

How PCDL funding can best serve learners with learning difficulties

**Good Practice Guidelines for Strategic and
Operational Managers in the FE System**

**Findings of a project commissioned by the DIUS
(formerly DfES)**

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March 2007**



How PCDL funding can best serve learners with learning difficulties.

“People with learning disabilities have the right to access learning for personal development in the same way as the rest of the population....”
Head of Education, Local Authority.

Section 1

Introduction

These guidelines are based on the findings of a NIACE project commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The aim of the project was to explore how courses funded by Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) money can best serve adult learners with learning difficulties.

Background

PCDL is a relatively new funding stream created from a reshaping of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) Adult and Community Learning (ACL) funding stream. The DfES asked NIACE to investigate how PCDL funding is being used. There had been concerns voiced that provision was being moved inappropriately from FE to PCDL funding. A particular point raised was that as the additional learning support funding stream is not available in PCDL, disproportionate amounts of the resources available might be used to pay for this.

Project Methodology

The project work took place from September 2006 to March 2007. A questionnaire was used to canvas the views of providers. Providers were also invited to a consultative seminar to further explore the initial findings from this survey. There were fieldwork visits to six sites, selected on the basis of information given in response to the questionnaire.

Regional LSC lead officers for learning difficulties and /or disabilities were invited to the consultative seminar. Some also took part in telephone interviews with the project workers.

Learners' views were sought via an accessible questionnaire. There were also three meetings people with learning difficulties. Two meetings were with people with learning difficulties who sit on Learning Disability Partnership Boards in London. One meeting was held in Leicestershire with learners from Leicester and Northampton talking about their experiences of learning.

Setting the context for the guidelines

In total 71 providers responded to the questionnaire. Of these, 33 were accessing PCDL funding. 1,361 people with learning difficulties responded to the accessible learner questionnaire.

The information and data gathered from the project work underpin these good practice guidelines. The main findings were:

- There appeared to be varying degrees of awareness and knowledge about PCDL. However, the funding was on the whole being used in a pragmatic and appropriate manner
- The vast majority of replies to the provider questionnaire were from the Adult and Community Learning sector, some of whom *only* accessed PCDL monies. A few FE providers responded, several of whom asked for additional information, as they knew nothing about PCDL. Some of the FE providers using PCDL money were providing services on behalf of their local education authority.
- The majority of PCDL provision for learners with learning difficulties was discrete and non-accredited.
- It appears that learner's views are being taken into account when planning the PDCL funded curriculum.
- Learners told us that the curriculum offer they had access to was generally what they wanted. However there was so much more they would like to learn but could not access it.
- There seemed to be good emphasis on recognising and recording progress and achievement and progression routes.
- Partnership working with other organisations, especially Social Services and residential homes, appeared to be integral to the success of this provision. This is particularly true of learner support.
- Learning Support and how to fund it was an issue for some providers.

Section 2

The curriculum offer:

Previous research¹ shows that the type of provider influences the way curricula are shaped. Learners may attend FE colleges, day centres or courses delivered in the community. The different infrastructures and organisational practices, including access to funding streams, of these providers will affect the nature of curricula and the manner in which they are delivered. For example, whereas the traditional approach of FE has been

“to serve the needs of the economy by producing appropriately trained workers, Community Education has very different origins, often rooted in ordinary people’s desire for personal growth, self-improvement and political change”.²

Some of the providers we spoke with were explicit that PCDL funding is more appropriate for learning that is closely related to leisure:

“Courses are more for leisure than skills for employability, communication and integration into local community”

“Relate more to the leisure aspect of students’ lives”

However some of our respondents only access PCDL funds and therefore use them for more than just leisure courses.

“It was the only grant stream the Service could use to support this delivery”

So alongside leisure courses we also found literacy, language and numeracy courses, ICT courses and Preparation for Work courses.

It is important that providers can access and jigsaw as many appropriate funding streams as possible (FE including Skills for Life, FE other, PCDL, Family Learning, ESF to name a few) thus ensuring a rich mix and choice and purpose of provision. It further ensures that PCDL classes are not used as a “dumping ground” for these learners if other options are available. For example, Rotherham Borough Council secured Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) money for Project 400. This was match funded by the Learning Disabilities Development Fund and Adult and Community Learning money. The funding covers the cost of 1 development officer, 1 part time administration support and 2 supervisors. Project 400 is a gardening project which provides training and educational opportunities in a real work environment. The workers carry out work for people who are unable to maintain their own gardens.

¹ Berkeley, V. and Tolhurst, E. (2005) Curriculum Offer and Part-Time Adult Learners with Learning Difficulties A project funded by the LGA (unpublished) NIACE, Leicester.

² Riddell, S., Baron, S., Wilson, A. 2001. The Learning Society and People with Learning Difficulties. Bristol: Policy Press

Another provider told us:

“The programme is jointly funded with PCDL funds and with funding from Social Services – it is put together as one budget”

One Inclusive Learning Manager we spoke with only had access to PCDL monies. She regularly signposts learners to the local colleges, this gives them the opportunity to access a much broader curriculum offer. It is important that even within an ever increasingly competitive market, providers in each region try and work together to maximise the service they offer to learners with learning difficulties.

The project found that a variety of courses for learners with learning difficulties were funded via PCDL funding streams. The most common subject areas for these courses were:

- **Arts and craft** and related activities. Courses including, Jewellery Making’, ‘Ceramics’, Art from around the World’ and ‘Sewing’.
- **ICT** courses, including ‘Webpage Design’, ‘Easy Steps in Computers’, ‘ECDL’ and ‘CLAIT’.
- **Dance, drama, music and performing arts** related courses.
- **Health and fitness** courses including ‘Yoga’, ‘Tai Chi’, ‘Gentle Exercise’ and ‘Health and Fitness’.
- **Cookery** and food related courses including ‘Cookery’, ‘Food safety’ and ‘Kitchen Craft’.
- **Literacy and Numeracy** related courses including ‘Skills for Life’, ‘Improve your Maths’ and ‘Improve your Reading’.
- **Independent living skills** related courses including ‘Life skills’, ‘Towards independence’ and ‘Looking after yourself’.
- **Preparation for work** related courses, including ‘Careers on Course’ and ‘Work skills’.

Courses ran at levels ranging from pre entry level up to entry level, with the majority being offered at pre entry level. There were only two examples of providers using PCDL money to fund courses at levels 1 and 2.

The majority of courses were not accredited. However many had internal accreditation. The Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service have a series of units in the curriculum that learners can access.

One provider told us that whilst the courses they offered were OCN accredited:

“learners who are not able to achieve accreditation achieve agreed learning goals”.

Only a few providers offered accredited PCDL courses. For example, St Helen’s Adult and Community Learning offer accredited ICT courses which are PCDL funded. Also one of the PCDL funded courses offered by Calderdale Adult Learning Service is a Basic Cookery Skills class, offered at Entry Level and accredited by Open College Network.

The majority of the courses were discrete. Providers told us that in some instances learners with learning difficulties were accessing mainstream PCDL courses.

Learners' views about the curriculum offer;

Some learners told us about the limited choice they had in terms of curriculum offer and one learner told us that he/she was sent to the class and did not chose to attend, however once there was happy to be part of the class:

"No choice"
"Not many courses available for people with profound disabilities"
"Was sent, did not choose, happy to come"

The learner survey showed people have a great thirst for learning. The table below give details of the subject people are interested in learning about;

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Speak Chinese'• 'Film study and location'• 'Learn about recycling'• 'Would like to be a drama teacher - doing Chitty Chitty Bang Bang at the moment'• 'To read papers,• 'How to look after children'• 'How to use a DVD player'• More about history – military WW2'• Course on small animals'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Football'• 'Science, Pre-historic life, Genetics'• 'Learn to be a DJ'• 'Forensic science'• 'How to be a joiner, always wanted to do this'• 'Zoologist'• 'Ballroom Dancing'• 'Car valetting'• 'Accountancy'• 'Course on mobile phones'
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Points for providers to consider around curriculum.

Do you regularly review your curriculum offer?

Have you a clear rationale for what you use PCDL monies for?

Do you know enough about other possibilities for funding?

Do you know where to go to find out about other funding possibilities?

How do you consult with learners in a meaningful manner and act on that feedback, thus informing the curriculum offer?

Do you know what other provision is on in your area in order to signpost learners?

Do you work with other providers in the area to ensure your provision compliments each other?

Section 3

Partnership working:

“Partnership working and the sharing of expertise should be in place across the sector.”³

There are obvious benefits to joint working, resources and expertise can be pooled and shared and organisations can plan together so services compliment each other. Joint work can promote a more joined-up, holistic approach to developing services for people with learning difficulties.

“People with disabilities in particular may be receiving support from a variety of different organisations. When collaboration between practitioners in these organisations does not occur, important learning opportunities can be missed.”⁴

Working with partners outside of the education sector enables providers to keep abreast of other relevant policy and practice developments. Some of these are currently having a significant impact on the lives of people with learning difficulties and the services they use. There are some innovative and influential initiatives emanating from the Social Care sector. These include:

- Individualised budgets
- The Modernisation of Day Services programme
- Direct payments
- Person-centred planning⁵
- The In Control project⁶

Learning Disability Partnership Boards;

The key local point for the joint planning of services for people with learning difficulties are Learning Disability Partnership Boards. They are the main drivers for taking forward the recommendations of the Valuing People White Paper. They exist in every local authority area and are usually based in Social Services or Social Care services. Each board has two carers and two people with learning difficulties as members. It is important that post-16 education services are actively involved in the work of the partnership boards.

Harrow Adult and Community Learning Service is a member of a post-19 Education Subgroup on the Local Learning Disability Partnership Board. This group is currently looking at progression routes, person-centred planning and how resources across the borough can be pooled and used more efficiently.

³ Learning for Living and Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for People with Learning difficulties and/or disabilities. LSC, 2006

⁴ Working in collaboration – enhancing provision for disabled learners by working with others (LSN, 2006)

⁵ www.in-control.org.uk

⁶ Learning for Living and Work

In the East Midlands, South Leicestershire College chairs the Education subgroup of the local Learning Disability Partnership Board. The national LSC acknowledges the importance of this joint work in the Learning for Living and Work strategy:

“The LSC also considers that local Learning Disability Partnership Boards will play a valuable role in brokering a joint commissioning approach for adults. Working with the Valuing People Support Team, The LSC will improve its own and providers’ links with Learning Disability Partnership Boards.”(LSC, 2006)⁷

Providers who attended a consultative seminar for this project noted the critical success factors in partnerships as:

- Shared understanding
- Trust
- Communication & support
- Openness

The LSN publication *Working in collaboration – enhancing provision for disabled learner by working with others* gives guidance for post-16 providers on partnership working.⁸

Partnership working and PCDL funded provision;

Just under half of the providers who responded to the project survey, had partnership arrangements which part-funded PCDL provision for people with learning difficulties. In some cases the support was through the use of joint budgets, in others the support was on an “in kind basis”. There were examples of organisations working with; Social services; Social Care and Health; residential homes; voluntary sector organisations; a local secondary school

Joint Budgets;

Harrow Adult and Community Learning Service in London run a programme of PCDL classes jointly funded with Social Services. The resources are put together as one budget. The programme is drawn up through joint consultation between Day Centre staff and users, Harrow College and Harrow Adult and Community Learning (ACL) Service.

In Somerset joint working between Housing, Social Care and the Adult Learning and Leisure Services is providing support for people with learning difficulties to attend PCDL classes:

- People with learning difficulties living in County Council homes attend PCDL courses for free. Their costs are met jointly by Adult Social Care and the Additional Learning Support element of the PCDL budget
- Social Care services have commissioned a Food Hygiene course and a Road Skills course for this same group of learners

⁷ Learning for Living and Work (LSC, 2006)

⁸ Maudslay, L and Nightingale, C - Working in collaboration – enhancing provision for disabled learner by working with others (LSN, 2006) Available from LSN www.lsneducation.org.uk

As the Curriculum Manager for the Adult Learning and Leisure Service explained:

“In times when we are strapped, we need to look at other creative ways of funding provision.”

Joint Planning;

The national programme for the Modernisation of Day Services is driving the move away from day centres for people with learning difficulties to the use of community facilities. In Harrow a partnership between the Adult and Community Learning Service, a local school and a college is planning a re-build project to develop a community based provision.

In East Riding the Modernisation of Day Services is providing the impetus to relocate education provision in the community nearer to where people live.

Support ‘in kind’;

Partnership working between Education and other organisations frequently supports PCDL provision on an ‘in kind’ basis. For instance, resources such as accommodation, care staff and transport are provided and a tutor is funded by the education provider. Courses may run in Social Services Day Centres, in residential settings or in Community Education venues.

Although there is no actual joint funding arrangement, Calderdale Adult Learning Service (CALs) has had a good working relationship with Adult Services (SSD) over a number of years. They meet together three times a year to plan and discuss the PCDL funded provision for learners with learning difficulties. Some learners attend classes with support workers employed by Adult Services which also provides transport for them to get to and from classes. One provider has links with a local voluntary organisation and a local Supported Employment Agency that supports PCDL funded provision. The co-ordinator explained:

‘One of the courses, ‘Art from Around the World’ classes takes place at an Arts Centre funded by Action Halifax and SRB6 (Single Regeneration Budget) monies. Although Adult Learning pays tutor costs, the space is rent free, made possible through partnership working with the centre.’

‘Careers on Course’ is in partnership with WorkWise (a local Supported Employment agency), who recruit the learners.’

Part funding arrangements;

In Northamptonshire Learning for Life and Leisure evening courses are part funded by the homes where the learners live. The homes provide the venue and support workers and £150 per course. The Adult Learning Service pay tutor costs. Costs for materials are negotiated. Where there is a network of homes there will be a mix of people attending courses. In one case a home is using a community venue to run a course and paying all the costs except for the tutor. However, such arrangements can also have drawbacks:

- There are cases of homes excluding people who do not live in homes that are part of host's network. One residential service used the question of insurance as a reason not to let others outside of the network, join the courses.
- People are learning in segregated settings and not sharing community venues with other learners
- In one area an Adult Learning Service avoids running courses in private homes due to past bad experiences with staff
- In one area PCDL courses for people profound and multiple learning difficulties are offered in the learners own homes with support from their carers. This gets over the problem of transport. However, the advantages of this approach have to be weighed up against the potential for re-enforcing the isolation of such learners who are already a particularly marginalised group.

Partnership working and contracted out PCDL provision;

At Rotherham Borough Council, services that deliver PCDL funded courses for people with learning difficulties are contracted out mainly to voluntary sector organisations. Using PCDL funds, the Community Learning service is working in partnership with the Housing Department, Mencap Pathways and the Social Care & Health Service. It has developed a social enterprise gardening project where people with learning difficulties are paid to work the gardens of council properties.

Points for providers to consider around partnership working

Is there potential for joint planning and funding arrangements in your area with Social Services?

Are you an active member of your local Learning Disability Partnership Board?

What are the implications of the Modernisation of Day Services in your area - do they offer opportunities for joint planning and funding to develop community based education provision for people with learning difficulties?

Can you work with residential services and offer courses that support people with learning difficulties to develop independent living skills?

What can be done to contact people not using social services so they can be supported to access PCDL provision?

Do you offer training for support workers from external agencies about their role in working with learners in education provision?

Section 4

Supporting Learners:

The survey responses provided strong evidence of much partnership working with other agencies to support learners in PCDL funded provision. Support comes in many formats however it is normally differentiated into Learner Support and Learning Support. Learner support is the support a learner needs to access learning – this can include transport or personal care needs. Learning support is the support a person needs for his/her learning to be successful – this can include access to Communication Support Workers, extra time in exams, Learning Support Workers, differentiated materials and adaptive technology. The list is not exhaustive.

Support can be provided by:

- Day centre staff
- Residential support workers
- Volunteers
- Families
- Carers

This support is key to the learning experience for individuals. However, its quality can be variable. Training for support workers on their role in the class can pay huge dividends. For instance, one co-ordinator from an Adult Learning Service ran a half day induction training course for Health Authority support workers.

For more ideas on the role of the support workers go to, www.sflgi.org.uk click on the "online material for professional development", then click on the continuing professional development (CPD) modules, and finally onto the PECF modules. The guidelines are included in the session 4 of "Working in the context of the PECF" - meeting individual needs.

Also visit the LLUK website, www.lluk.org.uk, for the latest information on the new national occupational standards for those working as learning support practitioners. Work will continue in 2007/08 on specific qualifications for Learning Support staff so it is worthwhile keeping up to date with information.

PCDL funded courses do not have access to Additional Learning Support Funds however that is not to say providers should not provide additional learning support. Under the Disability Discrimination Act, Part 4 providers must make "reasonable adjustments" to support disabled learners. One provider informed us:

"...any additional learning support has to be funded out of block PCDL funding"

Whilst another told us they use:

"fee income streams from PCDL to cross subsidise support".

The following are examples of how providers can support learners:

- A large FE college which delivers PCDL funded evening classes uses a buddying scheme to support learners. They advertise for and train volunteers and match volunteers with learners with learning difficulties. Volunteers are asked to support for just one class a week. Their travelling expenses are paid for.
- A sixth form community college run an enrichment programme for their pupils. One of the options is to support learners with learning difficulties in the classroom. The young adults are given training in Disability Awareness and act as volunteers during evening classes.
- A young man on a Health and Social Care NVQ programme spends most lunch breaks supporting learners with profound and complex learning difficulties in his college. He feels the experience he gains will be invaluable in his future career.
- One ACL provider use their local Volunteer Bureau to recruit volunteers.
- A community college asks parents to support the swimming sessions .
- An ACL manager asked the community nurse for people with learning disabilities to attend and support a Get Fit and Healthy Course aimed at people with learning difficulties. The class had been provided after a request from the same community nurse.

Providers told us that in some instances support was available for learners with learning difficulties to access mainstream classes.

“Learners attending discrete classes can access mainstream provision if it is appropriate for them. Additional Learning Support is provided if necessary”

Points for providers to consider around supporting learners.

Have you got any partnerships in place to support learners and learning?

If so, are these partnerships ad hoc or are there clear guidelines about each organisations roles and responsibilities?

How do you monitor the quality of the support your learners receive?

Do you keep up to date with the latest developments in the field?

Do you inform learners of the support options that are available to them?

Do you have a fee remission policy that supports these learners?

If you struggle to get funding for 1:1 paid support staff have you considered using volunteers?

Do you offer / access joint training with staff from health and social care?

Section 5

Consulting learners:

In the survey learners were asked why they had chosen to attend the courses or classes they attended. Many respondents indicated that they were learning for learning's sake and/or for enjoyment. Other reasons included improving specific skills and to help with employment or independent living. There appeared to be some indication that some learners were learning to enhance their soft skills, such as confidence and interaction skills, and to be integrated into a community activity.

“To get a job in the future”

“Makes me feel good, meet people”

“Want to be a chef and start own business”

“To learn how to use the computers, learn how to read and write”

The rights of this cohort of learners are firmly protected by law. The following Acts require learning providers to give due regard to, and ensure equality of, opportunities for such learners.

- 1992 Further and Higher Education Act
- Learning and Skills Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 2001
- Disability Equality Duty

Advice and guidance is available to providers about involving learners in decisions that are being made about them. It states:

“Involving learners in developing and improving provision is not just about more or different course evaluation; it is also more than listening to learners’ views. It is about planned courses of action where the learners’ views, their participation and action are at the heart of the process. Involving learners effectively will not only have an impact on the learners themselves, but on practitioners, staff and the organisation in which they are involved.”⁹

All public authorities have to produce a Disability Equality Scheme and an accompanying action plan detailing what they are going to do to promote disability equality. Disabled people must be involved in this process.

The key reason for consultation is to gain information to shape and improve provision. Consulting with people with learning difficulties needs careful thought. There are a number of issues that need considering including:

- Using appropriate, accessible consultation methods
- Taking into account the level of learners’ self-advocacy skills
- A recognition of the power service providers have on individuals’ lives and how this might effect the answers they give

⁹ Nightingale, C., Nothing about me: involving learners with learning difficulties or disabilities – Guidance on learner involvement (LSN, 2006)

The practitioner's survey found that in some cases, learner feedback was gathered in formal ways, such as via focus groups, questionnaires and evaluations. Other methods appeared less formal, and more based on general feedback received from learners over the course of their learning.

Consultation with other practitioners, such as tutors, Day Centre staff, Social Services practitioners and Learning Disability Partnership Boards, and with parents/carers, was mentioned frequently. In some cases learning providers consulted with both learners and practitioners and in other cases they consulted with practitioners who had previously consulted with learners.

'Programme is drawn up through joint consultation between Day Centre staff and users, Harrow College and Harrow ACL Service.'

'Provision was devised in partnerships with Social Services staff who consulted with learners and carers.'

'Student meeting feedback said that learners enjoyed these courses and wanted them to continue.'

'The adult education service is represented on the Learning Disabilities Strategic Commissioning Group, which includes people with learning disabilities and their advocates. It is also represented on the Partnership Group, on which people with learning disabilities are in the majority and which often discuss education and training provision. We also gather the views of existing students on how they would like to see the provision develop.'

The Yorkshire and Humberside Region will consider the voice of the learner in response to the LSC Learning for Living and Work strategy.

Essex Adult Education service have "Talking Together" days when the Manager responsible for provision for learners with learning difficulties speaks to learners to get a sense of what they are looking for in terms of curriculum offer. The learners consistently ask for leisure based courses, something that is not always deliverable because of funding issues. Herein lies the tension. Maudslay (2005)¹⁰ advocates listening without prejudice to learners and suggests using person centred approaches when listening to learners. However, she warns:

"National initiatives, such as demands for formal accreditation, the priority given to basic skills or Skills for Life, and the target for learners to reach a level 2 qualification, are often perceived as skewing person centred initiatives, leaving staff feeling that programmes which do not conform to these targets are given lower priority and are less secure financially."

The results of the consultation that took place with learners is in accessible format and can be found by clicking on the following link
<http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/HDE/Documents/Brightening-Lives.doc>

¹⁰ Maudslay, L. (2005) Changes and choices: valuing people in the curriculum, LSDA, London

Points for providers to consider around consulting learners.

When consulting with learners ensure you use person-centered approaches? Do you use accessible information? Are you aware of the CHANGE picture bank? Do you consult with learners who do not use conventional systems of communication? Have you considered using Talking Mats?

How can you ensure feedback from learners influences what happens in your service?

How can you work with partners to facilitate gaining learners views?

Have you considered that your learners might need support to express their views? Have you ever used parents, friends and carers as advocates? Have you ever considered using an advocacy organisation to support you in this area of work?

Do you listen, without prejudice, to what your learners are telling you?

Section 6

Learner progression:

We asked providers about the progression routes available to learners from PCDL funded courses. One provider told us:

“Progression is disjointed and becoming more difficult as funding for non-accredited provision and below level 2 becomes more difficult”

Another explained that:

“Some courses that we have provided for a number of years but have not been able to continue because of lack of learner progression, repeat learners etc. have been continued by Social Services employing the tutor directly. These include Tap and Line Dancing and Armchair Exercise.”

One manager told us that in order to avoid learners getting “stuck” in the same class, on the same night, at the same venue that “every now and again” she “moves the curriculum offer around”.

Progression options included;

- progression onto mainstream FE courses,
- onto other PCDL provision,
- into employment or employment related provision and
- into more independent living.

Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service state that they:

“have tried to develop courses that can lead people somewhere other than pure leisure. There is a plan to follow on the ceramics course with a mentoring activity where the more experienced learners support new learners”

Support to help people progress was seen as important, one provider told us:

“we ensure that a matrix accredited IAG provider visits each group to look at progression opportunities” (EM1)

Other providers were ambivalent about such progression as the nature of PCDL negated the need for a focus on such progression. This is in line with the LSC thinking on PCDL. They state that PCDL is:

“not linked to prior levels of achievement and is not intended to link to the LSC’s funding priorities or to offer progression to other learning aims”¹¹

¹¹ LSC 2006

One respondent pointed out that PCDL provision in their institution was mainly art and craft courses and:

“that very few learners move on to other courses as they prefer to stay in an environment which is familiar to them.”

There is, of course, a danger in this. Systematic progression for adults with learning difficulties is vitally important. Without such progression learners' skills and knowledge remain untested and under developed; independence and successful personal growth remain limited. In short, learners fail to become all that they are capable of becoming – and that includes making a contribution to the economy and the community.

Fee remission policy is not the same for all providers but certainly in some there exists a 100% fee remission for learners with learning difficulties. Some institutions have rethought their fee remission policy and reduced it. In effect this means that learners with learning difficulties have to pay a proportion of the costs. This can add to the perceived value of the course and focus learners and their carers more carefully when it comes to making decisions about what learning they want to participate in. It may also lessen the likelihood of learners returning year after year. Some providers we spoke to were “time limiting” their PCDL classes i.e. a learner could attend for two years only. This lessened the likelihood of having repeat learners. One manager told us:

“We can and do say No”

It can be difficult at times for providers to challenge learners who are returning year after year to think about what they might like to do in the future as an alternative. It can be equally as disturbing for learners. Learners might lack the skills necessary for informed choice making and may need support with this. Local self-advocacy organisations can support providers to work with learners to think about what they might want to do in the future and how they might achieve this.

One local authority, who contract out their provision, told us how they expected bids for the provision to state how learners would receive IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) services.

“Where applicants were unable to do this in house, we made arrangements for a NextStep provider to go in and deliver an input. To ensure a common approach we drew up a service level agreement with NextStep to cover roles and responsibilities. Most of the LLDD interventions were undertaken by one NextStep provider who was experienced in working with this client group, the provider then claimed these interventions back against their target under their contract agreement; this then released funding”

Northamptonshire Adult Learning Service use an interactive accessible PowerPoint to support delivering IAG for learners wishing to access PCDL funded courses. Two slides on the PowerPoint give suggestions for progression routes. They are:

- Working towards employment
- Beyond Milestone 8 literacy and numeracy
- Skills for Life courses
- College Courses
- Gateway Clubs
- Sports Clubs

Recognising and recording progress and achievement;

In order to ascertain how progress and achievement are being monitored and recorded in PCDL provision for learners with learning difficulties, respondents who were using PCDL funds were asked how they use of RARPA (Recognising And Recording Progress and Achievement) in PCDL provision.

The majority of respondents were explicit about various measures they use to record learners progress and achievement. As one would expect, some gave more detail and appeared to place more emphasis on the importance of this than others. However, most did appear to see this as essential for effective provision for learners with learning difficulties.

16 of the 33 respondents either explicitly declared that they use the RARPA process (or an adaptation of this process) or implied that this is the case:

'I think programmes for learners with learning disabilities were using RARPA before RARPA was invented. It is well established practice that learners will have a detailed assessment of their needs, often negotiated with other agencies as well as the learners. They will each have a personal set of learning goals based on this assessment and regular monitoring of how they are progressing towards these goals. The progression may be in very small steps, and goals will frequently need to be renegotiated as it is rarely a direct linear progression.'

'RARPA is applied across all courses. It is enabling the setting of agreed personal learning goals and the resulting achievement for adults with learning disabilities where achievement of accredited outcomes is not possible.'

12 of the 33 respondents referred to specific methods, which they have in place to record learner progression and achievement. It was not explicitly mentioned whether these methods were taken from the RARPA process. Methods referred to were Individual Learning Plans, photographs, 'ILT' equipment, individual learning targets, end of course reviews, learner diaries, portfolios, action planning, records of achievement and video records of achievement.

'Currently the tutors are using digital photography as a way of recording progress as well as working with tutors to find appropriate methods of recording progress and achievement which are appropriate for the learners. Folders are also produced along side ASDAN programmes which clearly illustrate the current level they are aiming for and recording their achievements. Where Skills for Life is embedded then this is linked to the curriculum framework.'

'We undertake initial assessment of all learners attending discreet classes, set appropriate individual learning goals and monitor progress. Progress and achievement are recorded using checklists, learner diaries, photographs.'

3 of the 33 respondents were planning to develop, or were in the development phase, of RARPA. The remaining 2 respondents either declined to answer or gave only vague responses.

Points for providers to consider around learner progression

Do learners access courses that support them in reaching their hopes and aspirations for the future?

Have you carried out a recent audit of how long your learners have been with you?

Do you keep in contact with other providers, clubs etc. about the services they offer as a progression route for your learners?

Have you a local map of progression pathways for your learners?

Do you offer IAG to your learners to support them in making choices about "What next?"

How accessible is the IAG service you offer?

Have you considered using a self advocacy organisation to support learners with moving on, especially if you have learners who have been with you a long time?

How do you support learners move from discrete provision to mainstream provision?

Conclusion:

The evidence born out of this project seems to indicate that where PCDL funding is best serving learners with learning difficulties, providers:

- Use person centred approaches when consulting with learners
- Use the feedback from consultation to inform curriculum planning
- Consider jigsawing other funding pots with PCDL monies to enrich the curriculum and allow for a broader curriculum
- Are aware of what other learning opportunities exist within their area to signpost learners to
- Think inventively about how best to support learners
- Work in partnership, recognising that partnership does not always have to involve money but can be “in kind”
- Consider progression pathways for their learners ensuring that PCDL funded courses do not allow for learners to become “stuck” in they system.

The following table consolidates the points providers are asked to consider:

How PCDL funding can best serve learners with learning difficulties.

Points for providers to consider

Curriculum	<p>Do you regularly review your curriculum offer?</p> <p>Have you a clear rationale for what you use PCDL monies for?</p> <p>Do you know enough about other possibilities for funding?</p> <p>Do you know where to go to find out about other funding possibilities?</p> <p>How do you consult with learners in a meaningful manner and act on that feedback, thus informing the curriculum offer?</p> <p>Do you know what other provision is on in your area in order to signpost learners?</p> <p>Do you work with other providers in the area to ensure your provision compliments each other?</p>
Partnership	<p>Is there potential for joint planning and funding arrangements in your area with Social Services?</p> <p>Are you an active member of your local Learning Disability Partnership Board?</p> <p>What are the implications of the Modernisation of Day services in your area - do they offer opportunities for joint planning and funding to develop community based education provision for people with learning difficulties?</p> <p>Can you work with residential services and offer courses that support people with learning difficulties to develop independent living skills?</p> <p>What can be done to contact people not using social services so they can be supported to access PCDL provision?</p> <p>Do you offer training for support workers from external agencies about their role in working with learners in education provision?</p>

<p>Supporting Learners</p>	<p>Have you got any partnerships in place to support learners and learning?</p> <p>If so, are these partnerships ad hoc or are there clear guidelines about each organisations roles and responsibilities?</p> <p>How do you monitor the quality of the support your learners receive? Do you keep up to date with the latest development in the field?</p> <p>Do you inform learners of the support options that are available to them?</p> <p>Do you have a fee remission policy that supports these learners? If you struggle to get funding for 1:1 paid support staff have you considered using volunteers? What training could you offer them?</p> <p>Do you offer / access joint training with staff from health and social care?</p>
<p>Consulting Learners</p>	<p>When consulting with learners ensure you use person-centred approaches?</p> <p>How can you ensure feedback from learners influences what happens in your service?</p> <p>How can you work with partners to facilitate gaining learners views?</p> <p>Have you considered that your learners might need support to express their views? Have you ever used parents, friends and carers as advocates? Have you ever considered using an advocacy organisation to support you in this area of work?</p> <p>Do you listen, without prejudice, to what your learners are telling you?</p> <p>Do learners access courses that support them in reaching their hopes and aspirations for the future?</p>

Progress and progression

Have you carried out a recent audit of how long your learners have been with you?

Do you keep in contact with other providers, clubs etc. about the services they offer as a progression route for your learners?

Have you a local map of progression pathways for your learners?

Do you offer IAG to your learners to support them in making choices about “What next?”

How accessible is the IAG service you offer?

Have you considered using a self advocacy organisation to support learners with moving on, especially if you have learners who have been with you a long time?

How effective is your RARPA system? Does it support progression?

How do you support learners move from discrete provision to mainstream provision?

Useful publications and websites:

DfES (2006) Person-centred approaches and adults with learning difficulties, DfES, Nottingham

Jacobsen, Y. (2007) e learning for adults with learning difficulties, NIACE, Leicester

Maudslay, L. and Nightingale, C., (2004) Achievement in non-accredited learning for adults with learning difficulties, NIACE, Leicester

Maudslay, L., (2005) Changes and choices: valuing people in the curriculum, LSDA, London

Maudslay, L., (2006) Support into employment for young people and adults with learning difficulties

Maudslay, L. and Nightingale, C., (2006) Working in collaboration: Enhancing provision for disabled learners by working with others, LSDA, London

Adults with Learning Difficulties & Employment

***You can work it out!**

Supporting you into work

***I want to work**

A guide to benefits and work for people with a learning disability

With a forward by Anne McGuire, Minister for Disabled people, Department for Work and Pensions

***I can get a job**

A step-by-step guide to getting a job. This guide is for you and the people who support you

With a forward by Anne McGuire, Minister for Disabled people, Department for Work and Pensions

Valued in public

Helping people with a learning disability to work in public bodies

Anne O'Bryan, Stephen Beyer November 2005

With a forward by Anne McGuire, Minister for Disabled people, Department for Work and Pensions

All four booklets published by Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) Valuing people Support Team.

*These publications are written in an accessible style aimed at people with learning difficulties

Copies of these publications are available from:

e-mail: valuing.people.info@dh.qsi.gov.uk

Or go to the website:

www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/employment.htm

Making the Jump: 'Transition to Work' – Supporting people with learning difficulties make the transition from education and vocational training to employment. Cost: £60.00 + p&p
ISBN 1 86201 143 5 (Transition to Work)

ISBN 1 86201 144 3 (We Can Do a Good Job) an accessible resource for students with learning difficulties
Cost: £15.00 + p&p

NB: Making the Jump: 'Transition to Work' cannot be ordered separately.

The following are available from Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities. <http://www.skill.org.uk/shop/shop.asp>

Open Learning Resource on disability issues for nextstep advisers: Information and advice on working with disabled people <http://www.advice-resources.co.uk>

www.changepeople.co.uk - CHANGE Picture Bank, a set of line drawings for use when making written information accessible.

www.easyinfo.org - a website to support organisations with making information accessible.

www.Mencap.org.uk - Am I Making Myself Clear – guidelines from Mencap on making writing accessible (free)

www.skill.org.uk - Skill: The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities.