Adult basic skills

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contents

Introduction 2

1. Overview of findings: approaches and impacts 4

2. The impact of adult basic skills development on individuals and employers 12

3. The development of basic financial capability skills for adults 46

4. The development of employability skills for adults 76

5. Adult basic skills development and family learning 122

6. Using flexible learning as a medium to develop adult basic skills 152

7. The development of basic skills through work-based learning 198

8. Conclusion: implications for policy and practice 232

Appendix 1: On policy 238

Appendix 2: Methodology for the review 271

Appendix 3: Impacts – about the research evidence 274

Appendix 4: Financial capability – about the research evidence 280

Appendix 5: Employability – about the research evidence 285

Appendix 6: Adult basic skills and family learning – about the research evidence 291

Appendix 7: Flexible learning – about the research evidence 296

Appendix 8: Work-based learning – about the research evidence 302

Index 307

i

introduction

Pippa Lord and Shona MacLeod

The current global economic instability, changing labour market, and shifting face of qualifications and skills provide challenging but ripe circumstances in which to invest in the UK's skills – and particularly the improvement of adult basic skills.

Boosting the skills of adults functioning at the lowest levels, and addressing poor literacy, language and numeracy continues to present a challenge for the government (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2009). The UK's *Ambition 2020: world class skills and jobs for the UK* (UKCES, May 2009) sets out the UK Commission for Employment and Skills' (UKCES) goal of the UK attaining a place in the top eight (that is the top quartile) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations in jobs, productivity and skills by 2020. This means improving the position on low-level skills – the UK is ranked 17th amongst OECD nations in 2006 data (UKCES, 2009, p.5) – and, in particular, improving functional literacy and numeracy skills.

In 2009, CfBT Education Trust decided to commission the International Review Programme, a research programme to review the international evidence on a range of themes related to adult basic skills and their improvement, to provide a timely insight on how these challenges may be addressed in practice.

1.1

About the International Review Programme

The International Review Programme comprises six literature reviews which were undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) between September 2009 and May 2010 for CfBT, with the purpose of informing continuous improvements in the teaching and learning of adult basic skills.

In the context of this work, ‘basic skills’ covers the ability to read, write and speak English, and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society. It also spans basic skills which are acquired for different purposes (such as financial capability) or through different modes of learning (such as work-based learning).

Through reviewing the UK and international evidence, this CfBT-commissioned International Review Programme highlights what approaches are being, and have been, taken to improve adult basic skills. It looks at what works well, and what still needs to be done to increase the ambition, aspiration and achievement of employers, employees, learners and trainees as well as those who make up the potential current and future workforce. This evidence suggests the most effective approaches in terms of improving adults’ basic skills.

The programme looks at how adults’ basic skills can be improved through family, work-based and flexible learning. It also looks at two specific components within basic skills: financial capability and employability skills, and how the teaching and learning of these specific components can be improved. The impacts of developing basic skills are considered for individuals and employers as well as for society as a whole. The reviews are organised into the following chapters:

2. The impact of adult basic skills development on individuals and employers.
3. The development of basic financial capability for adults
4. The development of employability skills
5. Adult basic skills and family learning
6. Using flexible learning as a medium to develop adult basic skills
7. The development of basic skills through work-based learning

The final chapter of this book provides a commentary on the implications for policy of the programme’s findings, set in the context of recent policy announcements.

The same methodological approach has been used for each review (details are included in appendix A2). Naturally, different chapters looking at the same sources do not necessarily reach the same conclusions, as is apparent in the chapters’ findings. The chapters were researched and written in a staggered way, over a nine-month period, and reflect any policy changes during this period.

A description of the most relevant literature selected for review and inclusion in each chapter is provided in appendices A3 to A8 (along with information about the nature and focus of the evidence audited prior to the selection of this key literature).

In addition, details of the policies and strategies relevant to each chapter are presented in a combined section in appendix A1.

1

Overview of findings: approaches and impacts

Kay Kinder and Shona MacLeod

This is an overview of the findings from each of the six literature reviews. As the chapter titles make clear, different foci are under investigation during this research programme. The first chapter, a cross-cutting study, specifically focuses on auditing evidence of the impacts of basic skills training on individuals and employers. It also highlights the factors associated with such impacts. Three of the chapters look at the different means by which adult basic skills training can be delivered (chapters 5, 6 and 7), and two focus on components of adult basic skills beyond numeracy, literacy and ICT skills (chapters 3 and 4). Each of these reviews investigates the evidence from the literature on policy, impacts, approaches to delivery, and what has been said about the effectiveness of basic skills training and pathways to improvement.

Despite these different starting points, a great deal of overlap existed across the six themed chapters in relation to the evidence of what constitutes effective practice and what impacts can be achieved.

1.1 Effective approaches:

what works

Eight key principles or features of effective practice recur across the six chapters, thus emerging as the core elements to be considered in the planning and delivery of all adult basic skills training:

- recruitment and retention strategies for learners
- embedded provision tailored to individual need
- the assessment and diagnosis of need
- progression opportunities for learners
- inter-agency and stakeholder collaboration and coordination that includes employers in all stages
- qualified trainers with their own professional development opportunities
- resources and funding
- underpinning policy.

1.1.1 Recruitment and retention strategies for learners

Recruitment should be planned, with publicity and strategies geared to the varied target audiences. Proactively raising awareness through flyers, websites and taster sessions should be considered. The use of outreach community workers or learning champions can help recruit those who are hard to reach. Hooks to encourage sign-up are important, including offering basic skills in the guise of other learning. Timing (to coincide with key life events, decisions and transitions) can be effective. Recruitment should be underpinned by a supportive learning culture. This is particularly relevant for employers offering work-based learning because low attendance in work-based learning is attributed to organisational issues such as the lack of a learning culture. Retention can be improved by having an accessible and welcoming location, and considering other needs such as transport, cost of materials, health issues, childcare and meals.

1.1.2 Embedded training tailored to individual need

Embedded training integrates or links basic skills learning into a broader curriculum, making it relevant to the real world and participants' everyday lives. The value of an embedded approach is cited across the chapters in this book. There should be a focus on the needs of individual learners, preferred learning styles and goals (taking account of cultural backgrounds and expectations). Courses should include individual learning plans, tailored support and mentoring so that those with varying needs can achieve the skills necessary to enter the labour market. Other key and recurring features across the chapters include informal learning approaches, flexibility, a fluid and dynamic course content, and using collaborative learning activities.

1.1.3 The assessment and diagnosis of need

Initial assessment and diagnosis of an individual’s basic skills needs (and any needs related to broader issues) effectively tailor the training received. Tools (including online versions) and services to help tutors, employers and learners make this diagnosis are important. These assessments can be embedded in other activities. In conjunction with such assessments, learners should be helped to ‘learn how to learn’. Similarly, regularly assessing progress is also important.

1.1.4 Progression opportunities for learners

Providing opportunities for learners to progress on to further learning features as effective practice in all the chapters. Progression routes need to be clearly signposted to learners and can be promoted through various channels. Employers, too, need to offer such opportunities following a work-based basic skills course. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services are critical, and the content of basic skills training should include opportunities to discuss next steps and have trainers facilitating access to further learning. The end of a course is another crucial time for providing individualised support and guidance.

Furthermore, the need for clearer routes for employees to progress in terms of employability and developing their employability skills is highlighted. When learners receive IAG services whilst engaged in work-based learning, they are most likely to be satisfied with their current learning programme and progress to further learning.

Learners receiving accreditation and certification open up progression opportunities, including transition to employment, career advancement and further study. A modular course structure is cited as a successful way of delivering progression in learning, while other options are those which prepare learners for work such as mentoring, shadowing and internships. Supporting employees’ opportunities to progress in learning is noted as a key issue for employers, especially in work-based learning.

1.1.5 Inter-agency and stakeholder collaboration and coordination, including employers

The need for collaborative working between those involved in coordinating, supporting and delivering basic skills training to adults through flexible and internet-based learning was a theme in several of the reviews.

All chapters highlight the quality of partnership working as a key factor in the success of basic skills training, which will invariably involve a range of agencies. Proactive and positive partnership working is commonly cited in the key literature, both as a driver of the effective planning and delivery of learning provision, and as a critical factor in the successful engagement of learners.

It is acknowledged that multi-agency projects create challenges in terms of coordination and communication. Clarifying roles and responsibilities (perhaps by written protocols or agreements) at an early stage is advisable.

Inter-agency liaison at the planning stage avoids duplication of effort, identifies gaps in training provision and ensures widened access. A one-stop-shop model or co-location of services typifies such stakeholder coordination, where more than one agency is on hand to provide support across a range of matters including finance, personal issues and gaining employment. A keyworker role may, similarly, provide the procedural knowledge and skills to refer learners to those agencies offering appropriate support for any associated problems impeding success in basic skills learning. Collaboration is enhanced when resources and assessment are shared across a range of agencies and opportunities for joint training are available.

Employer engagement and championing of basic skills training is particularly important, and this should include employers having a role in determining a course's design, content and goals.

1.1.6 Qualified staff with their own professional development opportunities

The chapters pinpoint the qualities and skill-sets of trainers as key elements of effective training. The evidence shows certain skills, or sets of skills, are conducive to effectively teaching basic skills. Interpersonal and communication skills are particularly important, in addition to more technical skills like being able to facilitate independent learning; understanding how flexible and distant learning can be most effective; and being able to address different ways of learning.

The importance of being able to develop positive and trusting relations with learners is often repeated in the chapters. Other significant interpersonal qualities include being able to create a positive, welcoming, supportive, non-threatening atmosphere for learning; being empathetic and understanding; and respecting cultural differences and local contexts.

Knowledge of workplace or industry cultures and discourse is also relevant. Trainers should have the skills to assess and respond to individuals' needs, and the ability to adapt teaching approaches to these needs. A number of sources in the literature called for the development of policies supporting the delivery of family learning. This was felt to be particularly important given the perceived lack of clarity about the concept of family learning.

Cross-sector working may be a new professional skill, which, in itself, requires training. The need for appropriate and sufficient professional development opportunities also surfaced in the literature: it was noted that qualified teachers have more impact on learner outcomes. Trainers from small organisations, including those from the third sector, also require on-going professional development. The importance of stability in staffing is also recognised.

Having the right staff in place is critical to the success of an inititative. Staff need appropriate levels of experience, knowledge of the subject area, and knowledge of the client group. Success of a training programme often depends on the ability of the individual trainer rather than a particular model of delivery.

1.1.7 Resources and funding

References to funding feature across the chapters. Adequate, stable and sustained funding is required to ensure successful delivery and positive outcomes. Some chapters note that the cost of basic skills training (for the organisations delivering it, the individuals participating in it, and particularly for the vulnerable and hard-to-reach) is often underestimated. The Ofsted review of family learning programmes reported that three-quarters of training providers felt that funders did not recognise the high cost of working with vulnerable groups.

Overall, the availability of funding is scarce in comparison to the level and diversity of need. Funding shortfalls result in a lack of high quality materials and resources (particularly if a course involves IT). This impedes success. Other consequences of scarce funding are an inability to offer follow-up courses and places restricted to those learners with the most chance of success. This is particularly the case where funding criteria are associated with achieving targets within short timescales. Even those courses which are successful are highly susceptible to changes in resourcing.

Successful provision requires courses to be of sufficient length to ensure positive impacts, which again has funding implications. The literature variously suggests widening the network of funding sources and legislative support for basic skills training programmes to ensures adequate resources and ongoing financial support.

1.1.8 Underpinning policy

All the chapters reference the significance of policies underpinning their particular aspect of basic skills, and, without exception, they highlight some deficit associated with the policy context. Variously, the chapters reveal the need for:

- clarity of the meaning and purpose of basic skills (and especially approaches such as family and online learning)
- a national strategy
- strategic champions and influencing bodies
- strategic planning and systematic action
- specific policy documentation.

Inevitably this requires significant investment to ensure an adequately resourced national model. The involvement of employers in policy development, design and delivery is seen as very important.

The tendency for programmes to cover basic skills alongside other, broader skills development may explain a lack of policy on basic skills training in the workplace.

1.2 Impacts of adult basic skills development

The impact of developing adults' basic skills levels encompasses both the 'harder' outcomes of progression towards entering the labour market (or obtaining employment) and the 'softer' outcomes associated with improvements in quality of life and general wellbeing (often more nuanced and harder to quantify). This diversity of impact extends to outcomes for different groups with an interest in the improvement of basic skills, as well as those experienced by individual learners (for which the most evidence is available). Other groups experiencing an impact, most commonly identified across the six chapters, are employers, learning providers, families, communities and wider society.

1.2.1 Impacts for individual adult learners

Improvements in learners' self-confidence, self-esteem and personal capacity to effect change in their lives are the most common impacts for adults engaged in basic skills training. This enhanced personal capacity manifests itself in related attitudes and behaviours ranging from higher motivation and self-directedness to an improved sense of self-awareness, resilience (especially among women and those experiencing multiple disadvantage), self-efficacy and self-advocacy.

Participation in family learning programmes significantly increases confidence in the ability to learn. Increased self-esteem enables adults to engage in self-advocacy and risk taking, which is necessary for learning.

Commonly, adults who have taken steps to develop their basic skills also experience several positive changes in their attitudes to learning and the value they place on their new skills, as evidenced in all six chapters. Impacts include greater confidence in their ability to learn; increased motivation; higher likelihood of participating in further learning (sometimes, progressing to further or higher education); and a clearer appreciation of the benefits of basic skills, particularly in terms of literacy skills.

In conjunction with changes in attitudes towards learning and higher levels of literacy and numeracy (an impact which is amplified amongst those furthest from the labour market), other skills-related impacts can be anticipated. These include better meta-cognitive skills, such as planning and self-management, and increased ability to apply literacy and numeracy skills to everyday activities such as reading and writing numerical information. Learners' gains in confidence and self-direction can be impressive, and those with the lowest levels of aptitude in basic skills are seen to gain the most in terms of, for example, confidence and ability to complete a task.

A common theme throughout all six chapters is the impact that improved basic skills have in supporting adults to become more employable and enter the labour market. Adults' development of their basic skills strengthens their capacity to identify employment opportunities by widening their options for looking for work; enhancing their self-belief of being nearer to getting a job; and sharpening their focus on developing clear career aims. It also increases their likelihood of obtaining employment as a result of improved core employability skills (such as communication, teamworking, problem-solving and IT skills) and other valuable skills such as the ability to plan ahead and budget effectively.

Participation in basic skills learning also leads to several benefits for those adults already in employment and, most commonly, these are centred around increased job satisfaction; improved performance at work (where this learning takes place in a work context); better access to employment or further learning opportunities; and a greater likelihood of sustaining a job or improved job status.

1.2.2 Impacts for employers

Improvement in workforce relations is the key impact for employers as a result of their employees' enhanced basic skills, referred to in three of the six chapters, particularly when employers have supported the training taking place in the workplace. The chapters highlight:

- employees' more positive attitudes towards their employers
- managers being more supportive of their employees as a result of seeing the benefits of increased confidence at work
- increased loyalty and employee retention rates, leading to enhanced workforce stability.

Impacts on workforce productivity are also referenced, such as improved attendance at work; reduction in health and safety incidents; and increased employees' flexibility and capacity to engage in innovative practices.

1.2.3 Impacts for trainers

A number of impacts for trainers and learning providers are highlighted, especially in the chapters focusing on modes of delivering basic skills training for adults. These impacts all result from the process of engaging with adults during courses. As a result, learning approaches designed to be flexible for learners, or maximise their use of technology, are also useful mechanisms for the training and continuing professional development of trainers.

Family learning focusing on engaging parents or primary carers can lead to improved awareness of the teaching roles of others, and understanding and coordination between different providers in the education sector (early years, primary and tertiary levels).

Basic skills training delivered through flexible and internet-based learning can increase the skills of the trainer as well as those taking the course. A reciprocal learning process can develop between a trainer and learners as they actively exchange ICT skills and knowledge.

1.2.4 Impacts for families, communities and society

A notable theme across several chapters is the positive effect basic skills training can have on parental behaviour and attitudes, with advantageous impacts for children. Benefits include better family relationships generally, as well as more effective support for children doing homework (particularly literacy learning) and greater involvement of parents in their child's school leading to better home-school relations.

The benefit of adults' improved basic skills extends beyond family-focused impacts to encompass local communities and wider society. Recurrent in at least three of the chapters, these positive impacts comprise learners' increased opportunities to meet new people and broaden their social networks, as well as strengthen their awareness and respect for different cultural backgrounds. The cumulative effect of such individual benefits is higher levels of social inclusion and people supporting each other within a community.

1.2.5 Impact focus of interventions

Evidence across all chapters illustrates the knock-on effect of learning basic skills, resulting in significant personal, social and financial developments for learners as well as beneficial effects for a number of different groups with an interest in the improvement of basic skills. The interdependence of such impacts is very apparent: some effects (such as learners' increased confidence and self-esteem) are able to generate another level of outcomes for those individuals as well as for others including the learning provider and employers.

Learning providers' understanding of these possible impacts before a course begins is very important for making sure its value to learners and other stakeholders is maximised. The following principles influence a course's impact, and are important considerations during the design and planning stage.

- Adult learners understanding the possible benefits of attending a course helps them to make an informed choice about participating. This is known to affect take-up.
- A focus on social capital impacts (such as better social networks) can drive human capital impacts (improved knowledge and skills).
- Defined and agreed target impacts help to mitigate the risk of incongruence between the impacts desired by learners and those expected by the government or learning providers (which, in reality, do tend to be different).

Looking at these issues transparently and early on in the planning of a course is particularly relevant in the current climate: imperatives to ensure cost effectiveness and efficiency of adult basic skills training are now clearer than at any time in the last ten years of delivery.

2

The impact of adult basic skills development on individuals and employers

Pippa Lord, Ruth Hart and Iain Springate

2.1 About the review

This review looks at the impacts of basic skills development on individuals and employers, and the factors affecting such impacts. It investigates the training programmes supporting basic skills, and identifies key messages for learning providers, trainers, employers and researchers.

2.2 Focus of this review

This review explores evidence from recent UK and international literature on:

- the impacts of adult basic skills development on individuals (that is adult basic skills learners) and employers
- the factors affecting impacts and what could be done to increase those impacts
- the training, programmes and interventions supporting the development of adult basic skills.

Numerous studies provide evidence of the correlation between basic skills levels, and employability and earnings (for example, Machin *et al*., 2001; Vignoles *et al*., 2008). Bynner and Parsons (1997) showed how basic skills have a positive impact on participation in public activities, and physical and mental health, while the lack of them can influence family breakdown. There is also growing evidence of the benefits of improving basic skills in adulthood, and the impacts these can have on individuals, employers and, ultimately, the economy, for example, as summarised recently by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC, 2009). It is this body of literature that this review considers.

2.3

Some definitions

2.3.1 What do we mean by low basic skills?

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001) sets out targets, measures and levels for literacy and numeracy curricula, following five levels:

- entry level 1
- entry level 2
- entry level 3
- level 1
- level 2.

Level 1 is seen as a key threshold of attainment, roughly equivalent to level 4 (that is GCSE grades D–G) in the National Curriculum. Level 2 is equivalent to GCSE grades A*–C. Low basic skills are seen as those lower than level 1.

2.3.2 What do we mean by impacts?

Impacts include the outcomes, effects and benefits for individuals and employers. Importantly, this includes impacts around 'life chances', including those as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1982) indicators of socioeconomic wellbeing, and on the economy:

> *The Skills for Life strategy takes as its starting point the Moser report (Working Group on Post-School Basic Skills, 1999) estimate that 7 million adults are functionally illiterate and aims to improve the basic skills levels of 750,000 of these adults by 2004 and a further 750,000 by 2007. The assumption is that very low levels of basic skills have a major impact on individuals' life-chances as well as on the economy, and that moving people across this particular threshold of attainment should be a major priority.* Ananiadou *et al*., 2003, p. 11

The literature includes discussion of social capital and human capital impacts. Social capital impacts are concerned with the relationships and connections that learners have with social networks, and which lead to more involvement in society. Social capital is defined as 'the networks, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within and amongst groups' (see Balatti *et al*., 2006, p. 6; and similar comments in Edwards, 2004, p. 5). There is further discussion of this in section 2.4.2.

Human capital outcomes are those related to gains in knowledge and skills (in this case in literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills), perhaps measured by qualifications gained and/or by earnings and economic outcomes. See sections 2.4.4–2.4.8 for a further discussion on this.

2.4

Impacts on individuals

2.4.1 Overview of the evidence

There is a substantial body of evidence on the impacts for an individual of developing adult basic skills. All 23 selected sources provide evidence of this. The impacts can be grouped into seven categories.

- Personal and interpersonal skills and everyday lives: this includes soft impacts such as confidence, and the impacts on home and everyday life, and social wellbeing (17 sources) (section 2.4.2).
- Attitudes towards and participation in learning: there can be increased confidence to learn, motivation to learn further, and progression to other learning opportunities (14 sources) (section 2.4.3).
- Knowledge and skills: in particular, better literacy and numeracy skills, and also information and communications technology (ICT) skills, and the confidence to use those skills (15 sources) (section 2.4.4).
- Qualifications: increased course enrolment and completion rates, as well as actual qualifications gained (eight sources) (section 2.4.5).
- Employability: improved job skills, confidence at work, and increased motivation to search for a job (12 sources) (section 2.4.6).
- Employment: the move made from unemployment to employment, job security, and job promotion (14 sources) (section 2.4.7)
- Earnings: increases in wages (seven sources) (section 2.4.8).

Taken as a whole, the body of evidence is convincing. Whilst for the softer impacts the evidence tends to be based on self-reported perceptions (with some triangulation, and longitudinal and comparison studies), the number of sources (and indeed the number of individuals) reporting these impacts is substantial and, hence, compelling.

Qualifications, employment and economic gains are reported more quantitatively or through systematic review, and, in the selected sources, the evidence is confident but measured. Key caveats must be noted.

- The effect on long-term employment impacts is not much known (most studies, even the longitudinal ones, have taken place over fairly short timescales and within the immediacy of an intervention or input).
- Some studies find that whilst there are employment impacts, these are not statistically significant compared to comparison groups.
- These impacts must be seen within the context of the adult basic skills intervention experienced. Section 2.6 explores how the nature of an intervention affects its impact on individuals.

2.4.2 Impacts on personal and interpersonal skills and lives

Impacts for individuals frequently include soft outcomes, for example personal and interpersonal outcomes, impacts on home and everyday life, and social wellbeing outcomes. Seventeen of the reviewed sources provide evidence of these types of outcomes, mainly via self-reported perceptions, but some through longitudinal and comparison data.

The most frequently reported personal impacts for individuals include:

- increased self-confidence (for example, Balatti *et al*., 2006; Cutter *et al*., 2004; Skaliotis *et al*., 2007; Tett *et al*., 2006; Wolf, 2008) and the confidence to try new things (for example, Frontline Consultants, 2006)
- increased self-esteem, self-worth and positive self-image (Goodison *et al*., 2004; Hamilton and Wilson, 2005; Metcalf *et al*., 2009)
- enhanced belief in own abilities and sense of personal achievement (Dench *et al*., 2006; Evans and Waite, 2008)
- reduced sense of embarrassment or stigma about having low levels of basic skills (Frontline Consultants, 2006; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008)
- better physical and mental health (Metcalf *et al*., 2009; Skaliotis *et al*., 2007)
- overall more positive attitudes towards life (Terry, 2006).

Impacts on individuals' home and everyday lives include:

- feeling better able to help their children with their homework, including reading with their children (Evans and Waite, 2008; Frontline Consultants, 2006; Peters *et al*., 2003; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008), and increased confidence to engage with their child's school and talk to teachers (Skaliotis *et al*., 2007)
- increased confidence and capabilities to undertake everyday tasks involving literacy and numeracy, such as household budgeting, checking bills, telling the time, emailing, understanding supermarket three-for-two offers, and using bus timetables (Peters *et al*., 2003; Skaliotis *et al*., 2007, Warner and Vorhaus, 2008); these are defined as 'personal effectiveness outcomes' by White (2003)
- greater ability to contribute to family life (Tett *et al*., 2006; HM Inspectorate of Education, 2005).

Specific impacts relating to social wellbeing (in addition to those above, which undoubtedly also contribute to individuals' social wellbeing) include:

- increased social networks and socialisation, and reduced isolation (Metcalf *et al*., 2009; Frontline Consultants, 2006), including 'getting out of the house more' (Warner and Vorhaus, 2008)
- increased confidence to take up volunteering opportunities and engage in society (Frontline Consultants, 2006; Hamilton and Wilson, 2005).

Despite being described as soft impacts, personal and interpersonal impacts are by far the most frequently reported, and have the potential to knock on to many other impacts. Indeed, some research shows that these are pre-requisites for individuals being able to maximise other learning impacts (for example, Balatti *et al*., 2006). On the other hand, Warner and Vorhaus (2008) say these softer impacts come about as a result of the transfer of learning from class.

Box 2.1 has quotes from some of the literature on the impact of personal and interpersonal outcomes.

Box 2.1 Personal and interpersonal outcomes: the most important impacts?

From a longitudinal survey involving 567 learners at 53 workplaces

For all types of learner, by far the most frequently reported outcome was a general increase in personal confidence, with two-thirds reporting that they are also more confident at work than before. Wolf (2008, p. 3)

From case study research on two adult literacy programmes in Canada

To several learners and their parents/significant others, the personal improvements that accrued from programme participation were just as important as their academic successes. Terry (2006, p. 3)

From an evaluation of the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) strategy

Overall, learners were most likely to identify personal life as being the aspect of their lives where they had experienced the greatest difference […] and by the second interview statistically significant numbers of learners, in particular women and older learners, had become more confident about making enquiries over the phone, joining a group of strangers, speaking up in a meeting and being interviewed. Tett *et al.* (2006, p. 47)

In inspections of Scottish ALN partnerships

Many learners spoke of the impact of literacy learning on their lives. They mentioned the pleasure of being able to read books, understand labels when shopping, interpret cooking instructions and cook for themselves and the family, prepare for and contribute to meetings in the community, and use time productively rather than spending entire days watching television. Many learners were pleased now to be able to help their children and grandchildren with homework. HM Inspectorate of Education (2005)

For some key groups, these personal and social outcomes are extremely important. For prisoners, being able to read and write more confidently means they are better able to keep in touch with their families (Warner and Vorhaus, 2008). Note the direction of transfer here, from gaining skills to personal outcomes. Section 2.4.4 has further discussion on this.

For learners of English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL), improved confidence in their communication skills impacts on their role as parents, their ability to carry out everyday tasks, their emotional wellbeing, and their confidence in accessing services (Skaliotis *et al*., 2007). As a result, the authors suggested such impacts also lead to greater social inclusion overall.

Some research has explored the impacts of adult basic skills development in terms of the OECD (1982) indicators of socioeconomic wellbeing, namely health, education and learning, employment and quality of working life, time and leisure, command over goods and services (where individuals have the skills they need to access goods and services such as finding information about health services they need), physical environment, social environment, and personal safety. In Balatti *et al.* (2006) adults' social environment and command over goods and services were identified as the most common socioeconomic outcomes. Furthermore, individuals who improve their basic skills in adulthood are more likely to own their own home, have savings, and are less likely to be on benefits than those who do not (Bynner and Parsons, 2006).

Drawing on a number of sources of evidence from the wider audit, as well as one of the selected sources (Balatti *et al*., 2006), Box 2.2 highlights the importance of considering social capital impacts. These are important because 'improvements to literacy and numeracy can lead to improvements in the quality of life even where there is no change in employment status or income' (Metcalf *et al*., 2009, p. 16).

Box 2.2 Spotlight on social capital impacts

The more social capital there is in society, measured by such indicators as network memberships and the extent of civic participation, the more cohesive and healthier a society is considered to be. Putnam (2000)

Moreover, social capital has been related to the production of human capital (for example, Coleman, 1988) with education and learning both producing and being produced by social capital. Not surprisingly therefore, the OECD (2001) has called for more research:

[…] clarifying the links between human and social capital to explore how social networks can promote the education of individuals and how education can promote social capital. (p. 70)

Source: Balatti et al. (2006, p. 8)

2.4.3 Impacts on attitudes towards, and participation in, learning

Impacts for individuals also frequently include changes in their attitudes towards, and participation in, learning. Fourteen of the reviewed sources provide evidence of these types of impacts, in terms of perceptions and actual progression rates onto other courses:

- Increased confidence to engage in learning, indeed, to re-engage in learning (an important impact where many adults with low basic skills have had negative experiences of schooling), for example, Evans and Waite, 2008; Frontline Consultants, 2006.
- Enhanced motivation to engage in further learning, and actively seek further training opportunities (for example, Goodison *et al*., 2004; Peters *et al*., 2003). Interestingly, both these examples involve ICT. In Goodison *et al.* (2004) adults often attributed their continuation with learning to the success they had had on ICT courses in UK online centres (a network of public, private, voluntary and community centres set up to provide public access to computers); and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants in Peters *et al.* (2003) were particularly motivated by job-related and ICT basic skills courses.

- Increased take-up of other learning or continuation with learning (for example, Cutter *et al*., 2004; Hamilton and Wilson, 2005), sometimes tracked over time or compared with a non-intervention group (for example, Metcalf *et al*., 2009; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008). Box 2.3 has examples of the kinds of learning opportunities participants moved onto.

Box 2.3 Spotlight on continuation with learning

Sideways progression?

The CLiCK project tested the impact of a further education college's community engagement model that aimed to give long-term support to hard-to-reach and vulnerable adult learners. Learners progressed from bite-sized learning to learning that supported and developed literacy and numeracy skills. Learners also progressed to other provision, although not always upwards. As found in research from the Netherlands (Van de Stege, 2003), learners often make several lateral moves before climbing upwards (Hamilton and Wilson, 2005).

Moving on, moving up?

By the fourth time learners were interviewed (Wave 4) for the longitudinal Skills for Life impact survey (Metcalf *et al*., 2009), there was a high rate of progression to other courses. Nearly three-quarters took another course, most commonly other basic skills courses or vocational courses. Some had progressed to higher-level courses. The authors concluded that Skills for Life is providing a stepping stone to continuing in education and training.

Moving out?

Warner and Vorhaus (2008) highlighted three types of progression: moving on to other forms of learning (progression), moving around within learning (continuing with the same or equivalent course), and moving out of learning. The latter can be a positive development if the learner has achieved what they wanted out of the learning experience. However, in some cases this is a negative move due to life circumstances and barriers.

It is interesting that, in the evidence, such impacts are rarely overtly construed as *learning to learn or lifelong learning,* except briefly in Metcalf *et al.* (2009) on the longitudinal survey of the impact of Skills for Life for college-based adult literacy and numeracy learners; and in Warner and Vorhaus (2008) who highlighted prisoners' self-reported improved ability to learn and feeling better able to plan to go to college or work after their release. Also in this study, the authors highlighted that some interviewees talked about 'changing from someone [who was] frightened of learning, to being a learner' (p. 44), although it is unclear how widespread such impacts were. Engagement in the lifelong learning agenda is, perhaps, a longer-term impact not uncovered by existing research. It may even be a higher-level impact (only attained once individuals have achieved their desired level of improvement in their skills and when their motivation for engaging in learning shifts towards the enjoyment of learning), not easily realised by adults with low levels of basic skills given their multiple and various barriers to learning.

2.4.4 Impacts on literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills

Fifteen of the selected sources provide evidence of the impacts on individuals' literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills. Developments in such skills are mainly evaluated via perceptions (aside from actual test scores or qualifications gained, see section 2.4.5). However, one of the selected sources explores the evidence more systematically. Brooks *et al.*'s (2004) systematic review of randomised controlled trials found a correlation between adult literacy and numeracy tuition, and literacy and numeracy developments. However, less than half of the 46 studies investigated either reported effect sizes or contained sufficient data to enable the researchers to calculate these. Six studies did show a statistically significant impact on literacy and numeracy knowledge for the intervention under consideration (for example, Cheek and Lindsey, 1994; Rich and Shepherd, 1993).

Overall, though, the evidence for this theme is variable in quality and depth, and less cohesive or coherent than the evidence for impacts on confidence, for example (also evaluated mainly by perceptions). A key issue when exploring individuals' literacy and numeracy developments (and possible reason for the variable evidence here) may be the actual measurement of learners' progress: do evaluators or course trainers measure what development takes place, in terms of where the learner started and how far they progress?

Gains in ICT skills are evident in the research.

- Low-skilled adults learning ICT skills in an informal space at work gained confidence. This had been set up for self-directed learning as the employer's formal learning was text-heavy and difficult for low-skilled employees to follow. As a consequence of the training, these employees were more able to book holidays online, send emails, and use ICT in the workplace (Evans and Waite, 2008).
- In an evaluation of UK online centres, Goodison *et al.* (2004) reported participants' gains in ICT skills, describing the outcomes as 'marketable ICT skills'. However, it was notable that many users were not digitally disadvantaged (just under half had a computer and internet access at home). Of those interviewed, many were relatively well-qualified, including having basic ICT skills, such as CLAIT (computer literacy and information technology) qualifications, and most were attending for vocational and employment reasons, and wanted to improve their job prospects, rather than social or recreational reasons.
- Practitioner-led research into how popular culture and ICT support the literacy activities of 16-19 year olds found that young people gain confidence in the accuracy of their work through using ICT (Joyce *et al.*, 2008). ICT also gives their work, and themselves, status (especially where they had previously struggled with literacy learning, but now found themselves ahead of the tutor with their ICT skills).
- However, in the systematic review of randomised controlled trials, Brooks *et al.* (2004) found that instruction using ICT could not yet be shown to produce more learning than conventional instruction.

A range of specific reading impacts is evident in the literature, associated with particular reading interventions and reading pedagogies, for example the *reading-to-learn* methodology trialled in a small-scale action research project in Australia (Joyce *et al.*, 2008). This is explained in Box 2.4.

Box 2.4 Australia: Spotlight on reading impacts

Improvements in adults' reading as a result of specific reading programmes and adult literacy interventions include:

- improvements in learners' grasp of grammatical structures (Joyce *et al*., 2008)
- improved story-telling
- improved factual writing competence
- positive effects on reading comprehension (Brooks *et al*., 2004)

Significant results were found with *reciprocal teaching* approaches, *a diagnostic prescriptive approach* and, for prisoners, *the community-building group process* accompanied by the Science Research Associates (SRA) reading scheme had a positive effect on reading.

Brooks *et al.*'s review (2004) found that auditory perception training on reading was not effective; learners in a control group made more progress than those on that specific training programme.

Interestingly, impacts on individuals' literacy and numeracy developments are rarely evaluated in isolation. Other impacts are equally, if not more, evident in the data (see Box 2.5). Even the randomised controlled trials investigated by Brooks *et al.* (2004) included qualitative elements to report wider benefits of the learning. Furthermore, some research suggests that those wider impacts must be viewed in tandem with the learning impacts, for example, Balatti *et al.* (2006). Certainly it is not hard to see the cyclical correlation here. Developing literacy or numeracy skills can *transfer* to enhanced skills and confidence for everyday life. And, the confidence and social networks gained through learning can help individuals maximise their new literacy or numeracy skills.

Box 2.5 has examples from practitioner-led research in different settings and the wider impacts for individuals that are more than just literacy and numeracy developments.

Box 2.5 Wider impacts for individuals than just literacy and numeracy developments

Reporting on the first round of the NRDC research initiative New Ways of Engaging New Learners, Hamilton and Wilson (2005) provided a collection of practitioner-led case studies that were mounted to provide new insights into adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL training.

Case study 1

The CliCK project tested the impact of a further education college's community engagement model in providing long-term support for hard-to-reach and vulnerable learners. Its research questions focused on whether partnership working between further education, community and voluntary sectors can address the engagement gap for these groups. It looked at the impact of the approach on individuals' lives, and their progress from bite-sized learning to learning that supports and develops literacy and numeracy skills.

Impacts for individuals:

- increased confidence, generally
- increased confidence to apply for jobs
- increased confidence to sign up for volunteering
- increased confidence to sign up for more courses
- progression to other learning provision.

Case study 2

As part of widening access to employment within the NHS, this practitioner-led project looked at essential skills support for NHS healthcare assistants (HCAs). This included literacy courses for those with level 1 or below, and a numeracy course to follow later in the year. The research questions explored HCAs' experiences of the literacy course, and the retention and achievement rates of HCAs.

Impacts for HCAs:

- enjoyment of course
- increased confidence in spelling
- increased amount of reading and writing at home, work, or both
- progression onto ICT courses.

Case study 3

The Young People Speak Out project used popular culture through a blend of online and classroom learning to engage 16-19 year olds with low levels of literacy in learning. The research focused on whether using popular culture, student experience and local specific content helped students to make progress in literacy. It enhanced the relevance of their learning by drawing upon their home and college lives, and looking at how ICT supports literacy activities.

Impacts for the young people:

- perceived improvements in literacy (this included spelling, understanding what they are reading, handwriting, use of capital letters, spoken English and being able to understand lyrics in songs)
- positive images of themselves through using ICT
- confidence in the accuracy of their work when using ICT
- teachers said that articles produced by the students were of a high quality
- improved retention on course (compared with similar classes in the previous year which had been delivered online)
- 95 per cent of the students gained a national qualification (on the basis that the course curriculum was matched to GCSE English and students took Core Curriculum National Tests at entry level 3 or level 1) or completed a portfolio of work for the Individual Learner Plan (no comparable figures for the previous year, as the college also implemented new qualifications at the same time as this project).

Case study 4

Research into engaging new learners in rural small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) explored the factors which influence SMEs' (employers' and employees') engagement in Skills for Life provision, to establish what changes trainers might make to better support rural SMEs regarding basic skills.

Impacts for SME employees:

- improved confidence and morale
- better awareness of Skills for Life
- improved job skills and CVs
- perceived improved prospects to go further in life and work
- improved teamwork across the SMEs.

Source: Hamilton and Wilson (2005)

2.4.5 Impacts on qualification gain

Eight of the selected sources provide evidence relating to qualification gains. However, this is mainly in terms of outputs: course enrolment rates, completion rates and numbers gaining qualifications such as level 1 qualifications. The evidence is often less compelling in terms of impacts for individuals.

Where studies include comparison groups, there is more evidence of impacts. For example, compared with those on a traditional adult basic skills course, learners on the Skills for Life Extension Pathfinder courses were more likely to complete the course within a year, and gain qualifications more quickly (White, 2003). These courses were government-funded intensive courses and those with incentives aimed at adults seeking to improve their basic skills. They began in 2001 in nine Pathfinder areas. Faster course completion was also highlighted by Cutter *et al.* (2004) in the Link Up evaluation of learner supporters (Link Up was a government-funded programme to recruit and train volunteers to support adults to improve their basic skills, which ran from 2001 to 2004). In Dench *et al.*'s (2006) review of the impact of learning on unemployed, low-qualified adults, seven studies (three with a control group) found that participants with no prior qualifications did gain qualifications through adult basic skills education and training.

There is some evidence that different settings can lead to different impacts. White (2003) found that course completion rates, qualification gains and labour market outcomes varied depending on the type of Skills for Life Extension Pathfinder course undertaken. Box 2.6 highlights these variations.

Box 2.6 Different settings can lead to different outcomes: some examples from Skills for Life Pathfinder Extension courses

Residential courses

Learners on three- to four-day residential courses over a long weekend gained especially in terms of positive relationships with other learners and trainers. Their self-confidence improved, as did their numeracy and literacy performance. However, compared with other Pathfinder Extension courses, those on residential courses were less likely to complete the course. Logistical challenges associated with a period away from home, such as travel, childcare and costs, were evident (see sections 2.6.5 and 2.6.7 for further discussion).

Intensive and highly structured courses

Compared with other Pathfinder Extension courses, learners taking intensive and highly structured courses were less likely to achieve a qualification, and less likely to continue on to another course. Overall, intensive courses performed less well on educational impacts than training in other settings. However, intensive courses were effective for prisoners (with obvious practical advantages here).

Work-based learning settings (with financial incentives for employers)

Learners in these settings achieved higher levels of course completion compared with those on other Pathfinder Extension courses. They also had the highest qualification rates, employment rates and lengths of employment (particularly where individual incentives were in place). However, these learners were less likely to start a new course. The offer of financial incentives in a work-based setting was found to be a key factor in the improved performance of learners in such settings, as illustrated by the following quote:

Based on purely descriptive results – i.e. not controlling for regional differences and differences in the characteristics of participants – courses that offer incentives for either employers or learners seem to perform relatively well in terms of course completion, qualifications and labour market outcomes. Bonjour and Smeaton (2003, p. 3)

See section 2.6.5 for further discussion on financial incentives.

Source: White (2003)

It is important to note that opportunities to gain a qualification are not always taken. In an evaluation of the JSA literacy and numeracy pilots, the opportunity was not taken up by all of those offered a training place at an initial assessment (Peters *et al*., 2003). Overall, six in ten of those offered training had not started any training or education since their screening.

Amongst the selection of reviewed evidence, there appears to be no systematic map of the actual qualifications gained through adult basic skills learning – in the UK or elsewhere. The selection of evidence reviewed covers a range of programmes and initiatives, and hence qualification types. Such a mapping exercise could prove useful in evaluating the effect of policies more broadly.

2.4.6 Impacts on employability

Impacts on individuals' employability frequently include improvements in their job search skills and motivations, and in their actual job skills. Twelve of the selected sources provide evidence of these types of benefits for individuals. The evidence is qualitative in nature, and on the whole more detailed and insightful (both in researchers' reporting and in any interviewees' quotes presented) than the literacy and numeracy learning impacts described earlier.

Job search impacts include:

- increased confidence to apply for jobs (Hamilton and Wilson, 2005; Tett *et al*., 2006; White, 2003)
- feeling more confident about actually getting a job (for example, JSA claimants who had taken up basic literacy and numeracy training (Peters *et al*., 2003), and having greater aspirations for what that job might be (for example, White, 2003; Terry, 2006)
- increased motivation to actively look for a job (again, JSA claimants who had taken up training were more likely to be actively looking for a job compared with those in the non-training control group who were inactive in this regard, and some did not want a job (Peters *et al*., 2003))
- enhanced job search skills such as being able to prepare a CV (for example, Frontline Consultants, 2006).

Job skills impacts include:

- working with others, more appropriate behaviour at work, and being willing and able to take on more responsibility at work (for example, Dench *et al*., 2006; Evans and Waite, 2008) (these link with impacts on workforce relations, see section 2.5.2)
- better timekeeping, being able to use reading skills at work, and better stocktaking skills (for example, Dench *et al*., 2006; Hamilton and Wilson, 2005; White, 2003) (these link with impacts on workforce productivity, see section 2.5.3).

Clearly there are links between employability impacts for individuals, and impacts for employers. In their evaluation of ESOL learning in the workplace, Skaliotis *et al.* (2007) typologise the impacts showing the overlap between impacts for individuals and impacts for employers – with a key overlap being enhanced staff morale and promotion opportunities (interestingly, neither of which are particularly explored or strongly evidenced in the literature). Section 2.5 has a further discussion on how impacts for employers are explored.

2.4.7 Impacts on employment

Impacts on employment are covered in a number of research studies, often using cohort datasets as benchmarks, for example, the 1970 British Cohort Study (CLS, 1970) and the 1958 National Child Development Study (CLS, 1958) (see, for example, Bynner *et al*., 2001, 2008; Bynner, 2004; Parsons and Bynner, 2002; Machin *et al*., 2001). Others have undertaken secondary analyses of the Skills for Life longitudinal dataset (for example, Grinyer, 2005; Bathmaker, 2007) to help understand the impacts on employment of gaining basic skills in adulthood.

Fourteen of the selected sources provide evidence on this theme. Some of these are literature reviews or syntheses in themselves, and two in particular provide strong evidence that attaining or improving basic skills in adulthood improves employment prospects (Dench *et al*., 2006; NRDC, 2009). Findings from the NRDC review are highlighted in Box 2.7.

It is perhaps important to note that some of the evidence on employment shows a statistically significant correlation between adult basic skills development and employment (for example, Vignoles *et al*., 2008), whilst other research highlights that the impact is not statistically significant (for example, Metcalf *et al*., 2009 reporting results of the longitudinal Skills for Life survey). Studies with control groups (for example, eight in Dench *et al*.'s (2006) literature review) highlight that low-qualified, out-of-work adults going through intervention programmes are more likely to progress to employment than those who do not participate in the intervention (for example, Bos *et al*., 2002; Hamilton *et al*., 2001; Anderson *et al*., 2004; McIntosh, 2004).

Box 2.7 Spotlight on improving employment prospects: some synthesised evidence by NRDC

There is strong evidence that attaining or improving basic skills in adulthood improves employment prospects.

Metcalf *et al.* (2009) found no statistically significant difference between Skills for Life learners and non-learners regarding employment at the fourth interview stage of the survey (Wave Four). It can take time to move into employment. Literacy and numeracy alone may not deliver the workplace skills needed to enter employment.

However, self-reported employment effects include changes in self-esteem, perceptions of literacy and numeracy gains, and commitment to education and training – these show statistical improvement over time and significant differences between learners and non-learners (Metcalf *et al*., 2009).

Bynner and Parsons (2006) found that men who improve their literacy skills (from ages 21 to 34) are more likely to be in full-time employment; for women, this pattern was found with regard to their numeracy skills.

Machin *et al.* (2001) found that men who improve their numeracy skills between the ages of 16 and 37 have a greater probability of being employed.

Source: NRDC (2009)

Despite the strong evidence, there are some caveats in terms of the nature of employment achieved. One of the studies reviewed by Dench *et al.* (2006) found that although participation in a learning intervention helped low-qualified participants find work, it was not necessarily stable or steady (Payne *et al.*, 1999).

Also, very few studies look at employment impacts in the longer term. Researchers, themselves, highlight the difficulty of evaluating this within the timescale of an evaluation programme. One evaluation looked at the differences in the impact on employment between two groups of unemployed individuals: those who participated in a training programme and those who did not (a control group). Little difference was observed in the impact on employment over the short term but after a period of five years (the longer term) those who had been in the short-term programme were employed for longer than the control group (Hamilton *et al.*, 2001).

2.4.8 Impacts on earnings

The body of evidence on impacts on earnings is similar in nature to that on impacts on employment, but smaller. Seven of the selected sources provide evidence on this theme – again including the synthesis of evidence by NRDC (2009). That review found that there is extensive evidence on the earnings returns of having basic skills, however and whenever these are acquired. Even so, there is less evidence on the returns to attaining basic skills in adulthood, although most of this evidence suggests a positive impact on labour market outcomes. Examples from the evidence are highlighted in Box 2.8.

Again, some evaluations draw on national cohort data to exemplify trends in economic impacts associated with levels of basic skills (in the UK, using the 1970 British Cohort Study and the 1958 National Child Development Study). Abroad, Gleeson (2005) analysed the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth 1975 Cohort dataset and the United States National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979, to assess the economic returns of education and training for adults with low basic skills. Gleeson found that when adults with very low levels of numeracy had greater opportunities for work experience, there were earnings returns. In the US data, in particular, he found that when adults with very low or low levels of numeracy participate in on-the-job training programmes, there are positive and significant impacts on their earnings.

Box 2.8 Spotlight on improving earnings: some synthesised evidence by NRDC

Metcalf *et al.* (2009) found no evidence of improved wage returns for the Skills for Life learners over time (from the first to the fourth time they were interviewed (Wave 1 to Wave 4)). Although net earnings were up slightly, this was not a statistically significant difference.

Bynner and Parsons (2006) used the 1970 British Cohort Study data and found that adults who improved their numeracy skills between the ages of 21 and 34 were more likely to have their own home and savings, and less likely to be on benefits than those who did not improve their skills.

Bynner and Parsons (2006) found that women who had improved their literacy or numeracy by the age of 34 were more likely to be better off and to have savings and investments. By the age of 34, men who had improved their literacy or numeracy were more likely to have their own home, less likely to be on state benefits or to be borrowing money from friends and family.

Machin *et al.* (2001) used the National Child Development Study and found that men and women who feel their literacy and numeracy (and skills in general) have improved in adulthood (between 16 and 37 years old) earn more than those who do not feel this.

With regards to the wage effect of having at least level 1 skills, numeracy skills appear to have a greater effect on earnings than literacy skills. However, a change in literacy skills between the ages of 16 and 37 has a greater wage effect – for men at least (Machin *et al.*, 2001).

Some research in the USA (Cunha and Heckman, 2007) has found that attempts to ameliorate years of educational disadvantage for individuals through public job training and adult literacy programmes have a low economic return for individuals. In contrast, Tyler (2004) found wage returns on average 6.5 per cent higher over the first three years in the labour market for young adults (aged 16-18 years old) who improve their maths test scores over that time. Hollenbeck (1996) uses two large datasets from the US, and found that workplace literacy programmes increase earnings by over 10 per cent.

Source: NRDC (2009)

Finally, whilst earnings and wages *per se* are one measure of an individual's economic wellbeing, there are also *hidden* economic impacts for families, carers and service providers of adult basic skills learners. As highlighted by Metcalf *et al.* (2009), the Skills for Life college-based courses released other services and carers from providing support, and reduced participants' dependencies on others – thus affording economic benefits to them. This is the multiplier effect.

2.5 Impacts

on employers

2.5.1 Overview of the evidence

The body of evidence on the impacts of adult basic skills development on employers is particularly limited, and the majority of the 287 audited sources did not cover this subject at all. There are a number of caveats and methodological difficulties to consider when engaging in research in this area.

- The first of these is time, and when impacts could reasonably be expected to be identified. Several sources draw attention to the strong correlation between low basic skills, other barriers to employment such as learning disabilities and poor health, and economic inactivity. Adults with very low basic skills have a low probability of being in employment. Metcalf *et al.* (2009) stressed that movement *into* employment (and subsequent development as an employee) may be an extremely slow process, and take place outside the timeframe of most evaluations.
- The second challenge relates to what workplace effects could and should actually be measured: how can the *value* of basic skills be quantified and what is the return on investment? None of the sources set out to quantify or cost business impacts. Instead, they report perceived (but plausible) impacts on workers' outlook, behaviour and skills, and which of these might be anticipated to contribute to the smooth and profitable functioning of an organisation.
- The third issue is attribution, and Ananiadou *et al.* (2003) drew attention to the wide range of factors and characteristics affecting company performance which need to be taken into account.

In their 2003 review of the literature, Ananiadou *et al.* noted the 'real dearth of [relevant] studies' and described the evidence of employer impacts as 'very sparse' (p. 1). Inasmuch as the selected sources identify impacts for employers, the tendency is to assume that the impacts on individuals (in terms of the development of both hard and soft skills) would translate into impacts for their employers – and then, in turn, for the economy (this being the received wisdom driving investment in adult basic skills in many parts of the world). This diffusion of impacts is not well theorised, though Skaliotis *et al.* (2007) have made efforts to map out the links and overlaps between impacts in different domains. They present a Venn diagram showing the links between impacts on individuals, employers and the economy, and the hierarchy and directionality of those links. This indicates that it is, at least in theory, possible to identify distinct impacts for employers (from those which accrue as a result of individuals' impacts) and could form the basis for further research.

The sources do not provide any clear indication of how the impacts for employers might vary according to organisational characteristics, for example size, sector and location. Neither do discussions of impact make clear whether differential impacts might be expected from employer-supported programmes (as opposed to employees' basic skills development *per se*) though the suggestion was made by Ananiadou *et al.* (2003) that employer investment in training of any sort can have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and commitment.

2.5.2 Impacts on workforce relations

The sources suggest that basic skills development and training may have a positive impact on workforce relations (both relationships between employees and *with* their employers).

Improvements in communication skills are argued to help create a more cohesive workforce (Skaliotis *et al*., 2007) and facilitate team working (Dench *et al*., 2006; Hamilton and Wilson, 2005). Increases in workers' confidence are reported as leading to greater willingness to work without close supervision and openness to taking on new or additional responsibilities (Skaliotis *et al*., 2007).

Other potentially significant impacts are increased commitment to an organisation, which has pay-offs in terms of reduced staff turnover and enhanced workforce stability (White, 2003). However, these latter impacts may be contingent on employers in some way sponsoring the training; Ananiadou *et al.* (2003) drew attention to the (more substantial) body of evidence on the impact of investment in workforce training *per se*.

2.5.3 Impacts on workforce productivity

Productivity is fundamentally about the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of systems, processes and, in particular, workers. Skaliotis *et al.* (2007) identify:

A great body of research which has showing [sic] *that poor reading, writing, speaking and listening skills can lead to a number of problems at work which lead to poor productivity.* (p. 23)

It seems a reasonable assumption that improving these skills will act to reduce the problems experienced and enhance productivity. Though 'widgets per hour' has been identified as a highly problematic measure of impact (Evans *et al*., 2005, p.4; not one of this review's key sources), several sources drew attention to impacts on other factors associated with variations in productivity.

Ananiadou *et al.* (2003), for example, cited studies identifying improvements in attendance (also noted by White, 2003; and Evans and Waite, 2008) and timekeeping (also reported by Dench *et al*., 2006). Skaliotis *et al.* (2007) identified evidence of reductions in health and safety incidents. Increased flexibility, capacity to engage in innovative practice (Ananiadou *et al*., 2003) and improved use of new technology (White, 2003) are also seen as relevant and significant outcomes of basic skills development.

2.5.4 Impacts on product or service quality

The evidence of impacts carrying through into product or service quality is more limited, but still reasonably convincing. Ananiadou *et al.* (2003) and White (2003) drew attention to improvements in employees' ability to follow instructions and adhere to systems and processes. Evans and Waite (2008), similarly, detailed increased engagement with activities that might be expected to support service improvement (for example, record-keeping).

2.6

factors affecting impacts

2.6.1 Overview of the evidence

There is a significant body of evidence describing the various factors that influence impacts for individuals that arise from basic skills courses. There was no evidence in the sources linking any factors specifically to impacts for employers. Of the 23 selected sources, 21 discussed factors affecting impacts. The factors can be grouped into the following categories, some of which reflect barriers to engagement and some are about the quality of the training itself:

- effective structures including national programme structures and their targets (two sources) (section 2.6.2)
- effective contexts including type and characteristics of provision (nine sources) (section 2.6.3)
- characteristics of learners such as confidence and prior experiences (seven sources) (section 2.6.4)
- practical barriers such as childcare, transport, and information about, and awareness of, opportunities to learn basic skills (six sources) (section 2.6.5)
- influence of trainers including their skills and personal characteristics (ten sources) (section 2.6.6)
- effective teaching and learning approaches – effective pedagogies and broad approaches (12 sources) (section 2.6.7)
- barriers mediating potential impacts – factors beyond the basic skills course that mediate realisation of potential impacts (four sources) (section 2.6.8).

The evidence base as a whole is relatively convincing, with the sources giving similar broad messages. However, it must be noted that few of the sources have evidence of direct links between any of the factors and specific impacts for individuals because evidence has not been generated by a large-scale randomised controlled trial. The evidence tends to be from self-reported perceptions such as interviews with trainers, managers and individual learners, rather than the identification of robust causal links.

2.6.2 Effective structures

Some evidence suggests that the structure of basic skills programmes and delivery is associated with impacts for learners (Goodison *et al.*, 2004; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008). Warner and Vorhaus (2008) evaluated the impacts of the *Skills for Life* (DfEE, 2001) strategy, and identified key aspects of its programmes that enabled impacts to be realised.

- The scale and scope of the strategy and its infrastructure were seen as positive. For example, the funding enabled new projects and initiatives to be developed that built on existing practices; the profile of basic skills was raised; and the scale of activities meant that trainers became more aware of different avenues their learners could take in order to develop their skills further.
- Managers and coordinators of the programmes generally felt that the participation and achievement targets helped to ensure both the quality of the training, and the expected quantity of training.

However, some managers and coordinators found the participation and achievement targets overwhelming and confusing and, in addition, some trainers felt the targets hampered their work, as they had to structure their work primarily to meet targets (Warner and Vorhaus, 2008). These authors also note another drawback of the targets:

For many providers, attempts to work with 'hard to reach' learners presented a funding risk, as these learners were less likely to attend regularly and to be able to meet national targets quickly, especially at Levels 1 and 2. (p. 47)

For some providers, this meant that they did not target such groups, even though they are arguably in the most need of such provision.

Goodison *et al.* (2004) also identified some structural factors which managers of UK online centres perceived were fundamental to positive impacts (particularly for hard-to-reach individuals).

- Sustained long-term funding was necessary for centres wanting to engage the socially excluded in basic skills courses, as it takes a long time to build the climate of trust and stability that such individuals need in order to benefit.
- Coordination of training at a regional level ensures there is no overlap or duplication which could threaten the stability of an individual centre and the relationship it has with its learners.

2.6.3 Effective contexts

There is no evidence in the sources that any particular site of learning is generally more effective in producing impacts for learners. NRDC (2009) found in their review of the economic impacts of basic skills that there is insufficient evidence to be able to determine whether the impacts vary for those learning in different settings, for example, further education or work-based training. Evidence from Northern Ireland (Frontline Consultants, 2006) suggested that whilst some individuals favour basic skills training in their community, others would not want to attend such courses close to home. Equally, whilst some would attend courses in colleges, others would find them too intimidating due to prior formal learning experiences.

When the learning takes place in a workplace, or is organised by an employer, there is evidence that the attitude of employers has an impact on learners. Impacts are greater where the employer values the learning being undertaken (Evans and Waite, 2008; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008), and are negatively affected when employers do not recognise and require the skills employees are developing (Evans and Waite, 2008).

However, regardless of the learning site, the literature shows that other contextual issues have an influence on impacts. There is evidence that positive relationships with other learners on basic skills courses are associated with positive impacts (for example, Warner and Vorhaus, 2008; White, 2003). As Pilbeam and Worthy (2005) note:

The social aspects of learning should not be underestimated, this emerged as an important factor in the lasting impact on the lives of our participants, they valued the interaction with others within the group, the voluntary sector workers and the tutors. (p. 20)

For example, Evans and Waite (2008) noted that supportive peers could play an important role in helping those who are lacking in confidence, negative, worried, or have low self-esteem.

In the literature, support from agencies other than the learning provider, as part of a course, is also associated with positive outcomes as shown in Box 2.9. This could be in the form of help with problems relating to finance, personal issues or gaining employment. See, for example, Dench *et al.* (2006) and Goodison *et al.* (2004).

Box 2.9 Examples of support from other agencies

Volunteers supporting adult learners

Cutter *et al.* (2004) evaluated the Link Up project, which recruited and trained volunteers to support adults on courses trying to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills. The support enabled learners to receive more tailored learning through one-to-one support or small group work, which led to improved outcomes.

Including support for broader issues than basic skills

Dench *et al.* (2006) in their systematic review of the impact of learning on unemployed and low-qualified adults, found that including broader support, such as personal development activities, improved motivation and interest in learning, as well as the impacts on employment.

In addition, Warner and Vorhaus (2008) found that workplace trade union learning representatives encouraged enrolment and were able to support learners undertaking courses. Pilbeam and Worthy (2005) found that outreach workers (from local voluntary and community sector organisations which worked in partnership with the learning provider) engaged with learners and helped enhance retention, achievement and progression to further learning.

2.6.4 Characteristics of learners

There is some evidence in the literature of individual learner characteristics that can affect the impacts they experience.

- Confidence: evidence suggests learner confidence is an important factor that affects outcomes (for example, Tett *et al.*, 2006; Wolf, 2008). As Pilbeam and Worthy (2005) explained: *'Confidence might be regarded as a by-product of learning but also a pre-condition to it.'* (p. 20).
- Fears and concerns about the course: Tett *et al.* (2006) found that personal sensitivities, for example, concerns about meeting new people, the reactions of friends, ability to successfully complete a course, and that the course might be like school, are the most significant barriers to participation.
- Prior learning: Metcalf *et al.* (2009) noted that those learners who started a Strategy for Learning course with qualifications were more likely to progress to higher level courses than those starting with none, as they were less likely to require additional assistance to progress and gain qualifications. Also, Tett *et al.* (2006) suggested that previous negative learning experiences, for example at school, are a barrier to participating in education in later life.

Individuals' motivations clearly affect impacts and, indeed, engagement in adult basic skills interventions. Perceptions of choice also influence impacts in terms of whether individuals have made their own decision to take part or, for example, their employer has told them they must do it. Two sources provided interesting examples here; see Box 2.10.

Box 2.10 How the element of choice can affect engagement in basic skills training

JSA claimants' take-up of basic skills training opportunities – affected by individuals' choice to attend

Basic skills screening was introduced in April 2001 for those claiming JSA for 26 weeks. If clients were identified as having potential literacy and/or numeracy difficulties, they were offered a more detailed assessment and, if necessary, suitable training.

However, it soon became apparent that not many clients were taking up this opportunity. In September 2001, pilots were set up in six areas to run for six months, to explore how this could be addressed. The pilots had four key features.

- Various timings for screenings (the evaluation found that earlier screening for JSA claimants' basic skills needs did not identify any more clients with a basic skills need. However, where needs were identified, there was earlier referral to training).
- Various screening tools.
- Various training opportunities: 26-weeks basic employability training for those with or below entry level qualifications; four to eight weeks short intensive basic skills training for those above entry level but below level 1; and further education or Learndirect courses for others.
- JSA benefit sanctions for those who refused to take up training.

However, overall, the pilot evaluation found that six in ten of those who had been offered training had not started any training or education since their screening at the time of interview for the evaluation. Reasons included that they were not looking for a job, did not want a job, felt there were no suitable courses, felt they did not need the training on offer, or wanted a job instead of training.

Others did take up the training offered, their motivation being that they would be more likely to get a job, wanted to learn, wanted to improve their literacy and numeracy for everyday life, and so on.

Clearly, individuals' choice of whether to take up the training was in play here. Importantly, sanctions and incentives had an impact on individuals' take-up of the training.

Expectations to attend (Evans *et al.*, 2005)

Evans *et al.* (2005) undertook detailed case studies with Canadian and English companies that were developing workforce basic skills. Success in one case study was attributed, in part, to the company's expectations that all employees should participate in the training on offer at the local further education college. This reduced any stigma felt by those with low levels of basic skills, and all employees benefited from learning together and bringing their learning back into the workplace.

Source: Peters et al. (2003)

2.6.5 Practical issues

The evidence shows that there are practical issues affecting individuals' participation in basic skills courses and the impacts such courses have on them.

- Ability to pay course fees and any other costs associated with participation, such as travel costs and materials, determines whether an individual can participate (Metcalf *et al*., 2009; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008). There is some evidence that financial incentives can help overcome this. For example, White (2003) found that paying learners for weekly attendance not only encouraged them to attend, but also enhanced their commitment to take the accreditation tests for qualifications. In addition, Peters *et al.* (2003) found that offering incentives was effective in encouraging claimants of JSA to undertake courses (although the nature of the incentives is not specified).
- The time and location of a course influences an individual's decision to take part. This could be due to childcare, family commitments, getting time off work, transport, travel time and distance from home (see Frontline Consultants, 2006; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008).
- Other personal circumstances such as health can affect participation (see, for example, Warner and Vorhaus, 2008).

Factors relating to the marketing to, and recruitment of, learners also influence their participation. Firstly, there is evidence that large campaigns relating to basic skills raise the profile of the issue, and demonstrate that many people have needs in this area, which serves to de-stigmatise it and encourage individuals who recognise they have a need to enrol on a course (Warner and Vorhaus, 2008; Frontline Consultants, 2006). There is also some evidence that engaging hard-to-reach groups through providers working with community and voluntary sector groups is a successful approach (Hamilton and Wilson, 2005).

2.6.6 Influence of trainers

Balatti *et al.* (2006) argue that *'the relationship that students have with their adult literacy/ numeracy teacher/trainer is probably the most significant factor affecting outcome.'* (p. 40). The literature emphasises the importance of trainers, and suggests that this relates firstly to a trainer's ability to develop positive and trusting relationships with learners (for example, Goodison *et al*., 2004; Hamilton and Wilson, 2005; Terry, 2006). The development of such relationships engenders constructive interactions and an effective climate for learners (especially those lacking in confidence or self-esteem) to progress in (for example, HMIE, 2005; Terry, 2006).

Secondly, the evidence suggests that a trainer's skills have an influence on impacts, and especially their skills in:

- assessing and responding to the needs of individuals (Frontline Consultants, 2006; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008)
- flexibly adapting teaching approaches to meet the needs of a particular group by, for example, adapting to the size of a class, the ability range in a class and rate of progress made (White, 2003)
- facilitating both group and individual work, so that a mix of approaches can be used in a class (for example, Frontline Consultants, 2006).

There is also some robust evidence that greater impacts are associated with trainers who have achieved qualified teacher status, assistance in the classroom, and/or high expectations of learners (Brooks *et al*., 2004).

2.6.7 Effective teaching and learning approaches

The literature includes evidence of some effective general strategies that are associated with positive outcomes for basic skills learners.

- Trainers should have a clear learning plan, deliver clearly structured teaching, have a learning plan for each learner, and regularly assess progress (adjusting individual learning plans as appropriate) (Brooks *et al*., 2004).
- The course should meet the needs of learners, and continue to be relevant to their goals throughout, as this increases retention (Brooks *et al*., 2004; Warner and Vorhaus, 2008). Where this is not the case, for example in a workplace course where the employer's needs are at variance with the needs or interests of learners, impacts are negatively affected (Warner and Vorhaus, 2008).
- Making links between learning and the real world where the skills will be used can be effective (Evans and Waite, 2008; White, 2003). For example, on workplace courses it is important that trainers directly link learning to everyday tasks in the workplace so that learners see their relevance, and can put them into practice (White, 2003).

The literature includes significant discussion of ICT in basic skills teaching and learning. Brooks *et al*. (2004), on the basis of their review of randomised and other controlled trials, found that using ICT cannot yet be shown to produce more learning than conventional instruction. However, other literature suggests using ICT is associated with positive impacts for learners as it is the incentive that initially attracts them into learning, and then motivates them to keep learning (Evans and Waite, 2008; Hamilton and Wilson, 2005; White, 2003). Evans and Waite (2008) described this as 'learning by stealth', as learners enrol and participate in order to improve their ICT skills, but in the process, they also improve their basic skills.

There is also evidence in some sources relating to particular pedagogies and their effectiveness (summarised in Box 2.11). In addition, Warner and Vorhaus (2008) made the point that *learning to learn* is as important for trainers to focus on as the actual basic skills at issue, as this is likely to aid the learning of basic skills.

Box 2.11 Some effective pedagogies or methodologies

Brooks at al. (2004) provide evidence relating to a number of approaches.

- Reciprocal teaching has positive effects on reading comprehension. This is the strongest single finding on pedagogy.
- A *diagnostic prescriptive approach* has positive effects on reading comprehension, but not on word identification.
- For inmates at a United States prison, *a community-building group process* accompanied by the SRA reading programme had a positive effect on reading.
- A *modified numeracy approach* has positive effects on arithmetic.
- Phonemic awareness and/or word analysis instruction may lead to increased achievement in other aspects of reading for adults learning to read.

- Fluency (greater speed in reading aloud) may be taught to adult learners, and fluency practice may lead to increases in reading achievement.
- Providing explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies may lead to increased reading comprehension achievement.
- Combining comprehension instruction with instruction in various other components of reading may lead to increased reading comprehension achievement.
- Small-scale teacher-researcher studies in the USA on adults' multiple intelligences with regard to adult numeracy suggest that this approach may be worth pursuing.

Evans and Waite (2008) found that encouraging informal learning in the workplace is an effective way to help employees gain basic skills, as it is a strategy such employees are likely to use if they want to learn something, and is not associated with formal learning. The authors suggested that informal approaches could include observations of colleagues, workplace discussions, loaning laptops for self-directed learning, and peer exchange of workplace practices.

White (2003) found evidence that there are benefits as well as disadvantages to residential or other intensive basic skills provision. Learners liked such provision, finding residential courses particularly motivating as they provided a quick way to gain skills in a new environment. They gave participants the opportunity to bond as a group and enjoy learning together. However, there were practical difficulties for learners such as arranging childcare; and trainers found it hard to intensively teach a group with different abilities, and had to modify the courses if there was learner fatigue due to the intensive nature of the course. The authors suggested that intensive courses are best suited to those who are currently studying, or have done so recently, as they are prepared to cope with the intensive pace of learning.

Joyce *et al.* (2008), in a small-scale study, found that delivering the *reading to learn methodology* (a highly systematic and explicit approach to teaching intensive reading) with integrity (not adapting or customising the approach) led to greater than expected improvements in reading and writing. This is attributed to the fact that the methodology gives detailed guidance for, and support to, trainers teaching reading, rather than just relying on tasks followed by tests.

2.6.8 Barriers mediating potential impacts

Finally, there is some discussion in the literature about factors that mediate between the immediate impacts arising from a basic skills course, for example, improved numeracy and literacy skills and confidence, and longer-term impacts such as improved earnings, employment, and progress in numeracy and literacy skills. Such mediating factors relate to the:

- personal characteristics of learners, such as age, health or learning disabilities, which can make it harder to gain or improve their employment (NRDC, 2009; Metcalf *et al.*, 2009)
- economic climate such as the extent to which there are jobs available locally or opportunities for progression in employment (e.g. Peters *et al.*, 2003)
- opportunities for using new skills – learners who retain or increase the gains made in basic skills following a course are those who have (or make) opportunities to use them in a work or social context (NRDC, 2009; Wolf, 2008).

2.7

Concluding comments and key messages

Outlined here are some concluding comments about the evidence base, in response to the research questions.

2.7.1 Comments about the evidence base

Concluding comments on the impacts of adult basic skills development for individuals and employers:

Research on the impacts of adult basic skills development provides clear evidence of positive impacts on individuals, including on their:

- personal and interpersonal lives
- attitudes towards and potential further participation in learning
- literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills
- gains in qualifications
- employability skills.

It also provides evidence of impacts on individuals' employment status and earnings, although the correlations are not always shown to be statistically significant.

Impacts on individuals' literacy and numeracy developments are rarely evaluated in isolation. Other impacts are equally if not more evident in the data. Furthermore, some research suggests that social capital outcomes are a pre-requisite for maximising the benefits of gains in literacy and numeracy.

The evidence for impacts on employers is sparser – the majority of audited sources did not include evidence on this. Indeed, researchers themselves highlight the difficulties with evaluating this benefit for employers:

The evidence on the benefits to employers of investing in basic skills training is very sparse, although some studies have indicated that such benefits may include increases in productivity, reductions in costs and enhanced customer satisfaction. Ananiadou *et al.* (2003, p. 1)

However, where evidence is available, it focuses on benefits regarding workforce relations and workforce productivity, and impacts on products and quality of services.

Concluding comments on the factors affecting impacts

There is strong consensus in the evidence on the key factors affecting impacts, focusing on structures, contexts, learners' characteristics (taking into account the particular group being targeted), trainers, and teaching and learning approaches. The evidence highlights that practical and other barriers to learning must be considered when delivering training for adults with low levels of basic skills. However, it must be noted that few of the sources have evidence of direct or causal links between any of the factors and specific impacts for individuals.

2.7.2 Key messages for training providers and practitioners

Training providers and trainers need to ensure that provision is sensitive to local needs and contexts

The evidence demonstrates that being aware of and adapting training to local contexts is worthwhile. This could be by providing the skills training that is appropriate for the types of jobs available in a local community. The evidence also suggests it is beneficial to link training with other services in an area such as employment support and financial advice. Not only can this help individuals, it also develops partnerships with local voluntary and community groups that can help training providers engage hard-to-reach groups.

Trainers need to focus on developing positive relationships with, and between, learners in the classroom

A key factor associated with positive impacts is learners being able to develop encouraging and supportive relationships with both their trainers and fellow learners. It is important that trainers have the skills to facilitate the development of such positive relationships, and to engender a mutually supportive environment within the classroom.

Training providers and trainers need to ensure that provision is directly relevant to the needs of individuals

If learners are to remain motivated and complete a basic skills course, they need to see how such skills directly apply to their lives. The evidence suggests there are two elements to this. Firstly, materials on a course need to link explicitly to life or workplace situations so that individuals can apply them, and the skills do not remain abstract. Secondly, trainers need to be flexible and skilled at adapting course materials and structures to ensure they meet the needs and interests of each particular group of learners.

Learner-progression targets for trainers might prove helpful

Measuring learner progress should consider what development has taken place: where did the learner start and how far did they progress? And this raises the question: could or should trainers have progression targets rather than absolute targets? This issue has been addressed through the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency’s and Learning and Skills Council’s (LSC) development of individual learning plans setting out individual progress. However, it is too early for the impact of this development to be acknowledged or explored in the current evidence base.

2.7.3 Key messages for employers

Engaging employers requires further attention

If employers are to encourage employees to sign up for basic skills development, they themselves need to be convinced of the benefits for their businesses and workforce. A more robust and extensive body of research is required, with more explicit demonstration of the benefits. To maximise employer engagement, such messages need to be promoted effectively. These are also key messages for policy-makers and for those researching and evaluating basic skills courses.

Employers need to ensure training continues in an appropriate form

Some of the research evidence highlights a lack of continued training for employees after an adult basic skills course, or follow-up by employers. If adults are to best use those new skills in the workplace, then further support is required. For example, employers could facilitate informal learning opportunities such as workplace discussions and peer exchange of workplace practices. This would enable employees to further develop their skills, receive acknowledgement of their new skills from their managers and colleagues, and feel encouraged to use their new skills in the workplace.

2.7.4 Key messages for research and evaluation

Evaluations are required of the longer-term impacts

The evidence is predominantly based on immediate or reasonably short-term evaluations. Even the longitudinal evaluations are reasonably short (up to three or four years in the case of the Skills for Life longitudinal survey (Metcalf *et al.*, 2009). Longer-term evaluations should explore the wider benefits of learning to see if adults have been able to grow and maximise their social and employment-related networks, which ultimately should impact on their employment, earnings prospects and quality of life.

A standard approach to reporting learner progress

Across the studies, there is little consistency in the way in which learner progress is measured or described. Encouraging evaluators to address and report learner progress in a standard way would enable policy-makers to better assess the overall impact of their policies. When documenting learner progress, this should include the level and type of qualification gained, by whom, and where it was gained.

Research needs clearer designation and classification of impacts for employers

Impacts for employers are not clearly defined in the research and evaluation literature. The issue is that employability, employment and earnings impacts for individuals are just that – for individuals – but at what stage do they become impacts for employers? Building on the interlinking model of impacts put forward by Skaliotis *et al.* (2007) may be a useful starting point.

Individual detailed studies of the direct correlations between the features of interventions and impacts

Clearly, not all the studies looked at had the same research questions. However, a clear set of impacts and factors was evident in the vast body of audited literature, as well as the 23 selected sources reviewed in full. However, to more fully understand the links between the features of adult basic skills learning and training courses, and impacts, research needs to explicitly explore these links.

To do this, the research clearly needs to take into account the context of the initiative and the particular learners involved. Some of the most insightful research in this regard may be that done through action research, trainer-led research, and detailed site and participant case studies. Further trainer-led and detailed case studies are required, focusing specifically on the direct links between impacts and the factors affecting them.

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3

The development of basic financial capability skills for adults

Shona MacLeod and Jennifer Jeffes

3.1 Focus of this review

The aim of this review is to examine UK and international evidence on the development of adults' basic financial capability. More specifically, the review sought to investigate three key research questions:

1. What policies support the development of adults' financial capability skills?
2. What evidence relates to the development of adults' financial capability training covering delivery approaches and impacts?
3. What can be done to improve the teaching and learning of adult financial capability?

3.2 Scope and definitions

The sources included in this study conceptualise financial capability in different ways. Financial literacy and financial capability are used interchangeably throughout the sources, and both refer broadly to the same set of knowledge and attributes. However, the two terms have slightly different emphases.

Schulter (2009) described financial literacy as:

[…] enabling people to make informed and confident decisions regarding all aspects of their budgeting, spending, saving and their use of financial products and services, from everyday banking through to borrowing, investing and planning for the future. (p. 1)

Sanders (2007) said *'financial literacy may be thought of as the "knowledge of personal money management concepts and skills"'* (Sanders *et al.*, 2007, p.240).

By contrast, Rocket Science UK Ltd (2008) cites HM Treasury's own description of financial capability, which refers to *'people's knowledge and skills to understand their own financial circumstances, along with the motivation to take action'* (p. 13).

So, while financial literacy is presented as having an understanding of financial issues, financial capability is characterised as a more active process, based on individuals having the motivation to take action alongside the necessary knowledge and skills. Mitton (2008) argued that both of these skills (literacy and capability) are necessary for financial inclusion:

Financial inclusion can be conceptualised as having two elements. First is good financial decision-making. For this, people need to have financial literacy, which means understanding of financial concepts. But, more than that, people need financial capability – the skills and motivation to plan ahead, find information, know when to seek out advice and apply it to their own life. (p. 1)

Some of the reviewed literature is concerned with consumer education rather than financial education per se. Brennan and Ritters (2004) said: 'Consumer education is concerned with the skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding necessary to become an effective consumer' (p. 98).

The OECD (2009) described it as the 'process of gaining skills, knowledge and understanding needed by individuals in a consumer society such that they can make full use of consumer opportunities presented in today's complex marketplace' (Wells and Atherton, 1998, p. 8).

The sources describing consumer education, therefore, tend to place greater emphasis on consumer issues but also contain financial capability content. Where relevant, these have been included in the review.

3.3

Approaches to the development of adults' financial capability

The approaches to developing adults' financial capability, as described by the sources, are explored in this section. It looks at the content of financial capability programmes and courses as well as the context in which they are delivered, and findings are presented in terms of:

- course content
- delivery organisations
- delivery approaches
- tools and materials
- staffing arrangements
- the length and structure of programmes and courses.

3.3.1 Course content

Course content, as described by the sources is varied, reflecting both the wide-ranging needs of adult learners and the diversity of contexts in which financial capability training is delivered. It appears, however, that across all financial capability training, there are core areas integral to the understanding of financial issues, which could be considered to form an essential toolkit of financial capability.

Common themes in financial capability training

A communication document produced by the European Commission (2007) said the most commonly taught subject areas in financial education programmes in the European Union are basic financial skills including using a bank account, budgeting, and managing credit and debt. Habschick *et al.* (2007) examined 180 financial literacy initiatives across the European Union and found these subject areas are rarely taught in isolation, but brought together within one financial programme designed to encompass a range of financial capability topics.

The Greater Easterhouse Money Advice Project (GEMAP) financial education programme, evaluated by Blake Stevenson Ltd (2007), provides a good example of this. The project, which is delivered in the Greater Easterhouse area of Glasgow, Scotland, aims to help people develop a better understanding of their financial choices; teach them to budget more effectively; and ensure they are empowered to make informed choices based on a sound understanding of financial services. The project includes modules on understanding and managing debt, including handling credit; saving in the short, medium and long term; creating budgets and being financially responsible; and understanding banking products and services.

Similarly, longitudinal research to evaluate the impact of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation's (FDIC) Money Smart financial education curriculum in the USA reports that the programme consists of core modules including banking, basic borrowing skills, savings, and managing spending. The programme also includes modules aimed at supporting adult learners purchasing their own home (FDIC, 2007).

An outline of the common topics covered by financial capability programmes and courses, as described in the reviewed literature, is provided in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1 An essential toolkit of financial capability: common topics included in financial capability programmes

- Banks and banking: for example, how to understand bank statements, how to use a bank account and an ATM (or cash point machine).
- Budgeting: for example, understanding the cost of rent, food and utilities, and prioritising expenditure.
- Managing credit and debt: for example, understanding different types of credit and the consequences of debt.
- Savings: for example, how to choose savings accounts and learning about why people save.
- Consumer rights: for example, how to assert consumer rights.
- Home buying: for example, how to purchase a first home.

Source: distilled from Hathaway and Khatiwada, 2008; Atkinson, 2008; Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007; Hopley, 2003; FDIC, 2007; Schulter, 2009; Rocket Science UK Ltd, 2008 and Koenig, 2007.

Topics in addition to core modules

In addition to the core modules that are common to most financial capability programmes, many courses are aimed at groups of adult learners with very distinct needs and cover additional topics to support these.

For example, Sanders *et al.* (2007) reported on the Realizing your Economic Action Plan (REAP) financial literacy programme at two shelters for female domestic abuse victims in St Louis, Missouri, USA.[1] In addition to the basic training discussed above, these women were also taught how to cope with oppression and domestic abuse. For example, the curriculum included modules on building or rebuilding a good credit history independent of an abuser.

Specialist support varies between countries. The OECD (2009) report showed that in Korea, for example, many initiatives are targeted at foreign women married to Korean citizens. While in Australia, regional authorities have identified the teaching of tenancy rights to new migrants as a specific need, whereas the Slovak Republic has found it more beneficial to focus financial initiatives on Romanian minorities.

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[1] REAP is a multi-agency collaborative of 13 domestic violence and three homeless service agencies in the St. Louis region, Missouri, that was created to promote the economic development of battered women.

The subject areas covered within financial capability courses may also vary depending on the specific emphasis of the course itself. For example, some training emphasises consumer education as a central component of financial capability. Hopley (2003) looked at the findings of an exploratory survey of financial education courses within the Fourth Federal Reserve District of the USA,[2] and stated:

- 72 per cent are about purchasing a home
- 68 per cent are about predatory lending
- 60 per cent teach about financing major purchases
- 43 per cent are about investing.

Financial capability training in the workplace often has additional specific support for employees in addition to the core content described above. Atkinson (2008) reviewed the literature on the impact of financial education programmes in the UK (and other countries) and reported that the HM Treasury and Financial Services Authority's *Helping You Make the Most of Your Money* workplace training teaches about pension and insurance schemes to encourage employees to save for retirement. Other schemes in the US have included information on, amongst other subjects, student loans, tax planning, company benefits and identity theft (Atkinson, 2008).

A Scottish scheme ran financial classes specifically for black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, and it is discussed in Box 3.2.

Box 3.2 Dundee Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Dundee Voluntary Action (CVS): engaging BME groups in financial learning

The Dundee CAB and Dundee CVS Financial Awareness Education Project for BME groups began in November 2006, targeting a range of vulnerable groups in Dundee to help raise their financial awareness. Drawing on lessons from another financial education project, run by Angus CAB, the learning content focused on what was called the *B4*:

- Benefits: claiming the right benefits, maximising income and using benefits wisely.
- Borrowing: debts, credit cards, hire purchase and loans.
- Budgeting: managing money wisely, saving schemes and maximising income.
- Bill paying: recognising priorities and methods for paying bills.

Each one-off session was attended by 10-12 participants. Sessions involved group work and discussions, quizzes and exercises, as well as practical tips and information. Materials for sessions were accessed from and certified by Citizens Advice Scotland and the FSA.

Source: Sellers, 2008.

Another project in Zambia has helped nearly 9,000 young women develop financial capability skills (see Box 3.3).

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[2] The Fourth Federal Reserve District comprises Ohio, eastern Kentucky, western Pennsylvania, and the northern panhandle of West Virginia.

Box 3.3 Camfed Zambia: financial education for young women in rural Zambia

Camfed Zambia helps young women living in rural areas of Zambia develop financial skills. It is run by Camfed, an international organisation which aims to eliminate poverty in Africa through the education and empowerment of young women. Over two years, the programme will reach 8,800 young women across eight districts of Zambia.

Most of these women do not have bank accounts, are not in permanent employment, and have little or no financial knowledge or experience of managing money.

The project aims to teach young women financial skills in four areas:

- savings
- credit
- financial entitlements
- control of household resources.

The programme uses a peer-educator model: 20 young women in each district are trained to deliver financial capability education, and then each woman teaches another 1,000 young women.

Source: Financial Education Fund (2010a)

Accreditation

Two sources identify courses offering learners accreditation in financial capability. Atkinson (2008) reported that some UK sixth form and further education colleges offer students the opportunity to study towards the Institute of Financial Services' School of Finance Certificate in Financial Studies (Davis *et al*., undated, p. 36). This course aims to teach learners how to plan their finances to meet their needs and future aspirations.

Schulter (2009) evaluated a project designed to provide female prisoners in Australia with the financial literacy skills necessary to be successful in their transition from prison to the community. He also identified some female prisoners who had benefited from taking an accredited vocational literacy course as part of their literacy and numeracy curriculum. This course included modules on budgeting, completing loan applications, understanding interest-free deals, and understanding application forms for direct debits, rentals and credit cards. This qualification leads to a recognised Statement of Attainment.

3.3.2 Delivery organisations

A Communication document from the European Commission (2007) highlighted that financial education is provided by a wide variety of agencies including financial supervisory authorities, adult literacy agencies, debt advice clinics, social workers, financial industry federations, micro-finance organisations, consumer representatives, education authorities, individual financial firms and housing authorities. Other research identifies providers such as credit unions, Citizens Advice Bureaux, community organisations, prisons, and other voluntary and not-for-profit organisations (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007; McMeeking *et al*., 2003; Schulter, 2009; Sanders *et al*., 2007).

3.3.3 Delivery approaches

Financial education can be delivered using a range of approaches including classroom learning, the internet, printed materials and education embedded within existing courses.

Classroom learning

Most of the training described in the sources has taken place in a classroom, using seminars or workshops. Research by Hopley (2003) found that 91 per cent of financial capability courses are held in a classroom. This is supported by Atkinson (2008):

The majority of the initiatives that have been evaluated have used seminars, lessons or workshops to deliver key financial ideas and information. (p. 70)

There are, however, challenges associated with teaching financial capability within a group environment. Atkinson (2008) identified that the most effective courses cater for learners with a range of language and literacy needs, although *'even the most basic have still been criticised by participants for being too difficult'* (Anderson *et al.*, 2002, p. 9).

It is, therefore, not surprising that many of the projects referred to in the sources combine classroom learning with other delivery mechanisms in order to expand the reach of the service, and to ensure that they best meet a range of individual needs. Habschick *et al.* (2007) identified that most financial literacy schemes within the European Union use a range of delivery methods including websites, leaflets, printed handbooks and classes.

For example, the FSA's Make the Most of Your Money workplace training engages learners in workshops delivered by external trainers. These are supported by printed materials and CD-ROMs that allow learners to access a more comprehensive range of information (Atkinson, 2008). Rocket Science UK Ltd's (2008) research supported the effectiveness of this approach. It explored the relationship between financial exclusion, indebtedness and financial capability in the East of England:

Best practice in existing advice services suggests that a successful financial advice service should encompass face-to-face advice along with other delivery channels to broaden the reach of the service. (p.56)

The internet

Habshick *et al.* (2007) found that 66 per cent of financial education programmes within the European Union use the internet to deliver financial capability materials. Whilst the internet is not usually the only source of delivery, it can be a useful tool for meeting the specific needs of individuals, as it can complement other services, such as printed materials or classroom-based activities.

Rocket Science UK Ltd (2008) concurred with this finding and identified interactive tools including financial health checks, budgeting and debt-reduction resources. This approach has been successfully implemented by Moneyextra's Financial Planner Service in the East of England. It combined an interactive online tool with face-to-face tuition and telephone advisers. Rocket Science UK Ltd (2008) also identified that a number of existing resources have been used to help learners track their income and expenditure:

> *There are a growing number of such online tools already in existence which analyse people's financial situation and help them to calculate how they can make ends meet by calculating their key income and expenditure. Some tools focus on spending incurred through utilities bills, mortgage payments and council tax, while others go into greater detail and include food, travel to work, and leisure spending.* (p. 56)

Printed materials

Atkinson (2008) reported that it is uncommon for financial capability providers to rely upon printed materials alone to deliver financial education. However, there are a number of instances where this has been the case. For example, prospective university students are sent a printed Moneymanual with their UCAS application forms, which provides them with information about tuition fees, student loans, student grants, budgeting, money worries and savings. In the UK, the *Parent's guide to money* is distributed to expectant mothers by midwives. It has information about a range of financial matters including prioritising spending, claiming benefits and investing in the Child Trust Fund.

Embedding financial education within existing training

Financial capability training is often embedded in existing basic skills courses. For example, a study by McMeeking *et al.* (2003) evaluated the impact of a programme introduced by the Basic Skills Agency to combine basic skills training with financial education for low income, socially excluded households. Courses were offered by local education authorities, Citizens Advice Bureaux and credit unions, and included group work and informal participatory discussions alongside personalised individual support.

In another example, research by Rocket Science Ltd (2008) found that within the higher education and further education sectors, training is frequently embedded in apprenticeships, national vocational qualifications (NVQs), diplomas, foundation degree programmes. and in courses not specific to financial education, as well as within basic numeracy courses.

3.3.4 Tools and materials

The tools and materials used to teach learners about financial capability vary according to where courses are held and the groups of adult learners that the financial education programme is intended to support. Hopley (2003) stated:

> *The materials and formats used to teach financial education vary tremendously – from no formal curriculum, to curricula developed in-house, material provided by sponsoring agencies, and resources used nationally.* (p. 5)

The GEMAP project, for example, uses activities such as quizzes and discussion topics to engage with learners on a face-to-face basis (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007).

In the USA, other projects use books and brochures, presentations, videos, budgeting worksheets, interactive case studies and role-play exercises (Hopley, 2003). In some cases these materials are in different languages. The Money Smart financial education curriculum, for example, is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Russian as well as Braille and large print.

Other materials include a participant's guide allowing adults to use budgeting tools, access money saving tips and compare loans, following their involvement in the course. The programme also has an instructor's guide and overhead slides for trainers (FDIC, 2007).

Some projects use innovative methods to engage with learners. Rocket Science UK Ltd (2008), for example, reported on a pilot scheme that worked with approximately 50 young adults not in education, employment or training (NEET) to develop their financial capability. In order to best engage with them, the pilot scheme offered a film-making project which integrated aspects of financial literacy. The aim was to reach a group of learners who may not otherwise have chosen to engage in financial capability training.

An innovative education scheme in Kenya has been successful in attracting its intended audience, as shown in Box 3.4.

Box 3.4 Kenya: Makutano Junction television series and financial education

Makutano Junction is a Kenyan educational drama series aimed at improving the management of personal finances. The programme has already broadcast eight series, and this financial education programme aims to take advantage of the programme's large audience of two million viewers aged between 18 and 40 years.

The programme works by allowing viewers to request leaflets by SMS on issues covered by each of the programmes in the television series. The content is tailored to cover budgeting, savings, investments and debt management. Where episodes relate to banking services, viewers will also be supported in completing application forms to open a bank account.

Source: Financial Education Fund (2010b)

Other research, however, concludes that the most innovative approaches to financial education are not always the most effective ones. Gutter and Renner (2006; 2007) evaluated a financial capability course for students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the US. The programme, covering a range of aspects of financial capability, made use of podcasts alongside class activities, seminars and reading. The researchers found, however, that the podcasts were not successful in engaging the learners (Gutter and Renner, 2006; 2007, cited in Atkinson, 2008):

Interestingly, innovation did not seem to be particularly welcomed – while almost all students felt that the homework had been useful, the podcast scored an average of just one on a five point scale (making it 'not at all useful'). (p. 38)

3.3.5 Staffing arrangements

Research by Hopley (2003) found that 60 per cent of financial capability providers employ full-time staff. Other evidence highlighted the mix of staff delivering financial education and indicated that, in other cases, financial education is delivered by a combination of salaried and volunteer staff. For example, the Money Doctors project (piloted at Roehampton University in 2005 and later used at other universities) employed student money advisers to improve the financial capability of other adult learners (Atkinson, 2008).

A number of sources raise concerns about the knowledge base of staff delivering financial capability training. Rhodes and Coben (2007), for example, in reporting on Skills for Life trainers' experiences of teaching financial literacy, found that only a sixth had previous experience of teaching the subject. Research by McMeeking *et al.* (2003) described financial courses taught by lifelong learning staff. However, very few of the trainers had received formal training in teaching financial capability, and were reliant on the support of community organisations.

However, concerns about the experience of trainers must be balanced with the importance of effective relationships between trainers and learners. Research by McMeeking *et al.* (2003) found that positive, informal relationships between adult learners and trainers were highly conducive to productive engagement with financial education courses. This may indicate that rapport with learners is more important than detailed knowledge of the subject.

Atkinson (2008) raised a similar issue in relation to young adults who are NEET. Atkinson stated that it was particularly important for this group of young people to work with trusted adults, as many were disillusioned with the process of learning. Their particular requirements needed to be recognised and understood. The FSA has since funded the development of a train-the-trainer scheme for youth workers and other professionals working with young adults who are NEET, in order to better support them in developing financial skills (Rocket Science UK Ltd, 2008).

The length and structure of financial education programmes

Hopley (2003) reported that, due to the diversity of financial education courses available to adult learners, it is difficult to identify any particular length or structure as more favourable than another.

The financial education courses described in the sources vary, from modular programmes held at regular intervals to more intensive courses over a shorter period. Hopley (2003), however, identified that, most commonly, adults receive 12 to 18 hours of financial education spread over a period of months. This format is widely corroborated by a number of the other sources (FDIC, 2007; FSA, 2008; Sanders *et al.*, 2007; Schulter, 2009). Where retention of learners is identified as a concern, it has been noted that shorter courses with a modular format may be beneficial for maximising their engagement (McMeeking *et al.*, 2003).

3.4 Impacts of

approaches to develop adults' financial capability

This section explores the impacts of approaches to develop adults' financial capability. Impacts for individuals include greater confidence, motivation and a sense of ability to deal with financial issues; better understanding and management of personal debt; the ability to budget, save and pay bills; and increased knowledge of banks and other financial products and services. Community impacts are also considered in this section relating to improvements in social inclusion, equal opportunities and partnership working.

3.4.1 Impacts for individuals

The approaches to developing adults' financial capability described in section 3.3 have led to a range of positive impacts at both individual and community levels. Qualitative research by Sellers (2008), which presented a picture of financial education projects across Scotland, highlighted a range of potential impacts that may arise from successful financial capability initiatives. These include:

- confidence, motivation and a sense of capacity to deal with financial issues
- understanding and management of personal debt, including credit, debt, interest rates and annual percentage rates
- ability to budget, save and pay bills as a result of increased understanding of the value of money and knowledge of financial concepts, such as saving and budgeting, which may have previously been unknown
- knowledge of how banks and other financial products and services work, including credit options, such as bank accounts, pensions and credit unions.

All of these impacts are clearly identifiable in the reviewed sources. One source describes a range of other potential impacts, which are not so clearly identified in other sources. These include awareness of the costs involved in a range of activities such as starting work and bringing up children; the advice and guidance available to help people deal with financial issues; welfare benefits; how to maximise income; and consumer rights (Sellers, 2008). Sellers's research focused on a wide range of financial education courses across an entire country, which means that these impacts merit some acknowledgement, although only mentioned by one literature source.

Confidence, motivation and a sense of ability to deal with financial issues

A key impact of the financial capability courses reviewed is individuals' increased confidence, motivation and sense of ability to deal with financial issues. This is characterised by the ability to demonstrate competencies in managing financial responsibilities as well as having a knowledge and understanding of financial issues. This impact is experienced across a wide range of learner groups and is not limited to any specific type of intervention.

For example, McMeeking *et al.* (2003), in their evaluation of a Basic Skills Agency pilot project to teach financial literacy and basic skills to socially excluded adults, showed that learners were more confident in dealing with financial institutions and benefits agencies as a result of their involvement in the project.

Similarly, 66 per cent of workplace learners who participated in the FSA's Make the Most of Your Money training experienced increased confidence in dealing with financial issues, and 75 per cent experienced increased knowledge of financial issues (Atkinson, 2008). Similar experiences were shared by the participants of the GEMAP financial education programme, who reported feeling more confident and assertive in dealing with money, and more motivated to make good financial choices (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007).

There is evidence to suggest that motivation and confidence to engage with financial issues is an important precursor to changing behaviour. Research by Sanders *et al.* (2007) considered the value of financial capability education programmes for female domestic abuse victims. This quasi-experimental study tested for both financial self-efficacy (belief in ability to take action as a result of becoming more financially literate) and financial literacy (the acquisition of knowledge). It found that the women's level of improvement in financial literacy was closely correlated to the amount of time they had spent in a relationship with their abuser. However, gains in financial self-efficacy increased regardless of this, suggesting that the content of the intervention had had an important impact in empowering women. The authors reported that this is important because even if a participant's financial knowledge is not increased through involvement in the programme, their belief in their ability to deal with financial issues may increase. The authors consider this to be a critical impact, supported by prior research suggesting that 'financial self-efficacy is a precursor to positive financial behavioural changes' (Danes *et al*., 1999 and Sanders *et al*., 2007, p. 250).

Managing and understanding personal debt

The approaches to developing adults' financial capability in the sources have also been effective in helping adult learners become better at managing and understanding the implications of personal debt. Rhodes and Coben (2007), in their evaluation of how financial literacy can help to improve the basic skills of adult learners, found that managing money and dealing with debt were considered the most important aspects of financial capability:

> [Debt and managing money] *were the things that [learners] believed people in society should learn about, as debt was perceived to be a problem for many, not only those on low incomes.* (p. 5)

Blake Stevenson Ltd (2007) also reported that GEMAP participants, according to their own perceptions, became more knowledgeable about the consequences of debt. They reported that the participants had a better awareness of their own personal debt circumstances and, in particular, how much they owed and to whom. Blake Stevenson Ltd (2007) also found that 24 per cent of adult learners sought additional money advice to resolve outstanding debt issues after participating in the programme. Of these:

Fifty-four per cent prioritised their debts and planned a phased reduction; 46 per cent received help to reschedule or reduce debt and produce an action plan to do so; and 24 per cent rescheduled or reduced their debt without further support. (p. 35)

Other research, however, shows that increased knowledge and awareness of personal debt is not necessarily always reflected in the debt management behaviour of individuals in the longer term. An evaluation of a financial skills course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the US (Gutter and Renner, 2006; 2007, cited in Atkinson, 2008), found that credit use was not reduced by the course:

Nine months after the class, there was an increase in the proportions of participants: holding a credit card; at the limit of their card; carrying a revolving balance and not paying balances in full. (p. 38)

Similarly, the FSA review identified research by Gartner and Todd (2005), which revealed that, following an online financial capability intervention in the USA, learners were likely to become more active credit card users than before they participated in the course, although they were also less likely to miss payments on their credit cards (FSA, 2008).

Ability to budget, save and pay bills

Improvements in adult learners' ability to plan ahead and budget effectively are also key impacts. A longitudinal evaluation of the FDIC's Money Smart programme in the USA shows that 61 per cent of participants, who did not use a spending plan or budget at the beginning of the course, used one upon completion. Furthermore, 95 per cent of those who used a budget plan at the end of the course were still using it nine months after completion (FDIC, 2007).

Although little is known about the impact of financial capability courses on groups with specific sets of needs, there is a small amount of evidence to suggest that they have also benefited from interventions. Atkinson (2008), for example, reported that the training delivered to groups of young adults who were NEET was beneficial in helping them to develop basic financial management skills. This, however, was contingent on the methods used to deliver this information:

[NEET young people] *did learn important lessons about financial topics such as budgeting, particularly if the same messages were repeated on different occasions.* (p. 6)

Knowledge of banks and other financial products and services

The approaches, to varying extents, influence the behaviour of adult learners with respect to their use of banking facilities, and their knowledge and understanding of financial products and services. A longitudinal evaluation of the impact of Money Smart reveals that 43 per cent of adult learners who did not have a current account at the end of their course subsequently opened one in the months following the intervention. A further 37 per cent opened a savings account (FDIC, 2007). Amongst GEMAP participants, around 40 adult learners (15 per cent) opened or changed a bank account following the course, and more than 30 (12 per cent) joined a local credit union (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007). Participants involved in the GEMAP financial education programme:

[...] *perceived themselves to have made improvements in their knowledge of financial products and services. Amongst both adults and pupils there was a significant improvement in knowledge of debit and credit cards, a greater awareness of the costs of taking out the loan, and improvements in knowledge of consumer rights and debt issues.* (p.37)

Research by Servon and Kaestner (2008) into the impact of digital communication technologies on the banking behaviour of lower-income bank customers found that a community economic development initiative piloted by a bank increased learners' use of online banking. The research found that online banking can be a helpful tool in supporting adult learners to pay bills on time and organise their finances as well as encourage them to save.

Other research has also found that adult learners are increasingly likely to make plans for the future as a result of a training programme. Participants in the financial education programme at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for example, had a greater awareness of insurance in relation to tenancies and health, and six per cent opened an account to save for their retirement, despite having no intention to do so at the beginning of the course (Gutter and Renner, 2006; 2007, cited in Atkinson, 2008).

3.4.2 Impacts for communities and society

The sources reveal that in addition to the demonstrable benefits of financial capability for individuals, financial learning has an important role to play in improving social inclusion, equal opportunities and partnership working at a community level.

Research by Sellers (2008) provided a snap-shot of financial education projects across Scotland. Sellers identified the scope of such training and models of effective practice, and found that a number of projects adopt the principles of community learning and development:

Financial learning can have an important role in the development of communities too. The projects featured in these case studies adopt many of the principles of community learning and development – which seeks to empower individuals and groups and to promote participation, inclusion and equal opportunities for those individuals and groups. (p. 1)

3.5 Factors which

support the effective teaching and learning of adults' financial capability

In this section, the evidence of factors which support the effective teaching and learning of adults' financial capability is considered. The review of the key literature sources identifies a number of such factors although most can be characterised as generic in that they are the factors commonly associated with effectiveness across a range of different financial education programmes.

The majority of the research looks at training for *financial education* or *financial literacy.* As a result, most factors focus on effectiveness in terms of improving individuals' levels of financial knowledge, rather than specifically financial capability, that is, changes in individuals' patterns of financial behaviour.

Some evidence sets out overarching principles and key elements. This evidence is reviewed first, followed by a discussion of other research evidence of effective features in order of the frequency in which they are found in the literature.

This section ends by considering the need to improve the evidence on effective factors for teaching and learning financial capability. Two particular areas requiring improvements are discussed.

- More specific evidence is needed of how financial knowledge can be improved in specific circumstances, for example the knowledge of learners from particular income groups, with different skills levels or using different delivery methods. It should be said, there are exceptions with minor examples showing what is effective for specific groups of learners.
- More specific evidence is needed of how to improve individuals' financial capability, focusing on how they can learn to apply their financial knowledge better, take action as a result, and make changes to their financial behaviour.

3.5.1 Overall principles for effectiveness in delivering financial education

A small number of sources specify or refer to guidelines for the delivery of effective financial education training (European Commission, 2007; US Department of the Treasury, 2004; Hopley, 2003).

In 2007, the European Commission published a list of basic principles that should underpin financial education programmes (European Commission, 2007):

- **Principle 1:** financial education should be available and actively promoted at all stages of life on a continuous basis.
- **Principle 2:** financial education courses should be carefully targeted to meet the specific needs of citizens.
- **Principle 3:** consumers should be educated in economic and financial matters as early as possible, beginning at school.
- **Principle 4:** financial education courses should include general tools to raise awareness of the need to improve understanding of financial issues and risks.

- **Principle 5:** financial education delivered by financial services providers should be supplied in a fair, transparent and unbiased manner.
- **Principle 6:** financial education trainers should be given the resources and appropriate training to be able to deliver financial education courses successfully and confidently.
- **Principle 7:** national authorities, financial services providers, consumer groups, educators and other stakeholders should be encouraged to cooperate in the delivery of financial education.
- **Principle 8:** financial education providers should regularly evaluate and, where necessary, update the schemes they administer to bring them into line with best practices in the field.

The US Treasury's Office of Financial Education has published similar guidance (US Department of the Treasury, 2004). It describes eight key elements that define a successful programme:

- a focus on basic savings, credit management, home ownership and/or retirement planning
- courses tailored to the target audience, taking into account language, culture, age and experience
- a local delivery organisation that makes effective use of community resources and contacts
- follow-up with participants to reinforce the messages and ensure participants are able to apply the skills taught
- specific programme goals and performance measures to track progress toward meeting those goals
- a positive impact on participants' attitudes, knowledge and behaviour through testing, surveys and other objective evaluations
- an easily replicated format so as to have broad impact and sustainability on a local, regional or national basis
- lasting impact as evidenced by factors such as continuing financial support, legislative backing or integration into an established course.

Hopley's (2003) descriptive report of financial education programmes cited five principles for success, as presented by the Consumer Federation of America, which stated that effective financial education should aim to:

- change behaviour and enable consumers to apply knowledge, not just increase it
- include useful knowledge that is relatively easy to apply
- address values as well as knowledge
- provide hands-on learning as well as studying
- benefit large numbers of people.

Although the research methodology and evidence for developing the above principles and key elements are not made clear in the literature, these guidelines could be considered as useful indicators of effectiveness on the basis that they have been endorsed by national or governmental agencies, which have relevant expertise and a vested interest in improving financial knowledge and capability.

Moreover, some of the factors that make a course effective corroborate these principles and key elements, and are discussed in more detail.

3.5.2 Targeted learning provision adapted to learners' needs

There is substantial evidence to suggest that there is no one prescription for the successful delivery of financial education and the improvement of financial capability (Hopley, 2003; Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007; Hathaway and Khatiwada, 2008; Rhodes and Coben, 2007).

As a consequence, the most frequently cited factor for a successful course is adapting and tailoring the training to the specific needs of the learners. For example, Mitton (2008) concluded:

The best support is tailored to individual need […]. *This mirrors the findings of a Scottish Government (2007) report into policies for specific vulnerable groups. In a review of financial education for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), England and Chatterjee (2005) also found that effectiveness depended on how much a programme is tailored to the needs and characteristics of the client group.* (p.49)

The effectiveness of adopting a tailored approach is supported in several other studies (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007; Rhodes *et al*., 2007; Hopley, 2003). In Scotland, an evaluation of a financial education course found: 'the flexibility of the programme content and delivery methods to meet the specific needs of a particular client group or partner agency' contributed to its successful implementation (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007, p.2). Additionally, Hopley (2003) asserted:

One financial education [programme] *cannot meet the needs of every audience.* [Programmes] *must be tailored to the particular needs of diverse groups of students, such as immigrants, low and moderate income adults and the elderly.* (p.7)

In an extension of this point, a number of other sources cite evidence to support the view that financial education training is more effective in achieving behavioural changes if it is targeted geographically, demographically, by financial activity or life event (Hathaway and Khatiwada, 2008; Rhodes *et al*., 2007).

Closely related to the effectiveness of targeted approaches is the use of local knowledge to then tailor and adapt learning to the needs of specific groups of individuals by, for example, choosing suitable and accessible learning environments for the target group of learners (McMeeking *et al*., 2003). Several other sources identify a number of specific effective factors, relevant to certain groups of individuals, including:

- prioritising the repetition of key information over a comprehensive coverage of topics when designing courses for young adults (Atkinson, 2008)
- offering a series of *stand-alone* classes tailored for women who are victims of domestic violence so they can benefit regardless of the number of classes they are able to attend (Sanders *et al.*, 2007)
- tailoring financial education training for women offenders in custody by providing basic self-study learning materials, such as a learning guide on budgeting, prior to course delivery (Schulter, 2009).

3.5.3 Interactive group discussion and sharing of personal experiences

A common theme, in a few key sources, is the value of integrating interactive sessions (usually based on group discussions) in the design of financial education training (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007; Koenig, 2007; Mitton, 2008; Wa Goro, 2006).

This approach is considered to be particularly effective for adult learners as it is argued that they are more likely to have personal experiences to draw upon, and interactive group discussion offers them an opportunity to debate different issues related to financial matters (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007).

The importance of sharing personal experiences of money matters is similarly highlighted as a key reason for the effectiveness of financial education training for male offenders in custody, according to Koenig (2007). Koenig's report highlighted the value of incorporating participants' previous financial experiences into the teaching of financial literacy, asserting that this can help others learn by example while, simultaneously, making learning more relevant and meaningful:

> *The opportunity to learn from others' mistakes and experiences was applied through class discussions. This teaching method was important for it showed the 'reality' of the experience. The students found themselves able to relate to the situations that were discussed in this way*. (p. 7)

Mitton (2008) characterised this feature in terms of participatory approaches and found that while sessions with interactive discussions are generally considered effective, there remains a need to take account of the characteristics of the group when employing this approach:

> *Popular approaches are participatory sessions, quizzes, case studies and games. The message is to keep it informal: 'Don't be like a teacher* […] *have discussions rather than lessons, keep groups small'. And it is important to communicate with the group on their terms and in their language. However, a couple of organisations working with older people found that their older group wanted just to listen, possibly because of hearing or sight problems, or low literacy. In contrast, their Sure Start participants did want to interact and participate.* (p. 51)

This factor is also relevant for trainers, according to a study of their training needs conducted by Wa Goro (2006). The findings of this study revealed that trainers expressed a preference for financial capability training that involves *'practitioners from a wide spectrum of organisations in order to maximise value of training through the sharing of experiences'* (p. 9).

3.5.4 Proactive and positive partnership working

Proactive and positive partnership working is commonly cited in the key literature, both as a driver of the effective planning and delivery of training designed to improve financial capability, and as a critical factor in the successful engagement of learners.

There are several components of partnership working considered to contribute to its effectiveness:

- Increasing engagement by using local organisations with an established local client base. They are 'best placed to reach the hard-to-reach because of their extensive experience of the local area and their own clients' (McMeeking *et al*., 2003, p.15).
- Establishing effective partner relationships. Blake Stevenson Ltd's evaluation emphasised the need for partners to *buy in* to training and to recognise the benefits of improved financial capability for their clients (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007).
- Investing time in capacity building and networking. In their evaluation of a financial literacy project, Rhodes *et al.* (2007, p.7) stated that success had been dependent on 'cooperation and support from others, beyond the teachers and managers directly responsible, for example, volunteers, employers, [and] trade union learning representatives'.

3.5.5 Credible and expert practitioners

The perceived credibility of tutors is critical, according to the findings of a few literature sources. The evidence describes credibility in this context as:

- the trainer's financial expertise and personal connection to a local area (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007)
- the learners' trust of their trainer, especially in the context of providing financial skills to young adults (Atkinson, 2008).

Wallace and Quilgars (2005) broadened this point by extending it to include trainers' individual abilities, more generally:

Having the right staff in place is critical to the success of an initiative. Staff need appropriate levels of experience, knowledge of the subject area, and knowledge of the client group. Success of financial inclusion projects often depends on the personal qualities of individual project workers, rather than any particular model of delivery. (p. 43)

3.5.6 Diverse and engaging learning materials and resources

Effectiveness also depends upon the range of learning materials and resources used, according to several sources. These sources cited evidence to indicate the importance of using a diverse range of media, and having engaging and fun materials (appropriate to learners' skills levels). This helps target adults with either basic skills needs or little prior financial knowledge, and ensures learning is reinforced (Hopley, 2003; Atkinson, 2008).

In this context, the use of technology can be particularly effective, and can operate both as an additional tool to deliver financial education and as an approach which improves the accessibility of such learning:

Use of technology is potentially a way to make services more accessible, providing education and advice through the phone, internet, text messaging (more accessible for some than the internet), mobile phone, television, video link to an adviser and electronic payment systems. (Mitton, 2008, p. 45)

Providing information and education online can be a relatively low cost way of reaching large numbers of people. Evaluation of the 'Sorted' website in New Zealand has indicated that people can be encouraged to access such information, and that some users believe that they may change their behaviour as a result of the website they have accessed. (Atkinson, 2008, p. 66)

However, some evidence highlights the need to employ this approach with care in respect to some groups with limited access to such technology:

Paper-based communication was not effective, targeted as it was at people with basic skills needs. They also needed very simple materials that assumed little or no knowledge and reflected their low levels of basic skills. (Atkinson, 2008, p. 59)

Large numbers of excluded young people do not have or have limited access to the internet. Therefore they prefer paper resources, so an organisation working with care leavers has produced a file with sections, such as how to open a bank account and what it means to have a loan. (Mitton, 2008, p. 46)

3.5.7 Modular programme approaches to financial education

There is a reasonable amount of evidence regarding the use of modular approaches to financial education, although some contrasting views emerge from the literature.

A number of sources say a modular course approach is effective. Rhodes and Coben (2007) found that such an approach produces better financial knowledge and capability than set curricula designed for a longer duration of study. McMeeking *et al.* (2003) said:

To ensure people receive both financial literacy and basic skills support, it may be helpful to provide modular courses. The first module would concentrate on basic skills (using examples relating to personal finance), and the second would concentrate specifically on money management. (p. 15)

Both of the above studies found that modular courses have a flexibility that:

- provides learners with more choice about the frequency of their participation, for example, taking one-off or short courses (Rhodes *et al*., 2007)
- allows tutors more autonomy to adapt a course to the specific needs of different learners (McMeeking *et al*., 2003).

Further illustration of this is provided by Rhodes and Coben (2007):

[The] *strength of the projects lay in their ability to develop flexible, modular programmes that were successfully adapted by the teachers to meet the particular needs of specified groups of learners.* (p.7)

However, a slightly contrasting view is presented in another study. Atkinson’s (2008) review of financial education evaluations concluded that, while seminars are effective in delivering financial education in the workplace, there is evidence to support the view that accredited courses (in terms of their fixed duration) are more effective than occasional lessons in improving financial capability.

3.5.8 Timing financial education to coincide with key events

The timing of training is described in a small number of sources as influencing a course’s success. Timing it to coincide with when learners are making key financial decisions or are at key life stages, means it is more likely to be perceived by them as relevant and of practical use. In turn, this can improve participation in learning, and ensure there are relevant opportunities to put recently acquired financial knowledge into practice.

Mitton (2008) concluded:

The timing of the intervention is as important as the content […]. *Financial literacy is best delivered on a mandatory basis when it is needed, i.e. in school prior to leaving, or as induction when starting work or further education. There should also be an emphasis on relevance and how the knowledge can be put into practice straightaway, which will vary for different target groups. For example, pensions information is likely to be perceived as boring by 16-24 year olds, but young people may feel motivated to participate in projects around budgeting for cars and mobile phones, which they perceive as immediately relevant.* (p. 37)

This is underlined further by Hathaway and Khatiwada’s (2008) study, which recommended financial education courses be timed to take place just before key financial events in learners’ lives:

> *We do see a pattern that highly targeted programs, unlike general programs, tend to be effective in changing people’s financial behaviour. As a result, we contend that programs should be highly targeted toward a specific audience and area of financial activity (e.g. home-ownership or credit card counselling, etc.), and that this training occurs just before the corresponding financial event (e.g. purchase of a home or use of a credit card, etc.).* (p. 2)

3.5.9 Improvements required to identify effective approaches

The review of key sources of literature and other references has found some evidence of the factors believed to be effective in improving basic financial capability. However, this evidence centres mostly on generic factors relevant to the effectiveness of financial education training in general, and mainly in terms of the impact on learners’ financial knowledge. As a consequence, there is a shortage of evidence to support stronger assertions about what is effective in improving financial capability and financial knowledge in specific circumstances for specific groups of learners.

This appears to correspond with Hathaway and Khatiwada’s (2008) literature review, which found that there is a gap in the evidence to indicate that training can lead to greater financial knowledge:

> *It does appear as though financial knowledge (i.e. financial literacy) does in fact lead to better financial [behaviour]. Unfortunately, the research does not find conclusive evidence that, in general, financial education programs do lead to greater financial knowledge, and ultimately, to better financial behaviour.* (p. 19)

However, there are notable difficulties in obtaining reliable evidence in relation to both financial capability and knowledge. This was acknowledged in two sources.

> *Given that behavioural change is only perceptible over the longer term, relatively few evaluations of the benefits of financial education programmes have been carried out. It is difficult to distinguish between the impact of a financial education programme, wider market influences such as employment rates, pay inflation, financial innovation etc., and the personal circumstances and environment that affect the behaviour of the individual. Evaluations therefore tend to focus on participation in individual financial education programmes.* (European Commission, 2007, p. 5)

> *It is not an easy task to evaluate the impact of a financial capability initiative, and few of the evaluations summarised can be used to form robust assumptions about how a particular scheme might be expected to impact on a population of interest. It also appears that there is some difficulty in identifying what an initiative might achieve, and deciding how to measure success, possibly because of a lack of clear objectives at the outset.* (Atkinson, 2008, p. 10)

In this context Hathaway and Khatiwada's (2008) recommendation regarding the need for integrating formal evaluation processes into financial education training at its inception, is also relevant to this review:

> *Progress on research into the impact of financial education programs is important because we need to understand how consumers behave and how they make decisions in the area of personal finance. Understanding this is critical in order to design programs that will influence these behaviours for better financial outcomes. Similarly, better understanding what works and what does not in financial education programs, through program evaluation and experimentation, is crucial in successfully filling financial knowledge gaps* […]*. We recommend that including formal program evaluation methods in the design of the program itself is critical in being able to measure whether the programs are achieving intended outcomes.* (p. 20)

3.6 Concluding

comments and key messages

Outlined here are some concluding comments about the evidence base, in response to the research questions.

3.6.1 Comments about the evidence base

Approaches to the development of adults' financial capability

Approaches to the development of adults' financial capability are documented in a wide range of sources. The content of such approaches is varied; however, a number of common themes across all types of financial capability provision are evident. These themes could be viewed as a form of 'toolkit' of financial capability, spanning banks and banking; budgeting; managing credit and debt, savings, consumer rights and home ownership. There is clear evidence to indicate that financial capability programmes are adapted to support specific groups of learners' needs.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that while there is wide variation in the types of agencies delivering financial education, most of this type of provision revolves around classroom-based learning which employs additional delivery mechanisms to meet a range of individual needs.

Impacts of approaches to develop adults' financial capability

A more limited body of literature identifies a number of interrelated outcomes associated with interventions to improve financial capability.

Key outcomes include increased confidence, motivation and a sense of capacity to deal with financial issues. The importance of these findings is underlined by other research evidence which indicates that these are important prerequisites for changes in financial behaviour.

There is also some evidence to indicate that increases in financial knowledge have led to both developments in literacy and numeracy skills (important in everyday financial activities) and improvements in social inclusion and equal opportunities.

Paths to making improvements

There is a reasonable amount of literature on what can be done, in a generic sense, to make improvements in the teaching and learning of financial capability. In addition to the limitations on the specificity of this evidence most of the research and evaluation evidence relates to improvements in terms of raising individuals' levels of financial knowledge rather than financial capability in its full sense.

Across this body of literature, the most consistent message is that there is no one prescription for the successful delivery of financial education programmes. This contrasts with the literature which presents 'key principles' of effectiveness for such learning provision while simultaneously corroborating their content, which is expressed in generic terms.

Given that almost all the evidence characterises paths to making improvements in adults' financial capability, in generic terms there is a clear paucity of evidence to support stronger assertions about what is effective in more specific circumstances. As a consequence there is a need to enhance the evidence base of effectiveness in relation to approaches which improve financial knowledge and enhance financial capability.

3.6.2 Key messages

There is a clear need to improve the evidence base of what is effective when teaching and learning skills related to adults' financial capability.

A number of sources confirm that there remains a definite need to improve the evidence base of what is effective when teaching and learning skills related to financial capability. Although guidelines on 'principles of effectiveness' in relation to financial capability have been produced (by the European Commission and US Treasury) and these are supplemented with pockets of good practice examples, the need to generate more overwhelming robust, reliable evidence is a necessity.

Two areas in particular require more robust, empirical evidence of effectiveness:

- more specific evidence of how financial knowledge can be improved in specific circumstances; for example those of learners from particular income groups, with different skills levels or the use of different delivery methods. It should be acknowledged that there are exceptions, with minor examples showing what is effective for specific groups of learners.
- more specific evidence of how to improve individuals' financial capability, focusing on how they better learn to apply their financial knowledge and take action as a result and make changes in their financial behaviour.

Two approaches are outlined in the literature for measuring the effectiveness of courses aiming to raise financial knowledge and capability.

1. Integrate the monitoring and evaluation of processes and outcomes into the design of financial education courses. This could highlight the most effective learning activities and inform the future delivery of courses. ***(Blake Stevenson, 2007; Hathaway and Khatiwada, 2008)***
2. Conduct a national exercise to consolidate all forms of evaluation evidence (including published and unpublished sources) to create a comprehensive database. This could then be used as the basis for meta-analyses and/or employed as a baseline of empirical evidence from which a more coherent understanding of what is effective could be derived or developed.

Develop a clearer articulation of what constitutes the activities that are successfully supporting the improvement of financial capability.

A clear articulation of what financial capability training incorporates would better support the coordination of these types of courses, minimise duplication and maximise value for money.

- What makes financial capability training distinct from other forms of financial education?
- Are there overlaps in content between financial capability training and other forms of financial education?
- What are the differences and similarities between financial capacity training and financial education, financial literacy, consumer education and financial inclusion courses?

It is clear from the evidence that a range of different policies and practice contribute to the improvement of adults' financial capability skills, directly and indirectly, and to varying degrees, depending on whether they focus on improving financial knowledge or seek to change financial behaviours.

It is also clear from the evidence that a range of partners should be involved in developing policies for how best to teach basic financial capability skills to adults; assessing different groups of learners' needs; and designing and teaching such courses.

Prioritise the assessment and identification of learners' needs in relation to financial capability, supported by a conceptualisation of financial capability which reflects the full range of individuals' potential financial capability needs.

The need to tailor and target approaches is a consistent message throughout the reviewed evidence, and doing so is common practice.

This places a priority on initial assessments to identify the training a person needs. An assessment for other basic skills, for example, literacy, numeracy or ICT skills, may reveal a need for financial capability training. However, some evidence shows that it can be difficult to convince an individual that he or she needs financial capability training.

In this context, there is a risk that more subtle financial capability needs are being missed. At the same time, if definitions of financial capability are too narrow or standardised they will not encompass the full range of subtle needs. A conceptualisation of financial capability reflecting the full range of potential needs could add depth to the initial needs assessment. It would help assessors recognise the diversity of needs as well as ensure training meets those needs.

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4

The development of employability skills for adults

George Bramley, Kay Kinder and Rowena Passey

4.1 Focus of this review

This review is in response to a renewed interest in employability and the need to crystallise key factors about its teaching and learning, taking account of different policy and economic contexts, and the requirements for specific groups of adults. Those furthest from the labour market (including the economically disadvantaged, ethnic minority groups, those with low educational achievement and those with disabilities) feature prominently. However, the literature review also covers graduates and parents returning to work.

More specifically, this review aims to answer the following questions:

- What does the descriptive and evaluative literature say about the development of adult employability skills in terms of approaches and outcomes?
- What research evidence is available relating to the development of adult employability skills?
- How effective are the approaches taken and what impact do they have?
- What can be done to improve the teaching and learning of adult employability skills?
- Given the findings of the above questions, which approaches could or should be replicated?

4.1.1 Some definitions of employability

There is a general shared understanding of the term employability, and Curtis and McKenzie (2001) offer the definition:

The concept of key employability skills provides a bridge between education and work. In a dynamic knowledge-based economy the job-specific skills that workers need cannot be readily predicted, and are subject to on-going change. What is important, therefore, is the capacity to continually adapt and upgrade through key or generic skills that can be applied in different settings. (p. vii)

However, working definitions for policy and research purposes, not surprisingly, vary across different contexts. This is because employability skills are complex and dynamic in nature, and because they are influenced by political, occupational, and social and economic factors as well as individual circumstances (Rainey, 2006).

Curtis and McKenzie (2001) made a number of observations about the employability skills debate. There is no shared language or understanding of what constitutes the skills set that makes someone employable:

Adjectives such as core; key; generic and essential are variously used to preface nouns such as skills; competencies; capabilities; and attributes. It is not clear whether these different terms reflect slight variants of the basic concepts or [...] whether they signal genuinely new developments. (p. vii)

The authors also said a lack of shared understanding has acted as a barrier to building consensus amongst governments, employers and educators about how training should be reformed to meet the needs of learners.

The term generic employability skills has been helpful in that it implies that what is learned in one context can be applied in others. Employability is often seen in terms of an individual having the qualities of resourcefulness, adaptability and flexibility, as well as more measurable skills such as literacy and numeracy.

As noted, other sources suggest that there is broad compatibility across differing definitions. Indeed, the UKCES report (2009b) stated:

There is no agreement on a definition of employability skills; but almost all definitions are in practice quite similar. (p. 9)

Examples of this similarity include Meadows and Garbers (2004) who defined employability as:

The ability to gain and keep a job, and to cope with changing employment conditions both in the workplace and in the wider economy, including getting a new job if necessary. (p. 17)

Hillage and Pollard (1998) suggested it is ‘the ability to gain initial employment, the ability to maintain employment and the ability to obtain new employment if required’. Hillard and Pollard’s definition appeared in other sources (for example Willott and Stevenson, 2006). In sum, employability is the getting, staying and progressing in work.

4.1.2 What are employability skills?

Employability skills are often seen as generic core skills that can be applied to any position and are essential for employees to be truly effective in their job. Employability skills are sometimes referred to as core work skills or competencies. They are often expressed in terms of employability frameworks.

Down (2003) outlined a typical employability skills framework (Box 4.1). What is clear from this framework is the range of skills covered under the definition of employability. It would be exceptional for one individual to be strong on all the skills listed. For some individuals, the need is to develop more core skills of numeracy and literacy, a lack of which may be acting as a barrier to entry and progression in employment.

Box 4.1 Example employability framework

The employability skills framework is made up from key skills and personal attributes:

- communication skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers
- teamwork skills that contribute to productive working relationships and impacts
- problem-solving skills that contribute to productive impacts
- initiative and enterprise skills that contribute to productive impacts
- planning and organising skills that contribute to productive impacts
- self-management skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and expansion in employee and company operations and impacts
- technology skills that contribute to the effective execution of tasks.

Source : Down (2003, p. 2)

Down (2003) noted that *'employability skills are not a package of skills, they operate in many different ways'* (p. 6), and depending on the specific job, or occupation, employability skills *'can be an integral part of a specific technical competency'* (p. 6). This can take the form of an individual's technical competency requiring the ability to improvise when things do not go to plan, or the ability to develop innovative solutions to work around issues rather than apply a predetermined set of taught procedures. This is what is referred to as mastery of a specific job and it can only be developed through experience and reflective practice. Other skills associated with employability were seen by Down (2003) as less job specific and transferable in that *'employability skills operate across tasks as well as just within them'* (p. 7). This could be, for example, the ability to work effectively within a team and manage time effectively. These skills *'are needed by individuals to manage their work life'* (p. 7).

Meadows and Garbers (2004) in their research used a definition of employability skills that is very similar to the standard definition used by occupational psychologists for defining work competences. This definition replaced knowledge, skills and understandings (KSUs) with knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs). They defined the key elements of employability for an individual as:

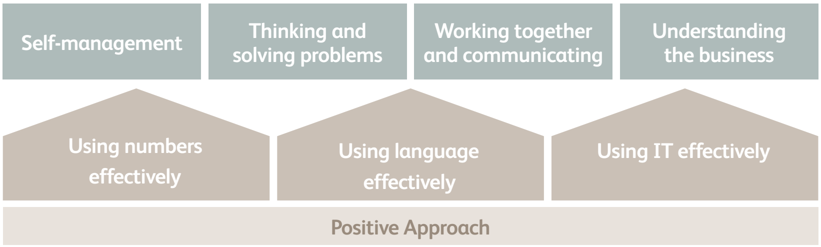
Their assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess; the way in which they use and deploy those assets; the way they present them to employers; and crucially, the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they work. Hillage and Pollard (1998, p. 17)

The change in emphasis from understanding to attitudes or personal attributes is significant in that it implies that an employee needs to have more than just an understanding of their occupational role.

Working definitions of employability skills reflect changes in policy discourse, with a renewed focus on the needs of employers or potential entrepreneurs. Individuals must be able to secure work in a globally competitive economy. Little and ESECT Colleagues (2006) define employability as *'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make [people] more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations'* (p. 2).

More specifically, the UKCES's working definition of employability skills is set out in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Components of employability skills


Self-management
Thinking and solving problems
Working together and communicating
Understanding the business
Using numbers effectively
Using language effectively
Using IT effectively
Positive Approach

Source: UKCES (2009b, p. 5)

Significantly, this definition pulls together a number of key concepts within a language than can be easily shared with researchers, trainers, employers and policy-makers. Table 4.1 illustrates the kind of skills that recur in the literature when employability is referred to.

Table 4.1 Examples of employability skills mapped to UKCES key components of employability

Skills [from UKCES, 2009b]	**Examples from other sources**
Self-management	- Timekeeping and punctuality (Deloitte, 2008; Lanning *et al.*, 2008) - Self-presentation: how employee appears to employer (Deloitte, 2008) - Planning and organising skills (Down, 2003) - Reliability (Deloitte, 2008) - Ability to deal with pressure (Down, 2003)
Thinking and solving problems	- Initiative and enterprise skills (Down, 2003) - Enterprise and entrepreneurship (CBI, 2009)
Working together and communicating	- Team work (CBI, 2009) - Communicating with the client (Down, 2003)
Understanding the business	- Business and customer awareness (CBI, 2009) - Being responsive and equipped to deal with the changing labour market (UKCES, 2009a and b)
Using numbers effectively	- Application of numbers (UKCES, 2009 a and b)
Using language effectively	- Client communication skills (Future Skills Scotland, 2005)
Using IT effectively	- Information literacy (21st Century Learning) - Managing information (UKCES, 2009a and b)
Positive approach	- Commitment (Lanning *et al.*, 2008) - Enthusiasm (Lanning *et al.*, 2008) - Willingness to learn and learning continuously (Asset Skills quoted in UKCES, 2009a and b; Deloitte, 2008)

Lanning *et al.* (2008) argued that while evidence does indicate there is a *'broad and shared understanding'* (p. 1) in terms of what is meant by employability skills, ultimately it is employers' definitions that matter most because they *'will have a clear, if specific, view of what is needed for employability in their business'* (p. 1). In terms of research and policy development it is important to remember that employability skills are context specific and, therefore, should be assessed within the context in which they appear (Down, 2003).

4.1.3 Definitions and how they influence employability programmes

Lunt (2006) observed that operational definitions of employability vary in their emphasis of five components. These components, in turn, influence the design and aims of different employability initiatives. The five components have been adapted for this review.

- The need for working-age adults to be flexible and adaptable to the changing labour market. This touches on the need for individuals to continuously develop through lifelong learning.
- The need to foster specific behaviours and attitudes. This covers the extent to which employability is determined by the personality traits of individuals and how this may affect their readiness for work. Implications for the teaching and learning of employability skills relate to prevailing beliefs about what is possible and the adoption of different pedagogical strategies. Often it is the role of the trainer or personal adviser to challenge attitudes and behaviours, such as timekeeping, personal hygiene and dress, and foster a sense of responsibility and self-belief.
- The need to overcome (real and perceived) external factors preventing entry into the labour market. Factors include family commitments, disabilities, lack of role models and lack of awareness of opportunities. Demand-side factors include employment opportunities and the willingness of individuals to undertake training to increase their employability.
- The need to progress the individual on the journey to sustained employability. This has implications for the design and purpose of programmes and courses. Lunt (2006) suggested these *'should be concerned with transitions and processes in and through work rather than straightforward steps into work'* (p. 474).
- The adoption of a human capital development and/or a work-first approach in policy, courses or research design.

A work-first approach is *'where programmes focus mainly on compulsory job searches and short-term interventions to facilitate a quick return to work'* (Lindsay *et al*., 2007, p. 539). This approach supports the notion that it is better to have a job than no job at all *'in terms of social and economic benefits for unemployed people'* (p. 541). There is less focus on *'the quality of the initial job outcomes'* (p. 541). There are some elements of this in the approach adopted in the UK, namely a focus on 'quick wins' in terms of placing individuals in employment.

Human capital development approaches are *'where programmes tailor services to promote longer-term skills and development*' (p. 539). It is acknowledged that jobseekers require a lot of support, potentially over a lengthy period of time, and *'the aim is to facilitate the development of skills and attributes that will equip people to find and retain suitable jobs, and advance through in-work progression routes'* (p. 542). The focus is more on enabling the individual to prepare for and take advantage of sustainable employment opportunities rather than 'quick wins' in terms of employment placement.

Lanning *et al.* (2008) observed that while there are plenty of resources for and advice on the delivery of employability skills such as numeracy and literacy, there is less guidance on how trainers can develop attributes, or soft skills, such as enthusiasm, commitment and timekeeping.

4.2 Delivery of employability skills training

The examination of the evidence identifies that the development of employability skills can take place in the following contexts:

- prior to entry into employment, including short courses and placements
- within education settings
- within work, including voluntary work settings.

An individual's employability training may involve one or more of the above contexts. Seventeen of the 24 key reviewed sources described how employability skills training is being delivered, but only a minority of these did so in any detail. The key sources tend to focus on the delivery of UK programmes. It was necessary to supplement the 24 sources with additional targeted web searches to identify current international activity.

4.2.1 Delivery of employability skills training: prior to entry to employment

Typically, these programmes tend to be aimed at adults who have been unemployed for some period of time. The exact nature of the training is determined by how far the target group is seen to need to progress in terms of its employability skills. The precise nature of the training is shaped by the level and nature of funding, with much of the most intensive and innovative support being funded by short-term challenge or discretionary funding (Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd, 2005).

Training can take the form of a work-first approach in which the individual is assessed to determine which work opportunities are most suitable for them. Depending on this assessment, an individual may receive:

- short job-focused training
- longer occupational training
- basic employability training
- enterprise or self-employment training.

Short job-focused training

Short job-focused training can include both the development of generic employability skills and specific occupational skills for a targeted job placement. Speckesser and Bewley (2006) noted that this type of training offers limited occupational training that can be easily assessed, for example training for a health and safety certificate in food processing. They noted that training could also be centred on the skills associated with searching for a job, such as CV-writing and interview skills. Typically this type of training lasts for up to six weeks.

Longer occupational training

Longer occupational training could last up to year but typically lasts for a period of 14 weeks. It builds on jobseekers' existing qualifications and develops them into the skills sought by employers. This type of training according to Speckesser and Bewley (2006) focused on:

Improving formal and certified qualifications and provides additional skills in order to update the existing qualifications [and] familiarise participants with new technologies and processes. (p. 7)

This type of training can vary in nature and type of provider. It can be mandatory for individuals signing on for welfare payments in, for example, the USA. Box 4.2 describes the workforce linkage workshops operating in Missouri. These encourage individuals to develop realistic career goals and an employability plan to achieve those goals.

Box 4.2: Missouri workforce linkage workshops

To receive food stamps, the unemployed in Missouri have to participate in classroom and group-based activities.[1]

Career exploration

Participants set realistic short- and long-term goals, and develop an employability plan to achieve their chosen career goal. They join a class and undertake group participation activities relating to goal planning using information about the labour market, themselves, occupations, and training and education programmes.

Networking

Participants are shown how to find job openings and network for the kinds of jobs they are looking for. The classes cover using different media for job searching; determining what type of job is wanted; how to effectively network; how to identify what skills job advertisements are really asking for; and how to effectively contact potential employers. Access to equipment, software and technical support is provided.

Applications and CVs

Equipment, software and technical support are provided to help participants produce a CV. Participants learn how to effectively complete an application (including analysing critical questions); deal with potential problem areas of an application; state their strengths as tailored to the employment being sought; identify different types of CVs and when each should be used; and compose covering and thank you letters.

Interviewing

These classes focus on how to make a positive first impression in an interview; how to deal with any fears about the job interview process; the importance of appropriate dress; the impact of body language; addressing tough questions; and positive conduct during an interview. Mock interviews may be videotaped.

Career advancement and enhancement

This covers what employers expect of employees; workplace ethics including punctuality, attendance and workplace dress; appropriate behaviour towards colleagues and managers; and problem-solving methods. It provides participants with information on ways to use their employment to achieve a higher skill level; create a stepping-stone to a future goal; and how to balance work and family.

Missouri career centre workshops

These supplement the workforce linkage workshops and are developed locally to enhance the individual's search for and retention of employment leading towards self-sufficiency.

Source: Missouri Employment Training Programme (2007)

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[1] For further information: https://worksmart.ded.mo.gov/documents/view_one.cfm?ID=1139&menuID=6

Basic employability training

Basic employability training is aimed at adults with low basic skills who require help with literacy, numeracy and fundamental working skills, for example communication, self-esteem and work ethic (Speckesser and Bewley, 2006). Basic employability training can involve confronting an individual's attitudes and behaviours: this might include issues such as personal hygiene and dress as well as punctuality and attitudes to authority. Those who participate in basic employability training are expected to develop the skills they require in order to start searching for a job.

Within the UK, basic employability training typically lasts for up to 26 weeks and is intended to raise the level of literacy and numeracy at least to the basic skills entry level. Third sector organisations concerned with tackling social exclusion provide basic employment training, and are often well placed to do so because of their outreach activities in deprived areas and amongst disadvantaged groups (Ramsden, 2005; Jones *et al.*, 2008). They are also considered best placed by mainstream organisations to provide wrap-around support that enables individuals to overcome the specific barriers they face in applying the skills taught in their employability skills training sessions.

Enterprise or self-employment training

Enterprise or self-employment training is provided for those wanting to leave unemployment by becoming self-employed (Speckesser and Bewley, 2006; Ramsden, 2005; Metcalf and Benson, 2000).

Depending on who provides the training and how much an individual needs to learn about employability, training is usually structured into a series of stages. The stages are raising awareness of the entrepreneurial options, identifying a business idea, developing a business plan, testing the idea with the support of a mentor and, in some cases, financial assistance in the form of a start-up grant or subsidised and/or delayed payment loan.

Such training and support is normally provided by specialist providers and can be highly bespoke to specific groups. The expectation is that individuals should progress to mainstream business support or advisory services and develop the skills to use the external advice and consultancy necessary for managing and growing their business (Mole and Bramley, 2006).

This type of support can be highly effective for individuals with multiple disadvantages (Ramsden, 2005). This option is available in a number of OECD countries, especially where enterprise is seen as one of the key drivers of economic growth.

4.2.2 Delivery of employability skills training in education settings

Transition into employment

The review of policies and programmes, with specific reference to employability, found that Canada and the USA have given significant attention to the transition from tertiary education into employment. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) is the lead Canadian government department. It has a common framework for state and local governments to develop programmes that relate to employability.

An example is the Listuguj Mi'gmaq Development Centre's (LMDC) Fundamental Work Skills Program.[2] This addresses the nine essential skills identified by the HRSDC through classes, workshops and entry-level mentored work placements. It is specifically for the native Listuguj Mi'gmaq who have not completed high-school education. The LMDC will specifically target those receiving social assistance and develop their skills in reading different types of texts (for example statistical reports and letters), documenting and presenting information, writing and numeracy, communicating orally, working with others, analysing, computing and engaging in continuous learning.

In the USA, colleges and universities have developed specific courses and activities to improve employability skills in response to two major studies published in the early 1990s. These were commissioned by the American Society for Training and Development (Carnevale *et al*., 1990) and by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991). They identified significant issues concerning the employability of young people entering the workforce. The response of the education community has been to either develop specific courses relating to employability or to embed activities within existing curricula.

Preparing graduates for the world of work

The CBI's (2009) recent research on preparing graduates for the world of work echoed previous studies concerning graduates' employability in that it confirmed that graduates' ability to demonstrate employability skills is significant to the majority of employers. Seventy-two per cent of employers sought a positive attitude in potential employees. Relevant work experience or an industrial placement was important to 54 per cent of employers. Over three-quarters of employers felt universities should prioritise improving the employability skills of their undergraduates. They felt this could be achieved through relevant work placements (60 per cent) and by improving the technical content of some degree subjects (46 per cent).

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) has developed a number of subject-specialised briefings for higher education staff developing students' employability in engineering and the physical sciences. These briefings set out clear practical steps.

- Audit the curriculum, preferably in terms of the core of a study pathway rather than at the level of individual modules. The curriculum should develop the subject understanding, specific skills, efficacy beliefs and meta-cognition sought by employers.
- Ensure approaches to teaching, learning and assessment are consistent with curriculum objectives; not least by creating opportunities that support the sorts of learning that is intended to happen. The HEA suggests that in the development of employability, subject departments should review how they do things, and how they might ask students to do things which are as important – perhaps more important – than the stated objectives of a particular module.

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[2] For further information see **http://www.lmdc.ca/**

[3] For further information: **http://www.engsc.ac.uk/er/employability/index.asp**

- Make sure students have clear learning goals and are aware of what they will have to do to achieve their goals. They should also have a perspective on their achievements, and a clear idea of actions necessary for improvement. Formative assessment can play a key role here. Students need to understand that the goals of a programme are wider than academic achievement alone, and to appreciate the ways in which their study could support claims to employability.
- Understand more about the career destinations of graduates, not only their first six months after graduation but also longer-term career paths. Most university careers services publish details of the destinations of their graduates and the Prospects website (http://www.prospects.ac.uk) has the destinations of UK engineering graduates.
- Recognise the increasingly uncertain and less supported career trajectories many graduates are likely to encounter, with more in self-employment, in smaller companies or facing a larger number of career changes.
- Encourage entrepreneurial skills amongst undergraduates through curriculum development, to equip them to start and grow their own business and also contribute effectively to an organisation.

Source: Adapted from Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre, 2005

Specific guidance for students

STEMNET (2010) has published specific guidance for students studying subjects related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics advising on how they can demonstrate core employability skills to employers. This guidance looks at the top ten employability skills sought by employers:

- communication and interpersonal skills
- problem solving skills
- initiative and self-motivation
- working under pressure and to deadlines
- organisational skills
- team working
- ability to learn and adapt
- numeracy
- valuing diversity and difference
- negotiation skills.

The guidance describes in a straightforward way what these skills are, and provides potential examples of how they can be demonstrated both inside and outside of the classroom. An example from the guidance is shown in Box 4.3.

Box 4.3 Example of STEMNET guidance for students on using initiative and being self-motivated

What this means

Having new ideas of your own which can be made into a reality. Showing a strong personal drive and not waiting to be told to do things.

Example from *inside* the classroom: 'For our coursework on electrical circuits I was the only one in class who chose to research how they are used in companies to get a real-life perspective.'

Example from *outside* the classroom: 'On my first morning of a summer temping job my manager was not around so I introduced myself to the other team members and offered to help until my manager arrived.'

Source: STEMNET (2010)

Certificates in employability

UK trade associations work closely with sector skills councils developing sector-specific training courses for their respective commercial sector. City & Guilds qualifications and their underpinning curricula have been developed through close links with trade associations. Recently, City & Guilds have launched an Award and Certificate in Employability and Personal Development.[4]

Some technical and further education courses in South Australia provide a certificate in employability skills based on the key competencies identified by the Australian Education Council. Mayer Committee (1992). Students undertake a validated self-assessment of their employability skills through the Linkup employability portal.[5] This portal is designed so that the student discovers what key competencies mean (employability skills), and how they are defined including three different performance levels, before completing an online assessment. The portal is operated by Technical and Further Education South Australia (TAFE SA), which provides technical and further education courses in South Australia.

4.2.3 Delivery of employability skills training in work

Structured project work placements

The CBI (2009) surveyed employers with university links. Of these, 74 per cent believed providing work experience was part of their corporate social responsibility. Established programmes include the Shell Step Programme for undergraduates and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) for graduates. These are well regarded by employers, students and their tutors because they require students to complete a specific project under the joint supervision of their academic tutor and the employer. Students develop their ability to apply technical knowledge to real commercial situations.

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[4] See **http://www.cityandguilds.com/24758.html**

[5] See **http://linkup.tafesa.edu.au**

Generally, while there has been progress in facilitating employers' access to undergraduates, and employers offering structured placements, businesses still feel that higher education institutions should be doing more to improve employer engagement.

There was some tentative evidence in SQW Ltd's (2002) evaluation of the Teaching Company Scheme (TCS), which was the forerunner to the KTP, that newer applied universities were more effective in creating partnerships that produced mutual benefits. Employers increased sales and broke into new markets through product and process innovation due to the know-how transferred from the universities. Associates (graduates) reported improved employability skills, high levels of job satisfaction and a sense of personal development. The universities themselves benefited in terms of exploiting their intellectual property and strengthened industry links which fed back into their teaching and research.

Tools and services to help employees and employers assess employability skills

Governments have simplified ways for employers to access support when developing employability skills. These include offering online tools and single points of access to training, and the analysis of their needs and brokering of the best packages of support. In Canada, the HRSDC has developed a number of online resources that allow employers and individuals to self-assess their essential work skills. Similarly, Singapore has developed online resources for employers.

In the UK, there are similar tools as well as telephone and face-to-face support through Business Link in England, which undertakes a thorough skills analysis and brokers the best package of support. Business Link is responsible for the delivery of Train to Gain in England. This programme is designed to encourage employers to invest in their staff's skills development. Adult learners receive training that builds on their existing employability skill set, such as becoming aware of new working practices and technologies.

4.3 Pathways to improvement:

how to get the best effects in the future

Thirteen of the 20 key sources reviewed describe potential improvements and good practices in relation to the delivery of employability skills training.

Four characteristics were identified in the review for improving the design, delivery and outcomes of employability skills training.

- Flexible training of employability skills responds to the needs of learners and employers.
- Development of inter-agency working means learners receive a seamless offer, which may also include wrap-around support enabling them to overcome barriers to developing employability skills and entry into employment.
- Employers' involvement engages them and results in their contribution to the design and delivery of employability training.
- Different routes by which adult learners can develop their employability skills, reflecting the fact the learners may prefer to learn in different contexts and at their own pace.

Together, these improve the employability training for adult learners. Within each of these characteristics, a number of key components were identified in the review, and these are discussed.

4.3.1 Flexible training

The review clearly highlights the need for employability training to be flexible for learners so that they can best make use of the opportunities afforded to them. Six key aspects of flexible training were identified in this review:

- Tailor training to the needs of the learner, taking into account how much they need to develop their employability skills set.
- Design employability skills training that meets the needs of different groups and addresses the specific barriers they face.
- Take into account specific learner characteristics when designing and delivering employability training.
- Use local third sector organisations, such as social enterprises, and community and voluntary groups, to reach out and provide accessible employability training for the most disadvantaged.
- Build in transportability of learning programmes and the ability for learners to progress easily to higher-level study and qualification.
- Involve learners in the design and delivery of employability training.

Tailor training to the needs of the learner and how much they need to develop their employability skills

This is mentioned by five of the key sources reviewed (Grief *et al*., 2007; Down, 2003; Jones *et al*., 2008; UKCES, 2009a and b; Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd, 2005). As noted by Jones *et al*. (2008), such an approach is crucial for engaging learners with specific needs and the most to learn in terms of developing the necessary skills to enter the labour market. They are more likely to require support for developing basic skills such as ESOL, literacy and numeracy. They may be facing disability barriers and need to develop the attitudes, demeanour and behaviours associated with working as either an employee or a self-employed individual.

The literature reviewed identifies programmes aimed at those with greatest need such as the European Social Fund Global Grants (Jones *et al*., 2008). This is outlined in Box 4.4. These grants are not target driven in terms of job placements but more concerned with an individual's progression towards employability as the first step to employment. Programmes are localised and aimed at individuals with multiple disadvantages in terms of developing employability skills.

Box 4.4: Example of a European Social Fund Global Grant project

The European Social Fund Global Grant supports a number of initiatives across the European Union. It supported the development of a gardening project for people with mental health issues. While most participants had previously been enrolled in mainstream learning, they failed to engage or receive the support they needed to succeed. As a consequence, they were far from ready for employment and faced long-term unemployment.

For these reasons, the gardening project's key objective was to deal with individuals' needs including help with rehabilitation after a health condition or disability acquired in later life. Absence from the labour market for a long period meant many participants were depressed and needed to build their self-esteem and confidence prior to moving back into work.

Participants benefited from social contact, peer support and a daily routine. In terms of impacts, they valued learning new things, had improved confidence and self-esteem, and benefited from sharing experiences with people in the same situation as themselves.

Source: Jones et al. (2008)

The review also found programmes targeting individuals close to having the necessary employability skills. For example, in India there has been a greater focus on employers recruiting those either very close to employability or willing to invest in developing the skills they need. Box 4.5 outlines the Maharashtra State's Modular Employability Scheme (MES) (Directorate of Vocational Education and Training. Maharashtra State, 2009). Participants are reimbursed the course fee, giving them an incentive to complete it and valuing what it can give them.

Box 4.5 Government of Maharashtra State Modular Employable Scheme (MES)

The MES scheme has two main objectives.

- Provide vocational training to, for example, school leavers, existing workers and IT graduates to improve their employability by providing access to facilities and resources available in government, private institutions and industry. Participants' existing skills can be tested and certified under this scheme.
- Build capacity in the area of development of competency standards, course curricula, learning materials and assessment standards in the country.

The scheme has the following features.

- Demand-driven and short-term training courses based on the employability skills decided in consultation with industry. The scheme is seen as providing the minimum skills set necessary for gaining employment.
- Central government facilitates and promotes the training scheme while industry, the private sector and state government are expected to do the training.
- Making best use of existing facilities and teaching resources to make training costs effective.
- Flexible delivery including part-time, weekends, full-time, and on- and offsite work locations to suit the needs of various target groups.
- Different levels of programmes, from foundation level to skills upgrading, to meet the demands of various target groups.
- Courses are also available for individuals who have completed secondary education at 5th Standard level.
- Skills are tested and certified in an informal way.
- Testing is done by independent assessing bodies not involved in the delivering of training.
- Completing the scheme results in a nationally recognised certificate.

Source: Directorate of Vocational Education and Training. Maharashtra State (2009)

Design employability skills training that meets the needs of different groups and addresses the specific barriers they face

Amongst the sources reviewed, some look at the needs of specific groups and how training is tailored to their needs (for example, Lunt, 2006; Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd, 2005).

Groups identified include:

- young people
- hard-to-reach groups due to disability, lack of basic skills, and not speaking English as a first language
- those living in a disadvantaged area.

Lunt (2006) described two New Zealand initiatives, *Working for Families* and *Jobs Jolt.* These helped individuals develop their employability, but Lunt concluded that in reality there was a *'complex mosaic of services and programmes'* that focused on both increasing the supply of skilled workers and raising employers' demand for such workers (p. 478).

Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd (2005) provided a comprehensive review of local training in Scotland for those with the most severe barriers to employability including homelessness, risky behaviour, mental health, transition to parenthood and drug use.

The United Nation's International Labour Office is sponsoring a number of initiatives to develop employability through its Regional Skills and Employability Programme in Asia and the Pacific (SKILLS-AP).[6] These promote innovation and the sharing of best practice. Additional packages of support and bespoke services are another way in which to address the needs of a particular client group.

Take into account gender when designing and delivering employability training

The literature review identifies distinct differences between the perceived employability training needs and preferences of men and women. Closely linked to gender differences are the differing needs of carers and parents in terms of support for developing employability and actual application of the employability skills they develop.

While women are more motivated to undertake training for soft impacts, there is some evidence to suggest that men's motivations are largely practical. Men wanted to increase their IT or English skills and overcome boredom due to long-term unemployment (Willott and Stevenson, 2006).

Willott and Stevenson (2006) also examined a number of initiatives attempting to meet the specific requirements of women. Initiatives were run by local organisations rooted in their immediate communities. These included, for example, the Equal Community Initiative Programme in Leeds overcoming labour market discrimination and inequalities by raising the confidence of the socially or economically excluded, and creating new access routes to employment and dedicated training opportunities.

A number of successful strategies and innovations for engaging and retaining women in employability skills training were identified in the literature.

- Involving minority ethnic women in community-based creative activities, to improve their confidence and self-esteem.
- Proactively raising awareness of courses by using, for example flyers, websites and taster sessions with hooks to entice prospective learners.
- Adapting courses so that learners can learn at their own pace, rather than rigidly sticking to external requirements set by funding or awarding bodies.

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[6] For additional information http://www.ilo.int/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/skills-ap/docs/young.pdf

- Trainers not making reference to learners' performance levels in training sessions. This was thought to be key, particularly for women *'who were often more insecure about their own skills and abilities and did not want to exhibit 'weakness' in front of others'* (p. 446).
- Providing pastoral support, which was particularly important for raising confidence and retention.
- Having childcare support for women.

Children are identified as the main motivation for undertaking employability skills training by women in two of the key sources (Willott and Stevenson, 2006; Grief *et al*., 2007). Reasons include wanting to be able to help with their children's homework, and be better role models. At the same time, family and caring responsibilities are reported as the main barrier to employment for women (LSC, 2008; Marangozov, 2009). Again, this suggests the need for childcare support to be put in place.

Mentoring can also be effective in encouraging parents to develop their employability skills. It was an aspect of the pilot using children's centres as providers of employability skills training and support for parents going back into employment (Marangozov, 2009).

Take into account the needs of young people when designing and delivering employability training

The literature identifies a number of activities, which young people can benefit from. This may be because an education and training programme gives them an increased focus on their employability and where they are in their careers.

However, there is a group of young people who are disaffected due to either having had poor previous learning opportunities or because they lack positive role models. The Prince's Trust has worked extensively with young people from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds and is identified by UKCES (2009 a and b) as an example of good practice in their review of employability training within the UK. Box 4.6 describes the Get Into programme, which provides highly structured and stepped training for those young people with pronounced barriers to employment.

Box 4.6 The Prince's Trust – Get Into programme

The programme started in 2004 and provides unemployed 16–25 year olds, who are ready and available to work, the opportunity to develop sector-specific vocational skills and transferable employability skills for sustainable employment. The programme targets young people who are in or leaving care, offenders, ex-offenders and education underachievers. Within these groups, the programme focuses on black and minority ethnic young people, those with disabilities, refugees, asylum seekers and lone parents. The aim is to be accessible to half of the young people living in the most deprived areas.

Young people can be referred as potential participants by a range of organisations including Jobcentre Plus and Connexions, or they can refer themselves.

The programme includes a mandatory employability day where interested young people can find out about a particular sector and practise key employability skills.

The trust also works with employers to develop a taster day, which potential learners must attend before deciding on the programme that is right for them. The decision about whether a programme is right for a young person is made by programme staff and the employer. Their decision is based on a range of information including how an individual responds to the employability and taster days. The programme staff ensure the employer is ready to work with the young person.

Learners are supported on a one-to-one basis for up to six months after completion of the programme and this period focuses on broader barriers such as mental health and homelessness.

The programme addresses skills shortages identified by both employers and the trust. In London, for example, sectors covered include digital media, cooking and sport. The precise content and design of individual programmes varies depending on the commercial sector's needs. However, all programmes are hands-on and give recognition of learners' successful completion.

Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd (2005) mapped employability and support services for disengaged young people and found that the outreach approaches adopted by youth workers were particularly effective. This involved working outside normal office hours in the locations frequented by young people and targeting young people not in education, employment or training. The adoption of a youth-work approach reduces the tendency to focus on those closest to having employability skills rather than targeting those in greatest need of assistance.

In addition to national programmes aimed at young people, there are transnational programmes. The International Labour Office, building on previous experience in developing employability, is piloting a number of initiatives aimed at young people to address unemployment and under-employment in the Pacific Rim, such as the First Time Private Sector Temporary Work Place Scheme and Certificate on Start. The Improve Your Business in Kiribati is concerned with capacity building and developing expertise in delivering employability-related training to young people.[7]

Take into account the needs of older people when designing and delivering employability training

The review did not identify any evaluative or research studies on programmes with tailored support specifically aimed at older people. Rather, older people have tended to be referred to in more universal programmes. This is changing due to an ageing population and the need to encourage those who leave the labour market prematurely before retirement age.

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[7] See **http://bravo.ilo.org/asia/countries/lang--en/facet--GEO-_-KIR%2C-_-LOC.ASIA-_-ASIA.SKL-_-2626/WCMS_DOC_ASI_CNT_KIR_EN/index.htm**

Lunt (2006) described the *Jobs Jolt* scheme in New Zealand. It set strong expectations that mature workers were not exempt from the test to see if they were fit for work. The scheme provided coaching for the long-term unemployed but it was not specifically aimed at older people. It also provided case management for sick and invalid beneficiaries and supported lone parents into work by helping them develop employability skills and entry into employment.

The Australians Working Together (AWT) programme, which informed the subsequent simplified Employment Service, had a specific programme strand for older people called *A Fair Go For Mature Age People*, and developed approaches for employability based around the needs of older workers. The evaluation of AWT did not specifically detail benefits for older people.

In the UK, *Enterprise: Unlocking the Talent* (HM Treasury and Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (2008) announced a number of initiatives to support those over the age of 50 wanting to become self-employed. One example was the PRIME Initiative, which provides free information, events and training.[8] Central to PRIME is the PRIME promise: potential participants are given a pack within one week of registration, a referral to a local organisation able to offer support, information about workshops, seminars or drop-in days, and a commitment to answer queries promptly and give follow-up support.

Take into account the needs of those with disabilities and health problems when designing and delivering employability training

Individuals with disabilities or health problems may receive support from different training providers for different reasons. Health professionals may see work as a means of improving the quality of life with specific health benefits. Likewise, those with disabilities and health problems can make a significant contribution to society by working.

Obviously, in terms of employability training, the training content needs to be adapted to meet their specific needs. The Pathways to Work programme is an example of employability skills training which combines employability services and cognitive behaviour therapy-type approaches to help individuals manage health problems. The programme is aimed at encouraging employment among people claiming incapacity benefit or income support on the grounds of disability. Based on proposals outlined in the 2002 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Green Paper *Pathways to Work: Helping People into Employment* (DWP, 2003), the programme was first introduced as a pilot for new claimants in seven Jobcentre Plus districts and was extended to cover a third of the country. Whilst mandatory participation for existing claimants was piloted in the original seven Jobcentre Plus districts, it was found that voluntary participation was more effective. The scheme has since been rolled out nationally (see Lindsay *et al.*, 2008).

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[8] The PRIME Initiative was developed by the Prince's Trust for people over 50 who have exited the labour market and want to develop skills associated with self employment. Further information is available at: http://www.primeinitiative.co.uk/

Use local third sector organisations to reach out and deliver accessible employability training for the most disadvantaged groups

Local third sector organisations are often the best place to reach out and deliver accessible employability skills training for the most disadvantaged groups. Jones *et al.* (2008) found the quality of engagement and support offered by community and voluntary groups had positive impacts. This included:

Projects being delivered in a non-threatening environment and in a non-pressurised way; activities and support undertaken in very small groups or on an intensive one-to-one basis; the amount and content of support tailored to the needs of each participant; participants being given the time and flexibility to progress at their own pace; and finally an incremental, long-term approach towards labour market progression. (p. 55)

Jones *et al.* (2008) said projects engaged participants in a variety of different ways, indicating the ability to meet the different needs of individuals who were *'at varying distances from the labour market'* (p. 26). For example, while *'some beneficiaries were involved passively and simply attended as project participants, others were more actively engaged and involved in the running of projects'* (p. 26). The provision of grants to support individuals in their job search and/or access courses was also a particularly effective form of support provided through the European Social Fund Global Grants (see Box 4.4).

Jones *et al.* also found that locally-delivered initiatives funded through the European Social Fund Global Grants encouraged *'progression towards the labour market'* (p. 4). They resulted in participants learning new things, and improving their confidence and self-esteem. The authors concluded: *'These softer skills were resulting in individuals taking positive steps towards the labour market.'* (p. 4)

Build in transportability and ability for learners to progress

Both Ofsted (2009) and UKCES (2009a and b) noted the need for learning programmes to move with a person between jobs. Ofsted suggested that those participating in programmes provided through Train to Gain (through an employer) should be able to pick up their studies with another employer should they, for example, be made redundant.

Ofsted (2009) also noted the need for clearer routes for employees to progress in terms of qualification levels and developing their employability skills. The Canadian Labour and Business Centres (CLBC) aim to make the transition easier for employees wanting to re-enter education and improve their skills set (House of Commons Canada, 2006).

Involve learners

The reviewed literature raises the importance of involving learners in the design and delivery of employability training. UKCES (2009b) advised that learners might be involved in the design of employability training, or allowed to influence its delivery to ensure best effect, and said:

The value of drawing on student views and experience can be enhanced if programme design allows flexibility to respond to student input in real-time – varying course structure to meet the needs (and incorporate the insights) of students. (p. 45)

One programme, for example, involved peer-to-peer feedback that allowed learners the opportunity to receive comments about teamwork and their communication style from other participants.

4.3.2 Inter-agency collaboration

The key aspects of inter-agency collaboration are:

- joined-up employability services
- the need for formal partnership structures
- increased focus of individual partner organisations
- the need to understand the wider context
- new working practices and teaching models.

The nature of inter-agency collaboration

Six documents made reference to a collaborative approach between various different agencies. Such agencies include further education colleges, city councils, Jobcentre Plus and training providers. However, the level of collaboration varies. For example, collaboration might be at a very basic level and involve displaying posters or information about available training or employment. At the other extreme, there could be open days giving agencies the opportunity to raise awareness and promote their services, and have professionals giving an insight into what their role involves and the types of training they undertook to gain employment (Meadows and Garbers, 2004).

In the case of Sure Start Local programmes, these events provide agencies with the opportunity to identify and engage parents (Meadows and Garbers, 2004).

Joined-up employability services

Joined-up employability services are another aspect of partnership working identified through the literature. The rationale being that *'job search and training services are not alone sufficient to move jobseekers towards work'* (McQuaid *et al*., 2007, p. 10). Adopting models such as a one-stop-shop brings together different service providers trying to address the issues faced by the unemployed.

One such example is the Working Neighbourhood centres in the UK offering both childcare facilities and expert advice. These are *'attempts to arrive at multi-dimensional, joined-up services that can address all the relevant issues affecting unemployed people's employability'* (p. 10). Furthermore, one source reported integrating Jobcentre Plus personal advisers into children's centres as a key aspect of their delivery approach. This enabled personal advisers to promote the benefits of employment and training in terms of eradicating poverty. They also helped tackle any negative perceptions held by Jobcentre Plus staff (Marangozov, 2009).

The need for formal partnership structures

Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd (2005) stressed the importance of formal partnership structures with clearly defined shared targets underpinned by deeper working relations between staff at all levels. There are a number of key ingredients to successful inter-agency working.

- Clear leadership and vision.
- Outcome-orientated approaches.
- Written agreement and protocols that clearly outline respective roles and responsibilities.
- Developing shared understanding by adopting either co-location, joint resourcing, shared assessment or training – and ideally adopting more than one of these.
- Each partner playing to their respective strengths, which requires trust in and recognition of each other's strengths and weaknesses. More specifically, mainstream training providers need to understand the value of the third sector when developing employability training for hard-to-reach groups.
- Strong employer engagement from the beginning of the partnership, including in the design of the training programme.
- Effective use of key workers to broker and monitor the best support for learners taking account of their multiple needs.
- Using case studies demonstrating the value of participation to potential learners. These can then be used to influence, for example, potential funders and organisations well placed to refer potential learners.

Source: Adapted from Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd, 2005; Lindsay et al., 2008.

Increased focus of individual partner organisations

Cameron *et al.* (2006) analysed best practice in Job Network in Australia. They found that high-performing providers did not see themselves as providing a holistic range of services for job seekers. Rather, they saw their strength as being able to quickly refer clients on to complementary services, where necessary.

Personal issues could then be dealt with by the relevant professionals and this enabled a professional relationship to develop between the consultant and the jobseeker. This allowed consultants to focus on finding employment, rather than being distracted by personal needs, and spread their time evenly rather than excessively on a few high-need jobseekers.

The need to understand the wider context

Employability services tend to work best when those delivering them have a clear understanding of:

- the relationship between structures and policies at local, regional and national levels
- the different options available for developing an individual's employability skills
- the dynamic situation in terms of training and the learners' needs
- how to secure and use short-term funding from a range of different funding streams that have objectives attached covering employability.

Source: Adapted from Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd, 2005

New working practices and teaching models

The review identifies various staffing arrangements for delivering employability skills provision. For example, the UK's Jobcentre Plus personal advisers deliver work-focused services such as interviews or job-search counselling designed to help the unemployed to identify suitable work opportunities and how they might equip themselves to secure those interviews (Marangozov, 2009; McQuaid *et al*., 2007).

In a Sure Start programme, staff give advice, support and help jobseekers identify training opportunities that promote active or lifelong learning that would increase their employability. The staff also play a key role in 'encouraging employers and education and training providers to remove unnecessary barriers to the participation of Sure Start parents' (Meadows and Garbers, 2004, p. 47).

Active programmes, which involve a collaborative approach, have employment coordinators focusing on helping parents overcome barriers such as lack of confidence or childcare. Their role might also involve providing support through accompanying parents to initial training sessions.

Down (2003) found that in Australia some employability skills trainers and assessors did not fully understand the training packages they deliver. Down concluded:

This means that much of what is possible in innovative delivery against Training Packages is not being realised and this further impedes the development of employability skills. (p. 7)

This lack of understanding was partly due to educators and trainers finding it challenging to capture, describe and deliver key competencies (employability skills) in ways that made sense to them. The feedback from frontline practitioners was that the key competencies approach goes a long way in doing this, but does not capture the complexity of the way employability skills operate and enhance work performance.

More positively, Down noted some practitioners were gaining confidence and were open to changes in new approaches to teaching employability skills, for example, assessment. It is important that appropriate and accessible professional development is provided to enable the implementation of formal approaches for recognising and integrating employability skills development within training packages.

4.3.3 Value employers' contributions

In the literature, a recurring and strong theme for improving employability training was the better engagement of employers and listening to their needs and suggestions. This section describe four aspects of successful employer engagement:

- employers included in all stages of the development of employability skills training
- employer-led initiatives
- employers in the formal education system
- employers outside of the formal education system.

Employers included in all stages of the development of employability skills training

Some of the key documents also cite employer involvement in the design, and/or delivery of employability skills (Lanning *et al*., 2008; UKCES 2009a and b). Lanning *et al.* (2008) argued that it is critical to make best use of every opportunity to enhance the employability of learners. This included contact with employers during programmes, for example through the use of work placements and involving employers in the delivery of learning activities such as masterclasses and training workshops. Such activities help learners develop key employability skills such as timekeeping and organisational awareness.

It is recognised that many employers have a core set of values for their own training which helps them develop the employability skills they require from their workforce. Understanding these values is, therefore, key to the successful design of employability skills programmes (UKCES, 2009a and b).

Employer-led initiatives

The literature review identifies a number of initiatives led or shaped by employers. UKCES (2009a) has published a set of 20 good-practice case studies relating to the development of employability skills. These case studies include examples of how private and third sector organisations have actively engaged in the development of employability skills. The example in Box 4.7 describes how Deloitte Foundation developed an employability course.

Box 4.7 The Deloitte Foundation employability initiative

This was established in 2001 with the aim to provide young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours necessary for securing and sustaining employment. The initiative aims to have delivered the Deloitte Employability Course to 40,000 learners by 2011.

The Deloitte Foundation has given £2 million to the training of those delivering the course in colleges. Nine employability centres have been set up to deliver the training (Train the Trainer), and funding has been made available to train 800 further education teachers.

UKCES's (2009a) review of the course made a number of conclusions.

- The Train the Trainer course helped teachers develop the necessary skills *'to deliver employability skills effectively in any context'* (p. 23). It went on to say: 'E-learning modules deliver personal and professional development for teachers, and cover the key requirements of the new *Lifelong Learning UK*[9] teaching standards for employability' (p. 23).
- The course has a number of distinguishing features including learning being *'based around practical exercises, simulations, role-plays and scenarios that replicate real employment and workplace situations'* (p. 24).
- The course provides contextualised delivery with 'employability skills training […] *not delivered in isolation, but alongside training in the technical skills and knowledge required for employment in specific sectors'* (p. 24). Students are able to participate in some work-based learning with employers.
- Teachers *'are required to deliver employability skills training to students in vocational areas in which they currently teach'* (p.24).

The Deloitte Employability Course has employer input, and includes visits and guest speakers. Staff visit colleges to provide workshops on, for example, CV-writing and presentation skills.

The initiative is being further developed to include functional and key skills alongside the employability course. It is also being adapted for higher education.

Source: UKCES (2009a)

The National Skills Academies have provided an opportunity for employers to have input into the design of innovative courses with experiential learning equipping students with the skills necessary for their chosen careers. The Peter Jones Foundation, for example, sponsored the National Skills Academy for Enterprise's testing of new ways to teach the soft skills associated with being entrepreneurial, which are essentially the same skill set for employability (for example communicating, networking, teamwork, problem solving and planning).

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[9] Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is the independent employer-led skills council responsible for the professional development of those working in career guidance, community learning and development, further education, higher education, libraries, archives and information services, and work-based learning across the UK.

In its review of the evidence, UKCES (2009b, p. 20) found employer involvement in the delivery of training could raise learners' motivation to develop their employability skills, especially when employers were involved in assessing their employees' learning. UKCES said: *'Direct contact with a real workplace makes the end goal of the training – a rewarding career – a more believable reality.'*

There is also evidence to *suggest simulated workplaces* can have a positive impact. Studies highlight the importance of the learning environment being *'like a workplace'* (p. 21). Work placements allow learners to show employers what they are able to do. Employer involvement in courses that develop employability skills can result in learners having better access to vacancies (p. 21).

Potential benefits for employers include improved retention of staff, increased motivation, a reliable source of candidates with the skills they need, and increased workforce diversity (p. 25). Learning providers reported that work placements were key to their programmes. Work placements *'improve the ability of graduates to find employment, and to find employment in graduate-level jobs'* (p. 36).

Involving employers in the assessment of employee training needs and the effectiveness of that training is identified as key to an employee's success (Ofsted 2009). Moreover, Ofsted's 2008-09 survey found that some providers had been successful in involving employers in employee development. In one instance, a member of a management team was allocated to employee teams for support and monitoring progress (p.11). In another example, employers were involved in programme discussions with providers about content and the level of learning required.

Employers in the formal education system

McQuaid *et al.* (2007) identified good practice work placement programmes in Edinburgh for which the design, development and delivery was shared between agencies and employers. Edinburgh's employment academies, covering the retail, hospitality and healthcare sectors, *'have persuaded employers to contribute to the development of tailored, sector-specific training; provide work experience placements; and offer job interview guarantees to successful course completers'* (p. 173). By the end of 2005, approximately 1,000 people were involved in the training, and most progressed into employment.

Employers outside the formal education system

There are a number of third party suppliers of employability skills training, such as third sector organisations, and training providers who are not educational institutions or individual employers. This provision may, or may not, be accredited by a third party.

In terms of employer-delivered employability skills training, embedding employability skills development as part of the employee's work can be more effective than discrete and separate learning activities. UKCES (2009b) found that *'employers who taught employability skills in distinct units sometimes found this demotivated participants, who thought the courses a distraction from real work'* (p. 53).

In Singapore, employers receive specific assistance to develop the employability of their staff within ten skill areas. This is delivered by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency's Employability Skills System, as shown in Box 4.8.

Box 4.8 Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) Employability Skills System (ESS)

The WDA aims to enhance the employability and competitiveness of both employees and jobseekers so they can meet Singapore's changing needs. The ESS gives a grant to employers to provide training in ten skill areas:

- workplace literacy and numeracy
- information and communication technologies
- problem-solving and decision-making
- initiative and enterprise
- communications and relationship management
- lifelong learning
- global mindset
- self-management
- work-related life skills
- health and workplace safety.

There are two modules that include employability: Appraisal for Workplace Literacy and Numeracy and Appraisal for Workplace Skills. In the former, the employer must send their staff for a formal appraisal by the Centre of Employability Skills which determines the modules staff should attend. In the latter, employers can undertake their own appraisal of their staff's competences using guidance developed by the WDA (see Enterprise One website, 2010).[10]

McQuaid *et al.* (2007) described the Green Jobhouse's Job Guarantee project in Copenhagen that aimed to address long-term unemployment. Green Jobhouse's staff forged strong partnerships with employers and increased the credibility and legitimacy of their programme with targeted learners:

By building trust with employers and then securing job guarantees for course completers, the project has gained a reputation as a source of 'real work' focused training with real job prospects on completion. (p. 139)

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[10] http://www.business.gov.sg/

By developing these relationships, staff were able to respond to local labour market conditions and reflect employers' priorities.

McQuaid *et al.* (2007) noted the factors that made the project a success:

- Partnerships were created with employers to share authority and decision-making.
- Green Jobhouse staff developed a strong relationship of trust with employers.
- Green Jobhouse staff provided background information and client assessment which employers valued in their recruitment of trainees.
- Employers had ownership of the training process.
- A job was guaranteed for participants.

The project brought together a range of stakeholders with the necessary resources and expertise. McQuaid concluded:

The Green Jobhouse is able to provide access to trainees and expert support during the recruitment, planning and training elements of the process. The employers have brought a key resource to the project, job opportunities, and the commitment of a job guarantee to successful trainees. (p. 138)

4.3.4 Use all routes to develop employability skills

The review identifies three alternative routes for developing employability skills.

- Volunteering as an opportunity to develop and demonstrate employability skills.
- Enterprise as an alternative means of employment and an opportunity to develop and apply employability skills. A period of self-employment allows individuals to develop skills sought by employers (Metcalf and Benson, 2000).
- Area-based initiatives, including those aimed at reducing unemployment and regeneration activities, which provide learners with opportunities to develop their employability skills.

Volunteering

Volunteering increases the confidence of an individual to re-enter employment, particularly if there has been a gap due to unemployment or being a carer. Hirst (2001) highlighted the role of volunteering in meeting many government targets:

The Government has a broad-ranging interest in developing active citizenship to help combat social exclusion and engage people in serving the wider communities. Moreover, there is a specific interest in the potential of voluntary activity to provide an important stepping stone in the route back to employment. (p. 1)

Women, those of older working age, and those who have higher-level qualifications are more likely to volunteer (Hirst, 2001), but these factors are less significant than aspirations and attitudes. Hirst also found a decline from over two-thirds of volunteers being unemployed when they started volunteering, to a third at the time of his survey.

Volunteering provides individuals with a range of learning opportunities that:

- develop employability skills through exposure to working with the public and within teams
- provide structured activities commensurate with ability
- offer opportunities to show leadership when undertaking supervisory-type roles
- provide training that results in a qualification or certificate
- include mentoring and personal development roles.

Enterprise

Running an enterprise is increasingly being seen as a means to developing employability. This can take the form of, for example, students running a micro-business under supervision in a formal educational setting, or providing support to adults with multiple disadvantages so that they can run their own enterprises.

Examples of initiatives funded through the Phoenix Development Fund are in *Leading Lights* (DTI, 2004), which outlined 96 pilot programmes. One example was Dukeries Training Agency which worked with offenders and helped them establish a business when released from prison. It provided opportunities to develop core employability skills through running a business whilst in prison.

In response to the findings of the International Labour Office's research on the role of micro-finance in enabling the unemployed to develop skills for employment through becoming self-employed (see Metcalf and Benson, 2000 for UK findings), the UK's Small Business Service piloted the use of Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) to support the disadvantaged. In essence, CDFIs give small loans to individuals without a track record so they can establish their own enterprises, thus, with wider support, enabling them to develop employability skills.

The rationale is that this is an effective mechanism for overcoming barriers to entering employment and developing employability skills. For example, individuals can combine self-employment with other commitments such as childcare. Also, those who decide not to stay in self-employment are able to demonstrate the employability skills sought by employers.

The scheme has been evaluated by GHK Consulting (2010). In the most recent evaluation report, the support was found to have significant impacts on:

- attitudes and skills associated with employability
- encouraging others to become self-employed or set up a social enterprise
- improved self-confidence and self-esteem
- financial literacy.

CDFIs have supported social entrepreneurs who deliver innovative employability training for hard-to-reach groups with multiple barriers and most to learn in terms of employability skills.

Area-based initiatives

Regeneration programmes are opportunities for developing employability skills. Frequently these overlap with area-based entry-into-employment and up-skilling initiatives. The most pertinent example is the forthcoming 2012 Olympics for which there has been a concerted effort to engage training providers in developing the employability skills of those living in the immediate communities.

More generally, there has been an increased focus on areas where individuals with the most barriers to employability live (Ramsden, 2005; Lindsay *et al.*, 2007). In the UK, this took the form of the Working Neighbourhood pilots that ran from 2004 to 2006. These were a new approach offering intensive services in areas characterised by high levels of economic inactivity and helped individuals access jobs within travelling distance of where they live (Lindsay *et al.*, 2007, 2008; McQuaid *et al.*, 2007). Work-focused contacts were offered at the earliest opportunity, and individuals helped to remain in work through in-work support and incentives. There were a number of specific aspects to the support.

- Accelerated access to employment programmes provided under the UK New Deal and Employment Zone programmes after just three months for all residents claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.
- More frequent work-focused interviews for people claiming income support. This included lone parents and the partners of those in receipt of designated benefits.
- More help for those recently in receipt of incapacity benefit to ensure employment opportunities and available support were regularly discussed and explored.
- A flexible, discretionary fund for tackling substantial barriers that prevent those living in these neighbourhoods from working.
- Retention payments, in the form of lump sum rewards, for those who moved into and remained in work after previously receiving benefits.

This approach brought those returning to work into regular contact with Jobcentre Plus and encouraged them to access the help and support available within the pilot sites.

4.4 Barriers and challenges

to delivering employability skills training

Five main barriers and challenges to the effective delivery of employability training were identified in ten of the reviewed sources.[11]

4.4.1 Information shortfall

A lack of awareness of the opportunities available for developing employability skills is a barrier to adults taking them up. Hirst (2001) found that either a lack of time or knowledge prevented individuals participating in voluntary activities that would help develop their employability skills. Similarly, employers may not be aware of ESOL training for employees, even though colleges are expected to market this in the workplace (Cooke and Simpson, 2009). Willott and Stevenson (2006) found that information about opportunities passed by word of mouth did not reach socially isolated women who were unemployed or at home looking after children.

Professional status

There is evidence that some practitioners who provide employability skills training do not enjoy the same professional status as other educators. Cooke and Simpson (2009) observed that trainers delivering ESOL do not enjoy the same professional status as those who teach specific occupational skills or academic subjects. This is a reflection of the fact that it can be difficult to describe the teaching of employability skills in the same terms as more academic subjects and occupational skills training (Down, 2003).

Some practitioners are gaining confidence and open to changes in assessment so that training packages can meet the differing needs of learners, whereas others are finding it more difficult to adapt. It is important that *'the concept of employability is not seen as yet another change made before previous changes have been given time to gain acceptance within the VET community'* (p. 8). Also, it is important that the concept of employability is:

> *[…] accompanied by appropriate and accessible professional development activities which will not only enable the implementation of a formal process for recognising employability skills development and for integrating the concept of employability skills within training package learning and assessment.* (p. 8)

4.4.2 Funding and sustainability

Some of the more formative evaluation studies looked at in this review identified the nature of funding as an issue in terms of skewing what is delivered and the sustainability of employability skills training activities (Jones *et al.* 2008; Ramsden, 2005). Jones *et al.* (2008) observed: *'Programmes which were overly focused on achieving hard impacts, particularly jobs impacts, inhibited funding from reaching the most disadvantaged.'* (p. 4)

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[11] Cooke and Simpson, 2009; Willott and Stevenson, 2006; Down, 2003; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Marangozov, 2009; Hirst, 2001; Eddy Adams and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd, 2005; LSC, 2007; and UKCES, 2009and b.

Support for harder-to-reach groups may be less sustainable given that it is funded by short-term challenge funding such as the European Social Fund Global Capital Grants. Jones *et al.* (2008) in their evaluation found that those who run Global Grant projects:

> *[…] argued that they would not, or could not, apply for funding streams that applied hard outcome targets, due to the difficulties in achieving such targets over short timescales, with beneficiaries facing serious constraints to work and at a considerable distance from the labour market.* (p. 4)

4.4.3 Cultural differences

Marangozov (2009, p. 2) found that Jobcentre Plus personal advisers and children's centre staff were concerned about potential cultural differences in that they provide different environments for their shared clients and have different working practices and priorities. This was a potential barrier to effectively delivering employability skills courses in children's centres. Jobcentre Plus staff had to overcome negative perceptions of the role they played in identifying and encouraging parents to take up employment opportunities.

4.4.4 Motivation

The LSC (2007) identified that learners' lack of motivation can be a significant barrier when reviewing provision for young people, in particular. This can be resolved through support and encouragement from project workers. UKCES (2009a and b) identified that one of the key roles of trainers is to challenge the attitudes and behaviours of those in training, and to encourage them to reflect more on how they can improve their employment prospects.

Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd and Smart Consultancy Scotland Ltd (2005) found a tendency for delivery partnerships to focus on services available to young people who are already engaged – leading to the neglect of those who are not.

4.5 Evidence of

the impact of employability skills programmes

The precise nature of the impacts described in the review was to some extent determined by the aims and objectives of individual programmes and projects. The LSC (2008) suggested it might be inappropriate to measure hard impacts for programmes aimed at developing the employability skills of those with the most to learn:

Employability outcomes can be measured in terms of 'hard' outcomes, such as movement into jobs. However, it is often the case with more disadvantaged groups that hard outcome measures are not the most appropriate. In these instances, measuring 'soft' outcomes, such as the 'distance travelled' by participants towards employment entry (which may subsequently result in 'harder' outcomes) might be more applicable. (p. 16)

This section looks at:

- hard impacts of employability skills training
- soft impacts of employability training
- the relative effectiveness of different types of provision.

4.5.1 Hard impacts of employability skills training

Hard impacts tend to be those that are easily measured and more tangible. They can be divided into intermediate and ultimate impacts. Intermediate impacts include qualifications, entry into employment, and education or training after completing a programme. Ultimate impacts are those that emerge over a longer time period and include:

- increased earnings for the learner
- benefits for employers in terms of the stock of potential employees and the productivity of existing employees
- reduced economic inactivity and welfare payments.

There can be issues when attributing impacts to programmes and policies as they are affected by wider economic and social conditions (Meadows and Garbers, 2004). However, as the LSC (2008) observed, hard impacts do not capture specific points in a learner's journey to employability and sustained employment.

Entry into employment

A range of policies and programmes in both the UK and other countries have had some impact on entry to employment. For example, in the UK, New Deal is reported to have moved 500,000 young people into work, with 80 per cent remaining in work more than three months later (Lunt, 2006). Australians Working Together is similarly reported to have supported access to casual employment or further training for around half of its participants (Rainey, 2006). Two New Zealand initiatives, Jobs Jolt and Working for Families, are associated with a decline in dependency on benefits, though the evidence does suggest quite considerable regional variations in impact (Lunt, 2006).

In contrast, the Sure Start programme in the UK, which had an explicit goal of reducing child poverty through enabling parents to access employment, appears to have had a more limited impact on parents entering employment. Meadows and Garbers (2004) found that there was little interest or involvement in explicitly employment-focused activities such as interview skills and CV preparation. Marangozov (2009) similarly concluded that, for many of the parents, and mothers in particular, their current caring responsibilities took precedence over employment in the short term.

It is worth noting that the assumption underpinning work-first approaches – that any job is an improvement on no job – is questioned by some authors (see, for example, Lindsay *et al*., 2007). They drew attention to variations in the quality of employment opportunities, and infer that insecure, inappropriate and low-paid work may not in fact be a positive impact for individuals, though it may be for the public purse.

Where the financial returns to entry-level work are low, there may need to be additional initiatives to make work pay, such as tax credits and childcare subsidies (as there are in the UK and New Zealand) to encourage low-skilled adults to enter the workforce and to ensure their circumstances actually improve as a result (Lunt, 2006; Meadows and Garbers, 2004).

Further training

There are some positive indicators that welfare recipients are being encouraged to undertake further education courses in England to improve their employability. LSC (2008) found that two-fifths of welfare beneficiaries who undertook further education courses went on to study further, and four in five of the learners surveyed indicated they would undertake further study in the next two years. Ofsted (2009) in their review of the Train to Gain programme (in which provision is shaped by the needs of employers so that they find it more relevant) concluded there was scope for improving learners' progression onto higher levels of training and study.

Benefits to employers

Few of the sources reviewed describe the benefits of employability programmes for employers. However, there is some evidence relating to the potential benefits of employers engaging in schemes aimed at undergraduates and graduates in their transition to employment.

Schemes that work effectively, which happen to have a strong focus on potential benefits for employers, include the KTP – based on TCS – and Shell Step programmes. These have been shown to develop higher-level employability skills such as teamwork, leadership and project working. SQW Ltd (2002) in their evaluation of the TCS found that 63 per cent of companies achieved the technical objectives and 39 per cent the commercial objectives of their TCS project.

UKCES (2009a and b) identified improved retention of staff as a result of investing in employability skills training. It stated that offering placements that allow individuals to develop their employability skills provided a reliable source of candidates with the skills they need and increased workforce diversity.

4.5.2 Soft impacts of employability skills training

Across the key sources, soft impacts for working-age adults undertaking employability skills training were described in some detail. However, only a few studies attempt to measure them in a rigorous way. The LSC (2008) study is particularly notable for its range of potential indicators of increased employability included in its survey of 10,000 learners. The learners had received remission from course fees as they were receiving out-of-work benefits. The study had no comparison group and does not quantify the nature of employability skills training received. It collected evidence in terms of respondents' own assessment of their learning, why they were not in work prior to enrolment, their motivation to move into work and description of their work history. Findings from this and other studies are described in terms of:

- attitudes towards securing employment
- improved core employability skills
- wider social and personal outcomes for the learner.

Attitudes towards securing employment

The majority of those interviewed in the LSC (2008) study reported having clearer career aims (63 per cent) and being nearer to getting a job as result of attending their further education course (56 per cent).

Just over two-fifths (44 per cent) reported acquiring improved job search skills. This contrasts with the Jones *et al*. (2008) study which found that only a third reported improved job search skills, but this is probably because the this study looked at a European Social Fund Global Grants programme targeting the most disadvantaged.

Groups more likely to report improved job search skills include women (46 per cent compared with 40 per cent of men); those with multiple disadvantages (51 per cent compared with 38 per cent with no disadvantages); and those undertaking basic skills training (56 per cent compared with 43 per cent undertaking vocational and non-vocational courses) (LSC, 2008).

Outside of the UK, Rainey (2006) reported that the Australians Working Together programme resulted in a *'deeper level of understanding of work place requirements, such as work ethics, which would facilitate participants' employability'* (p. 396). Rainey also noted that employability skills training could raise the aspirations of learners about the type of work they might do. McQuaid *et al.*'s (2007) study found similar changes in attitudes, understanding and aspirations in the UK.

Improved core employability skills

The LSC (2008) study found that those on benefits who participated in a further education course reported improvements in a number of skills valued by employers and that this 'may help unemployed learners progress towards employment'. Learners reported improved communication skills (66 per cent), teamworking (60 per cent), problem solving (57 per cent), literacy (50 per cent), numeracy (41 per cent) and IT skills (55 per cent).

Again, the LSC found marked differences among groups of learners. Those with the most to overcome and the most to learn (namely women, ethnic minority groups and the multiple disadvantaged) were more likely to report improved literacy, numeracy and literacy skills. Younger learners were more likely to report improved teamworking skills as they had fewer opportunities to have already developed these skills in the workplace (LSC, 2008).

Wider social and personal outcomes for the learner

One of the broader impacts of employability skills training, or programmes of study that directly or indirectly develop employability, can be the socialisation of the learner into both work and the wider community.

Learners benefit from improved social relationships and opportunities to meet new people (LSC, 2008; Jones *et al*., 2008; Rainey 2006). The LSC study found that 70 per cent of learners reported improved personal and social skills, though these are not specified in any depth. Similarly, other sources do not refer to improved social and personal skills in any depth, rather the need to encourage the development of appropriate behaviours, and for trainers to challenge inappropriate behaviours (poor punctuality, for example) and attitudes (UKCES, 2009a and b).

A number of sources refer to improved confidence (LSC, 2008; Jones *et al*., 2008; Meadows and Garbers, 2004); self-esteem (LSC, 2008; Willott and Stevenson, 2006; Jones *et al*., 2008); motivation (LSC, 2008; Willott and Stevenson, 2006) and increased self-awareness and resilience (Rainey, 2006).

Some of the sources suggest that these wider social and personal outcomes are more prevalent for women, individuals with multiple disadvantages, and those with the most to learn (Lunt, 2006; LSC, 2008; Rainey, 2006). Ramsden (2005) found that some participants in Phoenix Development Fund[12] projects gained sufficient confidence to act as role models for other members of their community.

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[12] The Phoenix Development Fund was created to test new innovative ways of developing enterprise skills in underpresented groups and individuals in disadvantaged areas so that they can enter into self-employment and/or develop skills sought by employers. The fund ran from 2000 to 2006.

4.5.3 Relative effectiveness of different types of provision for employability skills training

The diversity of provision and groups targeted, and the nature of the evidence in the reviewed sources, limits the ability to undertake a genuinely rigorous assessment of what types of training work best for different groups of learners.

The LSC (2008) study is useful for identifying the groups of learners that will benefit most from attending further education courses. There is a genuine theme within the literature that the focus should be more on progressing those learners with the greatest barriers to overcome and most to learn, rather than those learners closest to being employable (Jones *et al*., 2008; Ramsden, 2005).

Speckesser and Bewley (2006) found that short job-focus training concentrating on job searches has more impact in terms of reduced benefit claims. This training tends to focus on job search skills and some limited occupational training. It could be that those who attend this type of training are more motivated and are essentially further along on the journey to employability. Longer occupational training, building on existing qualifications and concerned with updating skills, is marginally less effective. Basic employability training is found not to result in a reduction in participant benefit rates in the long run.

Innovative programmes for those with the most to learn enabled good practices to be identified. These include involving employers more (Lanning *et al*., 2008; UKCES, 2009a and b), and drawing on the expertise and reach of third sector organisations already working with hard-to-reach groups (Jones *et al*., 2008; Ramsden, 2005).

4.6

Conclusion

In conclusion, the sources describe a range of impacts related to employability skills training, but they reveal a lack of the rigour and consistency necessary for reaching firm judgments on the relative effectiveness of different types of training. It may simply be the case that employability skills training has to be tailored to the needs of employers and individual learners to be truly effective, and this requires a more sophisticated approach on the part of trainers and policy-makers.

4.6.1 Key messages for trainers and training providers

Third sector non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

NGOs are often well placed to reach out to the most disadvantaged individuals and provide wrap-around and joined-up support so they can progress towards employment.

Third sector NGOs with funding from the European Social Fund Global Grants have been particularly innovative in their approaches to employability skills training for the most disadvantaged individuals (Jones *et al*., 2008).

Mainstream providers have found working with the third sector *'an effective means of reaching and supporting 'harder to help' groups'* (p. 5). The development of links between mainstream and third sector organisations benefits individuals because they are being referred to the most accessible and appropriate learning opportunities and given more joined-up support.

The teaching and development of employability skills

There is a growing consensus that the skills associated with employability are often best developed through work placements, close contact with employers, and involving trainers outside of the mainstream learning environment. (UKCES, 2009a and b; Richardson and Storberg-Walker, 2006).

Work placements should ideally be structured in such a way that an individual's developmental needs are addressed and this could include, for example, group work placements that develop teamwork skills. Similarly, networking opportunities can develop an individual's understanding of realistic employment opportunities.

Employers running masterclasses for students in post-compulsory education can be effective in developing a more rounded skills set, though this does require trainers to flex and develop their curriculum accordingly.

Where possible, an experiential approach to developing employability skills should be adopted, drawing on diverse opportunities so that students can develop skills in realistic situations, are able to make and learn from mistakes, and observe and learn from colleagues.

Sharing good practice on the initial assessment of an individual's needs, as well as having individual learning plans, also features as elements of good practice (Ofsted, 2009). UKCES (2009a and b) advocates the need to challenge existing assessment methodologies and, if necessary, develop new approaches that reward good practice in the development of employability skills, and give employability skills a parity of esteem with specific vocational skills and academic knowledge.

The personal approach

This means trainers moving beyond a standardised curriculum to demonstrating high levels of emotional intelligence in how they manage learners. They need to be able to engage learners and be willing to challenge behaviours and attitudes that undermine employability, and encourage learners to reflect so that they can respond and adapt to the work environment (UKCES, 2009a and b).

Gender differences in motivation

Willott and Stevenson (2006) found differences in motivations between women and men in relation to the employability skills they wished to develop. Men sought to develop practical and technical skills whereas women wanted to develop social and personal skills.

This has two implications in that courses designed to develop technical skills may be less appealing to women, and the possibility that there is a tendency to play to existing strengths rather than developing the more rounded skills sets sought by employers.

4.6.2 Key messages for employers

Employer benefits

Employer investment in the design, delivery and assessment of employability training is a recurring key factor in the successful programmes reviewed in the literature, and it is seen as vital for creating positive outcomes for learners (Lanning *et al.*, 2008; UKCES, 2009a and b). Workplace learning and combined classroom and on-the-job training are also highlighted as particularly valuable as they increase motivation and give better access to vacancies (Grief *et al.*, 2007; Richard and Storberg-Walker, 2006).

However, employer involvement not only benefits the learners but also, crucially, the employers themselves. UKCES (2009a and b) has outlined potential benefits such as improved retention of staff, a reliable source of candidates with the skills they need, and increased workforce diversity. These advantages may need more acknowledgement, recognition and promotion between employers.

4.6.3 Key messages for research and evaluation

Longitudinal evaluation and other research methodologies

There is the need for more longitudinal evaluation and other research methodologies that robustly measure the qualitative aspects of employability skills.

Some of the employability skills considered most important, such as motivation, can be difficult to evaluate transparently and objectively. There is a need to devise appropriate methodologies that capture these softer impacts. Such evidence will ultimately convince education providers and trainers to invest in developing these skills in their students. Such evidence would also make it possible to better model the impact of different approaches to developing employability skills.

Longitudinal studies, in turn, would similarly give insights into the effectiveness of individual initiatives. It may also be possible to link administrative data, such as social security records, and qualitative survey data (see Speckesser and Bewley, 2006), in order to gain understanding of which individuals benefit most from different types of training.

Research on teaching competencies

Resources need to be invested in establishing whether there is a distinctive set of competencies required to teach employability skills.

This would assist in developing professional practice; allow a better understanding of the extent to which it is an area for trainers and educators to specialise in; and identify how employability can be better integrated into mainstream curricula.

UKCES (2009a and b) has called for more effort at a national level in defining, selecting and developing the distinctive personal qualities and skills that make an effective teacher of employability skills. This could be complemented by developing a more active community of researchers developing and testing new practices, leading to a sharing of good practice.

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5

Adult basic skills development and family learning

Anne Wilkin, Ruth Hart, Karen Halsey and Kay Kinder

5.1 Aim of this review

The aim of this review is to examine UK and international evidence on the development of basic skills through family learning. More specifically, the review sought to investigate:

- the approaches taken to develop basic skills through family learning
- the impacts of these approaches on parents and their children
- what can be done to improve the teaching and learning of adult basic skills through family learning.

5.2 Family learning: some definitions

The term *family learning,* although commonly employed in the reviewed literature, is not always well defined. Usage suggests, however, that it refers to programmes of learning which include both children and older members of their family (particularly, but not exclusively, their parents), as well as programmes which cover literacy, numeracy, language, and, in some cases, wider skills or subject knowledge. Brooks *et al.* (2008), referring to statements from the National Literacy Trust, suggested that family learning programmes are intended, primarily, to impact on children through their parents, in addition to which, some have the improvement of parents' skills as a core aim. This suggests that the extent to which programmes are designed to, and work towards, improving adults' skills may vary.

The term family learning can be applied to an array of ‘different and diverse’ learning opportunities ‘encompassing health and well-being, relationships, children’s development, literacy, language and numeracy, and creative and arts-based activities’ (Lochrie, 2004, p. 5). Mallows (2008) reported that family learning programmes are specifically designed to enable adults and children to learn together, thus developing the skills and knowledge of both parties, as well as helping parents to support their children’s learning and development. Brooks *et al.* (2008) pointed out that it is important to recognise and value informal learning opportunities such as those presented through family learning, as ways of developing language, literacy and numeracy. Family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN), thus, comes under the umbrella of family learning. As Mallows (2008) pointed out, although FLLN is, by definition, always family learning, family learning is not necessarily always FLLN.

The concept of family literacy is identified as originating in the USA (Brooks *et al.*, 2008). Anderson *et al.* (2008) argued that interest in the family as a site for literacy acquisition and development can be traced back to research in the USA by Taylor (1983), which found that children participated in a whole range of literacy activities in the home and in the community as families conducted their daily lives. By the early 1990s, the idea that families should be regarded as the ‘learning unit’ (Belzer and St Clair, 2003) had become popular.

Family literacy gained prominence in the UK in the 1990s when the Adult Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) introduced the Kenan model (developed in Kentucky in the late 1980s). This model features intensive and long-term work involving a combination of adult basic education, pre-school education, parenting education and opportunities for shared activities. As a result, family literacy programmes began to recognise the value of family literacy practices that involved both children, and their parents and carers. Hannon and Bird (2004) argued that the development of family literacy programmes in England can best be understood in terms of bringing together two strands: early childhood education, and adult and community education. The ALBSU (later the Basic Skills Agency) model remained the dominant one throughout the 1990s, as well as the only one supported by government funds, although smaller-scale programmes funded by a range of other sources were developing alongside this (Hannon and Bird, 2004).

Currently, provision is diverse, with many different interpretations of FLLN in evidence. Programmes have been adapted to local contexts and to better meet the needs of particular groups, for example those of prisoners (Halsey *et al.*, 2004), gypsy travellers, linguistic minority families,[1] and young parents. In addition, a number of sources (for example, Stanton and Tench, 2003; Bostrom, 2003; Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 2008) refer to a new, intergenerational model of family literacy which has developed where non-biologically connected older adults and children interact together for mutual benefit. As children develop their academic knowledge and skills, older adults learn about school curricula, increase their understanding of young people, and develop the skills to support the children’s learning. Newman and Hatton-Yeo (2008) referred to this new model as *‘extrafamilial’* (p. 31).

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[1] The term ‘linguistic minority’ refers to people who come from households where a language other than English is spoken.

5.3 Approaches to adult basic skills development and family learning

This section describes the range of approaches to family learning which are represented in the selected literature. It presents information on:

- programme target groups
- models of provision
- focus and curriculum content
- instructional approaches
- programme duration
- delivery settings.

In several of these areas, detail is limited, and attention is drawn to the most obvious gaps in information.

5.3.1 Programme target groups

The majority of the programmes and projects appearing in the literature target families *'at the lowest ends of the economic and educational continuum'* (Darling, 2004, p. 604). They work with families characterised by low levels of parental education and employment, and correspondingly low incomes.

Family, typically, means parent or primary caregiver, though there are a few examples of programmes catering for the wider or extended family (for example, the South African Families Learning Together project, as detailed by Mashishi and Cook, 2003). Parent or primary caregiver, in turn, largely signifies mothers, with a host of authors (for example, Skinner, 2007; Brooks *et al*., 2008; Ofsted, 2009) noting the low levels of men participating in training programmes.

Programmes vary in terms of the age of the children they can accommodate or whose needs they are designed with an awareness of. However, Ofsted (2009) reported that children are predominantly at Key Stage 2 or below (aged up to 11 years). The international literature supports this position. For example, Even Start (ES) is described as explicitly designed for families with children aged 0–7 years (Richardson *et al*., 2001).

5.3.2 Models of provision

The literature suggests that family learning programmes have grown out of two distinct traditions, these being early childhood and adult or community education (Hannon and Bird, 2004). However, in the USA and the UK respectively (to which the bulk of the literature drawn upon for this study relates) investment from federal or central government in the 1990s was accompanied by clear direction as to the form provision should take. As a result, the models of provision are less diverse than might have been anticipated: almost all provision in the USA and UK broadly observes the Kenan model (see Box 5.1). Kenan-style projects are also known to have developed in New Zealand (Benseman and Sutton, 2005).

Box 5.1 The Kenan model

The Kenan model, which underpins ES (the programme with the strongest presence in the literature), comprises four inter-related strands of activity:

- adult education, which typically includes basic and/or secondary education, English as a second language (ESL), and, in the USA, General Education Development (GED) certificate or high school diploma preparation
- early childhood education (direct work with children) taking place in parallel with the adult education activities
- parenting education
- joint (parent and child) literacy activity (commonly referred to as parent and child together or PACT time).

The Kenan model has been widely exported and variants on it are to be found in several other countries. For example, the family learning programmes piloted and funded in the UK by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (later the Basic Skills Agency) broadly observed this model, though parenting education was not a mandated component (Hannon and Bird, 2004; Brooks *et al.*, 2008).

Of course there are exceptions, even in the USA, an example being Project FLAME (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando).[2] This programme, which was developed to meet the needs of the growing Hispanic community, is highly unusual in that it only involves direct work with parents (Rodriguez-Brown, 2004).

5.3.3 Focus and curriculum content

Few of the sources provide much information about the programmes' foci and curricula content. What is clear, however, is that it is far more common for programmes to be geared primarily towards the development of literacy skills and, in particular, reading rather than numeracy skills.

Literacy

The literature makes reference to a considerable number of programmes with an explicit focus on reading and literacy. These appear to fall into three distinct groups or types.

Book distribution

- Books for Babies and Bookstart: these schemes involved the delivery, via health visitors, of book packs to new parents. They were intended to increase awareness of the importance of introducing babies to books, and encourage library usage by the wider family. The schemes were largely untargeted in that book packs went out to all families in programme areas, regardless of background or need (Bailey, 2003; Brooks *et al.*, 2008).

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[2] This is Spanish for learning, improving and educating.

- Reading is Fundamental, UK (based on RiF Inc from the USA): this National Literacy Trust programme also involved the distribution of books. However, it was targeted on deprivation, and a range of activities were delivered to encourage and support reading and library use (Brooks *et al*., 2008).

Book groups

- Prime Time Family Reading Time: *'a family literacy program based in public libraries that incorporates the presentation of children's literature with the discussion of humanities-based questions for low-literacy, at-risk parents and their children aged six and older'* (Langley *et al*., 2001, p. 160).

More comprehensive reading-readiness programmes

- PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership): this was a five-year programme of support for families with pre-school children (0-5 years) focused on reading readiness. It offered materials, home visits and group sessions to parents in deprived communities (Brooks *et al*., 2008).

Box 5.2 has more information about the content of family literacy programmes.

Box 5.2 Curriculum content

Padak *et al.* (2002b) reported on the use of 'meaningful' curricula and 'authentic' materials, but do not go into great detail about what this means. Where reference is made to curriculum content in the literature more widely, the examples often relate to child development and parenting. So, for example, the Canadian Literacy and Parenting Skills (LAPS) programme (as described by Brooks *et al.*, 2008) incorporated sessions called: Building Self-Esteem in Your Children, Positive Discipline, and Ages and Stages. Project FLAME in the USA included a series of seminars on children's learning and education, covering topics such as children's writing, classroom experiences, and homework (Rodriguez-Brown, 2004).

Alamprese (2004) reported that most ES projects included some 'functional' (applied) literacy activity. This is contrasted with stand-alone adult education programmes, less than half of which Alamprese believed to have such a component. However, the other sources in this review do not provide supporting evidence of a marked difference of this sort between family and stand-alone adult learning programmes. And, turning to curriculum materials from the UK, the original Adult Literacy Core Curriculum explicitly encouraged the development of functional skills.

Numeracy

Though the literature includes examples of family learning programmes with some sort of numeracy component, for example, the UK's Keeping Up with the Children (in total a 12-hour course), programmes with a substantial focus on numeracy appear few and far between. Brooks *et al.* (2008), outlining the development of provision in the UK, presented it as largely an add-on to family literacy (the first Basic Skills Agency numeracy programmes were piloted in 1997-98).

There is some evidence of numeracy-focused programmes in other countries, specifically in the USA, and Brooks *et al.* (2008) have information on the MAPPS project (Maths and Parent Partnerships: South Western States), which:

[…] *aimed to help parents understand that success in mathematics is important for their children, become familiar with the new curriculum materials and changes in teaching mathematics, believe that their children are capable of being successful in doing mathematics, deepen their understanding of mathematics, and know that doing it can be satisfying.* (p. 44)

This programme comprised 17 (two-hour long) workshops, each covering a different mathematical topic (for example, multiplication, surface area, and making sense of data). Workshops included problem-solving activities and trainers helped participants make connections between school mathematics, real-world applications and careers.

Language

Project FLAME is an American programme designed specifically for the Hispanic community, members of which '*are much more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to be unemployed and living in poverty*' (Rodriguez-Brown, 2004, p. 213). Alongside the development of new programmes such as this, with an explicit focus on (English) language development, the literature suggests there has been some adaptation of curricula to meet the needs of new migrant communities. Darling observed (2004):

The increase in program participation of Hispanic families has implications for both the design and delivery of family literacy services, particularly in terms of the availability and appropriateness of materials, curricula and instruction. (p. 607)

Strucker *et al.* (2004) noted how, over the course of the 1990s, the proportion of ES families with limited proficiency in English doubled (from one- to two-fifths of enrolments), requiring staff to improve their understanding of adult and child second-language acquisition and cultural differences.

Entry to employment

It is clear from the literature that legislative and welfare reforms during the 1990s have had an impact on the focus and curriculum content of family learning programmes in the USA. For example, Darling (2004) reported: *'Family literacy programming has tried to adapt quickly to the work-first attitude […] providing more work-related instruction […] and offering more flexible scheduling'* (p. 606). One example Darling gave was the Family Independence Initiative (FII), which, in a bid to fulfil the new legislative mandate, introduced a range of work preparation activities including shadowing, mentoring and internships.

5.3.4 Instructional approaches

Several sources include descriptions of instructional frameworks or formulae associated with particular (literacy) programmes or projects. Common features of these are:

- enabling participating adults to identify opportunities (outside the classroom) for literacy development
- modelling of literacy practices
- facilitating interaction around literacy between adults and children.

So, for example, Richardson *et al.* (2001), in their review of the Oklahoma ES programme (locally known as Family Intergenerational Literacy Model, or FILM) described a 'teaching for success formula' running through the different strands of the programme as follows: model, observation, discussion, exploration, life skills integration, and success celebration. Similarly, Rodriguez-Brown (2004) drew attention to Project FLAME's four key components: opportunity, modelling, interaction, and connection (of home and school). Meanwhile, in the UK, the ORIM framework (opportunities, recognition of children's literacy practices, interaction, and modelling) underpins the delivery of several family literacy and learning programmes (Hannon and Bird, 2004; Brooks *et al*., 2008).

Beyond this, information on the detail of instructional approaches is very limited. For example, it is not clear from the selected literature whether – in the context of family literacy – the teaching of phonics to adults is widespread. It is also not possible to ascertain whether there is any systematic difference in instructional approaches when teaching adult learners in the context of family literacy programmes, as compared to teaching them in stand-alone (adult education) provision. There are some references to the adaptation of programmes to take account of and exploit new technologies (see Box 5.3) but this is not, as yet, well documented.

Box 5.3 Use of new technologies

Brooks *et al.* (2008) commented: *'Home literacy practices are shifting with new technologies. Family literacy needs to take account of this'* (p. 60).

The literature does not provide much evidence that this is happening, over and above a couple of references to film projects and computer literacy classes (for example, the Californian Verizon OPTIONS Initiative, as cited in Brooks *et al.* (2008)). However, this may be due, in part, to the pace of technological change and/or the time-lag between a project or programme's development and its documentation in the literature.

Internet searches suggest more work is going on. See, for example, the Verizon Tech Savvy Awards promoting intergenerational digital learning (see http://foundation.verizon.com/index.html for more information).

5.3.5 Programme duration

Information is available on the duration and intensity of family learning programmes in the UK, the USA, and to a more limited extent, elsewhere, for example, the Manukau (New Zealand) Family Literacy project, which runs over 30 weeks (Benseman and Sutton, 2005).

With regard to the UK, Mallows (2008) reported that courses, observed as part of a NRDC adult literacy and numeracy study, mainly ran over an academic year, for a total of between 30 and 72 hours. Sessions, in general, lasted around two and a half hours and took place during the school day. In addition, a number of shorter, taster courses were on offer, with these often being specific to particular groups, organisations or settings.

Legislation underpinning family learning in the USA, the (reauthorised) Head Start Act 1998, stresses that services should be *'of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration, to make sustainable changes in a family'* (Edmiaston and Fitzgerald, 2003, p.170). Alamprese (2004) further noted that the ES model 'is predicated on parents' ability to access more hours of service than adults in basic education generally do' (p. 242).

5.3.6 Delivery settings

The literature indicates that family learning programmes are delivered in, or out of, a range of settings (Campbell and Wilson, 2001). The Canadian Literacy and Parenting Skills (LAPS) 30-hour training package *'was developed for use in a number of settings, including community centres, women's shelters, jails, drop-in centres and community housing projects'* (Brooks *et al*., 2008, p. 32). Other programmes have been designed with specific settings in mind. One example of this is The Big Book Share: Libraries and Family Reading in Prisons, a family literacy project developed in a male prison in Nottingham, which was subsequently rolled out to a number of other custodial settings. Similarly, the Prime Time Family Reading Time programme was devised specifically for delivery in public libraries (Langley *et al*., 2001).

Looking at the larger-scale programmes already referred to, the most common setting for them would appear to be schools. This is certainly the case with the ES programme, which is almost always centre-based, though on-site sessions can be supplemented by home visits (Anderson, 2006). In the UK, schools also commonly feature as the central setting for family learning programmes – increasingly so since the extended schools programme was introduced, with family learning as part of the core offer (Lamb *et al*., 2007). However, the children's centres established under the Every Child Matters agenda also play host to family learning programmes, typically those designed for families with a child or children below school age.

5.4 Impacts of approaches to family learning

This section explores the wide range of impacts that accrue from family learning programmes as identified in 22 of the 26 key sources. Impacts on both adults and children are very apparent in the literature, and there is much variation in the nature of the evidence, as well as the measures or performance indicators used to substantiate them. Sometimes, the impacts are modelled to include benefits for schools, families, the programme providers and wider communities (for example, Lochrie, 2004). Some authors also identify impacts relating to the actual programme, such as increases in regular attendance, retention rates or numbers enrolling when compared with exclusively adult learning programmes (see, for example, Campbell and Wilson, 2001; Padak *et al*., 2002b).

5.4.1 Impacts on adults

The effects of attendance at family learning programmes for adults cover four major arenas:

- personal impacts
- changes to parenting behaviours and attitudes
- effects on disposition towards their children's school and education (including activity relating directly to literacy and language learning)
- impacts associated with educational and employment advancement or aspiration. This has been referred to as self sufficiency by Anderson (2006), and is, ultimately, linked to reductions in state dependency and an improved status in society.

Personal impacts

For the purpose of this review, personal impacts relate to changes in participating adults' self-perception and social interaction behaviours, generally. Such changes are highlighted as 'core benefits' by Lochrie (2004) and a number of authors cite associated positive outcomes flowing from this type of impact.

Some sources identify how involvement in family learning increases an adult's confidence (for example, Mallows, 2008; Swain *et al*., 2009). Other terms used in the literature include increased self-advocacy (Padak and Rasinski, 2003) and self-efficacy (Benseman and Sutton, 2005; Rodriguez-Brown, 2004). Rodriguez-Brown (2004) added that this self-efficacy in turn allows participants to be *'successful as parents and members of society'* (p. 227) and Bensemann and Sutton (2005) noted that *'by building their self-efficacy, learners become immersed in a positive spiral where self-efficacy leads to improved skills levels, which in turn leads to greater self-efficacy'* (p. 6). Seaman and Yoo (2001) highlighted how participation in family learning programmes significantly increases confidence in the ability to learn, while Padak *et al.* (2002b) quoted Roth *et al.* (1997) who suggested *'increased self-esteem enables adults to engage in self advocacy and risk-taking, which is necessary for learning'* (Padak *et al.*, 2002b, p. 245).

A second element of personal impacts covers changes to an adult's social behaviours due to family learning programmes. Padak *et al.* (2002b) designated this *'social development'* and also quoted the terminology of Neuman *et al.* (1998, p. 24) that adults have *'more awareness of social practices'*. Mashishi and Cook (2003) noted that parents have more communication with each other, while Ofsted's 2009 evaluation of family learning programmes, delivered by adult and community learning services in 23 local authorities, also highlighted 'increased social networks'. Rodriguez-Brown (2004, p. 226) similarly identified that participants develop networks in the community, and cited evidence from the FLAME project of mothers who had rarely left the house without their husbands, now making friends, going to the library and taking public transport.

Changes to parenting behaviour and attitudes

Sources highlight how family learning programmes impact on the way participants perceive the role of a parent and how they subsequently behave in that function.

Improved parenting skills feature as impacts in a number of sources (for example, Bensemann *et al*., 2005; Judkins *et al*., 2008; Brooks *et al*., 2008). Ofsted (2009) noted that participants achieve 'good parenting attitudes'. Richardson *et al.* (2001) highlighted that parents report positive changes in the way they discipline their children and that they display more confident parenting. Bensemann *et al.* also noted improvements in disciplining skills and cited 'gaining new energy and commitment as parents' as an impact. Judkins *et al.* (2008) reported how the combined Classroom Literacy Interventions and Outcomes curricula increased parents' responsiveness to their child. Campbell and Wilson (2001) stated that knowledge about parenting options and child development increases. Padak *et al.* (2002b) noted moderate gains in parents' ability to provide emotional support and cognitive stimulation.

Effects on disposition towards children's school and education

Closely associated with changes to parenting behaviour is the specific relationship that participating parents forge with schools, and how their approaches to learning in the home are affected.

A range of impacts regarding participants' attitudes to, and relationship with, schools and schooling were evident in the literature. In general terms, Seaman and Yoo (2001) highlighted parents' increased expectations for their children, while Bensemann and Sutton (2005) noted that there is *'role modelling of different expectations and ambitions for children'* (p. 9).

The selected sources provide a number of examples where programmes have particularly enhanced home-school relations. Mallows (2008) and Seaman and Yoo (2001) cited improved communication and increased interaction with schools, and strengthened links between parents and teachers. Rodriguez-Brown (2004) also stated that there is a greater willingness to talk to teachers. Van Horn *et al.* (2002) noted evidence of increased volunteering in schools, while Darling (2004) found that 79 per cent of adults in family learning programmes were more involved in school activities and 58 per cent volunteered in schools. It is noteworthy that Brooks *et al.*'s (2008) meta-study of FLLN programmes suggested that longer-term benefits are evident in this area: parents were rated by teachers as more involved with their children's schools than those in comparison groups.

As well as greater involvement in their child's school, generally, there are references to changes in how parents increased or changed the way they engaged with their children regarding their education, particularly so for literacy. Langley *et al.* (2001) cited that three-quarters of participants had changed the way they spoke to children. Undertaking more reading with children and supporting literacy learning in the home are mentioned by Van Horn *et al.* (2002) and Richardson *et al.* (2001). Some sources (for example, Darling, 2004; Langley *et al.*, 2001; Van Horn *et al.*, 2002) noted increased and more regular use of libraries.

Impacts on education and employment advancement

The fourth major arena where impacts of family learning programmes on adults are noted, relates to changes in adult attitudes, aspirations or achievements regarding their own education and employability.

Mallows (2008) highlighted adults' increased desire to embrace the wider culture of learning and participation, and Swain *et al.* (2009) noted a greater appreciation of the benefits of developing their own literacy.

Some sources cited adult participants going on to further courses (Swain *et al.*, 2009), achieving qualifications and attending longer courses (Ofsted, 2009). Skinner (2007) similarly noted progression from family learning to further or higher education and also work; and Swain *et al.* (2009) reported improved chances and options of looking for work. Anderson (2006), drawing on six years of ES data, cited the evidence of increased 'self-sufficiency' by referring to the fact that 86 per cent of participants who wanted a job achieved this after attending a family learning programme, and that 17 per cent had an 'improved job status' subsequent to attendance.

Other evidence relates to significant gains in reading, maths, language use, oral and written English (Swain *et al.*, 2009; Van Horn *et al.*, 2002; Rodriguez-Brown, 2004). However, Brooks *et al.* (2008) are more cautious and, in their international meta-study of family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programmes, stated there is a *'dearth of evidence on benefits for parents' skills'* (p. 28), citing limited numbers of studies reporting benefits to parents' literacy, numeracy or spoken language. Nevertheless, from that evidence, they went on to conclude: *'This probably does mean that parents' skills benefitted, but the situation cries out for much more systematic gathering of data on this in a series of rigorous studies.'* (p. 28)

5.4.2 Impacts on children

The effects of attendance at family learning programmes for children cited in the key sources cover four arenas:

- specific improvements in children's literacy, language or numeracy skills
- advances in other aspects of child development (such as motor skills and cognitive growth)
- improved academic development more generally (including attitude towards and attendance at school)
- improvements in social or interpersonal skills.

For children's impacts, particularly, there is a very wide range of indicators and measures being relayed in the literature, with much of the evidence based on pre- and post-testing, comparative groups, and sometimes longer-term follow-up.

Impacts on literacy, language and numeracy

A number of sources report that family learning programmes provide children with significant gains in literacy, language skills and numeracy (Van Horn *et al*., 2002; Mashishi and Cook, 2003; Skinner, 2007; Swain *et al*., 2009; Hannon and Bird, 2004).

Some of the literature provides considerable detail about particular aspects of literacy: for instance, Padak and Rasinski (2003) cited understanding of print, phonemic awareness and decoding, as did Judkins *et al.* (2008) and Rodriguez-Brown (2004). Anderson (2006) reported that *'78 per cent of primary school children were reading at or above their grade level or demonstrate one year's growth in literacy skills within the year'* (p. 3). Rodriguez-Brown (2004) also noted children make significant gains in tests regarding *'the development of concepts such as time and quantity'* (p. 225).

Other sources cite increased motivation to read (for example, Padak and Rasinski, 2003), and these authors also state other improvements in literacy such as gains in comprehension skills and writing ability. Hannon and Bird (2004, p.9) cited research by Brooks *et al.* (1996, 1997, 1999), which provided evidence that such improvements are maintained, and stated: *'The benefits of family literacy and numeracy programmes persist long after the intervention is finished* (p. 9).' Langley *et al.* (2001) noted that *'previous studies have clearly documented the connection between home-based literacy development efforts and successful literacy-related behaviour in school'* (p. 160).

Impacts on child development

A few sources suggest that improvements for children involved in family learning are of a more general nature. Van Horn *et al.* (2002) reported increases in general cognitive skills and also gross and fine motor skills. Padak and Rasinski (2003) and Campbell and Wilson (2001) cited that children are healthier, and improved emotional wellbeing is cited by Van Horn *et al.* (2002). These authors also stated that *'elementary teachers report that, compared to a control group, children exhibited more growth [...] in most development areas'* (Van Horn *et al*., 2002, p. 20).

Improvements in academic development

Some authors note improvements in children's general attainment. Richardson *et al.* (2001) noted that, from the first to the eighth grade, the mean achievement test scores of those attending ES programmes were higher than their non-ES classmates. Padak *et al.* (2002b) reported that children 'perform better when they enter school', and have better 'general knowledge, measured by IQ tests'. Langley *et al.* (2001) noted an improvement in grades.

Associated with general academic development, sources cite a more positive attitude to school for those children who attended family learning programmes, for example, Padak *et al.* (2002b). Ofsted (2009) noted that children had 'settled better in class' and Richardson *et al.* (2001) stated that *'kindergarten teachers observed improvements in the school readiness of ES children'* (p. 14). Padak and Rasinski (2003), in their literature review exploring the benefits of family literacy programmes, reported a persistent finding (over 30 years) that such programmes are associated with more regular attendance at school and being more likely to complete education.

Impacts on social and interpersonal skills

Some studies conclude that family learning programmes have benefits for the social behaviour of children. Ofsted (2009) and Padak and Rasinski (2003) noted improved self-confidence, and Judkins *et al.* (2008) reported that measures of children's 'social confidence' are statistically significant. Van Horn *et al.* (2002) pointed to improved social behaviour, while improved communication and interpersonal skills are cited in Ofsted's (2009) report. Padak and Rasinski (2003) noted better 'social awareness'.

5.4.3 Impacts on families

Many of the impacts relating to improvements in parenting behaviour, skills and attitudes, highlighted in section 5.4.1, inevitably will have positive consequences for families as a whole. Improvements in disciplining skills or greater confidence in parenting are perhaps obvious examples of an associated family-related impact accruing from family learning programmes. However, it was notable that only a few sources specifically nominated family impacts.

While a greater engagement in literacy behaviours in the home is cited by a number of authors, Padak and Rasinski (2003) suggested that these literacy behaviours also create 'a more supportive home environment'. Both Campbell and Wilson (2001) and Padak and Rasinski (2003) referred to families being emotionally closer; Lochrie (2004) cited better family relationships. Mallows (2008) suggested that *'when one member of the family takes part in a FLLN programme this can lead to wider involvement of other family members'* (p. 28) and gave examples of the subsequent involvement of fathers and older children in reading in the home.

Improvements for families' living conditions and support are noted in two instances. Van Horn *et al.* (2002) suggested that local networking and support from family literacy staff helped families receive the support services they needed: 18 per cent of participants began receiving one or more support services that they had not been receiving prior to entry to the programme. Anderson (2006) noted that 19 per cent of families had improvements in housing and 46 per cent followed a budget for six months or longer.

5.4.4 Impacts on providers

Four sources highlight that family learning programmes can have an impact on the providers themselves. Bensemann and Sutton (2005) suggested that the Manukau Family Literacy Programme (MFLP) in New Zealand resulted in 'improved integration' of the early childhood, primary school and tertiary sectors, and that this had:

Positive effects for providers, increased awareness of each other's work, improved co-ordination, awareness of being part of a larger education system and having a more prominent profile in the wider community. (p. 9)

Padak *et al.* (2002b) reported earlier findings that teachers (as well as children and parents) had more positive attitudes towards literacy programmes and *'changed their classroom styles of enquiry from higher order abstractions to more affective interactions in response to interactions with parents'* (p. 28).

Langley *et al*., (2001) suggested that family learning programmes had improved understanding of the role that teachers can play in developing a learning environment that fosters *'critical thinking, creative interpretation and collaboration'* (p. 160).

Mashishi and Cook (2003) stated that the FAST programme in America *'moved both parents and schools some way towards recognition of children's play as an important feature of home culture'* (p. 247).

5.4.5 Impacts on the wider community

It may be inferred that impacts for adults and children in terms of education and future employability should have positive consequences for communities as a whole, and a few authors go on to explicitly make this association.

Padak *et al.* (2002b) cited Anderson (1994) who discussed the potential benefits of family literacy programmes for communities in terms of 'a larger pool of qualified workers' and that, with the strong correlation between economic status and literacy, programmes could *'help reduce the effects of poverty on self-esteem, hope and aspirations, if not poverty itself'* (p. 28). They suggested *'with increased educational levels and strengthened families, crime and violence could decrease'* and that *'because parents would have a better chance to become self-sufficient, government would spend less on welfare services'* (p. 29). Similarly, Campbell and Wilson's (2001) American model of possible impacts of family literacy programmes suggested a category entitled 'possible community outcomes' and included increases in literacy rates, employment rates and income levels. Lochrie's (2004) discussion presented a model of outcomes in the UK that includes 'employment' and 'better use of services' under the domain of benefits for communities. These two models are shown in Box 5.4 and Figure 5.1, respectively. These perspectives are not clearly evidence-based and it may be that community benefits is an area for further research and modelling (including value for money and cost-benefit analysis).

Overall, the longer-term benefits for adults and the ongoing positive developments that family learning programmes can stimulate is an arena that should merit further attention. It stands in contrast to the precise measurement and longitudinal studies often conducted with children involved in such initiatives.

Box 5.4 Possible outcomes of family literacy programmes

Possible Outcomes for Parents

- Improvement in adult reading level
- Improvement in English proficiency
- Improvement in adult math skills
- Attainment of or improvement in computer skills
- Improvement of budgeting and basic financial skills of parents
- Improvement in parent income level
- Increase in parental knowledge of child development
- Increase in positive interaction between parent and child
- Parent reads more to child
- Household has more books for adult and child
- Increase in use of library
- Improvement in confidence of parents in their role as their child's first teacher

Possible Outcomes for Children

- Improvement in developmental levels of child
- Child scores ready for first grade
- Child enjoys being read to by parent
- Increase in positive interaction between parent and child
- Decrease in behavior problems of child as reported by parent and teacher

Possible Program Outcomes

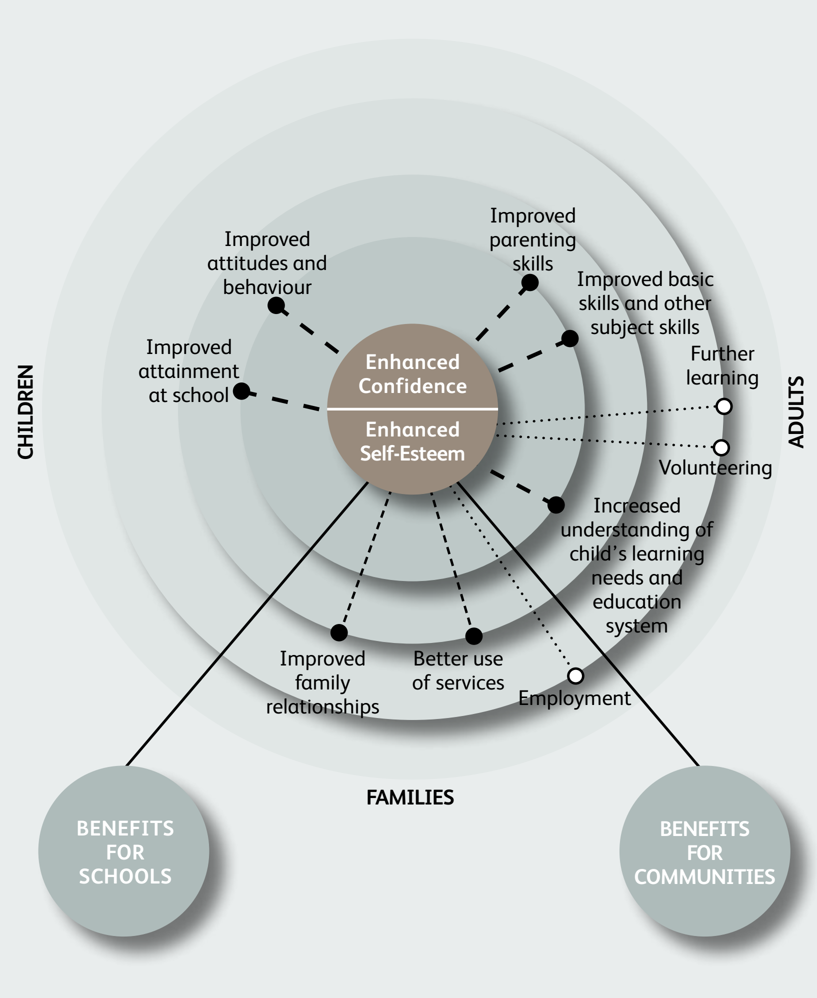
- Improvement in percentage of participants attending regularly
- Improvement in percentage of participants attaining personal goals
- Improvement in percentage of participants completing program
- Improvement in the percentage of targeted population enrolled in program

Possible Community Outcomes

- Increase in literacy rates
- Increase in employment rates
- Increase in income levels
- Improvement in school readiness scores
- Improvement in school test scores

Source: Campbell and Wilson (2001, p. 33)

Figure 5.1 Benefits of family learning model


Improved parenting skills
Improved attitudes and behaviour
Improved basic skills and other subject skills
Improved attainment at school
Enhanced Confidence
Enhanced Self-Esteem
Further learning
CHILDREN
ADULTS
Volunteering
Increased understanding of child's learning needs and education system
Improved family relationships
Better use of services
Employment
FAMILIES
BENEFITS FOR SCHOOLS
BENEFITS FOR COMMUNITIES

Source: Lochrie (2004, p. 6)

●	Core benefits
●– –	Linked benefits
●- - -	Family benefits
○······	Extended adult benefits
——	Community benefits

5.5

Paths to making improvements

This section considers the evidence available to answer the third research question, namely: what can be done to improve the teaching and learning of adult basic skills in relation to family learning?

Across 20 of the 26 literature sources, this question was addressed in various ways, for example with references to barriers, success factors, improvements and good practice. All of these areas have implications for the development of family learning. Therefore, these insights have been collated and 15 factors identified, which would appear to be critical to the effective delivery of adult basic skills in a family-learning context.

In order of frequency of mention, the factors associated with effective approaches are:

- the use of recruitment strategies to engage families
- evaluation to demonstrate the benefits of family learning
- professional development for those involved in delivery
- effective collaboration between stakeholders
- strategies to ensure retention of participants
- tailored provision
- appropriately qualified staff with the necessary expertise and background
- a clear definition and understanding of family learning
- funding
- policies which support family learning
- planning of provision with a focus on collaboration
- suitable location
- appropriate assessment
- effective management and coordination (local and national)
- opportunities for progression.

5.5.1 The use of recruitment strategies to engage families

In terms of facilitating factors, a key issue to emerge from the literature was the importance of planning a recruitment strategy to attract participants to family learning opportunities.

A number of sources reported difficulties attracting certain types of participant. For example, an evaluation of 23 family learning programmes (Ofsted, 2009) found that providers were generally unsuccessful in recruiting fathers or male carers. This report highlighted a series of workshops which were part of a wider strategy using imaginative play and technology as a way of attracting this particular group (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.5 UK: recruitment strategies to engage fathers and male carers

Rowdy Robots programme

Each event typically involved over 50 fathers, grandfathers, uncles and older brothers, with children, in a technology project that was delivered in the early evening at primary schools. Each family group collectively produced a simple robot racer using easy-to-follow guidance. Generally, the men enjoyed working with the children on the technical aspects. The children enjoyed the creative part of designing and making the robot's body and testing the finished article through robot races along the corridor. School and family learning staff were on hand to provide additional guidance and support so that every family group successfully completed their robot. One father commented: 'I thought I'd come to a robot-building session, but it's not building robots, it's building families'. School staff were particularly positive about the benefits children gained from the event, where it became the topic of assembly and class-based discussions and activity.

Source: Ofsted (2009, p. 11)

Other studies (Benseman and Sutton, 2005; Skinner, 2007) described problems engaging parents with low attainment levels and those who had less positive experiences of education as a child. Such individuals are likely to be more apprehensive about education generally and, therefore, less willing to sign up to courses.

To overcome such barriers, the literature recommends that new programmes actively plan their recruitment strategies (for example, Alamprese, 2004). The specific nature of a strategy was not discussed in great depth, but a few suggestions were put forward. These include offering taster sessions to families; ensuring publicity is geared towards the target audience (as opposed to a generic campaign); and, if feasible, taking a more direct and personal approach by visiting families at home to outline the purpose and benefits of a family learning programme. Another suggestion, featured in the literature, is the use of former learners to serve as learning champions, going out to speak to parents and carers and telling their own stories about the courses. Two sources recommend adopting a broad-based approach to recruitment, utilising a number of different routes in order to target parents, ranging from one-to-one conversations to larger-scale public awareness campaigns (Campbell and Wilson, 2001; Mallows, 2008).

5.5.2 Evaluation to demonstrate the benefits of family learning

Around half of the selected sources make reference to further evaluation in order to fully understand the benefits of family learning. Authors felt there was room for greater monitoring of impacts and tracking of participants over the longer term (Skinner, 2007; Padak *et al*., 2002a; Alamprese, 2004). It was asserted that such information could be used to inform policy and the direction of future family learning programmes.

Interestingly, an international meta-study conducted by Brooks *et al.* (2008) failed to find any evaluation evidence on whether parents taking part in family learning experience greater progress in their basic skills compared to others achieving this through other adult education programmes. A similar finding was reported by Hannon and Bird (2004). Swain *et al.* (2009) highlighted a need to contrast the progress of children not attending a family literacy course, with those who had taken part. To strengthen the case for developing adult basic skills and child literacy within a family learning programme, it would be helpful if future research could undertake such a comparison of impacts.

Even where positive impacts are clearly proven, Lochrie (2004) found a knowledge gap in the literature, in terms of identifying the precise catalysts for improvement. For example, had greater confidence in reading resulted from actual improvements in reading skills, or because of a generalised boost in self-confidence? Lochrie suggested more could be done to understand the 'active ingredients' of family learning.

5.5.3 Professional development for those involved in delivery

To improve delivery of family learning, ten of the 26 sources highlight, in various ways, the professional development needs of those working in the sector. This was felt to be particularly salient given the multi-disciplinary nature of family learning – requiring knowledge and expertise in fields such as adult education, early childhood education, social work and education administration (Campbell and Wilson, 2001; Richardson *et al.*, 2001). Working across sectors is seen as presenting 'new professional challenges' for early-childhood educators teaching adults, and adult educators acquiring knowledge of pre-school development and literacy (Hannon and Bird, 2004). Hence, to ensure providers possess the necessary range of expertise and knowledge, the family learning workforce requires appropriate and sufficient professional development opportunities.

5.5.4 Tailored programmes

In various ways, the literature supports the notion that programmes should be tailored to the needs of participants (Alamprese, 2004). Lochrie (2004) stated that family learning programmes should be sufficiently differentiated to address learners' needs, although, as noted by Swain *et al.* (2009), the spectrum of needs can be so diverse as to prove challenging in terms of programme delivery. The curriculum may need adapting for ESOL learners (Strucker *et al.*, 2004), or to take account of participants' emotional barriers such as a fear of school (Campbell and Wilson, 2001). Ofsted (2009) looked at how one provider tailored courses by asking learners what they wanted to learn (see Box 5.6).

Box 5.6 UK: tailored programmes

Meeting learners' needs

In one provider visited, all learners completed a 'What You Want to Learn' form in their family learning passports, which included space for children to include their targets. Learners were supported in target setting, with the use of target cards provided for all courses. Tutors and teachers used this information when planning their courses to ensure that personal targets were met.

Source: Ofsted (2009, p. 17)

An evaluation of the ES family literacy programme (St. Pierre *et al.*, 2003) identified the nature and quality of instruction as possible reasons for a lack of progress. The hypothesis was put forward that services were spreading themselves too thinly by trying to cater for parents with various needs and children of different ages. It was proposed that more careful targeting of services towards subgroups with similar backgrounds might enable projects to focus activities more effectively and, at the same time, offer services that appeal more strongly to the families. The extent to which provision can be truly personalised to suit individual circumstances is clearly an issue for consideration.

Authenticity and relevance in programme design are other characteristics highlighted in the literature as key to the effective delivery of family learning (Padak *et al.*, 2002b). Campbell and Wilson (2001) recommended that activities be reality-based and meaningful to the everyday lives of participants. Strucker *et al.* (2004) maintained that programmes should take account of cultural differences between participants and their effect on, for example, participants' views on parenting.

5.5.5 Effective collaboration between stakeholders

As noted by Padak *et al.* (2002b), the very definition of family learning – addressing the learning needs of both parent and child simultaneously – invites collaboration and brings together contributors from the adult and child education sectors, as well as other community services. The literature sees the quality of this collaboration as paramount to the success of a programme. It is mentioned variously by nine of the 26 sources.

Liaison between agencies in the initial planning phases is regarded as important in order to avoid duplication of effort, to identify gaps in provision, and to ensure widened access to the programme (Skinner, 2007; Padak *et al.*, 2002b). To demonstrate this last point, one study found that networking with pre-school providers encouraged parent participation (Bauernfeind (1990). The involvement of partners also enables family learning teams to benefit from a bank of expertise, resources, reputation and credibility (Mallows, 2008). Thus, collaboration is seen as beneficial to family learning. In one study, student success was even found to correlate partially with the number of agencies involved (Anderson, 1995). At the same time, it is acknowledged that multi-agency programmes can create challenges in terms of coordination and communication. To avoid such issues, the literature advises clarifying the roles and responsibilities of contributing stakeholders at an early stage (see the example in Box 5.7 of the Boots Books for Babies project.

Box 5.7 UK: effective collaboration between stakeholders

Boots Books for Babies project

This collaborative project involved Boots (a leading UK retail chemist), Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottinghamshire health visitors. The project gave book packs to babies' parents or carers at the nine-month hearing check, in order to increase adults' awareness of the importance of sharing books with babies and to increase registration with, and use of, libraries.

The links between health and library staff were seen as very important by the professionals involved. The partnership was said to enable health and library staff to develop their own awareness of literacy, as well as validating existing literacy practices. Healthcare workers did not see the extra work involved as 'burdensome' but rather as complementary to their purpose of promoting child development. In addition, the role of the bilingual healthcare assistant was seen as crucial in the delivery of packs to parents who were not confident English speakers.

Source: Bailey (2003, chapter 10)

Outside of the immediate programme contributors, an evaluation of family literacy programmes in an American state (Van-Horn *et al*., 2002) found a need to build effective local collaborations that move beyond simple referral services.

5.5.6 Strategies to ensure retention of participants

Studies have demonstrated that the duration of participant involvement in family learning programmes has a direct relationship with the benefits experienced. In an evaluation of Pennsylvania's family literacy programmes, Van-Horn *et al.* (2002) reported that long-term participants made significantly larger gains in relation to the frequency with which they talked with their children about school, read to their children, their children read to them and the frequency with which their children read for fun.

Another American evaluation (St. Pierre *et al*., 2003) concluded that a lack of progress could be attributed to the length of contact with a programme, and the fact that families do not receive enough instruction to make the kinds of changes that are needed. In this instance, families remained in a programme for an average of ten months (and, in that time, received an equivalent of seven months' instruction). The target group included parents with low literacy levels from a very disadvantaged population. Hence, it was speculated that their needs could only be met by a more intensive programme, delivered over a longer time span.

Given the importance of remaining in a programme, the literature advises attention is paid to the retention of families, in particular ensuring steps are taken to facilitate their attendance. For example, this may involve giving consideration to transport arrangements, offering meals, access to childcare and a location which is convenient to parents (Campbell and Wilson, 2001; Padak *et al*., 2002b; Swain *et al*., 2009; Richardson *et al*., 2001).

One source (Strucker *et al*., 2004), however, felt it was necessary to be realistic and to accept that, for many parents, it would be difficult to dedicate several hours of their week to a family learning programme. The authors contended that programmes cannot typically expect more than a few hours a week of participation, must deal with frequent absenteeism, and make allowances for other commitments.

5.5.7 A clear definition and understanding of family learning

In 2004, Hannon and Bird observed that, in England, the family literacy element of family learning had gained a certain momentum, with much more funding available. However, they also suggested that this pace of change had resulted in a lack of clarity over what is meant by the term family literacy. They concluded that the state needs to catch up with the rapidly changing policy climate and clarify what family literacy is and where it fits in.

Similar statements have been made by others in the literature. Richgels (2003), for example, suggested reconceptualising family learning intervention as multi-year or multiphase models rather than short-term ones. Lochrie (2004), meanwhile, wanted to see a broadening of family learning programmes to encompass subjects such as ICT, health and nutrition, and managing finances.

A lack of shared understanding around the purpose of family learning programmes can lead to difficulties, as described by Swain *et al.* (2009). This evaluation for NRDC of family literacy courses across the UK found that schools and family learning staff hold different perceptions regarding programme goals. School staff can see it as a way of building home-school links, whilst trainers see the programme as seeking to improve the motivation of parents to help their children and enhance their own literacy skills.

Such differing perceptions can lead to tensions between participating agencies. In light of such confusion, Ofsted (2009) recommended producing standard definitions of family learning.

5.5.8 Qualified staff with the necessary expertise

Seven sources discuss different aspects of staffing in relation to effective practices in family learning. Reviewing research evidence from across a decade of family literacy programmes, Padak *et al.* (2002b) concluded that success was associated with:

- staff having a variety of expertise (for example, encompassing adult education, early childhood education and social work)
- staff adopting a collaborative approach such as joint planning between adult and child trainers
- stability of staffing
- an awareness of cultural issues (for example, acknowledging that beliefs on parenting can vary across cultures).

These attributes are noted by others in the literature (for example, Campbell and Wilson, 2001; Strucker *et al*., 2004). In a practitioner handbook, informed by research findings, Mallows (2008) stated that staff attitudes and qualities are central, and that they need to create *'a positive, welcoming, supportive, friendly, non-threatening atmosphere'* (p. 20).

5.5.9 Funding

Six sources make a range of comments regarding the funding of family learning programmes. For example, Campbell and Wilson (2001) stressed the need to obtain stable funding to support programme delivery.

Similarly, Hannon and Bird (2004) voiced concerns that funding was often short term. The same authors also raised the issue that the source of funding may have implications for programme focus, for example whether it is seen to be addressing the needs of adults or children. The solution, they felt, was to take a broader view of provision and support local partnerships bringing together providers of both adult and early childhood education.

Peyton (1996) conducted an American review of 11 states' efforts to develop family learning programmes and identified adequate funding as a feature of success. In particular, it was felt that the most effective strategy was to fund a small number of programmes rather than trying to spread resources thinly over a wide array of programmes.

Indeed, the Ofsted review of family learning programmes (2009) reported that three-quarters of providers felt funders did not always recognise the high cost of working with vulnerable groups.

Hence, for any programme to succeed, consideration needs to be given to securing appropriate funding levels.

5.5.10 Planning of provision with a focus on collaboration

Whilst any programme will inevitably require a planning phase, the literature draws attention to the importance of engaging all stakeholders during this process. Campbell and Wilson's (2001) guidance document on setting up a family learning programme has considerable detail of the steps involved in planning a family literacy programme. They advised forming a 'diverse, collaborative planning group'.

Specifically mentioned in the literature was the need to consult with parents (with positive spins for recruitment and retention at a later stage) and also other community services (to assist with promotion of a programme).

5.5.11 Suitable location

Location issues are discussed in four sources (Benseman and Sutton, 2005; Mallows, 2008; Swain *et al.*, 2009; Richardson *et al.*, 2001), with comments regarding the need for adequate space, separate adult and child areas, local and convenient locations, and familiar venues.

Adults' sense of comfort with the chosen venue will be particularly relevant for parents who may feel apprehensive about attending educational provision. Hence, location is likely to have an impact on both recruitment and retention. See Box 5.8 for examples of how two venues were made appropriate for those participating in family learning projects.

Box 5.8 UK: suitable location

Two examples of appropriate teaching environments

One session takes place in a school classroom containing arts and crafts materials:

The walls are decorated with photographs, paintings, poems and other work created by a family literacy group. The classrooms are all situated off a glass-walled corridor in an 'L' formation. This one is the fourth of five along one arm of the 'L' and therefore well integrated and visible within school.

The other session is held in the parents' room within the Sure Start building in the grounds of the primary school, thus, it is felt, removing potential negative connotations of school-type environments:

This is a very pleasant room with plenty of table space and comfortable chairs. The walls are covered with a wide range of posters related to family health, safety and education as well as artwork from the family literacy class. There is a kitchenette, computer, bookshelves and arts and crafts storage. Adjacent to the parents' room is a crèche.

Source: Mallows (2008, p. 21)

5.5.12 Appropriate assessment

The role of assessment within family literacy programmes is debated in three sources. Requirements to undertake assessment or achieve a certain level of attainment are said to have a potentially negative impact on family learning programmes.

In an evaluation of 74 family literacy courses (Swain *et al*., 2009), the pressure for parents to take tests at level 1 and level 2 was seen as excluding less able and less confident parents from participation. Likewise, Padak *et al.* (2002b) reported that an emphasis in the USA on achieving a GED certificate in a short space of time can be detrimental to the overall quality of delivery. In relation to effective approaches, Mallows (2008) suggested assessment and accreditation be embedded in other activities and that tutors are sensitive to adults' fear of accreditation (especially during the recruitment stages).

5.5.13 Effective management and coordination (local and national)

The multi-agency nature of family learning means it presents certain challenges in terms of management and coordination.

An evaluation of a family learning programme in New Zealand (Benseman and Sutton, 2005) found great value in employing an independent broker to undertake a coordination role, as none of the individual partners 'had enough time, expertise and knowledge of other parts of the education sector to take on family literacy alone'. The broker was able to take a wider view and challenge partners to see outside of their own sphere.

Meanwhile, at a national level in the UK, Lochrie (2004) argued the case for a national body to lead and manage provision. The author recognised the diversity of opportunities that exist for family learning but maintained that provision would be strengthened if brought together under a single conceptual framework, and under the leadership of a national organisation.

5.5.14 Opportunities for progression

Two sources (Padak *et al*., 2002b) and (Swain *et al*., 2009) signalled the importance of considering progression routes after family learning programmes. Such opportunities should be clearly signposted to participants and promoted through a variety of channels.

5.6 Conclusion

This overview has identified models of practice and impacts associated with family learning. With a clear focus on the implications for adult basic skills development, the following are key messages which can inform the future direction of such programmes.

5.6.1 Models of practice

The evidence points to the impact of family learning programmes on adults' personal confidence, social skills, educational advancement and opportunities for employment. However, in the models of practice identified, it is rare to find examples of planned progression routes which show clear pathways for adults from family learning programmes on to other educational and employment advancement. Only two of the 26 selected key sources identify this as a significant factor in successful approaches.

Most of the programmes researched and evaluated relate to literacy. Few focus on numeracy, and there is little evidence of family learning research reporting on IT literacy programmes for families. Again, this may be an area for development by course designers and for investigation by the research fraternity.

Equally, given the finding on the low numbers of men engaging in family learning activity, there may be value in investigating further programmes which do focus on male adult learners and children. This would help to identify specific outcomes for male learners, and any gender-specific FLLN activities which successfully attract, retain and progress basic skill acquisition for men.

5.6.2 Impacts

Most of the robust, comparative and longitudinal evaluation and research around family learning is focused on children's outcomes. Key sources are often American and quote in-depth research over time that is not always recent. Hence, exploring the longer-term impact of family learning on adult participants with the same rigour would be a particular benefit. This is especially the case if the focus is on modelling the impact in terms of employment and career advancement. A value-for-money analysis of FLLN programmes' expenditure and impacts may also be an appropriate way forward in future research.

5.6.3 Policy

Brooks *et al.'s* (2008) meta-evaluation describes how the initial rationale for FLLN was focused on benefits for children, with 'an assumption throughout that parents will also benefit'. They also describe 'a policy vacuum' connected with FLLN and note that the diminished role of the Basic Skills Agency has not been taken up in full by any other organisation, which, in turn, may have contributed to the lack of a universally understood definition of family learning.

Alongside this, the available evidence does suggest the potential for family learning to provide important benefits to individual adults as well as to children, families and communities. Equally, there is some evidence that recruitment, retention rates and advancements following the programmes are more apparent for some family learning programmes than is the case for adult basic skills training. Perhaps this is the kind of evidence required to ensure FLLN stays firmly on the policy agenda and is championed as a vehicle for adults' basic skills acquisition, as well as that of children's.

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6

Using flexible learning as a medium to develop adult basic skills

Liz Phillips and Robert Smith

6.1 Introduction

Increasingly, in line with the demands for competence in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, governments around the world have endeavoured to widen access to learning and break down the barriers linked to distance, competing work and childcare responsibilities, illness and disability, age, and stigma. Allowing learners to develop their basic skills at a time and pace that suits them, often facilitated by learning technologies, is a viable and innovative way of increasing participation.

6.2 Aim of this review

The aim of this review is to examine UK and international evidence on the development of basic skills through flexible learning, including internet-based distance learning.

The specific objectives of the review were to investigate:

- the approaches used to develop basic skills through flexible learning (including internet-based learning)
- the outcomes arising from these approaches
- ways in which the teaching and learning of adult basic skills through flexible learning (including internet-based learning) can be improved.

6.3 Defining

flexible learning

Flexible learning seeks to promote access to opportunities in ways that overcome a range of attitudinal and situational barriers affecting a person's ability to participate in learning activities. Attitudinal barriers may be a lack of confidence, a history of negative experiences or disengagement from formal education and training, and cultural barriers associated with notions of gender and appropriate behaviour in different circumstances. Situational barriers may be irregular work patterns, childcare responsibilities, health problems, and a lack of transport or geographical isolation (Thomas, 2009).

At the same time, flexibility in the delivery of adult basic skills education can refer to the modes of study available to the learner (for example, online study, classroom-based study or a combination of the two), and also to the ways in which learners access and engage with course content (for example, accessing pre-recorded lectures, using textbooks, or online focus-groups) (Holland, 2002).

Several different terms are used in the literature and it is worth defining these. As well as the term flexible learning, there is distance learning, distributed and electronic learning or personal learning environment, computer-assisted instruction, and e-learning (Outram, 2009).

6.3.1 Definitions of flexible learning terminology

Distance learning

According to Calder (2000, p.2), the terms open, distance, flexible and remote learning are used 'increasingly loosely' to describe a wide variety of learning delivery modes, and should not be used interchangeably to refer to the same concept. Calder advocates Holmborg's early definition of distance learning:

Distance education thus includes the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of trainers present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a trainerial organisation. (Holmborg, 1986).

Distributed and electronic learning

While they do not formally define the terminology, Crawley and Attewell (2001) adopted the phrase *distributed and electronic learning* (DEL) to describe internet-based learning and that which incorporates technology as a main learning medium. The term *personal learning environment* (PLE) is used to define the similar concept of technology-supported learning used by (mainly Australian) authors such as Muldoon (2008), Barone (2003, cited in Muldoon, 2008, p. 1), and Milligan (2006, cited in Muldoon, 2008, p. 1),

Milligan (2006) outlined the benefits of using a PLE for lifelong learning because it allows for self-directed and personalised learning:

'The key concept of the PLE is that the use of a service oriented approach allows the individual to choose the suite of tools that they want to work with (their personal learning toolkit), and the PLE is the glue that brings the individual tools together and allows them to interoperate' Muldoon (2008, p. 1)

Computer-assisted instruction

Some American and British authors use the term computer-assisted instruction (CAI) when a range of learning technologies is used to deliver basic skills training to adults, including internet-based distance learning (for example, Li and Edmonds, 2005; Silver-Pacuilla, 2008; Nicol and Anderson, 2000).

E-learning

The term e-learning is used synonymously with open and distance learning (Calder, 2000), and describes supported online learning environments, or 'integrated electronic distributed learning environments' (Calder, 2000, p. 3).

The Australian author Bradshaw (2009) outlined the trajectory of e-learning and its use in adult and community education (ACE). All types of education, from basic literacy and numeracy to degree and post-graduate level, are included under the broad umbrella of ACE. Bradshaw considered e-learning to be a major development in the history of education in Australia, having expanded over many years (p. 365). It adds depth and breadth to adults' learning experiences through increasing their interactivity and flexibility. Merely conceptualising e-learning as the use of technology in educational delivery represents an impoverished view of its application. According to Bradshaw (2009):

The 'e' in e-learning means so much more to me [than electronic]. It means emerging, emotional, exhilarating learning, exemplary, essential and effective learning; it means sometimes exotic, regularly exhausting, but always exciting learning. For me, as well, 'e-learning' means everyday and everywhere everyone learning, and, possibly most important of all in ACE, it means egalitarian and ethical learning (p. 366).

There is a confusion between the terms open and distance learning, and this derives from the introduction of the UK Open University (UKOU) in the late 1960s (Calder, 2000). The UKOU was designed to give adult learners a second chance to pursue undergraduate and post-graduate degree level study, regardless of their location, personal commitments, or prior educational qualifications. Various media have been used over the years by the UKOU to deliver distance learning, including print and broadcasting, personal media such as audio and video, and online provision. This is in conjunction with personal support delivered by allocated trainers. The UKOU is not a major focus of this chapter because it only delivers degree-level education. The only English language/basic skills support provided by the UKOU is for ESOL learners undertaking degree-level study.

According to George and Luke (1995, p. 3), flexible learning involves constructing opportunities for 'deep' approaches to learning through using forms of delivery which are multi-dimensional, and broaden teaching and learning choices for trainers and learners. Flexible learning also provides value for money, and utilises a range of teaching and learning methods. Flexible learning delivery comprises three key dimensions, as shown in Box 6.1.

Box 6.1 The key dimensions of flexible learning

1. Student learning: variable location time and pace of learning; consideration of the entry and exit points; and assessment.

2. Forms of delivery: variable location, time and pace of delivery; collaborative ventures between teaching providers and community organisations; and involving a range of learning technologies.

3. Content: partnerships with industry; consideration of previous learning experiences through ‘recognition of prior learning’ policies (which outline how previous learning can be recognised by trainers to facilitate access to a programme of study); credit transfer (systems in which previous learning is recognised by means of credits or levels which can accumulate and which can be transferred between different institutions or providers); and articulation arrangements (whereby two institutions or providers formally agree to recognise learning outcomes, standards and qualifications achieved through completing provision at one institution or provider towards completing provision at the other).

Source: George and Luke (1995 p. 3)

Outram (2009) defined flexible learning as that which allows greater flexibility for the learner in terms of how, when and where they study. The author also acknowledged the frequent inclusion of internet tools such as virtual learning environments, and those such as mobile phones, iPods and personal digital assistants (PDAs) that facilitate ‘mobile learning’ (p. 3). A flexible learning course, Outram said, is one that has a concentrated duration (for example, a two-year literacy programme would be undertaken in one year), more personalised content, and incorporates learning technologies as a main method of delivery.

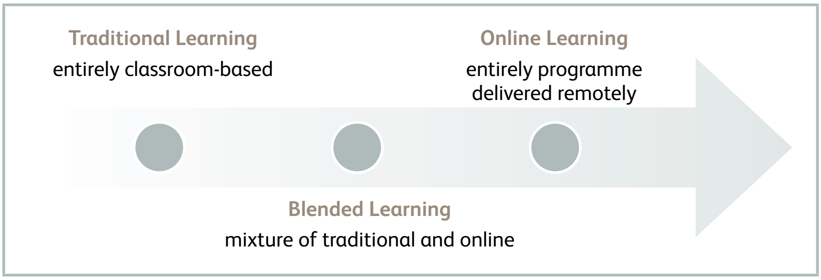
A related concept is *blended learning*, which combines internet-based distance learning with some face-to-face trainer support. This term is derived from the model of learning applied by the Open University in the 1980s, but has now become somewhat archaic, and is interpreted in different ways by different people, organisations and institutions (Gulc, 2006). By means of explanation, Gulc cited the following rationales of two institutions for making learning available via blended learning, which highlights their different interpretations:

The University of Hertfordshire’s Blended Learning Unit (BLU), CETL, state that they aim to “develop, promote and evaluate the combination of established ways of learning and teaching and the opportunities offered by technology in order to improve students’ learning and increase flexibility in how, when and where they study”.

Significantly the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) describe it as a “combination of face-to-face and on-line delivery”, which they believe “suits a wider range of learning styles”.

Gulc (2006) also presented a pedagogic continuum (see Figure 6.1), on which blended learning sits between traditional, classroom-based and internet-based delivery.

Figure 6.1: A pedagogic continuum of different learning models



Source: Adapted from Gulc, 2006.

Some authors see the increased use of flexible learning as a response to the rise of the information age; the need to consider the growing diversity of the learner population; the greater use of recipient-focused learning methods; the expanding need for graduates to be technologically-literate and ready to enter increasingly technology-focused workplaces; and the requirement for accessible and personalised learning opportunities throughout a person's life in accordance with the needs of the economy (Barone, 2003, cited in Muldoon, 2008; Candy, 2004, cited in Muldoon, 2008; George and Luke, 1995; Muldoon, 2008).

No definition of flexible learning was presented in the Scottish Executive's audit of adult skills provision (2001) yet distance learning (referred to therein as 'distance supported study') was cited as one of the main delivery mechanisms for adult basic skills. Using the internet and technology for learning was a key feature of distance supported study, as defined by the audit report.

Flexible learning, then, is a multi-faceted concept that incorporates distinct yet overlapping features. It represents a move away from traditional didactic teaching methods towards maximising the use of learning resources and technology.

In conjunction with this shift towards flexible learning, the role and function of the trainer changes. To deliver flexible learning, trainers change from being the main teaching resource to just one of many, and become facilitators of skills and understanding rather than deliverers (George and Luke, 1995).

6.3.2 Use of ICT in basic skills learning

The use of ICT as a medium for delivering adult basic skills is not a new concept. The creator of the internet, Tim Berners-Lee, intended it to be used primarily as a medium for learning, sharing information and promoting social interaction (Arenas, 2008). The Information Society Commission in 1999 recommended that all adult literacy programmes should include the teaching and learning of ICT skills, as it was essential for learners to keep abreast of technological developments (Holland, 2002). It has also been suggested that ICT has itself changed the definition of basic skills, with literacy training, for example, being extended to include elements such as the skills of internet searching, moving between internet pages using links embedded into the text (known as hypertextual navigation), content evaluation, and knowledge assembly. These features form what Snyder *et al.* (2005) called the 'new literacies' of adult learning.

6.4 Approaches to adult basic skills development through flexible learning

(including internet-based distance learning)

6.4.1 Approaches within flexible learning

Flexible learning has evolved from its early association with correspondence courses as it has harnessed technological developments to provide an increasingly sophisticated range of opportunities for learners. Some of the tools and techniques used to deliver flexible and internet-based distance learning include:

- email (Holland, 2002)
- chat tools (Holland, 2002)
- course conferencing (Holland, 2002)
- CD-ROM software packages (Warschauer, 2004, cited in Webb, 2006)
- digital telephones, televisions, mobile telephony and games (Crawley and Attewell, 2001; Silver-Pacuilla, 2008; Bradshaw, 2009)
- video conferencing (George and Luke, 1995; Holland, 2002; Silver-Pacuilla, 2008)
- virtual learning environments (Gulc, 2006)
- PDAs (Outram, 2009)
- programmes such as WebCT, Lotus Learning Space, TopClass which can be used to create online learning environments for basic skills training (Holland, 2002)
- discussion forums (Holland, 2002), including TopClass as used by the Open University (Knightley, 2007)
- internet services such as Google, AdSense, Flickr, Wikipedia, Napster, MySpace, Ebay, Amazon, YouTube, Facebook and Second Life (Arenas, 2008)
- webquests (internet enquiry projects) (Kambouri *et al.*, 2006)
- e-portfolios (Kambouri *et al.*, 2006)
- mind-mapping software (Kambouri *et al.*, 2006)
- MP3 players (Bradshaw, 2009)
- iPods (Outram, 2009)
- social software including blogging, wikis, e-portfolios, instant messaging and podcasting (Arenas, 2008, p.1).

According to Silver-Pacuilla (2008) distance learning can encompass many different formats including video checkout, televised courses, internet conferencing, integrated learning system software accessible through a password login, and web-based self-directed inquiry assignments. Wrap-around models of internet-based distance learning combine course materials designed in accordance with learners' individual requirements such as study guides, activities and discussions with existing resources like text books, CD-ROMs and tutorials. Learners spend about 50 per cent of their study time online when adopting a wrap-around model of online learning, and use interactive learning technologies such as screen-sharing and video conferencing to a significant extent, which enhances the propensity for learners to solve problems collaboratively with their trainers and each other (Holland, 2002).

The techniques and resources used to deliver distance learning in Australia have changed in conjunction with technological advancements, which have been progressively rapid since 2003 and the expansion of satellite broadcasting (Towers and Hutchinson, 2008). For example, it was only possible to broadcast sound-based transmissions to learners in rural and remote areas of Australia through VHF radio. Satellite broadcasting made it possible to add vision to sound, and have real-time audiovisual transmissions. The contribution of developments in learning technologies towards the expansion of distance learning worldwide is also acknowledged by Calder (2000), who emphasised that new technologies should only be adopted for distance learning teaching and learning in conjunction with new teaching methods, quality control processes, and forms of organisation.

6.4.2 Community approaches

Outreach community-based training has traditionally been at the core of adult learning activities and is one of the most recognised forms of adult learning at all levels from basic skills to degree-level studies. Basic skills training, delivered in community settings, represents one of the main activities of local authority and other adult education training in the UK.

NRDC's research report (Hannon *et al*., 2003) distinguished between community-*focused*, and community-*based* provision of basic skills to adults. Community-based training is that which is geographically located within the community it serves. Community-focused training is not only located within a community but is focused on it in terms of acknowledging learners' community identity, the similarities and differences between them, their need for challenge as well as support, and the benefits of providing protracted input over a period of several years (Hannon *et al*., 2003).

Five factors are associated with successful community-focused adult literacy, numeracy and language training (Hannon *et al.* 2003):

- holistic approaches to learning: aligning learning with learners' lives and interests, and being sensitive to any prior negative experiences of education
- learning location: fitness for purpose
- quality of staff, and teaching and learning resources
- basic skills integrated but not apparent: overt labelling of training as basic skills can discourage potential learners
- achievement and progression.

An example of how the community-based approach has been successfully implemented in the USA is in Box 6.2.

Box 6.2 USA: Community technology centres (CTCs)

One community-based approach to delivering basic skills to adult learners using flexible and internet-based learning is outlined by Webb (2006). Government-funded CTCs were set up across America to raise the basic skills of adults living in urban, economically deprived areas.

Various models of CTCs have been adopted and most are run by community-based organisations offering adult basic training, ESOL, and computer literacy programmes (Webb, 2006).

6.4.3 Integrated approaches

Integrated or embedded approaches are defined as those that include basic skills development as a secondary learning impact, rather than the primary goal of a learning programme.

One example in the literature of where flexible learning has been used to deliver basic skills to adults using an integrated approach is the Literacy 2000 Team, which was established in Scotland in 2000 as part of the Scottish Executive's goal to address the deficit in adult literacy and numeracy. The team completed an audit of adult basic skills training in the country during the same year. The audit found that two main types of basic skills training were being delivered in Scotland, namely integrated tuition and dedicated tuition.

Dedicated tuition is referred to in some sources relating to work-based training as formal tuition. Refer to Chapter 7 for further discussion of this.

The audit found that 64 out of 78 providers used integrated tuition, while 49 providers offered it as a separate option for learners. The audit addressed adult basic skills delivery in general, rather than focusing exclusively on flexible learning (including internet-based distance learning).

Further examples of where online learning is used to deliver basic skills to adult learners in rural England are included in the NRDC's (2005) research report (Atkin *et al*., 2005). Basic skills training is embedded within an ICT course in Lingen, Herefordshire, for instance. The course is flexible because it is adapted to incorporate learners' specific needs and interests. Trainers felt that it is successful because learners are willing to identify ICT skills needs, whereas they are not so forthcoming in admitting literacy and numeracy skills needs (Atkin *et al*., 2005).

A further example of flexible embedded basic skills training is identified in the Atkin *et al.* (2005) report. The charitable organisation Community Action Furness delivers flexible training to local people in woodwork, catering, and furniture restoration. Participants are asked to state whether they have basic skills needs prior to the start of the course, but are often reluctant to divulge this information to trainers. Trainers closely review learners' progress after commencing courses to ascertain whether basic skills development is needed, and it is then provided in one-to-one or group sessions (Atkin *et al*., 2005).

6.4.4 Flexibility within adult basic skills delivery

Evidence concerning the method and impact of combining community and integrated approaches to delivering basic skills to adults was found in the literature. The NRDC research reports (Hannon *et al*., 2003; Atkin *et al*., 2005) stated that concealing basic skills training within community-focused provision was associated with high learner retention, regardless of the size of the basic skills component relative to other elements. Hannon *et al.* (2003) termed this model of community-focused provision *'basic skills integral but not apparent'*. (p. 21)

Integrated approaches to delivering basic skills to adults are criticised in some of the literature relating to work-based learning (Chapter 7), however, although no evidence was found to this effect in the literature included in the current review.

A hybrid of the community and integrated model was found in the LSC's report (GHK Consulting, 2003) outlining good practice in education and training in sparsely populated areas. The Link into Learning programme, which operates in Cornwall, does not offer any courses explicitly marketed as basic skills training. To do so would discourage many learners due to the stigma attached to asking for help with basic skills, particularly within a small community where learners can be identified. One of the Link into Learning courses is based ostensibly on building kites and contains numeracy exercises such as measuring materials. Flexibility in terms of timing and location are vital aspects of the Link into Learning programmes. Training is offered at a range of community settings including village halls, community centres, pubs and schools, thus enabling learners to overcome any situational barriers to learning.

According to Holland (2002), drawing on the earlier work of Mason (1998), the integrated model as applied to internet-based distance learning is characterised by the following elements:

- collaborative activities and learning resources
- joint assignments
- fluid and dynamic course content, determined by individual and group activity
- use of real-time communication such as video, audio and text within small, interactive groups.

Webb (2006) investigated three courses in different settings delivering basic-level English through ICT to ESOL learners.

- **Course 1**: open-access IT room in a further education college with trainers giving general support to all learners
- **Course 2**: specialised CD-ROM in a community-based setting with ESOL-trained trainers giving more structured support
- **Course 3**: learning technology without trainer support.

Webb made a number of key findings.

- There was little evidence to suggest ICT encouraged the participation of learners due to the fact that the learners involved in the study were already engaged with lifelong learning.
- Regardless of the approach and setting used, learners enjoyed the experience of learning English through ICT.
- The most positive views about learning English through ICT were expressed by learners who saw doing so as an essential skill, and for whom alternative ways of learning the language were unavailable.
- The extent of learners' existing familiarity with ICT predicted their success with the training.
- Learners used ICT to facilitate their learning to a greater extent in the open-access settings where trainer support was more generic than in the further education college where the trainer gave intensive specialist support.
- Using ICT as a learning medium facilitated independence in learning, and reduced the feeling of being marginalised that had been experienced previously by some of the learners when taking up provision offered in traditional classrooms.

Overall, learners were more likely to use the whole range of learning technologies available to them when they studied at open-access sites rather than community settings. This was linked to the nature of the trainer support: less intensive support fostered greater independence in learning. Learners preferred being able to ask for support when they needed it, rather than receiving the more intensive guidance from trainers at the community settings.

The University for Industry (Ufi) is a UK-based provider of online learning for adults. Box 6.3 gives further background information about the organisation and the services it provides to those with basic skills needs.

Box 6.3 Ufi and the learndirect service

learndirect was launched by the University for Industry (Ufi) in 2000, which itself was launched by the UK government in 1998. Ufi aims to improve the basic skills of the UK workforce. Its services include an online information service, a national telephone advice line, providing learning opportunities and resources for adults through innovative technology (including the internet), in addition to offering training through a network of 2,400 learndirect centres and 6,000 online learning centres. No similar organisations exist in the world – most e-learning networks are affiliated with higher education institutions.

Almost three-quarters of learndirect's courses can be delivered through internet-based distance learning. Learning centres in the community are based in a diverse range of locations including shopping centres, pubs, schools, colleges, football clubs and prisons. learndirect operates throughout the UK, and 90 per cent of the population of England lives within a 40-minute walk of a learndirect or online centre.

Flexible learning is a key characteristic of Ufi and learndirect's provision. Learners can complete courses in 'bite-size chunks' (National Audit Office, 2005, p.5) at home, at work or at a learndirect centre, at a self-directed pace. Learners are regularly consulted and their feedback used to improve the services. Greater flexibility is linked to greater learner satisfaction and high rates of course completion, as evidenced by research commissioned by the organisations.

Learners who may not otherwise have engaged with learning have been attracted to learn through learndirect. Those with the lowest basic skills levels, those who have not engaged with any formal learning for three years or more, the unemployed, people from ethnic minority groups, the disabled, and single parents, are among the groups successfully engaged with learning through the service.

Since 2000, more than 2.75 million people have done a learndirect course, and currently, more than 10,000 learners log on with learndirect each day (Ufi/learndirect, 2010).

Source: National Audit Office (2005)

learndirect is currently the largest contributor to the UK Government's skills targets (Ufi/learndirect, 2010). In 2008–09 the organisation delivered just under 10,000 Skills for Life test passes in England, and in 2009–10, it is expected that over 6,800 entry level numeracy test passes will be achieved by its adult learners (Ufi/learndirect, 2010).

learndirect has recently expanded its use of technology for delivering online basic skills training to adult learners. Learners can now use social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to access course content. learndirect users can also engage with online interactive games to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. In February 2010, learndirect launched a Number Fun application for the iPhone, which is available for all learners wanting to improve their numeracy skills. The organisation reported that incorporating basic skills training into social media in these ways facilitates its propensity to engage learners, and improves the trainer-learner relationship through making it more direct and supportive (Ufi/learndirect, 2010).

Feedback from learners has been positive; learndirect cited learners' self-reported enjoyment of taking up basic skills training online. Ninety-four per cent of learners felt that the courses were easy to use, and many cited the propensity to learn at their own pace and the strong trainer support as advantages of the training (Ufi/learndirect, 2010). The organisation emphasised the high, yet under-exploited, value of technologies in delivering basic skills to adult learners, and the need for the benefits of online learning to be realised more extensively, particularly by the UK Government:

We would like to see the benefits of online learning more widely recognised, and the use of technology in learning reflected in future Government strategies. We would also like to see greater incentives for providers to offer innovative solutions which engage the hardest to reach and lowest skilled adult numeracy learners. (p. 5)

Some more mixed views were expressed in the literature regarding learndirect's online provision of basic skills training. The NRDC research report into the provision of, and learner engagement with, adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL support in rural England (Atkin *et al.*, 2005) found that most of the rural areas involved had learndirect centres. However, the number of these which actually delivered basic skills and offered online learning tests to adult learners was hard to measure accurately.

Some of the basic skills trainers interviewed as part of the NRDC's research felt that learndirect courses were of little use to entry-level learners and that they were suitable only for those already possessing a basic standard of literacy and numeracy. More traditional, trainer-led, face-to-face basic skills training was seen by some of the interviewed trainers to provide the necessary level of support for non-literate and/or non-numerate learners. Some also felt that learndirect trainers lacked the specialist knowledge required to adequately support learners who did not yet possess level 1 basic skills standards. A further proportion of trainers interviewed felt that learndirect courses had a very important part to play in the delivery of basic skills to adults in rural areas.

6.4.5 Underpinning principles to effective delivery

Taking account of the individual

The literature points to a growing recognition of the need to take account of cultural backgrounds, promote learning through flexible approaches and target key groups of learners. Delivery approaches must be tailored to individuals' needs and avoid using methods of learning that suit providers rather than learners. The role of ICT in flexible learning should be considered solely in the light of how it meets a learner's needs. (Harvey, 2004).

Crawley and Attewell (2001) reviewed literature concerning the promotion of social inclusion and widening participation via DEL. They concluded that creative and innovative 'socio-technical' strategies were needed to raise the engagement of socially-excluded adults and overcome the discrepancy between the goals of providers and learners, and their propensity and skills to achieve these goals (p.14). This discrepancy can be caused by a *'lack of capacity in the domains of organisation, ICT skills, effective partnership working, confidence, financial resources and acumen, and a number of other factors'* (p. 14).

Slavit and Yeidel's (1999, cited in Wooler and Warner, 2001) checklist for those developing resources for adult basic skills students also acknowledged the importance of considering learners' cultural expectations. Wooller and Warner (2001) raised this in their presentation of the flexible Women Into Science and Technology (WIST) programme delivered to women learners in rural Queensland, Australia (see Box 6.4).

Box 6.4 Overcoming cultural and societal negativity through distance learning: the WIST programme

Cultural and societal negativity towards those female participants returning to or beginning study was commonplace. To begin to address this, WIST learners initially embarked on a communication and study skills programme, which facilitated their realisation that they already possessed skills congruent with those required for study and deemed valuable by society. The programme also encouraged the learners to question their role and position within society, thus aiming to raise their self-esteem and confidence, and foster in them ‘the strength to overcome adversity’ (p.202).

The use of distance learning helped to make the WIST programme ‘truly flexible’ (p.196). The lack of entry requirements, deadlines or pre-requisites attached to the course also enhanced the course’s flexibility. For example, learners were able to re-submit their work until it reached the necessary standard. Course and equipment fees were heavily subsidised by the Australian government, which further increased the course’s accessibility.

Source: Wooller and Warner (2001)

Establishing content and support models

Courses need to be carefully designed to ensure the training is both appropriate for learners’ needs and tailored to maximise the potential of flexible learning. Barbour and Reeves (2009) noted the impact of a course increased when trainers with specialist knowledge of flexible learning contributed to a course’s design from the outset. In addition to nurturing appropriate content and delivery, they also raised awareness of the changing nature of the basic skills required in the workplace.

The content and support model of internet-based flexible learning separates the content of adult basic skills courses from the accompanying tutorial support. The course content can be delivered in print format as well as a web-based package. Tutorial support is then delivered separately in the form of email or internet video conferencing to encourage students to interact with the course content constructively. Learners, typically, spend around 20 per cent of their time studying online when engaged with a content and support delivery model (Holland, 2002).

Anticipating barriers

The need to anticipate possible barriers to online learning (such as changing institutional passwords, inadequate public library computer access or trainers’ weakness in using ICT) are highlighted as issues that need to be addressed for successful delivery of flexible learning (Snyder *et al.*, 2005). These are particular issues for adult basic skills learners given that many can find the learning process daunting after a history of negative experiences with formal learning. It is essential for training to be tailored in a way that takes account of learners’ home circumstances, and their access to computers, the internet and other facilities (Snyder *et al.*, 2005).

6.4.6 Key success factors

Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon (West Coast College of TAFE, 2002), was a national adult literacy programme implemented by the Australian National Training Authority in 2001–02. It was aimed at those both with and without English-speaking backgrounds who needed to develop their language and literacy. Senior citizens and computer-literate young adults volunteered to be trainers. Learners took part in an introductory computer course with embedded literacy training in a community-based educational setting.

The programme was in two phases; the first development stage was a pilot, and the second consolidated the delivery model and refined the training materials. Support materials for learners and trainers were developed during the first phase of the programme and subsequently made into booklets for self-supported study.

The factors associated with developing basic skills through flexible learning (identified through qualitative attitudinal questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups) highlighted in an evaluation of the Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme were:

- positive attitudes of learners and trainers
- an open and friendly atmosphere
- trainers' past experience in cross-cultural facilitation, working with mixed age groups, and teaching basic skills to adults using ICT
- a one-to-one learner to volunteer ratio for the first two sessions
- trainers providing a communication bridge between trainers and learners and acting as support staff
- facilitating opportunities for social interaction through a morning tea break for volunteers and learners
- having access to computers with Microsoft Office programmes and internet access
- clear competency statements on which trainers can base the programme delivery
- learning materials developed and reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure any changing or differential needs of the learners were being consistently met
- speed of volunteers' interventions when learners experienced communication difficulties
- a core group of continuing volunteers and learners at the start of the second phase facilitated social cohesion, in particular
- effective guidance and support materials for the volunteers
- effective learning and support materials for the learners.

6.5 Impacts of approaches to adult basic skills development through flexible learning

(including internet-based distance learning)

The impacts of approaches to basic skills development can be categorised in two ways:

- progression to qualification, formal study, employment and work
- personal progression.

Within this broad categorisation, the following impacts are identified:

- career progression and continuing professional development
- gaining qualifications
- progression to further learning
- gaining skills
- increased confidence and self-esteem
- increased cultural awareness.

Each of these impacts is discussed in detail and grouped under the two general themed categories: the hard, or economically related outcomes, and the soft, more personal outcomes. This reflects the debate about the notion of progression, which needs to be defined in learner's terms (Hannon *et al*., 2003). Clarke and Cushman (2006) noted that the desired impacts of adult basic skills courses delivered using flexible learning (including internet-based distance learning) are not necessarily the same for the learners, trainers and government.

Government policies relating to improving the basic skills of adult learners assume that the most significant impact and primary goal is to gain employment, or more gainful employment. In reality, however, adult basic skills learners tend to see employment as a longer-term impact of their training (Hodgson *et al*., 2007).

Smith and Cook (2003), for instance, argued that defining progression in terms of the government's measure of success (participation on a course and/or obtaining employment) overlooked how online learning centres raise the confidence of adults learning basic skills. This view is supported by research conducted in the USA on the Department of Education's initiative to establish CTCs for adult literacy in economically deprived areas (Servon, 2002; America Connects Consortium, 2003, and Fisher *et al*., 2004, cited in Webb, 2006).

6.5.1 Progression to qualifications, formal study, employment and work

Career progression and continuing professional development

Mastering the use of ICT, the internet, and other technology when learning basic skills helps to improve the prospects of adult learners in terms of gaining and sustaining employment, including success in obtaining new jobs that require knowledge of mathematics and technology (FitzSimons, 2006).

The ability to use technology to support lifelong learning in the workplace enhances employees' value, as Arenas (2008) outlined:

It is hardly surprising that the rapid changing science and technology has created the need for a continuous learning spanning beyond the formal education to remain current, competitive and improve career prospects in the workplace. (pp. 3–4)

Using flexible learning (including internet-based distance learning) to deliver basic skills to adults can induce positive impacts for trainers as well as for learners. For instance, technologies make it easier to monitor students' progress, develop networks, create distance-learning systems, and use software and video materials. It can also be used for trainers' own training and continuing professional development (Holland, 2002).

Gaining qualifications

Accreditation is an impact of most of the basic skills training outlined and discussed in this chapter. This reflects the view that obtaining accreditation can support transition into employment, career progression or further study. In addition, online courses tend to be formal and, therefore, easier to access relative to informal training.

Governments around the world focus on gaining qualifications as a primary impact of undertaking basic skills education through pointing out the personal and individual benefits accruable in conjunction with the broader societal and economic benefits (Knightley, 2007). However, as outlined earlier in this chapter, Ufi/learndirect (2010) in their response to the *NIACE Review of adult numeracy* recommended that the benefits of online learning should be more widely recognised, and the use of technology in learning included more in future government strategies.

Progression to further learning

In Hodgson *et al.*'s (2007) study, 83 per cent of adult learners pursuing flexible, further education-based basic skills training cited the desire to progress to higher education, while acknowledging that it would take time and effort to do this. The level of the course pursued by the learners did not predict the extent or direction of learners' aspirations; those wishing to enter higher education were distributed across level 1 and level 2 courses.

However, the NRDC study of *Community-focused provision in adult literacy, numeracy and language* (Hannon *et al.*, 2003) noted that progression is not always linear for adults undertaking basic skills courses; and trainers should, therefore, aim to understand learners' definitions of the term, and their reasons for wanting to undertake the training. In accordance with this, flexible learning training should be appropriate to the venue in which it is delivered, be self-paced, tailored to learners' personal goals, encourage informal learning as far as possible, and avoid placing unnecessary pressure on learners.

Gaining skills

Demonstrating learners' increased proficiency in basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning is a main purpose of most of the reviewed evaluative literature. Skills-related impacts for learners include:

- meta-cognitive skills
- peer mentoring
- triple skills gains: literacy and numeracy, and ICT skills.

Furthermore, trainers gain ICT skills.

Adults using flexible learning, including internet-based distance learning, as a tool for developing basic skills, can develop additional skills, related specifically to the use of technology, over and above their primary goals of improving literacy and numeracy.

Meta-cognitive skills such as planning, organisation, self-monitoring, self-directing study, and self-evaluation are all impacts of accessing internet-based learning through a PLE (Zimmerman, 2000, cited in Muldoon, 2008).

Independence in learning is a linked meta-cognitive skill which using flexible and internet-based distance learning can foster (Webb, 2006). Using resources like CD-ROMS and DVDs to deliver learning have enabled computers to portray life-like dialogues and interactions that allow the learner to be autonomous and more independent from their trainer (Levy, 1997, cited in Webb, 2006).

Mentoring was a skill exhibited by a small number of learners in Webb's (2006) study of the contribution of ICT to reducing social exclusion. This was seen to have developed in two main ways: learners encouraged their friends to join the class, and trainers recognised and nurtured skills in them. For example, learners' success on ESOL courses in California, using a range of learning technologies as the primary media of delivery, was attributed in part to support from a friend or family member (Richmond *et al.*, 2005).

Learners have been seen to gain from engaging with basic skills training through flexible and internet-based distance learning in terms of developing their skills with learning technologies, and improving their basic skills (Silver-Pacuilla, 2008). Mellar *et al.* (2004), for instance, assessed learners' skill gains across a range of dimensions, and reported that *'learners who use ICT for basic skills double the value of their study time acquiring two sets of skills at the same time'* (cited in Silver-Pacuilla, 2008, p. 8).

Similarly, some learners on the Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme in Australia, having never used a computer previously, gained in confidence and skills levels with ICT to such an extent that they bought their own computers for use at home (West Coast College of TAFE, 2002). Using a computer as the main medium of learning also facilitated the development of some learners' communication, grammar and spoken English skills. This was mainly achieved through following instructions regarding the functioning of the computer, which led learners to encounter and interpret language they may otherwise not have had the opportunity to, and asking for assistance with computer-related functions or issues. Acquiring vocabulary specific to ICT usage was an additional skills-based impact of the programme.

Trainers delivering basic skills training using flexible and internet-based learning also gained skills as a result of adopting these approaches. Using these media and actively exchanging knowledge and reflections enables trainers to become learners themselves, thus engaging in a reciprocal learning process (Arenas, 2008).

6.5.2 Personal impacts

Personal impacts, such as more confidence and better self-esteem, were soft impacts cited in a range of sources describing the flexible learning in groups of similar people. These included participants residing in rural or isolated areas, with low socio-economic status, and experiencing specific cultural or societal barriers to learning (for example, participants of the WIST programme, as outlined by Wooller and Warner, 2001).

Confidence and self-esteem

Although measurable impacts in terms of gaining recognised qualifications, tend to be linked to course funding, the evidence shows that learners' impacts are usually far broader. Clarke and Cushman's (2002) qualitative interviews with adult learners on the Penceil programme in Lambeth, south London revealed that 38 per cent hoped to gain confidence through better computer skills, especially email and the internet, and a further 12 per cent wanted to improve their life prospects. Increasing confidence was the most desired impact from completing the basic skills course using ICT.

Building confidence in using everyday English, Maths and ICT was the most frequently cited impact desired by the learners interviewed as part of Hodgson *et al.*'s (2007) qualitative study. While improving employment prospects was the second most cited reason for pursuing their courses, the majority of learners explicitly acknowledged that they realised the course had little chance of leading straight into employment. Box 6.5 outlines the influence of the Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme on raising learners' confidence.

Box 6.5 Outcomes of basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning: gaining confidence

The adults learning basic skills through the Australian Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme reported a range of positive outcomes, of which increased confidence and self-esteem were the most notable. Learners reported having the confidence to interact more with others and use ICT:

'I am very confident with the computer. It's very helpful. I look forward to my class each week' (Learner).

'I am 53 years old and have had a computer at home for over 2 years and was convinced I would never be able to learn a thing. This class has proved me wrong' (Learner).

'The students are gaining more confidence every week' (Trainer).

Source: West Coast College of TAFE (2003, p. 34)

Other studies have also found that increases in learners' confidence have been the main impact of completing basic skills training through flexible and internet-based learning. Long *et al.* (2003), for instance, asked adults pursuing the AlphaRoute online basic skills course and their trainers about the range of related impacts. Learners' gains in confidence and self-directedness were 'astounding' (p. 59), and those with the lowest levels of aptitude in basic skills had gained the most in terms of 'intangible competencies such as confidence and sticking with a task' (p. 60).

Increased cultural awareness

One study in the selected key sources identified cultural impacts associated with ICT-based basic skills training. Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon was unusual (relative to the range of other literature reviewed) because one of the aims was to foster communication and interaction between young and older people with computer literate volunteers facilitating the programme (West Coast College of TAFE, 2002).

The initial feelings of apprehension reported by both the young computer-literate and senior citizen trainers dispelled progressively over the course of the study, and each group reported the additional beneficial impact of becoming more aware of and interested in the cultural backgrounds of each other and the learners. This impact may be specific to programmes that involve English and non-English speaking learners.

Feedback from the trainers and learners reflect the growth in understanding between the two groups.

I think it's great, because it gives the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds. Also it's a great idea to teach people computers (Trainer).

Since I've known this computer lesson I'm so happy to learn and interested. Its lots of fun especially with the people around me. It is so nice to communicate with people like this especially from different countries (Learner).

I love the project and being a part of it each week. I love teaching the students computers and I think it is a great chance to meet new people and make new friends and to interact with people of all ages and different cultural backgrounds (Trainer).

6.6 Paths to making improvements

Literature before 2000 focusing on the use of flexible learning (including internet-based learning) drew attention to the paucity of sound research evidence advocating its value as a medium for delivering basic skills education to adults. Anecdotal evidence taken from trainers appeared to support the wider use of flexible and internet-based learning for this purpose (Holland, 2002), but it was not until later on that the subject area became a focus of scientific research.

The available evidence post-1994 indicates strongly that the use of ICT and flexible learning methods must be linked to a range of other strategies to engage and support learners. This section outlines the key principles that should underpin flexible basic skills learning, and then considers the specific requirements in terms of:

- effective recruitment, engagement and retention
- developing an understanding of learners' backgrounds and preferred learning styles
- the role of the trainer
- the need for collaborative working between those involved in the delivery of training
- the need for appropriate and effective pedagogical approaches
- the need to foster a group ethos amongst learners
- the need to facilitate learners' motivation
- the need to provide effective support for learners and trainers (including high quality learning resources)
- widening access to learning technology
- overcoming apprehension of new technologies.

6.6.1 Key principles

Many researchers and trainers consider internet-based distance learning and the use of learning technologies as the future of adult basic skills training, ESOL, and continuing education, in addition to being a means of reaching and engaging adults who do not take part in formal education (Silver-Pacuilla, 2008).

Flexible learning, including internet-based distance learning, offers the advantage over more traditional training (delivered at a physical location such as a further education college) of enabling the basic skills learner to maintain their anonymity and avoid any stigma associated with not having basic skills. Preventing their status from becoming widely known is a strong predictor of learners' retention on literacy programmes (Holland, 2002).

There are a number of other reasons why flexible learning can sustain the engagement of adult basic skills learners.

- Technology can be used to create individualised and relevant learning packages (Arenas, 2008; George and Luke, 1995; Holland, 2002).
- Basic skills learning packages can be created which correspond with and harness individual learning styles (George and Luke, 1995; Holland, 2002).
- A range of learning technologies can be combined effectively such as television, digital video, mobile telephony and games as well as the internet (Crawley and Attewell, 2001).
- Smaller, 'bite-sized chunks' of learning can be easily delivered, making the learning more accessible and attainable (Crawley and Attewell, 2001, p.4).

The National Audit Office (2005) identified five lessons learned by Ufi and learndirect relating to managing courses using learning technologies, which could be considered as good practice for other organisations aiming to establish basic skills courses for adults using flexible and internet-based learning (see Box 6.6).

Box 6.6 Lessons learned in managing innovative provision: Ufi and learndirect

A fit-for-purpose structure

Establishing a separate organisation to lead the innovative practice provides the requisite creativity that may not have been as easily achieved through an existing organisation or department.

Commercial services can be difficult to operate from a structure that has to adhere to public sector rules. These could, therefore, be handled by a separate company.

Setting up new services is expensive; cost savings should be made over the longer term.

Skills that match the current need

Staff with a diverse range of skills can help to meet policy objectives such as widening participation in e-learning.

Staffing arrangements should be reviewed as the organisation and service matures.

Building a reputation for accessible, high quality, cost-effective services

The characteristics and needs of the target population must be identified through thorough research.

Services must be of a high quality and learners' initial experiences positive in order to maximise retention.

Costs should be reduced over time following the inception period.

Organisations should acknowledge shortcomings in provision and address them promptly.

Working through others

Publicly funded organisations must contribute to government objectives. Some leeway may be given at first regarding this, but the requirement will become more pressing over time.

Working with reputable partners and contractors who have common goals is essential, but arrangements will require reviewing in line with changing expectations and performance levels.

Collaborative working with voluntary and community groups is important for engaging all learners.

Source: National Audit Office (2005)

6.6.2 Effective recruitment, engagement and retention

Basic skills training using flexible learning, including internet-based learning, as a primary medium of delivery is recognised as good practice by many employers (Atkin *et al*., 2005).

Learners can access provision at times that fit around shift patterns and work commitments, and content can be tailored to suit the needs of both learners and employers.

Atkin *et al*. (2005) found that offering basic skills courses marketed under the guise of ICT training serves as a hook to engage more learners and employers than would be possible if the courses were presented in their true form. This is because many employers see ICT training as being more relevant than basic skills, and more learners are likely to identify themselves as needing an ICT skills course. Once learners have been recruited, ICT tuition begins, which is followed later on by basic skills elements:

Many learners do not want to admit to having literacy or numeracy needs but ask for ICT assistance. Once learners have been attending a course for several weeks they gain confidence and become more positive about learning. It is at this stage that literacy and numeracy can be introduced. Other providers offer tasters in a wide variety of subjects to engage learner interest before offering literacy and numeracy provision. (p. 84)

However, as highlighted in Chapter 7, trainers must take care to fully address learners' broader basic skills needs (over and above those related to their main jobs) when delivering basic skills training embedded within other subjects. Explicitly assessing progress in basic skills accrued through undertaking embedded training is also an issue for trainers to consider.

The need to take account of cultural and ethnic backgrounds when developing effective recruitment activities is recognised in the literature and Box 6.7 shows how the Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme (West Coast College of TAFE, 2002) did this.

Box 6.7 Cultural factors in recruitment onto flexible and internet-based basic skills training

The Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme experienced difficulties recruiting learners who were of a non-English speaking background.

The absence of an advocate in the migrant community was thought to be a possible reason. Publicity materials and application forms in English were a barrier to engagement.

The research identified that courses should be delivered in areas familiar to the target group, and relatively close to where they live.

West Coast College of TAFE (2002)

6.6.3 Understanding learners' backgrounds and preferred learning styles

Stewart and Waight (2008) argued that those designing and delivering internet-based learning should consider learners' histories, cultures and values to ensure learning needs are fully addressed. The content of internet-based training should also be guided by an understanding of the actions and processes underpinning new learning experiences.

An understanding of the principles of andragogy and social learning theory is also important when creating content that will be delivered through internet-based learning. Andragogy is the science of teaching adults, and the processes involved in doing so. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) refers to the process of learning through experience, observing others, and imitating their behaviour. This knowledge enhances learning experiences and enables course designers to develop content that achieves the best learning results.

The need for prior assessment was found to be particularly apparent in the NRDC *Review of the provision of and learner engagement with adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL-support in rural England* (Atkin *et al*., 2005). Community consultation prior to the establishment of basic skills training is, consequently, recommended. Consulting with learners to ascertain their learning needs and preferences is also seen as good practice when designing educational provision in sparsely populated areas (GHK Consulting, 2003).

All learners are assessed prior to commencing a course with Ufi/learndirect to determine their needs in terms of literacy, numeracy, and ICT. Upon enrolment, trainers assist the learner to 'make the best use of the services offered' (National Audit Office, 2005, p. 16). As Barbour and Reeves (2009) suggested, IT-based applications have proved effective for measuring an individual's preferred learning style.

The evidence indicates that developers and trainers should work in partnership to conduct and review research to ascertain what the likely characteristics and needs of learners will be when they design learning technologies and materials for adult learners of basic skills (FitzSimons, 2006; Silver-Pacuilla, 2008; Wooller and Warner, 2001).

This was a key feature of the HEFCE Flexible Learning Pathfinders pilot schemes. The model of delivery relied on higher education partner institutions sharing delivery of a range of training for adult learners (including basic skills education). All those involved in each pilot scheme undertook some form of market research to identify the nature and type of learners most likely to be interested in studying via flexible learning, and also those who would be likely to succeed (Outram, 2009). This research had the secondary purpose of aiming to identify non-traditional learners, including those who may have poor basic skills in order to attract them back into education.

The LSC (GHK Consulting, 2003) highlighted the Link into Learning course, delivered in a sparsely populated part of Cornwall, as a model of good practice partly because of the strong support given to participating learners. Prior to commencing the course, all prospective learners were interviewed and had a basic skills assessment to ascertain the shape and magnitude of their learning needs and their preferred learning styles. Trainers were then able to tailor the training to address the learners' specific skills deficits in accordance with their preferred learning styles.

6.6.4 The role of the trainer

When discussing factors associated with the effective delivery of adult learning, the roles of trainers feature prominently. A range of trainer-related aspects which are important in effective delivery were identified in the literature. Trainers who are ‘trusting, empathetic, caring, authentic, sincere, and demonstrative of high integrity’ (Taylor, 2009, p. 9) are instrumental in facilitating learner engagement and progression.

According to the NRDC study of *Community-focused provision of basic skills for adults* (Hannon *et al*., 2003), trainers should possess sound interpersonal or ‘people’ skills. For example, good social, communication and interpersonal skills were identified as important by the trainers and learners interviewed as part of Webb’s (2006) study of ESOL learners pursuing ICT-based courses. Trainers in the open-access centres did their best to make learners feel at ease through engaging them in conversation, creating pleasant learning environments, offering hot drinks and decorating the surroundings. Box 6.8 outlines further aspects of the role of the trainer in facilitating basic skills delivery to adults, as found in Li and Edmonds’ (2005) study of basic numeracy provision.

Box 6.8 The role of the trainer: delivering basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning

A study of basic numeracy development using CAI showed that trainers have a vital role in helping learners to link their understanding of the mathematical concepts covered in the class environment and online activities.

Learners received basic numeracy training via either CAI led by trainers or trainer-directed instruction without CAI. Learners expressed strong preference for using CAI, with the trainer seen as important for facilitating the relationship between class-based and independent learning.

Source: Li and Edmonds (2005)

ESOL learners also benefit more from the presence of a trainer, rather than pursuing online-only provision (for example, Ellis and Sinclair, 1989, cited in Harris, 2003). Trainers have a key role to play in tailoring studied material to the learning needs and styles of students (Cohen, 1998, cited in Harris, 2003). Furthermore, trainers within this context can assist students in understanding and deploying their repertoire of learning strategies, patterns, attitudes and feelings (Butler, 1997, Rubin, 2001, Wenden, 1995, cited in Harris, 2003).

This evidence shows that trainers require certain skills or sets of skills to effectively teach basic skills using flexible and internet-based learning. Interpersonal and communication skills are important, in addition to more technical skills like facilitating independence in learning, understanding the flexible and distance learning context, and addressing learning styles. Some professional backgrounds were found to be conducive to developing people skills, like social work and counselling.

6.6.5 Collaborative working between those involved in delivery

The need for collaborative working between those involved in coordinating, supporting and delivering flexible or internet-based basic skills training to adults was a theme of two of the reviewed sources (GHK Consulting, 2003; Outram, 2009).

Collaboration between organisations, in terms of sharing teaching and learning materials, can add value to these services. Thirty-nine per cent of the policy-makers and trainers interviewed as part of the 2005 NRDC review of basic skills training in rural areas in England identified partnership working between those involved in planning and delivering training as a factor in its success, or as a strategy used to overcome barriers to implementation. Many were already working closely with employers, ULRs, providers of IAG services, libraries, schools, health and social services, Jobcentre Plus, community groups and other providers. Staff training was also provided collaboratively to ensure that sufficient numbers of trained staff were in post throughout the geographical areas concerned. (Atkin *et al*., 2005).

Collaborative working could be more widely exploited, according to the National Audit Office (2005) in their review of Ufi and learndirect. Research carried out by Ufi shows that potential partners such as schools, colleges and work-based learning providers are unable to benefit fully from the available materials. This is due to the differences between traditional teaching and learning approaches, and flexible and internet-based learning. In light of these findings, Ufi has developed a new course licence that allows other organisations to incorporate learndirect resources into their learning programmes.

6.6.6 Adopting effective and appropriate pedagogical approaches

In addition to effective trainer support, adult learners of basic skills in Hodgson *et al.*'s (2005) study cited largely pedagogical factors as helping to create a positive learning experience, thus fostering their engagement with and enjoyment of the provision (p. 320):

- small classes with one-to-one attention and support
- a relaxed and friendly learning environment
- learning being at the right pace for the learner.

Traditional methods of delivering flexible adult basic skills training, including internet-based learning, typically comprise individual exercises, worksheets and group activities. However, this has been found to be incongruent with learners' preferred pedagogies, which were access to a trainer, practical tasks, and peer-led learning. Learners also value learning materials and teaching packages, but to a lesser extent (Clarke and Cushman, 2006).

Therefore, simply using traditional pedagogical methods to deliver internet-based distance learning is not an effective approach (Holland, 2002; Muldoon, 2008; Outram, 2009). Outram (2009, p.11) stated: 'Flexible learning is not about *re-packaging* existing materials, it is about the development of distinctive forms of provision.'

Holland (2002) stipulated that learning models should be collaborative and constructive, whereby trainers assist in the learning process as opposed to leading it. In a similar vein, Muldoon (2008) warned against implementing the 'telling' mode of teaching when using technology-supported learning, and cites Freire (1972, p.2) who stated that teacher-directed learning was 'dominating' learners in the process of learning as opposed to 'liberating' them.

This conclusion was echoed by De Castell *et al.* (2002) who argued that practices that foster learner autonomy and independence should also extend to the assessment and delivery of basic skills training to adult learners using flexible and internet-based learning. Trainers should be innovative and avoid using the same methods they implemented for more traditional forms of assessment, such as the 'standardised test' (Webb, 2006, p. 487). They maintained that if assessment practices are incongruent with flexible and internet-based distance learning, rather than fostering learner autonomy, the learning technologies may just support an environment in which learners are presented with *'an active way of being very passive'* (Webb, 2006, p. 487).

The NRDC report (Hannon *et al.*, 2003) into community-focused training of basic skills education found that a holistic approach to learning was associated with successful delivery. In this context, the training should be designed and delivered in accordance with the lives and interests of learners, taking prior learning, desired outcomes, and earlier experiences of education into account.

The review of the HEFCE Flexible Learning Pathfinders pilot schemes identified several technical aspects of pedagogy that were associated with the schemes' successes. The schemes related to wider adult learning than just basic skills and used problem- and enquiry-based learning techniques, e-portfolios, blended learning techniques, and learning objects (small amounts of learning resources which can be used in various programmes). These were found to be appropriate and effective teaching and learning methods (Outram, 2009).

Based on their previous experience of teaching basic skills to adults using ICT, the creators of the Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme made a series of planned amendments to the second phase of the programme. These were mainly pedagogical, and were also informed by feedback from trainers and learners:

- integrating literacy exercises into word exercises from an earlier stage
- providing all learner support materials in a booklet for both learners and trainers at the start of the course
- providing lesson plans and trainer support materials linked to learner support materials
- allowing students to progress at their own pace with the support of a 'floating' trainer
- introducing the internet at the beginning of the programme
- not having sessions during the school holidays.

These changes were adopted in Phase II of the programme, and were seen by trainers and learners to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of the training.

6.6.7 Fostering the group ethos

Collaboration with fellow students can improve the teaching and learning of adult basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning by providing mutual support and impetus. Courses of this nature should actively facilitate collaborative learning through incorporating interactive problem solving, having opportunities for discussion and reflection, and fostering the development of collaborative skills (Alexander, 1998; 2001, cited in Holland, 2002).

Holland (2002) suggested trainers should create a true collaborative learning environment not through simply using cut-and-paste hyper-linked notes, email facilities and placing learners into small groups, but through fostering:

A group ethos […] *giving and receiving compliments and criticisms [and facilitating] the social situation where literacy learners feel appreciated, supported and accepted with a their strengths and weaknesses.* (p. 18)

This approach was explicitly adopted in the Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon literacy, numeracy and ICT programme. Young and older volunteers supported the delivery of the training via ICT to learners in small groups, and the social interaction between volunteers and learners was seen as a very significant contributory factor in the success of the programme.

The groups quickly became cohesive, and a good rapport developed between the learners and volunteers, which was seen to be due in part to the floating support role of the older volunteers. They provided both the *glue* and the *bridge* to bond the group (p. 11).

Prior to starting the course, most learners reported feeling apprehensive about working with both young and older volunteers, but as the course continued, these feelings diminished as friendships and group dynamics evolved. Participants valued the opportunity to interact with people from different cultures, and learners found the open, approachable manner of the trainers facilitated their success with the programme, as these quotations reflect:

I heard about this course and thought of giving it a go with much apprehension. I was pleasantly surprised to find how much easier it was with pleasant patient volunteers who did not make you feel dyslexic (Learner).

The students often from diverse cultural backgrounds have added a perspective not usually found in conventional teaching. This ongoing interaction has enabled the diverse group to become more homogenised as the weeks passed (Young computer-literate volunteer).

Facilitating motivation

Distance learning requires the most learner autonomy of all the existing forms of self-directed learning because learners have to maintain their motivation while working alone (Harris, 2003). Motivation must, therefore, be high. As Hurd *et al.* (2001, p.344, cited in Harris, 2003, p.1) stated:

In order to complete a distance-learning programme, learners have to maintain their motivation while working alone and develop a series of strategies that will enable them to work individually.

Motivation is a strong determinant of learner enrolment, retention, and success on basic skills courses (Gorard *et al*., 2004; Holland, 2002; Webb, 2006). Highly motivated learners are more able to overcome barriers encountered through the course of their studies and are, thus, more likely to complete their learning. Having an input into the content and foci of their basic skills courses correlates positively with motivation and success levels of adult learners (Gorard *et al*., 2004).

Using learning technology as a medium to deliver adult basic skills education boosts motivation levels due to having individualised learning packages, the novelty factor, the freedom it allows for exploring new material, the anonymity it brings, and its propensity to allow feedback to be supplied quickly (Holland, 2002).

These findings are supported by other research showing how ICT can increase motivation and overall success rates for basic skills courses. Kambouri *et al.* (2006), in an unpublished Ufi and learndirect report, and Webb (2006), for instance, found that ICT had this effect along with the learning environment, and the nature and magnitude of the learning support given by trainers.

One of the trainers interviewed as part of Webb's (2006) study said:

Some of them have never used a mouse […] but she picked it up quite quickly. It's fairly straightforward to grasp. I think they do well. Part of the excitement of it is the new technology and it's given them [confidence]. (p. 494)

Factors related to ICT which were seen to raise the motivation of users can be summarised:

- making learning fun (p. 498)
- making learning a personal activity, which reduced embarrassment
- software acting as a 'private tutor' (p. 498)
- taking tests, which are often included with software packages used to deliver or complement teaching and learning.

However, engaging in distance learning per se may not facilitate the requisite autonomy and motivation in learners (Harris, 2003; White, 1995, cited in Harris, 2003), despite the evidence of the facilitating effect of using ICT in learning as outlined above. This highlights the need for trainers to adopt approaches that motivate learners, and also to teach them the strategies and techniques they need to take charge of their learning (McDonough, 1999, cited in Harris, 2003).

6.6.8 Providing effective support for learners and trainers

High quality resources and equipment to support the delivery of flexible learning (including internet-based distance learning) are significant aspects of successful basic skills provision (Askov *et al*., 2003; Brennan *et al*., 2001; Ginsburg, 2004; GHK Consulting, 2003; Long *et al*., 2003 Hannon *et al*., 2003). As a manager of a community-focused basic skills training course reflected (Hannon *et al*., 2003):

> *When we produce something, it is as good as it can possibly be – the booklet for the ICT website thing: it's high quality, it's been printed properly, it's got a really nice cover, a designed cover, that sort of stuff. Anything we produce – I'm fanatical about it going out right*. (p. 20)

FitzSimons (2006) had a checklist (drawn from Slavit and Yeidel, 1999) for developers of online learning resources for adult learners of numeracy skills. In order to create effective, good quality resources, developers should ask themselves these questions:

- Are connections made between classroom practice and the ideas in web-based activities?
- Are lectures, web-based resources, practical exercises, field trips and assessment tasks integrated?
- Are web-based activities visually appealing, technologically transparent, interactive, rooted in context, enjoyable, connected to course content, and firmly related to concepts?
- When teaching with web-based resources, will there be a range of teaching strategies aligned to the pedagogical perspectives for both labs and theory to ensure learners' success?
- When teaching with web-based resources, are there pedagogical adaptations to meet the diverse cultural expectations of learners?

Other evaluations focus more closely on aspects related to the design of the instruments and resources used, and identify points for helping to sustain learners' engagement with and enjoyment of internet-based courses. Silver-Pacuilla (2008) suggested:

- writing and communication activities based on real-life topics and experiences
- readable resources which incorporate authentic vocabulary
- resources that prompt feedback from trainers
- tasks that deliver computer and media literacy training in conjunction with content
- video presentations
- clear graphics and images that reinforce the content
- clear navigation that enables learners to be organised and does not embed information on sub-pages
- a range of ways to access the course content, for example, online, in print, CD-ROMS or discs.

Resources should also be user-friendly. This is especially important for distance learning because material can be easily misinterpreted by those with poor basic skills; they can find it difficult to find information, generate search terms, and distinguish between commercially sponsored and informational links (Birru *et al*., 2004; Harryson *et al*., 2004).

Poor quality resources, especially those for basic numeracy, can result in alienating learners who may already be reluctant to engage and lack confidence in their abilities, which consequently raises barriers to progression to further study and employment (FitzSimons, 2002). Learners will only be willing and able to learn when they have access to high quality resources, and are well supported by their trainers (FitzSimons, 2002).

Rouet (2006) stated that, for internet-based learning to be effective, the activities used in its delivery must contain a balance of three elements: comprehension skills supporting the learner to locate, evaluate, and integrate information; clear tasks that necessitate deep processing of materials; and a learning environment which has all of the requisite resources and tools to fulfil the tasks.

The recommendations in all of the literature reviewed in Silver-Pacuilla (2008) of the language and literacy skills required by online learners converged on the importance of providing support for both learners and trainers. It concluded that ‘pure’ online delivery is not the best approach to internet-based distance learning. Additional support augments the effectiveness of the learning, and can be provided through:

- trainer support for learners provided for at least part of the delivery time
- learner-to-learner communication
- readily available technical support for trainers and learners
- peer support for trainers learning to provide internet-based delivery.

Learners pursuing Ufi or learndirect programmes are supported in a variety of ways (National Audit Office, 2005). Trainers, accessed through learndirect centres or online, help learners to achieve their goals and complete their courses. Online tools are also available to connect learners with their trainers, and to enable them to manage their learning. They can also use a 24-hour telephone and email helpline, and interact with other learners through online forums and chat rooms.

The National Audit Office (2005) report identified the following points as good practice for trainers supporting learners to overcome the barriers they face to completing basic skills courses.

- Provide consistent encouragement, feedback and support, especially to learners who are not confident in their learning ability or ICT literacy.
- Develop a good rapport, and understand how learners’ personal situations may affect their propensity to study, and help them to overcome personal and practical barriers to learning.
- Monitor learners’ progress closely, maintain contact, identify issues promptly and encourage them to continue with their courses at a suitable pace.
- Provide extras to make learning more enjoyable, for example, a session on using a webcam.
- Hold workshops where learners can meet each other and discuss their experiences or learn as a group.

Peer support for trainers was also identified as a factor associated with the success of the HEFCE Flexible Learning Pathfinder pilot schemes. It was a key aspect of the participating institution's quality control framework. Trainers had been able to give mutual peer support through the 'community of practice' that had become established through the regular meetings (Outram, 2009, p. 11).

The role of learning institutions including flexible learning approaches in trainers' continuing professional development (CPD) has also been highlighted in the literature (for example, Outram, 2009). Good practices should be recognised and rewarded in order to engage trainers more fully with flexible delivery.

6.6.9 Widening and ensuring access to learning technology

In order to develop their basic skills using flexible learning including internet-based distance learning, adults must have the appropriate support to enable them to access learning technologies (FitzSimons, 2006). Accessing and, in many cases, affording the electronic equipment necessary to implement flexible and distance learning is often a major barrier (Wooller and Warner, 1999). Similarly, ageing equipment in the home and in some provider settings can be a barrier to participation (National Audit Office, 2005).

These findings emphasise the importance of learners having access to up-to-date, functional equipment to support their basic skills learning. Providing localised access to DEL is the most effective means of removing this barrier, as identified by Crawley and Attewell (2001). They cite the growth of local centres and facilities in the UK as evidence for this.

The E-commerce and Telecommunications Advisory Group's (1998) report, as cited in Gorard (2002), p. 2, highlighted the importance of having access to the technology for flexible and distance learning:

Modern information and communication systems, including digital developments, present both opportunities and threats in adult education. ICT can minimise the constraints of time and space: people can learn or gain information about what is available, whenever and wherever they wish – providing they have access to modern technology and the confidence to use it. (p. 30, cited in Gorard, 2002, p2)

The HEFCE Flexible Learning Pathfinder schemes, while not entirely devoted to delivering basic skills provision to adults, have been particularly successful in developing supportive organisational and infrastructural elements that have widened access (Outram, 2009). For example, a pilot scheme at Staffordshire University developed a system entitled MyPortal, a personalised web page which allows a single point of entry into the institution's IT system including the library, email and VLE resources for trainers and learners, both on- and off-site. In 2009, over 2,500 users were accessing MyPortal every day.

Amending an institution's timetables to extend the academic year throughout the summer months and also including blended learning options were identified as factors in the pilot schemes' success.

Using accessible language and instructions, clear configurations, recognisable graphics, and maps to direct learners to online literacy resources have also been cited as important considerations for those designing and delivering basic skills learning to adults (Hacker, 2000, cited in Holland, 2002).

Large-scale national surveys conducted in the US in 2000 and 2002 found that, respectively, just one and five per cent of all internet content was accessible and relevant to users with low basic skills (Lazarus and Mora, 2000). Limited amounts of accessible content reduce the propensity of those with low basic skills levels to use the internet for learning (Silver-Pacuilla, 2008).

Aspects that can widen access to basic skills delivery through flexible and internet-based distance learning may be particularly appropriate for learners with disabilities including those with special educational needs requiring extra support to facilitate their access to the training. This is recognised by Ufi and learndirect. They explicitly aim to increase the participation of learners with disabilities in basic skills training through flexible and internet-based distance learning.

Ufi staff and partner organisations record the needs of disabled learners through accredited training. Staff undertake the Access Technology Foundation Certificate from the British Computer Association of the Blind which advises on how visually impaired and blind learners use learning technology, and how best to support them. In 2005, Ufi and learndirect piloted wireless technology with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and in deaf communities in London, Sheffield and Manchester. They looked at what materials were suitable for Kickstart TV, an initiative used by the LSC to help adults improve their literacy and numeracy skills (National Audit Office, 2005).

Ufi and learndirect (2010) managed the Cybrarian project, for learners who do not or cannot use the internet. The Cybrarian project is now successfully integrated into the My Guide website www.myguide.com, which enables users with disabilities and those who lack confidence to take their first steps towards using the internet. Users are able to change the size and colour of fonts, and can navigate around the site using their voice.

The US internet consortium, W3C, has produced two versions of their *Web content accessibility guidelines* (WCAG) recommending how online content can be made accessible for learners with disabilities (see Box 6.9). The recommendations are set out under four key areas or principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

The WCAG recommendations do not relate specifically to the teaching and learning of adult basic skills, but may be useful considerations for creators of flexible and internet-based distance learning programmes of basic skills.

Box 6.9 WCAG recommendations for widening access to learning

Principle 1: perceivable – information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive.

Recommendations

- Provide text alternatives for non-text content so it can be changed into more accessible formats (for example Braille, speech, symbols or simpler language).
- Provide alternatives to time-based media to avoid sessions or components timing out.
- Create content that can be adapted, for example into a simpler layout.
- Make it easier for users to see and hear content.

Principle 2: operable – user interface components and navigation must be operable.

Recommendations

- Make all functionality available from a keyboard.
- Provide users with enough time to read and use content.
- Do not design content in a way that is known to cause seizures.
- Provide ways to help users navigate, find content and determine their location.

Principle 3: understandable – information and the operation of the user interface must be understandable.

Recommendations

- Make the text content readable and understandable.
- Make web pages appear and operate in predictable ways.
- Help users avoid and correct mistakes.

Principle 4: robust – content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of other user agents, including assistive technologies.

Recommendation

- Maximise compatibility with current and future agents, including assistive technologies.

Source: Caldwell et al. (2008)

6.6.10 Overcoming apprehension of new learning technologies

Delivering basic skills to adults using flexible learning (including internet-based distance learning) invariably involves using computers and other technology. Learners with no or little experience of such equipment can be apprehensive of doing so, which, in turn, can increase their sense of social isolation (Clarke and Cushman, 2006; Webb, 2006). Basic skills courses, which are delivered through flexible and internet-based distance learning, should therefore contain instruction on using learning technologies safely and effectively.

Other studies highlight the importance of providing basic ICT instruction prior to the delivery of basic skills courses using flexible and distance learning (Askov *et al*., 2003; Outram, 2009; Kambouri *et al*., 2000 Webb, 2006). Many trainers interviewed as part of Webb's (2006) qualitative study, for instance, viewed this as an essential component of training using ICT as the main medium of learning:

> *If you have never used a computer before it wouldn't be suitable but once you know your way around it's not so hard. If they haven't got the IT, they don't know about clicking [they are] not familiar with the Windows environment* […]*. If we give them that support at the beginning it does make it easier for us after because they do seem to be better if they have that initial skill.* (p. 494)

> *I think it would be confusing if all the features of the screen weren't explained to them at the beginning […]. There is so much to offer there and they would miss quite a lot if they weren't explicitly shown what was there.*

Clarke and Cushman (2006, p. 8) argued that a collaborative and discursive classroom environment is necessary to foster the development of skills and knowledge that support the effective teaching and learning of adult basic skills:

> *The gap between a discourse of opportunity promulgated by the government and service providers and a discourse of anxiety and fear exhibited in our research interviews cannot be resolved by instruction. Debate, discussion, argument and joint activity must feature in a successful ICT learning environment.*

Trainers can be equally apprehensive about using technology and ICT to deliver basic skills. The NRDC (2004) study into the use of ICT for developing adult basic skills revealed that, where trainers felt less comfortable with using learning technologies, they were more likely to use a smaller range of methods and types, which restricted the benefit that learning technologies can induce (Mellar *et al*., 2004).

Studies from the US (Ginsburg, 2004) and Australia (Javed, 1998) identified the strong relationship between basic skills trainers' self-reported proficiency and familiarity levels with technology, and the extent to which they used it to deliver distance learning. Less experienced technology users were more likely to use computers for drill and practice-type activities (where the learner systematically reviews and practises previously learned concepts or exercises in order to master them), and for their own planning of resources, and less likely to use the internet in innovative, creative or learner-led ways.

There is a close relationship between age and the extent to which learning technologies are likely to be used successfully to teach and learn basic skills (Gorard, 2002; Gorard *et al*., 2004; West Coast College of TAFE, 2002). The Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme found that one of the biggest barriers to achieving a full quota of older people as volunteers was lack of confidence with technology. The evidence suggested that this could be overcome if the model were to be replicated by recruiting older people who are not necessarily retired, have experience of life and a past role with a 'communications bias' (West Coast College of TAFE, 2002, p.41).

Social networking sites have significant potential for enhancing teaching and learning (Arenas, 2008). Trainers can be less aware of the potential affordances of social networking for developing adult basic skills (Arenas, 2008). Trainers have been described as 'digital immigrants' relative to learners as the 'digital native generation', terms which reflect differential awareness of, and aptitude with, the software (Arenas, 2008).

In line with their status as digital immigrants, trainers may be apprehensive of using social software as a tool for delivering basic skills to adult learners. Good practice in overcoming any such apprehension is achieved through harnessing learners' knowledge. This also helps to raise trainers' awareness of the uses and value of the technology, and would serve to increase the usage of social software as a tool to enhance teaching and learning (Arenas, 2008).

6.6.11 Factors for consideration

There are a number of factors for consideration by those designing and implementing training for adult basic skills using flexible and internet-based learning which are identified in the reviewed literature. These aspects are alluded to rather than discussed in depth in the literature. They are, consequently, reported separately here, rather than being integrated into the main text of this chapter.

Hidden costs to learners

There are certain hidden costs to learners in using learning technologies, and, specifically, for numeracy, such as purchasing or hiring computers, and printing costs (FitzSimons, 2006).

Making content appropriate for adult learners

In relation to basic numeracy development in adult learners, FitzSimons (2006) highlighted that the mathematical content must be appropriate to the individual. Simply adapting materials originally designed for use in schools with young children would be *patronising*, and would increase the sense of *humiliation* experienced by the adult learner (p.2).

Support with using learning technologies

Adults using flexible learning (including internet-based learning) to develop their basic skills need to know how to use the technologies properly first, to enable them to learn the content of any subsequent courses (Clarke and Cushman, 2006).

George and Luke (1995) emphasised the pivotal role of libraries and librarians in creating and maintaining flexible learning environments.

Consideration of learners' needs in curricula design

Basic skills courses which use internet-based learning as a medium should consist of aspects which learners wish to focus on, rather than being prescriptive and devised without learner input and direction (Clarke and Cushman, 2006; Silver-Pacuilla, 2008).

Flexibility in assessment practices

According to George and Luke (1995) flexibility itself is required when assessing those who are learning through flexible delivery. This is because there may be more than one correct answer to certain questions. Information skills should be integrated into the course content, which should be viewed in line with the learning technology and information networks that support it.

Models of internet-based learning

The appropriate model of internet-based learning must be adopted to enable learners to achieve their full potential (Muldoon, 2008). As well as being able to access resources any time, from any location in the world, learners should be able to create and manage their own resources. Vander Wal (2006) labelled these models 'I go get web', and the 'come to me web', respectively.

Checking on learners' progress regularly

When basic skills are delivered through flexible and internet-based distance learning, it is important to regularly check on learners' progress (Webb, 2006). When using ICT as a delivery medium, learners can appear to be engaged with a task when in fact they are not, and may require further trainer support. It is consequently important for trainers delivering basic skills using ICT to check on the progress of learners to ensure they understand how to progress.

The creators of the Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme (West Coast College of TAFE, 2001) implemented the initial introductory session so that each of the volunteer trainers was allocated to a computer with one or more learners. This was to ensure that *'no student was left sitting in front of a computer becoming less and less confident while waiting for help to access [Microsoft] Word'* (p. 12).

Subsequent sessions were carried out with one learner per computer to prevent frustration caused by having to wait for a computer to become available.

Time spent using internet-based software packages

The time learners spend using internet-based software packages for learning basic skills is positively correlated with the extent of learning achieved (Long *et al.*, 2003). Thus, an important consideration for those designing and implementing internet-based learning packages is to allow learners sufficient time to use the resources, and for course content to be distributed over more than just a few sessions.

Using the full range of learning technologies to deliver learning

The range of technologies available for use in delivering online learning is now wider than ever (Silver-Pacuilla, 2008). It is not all being used to its full potential for delivering basic skills to adult learners, however. An Australian review concluded: *'The new technologies […] are being used for searching, for communicating, for providing information, and for processing text in various forms – not for online delivery'* (p. 21).

Supporting all-year-round teaching

The HEFCE Flexible Learning Pathfinders pilot schemes were more successful where they allowed students to participate in learning throughout the summer months when more traditional provision does not usually run. This required the participating institutions to introduce more flexibility into their timetabling and other aspects of their infrastructure (Outram, 2009).

Investment and infrastructure costs associated with flexible learning

Flexible learning schemes can be costly to run. Purchasing the new equipment needed to develop face-to-face and internet-based resources, extending opening hours of libraries and information services, catering and accommodation services, and paying staff overtime for working unsociable hours are examples of some of the additional expenditures associated with delivering flexible learning (Outram, 2009).

In order to make flexible learning sustainable over the long term, training delivered via this medium needs to attract and retain sufficient numbers of learners so that institutions can achieve a reasonable return on the considerable investments they make when establishing and maintaining flexible learning courses.

6.6.12 Developing research into adult basic skills development through flexible learning (including internet-based distance learning)

A theme running throughout the reviewed literature was the paucity of research that has been conducted into the development of adult basic skills through flexible learning, including internet-based distance learning. The specific foci of research within these fields to be highlighted varied in accordance with the topic on which the sources were based, but all concluded that, in order to inform policy and practice reliably, sounder, empirical, larger-scale research was needed.

Research into adults undertaking ESOL training, especially those from deprived areas with basic skills needs who are not currently engaged with learning (Kim *et al*., 2004, cited in Silver-Pacuilla, 2008), was required to develop the evidence base.

The need for quantitative research into the cognitive processes underpinning knowledge transfer in adult basic skills learners was raised (Taylor *et al.* 2009), along with further work into effective pedagogical methods for delivering and supporting flexible and internet-based learning (FitzSimons, 2002; Silver-Pacuilla, 2008).

Other topics cited in the reviewed literature as priorities for further research were evaluation of flexible and internet-based learning resources and environments (Silver-Pacuilla, 2008); developing new learning technologies based on good practice in basic numeracy education (FitzSimons, 2002); increasing the sustainability of flexible and internet-based basic skills training (National Audit Office, 2005); identifying what flexible and internet-based training is currently available and good practice within that (Outram, 2009); and separating the potential of online learning from that of learning in general (Knightley, 2007).

6.7

Conclusion

The review considered whether there was sufficient coverage of the topic within the literature. It was found that although an immense amount of material was available focusing on flexible learning and basic skills, evidence about basic skills through flexible learning was very limited and there was little robust evaluatory evidence available in this field. Many of the documents which were included were either opinion pieces or were items that shed light on aspects of flexible learning or basic skills and merely touched briefly on the interface between the two.

The lack of specific focus on basic skills meant that a great deal of the literature that was reviewed dealt with flexible learning/distance learning in general. It was evident that flexible learning was used extensively, in a range of different contexts, to reach groups which were hard to engage. Therefore, a great deal of the literature was concerned with overcoming attitudinal barriers, providing support to learners, and other factors in a generic way. The coverage ranged from basic skills to degree-level courses (with a stronger focus on the latter) and the information about the specific needs of those developing basic skills through flexible learning was limited.

A number of themes were identified in the literature. One emerging finding was that flexible learning, particularly the ICT components, held a novelty value for learners, which could help attract and retain them. For this to occur, providers needed to ensure access to up-to-date ICT facilities at a central location and, ideally, in learners' homes. In addition to the computer hardware and software, internet connections remained poor in some isolated areas. There was a need to build ICT-user skills into the pedagogy of flexible learning.

It was evident that the use of flexible learning needed to be planned carefully if its potential (especially distance learning) was to be maximised. In doing so, course materials and the way in which they were to be used needed to be analysed and coordinated in order to test their effectiveness in the flexible mode. Simply adapting existing materials and putting them online was neither sufficient nor effective. Courses needed to build in opportunities for learners to work together through online communities, providing interaction and opportunities for reflection, in order to overcome isolation and to make the optimum use of online techniques. Similarly, assessment materials needed to be designed in ways that take account of the specific needs of flexible learners. Combining the expertise of trainers with backgrounds in basic skills delivery with those of others experienced in flexible learning was identified as good practice.

At the same time, the review identified that the role of the trainer was not diminished or de-skilled by use of flexible learning. Indeed, the opposite was identified as there was evidence that supporting learners to study flexibly called for a range of skills which (as in the case of course design) combined content (basic skills) with the mode of delivery. It also required a less directive teaching style more akin to that of facilitator than instructor.

It was also clear that the needs of basic skills learners studying flexibly differed significantly from other groups. This called for greater one-to-one support, more frequent face-to-face meetings than was the case with other learners, and a relaxed learning environment.

The need to take account of individuals' backgrounds (such as home background, culture ethnicity, and prior experience of learning), which is a requirement of all adult learning provision, was found to be particularly important in relation to those studying through flexible learning. Such considerations needed to be addressed during the design of flexible learning training, especially the design of the support structures.

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7

The development of basic skills through work-based learning

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7.1 Aim of this review

The aim of this review is to examine UK and international evidence on the development of basic skills through work-based learning (including apprenticeships). More specifically, the review seeks to investigate:

- the approaches used to develop basic skills through work-based learning
- the impacts arising from these approaches
- what can be done to improve the teaching and learning of adult basic skills through workplace learning.

7.2

Adult basic skills in work-based learning: scope and definitions

It is useful to clarify what basic skills in the workplace can refer to or encompass since a broad set of definitions and interpretations are apparent in the literature.

The term *work-based learning* can refer to the delivery of formal training, such as courses delivered through an on-site learning centre, as well as more informal learning approaches that take place on the job such as mentoring.

The development of adult basic skills through work-based learning can also involve a range of providers both inside and outside of an organisation. Formal adult basic skills training might, for example, include external trainers from further education colleges or take place in an in-house and purpose-built training centre run by staff employed by a company. It might also include basic skills training as part of an apprenticeship programme. More detail on approaches to work-based basic skills training is in section 7.3.

In terms of content, basic skills training has traditionally focused on reading, writing and numeracy. However, more recently, it has been argued that other skills are also important for carrying out job roles and should be included in this classification; specifically, these are communication, problem solving, teamwork and ICT skills (Levy and Murnane, 1996; Jurmo, 2004). Recently, basic skills training has also encompassed courses developing English language skills such as ESOL courses (Skaliotis *et al*., 2007). It has also encompassed the development of employability skills (for example, critical thinking, learning to learn, and planning); see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of these skills. These are all widely recognised as essential for work, regardless of the occupation or industry (Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008).

Townsend and Waterhouse (2008) highlighted the potential problem with obtaining a consistent or universal definition for adult basic skills training: *'Recent research has highlighted the extent to which literacy in particular, but also numeracy and employability skills, are highly value-laden and defined by their context'* (p. 7). They also demonstrated a mismatch between understandings of basic skills by researchers and policy-makers. Similarly, there has been much debate, for example, about how the terms mathematics and numeracy differ and where their boundaries lie, as well as what they encompass (FitzSimons *et al*., 2005; Marr and Hagston, 2007).

It is apparent how varied the definitions of work-based learning can be. A broad view of work-based basic skills training has, therefore, been adopted, in order to extrapolate findings and good practice that can be applied to a wide range of approaches to work-based learning.

7.3 Approaches to

adult basic skills development through work-based learning

This section considers five approaches to delivering adult basic skills training in the workplace identified in the key literature:

- embedded approaches
- use of learning centres
- the use of trade union learning representatives
- informal on-the-job training
- contextualised approaches.

The approaches differ according to environment and delivery methods, and they are presented in the order of frequency with which they are reported in the literature.

Seventeen of the key sources refer to different approaches. However, the number of sources referring to all but embedded approaches is quite small, thus limiting the information available. It is also worth noting that some of the approaches are used to deliver other skills training in the workplace, rather than just basic skills. The findings are therefore, transferable, to workplace training more generally.

7.3.1 Embedded approach

This is the most frequently cited approach to developing basic skills in the workplace: it is in seven sources, and all but two of these are based on Australian practice. An embedded approach is usually used for in-house or company-organised training in which basic skills are included in a concealed form in the curriculum of another course (for example, Evans and Waite, 2008; Marr and Hagston, 2007; McKenna and Fitzpatrick, 2005).

In Australia, McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2005) noted the growth of embedded training, where the acquisition of literacy skills is built into broader skills development. Indeed, Millar and Falk (2002) described literacy and numeracy training being embedded into the training package approach. The degree to which basic skills are made explicit in training packages varies according to the training provider (O'Neill and Gish, 2001). Also in Australia, Marr and Hagston (2007) identified the use of an embedded approach to integrating numeracy into other training packages so that negative perceptions about mathematics education could be surmounted.

In the UK, Evans and Waite's (2008) evaluative study recognised the resistance from learners to basic skills training which, in part, was due to a fear of being stigmatised by others. In one instance, to overcome this challenge and encourage learners into training, literacy was embedded into an ICT course. ICT was described as a helpful way in which to engage learners in literacy: *'People see a computer as a way of making them skilled generally both at home and work […] whereas they can't always see the relevance of English quite so easily'* (p. 15).

Front-end delivery describes the process of providing basic skills at the start of a programme. For example, Cranmer *et al.*'s (2004) evaluative study discussed a front-end delivery model through which literacy, numeracy and key skills training was provided at the outset of apprenticeships so learners developed the skills necessary for the rest of the programme. Although not necessarily concealed in the training, the approach embedded the basic skills early into the course. As noted by O'Neill and Gish (2001): *'Employers see good literacy skills for apprentices as providing a good foundation for learning on the job'* (p. 41). Cranmer *et al.* (2004) also found that learners benefited from literacy and numeracy support being front-loaded into their apprenticeships, providing them with the skills and confidence to both learn and carry out their trade well.

Other research highlights a potential drawback to this embedded approach, finding that it can result in a lack of recognition by trainers of learners' requirements due to the learning focus not being on basic skills (Marr and Hagston, 2007). Miller and Falk (2002) also noted that learners' needs are addressed in terms of basic skills deficits within the narrow context of the main job task, and their broader literacy and numeracy needs are not addressed. There are also some concerns expressed about how the impacts of this approach can be measured without an explicit method of assessment (Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008).

7.3.2 Use of learning centres

Four of the key evidence sources have examples of basic skills training through workplace-based learning centres, usually funded by employers (Evans and Waite, 2008; Finlay *et al.*, 2007; Levenson, 2001; Taylor *et al.*, 2007). Learning centres can provide formal learning opportunities and be run by company employees or external trainers. A learning centre offers several, interconnected benefits for employers. For example, it enables a broad curriculum of training to be delivered (for example, basic skills, ICT, communication, supervisory and safety skills). This, in turn, enables costs to be offset against a range of activities, not just basic skills, making it easier to justify funding basic skills training (Levenson, 2001). Employees often see learning at work as preferable to learning externally in a college and, therefore, more employees engage in developing their basic skills (Evans and Waite, 2008).

7.3.3 Use of trade union learning representatives

Four sources referred to approaches using trade union learning representatives (ULRs) (Shaw *et al.*, 2006; Findlay *et al.*, 2006; Evans and Waite, 2008; Hudson, 2007).

The Skills White Paper (GB Parliament, HoC, 2005) specified training should be delivered flexibly and encompass the entire workforce. It stresses the role of ULRs in addressing learning and skills needs. They are recruited from within the workforce to work with colleagues and employers to promote learning and raise workforce skills (Hudson, 2007). ULRs were an instrumental part of the Union Learning Fund in the UK (Findlay *et al.*, 2006; Shaw *et al.*, 2006). Although not used solely for basic skills training, they successfully encouraged employees to take up the offer of learning opportunities and development courses. Evans and Waite (2008) noted that ULRs have also been involved in facilitating informal learning opportunities in the workplace (see the case study in Box 7.7).

7.3.4 Informal on-the-job training

A fourth approach to work-based learning is informal on-the-job training, cited in three sources. In describing workplace training in both the UK and Canada, Taylor *et al.* (2007) noted that formal training has a structured plan, whereby an employee, led by an instructor or trainer, follows a programme and receives some form of formal recognition on completion. However, informal training involves little or no reliance on pre-determined guidelines for its organisation, delivery or assessment. The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) defined informal learning as loosely structured, self-paced and self-directed activities that are intended for either personal or work-related objectives. As noted by Fenwick (2008), there has been a shift in focus in recent years from employees simply gaining new skills and behaviours through formal courses to learning basic skills through practice.

Taylor *et al.* (2007) observed five types of informal learning used to develop literacy skills:

- observing from knowledgeables, for example learning a task in a different way from a more proficient colleague
- practising without supervision, for example seeking out experiences for practising a new skill
- searching independently for information, for example in a book or on a computer
- focused workplace discussions with peers and supervisors using, for example questioning and summarising skills
- mentoring and coaching from a colleague.

Marr and Hagston (2007) noted that most employees in their evaluation preferred training that is informal, immediate and on-the-job, and taught by peers or supervisors. They also spoke highly of informal methods that gradually gave them greater responsibility with support or mentoring.

The literature, however, suggests that informal training may not necessarily be an alternative to more formal training. Rather, in some cases it might be a valuable addition to formal learning approaches. Indeed, one study acknowledged that, while employees might have received formal training in the past, there might be a need for further contextual on-the-job mentoring and support (FitzSimons *et al.*, 2005). This was also reflected in the research carried out by Taylor *et al.* (2007, 2008) and Evans and Waite (2008). They highlighted that basic skills programmes can offer a range of both formal and informal learning opportunities, as Box 7.1 illustrates.

Box 7.1 United Kingdom: formal and informal delivery

Evans and Waite (2008) described the use of both formal and informal approaches to workplace basic skills development.

In one of their case studies, the company embraced a looser vision of learning that included both formal and informal elements; indeed, the popularity of the learning centre rested on it not being too closely associated with formalised learning.

In a second case study, informal development of basic skills took place through observing more knowledgeable employees; focused work-place discussions; and coaching and mentoring. Formal training also took place during, for example, a one-day training course on health and safety.

In a third case-study, English and ICT courses were run in the company's training centre but employees were also encouraged to show initiative in taking on more responsibility in the form of more challenging tasks that depended on informal learning on the job.

Source: Evans and Waite (2008)

7.3.5 Contextualised learning

Three sources (two from Australia, and one from the USA) refer to two methods of delivering specific basic skills training: a contextualised and a decontextualised approach.

Contextualised training directly relates to employees' current job roles, using real examples from everyday practice. Research on the transferability of skills (Milkulecky, 1988; Askov and Aderman, 1991), suggested literacy and numeracy skills integrated into the workplace context are more effectively acquired through on-the-job and work-based training.

A contextualised approach builds on learners' job-related knowledge and teaches the strategies needed to apply basic skills to their current role. The approach was supported in the USA by the National Workforce Literacy Program (NWLP) (Jurmo, 2004). One of the main advantages of this approach, as noted by Jurmo (2004), is that learners are better able to see how the skills they develop are relevant to actual workplace activity.

There is, however, the risk that a contextualised approach produces training that is too narrowly focused, preventing the strengthening of skills more widely.

Jurmo (2004) also described an alternative contextualised approach, as set out in Box 7.2.

Box 7.2 USA: contextualised and alternative contextualised approaches

Jurmo (2004) set out how a contextualised approach is put into practice:

- jobs requiring improvements are defined by the employer
- a specialist conducts a literacy audit to clarify the basic skills these jobs need
- a customised, job-specific assessment carried out by the basic skills specialist determines whether employees possess the required skills
- the resulting curriculum focuses on the identified gaps in skills.

An alternative contextualised approach:

- involves a broader range of people, for example employees, employers, basic skills trainers and trade union representatives
- includes a systematic and inclusive decision-making process to decide how basic skills fit into a company's strategic plan for workplace and employee development
- in the process, employees develop skills in problem-solving, speaking and listening, research, teamwork, numeracy and presentation skills.

Source: Jurmo (2004)

O'Neill and Gish (2001) noted that integrating English language and literacy skills training into the workplace ensures these skills are addressed in context, since they go hand-in-hand with the various units of competence that rely upon these skills. An example is learners on a hospitality and catering apprenticeship being taught how to read recipes. Townsend and Waterhouse (2008) also stressed that literacy, numeracy and employability skills should be embedded in context and do not exist in a vacuum, nor are they fixed or constant. Instead they need to be understood in context.

A decontextualised approach is more academic, and characterised by a focus on mastering reading, writing, speaking, listening, and/or numeracy skills, and with *'little or no direct connection to how participants use those skills in their work or other real life contexts'* (Jurmo, 2004, p. 23).

Users of this approach tend to argue that it is important to teach basics first, and to assume learners will then apply them to real-life contexts. Jurmo (2004) reported that the benefits of such an approach are rooted more in the planning and assessment of such learning. For example, it is relatively easy to assess whether learners have mastered discrete skills using standardised tests that are easy to administer and grade. Further, this approach is thought to be especially appropriate for individuals with a low level of skill, due to the absence of the need to process complex information. Decontextualised approaches are more in line with learning that might be offered at a learning centre, and with standardised and certified basic skills courses.

7.4 Impacts of work-based learning

Fifteen of the key sources in the review contain evidence regarding the impacts of work-based learning approaches. However, there is a general lack of robust evaluative evidence on these impacts, particularly concerning those that are long-term. Instead, evidence tends to be based on self-reports in qualitative reviews. Furthermore, the impacts can be situation specific, and closely associated with the organisational context and culture in which training is located. The impacts gained from basic skills training in one organisation may, therefore, not be replicated in another. As Levenson (2001) noted:

> *Unfortunately, precisely quantifying the benefits of such programs can be difficult. And even where a benefit can be shown, it is difficult to guarantee the same benefit will be realized in a different organizational setting.* (p. 9)

The majority of the 15 sources tend to focus on impacts for learners, although some do cover these for employers. However, as Ananiadou *et al.* (2004) and Finlay *et al.* (2007) noted, there are difficulties in quantifying longer-term impacts for employers such as gains in business productivity and competitiveness.

The key evidence identifies a range of softer impacts associated with different approaches to workplace basic skills training. In order of their frequency in the literature, they include:

- increased motivation to undertake further learning
- increased job satisfaction, loyalty and retention
- skills development and improved performance at work
- enhanced confidence and self-esteem
- greater engagement in learning programmes
- career development and enhanced employability
- improved employer and employee relations.

These impacts largely reflect those of adult basic skills development more broadly (see Chapter 2), although improved employer and employee relations, and greater engagement in learning programmes are more specific to work-based training.

7.4.1 Increased motivation to undertake further learning

The most frequently cited outcome of workplace-based skills development is increased motivation to undertake further learning and an understanding of the importance of learning, as referred to by eleven of the key sources (for example, Taylor (2001) and Wolf *et al.* (2008) in the UK, and the Workplace Education Research Centre (2008) in Australia). Increased motivation is often a result of enhanced confidence (see section 7.4.4).

In discussing apprenticeships, Cranmer *et al.* (2004) reported that *'front-end delivery has been a highly motivational experience for both teachers and learners, and resulted in a number of positive outcomes'* (p. 23). Findlay *et al.* (2006) also noted that the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF) developed 'learner capacity' by stimulating the desire and willingness amongst employees to engage and progress in learning. The evaluation of the Employer Training Pilots (ETPs) in the UK found that learners who took part were more inclined to undertake further learning, and that the more positive the learning experience, the more likely they were to go on to further training. Receiving information, advice and guidance alongside the basic skills enhanced inclination for further study (Hillage *et al.*, 2006).

As well as motivation to seek out further formal learning, Taylor *et al.* (2007, 2008) reported that participation in formal learning programmes acts as a 'catalyst' for various informal training activities that happen in the workplace; and participating in a class or tutorial heightened employee awareness of the 'importance to learn'.

Informal training develops employees' curiosity for learning new things in the workplace through a belief that they possess the creativity and imagination to learn. Employees stress the importance of their newly acquired confidence in seeking out informal learning after participating in a formal programme (Taylor *et al.* (2007, 2008). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that a higher level of confidence motivates learners to actively seek out and take advantage of further learning opportunities (Evans and Waite, 2008).

However, Evans and Waite (2008) also noted that the confidence to take on new challenges and to undertake further learning could be dependent on the extent to which employees feel supported in doing this. Without this support, confidence can decline and with it, the motivation to learn.

7.4.2 Increases in job satisfaction, loyalty and retention

Ten sources refer to increases in job satisfaction, loyalty and retention rates as outcomes of work-based basic skills development. Six sources identify the potential for work-based learning to positively impact on organisations' retention rates, which, in part, can reflect high levels of loyalty and pride in an organisation (for example, Ananiadou *et al.*, 2004; Cranmer *et al.*, 2004; Finlay *et al.*, 2007; Hillage *et al.*, 2006; Skaliotis *et al.*, 2007). Other key literature (Levenson, 2001) supported this, stating that employees' loyalty to an organisation can be increased through opportunities to undertake basic skills training, thus providing learners with a more positive outlook. As Levenson noted:

> *Monetary compensation is not the sole characteristic that makes jobs appealing. Working for an organisation that distinguishes itself by actively supporting low skill workers can boost worker morale and loyalty significantly.* (p. 8)

Hillage *et al.* (2006) also found that, as a result of being involved in the ETPs, learners were more likely to stay with their existing company. In addition, most employees reported an increase in the confidence to undertake different tasks and responsibilities with their current employer. Very few reported they would be more likely to change employer after participating in an ETP.

A precursor to improved retention rates is an increase in job satisfaction. Four sources refer to the enhanced work-related satisfaction reported by employees after engaging in workplace basic skills training (Taylor *et al*., 2008; Evans and Waite, 2008; Johnson *et al*., 2009; Wolf *et al*., 2008). Evans and Waite (2008) and Taylor *et al.* (2008) reported greater job satisfaction experienced by employees who have participated in a formal workplace course. However, longer-term follow-up suggests that this job satisfaction can wane in the absence of advancement or some kind of external recognition. This is less the case when the focus has been on informal learning.

7.4.3 Development of skills and improved performance at work

Eight of the main literature sources state that an increase in learner skills and qualifications (for example, in literacy, numeracy, communication and ICT) are impacts of participating in adult basic skills through work-based training (for example, Evans and Waite, 2008; Findlay *et al*., 2006; Hillage *et al*., 2006). The chance to revive skills which have largely gone unused since school, as well as develop and practise new skills, such as IT, can be welcomed by learners (Evans and Waite, 2008).

Skill development can, naturally, lead to improved performance at work. Hillage *et al.* (2006) reported that employers perceived that participation in ETPs had provided employees with the skills to carry out their current job better, therefore, enabling higher quality output. Taylor *et al.* (2007) also noted that formal basic skills training led to employees using their literacy skills to undertake their job tasks differently, and informal learning had encouraged employees to want to perform better for their organisation or customer. Employees involved in the Learning Worker Pilots (LWPs) in Wales also believed that their involvement led to better job performance (UKCES, 2009). Interestingly, however, while employee participation in basic skills training should have a positive impact on a company's productivity, Ananiadou *et al.* (2004) and Finlay *et al.* (2007) noted that there is currently little empirical evidence to support this.

Two sources cite additional and more personal benefits that employees can gain from the development of their literacy and communication skills. Evans and Waite (2008) and Skaliotis *et al.* (2007) noted how improvements in adults' communication skills (for example, through English or ESOL classes) could enable them to more effectively help their children with their homework.

7.4.4 Enhanced confidence and self-esteem

Increased confidence and self-esteem are highlighted as important soft impacts resulting from employees' participation in basic skills training at work (cited by seven key sources, for example, Finlay *et al*., 2007; Taylor *et al*., 2007).

As a result of various interventions in workplace learning centres, both formal and informal, Evans and Waite (2008) reported improvements in employee confidence and any fears about using IT were overcome. ESOL courses have been shown to boost confidence and independence (Skaliotis *et al*., 2007) and the Johnson *et al.* report (2009) noted that the LWPs in Wales also led to more confidence amongst learners.

Wolf *et al.* (2008) noted that the most frequently reported outcome of UK government-funded workplace programmes was a general increase in personal confidence. Indeed, two-thirds of survey respondents reported that they were more confident at work after the training.

As mentioned earlier, enhanced confidence is often a precursor to other impacts (such as motivation to engage in further learning), and increased confidence in skills and abilities can help employees to feel more positive towards taking on additional responsibilities (Hillage *et al.*, 2006) as well as to progress onto training at a higher level (for example, Findlay *et al.*, 2006).

7.4.5 Greater engagement in learning programmes

The literature commonly reports that the offer of work-based basic skills development leads to greater engagement in learning programmes (for example, Findlay *et al.*, 2006). Finlay *et al.* (2007) noted that government-funded basic skills training in the workplace has increased the nature and scale of the learning that has taken place. They also noted that learners, in their research, undertook to improve their basic skills only because the opportunity to do so was offered in their place of work.

Similarly, in their review of the ETPs, Hillage *et al.* (2006) reported that most learners in the programme, who responded to their survey, said they would not have undergone training if they had not been involved in the pilot.

Johnson *et al.* (2009) highlighted that, as well as ETPs, the Training Support Scheme (TSS) in Ireland, the Workplace Innovation Fund in Northern Ireland, Group Training Organisations (GTOs) in Australia and the LWPs in Wales were all successful in attracting large numbers of employees to learning. Indeed, only 23 per cent of respondents to the LWP evaluation said they had planned to undertake training prior to being offered the opportunity via an LWP.

The GTOs in Australia are considered effective for assisting small-sized employers to take on apprenticeships, thereby indirectly acting to boost individual participation in skills development. Wolf *et al.* (2008) said workplace learning (including basic skills) is successful in reaching adults who do not participate in other types of formal learning.

7.4.6 Career development and enhanced employability

Initial impacts arising from training, such as skills development, enhanced confidence and improved work performance, may lead on to secondary benefits, in the form of enhanced employability and better career prospects.

For example, developing English language skills through an ESOL course can lead to enhanced employability (Skaliotis *et al.*, 2007). Although not exclusively related to basic skills training, Taylor (2001) also noted that work-based learning could develop work-related skills, making employees more attractive to employers. Developing basic skills through workplace training can also lead to increased wages (Ananiadou *et al.*, 2004).

7.4.7 Improved employer and employee relations

Evidence suggests that improved relations between employers and their staff can arise after work-based basic skills training (for example, Hillage *et al.*, 2006). This is likely to be a benefit specific to work-based learning as opposed to other forms of basic skills development.

Again, this impact can develop at a secondary level and, indeed, was picked up in a longitudinal evaluation carried out by Evans and Waite (2008). They noted that managers were more supportive of their employees as a result of seeing the benefits of their increased confidence at work. This had come about through formal in-house basic skills training, often in work-based learning centres. Conversely, Findlay *et al.* (2006) noted that employees develop more positive attitudes towards their employers after involvement in work-based courses through the Scottish Union Learning Fund.

7.4.8 Interaction between impacts

It is important to note that impacts do not often occur in isolation. Rather, those sources that address impacts tend to highlight a number of them as a result of workplace basic skills training. As already shown, some impacts of workplace learning lead to the development of secondary impacts.

Although few sources look at benefits for employers or training providers, the literature does suggest that positive impacts are also apparent for these groups (for example Hillage *et al.*, 2006; Taylor *et al.*, 2007, 2008). The case study in Box 7.3 has examples of employer impacts arising from ETPs.

Box 7.3 The range of ETPs' impacts

The ETPs demonstrated how it is possible to persuade employers to provide more workplace training.

The pilots tested the effectiveness of an offer of free or subsidised training to employees without level 2 qualifications. Employers were given wage compensation to cover the time taken from work.

An evaluation of ETPs made a number of positive conclusions.

- Employers benefited in terms of increased commitment and having more capable employees willing to take on additional responsibilities.
- Employers were more positive about training in general, and training low-skilled employees in particular.
- External training providers reported they had become more flexible in terms of location, time and form of training delivery.

Source: Hillage et al. (2006)

7.5

Ensuring success in the delivery of basic skills training

This section looks at key factors associated with the successful delivery of basic skills development in the workplace. In order to interpret the findings discussed in this section, it is worth acknowledging three important points.

Firstly, 21 of the 23 literature sources make claims about the factors associated with effective approaches, but not all of these can be said to have arisen from rigorous evaluation evidence. Instead, they are presented as observations and/or opinions, some clearly linked with trainers' experiences, but not necessarily tried and tested through evaluative methods.

Secondly, not all the sources deal solely with the delivery of basic skills training in the workplace. Several studies have a wider focus and their conclusions may also relate to other areas of skills development.

Thirdly, there is limited evidence in the literature regarding specific approaches which stand out as proven examples of best practice and, therefore, cannot be recommended for replication in their entirety. Instead, an analysis of the literature has revealed certain design features or aspects of training that appear to contribute to the success of adult basic skills development in a workplace setting.

In order of their frequency in the literature, the 16 factors associated with effective approaches are:

- employees being offered the chance to learn skills required by their employer
- a supportive learning culture and employer commitment to learning
- effectively identifying and responding to learners' needs
- adequately funding training
- tutors with specialist expertise and industry knowledge
- awareness of other resource issues
- face-to-face and individual support for learners
- accessible learning locations and flexible timing
- learners' awareness of, and reflections on, their learning and new skills levels
- opportunities for progression after learning
- strategies to engage employers in work-based learning
- embedding basic skills in vocational or other training
- considering the language used when referring to adult basic skills training
- using front-end delivery
- increasing the status of basic skills within work-based learning
- interweaving formal and informal learning.

7.5.1 Employees offered the chance to learn skills required by their employer

The need to contextualise learning and ensure it relates to the skill requirements of the workplace was the factor which resonated most strongly in the literature, cited in 12 (over half) of the selected sources (Hudson, 2007; Cranmer *et al*., 2004; Marr and Hagston, 2007; O'Neill and Gish, 2001; Ott, 2008; Skaliotis *et al*., 2007; Levenson, 2001; Taylor, 2001; McKenna and Fitzpatrick, 2005; Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008; Johnson *et al*., 2009; Hardy, 2008).

Trainers involved in the delivery of work-based learning stress the importance of finding out what employers want and need from their employees, and designing lesson plans accordingly (Hardy, 2008). A tailored approach is also advocated by O'Neill and Gish (2001) who suggested trainers need to assess workplace tasks in terms of their underlying basic skill requirements and focus on developing those skills that, for example, apprentices actually need in the workplace. FitzSimons *et al.* (2005) (cited in Hudson, 2007) explained that encouraging authentic problem-solving requires learning materials closely related to the workplace, for example, trainee chefs learning how to read recipes or health and safety legislation.

Benefits of a contextualised approach can be seen for both employees and employers. Employers more easily appreciate the relevance of basic skills training if it is linked to tasks that staff are likely to encounter in their daily working lives. The Marr and Hagston (2007) study found industry support for numeracy training that is meaningful and experiential, with strong links to immediate work situations and opportunities for reflection on the applications. An 'experiential learning cycle' is posited as ideal, where numeracy training is always undertaken in conjunction with a practical and immediate workplace situation. Where training is perceived to encourage and complement companies' own endeavours, employers are more inclined to lend their support to the programme and encourage employee participation (Johnson *et al*., 2009).

Addressing basic skills development within a vocational context can also help secure the engagement of learners. For example, Cranmer *et al.* (2004) described how apprentices could initially resent the time allocated for basic skills being 'borrowed' from their vocational training. However, if they feel that what they are doing in class relates to their future profession, they gradually undergo a transition from resentment to acceptance and involvement.

The value of contextualised provision is exemplified in the case study in Box 7.4.

Box 7.4 UK: tailoring training to the needs of the industry

ESOL in the care section

A domiciliary care agency took part in a pilot programme whereby the employer was paid to release staff, once a week for 10 weeks, to participate in an ESOL course. The course was developed purely to meet the needs of the care sector. It aimed to raise confidence and give employees opportunities to improve their language skills in English; identify and practise effective communication skills in a care environment; and to achieve a level 1 literacy national qualification.

The employer reported a positive impact on the company:

We have been delighted with the improvements in the telephone skills of staff when speaking to service users and GPs. It is imperative that the learners have a good understanding of the needs of service users and healthcare professionals.

Learning English has been key to helping the employees perform more effectively. They have felt more confident in their work, particularly answering the phone, writing reports, and communicating with service users.

Source: Skaliotis (2007)

7.5.2 Supportive learning culture and employer commitment to learning

When discussing factors associated with the effective delivery of work-based learning, a supportive organisational culture and employer commitment to learning also feature prominently in the literature (Cranmer, *et al*., 2004; Jurmo, 2004; Taylor *et al*., 2007; Evans and Waite, 2008; Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008; Marr and Hagston, 2007; Johnson *et al*., 2009; Shaw, 2006; Wolf *et al*., 2008; Ananiadou *et al*., 2004).

Townsend and Waterhouse (2008) stressed the importance of building an organisational culture that demonstrates the values of ‘inclusiveness, employee support and lifelong learning’ and in which employees are encouraged to ‘extend their learning and development’.

In many cases, organisations with such cultures see themselves as highly competitive and, in some cases, are industry leaders. They proactively link developing their employees with being successful in the marketplace. Evans and Waite (2008) and Townsend and Waterhouse (2008) both stressed how work-based learning programmes need to be supported by environments that are ‘expansive’ if the benefits from learning are to be sustained. This includes, ‘learning rich’ working environments, which offer rewards and promotions that support employees’ engagement and, thus, contribute to the sustainability of workplace learning programmes.

The focus is on creating an environment in which learning is considered to be an integral component of both work and home life rather than something ‘bolted on’. Taylor *et al.* (2007) found that employees within companies demonstrating a ‘well defined and visible learning culture’ wanted to perform better for the organisation or the customer, thus benefiting their employer. In contrast, where attendance and retention rates are low in work-based training, it has been attributed to the lack of a strong learning culture (Ananiadou *et al*., 2004).

Closely linked to the presence of a learning culture within the workplace is the importance of employers' active and supportive role in the skills development of their employees, as cited in three key sources (Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008; Ananiadou *et al.*, 2004; Cranmer *et al.*, 2004).

In one study, learner engagement and motivation was found to be associated with the active involvement of employers and their support for employees to attend training (Cranmer *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, workplace training can be improved by trainers being helped to understand the specific needs of a company. Consulting with employers can ensure training is appropriate to the needs of the company and industry, which in turn makes the learning more relevant to employees.

Equally, if employers feel that they have had a say in a training programme's goals and can contribute to the planning of the curriculum, they are more likely to release employees to attend classes and generally serve as champions for the programme (Jurmo, 2004).

According to Taylor (2001), the key to success is getting employers involved:

Well-planned, on-the-job learning, with active employer involvement, leads to a better learning experience for learners and better outcomes in terms of their work related skills and employability. (p. 7)

The case study in Box 7.5 is an illustration of an employer's commitment to learning, through the development of an on-site learning centre.

Box 7.5 UK: creating a learning culture in the workplace

A learning centre developed by a food manufacturing company

A large food manufacturer company has won several awards for its learning centre implemented on the initiative of senior management. It was first set up in 2001 in the main factory. The learning centre subsequently became a learndirect centre and moved to a large purpose-built building. The company paid the salaries of a full-time trainer and assistant, and provided the funds for the new building, while learndirect financed the computers and resources.

The centre was also open to the local community. In addition to computing, Skills for Life courses and job-specific training, the centre also offered courses such as flower arranging which were very important for attracting both employees and individuals from the wider community. These courses were also used as a 'hook' by the tutor to attract individuals to Skills for Life courses.

The company's reliance on so called 'huddles', in which employees gathered to share their working experiences, listen to company updates and opportunities for training, provided a range of learning opportunities. Every employee at the level of technician and above underwent a performance development process that reviewed their work and set learning objectives linked to the learning centre.

The learning centre was an important site for the complex inter-weaving of formal and informal learning opportunities. Learners were able to undertake a variety of formally accredited learndirect courses in Skills for Life and ICT but they were also given scope to engage in independent self-directed learning. Learners could borrow laptops to experiment and develop confidence in their own time.

The positive impacts associated with the learning centre are:

- learning at work being less intimidating and free from the associations of formal learning (as at school)
- increased accessibility and flexibility encouraging employees to engage in learning and facilitate their participation, for example, the learning centre provided good access to learning opportunities but also the flexibility for employees to take work home and undertake self-directed learning on computers.

According to the company's human resources manager: 'The employees see the learning centre as their own' and the centre has had a positive effect in boosting morale: 'It helps create that feel good factor.'

Source: Evans and Waite (2008)

7.5.3 Effectively identifying and responding to learners' needs

Recognition of learners' needs is, understandably, cited as important in ten pieces of the literature (Hillage *et al*., 2006, Finlay *et al*., 2007; McKenna and Fitzpatrick, 2005; Marr and Hagston, 2007; O'Neill and Gish, 2001; Ott, 2001; Skaliotis *et al*., 2007; Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008; Taylor, 2001; and Hardy, 2008).

Identifying learners' needs *prior* to work-based learning through, for example, performance or appraisal interviews is highlighted by Townsend and Waterhouse (2008). Similarly, the evaluation of the ETPs found that thorough initial assessment made a significant difference to the success of training; and those who received an initial assessment and training plan were more likely to complete training successfully (Hillage *et al*., 2006). Hence, the authors recommended adopting an 'assess train assess' model, which establishes a skills starting point, followed by targeted training and a follow-up assessment to determine the progress made in terms of skills development.

The delivery of basic skills training should also take account of possible variations in the prior skills levels of groups of learners. Such diversity is likely to exist, for example, amongst ESOL learners. Some individuals, whilst not fluent in English, can in fact be highly skilled learners. Others could experience difficulties with learning, generally, as well as lacking English-speaking skills (Skaliotis *et al*., 2007). Assessing skills levels will ensure planned curricula are pitched at an appropriate level to avoid being either too advanced or insufficiently challenging.

In addition to establishing the skill requirements of learners, the literature also advises paying attention to an individual's preferred teaching and learning styles. Finlay *et al.*'s (2007) article, for example, noted that, in some cases, learners are more responsive to teaching and learning methods that they feel are suitable to them rather than those which have been used during previous failed attempts to learn.

Negative experiences of school education can impact on individuals' responsiveness to more formal teaching methods and this may be particularly true amongst adults lacking in basic skills. For these individuals, as Finlay *et al.* (2007) suggested, trainers need to create a supportive and warm environment that puts learners 'at ease' and is flexible in terms of delivery methods. Consistency of trainers is also said to help in this respect, ensuring that the same trainer works with learners throughout the programme (Evans and Waite, 2008).

In their study of workplace numeracy skills, Marr and Hagston (2007) concluded that such basic skills training needs to be undertaken in a non-threatening atmosphere supported by employers. They particularly highlighted the importance of encouragement and employers having a positive attitude to the development of successful training strategies.

Attention to these areas can create a more enjoyable and productive learning environment and, as a result, have a positive impact on retention rates.

7.5.4 Adequate funding for provision

Funding is identified as a particular challenge because without it courses cannot go ahead. This is identified in a range of evidence from national and international sources, including the UK, the USA and Australia (for example, Cranmer *et al.*, 2004; 2008; Finley *et al.*, 2007; Levenson, 2001).

In 2001, Levenson reported that the availability of public funding was scarce in comparison to the level that was required, and acknowledged that, even if it is increased, it was unlikely that it would be enough to address the diversity of needs amongst learners.

The implications of a funding shortfall in Australia were discussed by McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2005). They found that it affected the levels of support available to learners, and involvement in literacy programmes had to be restricted to those learners with the strongest chance of success. The ability to offer follow-up courses also suffered due to funding shortages.

A key improvement, according to one study, would be greater stability in the funding of work-based learning provision – even those programmes that are successful are highly susceptible to changes in resourcing:

The provision that we explored all took place in sites recommended to us by the LSC as examples of good practice. What we found was what might be termed 'flowers in the desert', that is, provision that grows very quickly given funding, but which is very vulnerable to funding changes and is, therefore, difficult to sustain. Finlay *et al.* (2007, p. 244).

This reliance on initiative funding (and the subsequent repercussions for achieving long-term sustainability) could be tackled by widening the network of funding sources. If a variety of funders are to pay for provision, this then poses the question of proportionality and how much employers, employees and governments should each contribute to the funding of work-based learning (Finlay *et al.*, 2007).

Securing the support and investment of employers is vital for improving both the teaching and learning of basic skills. They must be shown the benefits of allocating their own resources to this activity and more robust evidence of the impacts for employers would encourage them to do so (see also section 7.5.11 on employer engagement).

7.5.5 Tutors with specialist expertise and industry knowledge

Several studies recognise that as well as possessing the necessary basic skills expertise, trainers also require an in-depth knowledge of an industry's culture and practices (Marr and Hagston, 2007; McKenna and Fitzpatrick, 2005; Millar and Falk, 2002; Taylor, 2001; Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008; Cranmer *et al.*, 2004; Hardy, 2008).

McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2005) said basic skills training would be improved by trainers having relevant industry knowledge alongside expertise in education and knowledge of applied linguistics. They need to be familiar with the discourse of industry and specific workplaces in order to understand and be able to analyse the communication practices commonly used (and incorporate these into any subsequent training):

The specialist language, literacy and numeracy teacher needs to have a sound knowledge of the requirements of the specific industry and workplaces, as well as of the relevant industry competencies to understand the reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy skills required by learners in their programs. McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2005, p. 7)

Good knowledge of an industry will also enable trainers to identify and exploit opportunities for learning in the workplace (Taylor, 2001). Townsend and Waterhouse (2008) advised selecting trainers on their ability to appreciate and then integrate an organisation's culture, values and performance impacts into all training interventions. Similarly, Wyse and Brewer, 2001) described trainers who are grounded in the culture of an enterprise as a hallmark of good practice.

Integrating educational services and theories into the workplace, however, can be challenging and will require trainers with new skills in terms of interpreting the requirements of work (Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008). Support to do this could be achieved through consultation with employers (as highlighted in section 7.5.2) and through appropriate professional development. Professional development is seen as particularly valuable for trainers based in smaller organisations, and where sustaining specialist expertise, such as numeracy or local enterprise, could be impractical. In these circumstances, collaboration between different employers and training providers may be beneficial, helping those with limited capacity to offer and develop work-based learning (Marr and Hagston, 2007; Taylor, 2001).

Box 7.6 is an example of how basic skills trainers assisting an American manufacturing company familiarised themselves with the company's working practices and, as a result, were able to deliver an effective training course.

Box 7.6 USA: knowing the industry

Basic skills instruction for ESL employees in a manufacturing company

The York County Literacy Council was contacted by a manufacturing company needing basic skill instruction for their English as a second language (ESL) employees who work as line operators and oversee the production of bottles.

The instructors familiarised themselves with the manufacturing processes on a tour of the factory. This helped them to gain a better idea of employees' tasks. They were made aware of the terminology employees would need to use in written communications.

Company supervisors were present during the basic skills training, which meant they could help their employees, and both sides got to know each other better. Employees enjoyed the class, found it helpful in relation to their job, and expressed a desire to continue taking workplace classes.

Success was attributed to focusing on what employees really needed to know, designing a curriculum which met the company's expectations, and incorporating practical writing tasks linked to the job.

Source: Hardy (2008)

7.5.6 Awareness of other resource issues

Having the capacity to cope with the demands of work-based learning can be a problem for employers, particularly in smaller firms. Running a programme produces knock-on effects for administration and human resources, whilst catering for large numbers of learners or providing appropriate learning facilities can also prove challenging (Skaliotis *et al*., 2007; Findlay *et al*., 2006). Paid time-off to undertake training has been identified as a key barrier to the uptake of training because employers feel unable to release staff from their normal work duties (UKCES, 2009; Findlay *et al*., 2006; Hillage *et al*., 2006; Taylor *et al*., 2008).

To minimise the burden on resources, the literature suggests paperwork for employers engaged with work-based learning be kept to a minimum; and for employers to be compensated financially (for example, as in the ETPs, see box 7.8). Perhaps most critically, employers need to be convinced that work-based learning is worthwhile and, as a consequence, feel able to accommodate the resulting demands.

7.5.7 Face-to-face and individual support for learners

Several studies emphasise the importance of improving an employee's chances of success by having individual and face-to-face support to facilitate their engagement and progress (O'Neill and Gish, 2001; Shaw, 2006; Skaliotis *et al*., 2007; Taylor, 2001; Taylor *et al*., 2007; Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008; Johnson *et al*., 2009). Such support could be provided by employers, generally, or undertaken by those appointed to specifically act as mentors, role models, workplace champions or buddies. The literature highlights the following ways in which these individuals can assist the learner by:

- promoting and raising awareness of work-based learning, alongside encouragement to take up these opportunities
- identifying learners' needs, leading to better targeting of basic skills training
- motivating and supporting learners once engaged in work-based learning.

A number of the sources (for example, Findlay, 2006; Finlay *et al*., 2007; Hudson, 2007; Shaw *et al*., 2006) document how ULRs improved the take-up of work-based training and both employers' and employees' perceptions of training. A case study is in Box 7.7.

Box 7.7 UK: the impact of ULRs in the workplace

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was created in 1998 to improve UK competitiveness through increased skills. The Scottish Union Learning Fund followed in 2000. Both initiatives aimed to enable trade unions in partnership with employers to develop workplace learning. Trade unions were intended to identify learner capacity, encourage take-up of learning, and ensure employers and employees realised the benefits of the learning.

To increase the capacity of trade unions to enhance workplace learning, a network of workplace ULRs was created. ULRs were recruited from within the workplace and worked with employers and colleagues to encourage employees to undertake training and, thus, increase the skills of the workforce (Hudson, 2007).

ULRs, being employees, were well placed to communicate with and understand the needs and concerns of their colleagues. They played a key role in the promotion of basic skills training to both employers and their staff.

- ULRs were considered critical to the success of four out of eight training programme initiatives (Finlay *et al*., 2007).
- Employees trusted the ULRs and found it easier to discuss any literacy or numeracy concerns that they had with them, rather than with senior staff. ULRs had received accredited IAG training (Finlay *et al*., 2007).
- The ULRs adopted a motivational role to try to encourage learners to participate in training (Finlay *et al*., 2007).
- When surveyed, 31 per cent of employees said that they had found out about learning opportunities through their ULR (Shaw *et al*., 2006).
- ULRs had been trained in the Skills for Life agenda and so felt more able to support learners (Shaw *et al*., 2006).

7.5.8 Accessible learning location and flexibility in timing

Environment and location are significant factors for improving the delivery of work-based learning, especially as they can make a difference to learner engagement (Hudson, 2007). Practicalities, such as whether training is offered on-site or off-site, and the distance required to travel, have been seen to influence enrolment and retention rates. Hudson and Lopez (2004) drew on previous research to support this point. NHS employees who enrolled on literacy and numeracy training outside of their working day and workplace, found it challenging to attend, especially as it was located some distance from their home or work. Subsequently, some withdrew from the course.

Evans and Waite's (2008) study noted a variety of reasons why an in-house delivery approach to adult basic skills can be of particular value to learners. These include:

- ease of accessibility
- convenience
- flexible timings
- familiar surroundings which help learners feel at ease.

However, where organisations and companies make use of their own learning centres, it can be important for them not to be associated with formal learning, in the school sense. In one of the case-study programmes that they explored, Evans and Waite (2008) found that 'the popularity of the learning centre rests partly on it not being too closely associated with formalised learning' because employees with negative perceptions of this type of learning are less likely to engage.

7.5.9 Learners' awareness of, and reflection on, their existing and new skills levels

When delivering work-based basic skills training, it is suggested that trainers need to raise learners' awareness of the skills which either they already hold or have acquired through their recent engagement in learning. Addressing basic skills in a vocational context improves the learning experience.

The Marr and Hagston study (2007) on workplace numeracy found that even when employees had learned new numeracy skills, there was a tendency for the less confident to regard them as merely part of the job or common sense. When skills are subsumed within larger, work-related tasks, learners may simply not detect the use or acquisition of numerical skills. The authors, therefore, advocated an *'exploration of tacit knowledge and its conversion into explicit knowledge'* (p. 9). This helps employees become more confident in their ability to use existing skills and develop new ones. Trainers conducting 'integrated training' should ensure employees are encouraged to identify their numeracy skills and reflect on their application in the workplace.

The value of feedback for learners, more generally, is discussed in other sources (Cranmer *et al.*, 2004.; Finlay *et al.*, 2007). Learners' awareness of their skills journey can be improved by keeping a learning log, employers can provide statements for inclusion, and it encourages learners to reflect on the tasks they undertake in the workplace and the relevance of basic skills to them (Taylor, 2001).

7.5.10 Opportunities for progression after learning

In a longitudinal study of work-based learning across 53 companies, Wolf *et al.* (2008) voiced concern that very few employers offered follow-up courses. These are vital for improving employees' relationships with the learning process. Opportunities for employees to progress in their learning must be considered, especially when 'non-traditional' learners, for example those with previous negative experiences of schooling, have successfully engaged in learning.

IAG services are cited as critical for the progression of learners (Johnson *et al.*, 2008). The timing of when this information is received can also be significant. To illustrate, evidence from Hillage *et al.*'s (2006) evaluation of the ETPs suggested that learners who received IAG services whilst engaged in work-based learning, are most likely to be satisfied with their current learning programme and progress to further learning. Hence, work-based learning programmes need to build in opportunities for discussing next steps in order to facilitate access to further learning.

The location of any follow-up learning may also be a deciding factor for employees considering further learning. For example, in some circumstances, employees have been found to only progress on to further learning if it is provided on-site or at their place of work (Finlay *et al.*, 2007).

7.5.11 Strategies for engaging employers in work-based learning

Paramount to the success of work-based learning is the commitment and active involvement of employers (see section 7.5.2). It is not surprising, therefore, that several sources suggest ways to improve employer engagement.

Firstly, the benefits of being involved need to be widely promoted (Skaliotis *et al.*, 2007; Wolf *et al.*, 2008). This can be achieved through award schemes publicly recognising the contributions of employers, and appointing business champions to communicate the benefits to companies. Increased performance and productivity amongst employees may be worth acknowledging. However, an evaluation of work-based learning found that managers are in fact motivated by a larger number of factors, with improved performance and productivity low on the list (Wolf *et al.*, 2008). Companies are more interested in offering courses because they improve employees' morale or general development. The authors, thus, contended:

It makes far more sense to see workplace provision as citizens' entitlements which may have multiple benefits, over a long period of time, than as an immediate productivity-enhancing intervention. Wolf *et al.* (2008, p. 3)

The partnership between trainers and companies was seen as central to achieving a long-term commitment to work-based learning (Taylor, 2001). Trainers should strive to form 'cooperative, honest, informative and supportive relationships' with employers, and, as part of this, continue to stress the advantages of their participation.

For employers, a very real consideration is the cost of training and whether they can afford to release staff from their normal working day. Provision of financial recompense for the time employees spend in training is seen to have a positive effect on take-up of training by employers, as shown in Box 7.8.

Box 7.8 UK: the benefits of employer wage compensation

Employer training pilots

The cost and time of providing training has previously been identified as a barrier to employers engaging in work-based learning. The ETP programme attempted to overcome this by offering payment to employers for employees taking time off. Free or subsidised learning was available to employees without a level 2 qualification – this included basic skills courses for those who needed them.

Pilot programmes were administered by the LSC in partnership with local Business Link offices and other agencies, through a network of local brokers, or learning advisers, and training providers. Employees were given time off to train and IAG services was also provided.

Wage compensation does seem to make a difference: a positive relationship was seen in the third year of the programme between levels of participation and wage compensation.

Employers reported that free, flexibly-provided and brokered training made the offer attractive, and they were particularly satisfied with the flexible way in which the training was delivered.

Source: Hillage et al. (2006)

7.5.12 Embedding basic skills in vocational or other training

Four sources discuss the merits of embedding basic skills within general training for, for example, IT or vocational related courses (Marr and Hagston, 2007; Evans and Waite, 2008; O'Neill and Gish, 2001; Levenson, 2001). Section 7.3.1 has already recognised the benefits of this in terms of making basic skills training relevant to the workplace. But it can also serve a second important function: engaging learners who may feel resistant or uncomfortable about addressing their basic skills needs. Disguising basic skills modules within other training can help to entice people into learning and improve their learning experience (Levenson, 2001).

Marr and Hagston compared what they termed an implicit or embedded approach with explicit styles of delivery (where basic skills are dealt with as discrete topics, with little or no links to employees' current jobs).

The advantage of an embedded model is that learners do not feel singled out for extra help, and, therefore, are less likely to feel stigmatised. Indeed, research cautions against publicly identifying employees in need of basic skills enhancement as this may damage their promotion prospects (O'Neill and Gish, 2001). Hence, by packaging basic skills within other courses, it may be possible to reach a wider audience of learners, without them being alienated or embarrassed. Box 7.9 shows how an Australian company dealt with this issue.

If an embedded delivery is adopted, it is important to make learners aware of their subsequent skills development, as they may not perceive the gains made when basic skills are hidden or disguised within other topics (described in section 7.5.9).

Box 7.9 Australia: addressing basic skills within a workplace context

Basic skills training in the construction and engineering industry

A project was undertaken between a construction and engineering company that had realised employees did not possess the communication skills to understand the need for workplace reform or to participate in the change process.

Language, literacy and numeracy training was seen as vital for ensuring workplace health and safety, developing employees' confidence and self esteem, and undertaking successful skills training. Literacy, language and numeracy tutorial sessions were valuable for improving job skills. However, the downside of this approach was the potential for those attending to be stigmatised.

It was found necessary to ensure employees understood that career progression was related to their participation in skills training. The skills training plan addressed workplace language, literacy and numeracy together with safety training, materials handling, specialist equipment and practical skills.

Employees were assessed in terms of how much their practical work skills, confidence and ability to communicate with colleagues and managers improved. They were assessed on spelling; expressing opinions and making suggestions; describing and explaining workplace processes, tools and equipment; understanding instructions; and completing forms.

Source: Hislop (1994)

7.5.13 Consideration of the language used when referring to adult basic skills

As already acknowledged, there can be a stigma attached to improving basic skills, and learners may harbour negative experiences of previous school-based learning (Johnson *et al*., 2009; Marr and Hagston, 2007). Hence, addressing basic skills within the workplace needs to be done sensitively, and this includes taking care with the language used.

It is suggested that terms such as literacy, workplace literacy, maths and English are avoided. Such labelling can alienate and discourage learners from participating in these types of courses (Jurmo, 2004; Cranmer *et al*., 2004). Townsend and Waterhouse (2008) found:

> [Research participants report that] *organisational intervention programs labelled as adult literacy programs were generally not supported by employees. They suggest that many employees still perceive that, if they commit to such programs, they will be exposed or stigmatised within the organisation.* (p. 30)

7.5.14 Use of front-end delivery

Some studies support the use of a front-end delivery model – delivering basic skills prior to, or at the beginning of, a learning programme. In particular, they recommend this for basic skills training within an apprenticeship framework (Cranmer *et al*., 2004; Finley *et al*., 2007).

The advantages of this approach is that apprentices, initially lacking in basic skills, are better able to cope with the demands of their study for qualifications such as technical certificates and NVQs, as shown in the case study in Box 7.10. Back-end delivery models, it is argued, offer learners 'no opportunity to develop skills which they might need for vocational study'. In addition, the opportunity to improve these skills at an early stage leads to early successes, which are in themselves a motivational factor for learners.

Box 7.10 UK: preparing apprentices for future learning

Four-day residential course for apprentices

This project involved a four-day residential course based at a Skills For Fun centre in a holiday resort. The programme included input from two further education colleges, an outward-bound organisation and the holiday resort staff. The apprentices were mainly school leavers with low GCSE grades, and the main objective was to develop their literacy, numeracy and wider key skills.

The course included the following activities:

- individual learning plans
- daily review sheets
- outward bound-led activities including teamwork, problem solving, and improving learning and performance
- classroom work including intensive communication training
- apprentices' presentations in which they were encouraged to talk about the programme, what they had learned and achieved, and how this could be relevant to employment.

The teachers recorded huge successes in developing learners' soft skills such as confidence and self-assurance. The apprentices said deploying their skills in real-life tasks made them feel more confident.

Employers gave positive feedback on the apprentices' increased confidence in the workplace.

Source: Cranmer et al. (2004)

7.5.15 Increase the status of basic skills within work-based learning

A few studies refer to how regulatory frameworks or changes in legislation had increased the demand for, and perceived value of, basic skills training within work-based courses. For example, the introduction of *licence to practise* in some industries, for example, health and social care, requires employees to achieve certain qualifications (which can include a basic skills element). The licence to practise has proved to be a powerful lever for encouraging learning in the workplace, as it raises the profile of training for both employers and employees (Finlay *et al.*, 2007).

Not having paid time off to undertake training has already been mentioned as a key barrier to learning. Following an evaluation of the Scottish Union Learning Fund, Findlay *et al.* (2006) concluded:

> *The one single change that might transform learning activity within workplaces is a statutory entitlement to time off for learning for all workers.* (p. 10)

7.5.16 Interweaving formal and informal learning

In the context of continuous learning, the literature recognises the importance of both formal training programmes and more informal learning in the workplace. The effectiveness of formal learning can be built on with informal learning, and interweaving the two is discussed as a way of improving basic skills teaching in the workplace.

In particular, Evans and Waite (2008) noted that participating in a formal training programme could act as a catalyst for more informal training activities to take place in the workplace: *'The interplay between formal and informal training was synergetic'* (p. 24). Box 7.11 is a case study showing how employees who participated in formal workplace courses developed greater awareness of the learning potential in their jobs, as well as their own abilities to learn. This placed them in a much stronger position to continue their skills development through informal training opportunities such as observing and learning from colleagues.

Box 7.11 UK: linking formal and informal learning

Basic skills training for local authority caretakers

Caretakers learned how to undertake their current roles through a combination of formal and informal learning. They attended a communications course involving literacy and ICT for three hours a week, over a five-week period.

The caretakers needed to be able to write reports on damage, accidents and vandalism. The course gave them an opportunity to brush up on or improve their literacy skills and take national tests at level 2. Newly appointed caretakers were assigned to a more experienced colleague who could advise them on key duties through an informal mentoring and coaching process.

The majority of learners emphasised the advantages of undertaking a course in the workplace. They also said the sessions allowed for a considerable degree of informal learning because of the range of support and exchanges of knowledge between caretakers.

Source: Evans and Waite (2008)

7.6

Conclusion

Adult education and training has increasingly been linked to the world of work. In the UK, the *Leitch review of skills* (Leitch Review of Skills, 2006) highlighted the need for the UK to raise achievement at all levels if it is to fulfil its ambitious agenda to become a world leader in skills by 2020. More than 70 per cent of the 2020 working-age population are already over the age of 16. As the global economy changes and working lives lengthen with population ageing, adults will increasingly need to update their skills in the workplace.

An important theme across the literature was the value of contextualising basic skills development so that it is firmly grounded in the workplace with reference to practical, real-life work examples. This has a number of benefits. Firstly, employers are able to recognise the relevance of basic skills training to the daily activities of their employees – essentially, employees are being assisted to undertake work-based tasks that require the application of basic skills such as writing incident reports and reading manuals. This relevance helps secure employers' support and commitment to work-based training, which is vital if employees are to be given access to further learning and progression opportunities.

For employees, basic skills training, which is authentic and explicitly related to work activities, tends to be better received and has positive repercussions for attendance and motivation. This is especially relevant for those who may not have experienced success in previous school-based or more formal learning environments. By concealing basic skills training within broader vocational training, employees are less likely to feel stigmatised and more open to taking part. In this way, the *cover* of work-related training can prove to be an effective tactic for engaging less confident learners.

Addressing basic skills training in the workplace has the power to generate a whole range of benefits beyond the primary purpose of skill enhancement. The sense of achievement and success experienced, perhaps felt for the first time by some participants, can provide the stimulus for engaging in further learning via either formal routes (for example, follow-up courses) or through more informal avenues (for example, discussions with colleagues or on-the-job mentoring or coaching). Equipped with enhanced skills, employees are more confident and better able to perform in the workplace with consequential spin-offs for career development and general employability.

A specific impact arising from work-based learning is the potential to improve employer and employee relations. An employer seen to be actively supportive of training boosts employees' job satisfaction, as well as the inclination of employees to remain with the company. Meanwhile, employees' willingness to improve and progress in this area is viewed favourably by the employer.

7.6

7.6.1 Key messages

Approaches to adult basic skills development through work-based learning

Five approaches to adult basic skills development in the workplace are highlighted in the literature.

- Embedded approaches: where basic skills training is included in a concealed form on the curriculum for another course.
- Use of learning centres: usually in the workplace and funded by employers for formalised learning.
- Use of trade union learning representatives: recruited from the workforce to promote learning and raise workforce skills.
- Informal, on-the-job training: more loosely structured and self-paced. Typically, this is delivered through observing more skilled colleagues, workplace discussion, and coaching and mentoring.
- Contextualised learning: training related to current job roles rather than more formal, standardised or unrelated learning programmes.

Impacts of approaches to work-based learning

Fifteen of the key sources in this review contain evidence regarding the impacts of approaches to work-based learning. The key outcomes are:

- increased motivation to undertake further learning
- increased job satisfaction, loyalty and retention
- the development of skills and improved performance at work
- enhanced confidence and self-esteem.

Greater engagement in learning programmes, career development, and improved employer and employee relations were also apparent.

Paths to making improvements

An exploration of the literature uncovered 16 factors that have been most commonly associated with the effective delivery of adult basic skills training in the workplace.

- Employees offered the chance to learn skills required by their employer. This contextualises the training and makes explicit links with the workplace, thus facilitating authentic skills development, for example learning to read health and safety manuals and recipes.
- A supportive learning culture and employer commitment to learning. Training must be underpinned by a *learning rich* work environment, with the employer actively encouraging and facilitating employee involvement in learning.
- Effectively identifying and responding to learners' needs. This includes assessing needs prior to training starting; catering for different skill levels; and creating a supportive and non-threatening learning environment for those with a negative experience of previous school-based education.

- Adequate funding for training. A lack of long-term funding can potentially hinder the development of training. Contributions from government, employers and even employees could secure the sustainability of work-based learning. To secure the support and investment of employers, it is vital that they can see the benefits of allocating their own resources.
- Trainers with specialist expertise and industry knowledge. In addition to possessing the appropriate basic skills knowledge, trainers also need an understanding of the industry context in order to tailor training to the needs of employees and employers.

Other effectiveness factors discussed in the literature include:

- awareness of other resource issues such as the capacity of smaller firms and minimising paperwork
- face-to-face and individual support for learners
- an accessible learning location and flexible timing
- learners' awareness of, and reflections on, their learning and new skill levels
- opportunities for progression after learning
- strategies for engaging employers in work-based learning
- embedding basic skills in vocational or other training
- considering the language used when referring to adult basic skills training
- using front-end delivery, providing access to basic skills training at the start of another programme such as an apprenticeship
- increasing the status of basic skills within work-based learning
- interweaving formal and informal learning.

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8

Conclusion: implications for policy and practice

George Bramley, Sam Shutt and Shona MacLeod

Changes in government yield changes in outlook, and changes in policy. This section briefly examines central developments in adult basic skills since the inception of the Conservative–Liberal coalition in early May 2010, and contemplates the potential impacts of a renewed ideology, combined with the prospect of unprecedented cuts in education funding. Average cuts of 25 per cent across all government departments (with the exception of health and overseas aid) add impetus to the hypothesis that training programmes unable to prove their economic worth will face significant withdrawals of state funding.

The respective Conservative and Liberal Democrat general election manifestos did not offer any substantial discussion of adult learning or adult basic skills, although there is a Conservative commitment to invest in apprenticeships and training places. This promise was reiterated by Vince Cable's, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, commitment in June 2010 to transfer £150m Train to Gain money to create 50,000 additional apprenticeships; along with the transfer of £10m to the Family Learning Impact Fund (which enhances current FLLN learning provision) (Cable, 2010).

8.1

Recent government publications and announcements

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has produced publications on Family Programmes Guidance funding for the year 2010/11 (SFA, 2010a), and Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL), Formal First Step and Family Learning funding for 2010/11. In both, there appears to be no major changes from the previous year.

On 22 July 2010, John Hayes, the Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, launched two consultations (BIS, 2010a; BIS, 2010b) on the future of further education and skills. These offer the clearest indication yet of government thinking regarding adult basic skills and adult learning, in general. One of these looked at the implementation of a simpler funding system, and produced at least two significant proposals concerning the delivery of adult basic skills training.

Firstly, the ASL budget had previously been broken down into four sections: FLLN; neighbourhood learning in deprived communities; wider family learning; and personal community development learning. These will now be merged, creating just one budget for ASL (BIS, 2010a).

In addition, there is the suggestion of a complete reform of SFA contracts, with the discussion of a 'minimum contract level' to significantly reduce the number of organisations engaging in direct contracts with the SFA. However, the ASL budget would be exempt from this, suggesting that, although the government wants SFA contracts to be larger in size and less in number, this change is not required for adult basic skills.

The other consultation launched by John Hayes looks at the future direction of skills policy and the government's approach to policy development (BIS, 2010b). The key theme, made clear at the beginning of the paper, is the need to determine exactly where limited funding is needed the most. There is a renewed emphasis on the importance of apprenticeships, and a continued stress on the value of higher-level skills, particularly level 4 apprenticeships.

One of the first mentions of adult basic skills is an acknowledgement that, at present, there is a legal right for people to receive 'free tuition for certain basic literacy and numeracy skills, a first full level 2 qualification and, for people under 25, a first full level 3 qualification' (BIS, 2010b, p.16). It goes on to express a concern that these entitlements restrict the freedom of colleges and discourage private investment, and reiterates the government's desire for public funds to be used in the most effective way possible.

Recent government announcements suggest that recognition and promotion of the social benefits of adult learning remain. The May 2010 publication of the journal *Adults Learning* included an extract of a speech by David Cameron (Cameron, 2010), in which the Prime Minister said adult learning was imperative for personal social development, to 'boost your belief in what you can do', and also to offer 'benefits for people's health and even for reducing crime'. In his foreword to the consultation on the future direction of skills policy, John Hayes remarked: 'We emphasise the economic and overlook the social and cultural benefits of learning at our peril' (BIS, 2010b, p.4). For those concerned about future state funding of adult basic skills, these words may be encouraging and indeed, notably, they reflect some of the key findings in this book.

8.2

Key messages for policy-makers

Given what is currently known about the coalition government's priorities regarding adult basic skills and lifelong learning, there are a number of specific suggestions for consideration, based on the evidence generated by these chapters. It is noteworthy that resourcing for family learning and the focus on apprenticeships have resonance with some of the findings and key messages in our reviews.

A number of this book's conclusions are relevant to, and can inform, the government's future policies and priorities for adult basic skills provision. Several key messages emerge from this series of reviews.

Responsibility for improving the teaching and learning of adult basic skills is the responsibility of not just one government department or agency. Rather, it is a shared responsibility for all departments, agencies and levels of government. However, in a crowded policy space, with competing priorities, there still needs to be a policy champion to ensure sufficient attention and resources are made available (this may be especially true for family learning).

Policies should emphasise the need for providers of adult basic skills to develop effective strategies for engaging, recruiting, retaining and progressing hard-to-reach groups, to ensure greater equity and increased participation in civil society. Local organisations, including the third sector, may be best placed to develop such provision in the context of a national framework, as they are already engaging with these groups. Funding arrangements need to be designed so that these organisations are able to access it.

It is important to ensure the sustainability of policy actions, in terms of core funding, and the capacity and capability of providers of adult basic skills training to deliver the most appropriate support for adults learning such skills. A significant proportion of activity has been on a short-term project basis and, whilst this provides a sense of urgency and promotes innovation, it is not sufficient for the scale of the UK's adult basic skills deficit. The recent consultation document published by BIS (2010a) sets out the case for a more simplified approach to funding basic skills development. One advantage of a single simplified funding stream is that it could potentially provide longer-term funding. Providers of adult basic skills would not have to meet competing priorities resulting in them drawing on multiple sources of funding, each with different objectives and targets.

John Hayes has recently highlighted the importance of adult learning in the workplace:

We must now look for innovative ways to incentivise employers to support training in the work place. There is also growing demand for adult and community learning. This is not only valuable in its own right, but also as an activity that can stimulate people to learn for vocational reasons as well as for enjoyment. (BIS, 2010c)

David Cameron’s commitment to adult learning was evident in an interview he gave in May 2010:

Given that my vision for this country is for all of us to get involved and play our part in national renewal, I believe adult learning and the way it inspires people is crucially important. (Cameron , 2010)

Policies need to promote multi-agency working to provide a more seamless offer for the end user, whether that is an adult needing training or an employer needing trained employees. Enabling a more holistic package to be put together encourages cross-fertilisation of ideas and, where necessary, new and more effective ways of working.

Employers need to participate in the development of relevant policies so that they are more likely to encourage adult basic skills training. They have a good understanding of the changing nature of basic skills required in the competitive global economy, and are often key to providing opportunities for the delivery of training. The creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships may provide an opportunity, in England, for engaging and drawing on employers’ expertise.

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A1 Appendix 1: On policy

For details of any references cited in this appendix, please refer to the lists of references for the relevant chapter.

A1.1. Policies that support the development of basic skills

The evidence suggests that, overall, adult basic skills policies and programmes are supporting adults' gains in literacy and numeracy, as well as their personal lives and employability skills (and, by implication, potential life and economic chances). On the impact of the *Skills for life* strategy (DfEE, 2001), Warner and Vorhaus (2008, p. 32) concluded:

> *The fact that there were very few differences between the different groups suggests that provision was working equally well for many different groups of learners and hardly any were being left behind.*

On the impact of the ALN strategy in Scotland, Tett *et al.* (2006) suggested the strategy was helping to close the gap between the disadvantaged and advantaged – trainers' perceptions were positive, targets were being met in terms of the number and range of learners participating in ALN, funding and resources were in place, the initial experiences of learners were positive, and the local and national profile of ALN was high.

The Essential skills for living strategy (2002) in Northern Ireland sets out a vision to:

> *[…] provide opportunities for adults to update their essential skills to assist them in improving their overall quality of life, personal development and their employment opportunities and by so doing to promote greater economic development, social inclusion and cohesion.* (p. 2)

Frontline Consultants' (2006) evaluation of the strategy concluded that the strategy had got off to a strong start in Northern Ireland. It was on track to achieve targets, learners were positive about the training, and there were early indicators of positive impacts and the potential for longer-term impacts.

However, the literature rarely goes further to say what kind of employment learners go on to (and whether they remain in it), or whether such impacts for learners really do get them out of the poverty trap. The literature rarely considers fully the multiple difficulties faced by these adults and, indeed, whether there are even *harder-to-reach* groups not engaged in such programmes, and who is supporting them.

A1.1.1. Key messages for policy-makers

Policies recognising social capital impacts as well as human capital impacts are important

The evidence shows that interventions, which include a focus on social capital such as helping adults to develop social networks, can drive human capital impacts such as increases in skills and knowledge. At present, much adult basic skills policy in the UK and internationally is driven by human capital requirements. To borrow Balatti *et al.*'s (2006) terminology, a 'reframing' of policy, assessment and targets around adult basic skills is required to incorporate the fields of both social and human capital.

Policies need developing to ensure that the most hard-to-reach groups are reached and served by adult basic skills training

Not all the programmes and projects investigated in the literature and examined by this review reached their intended target groups. In particular, ICT programmes do not always attract the most acutely digitally disadvantaged; and American welfare-to-work programmes are not as successful with adults with very low levels of basic skills compared with those with some level of qualification.

Reasons suggested are that those with very low qualifications are likely to have other poor basic skills, and are not as ready for work as those with slightly higher basic skills. For example, there may be a range of attitudinal and behavioural issues related to having no qualifications, which act as barriers to individuals' initial engagement, and are also less attractive to employers.

In the UK, not all JSA claimants identified as being in need of basic skills support took up the offer of training. Ensuring that all those who need support do get it requires giving attention to marketing, recruitment (involving local community and voluntary organisations), and policies that cover hard-to-reach target groups.

Policies, and evaluations of policies, need to look at the interrelationship of impacts between individuals, employers and the economy to better understand how to maximise their synergy

Very few of the sources reviewed explore how the impacts on individuals, employers and the economy are interlinked. The implicit assumption is that impacts for individuals will ultimately make a difference in the workplace, to employers and to the economy (in terms of output, productivity and finance). Policies need to set out their vision even more clearly for how the economy, specifically, will benefit from adult basic skills improvements in terms of, for example, at what level, by how much, in which industries and with what support.

Provision should be continuous and sustainable so that participants can continue to make progress with their basic skills. Policies need to reflect this

If individuals are to retain, and then build on, the gains they have made in their basic skills, the evidence suggests they need opportunities to utilise such skills. Not all will find an opportunity to do this in their workplace or at home. Therefore, it is important to ensure there are clear progression routes on to further courses that individuals can take to sustain and build on their learning.

Policies encouraging adults with low levels of basic skills to engage in the wider lifelong learning agenda might prove fruitful

Much of the evidence highlights adults' engagement and even re-engagement with learning through basic skills interventions. However, engagement in and opportunities for their increased participation in the lifelong learning agenda were not uncovered by this review.

Even so, the review has revealed that many adults developed a renewed enthusiasm for learning, considerable confidence, and an enjoyment of the social aspects of learning. Tapping into this pool of renewed engagement through creating wider learning opportunities that *fit* the culture and needs of the client group may prove fruitful. Examples of such opportunities are creative theatre projects in prisons and ICT learning for ESOL women.

A1.2 Policies that support the development of adults' financial capability

This section presents the evidence of policies supporting the development of adults' financial capability. It begins with a review of UK policy developments, both those that apply to the whole of the UK and those implemented by the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This is followed by a review of international policies that directly present, or incorporate, priorities designed to develop adults' financial capability. The section concludes with a consideration of the evidence related to the impacts of such policies, where available.

A1.2.1. UK policy

There is substantial evidence to indicate that policies to support adults' financial capability are well developed in the UK. The milestone UK policies (since 1999) are described along with, where available, the rationale and objectives or priorities of such policies. The literature identifies four main types of relevant policies covering:

- policies related to financial capability
- policies related to financial inclusion or exclusion
- other related policy developments
- policies within the devolved administrations in the UK.

These groups of policies are discussed in chronological order, covering milestone policy announcements and key funding initiatives relevant to the development of adults' financial capability skills.

Policies related to financial capability

Policy to support the development of financial capability in its widest sense (that is, for the whole population) is well established and advanced in the UK. According to a recent study, the UK is recognised as one of a few countries with an advanced strategic and policy response to the development of financial capability (Godfrey, 2009).

In the early part of the 21st century, there were a number of UK policy developments related to the promotion of financial inclusion and in support of raising levels of financial capability in the UK population. The clearest indication of the emergence of financial capability as a policy priority came in 2003 when the FSA launched its first publications aimed at improving financial capability. Since then, although the FSA has taken the lead on implementing the UK government's policies supporting financial capability, there have also been a number of policy statements and documents issued by Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) (Mitton, 2008; HMT and FSA, 2008; European Commission, 2007).

These publications are discussed in terms of their rationale and priorities.

Towards a national strategy for financial capability in the UK (FSA, 2003) built on the FSA's statutory duty to promote public understanding of the financial system. This policy document set out a framework to facilitate the development of a national strategy for financial capability to provide consumers with 'the education, information and generic advice needed to make their financial decisions with confidence.' (FSA, 2003, p. 3)

The priority was to develop a national strategy for financial capability and set up a financial capability steering group to manage its development and implementation.

Building financial capability in the UK (FSA, 2004) provided an update on the progress of the development of a national strategy for financial capability, and further details on such a strategy's possible content, setting out a vision, aims and key priorities as developed by the Financial Capability Steering Group.

Seven priority areas were identified including schools, young adults, work, families, retirement, borrowing and advice. Within each of these priority areas, projects were to be led by a working group which would develop baseline measures for measuring progress, identify and evaluate potential pilot activity as well as devise and implement new initiatives, specifically taking account of the needs of financially excluded individuals.

Financial capability in the UK: delivering change (FSA, 2006) set out a road-map for achieving improvements in the levels of financial capability in the UK, on the basis of the in-depth work relating to what had effectively improved financial capability since 2003. Published simultaneously with the results of a baseline survey of financial capability, this national strategy set out a five-year programme to improve financial capability in the UK, aiming to reach 10 million people in the UK by 2011.

The priority was to deliver financial education, information and advice in a range of different ways to both specific groups and the wider population of consumers in the UK. A programme of seven key priorities (revised since the 2004 policy and incorporating long- and short-term steps) focused on work in schools, in the workplace, with young adults, with new parents, in consumer communications, and developing Money Advice and online tools.

Financial capability: the government's long-term approach (HMT, 2007) stated the government's long-term aspiration for financial capability as 'all adults in the UK to have access to high-quality financial advice to help them make better decisions about their money' (Mitton, 2008, p. 14).

The aim was to ensure all UK adults have access to high-quality generic financial advice to help them engage with their financial affairs and make effective decisions about their money; all children and young people have access to a planned and coherent programme of personal finance education, so that they leave school with the skills and confidence to manage their money well. A range of government programmes was focused on improving financial capability, particularly to help those who are most vulnerable to the consequences of poor financial decisions.

Helping you make the most of your money: a joint action plan for financial capability (HMT and FSA, 2008) was partly in response to recommendations from the Thoresen Review of Generic Financial Advice (see section A1.2.2). This joint publication from the FSA and HMT set out a range of measures which offered targeted support on managing finances, reflecting that people need the most support at key points in their lives.

The plan covered a wide range of priority actions designed to improve or add to the ways in which the UK population could be supported to improve financial capability. There were a number of key actions of relevance to the development of adults' financial capability.

- Development of a range of measures to provide education and support, targeted to reach people at transition points in their lives. In particular, the FSA's workplace-based financial capability programme, Making the Most of Your Money, was identified for further promotion and expansion with the aim of reaching 4 million employees by 2011.
- Development of a one-stop-shop for impartial information and support on money matters, based on the FSA's *Moneymadeclear* website and consumer helpline.
- Funding of £12 million for a Money Guidance Pathfinder (a pilot to test different models for a generic financial advice service), which began in early 2009.

A1.2.2. Policies related to financial inclusion

Two key literature sources identify a group of policies distinct from but closely related to financial capability insofar as their main focus was to address the effects of social exclusion experienced as a result of low levels of financial capability (Rocket Science Ltd, 2008; Mitton, 2008). This type of policy is primarily aimed at promoting financial inclusion and as such concentrates on widening access to financial products and services. Their relevance to financial capability stems from their increased focus on facilitating access to money advice services, which is recognised as key to addressing financial exclusion and capability (Rocket Science Ltd, 2008).

There have been a number of key policy developments in relation to financial inclusion.

Policy Action Teams (PATs) were brought together by the Social Exclusion Unit, as part of the UK's Cabinet Office in 1997. Following the findings of another PAT report on deprivation, a group of policy-makers and researchers was brought together to report on policy recommendations for widening access to financial services within deprived communities. The resulting report, *Access to financial services, report of Policy Action Team 14* (HMT, 1999), included development of credit unions; availability of insurance services; and the role of retail banks, post offices and other organisations delivering financial services in deprived neighbourhoods.

Forty policy recommendations on widening access to financial services were presented in this report. In relation to developing adults' financial capability it specifically highlighted the need for money advice and access to credit, recommending the creation of basic bank accounts.

Promoting financial inclusion (HMT, 2004) was the government's first financial inclusion policy as a result of its commitment to tackling financial exclusion, included in the Spending Review of 2004. The policy focused on prioritising access to banking, affordable credit and face-to-face money advice and set up the Financial Inclusion Taskforce to monitor overall progress against the objectives set for these three areas. It also created the £120 million Financial Inclusion Fund for 2005-08, to support initiatives to address financial exclusion.

Financial inclusion: the way forward (HMT, 2007) refreshed the government's commitment to addressing continued financial exclusion and reiterated the value of financial capability skills to improved life outcomes in three key goals, one of which stated: 'Everyone should have the information, support and confidence they need to prevent avoidable financial difficulty, and to know where to turn if they do find themselves in financial distress.' (p.7).

The role of the Financial Inclusion Taskforce was extended to 2011, along with an extra allocation of £130 million to the Financial Inclusion Fund, with a commitment to 'continue to assess the emerging evidence carefully, so that, in the following spending period from 2011 to 2014, financial inclusion initiatives could be mainstreamed into core departmental activities most effectively' (Mitton, 2008, pp. 13–14).

Thoresen review of generic financial advice (HMT, 2008) was a direct result of the government's published long-term approach to improving financial capability. The Thoresen Review had been set up in January 2007 to consider a range of models for a national provision of generic financial advice. It recommended that a national money guidance service be established and funded jointly by the government and the financial services industry.

Related policy developments

A few sources identify a number of wider UK policy developments which include aspects related to the improvement of financial capability or financial inclusion (Mitton, 2008; HMT and FSA, 2008). Some of these other policies have been developed in response to the financial capability and inclusion policies described, reflecting their emphasis on cross-government working and the recognition of the need to involve a wide range of government departments and other partners working in linked policy fields.

As a result of the variety of policy priorities pursued by these other government departments, relevant developments are observed in a variety of initiatives and programmes, and generally manifest themselves in four ways, as follows.

Awareness-raising marketing and communications campaigns have been implemented. For example, the DWP delivered the Now Let's Talk Money campaign, which aimed to raise awareness of the availability of financial services amongst people on low incomes, such as free face-to-face money advice and affordable credit. Additionally, the Office of Fair Trading has implemented relevant consumer education campaigns including one intended to help consumers spend wisely at Christmas (Mitton, 2008).

Funding has been available for financial literacy and education programmes. Since 2001, over £3 million has been provided for financial literacy and capability learning, as a result of the *Skills for life* strategy (DfEE, 2001) (Mitton, 2008; HMT and FSA, 2008). Through its Pensions Education Fund, the DWP supported the delivery of financial and pension awareness in the workplace including financial education projects for employees and the self-employed. Initial funding was extended to March 2009 (HMT and FSA, 2008).

Financial capability has been integrated into existing learning programmes. As a result of the Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Taskforce's cross-government plan to improve the life chances of families at risk, financial capability content was planned to be integrated within a wide range of learning programmes for families at risk, as overseen by the DCSF and the DIUS (HMT and FSA, 2008).

There has been funding to increase the delivery of money advice and debt services. The capacity of face-to-face money advice services has been increased using £45 million from the Financial Inclusion Fund, overseen by the DTI. This was used to increase the number of trained advisers as well as the level of funding for the National Debtline telephone advice service and third-sector providers of debt advice (Mitton, 2008). Further, in December 2007, HMT launched a £5 million initiative to deliver a prison-focused money advice outreach service in England and Wales, partly funded through the Ministry of Justice (Mitton, 2008).

A1.2.3. Policies in devolved administrations within the UK

As highlighted by Mitton's review (2008), the devolved administrations in the UK have varied control over certain aspects of policy development. This can affect the extent to which the administrations can directly change or introduce new policies. For example:

Although outreach in prisons is a devolved matter, legislative change to the framework for credit unions is not a devolved function, so the Scottish Government has control only over its funding. (Mitton, 2008, p.16)

Notwithstanding these constraints, the devolved administrations have taken steps to support adults' financial capability through their policies, focusing predominantly on issues related to financial inclusion. The extent to which these policies promote improvements to financial capability is most often within the context of reducing the disadvantage experienced by different social groups as a result of financial matters.

In Wales, *Taking everyone into account: a financial inclusion strategy for Wales* was launched in July 2009, following the *Review of over-indebtedness* in 2005 (Mitton, 2008). As the first strategy, its emphasis on a multi-agency response to financial inclusion includes addressing financial capability (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009).

In Scotland, ten specific targets to tackle social exclusion (known as the Closing the Opportunity Gap objectives) were launched in December 2004, followed by the publication of the Scottish Executive's first *Financial inclusion action plan*, in January 2005 (Scottish Executive, 2005). Financial capability was one of three strands of activity set out in the action plan, underpinned by £10.6 million funding targeted at 11 local authorities, from the Financial Inclusion Fund 2006/07-2007/08. In addition to Scottish-based activity funded through the UK's Financial Inclusion Fund (announced in the UK-wide policy, *Promoting financial inclusion* (HMT 2004)) the Fairer Scotland Fund was set up to fund financial inclusion activity across all local authorities in the UK, from 2008-09.

In Northern Ireland, financial exclusion was identified as a priority in its consultation document *New targeting social need (New TSN) – the way forward* (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2004) aimed at developing a policy to tackle poverty and social exclusion. However, in the final strategy, *Lifetime opportunities: Government's anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy for Northern Ireland* (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2006), the focus on financial exclusion was softened, with a greater emphasis on financial support for those living in, or at risk of, poverty.

A1.2.4. International policies

Internationally, the evidence across all the reviewed literature is less comprehensive in relation to policies which support financial capability. However, there are three sources that make reference to developments in a number of countries (Brennan *et al*., 2004; European Commission, 2007; and Koenig, 2007). A number of additional sources have been identified both through extended website searches and the harvesting of references within these three key sources.

In the international context, policies which support adults' financial capability vary in terms of the degree to which they have been developed and implemented. It may be useful to describe the range of international policies in relation to five stages of a policy cycle as outlined by Fisher *et al.* (2006, p.43): agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation and evaluation.

Policies which have gone through all five stages of the policy cycle

Countries with developed economies are generally identified as the leaders in the field of financial education, supported by national initiatives and policies:

The US, UK and Australia are usually hailed as best practice providers of financial education globally where a large variety of financial education initiatives are carried out by a number of commercial banks and industry associations complemented by national initiatives aimed at coordinating and strengthening the various initiatives. Godfrey (2009, p. 10)

Correspondingly, most of the policies which could be regarded as having gone through all five stages of the policy cycle, are found in countries with an advanced financial sector, such as the USA and Australia.

In the USA, the Financial Literacy and Education Commission was set up in 2003 to improve ‘the financial literacy and education of persons in the United States through development of a national strategy to promote financial literacy and education’ (US Department of the Treasury, 2006, p. vi).

The American national strategy for financial literacy *Taking ownership of the future: the national strategy for financial literacy* (US Department of the Treasury, 2006) subsequently published in 2006, centred on four thematic priority areas of:

- raising public awareness of resources
- developing targeted educational materials and dissemination strategies
- partnerships between the public and private sectors
- developing the evidence base on successful financial education approaches.

Of the 26 specific priorities within the strategy, those that particularly relate to improving adults’ financial capability focus on specific financial topics such as taxpayer rights, consumer protection or saving for retirement.

Australia set up the Consumer and Financial Literacy Taskforce in February 2004 to develop its first national strategy for consumer and financial literacy. Among the taskforce’s preliminary recommendations was setting up a strategic, national financial literacy agency (the Financial Literacy Foundation) and creating an educational website (Understanding Money). The Financial Literacy Foundation was set up in 2005 with a number of responsibilities, including one to:

[…] build the capacity of all Australians to better understand and manage financial risk and take advantage of increased competition and choice in Australia’s finance sector. Australian Government Consumer and Financial Literacy Taskforce (2010)

In a move aimed at strengthening the government’s response to financial literacy the responsibilities of the foundation were then transferred to a regulatory body, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, in 2008.

Policies in the early stages of the policy cycle

There is a little evidence of policies or programmes to support adults’ financial capability in developing countries, and most can be considered to be in the early stages of the policy cycle.

A report by the UK’s DFID said financial education is increasingly a priority for ‘middle-income’ countries, such as Hungary, Poland, Russia and the Czech Republic although ‘little systematic information is available’ (Godfrey, 2009, p. 15). This study also notes that some Caribbean countries have initiated policy initiatives related to financial literacy. For example, Trinidad has recently launched a financial literacy programme with some support via the Commonwealth Secretariat.

A few countries in Africa have developed policies or programmes to support financial capability, mostly related to the delivery of financial education. The evidence indicates that South Africa is the most advanced in this respect and ‘by far the most advanced in Africa compared to its neighbouring countries’ (p.15).

Where evidence is available for other African countries, it indicates that policies are mainly in the early stages of development, concentrating on the agenda-setting and policy formulation aspects of their policies.

Detailed evidence is available for Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

- Uganda is considered the next most active country after South Africa in developing its financial literacy agenda. Examples of activity, mostly led by NGOs and industry bodies, include two projects funded by DFID; one by the association of Micro Finance Institutions to extend the outreach of training modules adapted from resources developed by MicroFinance Opportunities; and the other through Straight Talk and the Communication for Development Foundation to deliver a mass media radio campaign to a target audience of seven million Ugandans.
- In Kenya, a financial education partnership was established in 2009 to realise: *[…] a vision for a National Strategy for Financial Education [which] seeks to lay the foundation for a comprehensive programme that: helps consumers make better and informed financial decisions; fosters effective use of financial services thereby promoting a thriving financial services sector; and advances consumer protection through a well articulated legislative agenda.* Financial Education Partnership for Kenya (2009, p. 2).
- As part of its second generation of reforms to its financial sector, Tanzania is developing a financial literacy strategy which will respond to the lack of an ‘inclusive approach to financial education in the country [and the previous] fragmented and short lived efforts, mainly aimed at marketing products’ (Macha, 2009).

A1.2.5. Effectiveness of policies

There is very little direct evidence regarding the impacts and effectiveness of policies supporting adults’ financial capability. The evidence which is available stems mainly from countries with a well developed policy agenda, namely the UK, the USA and Australia.

However, relevant evidence on the effectiveness of policies in these countries is also limited, with the best example being a US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to Congress, in 2006, which assessed the Financial Literacy and Education Commission’s progress in relation to:

- developing a national strategy
- developing a website and hotline
- coordinating federal efforts and promoting partnerships among the federal, state, local, non-profit and private sectors (Jones, 2006).

The GAO assessment found that overall more progress was required to ensure an effective national strategy (Jones, 2006). More specifically, it made four recommendations regarding the commission's effectiveness:

- Incorporate additional elements into the national strategy to help measure results and ensure accountability.
- Conduct usability tests of, and measure customer satisfaction with, its website.
- Independently review for duplication and evaluate the effectiveness of federal activities.
- Expand upon current efforts to cultivate sustainable partnerships with non-profit and private entities.

In the UK, there is some indirect evidence of the success of policies that support financial capability through the introduction of a national survey, albeit that it relates to a period prior to the launch of the UK's first full national strategy. This survey was introduced as a systematic measurement of any improvements in the level of the population's financial capability.

Specifically, in 2006, a baseline profile of levels of financial capability in the UK was published simultaneously with the *Financial capability in the UK: delivering change* (FSA, 2006). This baseline profile made a number of revelations.

- Many people were failing to plan ahead adequately for retirement or for an unexpected expense or drop in income.
- Although only a small proportion of the population were experiencing problems with debt, they were often very severely affected.
- People were not taking adequate steps to choose products to meet their needs.
- The under-40s were less capable, on average, than their elders.

Progress towards improving levels of financial capability will be monitored in the results of follow-up surveys, due in 2010 and subsequently at four to five year intervals. Furthermore, additional evidence of levels of financial capability will be available through the UK's Wealth and Assets Survey which will enable comparisons of people's attitudes towards money and their actual behaviour (HMT and FSA, 2008).

A1.3 Policies that support the development of employability skills

This section looks at:

- the policy context for employability skills development
- the underpinning rationales for programmes that have an employability component
- policy innovation and capacity building around delivering employability skills training
- the emergence of strategic influencing bodies who are tasked to influence government policies and training providers.

The sources reviewed identify a range of policies that are relevant to the development of employability skills in a small number of countries. The most robust sources, in terms of evaluating policy initiatives, are from the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

Given that employability is often a sub-theme of entry-to-employment policy, the searches did not elicit many international policies that specifically focused on the development of employability skills. Rather, relevant provision tended to be embedded in employment programmes. Australia is notable in terms of having documented its development of policies, their evaluation, and the conceptualisation of employability. Information on the evaluation of relevant policies can be accessed easily through the Australian government website, including a series of robust evaluations and research reports. Singapore and India might be said to have the most explicit policies and programmes on employability in that they have specifically designed programmes to raise employability skills. In contrast, employability is embedded as an important subtheme in other countries' employment and skills policies and programmes.

A1.3.1. The policy context for developing employability skills

The development of employability skills is embedded in a range of different policies and initiatives in the countries looked at. Employability is a crosscutting policy theme that touches on the objectives of a range of government departments and agencies. This means that, from an international perspective, responsibility for developing employability skills can be configured in a number of different ways in terms of which government departments lead on policy development and delivery, and the extent to which this is centralised or devolved to a local administrative level. In some countries, there are semi-autonomous organisations with multiple stakeholders that have a strategic influencing role on skills development, including the development of employability skills. Such organisations include the CLBC and the UKCES.

There has been a number of cross-government strategies within the UK such as *Skills for life* (DfEE, 2001), *21st century skills* (DfES, 2003) and *In work better off: next steps to employment* (DWP, 2007). *Skills for life* aimed to raise the quality and provision of training for adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy. It sets challenging targets for adult learners to achieve national qualifications in literacy and numeracy (Grief *et al.*, 2007). In contrast, *21st century skills* was more concerned with identifying skills needed to compete in a globally competitive knowledge economy. *In work better off: next steps to employment* was mainly in response to a core group of individuals that were struggling to enter employment in a period of full employment. It is likely that resources will continue to be directed at this group, given the potentially high level of employability impacts from assisting individuals who are least likely to develop employability skills without government funded support.

Working with these more disadvantaged individuals requires a step change in the teaching of employability skills and the quality of learning opportunities afforded to them.

Overall, in England, employability policy does not fall under the domain of any one government department or agency. Responsibility for developing employability amongst working-age adults is shared across a number of departments, as it contributes to meeting their respective policy agendas. In the previous UK Labour administration the DWP focused on increasing the number of people in work; the LSC, DfES, and DIUS focused on increasing the supply of skills; and the DTI on the needs of employers. The creation of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has created the potential for a joined-up approach to developing employability skills from the perspective of employer organisations such as the CBI, Institute of Directors and Federation of Small Businesses. BIS has responsibility for the regional development agencies, which also have responsibilities for skills development within their regions until 2012, when new arrangements will be in place.

The relevant policies that aim to develop employability in the UK have been shaped by *A fresh start* (Working Group on Post-School Basic Skills, 1999), the Social Exclusion Unit Policy Action Team reports (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), *Skills for life* (DfEE, 2001) and *Leitch review of skills* (Leitch, 2006). These reports have identified the need to raise the basic skills associated with employability, such as literacy and numeracy (Working Group on Post-School Basic Skills, 1999); tackle social exclusion by enabling disadvantaged groups and specific locations to overcome barriers to entry to employment (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999); and meet the challenges of the global economy (for example, *Leitch review of skills*, 2006). The seminal work of Hillage and Pollard (1998) shaped thinking in terms of what constituted employability and how it might be developed.

Policies that were identified and examined in the literature reviewed for this report included:

- *Skills for life* (DfEE, 2001) and activities emerging out of that strategy (UK)
- Closing the Opportunity Gap (Scotland)
- Local initiatives funded by the European Social Fund Global Grants
- Working Neighbourhoods (UK)
- Employment Zones (UK)
- Pathways to Work (UK)
- New Zealand's Jobs Jolt and Working Families programmes
- Work-focused services provided by children's centres
- New Deal (UK)
- Sure Start local programmes (UK)
- Train to Gain (UK)
- Australians Working Together
- Work-based learning programmes (in a number of countries including the UK and the USA).

Significantly, employability has become a policy theme of transnational bodies, which have significant influence on the governments that sponsor them. Box A1.1 briefly outlines some activity being undertaken by the International Labour Office, European Commission and the OEC.

Box A1.1 International bodies concerned with employability skills development

Transnational bodies, either working directly with governments or providing advice and support to government agencies designing policies, have had some influence on provision for the development of employability skills. These skills are an area of considerable interest to the UN's International Labour Office, which is operating programmes in Asia and the Pacific rim. It was a subtext to the OECD's *Jobs strategy* (OECD, 1996) and will be in the OECD's *Innovation strategy* (OECD, 2010). The latter will encourage governments to invest in higher-level employability skills, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship so that their workforces can adapt and thrive in the global knowledge economy.

Within the European Union there has been funding of innovative local projects that develop employability through the European Social Fund. The European Commission encourages the sharing of what member states consider to be best practice, though it should be noted that programmes can be very country-specific and evaluation practices vary amongst member states.

A1.3.2 Policy rationales for developing programmes for employability

The policy rationales for developing employability are very similar to those described for work-based learning policies in Chapter 7. Programmes and policies identified in Chapter 4 on employability skills include one or more of a number of rationales:

- Raise competitiveness within the global economy, including improving productivity and supply of workers.
- Increase the skills of the working-age population by:
  - increasing literacy and numeracy levels
  - responding to the evolving set of skills that individuals need to maintain their employability as a result of more competitive economies
  - developing lifelong learning and human capital.
- Promote equity (improving life chances) by:
  - reducing social exclusion and economic inactivity
  - overcoming barriers to employment
  - reducing unemployment and under-employment (where an individual is employed in a position not commensurate with their abilities or academic attainment).
- Reform welfare by:
  - taking a work-first approach in the provision of welfare support, as individuals benefit from being in work.
- Respond better to the needs of employers and learners by:
  - improving the transition into employment from education (this review focused on adults who have completed compulsory education)
  - equipping graduates with wider employability skills in addition to technical knowledge
  - building capacity to develop and deliver new approaches to, and apply best practice in, teaching employability.

A1.3.2. Policy innovation and capacity building

The period 1997 to 2007 can be described as a period of policy innovation and building capacity to deliver the support required by individuals who need to develop their employability skills. During this period, there were a number of pilots and pathfinders developing the employability skills of working-age adults. In the UK, these included:

- area-based initiatives such as Employment Zones and Working Neighbourhoods
- initiatives aimed at specific groups such as employability courses offered through children's centres and Sure Start centres for parents
- specific bespoke initiatives developed and delivered by local organisations for specific groups (for example, European Social Fund Global Grants and the DTI's Phoenix Development Fund).

Similarly, there were policy innovations in Canada, New Zealand and Australia during this period. Within Europe, the European Social Fund has funded local initiatives within European Commission Objective1[1] areas, and is committed to sharing practice emerging from these initiatives.

From 2007, as evidenced in Australia and the UK, there has been a shift from piloting new approaches to increased streamlining of provision and a single-entry route to support for potential learners who would otherwise have to navigate a complex array of potential providers. A significant theme in the reviewed literature is the development of inter-agency working allowing for a more seamless provision of training and support, and enabling individuals to gain employability skills and enter employment. This results in the development of an integrated employment and skills service that places all provision within one service so that individuals receive a seamless offer.

A1.3.3. Strategic influencing and delivery bodies

The review identified that some countries have established strategic bodies influencing government policies with a strong interest in employability. Canada has the CLBC, an independent organisation that brings together employers and those representing the needs of employees and the unemployed. It is tasked to develop a consensus on the best approach for ensuring the Canadian workforce has the skills to be competitive in the global economy, including employability skills. Established in 1984, it provides policy advice and is in some ways similar to the UKCES. It is the lead organisation for work and learning knowledge centres. These centres have three objectives related to developing employability skills in Canada:

The first is to improve the quantity and quality of work-related learning and training. The second is to improve access to work-related learning for particular groups, such as aboriginals [sic], immigrants, and persons with disabilities. The third objective is to improve school-to-work and work-to-school transitions. House of Commons Canada (2006, p. 1)

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[1] Objective 1 areas are geographical areas within Europe whose gross domestic product is less than 75 per cent of the European Community average and, therefore, eligible for assistance under European Community structural funds. These areas have lower skills levels and higher levels of unemployment.

A1.3.4. Key messages for policy-makers

Drawing on local resources, including those provided by the third sector, is particularly helpful for developing employability skills, and this is especially the case for hard-to-reach and more disadvantaged groups.

Relatively small-scale funding through the European Social Fund Global Grant programme has been particularly effective in mobilising the third sector to provide learning opportunities that progress the most disadvantaged people towards the labour market. The sector is brokering wrap-around support that can overcome barriers to employment, such as a lack of childcare (Jones *et al.*, 2008).

Third sector organisations are already engaging with target groups under-represented in employment and therefore are well placed to develop effective strategies for recruiting and engaging individuals in learning activities by adapting best practices and being innovative.

The UK government's policy is that there should be a sustained focus on the steady progression of individuals economically excluded from society towards the labour market. However, there are barriers preventing this group from taking up opportunities to develop employability skills through workplace programmes or volunteering. Third sector organisations may be well placed to provide these opportunities and remove the barriers.

A multi-agency or partnership approach is important, particularly for those with the most barriers to overcome

A number of sources identify partnerships between agencies as a key element of successful practice. UKCES (2009a and b) and Ofsted (2009) suggested that employer involvement is also key. Meadows and Garbers (2004) noted the need for partner agencies to have knowledge of one another, a collaborative approach, and a sense of shared practice.

McQuaid *et al.* (2007) reviewed agencies working together on employability issues. They identified best practice and found there should be strong strategic leadership and vision; staff equipped with the skills and resources for working in partnership; and a common commitment to providing a seamless service, one-stop-shop or no-wrong-doors approach.

Policy-makers should also consider strategies and incentives for encouraging partnership working, including aligning targets and different sources of funding that will encourage employability partnerships, especially those with employers.

Move beyond the short-term piloting of special programmes for the most disadvantaged towards an adequately resourced national model

Lindsay *et al.* (2007) examined recent UK approaches to developing employability programmes. These approaches combined a human capital development approach and work-first strategies through the Working Neighbourhoods and Pathways to Work pilots.

They reported some positive impacts in terms of the quality of services for jobseekers. They suggested that standardised work-first programmes require buoyant labour market conditions and jobseekers relatively close to having developed the skills associated with employability.

When contracting providers of employability programmes, care needs to be taken not to reward quick wins, such as focusing on those who are most easy to make employable or placing people in unsuitable positions. Furthermore, providers should be able to offer more intensive and in-work support for those with a long-term illness or disability.

Focus on improving the engagement of employers

Lanning *et al.* (2008) suggested agencies should work with employers to show them the commercial benefits of being involved in developing the employability of those not working in their local community. There is still an issue of employers not seeing the benefits of employability programmes. Policy-makers need to look at how they can make their programmes attractive to employers.

Learning providers putting employability skills at the heart of what they do

This requires policy-makers to adapt the policy framework to empower and encourage learning providers to develop employability skills training as part of their teaching and training programmes.

A1.4 Policies that support the development of adult basic skills through family learning

This section charts the main developments within policy relevant to family learning and adult basic skills, as identified by the key literature sources. Fourteen of the 26 key sources refer to relevant policy developments: five to UK policy developments, eight to relevant developments in the USA, and one to developments in Wales.

A1.4.1. The UK policy picture

In the 1970s, FLLN initiatives developed in the context of adult literacy (Lamb *et al*., 2007). Two decades later, research in the 1990s drew attention to the intergenerational transmission of low basic skills and the potential impact on children's learning. In 1995, the UN set out a clear rationale for government action to provide family education through all stages of the life cycle. The aim was to support the sound development of children and to sustain family life as a response to poverty, weakened family structures and the rise of women's employment (Lochrie, 2004). In the same year, the emerging development of family learning was given focus and direction by the publication of the NIACE policy discussion paper *Riches beyond price* (Alexander and Clyne, 1995 cited in Lochrie, 2004).

In 1999, the DfEE publication *A fresh start – improving literacy and numeracy* (Working Group on Post-School Basic Skills) made the case for investment in FLLN programmes. Through the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Standards Fund, local authorities were supported to develop and deliver FLLN, with responsibility for funding and planning (Lamb *et al*., 2007).

Around the same time, the National Year of Reading (1998-99) featured as a key element of the government's *National literacy strategy* and lifelong learning policy. The year was run by a team based at the National Literacy Trust and included a high-profile media campaign with TV advertisements, monthly themes to encourage local activity, and a free booklet for parents (Hannon and Bird, 2004). The year was said to have raised the profile of reading and increased the understanding of how parents can be supported in helping their children to read. During the year and since, *'the level of reader development work undertaken by libraries has greatly increased, very often with other partners'* (p. 32). The year also highlighted the role of fathers in sharing books with their children and lessons were learned about how to reach parents (particularly fathers). The subsequent National Reading Campaign's Reading Champions initiative promoted *'the importance of male role models (particularly fathers and grandfathers) in encouraging boys to read'* (p. 32).

Since 2000, policy changes and funding have been implemented to improve family programmes nationally (Swain *et al*., 2009). The government recognised that parental education and skills are key determinants of children's attainment, and family literacy is seen as playing an important role in increasing social inclusion and reducing the intergenerational transfer of disadvantage. In 2001, Skills for Life (DfEE, 2001) was launched with the goal of improving the literacy, numeracy, ICT, and English language skills of adults in England. This strategy ran in parallel with the Sure Start programme, which 'encouraged local groups to *"take hold" of different models of FLLN and adapt them to local context'* (Brooks *et al*., 2008, p. 15).

The period 2003–05 saw the national roll-out of Skills for Families – a joint LSC, Skills for Life Strategy Unit, and Basic Skills Agency initiative, which involved the recruitment of regional FLLN advisers (Lamb *et al*., 2007). The project aimed to develop a coherent, cross-agency approach to area-wide programmes for families (Brooks *et al*., 2008, p. 47).

Skinner (2007) noted that the Welsh Assembly Government built on the national basic skills strategy with Words Talk – Numbers Count (2005). Within this policy, there was recognition of the importance of parents' involvement in the early years of children's development. A budget was allocated to local authorities by the Basic Skills Agency to run workshops, taster sessions and courses related to literacy, numeracy and keeping up with children.

According to Lamb *et al.* (2007, p. 9), family learning programmes were seen as 'a building block of social mobility' and as such, contributed 'to a number of different policy areas'. One of these is *Every child matters* (HM Treasury, 2003) and, in particular, the flagship children's centre programme. Family learning also features explicitly in the extended schools programme (which requires family learning to be provided as part of the core offer) (Lamb *et al*., 2007). The Social Exclusion Team's (2007) review *Reaching out: think family,* drew attention to the positive effects of intergenerational learning in relation to those families most at risk. Other reports published that year (for example *Every parent matters* (DfES, 2007)) suggest *'a renewed policy interest in the importance of the role of parents'*, backed up by plans for increased investment in parenting support activity (Lamb *et al*., 2007, p. 15).

Government interest and commitment to family learning can also be seen in *The children's plan: building brighter futures* (2007) and through *Skills for life: changing lives* (DIUS, 2009). Furthermore, family literacy programmes contributed to DCSF and DIUS priorities set out in documents such as the 2007 *World class skills: implementing the Leitch Review of skills in England 2020* (Swain *et al*., 2009).

In 2007, *The children's plan* announced Family Learning Impact Funding (FLIF) which aimed to increase the number of disadvantaged mothers, fathers and carers achieving qualifications and progressing. The fund, administered by the LSC, has been used to complement family learning programmes to meet national and local priorities; to increase the number of hard-to-reach families engaged in learning, including families at risk; and to support progression and qualification achievement. The fund has been allocated £30 million over three years from 2008-2011 (Swain *et al*.,2009).

The funding is noted as having a positive effect on local authorities that are trying to reach parents with low literacy, language and numeracy skills. The programme is also said to be helping local authorities and their providers develop systems that collect data on children's achievement so that they can assess the impact that improving adult literacy and numeracy skills have on children's progress (Swain *et al*., 2009).

The last decade has, thus, seen multiple policy agendas infused with an element of family learning. However, it is notable that, although family learning is embedded and referenced within policies, it has never taken a headline role. To date, there has been no policy with a focus solely on family learning. This led Brooks *et al.* (2008) to conclude that there was a 'policy vacuum' connected with family learning, literacy and numeracy.

A1.4.2. The international policy picture

Eight of the 26 sources included information on policies outside the UK, all of which refer to the American context.

Development of family literacy legislation began in the 1960s with President Johnson's War on Poverty. The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act made it the nation's largest and most comprehensive federal education law. It established a foundation programme within the family literacy movement: Head Start (Padak, *et al.*, 2002b). In the USA, Head Start provides the primary model for involving families in the education of their children. The reauthorisation of the Head Start Act (1998) described the purpose of the programme:

> *To promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of low-income children through the provision, to low-income children and their families, of health, educational, nutritional, social and other services that are determined to be necessary.* Edmiaston and Fitzgerald (2003, p. 169)

Federal programmes such as Head Start paved the way for new ways of thinking about parental literacy and their involvement in children's education (Darling, 2004). Since the late 1980s, attention to family learning and literacy in the USA has grown steadily (Padak *et al.*, 2002b).

Family literacy was formally established and recognised as an instructional context with the creation of the National Centre for Family Literacy in 1989. In the same year, the ES programme began which provided national funding for the developing family literacy services.

The ES programme has given grants to local projects to provide family literacy services to low-income families. The ES programme aimed to improve the academic achievement of young children and their parents, particularly in the area of reading. The original legislation has since been expanded with the passage of various acts. The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 said each programme must be designed to accommodate participants' work schedules and other responsibilities. Meanwhile, the Literacy Involves Families Together Act and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) called for ES projects to offer: 'high-quality, intensive instructional programs; instructional programs based on scientifically-based reading research, and reading readiness activities based on scientifically-based reading research.' (Judkins *et al.*, 2008, p.vi). Usefully, the No Child Left Behind Act provided a unified definition of the four components that must comprise a comprehensive family literacy programme (Laanan and Cox, 2006):

- early childhood education
- adult literacy
- parenting education
- interactive literacy activities between parents and children.

Between 1989 and 2001, the ES programme grew steadily from 76 demonstration projects (with funding of US$14.8 million) to 855 projects serving 32,000 families in all 50 states (St. Pierre *et al*., 2003). By 2005-06, ES funding amounted to US$225 million, allocated to states and then disbursed 'through competitive grants' (Anderson, 2006).

Moving away from policies related to ES, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (1998) stated that federally-funded adult education programmes have an explicit goal of supporting family services as part of their adult education systems. The services are intended 'to serve adults who are most in need of educational services in order to improve their quality of life and economic well-being' (Alamprese, 2004, p.254).

Since the conception of ES, family literacy programmes have remained a priority of current federal administration in the USA (Edmiaston and Fitzgerald, 2003). Darling (2004, p. 163) however, warned that there were conditions attached and, in particular: *'The field of family literacy will need to demonstrate and document outcomes that are directly tied to practice in order to maintain ongoing federal support.'* Judkins *et al.* (2008, p. v), referring to an evaluation of ES by St. Pierre *et al.* (2003), noted that the results from this study showed that ES projects 'were not effective at improving the literacy skills of participating pre-school-age children and their parents'. The literacy gains made were found to be no different from those made by a control group of parents and children. St. Pierre *et al.* (2003) suggested that this lack of impact was partly linked to the quality of instruction. This supports the case for ensuring that any future policies take account of findings from evaluations to ensure that the delivery of services is based on the best available knowledge and experience (Alamprese, 2004).

A1.4.3. Policies which support family learning

A number of sources called for the development of policies which support the delivery of family learning. This was felt to be particularly important given the perceived lack of clarity around the concept of family learning (as discussed in section 4.8).

For example, in Skinner's 2007 review of family learning in Wales, there was a reported absence of strategic planning and systematic action to take forward the work on a broad front. These comments echo Lochrie's earlier observations (2004) regarding the predicament of family learning across the UK and the assertion that it would benefit greatly from a national family learning strategy.

Meanwhile, in the USA, Darling (2004) stressed the importance of policies that provide avenues for interagency collaboration; include definitions; and clarify administration structures.

A1.5 Policies that support the development of adult basic skills through flexible learning

The rationales for developing basic skills through flexible learning, including internet-based distance learning, are outlined in this section, followed by the policy mechanisms used to promote learning basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning to adults.

A1.5.1. Policy rationales

Flexible learning is not a goal in itself, although learning through this mode is a means of fostering skills (such as online skills and IT skills) which would not necessarily be developed through more traditional means of study. The rationales for utilising this method of learning can be categorised in the following way.

The skills agenda

The development of basic skills through flexible learning offers one way of meeting the aims set in national strategies to develop adults' basic skills (DfES, 2001) and to up-skill and re-skill the workforce (DTI, 2003; NIACE DC, 2008). This would be in line with strategies designed to promote economic wellbeing through the skills agenda (DTI, 2003; NIACE DC, 2008). However, flexible learning (particularly the use of ICT-based solutions) should only be seen within the context of a holistic approach in which flexible learning is part of a much wider movement towards promoting basic skills.

Personal and social wellbeing

Flexible learning of basic skills can contribute towards meeting a range of personal goals relating to isolation, cultural awareness, quality of life, social inclusion and negative attitudes (DTI, 2003).

The accessibility agenda

This is one of the key areas identified in the literature. Flexible learning offers a means of reaching potential learners in geographically isolated communities and, equally, those who have to overcome a range of situational factors (such as barriers caused by prior experience of learning, gender issues or personal circumstances, and work issues such as shift patterns). This requires addressing issues of access and also ensuring that tailored, personalised support is available to enable learners to access learning through this mode (NAO, 2005).

Flexible learning has the potential to offer added value

It potentially increases learners' contact with course materials and provides them with opportunities to complete assignments or revision activities at a time and pace that is suitable to them. This should increase the effectiveness and speed with which the aim of developing the individual's basic skills is achieved (Atkin *et al.*, 2005).

A1.5.2. Policy mechanisms

The literature review did not identify specific strategies to promote basic skills using flexible learning.

National strategies to promote online learning

A number of IT-based flexible learning strategies included a focus on basic skills. For example, the Ufi and the learndirect service provided learning opportunities and resources to adults online and through a network of local centres (NAO, 2005).

National strategies for community learning

In the UK, the government and devolved administrations have developed strategies to promote adult community learning which have a strong focus on both basic skills and ICT-related provision (Atkin *et al*., 2005). Such approaches offer opportunities to marry the two (ICT and basic skills) by harnessing the investment in ICT infrastructure (in terms of both hardware and software) together with the expertise in community-based basic skills work which rests within the community learning sector.

Strategies for recruitment and retention

These vary although there is some evidence (such as Thomas, 2009) of a move towards insisting on participation in some form of learning as a possible condition for those in receipt of benefits. More traditional forms of recruitment have focused on inspirational methods (fostering a learner’s interest) or providing integrated learning opportunities where basic skills were concealed within other activities.

National strategies to remove barriers to technology

These have a central role in ensuring that individuals can access opportunities to learn through ICT applications (FitzSimons, 2006). These have involved ensuring web access (overcoming communication issues in isolated areas) and also providing access to software and modern equipment (a key feature of approaches used in Wales, as part of ESF-funded projects to up-skill and re-skill the population).

However, it is clear that none of these mechanisms would by themselves develop the use of flexible learning to promote basic skills learning but rather that flexible learning should be included as an element, to be used where appropriate, within those strategies.

At the same time, the evidence suggests many of the attributes associated with flexible learning (such as tailoring training according to learners’ needs; the need for effective trainer-learner relationships; the need for a collaborative group ethos among learners; and appropriate technical and pedagogical support) would be factors that were common to all forms of basic skills training. A distinctive approach is only required to the extent that resources and pedagogy should be adapted appropriately for the specific mode of flexible learning.

A1.5.3. Policy developments in the UK

The key policy developments which have taken place in the UK in relation to developing adult basic skills through flexible learning, including internet-based distance learning, are set out here. Twelve of the sources referred to specific policies, some in more detail than others. None focused in any depth on the development of adult basic skills using flexible and internet-based learning. Rather, they tended to focus on basic skills development and its relation to the workplace, gaining employment, returning to education and/or training, socio-economic status and poverty, and self-improvement and empowerment.

The following policies were covered in the literature:

- *The Learning Age Green Paper* (GB Parliament. HoC, 1998)
- *A fresh start: improving literacy and numeracy* (Working Group on Post-School Basic Skills, 1999)
- *Skills for life* (DfEE, 2001)
- *Success for all* (DfES, 2002)
- *The Leitch review of skills* (Leitch, 2006).

While not explicitly mentioned in the reviewed literature, the following policies are highlighted due to their relevance to the development of adult basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning:

- *Skills: getting on in business, getting on in work* (HM Government, 2005).
- *Words Talk – Numbers Count* (WAG, 2005)
- *Skills and employment action plan for Wales* (WAG, 2005)
- *Skills that work for Wales: a skills and employment action plan* (WAG, 2008)
- *Skills investment strategy* 2010-2011 (BIS, 2009)
- *Skills for growth: the skills investment strategy* (BIS, 2009)

A1.5.4. Overview of policy

Following is an overview of the policies and an outline of their relation to the development of adult basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning.

The Learning Age Green Paper (DfEE, 1998)

This set out a broad vision of lifelong learning in which the Government pledged to allocate a larger proportion of national education resources than in previous years (Hodgson *et al.*, 2007). Improving adult basic skills was a major focus and explicit links were made between skills deficits and poor social, health, and economic impacts. Common barriers to learning were outlined in conjunction with strategies and initiatives for overcoming them.

It highlighted that learning is taken from all kinds of locations: home, work, a local library, shopping centre, as well as in colleges and universities. The use of innovative learning media, such as broadcasts, digital technologies, and the internet, was emphasised. Existing links would be developed with community and voluntary organisations to boost participation in learning, particularly in areas most in need.

The roles and functions of Ufi, the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and learndirect were outlined in widening access to learning and alleviating concerns about using computers and the internet.

Libraries throughout the UK would also be equipped with digital content to facilitate learning and access to the internet.

A fresh start: improving literacy and numeracy (Working Group on Post-School Basic Skills, 1999)

A *fresh start* arose from the Inquiry of the working group chaired by Sir Claus Moser in 1999. It outlined the extent of the deficits in basic skills among adults in the UK, and the often marginalised nature of its teaching and learning. The report outlined the set of changes which aimed to genuinely produce more attractive offerings for those who want to improve their basic skills.

The benefits of new technology was one of the ten elements of the report, alongside an entitlement to learn, guidance, assessment and publicity, better opportunities for learning, quality, a new curriculum, a new system of qualifications, teacher training and improved inspection, and planning of delivery.

The uses of new learning technologies such as the internet and digital TV technology were heralded as a staple of adult basic skills programmes which widened access to learning and allowed learners to double the value of their study time. At the same time, they presented the opportunity for adult learners to gain keyboard and other computing skill sets. Supporting teaching staff to use ICT in delivering basic skills education was another key facet of the policy.

Skills for life (DfEE, 2001)

Skills for life was the Government’s response to the call of Sir Claus Moser to improve the basic skills of British people (Hodgson *et al.*, 2007). The government provided £313 million for this purpose, which dwarfed the £1 million allocated for the roll-out of the Right to Read campaign in 1974, even after allowing for inflation (Hodgson *et al.*, 2007).

Priority groups with low basic skills levels were identified in the report, alongside a range of specific initiatives targeted to meet their needs. Prisoners, young adults, parents, the unemployed, and people living in disadvantaged communities were among those groups designated for specialist support.

Learning technologies were to be fundamental in widening access to basic skills support, allowing adults to take up training at a time, place and pace that suited them, enhancing quality and standards. Courses were to be made more flexible and individualised, tailored to meet the needs and lifestyles of those at whom they were aimed.

Accreditation of learning and assessment to monitor progress were significant aspects of the policy. Technology was key to this through e-assessment and the development of learndirect and Ufi. Evaluation of the suitability of new learning technologies would be carried out under the policy, and learners were to be able to access extra support through chatrooms, advice and guidance forums.

Success for all (DfES, 2002)

Success for all was published in June 2002 in conjunction with a consultation document of the same title. Flexible learning was identified as a means of offering greater choice and individualised training to learners, as well as an important aspect in raising standards. Accountability and removing bureaucracy were key to the strategy's delivery.

The use of ICT, e-learning, and the Curriculum Online was to be expanded through collaboration between providers and Ufi/learndirect. Improvements were to be made to initial teacher training and continuing professional development in order to drive up quality in training and to make careers in teaching more attractive and rewarding. Flexibility in assessment and accreditation was to be increased through an impending revision of the qualifications framework, which would enable learners to gain recognition for modules and units of qualifications.

The strategy highlighted community education as a priority for improved teaching and learning, including the incorporation of greater flexibility. ICT facilities were to be introduced to all areas of England in order to support and encourage learning.

A new e-learning strategy and implementation plan was also to be developed on the basis of the consultation outcomes; this aimed to improve quality, raise standards and increase coherence in e-learning across all post-16 delivery routes. Further funding was to be allocated to further develop the National Learning Network to increase the effectiveness of the e-learning infrastructure in further education. Plans to ensure quality of access to flexible and internet-based learning for those with disabilities were outlined, in addition to support for staff training in the effective use of learning technologies, and the development of new materials and resources specific to ICT-based learning.

Skills: getting on in business, getting on in work (HM Government, 2005)

Basic skills were defined as a key element of the infrastructure supporting Britain's economy and society within this policy. Narrowing the gap between high-and low-skilled individuals in terms of their occupational and personal achievements was a fundamental focus, along with increasing the flexibility of the labour market to adapt to international economic changes and challenges.

Importantly, ICT skills were formally recognised in the policy as a third basic skill alongside the literacy and numeracy needed to raise the skills profile of Britain to enable it to compete with its European counterparts. Qualifications frameworks were to be made more flexible, allowing individual units and modules to be accredited. Assessment processes were also to be speeded up through the introduction of new qualifications and the development of electronic methods.

Overall, the policy pledged £200 million from the LSC over three years to improve and develop the current arrangements for planning and delivering basic skills through e-learning, including producing more resources and materials.

Words talk – numbers count (WAG, 2005)

The WAG's second basic skills strategy took forward the agenda set out in the policies *The Learning Country I* and *II* (2001; 2006), which aimed to revolutionise education in Wales. *Words Talk – Numbers Count* shared the same aims as *The Learning Country,* which were to ensure that all children starting school have the basic levels of literacy and numeracy to prepare them for learning; to reduce the number of children leaving primary and secondary school with basic skills difficulties; and to address the basic skills deficits among adults in Wales. Setting out plans for basic skills education until April 2010, the strategy outlined ten key groups with more acute basic skills needs who would receive more focused attention.

ICT skills were defined as a distinct set of necessary aptitudes, over and above literacy and numeracy. It recognised that ICT could act as a hook to encourage new basic skills learners to take up training, yet no specific targets for improving ICT skills were set out as they were for literacy and numeracy. Delivering ICT through flexible and internet-based learning was seen as a means towards lessening the stigma attached to attending basic skills classes and of widening access to learning.

The skills and employment action plan for Wales (WAG, 2005)

The action plan outlined the extent of the skills needs of adults in Wales. While good progress had been made towards raising the attainment of children and young people in compulsory education, it was apparent that almost one-fifth of working-age adults in Wales have no qualifications, that almost one-quarter did not have level 1 literacy skills, and over half did not have level 1 numeracy skills. The links between poor basic skills, employability and deprivation were outlined. Employers were seen to have a key role in facilitating the basic skills development of their workers.

Flexible access to education, employment and training advice and guidance had been expanded through the growth of Careers Wales Online, an internet-based service aimed at adults. Innovative methods of delivering basic skills to adult learners were earmarked for future development, along with training for staff delivering such programmes.

Leitch review of skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills (Leitch, 2006)

This major review outlined skills standards in the UK, the challenges posed by skills deficits, and the action to be taken to remedy the situation. Radical change across the skills spectrum was recommended to avoid a trap of inequality, poverty and deprivation. In order for the UK to reach its target of doubling its current performance in the OECD leagues, attainment had to be doubled.

The review did not focus specifically on the development of adult basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning, but outlined a number of standpoints which were relevant to the current review. Firstly, the unemployed were to be screened for basic skills deficits upon signing up for benefits, rather than having to wait six months for this to take place. Flexible training to remedy basic skills deficits would then be provided to those in need of it alongside their job-seeking activity. Upon finding a job, further flexible training would be offered.

Skills that work for Wales: a skills and employment action plan (WAG, 2008)

Raising the basic skills levels of Welsh learners was at the heart of the action plan. A cradle-to-grave approach to achieving this was outlined, with particular emphasis on giving children the best start in life, and on widening adult and community learning (ACL). In light of Estyn's finding that ACL lacked clear strategic and political direction, the policy announced the impending publication of a draft ACL strategy.

It was recognised therein that significant additional investment was required to boost adult basic skills to the target levels. Hard-to-reach learners were to be more intensely targeted, and the flexibility of provision increased.

Skills investment strategy 2010-2011 (BIS, 2009)

This built on the findings of Estelle Morris's 2009 Independent Review of ICT User Skills to widen the availability of basic ICT skills courses which enabled all adults to learn the skills needed to use the internet. A pilot phase of the Online Basics course is now complete, and, based on its success, is to be rolled out across England from September 2010. Further education colleges and other training institutions are expected to use existing funding to support this, including the Adult Safeguard Learning budget where these plans can be aligned with wider 'digital participation' strategies (p. 27).

Skills for growth: the skills investment strategy (BIS, 2009)

A significant development detailed in this strategy was the launch of a new, high-quality skills advice service for adults, which would be delivered flexibly to facilitate ease of access and promote widespread use. The service is to commence delivery of advice and guidance to adult learners in August 2010, and will be accessible face-to-face and via the telephone and internet. It will also be used to undertake skills assessments to ascertain service users' skills needs.

The new service builds on the success of the Next Step service, which, between July 2008 and July 2009, provided face-to-face advice and guidance to around 375,000 adults, with 158,000 obtaining further support. By virtue of its flexibility, the service will be impartial, will promote equality of opportunity and will be accessible to all adults who require it. It will be accessible from within short distances of users' homes, in the evenings and at weekends, and will be able to provide more intensive support to those who need it.

A1.6 Policies that support the development of adult basic skills through work-based learning

In this section, the range of underpinning policy rationales for developing basic skills in the workplace are described, followed by the policy mechanisms deployed to increase levels of work-based learning.

A1.6.1 Policy rationales

There is a diverse, sometimes overlapping or competing, range of underpinning policy rationales for developing basic skills and encouraging work-based learning.

- Improving competitiveness at the national level. Skills are one of five drivers of productivity and growth (DTI, 2003a).[2] Evidence suggests that the UK performs relatively poorly with regards to the share of adults of working age with basic skills compared to other OECD member and non-member economies.
- Improving competitiveness at the enterprise level. It is argued that individual businesses can improve their performance by investing in and developing the skills of their employees. The widening definition of basic skills also means that, increasingly, businesses need to invest in developing basic skills (Leitch, 2006).
- Tackling social exclusion and increasing equity. The Policy Action Team Report on Skills (Cabinet Office, 1999) identified the role employers can play in the development of skills of disadvantaged communities. Developing the basic skills of employees increases employment duration and incomes, and the workplace can be a suitable place to develop them.
- Responding to actual and perceived issues relating to (basic) skills shortages by employers. Whilst only four per cent of UK small businesses see skills shortages as an obstacle to growth, there is a general concern amongst employers that new entrants to the employment market lack basic employability skills (Williams and Cowling, 2009).

A1.6.2 Policy mechanisms

Internationally, a number of different policy mechanisms have been deployed to increase skills levels, generally, but examples of specific policies and programmes designed explicitly to develop basic skills through work-based learning are limited in the literature. This may partly be a reflection of the scope of this review – seeking to capture references to policies *within* research and evaluation sources. A dedicated trawl through government policy documents would be required to ensure a more comprehensive review. The tendency for programmes to cover basic skills alongside other broader skills development may also explain a lack of specific policy documents on basic skills training in the workplace.

A range of policy mechanisms has been identified in the review.

Legal frameworks have been used in countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Latvia specifying in law that lifelong learning should be available to all. For example, the Satversme (the Constitution) of Latvia guarantees the right to education for every resident.

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[2] The other four being investment, competition, enterprise and innovation.

National and regional strategies have been formulated with a strong focus on developing basic skills and encouraging employers' involvement in this. The European Council resolution (2002) advises member states to produce strategies to promote flexible learning pathways and improved access to opportunities for all.[3] A number of European Community member states have published strategies regarding how they will reform provision and the actions they will take (for example, Estonia's Operational Programme for Human Resource Development which covers the period 2007-13). In England, the regional development agencies are tasked with developing and delivering regional skills strategies with a strong focus on increased employer engagement in the development of skills.

There are national registers of training providers that can be accessed by either individuals or employers. This usually involves some form of accreditation and quality assurance. For example, the Latvian Adult Education Association, together with the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments and the Ministry of Education and Science, introduced a procedure for licensing non-formal education programmes in local municipalities.

Strategic coordinating or influencing bodies have been established, which may or may not directly fund or provide programmes. The UKCES has been specifically set up to influence Whitehall and other agencies involved in the development of policy and delivery relating to skills training. Other examples include the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, which is responsible for the planning, coordination and implementation of lifelong learning in Greece; and the Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning, which has the administrative responsibility for a national programme directed at funding training for basic skills at work.

Regional or local centres are aimed specifically at adult learners such as Volkshochschulen (local adult education centres) in Germany, KKE (Centres for Adult Education) in Greece, Second Chance Schools in Hungary and Centri Teritoriali Permanenti (Permanent Territorial Centres CTP) in Italy.

A1.6.3. UK policy developments

This section sets out key UK policy developments highlighted in the literature sources. Thirteen of the sources refer to specific policy developments, some in more detail than others, and between them, the following policies were covered:

- Union Learning Fund (1998)
- Moser Inquiry (1999)
- Scottish Union Learning Fund (2000)
- Skills for Life (2001)
- Learning Worker Project (Wales) (2001)
- Workplace Innovation Fund (Northern Ireland) (2002)
- Employer Training Pilots (2002)
- Train to Gain (2006)
- Leitch Review of Skills (2006)
- World Class Skills (2007).

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[3] Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on Lifelong Learning (2002/c 163/01)

Union Learning Fund (1998)

This was part of a wide-ranging suite of policy initiatives and programmes aimed at improving UK competitiveness through increased skills and making the supply of education and training more responsive to demands from employers and individuals. It sought to support the development of learning and skills by encouraging the take up of learning in the workplace through partnerships between trade unions and employers.

Funds were available for projects that included the establishment of learning centres, the promotion of NVQs, the training of ULRs, the development of new materials, and focused on widening participation in learning.

The Moser Inquiry (1999)

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) revealed that around one-fifth of the population operated below functional levels of literacy, which was likely to undermine productivity and growth. This prompted the Moser Inquiry, which in turn recommended a major public initiative. This was realised in *Skills for life* (DfEE, 2001).

The Moser Inquiry recognised the workplace as an important site of learning and recommend that the Workplace Skills Development Fund was put in place to provide seed funding for companies to set up basic skills programmes in workplaces, colleges or adult education centres.

Scottish Union Learning Fund (2000)

This fund was established by the former Scottish Executive to help promote activity by trade unions in support of its lifelong learning programme.

A key premise of the policy was to enhance workplace learning in addition to that already provided, and to create partnerships with unions and capacity within unions to support learning. It enabled trade unions in partnership with employers and others to develop workplace learning (not specifically for basic skills).

Skills for life (2001)

As a result of the Moser Inquiry (1999), the poor position of the UK in the IALS (1996) promoted the four UK countries to develop a new national strategy in response to the perceived problem of low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Skills for Life set national standards for literacy, numeracy and ESOL among adults. Funding was ring-fenced for free basic skills training; screening; initial and diagnostic assessment and individual learning plans for all learners; and an employers' toolkit developed to encourage employers to identify and support employees with basic skills needs.

The strategy took up recommendations from the Moser Inquiry for trade unions to organise basic skills programmes for their members, train ULRs and submit bids to the Union Learning Fund for the development of training.

Employer Training Pilots (2002)

These pilots were designed to boost productivity by encouraging employers to engage employees who lacked qualifications at level 2 and had poor basic skills. It also tested the effectiveness of an offer of free or subsidised training to employees.

The pilots were administered by local LSCs in connection with local Business Link offices and other agencies. Employers were offered financial incentives and free training courses for employees needing to improve their basic skills. A key part of this initiative was time-off for training, free training and point of delivery, and wage compensation.

In 2003, the pilots were followed up with the Employer Engagement Strategy to support basic skills learning in the workplace.

Learning Worker Pilots (Wales) (2002)

This £2million pilot project was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and what was formerly ELWa (Education and Learning Wales). The pilots were broadly equivalent to the employer training pilots in England, and the objective was to increase the demand for learning amongst employees. As a pilot initiative, the aim was to see how successful learning could be if it was free of charge, and promoted with relatively limited marketing or interventions.

Training was provided up to level 3 for almost 1,800 employees across 300 organisations.

Workplace Innovation Fund (Northern Ireland) (2002)

In 2002, in response to the Moser Report, the NI Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) published its strategy and action plan for Adult Literacy – Essential Skills for Living. Workplace learning was highlighted and given a strong commitment in the policy document.

The Workplace Innovation Fund (WIF) was established by DEL and managed by the Educational Guidance Service for Adults. It pre-dated the introduction of the Union Learning Fund in Northern Ireland and provided an opportunity to explore different approaches to offering literacy and numeracy to employees in a way that matched their life circumstances.

It aimed to promote the provision of small-scale capacity-building projects for workplace or other basic skills providers by, among other things, increasing demand and participation from individual learners and their employees.

Train to Gain (2006)

This UK national employer-training programme succeeded the employer training pilots. The aim was to stress how businesses can remain competitive by improving employees' skills levels.

Employers were free training for employees to achieve their first level 2 qualification and the necessary basic skills training to support it (Findlay *et al.*, 2006).

Through a system of brokers, Train to Gain gives advice to businesses on training needs and finds appropriate training courses to improve workforce skills levels. Through Train to Gain, the government funds the cost of advice and the training of employees taking literacy, language and numeracy qualifications and a first full level 2 qualification (HM Government, 2005). In return, employers are expected to allow employees time off work for training. Training beyond level 2 can be facilitated, but the business is expected to fund it.

Leitch review of skills (Leitch, 2006)

This arose out of a need to improve the UK's skills base. It argues that, if the UK is to have a skills base which is among the top eight in the world, it needs: 95 per cent of adults to have functional literacy (level 1) and numeracy (entry level 3); more than 90 per cent of the adult population to be qualified to at least level 2; the balance of intermediate skills to move from level 2 to level 3; and more than 40 per cent of the adult population to be qualified to at least level 4.

The report recommended direct funding through Train to Gain and Learner Accounts by 2010; employers' voice to be strengthened; and an employer pledge to voluntarily commit to train all eligible employees up to level 2 in the workplace.

World class skills: implementing the Leitch Review in England (DIUS, 2007)

This was a response to the Leitch review, and set out plans to implement the review's recommendations, including setting a target for 165,000 learners to improve their skills every year.

It raised funding for Train to Gain; conducted a pilot of skills accounts; brought forward legislation to strengthen funding entitlements for adults to receive free training in basic literacy and numeracy skills without creating new obligations on employers; encouraged employers to take the lead on the content and delivery of skills and employment programmes; and created the UKCES.

A2 Appendix 2: Methodology for the review

This section focuses on the common methodological framework applied to all six literature reviews and outlines:

- search strategies employed (including databases searched)
- identification of sources (with inclusion/exclusion criteria)
- reviewing the evidence

A2.1 Search strategies

The NFER's dedicated Library and expert staff provided a specialised literature searching service. This included identifying and acquiring the relevant sources and compiling and proof-reading each review's bibliography, as well as conducting the actual database and web searches. A range of databases were searched for each review, together with relevant internet subject gateways and websites. These included the following UK-based and international sources:

- Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)
- Australian Education Index (AEI)
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)
- British Education Index (BEI)
- British Education Index Free Collections (BEIFC)
- Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)
- PsycINFO
- Social Care Online
- Social Policy and Practice
- CERUK*plus* [which covers current and recent research in education and children's services].

Search strategies were developed for all databases by using the controlled vocabulary pertinent to each database, initially under the the broader 'core' subject headings of *adult basic skills* and *skills for life* and then using the keyword search terms specific to each of the six individual reviews. Specific details of the search strategies adopted for each review, including databases and websites searched, are included in appendices 3 to 8.

Where no thesauri were available, or the controlled vocabulary included no appropriate keywords, free-text searching was undertaken. The search strategies and search terms were developed in collaboration with the NFER team and agreed with CfBT. The following search parameters were agreed with CfBT, such that each review considered:

- studies from within the UK and other wider English language sources (including those countries in which CfBT is active), which were readily available
- evidence from literature published from 2001 onwards
- research studies (published reviews, articles, reports and conference papers)
- both descriptive and evaluative literature
- opinion pieces, but only where they provided context for the research evidence.

In addition, in order to obtain as full a picture as possible of international policy and practice in the teaching and learning of adult basic skills, further contextual and policy information was sought via the International Information Unit (IIU) at the NFER. The IIU incorporates the Eurydice Unit for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the Eurydice information network on education in Europe; it manages the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Internet Frameworks (INCA) project, which covers some 21 countries; and is involved in a range of other NFER projects with a cross-national perspective. The following three questions were raised with the Eurydice and INCA networks to help further identify relevant basic skills policies and evidence related to them.

1. What, if any, specific policies, strategies and programmes are in place to improve the basic skills of adults?
2. What do they aim to achieve?
3. Are you aware of any evaluations of their impact on either individuals or employers?

A2.2 Identification of sources

The identification of possible sources to be included in the review (including, but not limited to, policy documents, research reports and ‘grey literature’) was undertaken by each NFER review team as follows.

Copies of the available sources believed to be the most pertinent to the review were obtained by the team and subsequently scrutinised for inclusion or exclusion in the review of evidence.

Each item of literature and the evidence it presented was scrutinised for its relevance to the three key research questions:

1. What policies exist to support this aspect of adult basic skills?
2. What does recent descriptive and evaluative literature say about this aspect of adult basic skills?
3. What can be done to improve the teaching and learning of this aspect of adult basic skills?

Each item was also reviewed for its ‘quality’ or reliability (i.e. soundness of the evidence), by considering for example: Is the reported analysis adequate and correct? Is the author’s interpretation supported by the evidence? Are there any biases/caveats raised or to be aware of? Is there corroboration or triangulation of sources? What use is made of case-study data and survey data? However, researchers did not adopt a strict ‘medical model’ of systematic review, which tends to give greater credence to experimental methodologies (e.g. with randomised control groups) over qualitative approaches (e.g. interviews). Studies based on qualitative data collection contain valuable insights into impacts and were equally considered for inclusion within the review.

A2.3 Reviewing the evidence

Once the evidence was scoped in this way, the most pertinent literature to the research objectives was summarised for full review.

Each of the publications was summarised using an agreed template, describing the evidence under headings such as the approach to adult basic skills teaching and learning, participants, sample size, methodology, main findings including impacts and facilitators/challenges and implications for good practice. These summaries were used as the basis for reporting on the findings relevant to each particular review theme.

A3 **Appendix 3:** Impact of adult basic skills development – about the research evidence

A3.1 Nature of the audited research evidence

- The audit refers to work undertaken mainly in England and the wider UK, as well as in Australia and the USA, and includes a smaller number of studies from Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, South Africa and Ghana. Some international studies (for example, reviews and comparisons) and pan-European perspectives are included.
- The publications date from 2001, with an even spread across the years (although slightly fewer from 2009).
- There is an even spread of qualitative and quantitative evidence amongst the audited research, and a number of literature reviews. Some work draws on national cohort datasets (for example, the 1970 British Cohort Study), or indeed the Skills for Life longitudinal dataset, to explore how employment and economic impacts are associated with basic skills levels.
- Nineteen sources were rated as highly relevant to the review, 40 as medium-high, 30 as medium, 49 as low-medium, and 118 as of low or no relevance.

A3.2 Focus of the audited research evidence

- Most of the audited evidence focuses on adult literacy and adult numeracy. Some explores the impact of adult ICT learning as part of basic skills.
- A wider body of evidence on adult community learning exists (for example, local history), as does evidence on gaining work-based vocational skills (for example, in social care). These are not covered by this review, unless basic skills are specifically evaluated, or indeed covered by *stealth* in the programmes.
- Much of the evidence is from evaluations of national adult basic skills programmes, such as initiatives under the Skills for Life agenda (for example, the Link Up Programme, Adult Basic Skills Pathfinder Extension, and JSA literacy and numeracy pilots), the ALN strategy, and Australia's Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme.
- Key target beneficiaries of the programmes investigated include: adults on low incomes, low-skilled workers, the unemployed, and job seekers. A few studies consider specific groups such as prisoners, ESOL learners, ethnic minorities, adults with disabilities, and employees in small rural businesses.
- There is more evidence of impacts on individuals than there is of impacts on employers amongst the body of audited evidence.
- There are clear links with work-based learning amongst this body of evidence (see Chapter 7), as well as with the body of evidence on employability (see Chapter 4).

A3.3 About our reviewed selection

Twenty-three sources were selected for full review, in order to provide convincing evidence of the impact of adult basic skills interventions and developments from a range of initiatives, learning contexts, and countries. The sources can be put into a number of categories.

- Research conducted in England (six sources) and the wider UK (nine), two from Scotland, one from Northern Ireland, Australia (three), Canada (one) and an international review (one).
- Research published from 2003 onwards, with more sources from the most recent years.
- Four literature reviews, including the recent BIS-commissioned synthesis of the economic impact of training and education in basic skills (NRDC, 2009), Ananiadou *et al.*'s (2003) review of the benefits to employers of raising workforce basic skills levels, and Brooks *et al.'s* (2004) review of randomised control trials in adult literacy and numeracy interventions.
- Six mainly qualitative studies, including a practitioner-led research study (Hamilton and Wilson, 2005), and an action research study (Joyce *et al.*, 2008).
- Ten with mixed methods – which interestingly included most of the programme evaluations, for example, the evaluation of the Scottish ALN strategy (Tett *et al.* 2006), White's (2003) evaluation of the Skills for Life Pathfinder Extension activities, and Frontline Consultants' (2006) evaluation of Northern Ireland's *Essential skills for living* strategy (DfEL, 2002).
- Three studies which undertake secondary quantitative analyses of existing data, for example, Grinyer's (2005) analyses of the 2003 Skills for Life survey results to explore the impact of gaining basic skills in adulthood on employability.

Of the 23 selected sources, nine were rated as highly relevant to the review and 14 as of medium-high relevance. Other sources rated high were not included in this selection as they were often older publications related to a more recent one selected – as in the case of the Skills for Life longitudinal survey, for example, where the fourth and final report (Metcalf *et al.*, 2009) was selected, but the previous reports were not fully reviewed.

A3.4 Search strategy overview

Search strategies for the bibliographic databases were developed using terms from the relevant thesauri (where available) supplemented with free-text searching. The search comprised a 'specific search set' which focused on the terms closely related to the impact of basic skills development on individuals and employers, and a more 'generic search set' designed to capture relevant works in the wider basic skills literature. The sets of keywords for each search are listed in the table below.

Key words used in searches

Specific search terms

- Adult basic education
- Adult literacy
- Adult numeracy
- Adults
- Basic skills
- Basic skills training
- Benefit (s)
- Businesses
- Confidence
- Cost
- Cost effectiveness
- Cost analysis
- Earnings
- Educational benefits
- Educational economics
- Educational outcomes
- Employability
- Employee productivity
- Employees
- Employers
- Employment
- Employment potential Impact
- Individuals

Generic search terms

- Adult (s)
- Adult basic education
- Adult basic skills
- Adult education
- Adult education curriculum
- Adult education teachers
- Adult educators
- Adult learners
- Adult learning
- Adult literacy
- Adult numeracy
- Adult secondary education
- Basic skills
- Basic skills training
- Communication skills
- Computer skills
- Continuing education
- EAL
- English (second language)
- English as an additional language
- English as a second language
- English for speakers of other languages
- ESL

Specific search terms

- Labour market
- Labour
- Literacy programs
- New deal
- Outcome (s)
- Outcomes of education
- Productivity
- Salaries
- Self confidence
- Self esteem
- Skills for life
- Social
- Social capital
- Social exclusion
- Social inclusion
- Social integration
- Train to gain
- Wages
- Welfare to work
- Workplace literacy
- Young adults
- Young people
- Youth

Generic search terms

- ESOL
- Foundation skills
- Functional literacy
- Functional reading
- ICT literacy
- ICT skills
- Key skills
- Lifelong learning
- Literacy
- Literacy education
- Literacy program
- Literacy skills
- Low skills
- Mathematics skills
- Maths skills
- Minimum competencies
- Numeracy
- Preparatory adult education
- Reading skills
- Skills for life
- Writing
- Writing skills
- Young adults
- Young people
- Youth

In addition the websites of key organisations were searched on main keywords and/or the publications/research/policy sections of each website were browsed as appropriate.

The following tables indicate the number of records found in each database and the number selected by the NFER library for the research team's consideration. It also includes the total number of items selected from the website searches (a breakdown for each individual site is provided at the end of this document).

Databases search using specific search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	47	0
Australian Education Index (AEI)	157	34
British Education Index (BEI)	77	32
British Education Index Free Collection	59	11
CERUKplus	45	5
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	603	35
PsycINFO	349	14
Social Care Online	230	4
Social Policy and Practice	804	30
Website searches	n/a	62

Website searches

The following table indicates the organisation websites browsed/searched for literature and the number selected for the research team's consideration. Website searches were carried out between 14/10/09 and 30/10/09.

Organisation	URL	Records selected
Audit Commission	**http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk**	0
Cabinet Office (Social Exclusion Task Force)	**http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force.aspx**	0
Campaign for Learning	**http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/index.asp**	4
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Research	**http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/**	23
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	**http://www.bis.gov.uk/**	2
Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) Research	**http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch/stats-research/research.htm**	2
Department for Work and Pensions Research	**http://www.dwp.gov.uk/research-and-statistics/**	7
European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)	**http://www.eaea.org/**	0
European Training Foundation	**http://www.etf.europa.eu**	0
European Training Village	**http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/default.asp**	0
Excellence Gateway	**http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/**	6
Institute for Learning (IfL)	**http://www.ifl.ac.uk/**	0
Jobcentre Plus	**http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk**	0
Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)	**http://www.lsis.org.uk/LSISHome.aspx**	0
Learning and Skills Network (LSN)	**http://www.lsnlearning.org.uk/**	0
Learning and Skills Council (LSC)	**http://www.lsnlearning.org.uk/**	0

Organisation	URL	Records selected
Lifelong Learning UK	http://www.lluk.org/	0
Literacy Trust	http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/	1
National Audit Office	http://www.nao.org.uk	1
National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)	http://www.nfer.ac.uk	0
National Institute for Literacy (US)	http://www.nifl.gov/	0
National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy	http://www.nrdc.org.uk/index.asp	6
NIACE	http://www.niace.org.uk/	0
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	http://www.oecd.org	2
Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (based at Lancaster University)	http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/	0
Scottish Government Research	http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/research	2
UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)	http://www.ukces.org.uk/	2
Union Learn	http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/	1
Welsh Assembly Government (Education and Skills Research and Evaluation)	http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/research-and-evaluation/?lang=en	2

A4 **Appendix 4:** Development of basic financial capability skills for adults – about the research evidence

A4.1 About our reviewed selection

A total of 22 sources were selected for full review following the audit of relevant evidence. These sources were selected to provide evidence on the development of adults' financial capability skills which encompasses:

- a range of relevant policy literature
- different teaching and learning approaches
- different types of basic skills training
- UK and international evidence from a range of countries.

The key sources can be placed in categories.

- Research conducted in the UK (11 sources), which includes two sources from Scotland. Six sources from the USA, two European studies, one international source, one report from Kenya, and one from Australia.
- Evidence published from 2001 onwards, with half (11) published from 2008 onwards.
- Four literature reviews, including Godfrey's (2009) scoping study of financial literacy in developing countries, and Hathaway and Khatiwada's (2008) report on the impact of financial education programmes on consumer financial behaviour.
- Six evaluation reports, including a longitudinal evaluation of the Money-Smart financial education curriculum in the USA (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 2007); an evaluation of a community development programme in financial literacy and basic skills from the UK (McMeeking *et al.*, 2003); and an evaluation of a programme of financial education in Scotland (Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2007).
- Four studies with mixed methods including a study to identify the range of financial education courses operating in Scotland (Sellers, 2008) and a review of financial inclusion policy and practice in the UK (Mitton, 2008).
- Three policy documents including an OECD report on trends, policies and practices in relation to consumer education (OECD, 2009) and the UK government's joint action plan on financial capability (HMT and FSA, 2008).

The focus of selected key sources has been directed by the primary need to identify sufficient research and evaluation evidence to respond to two of the three key research questions. As a result, additional sources describing policies which support financial capability have been identified through additional web searches and the harvesting of references from the summaries of key sources.

A4.2 Search strategy overview

Search strategies for the bibliographic databases were developed using terms from the relevant thesauri (where available) supplemented with free-text searching. The search comprised a 'specific search set' which focused on the terms very closely related to the development of basic financial skills competency for adults, and a more 'generic search set' designed to capture relevant works in the wider basic skills literature.

Due to time constraints it was agreed with the research team to prioritise searching for the specific terms, and the generic set was not run on some databases predicted to produce the fewest relevant hits. The sets of keywords for each search are listed in the table below.

Key words used in searches

Specific search terms	Generic search terms
Consumer education	Adult basic education
Economics education	Adult basic skills
Education for capability	Adult education
Financial awareness	Adult education curriculum
Financial capability	Adult education teachers
Financial competence	Adult educators
Financial competencies	Adult learners
Financial education	Adult learning
Financial exclusion	Adult literacy
Financial inclusion	Adult numeracy
Financial knowledge	Adult secondary education
Financial literacy	Adults
Financial numeracy	Basic skills
Financial skills	Communication skills
Financial understanding	Computer skills
Money management	EAL
Money skills	English (second language)
Personal finance	English as an additional language
Understanding financial products	English for speakers of other languages
	English second language
	ESL
	ESOL
	Foundation skills
	Functional literacy
	Functional reading
	ICT literacy
	ICT skills
	Key skills
	Life long learning
	Literacy
	Literacy education
	Low skills
	Mathematics skills
	Minimum competencies
	Numeracy
	Preparatory adult education
	Reading skills
	Skills for life
	Writing skills
	Young adults
	Youth

In addition the websites of key organisations were searched on main keywords and/or the publications/research/policy sections of each website were browsed as appropriate.

The following tables indicate the number of records found in each database and the number selected by the NFER library for the research team's consideration. It also includes the total number of items selected from the website searches (a breakdown for each individual site is provided at the end of this document).

Databases search using specific search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	86	27
Australian Education Index (AEI)	245	24
British Education Index (BEI)	87	7
British Education Index Free Collection	61	9
CERUKplus	1	0
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	608	47
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	265	16
PsycINFO	284	25
Social Care Online	223	23
Social Policy and Practice	381	44
Website searches	n/a	50

Databases searched using generic search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Australian Education Index (AEI)	2449	20
British Education Index (BEI)	1890	33
British Education Index Free Collection	675	47
CERUKplus	184	0
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	6958	54
Social Care Online	279	6

Website searches

The following table indicates the organisation websites browsed/searched for literature and the number selected for the research team's consideration. Website searches were carried out between 16/11/09 and 20/11/09.

Organisation	URL	Records selected
Campaign for Learning	http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/index.asp	1
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	http://www.bis.gov.uk	4
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk	0
Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) Research	http://www.delni.gov.uk/research	0
Department for Work and Pensions	http://www.dwp.gov.uk	1
European Association for the Education of Adults	http://www.eaea.org/	3
European Training Village	http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/default.asp	1
Excellence Gateway	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk	1
Financial Skills Authority (UK)	http://www.fsa.gov.uk/	14
Institute for Learning (IfL)	http://www.ifl.ac.uk	0
Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)	http://www.lsis.org.uk	1
Learning and Skills Network	http://www.lsnlearning.org.uk/	0
Learning and Skills Council	http://www.lsc.gov.uk/	2
Literacy Trust	http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/	2
National Institute for Literacy (US)	http://www.nifl.gov/	0
National Foundation for Educational Research (website and library catalogue)	http://www.nfer.ac.uk	2

Organisation	URL	Records selected
National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy	http://www.nrdc.org.uk	3
NIACE	http://www.niace.org.uk	7
Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (based at Lancaster University)	http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/	0
Scottish Government Research	http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/research	6
Union Learn	http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/?backhome	0
Welsh Assembly Government	http://www.wales.gov.uk	2

A5 Appendix 5: Development of employability skills for adults – about the research evidence

This section provides a brief overview of the standard methodological approach used to undertake this review.

- Key words and search terms were agreed between the review team, NFER's library service, and CfBT.
- An initial search of databases identified 11,594 potential 'hits' relating specifically to the review, with 16,834 potential 'hits' to wider generic sources on employability skills.
- Using the guidelines set out in the parameters document, 138 sources were then identified as relevant to the review theme, with 82 sources identified of wider generic relevance.
- Web searches identified 47 potentially relevant sources.
- Researchers audited these potential 267 sources using a spreadsheet. After removing duplicates, and any sources which on further inspection did not meet the parameters of the review, 171 sources were included in the audit.
- Using abstracts and executive summaries for these documents, and the full source where readily available, researchers recorded the following information about each source: date of publication, country in which the research was carried out, type of research, and whether the research addressed the aims and review questions. On this basis, researchers then indicated the overall relevance of each source to the review (with ratings of low, low-medium, medium, medium-high and high).

Researchers then selected 24 sources (from those rated high, medium-high and medium) to summarise for full review. The selection should be viewed as illustrative of the evidence base, and not exhaustive, or indeed exclusive of other good quality sources.

A5.1 Nature of the audited research evidence

- The audit refers to work undertaken mainly in England and the wider UK, as well as in Australia and the USA, and includes a smaller number of studies from France, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland. Some international studies (for example, reviews and country comparisons) were included.
- The publications date from 2001, with a relatively even spread across the years to 2009. Where these publications referred to significant landmark publications before 2001 these were obtained and reviewed.
- Publications ranged from evaluations of national and pilot initiatives, policy and evidence reviews, best practice guidance and discussion papers. Evaluation studies tended to focus on the more qualitative impacts of providing employability training.
- Twenty-two sources were rated as medium-high relevance and 3 as highly relevant to the review, 50 as medium, 13 as low-medium and 79 as low. Two sources were identified as providing good background reading on employability skills training and policy.

A5.2 About our reviewed selection

Twenty-four sources were selected for full review, in order to provide a good overview of policy, practice and impacts of employability skills training. The sources can be put into a number of categories:

- The majority of sources (21) reviewed were from the United Kingdom, 2 sources from Australia and 1 each from United States and New Zealand.
- The majority of the sources were research reports (13), 2 were discussion papers, 2 were policy reviews, 2 were evaluation reports and 2 were case studies, 1 of which identified potential good practice.
- Half of the sources reviewed used mixed methods (12), 3 were reviews and 2 were discussion papers. 3 used a case study approach, 1 drew on consultation, 1 used longitudinal data, 1 drew on qualitative interviews and 1 used administrative data to look at impact over time.

Of the 24 selected sources, three were rated as highly relevant and the remaining 21 sources as of medium-high relevance.

A5.3 Search strategy overview

Search strategies for the bibliographic databases were developed using terms from the relevant thesauri (where available) supplemented with free-text searching. The search comprised a ‘specific search set’ which focused on the terms closely related to employability skills and a more ‘generic search set’ designed to capture relevant works in the wider basic skills literature. The sets of keywords for each search are listed in the table below.

Key words used in searches

Specific search terms	Generic search terms
Adults Attitudes to work Communication skills Communication skills training Critical thinking Emotional intelligence Emotional literacy Employability Employability skills Employee attitudes Employee skills Employment potential Interpersonal competence Interpersonal skills Job skills	Adult Adult basic education Adult basic skills Adult education Adult education curriculum Adult education teachers Adult educators Adult learners Adult learning Adult literacy Adult numeracy Adult secondary education Adults Basic skills Basic skills training Communication skills Computer skills

Specific search terms	Generic search terms
Life skills	Continuing education
Problem solving	EAL
Problem solving skills	English (second language)
Social skills	English as a second language
Social skills training	English as an additional language
Soft skills	English as second language
Team work	English for speakers of other languages
Teamwork	English second language
Thinking skills	ESL
Time keeping	ESOL
Time management	Foundation skills
Work attitudes	Functional literacy
Young adults	Functional reading
Young people	ICT literacy
Youth	ICT skills
	Key skills
	Life long learning
	Literacy
	Literacy education
	Literacy programs
	Literacy skills
	Low skills
	Mathematics skills
	Maths skills
	Minimum competencies
	Numeracy
	Preparatory adult education
	Reading skills
	Skills for life
	Writing
	Writing skills

In addition the websites of key organisations were searched on main keywords and/or the publications/research/policy sections of each website were browsed as appropriate.

The following tables indicate the number of records found in each database and the number selected by the NFER library for the research team's consideration. It also includes the total number of items selected from the website searches (a breakdown for each individual site is provided at the end of this document).

Databases search using specific search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	1164	2
Australian Education Index (AEI)	903	21
British Education Index (BEI)	518	17
British Education Index Free Collection	390	16
CERUKplus	73	4
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	3041	38
PsycINFO	3264	9
Social Care Online	1241	9
Social Policy and Practice	1000	22
Website searches	N/A	47

Databases searched using generic search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	515	1
Australian Education Index (AEI)	2482	5
British Education Index (BEI)	1894	22
British Education Index Free Collection	893	19
CERUKplus	184	3
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	6643	17
PsycINFO	2347	2
Social Care Online	334	4
Social Policy and Practice	1542	9

Website searches

The following table indicates the organisation websites browsed/searched for literature and the number selected for the research team's consideration. Website searches were carried out between 27/10/09 and 23/11/09.

Organisation	URL	Records selected
Campaign for Learning	http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/index.asp	2
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Research	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/	5
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	http://www.bis.gov.uk/	2
Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) Research	http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch/stats-research/research.htm	5
Department for Work and Pensions	http://www.dwp.gov.uk/	8
European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)	http://www.eaea.org/	0
European Training Village	http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/default.asp	0
Excellence Gateway	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/	9
Institute for Learning (IfL)	http://www.ifl.ac.uk/	0
Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)	http://www.lsis.org.uk/LSISHome.aspx	0
Learning and Skills Network (LSN)	http://www.lsnlearning.org.uk/	3
Learning and Skills Council (LSC)	http://www.lsc.gov.uk	6
Literacy Trust	http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/	0
National Institute for Literacy (US)	http://www.nifl.gov/	0
National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy	http://www.nrdc.org.uk/index.asp	0
NIACE	http://www.niace.org.uk/	0

Organisation	URL	Records selected
Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (based at Lancaster University)	**http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/**	0
The Network (for Workplace, Language, Literacy and Numeracy)	**http://www.thenetwork.co.uk/**	0
Scottish Government Research	**http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/research**	2
Union Learn	**http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/**	0
UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)	**http://www.ukces.org.uk/**	3
Welsh Assembly Government	**http://www.wales.gov.uk**	2

A6 Appendix 6: Adult basic skills and family learning – about the research evidence

A6.1 Categories of sources

Following an audit of the evidence, a total of 26 sources were selected for full review. These sources were selected to provide evidence on the development of adult basic skills through family learning, and can be grouped into a number of categories.

- Research conducted in the UK (six), one from Wales, 16 from the USA, two international studies and one from New Zealand.
- Evidence published from 2001 onwards, with eight from 2006 onwards.
- Three practice guides or handbooks including a practitioner handbook of effective and inclusive practices in FLLN in the UK informed by research findings (Mallows, 2008), and one from the USA which offers a section on 'how to get started' with family literacy programmes (Campbell and Wilson, 2001).
- One small-scale survey by Ofsted (2009), which involved visits to 23 local authority adult and community learning services receiving LSC funding for wider family learning.
- Thirteen largely qualitative sources, the majority of which review existing research and practice in FLLN. These are predominantly within the family literacy strand, for example, sources focusing on theory, practice, research and policy in family literacy (Hannon and Bird, 2004; DeBruin-Parecki and Krol-Sinclair, 2003) or which summarise or synthesise existing research such as Padak *et al.* (2002b).
- Five studies involving mixed methods including Benseman and Sutton's (2005) summative evaluation of the Manukau Family Literacy Project in New Zealand, a report from a NRDC evaluation of 74 family literacy courses in the UK (Swain *et al.*, 2009); and a longitudinal evaluation of the American Family Intergenerational Literacy Model (FILM) ES programme (Richardson *et al.*, 2001).
- Two experimental research designs, interestingly both of which focus on the ES programme in the USA (St. Pierre *et al.*, 2003; Judkins *et al.*, 2008).
- One summary of a fairly comprehensive literature review (Padak and Rasinski, 2003) which included 93 sources.
- One meta-study by Brooks *et al.* (2008) intended to provide an international overview of FLLN programmes and practice.

A6.2 Relevance to the key research questions

Clearly, the outcomes of any review like this are determined by the range and quality of the evidence available. We have made every effort to select the most appropriate sources in terms of providing answers to our key research questions. A number of sources focused on involving parents more in their children's schools and education than on skills development. Others were not aimed at improving impacts for both adults and children. Many of the subsequently selected sources are descriptive, often reporting on the impacts of existing research or practice, rather than based on robust evaluation methods. Reflecting the weight of evidence available, the selected sources focus primarily on family literacy, as opposed to language, numeracy, or wider family learning.

A6.3 Search strategy overview

Search strategies for the bibliographic databases were developed using terms from the relevant thesauri (where available) supplemented with free-text searching. The search comprised a ‘specific search set’ which focused on the terms very closely related to basic skills and family learning, and a more ‘generic search set’ designed to capture relevant works in the wider basic skills literature. A judgment was taken to limit the number of databases on which the generic search was executed, based on the low proportion of relevant items being retrieved by that search. The sets of keywords for each search are listed in the table below.

Key words used in searches

Specific search terms	Generic search terms
Community education	Adult basic education
Community learning	Adult basic skills
Family language	Adult education
Family learning	Adult education curriculum
Family literacy	Adult education teachers
Family numeracy	Adult educators
Family programmes	Adult learning
Family programs	Adult literacy
Grandparents	Adult numeracy
Home learning	Adult secondary education
Home programmes	Adults
Home programs	Basic skills
Intergenerational learning	Communication skills
Intergenerational programmes	Computer skills
Intergenerational programs	EAL
Joint learning	English as a second language
Language	English as an additional language
Learning	English second language
Literacy	ESOL
Numeracy	Foundation skills
Parents	Functional literacy
Skills for families	Functional reading
Skills for life	ICT skills
Skills for life programs	Key skills
Skills for life programmes	Lifelong learning
	Literacy
	Literacy education
	Low skills
	Mathematics skills
	Minimum competencies
	Numeracy
	Preparatory adult education
	Reading skills
	Writing skills
	Youth

In addition, the websites of key organisations were searched on main keywords and/or the publications/research/policy sections of each website were browsed as appropriate.

The following tables indicate the number of records found in each database and the number selected by the NFER library for the research team's consideration. Details of the website searches undertaken are provided at the end of this document.

The key words used in the searches, together with a brief description of each of the databases searched, are outlined below. Throughout, (ft) has been used to denote free-text search terms and * to denote truncation of terms.

Databases search using specific search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	440	9
Australian Education Index (AEI)	1143	20
British Education Index (BEI)	331	39
British Education Index Free Collections (BEIFC)	172	14
CERUKplus	40	3
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	2147	109
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	193	9
PsycINFO	787	40
Social Care Online	326	27
Social Policy and Practice	432	45

Databases searched using generic search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Australian Education Index (AEI)	2410	7
British Education Index (BEI)	1912	18
British Education Index Free Collections (BEIFC)	472	3
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	814	3
Social Care Online	339	16

Website searches

The following table indicates the organisation websites browsed/searched for literature and the number of items selected for the research team's consideration. Website searches were carried out between 17 and 22 March 2010.

Organisation	URL	Records selected
Campaign for Learning	**http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk**	0
CEDEFOP[1]	**http://www.cedefop.europa.eu**	1
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Research	**http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research**	4
Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) Research	**http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch/stats-research/research.htm**	0
European Association for the Education of Adults	**http://www.eaea.org/**	1
European Family Learning Network	**http://www.efln.eu/index.php**	4
Excellence Gateway[2]	**http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/**	1
Institute for Learning	**http://www.ifl.ac.uk**	0
Learning and Skills Council (LSC)	**http://www.lsc.gov.uk**	4
Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)	**http://www.lsis.org.uk**	1
Learning and Skills Network	**http://www.lsnlearning.org.uk/**	0
National Family Learning Network	**http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/familylearningnetwork/**	0
National Institute for Literacy (USA)	**http://www.nifl.gov**	1
National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)	**http://www.niace.org.uk/**	10
National Literacy Trust	**http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/**	3

[1] Links for the European Training Village, one of the sites recommended to be searched, map to CEDEFOP.

[2] Links for the Skills for Life Strategy Unit, formerly the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, now map to the Excellence Gateway site.

Organisation	URL	Records selected
National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy	http://www.nrdc.org.uk/index.asp	3
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)	http://www.ofsted.gov.uk	1
Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (based at Lancaster University)	http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/	0
Scottish Government Research	http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/research	0
Skills for Families	http://skillsforfamilies.excellencegateway.org.uk/	10
UNESCO QualiFLY – Quality in Family Literacy	http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/QualiFLY/	6
Welsh Assembly Government	http://www.wales.gov.uk	1

A7 **Appendix 7:** Flexible learning – about the research evidence

A total of 60 sources were selected for full review following the audit of relevant evidence. These sources were selected to provide evidence on the development of adult basic skills through flexible and internet-based learning that encompasses:

- different teaching and learning approaches
- different types of basic skills training
- the perspectives of learners, employers and providers
- a range of international evidence.

The key sources selected can put into a number of categories.

- Research conducted in the UK (32 sources), nine sources from Australia, three from the USA, one from Cyprus, one from Asia, and two international.
- Evidence published from 1995 onwards. It was not originally intended to have sources from before 2001. However, six sources dating from before this time were included due to their strong relevance to the topic area. Thirty-seven of the sources dated from between 2001 and 2007, and a further 19 were from 2007 onwards.
- Seventeen literature reviews, including Crawley and Attewell's (2001) review of the role of DEL in social inclusion and widening participation; the American National Institute for Literacy review of the language and literacy skills required for independent online learning (2008); and Barbour and Reeves' (2009) review of virtual schools.
- Eleven predominantly qualitative sources, including Wooler and Warner's (2001) report on the innovative WIST programme for women in rural Australia; and a report on the perceptions of adult online learners (Knightley, 2007).
- Nineteen with mixed methods including the LSC's report of good practice in the provision of education and training in sparsely populated areas (2003); the final evaluation report of the Australian Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon programme (West Coast College of TAFE Research and Development Division, 2001); the NRDC review of community-focused provision in adult literacy, numeracy and language (2003); and the Ufi/learndirect response to the NIACE Review of adult literacy (2010).
- Fourteen policy documents, eleven of these published by the UK Government, and three by the Welsh Assembly Government.

A7.1 The evidence base

The current review was characterised by a paucity of literature sources directly relevant to adult basic skills development through flexible learning (including internet-based distance learning). Indeed, several authors commented on the lack of empirical research (for example, Calder, 2000; Webb, 2006; Silver-Pacuilla, 2008). This is in spite of the wealth of government policies advocating the use of ICT and flexibility in adult basic skills teaching and learning, a point which is highlighted by authors including Gorard *et al.*, 2002; Selwyn *et al.*, 2002; and Webb, 2006.

The National Institute for Literacy report concluded that:

The lack of replicable studies or interventions […] is an impediment to creating an evidence base in this area that could guide future professional development, teaching and research […] waiting for a traditional research base to be amassed is impractical: practitioners need guidance, adults need opportunities to grow their skills, and advocates need to represent the learners to content developers and syndicators. The National Institute for Literacy (2008, p. 28)

A number of sources related to flexible and internet-based learning focus on the approaches to and outcomes of these pedagogical models rather than how they have been used to deliver adult basic skills training. Likewise, several sources addressed adult basic skills without incorporating flexible and internet-based learning. Some sources were not as empirically robust as others, and were largely opinion-based pieces.

It was not possible to adhere entirely to the selection criteria because very few pieces of the located literature would have been appropriate for inclusion in the review. Consequently, while the most relevant and robust literature sources were selected for the review, it was necessary to include some that were less so. There is a need to develop more replicable, empirical research into the elements on which this literature review is based.

A7.2 Search strategy overview

Search strategies for the bibliographic databases were developed using terms from the relevant thesauri (where available) supplemented with free-text searching. The search comprised a 'specific search set' which focused on the terms closely related to basic skills and flexible learning, and a more 'generic search set' designed to capture relevant works in the wider basic skills literature. The sets of keywords for each search are listed in the table below.

Key words used in searches

Specific search terms	Generic search terms
Access to education	Adult
Access to services	Adult basic education
Accessible education	Adult basic skills
Accessible learning	Adult education
Adult learners	Adult education curriculum
Adult literacy	Adult education teachers
Adult numeracy	Adult educators
Andragogy	Adult learning
Audio blogging	Adult literacy education
Blogs	Adult low skills
Community education	Adult secondary education
Computer assisted learning	Adults
Computer assisted teaching	Basic skills

Specific search terms	Generic search terms
Computer mediated communications	Basic skills training
Computers	Communication skills
Distance education	Community education
Distance learning	Computer skills
E learning	EAL
Employment	English (second language)
Employment status	English additional language
English as a foreign language	English Additional Language
English as an additional language	English as a second language
English for speakers of other languages	English as an additional language
Extension education	English as second language
Flexible learning	English second language
Interactive learning	English speakers other languages
Internet	English speakers others
Internet learning	ESL
Learner support	ESOL
Learning support	Foundation skills
Learning technology	Functional literacy
Lifelong learning	Functional reading
Multimedia sharing	ICT skills
Nonformal education	Key skills
Nontraditional education	Lifelong learning
Online learning	Literacy
Online teaching	Literacy education
Podcasting	Low skills
RSS	Mathematics skills
Skills for life	Minimum competencies
Skype	Numeracy
Social bookmarking	Preparatory adult education
Syndication	Reading skills
Tagging	Recurrent education
Video conferencing	Skills for life
Virtual learning environments	Writing skills
VLE	Young adult
Web 1.0	Youth
Web 2.0	
Web 3.0	
Wikis	

In addition the websites of key organisations were searched on main keywords and/or the publications/research/policy sections of each website were browsed as appropriate.

The following table indicates the number of records found in each database and the number selected by the NFER library for the research team's consideration. It also includes the total number of items selected from the website searches (a breakdown for each individual site is provided at the end of this document).

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	109	9
Australian Education Index (AEI)	866	120
British Education Index (BEI)	353	97
British Education Index Free Collection	66	17
CERUKplus	36	5
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	86	22
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	45	3
PsycINFO	185	28
Social Care Online	334	18
Social Policy and Practice	356	28
Website searches	n/a	90

Website searches

The following table indicates the organisation websites browsed/searched for literature and the number selected for the research team's consideration. Website searches were carried out between 01/04/10 and 14/04/10.

Organisation	URL	Number selected
Becta	**http://www.becta.org.uk/**	10
Campaign for Learning	**http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/**	0
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	**http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research**	0
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Research	**http://www.bis.gov.uk/**	6

Organisation	URL	Number selected
Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) Research	http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch.htm	0
European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)	http://www.eaea.org/	6
European Training Village	http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/	4
Excellence Gateway	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/	21
Informal Education	www.infed.org	0
Institute for Learning (IfL)	http://www.ifl.ac.uk/	0
Learning and Skills Council (LSC)	http://www.lsc.gov.uk/	0
Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)	http://www.lsis.org.uk/	3
Learning and Skills Network (LSN)	http://www.lsnlearning.org.uk/	8
Lifelong Learning UK	http://www.lluk.org/	5
Literacy Trust	http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/	0
National Education Network	http://www.nen.gov.uk/	0
National Institute for Literacy (USA)	http://www.nifl.gov/	2
National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)	http://www.nrdc.org.uk/	6
NIACE	http://www.niace.org.uk/	9
Research and Practice in Adult Literacy	http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/	0
Scottish Government Research	http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/research	3

Organisation	URL	Number selected
Skills Funding Agency	http://www.skillsfundingagency.com/	0
The Learning from Experience Trust	http://www.learningexperience.org.uk/	2
The National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland (NALA)	http://www.nala.ie/	5
The National Grid for Learning (NGFL) Cymru (no longer operated in England)	http://www.ngfl-cymru.org.uk/eng/index-new.htm	0
UKCES	http://www.ukces.org.uk/	6
Union Learn	http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/	3
Welsh Assembly Government	http://www.wales.gov.uk/	4

A8 Appendix 8: Work-based learning – about the research evidence

A total of 23 sources were selected for full review following the audit of relevant evidence. These sources were selected to provide evidence on the development of adult basic skills within work-based learning that encompasses:

- different teaching and learning approaches
- different types of basic skills training
- a range of perspectives from learners, employers and training providers
- international evidence from Australia, Canada and the USA.

The key sources selected include international research, literature reviews and qualitative studies.

- Research conducted in the UK (12 sources), one source from Scotland, and a combined study between the UK and Canada, five sources from Australia and four from the USA.
- Evidence published from 2001 onwards, with 12 sources from 2007 onwards.
- Five literature reviews, including Ananiadou *et al.*'s (2004) review of the benefits of basic skills and workplace learning; Jurmo's (2004) review of definitions, purpose and approaches to workplace literacy education; and the more recent NRDC review of workplace numeracy (Hudson, 2007).
- Eight predominantly qualitative sources, including guidelines on company-funded workplace-based basic skills programmes (Levenson, 2001); an evaluative study which explored different models for delivering literacy, numeracy and other key skills in apprenticeships (Cranmer *et al.*, 2004); and a report on employers' views on developing their employees' literacy, numeracy and employability skills (Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008).
- Twelve with mixed methods including Hillier's recent assessment of the shifts in adult literacy, language and numeracy policy and implementation in the UK (2009); the final evaluation report of the ETPs (Hillage *et al.*, 2006), and the evaluation of the SULF (Findlay *et al.*, 2006).

The impacts of a review such as this are naturally determined (and constrained) by the range and quality of evidence available within the literature. While all endeavours have been made to select the best sources in terms of answering the key research questions, it is worth conceding that this may include sources that do not entirely fulfil our selection criteria. For example, it would have been preferable to only use those sources where claims are substantiated through robust evaluation methods. However, some sources are more descriptive and opinion-based. Similarly, the focus was on identifying sources which dealt solely with basic skills, but practitioners and researchers often have a wider agenda and, consequently, some of the selected sources discuss basic skills alongside other skills development.

Had there been a wealth of evidence encompassing the areas of enquiry, the selection criteria would have been more strictly applied. As a consequence, some sources have been included which are relevant, but which do not necessarily fulfil every one of the criteria.

A8.1 Search strategy overview

Search strategies for the bibliographic databases were developed using terms from the relevant thesauri (where available) supplemented with free-text searching. The search comprised a 'specific search set' which focused on the terms very closely related to basic skills and work-based learning/apprenticeships, and a more 'generic search set' designed to capture relevant works in the wider basic skills literature.

The sets of keywords for each search are listed in the table below.

Key words used in searches

Specific search terms	Generic search terms
Adult basic education	Adult
Adult basic skills	Adult basic education
Adult literacy	Adult education
Adult numeracy	Adult education curriculum
Apprenticeship	Adult education teachers
Apprenticeships	Adult educators
Basic skills	Adult learners
Basic skills training	Adult learning
Employment	Adult secondary education
Functional literacy	Adults
Functional reading	Communication skills
Job training	Computer skills
Key skills	Continuing education
Literacy	EAL
Literacy programs	English (second language)
Literacy skills	English as a second language
Minimum competencies	English as an additional language
Numeracy	English as second language
On the job training	English for speakers of other languages
On-the-job-training	English second language
Skills for life	ESL
Training	ESOL
Work	Foundation skills
Work based learning	Functional literacy
Work based training	Functional reading
Work place learning	ICT literacy
Young people	ICT skills
Youth	Lifelong learning
	Literacy education
	Mathematics skills
	Maths skills
	Preparatory adult education
	Reading skills
	Writing
	Writing skills
	Young adults

In addition, the websites of key organisations were searched on main keywords and/or the publications/research/policy sections of each website were browsed as appropriate.

The following tables indicate the number of records found in each database and the number selected by the NFER library for the research team's consideration. It also includes the total number of items selected from the website searches (a breakdown for each individual site is provided at the end of this document).

Databases search using specific search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	11	0
Australian Education Index (AEI)	43	15
British Education Index (BEI)	23	15
British Education Index Free Collection	16	11
CERUKplus	5	2
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	101	14
PsycINFO	195	4
Social Care Online	14	5
Social Policy and Practice	8	2
Website searches	n/a	56

Databases searched using generic search terms

Database	Records found	Records selected by library
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	511	0
Australian Education Index (AEI)	243	34
British Education Index (BEI)	1838	30
British Education Index Free Collection	873	29
CERUKplus	183	5
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	6403	29
PsycINFO	2266	8
Social Care Online	278	3
Social Policy and Practice	1359	17

Website searches

The following table indicates the organisation websites browsed/searched for literature and the number of items selected for the research team's consideration. Website searches were carried out between 28 September and 12 October 2009.

Organisation	URL	Records selected
Campaign for Learning	http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/index.asp	7
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Research	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/	15
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	http://www.bis.gov.uk/	1
Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) Research	http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch/stats-research/research.htm	0
European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)	http://www.eaea.org/	0
European Training Village	http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/default.asp	0
Excellence Gateway	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/	5
Institute for Learning (IfL)	http://www.ifl.ac.uk/	1
Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)	http://www.lsis.org.uk/LSISHome.aspx	0
Learning and Skills Network (LSN)	http://www.lsnlearning.org.uk/	2
Learning and Skills Council (LSC)	http://www.lsc.gov.uk	0
Literacy Trust	http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/	2
National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)	http://www.nfer.ac.uk	2
National Institute for Literacy (USA)	http://www.nifl.gov/	2
National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy	http://www.nrdc.org.uk/index.asp	7

Organisation	URL	Number selected
NIACE	http://www.niace.org.uk/	4
Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (based at Lancaster University)	http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/	0
Scottish Government Research	http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/research	1
Union Learn	http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/	3
The Network (for Workplace Language, Literacy and Numeracy)	http://www.thenetwork.co.uk/	2
Welsh Assembly Government (Education and Skills Research and Evaluation)	http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/research-and-evaluation/?lang=en	2
Workers' Educational Association	http://www.wea.org.uk	0

Index

Bold entries indicate the major areas of research reviewed.

access to learning technology 182-3, 187
accreditation of courses 51, 66, 167
adult and community education (ACE) 154
adult basic skills development: effective approaches 5-8; impacts of 9-11
Adult Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) 123
adult education teachers/educators *see* trainers
Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) 233, 264
Africa programmes/policies 50-1, 54, 124, 247, 274, 280
ALN strategy 16, 238
andragogy 174 *see also* teaching and learning approaches
apprenticeships 206, 208, 222-3, 233
assessment of learners' needs 6, 174, 214-5
attitudes, change in 9, 10, 17, 111, 131
Australia programmes/policies 20, 49, 87, 95, 98, 109, 111, 158, 163-4, 165, 168, 169, 170, 185, 200, 208, 222, 246, 249, 252
Australians Working Together programme 95, 109, 111

barriers to learning 30, 31, 32-6, 81, 93, 107-8, 153, 164, 181, 182, 217, 260
Basic Skills Agency 53, 57, 147, 256
basic skills 3; policies supporting development 238-9
blended learning 155
Books for Babies 125, 142
Bookstart 125
Business Link 88, 221

Camfed 51
Canada programmes/policies 84-5, 88, 96, 126, 202, 249, 252
Caribbean programmes/policies 246
childcare 5, 23, 34, 36, 93, 98, 105, 110, 142
Citizens Advice Bureau 50, 51, 53
classroom learning 38, 52, 69
CLiCK project 18, 20
collaboration 6-7, 89, 96, 97, 141, 176
communication skills 7, 15-16, 29, 78, 112, 175, 207, 222
community education/learning 59, 123, 260, 263
computer use 154, 168 *see also* flexible learning
Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) 105-6
community-based/-focused approaches 158-9, 260
Confederation of British Industry (CBI) 85, 87
consumer education 47, 50, 71
contextualised/decontextualised learning 203-4, 225
continuing education 171
costs of learning/training 34, 186, 188, 201, 221
curricula 15, 87, 126
Cybrarian project 183

Deloitte Employability Course 101
Denmark *see* Europe and Scandinavia programmes/policies
disadvantaged learners, benefits for 9, 109, 111, 112, 253; involvement of 84, 90, 93, 96, 105, 114, 142, 250
distance learning 153, 154, 156, 157-8
distributed and electronic learning (DEL) 153, 163

e-learning *see* flexible learning
earnings, impact on 26-7, 36, 37, 109
education settings 84-6
embedded learning 5, 53, 159-60, 173, 200-1, 221
emotional intelligence 115
employability 76-121 (Chapter 4); definitions: 80-1; in students 84-7; key research messages **114-6**; policies supporting 249-54; research conducted 285-90 (Appendix 5); skills programmes – 'hard' impacts 109-11, 'soft' impacts 111-12; training delivery methods 82-4
employees: attitudes of 32-3; impacts for 22, 29; relations with employers 29; skills development 39, 50; *see also* employability *and* work-based learning
Employer Training Pilots (ETPs) 206, 209, 221, 269
employers: attitudes of 31, 33, 83; impacts for 10, 28-9; key messages for 39, 40; 100-4, 115; relations with employees 209; commitment and involvement 7, 100, 212-3, 220-1, 225, 235
employment 24-6; *see also* employability
English as a second language (ESL) 125, 217
English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) 107, 160, 175, 212, 214, 239
enterprise *see* self-employment
Europe and Scandinavia programmes/policies 18, 49, 103, 208, 246, 251, 266-7
European Social Fund (ESF) 90, 108, 114, 252, 253
Even Start (USA) 124, 125, 126, 127, 134, 257-8
Every Child Matters 129, 256

Family Independence Initiative (USA) 127
family learning 7, 9, 11, **122-51** (Chapter 5); definition 122, 123, 143; impacts: on parents 130-2, 136, on children 133-4, 136, on communities 135, 136, on families 134, 136, on providers 135, 136; improving 138-47; key research messages **146-7**; policies supporting 255-8; research conducted 291-5 (Appendix 6)
family literacy, language, numeracy (FLLN) 125-6, 127, 143, 145, 146
Family Learning Impact Funding (FLIF) 232, 256
Families Learning Together (S Africa) 124
financial capability 46-75 (Chapter 3); impact of approaches 56-9, 69; key research messages **69-71**; policies supporting 240-8; publications 241-3; research conducted 280-4 (Appendix 4)
financial education 50-71; exclusion 52, 242, 243; inclusion 47, 71, 242-3; literacy 46-7, 48, 60, 71
financial incentives 23, 34, 269
Financial Inclusion Fund 243, 244
Financial Literacy Foundation (Australia) 246
Financial Services Authority (FSA) 52, 55, 57, 58, 240-2
FLAME *see* Project FLAME
flexible learning 89, **152-197** (Chapter 6); characteristics of 154-5; good practice in 172; key research messages **189-90**; making improvements in 171-88; progression/impact resulting from 166-70; policy supporting 259-65; research conducted 296-301 (Appendix 7)
formal/informal learning 203, 224
Flexible Learning Pathfinders 174, 177, 182, 188
FLLN *see* family literacy, language, numeracy
Fresh start see Moser Inquiry/report 262
front-end delivery 201, 222
functional skills 101, 126
funding 8, 30-1, 107, 144, 215-6, 234

Get Into programme 93-4
Global Grants *see* European Social Fund
Greater Easterhouse Money Advice Project (GEMAP) 48, 53, 57, 58, 59

Green Jobhouse (Denmark) 103-4
group ethos 178
gypsies *see* travellers

'hard' outcomes 9, 108, 109-11, 166-9
hard-to-reach learners 18, 31, 34, 91, 106, 113, 189, 239
Head Start (USA) 129, 257
Higher Education Academy (HEA) 85
human capital 11, 13, 17, 19-27, 238

ICT: skills 17, 19, 35; use of 156, 160-3, 168
impact of adult basic skills development 12-45 (Chapter 2); definitions 13; factors affecting 30-6; impact: on earnings 26-7, on employability 24-6, on employers 10, 28-9, 37, on families and communities 11, on individuals 9, 14-22, on job search 24, on literacy/numeracy 18-20, on qualification gain 22-3, on trainers 10, on young people 21; key research findings **37-40**; research conducted 274-9 (Appendix 3)
India programmes 90-1, 249
individual support 53, 210, 218
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) 6, 220
Institute of Financial Services 51
integrated approaches *see* embedded learning
intensive courses 36, 96
interactive learning 157 *see also* flexible learning
inter-agency working *see* collaboration
intergenerational learning 123, 128, 139, 256, 291
International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) 268
internet-based learning 52, 155, 156-6; impacts from 166-70
interpersonal skills *see* communication skills

job satisfaction 10, 88, 206, 225, 226
job search 24, 83, 96, 111, 113
Job Network (Australia) 98
Jobs Jolt (New Zealand) 92, 95, 109
Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants 17, 24, 33, 34, 239
Jump on the Cyber Bandwagon (Australia) 165, 168, 169, 170, 173, 176

Kenan model 123, 124-5
Kenya *see* Africa programmes/policies
key research messages: adult basic skills development 9-11; employability skills 114-16, financial capability 69-71; family learning 146-7; flexible learning 189-90; for policy-makers 234-5, 253-4; impacts of basic skills development 37-40; work-based learning 225-7
key skills 101, 201
Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) 87, 110

learndirect *see* University for Industry (Ufi)
learner characteristics 32-3
learner fatigue 36
Learning Age Green Paper 261
Learning and Skills Council (LSC) 38, 109, 111, 112, 113, 183, 221, 256, 264
learning centres 201, 213-4, 219
learning materials/resources 53, 65, 165, 180-1, 186, 211
learning technology 128, 168, 171-2, 182, 184-7, 262
learning to learn 18, 35, 199
learning unit 123

Learning Worker Pilots 207, 269
Leitch review 225, 250, 256, 264, 270
libraries, role in learning 126, 129, 132, 142, 186, 188, 255, 262
lifelong learning 18, 81, 117, 239
life skills 103, 128
Link into Learning 160, 174
Link Up 22, 32
literacy and numeracy: curricula 13; skills development 9, 15-17, 19-20, 25, 27, 69, 125, 159, 162, 183, 203, 233
local authority involvement 131, 158, 245, 255, 256, 291
Local Enterprise Partnerships 235
location of learning 31, 34, 142, 144, 219
low adult skills 13, 28, 239

Making the Most of your Money programme 242
MAPPS project (USA) 127
marketing 34, 92, 239, 243
mathematics 199, 200 *see also* numeracy
men, motivation/participation 92, 115, 134, 138-9, 146, 255; skills development 25, 26, 27
minority ethnic programmes 50, 92, 93
modular approaches 66
money management 48-51, 57-9
Money Smart (USA) 48, 54, 58, 59
Moser Inquiry/report 13, 262, 268
motivation 178-9, 205-6, 211, 213, 225

National Institute for Literacy (USA) 297
National Literacy Trust (USA) 126, 255
National Skills Academies 101
NEET 54, 55, 58, 94
New Deal 106, 109
New Ways of Engaging New Learners 20-2
New Zealand programmes/policies 65, 92, 95, 109, 124, 135, 249, 252
Next Step service 265
NGOs 114
Northern Ireland programmes/policies 31, 208, 238, 245
numeracy **127**, 180, 200, **211**, 215, 219 *see also* literacy and numeracy
NVQs 53, 223, 268

offender learning 16, 18, 23, 35, 51, 63, 93, 105, 123, 239
older learners/volunteers 63, 94-5, 169, 185
on-the-job training 26, 202-3
online learning 154, 260 *see also* flexible learning
open-access learning 161, 175
open learning *see* distance learning
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2, 13, 17, 47, 84
outreach 32, 84, 96, 158

parents/parenting 11, 110, 125, 131, 256; *see also* family learning
partnership working 20, 64, 97, 253; *see also* collaboration
Pathfinder courses 22, 23, 177, 182, 188, 242, 252
Pathways to Work programme 95, 253
pedagogy *see* teaching and learning approaches
Personal Advisers 99, 108

personal learning environment (PLE) 153
personal skills development 9, 164, 169, 170, 206-8, 219
Phoenix Development Fund 105, 112
policy: capacity building 252; effectiveness of 8, 247-8; international 245-7, 257-8; supporting: basic skills development 238-9, financial capability 240-8, employability skills 249-54, family learning 255-8, flexible learning 259-65, work-based learning 266-70; UK basic skills policies 1998-2009: 240-5, 248, 249-50, 255-7, 259-65
policy-making 232-6, 238
PRIME Initiative 95
Prince's Trust 93
principles for effective financial education 60-1, 69
prisons/prisoners see offender learning
productivity 29, 109, 207, 220, 239, 266
professional development *see* trainers
progression for learners 6, 18, 146, 167-8, 187, 207, 208, 220, 225, 239
Project FLAME 125, 126, 127, 131

QCDA 38
qualifications 21, 22, 23, 82, 87, 109, 132, 155, 166-7, 207, 223, 239, 263

Reading is Fundamental scheme 126
reading 20, 125; readiness 126
Realizing your Economic Action Plan (REAP) 49
recruitment/retention of learners 5, 35, 142, 173, 179, 206-7, 260
review methodology 3, 271-3
Rowdy Robots programme 139
Right to Read programme 262
rural settings 22, 158, 159, 160, 163, 174

Scotland programmes/policies 50, 56, 59, 62, 92, 102, 159, 238, 244
Scottish Union Learning Fund 268
self-employment 84, 95, 105
self-confidence, self-esteem *see* personal skills development
Shell Step programme 87, 110
Singapore programmes/policies 88, 103, 249
SKILLS-AP 92
Skills for Families 256
Skills for growth 265
Skills for Life: effectiveness of 18, 22-3, 25, 26, 30-1, 55, 238; impact survey 18; programmes 55; strategy 13, 244, 249, 250, 255, 262, 268
Skills Funding Agency (SFA) 233
Skills White Paper 201
SMEs 22
social capital 11, 13, 15, 17, 238
social exclusion 84, 104, 168, 242
social inclusion 11, 16, 255, 259
social learning 174
social software 157
'soft' outcomes 9, 14, 16, 111-2, 169-70, 207
'soft' skills 81, 101, 223
South Africa *see* Africa programmes
staff *see* trainers
stigma 15, 33, 160, 171, 200, 221, 222, 225, 264
strategies (UK) since 1998 267-70
students, support for 53, 54, 85-8, 102
Success for All 263
Sure Start 63, 97, 99, 110

targeted learning provision 62, 71
targets for learners 30-1, 38
teaching and learning approaches 35-6, 176-7
Teaching Company Scheme 88
teamwork 97, 101, 110, 114, 199, 204, 223
third sector organisations 7, 84, 100, 102, 113, 114, 234, 253
Thoresen review 243
Trade Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) 32, 201, 218
Train to Gain 88, 96, 110, 269
trainers: effectiveness of 143; influence of 34; key messages for 10, 35-6, 38; professional development 7, 10, 115, 140, 168, 169, 216-7; role of 55, 64, 143, 156, 164, 165, 174, 175-6, 181-2, 185-6
training providers 97, 98, 102, 209, 216, 267; key messages for 38, 114
transnational programmes 94, 250-1
transportability 96
travellers 123

UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) 2, 79, 80, 249, 267, 270
UK Open University (UKOU) 154
UK programmes/policies 84, 88, 95, 110, 123, 124, 139, 141, 142, 174, 200, 224, 240, 241-2, 249-50, 253, 255-7; UK strategies 1998-2009 261-5
ULRs *see* Trade Union Learning Representatives
Union Learning Fund 268
University for Industry (Ufi) 161-2, 167, 172, 176
USA programmes/policies 26, 27, 35, 36, 49, 50, 54, 58, 84, 85, 123, 124, 136, 159, 185, 204, 245, 246, 257-8

virtual learning environment (VLE) 155
voluntary and community provision 34, 96
volunteering 104-5

Wales programmes/policies 207, 208; 244, 256, 261, 264, 265
web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG) 183-4
Welfare to work (USA) 239
WIST programme 163-4
women, motivation 92-3, 105, 115; programmes for 49, 50-1, 57, 63, 163-4, 239; skills development 9, 16, 25, 26, 112
Words Talk – Numbers Count 256, 264
work placements 102, 114
work-based/workplace learning 198-231 (Chapter 7); approaches to delivery 36, 52, 200-4; definitions 199; impacts of 23, 50, 205-9; key research messages **226-7**; policies supporting 266-70; research conducted 302-6 (Appendix 8); success factors 210-24
work-first approach 81, 82, 110, 253
Working for Families (NZ) 109
Working Neighbourhood scheme 98, 106, 252, 253
Workplace Innovation Fund (WIF) 269
World class skills 256, 264, 270

young adults/people, impacts for 21, 64, 91, 93
Young People Speak Out project 21

Zambia *see* Africa programmes/policies

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