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**The Effectiveness of the Response and Follow Up Processes to
the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign in the Nottingham Area**

Eskricke Henry George Inman

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of:**

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ABSTRACT

In the late 1990s the Government concluded that poor adult literacy and numeracy were having an effect on the United Kingdom's competitiveness. Consequently, in 1999, Claus Moser was asked to undertake a review and make recommendations as to how greater numbers of disadvantaged adults might be encouraged to seek advice and start learning. Moser's findings stimulated the Government to develop and launch the Skills for Life Strategy out of which came the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign, a flagship awareness raising programme.

The researcher set out to develop a body of knowledge related to participation in learning, to find out more about callers to the Learndirect Helpline, and to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the publicly funded support services such as the Information, Advice & Guidance Service and providers of learning. Out of a cohort of 360 callers, 165 agreed to take part in a telephone interview, and 52 said they had taken up a learning opportunity; however, only 27 were found to have taken up Learning & Skills Council (LSC) funded programmes leaving the researcher to conclude that the remaining 25 had either taken up programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus, started to learn informally, or were uncomfortable in admitting that they hadn't started learning. Perhaps the most striking finding from the research was that the majority of respondents who chose not to take up learning were keen to stay involved. Also it was found that adults living in disadvantaged communities were significantly less likely to take up LSC funded learning opportunities; but, with additional support, learners from those

communities had the potential to perform better than those from other areas. Of those who went into learning a lower percentage than the Nottinghamshire average was employed full - time, a higher percentage was employed part - time and a higher percentage was economically inactive. More were in lower order occupations, with a bias towards personal service occupations.

The Government responded to Moser's findings by setting challenging targets; however, although the targets have been exceeded, there is a significant difference in performance between 16 to 19 year olds re-taking GCSEs in English and Mathematics, and adults, aged 20 +, taking literacy and / or numeracy qualifications. During the 2004 academic year 46% of the former achieved their learning aim, but only 20% of the latter, suggesting that a renewed focus is needed on adults, especially the hard to reach living in disadvantaged communities.

It is recommended, therefore, that there should be a drive for greater consistency in the quality of information, advice & guidance and learning provision, and a more coherent network of high quality community based provision with enhanced levels of support provided by Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships.

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DECLARATION

The author hereby declares that none of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree.

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1. CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

This study will focus on adults who, in response to a mass communications campaign co – ordinated by Learndirect, made the decision to seek help to address their literacy or numeracy (Skills for Life) deficits. This introduction will provide some background information on the main support agencies associated with Learndirect's 'Gremlins' campaign, and with the client group.

1.1 Aim of the Thesis

Set in the context of the Skills for Life Strategy the main aim of this thesis is to find out whether the information, advice & guidance service and learning providers in Nottingham are sufficiently robust to sustain the engagement of adults who wish to improve their Skills for Life. By way of supplementary information the thesis also seeks to establish whether the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign properly engaged its target group in the Nottingham area.

1.2 Background

As far back as 1976 James Callaghan, then Labour Prime Minister, in a speech at Ruskin College, Oxford warned that unless skills levels were improved the United Kingdom could become an economic backwater. This statement gave an impetus to Government thinking that would influence a shift from learning for the sake of it in the great liberal tradition to learning that would benefit the economy.

Williamson (1998: 106) refers to this as 'a dominant discourse about learning which justifies it only in terms of helping people to get jobs.' Nevertheless, the justification for this change in direction is regularly re – inforced as price sensitive industries such as manufacturing, the traditional employers of large numbers of adults in low skilled jobs

requiring few or no qualifications, continue to re-locate to overseas countries with significantly lower labour costs.

The Government is, therefore, determined to make the economy more competitive; and literacy and numeracy skills are regarded as the foundation for further learning. Qualifications at Level 2, broadly equivalent to 5 GCSE's at A* to C including English and Mathematics (Appendices 2 and 3), are widely seen as the minimum required to ensure sustainable employment; therefore the Government has set a Public Service Agreement target to reduce, by at least 40%, the number of adults without a NVQ Level 2 or equivalent qualification by 2010. This translates into one million adults being expected to achieve a Level 2 qualification between 2003 and 2006 (Fullick, 2000: 7).

Adults with no or low qualifications are more likely to be unemployed or working in unskilled or low skilled work, and are the most vulnerable to lay offs or redundancy. Education and training services, including the information, advice & guidance partnership, have a major contribution to make to the economy; because, by equipping unemployed adults with employability skills and helping them to secure sustainable employment, they are removed from the benefits system. It is also important that those already in work improve their skills by gaining a vocational qualification at Level 2 as a minimum, thus making them more productive.

Some adults may be much further away from a Level 2 qualification for a number of reasons including their educational starting point and personal barriers eg. finance, transport. Literacy and numeracy are classified at a number of levels from pre - entry, Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2, Entry Level 3 or Level 1 (Appendices 2 & 3); however, some of those who aspire to a qualification at Level 2 (Appendices 2 & 3) are likely to struggle to achieve their goal. Learners with learning

difficulties and disabilities may be classified as such; however, a detailed study of this cohort is outside the scope of this thesis.

Kennedy (1997) counselled against being too focused on the competitive environment and stressed the need to widen participation. The 'creaming off' of those closest to the desired level of qualification can serve to marginalise those that have much further to travel. This view was supported by Smith and Spurling (2003: 113) who advised of the need to 'heal the motivational split in the population to increase the participation of those from poor social backgrounds with no track record of successful learning.'

1.3 Skills for Life / Basic Skills

Concerned by growing evidence relating to the number of adults with poor literacy and numeracy the Government, in 1997, asked Sir Claus Moser to chair a working group with an objective to improve the literacy and numeracy of the nation. Moser's influential report 'Improving Literacy & Numeracy: A Fresh Start' was published in 1999. In determining the scale of deficit Moser (1999: 103) estimated that some 20% of adults had low literacy skills; and as many as 48% of adults had low numeracy skills (ibid 1999: 4). These findings drew Moser to conclude that priority should be given to the least able adults and those living in deprived communities (ibid 1999:24). In response to Moser's recommendations a literacy and numeracy strategy (the Skills for Life Strategy) was developed and launched in 2001; and a Public Service Agreement target (from 2001 to 2010) was set to reduce by 2.25 million the number of adults classified as not having achieved a Skills for Life qualification at Entry Level 3 (Appendices 2 & 3) or above.

Because of the absence of a consistent approach to testing an

individual's competence and the diverse nature of the curriculum at the time of Moser's research, he was able only to provide an indication of the magnitude of the literacy and numeracy deficit and raise a number of issues worthy of further investigation. Since Moser called for a literacy and numeracy strategy standard tests and curriculae have been introduced (Skills for Life Survey 2003:10); and, by 2003, it was possible to conduct, for the first time, a United Kingdom wide survey to establish levels of literacy and numeracy accurately. The Skills for Life National Survey tested the literacy levels of 8,041 adults and numeracy levels of 7,873 adults (Skills for Life Survey, 2003:14). The survey results confirmed that lower levels of literacy and numeracy were associated with socio economic deprivation; and that adults in more deprived areas tended to perform at a lower level (ibid:2003:19). Also a strong correlation was found between a respondent's level of literacy and numeracy and his/ her educational history; and, of those with no qualifications, test results showed that 43% were at Entry Level, 40 % at Level One and only 17% at Level 2 or above (ibid:2003:21).

1.4 Response & Follow Up Provision

The Department of Education & Skills gave the operational responsibility for delivering the national literacy and numeracy targets to one of its agencies, the LSC, which funds the Information, Advice & Guidance Network, Further Education Colleges, Adult & Community Learning, Work Based Learning and Learndirect. The LSC also operates as a Co – Financing organisation for European Social Funding, and works in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the delivery agency of the Department of Work & Pensions. Similar to the LSC, Jobcentre Plus commissions training providers, but specifically to prepare unemployed clients for work.

The Learning & Skills Act created the LSC (<http://www.lsc.gov.uk>) in 2001 and made the organisation responsible for the planning and funding of post 16 education and training, with the exception of higher education. It aims to increase the demand for learning amongst adults, provide better access to learning, and raise skills levels for national competitiveness (Fullick, 2000:14).

Nextstep is the national brand for specialist organisations that are licensed to provide information, advice and guidance to adults without a Level 2 qualification (<http://www.nextstep.org.uk>). Nextstep, the Information, Advice & Guidance partnership, helps adults aged over 20 who have low or no qualifications and are seeking to improve their career prospects by gaining qualifications, developing new skills, brushing up existing skills or re-training. The service includes initial diagnostic of skills gaps, determining client's training needs and providing information on learning, skills and work in a range of formats including electronic, printed and verbal. The Nextstep service acts as a referral agent for those needing to improve their reading, writing and mathematics before applying for work and for those who are not in the job they want because they lack confidence in their literacy and / or numeracy.

Further Education Colleges, under Local Authority control prior to incorporation in 1992, are autonomous bodies which are largely, but not exclusively, funded by the LSC to provide post 16 education and training, but generally not higher education.

Adult & Community Learning, delivered by Local Authorities through outreach into local communities, receives a large part of its funding from the LSC, mainly to widen participation in learning with a focus on disadvantaged groups.

Work Based Learning is largely focused on Apprenticeships and Entry to Employment Programmes.

European Social Funding, co – financed by the LSC, is mainly targeted at adults who need additional support.

Learndirect was set up by the University for Industry (www.ufi.com) in 2001. The service aims to help adults without a literacy / numeracy or Level 2 qualification gain the skills and qualifications they need to find a job or to progress at work (Fullick, 2000:14).

Jobcentre Plus provision is funded from the Department of Work & Pensions. Its main focus is to prepare unemployed adults for work. All long term unemployed adults are referred to New Deal programmes which provide employability training, including literacy, numeracy and language. Jobcentre Plus also co – finances European Social Funding.

1.5 Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign

One of Moser's recommendations (1999:41) was that there should be a national campaign using mass communication media 'to raise awareness of the scale of the Skills for Life deficit in the United Kingdom; and to encourage adults to take action to address their shortfalls.' In 2000 this responsibility was given to The University for Industry (Ufi) / Learndirect and by 2001 a campaign, known as the 'Get On' campaign, had been launched. It featured characters, known as the Gremlins, who simulated situations in which poor Skills for Life were causing embarrassment. It was hoped that adults would identify with the images and be sufficiently motivated to take action. A typical example, aimed at those with poor numeracy, showed the Gremlin character unable to count the change being given by a shop assistant.

The advertising campaign, which used the media of television, radio and print, advised adults that they could access help and support by making a call to the Learndirect 'Get On' Helpline; whereupon a Helpline Adviser would ask for some basic personal information and offer to send them a copy of a video / DVD and / or referral to an

organisation that provided courses in literacy and numeracy. Finally, the Helpline Adviser would ask the caller for permission to pass on their contact details to the local LSC from which a follow up call would be arranged.

Although there were criticisms that the campaign played too much on individual deficit it was hailed a success because of the number of calls it generated.

1.6 Location of the Study

This study tracked a cohort of Nottinghamshire residents who called the Learndirect Helpline as a direct result of being exposed to advertising stimulated by the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign. Comparisons, however, will be drawn with Leicestershire which has similar disadvantage in its urban areas and rural hinterland. Both Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire are sub regions of the East Midlands where, in 2003, the East Midlands Regional Development Agency (emda, 2003:47 – 50) reported that 'one million people with poor literacy and numeracy lived, providing a challenge both inside and outside the workplace.' emda called for 'barriers to learning, whether financial, physical or psychological, to be addressed: and for improvements to be made in information, advice and guidance services for all ages to allow learners to progress along a continuum from Skills for Life to higher level skills'. In support of emda's position, and in recognition that without literacy and numeracy skills adults may find it difficult to progress towards a qualification at Level 2 (Appendices 2 & 3), the East Midlands' Employment & Skills Partnership (ESP 2003:26) supported the need for an awareness raising campaign to show how employability and productivity measures could be improved by tackling poor Skills for Life. Aimhigher, East Midlands (2006) reported that Nottinghamshire has thirty seven wards in the most deprived 500 (out of 8.400) in the

country according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation measure relating to Education and Skills. Disadvantaged wards are to be found in the ex coalfield area in North Nottinghamshire; and in the City of Nottingham, where a cluster of profoundly deprived wards are to be found in the parliamentary constituency of Nottingham North. The predominant ethnic minority population, mostly resident in Nottingham City, comprises mainly adults from Afro – Caribbean and Asian origin and is largely English speaking.

The labour market in Nottinghamshire is relatively healthy with high levels of employment helped by the number of low paid, low skill jobs. In the areas in which it is not difficult to find work there is a low perceived need for education and training. Appendix 5 shows the percentage of the workforce, by District, without a Level 2 qualification. Local Futures (2005:11) found that, overall, Nottinghamshire has slightly more working age adults without a Level 2 qualification (36.3%) than the England average (34.6%), but the range was from 21.8% in Rushcliffe District to 43.9 % in Ashfield District; and 41.4% of working age residents in Nottingham City was without a Level 2 qualification.

Between August 2002 and October 2005, the researcher, an employee of the Nottinghamshire LSC, populated a database with the details of 360 Nottinghamshire residents who called the Learndirect 'Get On' Helpline. During 2005 and 2006 attempts were made to contact each of the callers to ask if they would take part in a telephone survey with a target of 150 completed questionnaires.

1.7 Outcomes

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will lead to the following outcomes :-

- a) A number of adults who contacted the Learndirect Helpline, but subsequently chose not to take action to address their learning deficits, may give permission for their contact details to be passed on to a Specialist Skills for Life Information, Advice & Guidance organisation.

- b) Recommendations will be made to Learndirect with the aim of improving their marketing campaigns which seek to target hard to reach adults.

- c) Recommendations will be made to the Information, Advice & Guidance Partnership with suggestions on how to improve tracking and follow up services

- d) Recommendations will be made to the LSC and Jobcentre Plus to inform the planning and funding of information, advice & guidance and learning for the most disadvantaged learners.

- e) The work will add to the body of adult literature on how to develop more effective transitions between initial engagement and the achievement of a learning outcome.

- f) A blueprint for enhanced support will be developed to reduce learner drop out during the period between initial engagement and the point at which the learner achieves his / her learning aim.

2. CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this Chapter is to report on the findings of a literature review which seeks to understand Skills for Life learners, the economic and social contexts for learning, the effect of initial education on future aspiration to learn, barriers to learning, motivation to learn and participation rates. Then, to understand the publicly funded services that are available to support the learner's journey from initial engagement, through each transition, until eventually the individual's learning aim has been achieved having stimulated interest and raised aspirations. This will involve a review of the role of Information & Advice Partnerships, Further Education Colleges, Adult & Community Learning, Work Based Learning, Job Centreplus and Learndirect; and how these organisations collectively contribute to the Government's Public Service Agreement targets for Skills for Life.

The main research question is whether the publicly funded follow up processes ie. information, advice & guidance and learning provision are able to properly support disadvantaged adults who have issues with their literacy and numeracy (their Skills for Life).

The researcher intends to seek answers on a number of supplementary questions to find out whether respondents were:

- a. Representative of the target group of adults with poor Skills for Life
- b. Negative about their initial education
- c. Faced with multiple barriers to learning
- d. Unmotivated to improve their Skills for Life
- f. Not planning to progress their learning or their career in the future

2.2 Definition of Functional Literacy and Numeracy

Moser (1999:2) defined the term functional when associated with basic skills as 'the ability to read, write and speak in English, and to use Mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general'. Since 2001, however, a consensus has developed within the practitioner community that a less demeaning term than basic skills for literacy, numeracy and language is Skills for Life.

Adults who called the Learndirect Helpline did so because they felt they were lacking in one or more of their numeracy, literacy and language skills.

2.3 Background

Comparative studies, conducted on behalf of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have shown that the United Kingdom performs badly when compared against competitor nations (Brooks et al 2000:19, Moser 1999:9 and NRDC 2003 : 2). Appendix 4 shows that 56.9 % of the United Kingdom labour force had low level qualifications compared with 20% in Germany and 32.4 % in France and 27.7% of (of the United Kingdom labour force) had intermediate skills compared with 65% in Germany and 51.2 % in France. When comparing higher level qualifications the United Kingdom compares favourably but has a polarised skills profile.

Despite some improvement, the United Kingdom's skills gap remains stubbornly persistent. Output per hour worked is around 25 % higher in Germany than in the United Kingdom and over 30 % higher in France (NRDC 2003: 10 and DfES 2003:12) than in the United Kingdom.

In his forward to the Learning Age David Blunkett (2000:7) said that learning was not only important in relation to the economy; but also it could make a wider contribution. The Hon. Ruth Kelly, M.P., Secretary of State for Education, in a speech to the Association of Colleges in

2005, stressed the importance of the links between learning, employability and productivity and expressed concern that the United Kingdom was ranked only 21st in the OECD league table in terms of the proportion of the adult workforce skilled to Level 2 (Appendix 3). Kelly (2005) said that the economic imperative of education, training and skills was clear but it goes hand in hand with a social imperative. More recently, Wiseman (2006 : 11), stated that a central objective of United Kingdom government policy is to increase productivity, reduce social inequality and overcome deprivation. There is still much to do to raise skills levels for employability (Level 2); but not all unemployed adults want to work; and , for those who do 50% of jobs are closed to those without at least Level 1 in literacy and / or numeracy because they are thought by employers to be less productive at work (DTI, cited by NAO, 2004:17). Although progress is being made there is much to do and by 2012 two thirds of all jobs are expected to be at Level 3 (Kelly, 2005) so it is reasonable that the Government continues to make the case to end what the Confederation of British Industry has referred to as a long tail of underachievement.

In 2005, therefore, the Government commissioned Sir Sandy Leitch to conduct a review of skills in the United Kingdom; and identify the competencies required to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice by 2020. In his report Leitch (2005) re – iterated the social and economic benefits of addressing poor Skills for Life; and he stressed the importance of literacy & numeracy skills and a first Level 2 qualification as a foundation which had both social and economic potential. Leitch (2007:6) recognised that progress had been made, helped and encouraged by the implementation of the Skills for Life Strategy and the Skills Strategy. For example, more than 1.7 million adults had gained literacy and numeracy qualifications since the Skills for Life Strategy was launched and more that one million adults had achieved a Level 2 qualification. Nevertheless, Leitch (2005)

concluded that there was much more to achieve before the skills gap was closed. A major reason for this is weakness in the United Kingdom's skills base (Leitch 2007:7) because 6.8 million people have serious problems with numbers, and 5 million people are not functionally literate.

By 2011 Leitch (2007:16) suggests that 89 % of adults should be qualified to at least Level 1 literacy, and 81% qualified to at least Entry Level 3 in numeracy , up from 85% literacy and 79 % numeracy in 2005. Leitch (2007: 22) reported that that half of those who have low skills levels, around 2.5 million people, are unemployed or economically inactive. Too many people are trapped in a cycle of low skilled, poorly paid, often short term employment with few training opportunities and dependence on public support to pay for their learning. Leitch (2007), therefore, recommended that 79% of adults should be qualified to at least a full Level 2, up from 69% in 2005.

In support (Wiseman, 2006:6) had previously stated that learning does improve productivity and competitiveness and only a minority would argue that learning is a noble and civilised human activity, worthy of pursuit for its own sake (ibid 2006:10). Covington (1998:7) also supportively spoke of a 'technologically advanced world game' and questioned how nations hope to compete if 'many of their players are illiterate or underprepared.'

Kennedy (1997: 6 / 15), NRDC (2003 : 10), Wiseman (2006 :10) all refer to the foundation of social capital which is considered to be necessary to ensure economic success; however by focusing on economic success alone Fryer (1997: 14) warns of the widening gap between the most well off and the worst off who are most likely to suffer from social exclusion, eventually leading to a noticeable and dangerous learning divide, exacerbated for those with poor literacy and numeracy skills who are more prone to social exclusion (Skills for Life Survey, 2003) cited by O'Hagan (2002:10).

Keenly aware of the issues Field, cited in NRDC (2003:24), reported that government agencies had the potential to create the kind of social capital that is required to enable the most excluded groups and communities to break through the profound external obstacles and internal constraints that inhibit regeneration and renewal. There is an imperative for this work because the world is going through unprecedented social, economic and technological change; and the number of employers expecting high levels of literacy and numeracy skills is increasing. Having to address Skills for Life deficits in the workplace is seen by employers as unwanted remedial work to address the large proportion of the adult workforce with no qualifications or qualifications below Level 2, which is widely seen as the minimum required for employability (Brooks et al 2000 27 / 30, DfEE Skills for All (2000: 7), Eldred (2005:3), LSC (2005 : 8) and NRDC (2003 : 10). Specifically referring to levels of competence in Skills for Life Eldred, (2005 : 33) reported that there was evidence of a substantial difference in life chances, quality of life and social inclusion between individuals at or below Entry Level 2 compared with others at higher levels. Eldred (2005) suggests that Entry Level 2 skills are associated with a lack of qualifications, poor labour market experiences and prospects, poor material and financial circumstances, poor health prospects and little social and political participation.

The problem is not new. Towards the end of the last decade Fryer (1997: 11 – 12) reported that opportunities for unskilled and semi skilled employment were diminishing. Four years later Skills in England (2001), cited in O'Hagan (2002:9), reported that occupations which require higher skill levels are growing faster than those which require lower skill levels, and numeracy in particular is a skills hotspot. More recently ALL, (2004:10) reported that the skills needs of businesses in the United Kingdom are increasing and the number of jobs requiring no qualifications is set to decline by 25% over the next 10 years.

Whilst safeguarding only relatively small amounts of funding for Personal & Community Development Learning government policy is driving behaviour away from social learning to learning for economic reasons. Learning providers are being encouraged to enrol learners on to approved programmes, and there is a target that 80% of Skills for Life enrolments should be on National Qualifications Framework (NQF) qualifications, allowing only 20% of enrolments to relate to courses that are not on the NQF; but may be ideal as a stepping stone to more challenging accredited and employment related programmes. The Government is promoting progression to Level 2 which is another Public Service Agreement target. The behaviour that is driven by a focus on targets is unlikely to increase the participation of the truly disadvantaged.

Foley (1999) has warned of the irresponsibility of driving the education system wholly towards economic growth when he advocated that 'adult education and learning (should not be) mere technical processes in a neutral process of economic restructuring.'

Street (1997) referred to three broad and sometimes overlapping perspectives for adult learning. Firstly, the functional view of literacy as a set of technical skills which can be measured; and which demonstrate competence at a foundation level; and in which individuals are blamed for their own 'deficits' whilst they are addressed in a 'top down' manner with a curriculum that has been developed for, and not with, the learner. This model, which is in the ascendancy, is being used to drive adults to improve their Skills for Life. Secondly, the liberal view which provides a context for learning, but which attributes no blame on the individual for any deficit. In this model learning interventions have context and are developed in conjunction with the learner. Thirdly, the radical / critical view, as expounded by Freire (1972) which brings a political dimension ie. empowering individuals

so they can more effectively enter critical discourse to help themselves out of disadvantage.

Williamson (1998: 6) refers to contemporary debate about the form and purpose of continuing education which is tied to an agenda set by the needs of industry and commerce and focuses attention on skills and competencies relevant to only one version of how economic life should be organised. These debates Williamson (1998:80) says 'are structured around issues of access, employment opportunities, the educational needs of the socially disadvantaged and the long term reconstruction of the labour force to meet the needs of industry and commerce.' Williamson (1998) suggests that issues such as social exclusion are put on the back burner by those whose politics support 'free market dogmas and parsimony with the public purse.'

Stuart (2002:12) observed that 'education has always been particularly political, and the participation debate, which grew to dominate policies in the 1970s and beyond, was a debate about the targeting of limited resources as well as the particular needs of groups of learners.

Although the Education Act of 1944 supported the notion of 'education for all'. Stuart (2002) says that the transformation that had been envisaged had not been realised by the 1970s at a time when there was considerable pressure on non priority adult education budgets. Stuart (2002:17) argues that 'despite significant changes in government policy since 1997, simplistic outcome driven measures have still been enforced, although the ideology behind the new participation strategy is more 'welfarist' than the simple market base approach in the previous 20 years.

Government funding targeted at outcome driven behaviours drives the behaviours of information, advice & guidance services and learning providers, thus there is an ever present desire on providers to 'harvest' those closest to outcomes with the result that those that are

farthest away from an outcome are likely to gravitate to the bottom of the pile.

As a means of supporting disadvantaged learners Leitch's targets for Level 1 Literacy and Entry Level 3 Numeracy are unlikely to encourage different behaviour in learning providers. This is because, prior to Leitch, the Public Service Agreement target allowed qualifications from Entry Level 3 to Level 2 to be counted towards national targets. The difference, now, is that providers will have to cream more people off who are at Entry Level 2 in Numeracy but closest to the Entry Level 3 target; and Entry Level 3 in Literacy but closest to the Level 1 target.

2.4 A focus on Nottinghamshire

All callers to the Learndirect Helpline came from Nottinghamshire, the majority from the City of Nottingham. Nottinghamshire encompasses the Unitary Authority of Nottingham City (the City) and seven Local Authority Districts, those being Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark & Sherwood and Rushcliffe, collectively known as the County. Out of a population of just over one million there is a working age population of approximately 650,000 (Household Survey 2006, cited in Wiseman, 2006: 1 – 10). Local Futures (2005:15) reported that, in 2001, 11.8% of the population was aged 16 to 24, 28.8% were aged 25 to 44, 23.7% were aged 45 to 64 and 15.8% were aged 65 plus. 94.1% of the population was white in 2001 (84.9% of residents in the City of Nottingham). 95% of ethnic minority residents surveyed by Wiseman (2006) said that English was their first language. Nottingham City, acknowledged as the leading City in the East Midlands, is ranked as the seventh most deprived District in the country with annual gross earnings below regional and United Kingdom averages reflecting a low skill, low pay economy

(Wiseman, 2006: 2-10). The Parliamentary Constituency of Nottingham North is part of the City of Nottingham and each of its nine wards (Aspley, Beechdale, Bestwood Park, Bilborough, Bulwell East, Bulwell West, Byron, Portland and Strelley) is to be found amongst the 500 most disadvantaged wards in England. According to Local Futures (2005:6) in 2003 – 2004 Nottinghamshire was under – performing in macro – economic terms, falling below the Great Britain median score on most counts; and a lack of employment growth contrasted with strong growth nationally.

In terms of occupational profile the 2003 / 2004 figures showed that 39.9 % of economically active adults were in managerial, professional or associate professional or technical occupations, 10.1 % were in administrative or secretarial occupations, 11.4 % were in skilled trades occupations, 7.3 % were in personal service occupations, 9.1 % were in sales and customer service occupations, 10.4 % were process, plant or machine operatives and 11.9 % were in elementary occupations (Local Futures, (2005:19)). 90.2 % of male employees were working full time and 9.8% were working part time, 53.6 % of females were working full time and 46.2 % were working part time. The percentage of the working age population that was economically active was 74.2%, ranging from 65.4 % in the City of Nottingham to 85.8% in the District of Rushcliffe (Local Futures, 2005:12).

According to Local Futures (2005: 10) skills and qualifications levels in Nottinghamshire were low. The Nottinghamshire share of Moser's estimated 7 million adults of working age with a Skills for Life deficit was 144,000 (Appendix 7); but this calculation, however, makes the assumption that the deficit is consistent across every District and Ward. Moser's figures, therefore, mask variations which are especially significant in wards that are classified as deprived, according to the education, skills and training measure of the Index of Multiple

Deprivation. Nottinghamshire residents are below the English average for literacy and numeracy and Basic Skills Agency findings (2001), cited in LSC (2005:16), suggested a more accurate estimate of need by District (Appendix 8). A further disaggregation from District to Ward level appears in Appendix 9 which shows the 37 Nottinghamshire wards which are in the 500 most deprived wards nationally (out of 8,400). Wiseman (2006: 4– 8) commented that although reported figures showed high levels of poor Skills for Life only a minority of respondents rated their literacy and numeracy skills below average; and some respondents were reluctant to admit to having problems with reading and writing, and were fearful of the stigma associated with poor Skills for Life.

Given that Skills for Life are an important foundation for those aspiring to a Full Level 2 qualification there are more adults in Nottinghamshire at Level 1 or below (36.3%) than in England (34.6%) (LSC,2005 :16, Local Futures,2005: 11). There is a correlation between Districts with higher than average numbers of adults without a Level 2 qualification and higher than average numbers with poor Skills for Life (Local Futures, 2005). Low levels of adult qualification are caused by poor school results and in 2004 only 37.7 % young people in the City of Nottingham Local Education Authority and 47.4 % in Nottinghamshire County Local Education Authority, achieved GCSEs with the equivalence of Level 2, compared with an England average of 53.7% (LSC 2005:20). Many of those leaving school without qualifications are disaffected because their lack of engagement that began during compulsory education has persisted for many years (LSC 2001:12). For those who have left the statutory phase of education 67% of Nottinghamshire residents perceived the greatest benefits of education and training to be job related, 19% perceived no benefits; and 29% believed that nothing would encourage them to develop their skills (LSC,2001: 8, LSC 2005:17).

In the thirty seven most educationally deprived wards fewer adults than the Nottinghamshire average were undertaking or planning to undertake training and learning with 37% saying they would take up learning in a Further Education College, 21 % had not engaged since leaving school and 26% considered it not at all likely they would ever engage because of barriers including lack of time, cost and difficulty accessing childcare, 35% felt that there were no skills that they needed to improve (LSC, 2001:5 – 10).

A hardcore of non learners remains difficult to engage and continues to provide a challenge for the Information & Advice Services. More than 20% of all respondents were found to be reluctant learners to the extent that when asked about their preferred learning locations or ways to learn they say 'nowhere' and 'none'; however, just 14% said they felt negative towards learning (Wiseman, 2006:5-6). Adults tend to use advanced coping strategies to help them settle in comfort zones in which their personal and job related needs are met. Although the individual may not be motivated to take any action at the time, they may re – consider if they perceive there to be either personal or work related benefit.

2.5 Characteristics of the Skills for Life Community

Fryer (1997: 16), O'Hagan (2002: 6) and Eldred (2005: 31) report that adults with below average Skills for Life, including lone parents, ex offenders, older adults and ethnic minorities, are least likely to be represented amongst learners in post – 16 education and training. If they are in employment they are more likely to be in low skilled jobs. If unemployed they are likely to be on benefit and more likely to live in disadvantaged communities. (National Audit Office, 2004 : 42).

Sargant (1997, vi) supports the view that social class continues to be a key discriminator in understanding participation in learning.

Educational disadvantage is compounded by other material differences including poverty, often resulting in a denial of imagined possibility (Williamson, 1999). Too often education has already written these people off, and they internalise a belief that education is not for the likes of them (O' Rourke, cited by McGivney, 2001:70). Many adults with the poorest Skills for Life are reluctant to take up learning or enter a formal education setting. They may have emotional barriers and suffer from the stigma of having poor Skills for Life, they may lack confidence, possibly because of bad experiences in compulsory education, or fear of failure. They may also be in denial about their low level of skills or they may fear that taking up learning can leave them with a burden of debt. Others may have had negative experiences of registering with community initiatives that encourage first steps learning but collapse because short term Government finance is withdrawn (Brooks et al, 2000 : 49), Learndirect. 2002 : 7, NAO, 2004 : 39). Finding the cost of transport and arranging and paying for childcare can also be barriers that make adults into unreliable learners (Kennedy, 1997 and NAO, 2004). Those who are on benefit fear they may lose their entitlements and those who are in work may find it difficult to arrange to have time off (Kennedy, 1997:85), and fearful that their employer might find out that they may have a deficit in literacy and / or numeracy that might be 'held against them in some way' and potentially slow down or stop any career progression. Disadvantaged adults are usually the hardest to reach and often research studies into this cohort are compromised because they struggle to find a representative sample. There are a number of examples where the engagement of this cohort has been postponed, preferring to take a sample from those that are easier to reach (NRDC, 2002 – 2005 : 38). This could be because some of the hard to reach are unaware of their problems or may be reluctant to acknowledge or face up to them (Moser, 1999:5). Individuals may have developed

elaborate coping strategies over the years to 'hide' their embarrassment and lack of competence and adapt to their personal and / or work circumstances. They may have a negative view of education but are able to 'get by' in their daily lives (NAO, 2004 : 46, HOC, 2005, Learndirect / Ufl, 2002: 5) and Skills for Life Survey, (2003:20/22). Coping strategies include memorising information, avoiding 'tricky' situations where a deficit might be exposed and using counter action designed to create the impression of competency. Less confident adults may be in denial that they have a problem whilst the most confident might speak openly about their situation preferring to seek help from others (Learndirect / Ufl,2002: 5). Some Skills for Life learners are both motivated to learn and have the willpower requiring only a push or pull to encourage them to take the first step. Some have neither the motivation or the willpower to take action because they can manage within their comfort zone; and some could be motivated to take action but do not have the willpower because they perceive that the barriers to learning are too great (Learndirect,2002:6).

Skills for Life learners are often very fragile and are hard to reach because they carry preconceptions about learning. They all too frequently lack confidence and have low self esteem. Bad experiences at school, such as being victims of bullying, may have kept them away from learning. Pressure from peer groups or sometimes family can also be significant in keeping those most in need away from learning. It is difficult to tell how much time will lapse before circumstances come together to encourage a hard to reach adult to take positive action. Those who chose to learn say they do so to increase self esteem and to create a feeling of belonging (Learndirect (2002:8/9)) ; also they may be motivated to learn by influential third parties or by word of mouth. According to Brooks et al (2000 : 46) the quest for a positive self image is very important. Smith

and Spurling (2003:113) ask whether those offered a helping hand in the 'deeper recesses of social exclusion' will actually be motivated enough to accept the offer. Whilst Moser (1990: 51) suggests that it is wrong to regard the majority of adults with poor Skills for Life as permanently hard to reach, there is evidence that fragile learners may be hard to keep engaged. In order to help the Government has put in place a number of initiatives to support those with low skills who are most in need including free information and advice, a means tested Adult Learner Grant, an entitlement to free tuition, learner support funding eg. to help those who are struggling to pay for transport; and learning support to help learners who have learning difficulties and disabilities in the classroom.

2.6 Participation in Learning

Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:22) reported that the overall current or recent participation rate in learning in England had been 42% in each of the survey dates (1999, 2005 and 2006) suggesting that participation has not widened. The very groups identified as key to the achievement of the Skills Strategy and the Leitch Review are bearing the heaviest burden in the rebalancing of funding by the Government to target qualifications perceived to be of benefit to the economy (ibid, 2008:7). McGivney (1996:133) advises that 'academic institutions should recognise the difficulties faced by specific groups who lack recent educational experience and who find themselves in a minority in an institution because of their age, race, class, gender or disability.'

2.6.1 Gender

Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:11) found that the gender gap has become narrower and the largest proportion of learners are now

female; also marginally more females than males are likely to take up learning during the next three years (ibid, 2008:27)

2.6.2 Age

Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:13) found that as age increases the number of participants in full time education reduces. For example in 2006 49% of 17 to 19 year olds were in full time education, 21% aged 20 to 24, and 4% aged 25 to 34. Above 35 the full time complement is very small.

Table 2.1 Participation by Age

Age	1999 %	2002 %	2005 %	2006 %
17 – 19	81	78	75	82
20 – 24	70	72	63	68
25 – 34	50	51	52	49
35 – 44	47	47	49	48
45 – 54	41	44	47	44
55 – 64	29	30	32	34

Source: Aldridge & Tuckett, (2008)

When asked about future intention to learn those who are closer to their full time education are most likely to learn in the next three years, although up to age 44 over 50% expect to be learning during the next three years eg. in 2005 over 50% of those surveyed aged between 17 and 44 said they were likely to learn over the next three years, 45 % of 45 to 54 year olds and 27% of 55 to 64 year olds (ibid. 2008:30)

2.6.3 Ethnicity

Aldridge, Lamb and Tuckett (2008:7) refer to the 2006 ONS Survey which indicates that, collectively, adults from minority ethnic groups participate in learning in similar proportions to the general adult population (60%). However, these overall figures mask differences between minority ethnic groups. Upon closer inspection the data

revealed that only 47% of Pakistanis and 38% of Bangladeshis participate in learning.

There are strong indications that Somalis, subsumed into the category of Black Africans, are also less likely to engage. Similarly subsumed in the white category are white working class adults from disadvantaged communities

2.6.4 Employment Status

Employment status does not appear to make much difference in terms of being likely to learn in the next three years (ibid, 2008:29) showing unemployed (49% in 2005), those who are working part- time (50% in 2005), and those who are working full -time (52 % in 2005)

2.6.5 Occupational Area / Social Class

Sargant (1997, vi) reported that social class continues to be a key discriminator in understanding participation in learning. Over half of all upper or middle class (AB) respondents are current or recent learners, compared with one third of the skilled working class (C2) and one quarter of unskilled working people and people on limited incomes (DE)

Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:13) found that adults from social class DE were least likely to be participating.

Table 2.2 Participation by Grade of Social Class

Social Class	1999 %	2002 %	2005 %	2006 %
AB	58	60	56	58
C1	51	54	51	50
C2	36	37	40	41
DE	24	25	26	27

Source: Aldridge & Tuckett (2008)

(for explanation of Grade see Appendix 1)

Those in socio economic class level DE are less likely take up learning in the next three years than C2, C1 or AB eg. in 2005 DE 26% compared with 36, 46 and 50 % respectively (ibid. 2008:28)

2.7 Scale of the Skills for Life Deficit

In 1997 concerns about the extent of poor Skills for Life in England motivated the Government to commission Sir Claus Moser, Chair of the Basic Skills Agency, to conduct an investigation into the available evidence on adult literacy and numeracy. The absence of consistently objective information, gained from individual testing, made comparison difficult; however, at the time it was estimated that about 20 % of the adult population had less than functional literacy and about 20 % had low or poor numeracy skills (Carey et al,1997) and Basic Skills Agency (1997, cited by Brooks et al, 2000: 1). Kennedy (1997:21), however, suggested that 16.7 % of the population over the age of 16 had serious problems with basic skills. Research conducted by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies in 1997, on behalf of the Basic Skills Agency, found that 19% had weak literacy skills (13% low and 6% very low) and almost 50% had weak numeracy (25% low and 25% very low). The Skills for Life Survey (2003) further analysed the national deficit by gender. In terms of literacy by gender (Skills for Life Survey (2003:51)) of the 3453 male respondents 55% were below Level 2, and of the 4391 female respondents 56% were below Level 2; however, when numeracy is considered by gender of the 3450 respondents 67% were below Level 2 and of the 4,500 female respondents 81% were below Level 2. Kennedy (1997:21) concluded that a quantum leap was needed in Britain's performance in education and training. In his report, a Fresh Start : Improving Literacy and Numeracy Moser (1999:103) estimated that up to 7 million adults (20%) in England had low literacy skills below Level 1 ie. functionally

illiterate, including 6% with very low literacy skills below Entry Level 3; and 48% of adults had low numeracy skills below Level 1 or classified as functionally innumerate, including 23% of the population with very low numeracy skills below Entry Level 3 (Moser, 1999: 8, NAO, 2004: 18, Appendix 7). Commenting on Moser's findings Gregson et al (2005: 3) concluded that the deficit in numeracy was of greater significance than that of literacy; and is even more pronounced in the female population. Despite such significant estimations of the scale of need Brooks et al (2000) reported that fewer than five percent of those with Skills for Life needs had taken action to address their deficits during the mid to late 1990s. Moser's estimate of need fuelled much debate and caused Thomas Sticht (2002), cited in Gregson et al (2005), to suggest that 3.5 million adults with poor Skills for Life, rather than 7 million, might be nearer the mark.

The Education Guardian (25th January, 2005) took the view that Ministers were hyping Skills for Life figures (successes) to make an impact; and referred to Alan Wells, Director of the Basic Skills Agency, who claimed that the Government was grossly exaggerating the number of adults who can't read or write in order to make it easier to meet targets set in accordance with an overestimate which was fuelled by poor quality research. Wells feared a knee jerk reaction which might lead to short-term, very polarised action towards adults who need only to have their (literacy and numeracy) skills brushed up before taking a test, thus marginalising the most disadvantaged. To add to the debate Fryer (1997: 16) warned against too mechanistic an interpretation of the evidence presented by Moser and advised that data which was partial and lacking in detail should not be used to assess the state of lifelong learning in England. Whilst recognising that his figures were inevitably estimates and a little on the high side, Moser defended the order of magnitude concluding that it was certainly right (Moser, 1999:8). Despite these concerns, the

Government's reaction to Moser's powerful conclusions was to develop a Skills for Life Strategy which was launched in March 2001 at the start of what NAO (2004: 1) called a long term programme to break the cycle of low literacy and numeracy skills in England. To re – inforce his point Moser (1999:17/18) drew on International Comparisons made by the OECD (1997) which showed Britain performing 11 percent less well in literacy and 16% less well in numeracy than Germany. Concerns regarding the United Kingdom's position in international league tables were also raised by O'Hagan (2002: 2), not only in respect of the volume of human capital (qualifications level) in the workforce but also because of the failure to include those who are most disadvantaged. Moser (1999:44), therefore, sought to prioritise adults below Level 1 in literacy and below Entry Level 3 in numeracy; and those living in Districts with the highest levels of deprivation because they have roughly a quarter more adults with poor literacy or numeracy than other areas (ibid, 1999: 24). Moser's Report supported a desire to establish a clear target authenticated through recognised qualifications (Gregson et al., 2005 : 3). Qualifications, however, only count towards the Government's Public Service Agreement Target, set in 2001, if they are above Entry Level 3 provoking Gregson et al (2005: 3) to caution against setting targets at too high a level because many Skills for Life learners are below Entry Level 3 ie. with pre – entry, Entry Level 1 and Entry Level 2 competence; and there is a concern as to whether those most in need are being sacrificed to achieve Government targets. Supporting the prioritisation of adults with the lowest skills levels NRDC (2002 / 2005 : 8) concluded that there was a marked gap in disadvantage between adults at or below Entry level 2 and Entry level 3 with the likelihood of social exclusion being particularly high for those below Entry Level 2. Referring to a target that is solely based on qualifications O'Hagan (2002 : 6), commented that not everybody

who decides to do some learning around literacy or numeracy will want to achieve a qualification.

As a means of informing the debate with information sourced by testing a national survey known as the Skills for Life Survey was conducted in 2003 (NAO,2004:1). The research found that only one in five of the adult population of working age had both literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to Level 2; and an estimated 17.8 million (56%) had literacy skills and 23.9 million (75%) numeracy skills below that level (NAO,2004:15/16). Focusing specifically on Level 1, the skills expected of an eleven year old, Learndirect (2004 – 2005:10) drew attention to survey results that showed a greater proportion of the adult population having deficits in numeracy. In England, for example, 14.9 million adults lacked the numeracy skills needed for Level 1 whilst 5.2 million adults lacked literacy skills at that Level.

Researchers can often be misled when comparing information gathered by testing with the results of self perception surveys because individuals may feel they have all the skills they need or they may wish to play down any deficit. Also they may cover up their deficit completely leading one to believe that they do not need help (O' Hagan,2002 : 3). In seeking a reason to explain the general apathy towards addressing poor Skills for Life Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994), cited in Brooks et al (2000 : 28) observed that self reported literacy and numeracy problems are an important feature of overall self esteem. People generally want to feel positive about themselves and do not necessarily want to admit to shortcomings because there is a strong stigma associated with admitting basic inabilities. Results from tests of adult literacy and numeracy are in striking contrast with people's own perceptions because less than 5% of adults will admit they have a problem (Moser, 1999: 20 – 28). According to Brooks et al (2000: 18) self reports of problems with literacy and numeracy show a figure in the region of 12 % of the adult population (4.5 million in

England) who believe their basic skills are not adequate to meet the demands of everyday life (ALBSU,1987). Underestimation of need has been confirmed more recently in the Skills for Life Survey (2003) which reported that very few people regard their reading, writing or mathematics skills as below average (NRDC, 2003 and McNamara, Ed. 2004:69). Taking numeracy alone fifteen million adults (47%) in England had numeracy skills below the Government's target level (Skills for Life survey,2003: 22, DfES,2003). Adults own assessment of their numeracy, however, did not match the test results because two thirds (67%) of those categorised as having Entry 1 or lower level numeracy felt that they were 'very or fairly good at number work'.

In support of self assessment Sticht, cited in Gregson et al (2005), keenly advocated that the Government should shape policy around self assessment of need, and Gregson et al (2005:4) estimated, if that were the case, that only around 1.5 million adults would assess themselves as having a need. Gregson et al (2005:5) chose to disagree (with Sticht's views) and claimed that this would provide a radically different view of the problem; and suggested that for a number of complex reasons, including coping strategies associated with a very difficult client group, it is hard to agree that self assessment is the best way to accurately define the scale of the problem. Care should, therefore, be taken when drawing conclusions from research that involves self perception of need.

Out of 1,215 interviews conducted as part of the Deprived Ward Survey published by the Bostock Marketing Group in 2002 (LSC, 2001:2) 40% of respondents were working full time, 15 % were working part time and 45% were economically inactive. 53% of males were in work and 48% of females. 24% of employed respondents were in higher order managerial or professional occupations, 19% were in skilled trades and 19 % were in elementary occupations.

2.8 The Causes and Effects of Poor Skills for Life

The origins of poor Skills for Life can be traced to adverse family circumstances, often referred to as the intergenerational affect (Brooks et al, 2000 : 29 – 32 and NRDC,2002 – 2005 : 14). Factors found to be predictive of poor Skills for Life include the low social class of parents, low qualifications and lack of parental interest in their children's education. Brooks et al (2000) concluded that individuals with poor Skills for Life have been conditioned by a blend of cognitive, social and educational factors which are often mutually reinforcing. Over half of our young people come out of school and start adult life in need of compensatory education (Kennedy 1997:11). The blame for this can be laid firmly at the door of statutory education which has allowed many young people to leave school with poor Skills for Life (Moser, 1999) and HOC, 2006). Fryer (1997 :15) concluded that the same groups of people who miss out on education after school are also likely to miss out on training opportunities at work. More school leavers are joining the pool of people with Skills for Life problems than can be trained; and once out of statutory education those with poor Skills for Life are more difficult to engage and circumstances may conspire to discourage them from undertaking remedial learning (ALI (2004: 23 / 24)). The majority of adults with poor Skills for Life, however, bring negative experiences of school education and are most likely to live in areas that suffer from deprivation which have roughly one quarter more adults with poor literacy or numeracy than other areas (NRDC (2002 – 2005:16)). Many who have not properly learned these skills at school are reluctant to start or persevere with learning as adults (NAO (2004 1)); however, some individuals may have acquired competence in basic skills during the statutory phase of education and failed to maintain them (Moser, 1999 : 20 – 28). Wiseman (2002: 8) reporting on their survey of deprived wards, when

considering barriers to learning and / or training, reported that 17% of respondents reported lack of time, 12% reported family commitments, 6% cited the cost, 6% cited illness or disability, and 54% said that nothing stands in their way.

Individuals who fail to improve their Skills for Life are up to five times more likely than those with adequate skills to be unemployed, if they are employed they are more likely to be in unskilled or semi skilled low grade work, twice as likely to have been made redundant or sacked from their first job, and four times more likely to experience long term unemployment. They are also more likely to suffer from poor physical and mental health and they are more likely to have children experiencing difficulty at school (Moser, 1999:24, O' Hagan, 2002: 8).

The Government publication 'In Demand – Adult Skills in the 21st Century (2002:5)' suggests that, without literacy and numeracy skills, individuals cannot start to develop a career path; and may be trapped on benefits or on a low salary because earnings are still relatively low until Level 2 competence has been reached. This is supported by NRDC (2002 – 2005 : 8/9) who found that adults with skills significantly below Level 2 ie. at Entry Level 2 and below are especially disadvantaged, and that low numeracy has a greater impact than low literacy in terms of the likelihood of being disadvantaged in the labour market or living in a non – working household.

Findings suggest that there is a strong correlation between a respondent's level of literacy and numeracy, and his / her educational history (Skills for Life Survey, 2003:20/22). More than six in ten of those employed in routine or semi routine work had Entry 3 or lower level numeracy skills; and those with Entry 3 or lower level numeracy were less than half as likely to earn the same as those with competence at Level 2 or above. Nearly one in two respondents were classified at Entry Level 3 or below in one or both of the literacy and numeracy assessments (ibid, 2003: 20/22). Those who appear to cope in their

social and / or work situation are unlikely to realise how vulnerable they are in the longer term; for example, as unskilled and semi skilled jobs become fewer in number.

Attempts have been made to calculate the financial consequences of poor Skills for Life. Moser (1999: 25) suggested that illiteracy alone, was costing business and Government £10 billion per annum, the sum of the combined effect of lower income, reduced productivity, poorer health and the cost of benefits from welfare services (Nottinghamshire Skills for Life Partnership Action Plan 2002 – 2005). In 1999 it was difficult to quantify the impact of initiatives to address poor skills for life prompting Moser (1999: 32) to suggest that initiatives had not been evaluated effectively enough. Between 2001 and 2006 £3.7 billion was spent on literacy and numeracy training for adults in Further Education, Adult and Community Education, Learndirect Centres, Prisons and the Probation Service (NAO 2004:25); however, employers have concluded that there was no systematic evidence, whatsoever, that there is any benefit from investing in literacy and numeracy training (NRDC 2002 – 2005).

2.9 Experiences at School

Field (2000: 139) refers to the core function of the school, specifically that ' every child needs access to the 'basics'. Literacy and numeracy are truly 'key skills' unlocking doors to further learning.'

Not all school experiences are positive; however and Mc Givney (1996:13) suggests that they 'can foster feelings of inadequacy and failure.' Westwood (1984:4-5) refers to defeats in the classroom suffered by working class children which alienate them early on from an educational system which they continue to view in adulthood as offering an alien and humiliating experience. Part of the working class response to capitalism might be withdrawal and failure to participate.

Westwood (1996) suggests that rather than 'quiet disaffection' schools foster active rejection which may accompany an individual into adulthood. Williamson (1998:9) says that it is 'certainly no mystery why millions of people recall their schooldays as days not of hope but of humiliation.' With reference to Government policy Williamson (1998: 105) goes on to refer to the 'tragedy that the need to learn has been incorporated into the dominant frameworks of public education where it has become for many an experience, not of the joy of learning and of feeling empowered by ideas, but of failure and of a determination never to return to study. The culture of many working class communities is ingrained with a hostility to education and everything it represents.' Covington (1998:126) says that 'for many disadvantaged students, school is an endless daily cycling through crowded, decaying classrooms managed by overburdened teachers who serve up listless, make – work assignments with little or no hope that these youngsters will even catch up and escape a life limited to dead end marginal jobs.'

Jeannie Oakes (1985), cited by Covington (1998:126), who conducted research on classroom inequality, speaks of low – track classrooms in which repetition of basic numeracy and literacy which is not 'functional at all' provides students with neither 'relevance or rigour'. The seeds of doubt and failure begin remarkably early and these youngsters are likely to be judged 'backward,' a bureaucratic label that will probably stick as demonstrated earlier by the dynamics of self fulfilling prophecy. Gee, cited in Lee, V., Ed. (1990). reports that too many children are failing to equip themselves with functional literacy, and that the cohort has greater presence of those from low income and minority homes. This stock of young people who are functionally illiterate, or marginally illiterate, flows into adulthood in need of support.

Mc Givney (1990) refers to three inter – relating factors which influence later participation behaviour : length of school (staying at school beyond the minimum statutory leaving age): acquisition of qualification, and a positive enjoyment of schooling.

2.9.1 Length of time at school

Covington (1998:255) says that the single best predictor of lifetime income is the number of years completed in school.

Table 2.3 demonstrates that the age an adult left education has a direct bearing on their likelihood to be in learning or to have been in learning recently (Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:17))

Table 2.3 Participation by Age of Leaving Initial Education

Age	1999 %	2002 %	2005 %	2006 %
Up to 16	28	30	30	31
17 – 18	53	52	48	48
19 – 20	55	45	47	48
21 +	61	65	60	56

Source: Aldridge & Tuckett, 2008

Table 2.3 shows that Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:26) found past learners or those who had not undertaken any learning since leaving school were much less likely to take up learning eg. In 2006 89% of current learners said they were likely to be learning, 72% of recent learners, 33 % of past learners and only 15% of those who had no done any learning since leaving school.

2.9.2 Failure to acquire qualification

Covington (1998:4) draws attention to the excessive numbers of students who drop out or finish their mandatory education 'without a single achievement for which they can feel uniquely responsible or feel justly proud.'

There are also gender and ethnic differences. Covington (1998:75) reports that men and boys express failure prone attributions less than women and girls, probably because males are more defensive

owing to societal pressures to maintain an image of competency. Covington (1998:58) also points out that 'many minority group members doubt that they will ever achieve satisfactorily in school.' Fordham & Ogbu (1986), cited by Covington (1998:63), reported that 'castelike minorities tend to exhibit an external locus of control. They feel like pawns of fate, buffeted by forces beyond their control. The tendency among blacks to discount themselves is thought to occur in large part because white America has long held low expectations of blacks and because blacks, as a result have come to doubt their intellectual potential.'

Williamson (1998:53) refers to those who 'remain victims, rather than agents of, their own fate.' In particular, he is singling out those who have little self confidence, feel worthless or are burdened by the label of being a failure at school.

Edwards and Mercer in Lee, (Ed.) (1990:103) refer to a set of joint understandings that combine to make the education process work. If a pupil does not succeed at school then it may be because he / she lacks innate ability, or because the pupil has not responded to the socialisation process engineered through control mechanisms put in place by the teacher.

Freire (1972: 55) contends that teaching is used to change and mould the oppressed so that the domination can continue. Oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus to adjust these 'incompetent and lazy' 'marginals' who need to be 'integrated,' 'incorporated' into the healthy society that they have 'foresaken.' This didactic approach serves to prevent students from confronting their own reality.

Wheldall and Merrett in Lee, (Ed.) (1990:13) suggest that 'the teacher's effectiveness in his / his role can be at risk if some students misbehave and / or are poorly motivated. The teacher seeks to excise or avoid these threats by aversive means.'

Teachers may also convey, through the way in which they speak to students or their body language, messages as to which students are in favour and which are not in favour. Those in whom teachers have little or no belief have few or no expectations placed upon them, they fall behind in their work and their failure to achieve re – inforces the teachers belief that they are, in their view, ne'er do wells.

Yarnit, in Mayo and Thompson (1995: 78 – 79, points out that the continuing rise in educational standards in our schools is masking a growing polarisation between those bound if not for glory then relatively stable employment and those who will merely survive at the margins'.

The challenge for schools must be to create what Covington (1998:19) refers to as 'motivational equity ' in the classroom so that all students feel that they are improving themselves and increasing their knowledge.

2.10 Barriers to Participation

Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:33 -36) found that 'barriers to learning tend not to be gender specific, with the exception of childcare arrangements (also cited by Decker and Whitfield,1989) or caring for others, where women (11%) are much more likely than men (2%) to be prevented from learning.'

Problems caused by a lack of public or private transport may prove insurmountable for some. McGivney (1996:39) explained that a lack of transport might cause unreliability or non attendance on the part of those who live in disadvantaged communities.

Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:33 -36) concluded that age, or perceptions of it, can have an effect; because they found that 11% of respondents thought that they were 'too old to learn.' Aldridge and Tuckett (2008) also found that work or other time pressures were more

often cited as a barrier to learning by adults aged between 25, and 44 and those in socio economic groups AB. They found that those who chose not to participate in learning beyond initial education may question the value of learning and have an attitude towards it. Aldridge and Tuckett (2008:33 – 36) also found that those who had not participated in learning since full time education were most likely to lack interest in learning. This may be because they lack confidence in their ability to learn new skills.

Particularly significant to the widening participation and Skills for Life initiatives is the suggestion made by Fletcher (2002) and supported by Decker and Whitfield (1989) that financial support has a greater effect on those taking lower level qualifications where drop out rates are highest.

Decker and Whitfield (1989) commented that unforeseen expenditure eg. the cost of books or examination fees might be the deciding factor as to whether or not an individual takes a course, especially for those on low incomes or in receipt of benefit. Also Dekker and Whitfield (1989) suggest that an individual's personal health may be a barrier to initial and ongoing participation, especially for older learners and those on Jobcentre Plus programmes which target incapacity. McGivney (1996:39) reported that learners who are in receipt of invalidity benefit may succumb to their long term condition and be absent for several weeks.

2.11 Increasing Participation through the Media

Kennedy (1997: 5) said there had been a growth in participation but one which had not come from a sufficiently wide cross section of the community. In support Fryer (1997) spoke of a sense of change being required to attract new students from the poorest communities. Moser (1999: 28) identified the reason for under – representation of

disadvantaged groups in Adult Basic Education as poor or crude targeting.

The importance of using a range of media to reach non learners who feel that learning is of no value to them is widely recognised (Kennedy,1997, Moser,1999:41 and DfES, 2003 b:11). Recommendations were made that promotional strategies should be tailored to meet the needs of different target groups of learners. In particular NAO (2004 : 1) acknowledged the need to find new and creative ways to involve people with the lowest skill levels and those who are least likely to perceive that they have poor competence in literacy. In the late 1990s the Department of Education used campaigns on television and radio to help adults to recognise their low skills and to signpost them to the most appropriate learning provision. In 2001 Learndirect (NAO 2004:4) developed and launched a high profile campaign known as the Gremlins' campaign which was considered to be a positive move by Gregson et al (2005: 3) because its design was based on research showing that non learners needed to be directly confronted with their Skills for Life deficits in a way that made them uncomfortable (Why Gremlins ? Stuart Barnes, St. Luke's Advertising Agency, on www.dfes.gov.uk ., NAO (2004 : 40).

Prior to the 2004 / 05 academic year the 'Gremlins' Campaign targeted adults with the most severe literacy, language and numeracy needs (Learndirect Promotions and Communications Strategy, 2004 – 2005: 8 – 16). The campaign used TV, radio and the print media and featured a 'Gremlin' character which aimed to challenge people to recognise their deficit(s) and take up learning. Gremlins were referred to as the characters that 'we love to hate' in advertising which depicted a number of difficult and potentially embarrassing scenarios which sought to engage adults who identified with one or more of them (Brooks et al, 2000 and Eldred, 2005:31).

There is strong evidence of the effectiveness of advertising campaigns in the national media (Kennedy 1997 : 104) who reported that a free telephone helpline had attracted up to 57,000 callers annually, a third of whom had taken up courses as a result of the advice, and more than half of whom were long term unemployed. At a regional level 75 % of callers responding to promotional campaigns had said that television and / or radio adverts encouraged them to call (Moser, 1999:39). Specifically, relating to market research into the 'Gremlins' Campaign (Basic Skills Bulletin Number 6, LSC, 31st January 2003), it has been reported that around a third of callers went on to do some learning.

The 'Gremlins' campaign generated a 73% recognition rate amongst the target audience in 2001 / 02 rising to 84% in 2003 / 04. Almost 300,000 people called the Learndirect Helpline, and many more contacted learning providers directly. The stigma felt by adults reduced; and 65% felt that there was no need to be embarrassed when seeking help. It was estimated that around 26% of the adults who had called the Helpline had gone into learning. Researchers have also concluded that up to six times as many adults may have taken some form of action to improve their skills as a result of the advertising without directly responding to the national campaign Helpline (Learndirect Promotions and Communications Strategy, 2004 – 2005:8 – 16, HOC 2006, NAO, 2004:40). Although an increasing proportion of callers had taken some action to improve their skills, follow-up research indicated that about half still had not, suggesting that there were still significant barriers which prevented people from taking up literacy and numeracy learning even if they were keen to improve their skills (HOC, 2006)

The point to note is that mass campaigns need careful management for a number of reasons. Firstly, the level of response is unknown although estimates based upon previous, similar campaigns can be

made; therefore, planning is difficult. Secondly, if large numbers respond there needs to be an infrastructure in place, subject to Data Protection protocols, to record personal details. Thirdly, the transition from Helpline to advice session has to be managed and the transition from advice session into learning.

Generally, the figures quoted for those who have gone into learning are couched in terms such as 'around' or 'it is estimated that' with no details of the type of learning.

Hodgson (2000), however, expressed concerns about 'the potential to place blame for social exclusion and poverty on non participating individuals rather than looking at the broader societal issues and trends.'

Advertising that portrays the individual with poor Skills for Life as somehow having a deficit, or being inferior, questions the very essence of a promotional strategy that seeks to 'promote basic skills courses whilst alienating and patronising the same individuals.' Erlewyn – Lajeunesse and Fowler (2001) suggest that 'If we want to attract high numbers of the target learners it is necessary to 'positively address the learners themselves as well as marketing the strategy.'

2.12 Motivation to Learn

Covington (1998:11- 18) compares the two models of motivation which are used in school settings, drive and goal theory.

An example of drive theory in action is where the teacher creates competition in the pursuit of extrinsic rewards, to be 'won' in competition with others. The motives-as-drive mentality, however, encourages largely negative reasons for learning, including the threat of punishment if performance is below par. When competition is used as a driver of learning and students become overwhelmed they may become defensive, resistant, and angry.

Dweck (1999:134) says that 'an approach that does not include goals does not deal with the different purposes that achievement strivings can serve. It does not tell us, for example, whether someone is trying to validate their intelligence or to challenge themselves and learn something new.'

Covington (1998:19) suggests that 'external inducements such as praise or a good grade are not important but satisfying a personal interest is.' If a student is involved in setting learning goals he / she has a positive reason to learn (an intrinsic reward) which is non competitive.

A failure oriented person is likely to avoid situations if they think that the chances of failure are high. If students are in competition with each other some students may adopt avoiding behaviour to protect their sense of ability. Covington (1998) suggests that impoverished young people and members of ethnic minority groups are examples of categories of learners who use failure avoiding strategies.

Counterproductively, If students are spending their time avoiding failure they are less likely to be concentrating on their own learning. In addition to the potential for time wasting Covington (1998:23) suggests that students may be motivated but for the wrong reasons ie. motivated to avoid failure or at least to avoid the implication of failure, that they lack ability. It is possible that the student gains recognition from peers and attention from teachers if he / she misbehaves, becomes a perpetual truant or the class bully.

Elliott (1997) cited in Dweck (1999:34) proposed an integration between the motive (drive) approach and the goal approach.

2.13 Response and Follow Up Provision

2.13.1 Information, Advice & Guidance

In the mid to late 1990s concerns were raised that the information, advice & guidance service was inadequate and could not properly

widen participation. The service was deemed not to be flexible enough to accommodate adults who wanted access to information at the right time for them which could be before or after they enrol on a course. It was also found that access to high quality provision proved difficult for under represented learners, and was thought to be no more than a lottery (Kennedy 1997: 85-92). Disadvantaged adults require information, advice & guidance services to be accessible, flexible, impartial and free. Although government policy seeks to provide Information and advice at no cost to adults without a Full Level 2 qualification (Taylor et al 2005), many are cautious that the creation of an entitlement to free learning will not necessarily guarantee take up (DfES 2003:63).

It has been recommended that the Government should support a high quality Information, Advice & Guidance Service that is able to provide expert advice and deal with the most disadvantaged learners sensitively (LSC 2004 : 18, Nottinghamshire Information & Advice Partnership Strategic Plan, DfES 2003 b 11). The Government's drive to improve services, widen participation and target those who are currently most under – represented has been welcomed by the Learning & Skills Development Agency (LSDA 2003 3).

McGivney (1996:122) refers to 'some analysts who suggest that better retention rates can be achieved through measures such as closer relationships between receiving and 'feeder' institutions and better pre entry information and guidance.'

Once an adult commits to take action to improve their education it is important that they are supported during and after transition points (LSC 2004: 11). There should be a seamless route from the point at which individuals initially receive information and advice prior to commencing learning, whilst they are in learning and before they move on to the next stage. There is a much to do to ensure that those who need help with their Skills for Life are properly referred to specialist

provision (Holland et al, 2004:10 and DfES, 2003 b: 2). The main role of Information, Advice & Guidance Services, according to O' Hagan (2002 : 11), is to refer clients, especially those who are disadvantaged, to specialists in literacy and numeracy; however, of 5,000 advice interventions from the Information, Advice & Guidance Network delivered in Nottinghamshire during 2002 / 2003, only 2% (100) were referred to Skills for Life provision, although 30% (1,500) had qualifications below Level 2 (Vale, 2004:3). For many adults with low skills it is necessary to build confidence and raise self esteem through first steps learning opportunities which are some way off a Level 2 (LSC, 2004:6). According to Irving (2001) local Learning Partnerships are best placed to plan coherent support; but to date work to track the experience of learners has been limited and not representative of such a diverse cohort (NRDC, 2002 – 2005). In recognition of significant concerns in relation to the effectiveness of information, advice & guidance services for adults, the Remit Letter from the Secretary of State (2000) asked the LSC to further develop coherent Information & Advice Services for adults so as to help them make an informed choice and to widen participation by attracting non learners into learning (LSC, 2004:21).

It is important that adults know where to access appropriate information and advice. When prompted, most adults do recognise the names of professional bodies charged with providing Information, Advice & Guidance to adults including Learndirect (Taylor et al, 2005:27, Learndirect 2005 : 5 - 6). Learndirect Advice provides a free telephone and web – based information, advice & guidance service which aims to engage adults not yet qualified to Level 2, in particular those who have a long way to travel to achieve significant outcomes (IES, 2003:6). Calls are generated by word of mouth, advertising and direct marketing and advisors have access to a database of learning providers. Client details such as age, gender, postcode,

qualification level and learning aim are recorded. The most recent client survey indicated a 67% satisfaction level (Learndirect, 2005 : 10). Although there has been progress in relation to establishing effective links between Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships and Learndirect significant work is still to be done to ensure coherence between the two services (Irving, 2001).

Research into the impact of Information, Advice & Guidance Services found that 76% of adults surveyed engaged in learning; and 43% of adults with no qualifications and 39% of adults with a Level 1 qualification undertook some form of learning as a result of receiving Information & Advice (LSC, 2004: 7); however, the methodology used to inform these findings is not clear, especially in relation to how those surveyed were selected. According to Irving (2001) client throughput information is not collected systematically across Information & Advice Partnerships thus restricting the use of management information at partnership level. Systems for monitoring outputs are less developed than those for recording information on clients accessing services, and few partnerships are in a position to monitor progression between services and effective referrals; or to monitor progression on to learning and employment opportunities. Nearly one in four adults (23 %) said nothing would encourage them to seek Information, Advice & Guidance; and those most likely to use the service in the future would be seeking to gain a qualification: however, those with no qualifications are among the most likely not to mention anything that would encourage them to use the service ie. 32 per cent compared with 17 % of those with some qualifications (Taylor et al, 2005: 40 / 41). The researcher conducted a review of Adult Learning Inspectorate inspections of Nextstep (Information, Advice & Guidance Services) in Nottinghamshire and, for the purpose of comparison, Leicestershire to find out exactly how well the services were performing.

Nextstep, Nottinghamshire was inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate in 2004. Inspectors found the overall effectiveness of provision to be satisfactory but there was found to be a slow development of a coherent Skills for Life Strategy. Identification of clients literacy, numeracy and learning needs was generally satisfactory with referrals being made appropriately to specialist support.

Between August 2004, when Nextstep, Nottinghamshire started collecting data on positive outcomes and July 2005 few clients were successfully contacted following their initial advice session. However, between August 2005 and July 2006 Nextstep, Nottinghamshire significantly increased the sample used to evaluate its achievement rate of positive outcomes. Respondents said their confidence had improved, their self worth had increased, and they had learned to recognise their strengths and identify gaps. 18% more women than men entered learning, 20% more men than women entered employment. 17% entering learning, gaining employment or progressing to voluntary work had a disability, and 30% were from Black Minority Ethnic groups.

Nextstep, Leicestershire was inspected in 2006 when the overall effectiveness of the service was assessed as good. Clients' literacy, numeracy or language needs were considered to be adequately met. Inspectors reported Nextstep as being particularly effective at directing clients to other support, employment and training agencies, and checking that clients take up this support. There was no evidence of target setting to improve client progression, and insufficient analysis of the success rates of different groups of clients. Nextstep, Leicestershire had not successfully analysed data and information it holds on clients to review progression into employment, learning over time or the variations between groups of learners. Between August 2004 to January 2006 8,791 clients without a Level 2

qualification and 1,617 with at least a Level 2 received a first advice session. 4% of those without a Level 2 and 8% of those with at least a Level 2 were contacted for a six months follow up.

Learndirect Advice was inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate in June 2005. It was found that hoax and caller terminated calls constituted up to a third of all calls. It was also found that the integrity of the learning database, the principal source of information for advisers, was found to be compromised because Advisors did not have access to the providers' inspection grades, thus making it possible for an Advisor to refer a client to a poorly performing training provider. The Inspectors found that data with which to measure the impact of each level of advice, participation rates in learning, completion and achievement rates was not systematically collected. The Inspectorate's recommendation was that robust performance indicators should be developed (ALI, 2005 : 1 – 9); thus re – enforcing similar recommendations from Government and its agencies (DfES, 2003b: 12 / 14, LSC, 2004 : 5-9, LSDA, 2003: 4). It was also recommended that measures should be developed for non qualification bearing courses because many hard to reach adults may be attracted initially to this particular type of provision (LSDA, 2003:4). The Nottinghamshire Information, Advice & Guidance Partnership Strategic Plan (2003) suggests that there should be a commitment to follow up with all users in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision and to establish whether key objectives are being met in terms of employment or further learning.

Leitch (2007:28) stressed that good information, advice & guidance is vital for finding the right training and the right work. But this is part of a larger goal; to help people make the most of their lives and take in their own hands their future and that of their families and communities. According to Irving (2001) Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships have striven to engage hard to reach learners by making

links with organisations working directly with priority groups eg. the voluntary and community sector. Marketing has been identified as being a key element of engaging priority groups but there are fears that if too much demand is stimulated it might not be satisfied without compromising quality. LSC, through Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities, and the Department of Work and Pensions, through City Strategy pilot programmes, are seeking to ensure that there is no deleterious affect on quality of service provision.

In recognition of the importance of information, advice & guidance Leitch (2007:28) recommended the merging of Learndirect's Advice Service with the existing Information, Advice & Guidance Service. It is anticipated the new organisation will work closely in partnership with Jobcentreplus, the organisation whose raison d'etre is to manage the benefits system and reduce the percentage of the working age population that is economically inactive. Leitch aims to remove 'discontinuity' from the Information, Advice & Guidance Service that is provided to vulnerable adults; and his vision is that working age adults should be supported with advice and guidance, and public finances should be focused on the more vulnerable adults with lower level skills. To remedy poor Skills for Life it is important that high quality learning provision is available; however, the quality of the post 16 education sector was brought into question by Eldred (2005: 31) who referred to Moser's (1999) finding that there were huge variations in quality and quantity of provision across the country due to years of neglect. Learners often failed to progress and some repeated the same programme year after year (Moser, 1999 cited in Eldred, 2005:31). Adults with poor Skills for Life should have a wide choice of provision because they are not a homogenous group (Moser, 1999:31 – 43). Present provision is not sufficiently varied to respond to the different motivations and needs of adults, and there is particular concern

about the inadequate scale of community and workplace provision (Ibid, 1999:31 – 43).

2.13.2 Further Education

Hamilton in Crowther (2001:25) reported that the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) made Adult Basic Education part of the system of Further Education in England and Wales which is mainly concerned with providing accredited vocational qualifications. As a result of these developments Adult Basic Education became more firmly established, increasingly formalised and less rooted in the interests and experiences of people in communities. About two thirds of Adult Basic Education students in England and Wales (Further Education Funding Council, 1998) now study within Further Education Colleges, and less than a quarter in Local Authority adult and community based programmes. This reverses the proportion at the start of the 1990s (Basic Skills Agency, 1997).

Mc Givney (1996:1) referred to changes in education policy and structures since the early 1990s which have created a new landscape for adult learners, not least because funding constraints and policy changes have led to a strong shift towards certificated provision for adults. Stuart (2002:15) says that funding was directed in such a way so as to shape the nature of Further Education and to promote the uptake of accredited vocational courses. The Further Education sector was also encouraged to provide guidance and develop packages of support for students.

McGivney (1996:14) and Stuart (2002:14) reported that Further Education Colleges were also required to improve attendance levels, completion rates and outcomes. According to Stuart (2002:15) this pressure and yet more pressure to improve quality and drive up success rates led a 'retrenchment into their main buildings and out of community settings where 'they felt' unable to provide the range of

support provision that is now required.' Further Education Colleges were also encouraged to eliminate or drastically reduce their franchised provision.

Mc Givney (1996) says that official concerns with quality, effectiveness, and accountability led to calls for more careful monitoring of student progress. In 1993, the Audit Commission recommended tracking of completion rates in Further Education and the inclusion of non completion rates for all courses in published results. When asked about procedures to contact learners who had been absent for a significant period of time McGivney (1996:37) reported that the responses from Further Education Colleges were variable, and there was no consistency in where the responsibility for follow up lay. Some Further Education Colleges said the tutor was responsible, sometimes an administrator, sometimes a pastoral tutor. The method of following up also varied sometimes by telephone, letter or in person which was the favoured method for some, especially in the case of Adult Basic Education students. McGivney (1996:38) however, found that some Further Education Colleges saw little benefit in following up with learners because of the cost and the considerable amount of time and resource needed to track erratic attenders.

In the late 1990s there was a drive to address the backlog of what was considered to be thwarted potential which could only properly be met by Further Education Colleges (Kennedy, 1997:11). Literacy and numeracy courses, delivered by Further Education Colleges, accounted for the greatest percentage of learners (Moser, 1999: 31) and NAO (2004 : 32). They had 60% of market share.

Since the 1990s, however, the focus of Further Education Colleges has changed from increasing participation to specifically targeting disadvantaged learners (Brooks et al , 2000:12). The main contributors to Government targets come from those who are comfortable with studying in Further Education Colleges where most teaching expertise

is concentrated, and where more than 2 million of the 2.4 million adults (83%) taking up Skills for Life courses from 2001 to July 2004 undertook their learning (HOC, 2006 and NAO, 2004 – 2005 / 15th December 2004).

In order to assess how well the Government's Skills for Life agenda is being embraced by Further Education Colleges a review of Adult Learning Inspectorate reports for New College, Nottingham and, for the purposes of comparison, Leicester College was undertaken. Overall The Chief Inspector (ALI, 05/06:8) commented that the 'vast majority of Colleges are good at what they do and they are particularly good at serving the totality of each learner's needs rather than solely those which are job related.'

Adult Learning Inspectorate – Inspection Report, New College, Nottingham 2005

The Inspectorate set the report in the context of a general Further Education College which serves a community with very low educational attainment, specifically 5 GCSE's A* to C at age 16 (37%), and a high percentage leaving school with no qualifications.

New College, Nottingham is a large General Further Education College which, in 2003/04, enrolled over 32,000 students, of whom over 26,000 were part time. At the time of the inspection approximately 60% of the students were female and some 20 % were from minority ethnic groups. 7% had learning difficulties and / or disabilities.

The report, (ALI, 2005), found in place comprehensive and effective support for students and a good wide range of programmes aimed at widening participation. Students were found to be making good progress and achieving their personal learning goals, although there were some issues with the recording of progress. Overall leadership and management was very good and teachers were well qualified.

Literacy and numeracy provision overall was rated good and pass rates on most courses leading to external accreditation were high. Retention rates were satisfactory.

On vocational courses students were receiving additional support to improve their pass rates; however, long term students in literacy and numeracy were often found to be making slow progress in lessons. The Inspectors found that students were receiving good advice, guidance and support from Basic Education and Guidance in Nottingham (BEGIN), a specialist service. Potential students moved very quickly from their first cohort with BEGIN to initial college interview, diagnostic assessment and induction. Excellent support for students who are dyslexic was being provided by specialist teachers. Additional learning support was made available to all learners, including those of vocational courses.

Adult Learning Inspectorate – Inspection Report, Leicester College, 2006

The Inspectors' Report set the context in relation to Leicester having an unemployment rate double that of the national level. In 2005 the proportion of 16 year olds achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C was low at 45%. The City has a very diverse population with the highest proportion of ethnic minority groups in the country.

In 2004 / 05 the College had 3,600 part time learners on discrete adult literacy and numeracy provision, of whom 1,500 were at entry level, 1,400 at Level 1 and 680 at Level 2. In 2004 / 05 retention rates were 90%, and achievement rates 86%.

Inspectors found Literacy and Numeracy provision to be good and, overall, achievements and standards and management & leadership were considered to be outstanding. The teaching was highly effective and learners were receiving good guidance and support from a comprehensive range of options that are readily accessible. Initial assessment was found to be thorough and included initial interview,

assessment of individual skills, free writing and verbal discussion. Diagnostic assessments helped place learners on the most appropriate course.

Tutorials were effective at reviewing progress of individual learners. The provision of adult learning support is particularly effective for those needing help with literacy, numeracy or dyslexia support staff work closely with teachers to provide group and individual support that improves learners ability to progress successfully through their qualifications. Support from learning development assistants and learning mentors was available to help with reading, extra support with assignments and with pastoral issues. Individual tutorials were used effectively to identify issues that impede learning and tutors provided good informal support.

2.13.3 Adult & Community Learning

Stock (1996) cited in Stuart (2002:13) argued that because of the reduction in resources for adult education that occurred during the 1970s the targeting of groups which were non participant became popular. This heralded the expansion and development of courses in Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages. 'We may be certain that there was a sea change in the perception of both central and local government as to what constituted 'useful' education for adults and for most this meant basic education' (Stock, 1996:17).

Hamilton in Crowther (2001:25) calculated that less than a quarter of Adult Basic Education learners were in Local Authority adult and community based programmes; reversing the proportion at the start of the 1990s (BSA, 1997). Brooks et al (2000:1X) found that Adult Basic Education provided by Local Education Authorities had around 20% of market share.

There was a widely held view that individuals and groups not attracted to more traditional programmes in Further Education Colleges may prefer to participate in community based programmes because choosing to learn in a community venue can lessen the stigma associated with formal education institutions. Only a small proportion of Skills for Life learners, however, have been able to access sustainable community based provision because of short term funding arrangements (HOC, 2006 and NAO, 2004:32). Nevertheless, there are more than one million people learning in community settings in England; 60 per cent of whom choose not to take qualifications, often because of the association with negative experiences at school (ALI, 2004:19). Mindful that providing learner support in Further Education Colleges improves retention rate, ALI (2005) expressed concerns that the extent of learner support that was found in the Further Education sector was not replicated in community learning settings. Fragile learners often need considerable support to maintain their commitment to learning, and literacy and numeracy support is strongest in Further Education Colleges (ALI, 2005). There is a correlation between support and increased levels of achievement (Moser, 1999), and many Colleges of Further Education have created and developed information and advice teams whose aim is to reduce drop out; thereby increasing retention and achievement rates. Strong motivation and frequent positive reinforcement are essential for adults who often have low self esteem and pressing responsibilities (Brooks et al, 2000:, citing Potts and Paull, 1995:16). The major motive for entering Skills for Life provision appears to be a desire for self – development and the creation of a better self – image, and the major barrier appears to be sensitivity to the stigma attached to poor Skills for Life (Brooks et al, 2000:57). Mayo in Mayo and Thompson (Eds.) (1995: 8) raises the concern that much of the working class tends to view adult education provision as

equally alienating as school. This raises questions about engaging those least likely to consider learning as an option.

Precise knowledge of the learner cohort is very important in order to ascertain participation rates. McGivney (1996:33) raised her concerns that data collection methods in Local Education Authorities appear to be extremely variable with wide discrepancies being found between central data and class registers .

The Report of the Chief Inspector (ALI, 2005/06) reported on two significant improvements, albeit from a very low base.

In 2002 / 03 75% of Adult & Community Learning providers had inadequate quality assurance but, by 2005 / 06, that had dropped to 33%. In 2004 / 05 37% were deemed overall to be inadequate; but that had fallen to 22% in 2005 / 06.

Adult Learning Inspectorate – Adult Learning Inspection Report Nottingham City Council – Adult & Community Learning Service

ALI (Nottingham City ACLS, 2005) set the context in relation to Nottingham having 15 Wards in the 10% most deprived nationally, as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and is ranked the 7th most deprived Local Authority nationally. The Adult & Community Learning strategy seeks to identify and support learners who are disadvantaged or not traditionally involved in learning in wards with high levels of deprivation. Nottingham City Adult and Community Learning Service aims to work with partners and community organisations from outreach locations promoting equality and inclusion developing those returning to learning and aiding their transition to a more formal learning experience.

The Inspectors found that the overall effectiveness of provision was inadequate, including foundation programmes; however, learners on

foundation programmes did develop good personal skills and were able to increase their confidence and self esteem.

The curriculum was not considered to be managed sufficiently well, foundation programmes were found to be insufficiently planned, developed and monitored, and 22% of lessons were considered to be inadequate. Tutors in the weaker sessions did not significantly relate the result of initial assessment to the planning of learning. Most groups of learners did not have effective Individual Learning Plans and specific timebound targets were not identified. Progress reviews did not identify the development of literacy and numeracy; however, Tutors in the better sessions did give consistent feedback and provide a good range of activities to stimulate learners to work at their own level to meet their needs. In the best sessions a wide range of stimulating and well contextualised materials were provided.

Overall, however, target setting and monitoring of learners was poor. Nottingham City Adult Learning Service contracts Guideline Careers Service (Nextstep) to provide learners with Information, Advice & Guidance on opportunities for progression. Advice and guidance was found to be satisfactory overall.

At the time inspection the service could not supply data on the number of enrolments since August 2004 or the learner profile regarding gender ratio, ethnicity and declared Learners with Learning Difficulties and / or Disabilities. Similarly, complete data for measuring retention and achievement was not available at the time of inspection.

Adult Learning Inspectorate – Adult Learning Inspection Report Leicester City Council – Adult & Community Learning Service

ALI (Leicester City ACLS, 2004) set the context in relation to an unemployment rate which is twice the national average, a generally low skilled workforce, below average literacy and numeracy skills and

low standards of educational achievement at GCSE level. Leicester is ranked 35th most deprived Local Authority nationally according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Overall provision was considered to be adequate to meet the needs of those receiving it; however, arrangements for quality assurance and foundation programmes were both considered to be unsatisfactory. Achievement rates were found to be poor on accredited foundation courses.

Teaching and learning was good in foundation programmes, in particular literacy and numeracy and for learners with learning difficulties; however, no strategy existed across the service for the development of support for learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills and arrangements to identify learners' support needs were inadequate. Not all learners identified as having support needs received diagnostic assessment and the planning and monitoring of support was not specific enough.

Poor use was made of Management Information Systems to contribute to planning and improving the service. Data was often inaccurate and the system could not be used to monitor targets or learners progression. Equality of opportunity data was not well monitored or analysed to bring about actions for improvement.

2.13.4 Work Based Learning

In this section no comparison will be drawn with similar provision in Leicestershire where the training network is a looser, informal collaboration. Leicestershire providers have been inspected separately and a review of inspection reports suggests wide variation in the quality of provision. Nottinghamshire Training Network is a consortium of 19 College and private training providers which has work based learning contracts with the LSC.

Although their most recent inspection (ALI, 2008) rated them as satisfactory overall, their provision known as 'Preparation for Work' and life was graded inadequate.

Inspectors determined that the Skills for Life Strategy was inadequately developed, achievement and standards in literacy and numeracy programmes were rated inadequate, and timely success rates were low across the whole Skills for Life provision. During 2006 / 07 only 10% of learners achieved their planned Skills for Life qualification within the set time period.

The Nottinghamshire Network employs a dedicated Learning Support Adviser whose brief is to ensure that all learners are appropriately assessed and diagnostics are undertaken, where appropriate.

Teaching and learning was satisfactory but information, advice & guidance on further learning was not well developed. Learning plans and reviews of progress against targets was generally poor. Leadership and management was inadequate.

Subcontractors' literacy and numeracy provision was considered to be inadequate, and monitoring processes and data analysis failed to identify significant lack of progress.

2.13.5 Department of Work & Pensions / Job Centre Plus Provision

Job Centre Plus contracts its employability training through a number of targeted interventions that include New Deal for the long term unemployed. The prime objective of Jobcentre Plus providers is to move their clients into work. Frequently, therefore, upon gaining employment, clients fail to complete training courses either because they see no advantage in doing so, or no arrangement is in place that allows them to complete.

The Report of the Chief Inspector (ALI, 2005/06) reported that in 2001 / 02 36% of the New Deal Provision was considered to be inadequate,

and 64% of the providers were considered to have inadequate leadership and management. However, by 2005 / 06 Inspectors found no inadequate provision. Improvements included better initial assessment of participants' skills, more attention being paid to bridging skills gaps; and more accurate recognition of literacy or language barriers to sustainable employment.

Adult Learning Inspectorate –Adult Learning Inspection Report – Care Training – New Deal

Department of Work & Pensions / Job Centre Plus – New Deal - Care Training, Nottingham, 2002

In 2002 Inspectors found that the quality of provision and leadership and management were satisfactory, but quality assurance was unsatisfactory.

Jobcentre Plus Advisers were responsible for organising assessment of clients' basic skills. However, not all clients were referred to basic skills assessments, and some were not identified as needing additional support with literacy until they started their (New Deal) programmes. Care Training also carried out some initial assessment; but, overall, initial assessment was found to be poorly co – ordinated. Individual learning plans were not used effectively, and were not kept up to date. Reviews of clients' progress did not always take place at the planned intervals.

Adult Learning Inspectorate –Adult Learning Inspection Report – Fern Training – New Deal

Department of Work & Pensions / Job Centre Plus – New Deal - Fern Training, Leicester, 2005

The Inspection Report explained that New Deal programmes cover the age groups 18 to 24 and 25 +; and are part of the Government's Welfare to Work Strategy targeting the long term unemployed.

Fern Training had clearly written strategies and policies which were understood by all and included a comprehensive strategy for literacy, numeracy and language support. Subcontractors were managed through clearly written Service Level Agreements, and Fern frequently carried out checks on the quality of provision which were recorded. The provider was considered to be effective overall and the proportion of clients gaining suitable employment was high.

Fern had a clearly written and comprehensive policy for Skills for Life. All participants who were identified as in need of support in literacy, numeracy or language were offered the opportunity to attend well planned lessons. Most participants attended and received effective support in this area; however, for those who chose not to attend, there was ineffective support.

Planning and monitoring of progress was inadequate for some participants. Some Individual Learning Plans were poorly written and incomplete, and targets were not adequately set on some Individual Learning Plans and reviews. Progress was not thoroughly monitored with all participants particularly those on shorter term programmes.

2.13.6 Learndirect

Learners who register at a Learndirect Centre benefit from a flexible approach to learning. They can take a Skills for Life screening test on line, learn on line and take a Skills for Life test on line. This method of learning is very flexible and user friendly but learners can miss out on group interaction, and it can be very lonely.

Adult Learning Inspectorate –Adult Learning Inspection Report – Learndirect

Learndirect, Greater Nottingham Hub, 2002

The Inspectors found the quality of provision to be inadequate and leadership and management weak; however, comprehensive advice, guidance and support were available in most learning centres; and courses were carefully matched to meet learners' needs.

Initial assessment did not effectively identify learners' additional support needs and in some cases there was a delay before learners received the support they needed. There was poor awareness raising amongst most staff as to how they should support basic skills learners.

The monitoring and recording of learners progress was found to be inadequate.

Adult Learning Inspectorate –Adult Learning Inspection Report – Learndirect

Learndirect, Leicestershire Hub, 2003

Inspectors found the quality of provision adequate, and leadership and management satisfactory.

Learning venues enrolled a wide range of learners, and were located strategically to attract learners who might not normally take part in further education. Resources were good, learning environments were well resourced and attractive, and most learning venues had or had access to specialist facilities and support for learners with a disability. There were good initiatives to widen participation, but there was a weak strategy for basic skills provision.

If a learner did identify a basic skills need it was not always tackled effectively; however, there was inconsistency in the use of initial assessment diagnostic tools. Some learning venues relied on learners'

self assessment of their needs. Overall there was inadequate initial assessment of basic skills which was often carried out by staff who had not been trained to identify learners with basic skills needs.

2.14 Contextualised (Situated) learning

Barton (2000) in Herrington, (Ed.), 2005 concluded that the Government approach, embodied in the Moser Report, focuses on what people have in common, or collective need; whereas a situated approach places more emphasis on individual need and differences between people. A situated approach emphasises that people learn in specific situations; and that one of the most powerful ways in which people generalise from specific situations is by reflecting on their practices, thus moving the focus from individual skills to the understanding of more general principles. The result is that learning becomes much more than having a set of skills.

The current government process emphasises learning in class rooms, with a strong curriculum framework and forms of assessment. A situated approach emphasises the importance of informal learning, how people are learning constantly in their everyday lives, and how everyday learning can be supported.

Crucially for education, when a task is moved from everyday life into becoming a classroom activity or part of a test, it can be transformed, or decontextualised into a different activity. Individuals are much more likely to engage and remain interested if classroom activities relate to their every day activities which are 'real and purposeful' to them. The trick is to translate everyday experiences to which individual's relate into the learning environment.

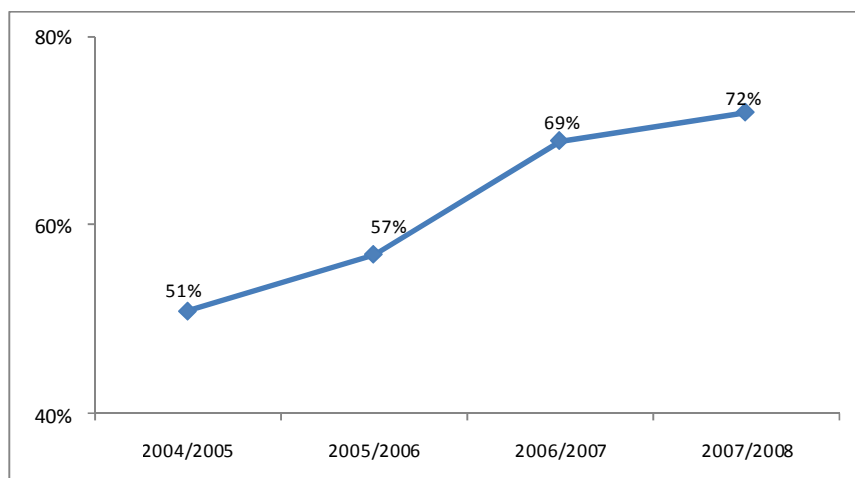
Atkin et al (2007:1) refer to the DfES definition of embedded learning as 'the development of literacy, language and numeracy with vocational and other skills. The skills acquired provide learners with

the confidence, competence, and motivation necessary for them to succeed in qualifications, in life and in work. Embedded learning has become an essential part of the Skills for Life Strategy, aiming to widen participation and help greater numbers of learners improve their literacy, language and numeracy competence whilst working towards vocational qualifications. There is strong evidence that many adult learners working for national qualifications fail to fulfil their full potential because their competence and confidence in their Skills for Life do not match their skills in other areas (Parsons & Bynner, 1999). The Skills for Life materials for embedded learning aim to help vocational learners to develop subject and Skills for Life confidence simultaneously.

Casey et al (2007:4/5) surveyed 2,000 Further Education College students who were undertaking vocational programmes at Levels 1 and 2 in which Skills for Life were embedded. Benefits were seen in higher retention and improved success rates in both vocational and Skills for Life qualifications. Learners on the embedded courses had better staying on rates and more positive attitudes to the value of literacy, language and numeracy study. The best results were achieved where the vocational specialist was supported by a Skills for Life specialist.

For example, Leicester College has been rated, by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, as outstanding in their approach to a whole College approach to literacy, numeracy and language. Figure 2.1 below shows Leicester College success rates on Entry Level Adult Literacy and Numeracy Certificates in Vocational Curriculum areas.

Figure 2.1 – Leicester College Success Rates on Entry Level Adult Literacy & Numeracy Certificates in Vocational Areas



Source: Leicester College Skills for Life Position Statement, 2008

The Leicester College Skills for Life Strategy (2008/2009) includes the following Skills for Life aims:

- Adopt a whole organisation approach for the delivery of Skills for Life
- Ensure the additional learning support needs of learners are effectively addressed
- Embed the adult literacy, numeracy, language and ICT curriculum within vocational programmes
- Track progression of learners on Skills for Life programmes

2.15 Learner drop out

Mc Givney (2003:5 - 6) refers to a paucity of evidence on how adults construct their learning routes at lower levels of engagement.

Harmonisation of learner data is difficult because it may have been gathered by different sectors and institutions. It is also difficult, and inordinately time consuming, for individual providers to identify and record the varied learning pathways adults may have taken before

enrolling with them. This is largely because adults, especially part timers, tend to move in and out of learning 'in a highly complex and individualised manner.' Any institutional and course based information on adult learning journeys that is available is variable and it has not yet been synthesised in a way that produces the larger picture. Similarly learner drop out is also complex to calculate at the macro level.

Drop out from learning programmes can have a negative affect on the individual and the institution. Mc Givney (1996:13) warns that early withdrawal can damage a person's self confidence and self esteem, and the psychological damage may never be undone.

In its mission to increase success rates the Further Education Funding Council put pressure on providers to focus on non completion leading Mc Givney (1996) to comment that there was no longer any room for complacency. Kember (1995) cited by McGivney (1996:13), however, explained that there are a number of ways, formal and informal, in which a student can end up as a non completion statistic eg. some may enrol but not start the course, some may have their learning interrupted for unforeseen reasons.

Because of the fluidity in the interpretation of non completion McGivney (1999) warned that the figures can be interpreted in an entirely negative way. There are, Mc Givney explains, positive reasons for withdrawing such as an individual having met their personal goals eg. gaining employment. Finding work has been cited by Dekker and Whitfield (1989) as the most significant reason for students leaving a course.

In 1997 the Basic Skills Agency undertook trials in Further Education Colleges to compare drop out amongst learners who had been provided with additional support and those who had not. Only 10 % of those receiving support dropped out compared to 30% of those who were not supported. Most of the reasons given for dropping out were negative (Brooks et al, 2000: 58). Inspectors found a poor levels of

awareness within Further Education Colleges as to what constitutes learner support, in particular regarding the support that was available to adults with poor Skills for Life. Too few teaching staff had the expertise necessary to make a significant difference to learners' competence in literacy and / or numeracy; and many teachers were found to have weak literacy and numeracy skills themselves (ALI, 2005) According to Flude et al (2007) it is particularly difficult to track individuals from the point of initial engagement throughout their learning journey. In 2000/01 the Leicestershire and Leicester City Learning Partnership (LLCLP) developed, tested and refined an approach to tracking which involved the major providers of learning in Leicestershire and Leicester City. The pilot targeted adults who had been out of learning for some time, who were outside the labour market and / or who were engaged in low skill and / or low paid employment. Learners were recruited on to a non accredited learning programme; and LLCLP tracked the 2000/01 cohort through analysis of audited Individualised Learning Records each year for a period of five years until 2005 to determine whether individuals continued to learn and at what level. Table 2.4 summarises progression data.

Table 2.4 - Summary of progression data – tracking project – Flude et al (2007)

	2000/1	2001/2	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5
Students	1937	846	495	433	351
Not classified for level	Non accredited starter courses	666	85	102	133
Entry		71	254	245	175
L1		390	244	263	232
L2		326	179	128	139
L3		151	79	69	55
L4		2	6	10	4
HE		2	2	2	1
Total qualifications	1937	1610	849	819	739

The data in Table 2.4 shows that 44% of those engaged continued their learning into year two and 18% remained in year five; however, 70% of the qualification aims being followed were either not classified for level or at Level 1 and below.

Focusing on the most disadvantaged wards in Leicester City the LLCLP set out to increase the participation of adults living in disadvantaged communities; and their target was a greater proportionate increase than the City as a whole. To do this they worked with providers of learning to change the pattern of delivery in a way that took into account barriers and supported individuals. LLCLP reported that increasing the number of courses where there are perceived gaps is not necessarily the answer for fragile learners because many people prefer to travel away from their own locality for help with their literacy or numeracy because of the stigma attached. The initiative was designed to meet two objectives. Firstly, to increase the number of adult residents from disadvantaged wards, participating in Skills for Life learning; and, secondly, to increase the number of Skills for Life qualification aims being taken.

Participation figures for 2002/3 were used as the baseline for future measurement, disadvantage was determined at ward level using the Index of Multiple Deprivation; and learners were tracked using audited provider Individualised Learner Record data. Table 2.5 shows participation data split between learners living in disadvantaged wards and those who did not. The comparative information for Leicester City shows that participation over the period 02/03 to 04/05 was 10% greater in disadvantaged wards than in non disadvantaged wards.

Table 2.5 – Learner Participation – tracking project – Flude et al (2007)

Year	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	% increase 02/03 to 04/05
Disadvantaged Wards	4060	5044	5781	42%
Wards not classified as disadvantaged	3181	3570	4202	32%
Total	7241	8614	9983	37%

Table 2.6 shows the qualification aims that were taken by learners who were the subject of the research undertaken by Flude et al.

Table 2.6 - Qualification aims being taken – tracking project – Flude et al (2007)

Year	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	% increase 02/03 04/5
Disadvantaged Wards	7368	10516	14,335	94%
Wards not classified as disadvantaged	5669	6883	10,207	80%
Total	13037	17339	24,566	88%

Table 2.3 shows that between 02/03 and 04/05 14% more learners from disadvantaged wards were working towards qualification aims than learners who were not from those wards. This proves that individuals from disadvantaged communities respond when they are properly supported, when barriers are removed, and when they are able to access provision at a time and place to suit them.

Flude et al (2007) considered data tracking to be more effective than telephone surveys or postal questionnaires which rely on learner perception and which, despite a lot of hard work, often produce a low rate of response.

On the subject of low success rates Moser (1999: 79) reported that only about one third of adults enrolling on Skills for Life courses achieve their learning goal; but Brooks et al (2000 : X1) reported that course completion is as high as 80% for students who remain on a

programme of learning beyond the first few weeks, and about half of students who complete their course achieve their learning goal. The greatest risk of drop out is during the first few weeks; however, Mc Givney (1992) and Brooks et al (2000) have both remarked on the unreliability of participation, retention and achievement data; and the lack of recorded information on the reasons for drop out. The 1992 Adult Basic Skills Unit Survey cited by Brooks et al (2000: 52 / 53) reported on second hand evidence gathered from tutors which suggested that 18% of learners were most likely to leave early because of personal or domestic reasons, 13% because of employment related issues and only 2% because of dissatisfaction with their course or the progress they were making. Kambouri and Francis (1994:53) cited by Brooks et al (2000) listed the reasons for dropping out given by Further Education basic skills students in response to a questionnaire. The findings were differentiated between those that were outside and those that were within the control of Further Education Colleges. The factors outside the control of Further Education Colleges, also cited by Learndirect (2002:10), included illness, lack of time, family problems, relocation, affordability, transport and child minding. Those within the control of Further Education Colleges included putting the learner into a class that didn't meet their needs because the work was either too easy or too challenging, poor teaching and inadequate support (ibid,1994:53). In addition, Learndirect (2002:10) suggested that issues such as the departure of a valued tutor or a bad learning experience may bring back difficult childhood memories and cause a learner to drop out. Tutors felt that the most important factor preventing drop out was the need for students to be confident that they are doing well and progressing in accordance with their own and their tutors' expectations (Learndirect, 2002).

Fragile learners need to have a purpose and feel that they are meeting their learning objectives. A support network which includes tutors, peers and significant others may be the best way to ensure that learners stay in learning, and grow their self esteem and self worth as they progress towards their learning goal. Some adults, having developed sophisticated coping strategies, may commit to learning and then drop out having convinced themselves that they can manage and don't need to continue to learn (Learndirect, 2002). There should be a seamless route for the individual from pre – entry into learning through to completion; therefore the effective management of transition between different stages of the learning journey is critical to ensure that fragile adults do not drop out (Holland et al, 2004:10 and DfES, 2003 b: 2). Very little research has been done to measure and understand drop out between the time the learner first engages and the point at which they enrol on a course. Understanding the experience of adults already on a learning programme is very important because similar motivations are likely to be relevant to those who called the Learndirect Helpline and are in transition between their initial call, receiving some information and doing something positive to address their Skills for Life deficit, such as enrolling on a course. Preventing learner drop out at each stage of the learner journey is critical to the achievement of the Public Service Agreement target for Skills for Life.

2.16 Progress made towards the Public Service Agreement Target

It is a mistake to equate either learning or achievement with qualifications alone according to Fryer (1997:16); however, adult literacy and numeracy courses in England are now organised through the Skills for Life qualifications framework (McNamara, (Ed.) 2004: 69) which includes standards from Entry Level 1 to Level 2 (Qualification & Curriculum Authority, March 2000). The Skills for Life

Strategy outputs, quantified in a DfES Technical note referred to by NAO (2004:28), include the achievements of those aged 16 and over in England who have left compulsory education. It is a Government requirement that success is measured in terms of 'countable outcomes' which are defined as a movement up one Level within the National Qualifications Framework and the successful completion of a qualification at Entry Level 3, Level 1 or Level 2. Eligible qualifications include Adult Literacy and Numeracy Certificates, Key Skills in relation to communication and application of number, and GCSE English and Mathematics. A learner can only count once towards the target, irrespective of how many learning aims they achieve; but none below Entry Level 3 counts towards the target.

Although Entry Level 2, Entry Level 1 and pre - entry level do not count they act as stepping stones for many adults with significant Skills for Life deficits. This calls into question the usefulness of the targeting methodology in respect of hard to reach learners because many Skills for Life learners have only pre - entry level skills, and there are issues as to the value of setting targets at such a relatively high level (NAO, 2004:28). Concerns have been expressed that those most in need are being sacrificed to achieve Government targets (ibid., 2004). In order to make challenging targets more achievable the Government has included 16 to 18 year olds in their definition of adults in the knowledge that many young people choose to re - take Mathematics and / or English as the core requirements of a good set of GCSE's ie. five at Grades A* to C which is broadly equivalent to a Level 2. This provides a relatively 'soft' and easily achievable contribution to the national target.

A very high standard of data management is critical to inform progress towards the target; however, the Department for Education & Skills and the LSC recognised limitations on the data gathering process and, therefore, were obliged to devise methods of estimating

participation, retention and achievement (NAO 2004 : 28). A major concern has been the retrospective nature of the recording system, in particular in relation to Further Education Colleges because the final outcome of the previous academic year's performance is not generally known until the January of the following year when what is known as FO5 data (the final return) is available.

Five years after its launch the Skills for Life Strategy has been closely aligned to the Skills Strategy (2003) and direction set in the White Paper, Skills: Getting on in Business: Getting on at Work (2005). This puts a firm focus on skills for adults who are both in and out of work (Eldred, 2005 33); and positions literacy and numeracy within a framework for employability. Having such a focus on the needs of the economy by developing skills for employment ignores, or at least detracts from the aspiration to develop Skills for Life as part of a personal development programme (Eldred, 2005). A central objective of Government Policy is to increase participation in learning, to reach economic and social goals (Wiseman, 2006 : 11) ; however, Eldred (2005: 33 – 34) suggests that current learning opportunities appear not to be designed to attract all groups of people. In spite of campaigns to promote learning those who arguably need it most don't seem to feel that learning has very much to offer to them. The drive to deliver targets has encouraged the use of methods that expedite the testing process eg. the introduction of multi choice testing which may not be the most appropriate form of assessment for people who have had negative experiences of testing and examination during their initial education. The National Test is only available to those studying at Entry level 3 and above, so the achievements of learners at lower levels of study, whilst acknowledged in success rates, cannot be counted towards the national target. Learners operating at Entry Level 2 and below may be excluded or marginalised in favour of their counterparts learning at higher levels which count towards the target. A side effect is that

teachers may feel less fulfilled if they know that the achievements of their students at Entry Level 2 or below appears not to have the same value as those at higher levels.

Over two million people have started courses since 2001, but far fewer have gone on to take the nationally-recognised tests according to the Learndirect Promotions and Communications Strategy (2004 – 2005: 16). Since the start of the Learndirect campaign, 3.7 million learners have taken up 7.9 million Skills for Life learning opportunities and over 1,275,000 learners have achieved their first national Skills for Life qualification (DfES, 2006:10, Eldred, 2005: 31). Figures of this magnitude, however, cannot and should not be wholly attributable to Learndirect's Get On Campaign; and are the result of an accumulation of outputs from the Government's multifaceted strategies to improve the Skills for Life of the nation.

The Government's objective is that between 2001 and 2010 at least 2.25 million adults will achieve a Skills for Life countable outcome; however, it is likely that the target will be met without having to engage large numbers of hard to reach learners, many of whom start from relatively low levels of literacy and numeracy. If the target is met there will still be a deficit of 4.75 million on the 7 million calculated in Moser's original estimation of need. Only 64.3 % of Moser's original target of 3.5 million will have been achieved and only 32.1 % of the 7 million identified as requiring remedial education. Kelly (2005) in her AoC Conference Speech reported that success rates (ie. the percentage of those who complete a course and pass a summative test) had risen from 59% in 2000/01 to 72% in 2003/04. These figures, according to NAO (2004:30), are skewed by the large numbers of 16 to 18 year olds taking GCSE qualifications in English and Mathematics. In response the Government is trying to shift the focus towards the post-18 age group; however, this will bring its own problems because, as NAO (2004) reports, the proportion of national literacy and numeracy tests

passed by adults aged 19 or over was just 23% in September 2001 and had increased only to 37% by July 2004. Clearly this depends upon the methodology for calculating the success rate but if the success rates relate to countable outcomes (ie. an adult counts once even if they have been successful in more than one learning aim ie. literacy and numeracy test) then the figures quoted by NAO (2004) are higher than those achieved in Nottinghamshire where, during the academic year 2004 / 05, the 19 plus figure was only 20.40 %. Appendix 9 shows the percentage of all Nottinghamshire 16+ learners, between April 2001 and July 2004, achieving a countable learning aim; and Appendix 10 shows the split between 16 to 18 learners and 19 + learners during 2004 / 05. Taking one year, 2004/05, and looking at the data more closely it is possible to quantify the numerical split between adults 19 + and 16 to 18 year olds. For each Skills for Life learning opportunity that was taken up by a 16 to 18 year old 2.9 were taken up by adults, for each 16 to 18 year old learner taking up a Skill for Life course 2.2 adults took up a Skills for Life course; and for every 16 to 18 year old learner counting towards the Skills for Life target only 0.7 adults counted.

Claims of mission drift have been made because more than half of the qualifications achieved between 2001 and 2004, principally key skills and GCSE's in English and Mathematics, were gained by 16 to 18 year olds, many of whom might reasonably have been expected to gain their qualifications at school (NAO, 2004 : 30, HOC, 2006). Young people are more likely to participate because future intentions to take part in learning are affected by recent participation (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2005:2). Also, because young people have had recent experience of full – time education they are more likely to be comfortable with a Further Education College environment (NAO, 2004 : 46).

In the late 1990s Kennedy (1997:17) observed that initiatives to engage disadvantaged members of society were usually short term and difficult to manage; and attracting and keeping those for whom learning is a daunting experience is hard work and financially unrewarding. Where policies to increase participation and achievement were showing some signs of success there was inadequate representation from disadvantaged groups (Ibid 1997: 15 and Fryer 1997:17). From 2001 to 2006 at least £3.7 billion will have been spent on delivering the Skills for Life Strategy. The £2.1 billion spent by 2004 had enabled 839,000 people to achieve a qualification, and had set 2.4 million adults on the path to improvement of their literacy and / or numeracy (NAO, 2004:30). The Government's aspiration to ensure equality of access by ensuring that public funds are focused on those most in need, thereby reducing inequality by impacting on priority groups, has not been met (DfES, 2003:70) despite the Government's best intentions.

As the Skills for Life strategy has grown and developed it has shifted away from some of Moser's initial priorities (Eldred, 2005: 35).

Awareness has been raised but an unintentional outcome is that the poorest and most vulnerable individuals continue to miss out.

Despite the Government's rhetoric regarding their aim to attract the hard to reach there is little evidence to suggest their strategies have worked (NAO, 2004:30). Hard to reach learners may be difficult to engage and expensive to support; but they have been sacrificed in favour of quick fix learners who are ready to take a Skills for Life test with little or no support; and have helped learning providers reach targets relatively inexpensively (Gregson et al, (2005 5). In the Guardian on Tuesday July 5th 2005 Paul Kingston asked whether Labour's skills targets were unintentionally leaving behind those most at risk; and, as an unintended consequence of a strategy to achieve countable outcomes against a target framework, whether a

significant portion of the adult population was not getting the help it desperately needed. Kingston (2005) concluded that disadvantage increases steadily as literacy levels reduce from Level 2, the Government's aspirational Level for adult achievement. The decline in advantage from Level 2 to Entry Level 3 follows a smooth gradient; but fortunes plummet for people in the next band down, those at Entry level 2, who make up 4% of the adult population.

The NIACE survey (2008) found that only 38% of adults overall participated in learning in the previous three years; and only 36% intend to participate in the next three years (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2008:33 -36). The key issues from the data relate to age, ethnicity and social class. The survey found that up to age 44 at least 50% of each age cohort intended to take up learning in the next three years, showing that the closer an individual is to their time in full time education the more likely he / she is to learn again. Overall the participation of Black Minority Ethnic Groups is projected to be the same as white groups at around 60%; but this masks lesser participation on the part of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. It is also estimated that Somalis are at least equally likely to be non participant; but the specific data cannot be gathered because they come within the overall category of Black African. Social class remains a key determinant related to future participation with group AB with low or no skills much less likely to participate.

The main research question of this thesis is whether the publicly funded follow up processes ie. information, advice & guidance and learning provision are able to properly support adults who have issues with their literacy and numeracy (their Skills for Life).

3. CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain Learndirect's role in providing information on callers to the Helpline. It will explore ethical considerations including the use of rewards / inducements, and outline the sampling procedure and the choice of research instrument. It will also describe the process adopted for designing, consulting on and piloting the draft questionnaire. It will outline the protocol used for making calls, management of the response rate and data; and the approach taken to confidentiality.

3.2 Role of Learndirect

Learndirect set up a National Helpline to take calls from adults who were stimulated by the 'Get On' Campaign adverts which featured the 'Gremlin' characters. Data protection procedures required Helpline Advisers to seek permission from each caller before they were allowed to pass on their contact details to the LSC. If callers agreed to a follow up call they were asked to provide a few brief details comprising name, sex, age, address, telephone / mobile number, employment status; and they were offered a video / DVD and / or the contact details of up to three local learning providers from Learndirect's own database. If, however, callers chose not to give permission for their details to be passed on they were offered a video / DVD and / or the contact details of local learning providers; but no details were passed on to the LSC and, as a consequence, no follow up calls were made.

3.3 Handling Learndirect Referrals

From the launch of the 'Gremlins' Campaign in 2001 details of Nottinghamshire callers were passed on to the researcher in his

capacity as an LSC Officer. The number of referrals fluctuated according to the amount of media activity with peaks following high profile media advertising and troughs when promotional activity was minimal. Some LSCs chose to pass caller details on to third parties such as Government funded Information & Advice Services; however, at Nottinghamshire LSC the decision was taken to populate a database and manage the follow up process locally.

The National LSC chose not to be prescriptive about the follow up process; however, in areas where referrals were passed on to the local Information, Advice & Guidance Service, follow up calls were made within three to six months to enquire if callers had received their video / DVD, ask what they thought of it and whether they had taken any action such as enrolling on a course. The average time lapse between the initial call and follow up from the researcher was nine months.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The researcher should operate under strict ethical standards according to Bell (1993: 53); however, before research can be conducted it is increasingly the case that it has to be scrutinised by a Committee of suitably qualified experts to ensure that the design includes appropriate measures to protect the interests of the people and groups involved (Oliver, 2003:140 – 141). Ethics Committees play a supportive role in giving help, advice and ultimately ethical approval (Ibid., 2003:40). Approval was sought and received from the Graduate School of Durham University whose guidance on research ethics makes it clear that, just because individuals have agreed to a follow up call and given consent for Learndirect to pass on their contact details, they should fully understand the purpose of the research and be comfortable taking part. It is important that participants know that they are protected by Durham University

Guidelines, The Data Protection Act and the LSC's Protocol for confidentiality.

According to Oliver (2003:134 – 139) researchers should respect the rights and dignity of those who participate and they should operate with honesty, integrity and confidentiality in line with codes of conduct with which they are governed. On the issue of confidentiality Denscombe (2003:150) suggested that if the researcher is operating according to the normal code of ethics for social researchers, the information collected will not be made publicly available, thus allaying the fears that may be harboured by some respondents. Permission should always be sought from would – be participants (Denscombe, 2003:148) because the principle of informed consent seeks to ensure that individuals have understood, in broad terms, the aims, methods and anticipated outcomes of the research; and that any undesirable consequences for the potential participant have been anticipated (Oliver, 2003:31). Participation must always be voluntary and force or coercion must never be used. Participants should know who is conducting the research and their name and contact details; and they should be clear as to what is expected of them and how much time they are expected to commit (Oliver, 2003:134 – 139). It should be explained to potential respondents that they are at liberty to refuse to take part, decline to discuss a particular topic or withdraw their consent at any time, should they wish

It is not expected that any physical harm will result from this research; although it is possible that minor psychological harm may be caused because some questions may be considered to be intrusive, some sensitive issues might be touched upon and at times the participant's core beliefs might be challenged. Disclosure of personal information might cause embarrassment and some respondents could be guarded in their responses if they suspect that information might be passed on to statutory authorities such as Jobcentre Plus, especially

because they also regulate benefit payments. The researcher must take into account those fears, although it is the researcher's duty to protect the interests of participants by ensuring that confidentiality is assured.

Whilst endeavouring to raise the interviewee's confidence and make them feel valued (Oliver, 2003:67) the researcher could potentially create situations in which individuals may become disturbed; especially if they are asked questions which cause them to recollect events about which they have very strong feelings eg. being bullied at school. Responses may be influenced in other ways, too. For example, some respondents may be overly eager to please the interviewer or there may be cases where antagonism might arise between interviewer and the respondent. Some interviewers may have a tendency to seek out answers that support pre – conceived notions. The response effect, as it is known, may lead to bias creeping into the interview causing the findings to be skewed (Bell, 1993:95). The researcher should try to avoid bias but they can only do their best to ensure that it is minimised.

Initially, in order to increase the number of respondents the researcher considered offering an inducement; but, before proceeding, consulted with his Supervisor who supported Oliver (2003:58 / 59) who said that paying an inducement can alter the perception of the research process from the viewpoint of both the researcher and the subject. As a result researchers may not be as careful explaining details of the research, and participants may decide to take part when otherwise they may have refused. There is also the possibility that either consciously or sub consciously data might be embellished. Stressing the importance of voluntary responses Denscombe (2003:150) reported that rewards are not generally used.

3.5 Sampling

It is important that the sample is selected carefully (Bell, 1993:11) because it has to be representative in order to allow greater confidence about making generalisations based on the findings. In very large surveys sampling techniques are employed in order to produce a sample which is, as far as possible, representative of the population as a whole; however, whether research is large scale or small scale all researchers are dependent on the goodwill and availability of subjects (Denscombe, 2003:22, Bell, 1993:83). There are a number of factors that might affect an individual's willingness to participate including age, sex, disability, literacy, employment status, the subject of the research and the social climate (Denscombe, 2003:19). For the purpose of this research the sampling frame comprised 361 callers who contacted the Learndirect Helpline during the 2001/02, 02/03, 03/04, 04/05 academic years and gave permission for their details to be passed on to the LSC. The sample was self selecting and Learndirect procedures dictated that only the details of those callers that had given permission would be passed on to the LSC.

3.6 Choosing a Research Instrument

The researcher read literature and discussed options with colleagues, significant others with expertise in Skills for Life and his Supervisor on the merits of face to face interviews (one to one), face to face interviews (focus groups), telephone and postal questionnaires. Also whether the engagement with group or individual should be structured, semi structured or without structure and methods of recording the data ranging from video recording, tape recording, verbatim minute taking and note taking of key points. It was decided to investigate further the possibility of using a semi-structured questionnaire which could be

developed and piloted over the telephone, not least because this was the way in which the caller had contacted the Helpline in the first instance.

According to Bell (1993:75) researchers should plan, consult and decide exactly what they need to find out in order to establish whether a questionnaire is the most suitable research instrument and likely to yield suitable data. Denscombe (2003:31) advises that the choice of instrument will reflect preferences about the kind of data that the researcher wishes to obtain and practical considerations related to time resources and access to the sources of data. The researcher's intention was to seek permission to ask a series of questions of each of the adults whose details appeared on the caller database. Firstly, to check for accuracy and fill any gaps; and secondly, to attempt to explain why some adults, who may have lived with Skills for Life deficits for years, are stimulated to take action. Thirdly, to seek information relating to level of motivation, barriers to participation and previous experience of learning; and, finally, to find out what progress individuals say they have made on their learning journey; and how many have actually taken up learning opportunities. The researcher was mindful that, although callers had agreed to a follow up call, they would not be expecting to answer a number of more searching questions.

Whilst a formal, structured means of gathering information would facilitate direct comparisons the researcher was keen not to intimidate the potentially fragile client group. In support of a structured approach Mc Cracken (1988:24) suggested that a questionnaire's first responsibility is to ensure that the researcher covers all the terrain in the same order for each respondent. Another concern, particularly related to the fragile nature of the client group, is that if questionnaires were posted, which is frequently the case (Bell, 1993), the participants would not have any personal contact with the researcher or any prior

notification that they would be receiving a questionnaire, rather than a follow up call. Some may have forgotten their original call to the Learndirect Helpline and would need a reminder. There are cost implications, too; but, most importantly, the average response rate for postal questionnaires, at 20%, is quite low (Denscombe, 2003:7) causing concern that a small respondent cohort is unlikely to be representative. Questionnaires can, however, be administered over the telephone and, in support of using telephone surveys, Denscombe (2003:9) pointed out that they are now in widespread use in social research because, not only are they cheaper and quicker than face to face interviews but also the researcher is able to contact a sample which is sizeable enough to be representative.

The researcher examined whether the research instrument should be used to gather quantitative or qualitative information or both.

McCracken (1988:16) suggested that the aim of the quantitative methodology is to isolate and define categories as precisely as possible before the study is undertaken, and then to determine the relationship between them. Studies making use of questionnaires will inevitably be quantitative but may also have qualitative features. The qualitative methodology seeks to isolate and define categories during the process of research (Bell, 1993:63). According to McCracken (1988:25), however, qualitative research demands a much more complex relationship between the researcher and the participant in which the researcher should use formality of speech to reassure the respondent that the researcher can be trusted to maintain confidentiality.

Although surveys by questionnaire have the potential to deliver information that is representative and generalisable they tend to forfeit depth in favour of breadth; however, they lend themselves to quantitative data which is useful for statistical analysis; and a large amount of data can be produced at relatively low cost (Denscombe, 2003:27 / 28). On the other hand, however, Ibid (2003) viewed a

tendency to empiricism as a disadvantage and cited a major limitation as being the degree to which the researcher can check on the accuracy of the responses because it is difficult to corroborate information on an individual's thoughts and feelings (Ibid 2003:186). There is no alternative but to take questionnaire responses at face value; however, a response from an interview can be developed and clarified according to Bell (1993: 91). There is a greater degree of risk with qualitative interviews because they can be time consuming, privacy endangering, and intellectually and emotionally demanding in ways that quantitative interviews rarely are (McCracken 1988:27). The Learndirect 'Get On' research was developed with an assumption that callers had agreed to take a follow up call; however, it had not been made clear to them who would make the call or when. Nevertheless, they did have prior knowledge that a call might be made.

Questionnaires have many advantages in that they are generally economical, easier to arrange and they supply standardised answers (Denscombe, 2003:159 / 160). They are essentially structured interviews, which involve tight control over the format of the questions and answers (Denscombe, 2003: 166). Upon reflection the researcher decided that the most appropriate means of gathering information was to develop a questionnaire and deliver it via a structured telephone interview. Although not face to face this would be far less intimidating given the client groups' self diagnosed problems in relation to literacy and numeracy; and perhaps more importantly the associated issues of low self confidence and a lack of trust in authority. Also, because the callers had chosen to call Learndirect and had agreed that their details could be passed on to the LSC, it was decided that there was likely to be a better rate of return from a telephone questionnaire than a postal survey; and that the quantum of data would be more generalisable. It was planned that the

questionnaire would be administered by the researcher and responses recorded directly in to the boxes provided on each one. The researcher gave some thought to tape recording the responses but concluded that it would provide an additional and unwelcome barrier for a potentially sensitive and fragile client group. In order to corroborate specific information by triangulation the researcher resolved to cross reference key personal information (name, address, including postcode, sex and age related to each respondent (who said they had gone into learning) with LSC Individualised Learner Records.

3.7 Design of Questionnaire

The purpose of the research instrument, a questionnaire, is to gather data that is both valid in terms of what it is supposed to measure and describe; and reliable in terms of whether it would produce similar results under constant conditions on all occasions (Bell, 1993:64 - 66). According to McCracken (1988:24 – 25) the questionnaire should establish channels for the direction and scope of discourse whilst being mindful of the complexities and difficulties of the respondent's lifeworld. This is an important message in that the caller cohort to the Learndirect 'Get On' Helpline is likely to comprise some individuals with below average Skills for Life who may have suffered considerable disadvantage in their school, home and / or work life. The proposed style of the questionnaire should, therefore, be appropriate to the client group.

Researchers should use a number of ways to gather information from participants including the use of open and closed questions which must not be ambiguous, imprecise or make unfounded assumptions about prior knowledge (Bell, 1993:77 – 81), nor should they be irritating (Denscombe, 2003:153). The participant may be asked to choose their response from a list of categories or from a scale eg. Likert (Bell,

1993:77 – 81). In order to elicit the most accurate response the researcher should be aware that questions might convey different meanings to participants and if they are confused they may just give any answer or hesitate and pass on to the next question (Bell, 1993:75). This is particularly important to the subjects of this research, in particular those who may have some form of learning difficulty or disability such as dyslexia or dyscalculia. Double, leading, hypothetical and offensive questions should be avoided; and care should be taken if sensitive questions are to be asked. Vague questions or those containing too much technical jargon may not elicit an appropriate response (Denscombe 2003 : 153). There is no fixed rule about the length of a questionnaire; however, those who are wondering whether or not to take part are likely to be put off by those that are too lengthy. Only the questions that are absolutely vital should be asked, they should be crisp and concise and there should be no duplication (Denscombe, 2003:151 / 152).

A draft questionnaire (Appendix 11) was developed by the researcher; firstly, to ask questions which sought to verify the information that already had been passed on from Learndirect and to fill gaps; for example, more accurate information on age had to be requested because sometimes Learndirect had passed on inconsistent data. It was important also to establish the wards in which respondents lived and identify how many lived in deprived wards and how many lived in what is considered to be the most deprived constituency in Nottinghamshire which is known as Nottingham North (the northern part of the City of Nottingham). Secondly, questions, some of which may be considered as sensitive, were drafted in relation to personal information ie. gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, occupational area, initial education, barriers to learning, motivation to learn, and participation, retention and achievement.

3.8 Consulting on / Piloting Questionnaire

According to Bell (1993: 84/85) data gathering instruments should be piloted to test how long it takes recipients to complete them; to check that all questions and instructions are clear and unambiguous and to identify which, if any, questions fail to yield usable data. Bell (1993) also suggested that researchers should monitor how long it takes each pilot respondent to complete the questionnaire. In order to ensure consistency it is also necessary to check whether pilot respondents are interpreting the meaning of questions in the same way (Bell, 1993:11). This is particularly important when dealing with a client group that has poor literacy and numeracy.

The first draft of the questionnaire (Appendix 11) was shared individually with a reference group comprising the East Midlands Regional Director of the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, the Manager of a well established and respected specialist advice and referral centre based in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire LSC's Research & Data Manager, Skills for Life Manager and Workforce Development Adviser. All their feedback was noted. The remaining pilot activity comprised running the questionnaire with the first ten callers on the database. Constructive comments from the reference group and the practical experience of working with the pilot group underlined the potentially fragile nature of the client group; therefore, it was considered essential that the research instrument was re-structured and re-drafted in a more user friendly way, worded less formally and more positively in plainer English without acronyms or complicated terms. It was also advised that some questions had too many sub-sections providing additional complexity for some of the client group; and which could be simplified, if they were separated. It was advised that the researcher should not be considered to be prying; for example, the use of terms such as crime, addictions and poverty were thought to be too intrusive, emotive and likely to cause a negative reaction. Terms

such as anonymised, low self worth, low self esteem should be de-jargonised so that those being interviewed were clear as to what precisely was being asked of them and there was no ambiguity. The absence of a question on ethnicity, although sometimes a sensitive one to ask, was considered to be a significant flaw in the first draft; and it was suggested that ethnicity should be included. Another sensitive area was considered to be around employment status and, after consultation, it was decided to seek more information on categories of worklessness even though there may be some apprehension, especially given the fear that participant details may be passed on to other Government Agencies such as Jobcentre Plus. The Researcher learned that before asking questions on ethnicity and employment it was really important to stress that there was no obligation to answer should the respondent feel uncomfortable. LSC colleagues suggested that it would be helpful if Likert scales were introduced to provide a gauge of the respondent's attitude and / or feelings to some sensitive areas; for example when seeking the client's perception of their school days. Although the memory can play tricks, especially if an older respondent is trying to recall his / her experiences, it was considered important to find out how many individuals with a poor experience of school decided to take action to improve their Skills for Life.

As a result of feedback from significant and knowledgeable others and learning from the experience of piloting the questionnaire with the first ten callers on the database several changes were made to the draft, including introduction of standard classifications for ethnicity and occupational area. Appendix 12 is the final version of the questionnaire which has twenty six questions, broadly covering:

- a. Representativeness of the Skills for Life cohort
- b. Experience of Initial Education

- c. Barriers to learning
- d. Motivation to address issues with Skills for Life
- e. Response and Follow Up Provision
- f. Plans for future education, training or work

By way of triangulation the researcher's intention was to establish, from public sector data sources, how many of those who claim to have taken action to address their poor Skills for Life actually did something positive.

From the database of 361 callers the researcher removed the information he had given to the Helpline when he was testing the system, leaving 360 bona fide callers. A target was set to engage 150 respondents, thus aspiring to a challenging response rate of just under 42 %. This took into account the fact that although callers to the Learndirect Helpline had already agreed to be contacted again they were not necessarily expecting a request to respond to a series of questions.

3.9 Protocol for making calls – telephone log

Each individual from the caller cohort had self diagnosed a Skills for Life deficit indicating that many were likely to be fragile learners. This category includes the socially or economically vulnerable who may feel uncertain, lack confidence or be anxious; and some individuals may, through limitations of education, have difficulty in understanding what is being required of them. The researcher should be conscious of the dangers of making assumptions about specific categories of people who may be unable to decide whether or not it is ethical to continue to answer questions. The researcher should be patient and not be condescending towards callers or make unwarranted assumptions about their competence or engage in a process of social labelling. Participants should feel valued because they are being

asked for their opinions, and this should enhance their feelings of self worth.

According to Bell (1993: 52) permission to carry out an investigation must always be sought through a formal, written approach that outlines plans for the research; however, given the self assessed Skills for Life deficits within the client group the researcher considered it to be inappropriate to make a written approach or to expect written confirmation from the caller cohort. It was decided that verbal consent would be sought and recorded on the questionnaire.

Referring to the principles of freedom and autonomy Oliver (2003:46) advised that participants should be aware of their right to withdraw at any time. Even though they may have given informed consent they cannot be expected to anticipate their feelings about participation in the various parts of the interview. Some may be put off by elements of the research process, perhaps in relation to disclosure of personal feelings or flashbacks to difficult periods of their earlier life. The participant should not feel intimidated and the researcher should not react adversely to any unexpected feedback.

The researcher was keen to maximise the response rate but recognised that response rates vary according to the research methods used, type of respondent and the issues under investigation. A non response occurs either when a client cannot be contacted or when the client refuses to take part. The problem with a high non response rate is that the researcher has no way of knowing whether those who did not respond were in any way different from those who did (Denscombe, 2003:20 and Bell, 1993:86). Because there is a potential for bias if there is a high non response rate the researcher should adopt appropriate measures to minimise the likelihood of non responses, and take steps to follow up with those who were not contactable or refused to take part.

Given the challenging response rate target the researcher was prepared to make every effort to contact each individual whose details were recorded on the caller database. No decision was made as to how many attempts should be made before discontinuing if a caller was hard to contact. Those who were contacted and refused to take part were not contacted again. The researcher decided to keep a telephone log on which to record the date and time of calls. The telephone contact number from the database was dialled and information including date and time were logged. Information relating to repeat calls was also logged and a tally kept of the total number of attempts made. The researcher tried to contact each individual up to nine times making sure attempts were made in the morning, afternoon, evening and at weekends. The researcher ensured that if the telephone was answered by a relative, friend or acquaintance and the named individual was not available they were asked politely when it would be possible to make contact again. The researcher resolved not to explain what the call was about because the respondent may not have wanted others to know that they had called the Helpline.

The researcher planned the telephone interviews so disturbances could be avoided because, according to Bell (1993:97), continuity should not be affected; for example, if a mobile telephone is constantly ringing or there are countless knocks on a door. After the preliminaries and a verbal summary of the research aims and objectives the researcher planned to ask the caller if he / she is willing to answer a number of questions which, it was anticipated, should take no longer than 30 minutes. It is important not to take longer than first communicated because overstaying one's welcome breaks one of the ethics of professional social research which is that the field should not be left more difficult for subsequent investigators to explore by disenchanting respondents with the whole notion of

research participation (Bell 1993:97, citing Johnson 1984:14-15). Some respondents, perhaps because they have difficulty in understanding certain questions or because they prefer to work more slowly or wish to elaborate more than others, may wish to take longer than 30 minutes; however, it is really important that the researcher manages the interview so that responses, especially around open questions, do not stray too much from the facts.

It is difficult to lay down rules for the way in which an interview should be conducted; however, Bell (1993: 97) suggests that common sense and normal good manners should prevail. The researcher should start by introducing him / herself and explain, in user friendly language and at a pace that is appropriate to the potential respondent, the purpose of the research and clarification as to how it is intended the information will be used to help adult learners improve their literacy and / or numeracy skills in Nottinghamshire.

Once the client is contacted they should be put at ease and reminded of their initial call to the Learndirect Helpline. It should be explained that this is a follow up call and that the researcher wishes to confirm that their details are recorded accurately. At a level and pace appropriate to the client the researcher should ensure that the client has received sufficient information about the research; and is given the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarity. Because of the fragile nature of the client group it is particularly important that the client is asked if they are satisfied with the answers they have been given. The researcher will then seek permission to ask a number of supplementary questions designed to inform the way Government Agencies engage with potential learners through Learndirect, Information & Guidance Networks and learning providers. If an individual agrees to respond to the questionnaire but is unable to proceed at the time the researcher should offer to call again at a mutually acceptable date and time.

Clients should be informed that any information they have given will be dealt with in accordance with Durham University Research Guidelines, the LSC Data Management Protocol and the Data Protection Act – explaining that no names will be linked to reports or passed on to any other agencies unless such action is the express wish of the client. It should also be explained that some questions may be viewed as sensitive and the interviewee has the right not to answer a particular question or withdraw from the interview at any time. If, during the interview, it becomes clear that the participant has taken no action to improve his / her Skills for Life but still wants to do something positive the researcher should seek permission to pass on their contact details to a specialist referral agency. At the end of each telephone interview participants will be given the researcher's contact details should they wish to discuss the outcomes. The researcher should not forget to tell the interviewee that their participation is really appreciated.

3.10 Data Management

According to Bell (1993:96) the researcher's objective should be to leave the interview with a set of responses that can easily be managed, and which are stored in an effective data management system which meets ethical requirements (Oliver, 2003:45 and Bell 1993:24). Learndirect batched up caller details and passed them on to contacts in local LSC offices. Each individual set of details was entered on to an Excel spreadsheet with columns for name, address, postcode, telephone / mobile contact details, age, sex, employment status, course interest and details of what the caller was offered eg. CD / DVD and or course details. The postcode information was very important because it allowed the researcher to identify the ward and district in which the caller lived. The database containing the details of 361 callers to the Helpline was built up over a period of

four years. A second Excel spreadsheet was set up with 25 columns, one for each question that was to be asked. The information from each of the responses, as recorded on the questionnaire, was entered into the box provided on the spreadsheet which included both numerical and verbal information.

The researcher used content analysis on each of the qualitative responses to the open questions, those being numbers 6,7,13,14,15,19,21,22,23,24,25. Drawing on guidance from Denscombe (2003: 221) the researcher broke down the text into smaller components, developed relevant categories for analysis of the data, coded the units in line with the categories, counted the frequency with which the units occurred and analysed the text in terms of the frequency of the units and their relationship with other units that occurred in the text. Each of the 165 responses was entered on to a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) spreadsheet to facilitate interrogation for frequencies, percentages and crosstabulation.

For the ease of analysis the researcher decided to record age in ten year spans; and to record employment status simply as employed (full – time, part – time, including self - employed) or unemployed because of concerns as to how accurately the question relating to employment status would be answered given the perceived suspicions relating to information sharing between different Government Agencies. The process of cross checking information gathered with one research instrument against that gathered by another, triangulation, is to be encouraged because it ensures that the meaning of the data has some consistency across methods, and allows the researcher to enhance the validity of the data (Oliver, 2003: 133 / 134). Cross checking is important in the case of adults with poor Skills for Life who have often developed sophisticated coping strategies and find it hard to admit they have failed to take action to address

their poor Skills for Life. The researcher decided to use triangulation to compare what respondents said they had done to address their Skills for Life deficit with what they had actually done by interrogating LSC Individualised Learner records. The researcher decided to compare and contrast the available caller information with respondent information and information on those living in the most deprived communities, in particular Nottingham North. The researcher also sought to investigate the follow up service provided by Information & Advice Services in two areas of the East Midlands. Firstly, Nottinghamshire the focus of the primary research; and secondly Leicestershire which has similar economic and social characteristics.

3.11 Anonymity / Confidentiality

The Data Protection Act 1998 was set up to ensure that data is only used for the purposes originally specified. Only data that is needed should be collected and the researcher must ensure that data are accurate and kept securely. When publishing results one should take care not to disclose the personal identities of individuals who have contributed to the findings (Oliver, 2003:136 – 143). During the informed consent procedure participants should be informed about the way in which the data will be used, how it might be retained and, if it is to be disposed of details of the procedure and timescales (Oliver, 2003:65).

3.12 Triangulation

The researcher decided to compare information on response rates and numbers going into learning from the field work with information from Welfare Direct relating to follow up work with those who have been interviewed by the Information & Advice Partnerships in both Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire.

Also the researcher decided to cross reference key information

(name, sex, age, postcode) for each of those who said they had gone into learning against LSC individualised Learner Records to ascertain whether or not they had enrolled on any LSC funded programmes.

4. CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report on findings from the field work as described in the research methodology, specifically personal information provided by each of the 361 callers to the Learndirect Helpline, and responses from the 165 callers who agreed to take part in a semi – structured interview.

The main research question is whether the publicly funded follow up processes ie. information, advice & guidance and learning provision are able to properly support adults who have issues with their literacy and numeracy (their Skills for Life).

From the responses the researcher is seeking answers to a number of supplementary questions to find out whether respondents were:

- a. Representative of the target group of adults with poor Skills for Life
- b. Negative about their initial education
- c. Faced with multiple barriers to learning
- d. Unmotivated to improve their Skills for Life
- f. Not planning to develop themselves in the future

For presentational purposes the findings are grouped in the following five themes:

- a. Representativeness of the Skills for Life Cohort
- b. Experience of initial education
- c. Barriers to learning
- d. Motivation to address issues with Skills for Life
- e. Response and follow up processes
- f. Plans for future education, training or work

For each theme the data has been analysed (where available) into the caller cohort, respondent cohort and the cohort that went into LSC funded learning (verified by Individualised Learner Records)

4.2 Contacting Callers

The researcher populated an Excel spreadsheet with the details of 361 callers who authorised Learndirect to pass them on to the LSC. The details included name, address (including postcode), sex, age, employment status and whether they were referred to a provider, sent a video / DVD or both. The 361 callers included one referral, since deleted, that was made by the researcher to test the system, leaving 360 apparently bone fide callers. If callers to the Learndirect Helpline chose not to give permission for their details to be passed on to the LSC, no records were kept. It is not possible, therefore, to calculate the ratio of all callers to those who gave permission. Over 12 months between Spring 2005 and Spring 2006 efforts were made to contact the 360 individuals whose names appeared on the spreadsheet and 165 questionnaires were completed giving a 45.83% success rate; however, to achieve this level of success the researcher had to be prepared to make repeat calls until either contact was made and a questionnaire was completed or making contact was considered impossible. Table 4.1 shows the number of attempts made by the researcher before successfully completing a questionnaire.

Table 4.1 - Number of attempts before successfully completing a questionnaire

Number of attempts before a questionnaire was completed	Frequency
Once	109
Two	17
Three	12
Four	8
Five	1

Six	4
Seven	6
Eight	2
Nine or more	6

Table 4.1 shows that although 66% of respondents were contacted at the first attempt it took the researcher up to nine or more attempts before contact was made with the remaining 34%. To summarise 165 questionnaires were completed and 195 were not completed. Of those who took part in the survey but hadn't taken any action to improve their Skills for Life 89 agreed to be referred to a specialist Skills for Life agency; and 7 asked to be sent more information. The researcher failed to contact 135 callers to the Helpline because there was no response, the telephone number was not recognised or they had left someone else's number. The remaining 60 were contacted; but 48 did not wish to answer any questions; 7 said that the research was not relevant to them because a third party had called the Helpline on their behalf; and 5 did not remember calling the Helpline.

4.3 Representativeness of the Skills for Life Cohort

This covers questions 1 to 9 on the questionnaire (Appendix 14)which relate to postcode (which allows the researcher to determine how many respondents live in areas formally classified as the worst in terms of multiple deprivation), gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, type of work (which allows the researcher to determine social class), concerns about reading / writing, numeracy or language, self assessment of Skills for Life and whether any screening has been done previously.

4.3.1 Area of Residence

Table 4.2 shows whether the callers, respondents or those that went into LSC funded learning reside in the County of Nottinghamshire or the more deprived City of Nottingham.

Table 4.2 Postcode – split by City / County

	County %	City %
Caller Cohort (n=360)	58.5	41.5
Respondent Cohort (n=165)	60.6	39.4
Those who went into LSC funded learning (n=27)	74.1	25.9

Caller and respondent cohorts provided a similar ratio; that being approximately 6:4. Fewer, however, from the City went into LSC funded learning with a ratio of 7.4: 2.6. A more detailed breakdown by Local Authority District can be found in Appendices 16 and 17

Table 4.3 shows the percentage of callers, respondents and respondents who entered LSC funded learning and live in wards categorised as having multiple disadvantage (as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation).

Table 4.3 - Breakdown by Deprived Ward

	% of residents living in deprived ward	% residents living in Nottingham North Constituency
Callers (n=360)	37	17.8
Respondents (n=165)	36	18.2
Respondents who entered LSC funded learning (n = 27)	22	7.4

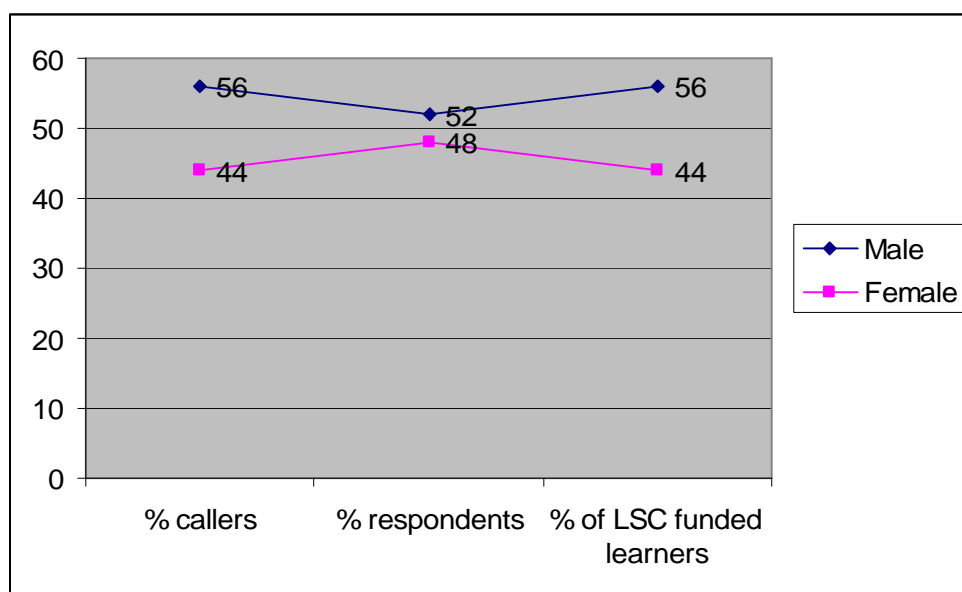
Table 4.3 shows that significantly fewer people from deprived wards went into LSC funded learning than were represented in the caller and respondent cohorts. The figures for the Nottingham North constituency,

the most deprived group of wards in the City of Nottingham, show that even fewer respondents went into LSC funded learning.

4.3.2 Gender

Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of females and males in each of the cohorts – callers (n = 360), respondents (n = 165) and those going into LSC funded learning (n = 27).

Figure 4.1 – callers, respondents and LSC funded learners by gender



The male / female split between callers and those that went into LSC funded learning is constant; however, more females agreed to respond to the questionnaire.

4.3.3 Age

Callers

The information for 249 callers passed on by Learndirect was inconsistent because age range categories sometimes overlapped eg. 26 to 35, 26 to 49, 36 to 45.

Respondents

Table 4.4 shows the breakdown by age category of respondents and respondents that went into LSC funded learning

Table 4.4 – breakdown by age category of respondents and respondents that went into LSC funded learning

Age	% of respondents (n = 162)	% of respondents that went into LSC funded learning (n = 26)
36 – 45	34.0	30.8
26 – 35	27.2	30.8
46 – 55	18.4	26.9
16 – 25	14.2	7.7
56 +	6.2	6.2
	100	100.00

Table 4.4 shows that 61.2 % of respondents and 61.6 % of respondents that went into LSC funded learning were in the 26 to 45 age range. Fewer younger people went into LSC funded learning but a greater percentage of the cohort aged 46 to 55.

4.3.4 Ethnicity

80% of the respondent cohort (n = 161) was White, 8% Black Caribbean, 4% Indian, 3% Pakistani and 5% other. Of the cohort that went into LSC funded learning (n = 26) 85% were white, 8% Black Caribbean, 4% Indian and 3% other.

4.3.5 Employment status

Table 4.5 shows the percentage of callers, respondents and respondents undertaking LSC funded learning by employment status.

Table 4.5 – callers, respondents and LSC funded learners by employment status

	Employed Full – time (including self employed) %	Employed Part – time (including self employed) %	Economically inactive %
Callers (n = 300)	51	12	37
Respondents (n = 162)	50	21	29
Respondents undertaking LSC funded learning (n=27)	30	33	37

Table 4.5 shows that approximately half of callers and respondents were employed full -time. A greater proportion of respondents working part – time took up LSC funded learning.

4.3.6 Occupational Area / Social Class

The question on job and job title allows the researcher to determine social class.

Table 4.6 shows the percentage of employed respondents and respondents who are undertaking LSC funded learning by occupational area.

Table 4.6 – callers, respondents and LSC funded learners by occupational area

	Respondents (n = 122) %	Respondents undertaking LSC funded learning (n=19) %
Personal Services Occupations	21	37
Skilled Trades Occupations	20	21
Elementary Occupations	16	16
Manager, Professional,	13	11

Associate Technical		
Process, Plant & Machine Operatives	12	5
Sales & Customer Service Occupations	11	5
Administrative & Secretarial Occupations	7	5

Table 4.6 shows that more of those who took up LSC funded learning were in personal service occupations; and significantly fewer were classified as process, plant and machine operatives and sales & customer service occupations.

4.3.7 Concerns about Skills for Life

Figure 4.2 shows the breakdown of the respondent cohort by self assessed category of Skills for Life deficit.

Figure 4.2 - Respondent cohort – self assessed category of Skills for Life deficit (n = 162)

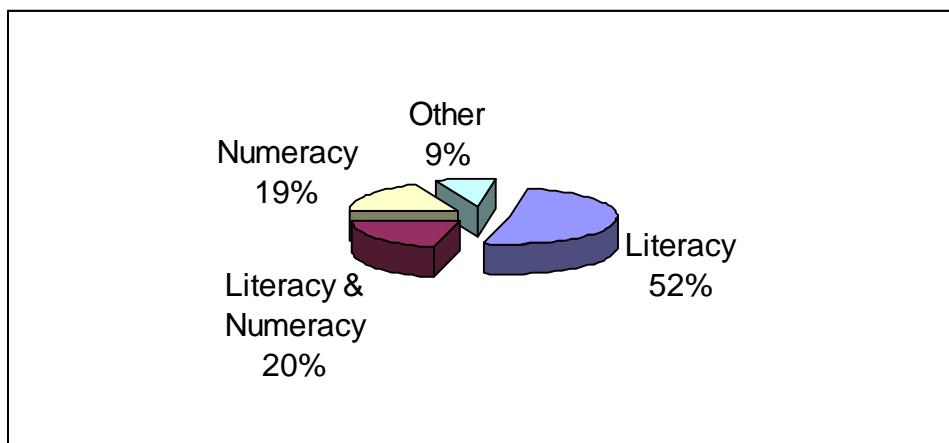


Figure 4.2 shows that stand alone literacy accounted for 52% of the concerns expressed by respondents. A further 20% said they had problems with both literacy and numeracy.

Figure 4.3 shows the breakdown of the cohort that took up LSC funded learning.

Figure 4.3 - Cohort that went into LSC funded learning – self assessed category of Skills for Life deficit (n = 27)

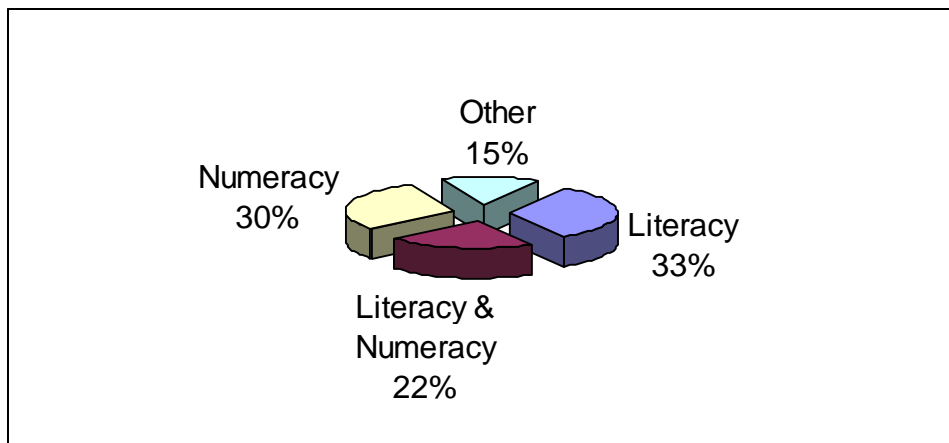


Figure 4.3 shows that more of the cohort that went into LSC funded learning perceived their deficit to be in numeracy.

Further investigation showed that 60 % of male respondents and 40% of female respondents said they had concerns with their level of literacy and 40% of male respondents and 60% of female respondents said they had concerns with their level of numeracy.

4.3.8 Self Assessment

Table 4.7 shows the percentage of respondents and the percentage of respondents who took up LSC funded learning by self assessed level of Skills for Life competence.

Table 4.7 – Self Assessed Level of Skills for Life Competence

	Good / Average %	Just below average %	Poor %	Very Poor %
Respondents (n = 160)	9	39	38	14
Respondents who took up LSC funded learning (n = 26)	15	46	31	8

Table 4.7 shows that more of those who took up LSC funded learning perceived their Skills for Life to be just below average, average / good (61% compared with 48%).

When asked about whether or not they had taken a screening test to identify problems with learning due to a learning difficulty or deficit 12% and 16% respectively of the respondent cohort and the cohort that went into LSC funded learning responded positively.

4.4 Experience of Initial Education

This section covers questions 10 to 13 (Appendix 14), specifically those that relate to age of leaving school, qualification level, feelings about school and how clever respondents felt at school

4.4.1 School leaving age

Of the respondent cohort (n = 161) 85% left school at age 15 or 16; and of those who went into LSC funded learning (n = 27) 82%.

4.4.2 Qualification level

Figure 4.4 shows the breakdown of the respondent cohort by their highest level of qualification.

Figure 4.4 - Respondents by Highest Level of Qualification (n = 157)

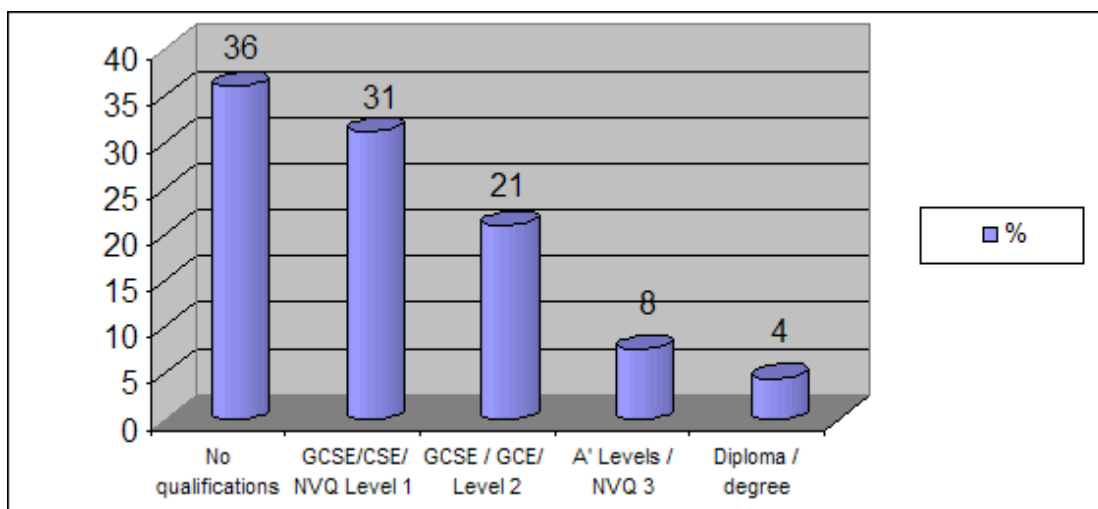


Figure 4.4 shows that 67% of the respondent cohort were qualified below Level 2 and 33 % have a Level 2 qualification or above.

Figure 4.5 shows the breakdown of the respondent cohort who went into LSC funded learning by their highest level of qualification.

Figure 4.5 - Respondents who went into LSC funded learning by Highest Level of Qualification (n = 27)

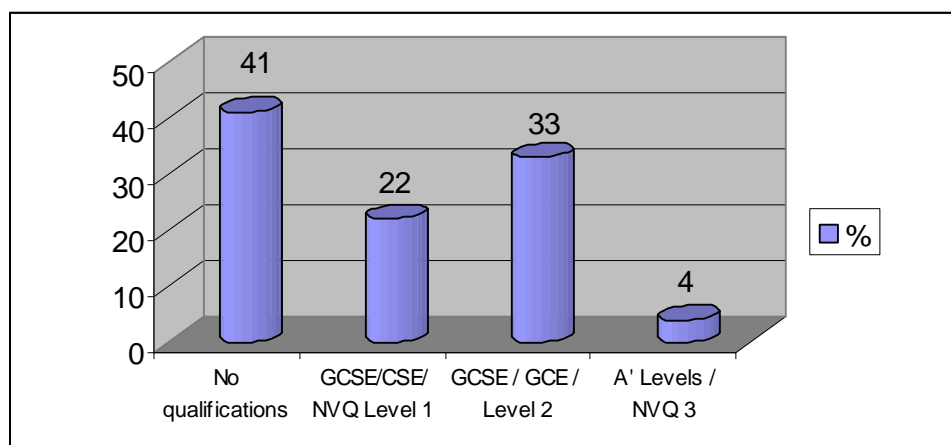


Figure 4.5 shows that 63% of the respondent cohort were qualified below Level 2 and 37% above Level 2.

4.4.3 Feelings about school

Figure 4.6 shows how respondents said they felt about their school days.

Figure 4.6 – feelings about school – respondent cohort (n = 157)

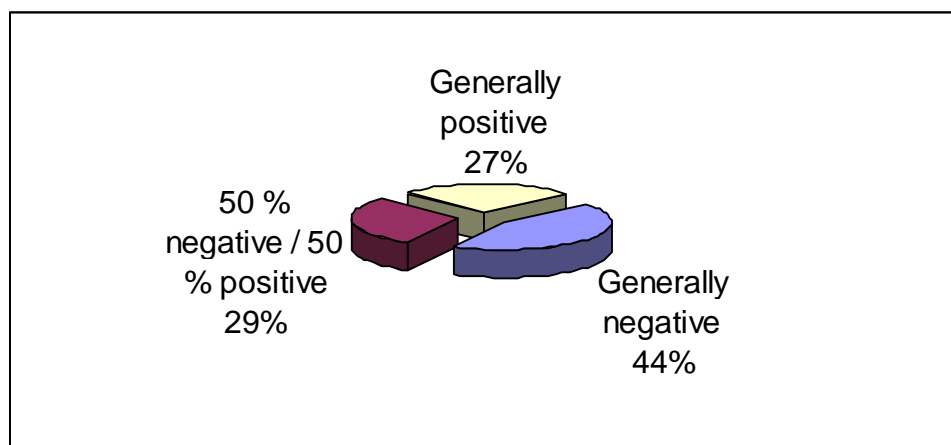


Figure 4.6 shows that nearly half of respondents were generally negative about their school days; with the remainder split almost 50:50 between those who were generally positive and those who were ambivalent. The findings for those who went into LSC funded learning were similar.

When asked what made individuals feel clever at school of the respondent cohort (n = 156) 67% said that being successful made them feel clever at school; but 29% said nothing made them feel clever. The figures were similar for those that went into LSC funded learning.

4.5 Barriers to learning

This section covers questions 14 to 17 (Appendix 14) which cover barriers to learning, the respondent's greatest barrier, how positive / negative respondents were about their schooling, how issues with Skills

for Life had affected respondent's home or family life, and how issues with Skills for Life had affected respondent's work life.

Figure 4.7 shows the barriers that prevented respondents from improving their Skills for Life.

Figure 4.7 – Barriers preventing respondents from improving their Skills for Life (n = 152)

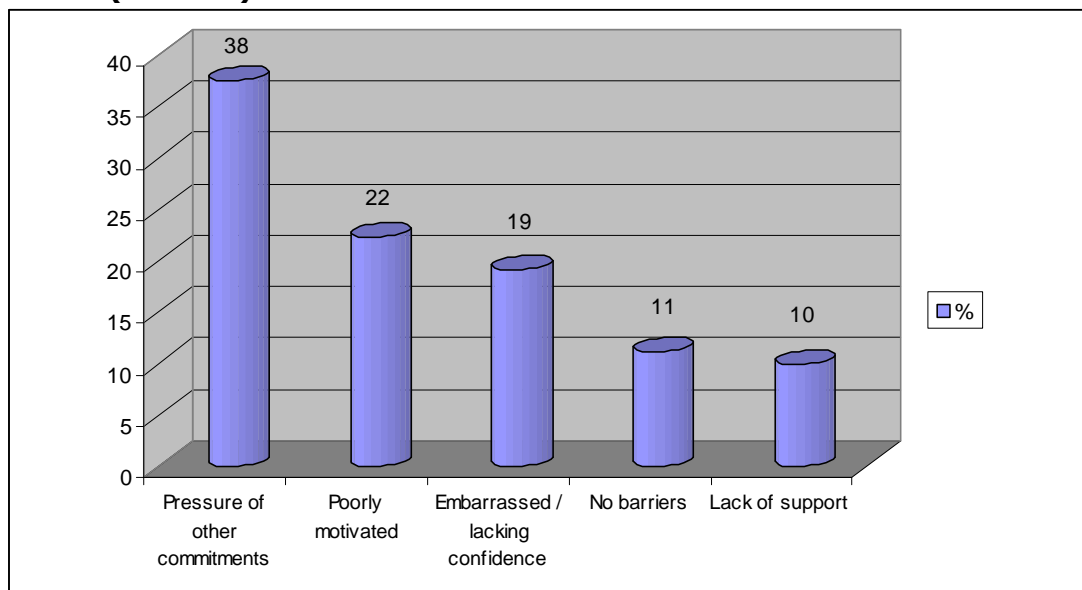


Figure 4.7 shows that the main barriers were pressure of other commitments (38%) and low levels of motivation (22%)

Figure 4.8 shows the barriers that prevented respondents who went into LSC funded learning previously from improving their Skills for Life.

Figure 4.8 – Barriers that previously prevented those who went into LSC funded learning from improving their Skills for Life (n = 25)

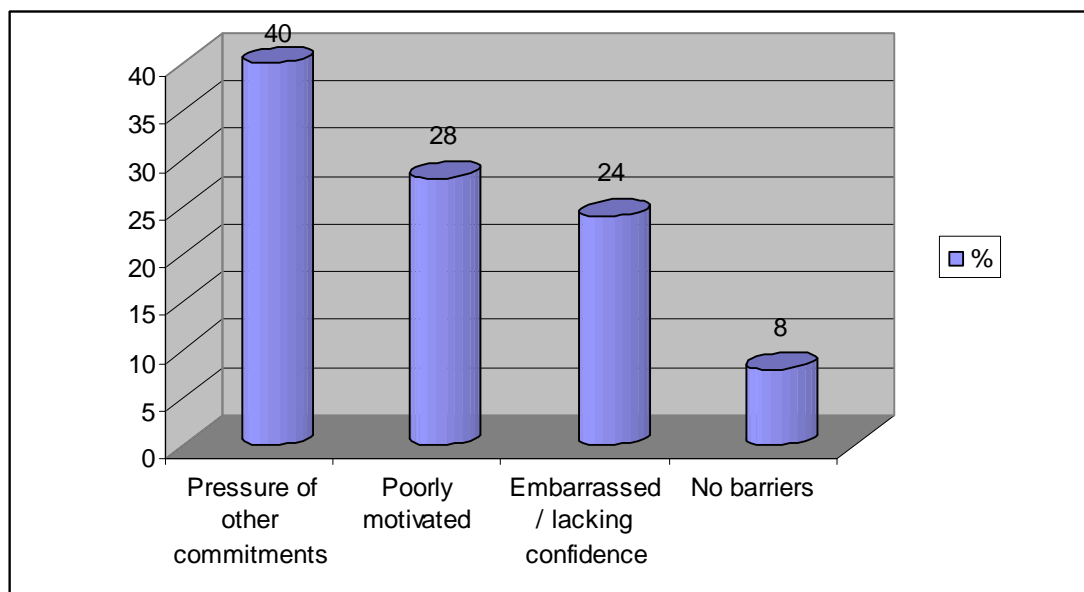


Figure 4.8 shows that more of the cohort that went into LSC funded learning cited pressure of other commitments, poor levels of motivation and embarrassment or lack of confidence as issues that have prevented them from taking up learning; however, none mentioned a perceived lack of support as being a barrier.

4.6 Motivation to address issues with Skills for Life

This section refers to questions 18 to 21 (Appendix 14) specifically relating to how the respondents got to know about the Helpline, why respondents thought they needed to address issues with their Skills for Life, how motivated they were when they made the call and what triggered them to call the Helpline.

4.6.1 Media of engagement

Information was passed on by Learndirect for bona fide 360 callers. The media through which the respondents were engaged can be found in Appendix 16. Although this information may be of interest to

Learndirect to inform future advertising campaigns it is not fundamental to this thesis.

4.6.2 Reasons for improving Skills for Life

Figure 4.9 shows the reasons why respondents chose to take action to address their self diagnosed Skills for Life deficits.

Figure 4.9 – Reasons given by respondents for taking action to address their Skills for Life deficit (n = 162)

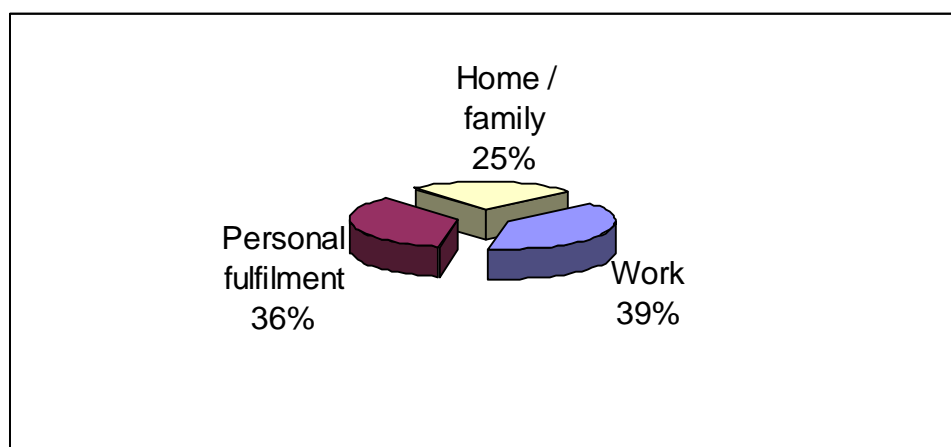


Figure 4.9 shows that 36% wanted to improve their Skills for Life for improve themselves (personal fulfilment), 25% for reasons related to home and family; and 39% related to work.

Figure 4.10 shows the reasons why those who went into LSC funded learning chose to take action to address their self diagnosed Skills for Life deficits.

Figure 4.10 - Reasons given by respondents in LSC funded learning for taking action to address their Skills for Life deficit (n = 26)

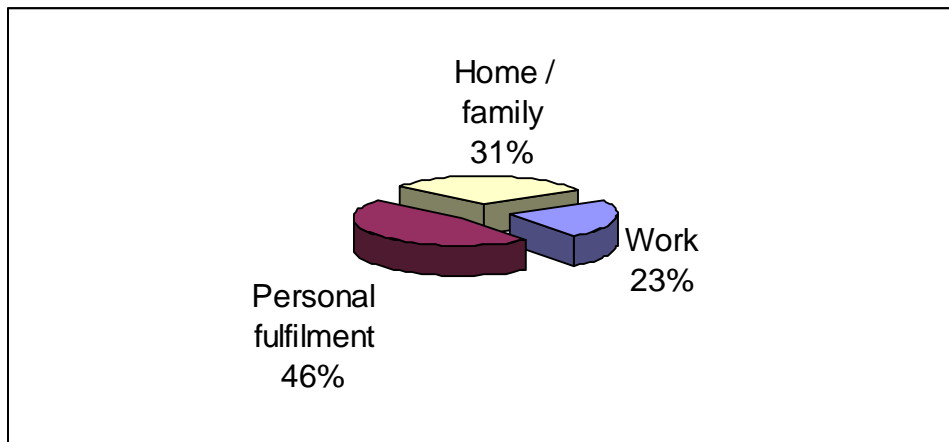


Figure 4.10 shows that reasons related to personal fulfilment and home / family were more important to respondents that went into LSC funded learning. Work related reasons were much less important to those that went into LSC funded learning.

4.6.3 Self Assessed Level of Motivation

Figure 4.11 shows how respondents assessed their level of motivation when they telephoned the Learndirect Helpline.

Figure 4.11 – Self Assessed Level of Motivation by Respondent (n = 162)

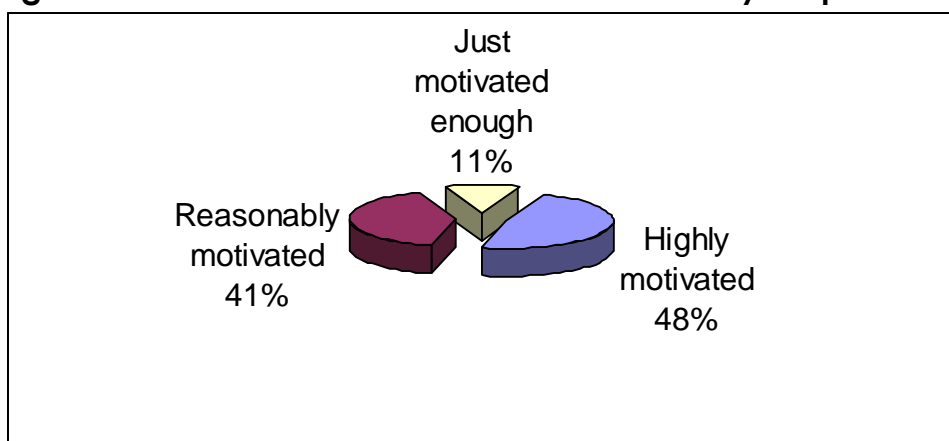


Figure 4.11 shows that almost half of respondents were highly motivated to call the Helpline.

Similar levels of motivation were found in those that went into LSC funded learning.

In terms of triggers to call the Helpline Table 4.8 shows what motivated respondents and those who went into LSC funded learning to contact the Learndirect Helpline.

Table 4.8 – reasons given by respondents and LSC funded learners for contacting the Learndirect Helpline

	% age of respondents (n= 149)	% age of respondents who went into LSC funded learning (n=24)
Desire to sort one's self out	45	50
Identified with Gremlins advert	36	29
Seeking more information	9	17
Desire to help family members	5	4
Other	5	0
	100	100

Table 4.8 shows that almost half of the respondent cohort and half the cohort that went into LSC funded learning were keen to sort themselves out. 36% of respondents and 29% of those that went into LSC funded learning identified with the 'Gremlins' advertisement.

4.7 Response and Follow up Processes

This section covers questions 22 to 25 (Appendix 14) and covers the help the respondent was given when he / she called the Helpline, what action the respondent took as a result, if the respondent joined a course, whether they continued to learn and if they didn't carry on learning the reasons why not.

Upon request callers who chose to give their details to Learndirect personnel were sent a DVD / video or details of a training provider. Their details were passed on to the local LSC's; and were generally passed on to the local Information, Advice & Guidance partnership. Generally, their names would be added to the Information, Advice & Guidance provider's database for follow up calls. Some Partnerships, subject to funding being available, may choose to follow up with a call. The researcher took on the role of following up on behalf of Nottinghamshire LSC.

The tracking of learners that was undertaken as part of this research would not be done widely because there is no protocol for tracking Nextstep clients into LSC funded provision. Retrospective information on engagement in learning was gathered by the researcher when he followed up with the callers. This information was then cross checked with the LSC's Individualised Learner Record information and the Learndirect database to verify the information given by respondents.

4.8 Action taken to begin a course of learning and whether those who started a course continued to learn

44 % of respondents (n = 71) said they had commenced a course to improve their Skills for Life and 56% (n = 90) had taken no action. When the 71 individuals who said they had commenced a course were asked if they had continued to learn 19 said they had started and then stopped, 3 had started, stopped and started again and 49 continued to learn. A total of 52, therefore, said they were in learning at the time they took part in the survey. Of those who chose not to continue to learn 47 % became dissatisfied and / or frustrated, 46% succumbed to the pressure of other commitments and 7% said they withdrew because of personal problems.

4.9 Plans for Future Education, Training or Work

The final section covers question 26 (Appendix 14) and covers the respondent's attitude towards future education, training or work. Of the respondent cohort (n = 162) 76% said they had plans for future education, training or work; and of those who went into LSC funded learning (n = 27) 81% said they had plans to continue education, training or work.

4.9.1 Referral / permission for future contact

Of the respondents who said that they had not taken any action to address their Skills for Life deficits 77% gave permission for their contact details to be referred to a specialist Skills for Life agency and 6% asked for further information
97% of all respondents said they would welcome a follow up call.

4.10 Crosstabulation of the data

4.10.1 Respondents from the Nottingham North Constituency compared with those living elsewhere in Nottinghamshire.

The Nottingham North Parliamentary constituency suffers from serious disadvantage. Each of its nine wards features in worst 500 in the United Kingdom, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

a. Characteristics of those who responded to the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign

Respondents from the Nottingham North Constituency (Nottingham North) had a younger age profile ie. 33.3 % in the 26 to 35 category compared with 25.4%.

Respondents were more likely to rate themselves as having just below average Skills for Life ie. 43.3% compared with 37%. They were also less likely to rate themselves as having poor Skills for Life ie. 30.0 % compared with 38.5 %.

Fewer respondents classified their work as full – time ie. 40% compared with 49.6% but a greater percentage classified their work as part – time ie. 26.7% compared with 17.8%. Fewer respondents were economically inactive ie. 23.3 % compared with 32.6 %.

Only 3.3 % of respondents were in Managerial, Professional or Technical occupations compared with 11.1 % of respondents from outside the Constituency. Also 20 % of employed respondents were working in elementary occupations compared with 9.6 % of respondents from outside Nottingham North.

b. Experience of mandatory education

In terms of highest level of qualification respondents had fewer Level 1 qualifications than those from outside ie. 16.7 % compared with 33.4 % but more Level 2 qualifications ie. 32.6% compared with 17.1 %.

More respondents felt positive about their school days ie. 40% compared with 22.2 % outside of Nottingham North; and fewer were generally negative about their school days ie. 26.7% compared with 45.2 %.

c. Barriers to learning

40% of the respondents cited family and work commitments as barriers compared with 33.3% of respondents from outside Nottingham North . 13.3 % of respondents cited there were no barriers compared with 9.6 % of respondents from outside Nottingham North.

When asked how poor Skills for Life had affected their home life 30% responded 'not at all' compared with 35.6% from outside Nottingham North. 67% said their home life had been affected compared with 60% from outside Nottingham North. When questioned about the effect of poor Skills for Life on their work life 30% from Nottingham North responded 'not at all' compared with 23.2 % of respondents from outside Nottingham North. 66% of respondents reported that a lack of Skills for Life had affected their work life compared with 70% of respondents from outside Nottingham North.

d. Motivation to address issues with Skills for Life

In terms of motivation to take action to improve oneself more respondents from outside Nottingham North were highly motivated to make the call ie. 48.9% compared with 40%. In relation to 'what triggered an individual to make a call to the Learndirect Helpline' 40% from Nottingham North identified with the 'Gremlins' characters compared with 31.1% of respondents from outside Nottingham North. Fewer from Nottingham North cited a lack of confidence as the reason they wanted to take action ie. 6.7% compared with 16.3%. More respondents from Nottingham North wanted to help their children or grandchildren ie. 30.0% compared with 17.8%. More wanted to do something to equip themselves better to apply for jobs ie. 16.7% compared with 8.1%.

e. Response and follow up processes

In terms of taking action to begin a course fewer from Nottingham North said they took action ie. 33.3 % compared with 45.2 % from outside Nottingham North. Also fewer claimed they continued to learn ie. 26.7% compared with 30.4 %.

Only 7.4 % (2 learners) of those going into LSC funded learning came from the Nottingham North constituency; however, out of all respondents 30 (18.2%) were from Nottingham North.

f. Future plans

More respondents from Nottingham North said they planned to do something about education, or training or work ie. 83.3 % compared with 73.3 %; and more respondents from Nottingham North were happy to be contacted again in the future ie. 93.3 % compared with 86.7%.

4.10.2 Respondents from deprived wards compared with those living in wards not classified as deprived.

a. Characteristics of those who responded to the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign

- A younger age profile
- Similar employment profile
- Those in work were more likely to be in lower level occupations

b. Experience of mandatory education

- More likely to have no qualifications – 38.3 % compared with 30.5%;
- Fewer felt negatively about their school days ie. 36.7% compared with 44.8%

c. Barriers to learning

- Fewer felt inadequate or not competent enough

- Fewer lacked confidence or expressed a desire to feel better about themselves

d. Motivation to address issues with Skills for Life

- A higher percentage identified with the 'Gremlins' characters
- More wanted to improve themselves in order to help their children or grandchildren; and a greater number did not want to depend on others, including family

e. Response and follow up processes

- Those who took up LSC funded learning were less likely to continue to learn
- Respondents were more likely to start and stop learning
- Respondents were more likely to stop learning because of work commitments

4.10.3 Respondents with no qualifications compared with those with qualifications

a. Characteristics of those who responded to the Learndirect Gremlin's Campaign

- Older - 16 to 25 cohort only 21.7 % compared with 40.9 % for 26 to 35 year olds
- More likely to self assess as poor or very poor (62%)
- Just as likely (as those with qualifications) to be employed full - time, part- time or be economically inactive
- More likely to be employed in skilled trades or lower level occupations

b. Barriers to learning

- More likely to cite lack of time due to family commitments as their main barrier to improvement
- Cite their home and work life as being significantly affected by Skills for Life problems

c. Motivation to address issues with Skills for Life

- Highly motivated (83.6%) to take action
- Keen for to improve themselves, become more competent; and to help children / grandchildren

d. Response and follow up processes

- 40% of those who went into LSC funded learning had no prior qualifications.

e. Future plans

- 76% said they had plans for the future in relation to education, training or work

4.10.4 Respondents taking up LSC funded learning compared with those who did not

a. Characteristics of those who responded to the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign

- Less likely to live in one of the 37 most disadvantaged wards
- Likely to be older (significant at 46 – 55 years of age)
- Less likely to have a Level 1 qualification, more likely to have a Level 2 qualification, and less likely to have a Level 3 or higher qualification
- More likely to have no qualifications
- Likely to have fewer concerns about their literacy skills, but greater concerns about their numeracy skills

- More likely to rate their Skills for Life at just below average
- Much less likely to rate their Skills for Life as poor or very poor (37% compared with 53%)
- Much less likely to be employed full -time (30 % compared with 55.1%)
- Much more likely to be employed part - time (33.3% compared with 16.7 %)

b. Barriers to learning

- More likely to lack time for learning due to family commitments, lack motivation, be embarrassed or lack confidence.
- More likely for their Skills for Life to have affected their home life 41% compared to 33%

c. Motivation to address issues with Skills for Life

- More focused on self improvement and family rather than work

4.11 Triangulation

4.11.1 Information, Advice & Guidance Partnership data for Nottinghamshire & Leicestershire

Some Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships in the East Midlands have contracted with an independent specialist organisation, Welfare Direct, to telephone clients three and six months after their information and advice session with an Adviser. The researcher, in order to triangulate the findings from his Learndirect research, decided to compare response rates, into learning rates and overall success rates (learning and job outcomes) for 2,148 clients from Nottinghamshire and 2,461 clients from Leicestershire who received advice between August and December 2006. Each cohort

was split in two and the first tranche was contacted after three months and the second after six months.

Figure 4.12 shows information relating to a three month follow up from Welfare Call.

Figure 4.12 Three month response rates and percentage into learning for clients receiving Information, Advice & Guidance in 2006 in Nottinghamshire (n = 1765) and Leicestershire (n = 1003)

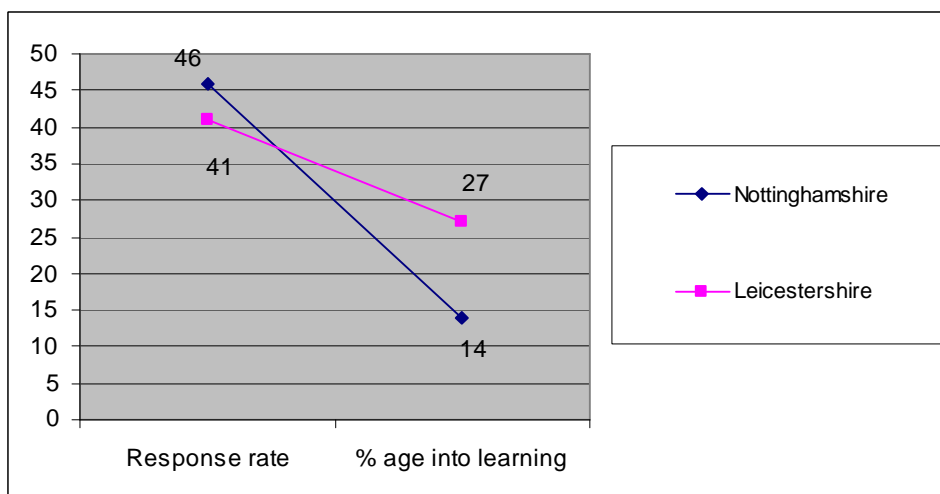


Figure 4.12 shows that Nottinghamshire had a response rate of 46 % and Leicestershire 41%. Of the respondent cohort 14% of Nottinghamshire clients said they had taken up learning and 27% from Leicestershire, and 26% and 30% respectively said they had started work.

Figure 4.13 shows information relating to a six month follow up from Welfare Call.

Figures 4.13 - 2 Six month response rates and percentage into learning for clients receiving Information, Advice & Guidance in 2006 in Nottinghamshire (n = 696) and Leicestershire (n = 1145)

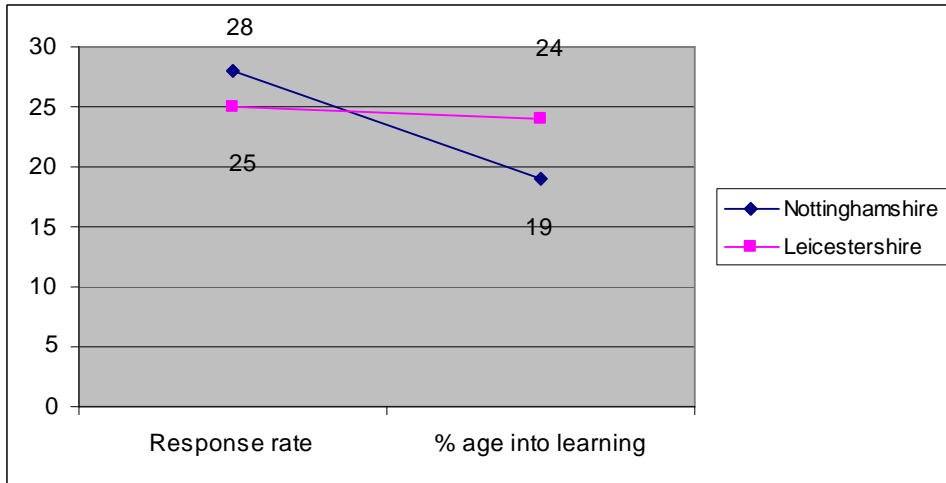


Figure 4.13 shows that Nottinghamshire had a response rate of 28 & Leicestershire 25%. Of the respondent cohort 19 % of Nottinghamshire clients said they had taken up learning and 24% from Leicestershire.

4.11.2 Data from field work with Learndirect clients

The 52 respondents (32% of the respondent cohort) who said they went into further learning were checked against Individualised Learner Record information for the academic years 2002/03, 2003/04, 2004/05 and 2005/06 for Further Education Colleges, Adult & Community Learning, Work Based Learning, Learndirect and European Social Fund Co – Financing. 27 of the 52 respondents who said they had gone into further learning (52%) and 16% of the respondent cohort were found to have completed Individualised Learner Records. 80% of the numeracy and / or literacy learning took place in Further Education Colleges, 10% in Adult & Community Learning settings, 5% in Work Based Learning, 3% in Learndirect and 2% in learning funded by co – financed European Social Funding.

5. CHAPTER FIVE – INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings from the survey (Chapter 4) in the context of the information gathered as part of the literature review (Chapter 2).

The main research question is whether the publicly funded follow up processes ie. information, advice & guidance and learning provision are able to properly support adults who have issues with their literacy and numeracy (their Skills for Life).

The researcher intends to seek answers on a number of supplementary questions to find out whether respondents were:

- a. Representative of the Skills for Life cohort
- b. Negative about their initial education
- c. Faced with multiple barriers to learning
- d. Unmotivated to improve their Skills for Life
- f. Not planning to develop themselves in the future

5.2 Representativeness of the Skills for Life Cohort

This covers questions 1 to 9 on the questionnaire (Appendix 14) which relate to postcode (which allows the researcher to determine how many respondents live in areas formally classified as the worst in terms of multiple deprivation), gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, occupational profile, concerns regarding Skills for Life, self assessed skills level and whether the client has been screened for learning difficulties, literacy or numeracy

5.2.1 Area of Residence

Given the background of deprivation articulated in the literature review the primary research set out to test whether Moser's (1999) aspiration to engage adults living in Nottinghamshire communities with the highest level of deprivation was being fulfilled; and whether Gregson et al's (2005) supposition that those most in need are being sacrificed to achieve Government targets is correct. The Learndirect 'Gremlins' initiative set out to attract hard to reach learners but from the caller cohort (n = 360) only 37% came from deprived wards, of the respondent cohort (n = 165) only 36% came from deprived wards; and, most significantly, of the cohort that went into LSC funded learning only 22% were from deprived wards. The greatest attrition between those who called the Helpline and those who commenced learning was in the Parliamentary Constituency of Nottingham North which comprises nine wards, each of which has multiple deprivation. 17.8% (n = 360) of the caller sample and 18.2% (n = 165) of the respondent sample were from Nottingham North but only 7.4% of those who took up LSC funded learning were from that area.

5.2.2 Gender

The NIACE Survey (2008) found that, overall, the largest proportion of learners are female. The caller cohort at 56%, respondent cohort at 52%, and cohort that went into LSC funded learning at 56% each had marginally more males than females.

5.2.3 Age

One of the findings from the literature review was that older adults are least likely to be represented amongst learners in post-16 education and training. Overall participation data suggests that just below 50% of the 25 to 44 cohort are current or recent learners. The primary research

found that 61 % of the respondent cohort and 62% of those who went into LSC funded learning were aged 26 to 45. This suggests that with maturity comes a realisation, in some, that improving one's Skills for Life can bring better life chances eg. to make a greater contribution to family life or to increase earning power.

5.2.4 Ethnicity

Overall participation data suggests that adults from minority ethnic groups participate in learning in similar proportions to the general adult population (60%). But that some are disadvantaged eg. Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Somalis.

The research found that the proportion of ethnic minorities in the respondent cohort was proportionate to the number of ethnic minority residents in the Nottingham area; however, fewer went into LSC funded learning. It is worth noting that none of the respondents of Pakistani origin went into LSC funded learning. There was no evidence that any Bangladeshis or Somalis called the Helpline.

5.2.5 Employment Status

The literature review suggests that those with poor Skills for Life are more likely to be unemployed or in unskilled or semi skilled low grade work. Leitch (2007: 22) concluded that that half of those who have low skills levels are unemployed or economically inactive. In Nottinghamshire the proportion of the working age population which was economically active in 2003 /2004 was 74.2 %. Higher rates in some Districts masked the relatively low rate of 65.4% in the City of Nottingham. The primary research found that the caller cohort was 63% economically active, respondent cohort 71 % economically active and of those who went into LSC funded learning 63 % economically active. 47% of respondents with no qualifications were

employed full-time, 22 % part-time, and 31 % economically inactive compared to those with qualifications 50% full time, 21 % part time and 29% economically active. The primary research found that contrary to Leitch's (2007) findings there was virtually no difference in economic inactivity levels between adults with no qualifications and adults who had some level of qualification.

Fewer of the employed who went into learning worked full time 30 % (down from 50% in each of the caller and respondent cohorts) and more worked part-time at 33 % (up from 12 % and 21% in each of the caller and respondent cohorts).

Local Futures (2005) data showed that of those who are employed 90% of males work full-time and 54% of females work full-time. Of those who went into learning 71 % of the males worked full-time and 30% of the females. Respondents, of either gender, who chose to take up learning were more likely to be working part-time.

Crosstabulations showed that when compared with respondents from non-deprived wards similar percentages from deprived wards were economically active; however, nearly 10% more respondents from the most deprived constituency Nottingham North were economically active.

65% of those that were employed full-time had qualifications below Level 2, significantly more than those who were employed part-time or unemployed, both at 35 %.

5.2.6 Occupational Area / Social Class

Participation data suggests that half of all upper or middle class (AB) respondents are current or recent learners, compared with one third of the skilled working class (C2), and one quarter of unskilled working people and people on limited incomes (DE). Nottinghamshire data shows that almost 40 % of working age adults are in managerial, professional or associated technical occupations; however, the

research showed that comparatively few adults were managers, professionals or in associate professional or technical occupations. Fewer than the Nottinghamshire average were in administrative and secretarial occupations, more were in skilled trades, significantly more were in personal service occupations, more were in sales & customer service occupations, and more were in elementary occupations. These findings show that respondents were less likely to be working in occupational areas that require more advanced administrative skills. More of the respondent cohort and those who went into LSC funded learning were found in occupations where applied and social skills, rather than academic skills, are important eg. skilled trades and personal and social care occupations. Greater numbers of respondents were working in elementary occupations which tend to be more vulnerable.

5.2.7 Self Assessment

The Skills for Life Survey (2003), through testing, identified that a greater proportion of adults have problems with numeracy.

Data on self assessment from the primary research showed that 19% of respondents thought their deficit was in numeracy, 20% in both literacy and numeracy and 52% in literacy. Of those that went into LSC funded learning 30% perceived a deficit in numeracy, 22% a deficit in literacy and numeracy and 33% a deficit in literacy.

The literature review suggests that adults perceive their Skills for Life deficit to be less significant than would be shown by subjective measurement. Given that those who called the Helpline had reconciled themselves to admit a deficit in Skills for Life one would expect an accurate indication from a cohort of those who called Learndirect. However, the Skills for Life Survey (2003) reported that very few people regard their literacy or numeracy skills as below average. From the primary research 91% of the respondent cohort perceived

their Skills for Life competence to be below average; and slightly fewer (85%) of those who went into LSC funded learning rated themselves as below average. However, when the figures are examined more closely 39% of respondents rated their competence as just below average, and 52% rated their competence as poor or very poor. Of the cohort that went into LSC funded learning 46 % rated their Skills for Life as just below average and only 39% rated their competence as poor or very poor. Fewer who rated their Skills for Life as poor or very poor went into LSC funded learning.

5.3 Experience of Initial Education

This section covers questions 10 to 13 (Appendix 14), specifically those that relate to age of leaving school, qualification level, feelings about school and how clever respondents felt at school

The literature review makes the link between perceived failures in the statutory education system and the numbers of adults with poor Skills for Life. NRDC (2002- 2005) suggests that the majority of adults with poor Skills for Life bring negative experiences of school education. From the primary research around half of respondents and half of those who went into LSC funded learning reported negative feelings about their school days, roughly a quarter of both cohorts were ambivalent and roughly a quarter of both cohorts were positive about their school experience. The evidence suggests that one cannot always directly attribute poor Skills for Life to negative experiences at school; but it may contribute to an individual finding it difficult to engage and being less positive about future opportunities. This is borne out by NIACE (2008) who found that only 15% of those who had not done any learning since leaving school felt they would learn in the next three years.

The literature review makes links between the age an adult leaves education and the likelihood of them taking up learning in the future. Those who leave at 16 are significantly less likely to go back to learning. Of the respondent cohort 85% left school at age 15 or 16, and 82% of those who went into LSC funded learning.

5.3.1 Failure to acquire qualification

Covington, (1998:4) draws attention to the excessive numbers of students who drop out or finish their mandatory education ' without a single achievement for which they can feel uniquely responsible or feel justly proud.'

Local Futures (2005), using 2003 / 2004 data, reported that 36.3 % of the working age population in Nottinghamshire had qualifications below Level 2 (the average masked a range from 21.7 % in the District of Rushcliffe to 43.9% in the District of Ashfield (41.4 % in the City of Nottingham)

Of the respondent cohort 67% had less than a Level 2 qualification, including 36% who had no qualifications.

Of the cohort that went into LSC funded learning 63% had less than a Level 2 qualification including, 41% who had no qualifications.

5.3.2 Feeling Clever at School

Of the respondent cohort (n = 156) 67% said that being successful made them feel clever at school; but 29% said nothing made them feel clever. The figures were similar for those that went into LSC funded learning. The Government, through Moser and Leitch, have made it clear that the minimum 5 GCSEs at A* to C or its equivalent are the minimum required for employability. The literature review refers to failure avoidance and individuals not wishing to have their notion of ability undermined. One respondent commented that criteria for success was 'being the best bully in the school.'

5.4 Barriers to Learning

This section covers questions 14 to 17 (Appendix 14) which cover barriers to learning, the respondent's greatest barrier; and how issues with Skills for Life had affected home or work life.

Chapter 2 outlines multiple barriers to learning some of which are personal, some family related, and some work related.

89 % of the respondent cohort and 92 % of the cohort that went into LSC funded learning admitted they had barriers. The primary research found that pressure of other commitments (work and family) was perceived to be the greatest barrier, followed by poor motivation; and being embarrassed, lacking in confidence, and in need of support. Around 10% of both cohorts felt there were no barriers.

10% of the respondent cohort cited a perceived lack of support yet none of those who entered learning did so. Items specifically referred to in the literature review such as finance, transport and health were not explicitly mentioned.

5.5 Motivation to address issues with Skills for Life

This section refers to questions 18 to 21 (Appendix 14) specifically relating to how the respondents got to know about the Helpline, why respondents thought they needed to address issues with their Skills for Life, how motivated they were when they made the call and what triggered them to call the Helpline.

The literature review describes the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign as a response to one of Moser's recommendations to engage adults who perceive themselves to have issues with their Skills for Life. The technique of confronting adults with their particular deficits to make them feel uncomfortable, as articulated by Gregson et al (2005: 3), had some success because 36% of the respondent cohort and 29%

of the cohort that went into LSC funded learning said they identified with the scenarios depicted by the 'Gremlin' characters.

Findings from the primary research showed that approximately half of respondents and those who took up LSC funded learning were highly motivated to call the Helpline and approximately two fifths were reasonably motivated to do so.

Chapter 2 (2.5) refers to a number of factors that have the influence an individual's motivation to learn such as the intergenerational affect and peer group pressure. Motivation to achieve goals related to work was a priority for respondents, closely followed by personal fulfilment and home & family reasons; however, motivation to achieve goals related to personal fulfilment was a priority (nearly 50%) for those going into LSC funded learning, followed by home & family and work. However, the number of individuals who were actually motivated enough to do something to address their perceived deficit dwindled from the 162 who responded to the question on motivation to 52 who said they had gone into learning. The primary research showed that in the cohort that was proved to have gone into LSC funded learning (n = 27) levels of motivation were similar to those of the respondent cohort because 48% were highly motivated and 37% were reasonably motivated.

5.6 Response and Follow Up Processes

This section covers questions 22 to 25 (Appendix 14) and covers what help the respondent was given when he / she called the Helpline, what action the respondent took as a result, if the respondent joined a course, whether they continued to learn and if they didn't carry on learning the reasons why not.

5.6.1 Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships

The literature describes the important role that Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships can play to support clients. The Partnerships are funded by the LSC and their main contract targets those without a Level 2 qualification. Partnerships that properly track and maintain contact with clients, providing support when necessary, have improved client success rates, but they have to be very pro – active at finding supplementary funding.

Research reported by LSC (2004) into the impact of Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships found that 76% of adults surveyed engaged in learning; and 43% of adults with no qualifications and 39% of adults with a Level 1 qualification undertook some form of learning as a result of having an information, advice & guidance session. These figures were reported with the caveat that the methodology used to inform the findings was not clear, especially in relation to how those surveyed were selected. Nor is it clear what is meant by 'undertook some form of learning' which may have several meanings. When telephoned three months after their session with an Advisor findings from research conducted by Welfare Direct, on behalf of the Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire (Appendix 13), showed a much lower percentage of adults going into learning ie. 14 % and 27% respectively. The primary research found that 32 % said they had taken up learning; but only 16 % actually took up LSC funded learning. Although Taylor et al (2005) reported that adults with no qualifications are least likely to consider using the services of an Information, Advice & Guidance Partnership; those who called the Helpline appear to be an exception because the primary research found that 36% of the respondent cohort (n= 157) had no qualifications; and of the respondent cohort

that went into LSC funded learning 41% (n = 27) had no qualifications.

Using Individualised Learner Record data Flude (2007) reported on a longitudinal study of disadvantaged learners which found that adults respond when they are properly supported, when barriers are removed and when they are able to access provision at a time and place to suit their particular circumstances. Community based learning venues may be considered the most appropriate venues for fragile learners; but they lack the same support infrastructure as Further Education Colleges and often fall victim to short term funding regimes. Wherever learning takes place success rates for adults are low with the greatest risk of drop out in the first few weeks of a learning programme; thereafter Brooks et al (2000) claim that completion rates are as high as 80%.

Mc Givney (1992) and Brooks et al (2000) have questioned the reliability of data and the lack of recorded information on drop out. Using reliable Individualised Learner Record data, however, gathered over a number years Flude (2007) demonstrated that disadvantaged learners are less likely to drop out than those considered to be less disadvantaged, and they are more likely to be successful if they are supported in a way that ensures that barriers are not perceived to be insurmountable. Also information from professionally conducted guidance interviews can be used to determine any support that individuals may require to help them through their learning journey. There is no evidence to suggest that a consistently accessible and sustainable support infrastructure is in place for adults with poor literacy and / or numeracy who at best aspire to pre Entry, Entry Level 1 or Entry Level 2 courses as a stepping stone to higher level qualifications which may count towards the Public Sector Agreement Skills for Life targets.

Follow up calls being made by an independent organisation rather than Advisors, who could easily become embroiled in an advice session whilst trying to administer a questionnaire, are one form of contact that shows the client that they have not been forgotten. The primary research unearthed large numbers of adults who had not taken up learning; yet were willing to be referred to a specialist Skills for Life brokerage service. There is, however, no evidence from Welfare Call to suggest that there is a process in place to deal with adults who have not taken up learning or gone into work. It appears that, from their monitoring calls at three and six months, Welfare Call are merely gathering statistics for the Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships. There does not appear to be any longitudinal tracking because the cohort that has seen an Advisor is split so that roughly 50% are surveyed after three months and the remainder are surveyed after six months.

The literature review referred to inspection reports that showed Learndirect Advice did not systematically collect data on the impact of each level of advice or participation, completion or achievement rates either for informal or formal learning. The Adult Learning Inspectorate does, however, require organisations that give information, advice & guidance to follow up with clients within six months of the advice session. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (2005) found that response rates were lower than 50%; and there were doubts as to the consistency of the data gathering process; and the quality of learning providers to whom clients were being referred. A more recent analysis of Welfare Direct information, collected on behalf of Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships, indicated that there was still some inconsistency in the data gathering process, and there is still no process in place to ensure that adults are only referred to providers with the highest inspection grades. The data on participation in learning provided by Welfare Direct is accumulated from what

adults have told the Welfare Direct researcher. There is no consistently adopted process of triangulation in place that includes interrogation of Individualised Learner Records to verify that formal (LSC funded) learning is taking place, and it is impossible to properly track informal learning. Also some Welfare Call interview questions (Appendix 13) have the potential to confuse respondents because they have mixed up the type of learning institution, mode of learning and the generic training course.

The information gathered for the literature review would suggest that the first transition that has the potential to let the client down is the link between Learndirect and the LSC whose representative may or may not chose to pass caller information on to the Information, Advice & Guidance Service. No formal protocols were put in place to ensure that this happened.

The literature review shows that the greatest capacity for delivering literacy and numeracy programmes is in Further Education Colleges; however, it is suggested that many adults with the poorest skills for life are reluctant to take up learning or enter a formal education setting. Kennedy (1997) referred to the backlog of Skills for Life learners that could only be met by Further Education Colleges which, according to HOC (2006) and NAO (2004), accommodated 83% of the 2.4 million adults who took up Skills for Life courses from September 2001 to July 2004.

Support is strongest for Skills for Life learners in Further Education Colleges, which on the one hand are keen to be inclusive and attract disadvantaged learners; but, on the other hand, there is a tension between supporting the most disadvantaged and contributing to challenging Government targets, which are set at Entry Level 3 and above. Therefore, if 80% of the learning is taking place in formal settings those who are reluctant have limited choice of less formal education settings eg. in community in venues where provision is delivered

through LSC funded Adult & Community Learning, in the community in a Learndirect hub or as part of community based project funded out of the European Social fund, and co – financed by the LSC.

5.6.2 Learning Provision

The literature review makes the case for high quality, well supported, learning provision and there is good and outstanding provision in Further Education in Nottingham and Leicester. Adults who have been newly engaged through the 'Gremlins' campaign are given a DVD or video to watch and provided with the names of up to three Skills for Life providers. This is at odds with Moser's suggestion that they should be offered a much wider choice of provision.

5.6.2 a) Further Education Colleges

Funding drives Further Education Colleges towards qualifications; and 83% of learners taking up Skills for Life courses are studying in this part of the post 16 sector. Over time funding bodies have driven Colleges to widen participation and latterly to target disadvantaged groups. This inclusive agenda is running hand in hand with the economic imperative to upskill adults to compete in the economy of the 21st Century. Further Education Colleges are being driven to improve retention and success rates; and to provide guidance and develop packages of support for students. The literature suggests that the pressure put on Colleges to continually improve has led to a 'retrenchment into their main building and out of community settings'. The literature review features the key points from Inspection Reports from Further Education Colleges in the two largest cities in the East Midlands, Nottingham and Leicester. Both serving populations with poor educational attainment and both continuing with some outreach.

An overview of the two inspection reports shows good leadership and management, and a well qualified teaching staff, with a good attitude to widening participation. The Colleges had embedded Skills for Life across vocational areas and were providing good quality teaching and comprehensive and effective support for students, with good advice, guidance. This integrated approach had led to improvements in success rates with a rising trend.

In summary, Further Education Colleges have moved the farthest to contextualise learning; raise overall quality standards, improve data and manage attendance, retention and success rates through effective support and tracking.

5.6.2 b) Adult & Community Learning

The literature suggests that hard to reach learners, if engaged at all, are more likely to favour Adult & Community Learning than provision in a Further Education College. This preference could be for a number of reasons including the formality of College buildings bringing back memories of alienating experiences at school, the stigma of attending a College, proximity to home. Concerns were also raised about the availability of learning support.

Inspection of Adult & Community Learning provision in Nottingham and Leicester brought out the following themes:-

- A mission to identify and support learners who are disadvantaged or not traditionally involved in learning in wards with high levels of deprivation
- Satisfactory Information, Advice & Guidance
- Variable teaching with some good sessions with contextualised curriculum

- Serious issues with inability to access basic learner information and information on retention
- Poor support for learners

In summary, there is scope to bring a greater consistency to this type of learning provision because examples of good performance are too dependent on innovation at an individual teacher level. Data management protocols should also be developed to ensure effective learner management.

5.6.2 c) Work Based Learning

The following is a snapshot of some of the issues coming out of the inspection report relating to the Nottinghamshire Training Network:-

- Provision known as 'Preparation for Work' and life was graded inadequate.
- Skills for Life Strategy was inadequately developed
- Achievement and standards in literacy and numeracy programmes was rated inadequate
- Teaching and learning was satisfactory, and a dedicated Learning Support Adviser had been appointed
- Learning plans and reviews of progress against targets were generally poor.
- Leadership and management was inadequate

- Subcontractors' literacy and numeracy provision was considered to be inadequate
- Monitoring processes and data analysis failed to identify significant lack of progress

In summary, although there was some satisfactory practice in Work Based learning, most was inadequate, including leadership and management. The inspector's report clearly demonstrated the need to develop and embed a Skills for Life strategy, improve administration and use data as a tool for driving up retention and achievement rates.

5.6.2 d) Department of Work & Pensions / Jobcentre Plus Provision

The prime objective of Jobcentre Plus providers is to move their clients into work.

- Most participants attended training sessions, and received effective support (with their Skills for Life); however, for those who chose not to attend, there was ineffective support
- Some Individual Learning Plans were poorly written and incomplete, with inadequate setting of targets which was also the case on review documentation
- Planning and monitoring of progress was inadequate for some participants

In summary, Jobcentre Plus provision is very job focused, and the organisation drives provider behaviour in terms of sustainable job outcomes. Investment to improve an individual's Skills for Life is very

focused on a job outcome rather than aiming to turn the individual into a lifelong learner.

5.6.2 e) Learndirect

The following findings, which came out of the inspection reports, are the most significant:

- Initial assessment did not effectively identify learners' additional support needs, and in some cases there was a delay before learners received the support they needed
- Most staff had a poor level of awareness as to how they should support basic skills learners
- The monitoring and recording of learners' progress was inadequate

In summary, Learndirect provision, with its on – line mode of delivery, had only recently embraced Skills for Life delivery at the time of the inspection; therefore the inspectors' comments should be seen as developmental.

5,7 Public Service Agreement Targets

Findings from the literature review showed that , overall, the Skills for Life Public Sector Agreement targets are being met, and there is a delivery infrastructure in place to 'harvest' outputs. Further investigation, however, shows that almost 50 % of the Public Sector Agreement outputs have come from young people aged 16 to 19 who are much more efficient at achieving countable outcomes,

because they have only recently left school and they are less likely to be intimidated by the formality of the education system. On the one hand the strategy to include the achievement of young people aged 16 to 19 in the overall figures should be applauded because it has the potential to reduce the cohort with poor Skills for Life entering the working age population. On the other hand, however, it masks serious shortfalls in the number of adults, aged 20 plus, working towards countable qualifications. This is because there is a finite 'pot' of money available to support achievement of the Public Service Agreement target for Skills for Life; and the greater the amount of money that goes to support 16 to 19 year olds, because they are more efficient at achieving countable outcomes, the less money is available to support adults. A strategy such as this slows down progress to reduce the deep seated literacy and / or numeracy deficit in the 20 years plus adult cohort which has largely been caused by failures in the secondary education system.

Chapter 2 (2.11) explains that the Department of Education & Skills through the LSC, has committed significant proportions of its education budget to remedying the national deficit in Skills for Life. NAO (2004) reported that at least £3.6 billion will have been spent between 2001 and 2006. The £2.1 billion spent between 2001 and 2004 had enabled 839,000 people to achieve a qualification and had set 2.4 million adults on the path to improvement. The Learndirect 'Gremlins' campaign was able to reach out to adults in the privacy of their own homes through a medium that engaged them with a very strong message. The evidence suggests that it was successful as a means of engagement; but its impact cannot be properly quantified because Learndirect did not keep a record of all callers to the Helpline, only those who were prepared to be referred to local LSCs. The way in which referrals were dealt with at local level was very much left to the discretion of local LSC Officer; and the majority chose

to refer them on to their local Information, Advice & Guidance Partnership. There is no evidence to suggest that monitoring data was collected from local areas to measure the effectiveness of the follow up process nor did the researcher find any evidence to suggest that Learndirect referrals to Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships were tagged in any way so as to enable them to be disaggregated from the rest. The result is that the Learndirect 'Gremlins' programme ended up as a marketing and promotional success; but the support services that were in place to improve retention and achievement were unable to capitalise on the success of the initial engagement. As a result the potential of this self selecting cohort of adults was partially wasted because they entered a process that was designed to harvest countable outcomes from those who are prepared to learn in institutions such as Further Education Colleges. The drop out rate for adults from the point of initial engagement was too high and the organisations that were best placed to help fragile learners eg. Voluntary & Community Sector organisations were debilitated by having to apply for short term project funding with which to support their daily activities.

5.8 Plans for Future Education, Training or Work

The final section covers question 26 (Appendix 14) and the respondents attitude towards future education, training or work.

Over three quarters of respondents spoke positively about their plans for education, training or work in the future, and 81% of those who had started a learning programme planned to find work and / or continue learning. The findings suggested that the majority of those who initially sought help would welcome a follow up call,

including 77% of those who took no action to improve their Skills for Life.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The main research question is whether the publicly funded follow up processes ie. information, advice & guidance and learning provision are able to properly support adults who have issues with their literacy and numeracy (their Skills for Life).

The researcher intends to seek answers on a number of supplementary questions to find out whether respondents were:

- a. Representative of the Skills for Life cohort
- b. Negative about their initial education
- c. Faced with multiple barriers to learning
- d. Unmotivated to improve their Skills for Life
- f. Not planning to develop themselves in the future

The purpose of this Chapter is to draw conclusions from the interpretation of the research findings, and to make recommendations on how to:-

- Inform promotional activity that seeks to target disadvantaged adults
- Improve client progression rates from initial engagement to learning
- Bring greater consistency to the delivery of Skills for Life learning across different types of provision – Further Education College, Adult & Community Learning, Work Based Learning, Jobcentre Plus; and Learndirect provision

6.2 Representativeness of the Skills for Life Cohort

6.2.1 Area of residence

Learndirect's objective of targeting the most disadvantaged was not met in the most deprived communities because only 37% came from deprived wards. Setting out to use television in addition to other media was always going to attract a wide range of people from across Nottinghamshire, not necessarily high proportions from disadvantaged areas. More fundamental to engagement of learners from disadvantaged communities is the even lower proportion from disadvantaged communities who took up LSC funded learning, down to 22%.

The data shows that the greater the disadvantage the more likely it is that callers to the Helpline will not convert into learners. It is recommended that Access Centres are developed in disadvantaged communities 'with the community, for the community'. These arrangements should have both a social and an economic perspective. They should have crèche facilities, multi agency services, adult learning; and vocationally specific training. They should be used to capacity build members of the local community.

6.2.2 Gender

Although marginally more females participated in the study gender is not an issue. There are, however, some sectors where there is under representation eg. females in construction, males in health & social care.

There are no recommendations in relation to gender.

6.2.3 Age

Personal situations change over time and the research showed that more mature adults can be engaged if they see some personal benefit in starting a learning journey. This may be self fulfilment, for family or home related reasons, or work related.

It is recommended that the Government funds pilot activity with enhanced support, specifically targeted at mature learners aged between 35 and 55 who express an interest in improving their Skills for Life.

6.2.4 Ethnicity

Overall the participation rate for ethnic minorities is the same as the rest of the population; however, some groups are significantly under – represented ie. Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Somalis. It is recommended that the Government funds pilot activity through specialist ethnic minority organisations working within the target communities.

6.2.5 Employment Status

When compared with the caller and respondent cohorts, fewer adults who are employed full -time, more adults who are employed part-time, and more adults who are economically inactive took up and remained in LSC funded learning. This suggests that adults in part time employment are more likely to be seeking learning opportunities. It is recommended that future Learndirect campaigns specifically target part time workers who are least likely to be offered training in work; but may have more time to study outside of the workplace. Full - time adults are more likely to be released by their employers to access training in the workplace through Government supported initiatives to increase the number of adults with a first full Level 2, such as Train to Gain.

A greater number of economically active adults from the respondent cohort were in employment at the lower end of the occupation scale. This makes them vulnerable because those sitting on the first rung of the employment ladder are at greater risk of redundancy, and less likely to find another job in a very competitive environment. The benchmark level for employability, Level 2 with embedded Skills for Life, should be promoted to all employers, especially harder to reach small to medium enterprises. It is recommended that the Government, perhaps alongside the Train to Gain initiative, funds specialist training in information, advice & guidance to enable one person in each workplace, as part of their job role, to inform, advise and guide a caseload of up to twenty five colleagues who are qualified below Level 2. As the majority of businesses in the United Kingdom employ fewer than 50 people a caseloading approach should be introduced as an option to encourage collaboration between smaller businesses. In house Advisers may be Human Resource officers, Union Learning Representatives, Line Managers or Owner Managers. Their role would involve working closely with the management cadre and Train to Gain brokers to diagnose individual needs, liaise with learning providers and support colleagues to develop their competence in the workplace.

6.2.6 Occupational Area / Social Class

The primary research found that those who called the Helpline are more likely to be found in categories C2 and DE ie. blue collar employment, especially in elementary occupations; however, there was significant representation among respondents from the skilled occupations where sometimes the need for practical application outweighs academic prowess. It is recommended that further research is undertaken to explore the Skills for Life competence levels of workers deemed to be skilled in industry sectors that are of national

importance eg. construction, engineering manufacturing, health & social care, food & drink manufacturing, retail, and in support functions eg. business administration. It is possible that individuals are vocationally competent but lack functional Skills for Life.

6.2.7 Self Awareness

It is also recommended that self perception is not used as a reliable measure of competence; and a Skills for Life diagnostic is used to ascertain levels of competence, and only those below Level 1 Literacy and Entry Level 3 Numeracy (Leitch targets) should be referred to LSC funded learning.

6.3 Experience of Initial Education

Much work is underway in schools to reduce the numbers of young people leaving school without functional skills in numeracy and literacy. Improvements are being made, but there are still significant numbers of young people entering work without the necessary skills. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make recommendations as to how the school sector can progress to the ultimate position in which virtually no young people enter the workplace without proper Skills for Life.

6.4 Barriers to Learning

Although work and family commitments were considered to be the most significant barriers by respondents to the primary research it is arguable that the greatest barrier is the journey from initial engagement to the point at which the individual satisfies his / her learning goals.

It is recommended that adults who are genuinely keen to improve their Skills for Life have access to quality information, advice & guidance and learning provision.

6.5 Motivation to Address Issues with Skills for Life

Findings from the primary research showed that although significant numbers of adults with low or no qualifications (the initial target group) were motivated to call the Helpline many from outside the target group, ie. those with a Level 2 or above qualification were also engaged. It is recommended that, in the future, it should be more widely recognised that adults with vocational qualifications at Level 2 or above, who may be working in skilled jobs, could still have issues with their Skills for Life. Rather than not encourage them, or sift them out these apparently more highly qualified individuals may need just as much help as less skilled colleagues. More funding should be directed at the Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships to allow them to support those with Level 2 and above beyond an initial interview.

Just because the dominant discourse is around globalisation and competitive advantage people don't always relate to work as a reason for doing any learning. Family & home related reasons and the need for self fulfilment are also key factors for many in taking the decision to do something about poor Skills for Life. It is recommended that further research is undertaken to investigate the reasons why adults want to improve their Skills for Life. Understanding individual need is critical to the way in which Information, Advice & Guidance Practitioners, and learning providers deal respectively with clients and learners. Their enthusiasm is most likely to be maintained if general reference can be made to their particular interests ie. contextualised in a similar way that it is possible to embed Skills for Life in a vocational curriculum that is of interest to the learner.

Even though many respondents to the primary research chose not to go into further learning the numbers of adults agreeing to be referred to a specialist information, advice & guidance provider, and to be

contacted again proved that their interest remained strong, even though they had not chosen to take action at that particular time. Harvesting that interest is the most challenging proposition. Whilst they remain motivated it is recommended that this cohort should be tracked and provided with additional support, through enhanced information, advice & guidance, to maximise the number entering learning, and the number completing learning programmes and gaining qualifications.

6.6 Response & Follow Up Processes

6.6.1 Engagement / Information, Advice & Guidance

The Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships operate both inside and outside the workplace targeting adults with low or no qualifications. Their performance is measured in terms of the number of individual information sessions they provide for adults over the age of 20. It is recommended that the Government considers funding Partnerships less on numbers engaged, and more the category of need and the distance an individual will have to travel to fulfil his / her needs. There could be a sliding scale of payment. This approach would require Information, Advice & Guidance Advisers to work more closely with a caseload of clients as they progress through their learning journey. Advisers should also be encouraged to work more closely with learning providers to ensure that transition arrangements are professionally managed and do not put the client at risk. A positive and effective transition to the learning provider's support services (Information, Advice & Guidance Service, Learning Mentor, Learning Development Assistant) is perhaps the most critical. For the most fragile clients it is recommended that an arrangement is put in place whereby the information, advice & guidance professional keeps the

client on his / her caseload until they have been on their learning programme for at least one month.

The Adult Learning Inspectorate requires that there should be a follow up call to clients no later than six months after their session with an Information, Advice & Guidance Partnership Adviser. Welfare Direct, on behalf of the Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships, aims to follow up with roughly 50% of clients three months after an information, advice or guidance session; and the remainder six months after the session. Welfare Call, however, have found that it is more difficult to contact clients after six months than after three months, although a greater proportion of respondents at 6 months went into learning. It is recommended that the Adult Learning Inspectorate requires all Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships to follow up with every client after three months, because evidence suggests that response rates are significantly higher at that time than after six months. It is also recommended that, in order to avoid confusion and enable comparison, a single national questionnaire should be designed, and mainstream funded so as not to be ad hoc and subject to local and / or regional vagaries. The questionnaires should be administered consistently on behalf of Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships across the country; they must be very clear and designed to differentiate formal learning from informal learning; and to find out exactly what learning programme the client is undertaking. There should be an agreed frequency for follow up across all Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships.

One of the reasons for the higher achievement rates demonstrated by the Leicestershire Information, Advice & Guidance Partnership appears to be their ability to attract additional funding with which to supplement their core operational activity, and to respond to individual need by providing extra support where it is required.

Interim findings from Flude et al's (2006) longitudinal study of

disadvantaged adults who were supported and tracked has also shown that an enhanced follow up service can improve progression, completion and achievement rates; thereby reducing drop out along the way. It is recommended that the Government considers ways in which an enhanced service could be established to meet the needs of fragile learners because, currently, the more pro – active Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships are having to seek out short term project funding to supplement their core funding. Those that are not being pro – active and successful in their bidding can only provide a basic service.

6.6.2 Learning Provision

6.6.2 a) Further Education

A review of inspection reports showed that Further Education providers are best placed to provide a high quality, successful learning experience. These organisations, which have the largest share of learners, are driven towards targets by funding agencies which are operating in support of the Government's Skills Agenda. Funding is associated with Skills for Life 'countable outcomes' which were recommended by Leitch, at Level 1 in Literacy and Entry Level 3 in Numeracy. There is limited funding, however, for learners who are significantly below those target levels eg. Entry Level 3 in Literacy and Entry Level 2 in Numeracy; and below. An holistic learner offer with wrap around support has had proven results in terms of retention and success in the Further Education College environment.

Introduction of the Individualised Learner Record and sound data management has enabled Colleges to target resources at less able learners. Leicestershire College with its outstanding leadership and management in Skills for Life has managed to increase success rates from 51% in 2004/05 to 72% in 2007/08. It is recommended that funding

agencies should develop a protocol for sharing best practice so that excellence from the Further Education College sector can be shared with parts of the post 16 learning infrastructure that are performing less well.

6.6.2 b) Adult & Community Learning

At the time inspection reports were reviewed Adult & Community Learning provision was generally found to be inadequate, with poor support arrangements in place and inadequate data management. With its traditions and outreach locations based in communities it has the potential to be the number one choice for disadvantaged adults; however, poor performance and a lack of funding for those farthest away from the labour market has caused this service to struggle. Generally, those closer to achieving 'countable outcomes' have migrated to Further Education Colleges. What is left is a rump of really disadvantaged learners who need information, advice & guidance and learning provision that meets the high standard that is required. Without that the vicious cycle of deprivation will continue to perpetuate itself.

It is recommended that the aspiration to develop Access Centres in disadvantaged communities should only be supported if Further Education Colleges and Adult & Community Learning providers work in partnership on the Access Centre projects. It is also important that residents from the communities are employed and developed to become Information, Advice & Guidance Advisers and Tutors because there is no better way to engage a community than through members of that community.

6.6.2 c) Work Based Learning

The review of the Inspection Report for the Nottinghamshire Training Network showed how a collective of providers can deal with the major issue of learning support and provide the necessary resource; whilst at

the same time failing to properly address Skills for Life. It is recommended that Skills for Life are embedded across all provision.

6.6.2 d) Department of Work & Pensions / Jobcentre Plus Provision

Whilst recognising that Jobcentre Plus provision is job, rather than learning, focused the issue of poor Skills for Life has to be handled sensitively and professionally. It is recommended that Jobcentre Plus should raise awareness amongst their front line staff to ensure that Skills for Life issues are picked up and clients are properly managed and supported through key transitions such as initial screening to diagnostic, and diagnostic to the start of a learning programme.

6.6.2 e) Learndirect

On line learners do not have the same potential for interaction with other learners as is the case in a Further Education College or Adult & Community Learning setting. Face to face interaction and group discussion can help learners contextualise course materials in an enjoyable way. It is recommended that a blended learning solution is sought in which the curriculum is delivered using on line materials and some classroom work in a high quality, well managed setting.

6.7 Learner & Learning Support

The LSC has traditionally compensated Learning Providers for having to organise smaller class sizes for Skills for Life learners. This is because fragile learners tend to need more contact time with a tutor. Findings from both primary and secondary research suggest that the majority of Skills for Life learners are studying at Further Education Colleges

which have well established learner and additional learning support arrangements in place. The researcher found that Further Education Colleges can be daunting to many and often bring back unwelcome childhood memories. Many fragile learners, therefore, would prefer to learn in their own communities or, with their peer group, in a supportive environment. Community based organisations suggest that there is a shortfall in the provision that is available in community venues which are largely run by Local Authority Adult Learning Services and the Voluntary & Community Sector. However, the quantum of provision is unclear, and research findings suggest that outside Further Education learner and learning support arrangements are less well developed. If limited and variable support is available in deprived communities only the needs of a small percentage of hard to reach Skills for Life learners at the 'tip of the iceberg' are being met. The primary research showed that fewer residents who were engaged by the Learndirect campaign in deprived communities chose to take up LSC funded learning suggesting that educational and support infrastructures are less able to meet the needs or aspirations of disadvantaged adults in those areas. It is recommended that the Government, through the LSC, doubles its efforts to make available funding for high quality learner support and learning support for Skills for Life learners in community venues that they do not find intimidating.

6.8 Data Management

According to Learndirect a decision was taken not to capture any information on callers who said they did not want their details passing on to the LSC so that a follow up call could be arranged. Nor were advisers, based at the Learndirect Call Centre, required to tally up the number of such callers to allow a calculation of the ratio of the total number calling to those who gave permission for their details to be

passed on to the LSC. Having complete information is the only way to measure how successful a campaign such as this has been at engaging its target audience. Because the data is missing any evaluation will be flawed. It is recommended that for future campaigns a tally system is implemented, and all callers should be at least asked in which sub region / LSC area they live (eg. Nottinghamshire). Sensitive callers, therefore, should not be concerned that they might be tracked by postcode. Data should be captured accurately and presented to the LSC in a consistent format. The data should not vary according to which Adviser is on the Helpline desk at the time of the call; and a standard template for recording should be used in order to allow more effective comparison of data from the caller cohort eg. age ranges. Mechanisms that do not breach the Data Protection Act should be put in place to track learners between funding streams commissioned by different Government departments eg. the Department of Work & Pensions which is the sponsoring department of Jobcentre Plus & the Department of Education & Skills which is the sponsoring department of the LSC. If they come to fruition Government plans to introduce Unique Learner Numbers should simplify the process of tracking individuals across different funding streams; however, data management is likely to remain a challenge. It is recommended that Government, in its deliberations about tracking learners, takes into account similar, but small scale, initiatives that are currently underway eg. that being undertaken by Flude et al in Leicestershire.

6.9 Public Service Agreement Target

Although an increasing number of adults aged 16 years plus are achieving qualifications that meet the requirements of the Government's Skills for Life target the contribution from the 20 + age

cohort is still too low when compared with the 16 to 18 cohort. It is recommended that the Government sets targets for the achievement of 5 GCSE's, including Mathematics and English, during the statutory phase of education. Any five GCSE's at Grade A* to C should not be sufficient unless they include mathematics and english. Such a strategy should reduce the number of those requiring to re – take english and / or mathematics after moving on from statutory education. Beyond that the Government should set targets for 16 to 19 year olds that are more stretching than the current one size fits all target for the adult (16+) cohort. The target for adults aged 20 years plus should take into account the needs of hard to reach learners, many of whom have had negative experiences both at school and as beneficiaries of short term Government funded initiatives. Some of these individuals haven't engaged with the education system since leaving school.

It is also recommended that, when dealing with the 20 years plus cohort, incremental targets should be set based on how far an individual has to travel to the point at which they achieve a minimum level of competence to function in work and in society. Rather than striving immediately for a Level 2 qualification, which may be appropriate for some, the aim should firstly be to reach Entry Level 3, then Level 1 and beyond. It is a major personal achievement when an adult who is operating at pre Entry Level gains a qualification. Their engagement is more likely to be sustained if they are allowed to work incrementally towards their learning goal, at each step gaining confidence by achieving a qualification eg. pre Entry to Entry Level 1 , to Entry Level 2 to Entry Level 3 to Level 1, to Level 2. Some will never achieve Level 1 or Level 2 qualifications but most have the potential to step up at least one level.

It is recommended that 16 to 19 year olds are no longer treated as adults for the purpose of the Skills for Life Target, that the Government

Public Sector Agreement Skills for Life target is no longer just focused on 'countable outcomes' but that distance travelled is also a key indicator. It is anticipated that this action will encourage Information, Advice & Guidance Partnerships and learning providers to target adults, aged 20 +, who have the farthest to travel.

6.10 Plans for Future Training, Education or Work

The primary research showed that the Learndirect 'Gremlins' promotional campaign had raised awareness and created a desire for self improvement. Even those adults who did not take any action to address their deficits remained keen at least to talk to someone knowledgeable about their needs, and discuss how they might go about addressing them. Much interest has been created and goodwill stimulated by the Learndirect 'Gremlins' Campaign, and It is recommended, therefore, that further work is undertaken to harness the potential of those who did not go into learning; and, even after two years, agreed to be referred to a specialist Skills for Life organisation or to be contacted again by the researcher.

A one off or standard Information, Advice or Guidance interaction is not sufficient to deal with the needs of fragile adults who should be dealt with only by a specialist, rather than a generalist adviser.

Much potential for improvement is being wasted; for example, the primary research found that 77% of those who chose not to take up learning agreed to be referred to a specialist Information, Advice & Guidance Service. When asked whether they would agree to be contacted again 97 % of respondents gave their permission.

It is recommended that funding should be made available to secure enhancements to existing follow up activity.

6.12 The Research Question

The main research question was whether the publicly funded follow up processes ie. information, advice & guidance and learning provision are able to properly support adults who have issues with their literacy and numeracy (their Skills for Life).

From the evidence gathered the Information, Advice & Guidance Service has the infrastructure but insufficient funding to provide the resource that is required to caseload more demanding clients and manage their transition into learning until such time as the learner is handed over to provider learning support personnel.

Learning provision is at its best in Further Education Colleges and variable in other categories of provision; however, the high standards within Further Education Colleges come at a cost which is their retrenchment into buildings that are daunting to most of the hardest to reach.

After consultation with disadvantaged communities Access Centres could be developed with childcare facilities and a multi agency presence. The purpose of the Access Centres would be social and work related; there would be learning facilities eg. Skills for Life and employability courses linked to a job brokerage scheme. Local residents, who are best placed to engage with fellow residents, should be given the opportunity to work in the Centres, and they should have access to self development programmes. The Access Centres should be paired up with high quality providers eg. Further Education Colleges but activity within them must be driven by the community for the community.

GLOSSARY

Additional Learning Support - discretionary funding that is made available to support eligible learners who have additional needs eg. learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Coping strategies – behaviour that disguises or hides Skills for Life deficits eg. asking a partner to fill in forms, memorising spoken information.

Countable Outcome – literacy or numeracy qualification (Qualifications & Curriculum Authority approved) at Entry Level 3, Level 1 or Level 2.

Deprived / Disadvantaged Wards – areas within Local Authority areas that have been classified as disadvantaged according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Enhanced Information, Advice & Guidance – additional and ongoing support from an Information, Advice & Guidance professional over a period of time. This will include monthly 'keep in touch' meetings at which progress is discussed.

Fragile Learners – learners who, because of barriers, have struggled to learn at school, during their adult life or both.

Functional Literacy and Numeracy – the ability to read, write and speak English, and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general (Moser 1999:2)

Hard to Reach – adults with no or low qualifications, perhaps with negative experiences of school life, who have found it difficult to engage with learning since leaving initial education.

Learner Support Funding – discretionary funding made available by the LSC mainly to help eligible adults with the cost of childcare and / or transport.

LSC funded learning – public funding, specifically Further Education College, Adult & Community Learning, Work Based Learning, Learndirect, Co – Financed European Social Funding.

Skills for Life - an overarching term for literacy and numeracy, the key skills of application of number and communication, and GCSE qualifications in English and Mathematics.

Skills for Life target (Public Sector Agreement)_ – the number of adults (aged 16 +) achieving a Qualifications and Curriculum Authority approved ‘countable outcome’ at Entry Level 3 or equivalent, or above, which meets the requirement of the Public Sector Agreement.

Skills for Life Strategy - the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills.

Train to Gain – a Government initiative which involves specialist brokers diagnosing skills deficits in the workplace and referring employers to learning providers. Public funding is available to support adults who have deficits in literacy and / or numeracy and / or have not yet achieved a Level 2 qualification.

APPENDIX 1

Social Grade A includes the upper and upper middle classes and is generally grouped with Grade B, the middle classes. Grade C1 includes the lower middle class, often called white collar workers. Grade C2 mainly consists of skilled manual workers. Grade D comprises the semi skilled and unskilled working class and is usually linked with Grade E, those on the lowest levels of subsistence such as old age pensioners and those dependent on welfare benefits.

APPENDIX 2

QUALIFICATION LEVEL, EQUIVALENCES AND WHETHER THEY COUNT TOWARDS THE GOVERNMENT'S SKILLS FOR LIFE TARGET

Level	Equivalent to	Equivalent to	Equivalent to	Equivalent to	Count towards Skills for Life target ie. countable outcomes ?
Level 2	GCSE Grades A* to C		Key Skills 2	NVQ 2	Yes
Level 1	GCSE Grades D to G	National Curriculum 4/5 Attainment aged 11 years	Key Skills 2	NVQ 1	Yes
Entry Level 3		National Curriculum 3 Attainment aged 9 to 11 years			Yes

Entry Level 2		National Curriculum 2 Attainment aged 7 to 9 years			No
Entry Level 1		National Curriculum 1 Attainment aged 5 to 7 years			No

Sources: HOC 2006, C & AG's Report, Figure 15 & Appendix 2, O'Hagan 2002 from BSA 2001, NAO, 2004:18

APPENDIX 3

SKILLS FOR LIFE LEVELS

Level	Literacy (reading)	Numeracy
Entry Level 1	Understands short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics Can obtain information from common signs and symbols	Understands information given by numbers and symbols in simple graphical, numerical and written material
Entry Level 2	Understands short straightforward texts on familiar topics Can obtain information from short documents, familiar sources and signs and symbols	Understands information given by numbers and symbols in simple graphical, numerical and written material
Entry Level 3	Understands short straightforward texts on familiar topics accurately and independently	Understands information given by numbers, symbols, diagrams and charts used for different purposes and in

	Can obtain information from everyday sources	different ways in graphical, numerical and written material
Level 1	Understands short straightforward texts of varying length on a variety of topics, accurately and independently Can obtain information from different sources	Understands straightforward mathematical information used for different purposes and can independently select relevant information from given graphical, numerical and written material
Level 2 and above	Understands a range of texts of varying complexity accurately and independently Can obtain information of varying length and detail from different sources	Understands mathematical information used for different purposes and can independently select and compare relevant information from a variety of graphical, numerical and written material.

Source: Skills for Life Survey, 2003 :11

APPENDIX 4

COMPARATIVE LABOUR FORCE QUALIFICATION LEVELS

	Percentage of Workforce with Qualifications at Levels		
	Higher	Intermediate	Low
France	16.4	51.2	32.4
Germany	15.0	65.0	20.0
UK	15.4	27.7	56.9

Source: O'Mahony and De Boer (2002) Britain's relative productivity performance (1996 figures)

APPENDIX 5

QUALIFICATION BELOW LEVEL 2 BY LOCAL AUTHORITY DISTRICT

Local Authority District	Percentage of working population qualified below NVQ 2 (2003 / 2004)
Ashfield	43.9
Bassetlaw	34.9
Broxtowe	30.2
Gedling	33.1
Mansfield	39.9
Newark & Sherwood	37.5
Nottingham City	41.4
Rushcliffe	21.8
Nottinghamshire	36.3
England	34.6

Source: Local Knowledge, Local Futures 2005:11

APPENDIX 6

PERCENTAGE OF WORKING AGE POPULATION WITH NO QUALIFICATIONS

Level	Nottingham City %	Nottingham County %	England %
None	21.7	16.5	15.4

Source: 'Qualifications and Participation in Learning at a Local Level: England 2002/03', Statistical First Release, May 2004

APPENDIX 7

MOSER'S ESTIMATION OF SKILLS FOR LIFE DEFICIT

	A	B	
	Working age population	Basic Skills Need Population	Moser's estimate of need
England	30,902,000	7,000,000	22.65 %
Nottinghamshire	637,100	144,318	22.65 %

Column A - Mid - 2000 population estimates. Nottinghamshire has 2.06 % of the England population.

Source: Skills for Life Delivery Plan 2002 - 2005, Nottinghamshire LSC, Page 10

APPENDIX 8

PERCENTAGE OF THE ADULT POPULATION OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LACKING BASIC LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS - BY DISTRICT

District	Poor Literacy %	Poor Numeracy %
Ashfield	27	29.5
Bassetlaw	24.4	25.2
Broxtowe	22.3	22.4
Gedling	22.2	22.3
Mansfield	26.6	27.9
Newark & Sherwood	24	24.8
Nottingham City	28	30.1
Rushcliffe	18.5	17.2
Nottinghamshire	24.8	25.8
England	24	24

Source: Basic Skills Agency, 2001

APPENDIX 9

LITERACY & NUMERACY RATES – NOTTINGHAMSHIRE – BY WARD

	Ward	District	IMD Rank (1 = worst)	Ward Population	Literacy %	Low Numeracy %	Very Low Numeracy %	Total Numeracy %
1	Strelley	Nottingham City	1	5120	28.3	33.48	26.31	59.79
2	Aspley	Nottingham City	17	5999	26.4	30.79	24.48	55.27
3	Manvers	Nottingham City	24	6303	25.6	28.27	22.53	50.8
4	Beechdale	Nottingham City	25	4568	19.3	23.94	17.14	41.08
5	Clipstone	Newark & Sherwood	27	2045	18.4	25.33	16.45	41.78
6	Worksop South East	Bassetlaw	32	4206	22.8	28.56	21.32	49.88
7	Bestwood Park	Nottingham City	45	5652	20.8	26.41	19.13	45.54
8	Bulwell West	Nottingham City	61	7616	20.0	25.88	17.43	43.31
9	Byron	Nottingham City	65	9350	19.6	24.98	17.03	42.01

10	Kirkby in Ashfield East	Ashfield	69	3605	22	27.9	19.85	47.75
11	Northfield	Mansfield	78	2187	22.3	27.66	20.46	48.12
12	Kirkby in Ashfield Central	Ashfield	82	3365	17.2	25	14.67	39.67
13	Radford	Nottingham City	119	6016	23.3	27.38	20.86	48.24
14	St. Anns	Nottingham City	124	5623	19.4	21.25	17	38.25
15	Trent	Nottingham City	133	6000	23.1	26.44	20.41	46.85
16	Bilborough	Nottingham City	135	3894	19.8	25.94	17.99	43.93
17	Portland	Nottingham City	139	6102	19.7	26.17	16.99	43.16
18	Bullwell East	Nottingham City	146	5913	20.1	25.89	17.54	43.43
19	Woodhouse	Mansfield	188	4686	17.6	25.3	14.8	40.1
20	Basford	Nottingham City	210	6021	20.8	26.63	18.07	44.7
21	Ollerton North	Newark & Sherwood	249	1901	17.4	25	15.22	40.22
22	Sutton in Ashfield West	Ashfield	278	6046	17.5	24.93	14.99	39.92
23	Kirkby in Ashfield West	Ashfield	291	4035	17.1	24.56	14.91	39.47
24	Robin Hood	Nottingham City	296	6865	18.6	23.79	15.97	39.76
25	Eastwood South	Broxtowe	303	2687	18.8	25.74	16.78	42.52
26	Hucknall West	Ashfield	312	6106	14.3	21.21	11.47	32.68
27	Pleasleyhill	Mansfield	344	2951	23.6	29.15	21.31	50.46
28	Oxclose	Gedling	349	2178	19.9	26.63	17.27	43.9
29	Cumberlands	Mansfield	352	2535	19.7	25.8	18.04	43.84
30	Bilthorpe	Newark & Sherwood	369	2083	19.6	26.01	17.45	43.46
31	Awsorth & Cossall	Broxtowe	397	2139	14.5	22.03	11.45	33.48
32	Sutton in Ashfield Central	Ashfield	408	6049	18.3	25.22	15.95	41.17
33	Birklands	Mansfield	411	4330	18.7	24.75	16.16	40.91
34	Bridge	Nottingham City	418	5994	19.8	23.16	17.38	40.54
35	Boughton	Newark & Sherwood	431	3562	21.2	27.86	18.7	46.56

36	Ladybrook	Mansfield	432	4298	18.1	24.46	16.21	40.67
37	Park	Nottingham City	452	7063	13.3	17.43	11.34	28.77
				175093				

Source: Skills for Life Delivery Plan 2002 - 2005, Nottinghamshire LSC, Page 9. Derived from Wards list, DETR Index of Multiple Deprivation: Education, Skills & Training 2000 and Basic Skills Agency Survey 2001.

APPENDIX 10

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE – SKILLS FOR LIFE MONITORING DATA FOR THE PERIOD FROM APRIL 2001 TO JULY 2004

	Cumulative total from April 2001 to July 2004
Skills for Life opportunities (learning aims) taken up (1)	93,272
Learners taking up Skills for Life courses (1)	41,420
Learning aims taken up per learner	2.25
Learners counting towards the Skills for Life achievement target (2)	12,232
Conversation rate (learners to countable outcomes – all learners) 29.53 %	29.53 %

1 = LSC funded provision only, including provision leading to Skills for Life Qualifications certified by a National Awarding Body and other Skills for Life provision, plus any enrolment on GCSE English or Mathematics plus any enrolments on Key Skills in Application of Number or Communication.

2 = Learners achieving at least one DfES approved Skills for Life course or a GCSE in English or Mathematics, or a partial or full achievement in Key Skills Application of Number or Communication.

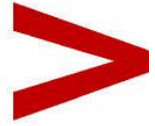
APPENDIX 11

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE – SKILLS FOR LIFE MONITORING DATA FOR THE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 2004 TO JULY 2005

Learning Undertaken	Age Group	2004 / 2005
Skills for Life learning opportunities taken up	16 to 18	17,862
	Over 19	51,999
Learners taking up Skills for Life courses	16 to 18	9,133
	Over 19	19,867
Learners counting towards the Skills for Life achievement target	16 to 18	4,173
	Over 19	4,053

Conversion rate (learners to countable outcomes) for 16 to 18 = 45.69 %

Conversion rate for over 19s = 20.40 %



Bulletin 6 – 31 January 2003

BUILDING LOCAL LEARNER CAPACITY THROUGH THE NATIONAL GET ON ('GREMLINS') ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

Summary

This bulletin details the process for forwarding information to local LSCs about callers from their area who have responded to the national *Get On* (or '*Gremlins*') advertising campaign.

Building Learner Capacity

One of the many challenges facing local offices in delivering the LSC's adult literacy, language and numeracy target, is building learner capacity.

All local LSCs have responded positively to and participated in the current Building Capacity project, which was funded centrally from national office.

Findings from the activity taking place in 2002/03 will be included in a forthcoming *What Works* guide. However, local capacity building may also be supported by other national initiatives, and the national *Get On* advertising campaign is one such example.

Get On advertising and building learner capacity

The '*Gremlins*' adverts have been appearing on TV screens since September 2001. So far they have led to about 130,000 people calling learndirect to order a free copy of the *Get On* video, and to find out more about local learning opportunities. Another round of TV advertising started on 27 December 2002, and runs until February 2003.

Since the campaign began many local LSCs have asked to be sent more information about the people in their area who are interested in improving their literacy, language and numeracy skills. From January 2003 it will be possible

APPENDIX 12

for learndirect to send a weekly email to each local LSC office with details of local callers.

This caller information should provide a valuable guide to the advertising response levels in each local LSC area, and also help to inform local strategies for meeting local targets.

The data that is provided will list only those callers who had consented to their details being passed on to a third party – meeting the requirements of the Data Protection Act. Local LSCs are welcome to pass this information onto their local providers or IAG partnerships for them to call back the potential learners. The estimated weekly volume is about 50 names.

Market research into the *Gremlins* campaign shows that around a third of callers go on to do some learning, but that the rest of them, for a variety of reasons, do not. A friendly phone call from a local provider could provide the encouragement that some adults need to turn their expression of interest into a course of learning, but no caller should receive more than one phone call, since we would clearly want to avoid duplication.

The data that is sent from learndirect will list the caller's name, postcode, telephone number and area of interest.

We propose to forward this local data to the 47 local LSC Basic Skills contacts, for them to disseminate, but obviously each local office is welcome to nominate an alternative person should this be more appropriate.

If you have concerns, require further details or wish to nominate an alternative person, please contact:

Matthew Lumby, **Communications Manager at the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, DfES**

Telephone : 0207 273 4893

Email : matthew.lumby@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

APPENDIX 13

FIRST DRAFT TELEPHONE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of telephone

interviewee:.....

Introduction

Good morning / afternoon / evening. my name is Henry Inman. I work for the Learning & Skills Council in Nottinghamshire and I am a part – time research student at Durham University. I am making a follow – up call to an enquiry, I believe you made to the Learndirect ‘Get On’ ‘Gremlns’ Campaign. It would be really useful if you could spend up to 30 minutes answering a number of questions. Any information you give will be anonymised and treated in the strictest confidence.

Question Number	Question
	How did you get to know about the Learndirect Helpline ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Television ➤ Newspaper ➤ Word of mouth ➤ Other
2.	Please confirm your details: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Name and address (including postcode) ➤ Age range ➤ Sex ➤ Employment Status ➤ Specify whether perceived problems are with numeracy, literacy, language ➤ Did you request a video? ➤ How did the video make you feel ? ie. seeing others confront their problems ➤ Did you receive course information? ➤ Did you make a call to your nearest learning provider ? If you didn't progress, why ?
3.	What made you think that you had problems with numeracy, literacy, language (all three, two or one) ? Please specify
4.	What made you telephone the Learndirect Helpline ?
5.	In what way (s) do you think that your problem has affected your life ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Job Prospects ➤ Education

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Health ➤ Crime ➤ Relationship with adults ➤ Relationship with , children – eg. asking for help with homework ➤ Difficulty with money eg.being short changed ➤ Less able to communicate with others
6.	Why haven't you addressed your problem (s) previously ? Eg. perhaps useful coping strategies have been developed and the individual has felt able to cope adequately ?
7.	What do you think is the root cause of your problems ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bad experiences at school or in learning ➤ Background – other family members, neighbours have similar problems ➤ No belief in education ➤ Area in which I live ➤ Other problems – addictions, lack of job opportunity, family too poor, too far to travel, poor provision
8.	How have your problems affected you in your home life ? (for unemployed and employed individuals)
9.	How have your problems affected you at work ? (employed only)
10.	Do you think there is a difference between the way your problems affect your home life and your work life ? (employed only)
11.	In what way (s) do you think people who have numeracy, literacy or language problems are disadvantaged ? How does it make you feel eg. low self worth, low self esteem ?
12.	How significantly do you think the area in which you live has affected your life chances ? Life chances = education, health, crime, employment
13.	Do you think you could have done better at school ? ie. to be able to develop numeracy, literacy or language skills ? If yes, why do you think you were unable to do better ?
14.	What are your plans for the future ?

APPENDIX 14

FINAL DRAFT

FOLLOW UP TO CALLS TO THE LEARNDIRECT 'GET ON' (GREMLINS) HELPLINE

Background

Those who contacted the Government sponsored Learndirect Helpline over the past 24 months or so gave their permission for a follow up call from the Learning & Skills Council. When they made their original call they gave details of age range, sex, employment status, whether they needed help with reading, writing, number or language and were offered a video / DVD and / or details of the nearest course to their home.

It is expected, not least because of the sensitive nature of the client group, that the telephone interview will be conducted in a compassionate, yet non - patronising, manner. The interviewer should be:

1. prepared for any response
2. positive at all times and;
3. should not react negatively to any response

Introduction

(Remember you will be taking up someone's own time, don't put them off at the outset)

Dial number –

Please could I speak to Mr, Mrs, Ms. - **NAME & ID. NO.**

Good morning / afternoon / evening. Could I please speak to (named respondent). My name is Henry Inman and I am calling on behalf of the Nottinghamshire Learning & Skills Council.

I am making a follow-up call to an enquiry, I believe you made to the Learndirect 'Get On' Campaign Helpline; the one that featured the Gremlins, sometime during the past 24 months or so. Is that the case?

I would like to ask you a few questions that will help us to ensure that the details on our database are correct. It will only take a few minutes of your time. You are under no obligation to answer any questions and, if you decide to proceed, you can always choose not to answer a

particular question and you may bring the conversation to an end at any time without having to give a reason for withdrawing.

Please be assured that any information that you give will be treated as confidential and there is no possibility that individual contributions can be traced back to you. I hope that the data will result in a report that will help adult learners improve their literacy and / or numeracy skills in Nottinghamshire.

Explain the purpose of the study.....

Do you understand the purpose of the study ?	YES / NO
Have you received sufficient information about the study ?	YES / NO
Are there any questions that you would like to ask regarding the study or points you would like to discuss further ?	YES / NO
Are you satisfied with the answers given to your questions ?	YES / NO
Do you consent to participate in this study ?	YES / NO

If yes, is it convenient to speak to you now, or should I call at a more convenient time?

Telephone Log

Date and time of call:

1. _____
2. _____

<p>2. Day / Time: Comments / Action needed Eg. time to call back</p>
--

	Question	Answer
1.	Can I confirm your postcode? (Read back from database)	Postcode
2	(check gender has been properly recorded)	M or F

3.	Do you mind if I ask your age? DOB	D.O.B (span of ten years)
4.	<p>Remind the interviewee they can choose not to answer a question.</p> <p>For the purpose of equality of opportunity and because research shows that ethnic minorities are under-represented do you mind if I ask a question about your ethnic background?</p> <p>If yes, abort this question If no, go through the following list:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ White ➤ Indian ➤ Pakistani ➤ Bangladeshi ➤ Black Caribbean ➤ Black African ➤ Black British ➤ Black Other ➤ Chinese Other 	Ethnic Background
5.	<p>Remind the interviewee they can choose not to answer a question.</p> <p>It would help with this research in areas where people are under-represented if you could confirm your employment status -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Employed full-time ➤ Employed part-time ➤ Unemployed job seekers allowance ➤ Unemployed income support ➤ Unemployed incapacity benefit ➤ Seeking employment, not on benefit ➤ Not seeking employment, not on benefit ➤ Retired ➤ Self employed Other (please specify) 	Employment Status
6.	If you are employed, what is your job and what is your job title ?	Content analysis
7.	Do you have concerns about your reading / writing, number or language or more than one of these ?	Content analysis
8.	How would you describe your reading / writing, number or language skills on a scale of 1 to 3 ? Where:	Response:

	<p>1 = very poor 2 = poor 3 = just below average</p>	
9.	<p>Before you made the call had you taken a screening test for dyslexia, dyscalculia, reading / writing, number or language ? If yes, tick which one</p>	Response:
10.	At what age did you leave school ?	Age
11.	<p>What is your highest qualification ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CSE ➤ GCE ➤ GCSE ➤ NVQs ➤ 'A' levels ➤ Diploma ➤ Degree ➤ Other – specify <p>No qualifications</p>	Level of qualification
12.	<p>Thinking back to when you left school would you say you had.....READ OUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Generally positive feelings about education ➤ Generally negative feelings about education ➤ Not bothered about education ➤ No answer ➤ Don't know 	Response
13.	What made you feel clever at school ?	Content analysis
14.	What were the barriers that prevented you from improving your reading / writing, number or language sooner ?	Content analysis
15.	<p>What was your greatest barrier ? (DO NOT PROMPT)</p>	Content analysis
16.	<p>On a scale of 1 to 3 how has your reading / writing, number or ability to speak English affected you in relation to home or family life where:- 1 = a great deal 2 = to some extent 3 = not at all</p>	Response

17.	On a scale of 1 to 3 how has your reading / writing, number or ability to speak English affected you in relation to work life where:- 1 = a great deal 2 = to some extent 3 = not at all	Response
18.	How did you get to know about the Learndirect Helpline ? a. Television b. Newspaper, magazine, leaflet c. Radio d. Word of mouth e. Found out about it whilst on another course f. Other (please specify)	Response:
19.	Why did you think you needed to do something about your reading / writing, number or language ?	Content analysis
20..	Before you made the call how motivated were you to do something about your reading, writing, number or language on a scale of 1 to 3 ? where:- 1 = just motivated enough to make the call 2 = reasonably motivated to make the call 3 = highly motivated to make the call	Response
21.	On the day, what do you think triggered you to telephone the Helpline ?	Content analysis
22.	What help were you given	Content Analysis
23.	What action did you take as a result of the help you were given ?	Content analysis
24	If you joined a course, have you continued to learn and if so what ?	Content analysis
25	If you didn't carry on learning was there any reason why not ?	Content analysis
26.	Do you have any plans for the future for training, education or work ?	Response

Thank you for being so helpful. In order to progress the research it would be really useful if you would allow me to contact you again, if there is a need. **Would you be agreeable? (please tick)**

Yes / No

For those who didn't go into learning or dropped out seek permission to refer them to a Specialist Skills for Life Advisory Service

Yes / No

APPENDIX 15

WELFARE CALL – INFORMATION, ADVICE & GUIDANCE SERVICE FOLLOW UP

Telephone Script

'Good morning / afternoon my name is..... (First & Surname) , I am calling on behalf of(nextstep / Subcontractor), the adult advice service on learning and work. Can I speak to please?'

(If the person is not available ask if the person you are speaking to could help?)

A few months ago you/they saw an adviser at(Subcontractor), to talk about work and learning opportunities and we are in the process of following up all the people that we have previously been in contact with to see how you are getting on'

Learning

"Have you **started and/or completed** a course since seeing the adviser?" "If yes, could you tell me what type of course was it, and the level?" (if started a course please tick one box in each of sections 1-3)
Started Completed

- 1 **a)** Learning at a local F.E. College or

- | | | | |
|---|-----------|--|--------------------------|
| | | distance learning, Learndirect etc | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | b) | Learning at local Adult Education/
Community Centre | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | c) | Training course | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | d) | University course | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | e) | Continued on existing course | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | a) | GCSE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | b) | AS Level | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | c) | A Level | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | d) | NVQ | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | e) | Degree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | f) | Professional | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | g) | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | a) | Level 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | b) | Other qualifications below Level 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | c) | Level 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | d) | Level 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | e) | Level 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | f) | Level 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | g) | Level 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | h) | Other qualification/level not known | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Employment

“Have you started a **job** since seeing an adviser, or are you unemployed/still in work?” (Please tick one box in 4)

- | | | | |
|---|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4 | a) | Entered part- time employment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | b) | Entered full -time employment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | c) | Entered/remained self-employed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | d) | Found voluntary work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | e) | Other/remained employed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | f) | Became/remained unemployed | <input type="checkbox"/> |

The service in general (if talking to named person)

5. “How satisfied were you with the help you received?”

- | | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|--------------------------|
| | a) | Completely | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|-----------|------------|--------------------------|

- b) Dissatisfied with some aspects
- c) Not satisfied at all
- d) Can you say why?

6. "Did the advice session help you in any other way?" E.g.

- Given you more confidence
- Made you more motivated
- Made you more aware of opportunities
- Other (please state)

7. "Have any of the following made it difficult for you to start a course or work?"

- a) Transport
- b) Lack of childcare/care for other dependents
- c) Lack of funding
- d) No course or opportunity available in your area
- e) Other difficulty (please state)

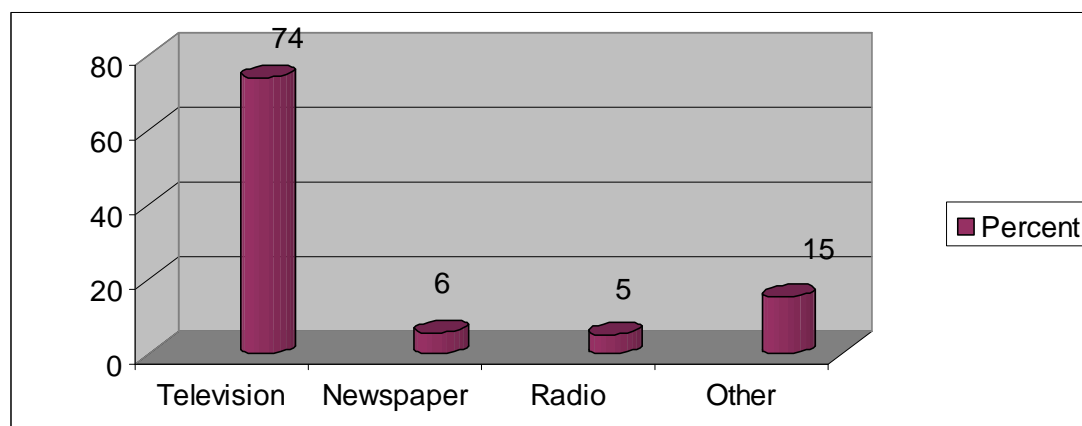
8. "If yes, what sort of course or work are you looking for?"

9. "Any other general comments?"

Be sure to end the call by thanking them for their time and inform them that further help is available should they need it by logging on to [www.nextstep \(name of sub – region eg. nottinghamshire\).org.uk](http://www.nextstep (name of sub – region eg. nottinghamshire).org.uk) or returning to the centre where they first received advice.

APPENDIX 16

MEDIUM OF ENGAGEMENT – RESPONDENTS (n = 160)



APPENDIX 17

PERCENTAGE BY DISTRICT OF THE CALLER COHORT, THE RESPONDENT COHORT AND THE COHORT THAT WENT INTO LSC FUNDED LEARNING

District	Percentage of Callers (n= 360)	Percentage of Respondents (n=165)	Percentage of Respondents going into LSC funded learning (n= 27)
Nottingham City	41.5	39.4	25.9
Gedling	10.5	10.3	7.4
Ashfield	9.6	9.7	14.8
Mansfield	9.2	9.1	14.8
Bassetlaw	8.6	9.1	14.8
Newark & Sherwood	8.3	8.5	7.4
Broxtowe	6.7	7.3	3.7
Rushcliffe	5.6	6.7	11.2
Total	100	100.00	100.00

APPENDIX 18

RESPONDENTS THAT WENT INTO LSC FUNDED LEARNING BY DISTRICT

District	Numbers going into LSC funded learning	Number of Respondents	% age of respondents going into LSC funded learning by District
Ashfield	4	16	25
Bassetlaw	4	15	26.7
Broxtowe	3	11	27.3
Gedling	2	17	11.8
Mansfield	4	15	26.7
Newark & Sherwood	2	14	14.3
Nottingham	7	65	10.8
Rushcliffe	1	12	8.3
Total	27	165	16.4

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