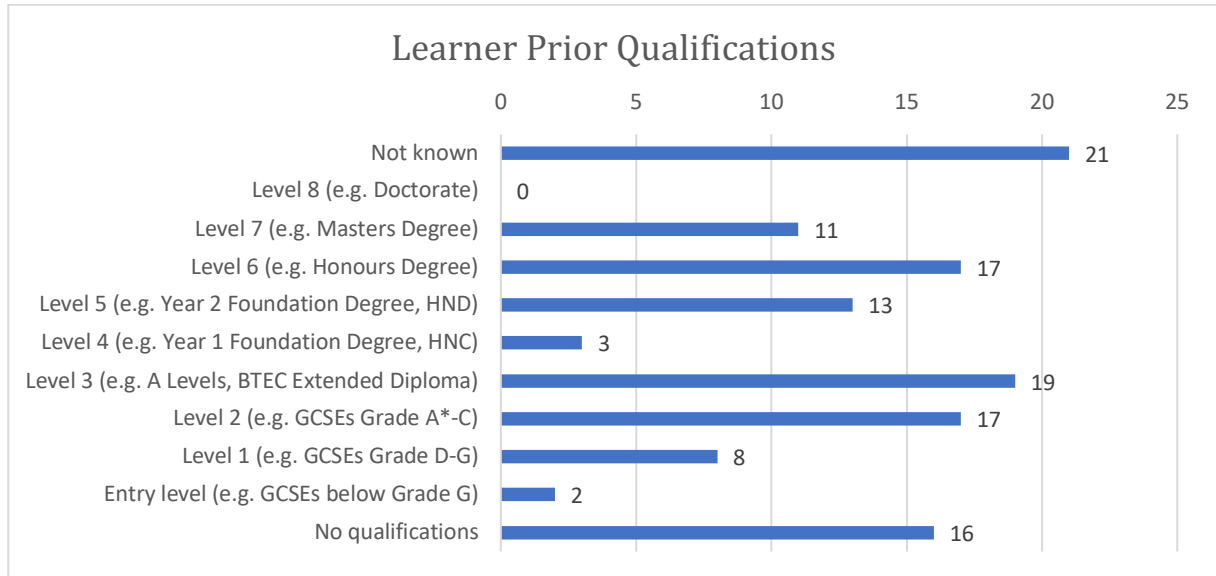


Figure 15. Learner Prior Qualification (Survey 2, n=127)

The pattern was quite similar to Survey 1, with some postgraduate qualifications and most having a GCSE (or equivalent). The main difference observed is the greater number of people reporting that they either had no qualifications or did not know what their qualifications were. Around a third of the sample (34.6%) reported having a prior qualification at degree level or above (Levels 4-8).

Figure 16 shows the situation of *Everyday Skills* learners with respect to formal study.

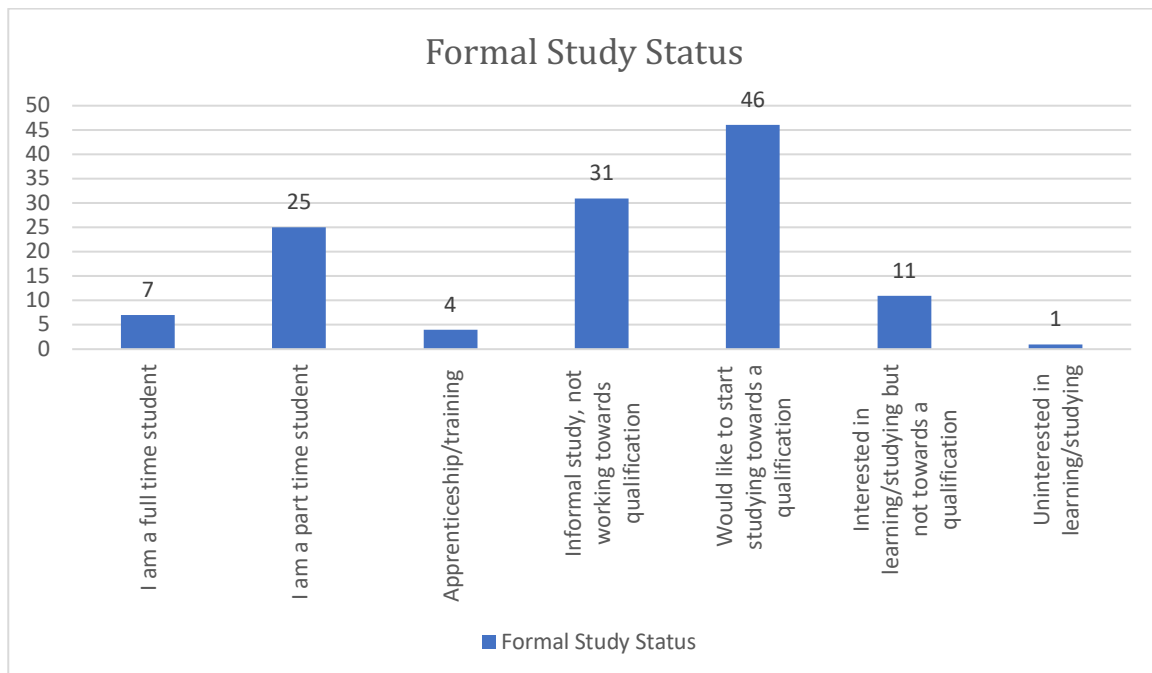


Figure 16. Formal Study Status (Survey 2, n=125)





Just over a third of the responses (36.8%) indicate a desire to go on to formal study – this was the most popular response. There were proportionately fewer part-time students and more informal learners compared with Survey 1 (see Fig. 3). Only a small number (n=12) expressed no interest in formal study.

## 16. Learner Confidence

Likert scales were again used to obtain a measurement of learner confidence with different aspects of the courses and learning in general.

### 16.1 Confidence with English

Table 35. Learner Confidence (English) (Survey 2, n=128)

<i>Reading</i>	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Writing</i>
8.0	7.4	8.0	7.0

Scores are again ranked on a scale where 1 indicates least confidence and 10 greatest confidence. The pattern observed is similar to Survey 1 with participants showing the least confidence about writing, though there are two significant differences. Firstly, average scores overall are lower (with the exception of Understanding) by between 0.3 and 0.7 points. Secondly, there seemed to be less confidence with speaking in Survey 2. This might partly be explained by the online nature of these learners.

While we need to be careful about generalizing between the two sample groups for Survey 1 and Survey 2, it is noteworthy that those who had taken the *Everyday Skills* course tended to report less confidence with English than those who had only just begun to use the materials. As noted in §3.1, people tended to be quite confident. It could be that learning more about what is required for formal study has the somewhat perverse effect of reducing confidence (or perhaps identifying overconfidence) though more data would be needed to substantiate this adequately.



## 16.2 Confidence with mathematics

Table 36. Learner Confidence (mathematics) (Survey 2, n=128)

	<i>Confidence</i>
Addition & subtraction	8.0
Multiplication & division	7.6
Understanding information like temperature, size, volume, weight	7.4
Understanding information like temperature, size, volume, weight	7.4
Using maths to solve real-world problems	7.1
Understanding mathematical information and symbols	7.0
Converting units (e.g. currency exchange)	7.0
Working with measurements like height, width, length	7.0
Double checking someone else's calculations	6.9
Using mathematical formulas/algebra	5.8

Scores here were quite similar to those from Survey 1, with less confidence associated with more abstract mathematical operations and checking the work of others.

It should be noted that people tended to express a similar level of confidence across all tasks. For instance, if they scored themselves highly on tasks relating to English they were also likely to score themselves highly for a Maths task. There were quite a few examples where respondents rated themselves a “10” across the board, for instance. Obviously, this has an inflationary effect on average scores, though around 80% of people tended to rate themselves an 8 or higher for most things. As noted in §3.2, this high level of confidence might be surprising considering these are learners from basic functional courses. Although the samples from Survey 1 and Survey 2 are different, we might expect to see some improvement in confidence once the courses have been taken. If anything, we see slightly lower measurements. This could be taken to suggest that inexperienced learners become less confident when exposed to course materials that challenge them in some way. However, we should also bear in mind that the *Everyday Skills* courses are quite short: only 48 hours of planned activity each.

## 16.3 Confidence with Learning Skills

Table 37. Learner Confidence (Survey 2, n=129)

	<i>Confidence</i>
Ability to learn new skills	7.8
Respond to new challenges	7.5
Self-management	7.5
Using technology	7.5
Solve new problems	7.3
Professional development	7.2
Deal with social situations or challenging behaviour	7.1
Academic study	7.1



The ranking here is the same as in Table 14 with the exception that those using the OpenLearn platform expressed a proportionately higher confidence in technology use. However, participants in Survey 2 tended to express less confidence by up to 0.6 points. Academic study was once again the lowest measurement, though this time joined by difficulty with social situations or challenging behaviour. Again, there were some learners who rated their own skills very highly with high scores across the board and some who lack confidence in all areas. It was rare to see someone offer an assessment of their own skills which assigned very different scores to different elements.

## 17. Technology Use

### 17.1 Confidence with Technology

Table 38. Learner Technology Confidence (Survey 2, n=124)

	<i>Confidence</i>
Internet connection	8.3
Desktop computer	8.1
Tablet computer	7.9
Laptop computer	7.9
Smartphone	7.7
Wireless network	7.7
Social media	7.2

We see a quite similar ranking to the data in Survey 1, though these scores tended to be consistently lower by 0.3-0.8. It was once again quite common for responses to reflect either a higher or lower level of confidence across everything. Social media was again the area with least confidence expressed.



## 17.2 Access to Technology

Table 39. Learner access to technology (Survey 2)

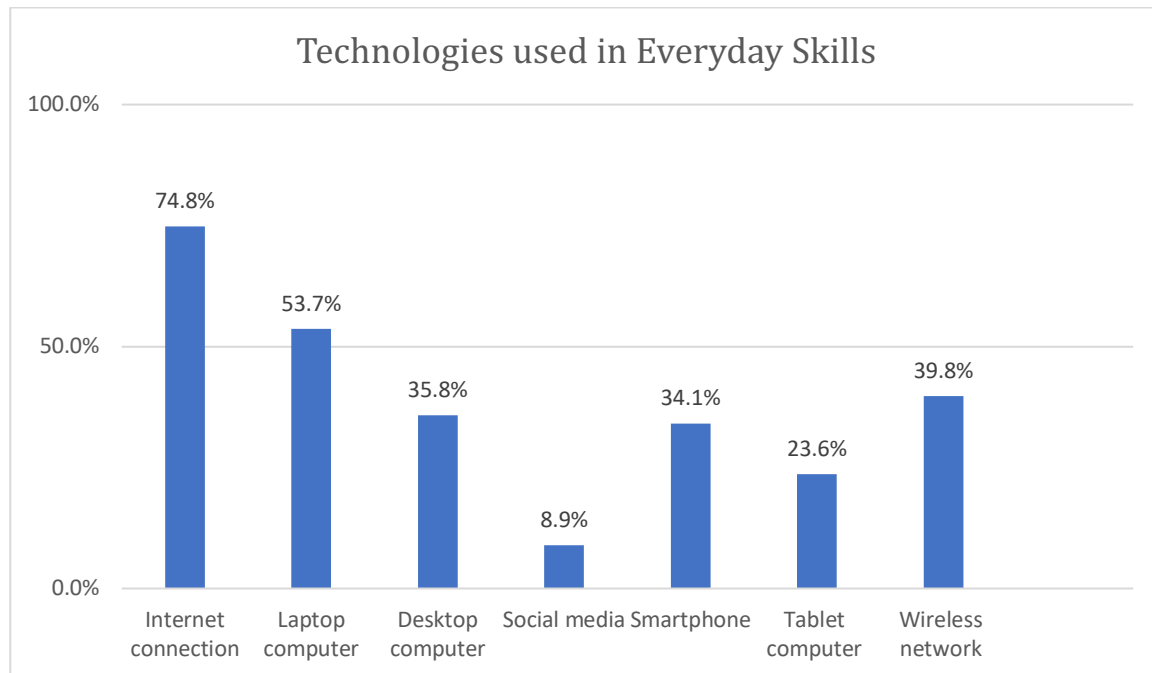
	<i>I have access frequently</i>	<i>I have access, but not all the time</i>	<i>I have very limited access</i>	<i>I have no access</i>	
Internet connection	82.2%	8.5%	6.2%	3.1%	n=129
Laptop computer	62.2%	15.7%	9.4%	12.6%	n=127
Desktop computer	55.6%	14.3%	9.5%	20.6%	n=126
Social media	68%	16.4%	7%	8.6%	n=126
Smartphone	77.5%	6.2%	4.7%	11.6%	n=129
Tablet computer	53.9%	14.8%	7.8%	23.4%	n=128
Wireless network	68.5%	11.8%	7.9%	11.8%	n=127

## 17.3 Technology use in *Everyday Skills*

In Survey 1 we found that around 10% of respondents did not have regular access to the Internet. Since Survey 2 was distributed online we had even less chance of hearing from excluded or marginalized learners. Survey 2 – answered from the perspective of having completed some part of *Everyday Skills* – asked which technologies were used in the course of studies.



Table 40. Technology Use (Survey 2, n=123)



Given that the presentation of materials on OpenLearn is online, we might have expected a higher proportion of learners with Internet access. (Some may have interpreted this as an ethernet connection compared with the 'wireless network' option.)

Just over half of learners used a laptop to connect, making it the most popular device, with a similar number of both desktop and smartphone users. More than a third of users learn with their smartphone, highlighting the importance of presenting materials that can be accessed in this way.

## 18. Motivations and Barriers

### 18.1 Motivations

Learners were invited to share their primary motivation for studying. Most reported that they were studying to improve career prospects, though there were several answers with a similar rating. More than a third said that they were learning for personal enjoyment or a sense of achievement. One fifth are interested in formal higher education.

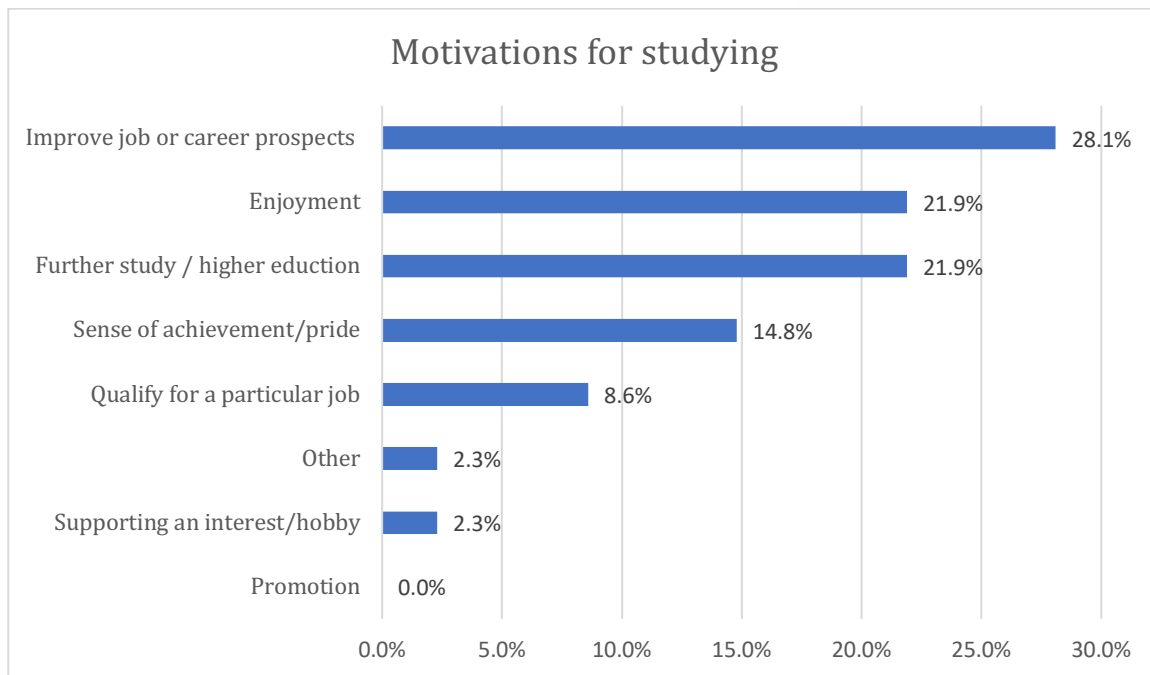


Figure 17. Learner Motivation (Survey 2, n=128)

There is a wider range here than we saw in the answers for Survey 1, which were predominantly career focused (especially in the case of staff perceptions – see Tables 8 & 21). It’s possible that after taking *Everyday Skills* learners have a wider sense of possibility and more self-confidence, but more data would be needed to substantiate this.

Responses received under “Other”:

- *It is a requirement for apprenticeship programmes. I left school 35 years ago and have managed fine with my maths which I learnt at school so I am not happy to have to do a maths test after all this time.*
- *I want to improve my self esteem and confidence*
- *I refer people for development to this course*

## 18.2 Barriers to Learning

Table 41 describes learner perceptions of the barriers to their own learning.

Table 41. Learner perceptions of barriers to learning (Survey 2)

	<i>Not an issue for me</i>	<i>Some relevance</i>	<i>It causes me problems</i>	<i>Significant issues</i>	<i>Major barrier to my learning</i>	
Access to technology	94	19	5	3	2	n=123
Access to Internet	104	8	4	4	2	n=122



Caring or family commitments	62	33	9	14	7	n=125
Disability	96	8	12	4	1	n=121
Fear of failure	51	36	16	8	10	n=121
Financial concerns	29	41	16	17	18	n=121
Lack of confidence	39	42	22	16	5	n=124
Lack of study skills	46	42	18	10	7	n=123
Lack of technology skills	76	22	9	10	4	n=121
Language and communication	71	30	12	2	7	n=122
Not knowing where to begin	47	43	17	6	9	n=122
Pressure from others	87	22	8	2	2	n=121
Social interactions	72	29	11	4	3	n=119
Time management	49	34	18	14	8	n=123
Work/life balance	48	35	15	13	11	n=122

Applying the same weighting to reported barriers used in §5, the following picture emerges:

- Financial concerns were perceived as the greatest barriers to learning (weighted 288)
- The next greatest barrier was lack of confidence (weighted 239) followed by work/life balance (222) and time management (218)
- The least important barriers were access to Internet (weighted 54), disability (73) and access to technology (75)
- Financial concerns were most commonly reported as constituting the greatest barrier
- Disability was on the whole not considered to be a major barrier to learning – including by those who reported a disability
- The most often reported barriers focused on developing an environment where they can learn rather than issues with having the appropriate skills and confidence to learn. However, there were significant numbers for whom fear of failure and/or lack of confidence are real issues
- Not knowing where to begin or lacking the requisite studying skills was considered a barrier at some level to more than half the sample
- Where people have caring commitments, these are likely to have significant impact
- Internet access was considered the least significant barrier, though this is no doubt influenced by the online administration of the survey



As part of this question, respondents were invited to describe their own learning, the challenges they face and how they can best be supported. Their responses are organised by theme.

### **Communication and Confidence**

- *I was born and raised in Japan so I'm not good at English very much. I am interested in learning but that is my barrier.*
- *Good communication*
- *I'm not worried about not succeeding as I really have nothing accept personal achievement at stake.*
- *I would like to go as far as is possible, with no limitations to what I can achieve-Age not withstanding ???*
- *I have only been having a go at the free learning so some of my answers are not significant*

### **Professional Development Pathways**

- *A diploma in mathematics which gives me the right to teach Maths*
- *I have been studied in South Africa GCSE and I did my Diploma.I have now been almost 15years in UK staying, but to date I have still not achieved my goal. I had worked for NHS hospital for 9 years and another 2 years in community as HCA and 4th year at present and I am still trying to enrol in university to do my nursing degree. From 2009 did NVG2 but the funding stopped,then again trying to do my foundation degree in nursing but the University still wants me to have Functional Skill Entry Level 1 and 2 English and Maths . Its been 2 years now that I enrolled with LearnDirect only to finish the Level 1 and 2 Maths then it was assured that I will finish my cause by February but it shut down . So it is a dead end. Its like saying that I just got so much skill and experience that I still cant get my Level 2 English certificate to enter university so many years down the drain . I feel very dishearten and yet I am doing the job with confidence.*
- *I have an NVQ 3 in care I would like to go further but as I work nights I am told that I cant be a senior carer I would have to work days but sometimes help with grandchildren*
- *Sometimes assumptions are made on prior knowledge, more practice and feedback needed. More specific office-based skills like excel, word etc, would be extremely useful.*
- *I am always interested in developing my skills and have some like this that provide the flexibility to learn around my family. My main interest was research and I have referred many clients for different reason onto this course for many reason but the ones that seem consistent are time, travel costs, improving English whilst in work and not being able to access college provisions due to nationality, childcare and finance - this has been a great success with the clients I have spoken to and I am pleased to see that the college is finally doing an initial assessment, however it is still unclear if you can access the exam without having a lessons at the college as people find it difficult to access and this can be the deciding factor as to why people are not approaching Bedford College for the accreditation.*





### **Self-directed Study**

- *I don't know what can I really study*
- *I find it hard to concentrate*
- *I take too many notes*
- *Love the fact that you can study, with feedback, and widen your horizons in your own time.*
- *Once I learn the skills required to learn effectively, I'm confident I'll reach my goal.*
- *On occasion balancing a busy work life with study was challenging. Perhaps more opportunity to meet with a tutor at the local college would have been beneficial*

### **Platform Issues**

- *I find some of the quizzes a bit prescriptive. If you don't give the exact answer in the exact words you get told it is incorrect even when it isn't. I have also encountered a couple of situations where the answer I selected was deemed incorrect but when I had run out of chances and the answer came up on screen it was once of those I had tried to select!*
- *I find punctuation a bit of a challenge during this course. Also it would have been nice to have an audio version of this course. Full access on smartphone to hear audioscripts would have been helpful*
- *Not having a way to do the speaking parts*
- *Peer to peer assessments are something I dislike and I quit course for this*
- *There are several reasons, main is I want to learn and being assessed by someone at about same level of knowledge or lower is just not acceptable. Second major reason is I don't want to be streamlined. I don't care if others agree with me or not. I am not interested in communicating with peers at all.*
- *Its is a good course but sometimes the quiz does not give u a second chance to correct yourself, the system is faulty*

### **Time and Money**

- *I would like to learn as much as I can and using my time better to do that. My goal would be to start with Everyday Skills English and Maths then carry on learning to achive GCSE from this subjects and perhaps to keep carry on learning higher levels as I develop. Unfortunately my work does not allow me to join to study at local collages, the Open University's more flexible online course could be the solution to this problem.*
- *If only I should have a personal laptop and have access to internet so can continue the study at home as well. Finance is the problem here. I did the study at work that where I have access to internet. my aim is to get as much information and understanding out of the learning or studies to apply in my work with confidence. challenges I gave birth this year and most times spent my time with my child same time house chore.*
- *May require extra time to complete projects.*

- *Time management starts work at one finish at nine gets home around ten tiered weekends can be very challenging so many things to catch-up with that's my problem*

In this range of themes we can see clear correspondence with the issues by both learners and college staff in Survey 1. It is noteworthy that several responses propose some version of open online learning as a potential solution to their study needs (even if issues were raised about platform functionality). However, it should be recognised that many of these challenges relate to wider socioeconomic considerations. Key areas where learners might be better supported relate to study skills, confidence and communication.

### 19. Use of *Everyday Skills* by college learners

In order to identify any learners taking the survey who were registered at one of the colleges taking part in the project, a filter question was asked. 86.3% of the sample indicated that they were not. There were 5 responses from Bedford College Group, 2 from Middlesbrough College and 7 from West Herts College. These numbers were smaller than expected, and support the interpretation that the samples from Survey 1 and Survey 2 have little overlap. With a sample this small it was not possible to do meaningful analysis of the differences between colleges.

Those who indicated that they were a student at one of the colleges were asked how they had accessed *Everyday Skills*. Figure 18 shows their responses.

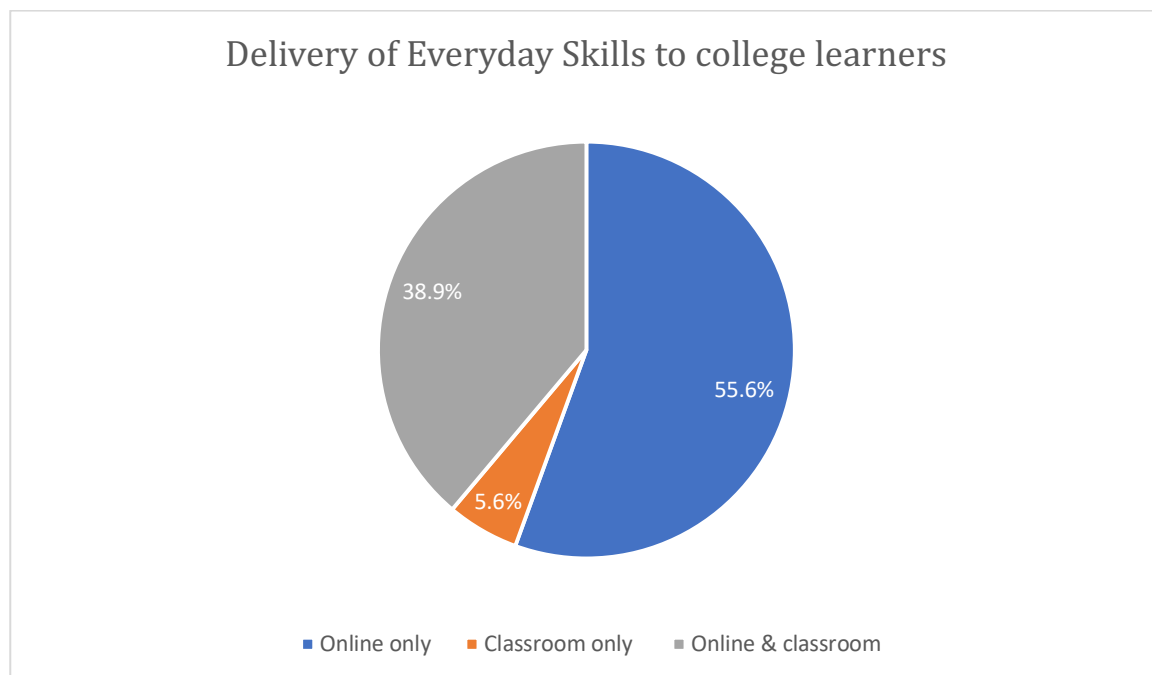


Figure 18. Delivery of *Everyday Skills* to college learners (Survey 2, n=18)

Some combination of online and classroom instruction was most common, with over half of the (small) sample experiencing the course in this way. Apart from a single



person who reported classroom instruction, the rest of the college learners were online only.

After the project had ended but before the start of the new academic year, the colleges involved in the project were asked to provide some additional evaluation data. This data is reported in sections 19.1-19.3

### 19.1 Bedford College

“At the start of the project the expectations were that collaborative working would develop a new approach to reaching potential adult learners through on-line learning opportunities; to build strong working relationships with the other colleges and the OU; to learn from the developments of the materials; and to open up avenues for adult learners to access courses and build confidence. Introducing another suite of learning options which were untried and tested requires attention during implementation. It was important to ensure that the college understood the project as a whole, not just in pockets around the departments. The departments and receptionists were all briefed about the project so that enquiries could be directed to the right place.

“Things that worked well:

- The materials were really attractive and informative as were the banners and imagery
- The IAG literature was informative and engaging for potential learners to read and follow up with accessing the on-line courses
- Collaborative working was excellent with all partners
- Understanding how the OU develops new innovative courses from concept to delivery
- Many college departments used the materials as revision opportunities for their students and entry assessments for courses
- Tutors found the courses extremely useful for students to do practice runs and revision prior to their functional skills exams
- Adult learning centres found the materials great for their learners to build confidence
- Access 2 HE tutors use the courses as a way to assess applicant levels in maths and English
- Our apprenticeship E&M delivery team are using it for learners to dip into to cover their weaker areas, being used as a revision resource
- We are signposting adults to it to revise over the summer in preparation for courses starting in September

“Things that worked less well:

- Tracking those who expressed their initial interest in the new courses
- Difficult to assess how far individuals go with online learning
- Insufficient time on the project to fully see the impact it will have in the near and far future
- It takes time for new provision to be embedded into the learner offer



“It is important to recognise that transition from distance learning into localised learning requires consideration to ensure learners are supported throughout their journey. Collaborative working between colleges helps to create a structure for sharing good practice though we need to find ways Need to find a way to share student contact details between OU and colleges in order to follow up the learners and bridge the gap into FE.”

Kay Rodger

Project Manager Schools and Colleges, Bedford College Group

[krodger@bedford.ac.uk](mailto:krodger@bedford.ac.uk)

## 19.2 Middlesbrough College

“Middlesbrough College has a strong commitment to supporting adult learners to improve their maths and English skills and develop into higher or further education and employment. Working collaboratively with other colleges and the OU was a great opportunity to create a range of online maths and English courses to encourage students to take their first steps back into education and learn at their own pace. Starting this project, our expectation was that these online courses would provide more potential adult learners with an opportunity to break down the barriers that may impact on their learning and build their confidence with maths and English.

“Positive outcomes from the project include:

- Excellent collaboration and sharing of best practice between all partners.
- Strategic marketing plan to raise the profile of the courses and gain interest from the public.
- Informative and engaging IAG package which was useful for potential new students.
- Courses used by many departments within the college during revision periods to build the confidence of students taking maths and English exams.
- Feedback from students that had completed the maths and English Everyday Skills courses was positive with many students stating that the courses were interesting, engaging and supported them to build their confidence with maths and English.
- Having access to information on students within our area that had completed Everyday Maths and English courses may have helped to ease the transition between online to college-based learning.

“There were not many issues identified during the project, but there were some concerns about our capacity to support learners. We were able to support students that came forward to enrol on a course following their completion of the OU courses but may have missed some learners that didn’t have the confidence to engage on their own.

“Overall, this was a fantastic opportunity to work with likeminded organisations to develop resources that encourage adults, who may not have engaged with education for a number of years, to build their confidence and start their journey to better English and maths skills.”



Kate Burgess  
English and Maths Manager, Middlesbrough College  
[kn.burgess@mbro.ac.uk](mailto:kn.burgess@mbro.ac.uk)

### 19.3 West Herts College

“West Herts College became interested in Bringing Learning to Life after observing that adult learners often experience barriers to progression with their careers and further or higher education due to lack of English and maths qualifications, especially at level 2. Online learning enabled motivated learners to achieve qualifications at their own pace and outside of our timetabled classroom delivery from September to June which requires regular weekly attendance at College.

“The expectations were that this would provide a route to engaging with more adult learners, employers, HE institutions; and supporting adult learners get a place at university and enter/achieve apprenticeships.

There were 105 enrolments on the 4 Functional Skills qualifications. Some of these learners were multiple enrolments, i.e. the same learner either progressing from one level to the next or taking maths and English qualifications. Learners wanting to enrol onto the funded qualifications rather than complete informal learning had to complete initial assessments in college and achieve at least 60% in their more in-depth diagnostic at the level they wanted to take the course/exam.

- 73 enrolments were as result of attending maths and English assessments in college.
- 32 enrolments were as a result of learners achieving the OU badge and then booking to sit the exam.
- An additional 82 learners completed assessments and diagnostics but did not achieve the level required to work towards the exams. They were referred to the OU’s informal learning route. Of these learners 60% had English as their second language. A number were referred to the College’s classroom-based ESOL courses as online learning was not suitable as their starting point was Entry 1, Entry 2 or Entry 3 level.

Table 42. Outcomes for West Herts College

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Enrolments</i>	<i>Passes</i>	<i>Pass %</i>
English Level 1	20	6	30%
English Level 2	24	12	50%
Maths Level 1	30	11	37%
Maths Level 2	31	19	61%
	105	48	46%



“Things we felt worked well included:

- The translation of the written materials by our maths level 2 author to OpenLearn was first-rate.
- The support and communications by all OU staff and designers was brilliant.
- The use of videos and cartoons brought the materials to life in an engaging way.
- We used ForSkills Initial assessments and diagnostics and these worked well to screen all potential learners and ensure their skills were at the right starting point for the courses and exams.

“Things that worked less well:

- Some learners retook their English exams up to 4 times without increasing their grade. The most challenging exam was English writing and learners wanted more feedback on their work so they could improve. However the online courses were unable to provide this tailored feedback.
- The end of funding for the project just as it got going was disappointing for everyone. There is no other route available in England for adults to be able to achieve level 2 English and maths qualifications quickly and free of charge.
- The lead in time from our initial publicity in January to availability of the level 2 courses in April was too long. In future, we would not advertise the level 2 courses until the month before they were live.

“West Herts College has been very proud to be partnered with the Open University and the work we have done together to develop the online course materials. This project has most definitely filled a gap in the market for adults to achieve English and maths Functional Skills qualifications at levels 1 and 2 free of charge. An individual example of success in the project is provided below.

“We genuinely hope that more funding will become available so we can update the materials in line with the new Functional Skills syllabus and continue to offer this training solution to adult learners especially as we know that the demand is high.”

Louise Thurston

Associate Director – Employer Engagement, West Herts College

[Louise.thurston@westherts.ac.uk](mailto:Louise.thurston@westherts.ac.uk)



In March 2019, Angela Taylor, an adult social care worker, was offered by her employer the opportunity to start an apprenticeship at Birmingham City University (BCU) in September 2019. She needed functional skills in Math and English at level 2, the equivalent to the GCSE grade C in order to be considered for the course. Through the scheme, she was able to study the OU courses through West Herts College.

“I contacted West Herts College who explained the online learning with The Open University and themselves. Where the exams would be sat, would be the quickest way to achieve the exams required for September 2019.

“I thought this was perfect for my circumstances, as I work full time and could not commit to set times each week, this way I could complete the online course at my own pace and time allowing. I attended Watford Campus to sit a competency test to see which level I could study at, fortunately I could start at level 2 (which was needed). I started my online learning, to help myself I completed level 1 and level 2 in both maths and English, just to help me get back into the swing of learning again, as it had been over 30 years since I was in formal education. When I had completed the level 2, I booked my exams via email with West Herts College.

“There were many dates and different venues to choose from to try and accommodate all students. I passed my maths, reading English and speaking and listening parts on my first attempt. However, the writing part did not come so easily. Finally, after my 3rd attempt I received the congratulations email. The results of all the exams were provided very quickly, within the week for the English and within 10 days for the maths. I can now start my University degree at BCU in September. I have recommended these courses to friends and family members as I feel they are invaluable for people that want to progress in their careers and do not have the relevant GCSE's.”

(Reproduced from <https://www.fenews.co.uk/press-releases/32995-open-university-and-colleges-extend-functionalskills-partnership-to-provide-sector-specific-versions-of-courses>)





## 20. Evaluation of *Everyday Skills*

This section provides an evaluation of the *Everyday Skills* courses in terms of

### 20.1 Courses studied

The Survey 2 cohort was asked which courses they had completed. The highest completion rate was for Everyday Maths (1) which correlates with the OpenLearn analytics showing that Maths learners were more likely to be awarded a badge.

Table 43. Completion rates for *Everyday Skills* (Survey 2)

	<i>Did not study</i>	<i>Studied but did not complete</i>	<i>Completed</i>	
Everyday English (1)	34.7%	35.7%	29.6%	n=98
Everyday English (2)	53.8%	20%	26.3%	n=80
Everyday Maths (1)	31.2%	23.7%	45.2%	n=93
Everyday Maths (2)	47.7%	14%	38.4%	n=86
Everyday Maths (1) (Wales)	87.9%	3.4%	8.6%	n=58
Everyday Maths (2) (Wales)	94.6%	1.8%	3.6%	n=56

Learners on the Wales presentation were much more likely to complete a course they attempted (though the sample was rather small). There were quite a few gaps in the data here.

### 20.2 Course Pathways & Retention

There were 11 people who had completed levels 1 and 2 for both Maths and English. 10 people completed levels 1 and 2 for English without attempting the Maths courses. 8 people completed level 1 in both Maths and English (2 of whom went on to complete level 2 in Maths). A further 20 people studied level 1 Maths (again, 12 went on to complete level 2).

The highest attrition rate was seen for level 1 English, where 54% of those who attempted it did not complete the course. However, if a learner progressed to level 2 their chances of completing get much stronger.

Almost two thirds (63.6%) of this cohort who attempted level 1 Maths completed it, and one third (34.8%) completed level 2 as well. One third of those who attempted level 1 Maths did not complete the course. 60% of those who attempted level 2 Maths completed the course.

Thirteen people indicated that they had not studied *Everyday Skills* at all, yet the invitation to participate was only sent to people who had enrolled. It is open to interpretation whether this constitutes an unsuccessful attempt to take the course or a lack of time to engage with the materials.





Those who reported an incomplete course attempt were asked about the reasons why they might have struggled.

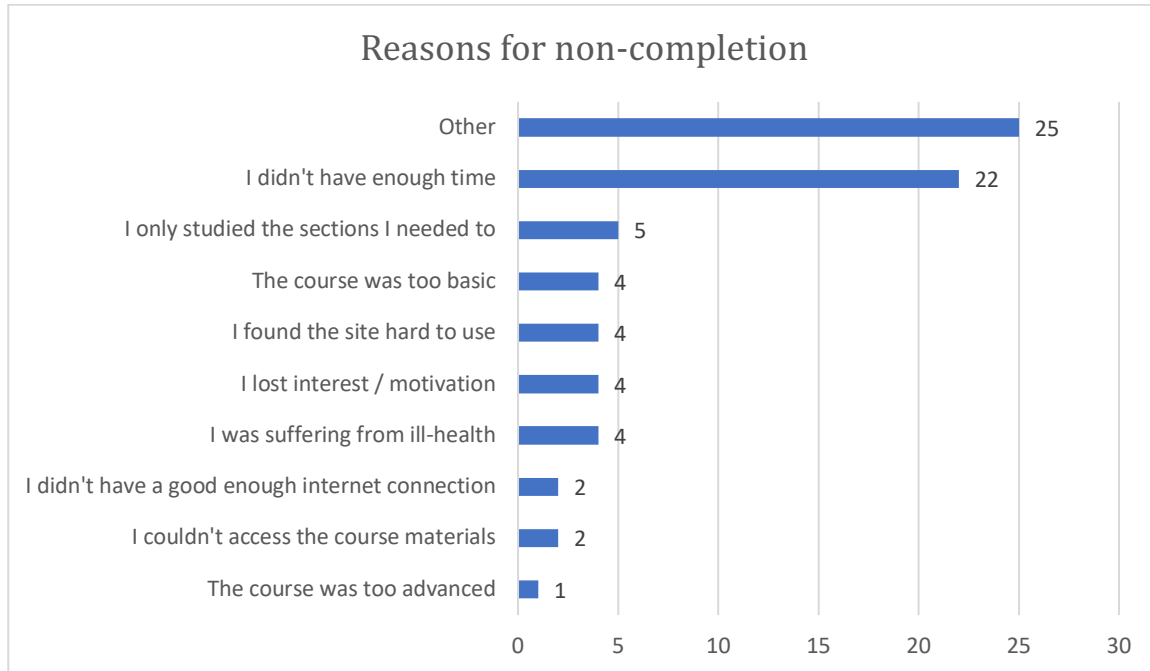


Figure 19. Reasons for non-completion of an Everyday Skills course (Survey 2, n=73)

Lack of time and targeted learning were the two most cited reasons (apart from 'Other'). Some users also thought the materials were too basic or the site hard to use. Under 'Other' 12 said that they were still taking the course and intended to finish it. Several responses stated that they had some time pressures, often relating to family responsibilities (such as bereavement or a new birth). Some users suggested that financial pressures or personal issues had impacted their study.

Other comments of interest:

- *Unable to select page required for exam/verification content*
- *I wanted to start from the English 1 hence I did not complete English 2*
- *I forgot about the course and how I accessed it*
- *Using as support to class room maths*
- *With West Herts Campus Doing Level 1 and 2 Functional skill English*

With respect the content and impact of the *Everyday Skills* courses, two questions were asked. The first re-used some questions asked as part of the standardised OpenLearn course evaluation rubric. This was intended to measure satisfaction with the learning experience. The second focuses more on the impact of the *Everyday Skills* courses and re-used categories from Survey 1 (§7).

### 20.3 Learning Experience

Participants were invited to express agreement/disagreement with evaluation statements using a 5-point Likert scale. Each of the statements outlines a positive

element, such as recommending the course to others, or finding the workload manageable. Responses are shown below in Figure 20.

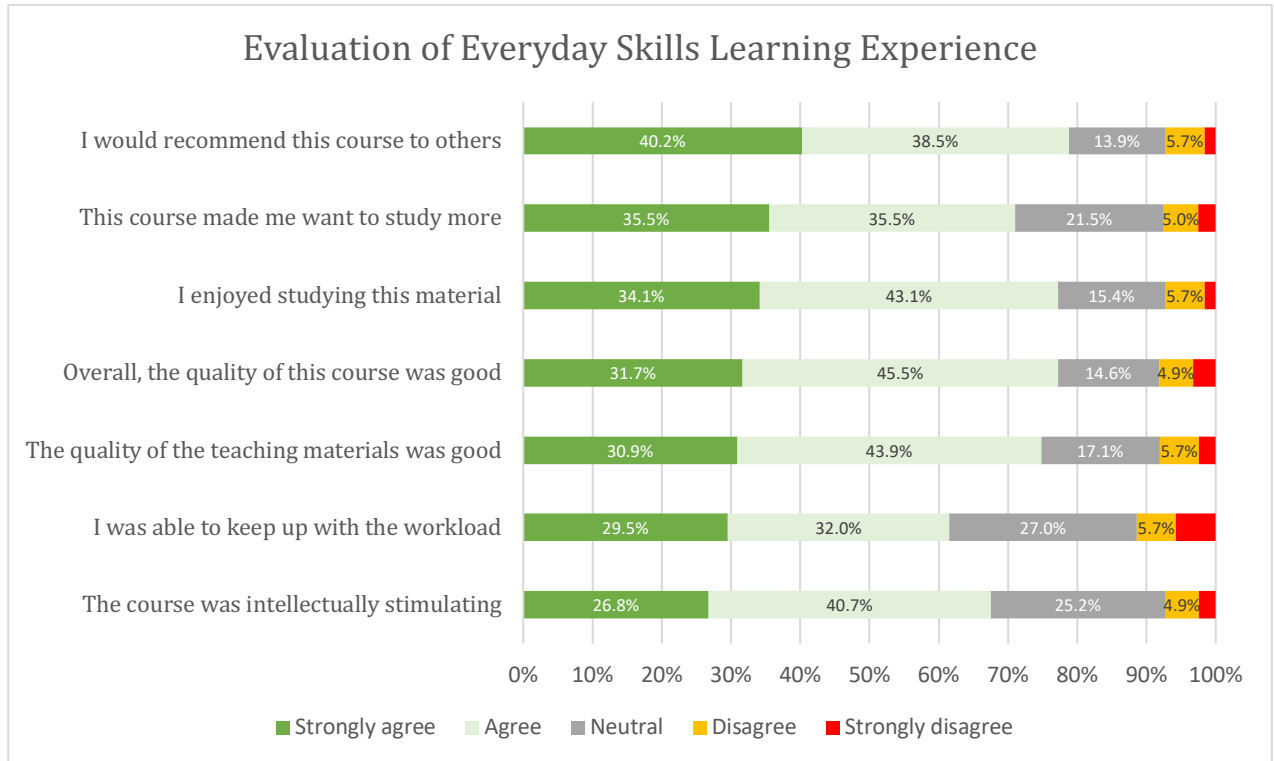


Figure 20. Evaluation of Learning Experience (Survey 22, n=122)

Positive sentiment (shown here in lighter and darker green) was the most common response. ‘Agree’ was the most common option chosen in all cases except for where it tied with ‘Strongly agree’. Where people selected ‘Strongly agree’ then tended to choose this option across the board. Conversely, most of the ‘Strongly disagree’ scores came from the same small group of people who scored everything consistently low. These learners did not leave much commentary but there seems to be a suggestion that the materials they encountered were considered either too easy or too difficult.

Strongest agreement related to recommending the course to others, which is a good indicator of quality. Overall these scores constitute an endorsement for key aspirations of *Everyday Skills*, and suggest that the level is pitched correctly for most of the intended audience.

The area where there was least agreement was keeping up with the workload. People who selected ‘Strongly disagree’ here also referred to a lack of time in their comments (§20.2). This was also the area where there was most neutrality.

There was least strong agreement with the proposition that the course was intellectually stimulating (although 67.5% agreed or strongly agreed).

## 20.4 Impact

Finally, respondents were asked about the impact of *Everyday Skills* on their own lives. The categories here corresponded with those used in §7. The original intention was to try to measure changes in these categories after the course presentation(s). There were insufficient numbers to make up a reliable cohort between Survey 1 and Survey 2, however. Nonetheless, the data below provides an insight into the perceived impact of *Everyday Skills* on learners.

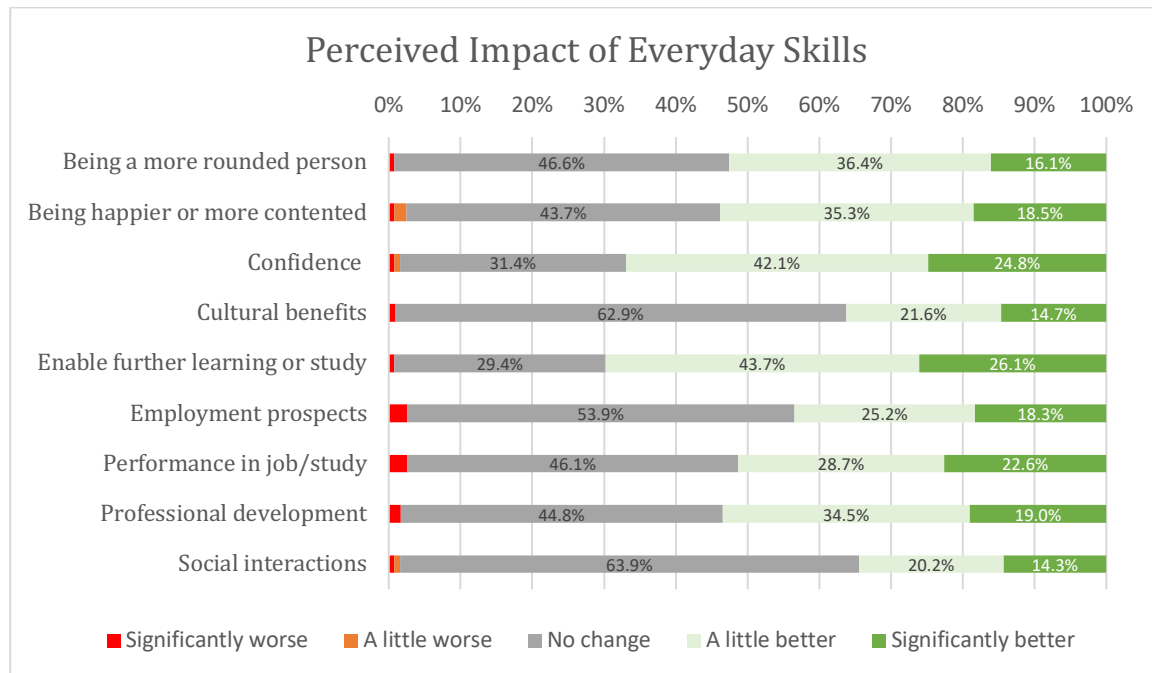


Figure 21. Perceived impact of *Everyday Skills* (Survey 2, n=119)

The most common response (n=18) was that their studies has resulted in no change across the associated variables. 5 reported 'A little better' impact across all variables. There were 14 who felt that they were significantly better across all variables. One respondent reported being significantly worse for everything. On the whole it was not common to report a negative impact. Most people reported a mix of 'No change' and 'A little better' across the categories.

The most positive sentiment here was associated with further learning or study, where 69.8% attested to some improvement. Least positive sentiment was associated with improved social interactions and cultural benefits, which arguably are longer-term expectations.

More than half the sample (51.3%) felt they had seen improved performance at work or in their studies as result of taking *Everyday Skills*. 43.5% felt they now had improved employment prospects.



The final comments (free text) indicate a range of experiences that illustrate the divergences seen in the data shown in Figure 21. There were many general comments which suggest a positive experience:

- *Enjoyed*
- *I have learnt so much in the English 1. things that I was suppose to do was doing it incorrectly when studying this I knew the correct ways. thanks.*
- *I have previously completed other free courses and really enjoyed them and have more set up waiting for me*
- *It is helping me learn a lot more*
- *Very enjoyable.*

A few comments highlighted that some felt the material was not pitched at the right level for them:

- *Didn't get far enough for it to impact significantly.*
- *I feel some of the math examples were quite basic, and would benefit future learners to have some more complex equations, to help with a better understanding. Also I feel it would of benefited myself for the exam I sat at college, or maybe a link to further practice pages on areas of subjects learners are struggling to grasp.*
- *The activities were too short, not enough to do.*
- *The materials used could of been better*

Some indicated a wish for a clearer pathway for progression. In particular there seems to have been some issues around the examination that affords recognition of learning:

- *I have completed just some free CPDs. I would like to have the possibility to get a diploma in Maths*
- *I think it was a good course. The only thing that could have maid it better, Would have been more availability to access the exam.*
- *The college administration of this course was shambolic and totally disorganised.*
- *The learning information was good but once I had completed the test I was unable to go back to revise for my test in the college, which is a few weeks after the online test. I have had to buy a book so that I can prepare for the test, which defeats the whole purpose of online learning.*
- *The exam conditions were dreadful. I only completed the course as I desperately needed it for my professional development otherwise I wouldn't have bothered with the chaos of trying to deal with the college. An unfortunate experience I would not relish to repeat*

For those whose interest in *Everyday Skills* was more leisurely the courses seem to have reassured them of their ability to understand material at this level.

- *Both courses, English and Maths, did not include any preparation for the format of the in-person exams that students might take. There could be a special optional section on that.*



- *I know that for someone with the need for the course would gain a lot for personal develop, accessing training, employment and social interaction. This however wasn't my motivation*
- *Not having studied maths well at school, this course confirmed that I could cope with everyday maths' problems*
- *The courses helped to check by basic understanding and use of maths and english*

## IV. Discussion

This section presents a concise summary of the key evaluation findings; considers their implications in relation to other research; and proposes possible elements for future studies.

### 21.1 Key findings

The central message arising from the evaluation of learning in *Bringing Learning to Life* as a whole is that learners responded highly positively to both the course materials and their flexible and open delivery. As shown in Fig. 20, 78.7% of those who took an *Everyday Skills* course would recommend it to others. Similarly, 71% reported that taking the course made them want to study more. Given that these courses are aimed at adult learners who may have been out of education for a while, these numbers are quite impressive. It is likely that iterative improvement of the course presentations could raise these numbers further. Provision of foundational course content on OpenLearn has been used to engage learners in both online, classroom and blended scenarios (though more data would be needed to meaningfully establish patterns based on primary form of access).

Data gathered about the learners on *Everyday Skills* reveal that they have diverse experiences and expectations. Survey 2 showed that more than half are already in work while a third are claiming some form of benefit. More than a third indicated a desire to go on to formal higher education, but these learners often have no qualifications (or are unsure how to navigate a pathway towards their goal). Supporting these learners in finding their pathway to skills and education – especially when they have taken a step towards formal learning – is crucial.

### Meeting Demand

Highly positive course evaluation results correlate with usage and access patterns from OpenLearn (§§10-12). Analytics show that a high proportion of those who visit the site can be expected to enrol for the course with many going on to complete and obtain recognition (see Fig. 12). Uptake for the courses was high, as evidenced in §12.2. Given that many of the target audience have not been in education for some time, this is a significant result which indicates the potential role of OpenLearn in supporting further education learners to transition into lifelong learning. The proliferation of the openly

licensed content and the web traffic coming from search engines and locations not associated with the project are a clear indication of demand.

The impact on learners from taking these courses seems high given that after only 48 hours of e-learning they were likely to agree that there was some improvement in a range of potential impacts such as confidence, ability to engage in future study, and job performance. More than half the sample (51.3%) felt they had seen improved performance at work or in their studies as result of taking *Everyday Skills*. 43.5% felt they now had improved employment prospects (Fig. 21). §20.4 shows that 69.8% of those who took an *Everyday Skills* course thought themselves more likely to go on to further study.

This is a strong endorsement of the real-life difference study of this kind can have, and should be taken as an endorsement of the quality and relevance of the course materials. The open licence on the course content and the open nature of the OpenLearn platform allowed these materials to proliferate across the country in a relatively short space of time, reaching a wide audience. In conjunction these elements suggest that the project as a whole was very successful in meeting its ambitions. This is also attested to by the impact statements received from the colleges involved in the project (§19). As the materials remain available online this impact is likely to grow well beyond the initial project network. The integration of the *Everyday Skills* content into the OpenLearn platform and the additional vocational pathways introduced (§10.1) provide several routes for learners to build on their experiences.

### Identifying Challenges

Though the approach taken to content delivery is validated by the data collected, areas where learners experience sometimes profound challenges were revealed. For the Survey 1 cohort these were work/life balance; lack of study skills; and time management. Survey 2 found a similar cluster with lack of confidence also featuring. College staff were more likely to identify lack of confidence and/or fear of failure as the most important barriers. Some learners said that the course content was not at the right level for them (though these were a clear minority).

As is common with online learning, some people revealed frustration with technical aspects of the platform. However, experiences were diverse. Others (especially learners with a disability) found in OpenLearn a great opportunity to access learning in a way that suited them. An accessible and easy-to-use learning platform is essential to the success of an initiative like *Bringing Learning to Life*. While these are key features of the OpenLearn approach, it has traditionally been aimed at those interested in higher education. It might be worth considering how the offer might be adapted for learners at a more foundational level, or whether a short course on using the platform should be offered alongside the *Everyday Skills* courses.

Several comments highlighted issues in the process of college examination and frustration with administration more generally. This meant that there were learners who completed the course and wanted certification but were unable to attain it.



Streamlining the process of awarding qualifications is a vital step in strengthening the connection between study and improved job prospects. Many learners in both surveys expressed least confidence in English with respect to their ability to write (which cannot be attributed to dyslexia according to the data provided). Given that writing is so fundamental to successful study, it could be an area of focus in the future. Alternatively, assessments could be rethought in such a way as to make them less dependent on the written word.

### A Confidence Paradox?

Learners tended to express either high or low confidence in their abilities as a whole. How best to support learners in the transition to formal study in a way that does not undermine their self-confidence is complicated by some of the data that pertains to learner assessment of their own performance. Though it was an unmatched sample, it was observed that learners who had completed *Everyday Skills* tended to express lower self-confidence. It was also noted that many learners in both surveys expressed high confidence across the board.

For learners who are at a foundational level, the role of self-confidence and self-managed learning can be crucial. The expectation is typically that learners new to formal study are lacking confidence which can then be built up through pedagogical exercises. The hope was to measure higher confidence in those who had taken *Everyday Skills*. What we found instead is that learners from both surveys expressed high confidence – but lower in those who had studied the course. Though we need to be careful here (see Limitations) this is a finding of interest. It could be that adult learners genuinely believe they have strong skills in Maths and English but actually studying these formally leads them to realise that this can be challenging even for a native speaker or someone who regularly makes calculations in their everyday life.

In light of this it may be instructive that ‘Not knowing where to begin’ was seen as a barrier to personal success by more than half the sample. Many seem to have self-belief but lack a sense of how best to apply themselves. If learners begin with an assumption that they can easily pass a basic course should they be given the opportunity and then are challenged in this by the material engaged with, this is something that learning designers should be attentive to, especially in an unmoderated presentation of the course. One option for managing this going forward would be to regularly collect data about learner confidence throughout a presentation to see how this might change in response to different activities or tasks (see below, ‘Suggestions for future research’).

### Drivers of Completion

High rates of attrition are often observed on open online courses. In a metanalysis, Onah *et al* (2014) argued that many participants regarded as ‘dropouts’ are in fact using materials selectively to meet their own identified needs rather than following the



prescription of the course designers.<sup>7</sup> There were a few comments from learners that support this interpretation, stating that their participation in the course was quite casual, or that they simply wanted to test themselves (§20.4).

The access patterns and badges awarded on courses (Table 27) showed rates of completion for English (4%) and Maths (12%). Both of these were lower than the average OpenLearn benchmark (13%). Jordan (2015) found that completion rates for MOOCs as a whole ranged between 0.7%-52.1% with an average of 12.6%.<sup>8</sup> This implies that the Maths pass rate was fairly typical for an open course while the English pass rate was lower than might be expected. Although there was a higher level of interest in English (Figs. 11-12), Maths learners were much more likely to complete their studies and be awarded a badge. This might be explained by English learners being more casual or non-linear in their approach, but it could also reflect the presence of a barrier to interest or engagement.

However, some more recent data suggests that MOOC completion rates have generally been trending downwards since 2013. In a study of more than 12.67 million course registrations (5.63 million learners) Reich & Ruipérez-Valiente (2019) found a completion rate amongst all open online learners on the edX platform of 3.13% for 2017-2018.<sup>9</sup> A completion rate of 4% is more satisfactory against this benchmark, but further data is needed to properly understand the different factors driving success across the *Everyday Skills* courses.

## Supporting Learners

Fig. 8 showed that learners are most excited by the prospect of flexible learning where they work largely unsupported: there was a clear preference for working in this way. Additional time was considered more essential than extra support. College staff, by contrast, were likely to instead assert the importance of close support from tutors or peers.

The college staff view that students require close support is closer to the traditional model used by The Open University to support its learners. The Open University's model for supported online learning is one that has been reined over fifty years of distance education and acts as a paradigm for institutions around the world. This approach reflects a very high level of support for learners, and there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that it is a very effective approach at degree level.

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<sup>7</sup> Onah, D. F., Sinclair, J. & Boyatt, R. (2014). Dropout rates of Massive Open Online Courses: Behavioural Patterns. *6th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies*, Barcelona, Spain, 7-9 Jul 2014.  
[https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/dcs/people/research/csrmaj/daniel\\_onah\\_edulearn14.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/dcs/people/research/csrmaj/daniel_onah_edulearn14.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Jordan, K. (2015). Massive open online course completion rates revisited: Assessment, length and attrition. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 16(3).  
<https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v16i3.2112>

<sup>9</sup> Reich, J. & Ruipérez-Valiente, J. A. (2019). The MOOC pivot. *Science*, 363(6423):130-131.





Jones (2015) describes the “Supported Open Learning” (SOL) approach that was developed by The Open University (UK) for supporting distance learners at scale.<sup>10</sup>

1. Distance or Open Learning
  - a. Learning ‘in your own time’
  - b. Reading, undertaking set activities and assignments
  - c. Possibly working with others
2. Resources
  - a. Printed course materials, set books, audio and video cassettes, CD/DVD materials, home experiments, course and program web sites (previously broadcast TV programs)
3. Systematic support
  - a. A course tutor, a regional network of 13 centres, central library and technical support
  - b. Tutorial held within regions, day schools and online (e.g. languages, summer schools)

Obviously the first two aspects are accommodated in open online learning, but this level of systematic tutor support cannot necessarily be offered through a free platform like OpenLearn. However, elements could be adapted for specific purposes or course presentations. For example, if an employer or college cohort was working through materials together they could offer targeted support which was relevant to the circumstances. Colleges or college networks could decide to offer systematic support on a shared basis. Striking a balance between building the independence and confidence of learners at foundational level and giving the support they need (but don’t necessarily want) seems essential for effective engagement.

In conclusion, The Open University is in a unique position to offer oversight and expertise for online and blended learning initiatives. Working in conjunction with college partners seems to have been extremely effective for establishing a shared approach and body of knowledge. *Bringing Learning to Life* has shown that there is much potential to further engage adult learners thorough flexible, open delivery.

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<sup>10</sup> Jones, C. (2015). Openness, technologies, business models and austerity. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 40:3, 328-349, DOI: 10.1080/17439884.2015.1051307



## 21.2 Constraints

There are several constraints which should be recognised with respect to the conclusions drawn in this study.

1. *Unmatched samples*: while Surveys 1 & 2 were originally planned with the intention to facilitate comparing a consistent cohort of learners before and after their experience of *Everyday Skills*, very few people responded to both Surveys. This means that it is hard to draw any conclusions by comparing data from before and after the intervention (as is typical educational evaluation).
2. *Self-selection*: participants were under no obligation to take part and the sample was not adjusted. Survey 2 is unlikely to have included any data from learners without an internet connection (approximately 10% according to Survey 1).
3. *Lack of triangulation*: datapoints were generated through Surveys 1 & 2 as well as through the OpenLearn platform analytics. From a scientific perspective it would have been desirable to triangulate these data for individual learners, which would provide a rich description of their learning activity. At present, individual learners are not tracked in this way, not least because this level of surveillance is open to criticism.
4. *Sequencing*: when the evaluation programme was designed the *Everyday Skills* courses were not finalised. This meant it was not feasible to evaluate specific course content elements.

In the original project conception there was anticipated greater involvement in the *Bringing Learning to Life* from employers, trade unions and other professional bodies. The evaluation rubric was designed with this in mind so that comparisons might be made between staff in education and staff in other sectors. In the end the survey was not shared with these groups, whose involvement with the project ended up being different than anticipated. This data might have provided a useful point of contrast with the expectations of learners and educators. It would be entirely possible to re-use the research tools with such groups in the future.



### 21.3 Suggestions for further work

Based on the findings of this report, a number of recommendations may be made for future work in this area.

1. *Longer term measurements*: one straightforward follow-up to this research would be to repeat the evaluation annually to measure any changes in attitudes towards the learning materials of the perceived impact of *Everyday Skills*.
2. *Wider measurements*: this report uses data from learners and staff, but the instruments can be used with all kinds of employers and other stakeholders.
3. *Triangulation of learner data*: during this initial presentation of *Everyday Skills* it was not possible to track individual learners or connect survey responses to data from the virtual learning environment. However, such triangulation is possible and would give a more granular description of learner pathways. Most learners offered a codeword which could be used to connect survey responses without retaining personal information on the learner.
4. *Confidence monitoring*: given that there were observed some interesting patterns of expressed confidence, it would be interesting to monitor confidence more closely throughout the activities of a course. This could be done by taking confidence measurements at regular intervals (e.g. after a weekly assignment) and identifying patterns that emerge.
5. *Comparison of online, classroom and blended use of materials*: with a bigger sample size, meaningful comparisons could be drawn between the use of *Everyday Skills* in different contexts and pedagogies. This could involve more detailed case studies for colleges using the materials.