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Learning+Skills Council
Somerset

Somerset's Statement of Learning and Skills Needs February 2002



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Contents

Page	
Executive Summary	2
Introduction: Aims and Focus of the Statement	3
Maximising the Contribution of Education and Training to Economic Performance	3
Demography, and Economic Activity	3
Demography	3
Employment	3
Economy	4
Economic Trends and Prospects	4
Industrial Change and Predicted Long Term Skills Needs	5
Changing Nature of Jobs and Skills	5
Skills Acquisition in the Workforce, Barriers to Learning	6
Businesses' Priority Skills Needs, Shortages and Gaps	7
Basic Skills	8
Generic Skills	9
Specialist Skills	10
Young People and Learning	10
Educational Attainment at Key Stages	10
Destinations at Year 11, 12 and 13	11
Post-16 Education and Attainment	12
Young People in Employment	12
Disaffection and Social Exclusion	12
Retention of Work Based Learning Trainees	13
Encouraging Young People to Stay on in Learning	13
Adults Demand for Learning	14
Adult Skills and Qualifications Profile	14
Adult Learning/Non-Learning Participation Profile	14
Adult Barriers and Motivational Issues	15
Adult Learning and Disadvantage	15
Rurality	15
Gender	15
Third Age	16
Disabled	16
Single Parents	17
Ethnicity	17
Gypsies/Travellers	18
Ex-Offenders	18
Homelessness	18
Asylum Seekers	18
Carers	18
Summary of Issues for Disadvantaged Groups	18
Increasing Demand for Learning by Adults	19
Raising Standards	19
Quality Improvement in Post-16 Learning	19
Provider Self-Assessments	19
Development Plans and Target Setting	20
Monitoring Visits	20
Provider Performance Reviews	20
Standard Funds	20
External Inspections	20
Current Quality of Provision	20
Further Education	20
Work Based Learning	20
Lufton Manor College	21
Foxes Academy	21
Centres of Vocational Excellence	21
Progress in Standards	21
Conclusion	21
Training	21
Education and Skills	21
Participation	22
Notes	24

Executive Summary

The aim of this statement is to provide a baseline picture of the demand for skills in Somerset. It is the pilot for what will become a yearly analysis and has been produced through secondary research. Future statements will draw on specifically commissioned primary research and will be refined on the basis of feedback and future guidance.

The report covers four main areas: maximising the contribution of education and training to economic performance; young people and learning; adults' demand for learning and raising standards. In each case, it presents a review of the existing evidence base and highlights issues that are of particular significance in Somerset. At the end of the report, conclusions are drawn together covering training, education, skills and participation.

Notable findings of this first statement are as follows:

- The Somerset population has a reasonable level of educational attainment but this will need to be improved, to take advantage of future opportunities and attract high value jobs to the county.
- The overwhelming majority of skills needs result from replacement demand, with growth in new jobs only responsible for a small percentage of vacancies. In the future, there needs to be a greater emphasis on increasing the depth of knowledge about occupational and sector replacement rates.
- The major 'skills gap' concerns of Somerset employers are generic in nature, rather than sector specific. Skills gaps most frequently mentioned are in basic ICT, customer care and general communication.
- More innovative delivery may be the answer to problems with skills gaps in key sectors. Thus in enabling employers, especially SMEs, to train staff without putting undue pressure on them.
- To meet the challenge of developing a 'learning culture', the attitudes of employers, employees, the self-employed and other individuals must be changed.
- Lack of motivation and poor self esteem are asserted to be greater barriers to participation in learning than widespread supply side failure. The role of informal learning in confidence building and progression to formal provision is highlighted.
- In general the unemployed are less likely than those in work to believe they have 'good' or 'high level' skills. Raising their confidence is likely to be at least as important as providing the unemployed with sufficient opportunities to practise their skills.
- In order to respond more fully to its widening participation agenda in the future, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) must address a major lack of data on disadvantaged groups in the county.

Introduction: Aims and Focus of the Statement

This statement aims to provide a baseline picture of the current skills in Somerset, the skills needs of businesses and education and training in the county. It is the first of what will become a yearly analysis intended to assist in the strategic planning process of Somerset's Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This document is very much a pilot and has been produced through secondary research. Future statements are also likely to draw on some primary research commissioned specifically for the 'Statement of Learning and Skills Needs in Somerset'. We hope feedback and future guidance will result in refinements to develop this document into a key resource on skills within the county.

This first report will provide a baseline from which to measure Somerset LSC's progress against its objectives, and to monitor changing needs for the county. As well as providing an overview of the local situation as it stands at present the statement will act as a framework for detailed assessments on progress, and priorities for research and action plans in future years.

Comments on the content and suggestions for future improvements are invited. Please send any correspondence to Ms Anne Greaves, Research Manager, Learning and Skills Council, East Reach House, East Reach, TAUNTON, Somerset, TA1 3EN.

Maximising the Contribution of Education and Training to Economic Performance

The South West has a healthy economy and for most of the last two decades has out-performed the UK average. Somerset has shared in this success, although there are some significant variations within the county from the regional economic and education profile. Aerospace and manufacturing are significantly more important in Somerset than regionally or nationally. Agriculture, electricity, food, clothing and leather are other important sections within the county.¹ It is important to understand such characteristics of the county and how they compare to the region and the country as a whole. Such an understanding ensures plans to improve learning and embark on highly focused initiatives are linked in to the real needs of individuals and businesses within Somerset. This systematic approach will provide new projects the best chance of engaging relevant individuals and organisations and leading to successful outcomes.

Demography, and Economic Activity

Demography

Somerset's population has been growing steadily over recent years with newcomers attracted to the county for a variety of reasons, including its economic success and the quality of life it can offer. Table 1 below shows a breakdown of the population for all residents over 16 in Somerset.

Breaking these figures down into male and female, the males are slightly outnumbered at 48.4% by females at 51.6%.

When looking at figures for the South West as a whole they are similar to Somerset figures with the exception of the 50 - retirement group, 22% in Somerset compared with 19.7% regionally. In the over retirement age group the South West has 25.1%, the same figure for Somerset.

Though the workforce is growing in Somerset, the reverse can be said for younger people. For 18-24 year olds there is a net loss of people each year, predominantly as young people leave to enter high education outside the county.²

Employment

The data in Table 2 shows how the age groups breakdown into those who are economically active and those who are without a job but available to start work and actively seeking employment.

When the South West region is compared with the figures in Table 2, it is interesting to note that the economically active rate is higher in the 25-34 and 35-49 age group for the South West than for Somerset. However all other age groups are higher in Somerset than the South West. The overall claimant unemployment rate in July 2001 was low in Somerset at 1.9% with 33.0% of those being unemployed for more than 6 months.³ In Somerset the claimant count is lower than the South West in the younger age groups of 16 - 19, 20 - 24 and 25 - 34, but higher for the 35 - 49 and 50 - retirement groups.

The proportion of older men out of work has increased from one-fifth to two-fifths in Britain since 1979⁴ and this cannot have been caused solely by a number of individuals' deciding to voluntarily take early retirement. There has been a shift in labour demand away from older men. Older workers are less likely to hold educational qualifications and can be perceived as harder to retrain. Older women have not shared in the general rise in female employment.

16+ breakdown of population in Somerset	Total number	%
16 - 19	20,000	5.1
20 - 24	26,000	6.6
25 - 34	58,000	15
35 - 49	101,000	26.1
50 - retirement	85,000	22
Over retirement age	97,000	25.1

Table 1

Labour Force Survey, ONS May 2001 (c) Crown Copyright Reserved

1 Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001
 2 Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001
 3 Office for National Statistics (ONS), July 2001
 4 CASE Paper 19 (1999) The decline of employment among older people in Britain

16+ breakdown of population in Somerset	Economically active rate %	Claimant Count %
16 - 19	83.5	8
20 - 24	83.6	13.4
25 - 34	84.3	26.2
35 - 49	87.5	31.5
50 - retirement	76.9	20.8

Table 2

Labour Force Survey, ONS May 2001 (c) Crown Copyright Reserved
Claimant Count, ONS May 2001 (c) Crown Copyright ReservedR

Levels of self-employment are high in Somerset, 15.3% of the workforce is self-employed compared with 11.3% in Great Britain.⁵ Whilst Somerset has not been 'creating' as many businesses as in other parts of the country, those that do emerge have a better chance of survival than nationally or regionally.

Economy

There are 20,990 firms in Somerset, 86% of those businesses employing between 1 and 10 employees.⁶ Small businesses are an integral part of the Somerset economy with 93.9% of all firms in the county in the under 25 employee size band, which is above both the regional and national levels. The 200+ employee size band makes up 0.3% of all businesses, one of the lowest percentages in the South West behind only Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.⁷ Somerset's economy does not have a strong presence of dominant global companies. One important challenge for the county is to attract international investment and also continue to develop 'home grown' businesses.

Agriculture continues to be important and the number of problems affecting the sector has increased uncertainty in the industry. Agricultural holdings number 6,110 in Somerset⁸, a variety of farm types such as cereals, horticulture, pigs and poultry, dairy and mixed. Many agricultural holdings look to diversify in production or even different areas completely e.g. tourism.

The key growth sectors in the Somerset economy are advanced engineering, food and drink processing, packaging, storage and distribution, tourism, financial and business services and other manufacturing industries. Manufacturing specialisms in high value, high skilled areas need to continue to be nurtured.

Economic Trends and Prospects

Somerset is essentially a rural county, however the M5 motorway and main line railway services ensure the county has direct links to national markets. Underneath the rural image of the county lies a sound economic base. Somerset is well represented in most sectors and contains a well advanced high technology engineering sector, a large number of residential homes and a sizeable tourist industry. The county's other distinctive assets include high-quality secondary education (including renowned independent schools) and a tradition of innovation and industry.

Whilst hi-tech sectors account for twice the proportion of manufacturing jobs in Somerset than Great Britain as a whole, the county also has a greater proportion of jobs in the low technology sectors. So, current manufacturing employment is polarised between these two extremes. Possible areas of concern within Somerset's manufacturing industry are the high reliance on a few large employers and the percentage of the sector's employment concentrated among low-tec jobs. Even more worrying is the fact that 1993 and 1998 employment in high-tech sectors nationally increased, but fell both in the South West and Somerset.⁹

Somerset has a higher proportion of employment in manufacturing than the South West region as a whole with 21% of its workforce employed within this broad sector; these companies make products ranging from 'Sunny Delight' orange juice to high-specification helicopters. South Somerset district contains a large percentage of Somerset's manufacturing companies, with manufacturing employment in this district accounting for 30.4% of the workforce.¹⁰

Tourism has been one of the fastest growing areas of employment in the UK over the last ten years, and with Somerset situated in the heart of the West Country, this sector will remain important for the county. West Somerset is particularly dependent on tourism, although the care sector is also increasing in importance, as the area has become a popular place to retire.

Transport and distribution has become an increasingly important sector for Somerset and has helped to rejuvenate the district of Sedgemoor, with high levels of investment particularly around the M5 corridor. The sector offers both opportunities and threats to Somerset's economy. The county is the gateway to and from the far South West yet the current infrastructure within the county means outside the main towns' accessibility can be a major problem.

Taunton Deane is considered by many to be the administrative, retail and financial centre of Somerset. It is true that there has been some success in attracting regional and even national headquarters of some financial and business organisations to the town, however this sector is one very much under represented in Somerset. Many companies go to Exeter, Bristol or London for business services.

Mendip has a similar industrial mix to the county as a whole, with key industries being manufacturing, wholesale/retail,

5 ONS (Sep-Nov 2000) Labour Force Survey

6 ONS (1998) Annual Employment Survey

7 ONS, Inter-Department Business Register

8 Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1999) Agricultural Census Statistics for the UK

9 Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001

10 ONS (1998) Annual Employment Survey

education and health and social work. Tourism is also important in the area with a mixture of natural and man-made attractions.

The national recession in manufacturing and the reduction in employment within this sector has not affected Somerset as much as other parts of the country, with many local businesses appearing more able to cope with the problems. However, how long this will continue to be the case is unclear and the county is considered by many to be too reliant on traditional manufacturing, tourism and to a lesser extent agriculture where incomes have been falling fast. None of these sectors are likely to be growth markets and may well be the subject of further rationalisation.¹¹

Despite these vulnerabilities within the county's industrial mix there are also key opportunities for diversification into more high-value related areas for all three of the above sectors as well as possible development of other sectors such as ICT which will continue to experience rapid growth. To make the most of such opportunities there needs to be an increased recognition that Somerset is going to need a much better educated and trained workforce. That must involve raising aspiration levels as well as other improvements on the supply side.¹²

Industrial Change and Predicted Long Term Skills Needs

The nature of work and the skills required for all jobs has undisputedly changed forever. As reported by the Skills Task Force "the predominant impact of technological change in recent years has been to demand, certainly, a wider range and, probably, a higher level of skills from the workforce."¹³ This change is across the board and not confined to hi-tech sectors. In common with this national trend, the labour market in Somerset is expected to continue to see a growing demand for higher skill levels within occupational groups - including depth and breadth of skills as well as an increase in demand for higher level occupations.¹⁴

Somerset is expected to see employment growth of 5% (9,520 jobs) between 1998 and 2011. This is lower than the SW (17%) and UK (9%).¹⁵ Employment levels between different occupational groups show a different pattern in the county compared to the national trends. The main differences are discussed in Somerset's latest Economic Assessment:¹⁶

- Substantial increase in professional occupations, but a decline in managerial and technical staff
- Faster growth in intermediate occupations, especially sales
- Faster decline in unskilled occupations
- Contrary to the UK trends an increase in craft workers and operatives

Often when skills needs are discussed the emphasis is on growth sectors, however new jobs are only responsible for a small percentage of vacancies and therefore future skills requirements. Replacement demand is much greater than that caused by occupational expansion. (That is recruitment to replace those that are retiring or leaving the workforce for other reasons rather than to increase the size of the workforce.) Training in relevant skills may remain vital to the economy and even increase for new entrants whilst the total number of jobs demanding such skills in the economy continue to reduce.¹⁷

This is true for example in manufacturing where many current workers are near retirement age, so even though the level of overall jobs are declining (and expected to continue doing so) many appropriately skilled people will be required to fill vacancies that are occurring due to the ageing workforce and therefore the level of retirements.

Changing Nature of Jobs and Skills

The National Skills Task Force has, over the past few years, been analysing skills throughout Britain on behalf of the government and subsequently produced a number of reports on their findings. These findings can help to set the national context within which Somerset finds itself and which undoubtedly has an impact on skills issues within both the county and South West.

As the National Task Force is keen to point out in its report, for modern economies to be successful it is important that the country has a high level of skills within its workforce. The rate of technological change and ever stiffer global competition means that such skills must continue to rise and adapt quickly to meet ever changing needs and priorities. The developing countries of the world now have the skills, and much cheaper labour, to attract a large and growing number of the low value added jobs. Therefore to attract foreign investment a modern, high wage economy has to have the edge in skills suitable for high-value added jobs.

In order to meet the skills needs of these high-value added jobs there are a range of generic skills that are most sought after by employers:

- Communication and social skills
- Cognitive skills
- IT and new technology skills
- Management skills¹⁸

Whilst workforce training overall has improved throughout the UK, such progress has tended to be concentrated on those with already higher skills levels gaining new or improved skills or qualifications. As government statistics show:

"Professional workers are more than 3 times likely to receive employer funded training than are plant and machine operators. Graduates are 5 times more likely to receive job related training than those with no qualifications."¹⁹

This has got to change as the demand for lower skilled jobs across all occupations and industrial sectors are reducing. New jobs require higher levels of skills and also a broader range of skills. Yet the majority of current training programmes, education and work based training courses do not seem to be focused on the large number of adults with current low level skills that require training for these new opportunities.

The Skills Task Force found that overall levels of workforce training in the UK are now on a par with many European countries. Despite this general increase in training; less qualified workers, part-time workers and workers in smaller firms are often not given the opportunities to improve their skills that they require.

11 Gripaios, P. (Ed.) (2001) "The South West Economy" Trends and Prospects. Thirteenth Edition,

Prepared by South West Economy Centre, University of Plymouth

12 Gripaios, P. (Ed.) (2001) "The South West Economy" Trends and Prospects. Thirteenth Edition,

Prepared by South West Economy Centre, University of Plymouth. P. 52

13 Skills Task Force Research Report Page 43

14 Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001

15 Ibid

16 Ibid

17 Ibid

18 Skills Task Force Research Paper

19 ONS (1998) Labour Force Survey

These groups with therefore need to be given particular consideration when developing strategies to improve the overall skill base of employees within the UK. Based on the evidence above current training patterns are unlikely to meet the key objective of raising qualification levels of many adults with no or low level qualifications.²⁰

The South West, and more specifically Somerset, do suffer from some of the skills problems and issues identified nationally, although they also have their own specific industrial mix which brings with it more specific issues. Fortunately a wide range of material exists that can help to identify the specific nature and possible causes of skills gaps and shortages locally and possibly lead to some innovative solutions.²¹

Despite a growth in qualifications among new entrants to the workforce a large number of adults have only basic (if any) qualifications. This situation will not be easy to solve as the majority of the 32% of adult workers without a Level 2 qualification are also part of that group of one in five workers who are functionally illiterate and/or innumerate.²² The future employment prospects of this group should be a matter of great concern to the future productivity of the county as the majority of adults with low or unqualified status are in elementary occupations - which are declining in the economy.

Somerset accounts for 9% of total regional employment and output in the South West²³ - one of the smaller regions in economic terms, largely due to its rurality and lack of a large urban centre. However, the county has a broadly similar industrial mix to that of the South West. Somerset's strong sectors in terms of employment and output include four of the ten RDA priority sectors, namely: food and drink, advanced engineering, leisure and tourism and printing and packaging.²⁴ In addition to these sectors in which Somerset is doing well, of the remaining RDA priority sectors Somerset will also potentially benefit from support/promotion in 2 areas it currently seems to be missing out on in terms of firms locating and numbers employed: customer marketing services, financial services.²⁵

Findings from DTZ Piedad's research "Research on current and emerging Industrial Sectors and the Implications for Skills Development"²⁶ shows the main skills issues and changes within these four sectors.

- **Food and drink:** Suffering persistent skills gaps, especially in information and communications technology, management, environment and conservation skills.
- **Advanced Engineering:** Current mismatch between training activities and the needs of this industry have been identified.
- **Tourism and Leisure:** Persistent skills gaps and recruitment problems due to lack of people with the right type and level of generic skills. Shortage of trained chefs/cooks and waiters/waitresses are a particular problem. There are possible opportunities for the environmental sector - move farming to more environmental concerns.
- **Printing and Packaging:** Skills shortage due to the higher level and broader range of skills required by employees due to the changing technology within the industry.

Whilst the above analysis and RDA support for development of these four areas is welcomed there are many other additional sectors that are important employers within Somerset and are suffering from skills shortages. Construction and distribution are very important and growing sectors within Somerset, even if they are not regional priorities they are certainly ones for this county. Both national and local survey results indicate that in general skills gaps among existing workers are becoming less prevalent, but remain most persistent in the manufacturing sector. This may be because, with an older workforce, declining in size, it has been difficult to bring on newer skills, and to replace some craft skills. There is a definite lack of local knowledge about replacement rates within each sector and this is a vital area Somerset LSC and its partners should work on in order to predict as accurately as possible the future skills needs of Somerset's employers.

Whilst financial services are not so well developed within Somerset as in many other areas (mainly large urban centres) it is important that this area is supported and encouraged to grow on a county basis. Not only is this sector important for providing services to current business, but for a key role in encouraging inward investment for development. The financial services sector, along with construction is essential not only for the employment it provides and to ensure a healthy sectoral mix for Somerset, but because they will provide an essential underpinning with new infrastructure to enable and encourage expansion and development for all sectors.

Development of customer care and marketing, along with financial services will enable the county to compete more effectively as a base for establishment of national call centres. ICT, whilst a volatile sector will continue to show a long term growth and is very much here to stay, also along with the sectors mentioned above it will improve the county's overall infrastructure, supporting other sectors and increasing Somerset's potential for investment.

Transport and communications is again essential for adequate infrastructure development and is more important to a county that is widely spread as Somerset. Retail is expected to continue to expand but must develop the necessary customer service skills among its staff to be successful.

Skills Acquisition in the Workforce, Barriers to Learning

Undoubtedly the evidence available indicates that employers are the drivers behind most learning among the workforce. In fact the Skills Task Force reported that "workplace learning ... may constitute the only way of upgrading the skills and qualifications of many adults who have become disillusioned with formal education."²⁷

Initial indications on the attitude of employers in Somerset towards training are encouraging. The Employers Survey found that the top action of managers to improve efficiency or effectiveness in a business was reported as training staff, at 85.3% of all those questioned. The second highest response was to 'reorganise working procedures' at 71% (multiple answers allowed).²⁸ However, as there was no grading of multiple responses we do not know how many of the 85.3% put training first (or last!).

20 Skills Task Force Research Report
21 Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001
22 Skills for all: proposals for a national skills agenda final report of the national skills task force
23 DTZ on the Somerset Sub region (In Appendix 2)

24 DTZ on the Somerset Sub region (In Appendix 2)
25 (DTZ Piedad Consulting 2000) SW RDA PRIORITY SECTORS
26 DTZ on the Somerset Sub region (In Appendix 2)
27 Skills Task Force research Report Page 72
28 Somerset TEC (1999) SW TECS 1999 Employer Survey

Another positive indicator from the survey is that 50.3% of employers responding to the questionnaire said they had increased the volume of training undertaken over the last 3 years, 29.6% said level of training activity was stable, 17.3% said training levels fluctuate and only 2.3% reported decreased levels of training.²⁹

However, there are some more worrying indicators with regard to employers training habits that may indicate a less active commitment towards training than at first appears from some of the survey results. Of those employers that trained, 24% provided on-the-job training only and 15% did not undertake any training of staff in the previous year.

Even more worrying is that of the Somerset companies surveyed, whilst 725 out of the 800 companies questioned stated that they had planned for training, with 71.4% saying they had a staff review or appraisal system and 55.3% a system for evaluating training, other formal tools for promoting training and ensuring it benefits the company and the personal development of the individual as much as possible were less widely used:

- Designated training budget 32.8% (289 cases)
- Training officer 39.6% (328 cases)
- Central strategic training plan 41.9% (336 cases)

Whilst, as may be expected, larger firms were on balance likely to have any and/or all of these tools for planning training and the smallest firms the least likely, this should not just necessarily be accepted. It is true that it may not be feasible for an owner/manager with very few employees to draw up a central strategic plan or appoint a training officer, all companies could benefit from having a designated training budget. This lack of a training budget may be a major factor in small firms being the least likely to provide training when comparing propensity to train with the size of firms. There are a number of sectors where employers have shown they are least likely to train, namely: 'other services', which include recreational, cultural and sporting activities and 'other production' firms (agriculture, fishing, mining, construction and utilities).

In the 12 months previous to the 2000/01 Household Survey, 53% of economically active residents* had taken part in some type of training. Employees are significantly more likely to train than self-employed and unemployed people. Whilst not all of this training is supported by employers, a significant majority is, either financially and/or time off for training. This is likely to be a large part of the reason why employees in full time training are most likely to have undertaken some training within the last 12 months.

The attitudes to training of employees produce some surprising and worrying results. Those employed in unskilled occupations and plant and machine operatives are most likely to feel they are over qualified and least likely to undertake training, which matches closely to the broad industrial class of those employers that tend not to train. Therefore an important question to consider when trying to increase training in these areas is where is reluctance/persistence/inertia towards training coming from - is it employers, employees or a vicious circle of both agreeing and perpetuating the feeling of over qualification and lack of

training needs. This view of not requiring training is widely held to be inaccurate in the modern world, as every employee needs to continually develop his or her skills. All employers in a mature economy such as the UK's, need to look at ways to develop all processes and employee activities towards the high value knowledge and skill intensive end of the spectrum. World competition is constantly increasing and cheap labour becomes increasingly attractive when considering relocation of or part of a company's operations and in some alternative countries, such as India, the cheap labour is combined with good skills levels.

Work based learning is an important way of producing people with the skills employers need in the workplace. In Somerset, NVQ awareness is almost universal with 9 in 10 of small firms (5-10 staff) familiar with the qualification.³⁰ Almost half of employers already use them and a further 5% were planning to do so. This level of training from the employers is very positive but still leaves considerable room for improvement. Also, there is a requirement that most capable youngsters that are suited to work based learning are guided in the value of this route, to ensure the quality of candidates is maintained (if not improved) rather than be guided down a more traditional academic route by a mistaken belief that the NVQ route is not a valuable one: such an approach may also attract even more employers.

There are three sectors that are significantly less likely to train towards NVQ, namely financial and business services, 'other' services and manufacturing.³¹ This is particularly worrying when looking at the key sectors for Somerset both now and in terms of maximising the potential for developing the county into a 21st century economy that can compete with the best.

Time and cost of training are cited by both employers and individuals as major barriers to its take up according to our latest Household Survey. Broadly, therefore, the challenge in developing a 'learning culture' is very much about changing people's attitudes as well as initiatives such as:

- Attempts to increase motivation to train through promoting its proven benefits (especially financial) and relevant case studies, (e.g. SME case studies to encourage SMEs to train, not studies on big corporations).
- Widely publicised information on increased earnings.
- Finding new and innovative ways to make learning accessible to all and require shorter time commitments. For example Bite size or modular based courses to enable dipping in and out of a course, possibly leading to a qualification on completing a certain number of units.
- Mobile teaching units to take on-the-job training courses to the employer. On-line learning is likely to have a huge effect here.

Businesses' Priority Skills Needs, Shortages and Gaps

Agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, engineering and the food and drink sectors are all important sectors within Somerset. Advanced engineering is dominated by a few larger firms in specialist areas, which cannot be relied on as the recent announcement of Westland's redundancy plans highlight.

²⁹ Ibid.

* Of those questioned

³⁰ Somerset TEC (1999) SW TECS 1999 Employer Survey

³¹ Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001

Diversification is the key challenge for advanced engineering within Somerset. Manufacturing employs a huge number of people and despite constant predictions to the contrary has not declined in line with national predictions. This sector's main challenges are to move up and progress into the advanced areas where possible and deal with a huge problem of filling vacancies with suitably experienced/qualified workers due to extremely high replacement rates. The industry has an age profile heavily skewed towards workers approaching retirement age and a very poor image that deters school leavers from seeking employment and/or training in this area.

Transport, construction and ICT are important to the development of the Somerset economy, both in their ability to reduce the peripherality of the South West and as an effective support infrastructure to assist local businesses to operate effectively. Transport has been an effective and high growth sector in Somerset. The demand for growth in ICT is driven by the need to be more self-sufficient in this type of business support and the potential for employment development without the need for huge factories within the countryside and therefore 'sustainable progress.' This will help safeguard the environment for other industries such as agriculture, fishing and tourism that rely on it. It is important these new businesses are and continue to be supported through the skills of the local population. Health and social care is another important sector for Somerset, especially when considering the ageing profile of the South West and its popularity as a retirement destination. It is a sector that is suffering from extreme skills shortages and gaps and general low levels of qualification among many staff. In areas such as maintenance and health many companies look to recruit abroad rather than train in-house when these problems occur. This is not a sustainable position for Somerset companies and the county's general economy to be in and this issue needs to be addressed. Recent initiatives to encourage training and accreditation within health and social care will hopefully go a long way to solving this problem.

The significance of tourism to the region should not be forgotten. Whilst the development into activities such as business conferencing in this sector has met with some success this sector still suffers from a poor image of low pay, unsociable hours and little chance of progression. Not surprisingly this continues to result in a shortage of staff with the right skill at high enough levels. This situation has been aggravated by the fact that along with other sectors the skills required have changed, no being broader and deeper has traditionally been the case. The major shortages for tourism are ICT and management skills at a very high level of competency. Communication skills are key within the sector, especially languages as are willingness to learn, flexibility, initiative, and team working. Retail suffers from some similar skills gaps as tourism, especially when it comes to low levels of customer care skills.

Skill shortages are quoted as the main reason for recruitment difficulties, especially among high and intermediate level hard to fill vacancies (46%), other factors count for 40% - this is more pronounced with low-level skill jobs. Over half of employers (83%) who sought to recruit staff in 1999 experienced difficulty: most common for personal and protective services, craft occupations, and sales occupations.³² The most severe skill shortages among Somerset employers are reported as: ICT skills,

various interpersonal skills (communication, customer care, people management), sales and team working are also frequent problems.³³

Skills shortages are particularly severe in those industries that have a less than appealing image to young people, despite many good jobs being available within these sectors, such as engineering and food and drink. Engineering is particularly surprising when the high level of wages enjoyed by qualified engineers is considered - even taking into account some degree of unemployment probable due to fluctuations in the industry's demand.

The most frequent occupational groups to suffer from job specific skills shortages appear to be those in craft occupations and associated professional and technical operations. This is particularly worrying when looking at the key sectors that form a crucial part of the workforce in areas such as advanced engineering, food and drink manufacture, transport and construction.

Skills gaps are undoubtedly having a significant effect on businesses in Somerset. This can be demonstrated by looking closely at those firms that cited skills gaps as affecting their company in the 1999 Employer Survey. The majority of companies that said they had skills gaps that affected their company - 48.5% significantly and 30% very significantly.

The most frequently mentioned skills gaps cited by Somerset employers were related to the changing nature of work in terms of embracing and maximising new technology and needing deeper and broader skills, especially in a number of key areas. The most prolific skills gaps quoted were: basic IT, customer care and general communication skills.

Basic Skills

Low levels of literacy and numeracy have considerable impact on individuals' ability to access employment, the majority of jobs requiring basic mathematics and a large proportion of jobs requiring good communication skills. The new adult basic skills national strategy *Skills For Life*³⁴ has shown that the government places importance on improving the basic skills of adults in this country. IT abilities have an increasing vocational relevance, however literacy and numeracy are the most fundamental skills and have received particular policy attention both at national and local level.

Skills for life identified five main target groups:

- Unemployed people and benefit claimants
- Prisoners and those supervised in the community
- Public sector employees
- Low-skilled people in employment
- Other groups at risk of exclusion

In order to reach this target, the government will provide free education and training provision for basic skills or English as an additional language for all adults of working age who need it, no matter where it is or who provides it.

³² Somerset TEC (1999) SW TECs 1999 Employer Survey

³³ Ibid

³⁴ DfEE website: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/news/absstrategydocfinal.pdf>

	Literacy			Numeracy		
	Somerset		UK	Somerset		UK
	000's	%	%	000's	%	%
Mendip	13.1	23.1	24	12.9	22.6	24
Taunton Deane	12.9	23.2	24	12.8	23.0	24
Sedgemoor	13.9	23.4	24	14.0	23.6	24
South Somerset	20.0	23.1	24	19.9	23.0	24
West Somerset	4.8	30.2	24	4.0	25.3	24

Table 3

Source: Basic Skills Agency in Somerset Economic Assessment (2001) Prism Research

The Basic Skills Agency describes basic skills as "the ability to read, write and speak English and use Mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general." Data published by the Basic Skills Agency for Somerset shows that the worst levels of literacy in the county are observed in a number of West Somerset wards but West Deane in Taunton Deane also has low levels of literacy. The wards suffering from low numeracy skills differ from those for literacy - with the most severe problems evident in some of the most disadvantaged wards in Somerset, such as Hamp in Bridgwater and Halcon in Taunton. Only West Somerset has a higher proportion of residents with poor literacy and numeracy than the national average as shown in table 3 above.

John Healey, adult skills minister said "Those who lack basic literacy and numeracy skills have had very bad learning experiences in the past and they have got lives in which finding the time, on top of the motivation to learn is a very tall order." He suggested "possible tax incentives for businesses that help their employees retrain. Trade Unions could also be used to get the message to older male workers, people from ethnic minorities and other less accessible sections of the workforce."

The Skills and Learning Intelligence Module (SLIM) a component of the South West Regional Observatory will be conducting a research review into basic skills, which will perhaps aid Somerset LSC in looking at possible action plans in their commitment to raise levels.

Basic skills provision in Somerset is delivered in a variety of ways:

- 'dedicated' basic skills courses
- as part of learning support
- integrated provision into vocational programmes
- programmes for young people
- programmes for the unemployed
- workplace programmes
- trade union programmes
- learndirect
- community based
- family based programmes
- experimental pilot programmes

The role of voluntary organisations and community schools is crucial in the delivery of basic skills. All types of places, libraries, arts centres, supermarkets, sports centres, village halls or pubs could be utilised.

Somerset LSC intends to map out provision for basic skills and collect information from other organisations such as private training providers, voluntary groups, probation service, health authority and housing associations. However, as the basic skills subgroup of Somerset Learning Partnership has produced a county strategic plan that includes current provision and identifies gaps, it is hoped Somerset LSC will be able to build on this existing work rather than duplicate it. The aim is to gather quality baseline data to be able to set realistic targets for Somerset.³⁵

Generic Skills

Employers are extremely concerned about the lack of generic skills among many employees. Major skill deficiencies among staff are cited as communication skills, problem solving and "the ability to organise oneself and others within a team".³⁶ Key transferable skills are essential for employability in the modern economy so it is particularly worrying that in the latest SW Household Survey (2000), the Somerset respondents rated themselves less favourably in most skills than the South West average. Whilst this could be a confidence issue rather than factual it is still cause for concern as gaining suitable employment means convincing potential employers of skill levels. This will be impossible if people are not confident in their own ability.

People in work are more likely to believe they have 'good' or 'high level' key skills than those who are unemployed. This is likely to be through a mixture of both a lack of practising these skills on a day-to-day basis and lower general confidence levels among many unemployed people, which demonstrates the importance of providing a range of opportunities for unemployed people to improve their key skills. The skills unemployed people feel least confident in compared to employed people are IT, numeracy, leadership and problem solving.³⁷

If generic skills within the workforce are to improve, which is essential for future employability of individuals and for success for Somerset and the UK in the modern economy, more flexible training must be developed. All sectors and all size of businesses need to be included in initiatives to improve such skills and to deal with consistent improvements to quality and coping with change.

³⁵ LSC Somerset (June 2001) Basic Skills Baseline Report

³⁶ Skills Task Force Research Report, Page 35

³⁷ Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

	% of 11 year olds reaching level expected of their age in English in 2000	% of 11 year olds reaching level expected of their age in English in 1999	% of 11 year olds reaching level expected of their age in Mathematics in 2000	% of 11 year olds reaching level expected of their age in Mathematics in 1999
Taunton constituency	75	70	69	68
Bridgwater constituency	69	70	65	65
Somerton and Frome constituency	79	75	74	74
Wells constituency	77	74	75	71
Yeovil constituency	76	76	69	69
England as a whole	75	71	72	69

Table 4

Specialist Skills

Craft occupations and associate professional and technical occupations are the most frequent to suffer from internal skill gaps. Despite the trend away from skilled manual and craft employment, there remains a need to train people for such work. Employer's failure to continue attracting and training apprentices has contributed to current skills shortages and recruitment difficulties.

The growing importance of the service sector in Somerset (in particular business and financial services and tourism) will generate demand for skills such as wider user of IT, and customer care.

There is a serious shortage of skilled staff within the care sector, which has serious implications for all those who are being cared for as well as the careers of the staff. These skills shortages are particularly severe at NVQ level 3, however before this can improve significantly more care staff need help to obtain the lower level qualifications. To this end there is currently a national Level 2 initiative to improve skills in the care sector, with Somerset being given a substantial amount of money to help improve qualification levels at NVQ level 2 within its large care sector. Somerset has been involved in the Pilot Project to December 2001, totalling £60,000. From 2003 there will be a national funding stream for this initiative through the Industry Group for Care. The programme target is for 50% of care sector

employees to have achieved relevant level 2 qualifications by 2005.

Distribution is becoming a very important sector in Somerset. Further expansion of the sector, could be hampered by a shortage of adequately skilled workers to fill the vacancies, especially in the areas of HGV licences, and high level ICT skills.

The retail sector is very important within Somerset in general and more specifically within a number of key retail centres. Customer care skills are a major concern at a local level and extensive customer care training will be required to develop an adequately skilled workforce. A lack of good customer care skills is also an issue for the tourism and leisure industry, which would benefit from a major customer care initiative.

Young People and Learning

Educational Attainment at Key Stages

Young people in Somerset are achieving reasonable levels of education when compared with the rest of England, there is however, room for improvement.

Table 4 above demonstrates the levels achieved by 11 year olds in Somerset by constituency, in English and Mathematics.

	% of 15 year olds achieving five or more passes at GCSE or GNVQ level at grades A*- C in 2000	% of 15 year olds achieving five or more passes at GCSE or GNVQ level at grades A*- C in 1999	% of 15 year olds achieving five or more passes at GCSE or GNVQ level at grades A*- G in 2000	% of 15 year olds achieving five or more passes at GCSE or GNVQ level at grades A*- G in 1999
Taunton constituency	55	51.7	96.6	97.7
Bridgwater constituency	45.7	41.8	97.3	95.2
Somerton and Frome constituency	59.8	54.8	95.7	96.2
Wells constituency	57.9	61.1	97.0	98.3
Yeovil constituency	56.8	53.1	96.5	95.9
England as a whole			94.4	94.0

Table 5

English levels in the county compare favourably with levels for England as a whole with only the Bridgwater constituency being below 75% (at 69%), a 1% drop from 1999. The Taunton constituency has improved by 5% from 1999 to 2000 and is now level with the England average. Yeovil, Wells and Somerton and Frome constituency have all achieved levels above 75%, Somerton and Frome doing particularly well achieving 4% above the average for England.

Mathematics levels in Somerset for 11 year olds do not compare as favourably as the English levels. Table 4 shows the England average of 72% and only 2 constituencies are above this figure, leaving the other 3 constituencies below, Bridgwater particularly low once more.

Table 5 illustrates GCSE results for 15 year olds in Somerset. Each of the five constituencies in Somerset achieved higher rates of five or more passes at grades A* - G than the average for England as a whole.

The lower numbers of 11 years olds reaching the level expected of their age particularly in Mathematics is a concern for the future. The good GCSE results we saw in 1999 and 2000 may be directly affected when the 11 year olds take GCSE's in 2004 and 2005.

Destinations at Year 11, 12 and 13

Somerset had slightly less young people entering full-time education from Year 11 than the South West as a whole. There were however, more Year 11 leavers entering Government supported training schemes such as Modern Apprenticeships in Somerset than the South West. Fewer than 10% of young people leaving compulsory education were not in any form of education or training.

Table 7 opposite shows the destinations of 17 and 18 year olds in 2000, who completed Year 11 in 1999. There were 78% of 17 and 18 year olds in full-time education or work based training. Of the counties in the South West, Somerset figures were lower than all other counties apart from Devon and Cornwall, the average for the South West being 79.3%.

It would seem Somerset is particularly bad at retaining students after the first year of leaving compulsory education. Only 56.4% of 17 and 18 year olds were in full-time education at that time, the lowest figure of the South West counties (South West average being 63.6%). One explanation for the lower figures may be due to a lack of response to the survey rather than a high drop-out rate; this will need to be researched further. However, Somerset did have more 17 and 18 year olds in government supported training (12%) than any other county in the South West, the average being 9.9%.

Destination of all Year 11 pupils in Somerset in 2000³⁸

	Somerset 2000	South West 2000
Full-time education	71.1	73.3
Government supported training	10.7	7.1
- training scheme funded by Government	4.8	3.8
- job, including training which is supported by Government funding	5.9	3.3
Employment outside Government supported training	9.9	9.5
- job with planned training	7.3	6.1
- job without planned training	2.6	3.4
Not settled	4.3	5.4
- not active in labour market	3.0	4.5
- economically active	1.3	0.9
Moved out of contact of Somerset Careers	2.6	3.2
No response to follow-up	1.4	1.5
Total in Survey	5,176	54,805
of which in learning %	89.1	86.5

Table 6

Destinations of 17 and 18 year old in 2000 completing Year 11 in 1999³⁹

	Somerset 2000	South West 2000
Full-time education	56.4	63.6
Government supported training	12.0	9.9
- training scheme funded by Government	4.4	4.6
- job, including training which is supported by Government funding	7.6	5.3
Employment outside Government supported training	13.0	13.6
- job with planned training	9.7	5.8
- job without planned training	3.4	7.8
Not settled	4.3	5.8
- not active in labour market	2.0	4.4
- economically active	2.3	1.4
Moved out of contact of Somerset Careers	6.1	3.0
No response to follow-up	8.3	4.1
Total in Survey	5,228	53,810
of which in learning %	78.0	79.3

Table 7

Post-16 Education and Attainment

There are 24,000 young people aged 16-19 in Somerset, making up 6.1% of the county's 16+ population.⁴⁰ Of all the students in Somerset enrolled on council-funded provision in further education in 1998-99, 23.8% were aged between 16 and 19. Over half of those in further education were studying a level 3 qualification such as A/AS Level, GNVQ, NVQ or Access to Higher Education, just under a quarter were studying level 2 courses.⁴¹

Qualifications were held by 85.5% of 16-17 year olds in Somerset, the regional average being 84.7%.⁴² The regional average for achieving GCSE Grade A*-C was 67.5%, Somerset is substantially below this average at 58.6%, however, when comparing GCSE Grade D-G Somerset levels were higher than the regional average (55.3% versus 32.3%). Although Somerset had similar results when comparing qualifications held by 16-17 year olds in the county with the rest of the region, it appears there was a difference in the levels of grades achieved. There appears to be huge room for improvement among young people in Somerset to achieve higher grades in their GCSEs.

When looking at achievement rates for 16-18 year olds in Somerset for council-funded students in 1998-99, Somerset had a 79% achievement rate compared to 74% for England.⁴³ Retention rates were also higher in Somerset than England, 87% compared with 84%.

There were 14.5% of 16-17 year olds in Somerset who held no education or training qualifications, a similar figure to the regional average of 14.8%.⁴⁴ These young people often leave school, unprepared for employment and disengaged from learning. The Learning Gateway scheme called Life Skills goes some way to re-engaging and encouraging young people who lack not only qualifications but are hard to employ. Since the start of Life Skills in 1999, 384 young people have started on the scheme and a further 338 are expected in the 2001/2002 contract year.

In 2000, 11% of year 11 leavers went into work based learning, 4% NVQ training (1% employed status and 3% non-employed), a further 3% entered Modern Apprenticeships (now known as Advanced Modern Apprenticeships) and 4% National Traineeships (now known as Foundation Modern Apprenticeships).⁴⁵

When 16-17 year olds in Somerset were asked which wider skills and particular abilities they thought were required in work situations, 12.7% thought customer care skills, the regional average being 5.7%.⁴⁶ Surprisingly, 15.0% of young people didn't know what skills they required, compared with 4.4% regionally, perhaps suggesting a gap in knowledge for some young people in the county regarding work situations. The work placements carried out in years 10 and 11 in schools are vital in informing young people what employers expect and which areas might need to be improved from a personal perspective.

Young People in Employment

Young people (aged 16-24) bring new skills into the labour market. High quality education and training are therefore

crucial, both for the young person and ultimately their employers' business performance.

More than four-fifths (87.25%) of all employers who had recruited in the last 12 months, or who had current vacancies, had recruited someone aged between 16-24.⁴⁷ The size of the employer is significant; medium sized employers are likely to recruit young people (94%), as are large employers (95%) compared with small firms (72%), perhaps reflecting the medium and large employers greater need for staff in general.

There are considerable differences in the sectors recruiting young people. Hotels and restaurants and 'other' services are most likely to recruit young people, transport and communications and 'other production' least likely.⁴⁸ This probably reflects occupational factors (e.g. requirements for professional driving licences - HGV and PCV).

Skills Needs in Britain⁴⁹ found that there is a tendency to think younger employees are less well skilled than older employees, particularly in communication and literacy. Over one-half of employers in Somerset who had recruited young people in the last year were dissatisfied with their abilities and key skills in communication, number skills, problem solving and written English.⁵⁰ However, over one-half of employers who had recruited young people in the last year were satisfied with the abilities and key skills in working with others, willingness to learn or continue to learn, and information technology.

It is important that young people who choose to enter employment rather than education are aware of training opportunities within employment. A positive attitude to training both from the young person and the employers' perspective is crucial if the standards of skills are to be raised.

Disaffection and Social Exclusion

The number of 16-17 year olds not in education, training or employment at some stage during 2001 is estimated to be 2,665.⁵¹ A significant number of those (estimated at 64%) are young people who will have special needs, are care leavers, under supervision orders or returning to the community after being held in custody.

Exclusion and disaffection can affect young people for a wide variety of reasons. The ConneXions service being introduced in Somerset in 2002 will target 13-19 year olds, with in-depth guidance for those at risk of disengaging and intensive sustained support for those with multiple problems.

Somerset Careers run the front-end of the Learning Gateway courses, which give those who have special needs help with the development of life skills provision, which will continue when ConneXions is introduced. Social Services provide 'Horizon Getting Equal', a project aimed at placing young people with learning difficulties and disabilities into employment.

Foyers combine accommodation with access to training, education and job searching opportunities, to enable homeless young people aged 16-25 to fulfil their potential and make the transition to independence. The Prince's Trust charity helps disadvantaged young people to develop confidence, learn new

40 ONS (1999) Labour Force Survey, Annual data

41 Individual Student Records 17 (31 July 2000; 1999-00)

42 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

43 Individual Student Records 17(31 July 2000;1999-00)

44 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

45 Somerset Careers (2000) Activity Survey

46 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

47 Prism Research Ltd (1999) SW TECs 1999 Employer Survey

48 Prism Research Ltd (1999) SW TECs 1999 Employer Survey

49 Skill Needs in Gt Britain and N Ireland 1998' - IFF Research for the DfEE and the Training & Employment Agency

50 Prism Research Ltd (1999) SW TECs 1999 Employer Survey

51 Somerset Careers (2000) Activity Survey

skills, get work and start businesses. They recognise that those with poor basic skills are one of the main target groups, often being associated with a range of other aspects of disadvantage.

There are other issues contributing to disaffection and exclusion. Teenage pregnancies can exclude those affected from further learning, especially if childcare provision is not available. Young people can also be primary carers for members of their families who may be disabled or ill, etc which can lead to some exclusion. Community groups that are run specifically for young carers or teenage mothers in the local community are an important factor when looking at keeping some dialogue going and encouraging re-engagement.

The Youth Offending Team working together with other agencies including Somerset County Council (Social Services and Education) and Avon and Somerset Constabulary have a principle aim of preventing young people from offending. Some factors reported to be related to youth offending, are substance abuse 13%, living arrangements 11% and personal relationships 19%. Surprisingly other factors include education 13%, training 8% and employment 6%⁵² which highlights a need for further support for young people in these areas to ensure they get sufficient help and guidance and not feel these factors actually add to their problems.

There are roughly 250 12-19 year olds who are travellers in the county and they can be excluded from mainstream learning provision for a variety of reasons. Having access to information on educational choices and the help available to them is an important issue.

Many young people live in rural areas within Somerset. Initiatives such as Somerset Rural Youth Project's scheme of loaning mopeds to young people who want to access education or seek employment do help, however many more young people can become disaffected and excluded because of lack of transport.

The way in which information is disseminated is important if young people outside compulsory education are to receive appropriate advice. It is also important the community projects mentioned above are supported and continue if disaffected and socially excluded youngsters are to be re-engaged in learning. With the introduction of ConneXions, there will be a good opportunity to ensure adequate help and support is given to all youngsters in need, especially those that seem to have slipped through the net in the past.

Retention of Work Based Learning Trainees

Full-time education does not suit everyone and it is not the right starting point for every job. Work based learning is a good option for young people who would like to leave school or college and take a job with training. It is important that programmes are at the right level for the trainee and the employer to ensure trainees complete their qualification.

The number of trainees leaving work based learning prior to gaining their qualification in 1999/2000 was 915⁵³, this figure includes transfers to Modern Apprenticeship/National

Traineeship or other employed status training. Considering the number of trainees on work based learning in Somerset is around 3,000 at present, around a third of trainees leaving without qualifications is relatively high.

The programmes from which leaving is most prevalent are foundation and preparatory training and certain occupational programmes especially care and retail. Further research is required to identify why these areas have higher rates of non-completion. Work experience offered in years 10 and 11 is a useful tool for giving young people tasters of the areas of work they may be interested in. It can also highlight areas that were once thought desirable to be not that suitable at all, which may save a young person from entering training only to find they are not suited to that particular type of work.

The use of psychometric assessments by Somerset Careers and/or training providers to ensure trainees are on the most appropriate programme will help prevent early leaving. It may also be helpful to continue to follow up those identified earlier in schools, as being at risk of dropping out so that some sort of continued support and advice can be made available.

Vocational testing as well as psychometric assessments are extremely important if young people are to be matched to the courses most suited to their interest and level.

Encouraging Young People to Stay on in Learning

In 1999/2000 a total of 1,638 16-19 year old students left college before completing their course (15%).⁵⁴ Somerset Careers (ConneXions) is working with colleges and sixth forms to identify students at risk of dropping out and have developed an amber alert scheme to enable careers staff and tutors to work together to help aid students to make the right choices. This system helps careers advisers focus resources on those with most need. Evaluation of this system at a number of colleges has identified its value in helping young people remain in learning.

Research has identified that one group of young people in particular that are at risk of dropping out of colleges are those who enrol late or make a late change in direction. It is important therefore, to make sure advisers are available on enrolment days and carry out referrals for those who enrol late.

For those young people who wish to leave school and enter employment after compulsory education, it is important to emphasise employment with training as preferable. The number of 2000 Year 11 leavers entering employment with training increased from 9.6% to 10.4% and the number entering employment with no structured training reduced to 3.5% from 4.8%.⁵⁵ This is partly the result of employment and training advisers continuing to work with this group of young people throughout the summer.

Good partnership work will be needed between Somerset LSC, ConneXions and many other partners to improve and increase the numbers of students who choose to continue their education and training once in employment which will help to create a life long learning culture.

⁵² Somerset Youth Offending Team (2001/2002) Somerset Youth Justice Plan

⁵³ Somerset Careers (2001-2002) Business Plan

⁵⁴ Somerset Careers (2001-2002) Business Plan

⁵⁵ Ibid

Adults Demand for Learning

Adult Skills and Qualifications Profile

As discussed earlier the occupational mix of employment in the UK has moved towards higher-level jobs at the expense of lower level jobs, which has implications for the skills required by employers. There has been a substantial increase in professional occupations in Somerset but contrary to national trends, a decline in managerial and technical staff. There has been a much faster growth in intermediate occupations than the national average - particularly in sales; and a much faster decline in unskilled occupations. Contrary to national trends, there has been an increase in craft workers and operatives.

The South West Household Survey⁵⁶ asked people to rate their own abilities on a range of key skills. In IT, numeracy, reading, spoken communication, working with other people, leadership skills and problem solving the confidence of Somerset's respondents in their ability was the lowest of all the counties. Only in improving own learning were they not the lowest scoring and then they were second lowest in the region. People in Somerset may be assessing themselves in a different or perhaps 'harder' way than the rest of the region, as the judgement used is subjective. However, these findings may also indicate a lower skills base than the rest of the region's workforce and is a cause of concern and an area requiring further analysis.

There is no evidence to suggest that people are generally more confident of a range of key skills than was the case four years ago in Somerset. It seems, therefore, that the current strong educational and policy focus on key skills development has not yet resulted in measurable gains in workforce confidence in this respect.

In addition to their confidence in key skills respondents were also asked about a wider range of skills or attributes. Somerset has a similar percentage of people with craft skills (30.1%) as for the whole region. When asked which skills were particularly needed by employers in the county 5% of respondents thought craft skills were, compared with 4.4% for the regional average. This is probably due to the high level of manufacturing employment in the county.

Foreign language skills were cited by 12.8% in Somerset (the regional average being 14.2%). 8.3% of respondents in Somerset thought obtaining foreign language skills would improve their career prospects. There is a similar picture for IT skills, 37.7% of Somerset respondents assessed they had them which was below the regional average, however 22.1% of respondents thought they needed them to improve career prospects. The percentage holding finance and accountancy skills in Somerset were more favourable, in fact they were the highest of all counties in the region at 31.8%. Being a rural county as expected possessing a car driving licence is important for mobility and this is reflected in the numbers with a car driving licence; 82.2% compared with a regional average of 79.2%. In addition, a PSV driving licence is held by a higher proportion of respondents in Somerset than other South West counties.

Whilst these mismatches between skills possessed and skills needed could indicate a recognition of training needs and ultimately lead to training to address such gaps, other findings from the Household Survey indicate a worrying position for skills in the Somerset workforce. The percentage seeing a variety of skills as important to improve career prospects was significantly lower in Somerset than the national average. Of particular worry is that 49% of respondents in Somerset felt they had no need for any of the skills (40.4% for the region).

The regional average of 84.7% for those adults holding qualifications is higher than the Somerset figure of 79.2%. Those with no education or training in Somerset are 20.6%, the regional average being lower at 14.8%.⁵⁷ The Labour Force Survey reported that 84% of the UK population were qualified and 16% of people had no qualifications, which are similar figures to the regional averages.⁵⁸ Although qualification levels have improved in Somerset, with the county's workforce having a significantly higher level of qualifications than was the case six years ago, the county is still lagging behind the South West region and the UK in terms of residents holding qualifications. This deficit needs to be addressed urgently.

Interestingly, when GCSE/GNVQ achievements are compared between Somerset and England in all maintained schools for the 1998/99 period⁵⁹, Somerset figures are higher for 15 year olds getting 5+ grades A-C, as well as all other categories. Not surprisingly, due to the lack of a Somerset university the county's achievement levels for first and higher degrees are lower than the rest of the region. First degrees are held by 11.3% of respondents in Somerset compared with 15.6% regionally.⁶⁰ This disparity between school performance and adult skill levels could indicate that many leave the county to study higher education elsewhere (especially as there is no university situated in the county) and former residents may not return once qualified.

The rates of achievement in Somerset with regards to vocational qualifications at levels 1, 2 and 3 are high. Level 3 NVQs have been achieved by 45% of work age in Somerset, the same figure in the South West region. NVQ level 4 achievement for the economically active is 25.4% for Somerset compared with 27.4% for the regional average.⁶¹

The age profile of the county also undoubtedly has an effect upon the lower levels of qualification rates for adults within Somerset, as many older people in Britain do not hold qualifications; this situation is particularly marked in West Somerset. A higher percentage of people in Somerset are aged 40-59 years (26%) and 60 and over (25%) compared with Great Britain at 25% and 21% respectively.⁶²

Adult Learning/Non-Learning Participation Profile

When recent participation in education and training is examined, the statistics suggest that around four out of ten of the employed/self-employed workforce engaged in vocational training and education in the last year.⁶³ The longer-term trend is not particularly encouraging - the figure for 2000 suggests the level is not greatly different from those four years before and less than training activity reported in the survey undertaken in 1998.

56 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

57 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

58 ONS (2000) Labour Force Survey

59 DFEE Statistics of Education (1999)

60 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

61 ONS (Jan 2002) Labour Force Survey

62 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

63 Ibid

Statistics confirm that training is strongly employer driven; 8 out of 10 people,⁶⁴ who trained in 2000, were funded by their employer. Employer attitudes to training and education are therefore extremely important in encouraging changes in attitudes and motivation for individual learners. According to the Employer Survey staff participating in off-the-job training were more likely to receive training if employed by companies with 100 or more staff.

The attitudes to training of employees produced some surprising and worrying results. Unskilled occupations and plant and machine operatives are most likely to feel they are over qualified and least likely to undertake training whilst professionals are least likely to feel they are over-qualified.⁶⁵ Yet, this does not agree with the findings of Somerset's Employer Survey.

Adult Barriers and Motivational Issues

Household Survey data⁶⁶ revealed that nearly half of respondents in Somerset did not take part in any work related or other study/learning in the last year. In fact, just over 40% reported that it was between 1-5 years since they last took part in learning. Studies have shown that the longer the time since any learning has occurred, the lower the motivation there is to do so.

Those individuals that are not undergoing training and are unlikely to do so cited a number of barriers towards commencing training. The main barriers identified were:

- too busy to train
- couldn't afford training
- staff don't need training
- no appropriate training courses available locally⁶⁷

In Somerset, 19% of respondents of the Household Survey did not have sole use of a car, the regional average being 10.2% and this may be a factor in lack of transport available. Although just under 5% said this prevented them from undertaking study.

The issue of motivation is very important in understanding the reasons behind participation/non-participation in study. A third of the respondents who were unlikely or certain not to train said nothing would prevent them, but were just not motivated to do so. In fact over 10% were either negative or very negative about any future study and certainly wouldn't engage in training or education next year. Somerset was the most negative of all the counties in the South West in this respect.

The most significant factors that affected the ability to study were lack of time (for a fifth of respondents) and cost (for just under a fifth). One of the key difficulties in persuading people into learning is one of priorities, many people prioritise other uses of time and money over their allocation to learn. Although demand for learning may not be as high as it could be there does not appear to be a widespread supply failure in that only 1 in 15 mentioned the unavailability of local courses or lack of information as a barrier to learning.

As time and cost are significant constraints for individuals, the challenge in developing a 'learning culture' is broadly one of

changing people's attitudes much more than adjusting training provision to fill 'gaps'.⁶⁸

Adult Learning and Disadvantage

Rurality

Somerset is a rural county with many people living in geographical isolation. Somerset County Council has calculated the rural population by subtracting the population totals for the 15 main towns from the district population totals. There are 232,000 of the population living in rural areas from a total population of 489,400.⁶⁹

The Household Survey found self-employment in rural areas was 18.9% compared with 9.9% in urban areas as many people are forced to set up their own business for employment.⁷⁰ Of those in employment, 19.4% of rural residents work outside Somerset as opposed to 12% of employees in urban areas and as expected travel to and from employment takes longer.

The distance and transport issues that face rural locations can affect the cost of and access to suitable employment and training opportunities although transport does not appear to affect the rural area significantly regarding people attending education. The Household Survey asked respondents if availability of transport would be a problem if they were seeking to attend education and of those respondents that answered 'yes', 8.4% were located in urban areas as opposed to 7.5% in rural areas.

The urban population (42.1%) took part in more education or training related to work in the last year compared with the rural population (39.9%). Training that is available at or near home would appear to be an important factor in encouraging future training and education for both rural (40.3%) and urban (33.8%) respondents.

Gender

Women's participation in either the workforce or training and education differs in characteristic to that of men.

Lower economic activity rates amongst women in Somerset mean that whilst they account for over one-half of the total population, they account for a smaller share (80.7%) of labour market participants compared to men (89.3%).⁷¹ Men account for almost two-thirds of full-time employees, whilst women hold almost four-fifths of part-time jobs and female full-time employment is slightly under-represented in Somerset compared with regional and national figures. Women's employment tends to be concentrated in lower skilled and lower paid often part-time jobs with the skills of more highly qualified women tending to be under-used.

Having found an employer with relatively good attitudes to flexibility in working practices, many women are loath to look elsewhere, just over two-thirds of women had only 1 employer in the last 5 years compared to one third of men. The Household Survey⁷² reported there are 42% of women employed/self-employed in the public services as opposed to 14% of men, demonstrating a sector that would attract women where there is quite often part-time and flexible work available.

64 Of those surveyed

65 Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001

66 Prism Research (2000) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

67 Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001

68 Prism Research on behalf of Somerset Economic Partnership (2001) Somerset Economic Assessment 2001

69 Somerset County Council (1999) Somerset County population and dwelling estimates 1981-1998

70 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

71 ONS (Jan 2002) Labour Force Survey

72 Prism Research (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

More women took part in training or study connected to their job in the last year, compared to men (43.3% versus 38.8%), over half of the training being on-the-job by company training staff. A study (Hillage et al., 2000) confirms that women in work are more likely than men to undertake training.

The Household Survey asked which skills or attributes were possessed and used to help perform a current job or a job in the future. More men (42.9%) thought they possessed IT skills compared with women (31.0%). Women were more confident about their customer care skills, 72.01% of women thought they possessed customer care skills compared with 62.6% of men.

Gender differences suggest that whilst time limitations affect men and women equally, cost of training, childcare issues and transport are much more of a barrier to women than they are for men. The childcare issues link into time constraints with regards to education and learning. 'Those adults that stay at home to look after a family are only half as likely as even registered unemployed to have taken part in some vocational training during the previous three years'.⁷³

Third Age

People over 50 are a valuable resource in the labour market. With many jobs in the market unfilled because of lack of skills and low unemployment, the over 50 population are important in the workforce in terms of the numbers available to work.

According to Labour Force Survey⁷⁴ estimates there are 79,000 people aged between 50 and retirement in Somerset. This accounts for 26.3% of the county's working age population and 37% of the population as a whole. The number of people aged between 50 and retirement has increased by just under a quarter since 1996 and an estimated 72.4% of the working age population aged between 50 and retirement are economically active.

Older workers (55 years to retirement) are strongly represented in the public service (26.6%), manufacturing (20.7%) and wholesale and retail (18.7%) sectors. Employment for the third age group is fairly stable, over a fifth have been with the same employer more than 20 years, just under a third for between 11 and 20 years and over two-thirds have had one employer in the last 5 years.⁷⁵

The Household Survey reported that 38.4% of the 55 to retirement age group had no qualifications, however when asked if their present qualifications were about right for the job they were doing, surprisingly 90.8% agreed they were. Nearly all of those who did training or study in the older age group last year were studying towards a qualification. The use of technology to help training and education was used by 26.4% of the 55 to retirement group compared with the overall age group average of 38.4%.

The 55 to retirement age group are the least motivated group to undertake future study. Over a third concluded that nothing would encourage them to do future training or education, a sixth were 'just not interested' and 6% 'had all the

skills/qualifications they needed'. Motivation to learn is highly correlated to the last episode of learning. Individuals whose last learning took place a long time ago are less likely to learn. One study found a very positive link between the length of time people spend in initial education and the qualifications they obtain on the one hand and their participation in education and training in later life on the other.⁷⁶ Another study amongst the 50-70 year olds carried out by the Institute of Employment Studies reported a positive impact on enjoyment of life, self-confidence, and satisfaction with other areas of life from learners from this age group.

The wider benefits of learning are not always known or appreciated by the third age group and by widening adult participation in learning this group should perhaps be targeted specifically with information on benefits outside the workplace to initiate a fresh interest in learning.

Disabled

Many people with disabilities, registered or unregistered, are at a serious disadvantage in the labour market. The unemployment rate amongst disabled people is significantly higher than that of the economically active population as a whole.

The 1991 Census reported that 12.2% of the population was disabled with a limiting long-term illness. The South West Household Survey⁷⁷ found that 10% of respondents in Somerset said 'yes' to having a disability that is expected to last for more than a year, 47% of those reported this affected the amount or type of work they could do and 56.6% reported it did not. The data in this disabled section was only available on a regional basis.

Qualifications are held by 80.7% of disabled respondents compared with 85.1% of people without disabilities. When asked if present qualifications are about right for a present job just over two-thirds of disabled respondents agreed, over a fifth however thought they were mostly over-qualified. Several studies have noted the lack of confidence, basic literacy skills and absence of recognised educational achievement among disabled young people. In the past, the low expectations of 'special' schools aimed any learning that did occur at therapy and not the skills to sustain young disabled people into employment later on.

Disabled respondents did less training or education connected with their job than other respondents (42.7% versus 47.8%), however more of the disabled respondents study lead to a qualification. Occupancy time for disabled people in training programmes may well be longer than average and outcomes more difficult to predict while certain NVQ units will be physically impossible to achieve in some cases.

Barriers to undertaking study for disabled people are very much the usual; cost (34.9%) and lack of transport (12.4%), but also illness/disability (11.9%) which for other respondents was only 1%. The factors that would encourage the disabled to participate in future learning were similar to respondents considered non-disabled, although slightly higher in having availability of better transport and having a personal adviser for guidance.

73 Calder and McCollom (1998) in Edwards et al

74 ONS (Mar-May 1996 and Mar-May 2000) Labour Force Survey

75 Prism research (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

76 Tuckett and Sargent (1999)

77 Prism Research (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

The workplace and training or education environments can present major problems for disabled people regarding access. As mentioned previously, public transport systems can be a barrier to learning but also to labour market participation. The needs of the disabled are often not fully known and the information, advice, opportunities and services that are available are not always communicated through an easy to access system.

Single Parents

Surveys have shown that the majority of lone parents would like to be in paid employment however there are certain predominant factors that prevent many lone parents taking up employment.

There are 8,300 single parent households in Somerset, making up 4% of all households.⁷⁸ This rate is lower than the South West and the UK figures. Although the proportion of 'solo' lone mothers (i.e. those who have never lived with a partner) has gradually increased, the majority of lone parent families come into being as a result of marital or relationship breakdown. Solo mothers tend to be younger than divorced or separated mothers - the median age of solo mothers being 24, 10 years below that of the latter group. Whilst the overwhelming majority of lone parents are women, around 9% are men.

In the South West 43.9% of single parents have a full-time job, 35.8% have a part-time job and 9% are self-employed.⁷⁹ The highest concentrations of these jobs or self-employment are based in public services and wholesale and retail. There are relatively few differences in the occupational and sectoral characteristics of lone mothers compared with women in general. Lone mothers are more likely to work in manual occupations such as catering and cleaning, especially those working part-time.

The Household Survey asked single parents in the South West what skills they thought they currently possessed; customer care skills and time management/organisational skills were similar to the region as a whole. However, IT skills possessed by lone parents were 30.6% compared with 39.8% for the whole region. All other skills were slightly lower for lone parents than for the rest of the region as a whole. When respondents were asked which skills would improve their ability to progress in their careers IT skills were thought important by 32.7% and business planning and management skills by 14.6% of lone parents.

Motivation to learn is marginally higher among single parents than the region as a whole (69% versus 67%). Motivation is strongly linked to qualifications so that those with higher qualifications are more motivated to learn than those who hold lower level qualifications. Single parents who have below level 1 qualifications are substantially more motivated to learn compared with the overall sample (49% versus 39%).

The most significant factor that would prevent any training or education for single parents would be cost. Not surprisingly, childcare implications of either having to look after their children or the cost of childcare was also a factor and 13.3% of lone parents thought transport would be a problem compared with 7.8% for the region. The lack of access and costs of

transport is likely to particularly affect lone parents in rural areas.

The provision of education and training (or re-training) is essential to improve the labour market position of many lone parents and to increase the access and quality of employment of those lone parents who are not in work. The provision of childcare at affordable costs is also vital.

Ethnicity

Labour market policies focusing on ethnic minority groups are overwhelmingly 'urban' policies, yet there are difficulties in transferring remedies/policies wholesale from urban to rural areas. The issue of targeting for the 'fragmented' nature of the ethnic minorities and the invisibility of racism in the rural areas of the South West and Somerset remains important.

The most recent robust data on ethnicity is the Census of Population 1991 which reported 0.54% of Somerset residents as non-white. Somerset has the lowest concentration of residents from non-white ethnic groups in the South West, however ethnicity issues are still significant.

One important feature of the ethnic population in Great Britain is the relative youth of that population compared with the white population. The median age illustrates this point: 25.5 years for the ethnic minority population and 37.4 years for the white population. Children (aged 15 and under) account for a third of the ethnic minority population, compared with a fifth of the white population. In contrast, over 16% of the white population are aged over 65 years, compared with 3% of the non-white population.⁸⁰

The Household Survey⁸¹ found more white people in the South West in full-time employment than those from an ethnic origin (61% versus 49.9%). Self-employment is higher at 15% for ethnic respondents compared to 12.4% for white respondents. The nature of employment differs between white and ethnic employees, the main differences being there are more managers and administrators from ethnic origin (19.7%) than white (15.5%) and personal service occupations are significantly higher for ethnic origin groups (23.5%) compared to those of white origin (11.4%). When asked which skills or attributes they possessed the ethnic origin respondents possessed a much higher level of foreign language skills (48.9%) than white origin (13.7%), but were lower in IT skills (24.1% versus 39.9%).

Qualifications were held by 75.4% of ethnic origin respondents, 23.9% have no education or training qualifications compared with 14.8% of white origin respondent. Many ethnic minority groups are characterised both by high proportions of highly qualified and high proportions with no/low-level qualifications, which will have a knock on effect for employment prospects. There is a wide disparity between the qualifications of individuals from ethnic minority groups who came to Britain as adults. The key 'qualifications divide' is between the lesser qualified ('Bangladeshis', 'Pakistanis' and 'Caribbeans') and the better qualified ('Chinese', 'African-Asians' and 'Indians') - the latter groups are more highly qualified than their white counterparts.

78 Wiltshire and Swindon TEC (1997) Lone parents and Labour Market Participation

79 Prism Research (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

80 Census of Population (1991)

81 Prism Research (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

Perhaps the biggest barrier to those from ethnic minorities is discrimination, in terms of employment and earnings potential. This in turn will have a knock on effect for participation in education and gaining relevant qualifications. However, higher than average participation rates in post-compulsory education are indicative of a strong ethnic minority commitment to acquiring qualifications.

Gypsies/Travellers

Gypsies are the largest ethnic minority group in the country. Somerset County Council provides 7 sites for over 100 gypsy families in Somerset. There are another 200 families that visit these sites. In addition, over 200 families are in private accommodation or sites. So roughly there are between 300 and 400 gypsy families in Somerset.

There are between 50 and 80 families who are new travellers staying within Somerset's boundaries, although this can rise to 300 families in the summer.

Ex-Offenders

Of the prison population aged 30 and under, 45% hold no qualifications.⁸² Education and training leading to employment for young people is particularly important, both in preventing crime and also in reducing the likelihood of re-offending.

Estimating the total number of ex-offenders is problematic, as official data relates to persons found guilty of offences, the prison population and those supervised by the probation service. Somerset has the lowest number of offenders on pre-release (those under supervision who are yet to be released from prison), although it should be noted that on release the individuals may not necessarily return to the area local to the prison.

Ex-offenders often experience problems such as poverty, poor health and low levels of education and skills. Around 50% of known offenders are aged 21 and under.⁸³ There is a need for training or re-training in basic skills and essential life skills, possibly before work related training.

Training packages and other provision that prepares ex-offenders for employment need to focus on skills or labour market demands and shortages, while taking into account the capacities of participants. Research shows that establishing close links with employers and targeting those industries and occupations that are prepared to recruit offenders are more effective strategies. It is important to ensure that needs other than work-related skills are also addressed, including those of self-confidence, motivation and other 'employability' skills such as communication skills.

Many ex-offenders are out of contact with local agencies, or may have become discouraged from approaching agencies for advice and support. Outreach work is essential to reach those who are isolated or alienated from mainstream provision. Young people form a significant proportion of the single homeless population and studies show that many young people have turned to crime after becoming homeless.

Ex-offenders are a diverse group and certain characteristics may compound their potential disadvantage e.g. age, race and gender. Employer discrimination and low levels of skills are the key barriers to labour market participation.

Homelessness

In the second quarter of 1997/98 the number per 1,000 households of families in Somerset that were accepted as homeless and in priority need, was 1.1%.⁸⁴ Homeless people can include older people, ex-offenders, asylum seekers, from different ethnic groups, women escaping domestic violence and alcohol and drug misusers. Some homeless people have multiple needs.

A disproportionate number of homeless people have low levels of qualifications compared with the population as a whole.⁸⁵ Other studies have found that a high proportion of young homeless people aged under 25 had no qualifications on leaving school and that literacy and numeracy problems can also be an issue.

Training for employment may be a longer-term goal for many homeless people, due to the disadvantage they have faced. For some 'life skills' may be a more immediate need. For others, problems of literacy and numeracy and low levels of qualifications also need to be tackled. Motivation can also be an issue for some people.

There is a range of organisations in the South West region dealing with homelessness, including Shelter, Cyrenians and Foyers. The organisations provide support, training and sometimes accommodation for homeless people in their areas.

Asylum Seekers

According to the Home Office there are no asylum seekers living in Somerset that are supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Obviously there are no figures available for asylum seekers who are not registered with NASS and choose to remain anonymous. Bournemouth and Exeter are the two areas that receive asylum seekers who are supported by NASS in the South West.

Carers

Somerset Social Services have a database holding details on 5,000 active carers in the county, three quarters are female and a quarter are male. The category of carers is broken down below:

- 21% care for someone over 65
- 5% care for someone with a learning disability
- 22% care for someone with a mental health problem
- 12% care for someone with a terminal illness or stroke victim
- 40% care for someone physically disabled

Summary of Issues for Disadvantaged Groups

Exclusion and disaffection affect adults for a wide variety of reasons. The ConneXions service being introduced in Somerset

⁸² Institute of Employment Studies (1994)

⁸³ Jane Pitcher (1998) Ex-offenders in the South West Region

⁸⁴ WESTEC (1998) Homelessness in the South West Region

⁸⁵ Campbell, M, S Foy and F Walton (1997) An assessment of employment opportunities and labour market disadvantage in the South West. Leeds: Policy Research Institute

in 2002 will target 13-19 year olds, with in-depth guidance for those at risk of disengaging and intensive sustained support for those with multiple problems. Consequently, ConneXions should make an impact on the number of disaffected adults, hopefully contributing to lowering the number of disengaged adults in the future.

The main gaps in data on the above disadvantaged groups identified during compilation and in need of research for future assessments are from the dual diagnostic and carers groups. More information is also required for gypsies/travellers, ex-offenders, the homeless and asylum seekers.

Increasing Demand for Learning by Adults

Everyone, irrespective of age, gender and race should have the opportunity to develop their skills and qualifications. Promoting workforce development and engaging people in employment rather than being solely concerned with education systems will help increase demand for learning further.

Adults who are returning to locally based learning have a huge potential role in widening participation in education and training. Informal learning appears to lead to progression because of its ability to raise levels of confidence and self-esteem. Confidence building is therefore an important aspect for adults returning to any form of education or training and this must be taken on board if Somerset LSC's participation strategy is to be successful.

Taylor and Spencer⁸⁶ found negative feelings towards education and training due to school experiences, can have a lifelong effect. In particular they highlight finding school boring, fear of exams and lack of exam success as major causes. Other studies consistently show that a large number of individuals who return to learn informally in the community left school at an early age with few or no qualifications.

Adults most often move from informal learning into more formal and certified programmes when there are particular mechanisms in place that help and encourage them to do so. The provision of both informal and formal learning opportunities in the same setting can often encourage people, who would not have considered approaching an educational institution to enrol in more formal programmes. Informal, community based education often provides childcare facilities or some financial support for childcare. The lack or inadequacy of childcare support in formal learning environments can deter many learners, especially women, who wish to move to more advanced learning programmes. The issue of cost and provision of childcare provision is a key factor in increasing demand for learning and will need to be addressed by the Somerset LSC.

The financial costs involved in education and training are definite de-motivators for many adults. A survey in Somerset found half the respondents would be encouraged and motivated towards future training if 'the costs were covered by someone else'.⁸⁷ Employers must be encouraged and given more information on how a higher skilled and trained workforce can benefit the organisation. ILAs went some way to providing some financial aid for adults, it has yet to be fully researched into whether there was an actual increase in the numbers of

adults entering training as a direct result of the scheme. The availability of access to learning opportunities is an important factor in increasing adult numbers. Not only do adults have to find the right course; they also have to be in a suitable place both geographically and a suitable learning environment. Difficulties with transport can prevent some learners accessing any learning opportunities and can also prevent learners accessing the type of learning they most need. A survey in Somerset found that 38% of respondents would be encouraged towards future attendance if training and education were available at home or near home.⁸⁸ Part of the solution to transport problems would be to locate learning closer to the learner and for some types of provision this can be a cost-effective approach.

Some adults prefer to use their spare time for leisure and relaxation, presuming they have spare time. The survey mentioned above found that 35% of respondents thought lack of time would prevent them from taking part in any training and education.⁸⁹ This was particularly high in the 30-49 age group, which averaged 42%. People in work, especially self-employment were most likely to lack time to train. It is hard to perceive how Somerset LSC can directly influence adults to use their spare time to train, rather, employers could be targeted to allow staff time off to study, an approach that could prove difficult and hard to implement.

To raise overall skills levels to the degree the economy requires, adults already in the workforce who are not in education or training of any kind will need to be re-engaged into the learning culture. To increase adult participation in learning, a variety of barriers and motivators will need to be understood and acted upon. The usual barriers of cost and lack of time will require innovative and new approaches if new learners rather than those already engaged are to be encouraged. There is a good opportunity for the LSC to promote more flexible community based learning to non-traditional learners in order to increase confidence and consequently increase adult participation in more formal education.

Raising Standards

Quality Improvement in Post-16 Learning

Raising standards in education and training is one of the main remits of the LSC. Ensuring that standards are continuously improved requires a variety of approaches that will help support providers in implementing positive changes. The main tools for monitoring and improving standards are:⁹⁰

- Provider self-assessments
- Development plans and target setting
- Monitoring visits
- Provider performance reviews
- Standards Fund
- Underpinned by external inspections including area inspections

Provider Self-Assessments

Each provider is obliged to carry out regular self-assessment reports, based on the Common Inspection Framework. These

86 Spencer, L and Taylor, S (1994) Individual commitment to learning: Individuals' attitudes: Report on the qualitative survey, Sheffield, Employment Department

87 Prism Research (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment in Somerset

88 Prism Research (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment in Somerset

89 Ibid

90 Quality Improvement Induction - Somerset LSC

assessments, along with the provider's development plan, will be used to assist in developing their strengths and overcoming any identified weaknesses.

Development Plans and Target Setting

Development plans are submitted by each provider yearly and cover a 12 month period. They include actions for improvement, measurable outcomes, timescales and progress monitoring.

Monitoring Visits

The Quality Improvement team at the LSC will undertake monitoring visits to assess progress against the approved plans. These visits will include meetings with learners, staff and sub-contractors. The visits are aimed at helping providers continuously improve their provision and share good practice. Outcomes of these visits will inform the provider review process.

Provider Performance Reviews

Provider Reviews will be carried out regularly by the LSC and will look at a broad range of measures. They will help in monitoring implementation of each provider's action plan and identify further improvement needed in a number of different areas, therefore providing an holistic view of the provider and act as an early warning system for problems.

Standards Fund

The Standards Fund has been provided by the LSC national office to colleges for three years and now work based learning providers have been included. This fund will provide £85 million nationally to improve activities in 2002/03. Currently the Standards Fund money for work based learning is allocated locally, according to national guidelines. As from April 2002 the majority of this fund will be allocated locally for all provision.

A major way of improving quality of training and education is through dissemination of good practice and this forms part of the Standards Fund.

External Inspections

Monitoring of standards and efforts to raise the standards of further education and work based learning will be based around each organisation's inspection grades. Two inspectorates will be in charge of carrying out these inspections, ALI for all work based learning and 19+ in college, OFSTED for 16-19 year olds in colleges.

These formal inspections will take place on a four yearly cycle and are really the main way of consistently monitoring standards and changes to those standards.

Area inspections will take place in addition to providers' inspections, for all 16-19 year old provision by LEA area.

Current Quality of Provision

There are three tertiary colleges in Somerset, as well as one sixth-form college, one college specialising in land-based

industries and one general further education college. The Further Education and Funding Council (FEFC) have inspected all these colleges within the last four years; this section summarises the inspection reports. Training standards inspections have also been carried out for all the work based learning providers (since April 2001 the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) has been responsible) and these will also be included in the summary.

Further Education

The grades awarded as a result of inspections by FEFC in colleges in Somerset for curriculum areas and cross-college provision have ranged from between 1 and 3 (3 being satisfactory and 1 being the highest grade achievable). There were no grades lower than 3 and therefore no areas of great concern for the inspectorate.

The average grade for all curriculum areas was 2, a good grade but still leaving room for improvement. One particular college did achieve a couple of grade 1's in curriculum areas, two college's achieved all grade 2's and the other three colleges had a mixture of 2's and 3's.

Cross-college provision looked at quality assurance, management, support for students, general resources and governance. The grades achieved in these areas for all the colleges, again ranged from between 1 and 3 with no big areas of concern. The support for students provision area produced encouraging results, with three of the colleges gaining a grade 1 and the other three a grade 2. There is a definite need for improvement for some of the colleges to improve from just satisfactory in some of the areas, one such area being quality assurance, which did not receive one grade 1.

Work Based Learning

The work based learning providers inspections were similar to the college inspections, looking at curriculum area or occupational area. The provision section covers the same areas mentioned in further education for colleges⁹¹ plus an extra three areas, which were responsiveness and range of provision, equal opportunities and management of training.

The grading for curriculum or occupational areas for work based learning providers has been average with many 2's and 3's. However, there were also a significant number of 4's, which occurred across different types of delivery, indicating areas of concern where training was less than satisfactory. Many providers are relatively small and some have not been in existence for long, although the main FE colleges in Somerset are also providing work based learning. There remains a need to significantly improve on some work based learning curriculum areas across county and continue to develop other curriculum areas that have achieved grades 2 and 3.

In terms of provision, work based learning providers are on the whole average. There was a good spread of grade 1's across the providers, particularly in the trainee/student support area, the majority of grades being 2's and 3's for other areas. There were also a few grade 4's, although less than for curriculum areas and these were mainly in the equal opportunity provision which obviously needs to be addressed.

In conclusion, the FE and work based learning provision available in Somerset is on the whole good or at the very least satisfactory, with a few exceptions where certain areas need to be improved significantly in work based learning.

Lufton Manor College

Lufton Manor College is a specialist residential college for learners with severe learning difficulties. It is situated on the rural outskirts of Yeovil and is based on two sites, Lufton Manor and Manor Farm, which are within walking distance of each other. Mencap, a national voluntary organisation for people with learning difficulties and their families, runs the college.

The college was inspected in December 1997 by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), report published May 1998. The work funded by the FEFC was judged to be good with strengths, which clearly outweighed its weaknesses, and was awarded a grade 2.

The college works with Yeovil College, Cannington College, the careers service, the local education authority, the local health authority, and social services in planning provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Foxes Academy

Foxes Academy is situated on the esplanade in Minehead. It is a training hotel for young people with mild learning disabilities. The hotel is open to the public, giving learners the opportunity to develop their skills in a real environment. Training is provided in partnership with Bridgwater College.

Centres of Vocational Excellence⁹²

The government's Centres for Vocational Excellence (CoVE) initiative is aimed to modernise FE colleges and ensuring access to high quality training for people of all backgrounds, focused on meeting the real needs of employers. In fact, one of the LSC's aims is that by 2004 around half of general FE and sixth form colleges will have at least one department that has achieved CoVE status.

Achieving CoVE status will be about ensuring a sectoral mix within each region as well as quality of provision, thus ensuring key sectors are represented and avoiding local duplication. Thus imbedded in this initiative is the new climate of co-operation rather than competition between FE colleges.

The achievement of CoVE status for an area will need to show how such status compliments the following:

- National and local LSC priorities
- Quality labour market information
- Regional Development Agency (RDA) identified priorities or growth sectors
- National Training Organisation (NTO) information and priorities

Three bids were accepted for further development in Somerset's first wave of development towards CoVEs; Automotive Engineering at Bridgwater, Advanced Engineering at Yeovil, and Construction at SCAT. Bids will be considered every three

months for new CoVEs as well as ongoing developments to move towards being awarded CoVE status for the successful bids.

Progress in Raising Standards

The current position of the colleges and work based learning providers within Somerset in terms of quality and continuous improvement can be gained from looking through the previous inspection reports. The summary of results for Somerset providers above will be used to provide a baseline against which to monitor future changes, along with other indicators such as qualification grades and retention rates of students. The results of future inspection reports are likely to form self-assessment and development plans, the cornerstone of quality and improvement within the LSC. They will provide robust indicators for assessing how far the remit of raising standards within Somerset FE and work based learning progresses and it is intended that as such they will be summarised in future Statements of Skills Needs.

Conclusion

Hopefully this statement has provided the reader with an informed baseline picture of the current skills in Somerset, the skills needs of businesses and education and training in the county. Somerset enjoys a diverse economy with many important sectors including, agriculture, advanced engineering, food, and general manufacturing. In terms of adequate workforce skills to meet the demands of the county's employers, Somerset has a reasonable level of educational achievement among its population. However there is room for improvement and a better-educated and trained workforce will be essential if new opportunities and high-value jobs are to be attracted to Somerset.

Often when skill needs are discussed the emphasis is on growth sectors, however new jobs are only responsible for a small percentage of vacancies and therefore future skill requirements. Replacement demand is much greater than that caused by occupational expansion. There is a definite lack of local knowledge about replacement rates within each sector and this is a vital area Somerset LSC and its partners should work on in order to predict as accurately as possible the future skills needs of Somerset's employers.

In order to meet the skills needs of high-value added jobs there are a range of generic skills that are most sought after by employers:

- Communication and social skills
- Cognitive skills
- IT and new technology skills
- Management skills⁹³

Training

Initial indications on the attitude of employers in Somerset towards training are encouraging. However, there are some more worrying figures that may indicate a less active commitment in reality towards training than at first appears. Of those employers that trained, 24% provided on the job training only and at 32.8% the percentage having a designated training budget was very low.

The attitudes to training of employees produce some surprising and worrying results. Those employed in unskilled occupations and plant and machine operatives are most likely to feel they are over qualified and least likely to undertake training, which matches closely to the broad industrial class of those employers that tend not to train. This view of not requiring training is inaccurate, in accepted thinking within the modern world, as every employee needs to continually develop his or her skills. Many think that all employers in a mature economy such as the UK's, need to look at ways to develop all processes and employee activities towards the high value, knowledge and skill intensive end of the spectrum. World competition is constantly increasing and cheap labour becomes increasingly attractive when considering relocation of or part of a company's operations and in some alternative countries, such as India, the cheap labour is combined with good skill levels.

Time and cost of training are cited by both employers and individuals as major barriers to its take up according to our latest Household Survey. Broadly, therefore, the challenge in developing a 'learning culture' is very much about changing people's attitudes as well as initiatives such as:

- Attempts to increase motivation to train through promoting its proven benefits (especially financial) and relevant case studies. (e.g. SME case studies to encourage SMES to train, not studies on big corporations).
- Widely publicised information on increased earnings.
- Finding new and innovative ways to make learning accessible to all and require shorter time commitments. E.g. Bite size or Modular based courses to enable dipping in and out of a course, possibly leading to a qualification on completing a certain number of units.
- Mobile teaching units to take on the job training courses to the employer. On line learning is likely to have a huge effect here.

Education and Skills

Skills gaps are undoubtedly having a significant effect on businesses in Somerset. This can be demonstrated by looking closely at those firms that cited skills gaps as affecting their company in the 1999 Employer Survey. The majority of companies that said they had skills gaps that affected their company - 48.5% significantly and 30% very significantly. The most frequently mentioned skills gaps cited by Somerset employers were related to the changing nature of work in terms of embracing and maximising new technology and needing deeper and broader skills, especially in a number of key areas. The most prolific skills gaps quoted were: basic IT, customer care and general communication skills.

People in work are more likely to believe they have 'good' or 'high level' key skills than those who are unemployed. This is likely to be through a mixture of both a lack of practising these skills on a day-to-day basis and lower general confidence levels among many unemployed people, which demonstrates the importance of providing a range of opportunities for unemployed people to improve their key skills. The skills

unemployed people feel least confident in compared to employed people are IT, numeracy, leadership and problem solving⁹⁴

When looking at achievement rates for 16-18 year olds in Somerset for council-funded students in 1998-99, Somerset had a 79% achievement rate compared to 74% for England.⁹⁵ Retention rates were also higher in Somerset than England, 87% compared with 84%. Yet there were 14.5% of 16-17 year olds in Somerset who held no education or training qualifications, a similar figure to the regional average of 14.8%.⁹⁶ These young people were often leaving school, unprepared for employment and disengaged from learning. The Learning Gateway scheme called Life Skills goes some way to re-engaging and encouraging young people who not only lack qualifications but are hard to employ. Since the start of Life Skills in 1999, 384 young people have started on the scheme and a further 338 are expected in the 2001/2002 contract year.

The number of 16-17 year olds that were not in education, training or employment at some stage during 2001 has been estimated to be 2,665.⁹⁷ A significant number of those (estimated at 64%) were young people who had special needs, were care leavers, under supervision orders or returning to the community after being held in custody.

The way in which information is disseminated is important if young people outside compulsory education are to receive appropriate advice. It is also important the community projects mentioned above are supported and continue if disaffected and socially excluded youngsters are to be re-engaged in learning. With the introduction of Connexions, there will be a good opportunity to ensure adequate help and support is given to all youngsters in need, especially those that seem to have slipped through the net in the past.

Participation

Household survey data⁹⁸ revealed that nearly half of respondents in Somerset did not take part in any work related or other study/learning in the last year. In fact, just over 40% reported that it was between 1-5 years since they last took part in learning. Studies have shown that the longer the time since any learning has occurred, the lower the motivation there is to do so.

The issue of motivation is very important in understanding the reasons behind participation/non-participation in study. A third of the respondents who were unlikely or certain not to train said nothing would prevent them, but were just not motivated to do so. In fact over 10% were either negative or very negative about any future study and certainly wouldn't engage in training or education next year. Somerset was the most negative of all the counties in the South West in this respect. The most significant factors that affected the ability to study were lack of time (for a fifth of respondents) and cost (for just under a fifth). One of the key difficulties in persuading people into learning is one of priorities, many people prioritise other uses of time and money over their allocation to learn. Although demand for learning may not be as high as it could be there does not appear to be a widespread supply failure in that only one in fifteen mentioned the unavailability of local courses or lack of

94 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

95 Individual Student Records 17(31 July 2000;1999-00)

96 Prism Research Ltd (2001) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

97 Somerset Careers (2000) Activity Survey

98 Prism Research Ltd (2000) Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment

information as a barrier to learning. The challenge in developing a 'learning culture' is broadly one of changing people's attitudes much more than adjusting training provision to fill 'gaps'.⁹⁹

Despite a growth in qualifications among new entrants to the workforce a large number of adults have only basic (if any) qualifications. The future employment prospects of this group should be a matter of great concern to the future productivity of the county as the majority of adults with low or unqualified status are in elementary occupations - which are declining in the economy.

Exclusion and disaffection affect adults for a wide variety of reasons. The Connexions service being introduced in Somerset in 2002 will target 13-19 year olds, with in-depth guidance for those at risk of disengaging and intensive sustained support for those with multiple problems. Consequently, Connexions should make an impact on the number of disaffected adults, hopefully contributing to lowering the number of disengaged adults in the future. The main gaps in data on the above disadvantaged groups identified during compilation and in need of research for future assessments are from the dual diagnostic and carers groups. More information is also required for gypsies/travellers, ex-offenders, the homeless and asylum seekers. These information gaps are essential for the LSC and its partners to address in order to understand these groups and the issues they face.

Informal learning appears to lead to progression because of its ability to raise levels of confidence and self-esteem. Confidence building is therefore an important aspect for adults returning to any form of education or training and this must be taken on board if Somerset LSC's participation strategy is to be successful. Adults most often move from informal learning into more formal and certified programmes when there are particular mechanisms in place that help and encourage them to do so. The provision of both informal and formal learning opportunities in the same setting can often encourage people, who would not have considered approaching an educational institution to enrol in more formal programmes. Informal, community-based education often provides childcare facilities or some financial support for childcare. The lack or inadequacy of childcare support in formal learning environments can deter many learners, especially women, who wish to move to more advanced learning programmes. The issue of cost and provision of childcare provision is a key factor in increasing demand for learning and will need to be addressed by the Somerset LSC.

To raise overall skill levels to the degree the economy requires, adults already in the workforce who are not in education or training of any kind will need to be re-engaged into the learning culture. To increase adult participation in learning, a variety of barriers and motivators will need to be understood and acted upon. The usual barriers of cost and lack of time will require innovative and new approaches if new learners rather than those already engaged are to be encouraged. There is a good opportunity for the LSC to promote more flexible community based learning to non-traditional learners in order to increase confidence and consequently increase adult participation in more formal education.

Looking at the data that is available, broadly the overall provision of courses seems to address skills shortages and gaps in most of the key areas for the county. The main barrier to filling skills gaps is possibly in enabling employers to train staff without putting undue pressure on SMEs, this is especially severe in sectors such as engineering, manufacturing and health and social care. More innovative delivery may be the answer to problems in these sectors.

Notes

