

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

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Between March and August 2001, NIACE undertook an enquiry into learners' perspectives on a range of current systems for identifying, recording and validating achievement in non-accredited learning.

The aims of the research were:

- to explore learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of different approaches to identifying gain from non-accredited learning
- to identify what learners require from such approaches and in particular, the value they place on those they have experienced
- to make an evidence-based contribution to policy development and quality assurance in the area of non-accredited learning.

The rationale was the learners' requirements of such approaches might well be different to those of other stakeholders, for example those who deliver adult learning, those who manage it and those who fund it. In the current policy context this is more than academic curiosity. The key documents outlining the priorities, funding methodology and quality assurance arrangements for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) all emphasise the centrality of learners.

The commissioning of this research by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) was a welcome recognition of this principle and also of the paucity of evidence to support a proper understanding of learners' perspectives on emergent systems.

The context for this research includes a significant body of material addressing the principalities of identifying achievement in non-accredited learning. In particular, it complements a recent case study based examination of various current systems by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA).

Research

Qualitative methods were used. Learners were reviewed, individually and in small groups, using a semi-structured schedule. Most conversations were one-to-one and groups were rarely larger than six people. Tutors were present in only a few of the interviews: those with learners recovering from mental health difficulties; and those with learners who needed support communicating verbally.

The timing, location and duration of the interviews were unpredictable and affected by the immediate circumstances of the learners. Whilst this was occasionally problematic, it reflects in microcosm the issues – of tolerance, understanding, language, time, resources and distractions – that will also affect the implementation of any system for identifying learning gain.

Sample

The sample included 169 learners. These were as diverse as possible in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, level of learning support needs and the curriculum. Subjects being studied ranged from bobbin lace to sound engineering, computer literacy to sculpture, yoga to creative writing. Some courses were designed with the needs of particular learners in mind, for example those recovering from mental illness, with basic skills

needs or with learning difficulties or disabilities. The sample encompassed ‘widening participation’ courses that were specifically intended to lead to accredited provision, and many programmes that were not. All learners had current or recent experience of some kind of system for identifying their achievement from non-accredited learning.

Ten education providers were involved. These included designated institutions, further education colleges working in partnership with local authorities and voluntary and community organisations, and local authority community colleges. All were using a learning outcomes-based approach to identifying achievement in non-accredited programmes. In other words, learners were asked at an early stage, either individually or collectively, to agree a range of outcomes which were later used to help assess learning gain. The methods and timings for initial identification and subsequent review varied between providers, as did the extent to which these processes were recorded.

Members of staff were interviewed, using a semi-structured schedule, to identify any links between learning outcomes systems and wider quality assurances processes, teaching/learning approaches and staff development.

Key findings

Value of learning

The learners’ stories combine to create an eloquent narrative about the value of adult and community learning, celebrating the energising, life-enhancing, health-giving and career-building consequences of non-accredited programmes.

Others spoke of being unexpectedly and irrevocably ‘hooked’ by their experience into becoming committed learners. This was underpinned by an appreciation of the intrinsic value of learning as well as the contingent economic, social and intellectual benefits. In some cases this extended to a sense of entitlement: ‘You should be allowed to learn just for the hell of it.’ In many ways, their enthusiasm echoes the eclectic vision offered by David Blunkett in the Foreword to *The Learning Age* – of learning as a nutrient for civic, social, economic, artistic and spiritual activity.

The opportunity to study without qualifications was widely appreciated. The benefits were seen as wider than the achievement of agreed learning outcomes, including the recognition of unanticipated (or unspecified) but valued gains such as greater confidence and self-awareness. Reference was made both to the lack of pressure and competition associated with qualifications, and to the dignity of having greater choice about what was learned. This was described as an ‘adult’ approach and something that distinguished their experience from school. ‘At school you are told what you will learn. It’s an adult way of learning, to make your own choices.’

Concern was expressed, particularly by older learners, about the possibility of reduced public subsidy for non-qualification-based learning and the prospect of higher fees. This was seen by some as a profound threat to their continued well-being. One student of creative writing put the case very cogently, ‘learning doesn’t stop when you leave school or leave work – you learn for wider purposes – use your brain or lose it!’.

Purposes of learning

The learners in the sample revealed a rich mix of purposes, and of both long- and short-term goals, which defy categorisation as either ‘vocational’ or ‘non-vocational’. For example, a nurse who retired early due to ill health was considering a new career as a writer after attending creative writing classes out of interest.

Most learners identified some form of skill acquisition as their overall motivation, around a quarter of which were linked to employment. For some this was moving into new areas, for others it was revisiting or refreshing existing skills. For example, a parent was hoping that massage would help her to calm her son who has a disability; a grandmother was learning word processing to write autobiographical stories; a graphic artist was studying calligraphy for a day a week to rediscover the skills that underpinned his technological expertise. Very few had consciously chosen non-accredited programmes as a precursor to accredited learning. In terms of the role of learning outcomes in the selection process, most learners had a general aim rather than specific objectives or outcomes in mind when making their choice.

Approaches to assessment

Assessment was not a term used by learners. It appeared to connote judgmental, unsympathetic attitudes and provoked strong antipathy amongst some. Instead, they spoke of feedback from tutors, which was valued highly.

Form filling to record learning outcomes was generally accepted as a necessary inconvenience but was perceived as having greatest value if it contributed to a dialogue with the tutor about individual achievement. The most important dimension of assessment for learners was the satisfaction of knowing their own progress; proving this to others was understandably secondary.

Ways of knowing

Learners identified three sources of knowledge about their achievements: self-assessment; tutors; and peer assessment.

Self-assessment

Most learners appeared confident that they knew if they were making progress: ‘You know yourself how you are doing’. They saw the value of on-going or formative self-assessment but this was often unguided by tutors and rarely involved comparisons with the agreed learning outcomes. The exception was summative self-assessment at the end of the course when reference was usually made to the original documentation. This was seen as helpful, ‘you can be surprised at what you have learner – then you set new goals’. However, the extent to which learners felt able to ‘claim’ achievement of particular outcomes varied in response to a number of factors including self-confidence, experience of adult learning and the nature of the outcomes themselves. Like the learners in the sample, many of us might prefer to describe ourselves as ‘working towards’ or ‘partially able’ to recognise and critically analyse philosophical ideas but would state confidently that we ‘can do’ a specific technical task.

Learner self-assessment has become a central element of most approaches to identifying achievement through learning outcomes. It is also a key skill for learning and has a crucial role to play in the development of lifelong learning.

Greater attention needs to be paid to the ways in which learners are supported in the process of self-assessment so that they are able to engage constructively and autonomously. There is also a need to review current practice in the area of designing, recording and agreeing learning outcomes.

Tutors

The role of tutors was critical, particularly their skills in observation, communication and informal assessment. Learners saw them as the key source of external information about progress and although a range of assessment methods was mentioned, the main approaches were informal observation and interaction. Feedback to learners was largely verbal. Importantly to learners, this was generally seen as supportive and part of the learning process.

Learners expressed a desire for more careful and constructive criticism from tutors ('a critical approach help the learning') but were also aware of the potentially negative impact of this on others. From a systematic perspective, this interim feedback was apparently without reference to any agreed learning outcomes, the criteria were not shared, and it was largely unrecorded.

Peer assessment

Learners conveyed a strong sense of the importance of learning with others. There were many comments on the support, honesty, feedback and stimulation they received from their peers: 'it's good to have the chance to learn from others, to give and take' and 'the group is like a mirror – we learn from each other's mistakes and responses'. Others spoke of the importance of a sense of belonging, of community, and how this was 'an essential contribution to learning'. This has implications for the Common Inspection Framework and the extent to which its individualistic focus can be stretched by the Inspectorate to take account of the shared experiences of learning that learners clearly value highly.

Role of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes were generally welcomed in terms of their contribution to learning. They were seen as creating a useful, flexible framework (rather than a fixed syllabus), which helped people to understand what they had signed up to. As one arts student put it, 'learning outcomes offer structure not a straight-jacket'. Further responsiveness to learners' interests and needs was linked to delivery, not renegotiation of the outcomes. On the whole, they were not seen as an assessment tool.

Most learners recognised the value of considering outcomes at the start and end of their programme. This was seen as obtaining informed consent and then facilitating more detailed reflection. Not all learners were invited to identify individual goals to supplement those designed by the tutor and agreed by the group, or to consider unexpected or unspecified gains. Some reference was made to the difficulties of discussing outcomes meaningfully at the start of a course where new knowledge and very mixed ability classes were involved. Again the role of tutors was critical – their understanding of the process, their disposition towards it and their skills in negotiation.

Current practice

The interviews suggest that recording learning outcomes (in some cases on individual records of learning), going through them at the start of the course and revisiting them at the end are common elements of practice in this area. They also suggest that learning outcomes associated with the subject are most commonly proposed by tutors and agreed, largely unchanged, by learners. This is often supplemented by the opportunity to identify additional personal goals.

Other aspects of assessment processes emerge as more variable and potentially mysterious to learners. Forms were completed by learners but they were not always told why, where they went, or to what effect. Criteria and norms were rarely shared. This means that tutors and learners may have used quite different bases for their judgements about progress. This militates against consistency and also equity, particularly if tutors' views are used to validate those of learners.

Most learners were not aware that formative assessment had taken place. This may reflect its informality and invisibility rather than complete absence but in either case this highlights a need to develop practice. Recorded formative assessment, with reference to agreed learning outcomes, has considerable potential to enrich the learning experience, to support more self-reflective and critical learners, and to create a more equal exchange between learners and tutors. It might help tutors to understand and value the experience of learners and to sustain the more consultative, 'adult' approach noted earlier.

Few learners referred to initial assessment. Where they did this was largely in terms of informal conversations with their tutor to establish starting points. They were content that this was sufficient. The notable exception to this practice was basic skills' students who were accustomed to working with individual learning plans. These learners felt strongly that decisions about the purpose and content of the learning should lie with them, 'it's the learner's domain to decide'.

Chapter One

Introduction and context

Focus of the research

There are three key aims for this research: to explore learners' perceptions of the value and effectiveness of different approaches to identifying gain from non-accredited learning; to identify what learners require from such approaches and in particular, the value they place on those they have experienced; and to make an evidence-based contribution to policy development and quality assurance in the area of non-accredited learning. The rationale behind the research is an awareness that learners' requirements of current approaches may be different to those of other stakeholders, for example those who deliver adult learning, those who manage it, and those who fund it.

The context

This research takes place against a background of intense interest in education and training, learning and skills. 'Education, education, education' is seen as an essential tool for addressing issues of critical economic and social importance. More and better learning is viewed as a prerequisite for positive change. Through the realisation of policies concerned with widening and increasing participation in learning, it is envisaged that social inclusion will be extended and local communities invigorated and empowered.

A major structural change has recently taken place within adult learning with the establishment of the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its forty-seven local 'arms.' The responsibility for planning, securing and improving provision (LSC) and for providing an independent public account of the quality of provision through external inspection (ALI), have been separated.

Whilst the dominant focus of the LSC will be upon skills and qualification-based provision, there is a clear expectation that non-accredited learning programmes (currently accessed by 67 per cent of the 1.1 million adult learners in England and Wales) will continue to be available. The Remit letter to the LSC from the Secretary of State refers to learning which does not lead to qualifications 'but which still offers value and progression' (1). That such provision is seen as being significantly, but not solely, designed to offer progression is indicated by the statement that 'many adults, including large numbers of older and retired learners will want to pursue high quality and rigorous study for its own sake' (2). The LSC is expected to provide such learners with the opportunities to do so and 'to restore a culture of commitment to learning' through partnership (3).

The commissioning of this research by the Department for Education and Employment (now the Department for Education and Skills) is illustrative of the seriousness of the government's declared intention to place learners at the heart of a demand-led planning system. This commitment informs much of the LSC documentation in the areas of funding and quality assurance and is articulated clearly in the guidelines published by the LSC on Provider Self-Assessment and Development Planning. This states that 'The new arrangements have been designed to ensure that the interests of the learners come first and are of paramount importance' in the context of the objective of 'placing the learner at the heart of the system' - March 2001 (4).

Similarly, the Common Inspection Framework (CIF), which will inform the monitoring and quality improvement activities of the LSC and guide the work of ALI, accords centrality to learners stating that ‘Inspections will focus primarily on the experiences and expectations of individual learners’ (xxx).

It is of particular relevance to this research that inspectors will be required to ascertain:

- learners’ progress relative to their prior attainment and potential,
- the extent to which learners make at least the progress that is expected of them (as identified through analysis of added value),
- the extent to which learners develop personal and learning skills, including key skills and the skills of critical evaluation and analysis,
- the extent to which challenging learning goals and targets are achieved,
- the extent to which learners develop the attitudes and skills necessary to maintain lifelong learning, including the capacity to work independently and collaboratively,
- how well teaching and training meet individuals’ needs and how well learners learn and make progress,
- the diagnosis of, and provision for, individual learning needs,
- the existence of individual learning plans informed by initial assessment and which are regularly reviewed,
- the extent to which clear objectives are set which learners understand,
- the regular use of fair and accurate assessment in planning learning and monitoring learners’ progress,
- the extent to which courses or programmes match learners’ aspirations and potential, building on prior attainment and experience,
- how effectively, through quality assurance and self-assessment, performance (implicitly of learners, teachers and managers) is monitored and evaluated and steps taken to secure improvement, and
- how well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve their potential.

In this context, the views of learners and their satisfaction levels must be a central concern.

A number of contemporary research and developmental initiatives are exploring the broad area of achievement in non-accredited learning. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has recently published the results of a case-study-based enquiry into a range of systems for identifying, recording and evaluating learning gain on non-accredited programmes. It takes place alongside an extensive research project by LSDA into recording and validating learning outcomes and achievement on non-accredited programmes in Basic Skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Similarly the thirty-four first-year and forty second-year ‘non- Schedule 2’ 2000-2001 pilot projects have been asked to evaluate and report on their approaches identifying and recording learning gain.

Background to the research design

Although the majority of the provision funded or purchased by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) or the Training and Enterprise Councils between 1993 and 2001 was accredited or designed to provide progression to accredited or qualification-

bearing provision, a number of designated institutions received FEFC funding for non-accredited provision. Consequently, they were subject to FEFC inspection and have been working on and piloting systems for identifying the outcomes of such learning for a number of years.

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) with its 'Learning Outcomes' approach has been in the forefront of thinking in this area. Furthermore, in 1999 a condition of the FEFC funding for non-accredited pilot projects led by colleges working with the voluntary sector and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) was that ways of identifying, recording and evaluating learning gain were developed. More recently a number of LEAs have designed and developed their approaches in anticipation of the new arrangements for monitoring, review and inspection. The learners who were interviewed in the sample for this research were approached via providers from each of these groups.

Research paradigm

The approach adopted for this research was qualitative and from a phenomenological paradigm, using subjective, interactive and interpretative processes. This assumes that the researcher is part of the field. The aim is to capture the insights and understanding of individuals and to give these expression and coherence through a process of analysis and interpretation. It begins with the voices of the learners and allows these to shape the analysis and conclusions. Again the focus on learners' centrality is reflected in the research.

Research method

Primary research was undertaken by interviewing learners about their experiences and asking them for their perceptions and views about that experience. Interviews also took place with providers, usually with managers or organisers, and some tutors. Secondary research was undertaken by reviewing relevant literature and by analysis of documents made available by providers. An annotated bibliography of the most relevant texts is provided in Annex xxx.

Sample

We know that the learners do not present an homogeneous set of needs, aspirations or intentions and therefore it was desirable to consult as broad a range as possible, taking account of age, previous experience of learning, level of support need, gender and ethnicity. Providers were asked to identify a diverse and representative sample of learners who had direct experience of the various systems, along with background information and documentation about those systems.

The range of supporting data varied. Some providers were able to contribute a variety of documentation such as discussion papers, guidelines for staff, course outlines and information, examples of blank and completed summative self-assessments and tutor validation, and course review documents. Additional documents were obtained from providers who did not provide learners for the research.

Two-thirds of the learners interviewed were women. Where appropriate, learners were asked for their ages. In some cases, for example in a group situation, this request would be framed by using broad age-bands. The total range was from nineteen to the late eighties, distributed as follows:

Age group	All	Men	Women
19-30	5.5%	7.5%	5%
30s	19%	15%	20%
40s	7.5%	7.5%	8%
50s	12%	7.5%	14%
60s	35%	37.5%	33%
70s	14%	20%	12%
80s	7%	5%	8%

Interviewees were not asked to identify themselves by a particular ethnic group. A number did so, or made reference to having been born in other countries.

The programmes represented in the sample were from a number of subject areas -- Bobbin Lace to Sound Engineering, Computer Literacy to Sculpture, and included Basic Skills courses and programmes for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. The number of learners who could be interviewed varied. Creative arts and craft courses were accessed by 29% of the learners; literature, language and modern foreign languages by 21.5%; humanities by 14.5%; personal development by 13%; information and other technologies by 11%; literacy, numeracy, 'return to learn' and provision for people with learning difficulties or disabilities by 11%.

Broadly speaking, the learning programmes belonged to two categories. Some were offered specifically to widen participation from amongst a number of priority categories of people, such as those recovering from mental illness, carers, single parents on low incomes and long-term unemployed people with no qualifications. These programmes had a clear intention to encourage and enable progression to accredited programmes and were either funded by FEFC as part of the 'non-Schedule 2' pilot projects, or by local authorities with similar intentions.

The other category of programmes appeared within a regular portfolio of non-accredited adult and continuing education offered by organisations that were funded by FEFC to make such provision (designated institutions) or by local authorities in respect of their continuing responsibility under the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act to provide such courses for local residents. These were not designed specifically to provide progression to accredited programmes.

The interviews

Interviews took place from April through to June 2001 at various times during the day and evening. They were held either at the providers' premises or at outreach locations where work was being undertaken in partnership with other organisations such as local schools or voluntary organisations. The interviews were conducted wherever space could be found. This included refreshment areas, offices, adjacent classrooms and, when it was the only location available, the classroom itself.

Learners

In all cases learners were consulted in advance and invited to participate. A semi-structured interview schedule was used, which asked them to comment on:

- their expectations about learning at the outset,
- their experiences of working with their tutors to identify and record appropriate learning outcomes,
- how their learning progress has been assessed through self-assessment and/or formative assessment by the tutor,
- their recognition of learning gain on completion of the programme through review or some form of summative assessment,
- the totality of gains from their learning experience which may extend beyond the planned learning outcomes,
- how the particular system of evaluating learning gain has an impact upon their learning, their relationships with other learners, the tutor and the curriculum,
- any benefits and disadvantages, and
- suggestions for improvements.

Interviews were conducted in a variety of ways, depending on what could be arranged, the nature of the programme, the subject area and the venue, including:

- groups of learners who volunteered to be interviewed during or after their classes, for example during a break, for part of the lesson, or at the end of a class,
- individual interviews during class time,
- focus groups of learners from a range of classes invited in specifically to be interviewed, and
- individual interviews by appointment, before or after class or at a time convenient to them.

Tutors were rarely present. The exceptions were some interviews with learners recovering from mental health difficulties and those with learners with learning difficulties or disabilities who had difficulty communicating verbally.

Learners' views were recorded with their permission and were confidential to those present. They were aware that their comments would be included in a research report that could include anonymous quotation. Individual comments made during group interviews were recorded separately if possible and endorsements were also noted.

Providers

Interviews with managers or tutor organisers responsible for developing and administering the arrangements were also conducted using a semi-structured schedule. Where these could not be arranged the interview schedule was completed and forwarded by the provider.

Providers were asked to comment on:

- the operation of their system for identifying planned learning outcomes and assessing learners' progress against these,
- the ways in which learner self-assessment or assessment by learner and tutor were linked to quality assurance processes, at individual tutor, department or institutional level,

- whether achievement of planned learning outcomes was aggregated to provide data or other evidence for self-assessment or inspection, and how this process operated,
- how learner self-assessment, or learner and tutor assessment have informed the development of systems, teaching and learning approaches, assessment practices, curriculum development or staff development,
- whether improvements in the range and quality of provision are the result of using such approaches,
- the disadvantages to the approach being used, and
- their summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the systems in place, and any other relevant comments.

Analysis: providers' views

Providers' responses were analysed against a matrix to identify the common features and differences between the systems, the way these were operating and the extent to which they influenced and informed wider developments. The aim was not to offer a critique of particular systems but rather to identify the features experienced by learners and the extent to which these addressed their needs and expectations. It was also to identify models of good practice and internal and external quality assurance and development requirements.

Analysis: learners' views

Learners' responses were transcribed and then grouped and organised thematically. Weighting was attributed on the basis of the number of responses expressing the same or closely related views. In some cases this might be one person whilst in others they might be held by a small group or several individuals. The weighting was a means of giving an indication of the balance of views and perceptions recorded.

Learners' responses were not analysed on a provider basis, as the purpose was not to invite learners to offer a critique of particular systems. Rather, it was to understand their perceptions and opinions of aspects of the approaches adopted and the extent to which these met learners' needs and expectations.

Commentary

Sample

Constructing the sample was a challenge. It needed to encompass learners of both sexes, across the age range and include people with differing support needs, from different backgrounds and ethnic groups, accessing a variety of subjects and programmes through a range of providers. Locating such a representative range of learners who were also aware they were participating in processes designed to identify, record and evaluate learning gain on non-accredited programmes presented some difficulties. Learners' involvement needed to be sufficiently prolonged for them to have become conscious of the various stages in the processes.

A number of the systems for identifying, recording and evaluating learning gain were operating as pilots and were not yet extended to all non-accredited provision. Therefore some subject areas commonly found within a range of non-qualification-bearing adult and community learning programmes could not be included. Finally, the time of year at which the primary research took place - immediately before the Easter

break and during the short Summer term - meant that some providers were offering a limited number of courses. While some learners were completing programmes, others were just starting and could not be expected to comment until their programme was well under way.

Interview length

The expected interview length was fifteen minutes with an individual or small group, and twenty-five to thirty minutes with a larger group. In practice the amount of time varied considerably in the different circumstances and locations. As the learning programmes were all part-time, learners were often available only at the time of their course, although in a number of cases they were willing to come in early or to stay late. While some learners were interviewed in class time there was a limit to how much interruption was acceptable. Where interviews took place on an individual basis during or in parallel with learning, every effort was made not to be too disruptive. A flexible and sensitive approach was essential.

Whilst this made the primary research problematic, it has the advantage of offering a model of the practical considerations that would affect any comprehensive system for identifying, assessing and recording learner achievement.

Focus and attitudes of learners

Not all learners chose or felt able to respond to all the interview questions. Some found it difficult to understand the focus and purpose of the research and wanted to talk more generally about their views of the available learning opportunities and other related issues such as course costs. A number were suspicious that the research might in some way threaten future funding and sought assurances that their classes, or their access to classes, would not be discontinued. There was a widespread view that 'learning for its own sake' at a reasonable cost (or in some cases, free) might be under threat and allowed in the short term only.

It was important to avoid jargon and to use accessible language. This sometimes led to difficulties in focusing on the key aspects of learners' experience. The flexible approach and the design of the semi-structured interview schedule enabled learners to express their views in a wide range of areas whilst at the same time seeking their perspectives on the themes of research.

Participation by providers

It would not have been possible to conduct the research without the support and co-operation of providers. In practice, some providers were not able to make available as many learners with relevant experience as they had hoped. This was because of a number of factors: the willingness and ability of learners with relevant experience to commit time to the process, the extent to which piloted approaches had been mainstreamed, the timing of classes, the lack of space in which to talk with learners, and the request for a diverse sample of learners and programmes. The amount of time that busy managers were able to give to interviews varied, and in some cases this was supplemented by telephone calls and contact through email or written correspondence.

Chapter Two

**The systems experienced
by the learners**

Introduction

This chapter summarises the range of systems experienced by the learners in the sample and discusses those aspects of which learners were aware. It also explores those aspects less likely to be visible to learners (and so less likely to be commented upon). This includes how processes inform and contribute to quality assurance and improvement, curriculum planning and development, and professional development and training.

The systems were at varying stages of development. Some providers had been evolving approaches to identifying, recording and evaluating achievement in non-accredited learning for a number of years. In some cases this was as a direct result of requirements associated with inspection and the continuation of funding. Others, who until recently had offered little non-accredited provision, had well-developed systems for mainstream programmes which were considered not entirely appropriate for non-accredited learning. In some cases the provider had received funding from a number of streams with different expectations and requirements and was now working towards a common system which would satisfy transitional and future common funding and quality assurance requirements.

Most of the courses involved were of between ten and twenty-four-hours duration. However, where providers offered a wide range of programmes of differing lengths, the systems might apply only to courses over a certain length, typically eighteen to twenty hours. Some providers were endeavouring to operate coherent systems with courses as short as ten hours.

System elements

The elements of the various systems experienced by learners were identified through reference to documentation and interviews with learners, tutors, organisers and managers. These established how the various systems operated, whilst not inviting a critique.

The main elements of the systems identified through these means were:

- identification of the curriculum or course offer,
- information about the course,
- scheme of work/course outline,
- initial assessment,
- identification of learning objectives or planned/intended learning outcomes,
- monitoring of process of identification of planned/intended learning outcomes,
- on-course assessment and/or feedback,
- review of individual progress – formative and summative,
- self-assessment and recording of progress/learning gain,
- validation of learner self-assessment,
- course evaluation,
- moderation and internal verification of tutor assessment, and
- production and use of quantitative information.

The extent to which each element was in place and accorded significance varied across the range of systems. Only one system in the sample used all of them.

Providers' responses to questions about the links between these arrangements wider quality assurance (including self-assessment, teaching and learning processes, assessment practices, curriculum planning and development, professional development and training and institutional development) are also summarised in the following commentary.

Summary of system elements

Identification of the curriculum or course offer

In most cases the curriculum or course offer to learners was determined and published well in advance of enrolment in prospectuses or brochures with course listings. The inclusion of some courses had been influenced by previous learners, some of whom intended to re-enrol. In two cases, both associated with widening participation, the curriculum was negotiated directly or through intermediaries with groups of potential or existing learners and organised as soon as possible thereafter. Most learners had deliberately selected a course that was of interest to them, at a time and location that was convenient and which did not give access to a qualification.

Information about the course

In addition to the usual, brief synopses in prospectuses, most learners had access to other pre-course documentation. Nevertheless some had enrolled without seeing this information where the subject was in high demand and short supply, or where the tutor was popular. In such cases the course information sheet was provided at the first class. Learners also had access to the tutor or other staff either in person or by telephone, although little reference was made to this possibility by learners themselves.

The written pre-course information (Course Information Sheet, Course Outline) usually included an indication of course content, topics to be covered, the target group of learners (sometimes with an indication of level) and a course aim or outcomes. The latter were typically expressed in terms of what students should be able to do or have learned by the end of the course. Some course outlines made reference to assessment methods and progression routes post course. The implicit purpose of most course information sheets was to enable students to make a choice that would match their needs, interests and aspirations.

Some course outlines were simplified for different reasons. One provider had developed a set of symbols to denote course elements for students with significant disabilities. In one example where the curriculum offer for groups of potential learners was negotiated, the course outline was replaced by an agreed record of negotiated group learning outcomes and an individual action plan for each learner which included personal goals. In Basic Skills courses the practice was to provide an Individual Learning Plan or Programme rather than a course outline, which could also serve as a record of work for the student.

Scheme of work/course outline

Learners were sometimes given a copy of the tutor's scheme of work to supplement other course information. These listed topics on a weekly basis covering, for example, the tasks on a computer course or the works of literature to be studied. Learners found these useful. They liked knowing what they would be doing from week to week,

gained satisfaction from looking back over the topics or material they had covered and found them helpful as an aide-mémoire when completing a review of what they had learned.

Initial assessment

During the interviews learners were not asked directly about initial assessment as it was not a term they were likely to use. Rather, they were asked how the aim of their learning outcomes was decided. For most learners any initial assessment was not identifiable as a separate process and was largely informal. Most systems incorporated the identification of starting points into conversations with learners. These took place individually before or at the start of the course, or within the group possibly as part of induction. Such assessments were likely to cover the students' familiarity with the subject area, any previous relevant learning or achievement, their expectations and hopes and any particular learning or other needs to which they wanted to draw attention. In exceptional cases a tutor might ask learners to bring along examples of their work in relevant subject areas or to undertake an assignment or task that would be indicative of their level of knowledge or skills.

For learners on Basic Skills courses, courses for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, or mental health difficulties, the process of initial assessment was potentially longer and might involve other agencies. For a year-long Basic Skills course the process might take up to six weeks and could include the use of specially designed assessment instruments. Such standardised instruments were not available or used for learners on other types of courses.

The outcomes of initial assessment were not usually recorded formally or indeed at all, nor were they shared with learners. For Basic Skills learners the outcomes of initial assessment informed the determination of both short-term targets and longer term planned learning outcomes and might be referred to in an individual learner record or Individual Learning Plan.

Identification of learning objectives or planned/intended learning outcomes

In most cases a set of learning objectives or outcomes for the course (and by implication for all the learners in the group) was proposed by the tutor. These were usually communicated to learners in the form of course objectives or outcomes, via the pre-course information, and were then reviewed during the first session before being set aside to be revisited towards or at the end of the course. In practice the nature of the outcomes and the way in which they were expressed varied considerably.

Most systems offered the possibility of negotiating outcomes with learners collectively and individually. In practice most learners seemed to accept those that were proposed and even to have seen themselves as having signed up to them by enrolling. The set of outcomes was invariably seen as a guide or framework to work within rather than a rigid agenda constraining the learning process. Learners and tutors felt there was sufficient flexibility to address individual needs or interests.

In some cases there was a more mixed economy. For example planned learning outcomes specifically related to course content were proposed and accepted in this way. However, learners were also encouraged to articulate and record their personal

aspirations or targets. These might be related only loosely to the subject or planned content of the course and might or might not be revisited at the end of the course.

One widening participation programme was organised so that in the first instance the provider negotiated and agreed with prospective learners a number of topics for linked short courses. For each of these the group was to negotiate a set of generic and subject-related planned learning outcomes. Individual learners could then select from these when drawing up their own intended learning outcomes and add their own personal targets identified with the support of a learning facilitator in the context of personal action planning. This individual set of intended learning outcomes was used subsequently to review and record the learner's progress.

For some learners with mental health difficulties or learning difficulties and disabilities, sets of planned learning outcomes were determined both on an individual and on a group basis. For Basic Skills learners the learning outcomes were usually agreed individually, although there was likely to be some commonality.

Monitoring of process of identification of planned/intended learning outcomes

Most systems in the sample made no provision for monitoring the setting of learning outcomes as part of quality assurance. This process and the type and format of the outcomes were usually established at the discretion of the tutor. The variability of learning outcomes was acknowledged as an issue by some providers. In several cases where systems had been evolving over time the need to train tutors in identifying and writing learning outcomes had been identified and training and written guidelines were provided.

There were no generalised mechanisms in place to check the suitability of the learning outcomes for individual learners and, with the exception of Basic Skills provision, where it did occur it was largely incidental. This might be through class visiting or lesson observation, or in one case as part of a sampling exercise where case studies describing individual learners' progress and achievement were reviewed, moderated and internally verified.

On-course assessment or feedback

Whilst most systems assumed that tutors would assess learners' progress informally and continuously, few actually required formalised assessment or stated how that assessment might be recorded and produced. One provider expected tutors on courses being taught over a certain number of hours to be able to provide a written record of the overall progress of three students with evidence to support it, including methods and outcomes of initial and subsequent assessments undertaken. In another case tutors were advised but not required to identify at least two points during the course where they undertook assessment and provided individual feedback to learners.

The main form of assessment learners referred to was being observed when working on a project, task or assignment, mainly on courses with a practical element. In some courses, for example languages, homework or class work was set and reviewed in class so that learners were aware of how successfully they had completed the tasks. On other courses there was no expectation on the part of the learners, the tutor or the providers that any systematic recorded on-course formative assessment would take place.

Continuous informal assessment was widely believed by learners to be taking place. This was based on the perception that tutors were well-informed about individual progress and able to articulate a measure of the progress when asked. Learners were confident that tutors knew how they were getting on and what progress they were making, even in the absence of any activity that the learner recognised as assessment. They felt that the tutor could assess progress from the discussion taking place in class or from observation of activity. Many learners spoke of receiving encouragement and feedback. This was usually informal, unstructured and apparently without reference to any stated or shared criteria. Importantly, learners articulated a desire for more one-to-one feedback that was positive but not uncritical. They also valued indications of what they could do to improve.

Review of individual progress: formative and summative

While in some cases tutors and learners were encouraged to make reference to the planned learning outcomes along the way, there was usually no requirement for these to be formally revisited until near or at the end of the course. In practice (and with the exception of learners on Basic Skills programmes, those with learning difficulties and disabilities and some learners on courses designed to widen participation) most learners did not appear to experience regular formative on-course individual reviews with their tutor. Few learners experienced individual tutorials, although some expressed the wish to have this opportunity.

Learners usually gained an understanding of how they were progressing during the course through informal assessment and feedback and through their own perceptions and evaluation. Neither of these was likely to be recorded in any way. Basic Skills learners, on the other hand, were accustomed to more frequent short discussions about how they were getting on with particular tasks and to short-term target setting while working towards longer term planned outcomes.

In some Basic Skills courses, learners had been attending classes (sometimes with the same tutor) for extended periods. This was also true of some older learners whose learning was primarily for enjoyment and personal satisfaction. In practice many learners on non-accredited programmes progress from one course to another, sometimes in seemingly unrelated subject areas, so that in effect the end of course summative review is actually an interim summative review and might more usefully be regarded as formative. Such learners might experience several summative reviews of progress on short courses but not have the opportunity for a review that looks back over their overall learning progress for the extended period. Exceptionally, within one widening participation programme where learners worked with a learning facilitator, progress over several courses was reviewed. This was in effect a form of supported cumulative self-assessment.

Learner self-assessment and recording of progress/learning gain

The main method of evaluation of progress against planned or intended learning outcomes was ipsative or self-referenced evaluation by the learners themselves. Usually, learners were asked to record their perceptions of their progress on a simple standardised form either at or towards the end of the course. Some learners with learning difficulties and disabilities also undertook regular self-assessment with the help of learning support assistants or care-workers.

Learners' evaluations of their progress were usually recorded by ticking a column or box which indicated the extent to which they considered a particular learning outcome had been achieved. Learners were not usually required to record reasons for their view or to cite evidence. In one example where both formative and summative review against planned and intended learning outcomes took place, learners were encouraged to discuss their perceptions of progress with other learners as well as with the tutor.

In many cases student-recorded self-assessment occurred before or after a discussion with the tutor. This was likely to be brief and unrecorded. During the last or penultimate session of the course, receipt of the completed forms was usually acknowledged and accepted by the tutor with informal comments. This process was seen as encouragement to continue learning. Learners were sometimes provided with the original or a copy of the self-assessment form but not in all cases. When asked, learners did not necessarily see any need to have a copy or have an understanding of how it might be useful to them. In some instances the completed forms appeared to be collected and held with course records without any copy being provided for the learner and with no written comment by the tutor (or at least none the learners were aware of) about the accuracy of the learners' self-perceptions.

Validation of learner self-assessment

Some systems in the sample made provision for tutors to comment on the validity of learners' self-assessment producing a joint record of assessment of progress. In some cases tutors wrote comments recording their views of a learner's progress against planned learning outcomes and sometimes they commented more widely. At its simplest this response offers a form of endorsement (or not) of learners' perceptions of their learning gain. In cases where the tutor differed with the learners' assessment, the written comments were more likely to indicate the disagreement implicitly rather than explicitly.

One piloted system invited tutors to comment after each of several self-evaluative statements by learners and to share these observations with them. On review this was considered to be too cumbersome and a tutor's summary comment responding to the overall self-evaluation by the learner was felt to be preferable. In another system, the learner and tutor undertook to assess separately the extent of learning gain. For the learner this took place with tutor and learning facilitator support and against individual planned outcomes and personal goals recorded in an action plan. For the tutor the assessment was against generic and individual learner outcomes and the assessment method and relevant evidence were recorded. The tutor then discussed the assessment record and any comments on overall progress with the learner. Where such joint records existed learners were usually provided with or could request the original or a copy.

One provider, while encouraging tutors to discuss progress with learners on both an ongoing formative basis and prior to summative assessment, did not give centrality to learner self-assessment. Rather, assessment of progress and learning gain was seen as the responsibility of the tutor and a matter of professional judgement.

Course evaluation

Learner self-assessment often took place at the same time as overall course evaluation - a sort of quid pro quo - and in some instances one form was used for both purposes. Some providers were trying to change their systems to separate these two processes

on the basis that the learner self-assessment cannot be anonymous and course review should be.

Learners' perceptions of their own progress were a source of information for tutors and informed their course evaluations informally. In effect they were a form of feedback and a stimulus to tutor reflection and self-evaluation. The record sheets relating to learners' self-assessments formed part of the tutor's records and evidence to support course evaluation. Where formal evaluative course reports were required, tutors might be asked to summarise the extent of achievement of planned learning outcomes by learners and in one case the suitability of the planned outcomes which had been identified. Some providers did not ask tutors for written evaluative course reviews.

Moderation and internal verification of tutor assessment

Moderation of tutor assessments, described either as internal moderation or verification, was uncommon in the sample. Only one system included formal peer moderation of tutor assessment. These were specially arranged procedures that preceded internal verification by managers of the tutor's judgements. This process did not involve and was not known to students. Another provider ensured that all part-time tutors' evaluative reports were reviewed by managers alongside records of learner self-evaluation in order to inform managers' summary evaluative reports. This review provided opportunities for managers to question any disparity between learners' and tutors' perceptions but cannot be described as moderation of assessment.

In some cases providers had systematic course review and evaluation systems in place as part of wider quality assurance arrangements which were seen as including non-accredited programmes. In practice, however, such periodic review had rarely been undertaken in the case of non-accredited courses, and in some cases such provision had been excluded from these arrangements (because not subject to external inspection).

Production and use of quantitative information

Learners did not refer to this aspect of provider systems. Most providers in the sample were not producing quantitative information based on the achievement of planned learning outcomes for the full range of non-accredited programmes they offered. Where they were generating quantitative information, it was because it had been stimulated by external inspection. Three providers were using and analysing data derived from courses above a specified length for internal management purposes, comparing outcomes for particular programmes or groups of programmes year on year and between programmes or groups of programmes.

There was considerable caution and concern about the use of quantitative data among those providers who had already generated and begun to use it. A number of other providers whose provision will now come within the frame of external monitoring and inspection were in the process of developing and in some cases piloting systems to generate data. At this stage they appeared less concerned about some of the issues than those providers with more mature quality assurance systems for non-accredited programmes.

Links with other areas of provider activity

Quality assurance and provider self-assessment

The extent to which learners had achieved the planned outcomes, however judged, usually informed the course evaluations undertaken by tutors. This was the case with both formal and recorded evaluations or informal feedback used during discussion with organisers or managers. It did not always directly inform wider evaluations of groups of courses within subject areas or departments. Such reviews tended to be more generalised rather than focused on individual learner achievement.

Several providers with experience of external inspection and well-developed self-assessment arrangements argued that consideration of the extent to which planned outcomes had been achieved was influential in the identification of strengths and weaknesses for the subject area or department. Furthermore, such information was useful to evaluating the extent to which inclusive learning was being provided or participation was being widened. Other providers who had not previously been required to undertake systematic self-assessment for non-accredited provision were in the process of reviewing and extending their quality assurance arrangements to include consideration of learner achievement in the context of the common inspection framework.

Impact on teaching and learning

Most providers in the sample considered that the requirement to identify, record and evaluate learners' progress and achievement had led to a greater focus on learning. It was argued that having to identify and review progress against planned outcomes encouraged tutors to think more about what learners needed to learn and actually were learning. Tutors were more likely to plan their delivery methods to ensure that all learners could achieve their goals, resulting in more varied and creative approaches to learning.

Where classroom observation was taking place, in the form of support visits or as part of quality assurance, the evidence suggested that a more learner-focused approach and more innovative delivery and assessment methods were being found. Conversely, where observations and course reviews indicated that learners were not achieving planned outcomes, this discovery was likely to raise questions and precipitate an intervention, usually supportive in the first instance. One provider involved learning facilitators whose role was partly to discuss with the tutor the methods used and, where necessary, to act as advocates for the learners.

Assessment practices

Many providers did not require formalised formative assessment and did not review assessment methods other than incidentally during lesson observations or support visits. Where formative assessment was expected, providers argued that the need to find appropriate ways for learners on non-accredited courses to demonstrate their progress was leading to the employment of more adventurous and imaginative assessment methods. Tutors were more aware of the benefits to learners of formative assessment and more engaged with the processes.

In the main, learners did not focus on assessment processes even where they stated that they benefited from continuous encouragement and feedback. Some spoke of

informal assessment activities that they found helpful. To support the interviews some of the learners were asked to consider types of assessment methods (see Appendix xxx) and whether or not they had experienced them or would consider them acceptable. While the use of the typology was unsystematic and the outcomes problematic from a research perspective (**not sure if reasons are still in the text!** see xxx), where learners did express a view about assessment methods they were usually open-minded. On the whole they objected only to methods that involved testing and examination or some form of individual performance with a risk of exposure.

Curriculum planning and development

Providers' perceptions varied about the extent to which the identification, recording and achievement of learning outcomes affected curriculum planning and development. Some felt that the processes were not sufficiently well-developed or had not been in place long enough to make a difference to either the range of programmes on offer or the delivery methods. In the Basic Skills field it was anticipated that the influence of the national curriculum and standards would be more influential.

The extent to which learners achieved planned outcomes was described as informing the pace as well as the content of subsequent programmes. In other words, tutors were continually evolving better ways of matching content and delivery to articulated learner needs and aspirations. For example, a modern foreign language learner had indicated that he would like to gain some understanding of the culture and lifestyle of the country while developing his language skills. This request was met, had proved popular with other students and had become an integral part of the course design. In another instance during a evaluative review of short courses (of ten hours' duration), the extent of achievement of planned learning outcomes was taken as an indicator of whether tutor and learner expectations had been realistic and subsequent courses were adjusted.

Professional development and training

Amongst the sample the use of learning outcomes approaches had affected professional development and training in three ways. When systems were being established there was proactive training and development for the staff who would be involved in implementation. This represented a major challenge for providers with numerous part-time employees. The major themes of such training were usually the underpinning principles and rationale for introducing learning outcomes approaches, and the conceptual framework.

Attention was also sometimes given to the identification, formulation and negotiation of learning outcomes. Some providers had prepared detailed written guidelines including discussion of good practice with illustrative examples. Providers with more developed systems were more likely to include guidance and training on assessment practices.

In those cases where teaching observations, course documentation, and course review and evaluation had highlighted concerns managers were likely to react by increasing support and providing advice and training.

Where it was available, involvement in team meetings to review courses and outcomes and to share practice was considered to be developmental for tutors and, in some cases, for learning support assistants or learning facilitators. Similarly, more

formalised peer moderation and internal verification processes provided an incidental and valuable form of professional development.

Institutional development

The extent to which the implementation of such systems had an impact on providers was linked to the overall portfolio of provision and the context in which they had been operating. For those who had received government funding for non-accredited programmes and who had been subject to inspection by the FEFC the development of such systems had been a priority. For providers in receipt of local authority funding and subject to OFSTED inspection, the level of priority was a function of the perceived value of such approaches to both provider and funder.

Some of the providers offered predominantly accredited programmes. The challenge for these was to adapt existing curriculum management and quality assurance systems to meet the differing needs of learners who were not seeking accreditation at the point of entry (for example, where 'Non-Schedule 2' programmes designed to attract new learners were project-funded). With the introduction of a common framework for quality monitoring and external inspection in April 2001 all providers were aware to a greater or lesser extent of the need to develop or adapt systems and arrangements to include all publicly funded provision.

Summary of issues emerging from interactions with providers

The following issues emerged from interviews with providers and from the relevant documentation. They reflect their experience of piloting and developing different approaches to identifying, recording and evaluating learning gain.

- Formalised initial assessment may be a significant deterrent for some learners and take considerable amounts of tutor time. If it takes place after enrolment it will be difficult to organise on a confidential basis during teaching time. Tutors will need further training in initial assessment
- Where courses are open access, learning outcomes defined by the tutor may not be equally appropriate to all learners who may be at different starting points. It may be necessary to differentiate courses by level. This could raise issues of viability for more esoteric programmes.
- Tutors need briefing as to the benefits of assessing progress in relation to planned learning outcomes, and they need training and guidance to identify and formulate learning outcomes on a consistent basis.
- Learners may be unaccustomed to identifying appropriate learning outcomes and may have difficulty where the subject matter is unfamiliar. Tutor support will be needed if individual intended learning outcomes are to be identified and negotiated, all of which takes time.
- It will be necessary to obtain a balance between achievable and challenging planned/intended learning outcomes.
- Some learning outcomes are harder to assess than others, particularly in the affective domain, and some subjects are harder to assess, for example the creative arts.
- Learners may be unused to self-assessment against stated learning outcomes and need support with the process. This will involve a time commitment on the part of the tutor.

- Tutors or learners may not identify any benefits from formative assessment and recording of learning gain. These processes need to be explained to all concerned, emphasising their contribution to learning rather than their links with accountability and funding.
- Assessment and progress recording practices need to be integrated into the learning process; more imaginative approaches are required.
- Learners should be made aware of the bases and processes through which their progress is to be assessed and of the formative uses of assessment.
- It is important to encourage learners and tutors to identify unanticipated or unspecified gains from learning as these represent added value. However it may be difficult to quantify or provide evidence of such gains.
- Validation by the tutor takes time and raises practical problems associated with ensuring that learners receive a copy of the tutor's comments prior to the end of the programme.
- Learners are reluctant to complete paperwork. Having to do so repeatedly or for several different courses being taken simultaneously can be counterproductive and result in the process not being taken seriously. Paperwork needs to be accessible and carefully explained.
- Where learners progress through multiple programmes periodic summative reviews of overall progress would be useful. Records of interim reviews and of learning gain would support such a process.
- Measurement of learning gain may be irrelevant and inappropriate for learners whose purposes are related to self-reflective learning or self-actualisation and personal development.
- It may be possible to generate quantitative information and data. However the range of subject areas, diversity of learner needs and purposes, lack of consistency in defining and expressing appropriate outcomes, and variability of learner and tutor responses to self-assessment and the assessment of learner progress and achievement mean that such data cannot be used reliably for comparative purposes within and between providers.

Chapter Three

**Commentary upon the systems
experienced by the learners**

This chapter identifies key messages from the research about learners' experiences and perceptions of providers' systems by considering the following questions: do the systems represent good practice; can evidence of current good practice be provided; do the arrangements satisfy external expectations and requirements?

Models of effective practice

It might be useful to begin by comparing what emerges from learners' comments about the systems in the sample with elements identified by other studies as being important to good practice.

In 'Recognising and Validating Outcomes of Non-accredited Learning – A Practical Approach' (LSDA 2001) John Vorhaus proposes a nine staged 'Framework for Good Practice' within which learners' progress can be recorded and evaluated against their learning 'objectives.' These are exemplified to a greater or lesser extent in the series of case studies featured in the LSDA report.

Vorhaus' proposed framework (5) consists of:

- initial identification of learning objectives,
- initial assessment of learners,
- negotiation of learning objectives with learners,
- learner self-assessment,
- on-going formative assessment,
- progression advice and guidance,
- record of achievement,
- moderation of assessment, and
- celebration of achievement.

Questions posed to learners for this study, and the interpretation of their responses, relate to some of these elements. As many of the learners and managers interviewed were associated with the providers featured in the LSDA case studies it is unsurprising that these elements figured in discussions with managers. However, this was also true where the providers had not contributed to the LSDA publication. As will be clear from Chapter Two, these elements were not universally present and their relative significance to the learner and the provider varied considerably.

There is a marked commonality between the above elements and those proposed by Turner in 'Squaring the Circle' (NIACE, 2001(6)). Significantly, there is also a high degree of congruence between both frameworks and the elements experienced by the learners interviewed for this research (see Appendix xxx for a simplified comparison). A substantial consensus is starting to emerge about what might constitute an acceptable and rigorous approach to the identification, recording and evaluation of learning gain that does not result in a qualification.

Two elements of this emerging framework hardly featured at all in conversations with either learners or with providers. These were progression advice and guidance, and the celebration of achievement.

Progression advice and guidance

To judge by end of course review documentation, methods were usually in place to check that learners were given information about further learning opportunities. The fact that this was mentioned only infrequently by learners may reflect its lack of significance to those interviewed whose purpose was not always progression, although many were habitual learners. One learner on a pilot programme designed to widen participation made specific reference to the difficulty she had encountered when following up information and advice by applying for a course offered by the mainstream arm of the provider. Other more tentative community-based learners were reluctant to transfer to a location more distant both geographically and psychologically. More experienced learners so enjoyed the ambience and ethos of the centre in which they were learning that they regarded it as their provider of choice for any subsequent learning.

Celebration of achievement

Several discussions with learners addressed how learning gain was celebrated. Many learners in creative or practical areas were proud to show their work. They felt this was evidence of their progress and should be displayed to anyone who needed proof that they were learning. During an interview with a group of creative writers who were recovering from mental illness, the reading and appreciation by the researcher of learners' work was a non-negotiable element of the research as far as the learners were concerned. It enabled them to practice performing to a stranger in advance of a celebratory event scheduled for Adult Learners' Week.

Do the systems experienced by learners represent good practice?

The summary in the previous chapter of the systems experienced by learners (see xxx) shows considerable variation in the presence of different elements. This may be attributed to the stage of development of the systems piloted by providers and the extent to which these have become embedded in their practice. This is related to the extent of non-accredited provision offered, the requirements of funders and external inspection regimes, the culture and philosophy of the organisation concerned, and the time and resources available to managers. Where all or most of the 'good practice' elements were in place, the evidence to demonstrate this was often not recorded systematically.

Can evidence of current practices be provided?

In *Outcomes of Adult Learning – taking the debate forward* Peter Lavender offered guidelines about what records might provide evidence of a rigorous approach to identifying, recording and evaluating non-accredited learning (7). He recommended that a number of routine recording systems needed to be in place to provide the evidence necessary to inform judgements about the quality of non-accredited provision. These are listed below cross-referenced against a summary of the arrangements made by providers in the sample, as indicated by interviews with learners and providers, and by the relevant documentation.

Lavender's guidance on recording systems /evidence required	Extent to which apparently present in sample systems
Students' individual needs/interests	May be identified through informal initial

(students' general objectives)	assessment; not systematically recorded for all students by most providers.
Tutors' initial (course) objectives	Usually identified in pre-course information or course outline; often translated into planned learning outcomes for all students in a group; in theory negotiable and variable – in most cases accepted by learners without adjustment.
Some standardisation of how intended outcomes are written	Training/guidance given by some providers. In practice few examples of proactive standardisation. Definition and formulation of learning outcomes usually at the discretion of the tutor. Learners may frame own learning outcomes – if so, require assistance.
Students' assessment of the extent to which they achieved the objectives	Most providers give considerable weight to learner ipsative self-assessment, usually towards the end of the course, sometimes undertaken with support.
Tutors' moderation of whether students have achieved the desired learning outcomes over a standard period	On-programme formative assessment and feedback to learners about progress against planned/intended outcomes usually informal and not recorded. Some providers ask tutors to validate learners' self-assessment in summative assessment records.
Students' unanticipated learning outcomes	Opportunity to recognise and record unanticipated gains built in to some systems.
Students' progression within the course and beyond it	Informal records of in-course progress may be kept – not usually systematic. Records of post-course progression not discussed.
The extent to which each of the students has achieved the intended learning outcomes	Extent of achievement of planned/intended outcomes for all learners in a group may inform tutor course review and evaluation.
Syntheses of achievements (group by group and for each curriculum area: achievement of intended and unanticipated learning outcomes; progression within and beyond the course; achievement of any qualifications; the extent to which benchmarks have been reached/exceeded)	Most providers not currently producing quantitative data for comparative purposes. Where such data is collected it is used with caution. Qualitative evidence of learner achievement and tutor summative records will inform annual or periodic curriculum area review and self-assessment where this is in place.
Benchmarks for what might be achieved in the following year	Use of internal benchmarks not possible for most providers. No valid external benchmarks available.
Standard performance indicators for achievements	Use not evident during this research.

The elements of practice highlighted by Lavender reflect those offered in the models both by Vorhaus and Turner, lending further support to the proposition that a consensus on rigorous practice in this area is starting to emerge. This offers practitioners and policy makers an agenda for further development not least because the frameworks correspond closely with stated accountability requirements in the

Common Inspection Framework (CIF). There is much still to debate about appropriate models, most particularly in relation to the generating and using aggregatable data. This raises significant practical issues but perhaps of greater concern are the substantial challenges to the validity and worth of such data. On the ground the challenge of implementing any system will be different for each provider. However, the movement towards a range of core elements of good practice will help to focus the debate and link it more closely to practice.

Do current arrangements satisfy external expectations and requirements?

Identifying and recording progress and achievement

Common Inspection Framework (CIF) evaluation requirements against which the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment are to be judged show that inspectors perceive initial assessment as the necessary starting point for identifying appropriate individual planned learning outcomes. The initial assessment that emerges from the learners' comments in this research is informal and often not recognised as such. It is usually not recorded, and the links between informal initial assessment and the planned learning outcomes identified for individual learners are not always evident.

The CIF implies an expectation that the eventual outcomes of the learning programme will include 'soft' or 'process' outcomes and the development of personal skills and those relating to the ability to learn effectively. It can be argued that this should include the capacity to reflect on the learning process itself and to evaluate learning gain through self-assessment. In most cases the learners interviewed were encouraged to self-assess but sometimes this was with limited tutor support. As a result, they may not perceive the process as being helpful in developing their skills of critical analysis. Self-assessment and progress reviews that did involve tutors did not always take account of personal goals as well as subject specific planned learning outcomes.

There is a clear expectation within the CIF that assessment will take place and that this will be both formative (integral to the learning process) and summative. Learners are expected to be made aware of their learning progress and what they need to do to improve, as well as what they eventually achieve. Assessment is expected to be used to monitor progress against planned learning objectives relating to learning activities, tasks and assignments designed to enable learners to make progress towards their intended learning outcomes (as defined in schemes of work and lesson plans). It was clear from interviews with providers in the sample that it was not always policy to require tutors to undertake any formal assessment or to record assessment systematically, whether formal or informal.

Using and providing evidence

Under the new quality assurance arrangements providers will be expected to form judgements for the purposes of self-assessment about the extent to which they meet the quality criteria in the CIF and will have to provide evidence to support their conclusions. Inspectors' assessments of the quality of provision must also be based on evidence. The research suggests that the processes by which providers identify starting points, agree to intended learning outcomes with learners, and monitor, assess and record progress may not always be recorded formally. Additionally, they may not all be taking place consistently for all learners. As a consequence the extent to which providers would be able to demonstrate that they base self-assessment on evidence -

whether qualitative or quantitative – will vary. Those providers with experience of external inspection appear to have moved furthest towards evidence-based self-assessment. Additionally there are substantial reservations about the production and use of quantitative data.

Learners' views will be a key source of evidence in this context. Most providers in the sample featured learner self-assessment and self-evaluation of progress within their arrangements. However it is difficult to see how learner self-assessment alone provides all learners with sufficient information about their progress, meets the requirement for fair and accurate assessment, properly informs provider self-assessment or provides sufficient evidence for inspectors to be confident about the learning outcomes being achieved. The role of some form of tutor commentary needs to be explored.

Within the sample, learners were very aware that tutors were monitoring progress informally. In some cases learners reported that tutors had also created 'assessment opportunities' (not the learners' words) in the programmes. However the tutors' judgements about learners' progress were not always recorded. It is arguable that if this is to be of greatest value in terms of learning (in addition to providing encouragement and being supportive) it needs to be based on a process that is explained to the learner and for which there is some kind of record. Arrangements for assessment decisions to be moderated or internally verified in some way would help to ensure fairness and consistency.

Meeting individual needs

For providers to show that individual learning needs are being met, they must also demonstrate that those needs can be and have been identified. The learners in this research were, on the whole, working towards group planned learning outcomes, even where provision was made for learning outcomes to be negotiated at the outset. The main exceptions were more 'customised' programmes such as basic skills courses, programmes for people with learning difficulties and disabilities and widening participation programmes. In these cases there was an inherent acknowledgement of the need to support learners in contributing to the identification of appropriate learning.

Where learners are moving through a series of learning programmes each tutor will probably provide feedback to the learner in relation to learning tasks and progress on that particular programme. However it is unlikely that arrangements will be in place to discuss with learners their overall progress through a series of learning episodes. The use of an individual learning plan or record for 'persistent' learners could assist, as could the inclusion of generic planned outcomes. These might include key skills or skills that contribute to the ability to learn.

Quantifying achievement

A number of providers in the sample had processes in place to record the outcomes of learner self-assessment and review against planned/intended learning outcomes. These usually asked learners to indicate with a tick which of a number of statements best described what they had achieved. In some cases this included ticking planned outcomes achieved. In some cases providers were using such data internally and making it available for inspection purposes, albeit with reservations.

They identified a number of problems with this approach. One provider in the sample who had been experimenting with the generation and use of such data found the resulting comparative statistics ‘problematic since the results are self-assessed and not comparable, consistent or meaningful’ (LSDA 2001 (8)) and therefore should be abandoned. Even where the recorded decision results from tutor verification of learner self-assessment, the issue of consistency within tutor assessment and between tutor and learner criteria would affect the reliability of the data.

Further problems relate to the identification and formulation of the planned learning outcomes. Analysis of the learners’ responses and of the relevant documentation shows that both the basis for identifying appropriate outcomes and the way these are expressed varied considerably within and between providers in the sample. For example they range from “be able to use a mouse,” or “structure sentences and group into paragraphs,” through “understand how poetic form creates meaning” or “gain familiarity with spatial, proportional and visual awareness,” to “acquire a basic understanding of the historical development of abstract painting and its influence on artists working now”. Such diversity is inevitable given the curriculum range and the fact that in some subject areas the identification of learning outcomes is more problematic.

The way in which planned learning outcomes were expressed in the sample also varied. Some simply reiterated stated course outcomes and were little more than a list of topics. Others were expressed either in terms of what learners should or might be able to do by the end of the course or as areas in which learners were expected to make progress towards stated goals. The expression of outcomes has an impact on how achievement is identified by learners, for example few are likely to claim full achievement of a planned outcome such as ‘gain familiarity with spatial, proportional and visual awareness.’ There may also be gender or culturally constructed issues to do with self-perception, self-esteem and accepted mores. These would all be confounded by any absence of tutor support and constructive feedback.

The basis upon which progress might be interpreted varied across the sample. Different options for self-assessment were offered, introducing another variable in terms of identifying achievement. For example, some learners and tutors had the option of ticking ‘Can do’ or ‘Working towards’ whilst others had ‘Have started on this’ or ‘Can’t do’. Which options would constitute achievement? Do both ‘Can do’ and ‘Working towards’ count? Some providers in the sample gave guidance to tutors on how many learning outcomes had to be achieved, and to what extent, before they could record that a learner had achieved all or most of the learning outcomes. Other arrangements asked tutors to identify separately those learners who had made substantial progress against all the planned learning outcomes (and may also have gained in other ways) and those who had made more limited progress.

Clearly, quantitative data obtained through a variation of counting the ticks may provide some information for provider use, assuming a consistency of approach to the formulation and articulation of planned learning outcomes and learner support in self-assessment. However, on the basis of this research, the diversity of levels and curricula in learning programmes and the absence of common approaches to generating such data between and sometimes within providers would make its use for comparative purposes misleading and potentially damaging.

Given the Learning and Skills Council's declared intention to use performance indicators to evaluate and compare provider performance there is an urgent need to address issues of consistency. More widespread use of guidance for tutors on writing and negotiating planned/intended learning outcomes supported by training would be beneficial. Arrangements to monitor and where necessary moderate the planned outcomes could also contribute to greater consistency within providers' programmes. However, support and monitoring will not address the lack of comparability between providers.

Chapter Four

**Summary of the findings from the
interviews with learners: purposes
and practice**

The learners' responses to the questions, and the many other comments they had to make on their learning, have been summarised thematically and presented in the following two chapters. This chapter focuses on purpose and practice by addressing:

- learners' purposes
- aspects of practice
- assessment of progress and learning gain
- identifying progress and learning gain
- reviewing and recording progress

Learners' purposes

Learners were asked whether, at the start of their courses, they had a clear idea of what the outcomes would be, what they would learn and what they would achieve. While the emphasis was on learning and achievement, some interviewees interpreted the question more widely and chose to talk generally about what they wanted from the course.

Most learners recalled having at least one general aim behind their decision to enrol rather than a set of specific objectives. Many spoke of several intentions. In practice, motivations were mixed and often defied neat categorisation between vocationally related and other life-enhancing ambitions. A complex inter-relationship between short- and longer-term learning goals was evident. This confirms the artificiality of the bifurcation of purposes in learning enshrined in the 1992 distinction between 'Schedule 2' and 'non-Schedule 2' learning programmes.

Gaining skills, knowledge and understanding

Half of all the responses spoke of seeking gains in skills with the development, extension or reinforcement of existing skills predominant. A third of these referred to acquiring new skills and the same proportion mentioned relearning skills or regaining interests that had been lost or diminished through lack of use.

Some learners had very specific ideas about what they wanted to learn for example, "to be able to use the internet" or "to learn the deaf/blind alphabet." However, in most cases their aims were broader, for example, "to understand more about disability." Basic Skills learners spoke of "catching up" or "making up for lost time" and becoming more confident with reading, writing and number work. An ex-professional Calligraphy student currently bringing up a family spoke of addressing her "bad habits" as a practitioner under expert guidance; an amateur lace-maker was frustrated that her skills had declined and wanted to regain pride in what she could do.

Using skills vocationally

About a quarter of the learners who spoke of wanting to gain or improve skills related this to current or future employment, voluntary work or self-employment. Only a few had chosen their course as a precursor to an accredited course in the same field. A nurse who had retired early due to a back injury had discovered, through attending various leisure classes, an ability to write and hoped to be able to earn money to supplement her small income.

A young man, whose intention in accessing tuition at a local youth centre was to continue to develop his sound-engineering skills, had recently been approached to

become an instructor on a programme for disaffected school aged students in a London borough. He was well aware of his value as a role model in that context. His fellow student, waiting to take up a media studies undergraduate place at university, had sought to improve his skills in the meantime and was passing these on as a volunteer at the centre where his course took place. Both learners intended to work in the music industry. A play worker from a playgroup where there were children with hearing impairment and who also worked part-time as a bartender, wanted to be able to use basic sign language with the children and her pub regulars. Other members of her group wanted to develop basic sign-language skills to use in work or volunteer situations.

Other learners sought to improve or extend their skills for familial or social purposes or for personal satisfaction. A parent attended a basic course in sign language to help her daughter communicate with an elderly relative. A woman who had been seriously ill wanted to “regain enjoyment in painting and a sense of achievement” while another who was now a full-time carer wanted to re-learn the artistic techniques she had once enjoyed practising. A young parent hoped that the massage skills she was learning would help to calm her son who had a disability and to improve the quality of their interaction.

One man was motivated to improve his reading so that he could enjoy a newspaper, while another was hoping to write to his sister in America with whom he had almost lost touch. A grandmother was learning word-processing skills to write autobiographical stories for her grandchildren. A retired man who now spent a lot of time in France through family connections had enrolled to maintain his French language skills and to gain a better understanding of the French way of life. A retired traffic controller who was proficient in five languages was keen to improve his conversational French.

Self-expression and creativity

The link between gaining skills and enhancing self-expression and creativity was made by a smaller number of respondents. A woman recovering from mental illness was motivated to attend a Creative Writing course by a desire to improve her ability to communicate her thoughts and feelings. A woman watercolourist spoke of learning new techniques to better express her artistic self and to “continue on my own learning journey,” while a retired civil servant in her eighties wanted to develop her creativity in new ways by moving from the two dimensions of painting to the three dimensions of sculpture.

The desire to recapture aspects of his creativity was also mentioned by a professional graphic artist working largely through electronic media who took a day a week to learn calligraphy. He wanted to feel in touch with the original hand skills that lay behind his technological expertise and “do something ‘real’ not ‘virtual.’” The blurring of personal satisfaction and potential vocational benefits is also evident in the testimony of the sculpture student in her thirties who wanted to explore sculpture both as a means of self-expression and of earning a living through her creative talent. This was a means of escaping the office job she hated.

New subjects and interests

A number of interviewees referred to exploring a new subject for study, to re-engage with earlier interests or to develop new ones. Again, motivation was a mixture of

enlightened self-interest, personal development and the enjoyment of knowing. One student of Contemporary Poetry said she had long wanted to “come back to poetry and to English literature, and to read for pleasure,” having had to drop English Literature at school several decades earlier. A pensioner who was interested in computers said he wanted to “know what was under the bonnet and understand the terminology” before investing in one “so at least I’ll know the right questions to ask.” A German-born student of early twentieth century English history felt her course offered her a way of making sense of the historical events she had lived through. Two students of Eastern Thought were interested in learning “new ways of looking at things, more about different schools of philosophy” while a third saw his study as helping him to learn to become “a better person.”

Seeing learning as beneficial

While most learners could identify practical or intellectual reasons to explain why they wanted to learn, a minority recalled having chosen courses because of the perceived intrinsic value of learning. They were convinced that the processes as well as the outcomes of learning were beneficial. Learners spoke of a desire to pursue a love of learning, to have fun and to enjoy it. “Enjoyment is the main point” was the firm view of one interviewee. There were also references to wanting to learn in order to “keep the brain ticking,” “keep me out of the doctor’s surgery” or in several cases as an antidote to stress and a means of counteracting the “long hours culture.” Several learners with busy lives who were caring for and meeting the needs of others spoke of “wanting to do something for me.” Some learners were unsure of what they wanted to learn at the outset but were motivated to explore what was available in the belief that it would be good to be spending their time in what they considered to be a worthwhile way, by learning something and developing an interest.

An entitlement

As well as asserting the right to choose courses that did not involve qualifications, some learners went further and spoke in terms of entitlement: “There should be an entitlement to dip back into education” (Painting), “You should be allowed to learn just for the hell of it!” (Sculpture), “Learning doesn’t stop when you leave school or leave work – you learn for wider purposes – use your brain – or lose it!” (Creative Writing). Others expressed gratitude that such opportunities existed. For example, a former linguist had decided to live in London rather than Paris when she retired because a wider range of challenging and stimulating opportunities was available.

Pragmatism

Learners also attended classes for a variety of pragmatic reasons. In some cases it was to overcome a lack of resources or expertise, such as having access to high cost equipment in music technology, space to work in a sculpture studio, or expertise such as that offered by a published writer. Two learners were explicit in their acknowledgement that they would not continue to study or practice their skills without “the discipline of attending a class regularly.” Reference was also made by other learners to a desire and need for support and encouragement to keep on learning. While many learners identified social benefits from attending courses, two learners were overt about having joined a class primarily for social reasons in order to meet like-minded people.

Intended learning outcomes

Few learners had chosen their programme with a set of specific learning outcomes in mind. They had been motivated by more general aims and interests and had chosen a course that would address these. However, the inclusion of intended learning outcomes within course information was considered to be helpful in making that decision. For some learners there had been an opportunity to identify areas of learning that interested them and then to negotiate more specific learning outcomes to meet individual needs and interests at the beginning. Some learners simply wanted to go on enjoying learning and their chosen course or subject was one of many pursued over time.

Aspects of practice

Identifying learning outcomes

Learners were asked how they worked with the tutor to decide their learning outcomes, whether these were recorded, and how helpful that process had been. The question was predicated on three assumptions. First, that learners and tutors worked together to decide what each individual wanted or needed to learn; second, that this was expressed in terms of learning outcomes; and third, that the term would be familiar to learners.

Planned learning outcomes

For the majority of learners, a set of planned learning outcomes had been presented as part of the pre-course information, indicating what they should be able to do or have learned. Learners found this information helpful and had chosen the course because it met their interests and needs. Some people with a clear idea about the subject they wanted to study and in order to secure a place had enrolled on the basis of the prospectus without seeing the course information sheet. Nevertheless even those learners stated that they would prefer to be able to see the planned learning outcomes before enrolling. There was a consensus among learners accustomed to using course information sheets with planned learning outcomes that these were helpful in ensuring that they were “on the right course.”

Where course information was provided, it was universal practice for the tutor to go through the information with the class at the outset, including the stated learning outcomes. Learners viewed this as setting out what was on offer and seeking their agreement to an agenda for the course. They considered it appropriate both to set out a framework for their learning and to obtain informed consent. Most learners were happy to accept what was proposed and, even where they were aware they could negotiate, had generally chosen not to. An exception was a group of computing students who would have preferred individual learning programmes. Learners did not recall learning outcomes having been revised or adapted during the course.

Learning outcomes were viewed as a guide rather than a fixed schedule and variations were perceived by learners to be an aspect of course delivery: “Learning outcomes are useful. You know what you will do and learn. They are flexible enough to enable you to pursue your own interests” (Developing Writing). Learners on practical courses spoke about the opportunity to undertake individual projects that gave them the freedom they required to achieve learning outcomes in their own way: “The prospectus and course outline give you information, the tutor goes through the

learning outcomes and says what you can expect to learn. You can move on to individual learning outcomes and get individual guidance. It's flexible" (Watercolour). In other areas, learners welcomed the opportunity to influence the content of classes by, for example, being encouraged to bring in relevant articles or artefacts or to contribute to the choice of poets or writers being studied.

A few learners who had attended courses in the same or a similar subject considered they did not need to know the planned learning outcomes before signing up as they were more interested in the identity of the tutor. In some cases learners had been given the opportunity on a previous course to influence the content of their current programme. This included by identifying what craft skills or techniques they would learn or the texts that would feature in a follow-up literature class.

Individual intended learning outcomes

A minority of providers in the sample had offered learners (as a group and on an individual basis) the opportunity to identify individual intended learning outcomes once the course had started. In such cases learners had usually been given information about what the tutor considered to be the possible learning outcomes (within course information provided during induction) and could, if they chose, select from those. However, they were encouraged to identify learning outcomes that reflected their own needs and aspirations.

In some cases, personal learning goals were related to the subject and were set alongside the planned outcomes for all learners on the course. For example, on courses arranged for people recovering from mental illness at one centre, learners were asked to identify social outcomes in discussion with their tutor. This identification was linked to one of the purposes of the programme which was to encourage learners to develop their interpersonal skills and relationships with others.

Some learners found it difficult to identify personal learning outcomes, either because it was too early in the course or because their real aspirations were too personal. As one Creative Writing student said, "Creative Writing is a journey. It's almost embarrassing to say 'I want to be a great writer' in week one – you may not be sure you'll get to week two!" Students of Eastern Thought felt that it would be difficult if not impossible to negotiate what you wanted to learn "if it is an area of new knowledge," while a computer student said he had no idea what a computer could do before he started the course. Several students on a French Literature course, which they considered to be on a par with undergraduate study, felt such an approach was inappropriate at that level. A Yoga student argued that "Yoga is a very personal challenge. It's about the development of understanding and skills – you need both to progress. I'm not sure it's appropriate to agree what you want to learn at the start."

In one example, creative writing students had been invited at the start of the course to identify individual personal learning outcomes and their motivation for learning. These accounts had been given to the tutor without the learners retaining a copy. The results were not discussed at the time or subsequently and the learners did not expect reference to be made to them until the end of the course when they would be asked to review their own progress against them. As these learners' individual intended outcomes were not assimilated into the content or delivery of the course, they had questioned the value of the process.

On the other hand, course content based on learners' expressed needs was appreciated. For example, learners on a Sound Engineering programme delivered at a youth centre viewed the practice of reviewing progress against individual intended learning outcomes as entirely appropriate. Similarly, pensioners on an introductory I.T. course valued having a set of proposed outcomes and also being able to renegotiate these so that their individual needs and interests could be accommodated.

Learners on Basic Skills programmes were accustomed to completing an individual learning programme or plan which defined the intended learning outcomes for a period of time, usually five or ten weeks. Targets for each lesson or a short sequence of lessons might also be agreed between learner and tutor on a regular basis. These learners felt strongly that it was important for decisions about the purpose and content of learning to lie with them and they shared the view of one learner who said, "It's the learner's domain to decide." Another student in the group considered it important that "I can say what's important to me."

While most learners found the identification of individual learning outcomes helpful, a few were not so sure. A group of students of the History of Poetry felt it was better to have broadly worded planned learning outcomes to accommodate a breadth of needs on the basis that this would provide "a necessary focus where there is such a diverse group of learners and life experience." History students who had been attending courses for many years were sceptical about the approach and saw no value in it for themselves. More than half of a group of Calligraphy students participating in a pilot programme remained unconvinced that using a learning outcomes approach was beneficial. A group of older learners engaged in a varied programme designed for their age group were unsure of the value or desirability of being asked to decide what they wanted to learn. They felt this could put people off learning and several seemed alarmed by the concept.

Recording of agreed learning outcomes

Almost all learners had experience of planned learning outcomes being recorded in some way, most commonly within the course information that they retained. In many cases these outcomes were also recorded on an individual record of learning. This sometimes included additional intended learning outcomes identified by the learner. There was usually an expectation that the recorded planned and intended outcomes would be revisited at the end of the course when learners would be asked to say to say if they felt they had achieved them.

Where this was common practice and the learning outcomes had been determined by the provider at the outset, there was rarely any expectation that these would be referred to by the learner and tutor during the course, except in entirely skill-based courses such as information technology. Where learners had selected and identified (usually with tutor support) a set of individual learning outcomes it was understood that progress would be reviewed by both the learner and the tutor against these at the end of, and in some cases during, the course.

Negotiation of learning opportunities

There were examples of learners negotiating the learning opportunities available to them. Some of these were involved in widening participation programmes set in community locations. A number referred to the importance of learning being based locally, even where this meant the accommodation was basic and access to resources was limited.

Outreach workers had spent time discussing with local people what they would like to learn and had then found a tutor to deliver it. In some cases learners were offered a list of possible topics or subjects with the proviso that they could suggest alternatives or additions. In one example, a group of learners had negotiated a series of short courses that they would all like to attend as a group. In another, some parents and other family and community members had joined in a series of craft courses at a local school and had negotiated their next course with the tutor.

Initial assessment and starting points

When learners were asked about how planned learning outcomes had been identified, only those on Basic Skills programmes made any reference to an individual assessment of their particular learning needs. Other learners spoke of discussions with the tutor, usually during the first class. In a few cases there had been conversations during the pre-enrolment phase covering their motivation for joining the class, what they wanted to get out of it and whether they had any relevant prior experience or learning. These took place on both a one-to-one and small group basis.

Assessment of progress and learning gain

Learners were asked how they and their tutors knew how they were getting on. Interviewees interpreted this question as being primarily about their awareness of their own progress and how they felt about that. They often needed prompting to focus on how the tutor knew what progress they were making. Learners rarely referred to planned or intended learning outcomes unless they were asked about them.

Assessment was not a term used by learners. When it arose a few expressed strong opposition to the idea that they were or should be assessed by the tutor in any systematic way. Where time permitted and the atmosphere was receptive, a few groups of learners were asked to comment on a variety of methods of assessment and to relate them to their own experience indicating their acceptability. A minority of learners could not identify any way in which progress was assessed, even after prompting. Importantly, however, most learners appeared confident that they were making progress.

Identifying progress and learning gain

Interaction with the tutor

The most common and popular way in which learners were made aware of their progress was through frequent interaction with the tutor during their learning time. Many learners mentioned verbal feedback on work in progress as a positive aspect of their experience. The term most commonly used by learners was “feedback.” Tutors’ comments were perceived as essential information on competence or progress. Lace-makers, Gospel Singers and Sculptors valued the chance to talk through technical and

practical problems associated with the work in hand. Tutors' comments were also seen as a means of providing support and encouragement. On some courses learners received written feedback or a written record of verbal feedback but this was not common. Some learners also spoke about receiving one-to-one feedback about their overall progress on an ongoing basis but this was much less common than interactions about learning tasks or practical work.

Constructive yet critical feedback

Students did not want uncritical feedback. As one Signing student made clear, the most useful feedback was constructively critical: "She won't let it go if you need to do something differently or better. Correction is necessary; you learn from mistakes." Another group member added that "If critical comments are made they are very positive and constructive and the tutor will suggest alternatives to build up your skills." A Calligraphy student confirmed that "a critical approach helps the learning." The value of receiving clear guidance about what to do to improve was mentioned by a Creative Writing student whilst another commented with satisfaction that her tutor did not give praise lightly.

One Sculpture and Pottery student commented memorably that tutors were always positive and encouraging but he could tell what they really thought: "When they tell you it's 'interesting' you know it's crap! When they say it's 'fine' it's not that good. When they say 'good' then you know it's OK." However, this student also said he would be offended if he thought something was good and the tutor did not agree. The importance of praise was also mentioned specifically: "You need critical evaluation of your own work and encouragement," stated a Watercolourist.

Self-assessment and awareness

When learners were asked how they knew if they were making progress, the most frequently used sentence was "You know yourself how you are doing," indicating that they had a strong faith in their own assessment of progress. Specific references were made to feeling more confident about learning, being able to do things more quickly or with less help from the tutor, understanding things better or understanding more and (particularly when using a computer) being "more willing to have a go" and "not panicking so often"! One student on a Literature course delivered in French said, "You become aware that you are improving when you don't have to concentrate quite so hard – you must be making progress." A Bobbin Lace student spoke about finding she could follow a pattern that she had thought was too difficult: "You feel elated when it's going well and you know you've got the hang of it!"

Students felt able to gauge their own progress: "You recognise your own weaknesses and your gains in confidence." A few learners said they used the planned learning outcomes to inform this process: "You can be surprised at what you have learned – then you can set new goals." The importance of reflection on and discussion of progress was asserted by a student of Meditation and Visualisation who considered that the process gave her the chance to explore and appreciate her own potential. Some learners felt that their progress was most evident from the artefacts they produced during the course - a booklet of stories and poems, lace samples, or art work prepared for an exhibition.

Responses from other learners

A number of interviewees mentioned that their awareness of progress was in part a result of comments, critical feedback and other responses to their work from other learners. They recognised that they gained from both the support and the honesty of their peers: “People in the group don’t flatter. They are truthful.” The courage it took to be open and honest, to give encouragement and constructive comments was acknowledged by a student of Mediation and Visualisation.

A group of learners recovering from mental illness spoke proudly of a ‘Voice of the Learner’ event planned for Adult Learners Week when they would present and read their work to other adult learners. They were supporting each other in preparing for this by hearing and commenting on each other’s work. As one learner commented, “We get homework to do, we read our work to each other, sometimes we laugh together, we give each other constructive comments. We appreciate each other’s work.” Learners studying basic sign language felt that it was useful and valuable for their group to share with their tutor individual planned learning outcomes and to discuss progress as a group. As will be seen from the section ‘Learning in and with a group’ (chapter 5), learners valued each other’s responses and comments and frequently mentioned the importance of group responses.

Checking by the tutor

The main reported method of assessment by tutors was observation of work in progress. Learners expressed considerable faith in the efficacy of this and several considered that tutors could tell how individuals were progressing on the basis of their participation in class discussion alone. However there were a number of references to more proactive approaches. One Signing tutor had asked learners to tell each other stories in sign language whilst she asked questions in the language. The same tutor “does refreshers and checks our learning. We do quick tests. She makes it fun.” A number of students mentioned the effective use of questions designed to provoke a response or discussion but which also gave the tutor information about how much learners had understood. A student of French talked about participating in role-plays, competitions and problem-solving activities, all in French, which enabled the tutor to assess individual progress.

Homework was given for some classes and was optional or negotiable in others. Where it was set it might be reviewed in class within a group setting or on a one-to-one basis. For example, Creative Writing students’ homework assignments were read and critiqued regularly by the tutor during class time. Written tasks were more likely to be set and marked where the focus of the course was learning a language or improving essential or key skills. One student on a course designed to improve her English language skills regarded completing homework and receiving detailed written feedback as essential. In Computer classes students were most likely to work their way through assignments assessed by the tutor on completion.

Awareness of assessment

Few students referred to formal assessment in their responses to questions about progress. With the exception of I.T. courses that were continuously assessed, there were no examples cited of formalised assessment. Some learners maintained that they were unaware of any assessment taking place. One learner on a French Conversation course expressed the view that since many adults disliked assessment his tutor was wise to disguise assessment activities as “fun.” The fact that tutors’ methods of checking on learning and progress appeared to be invisible to learners suggests that

other tutors adopted a similar approach. This could account for the apparent discrepancy between learners' confidence that tutors checked their progress and the apparent lack of awareness of how this was being done.

Reviewing and recording progress

Learners were asked about the process for reviewing their progress on the course, including whether this was recorded and how it was helpful. References to a specific review of progress during the course were rare, reflecting the informal nature of the formative assessment experienced by most learners.

Formative or interim review

With the exception of learners on Basic Skills courses, few had experienced explicit interim or formative reviews of their progress. Exceptionally, there were two or three occasions each term during a Sculpture course when past and present work was reviewed. Additionally a small number of learners made it clear that their progress had been appropriately monitored during one-to-one interactions with the tutor. The outcomes of these had been conveyed verbally. A small minority of learners could not identify any specific progress review with their tutor, either formative or summative, but this does not necessarily mean that progress assessment of some kind had not occurred. The value of the assessment is not clear, however, if learners are oblivious to both the process and the outcomes.

Summative or end of course review

Most learners on programmes with planned learning outcomes expected to make reference to these when reviewing their own progress at the end of the course. Where students moved from one course directly onto a follow-up course in the same subject, the review was likely to take place at the end of a term. In effect, this functioned as an interim review. For most learners the end of course review was essentially self-assessment without necessarily any contribution from the tutor.

Other learners spoke of self-assessment against the stated planned learning outcomes as the starting point or main focus of a review with their tutor. For some, this involved examining and discussing a portfolio of completed work or work in progress. Few students had the opportunity of a specific tutorial although several mentioned that they would very much value the chance for a full one-to-one review of progress. They could not see how this could be accommodated within the pattern of course delivery (Yoga, Creative Writing, French Literature). Some providers in the sample made provision for tutors to endorse or comment on learners' perceptions of their progress and learners usually received a copy of the report.

The value of reviewing progress

About a quarter of the learners in the sample were positive about the value of reviewing progress. It was seen as helpful in determining next steps and in redefining learning goals. Calligraphy students felt that the opportunity to review their work with the tutor enabled them to appreciate its development. Lace-makers felt that completing review sheets with the tutor against the agreed learning outcomes "helps you see what you've accomplished and that you have not been wasting your time." A group of students with disabilities and learning difficulties, several of whom could not readily communicate verbally, had reportedly enjoyed indicating with crosses or ticks

against a set of symbols the extent to which they felt they had achieved learning targets. One student wanted to explain that several noughts on her review sheet should be interpreted as ticks as she had decided to use a nought instead of a tick as if playing noughts and crosses, just for fun. An aspiring writer “found I wasn’t as good as I thought I was!”

A small number of students either did not see a value in progress review or were opposed to the idea of it. It was described by one History student as “an alien concept.” Another student from the same class did not “see learning as making progress from a to b to c.” A group of Poetry students felt that reviewing against planned learning outcomes would not assist them. Another student of Sculpture stated baldly, “I know I am learning and developing and don’t want to have to justify that” and felt that reviews of progress were “not helpful, irrelevant to my learning.”

When asked about the benefits of participation in their learning programmes few learners made reference to the achievement of planned or intended learning outcomes, preferring to speak about the wider benefits of learning. However, when asked specifically about achievement of agreed learning outcomes the majority of learners appeared confident that they had made or would make recognisable progress which would merit recording on summative review sheets.

Recording of progress and achievement

While most students on practical courses retained their work, and in some cases brought it with them to class, few students kept a record of the outcomes of their own self-assessment. This had usually taken place privately and without the involvement of the tutor. A group of students on Basic Skills courses maintained weekly learning logs with their tutor’s support, and one student on a Meditation and Visualisation course kept a learning journal from which she chose extracts to read to her tutor during one-to-one tutorials. One Sculpture tutor made photographic records of students’ work which were used to inform reviews. Written records of on-going progress were not the norm, and even where there was a summative review against a set of agreed learning outcomes the learners did not always keep a record of it.

A small proportion of learners were not aware of any written record of their progress, whilst others did not know how the records were used or what happened to them. Most learners who commented on the review forms expressed the view that they should be read and some use made of them. A lace-maker commented that completing a record of a review was “a bit of a bore – but I can see the college needs [the record] to know how we’re doing and if the tutor is doing a good job, that the students are progressing and not messing about.” A Yoga student thought that a written record of her progress would be good to have to take to a more advanced class.

Chapter Five

Summary of the findings from the interviews with learners: the value of current approaches and of learning

This chapter focuses on the learners' perceptions of the value of the systems they experienced, and the benefits of learning. It addresses the following themes: the benefits of current approaches; doubts about current approaches; and the benefits of learning.

The benefits of current approaches

Learners derived a number of benefits from the approaches to identifying, recording and evaluating learning gain they experienced. These were associated with learning in and with a group; relationships between learners and tutors; and setting the agenda for learning.

Learning in and with a group

Learners found comments from their peers helpful during the process of self-assessment. While the benefits of learning in a group were not seen as unique to non-accredited learning, particular reference was made to a lack of pressure (associated by some learners with accredited courses) and a lack of competition within learning groups. This was seen as enhancing relationships between learners and the consequent benefits in terms of learning.

Full-time carers attending an Art course (while those they cared for attended a community centre) spoke of the importance of not being under the pressure they associated with a more formal course. One commented, "It's not competitive here [by comparison with attending a mainstream college course]. Others appreciate your work and it changes your views." Deaf Awareness students felt that they had closer relationships and respected each other because they were not competing. A student of Meditation and Visualisation commented, "Everyone gives each other space and is supportive. We are not competing or showing off."

In addition to valuing other learners' evaluation of their progress, a significant proportion of the interviewees spoke of the benefits of learning with and from each other. There was enjoyment in being part of a group that gelled and being able to argue and discuss ideas. "We learn from each other, help each other, share ideas. We all have different styles." (Mosaic); "You get ideas from others. You can watch the tutor sorting out others' problems and learn from that." (Bobbin Lace); "You can learn so much from fellow students. They can contribute factual information or make cross-references to other areas of knowledge such as medieval history." (History of English Poetry); "The group is like a mirror – we learn from each others' mistakes and responses." (Creative Writing); and "We are encouraged to look at each others' work. It can be inspiring." (Watercolour).

Social contact was seen as a positive gain and source of enjoyment for many and a necessity for some. Older learner spoke of classes as combating social isolation, and one member of the group stated that it had enabled her to "start living again". A group of carers spoke of the added value of learning with others with whom they shared common concerns and needs, as caring could be very isolating. For learners with mental health difficulties, being able to come to a group where they felt safe, supported and listened to made a real difference. As one member of this group put it: "If you feel rough, no-one will give you a hard time." Another group of learners who had experienced mental illness spoke of the value of coming to a class where "We can be ourselves, get strength from each other – others who understand" and of the importance of "a place to come, some laughs, relief from anxiety".

Learners spoke of valuing a sense of belonging and community. Gospel Choir members agreed that one benefit was how “We’ve really gelled as a group”. Lace-makers liked the fact that “You can make new friends and be part of a community with shared interests”. A Creative Writing student spoke of the way that comradeship “gives a high” while another student in this group felt that “Group support and dynamics are an essential contribution to learning”. A colleague spoke of experiencing “a kind of intimacy” with others through listening to and discussing their writings. A student of Contemporary Poetry spoke of being deeply moved by the realisation that others in the group were also moved to tears by the reading of a poem by Wilfred Owen. This student spoke of valuing “companionship in learning”.

The range and diversity of friendships made through shared learning experiences was a source of pleasure and enlightenment to many learners: “Different, yet on the same wavelength. We share a common sense of purpose.” (Sculpture); “You meet new people, hear different views and learn from others, recognising that people have different views and perspectives.” (Eastern Thought); “I’ve made friends with people of different ages, with different jobs and backgrounds with whom I wouldn’t have expected to make friends. That’s been beneficial.” (Meditation and Visualisation); and “You meet people who have had extraordinary lives, undergone major changes in their lives, had hard times.” (Painting).

However there were a few exceptions to this favourable view of multi-age learning. One retired learner of computer skills felt that the fact that his course was specifically aimed at older learners was advantageous: “I want to learn with others who want to learn, not reluctant seventeen-year-olds”.

Relationships between learners and tutors

Comments in this area were not linked specifically to the absence of accreditation. The tutor was seen as strongly influential over the atmosphere for learning and particularly in setting an informal tone, which was seen as important. Creative Writing students who had experienced mental illness appreciated the relaxed feel to their group, referring to their learning as fun and enjoyable. A Gospel Choir member described what made the experience so rewarding: “You have to work hard; it’s pacy and energising”. The opportunity to learn in a small group (as compared with school) was considered a benefit, and some students commented that working in a small group was less stressful and afforded a high level of individual support from the tutor.

The relationship between learners and their tutor was mentioned as a critical factor by a number of students. The tutor was identified as a key source of learning whose advice and support, objectivity and encouragement was vital. Exchanges with the tutor were described as on a more equal footing than learners had experienced in the past. Relationships on a range of courses were described as “adult, reciprocal and flexible” and were contrasted with experiences at school. One Creative Writing student commented, “It’s very different from school. Everyone is on an equal footing. It’s less formal, more respectful and valuing”. One Sculpture student described the atmosphere as “very adult, positive, pleasant”, while a colleague described tutor and student as being on more or less equal terms.

A Painting student spoke of the sense of confidence and trust engendered by the quality of the relationship between tutor and learners: “There’s no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ – whatever you do is acceptable, all starting points are OK. You are treated as

intelligent individuals, everyone is respected. There are no boundaries, and you can be vulnerable. There is constructive criticism, no ‘put-downs’”. A student of Contemporary Poetry echoed this view when she said, “I feel all contributions are valued, however individualistic!”

While learners valued this sense of mutual respect and greater equality they acknowledged the different position of the tutor who was seen as a source of knowledge, expertise and inspiration. A Creative Writing student described her tutor, a published writer: “She knows her stuff and isn’t too buddy-buddy”. A Deaf Awareness student said of her tutor: “We respect her and she’s one of us, not distant, not ‘her and us’, a friend. But we do what she asks. We don’t feel looked down on, we are asked – not told”.

Setting the agenda for learning

As will be evident from earlier discussion, many learners derived benefit from identifying learning outcomes at the beginning of their courses. A number of learners considered that a set of planned learning outcomes offered a useful framework or focus for the course “and a common sense of purpose”, according to a student of Contemporary Poetry.

Learners valued having an agreed agenda for their learning while being able to work in their preferred way. As one arts student put it, “Learning outcomes offer a structure not a straight-jacket” on the basis that students can choose what they want to do and how to do it. This student felt that the approach encouraged her “to experiment, take risks, go beyond what you are comfortable with”; a Creative Writing student felt it “gives you confidence, encouragement to have a go, take a chance”. Flexibility in the pace and level of learning, being able to take from the class what they wanted (for example, deciding whether or not to do homework) and to choose their own projects were all cited by learners as positive aspects of their learning. A Sculpture student who was receiving treatment for a mental health difficulty spoke with enthusiasm: “You can choose what to do, ask for ideas, try out lots of ideas. There are lots of resources to use”. A craft student was confident that “the tutor will teach the necessary techniques and everyone can achieve something”.

Learners felt that their progress was enhanced by the opportunity to influence what and how they learned. A Deaf Awareness student commented that “It’s better to have an input [to what is learned], not being told” while another confirmed that “You enjoy it more, if it’s your own choice it is more interesting”. A parent learning about Aromatherapy at her son’s school contrasted this experience with her own earlier learning experiences: “At school you are told what you will learn. It’s an adult way of learning to make your own choices”. Another young parent on a similar course at her community centre felt that “the course is for us, not like school. Our needs can be accommodated”. A parent learning how to create mosaics at her daughter’s school stated that “Being asked what you want to learn is more adult”.

Doubts about current approaches

Some learners were sceptical about different aspects of the processes they experienced. They commented particularly upon: completion of paperwork; difficulty in evaluating progress; and difficulty in identifying and claiming achievement.

Completion of paperwork

Inevitably, completion of paperwork was never actively welcomed. A Sculpture student was frank in her view that the recently introduced process for completing documentation was “irritating”. The view of a Mosaics student who stated bluntly that she did not like “paperwork” was endorsed by the group. The consensus in a History class was that the whole approach to learning outcomes (involving the completion of what their tutor referred to as “horrible forms”) was burdensome and detracted from their enjoyment of their course. This raises another issue reflected by the learners – lack of clarity over the purpose of the documents. For example one group of students were sent the planned and intended learning outcomes forms through the post to complete and bring with them. They felt they could have been better informed about why they had been asked to do this. On the whole, however, the completion of paperwork was accepted as a necessary if irksome requirement. Learners viewed it as part of their programme and in this context, several students mentioned accountability on the part of the providers. There was a willingness to co-operate while not being persuaded of the value of the activity.

Difficulty in evaluating progress

Some learners struggled to interpret the approach they were being asked to implement. A Mosaics student was not sure how much detail was required in response to the open question “What have you learned?” It could be a very long list and she was concerned about including what might be seen as trivial elements. One system gave students the option of saying they had decided “not to pursue” one or more learning outcomes, which a Contemporary Poetry student did not see as being helpful. A student of Eastern Thought did not think it sensible to ask learners to choose the “Can’t do” option when discussing aspects of philosophy but was hesitant about deciding upon whether he could claim to ‘recognise and critically analyse ideas drawn from classical Chinese and Buddhist sources’.

Difficulty in identifying and claiming achievement

Several students revealed a disinclination to claim achievement. A Contemporary Poetry student commented, “It’s hard to say that you can ‘discuss with confidence’. I feel diffident so tend to say I am ‘working towards’ [the stated outcomes]”. A student of Eastern Thought stated that he was “inclined to be modest, moderate, not to boast”. However, he did view as generally useful the process of reflecting on his achievement of the planned learning outcomes.

As was mentioned earlier, a number of students expressed the wish for more individual reviews of progress and achievement with their tutor. However, the difficulty of engaging the tutor in a discussion of progress against planned learning outcomes was also noted. For example, a Sculpture student commented that although she would have liked the opportunity to discuss her future learning and aspirations in more detail, her monopoly of the tutor’s time might be seen as “egocentric and pretentious”.

Many learners had reservations about the benefits of assessment as distinct from constructive tutor feedback. Some were very clear that they had joined their courses neither expecting nor wanting any form of assessment. A group of learners on a poetry appreciation course recognised the value of reflecting on their progress in relation to the stated planned learning outcomes but rejected the suggestion that this was a form of assessment. One learner studying poetry had felt moved to write after a class but had not submitted her work as she did not want to be “judged”.

Students studying Philosophy considered that the tutor’s tasks were to cover the ground indicated in the course outline, involve people in discussion and stimulate them to thought but not to assess their understanding. Learners attending a history class were firm in their view that they were not interested in whether the tutor or other students considered that they were making progress. They were extremely satisfied with their course and the tutor. On the whole these learners had attended courses over a number of years and were committed and sometimes passionate learners.

A minority of those interviewed demonstrated an awareness that those subsidising non-accredited learning lacked a straightforward indicator of performance – a qualification. Several made the point that they would not continue attending unless they felt they were making progress. It was also pointed out that for practical classes it was necessary to purchase equipment and materials, something not done lightly by those on restricted incomes. It was suggested that attendance was a key indicator of satisfaction and thus of “performance”.

The benefits of learning

When asked to reflect on their learning and what they considered they had gained, learners responded enthusiastically with more answers than to any other question. They identified both anticipated and unexpected positive outcomes. The former echoed the general aims and purposes outlined in ‘Learners’ Purposes’ (p xxx). These included, in descending order of frequency:

- the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding
- self-expression and creativity
- new subjects and interests
- enjoying for its intrinsic benefits

Certain specific benefits were associated with non-accredited learning. For example: “Older people don’t want exams but still want to learn”; “Exams can be off-putting” (I.T. for Pensioners); “Exams are relevant to careers, later in life you learn for life, follow your own interests” (Painting); “You have nothing to prove – you learn for yourself”; “Don’t want ‘grading’, I’m beyond qualifications” (English History); “You don’t have exam pressure but are motivated by achievement – you get the learning bug” (Maths Workshop).

Students of Eastern Thought considered that accreditation would narrow their learning and they rejected the idea of formalised assessment or accreditation. Those studying the History of English Poetry felt they were “Sampling different areas purposefully rather than digging a single furrow deep” as they would have to do if studying for an exam. Watercolourists felt that qualifications caused anxiety and that their skills would develop better without exam pressure. One arts student who had had experience of NVQs saw accreditation as time-consuming for both learner and tutor and heavily reliant of paperwork.

The learners identified a range of anticipated beneficial outcomes from their learning.

Enjoyment and satisfaction

Although relatively few learners recalled their purpose in learning as being about enjoyment in the processes outcomes of learning, the largest number of responses identified these as major gains or spoke of the fulfilment derived from creativity and self-expression. Learners spoke of the sheer pleasure, excitement, stimulation, fun and delight they experienced. They described quiet absorption, inspiration and challenge. Satisfaction and increased motivation were consequences of an awareness of improvement and achievement. A student with a disability and learning difficulties displayed great pleasure when demonstrating how she was now able to teach another student how to 'read' instructions to play a tune on an electronic keyboard. Participating in learning provided a focus of interest, something to think about and to share with friends and family.

Learners identified enjoyment and satisfaction as a major gain in a variety of contexts: "My previous learning (linguistics) was very precise. This learning is about creation, eternity, humanity – I feel inspired to go on" (Contemporary Poetry student); "I'm just agog with the computer – I'm thinking of bringing a bed in!" (Computer course for older learners); "I feel happy and fulfilled – I've become unexpectedly 'hooked'!" (Sculpture student); "It's not just occupying time – it's challenging and stimulating" (Creative Writing); "Hardest tasks give greatest satisfaction" (Lace-making student); "Voluntary learning is nourishment" (older learner – programmes for older learners); and "It gives me something to think about when I am not here. I think about what I'm doing, what I may do next..." (Sculpture student with mental health difficulties).

Gains in skills, knowledge and understanding

While not necessarily making reference to specific planned learning outcomes, interviewees wanted to be clear about the value they placed on acquiring new skills or extending and improving existing ones. As well as being a source of satisfaction and pride there were wider perceived family and social benefits. Parents participating in a community-based programme mentioned passing on craft skills to their children as an enjoyable occupation. Another parent had taught basic massage techniques to a niece with a baby prone to colic, with apparently impressive results. A literacy student was delighted that as a result of improving his skills he could now communicate by letter with his sister. She had lived abroad for many years and he planned to visit her when confident enough to cope with signboards at airports.

An older learner spoke of maintaining her lace-making skills. Others in the group spoke with pride about keeping traditional skills alive through membership of a lace society and through giving demonstrations. These activities were a spin-off from attending classes: "It's important to keep traditional crafts going. If no one learns there will be no passing on of skills to future generations. These skills may not be necessary these days but are a source of pleasure and a pastime. Lace-making is not like knitting where you can learn the basics then go on, on your own. You can't really develop your skills without practical help".

There were also some unexpected practical gains. An Aromatherapy student was pleased to have found a cure for headlice, endemic at her daughter's school. Parents at a craft class spoke of the unanticipated advantage of being able to make gifts rather

than buying them. Lace-makers similarly enjoyed being able to create hand-made items to traditional designs to give as presents and keepsakes.

Reference was made to the intrinsic value of gaining knowledge and understanding. A student of Contemporary Poetry considered that her course had given her “very valuable learning to recognise the way that poetry can reflect the concerns of a society at a particular point in time”. A student of Eastern Thought enjoyed the course because it enabled him to pursue his interest “in making connections, seeing similarities and differences” within and between areas of knowledge. A French Literature student felt that it was “useful to read texts [in the original language] and learn about the writers in their historical context” while another member of the class spoke of the motivation to go back to read texts in French that she had previously read only in translation.

Learners liked being introduced to new areas of knowledge as well as having the chance to revisit those that interested them in the past. A number spoke of waiting until they had time to pursue long held interests. One student had wanted to paint in the medium of watercolour since her school days, a retired civil servant had worked her way through drawing and painting to sculpture, which she relished, and a painter spoke of the benefits of learning to use a different part of her brain after a serious illness.

A basis for further learning

A number of interviewees felt they now had a basis for further learning. For one parent the benefits of “getting back in touch with learning – it’s a long time since school” included learning about a new subject (Aromatherapy) and a possible way into a new career. A Poetry student spoke of “getting excited to learn more” while a small group of computing students felt ready to move on, aware of recently acquired skills which they wanted to extend. A Calligraphy student noted that one of the things he had learned was how much more there was to learn.

Students of Sign Language and Calligraphy were already committed to continuing to develop their skills beyond their current course. A learner recovering from depression and who had successfully learned how to use a computer decided to pursue a career in childcare and was training as a classroom assistant as a precursor to taking a vocational course at a local college. A Deaf Awareness student commented, “Enjoying learning creates an appetite for learning”.

Learners identified a number of beneficial learning outcomes that were unexpected. These were associated with a sense of well-being, increased confidence, improved quality of life, and changes in perception of themselves and others. These could all be described as ‘soft outcomes’.

A sense of well-being

A significant number of comments reflected and expanded upon the statement made by a former nurse who asserted: “Learning makes you feel good”. There was a widespread acknowledgement of the emotional, psychological and physical benefits of learning. In some cases these were seen as being derived directly from the course content for example, in Yoga, alternative therapies, and creative and expressive

subjects: “I feel fantastic, have more energy, [it] spills over [into home life] and I cope better” (Yoga); “The feeling of well-being affects how I relate to the world and to other people” (Yoga); “I enjoy coming even if I don’t feel like coming. I feel better when I go home” (Creative Writing for people with mental health difficulties); “Singing does you good, gives you a lift, is stress relief. Singing helps my asthma!” (Gospel Choir); “Having to concentrate and make an effort takes your mind off work. It takes you out of yourself, gives you a different focus” (Art for Carers); and “This keeps me out of a mental hospital [and] surely costs less for me to come here than to be back in there?” (Creative Writing for people with mental health difficulties).

Older learners made more generalised reference to the wider health benefits they saw resulting from an active engagement in learning: “It’s preventative medicine!” and “I’ve had a new lease of life, I feel good and I’m learning.” (Programmes for Older Learners). One student of French Literature put the case very cogently “The true importance of adult learning is not in people understanding more, per se. The key factor is continuing engagement in a process of personal development – the prolongation of useful life.”

Increased confidence

A significant number of references were made to an increase in confidence due to learning. For some, this was related to how they now participated in learning, for example by feeling able to ask questions or to speak up in class. A Contemporary Poetry student felt “more able to contribute now that I realise that my contributions are valued in the discussion” and was pleased at “having the confidence to say what I think”. An increased willingness to speak in public was mentioned by a student of French who wrote and read in five languages but had found conversation in an additional language difficult. Computing students spoke of greater belief in their skills while a group of pensioners described feeling more at ease with technology. A student who had made good progress in learning sign language was clear that as an adult returner to learning, her success in this area had given her the confidence to go on and learn “other things – whatever I want!”

Specific reference was made by some learners to overcoming anxiety and a fear of failure and becoming less averse to risk-taking and change: “You learn that it’s OK to take risks. You learn from mistakes too” (Watercolour); “I’m less afraid of change. I can let go in the knowledge that something else will come along” (Meditation and Visualisation); “When asked to do new and different things and take risks I’ve risen to the challenge” (Creative Writing); and “It’s OK to try things you wouldn’t choose to do, and you can get good outcomes” (Painting).

Seeing oneself and being seen differently

A significant number of learners spoke positively about how learning had changed their perceptions of themselves and cited this change as beneficial. One learner confessed to finding her own paintings “amazing”! References were made by learners in a range of contexts to their surprise at what they had been able to achieve: “I’m surprised I can put my thought on paper. I’m usually a listener not a talker” (Creative Writing for people with mental health difficulties); “I’m very surprised at my own achievement” (Art for Carers); “I’ve learned to use a scanner after only six weeks!” (Computers for Pensioners); “I have overcome my fear of computers” (I.T./Improving Writing); and “I have done better than I expected. It’s harder to learn when you are older” (Lace-making).

Learning was presented as having a positive influence on how learners viewed their lives. A student of Meditation and Visualisation spoke about how learning had changed her: “The course has changed how I think about my children, myself, my life. I’m more relaxed, can take my time, am more positive about home. I didn’t expect the interaction between home life and learning. I am more appreciative of my life”. A student of Sculpture spoke of how her course gave her “a chance to find ‘me’”.

A student who had experienced racism and “put-downs” when attending a “mainly Caucasian” school in the United States had attended a literacy course and was now on a “Return to Study” programme. A dancer and singer, he had reached a point where he wanted to change his life and saw education as a means of achieving this. He was surprised at his progress: “I feel I’ve gained greatly. I feel more at ease, relaxed, comfortable. I feel this is the start to something good for my future”.

Awareness of learning helped to counteract previous negative messages. A group of parents on a Deaf Awareness course at their local primary school said that they realised that “You don’t have to be intelligent to come to learning. People who thought they were too old or too thick, who wouldn’t normally learn are learning”. This sentiment was echoed by a “Return to study” student who commented “I felt I wasn’t smart enough and now I’m having in-depth conversations”. One learner attending classes for people recovering from mental illness saw the provision of the programme within the local community as a means to “counteract ignorance”.

A student who did not have English as her home language and who was attending a course to improve her writing skills was aware that to others she was a house cleaner, but to herself she was a thinker and potentially a writer: “I now read widely – psychology, biography – and may now do a writing course, personal writing or life story”. A young single parent who had not realised just how much being a parent had diminished her confidence, she now saw herself as “not just” a mother.

A Creative Writing student who had spent many years in a locked ward in a psychiatric hospital felt that his status had changed, that he was no longer “just a dosser”. When he set off from home to attend his class he was proud to see himself as a student. A parent attending an Aromatherapy class was aware that to her young son, who was amused by his mother coming to learn at his school, she was a role model. Similarly a young man who had left school some years earlier and who was now trying to earn a living through his music felt motivated to pass on his skills to young people at risk of dropping out of school.

Seeing the world differently

Interviewees also spoke of benefiting from changes in their perceptions of others and their view of the world. There were generalised references to enjoyment derived from recognising that their views, horizons and interests had been broadened. Some learners specific. A student of Eastern Thought admitted that he had “been impressed by the thoughts of some of the young people [in his class]. They know more than we did at that age!” A student of Creative Writing commented that she had learned to get to know people “through their writing,” whilst a student of Meditation and

Visualisation stated that as a result of hearing other people's stories "people I wouldn't have given the time of day to, I now see are special". Two students on a Deaf Awareness course spoke of how their views of deaf people had changed: "I don't stare, from strangeness. I watch now. I can smile and communicate with deaf people with confidence", and "I now see deafness as a disadvantage not a disability and signing as a different language".

A Painting student spoke of a heightened sense of awareness and felt that learning "opens up your life. You see differently, develop a critical eye, are opened up to opportunities such as visiting galleries and museums". A similar comment was made by a Calligraphy student who had taken part in a museum visit as an enhancement to his course. A student of English History spoke of the enjoyment derived from "the cross-fertilisation of ideas" and from questioning his own assumptions, while a retired office manager who had found it difficult to cope with retirement acknowledged, "I used to think I knew everything. Now I know you are never too old to learn".

The range of anticipated and unexpected benefits identified reflects the diversity and complexity of the learners' purposes and the range of ways in which non-accredited learning enhances adults' lives. Incidentally or sometimes deliberately, learning also enriched the lives of their families, friends and acquaintances. These learners were champions and role models for lifelong learning.

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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Appendix

A

Definition of terms

It is helpful to examine more closely various terms frequently used in debates in this area and to outline how they have been interpreted in this analysis.

Learning gain

Learning gain indicates a positive outcome from learning. This might be a gain in knowledge, understanding or skill as a result of learning. The learners interviewed for this research made it clear that they saw such learning gains as being both intrinsically satisfying and useful. The term could also be interpreted as a gain in learning or an enhanced ability to learn. One learner interviewed made specific reference to being able to learn better as a result of successful teaching and learning on a non-accredited programme. She highlighted the benefit likely to accrue from this skill as she went on to further learning.

Progress

If someone can demonstrate (including to themselves) that they have gained from learning, this could be termed *progress*, described by Turner as ‘at the heart of all successful learning’ (29). This is distinct from *progression*, which is one possible outcome of learning. *Progress* is used in this study to identify movement towards learning goals. These are likely to be related to the learner’s needs and aspirations and might be interim or seen as a destination. Progress is the achievement of intended or planned *learning outcomes* which could eventually result in accreditation or progression.

Accredited and non-accredited learning

Accreditation is the awarding of credit usually through some form of examination or a process of external evaluation of the quality of the learning that has taken place. It is a means of allocating a formal and portable currency value within an accreditation and qualifications framework, for the learning and achievement. The learner may use this to gain entry to further learning or to improve her/his economic or social status through improved employment prospects or access to enhanced earnings.

The term ‘non-accredited learning’ refers to learning not designed to give immediate access to accreditation. Learners cannot gain credit in the sense of currency value, although they and others may consider the learning to be ‘creditable’ in the sense of having value. One purpose of seeking appropriate ways of identifying, recording and evaluating learning gain on non-accredited programmes would be to give learners such recognition and confirmation of value.

Progression

Progression may be an outcome or consequence of learning. The term can be defined as ‘moving forward or advancing in stages’ (30), implying a known path or what is often referred to as a ladder of progression. Such progression may be neither immediate nor linear through a hierarchy of levels usually defined in terms of qualifications. This is particularly true where the learner’s purpose in learning and accessing a non-accredited programme does not include, and may specifically exclude, progression. A more useful metaphor might be that of a climbing frame which allows for lateral progression (and consolidation) while permitting upward movement when the climber (learner) feels more confident.

Course or programme aims and planned outcomes

Aims and outcomes are commonly used to express what the tutor intends a group of learners to know, understand or be able to do as a result of participating in the learning programme. The activity (including teaching) is designed to enable all learners within the group to achieve or at least make progress towards these outcomes. They usually appear in written information about the course, they help to form an agenda for the course, and are likely to be reflected in schemes of work and lesson plans, if these are used.

The intended goals to be achieved by individuals through learning may be variously described as a set of 'learning objectives' or 'learning outcomes.' The terms are sometimes used interchangeably but they have different meanings, indicating different concepts of both the processes and purposes of learning.

Learning objectives

The term *learning objectives* is closely related to 'behavioural objectives' or 'performance objectives.' Curzon (1990) describes objectives as 'statements, often of a quantifiable, operational nature, indicating events from which a mastery of desired activities can be correctly inferred,' (31) and he quotes Mager, who defines an objective as 'an intent communicated by a statement describing the proposed change in the learner – a statement of what the learner is to be like when he has successfully completed a learning experience' (32). Learning objectives are usually defined in such a way as to provide 'a statement which describes what a learner will be able to do on the completion of an instructional process' (33). These may be short-term and interim or longer term. Learning objectives assist the teacher in planning and assessing and in forming an agenda for the course akin to that provided by stated course objectives/outcomes.

Learning outcomes

An outcome is a consequence of deliberate action or inaction and therefore a *learning outcome* is a consequence of learning. The outcomes of learning may be diverse. As Ecclestone (1994) states, 'Learning outcomes represent all the gains from learning. These benefits include knowledge, personal skills, self-awareness, study and learning skills and occupational competence' (34). They may include concrete results such as artefacts or events such as poetry readings which could provide evidence of the learning gain or progress made.

Another interpretation of a *learning outcome* could be an outcome associated with learning, or in other words the processes of learning, which are usually linked to teaching. The contention that the achievement of learning outcomes may be viewed as one way to evaluate the success of teaching implies that learning has a causal connection with teaching. However, as Vorhaus (1999) points out, such links may be hard to establish 'where the outcome is not closely proximate to the teaching, or where learning does not readily lend itself to quantifiable confirmation' (35)

Evaluation of progress in learning depends on consideration of the outcomes of the learning. While learning outcomes can be planned and to some extent predicted, they can only be evaluated properly retrospectively. Furthermore, some outcomes may not be immediately evident even to the learner and some may not have been intended or anticipated on the part of learner or tutor.

Lavender's proposed definition of a learning outcomes is 'that it is a causally related outcome of a period of teaching or a specified period of education'. In this context, it is important to note, as Lavender points out, that "Not all outcomes experienced by the learner are learning outcomes' (1999,(36)). The outcomes of participation in learning may include social or practical benefits – new friends, a better-decorated living space or a more supple body. Similarly, progression to employment or to further learning can be an outcome of successful learning but is not of itself a 'learning outcome' in the sense of enhanced knowledge, understanding or skills.

Not all outcomes of learning are positive. As Jessup remarks 'the way Shakespeare or poetry are taught in schools may actually put more people off these pursuits as adults' (37). Many adult learners may be reluctant to return to learning as a result of such negative experiences and the need to overcome their impact may inform learner purpose and the intended learning outcomes.

Given the retrospective nature of evaluating learning outcomes and the obvious need for congruence between learners' aims, goals and desired outcomes and the aims and intentions of those planning learning programmes, it may be useful to use the terms *planned learning outcomes* when referring to tutor/provider intentions and *intended learning outcomes* when referring to learner purpose. Where there is a close match between the learning programme on offer and the identified needs, interests and aspirations of the learner, these are likely to be the same.

Soft outcomes

Some outcomes of learning, whether they are 'learning outcomes' or not, are notoriously difficult to measure. Examples would be outcomes relating to attitude, such as improvements in interpersonal skills or increased self-confidence. These may not be 'learning outcomes' but may be pre-requisites for further successful learning. Such outcomes are sometimes referred to as 'soft' outcomes not because they are easy to achieve but because precise measurement is neither appropriate nor possible.

Initial assessment

Initial assessment is a process by which the needs, aspirations and prior experience of learners are identified before or at the start of a learning programme. Where this occurs before the programme starts it can help the learner to select appropriately. In practice many learners undertake some informal initial self-assessment to guide their choice of a non-accredited programme, using pre-course information indicating the target group and any stated planned learning outcomes. Where an initial assessment takes place jointly between the learner and the tutor it helps in the identification of the learner's starting point. Initial assessment is necessary if the distance travelled by the learner is to be assessed later. It can also indicate to the tutor whether adjustments to the learning programme or style of delivery may be necessary for the learner to achieve the planned/intended learning outcomes and whether there is need for any additional learning support.

It is important to note that more formal initial assessment would present significant issues for many providers and learners in non-accredited provision, notably in terms of the resource and time implications, and the impact of the process upon both mature and more hesitant learners.

‘Diagnostic assessment’ is sometimes used loosely in the context of initial assessment. It refers to the diagnosis of individual learners’ specific learning needs with a view to designing a programme to address these. It is most likely to take place when programmes are being designed for learners with basic skills needs or for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Assessment

The identification of the achievement of planned/intended learning outcomes cannot happen without some form of assessment whether by the learner, the tutor or a third party such as a moderator, internal verifier, or an inspector. Within adult education *assessment*, in the sense of making a judgement about the extent and quality of the learning goes on all the time often privately and informally. This process of ongoing informal assessment, which may or may not result in feedback to the learner or the tutor, is different from ‘assessment episodes.’ The latter is when a learner pauses to reflect on his or her learning (a self-assessment episode) or when the tutor or a third party deliberately checks that learning is taking place. This assessment can be related to a task or to progress more generally.

Assessment has two main purposes: proving to the learner, tutor and others that learning is taking place; and improving learning by helping the learner to understand how well s/he is learning and what s/he needs to do to make further progress. The latter can be described as *formative assessment* which is ‘intended to improve learners’ final performance and achievement’ (38) – the eventual learning outcomes. Although it provides information for teachers and possibly, if recorded, for managers/providers/inspectors, it is primarily used for the benefit of learners.

Summative assessment on the other hand, summarises the quality of learning that has occurred by the end of a learning programme and may include an evaluation of the extent to which planned/intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Its purpose is to prove the learning that has taken place and, where appropriate, to ensure that credit is gained.

Ecclestone defines three bases for assessment, whether formative or summative. These are: norm-referenced assessment; criterion-referenced assessment; and ipsative (self-referenced) assessment.

Norm-referenced assessment makes comparisons between what a learner knows, understands and can do by comparison with either general notions of average performance in that area or direct comparison with other learners in the same group or cohort, or previous groups or cohorts. As Ecclestone points out ‘Norm-referencing may be based on pre-determined criteria but these often rely on implicit notions of good/excellent/poor performance. They are not usually made explicit to learners and may not be very specific or consistent ...’ (39).

Criterion-referenced assessment makes comparisons between what a learner knows, understands and can do and explicit specific criteria. An example would be assessment of competence in NVQs. Criterion referencing is designed to ‘make requirements for assessment, differentiated grades and/or levels of “mastery” clear to all concerned and to ‘enable assessors to differentiate on a simple “pass”/“not yet passed” basis’ (40).

Ipsative or self-referenced assessment is, Ecclestone suggests, ‘a form of criterion referencing which measures a person’s performance against her/his own previous performance and self-defined criteria’ (41). It can, she argues, be used alongside other approaches to assessment since it allows learners to reach their own standard of achievement. She points out that ‘The process can build up confidence and the skills of self-assessment before learners move on to measurement against externally defined standards’ (42).

In reality norm and criterion referenced assessment cannot be totally separated. Criteria are likely to be defined, at least in part, by normative notions of what constitutes an acceptable or good standard of performance. Obvious examples would be to compare and contrast perceptions of computer literacy in 1981 and 2001, or of the standard of hand-sewing appropriate to Victorian and present-day nine-year-olds. It may be that tutors’ notions of what constitutes good progress or effective learning are in part derived from experience of teaching and assessing on accredited programmes or from their own experiences as learners. The same may be true for learners.

Ipsative assessment is the basis of learner self-assessment and in the absence of defined assessment criteria, most tutor assessment on non-accredited programmes will be norm-referenced. It is likely that neither the learner nor the tutor will articulate or share the basis on which they are judging performance and progress.

Validation

Not all assessment activity and resulting judgements on the part of either learner or tutor are shared. However when the tutor records the results of ‘assessment episodes’ and communicates this to the learner s/he may be confirming the learner’s own assessment as to whether learning has taken place, what that learning has been, and the extent of the learning, not least as it relates to planned/intended learning outcomes. This could be described as *validation*.

Moderation and verification

Moderation implies a process of evening out or adjustment if the assessment and validation by the tutor is at variance with a set of implicit or explicit standards. This can be undertaken by peers or managers. *Verification*, whether internal or external, is a process of confirming or validating the assessment judgements of the tutor.

Measurement and evaluation

When a learner or tutor assesses the learning that has taken place there is an implicit or explicit comparison with the perceived previous position of the learner, probably based on some form of initial assessment however informal. The terms *measurement* and *evaluation* may both be used in discussions of the extent of such progress. Measurement implies a level of exactitude, a ‘comparison with something of a known size’ using ‘an instrument graded in standard units’ (43). It is not possible to measure progress accurately unless precise points of departure and conclusion are known. This would entail more formal means of initial assessment. Whether it is feasible or desirable to arrive at a precise measure of learning in all domains is a separate and contentious issue.

On the other hand, *evaluation* suggests notions of ‘value’, of ‘forming a judgement about the worth of something’ (44). It is possible within non-accredited learning to form a view of the value of learning gained without making a specific comparison with a known starting point.

Appendix B

Comparison of elements of systems

Comparison of elements of systems for identifying, recording and evaluating achievement on non-qualification courses

Elements identified through the research	Vorhaus's Good Practice Framework	Turner's proposed eligibility criteria (abbreviated extracts)
Identification of curriculum or course offer		Information about the curriculum.....
Information about the course	1. Initial identification of learning objectives	Clear stipulation of entry requirements, APL arrangements, any assessment procedures
Scheme or work/course outline		
Initial assessment	2. Initial assessment of learners	Where applicable, opportunities to have their relevant key skills and evaluative skills addressed
Identification of individual/group planned outcomes	3. Negotiation of learning objectives with learners	A clear method for/opportunities for identifying and agreeing, and a record of, individual/group learning objectives
Monitoring of process of identifying planned outcomes		
On-course assessment and feedback	5. On-going formative assessment and feedback	Clear evaluation methods.....
Review of individual progress, formative and/or summative	6. Progression advice and guidance 7. Record of achievement	Information about progression opportunities/the capacity to signpost learners towards information advice and guidance....formative and summative evaluation
Self-assessment and recording of learning gain	4. Learner self-assessment 7. Record of achievement	Clear evaluation methods that include learner evaluation Opportunities to evaluate achievement against agreed objectives and unanticipated learning gains and produce evidence
Validation of learner self-assessment		Internal validation of or commentary on learner self-assessment
Course evaluation		Consultation and feedback on the quality of the programme
Moderation and internal verification of tutor assessment	8. Moderation of assessment	
Generation and utilisation of quantitative information		A system for obtaining, storing and collating data and for responding to the outcomes within a QA strategy
Links with provider QA and self-assessment		Quality assurance systems
	9. Celebration of achievement	

Appendix C

Questions for learners

Location.....Group/Learner programme.....

Questions for learners who are involved with an LO approach

1. When you started this course did you have a clear idea of what you wanted to learn and achieve?
2. How did you work with the tutor to decide what learning outcomes you were aiming for? Were these recorded? (Could I know what they were?) Was this helpful?
3. How do you/does your tutor know how you are getting on/what progress you are making? (What methods are used to check on learning?)
4. How do you review the progress you are making while on the course? How is this recorded? How is it helpful to know and record what progress you are making?
5. Does agreeing what you want to learn and talking about how you are getting on make a difference to how you learn/progress? What's good about being on a course where this happens?
6. Does working in this way with your tutor make a difference to how your learn and make progress? To your relationship with the tutor, or with other learners? To how you feel about the curriculum/course content? To how the teacher approaches the subject?
7. Is there anything about this approach that work less well? If so, can you say why or what could be improved?
8. What have you gained from being on this course? Have you achieved the learning outcomes? What other outcomes have there been?
9. Are there any other comments you'd like to make?

Appendix D

Interviews with tutors/managers

Interviews with tutors/managers

1. **How does the identification of Learning Outcomes and assessment of learner progress against these operate, for your programmes?**
2. **In what ways does learner self-assessment/assessment of learning gain by learner and tutor feed into your overall QA processes?**
 - **At individual tutor/programme level**
 - **For a group of programmes**
 - **For a School/Department**
 - **At institutional level**
3. **Is the achievement of learning outcomes aggregated in some way to provide data/evidence for formal self- assessment? For inspection? How does this work?**
4. **How has involving the learner in self-assessment and/or learner and tutor assessment of learning gain informed developments in relation to**
 - **Systems**
 - **Teaching and learning approaches**
 - *Assessment practices*
 - **Curriculum Development**
 - **Staff development**
 - *Other*

(How do you know?) Can you give examples?

5. **Are there specific improvements to the range and quality of provision you are able to offer that have arisen as a result of using this approach?**
6. **Are there disadvantages in using this approach? If so, what are they?**

Any other comments you'd like to make? Summary of S and W of system in place?

Appendix E

Ways of demonstrating learning gain

Ways of demonstrating learning gain

There are many ways in which adult learners can show what they have achieved in an adult class. Some will be familiar and some may be more appropriate in different situations. Which of these have you experienced? Which do you think would work for you on your course or learning programme?

No	Activity to show learning	Have done	Would be OK to do
1.	Giving a short talk to the group		
2.	Giving a demonstration to the group		
3.	Giving a presentation to the group		
4.	Helping others and sharing my skills/learning		
5.	Answering questions in class		
6.	Taking part in discussion in class		
7.	Completing a quiz in class		
8.	Doing practical work in class		
9.	Working on tasks in a small group		
10.	Making or creating something in class/at home		
11.	Taking an exam		
12.	Taking a short test in class		
13.	Completing a questionnaire		
14.	Completing a form to assess/record my progress		
15.	Keeping a learning "log" or diary		
16.	Keeping a record of achievement		
17.	Doing written work		
18.	Using worksheets		
19.	Doing homework tasks		
20.	Undertaking an individual study or project		
21.	Making a tape or video recording		
22.	Completing tasks on a trip or visit		
23.	Taking part in role play or simulation		
24.	Contributing to a group or class project		
25.	Contributing to a group or class publication		
26.	Performing as an individual or with a group		
	Other activities – please add		
27.			
28.			
29.			

Thank you for giving your time to complete this form.

Location.....Course.....

Annotated Bibliography

Annotated Bibliography

A number of texts are here identified which are likely to be of further interest to those wishing to explore further issues raised in the research report.

Foster, P., Howard, U., Reisenberger, A., *A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning*, FEDA 1997

This 'FE Matters' report, one of a number of publications in the 'Widening Participation' series, is based on a research study undertaken during 1996/7 into ways of recognising the outcomes of non-accredited learning, which built on a number of earlier studies. These and the context are reviewed together with the outcomes of a national Colloquium on the subject to which contributions were made by a number of 'designated' institutions (funded by the FEFC to deliver non-accredited as well as accredited programmes) and by HMI, FEFC, FEDA and NIACE. The report traces and summarises the emergent 'philosophy' of 'learning outcomes' with particular reference to the NVQ model, Open College Network accreditation and credit frameworks. It also identifies and discusses assessment and accreditation issues. A series of case studies are presented which exemplify the practical application of 'learning outcomes' approaches. The penultimate chapter proposes a model and a practical framework for developing 'learning outcomes' strategies. The final chapter sets non-accredited learning in the context of the development of a culture of lifelong learning, with perspectives from the Employment Department, the FEFC and OFSTED.

Hayes, A., Lavender, P., Reisenberger, A., and Vorhaus, J., *Outcomes of adult learning: taking the debate forward*, FEDA/NIACE, 1999

A collection of papers, with one exception presented at the 1999 Further Education Research Network (FERN) conference. The first, by Peter Lavender, summarises and synthesises progress to date in the development of appropriate ways of identifying, recording and valuing learning which does not lead to qualifications. Close reference is made to inspection frameworks and related evidence requirements. In the context of proposing ways forward, a number of aspects are discussed, including the identification of planned learning outcomes, recognising and recording progress and achievement, the range of possible outcomes from learning, the measurability of unanticipated and beneficial outcomes and how the intrinsic benefits of learning can be captured and valued. Lavender offers an indicative checklist of necessary systems developments and evidence sources for providers.

The second paper by John Vorhaus is a response to the first. Vorhaus argues that there is a need to consider the nature of the cohort of adult learners accessing the non-accredited curriculum and their purposes in so doing. He argues in favour of prioritising the development of formative rather than summative assessment, and discusses practical considerations in recording and providing evidence of progress. Vorhaus identifies a potential tension between designing learning programmes including appropriate formative assessment to meet and address individual needs, and the drive to obtain reliable quantitative data for aggregation purposes.

The third paper, by Amanda Hayes, discusses accreditation and qualifications in the context of both equality of opportunity and public funding and accountability. Hayes identifies the need to clarify the relationship between 'measurement' of individual learner progress, the evaluation of course quality and judgements about provider

performance. In the final paper Anna Reisenberger discusses the requirements for a framework to support and recognise adult achievement which takes place outside of the formal qualifications frame of reference including ‘threshold’ quality criteria for providers. The use of incentives to encourage adult progression and the potential contribution of a national credit framework are also explored.

Greenwood, M, and Merton, A., Taylor, S., *An evaluation of non-schedule 2 pilot projects*, LSDA/NIACE, 2000

This report summarises the outcomes of the evaluation by the Learning and Skills Development Agency and NIACE of the 1999-2000 FEFC-funded ‘non-Schedule 2’ pilot projects. The FEFC funded 40 FE providers to work in partnership with other organisations and agencies to develop innovative non qualification-bearing programmes designed to widen participation by attracting new learners and offer progression to accredited programmes. Providers were required to develop ways of identifying and recording learners’ progress, achievement and progression. The report discusses the extent to which these objectives were achieved. Learners’ views of the programmes and the place of non-accredited learning in the wider context of raising standards and social inclusion are also discussed.

Greenwood, M., Hayes, A., Turner, C., Vorhaus, J., (eds.), *Recognising and Validating Outcomes of Non-accredited Learning – A Practical Approach*, LSDA, 2001

This report describes, illustrates the work of providers and practitioners who have developed, implemented and evaluated ‘learning outcomes’ systems and approaches, as a way of capturing achievement in non-accredited learning. A number of case studies provide detailed accounts of these systems in use and critical analyses and evaluation of the benefits, challenges and issues. In most cases illustrative examples of documentation used are provided. An interim account is given of research in progress into learners’ perceptions of such systems. The report concludes with an overview by John Vorhaus of what can be learned from the case studies, in the context of the introduction of the Common Inspection Framework. Vorhaus proposes a nine-stage framework/process for recording, validating and celebrating adults’ learning progress and achievement, as exemplified to a greater or lesser extent within the case studies.

Dewson, S., Eccles, J., Tackey, Nii Djan, Jackson, A., *Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled: a review of current practice*, DfES research report 219, 2000.

A review of literature and practice on ‘soft indicators’, ‘soft outcomes’ and ‘distance travelled’ including a survey of 300 ESF (Objective 3) funded projects in this field. This study was undertaken with a view to informing the development of a model for measuring ‘distance travelled’ as well as proposals and recommendations for monitoring ‘soft indicators’ at national level.

The report consider the nature of ‘soft’ outcomes and indicators, reviews and evaluates systems in use for monitoring and measuring ‘soft’ outcomes and ‘distance travelled’ and discusses the feasibility of developing a single model for the measurement of these. The report concludes that it would be inappropriate to seek a ‘one size fits all’ single national monitoring system.

Dewson, S., Eccles, J., Tackey, Nii Djan, Jackson, A., *Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled*, Institute for Employment Studies, 2000

This guide aims to assist providers in understanding and implementing systems for recording 'soft' outcomes and 'distance travelled'. It is aimed particularly at organisations running projects under ESF Objective 3 in Policy Field 2, Equality of Opportunity for all and promoting social inclusion. The authors assert the importance of identifying and giving credit for progress in relation to 'soft' outcomes. These are defined as key work skills e.g. problem solving, team working; attitudinal skills e.g. confidence; personal skills e.g. self-awareness; and practical skills e.g. financial literacy. A system of assessment which is built around 'the positive affirmation of beneficiaries' current (and developing) skills is advocated, as is the development of a range of ways of capturing and producing evidence of achievement.

Turner, C., *Squaring the Circle: Funding non-accredited adult learning under the Learning and Skills Council*, NIACE, 2001

This paper considers how non-accredited learning might be supported under the Learning and Skills Council. Turner explores the scope for funding such learning, and sets this in the context of quality assurance and improvement arrangements. Issues affecting the development of a quality framework for non-accredited provision are discussed, including questions of evaluation and measurement of learning progress and achievement, and the role of non-accredited learning in the wider context of raising standards and lifelong learning. The paper proposes three series of quality criteria for demonstrating and determining eligibility for funding. These are expressed in terms of what is provided for learners, by way of information and advice, tutor support, appropriate individual learning programmes for learners and associated resources; features of the provision and programmes including curriculum design, delivery and assessment methods and resources to support learning; and providers' resources, systems and arrangements including those to quality assure and effectively manage the provision. In each case sources of indicative evidence are suggested. The paper concludes with a number of questions for further discussion.