

Chapter Six

Reflections and conclusions

The reflections in this chapter have as their starting point learners' responses. These are discussed in relation to the wider purposes and outcomes of adult learning and in the context of major policy and structural changes in the field of learning and skills.

The primary purpose of this research was to invite learners to talk about their experience of different systems for identifying achievement in order to identify the extent to which these were useful and valuable to them. If these systems are unsatisfactory to learners, then the extent to which they may serve the needs of other stakeholders is compromised. If learners are truly to be at the heart of future approaches to planning, funding and delivering adult learning then their perceptions must inform views of what constitutes effective practice

Reflections

Perceptions of the purposes and processes of adult learning

The stated primary purposes for most learners in the sample suggested that they initially saw learning as a process of acquisition – of knowledge, understanding and skills. In retrospect they often identified other outcomes, for example to “do something for myself” or to enjoy the social aspects of learning.

The focus for the research and consequently the interviews was upon the learning that takes place during or as a result of a learning programme, rather than more abstract concepts of learning as an ongoing and continuous process. Some of the more habitual learners in the sample were confident in their expectation that by continuing to attend classes they would continue to learn, indicating that they saw themselves as competent learners. Others were less confident at the outset but were prepared to be convinced, despite earlier less positive encounters with formal learning. All of the interviewees saw a direct link between learning (in the sense of acquisition), attending a course and engaging in the learning designed by or with the tutor.

Learning was seen as an internal, personal experience which they had chosen to pursue in company and with a tutor. When asked how they knew that they were making progress many learners referred to “knowing yourself that you were learning”, echoing Griffin's definition (1987) of learning as a series of “inner happenings or experiences the learner has when engaged in learning” (9). However some learners spoke of welcoming confirmation from the tutor that they were learning and others spoke of the benefits of dialogue with their tutor about their individual learning progress.

For most learners the tutor's role was crucial. The comments of some learners about the expertise of the tutor and their purposes in attending courses suggested they saw teaching as the passing on of skills or the transmission of knowledge, and they attended classes in order to be taught. This could imply a view of learning as an essentially linear process in which the primary responsibility rests with the teacher whose role is to ‘cause’ learning at the highest possible cognitive level. The learner is a recipient rather than a source or contributor. On the other hand, a number of learners strongly endorsed the value of learning from other students. Learning was enhanced through interacting with others, sharing their knowledge, experience and ideas. This reflects a distinct and abiding tradition in adult education – that of valuing group learning and the contributions of each learner to the collective process.

The relationship between different learning programmes was not deliberately explored. However, it was mentioned by a number of learners who spoke of the particular course they were attending as part of a sequence. This could be described as an individual 'learning journey'. Such 'journeys' often included both accredited and non-accredited learning, in some cases simultaneously. The combination depended on a variety of factors. For some interviewees, learning was a means of responding to or creating a change in their lives or circumstances, such as career move, recovery from illness, retirement or a child starting school. Others spoke of a continuing pattern of choosing courses on the basis of personal interest and development. These included older learners no longer seeking work and younger people returning to learning after a break and not yet in a position to seek employment. In other cases the trigger was a simultaneous recognition of need and opportunity. The learning patterns and pathways described were many and varied, endorsing Jessup's statement (1990) that the coherence of learning patterns is essentially a subjective matter. "What we learn varies in its value to us as individuals and its general utility...It is only the learner who can make sense of the diverse inputs he or she receives and relate them to his or her perception of the world" (10).

The purposes of non-accredited learning

As was shown in Chapter 4, learners' purposes were hugely varied. Where skills were concerned, their acquisition had a practical focus, to use them and to enjoy and gain satisfaction from using them. Learning was essentially instrumental - how to do things efficiently and effectively, to understand cause and effect, and to improve and optimise the performance of tasks. The context in which the skills would be applied varied according to learners' circumstances, including within the family or community, at home, as a volunteer, in employment or self-employment.

When learners sought to extend their knowledge or understanding of a subject, their purposes were less likely to be instrumental although a number of older learners saw such learning as having the value of keeping "the brain ticking". The motivation was usually to pursue or gain an interest and to engage in learning for pleasure. There was a perception of the intrinsic value of learning as a process which was described by one learner as learning 'for the hell of it'.

Learners showed that they valued highly the opportunity to engage with others, for example when studying and appreciating poetry or other forms of literature, the cultural artefacts of different countries, or the tenets of various religions or schools of philosophy. They enjoyed drawing on their own experience and developing their ideas and opinions through exposure to those of others. Such learning is about increasing insight and understanding through communication, interpretation, exploration and interaction. It may include a greater understanding of the learning process and thus engender greater confidence in the ability to learn – defined by Pedler et al (1997) as 'Learning about learning' (11). There may be no immediate, obvious application for such learning in wider contexts, other than a belief in the intrinsic and wider benefits of learning. However, the ability to reflect on the processes of learning is one factor that distinguishes activity from learning and must surely be a pre-requisite for the development of a learning society.

The economic implications of the learning and skills of adults who make up the majority of the current and future workforce does not need explanation. A number of the learners interviewed spoke of the importance of previous learning to their careers, while others saw the potential for their non-accredited learning to enhance their

employment prospects and incomes. However, in the preface to the green paper *The Learning Age* David Blunkett emphasised that in addition to “securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution.” (12) It has the capacity to empower people to contribute positively to the life of their families, communities, neighbourhoods and consequently the life of the nation. Learning is thus identified as a driver for shaping and bringing about societal change and a means of overcoming disadvantage. A number of the learners interviewed bore witness to the power of learning to improve their lives and increase their confidence and self-esteem.

The purposes of lifelong learning are also described as supporting the fulfilment of individual potential and enhancing the ability of individuals to cope with “the challenge of rapid economic and social change” (13). Blunkett’s vision echoes Kennedy’s proposition in *Learning Works* (1997) that the ability and capacity to learn throughout life are essential if individuals, communities and the economy are to cope with the pace of change. In *The new learning market* Leadbetter (1999) argues that

“The point of education should not be to inculcate a body of knowledge, but to develop capabilities: the basic ones of literacy and numeracy as well as the capability to act reasonably towards others, to take initiative and to work creatively and collaboratively. The most important capability, and one which traditional education is worst at creating, is the ability and yearning to carry on learning.” (14)

This suggests that both ‘learning how to learn’ and the acquisition of an appetite for learning are crucial for the achievement of both individual and collective economic and social ends.

The learners interviewed for this research had elected to join non-accredited programmes. The legitimacy and the value of non-accredited learning in this context was set out clearly in the Secretary of State’s ‘*Remit Letter*’ to the Learning and Skills Council. This argues that

“not all learning should lead to awards. Encouraging adults back into learning and helping the more disadvantaged through relevant provision will also be important. Such first rung provision should, where practicable, act as a stepping stone into further learning leading to qualifications or units of qualifications, but many adults including large numbers of older and retired learners will want to pursue high quality and rigorous study for its own sake, and I expect provision to be made available to meet their needs” (15).

This reflects an acknowledgement in the White Paper *Learning to Succeed* that “older people who continue to be active learners enjoy healthier lifestyles and maintain their independence longer than those who stop learning” (16). It is anticipated that large numbers of learners, no longer in full-time or indeed any paid employment, will want and should be able to continue to access learning for its intrinsic value. This should offer a measure of reassurance to those learners in the sample who, in Kennedy’s words, “see continuous learning as one of life’s pleasures” (17) and expressed their anxiety about the security of affordable opportunities to participate.

Learners in the sample who were on widening participation programmes were aware that the underpinning intention was to encourage them to move to accredited courses. However, some expressed concerns about whether they were ready for such progression, whether the provision available would be suitable to their needs and

aspirations, and whether they would feel comfortable in a more formal environment. Whilst this apprehension highlights the need for appropriate information, advice and guidance and for co-ordinated planning amongst providers, it also demonstrates that ‘first rung’ learners will follow unpredictable, individual paths that may involve lateral as well as linear movement – they are not always ready or willing to ascend the progression ‘ladder’.

The learners in the sample also illustrate the fact that ‘first rung’ and ‘non-accredited’ should not become synonymous terms. Depending on changing life circumstances, learners on these programmes may move into an accredited framework but not necessarily at the earliest levels. Many who access non-accredited learning already have vocational or academic qualifications at Level 3, or above. As Turner observed in *Squaring the Circle* “It would be unfortunate, and indeed ironic given the declared intentions of the Government, if the LSC should repeat some of the mistakes arising from the 1992 Act by subscribing to the assumption that non-accredited learning necessarily functions as the ‘first step’ in a progression ladder taking the learner inexorably onwards and upwards. Learner purpose is far more complex and unpredictable.” (18) This view is supported by the comments of the learners in the sample.

The cost of learning

For large numbers of adults non-accredited programmes are still a genuine option. Many but not all local education authorities give fee concessions to retired people and those on means tested benefits. However the evidence from the evaluations of the FEFC funded ‘non-Schedule 2’ projects suggests that even a modest charge for ‘first rung’ learning, would be prohibitive for some (19). Certainly learners in this study who were participating in FEFC/LSC funded non accredited programmes made reference to the fact that their opportunities were affordable and a number of retired learners expressed concern that they might not be able to learn if the pattern of subsidy changed. Many were aware of ongoing debates about funding adult learning and one learner had made dispositions to the Carnegie Committee. This understanding informed their willingness to complete paperwork which some otherwise saw as irrelevant. They felt they were acting in the interests of the organisation towards which they displayed a strong loyalty.

To nourish the rich diversity of learners, curricula and outcomes of non-accredited learning encountered in this research it will be essential to avoid a situation where access to public funding is limited to programmes designed as ‘first rung’ pre-accreditation provision. Unless the ‘spirit’ of the *Remit Letter*, which recognised the benefits of learning for its own sake, is honoured we are in danger of signalling that it is not learning that is valued but the achievement of qualifications. Linking state-support to accreditation would deter many passionate learners of limited means who have no wish or need for qualifications. It would also run the risk of undermining the process of convincing reluctant learners, who may have few if any qualifications, that learning itself is valued and valuable. Without this we are unlikely to create a ‘learning society’.

Turning activity into learning

We know that not all activity will necessarily result in learning. The evaluation of the 1999/2000 FEFC non-Schedule 2 pilot projects highlighted the fact that many projects

“focused more on mounting activities than on designing progressive learning programmes” (20). It is important to ask what it is that turns activity into learning and how the identification of planned and intended learning outcomes can contribute to this process.

It is arguable that for activity to become ‘learning-ful’ there needs to be:

- awareness of the potential for learning within the activity;
- motivation to learn or intentionality;
- self-awareness and reflection in order to recognise and evaluate the learning;
- confirmation of learning – from an informed source.

The learners interviewed exhibited the first two of these characteristics. Both would apply in a range of learning contexts, for example to self-directed and self-managed informal learning. The third, a habit of self-reflection, was not universal amongst the learners but as the learners demonstrated it can be fostered through participation in learning and with the support of a tutor. At its best, the process might begin with self-review at the point of choice, followed by interaction between the learner and the tutor to acknowledge starting points and potential learning outcomes, and continue during the programme through supported self-assessment.

The fourth element, confirmation of learning, could take place independently through a self-test designed for the purpose, such as the materials intended to help applicants prepare for the written driving test. However, within adult learning programmes such confirmation is likely to come through some form of assessment or check on learning. The purposes of this are both to ascertain that learning is taking place and to identify the quality of that learning in relation to the planned learning outcomes. In other words, this would function as a check on progress towards the planned learning outcomes and a means of informing next stages of learning and tutor support or intervention. As this research shows the important element of formative assessment is often lacking, and not all learners had systematic access to tutor validation or confirmation of their perceptions of their learning, at the end of programmes.

Assessment for learning

It is notable that the concept and language of assessment caused strong responses from many learners in this sample. In some cases, they were defensive or openly dismissive. Others were dismayed at the suggestion that assessment might form part of the interaction between themselves and the tutor, and they rejected the idea that the provider, and therefore they, might have to prove in some way the reliability of the learning they were sure was taking place. A number of learners expressed the view that they should not have to prove themselves by submitting to assessment and testing.

In this context there are significant connotations associated with the language used and the potentially diminishing resonance of ‘assessment’ by comparison with the more constructive tone of ‘feed back’. There is also a tension between judgement (external) and confirmation (mutual) of learners’ progress. Confirmation of learning in both a formative and summative sense helps to turn activity into learning. Many of the learners in the sample felt that they knew learning was taking place and some failed to see any need to prove this for external scrutiny. At the same time, however, many expressed an interest in having more opportunity to discuss their progress with tutors, part of which must involve confirmation of that progress. While learners who

seek non-accredited programmes may see limited value in a summative record, they may recognise that the process of acknowledging achievement confirms their transferable skills and ability to learn. As Reisenberger points, out even where learners are not (or not at present) interested in formal qualifications, “most of these students will want some recognition of their learning” (21).

Formative assessment and self-assessment

Most learners in the sample experienced informal feedback on work in progress but not systematic review. Some younger and less habitual learners were open to assessment of progress and checks on learning and expressed some interest in a wider range of assessment methods than they were experiencing as part of their programmes. Many learners, including some who were hostile to or afraid of the idea of assessment, welcomed and valued what they described as continuous feedback and wanted more opportunity to discuss their individual progress with the tutor.

This response suggests two possibilities. First, that what learners perceive as feedback is in fact informal formative assessment without the method or basis for assessment decisions being shared with the learner. Second, that such feedback is predominantly encouragement rather than assessment and does not necessarily provide the constructive comment and advice that learners want. Whilst these possibilities are not mutually exclusive, in neither case is this aspect of the process likely to be of maximum benefit to learners.

Being aware of the basis on which feedback is being given would enhance learners’ ability to assess their own progress. This could, in turn, make a significant contribution to their confidence as learners and to their skills for learning. It is arguable that this key skill is a prerequisite for successful life-long learning. Such ‘sustainable assessment’, as identified by David Bond in *Studies in Continuing Education* (22), must involve developing learners’ abilities to undertake self-assessment of their own learning needs and progress in order to enable them to share responsibility for and ownership of the assessment processes. The use of planned and intended learning outcomes as a means of shaping learning and evaluating progress has shifted the focus substantially to self-evaluation and self-assessment, sometimes but not always supported by tutors. Jessops’ prediction that “self-assessment will become an important component in learning” (23) is now a reality in this context.

It is also clear that whilst there are major resource implications for strengthening formative assessment as part of progress review, this is a neglected and underdeveloped area. Referencing to planned and intended learning outcomes, explicit criteria, and recording would all help to enhance this element of agreed good practice. As David Hargreaves argued recently in *Making Assessment Work*, this has huge potential for raising achievement (24).

In those cases where learners were aware that tutors were checking for understanding, retention of information or for improvements in skill, and where they were also receiving advice for further improvement, it was unusual for this to be against known or recorded starting points. This suggests that learners may be self-assessing against unspoken or not fully acknowledged criteria. This might include some level of awareness of their own prior knowledge, understanding and skills. It could also imply that tutors were basing their ongoing and end-of-course feedback on a combination of: perception of starting points of individual learners; comparison with other group members; comparison with member of other groups or cohorts (from previous

experience of teaching the same or a similar course); or perceptions of external standards (for example, where they teach accredited programmes in the same or a similar subject area). Thus learners and tutors might be evaluating learning gain against different norms and criteria which are neither shared nor recorded.

Summative assessment

The first part of the end-of-course or summative assessment process was usually completed by the learner. In some cases this was done without any previous recognised assessment. In the absence of prior review between learner and tutor as an integral part of the learning process it is difficult to see how tutors can critically validate learners' claims. In these circumstances, learners would not be provided with the careful constructive and critical comment they seek in support of their learning.

Benefits of using planned and intended learning

The proposition that we can identify and demonstrate to learners, and others, their progress and achievement by reference to planned and intended learning is an attractive one. Both the primary and secondary aspects of this research suggest the following advantages to using learning outcomes:

- Tutors are encouraged to focus on the outcomes of participation in learning – what learners need to know, understand or be able to do by the end of the programme – and plan accordingly to facilitate this
- Identifying learning outcomes at the start of the programme gives both a framework for the learning experience and a basis for evaluating progress and achievement
- Learning outcomes can provide a basis for the tutor's assessment, both formative and summative. In the first case, the tutor can make adjustments to the learning programme
- Learning outcomes can provide a frame of reference for reflection and self-assessment. As a result, learners may wish to adjust their approach in order to achieve their goals e.g. practice more, ask more questions
- Assessing and recording progress against planned learning outcomes does not exclude the recognition and recording of other beneficial outcomes
- Reviewing learners' achievement in relation to planned outcomes can provide a stimulus for programme review - for example, of the process for identifying the learning outcomes, initial assessment, teaching and learning approaches and assessment methods
- The use of learning outcomes would not exclude the inclusion, for example in skills areas, of specific objectives related to performance

Issues arising from using planned and intended learning outcomes

A number of issues have also emerged from or been highlighted by this research:

- The definition in advance of learning outcomes and the structuring of assessment against these will not ‘capture’ all beneficial learning outcomes or outcomes of learning
- There is no well-defined prescription for the derivation of learning outcomes and therefore there are significant variations in how these are defined, negotiated, expressed and recorded. This has implications for how learners are able to interpret and respond to them, and for their effectiveness in relation to quality assurance and particularly benchmarking
- It is difficult to define precise outcomes in some subject areas and impossible to make these ‘measurable’ e.g. the creative arts, and the affective domains of learning
- To assess only that which is easily assessable or ‘measurable’ would severely limit both the internal and external understanding of learners’ progress and achievement
- The process of learning is not predictable; an exclusive focus on the achievement of a set of specific learning outcomes may inhibit exploration and ‘serendipity’
- Where learners’ needs change during the learning process learning outcomes would need to be reviewed and possibly redefined
- Individual learning plans require individual sets of planned learning outcomes – this has major resource implications, particularly where programmes are open-access and multi-level, this is often the case with non-accredited programmes
- If the results of assessment against learning outcomes are used to measure learner or teacher performance for funding purposes there may be a tendency for tutors to ‘teach to the test’, or to produce universally achievable, unchallenging goals

It will be evident that using learning outcomes, whether framed broadly or as specific learning objectives, or in combination, can enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning. They offer a basis for designing and planning learning programmes and support for learners, and for the assessment, recognition and eventual celebration of achievement. This can be enhanced by the definition and sharing of appropriate assessment criteria.

However these benefits would be at risk if providers felt compelled to shift the dominant focus on to precise, measurable learning objectives. It would also be damaging to regard measurement of the achievement of specific outcomes as the only indicator of learner, tutor or indeed provider success. In many cases using broader learning outcomes or more general objectives, such as those defined by the learners interviewed, will be more suitable. It will be necessary to establish feasible and appropriate ways of evaluating learners’ progress and achievement in relation to these less precise and less measurable planned outcomes.

The importance of ‘soft outcomes’

Many of the beneficial outcomes of learning identified by the learners in the sample could be termed ‘soft outcomes.’ This term is used to encompass: those associated

with attitude, for example motivation, confidence and self-esteem; key skills such as communication and interpersonal skills; personal skills such as time-management; and generic practical and learning skills such as self-organisation and problem-solving. It is interesting to note that managers of the first round FEFC funded non-Schedule 2 projects when asked to evaluate the impact of non-accredited learning programmes on the learners' lives were most likely to cite gains in confidence and self-esteem as outcomes experienced by learners.

The Common Inspection Framework (CIF) also identifies key skills, skills of analysis and critical evaluation and personal skills as important elements in programme design. This research indicates that learners share the view that these are valuable. They welcomed the opportunity to identify personal desired outcomes as well as signing up to learning outcomes that were specific to a subject. They relished the opportunity to discuss these when asked about the benefits of participating in learning.

The importance of 'soft' or qualitative outcomes of learning and training has been recognised within a vocational or pre-vocational context for many years. It is understood that they cannot be measured directly, are intangible rather than concrete, are a matter of degree, and are personal and individual. We also know they may be interim achievements, indicating progress towards other outcomes such as qualifications. In this context it is arguable that taking account of progress in relations to 'soft' outcomes gives 'a truer, more rounded picture of success' (25).

As an alternative to a single system of 'measurement' in these areas of learning the *Guide to measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled* suggests utilising a variety of sources of evidence alongside assessment by learners and their peers and employers, as well as those responsible for the design and delivery of programmes. The types of evidence suggested include the outcomes of individual and personal action planning and reviews with the trainer/assessor, learners' diaries or journals, reflective self-review by learners, recorded observation of learning by individuals or groups, and presentation of learners' work in portfolios. This summary accords with the guidance from the Adult Learning Inspectorate about the application of the CIF to adult and community learning and Turner's proposals in "*Squaring the Circle*" (26). It also has much in common with the good practice elements identified by Lavender (27) and the models suggested by Vorhaus (28).

Conclusions

It is clear from the outline of practice in Chapters 2 and 3 that approaches to the identification, recording and validation of achievement in non-accredited learning vary significantly. We know that there are key areas requiring further debate and action, notably:

- the use of more formalised initial assessment
- identification, expression, negotiation and adaptation of planned learning outcomes
- encouragement to identify individual, intended learning outcomes
- identification of unanticipated or unspecified learning gain
- formative assessment, in particular with reference to planned and intended learning outcomes, and embedding this into programme and session designs
- identification and sharing of criteria and norms for assessment between tutors and learners
- recording of assessment outcomes

- skills and knowledge needed for learner self-assessment
- tutor commentary upon validation of learner self-assessment
- moderation arrangements
- linking summative reviews together for repeating learners

The current policy focus upon designing a rigorous system for interpreting achievement outside a qualification or credit framework for both quality assurance and funding purposes means that we have to address these issues. Obtaining a consensus, rooted in practice, on the core elements of such a system and working towards common standards of application are major challenges facing those providers and policy makers concerned with the development of non-accredited learning.

In this context, it is crucial to retain a clear sense of what learners, as both subjects of and contributors to such systems, have to say about their value. This research has briefly, but only briefly, pulled the curtain slightly apart in order to glimpse the myriad ways in which we, as learners, experience our learning. Typically nonconformist, the interviewees were most inspired to talk about the broader value of learning, rather than the particulars of any system, and as a consequence have created an eloquent celebration of its many benefits. However, they also produced a range of observations upon different elements of the approaches they experienced, which should provide both pause for thought and some encouragement for those trying to design a feasible model. These are summarised as follows:

Positive aspects – from the learners’ perspective

- Course selection reflecting personal choice based on need, interest, aspiration and convenience
- Opportunities to influence course content, planned learning outcomes and delivery methods – “the learners’ domain”
- Some focus upon what learners can or should be able to learn by the end of the course to provide a flexible framework for study
- Personal goals identified by some learners and valued as part of the programmes
- Enhanced awareness of learning gain through feedback and ongoing informal assessment
- For practical subjects, continuous monitoring of work in progress
- Enhanced individual insight into learning progress by the end of the course
- Encouragement for some learners to identify unplanned beneficial outcomes
- Less ‘compulsion’ to undertake homework or class work, and more a response to a commitment to study or to the group
- Less of the pressure and competition associated with exams
- Less time on paperwork
- Emphasis on learner self-assessment of progress and achievement, linked to enhanced confidence and skills for learning
- Learners treated as adults, with respect for their diverse views and contributions
- Learners learn from each other

Less relevant or visible aspects – from the learners’ perspective

- Initial assessment or recording of starting points in relation to subject or planned learning outcomes

- Formative assessment and record of progress during the course

Negative aspects – from the learners’ perspective

- Delays in starting the learning itself
- Time spent on paperwork
- Repeat completion of paperwork
- Excessive take-up of the tutor’s time by individuals (including themselves)
- Being ‘assessed’ or judged
- Claiming achievement
- Having to comply with administrative requirements to secure funding or to satisfy external requirements

Wider issues arising from the research

If ways of identifying, recording and evaluating learning gain in non-accredited learning are to be found which are acceptable to learners, are perceived as reliable and viable by practitioners and managers, and are seen as robust in the context of wider accountabilities, a number of issues need to be considered and addressed. These may be grouped as follows:

Philosophical/attitudinal/cultural

- Differing perceptions of purposes and processes of learning
- Differing views about value of learning – instrumental and/or intrinsic
- Objections to assessment on part of learners, tutors and managers where learners have opted for non-accredited programme
- Culture of adult education as a process of self-actualisation and personal development as well as skill and knowledge acquisition
- Learner indifference to value of assessment and accreditation
- Antipathy to and potential for damage of a ‘deficit’ model of initial assessment

Practical and operational

- Diversity of non-accredited provision would require ‘bespoke’ instruments and methods to identify starting points reliably and sensitively
- Learners might be deterred by increased emphasis on initial and subsequent assessment
- Identification of starting points and planned learning outcomes, interim formative and summative assessments on an individual basis each likely to take 15 - 20 minutes per learners – course may last only 12 – 24 hours, group size could be 15 – 20
- Learners resistant to ‘losing learning time’ to assessment and review
- Nowhere for confidential discussion about progress at some venues

Systemic

- Division into Schedule 2 and non-Schedule 2 resulted in differential emphasis on quality assurance and hence uneven development of quality assurance systems and improvement mechanisms

- Self-assessment using evidence of progress and achievement is new to many current and aspiring providers of non-accredited programmes
- No requirement as yet that all tutors and facilitators of learning are trained e.g. in assessment of learning
- Tutors part time, geographically dispersed and usually paid for teaching time only. Costs of providing training for all tutors prohibitive
- Some aspiring providers working with hard-to-reach clients may be unfamiliar with planning learning and assessment
- Providers may have few full-time administrators, organisers or managers to record and monitor the outcomes of more systematic processes

Political

- Non-accredited learning may be seen as either ‘first rung’ provision designed to give access to accredited programmes (‘progression provision’) or as simply ‘learning for leisure’ for older people – state subsidy available for the former but not the latter
- Government emphasis upon instrumental and employment-related provision may challenge the concept of a ‘learning society’ if some learning is seen as ‘better’ than others
- Drive for quantitative data may result in undue importance being given to outcomes that are easier to measure, quantify or achieve
- Comparisons based on quantitative data may distort given lack of comparability of programmes and inconsistent practices in identifying, recording and evaluating progress
- Non-accredited learning may be subject to more rigorous requirements than qualification based learning because it is perceived to be lacking in recognisable quality indicators

Financial

- Overall resource envelope finite while demand for learning, including non-accredited, needs to be stimulated and increased
- Differing financial and resource starting points for providers and aspects of provision for historical reasons
- Some non-accredited provision has been favourably funded (Basic Skills, non-Schedule 2 pilots) compared with ‘other’ provision outside such pilot projects which was dependant on the varying levels of funding allocated by local authorities
- Cost of developing robust alternatives to accreditation likely to be considerable e.g. validation of learner self-assessment and moderation of tutor validation
- Cost of recording such processes and their outcomes and collecting and storing related evidence may be disproportionate to the range and volume of formal learning provided
- Cost of achieving compliance with quality assurance requirements may deter or exclude new providers such as community and voluntary organisations in touch with hard to reach new potential learners

Proof Positive: a report on research into learners' views on approaches to identifying achievement in non-accredited learning.

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