

# Suffolk TAP



## SKILLS FOR LIFE STUDY IN THE HAVEN GATEWAY

A Survey commissioned by Haven Gateway Partnership

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The 1999 Moser report into Basic Skills found that up to 7 million adults nationally had difficulty with literacy and numeracy, while one in five adults were functionally illiterate. Following this, a long-term national Skills for Life strategy was implemented to halve the numbers of those considered functionally illiterate by 2010. However, the 2004 – 2005 Adult Learning Inspectorate Report was quite critical of several aspects of Skills for Life Provision. They found a “depressing lack of improvement and a failure effectively to tackle weaknesses over the past four years”, despite “an extraordinary injection of funds and capacity building from the government’s *Skills for Life* campaign”<sup>1</sup>. The report claims that the amount of good provision in general further education colleges has fallen and cites a failure, across all types of provider, to address poor progression onto other programmes or into work. The report found “inadequate support for learners with literacy and numeracy problems”<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, a BCC Skills survey, published in March 2006, found that only 64% of UK adults are qualified at level 2 or higher, compared with 77% in France and 85% in Germany<sup>3</sup>.

According to the Essex LSC 2006 – 2007 Annual Plan one third of adults in Essex have no qualifications and a further 20% are only qualified to NVQ Level 1. An estimated quarter of the population of Suffolk have a problem with literacy skills and a slightly higher proportion (27%) has difficulty with numeracy. The purpose of this study is to identify *Skills for Life* provision in Haven Gateway. Our remit was to identify which groups are not currently being served and their requirements for Basic Skills (Skills for Life) training. We also explored employer requirements for trained staff that are currently not being met.

Our study has led us to make the following recommendations:

#### **Skills for Life Provision:**

- There is general agreement among providers and voluntary groups that learning provision needs to be more flexible
- Funding for 1:1 support is important to help those in the hardest to reach categories
- As was suggested by the ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate) report some funding needs to be targeted at entry level learners who are being disadvantaged by current funding targets
- There is a need for co-ordination of *Skills for Life* services, possibly by provision of a helpline which is manned by qualified advisors with an understanding of what is required
- Better communication between Skills for Life brokers and providers: opportunities to network, to influence and learn from each other.
- Teaching materials need to be relevant to learners
- There needs to be an adequate provision of knowledgeable tutors

#### **Workplace provision:**

- Successful workforce development depends on the enthusiastic support of employers
- Independent brokerage is needed in order to engage employers, especially small employers
- Need to engage ‘hard to reach employers’. The BCC Taskforce noted that the Employer Training Pilots did not engage the hard to reach employers. According to a local adviser, “It could be argued that we engage with employers who are easy to get to, rather than attempting to find the areas of greatest need”<sup>4</sup>.
- Funding for 3 hour initial assessment; this was particularly mentioned as useful by workplace providers. However, this provision is about to be removed
- Providers need to listen to employers to ensure that their employees get appropriate training
- The training that is offered needs to be what the employers require

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<sup>1</sup> Adult Learning Inspectorate, *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector 2004-05*, pp.8

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> BCC Skills Taskforce, *Building a Skilled Nation: The Business Perspective education and Skills*, March 2006

<sup>4</sup> Extract from interview with a local business adviser

## 2 INTRODUCTION

The Haven Gateway Investing in Communities (IiC) Business Plan acknowledged the need for a study to identify the reasons why unqualified people in the Haven Gateway do not undertake basic skills training; and to develop a range of strategies to improve take up of training.

The purpose of the study is to rationalise the numbers of people in the Haven Gateway who need further basic skills training in order to improve their opportunities for employment, advancement within the workplace, or developing their own business. The study aims to identify what is currently being provided, and why the current provision of basic skills training is failing to meet needs of the hardest to reach groups.

The study was undertaken in the context of how well disadvantaged groups/ communities in the Haven Gateway are being served. The study aims to be a critical piece of work looking at what has worked and not worked in the area of basic skills training.

The Haven Gateway area comprises the North East Essex sub region, which incorporates Colchester and Tendring, and South East Suffolk sub region which incorporates Ipswich, Babergh, Mid Suffolk and Suffolk Coastal districts.

## 3 RESEARCH BRIEF

"The Skills for Life survey undertaken in 2001 looked at the national needs and impact of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. It revealed that at Level 2 or above (GCSE Grades A – C) for literacy and numeracy in the Haven Gateway are above national average at 47% and 30% respectively, but all other levels are below national average. Overall the region has one of the highest literacy and numeracy levels, only bettered by the South East. However, at the lower end of academic attainment the Haven Gateway is achieving lower than national and regional standards. The Regional average for entry level literacy is 12%, the Haven average is 10.4%." *(Extract from Haven Gateway IIC Business Plan)*

"The first stage of the study is to rationalise the target group for people requiring basic skills training, by identifying those groups whose employment or advancement opportunities are hampered by their lack of qualifications. The study should then question the existing training providers to determine what they are providing? What is the take up? And what are their strategies to improve the take up?" *(Extract from Haven Gateway tender document)*

The study should:

- provide an analysis on which groups are currently not being served, and their requirements for Basic Skills training
- refer to employers requirements for trained staff that are currently not being met

## 4. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve a comprehensive coverage from a broad range of interests we undertook a qualitative survey of providers, employers and various agencies. In addition, we carried out in depth interviews of individuals who have not achieved level 2 in literacy and numeracy. Our aim was to discover why they had not achieved 5 GCSEs A-C either at school or subsequently in their working lives.

In order to complete the survey, we aimed to identify Skills for Life Training Providers. We designed a questionnaire for providers to determine:

- what they are currently providing
- what is the take up of their provision
- what are their strategies to improve take up of their provision

We designed a questionnaire for employers in order to ascertain:

- perceived employers views of basic skills needs in their workplace

- employer views of provision available
- employers requirements for trained staff that are currently not being met

We designed a questionnaire for learners in order to gain an understanding of

- why they have not achieved level 2 in literacy and numeracy
- what was their school and work experience
- their hopes for the future

In addition we carried out a combination of telephone and face-to face interviews with appropriate individuals from organisations such as Essex and Suffolk Learning and Skills Councils, Job Centre Plus, adult advisers and voluntary agencies.

## 5 NATIONAL CONTEXT

"Literacy and numeracy are the fundamental skills that every adult needs to be able to function and progress at work and in society in general. Collectively the skills of literacy and numeracy are often referred to as the basic skills"<sup>5</sup>.

The terminology that is used to describe difficulty with literacy and numeracy has changed over the last number of years and continues to change. In this survey we have used the terms basic skills or Skills for Life. However, some organisations are now using the term essential skills. Basic Skills/*Skills for Life* also includes ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) but we have concentrated on numeracy and literacy in this survey.

The first national agency for improving adult basic skills was set up in 1975, as part of a government adult literacy campaign. Following a review in 1994/1995, the remit of the Agency was extended to allow it to undertake work with schools and children as well as with adults and the name was changed to the Basic Skills Agency. In 1998, Sir Claus Moser, chairman of the Basic Skills Agency, was asked to produce a report on how 'to tackle the vast basic skills problem in this country'. The Moser report in 1999 stated that up to 7 million adults in England had difficulties with literacy and numeracy and that one in five adults had poorer literacy than was expected of an eleven-year-old<sup>6</sup>. The situation in numeracy was considered to be worse; estimates of the percentage of adults having some numeracy problem ranged from 30% to 50%.

Moser regarded the teaching of adult basic skills as marginalised: a Cinderella service. He proposed that basic skills should become a key part in the strategy for Lifelong Learning. This should lead to a National Strategy that aimed to halve the levels of functional illiteracy and innumeracy in a decade. The National Strategy had ten main elements, including the setting up of national targets and a national curriculum.

The Moser report made twenty-one recommendations and many of the key recommendations have since been implemented including:

- The adult basic skills curricula for literacy and numeracy were published in February 2001.
- A working group on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) produced a report in October 2000.
- Following this, the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum was launched in May 2002 to ensure consistent standards in English teaching for ESOL learners.
- Lifelong Learning UK, formerly the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO), has produced subject specifications for teachers of literacy and numeracy at Levels 3 and 4.
- The first of these new qualifications was introduced in September 2002.
- Subject specifications for teachers of ESOL were developed by the London Language and Literacy Unit.
- The Adult Learning Inspectorate was created and, along with Ofsted, given a clear remit by the Government to separately inspect and report on adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Inspections began in January 2002.
- Specific guidance on inspecting adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL has also been produced by each inspectorate.

<sup>5</sup> Basic Skills Agency, *National Standards for National Literacy & Numeracy*, 1999

<sup>6</sup> These figures were estimates based on official surveys.

- Workplace Basic Skills Network piloted 32 demonstration projects, and developed a training and information network. A toolkit has been developed to help employers to identify and address the needs of their employees.

### National standards

National standards for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL have been set by the DfES. They are set at different levels, 3 Entry Standards (1,2 and 3), Level 1 and Level 2. The levels are simply described by reference to Skill Level, Vocational Skills Standards Levels and relationship to the National Curriculum.

- Entry levels 1, 2 and 3 are set at Survival Skill Level, have no Vocational Skills Standards equivalent.
- Level 1 is at the Functional Skill level, and equates to Level 1 of the Vocational Skills Standards
- Level 2 is at the Operational Skill level, and equates to Level 2 of the Vocational Skills Standards

National Standard	National Curriculum Level equivalent
• Pre-Entry -	
• Entry Level 1 -	Level 1 (age 5)
• Entry Level 2 -	Level 2 (age 7)
• Entry Level 3 -	Level 3 (age 9)
• Level 1 -	Level 4 (age 11)
• Level 2 -	GCSE A* - C (age 16)

## 6. STRUCTURE OF PROVISION IN HAVEN GATEWAY

As previously described, the Haven Gateway spans parts of Essex and Suffolk. Education provision is structured very differently in these two counties<sup>7</sup>.

The Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) in each county are responsible for education and training for everyone after the age of 16 except those studying in universities. This includes:

- 1 further education colleges;
- 2 training at work;
- 3 school sixth forms;
- 4 working with employers to develop skills
- 5 adult and community learning; and
- 6 information, advice and guidance for adults and young people

Learndirect offers on-line Skills for Life provision nationally. Centres are located throughout the region in libraries and other centres. These are test centres, which offer learners a Certificate in Adult Literacy Level 1 and 2 and Certificate in Adult Numeracy Level 1 and 2. The level of support available to clients at these centres varies. In addition, there are private training companies offering Skills for Life courses.

### 6.1 ESSEX

Adult education in Essex is the responsibility of Adult and Community Learning (ACL), Essex. This is part of Essex County Council's Early Years, Post 16 and Lifelong Learning Service Group and is one of the largest and most comprehensive services in England and Wales<sup>8</sup>. ACL Essex had nine Adult and Community colleges; these were recently merged into four area colleges, North East, South, Central and West Essex. The North Essex Adult Community College covers the Haven Gateway area of Tendring and Colchester. The new institution incorporates the former Tendring Adult Community College, which has main centres in Clacton, Harwich and Frinton and Colchester Adult Community College, which has main centres in Grey Friars and the Wilson Marriage Centre. ACL in Essex specialises in learning provision for adults and so has few students under nineteen years of age. Essex Adult and Community Learning holds classes in local schools and community centres throughout the area.

Colchester Institute is the largest vocational college in the UK and has two main campuses: Sheepen Road, Colchester and Church Road, Clacton. In addition the Institute works in consortia with other organisations to provide outreach and workplace learning.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1 – Skills for Life Provision

<sup>8</sup> Essex Community Foundation, *A Community Needs Survey of Essex*, 2004

The Colchester Learning Shop is a partnership between Anglia Ruskin University, Colchester Borough Council, Colchester Institute, Open University in East Anglia, The Adult Community College, Colchester, The Sixth Form College, Colchester and the University of Essex. The Learning Centre, situated within The Learning Shop in the Colchester town centre, is an outreach centre for Colchester Institute. It offers a range of free taster courses and workshops and is a learndirect centre.

## 6.2 SUFFOLK

Adult education in Suffolk is provided via four Further Education Colleges and the Adult and Community Learning Service (ACL). ACL in Suffolk manages adult and community learning programmes throughout the county and offers a wide range of provision for adults. Courses are based in community venues across the county. These include a range of community-based courses and Family Learning (Literacy, Language and Numeracy) programmes. Workplace Skills for Life is provided through 'Training Matters', which offers workplace essential skills training to companies across all sectors in Suffolk.

FE Colleges offer post-16 education and training. This includes Skills for Life classroom teaching as well as a broad range of training and development programmes, aimed at upgrading the skills of the workforce. Workforce Training is provided on site. A wide range of training and development programmes is offered, aimed at upgrading the skills of the workforce. Otley College, Suffolk College and West Suffolk College provide workbased learning in the Haven Gateway area.

## 7. SKILLS FOR LIFE OVERVIEW

In order to gain a balanced view and to place our local study in a regional and national context we have consulted recent publications, local and national, which related to Skills for Life. We consulted the Essex and Suffolk Learning and Skills Councils 2006-2007 National Plans. According to the Suffolk plan, an estimated quarter of the population of Suffolk have a problem with literacy skills and a slightly higher proportion (27%) has difficulty with numeracy. One third of adults in Essex have no qualifications and a further 20% are only qualified to NVQ Level 1.

According to the Suffolk plan, there is insufficient provision across the county to meet the needs of Suffolk's adults or to achieve the Government's targets for 2007. The relatively low level of people taking up programmes in order to improve their maths is also a concern. The basic skills audit report suggests that provision in Suffolk needs to grow by 45% to meet the target outcomes. However, the report suggests that further analysis may be needed, as the solution may be to increase opportunities for adults to achieve recognition for their learning, rather than simply engaging more learners. Both Essex and Suffolk LSCs expressed concern at the proportion of learners who are engaged in learning that does not lead to a qualification.

The solution may be to increase opportunities for adults to achieve recognition for their learning, rather than simply engaging more learners

The Adult Learning Inspectorate 2004-05 examined *Skills for Life* provision nationally over a four-year cycle. The report was critical of some aspects of *Skills for Life* provision, pointing to a "depressing lack of improvement and a failure effectively to tackle weaknesses over the past four years", despite "an extraordinary injection of funds and capacity building from the government's *Skills for Life* campaign"<sup>9</sup>. The report claims that the amount of good provision in general further education colleges has fallen and cites a failure, across all types of provider, to address poor progression onto other programmes or into work. The report found "inadequate support for learners with literacy and numeracy problems"<sup>10</sup>.

There was criticism of rigid, inadequate teaching, which lacked creativity and turned the core curriculum into a "straightjacket". Last year *Skills for Life* met its initial targets of three-quarters of a million new qualifications achieved in numeracy or literacy. However, half these were gained by 16-18 year olds already enrolled on college courses. The programme could therefore not claim to have added value in these cases.

<sup>9</sup> Adult Learning Inspectorate, *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector 2004-05*, pp.8

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

A longitudinal study involving 10,000 people born in 1970 has shown that "real disadvantage is concentrated among those whose capabilities are at or below entry level 2"<sup>11</sup>. As the report points out, this is well below the working definition of literacy and numeracy officially used by *Skills for Life*, of Level 2. It is also below the level at which most beneficiaries from the programme are working. The report suggests that future efforts should be aimed at this "relatively small group of acutely disadvantaged people, offering the potential for a more precisely targeted approach"<sup>12</sup>. However, this does not seem to be the focus of future funding. Instead the emphasis will be to target those who have the potential to achieve Level 2.

The findings of the ALI report accord with the views of many local providers who are concerned that entry level learners with the most complicated needs do not meet government targets. There is concern that learners who take a long time and need a lot of support are likely to lose out. The methods required to reach entry-level learners do not fit with the new structure.

The findings of the ALI report accord with the views of some local providers who are concerned that entry level learners with the most complicated needs do not meet government targets

One local provider was concerned that ACL (Adult and Community Learning) restructuring is limiting the capacity to assist very slow learners. There is difficulty with some community provision. Very persistent slow work is required and there is usually no funding for that. This provider recalled that before the introduction of the National strategy, community based tutors trained volunteers to deliver 1:1 help to learners. Volunteers are still used but usually in group work.

However, another ACL provider, based in an Adult and Community College, considers that the National Strategy has improved *Skills for Life* provision by introducing a structure and thus making the assessment and teaching of learners "more slick" and "much smoother from the tutor's point of view". This provider started as a basic skills volunteer seventeen years ago and is now a *Skills for Life* team leader. In her view, before the Moser report, there was no formal assessment process for learners. "It could take a couple of weeks to find what level learners were at". Now it is more formalised; in the past, "assessment was more of a guessing game"<sup>13</sup>.

This provider considers that the introduction of the Core Curriculum has brought *Skills for Life* into mainstream provision. In her college, management is very supportive and *Skills for Life* is embedded throughout the whole curriculum. She runs Level 3 for GCSE tutors, which ensures a 'champion' from each area of learning. Adults who enrol for GCSE are offered *Skills for Life* assessment, followed by the National Test. When appropriate, learners are referred to the *Skills for Life* department. This has had a significant effect on drop out rates. She makes the point that successful *Skills for Life* provision depends on good management, employing sufficient staff to carry out projects.

This college also has close links with a local Learndirect provider. Since Learndirect is unable to support entry level learners; these are referred to the Adult and Community College. "The key is communication and talking to other providers."

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The importance of communication is a key theme. *Skills for Life* provision is complex with a diverse range of providers from the public sector, private sector and voluntary sector. Much of the provision is funded through short term schemes and there seems to be a lack of coherence. One voluntary provider commented, "new projects often mirror what has gone before rather than building on earlier projects". Co-ordination is required; this could be provided by a helpline but this would need to be mediated by an adviser with

<sup>11</sup> Adult Learning Inspectorate, *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector 2004-05*, p9

<sup>12</sup> Adult Learning Inspectorate, *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector 2004-05*, p9

<sup>13</sup> Extract from an interview with an ACL *Skills for Life* provider

appropriate skills. An experienced ACL provider commented, "The person at the end of the line needs to know what they are dealing with. It cannot just be an untrained call centre"<sup>14</sup>."

## 7.1 The role of Voluntary Organisations

Part of the brief of the study is to identify hard to reach learners. In order to get a comprehensive view we interviewed a number of voluntary organisations. These included organisations that focus on disability, mental health and people involved in crime. One organisation that we interviewed has provided *Skills for Life* literacy and numeracy assessment and guidance. They used to work extensively with prisons and with the probation service. But the funding for *Skills for Life* has changed; it is now operating through large organisations. Operating *Skills for Life* with volunteers has also changed; the volunteer remit is now more marginalised, more of a signposting role. Intensive 1:1 support was what volunteers could offer. However, since the 1:1 support was for learners with very poor skills they did not necessarily reach Level 1 and 2 and therefore did not hit learning targets, "The targets were too high for some clients"<sup>15</sup>.

An adviser who works with clients who have suffered with long term illness suggests that *Skills for Life* courses need flexibility, not 'one size fits all'<sup>16</sup>. Often 1:1 training is necessary until the learner gains sufficient confidence to work in a group. Poor literacy and numeracy skills can lead to difficulties in communication and in personal life.

A number of local providers who used to provide *Skills for Life* services have felt unable to bid under the new co-financing bidding system: "Co-financing structures are pre-determined and too rigid. We would appreciate the opportunity to build capacity for Skills for Life. Where can we get funding which allows a little more freedom?"<sup>17</sup> This provider has explored every option with the LSC and, while the local LSC was sympathetic and the value of what they provided was recognised to a certain extent, they have been unable to find any appropriate funding. This provider suggests that, in dealing with the 'hard to reach' the rhetoric is not matched by funding targets. Group work has benefits for many learners and is often the most appropriate form of learning, but the most marginalised often need 1:1 support to start them off. When they have had initial support they can move onto group work. Some learners are at a very basic level, i.e. difficulty in holding a pen/pencil. "There is a missing link with the new funding". This concern mirrors the findings of the ALI report, which suggested that more flexibility is vital<sup>18</sup>.

This concern mirrors the findings of the ALI report, which suggested that more flexibility is vital

A provider working with disabled students made the point that the emphasis on learners achieving the level 1 and 2 qualifications is a major problem for learners with both physical and learning disabilities, who are unable to achieve at these levels. They often don't have the health or the ability to complete a course in the allocated time. They need continuous learning to maintain the progress, however small, that they have made. This provider also felt that the emphasis on targets meant that providers are forced to concentrate on those learners most likely to achieve and that, whilst this is understandable, it discriminates against those who are working at any of the Entry levels. Ideally it would be better if funding were not so target orientated or time limited. This would allow for the diversity of need in this area to be addressed.

## 7.2 Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus undertakes *Skills for Life* analysis on all long term unemployed. If there is a basic skills need, then advisers suggest Basic Employability Training (BET): social skills, organisation etc. Among the long term unemployed there is often a reluctance to attend courses; they often do so only in order to keep benefit. The long-term unemployed are the hardest to deal with, "It is usually not just one thing that's preventing them from getting a job. They are often reluctant to leave their comfort zone"<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Extract from an interview with an ACL *Skills for Life* provider

<sup>15</sup> From an interview with a voluntary organisation in Suffolk

<sup>16</sup> Extract from an interview with a voluntary organisation

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Adult Learning Inspectorate, *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector 2004-05*

<sup>19</sup> Extract from an interview with an adviser from Jobcentre Plus

Short-term unemployed are often referred to Learndirect centres, where they can undergo assessment and can study on-line to achieve Literacy and Numeracy Level 2. The longer term unemployed are often reluctant to undertake *Skills for Life* training. These clients usually need longer term help, i.e. getting up in time for appointments, how to dress appropriately, practice interviews. With low unemployment there is a small, hard core, who are hard to help. They often have complex *Skills for Life* needs that are difficult to address.

There are also Government funded schemes such as Power to Work which aims to get people off Incapacity Benefit and back into work. This is a 26 week programme which combines support for health needs with job search help and Skills for Life training. They work with people up to Level 1; after 26 weeks the support is limited and there seems to be little opportunity for onward referral.

### 7.3 Workbased Learning:

In 2005, the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) established the BCC Skills Taskforce to consider the business view of government policy on skills and its implementation on the employment and training on the adult workforce. The Taskforce was made up of a cross section of members of the business community, Chamber representatives and BCC staff. The report was published in March 2006<sup>20</sup>. The Taskforce explored the skills gap, with 64% of UK adults at Level 2 or higher compared with 77% in France and 85% in Germany. Only 28% of the UK workforce has skills at level 3 or above compared with 51% in France and 65% in Germany<sup>21</sup>. Currently only 44% of school leavers gain five GCSEs at grade A\* to C, including English and maths<sup>22</sup>. The Department for Education and Skills views this standard as the minimum level of skill required for productivity. The BCC Taskforce suggests that all school leavers should be equipped with the basic skills they will need in the workplace including English, maths and ICT, as well 'soft' skills to enable them to work effectively with others. However, local providers who deal with 14 – 16 year olds who have been excluded from school expressed concern at the growth in exclusions. They fear that those who have been excluded do not receive a rounded education and that in future they will not have the skills that they will require as adults.

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The Taskforce identified the numbers of adults lacking in skills; 12 million people do not have literacy skills and 16 million do not have the numeracy skills of an 11 year old, out of a workforce of 30 million people working full-time or part time<sup>23</sup>.

The Taskforce praised the government's Employer Training Pilots, which are to be rolled out nationally under a new title *Train to Gain*. This programme aims to tackle skills shortages by sending brokers into companies to provide full skills audits and to construct training plans. The employer is then presented with training options from both independent and public sector providers. A full subsidy is available for the cost of training taken up by the business for employees lacking a Level 2 qualification.

The Taskforce suggests that the fact that the training was subsidised and delivered in the workplace reduced the negative impact on the business. The training needs analysis and brokerage aspects of the programme are particularly relevant for smaller businesses that often do not have the expertise to identify training needs among their staff. They stress the importance of the independence of the broker. "Trust is an essential factor

<sup>20</sup> BCC Skills Taskforce, *Building a Skilled Nation: The Business Perspective education and Skills*, March 2006

<sup>20</sup> The Leitch review of Skills Interim Report, HM Treasury, *Skills in the UK: The Longterm Challenge*, December 2005

<sup>20</sup> Sir Andrew Foster, *Realising the Potential, A review of The Future Role of Further Education Colleges*, November on education and Skills, March 2006

<sup>21</sup> The Leitch review of Skills Interim Report, HM Treasury, *Skills in the UK: The Longterm Challenge*, December 2005

<sup>22</sup> Sir Andrew Foster, *Realising the Potential, A review of The Future Role of Further Education Colleges*, November 2005

<sup>23</sup> House of Commons Public Accounts Committee Twenty-first Report, *Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy*, January 2006, p14.

in getting businesses to invest in training. Companies want to know that they are not simply being sold a product without any consideration of their own needs"<sup>24</sup>.

The Taskforce is concerned also that there is a need to ensure that subsidised training does not just occur in companies that would have undertaken training anyway. The Employer Training Pilots increased the volume of training by only 0.5% because much of the training happened in companies that were already trying or considering similar schemes<sup>25</sup>. In addition, only 14% of businesses that took part in the pilot scheme were 'hard to reach' businesses<sup>26</sup>. This corresponds with the evidence of local workplace advisers. One commented, "It could be argued that we engage with employers who are easy to get to, rather than attempting to find the areas of greatest need"<sup>27</sup>.

According to the local LSC, future funding strategy is to fund more meaningful learning episodes rather than short non-accredited courses. From August, a change in funding allocation will mean that the LSC will not fund any provision shorter than nine hours. This causes concern to providers who have concerns around short-term funding and sustainability. Until this year providers got funding for a three-hour assessment model. This will no longer be possible. Providers were able to use the three-hour assessment model to introduce reluctant learners into learning. "Mainstream funding cannot support the model that is successful<sup>28</sup>." One very experienced workplace provider suggested that learning at this level does not occur in a regular progression but in big leaps. Providers need to be able to offer shorter courses, enabling learners to advance when ready.

Providers need to be able to offer shorter courses, enabling learners to advance when ready.

There is concern also that employers cannot afford to sign up to the longer 30-hour courses. The models that are familiar to the government are not relevant to local companies, most of which have fewer than five employees. Huge employers such as Richard Branson and Tesco can put training packages together and can release groups of workers fairly easily. Similar packages are very costly for small local companies. It is also difficult for small companies to release groups of workers.

One suggestion is that a number of small companies are trained together. This is not ideal; several problems or potential problems can occur. For example, it is not always possible to bring companies together. In the case of food companies, there could be danger of cross-contamination. Another difficulty relates to privacy and the unwillingness of some companies to share information. Also, *Skills for Life* is usually embedded; it is not easy to embed if dealing with different types of company.

In order to engage employers, the training that is provided must be the training that they need. Several providers pointed out that an important element to workplace learning is a sympathetic employer. A lot of cancellations occur due to changes in work duties and times, which can be very demotivating for workers.

## 7.4 SURVEY OF PROVIDERS

We interviewed a range of providers: colleges, adult and community learning, private companies, work based learning, voluntary organisations and learndirect centres. There was an immense variation in the level and type of support offered by these providers. This reflects to some extent the different levels of need among learners. The level of support offered to learners varied from 1:1 tutor support to independent on-line learning.

Entry level provision (needing a high level of tutor support) is offered mainly by Adult & Community Learning and Further Education colleges in both counties and also by voluntary organisations such as Anglia Care Trust

<sup>24</sup> BCC Skills Taskforce, *Building a Skilled Nation: The Business Perspective on education and Skills*, March 2006

<sup>25</sup> The Institute of Fiscal Studies, *The Impact of the Employer Training Pilots on the take up of training among employers and employees*, December 2005, p12.

<sup>26</sup> BCC Skills Taskforce, *Building a Skilled Nation: The Business Perspective on education and Skills*, March 2006, p.19.

<sup>27</sup> Extract from an interview with Business Adviser

<sup>28</sup> Extract from an interview with a Skills for Life workplace provider

but the funding of this provision is problematical because it is not target oriented. Learndirect centres do not offer entry level tuition.

All *Skills for Life* providers deliver Literacy and Numeracy courses leading to the Level 1 and 2 qualifications but again it is mainly the colleges and ACL who offer ESOL courses along with voluntary organisations and one private provider.

Providers use a number of methods of accessing learners; these include internal referrals, recommendation by word of mouth, various marketing strategies and, to a lesser extent, Skills for Life brokerage and Union Learning Reps. Some providers use advertising and awareness raising events. A number of providers, including learndirect providers, access learners via Jobcentre Plus. Some voluntary organisations, such as Anglia Care Trust and NACRO access learners via the Youth Offending Team. Learners are referred to CSV Media via the Refugee Council.

Larger organisations, such as FE Colleges and Adult & Community Learning, use internal referral systems to access learners. These organisations offer several different methods of delivery, from classroom to workplace and outreach learning. The use of internal referral enables those who work in these organisations to signpost learners to the most appropriate tuition. For example, Workplace providers cannot always do a follow-on course; in this case the learner can be referred to community learning. Skills for Life brokerage and Union Learning Reps (ULRs) are utilised by workplace learning providers, mainly by providers in Suffolk. In addition, the Learning Champions<sup>29</sup> training website is used, as are sector specific networks, eg. the Skills for Health project. In Essex, Adult & Community Learning works closely with other providers and community colleges within the county in order to direct learners to appropriate provision.

Providers also use a variety of methods of delivery. Group training in the classroom or workplace is the most common because it is cost effective although Learndirect centres also offer on-line learning with some tutor support. 1-1 training is less common because of difficulties funding this but several providers made the point that it is often necessary for the lower ability students, particularly when they first start.

#### **Provider responses on workplace provision:**

##### **How do you attract potential learners in the workplace to access Skills for Life Provision?**

The providers to whom this question applies gave the following responses:

- One provider commented that they work with union learning reps/HR/personnel/supervisory staff to design programmes which have benefit for individual progression and performance at work and for the organisation.
- Avoiding reference to "literacy" and "numeracy". Instead using English/maths
- Posters for individual courses
- Clear, informed overall programmes
- Recommendations
- Through referrals
- Suffolk brokerage
- College work-based learning assessors
- Trade Union Learner Reps.

##### **What are the elements of successful workplace provision?**

- Provision needs to be relevant to the individual workplace
- Professional, confident, experienced trainers
- Thorough learner recruitment process – initial assessment, individual interviews
- Employer engaged in the process and committed to releasing staff
- Supporting the contextualising of training
- Learners informed about content, commitment and benefits – no coercion
- Flexibility
- Short task sessions leading to longer provision
- Adapting to shift patterns and location
- Making training specific to individuals and/or jobs

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<sup>29</sup> This is an ESF funded project through which non-unionised companies to appoint 'champions' in the workplace who assist their colleagues to find learning opportunities

- Customising teaching materials to individual circumstances
- Maximising use of learning technology

### **How effective are Union learning Reps in encouraging learners in the workplace to access Skills for Life provision?**

The response to this question varied. It appears that Union learning Reps are used more widely in Suffolk than in Essex. Essex providers responded that they had no evidence of their effectiveness. However, on the whole, providers in Suffolk were very enthusiastic:

- Extremely effective. They encourage learners to attend.
- In my experience, very effective
- Initially reluctant to address the issue but then grew in confidence.
- Good at addressing the specifics when offering courses e.g. help with letter-writing
- Union Learning Reps grow in confidence over time and good union networks support each other in the early stages
- Some are/some aren't. ULRs can provide a barrier when they have been in the job for a while. Newer ones are keener.

### **Do you find out about on-going training needs of learners and if so, how?**

It appears that on-going training needs are most effectively addressed by workbased trainers. This may be because a community of learning is created in the workplace and a package of support is put together by the providers. Responses from workbased providers included:

- Yes, all teams receive information about the IAG (ACL) service during their course. IAG workers visit some courses to speak with individuals about future training opportunities. The final evaluation and action planning process addresses future training needs.
- Learner evaluation indicates further training needs. IAG information given to learners
- Encourage learners to go on to further training courses. We do this by talking to the learner. Also we keep in contact with employers that we have worked with in the past to further identify new employees learning needs
- Every session there is an opportunity for feedback. After initial assessment and induction learners share their future goals so individual learning plans are made.
- Basic skills assessment initially. Additional needs are addressed along the way by tutors. ESOL is different as it works purely from curriculum

Comments from other providers include:

- Regular learner reviews
- Ask them
- Questionnaires half way through the course. At end of the course students asked whether there is any other training needed
- No its mostly dictated by learndirect
- We refer to other providers in the area on an individual basis
- Yes Initial assessment/career aspirations. Employer requirements
- Talking to people. On-going projects for homeless people/rough sleepers. Mostly IT training so far
- BSA assessment at induction
- Some providers answered no to this question

### **What percentage of learners complete the course?**

Responses to this question varied. Some responded, "high percentage". Where a percentage was given, the figure was usually over 90%. One (Learndirect) provider commented that not all learners who take the test are successful. Learners prepare for tests on their own, using Learndirect. The high level of completion might suggest that the majority of learners have quite a high level of skills. This would accord with the view of several providers and voluntary agencies that provision is not being aimed at those learners with lowest skills.

### **Have you got any strategies to improve Skills for Life provision?**

Several providers had no strategies for improvement. However, others responded very positively to this question. Responses included:

- Personal contacts

- Using national and local campaigns to highlight benefits to employers
- Using business networks
- Celebrating success and publicising achievement
- Ensuring tutors are up to date in their training
- Providing teaching materials and learning technology of high quality
- Continue to ensure that experienced tutors offer relevant and appropriate provision that 'hooks' employers back into learning
- Make sure that programmes offer national accreditation
- Continue to offer free individual programmes
- Continuing process of self assessment and assessment of teaching and learning: group visits, staff supervision
- We get in feedback from tutors, learners and employers at end of courses
- Continuing professional development programmes
- Listening to what employers need; embedding this within Skills for Life courses
- Actively pursuing additional funding streams which support flexible modes of delivery and small groups

### **Outreach:**

A number of organisations provide an outreach service to engage hard to reach learners. Colchester library is part of an ESF funded project which has been running since 2001. This project is specific to Colchester, because of the number of homeless in the area, and brings together a variety of agencies targeting homeless/rough sleepers.

The library provides computer equipment and access to on-line learning. They feel that it has been successful on a number of different levels in engaging those who are excluded from the usual services. They mainly offer basic IT because the learners tend to move on; a lot of them are ex-Army (RFEA contact?). They have not been so successful with the literacy and numeracy qualifications, partly because a surprising number already have qualifications but also because personal circumstances are not conducive to learning, since other considerations take priority.

Essex library service also do outreach work with travellers, in a project which began in 2000. As part of this project, Essex mobile library schedules weekly stops to six Travellers' sites and nine primary schools that have a high percentage of Traveller children on their rolls. From the start the library has worked closely with the Travellers Education Service to build up trust and identify suitable sites. They have continued to work closely with other partners. This co-operation and a continuity of funding has resulted in a successful project. The project co-ordinator commented, "I have never encountered such an enthusiastic response."

There has also been an enthusiastic response from participating schools, "Some [traveller children] have parents with very basic literacy skills and few or no books at home. The children now have the opportunity alongside the rest of their classmates to choose and share books at school and then at home. One traveller mum was delighted that her son was teaching her to read!

The project is increasing the children's interest and enjoyment of reading, which in turn is improving their reading standards and, potentially, literacy skills within their families."<sup>30</sup>

## **8 EMPLOYERS**

We carried out twenty two interviews with employers in Essex and in Suffolk, focussing on employers in the Essex and Suffolk priority skill sectors<sup>31</sup>. The employers that we contacted fitted into two main groups: those who had undertaken *Skills for Life* training for their staff and those who were completely unfamiliar with *Skills for Life*. However, in both cases there was little understanding of the concept of Basic Skills/Skills for Life. One employer replied that he employed unskilled staff. However, he had no recognition that his staff might have Skills for Life issues or that they might need training. Even employers whose employees were

<sup>30</sup> Extract from an Essex Library Service Report about the Traveller Project

<sup>31</sup> The priority sectors for Essex and Suffolk are: Construction, Engineering, Food & Drink Manufacturing, Skills for Health, Hospitality, Logistics, Health & Social Care and Retail

undertaking ESOL training did not immediately recognise this as *Skills for Life/Basic Skills* training. Employers responded more readily to terms like literacy/numeracy or English/maths.

In response to whether they faced difficulties in training staff, several employers replied that they were unable to afford the time. Other responses included cost of training and location, suggesting it was too far to travel. Several companies only offer in-house training. Some indicated that training was undertaken 'to do the job'; usually industry specific courses, also Health & Safety and Food Hygiene. Employers in the Care sector, for example are required to enrol all staff in Health & Safety and Food Hygiene courses. One employer in this sector complained about the cost of putting all members of staff through this training. Care homes are all working towards training employees to a minimum of NVQ Level 2. There will shortly be a requirement that 80% of staff in care homes have achieved this qualification. Some employers indicated that they have difficulty finding employees locally and now use overseas workers, who receive ESOL training. Other employers prefer to employ local employees and train them to the required standard.

Where employers had undertaken training with *Skills for Life* providers, they were happy with the training that was provided. General opinion was that once employees acquire a 'taste' for training, they go on to further their experience. Some employers have found that staff can be fairly negative about training initially, but once they get into a course they become more and more enthusiastic. One employer made the point that employees were enthusiastic about general training but added, "There is more of a problem identifying difficulty with reading and writing ... nobody would admit to it"<sup>32</sup>.

Few companies have training needs analysis in place; those who do are mainly larger companies. Some employers use an appraisal system to identify training needs; several indicated that training requirements were the responsibility of the line manager. Smaller companies indicated that they arrange to train people as needed or they allow staff to identify their own needs. Only 25% of the companies were IiP accredited; these were all companies with more than 70 employees. One hospitality employer with 160 staff offers inductions to all new employees, offers a *Skills for Life* assessment to 50% of employees and runs a drop in centre at which learners can attend weekly to do C&G qualifications with an FE college.

Most employers considered that there is opportunity for staff to progress within their company. However, this was not so in all cases. Several employers were quite negative about the potential of their employees. One construction industry employer commented that the industry "doesn't need much literacy and numeracy skills which is why people with low level of skills chose to go into it." This employer added that he would support any employee who articulated a need for literacy but "they tend not to be interested in doing any extra training." While one employer responded that "if they fill in the form we employ them so they often have basic skills needs but these are not addressed"<sup>33</sup>.

Business advisers refer to the difficulty in providing training in the construction sector. As one adviser remarked, "No one has any clear ideas on how to address the needs of the construction industry. It is very difficult to engage with people working on building sites"<sup>34</sup>.

Most of the companies who had undertaken Skills for Life Training were in the care sector, where qualifications are required by regulations. Other companies had undertaken ESOL training for employees from abroad. Some workplace providers indicated that many employers undertake the minimum of training required in order to comply with regulations. It can be difficult for providers to find the balance between the training needs of employees and the requirements of the employers. The employer survey accords with providers' view that successful workplace provision depends on employer support. Several workplace providers stress the importance of getting the employer to engage. If the employer is not supportive then it is more difficult to ensure that the learner undertakes and completes qualifications.

The employer survey accords with providers' view that successful workplace provision depends on employer support. Several workplace providers stress the importance of getting the employer to engage. If the employer is not

<sup>32</sup> Extract from an employer interview

<sup>33</sup> Extract from an employer interview

<sup>34</sup> Extract from an interview with a business adviser

supportive then it is more difficult to ensure that the learner undertakes and completes qualifications.

As has been pointed out by several workplace providers, employers want training that is appropriate to their needs. Training should be relevant to the individual workplace, which involves listening to the employers and embedding their needs within *Skills for Life* courses. According to one business adviser Skills for Life provision "is distorted by the need to meet targets". The BCC taskforce suggests that workers may only need elements of a level 2 qualification in order to be proficient in their jobs. A number of employer bodies use skills passports for recognising the skills employees learn on the job. The taskforce suggests that government should devise a similar system<sup>35</sup>.

## LEARNER EVALUATIONS

As part of our study we undertook in depth interviews with 46 individuals who had not achieved Level 2 in literacy and numeracy. We interviewed a range of individuals, male and female, aged 16 -70. Our aim was to learn why they had not achieved qualifications at school or later at work.

Among those who have not achieved level 2 in literacy and numeracy there is a huge variation. Many have undertaken learning but left school without taking exams. These learners are able to achieve levels 1 and 2 quite quickly. However, there are also individuals who require a high level of support in order to gain qualifications.

We identified learners through a number of sources, including Skills for Life providers, Job Centre Plus, voluntary agencies and through advice episodes. The interviews identified a number of main themes. Most of those interviewed expressed regret at their lack of qualifications and at not having studied harder at school. Reasons for lack of achievement included:

- lack of engagement at school
- poor teaching
- lack of careers advice
- In some cases, bullying at school
- dyslexia
- Older learners were often required to leave school early for financial reasons
- In some cases individuals were recruited to work straight from school
- There was often little opportunity to train at work
- Long hours at work
- Not encouraged by employers to train
- The feeling that undertaking training would not improve job prospects

Some learners do not regret their lack of qualification, but others do. Some are now engaged in learning and hope to attain qualifications in the future. Their reasons for undertaking training vary. Some, mainly women, became aware of the need for skills through involvement in their children's education. Others had been made redundant, having worked for the same employer for many years; they had gained skills but no formal qualifications.

There is a marked enthusiasm among those who are now engaged in learning. This accords with the testimony of providers who have asserted that, once adults have engaged in learning, they are eager to continue. However, adult learners have many economic and time constraints, which can limit their ability to engage in the study to which they aspire. The following case studies represent a sample of the learners we interviewed:

### 9.1

## CASE STUDIES

### 1 Name: Jim L.

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<sup>35</sup> BCC Skills Taskforce, *Building a Skilled Nation: The Business Perspective education and Skills*, March 2006, p.20

**Age: 59**

Jim went to Northgate High School, which he quite enjoyed. He gained 3 GCEs before leaving school aged 16. His first job was as a dock runner. He continued to work in the same company until 5 years ago, when he was made redundant. Another shipping company employed him, until making him redundant at the end of 2005, when the company was taken over.

During his years of work, Jim had experience with warehousing and forklift driving. He worked as a vessel agent, attending ship and clearing cargo, a job that he enjoyed and which gave him job satisfaction. He used computers at work for a number of years; he has worked with different computer systems but has no computer qualifications.

The company was understaffed and Jim worked very long hours, up to 100 hours a week. He was not offered any training outside work and was always too busy to take time off work in order to train; he would have got behind with his work. Superiors did not encourage training unless immediately related to the job, e.g. learning about new equipment. He felt that there was no point in training since it would not lead to job improvement.

**Ideal Job:** Jim loved his job as vessel agent. It gave him job satisfaction.

**2 Name: Casey S.**

**Age: 21**

Casey attended Westbourne High school. He did not really enjoy school: it was not inspiring. He left at 16 with a GCSE in Maths and Science. He later completed a GNVQ in IT.

Casey cannot recall any careers advice while at school. He has worked with CSV Media as a volunteer and employee on minimum wage but funding for this has run out. Casey has considerable experience with computers but he realises that in order to get a job in this field he needs to gain qualifications. Eventually, Casey would like to do advanced IT courses in networking and hardware maintenance.

**Ideal Job:** Scuba diver but would settle for a job in Information Technology

**3. Name: Susan H.**

**Age: 53**

Susan attended Copleston High School, which she left at 16. She did not really want to be at school. She is not sure why, as she enjoys learning now. Susan commented, "Exams made me freeze". As a result, Susan left school with no qualifications and went to work at Eastern Electricity. Her first job was card punching. She later took a similar job with East Anglian Daily Times, putting adverts onto magnetic tape. After having children, she did shopwork, as a cashier, receiving on the job training.

Susan worked at Littlewoods for 15 years until it closed making her redundant. She is using her redundancy payout to undertake training. In particular, she wants to improve her IT skills. She is first doing numeracy and literacy on-line, then will go onto IT training at a Learndirect centre.

As Susan has always worked quite long hours, it was difficult to find time previously to do training. Now her children have grown up and she is taking the opportunity of redundancy to make up for this. The training provider offers flexibility, which is enabling her to set her own pace and to have control over her training.

**Ideal Job:** Office work, bookkeeping. Susan enjoys figure work and really does not want to return to shop-work which she did not enjoy and which she found very tiring

**4 Name: Margaret Rose J.**

**Age: 46**

Margaret was born in Ipswich and started school at Whitton. She began secondary education at Thurleston in Ipswich but at age 12 moved to Reading with her mother, where she remained until the end of her schooling. Margaret left school at 15 with just one CSE in Home Economics. When asked if she wished that she had attained more qualifications at school, she said she was "not really bothered" and "got through learning as I needed to". Margaret moved a lot during school years and considers that she taught herself. In her view, education is better now. She cannot recall any careers education at school.

She left school to go straight into a job. The school arranged interviews with employers, mainly factories. She did not want any of the jobs that were available but was strongly encouraged by her parents to go

straight into work. Margaret would have liked to do designing, but, "in them days you had to listen to your parents." Margaret feels that her mum forced her into work that she really did not enjoy.

Her first job was in a factory, coilwinding. She recalls long working hours in a poorly ventilated environment. Later she recalls working in a Bingo hall and then in a shop. She did a modelling course, which she enjoyed and passed.

**Ideal Job:** Margaret's ideal job would still be in designing but she would also like to work as a receptionist. She enjoys working with people. She is at present doing a course in IT.

**5 Name: Lynne P.  
Age: 48**

Lynne went to school in Westbourne. It was OK; Lynne received some careers advice at school, from teachers. She got her first job, through the school and left school at 15 to work at Fisons, where she remained for 10 years. She attended college at Smart Street. She did not enjoy this and attained no qualifications.

Lynne went on to become manager of a photocopy shop but was made redundant after one year. She then worked as a van delivery driver, until she had her first child. After her children were born she did part time work. Over the years any training she did at work was on the job and relevant to the job she was doing.

**Ideal Job:** Lynne would like to have done Law. She now regrets that she did not get better qualifications at a younger age. She now aims to become a court usher. She has looked into this and considers that she would enjoy the job. There are no specific qualifications required. Lynne is undertaking IT training for herself. She considers that it is a useful skill. It also has the practical outcome of helping her when applying for jobs.

**6 Name: Robert P.  
Age: 37**

Robert went to Nacton High school, now Holywells High school. He recalled that it was a rough school, "If you tried to learn you were considered a swot". Pupils were encouraged by teachers to get a job as soon as possible. He considered that the teachers meant well and were trying to do what was best for the pupils. Robert does not recall any careers advice at school. He recalls a careers office in town, but not very useful. "It was like a job centre but for young people".

Robert left school at 16 with no qualifications and went to work as a roofer. He remained at this for three years, after which he did several temporary jobs. He worked at Debach Enterprises for 8-9 years. He then returned to roofing before joining the port of Felixstowe, where he worked for 3-4 years. He worked on the docks as a crane driver. He found the shifts difficult and had to work very long hours.

While at work, Robert did training related to work, for example Health & Safety training. At the port he worked as a crane driver and did a test organised by Felixstowe port. He also trained as a tug driver. He found the work very hard and he took a break to do an IT course as he wanted a change. He then went to work at Ipswich port and was unable to continue IT training due to the very long hours – 70-100 hours per week. He had to leave work due to ill health; having suffered two heart attacks. He is now unable to return to the work he undertook previously. However, he has been told by the port that it may be possible for him to return to the port to do office work. This has encouraged him to enrol on an IT course again.

He is concerned about finances, as he receives no benefits. He is more interested in learning than he was when he was younger. "A lot of things seem easier to learn because I know I need to learn them. I know they are helping to change my life".

**Ideal Job:** Anything involving working from home, "I have realised time is precious. I want to spend time with my son".

**7 Name: Rebecca G.  
Age: 23**

Rebecca enjoyed school at first but by the age of 14 had lost interest. She moved out of home to live with her boyfriend and subsequently only attended school in order to sit for exams. She finds it hard to study when not interested in a subject. Rebecca attained 3 GCSEs, one C and two Ds.

Rebecca now wishes she had achieved better qualifications. When asked why she did not get better results, she responded that she had not been attending school when she should have done and she did not study enough. She does not recall any specific careers advice other than two weeks work experience, floristry

work, which she enjoyed. She was really keen to leave school and start work. She just no longer wanted to be there.

She worked as a seasonal worker in a garden centre and later as a sewing machinist in two different companies. She did training on the job, when necessary. As she did not intend to stay at this work she was not that interested in training. She now works as a mid-day supervisor in school.

Rebecca is a lone parent with one child. Her son has had learning difficulties, which encouraged her to spend time at the school as a volunteer. She enjoys working with children and would like to become a social worker, working with children. However, she realises that this may not be possible at present. As she enjoys working with children, she is considering undertaking training to become a teaching assistant.

The school where she assists has Investors in People. The school principal is very supportive and is encouraging Rebecca to progress and learn. She is being set up for first aid training and is being sent on a games course.

**Ideal Job:** Social Worker

**8 Name: Rosemary B.**

**Age: 42**

Rosemary left school at age 15. She did not enjoy school. She gained some qualifications but not 5 GCSEs A-C. She now wishes she had achieved better qualifications and attributes her lack of qualification to lack of confidence. She suffers from dyslexia. She does recall having careers advice.

Having left school aged 15 Rosemary worked at Tesco's for five years, as a general assistant, then as a supervisor. She left to move to Cumbria, where she worked as a cleaner for two years. She has worked as a carer in several homes in Cumbria and now back in Ipswich. The only training that she has done has related her job as a carer. She does not consider that she has been encouraged to do training at work. She has approached her company to do an NVQ "but they have not done anything about it".

**Ideal Job:** To work with learning disabilities/autism

**9 Name: Amanda G.**

**Age: 37**

Amanda left school at age 16. She enjoyed her time at school and achieved some qualifications, but basic. She now wishes that she had achieved better qualifications. She met her future husband, did not listen to advice and did not try as hard as she could have done.

Amanda left school at 16 to work at Tesco's, where she worked for seven years. More recently, she has worked at Debenhams as a Christmas temp, then at BAC Windows for one year as a cleaner and for two years at the Co-op. She now works as a mid-day supervisor at school.

While working, she gained some computer skills at Tesco's and has done a basic Hygiene course. She considers that she was encouraged to do training at work. At present she is doing a WEA skills course for Mid-day supervisors. "Quite strange using your brain again. Difficult at first. Amazing how much basic English you forget".

**Ideal Job:** To become a midwife

**10 Name: Teresa B.**

**Age: 39**

Teresa left school aged 16. It was mostly a good experience. She achieved some qualifications and does not particularly wish she had attained better qualifications. She thinks that not knowing what she wanted to do as a job stopped her from getting better results.

She recalls having careers advice at school. While at school she had Saturday job at a florists and was taken on full time after she left school. Teresa later worked as a catering assistant for 13 years. For the past five years she has worked as a mid-day school supervisor. She feels she was encouraged to do training at work.

**Ideal Job:** Don't know

**11 Name: Eileen H.**

**Age: 51**

Eileen left school aged 15. She recalls it as quite a positive experience but left school without any qualifications. She does not regret not achieving qualifications and thinks that there were not many opportunities for carrying on studying then. She does not recall receiving any careers advice at school. She went to work straight from school and worked as a sales assistant at British Home Stores from 1969 – 1975. She was promoted to supervisor and while there did first aid and manual handling training.

Eileen had nine children and had not worked since 1975, until she became a mid-day supervisor five years ago. She is now a senior supervisor and is undertaking a study skills course with WEA.

**Ideal Job:** Working in a fulfilling job (emotionally)

**12 Name: Joy C.**

**Age: 46**

On the whole, Joy enjoyed school but she left at 15 with no qualifications. With hindsight she wishes that she had achieved qualifications. She did not achieve better results due to personal circumstances. She received careers advice at school but it was the wrong advice. She did not go straight into work after school.

She has worked as shelf filler for five years, as a cleaner for two years and later in shop work. She has done a Health & Safety 1 day course. She was not encouraged to do training at work. "Never really been employed in a job to advance". She now works as a mid-day supervisor and is undertaking a study skills course with WEA.

**Ideal Job:** Teaching special children

**13 Name: Jane B.**

**Age: 53**

Jane left school at 16. She does not recall it as a good experience. She gained some qualifications but now wishes that she had achieved better results. She feels that peer pressure from friends stopped her from getting better results, "not wanting to spend any more time extra than necessary on school work".

She recalls getting careers advice at school. She left school and went straight into work as an office junior, then shorthand typist, where she stayed for six and a half years. She then worked as a copy typist for two years.

She had a break while her children were small then started work as a mid-day supervisor. She has been in this role for ten years. Jane also works as a till operator at the Co-op.

**Ideal Job:** Personal assistant to a high flying businessman

**14 Name: Sheila H.**

**Age: 38**

Sheila left school aged 16. She enjoyed school but left with no qualifications, which she now regrets. The desire to get married distracted her from getting better results. She does not recall careers advice at school.

She has done a number of part time jobs and has done voluntary work. She has done First Aid and Food Hygiene courses at work. She feels that she was encouraged to do training. She is doing training skills for mid-day supervisors but is not doing the written work, "but I look, listen. I am finding it's interesting to be there, I have not time to do the qualification because of family life".

**Ideal Job:** My dream job would be?

**15 Name: Jane N.**

**Age: 40**

Jane left school at 16. She did not enjoy school and thought it was very boring. She achieved some CSEs and is ambiguous about whether she wishes she had achieved better results, "Yes and no". She thinks the subjects were uninteresting – not creative enough.

She went straight into employment from school, working mainly as a sales assistant, then as a debt collector for 7-8 years. She did no training at work; work was mostly sub-contracted and she was not encouraged to do training. Jane recently moved to Suffolk and is unemployed at present. She wants to get back into a job

as soon as possible but, long-term, wants to undertake training which will lead to a more fulfilling career. She is now doing IT training, whilst looking for a job.

**Ideal Job:** Forensics with the police force or working with the less fortunate. Jane has applied to be a special constable.

**16 Name: Mr B.  
Age: 44**

Mr B left school at 16 and started work straight from school. He felt he did not revise properly and wished he had achieved better qualifications. He also mentioned that he received very little careers advice at school. He has undertaken some training at work and worked for several local employers, one in particular for 8 years and one for 6½ years. He is presently doing some IT training in Ipswich

**Ideal Job:** Does not really have one but being a professional pool player would be nice

**16 Name: Tony S.  
Age: 25**

Tony did not enjoy school and he was not taught in a way that he enjoyed. He felt bored and got into trouble. As a result, he was imprisoned, aged 15. He missed GCSE exams and therefore has no qualifications; he got into trouble at a vital time in his life.

Tony served 13 months in prison, where he received no training or careers advice. He now wishes that he had worked harder at school and that he had gained some qualifications earlier. He is trying to make up for that now. Tony is living at the YMCA hostel and is finding the keyworker there very supportive.

Tony has worked in the building trade. He enjoys that, as he is good at practical work. He did no formal training at work and was not encouraged to do so by his employers. He was only encouraged to learn what was necessary in order to do the job.

**Ideal Job:** Professional footballer

More realistically he would like to work for a big building company and to travel. He likes to work with his hands and wants to be realistic about what type of job he can get.

**18 Name: Dwayne  
Age: 25**

Dwayne left school at 16 with no qualifications because he wasn't put in for any exams. He didn't find school a good experience because they didn't teach very well.

He now wishes that he had achieved qualifications. He went straight into unskilled work after school and has only received training necessary to do the actual job. He now is undertaking some Skills for Life and IT training at CSV Media.

**Ideal Job: ?**

**19 Name: Philip  
Age: 50**

Philip left school at 15 with no qualifications. He did not find school a good experience. He hated school and was not interested in learning. He supposes that he wished he had achieved better qualifications. However, at the time, he paid no attention to learning – just not interested.

Philip did not go straight into work from school. Over the years he has had numerous jobs – “too numerous to mention”. His most recent job was as care assistant at a school in Herts. He loves working with children but didn't always get on with colleagues.

**Ideal Job:** “Anything, earning plenty of money for doing very little”

**20 Name: Jessica  
Age: 16**

Jessica left school aged 15. On the whole, school was a good experience, “as you learn things you might need in the future”. However, Jessica regrets having left school at 15 and wishes that she had stayed on to do A-levels. Bullying by other pupils deterred her from continuing at school, “people at school picking on me and causing trouble, so I didn't want to go to Harwich sixth form”. Jessica does not recall much careers advice. She did not go straight into a job but later worked as a chambermaid for 4 months. She is unemployed at the moment but is looking for work.

**Ideal Job:** "My dream job would be either working with Down Syndrome people or as a holiday rep., or something with computers".

## SUMMARY

Most of those interviewed are either considering undergoing training or have already started *Skills for Life* training. Most of this client group show some regret at not having studied harder and thus not having achieved more while at school. They now realise that they need qualifications in order to enable them to find a more rewarding occupation. On the whole, they aspire to meaningful and rewarding employment rather than to higher wages.

The reasons for lack of achievement varied. Some individuals felt disengaged at school and just wanted to leave as soon as possible. Some, mainly older clients, went to work straight from school and were not encouraged to take exams. They often had neither the opportunity nor the incentive to gain qualifications at work. The lack of clear careers advice was a theme among all age groups.

Of those who have now undertaken learning, several were taking the opportunity of redundancy to gain new skills, while a number of women became interested in learning through involvement with their children's education. On the whole they had a sense of optimism and an enthusiasm to continue learning and find more rewarding employment.

## 10 CONCLUSION

Basic Skills/*Skills for Life* covers a very broad spectrum. It encompasses a range from those with no numeracy and literacy skills to those who have undertaken learning but have not achieved qualifications. In addition, the provision that is available varies widely in its aims and outcomes. However, there is a feeling among those engaged in Skills for Life provision that the requirements of those with greatest need are not being met. Long term continuous funding is needed in order to provide on-going support to those learners with greatest need because it takes time to build up a rapport between learners and tutors.

Interviews with those who have not attained qualifications indicate that most now regret this and want to gain qualifications in order to find more rewarding employment. A worrying aspect for the future is the growing number of school exclusions. Providers who are dealing with those who have been excluded are concerned that provision for this group is insufficient, which bodes ill for their future employment prospects.

There is consensus that the support of employers is very important in encouraging employees to learn. This emerged from interviews with providers, employers and those who have Skills for Life requirements. Employers who had utilised Skills for Life training were positive and enthusiastic about the benefits. Likewise learners who had enrolled on Skills for Life courses were often hooked back into learning and expressed the desire to continue.

The main points to come out of this survey were:

- There is not a wide understanding of the term *Skills for Life*; employers when interviewed often did not understand the term
- There is still a stigma attached to having difficulty with literacy and to a lesser extent numeracy
- *Skills for Life* needs are often hidden out of embarrassment or shame and employers are often reluctant to address the matter.
- Employers need help and guidance from independent and sympathetic brokers who can relate to their needs rather than to government targets.
- There is an ongoing difficulty with engaging learners, particularly those in the hardest to reach categories.
- It is a concern that funding is not being aimed at learners with difficulties at the Entry levels because their problems are more intractable.
- There is some good provision but there is a need to ensure that changes in funding do not result in loss of provision that cannot be replaced.
- Much funding is now aimed at the attainment of the level 1 and 2 Literacy and Numeracy tests which are suitable for a large proportion of learners but not all and funding needs to reflect this fact. As has been mentioned "one size does not fit all"<sup>36</sup>.

## 11 RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is general agreement among providers and voluntary groups that learning needs to be more flexible
- Funding for 1:1 support is important to help those in the hardest to reach categories
- Funding for 3 hour initial assessment was particularly mentioned as useful by workplace providers
- Independent brokerage in order to engage employers, especially SMEs
- Need to engage 'hard to reach employers'. It was noted by the BCC Taskforce that the Employer Training Pilots did not engage the hard to reach employers.
- Need for co-ordination of *Skills for Life* services, possibly by provision of a helpline which is manned by qualified advisors with an understanding of what is required
- Teaching materials need to be relevant to learners
- Need to listen to employers to ensure that their employees get appropriate training
- Ensure tutors are up-to-date with their training
- Adequate provision of knowledgeable tutors
- Better communication between Skills for Life providers, opportunities to network, to influence and learn from each other.

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<sup>36</sup> Extract from an interview with a voluntary provider

## 12.1 APPENDIX 1 - SKILLS FOR LIFE PROVISION

### ESSEX

Colchester Institute – Colchester & Clacton

North Essex Adult Community College

- Tendring Adult Community College - Clacton, Harwich and Frinton
  - Colchester Adult Community College - Grey Friars and the Wilson Marriage Centre
- Learning Shop - Colchester

### SUFFOLK

Adult & Community Learning (Skills for Life)

Adult and Community Learning - Parenting and skills for families

Training Matters – Workplace Skills for Life provider

Otley College

Suffolk College

West Suffolk College

NACRO, Ipswich

Anglia Care Trust (Suffolk Single Gateway project)

The People Project

#### Out of Area:

Lowestoft College

Aquila Computer Services

Haverhill Learning Centre

YMCA Training, Lowestoft

### LEARN DIRECT CENTRES

#### ESSEX

Blackwater Training Limited

Clacton Library (link)

Colchester Learning Shop

Colchester Library

TBG Learning Colchester

TBG Learning Ltd Tendring

Walton Library Learning Centre (Link)

Wilson Marriage Centre

Colchester Road, Maldon, Essex

Station Road, Clacton on Sea

1A St Nicholas Street, Colchester

Trinity Square, Colchester

Portal House, 27 Southway, Colchester

03-105 Carnarvon Road, Clacton-on-Sea

52 High Street, Walton on the Naze

Barrack Street, Colchester

#### SUFFOLK

Cameo Network Services

Ipswich County Library

Ipswich CSV Media Clubhouse

Ipswich ITeC Services Limited

Mainstream Suffolk (link)

Oasis Centre (Link Centre)

RTT Training Services Ltd

SIT Learning Point (Link)

Suffolk College learndirect Learning Centre

Suffolk Institute of Technology (Link)

The Foyer for Ipswich

Woodbridge Library

Suffolk Carers

91 Gainsborough Road, Felixstowe

Northgate Street, Ipswich

120 Princes Street, Ipswich

Felaw Maltings, Felaw Street, Ipswich

Building 5, Bentwaters Park,

Rendlesham, Woodbridge

1 Portman Road, Ipswich

Gippeswyk Hall, Gippeswyk Avenue

Ipswich

Ipswich Station, Burrell Road, Ipswich

Rope Walk, Ipswich

Upper High Street, Ipswich

Richmond House, Star Lane, Ipswich

New Street, Woodbridge

Claydon, Ipswich

**Employers interviewed:**

**SUFFOLK:**

Brinor International Shipping & Forwarding

Adnams Plc

ABX Logistics

Aldeburgh Hotels

Anglesea Heights Nursing Home

Best Western Ufford Park Golf & Leisure

Coes Retail Clothing

Creative Cosmetics Ltd

Suffolk Coastal

Foxearth Lodge

Sue Ryder Care

Suffolk Heritage Housing Association

Thornbank Residential care Home

**ESSEX:**

Balkerne Care Homes

Little Clacton Resource Centre

Cadman Contracts

C A Blackwell

Billam Contractors

Hatfields Furniture

Surefields School

**Outside of area (large employers):**

Center Parks

Padleys Chickens

## PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

In addition to interviews with providers, employers and clients who have not achieved level 2 qualifications, we had personal meetings with individuals from the following organisations:

Anglia Care Trust  
Business Link  
Careers Development Group – Power to Work Project  
CSV Media  
Essex & Suffolk Learning Hub  
Essex and Suffolk Adult & Community Learning  
Essex and Suffolk Libraries  
Essex LSC  
INBIZ  
JobCentre Plus  
Step Employment Training  
Suffolk Carers  
Suffolk IAG  
Suffolk LSC  
Sure Start  
The People Project, Signposting Service  
UNISON  
WEA

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## GLOSSARY

ACL	Adult & Community Learning
ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
BCC	British Chambers of Commerce
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ESF	European Social Fund

ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
IAG	Information, Advice & Guidance
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IiC	Investing in Communities
LSC	Learning & Skills Council
SME	Small & Medium Sized Enterprises
ULR	Union Learning Reps

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