



National Research and Development Centre  
for adult literacy and numeracy

# Research Report



## **Provision of, and learner engagement with, adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL support in rural England: a comparative case study.**

Chris Atkin, Anthea Rose and Rosie Shier  
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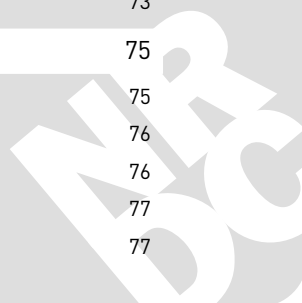
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This report was read and critically peer reviewed by: Laura Bond; Rebecca O'Rourke; Helen Cross; Pat Dreyer; Angelia Paschal; Linda Sidorowicz; Fiona Cameron; and Carol Woods.

# Summary: findings and recommendations

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## Synopsis

This research examines the issues surrounding the delivery of the *Skills for Life* agenda (DfEE, 2001) to adult learners in six rural counties of England. Although the research is situated in the rural the findings and policy recommendations offer much to those concerned with the planning and delivery of the *Skills for Life* agenda in the urban and semi-urban context. We argue that providing adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in rural communities and then engaging learners with that provision is a major challenge for providers and policy makers alike. Currently the *Skills for Life* policy draws heavily on research material grounded largely in the urban context and relies on urban models of delivery and funding that are often found to be inappropriate and unworkable in many rural areas. Our analysis draws on, amongst other data, 103 questionnaire responses and 214 learner interviews. We make recommendations for policy development and future research in this field.

## Background rationale and approach to research

This study builds on the growing national and international interest in the problems faced by rural communities and the delivery of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in times of rapid change. We argue that for effective delivery the needs and motivations of the adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL learner, in the context of their rural setting, need to be fully understood before it can be met. In particular we argue that without changes to the funding of the delivery of the *Skills for Life* agenda in rural areas it will be almost impossible for rural Learning and Skills Councils to meet government targets. In this report we have focused on rural as the defining characteristic of 'hard to reach'. Clearly there are many other potentially disadvantaged groups in society for which this report and its findings may aid policy development.

## Research findings

- Learners prefer provision that is locally available.
- There is a lack of suitably qualified tutors, particularly in numeracy and ESOL.
- In all areas providers feel they are in competition with each other for the same learners; partnership working is crucial if this is to be avoided.
- Transport, access and childcare are major barriers to learning in rural areas, along with the issue of attracting a viable number of learners.
- Tutors need to have greater training opportunities and to be adequately compensated for the cost of their time and travel to rural areas.
- Word of mouth was the most effective method of promoting classes and encouraging new learners to attend.
- Learners are often aware of their lack of basic skills, they think they can not learn or have other priorities and therefore develop coping strategies and are unlikely to seek help until such time as they see a need. This often occurs after a change in their circumstances, personal or professional. This has implications for those involved in encouraging new learners to attend provision.
- Learners' reasons for attending a course often change over time from helping their children to gaining qualifications or from gaining confidence to aiming for a new or better job.
- Despite the fact that in rural counties the resident ethnic minority population is small and



diverse there is a growing need for an increase in dedicated ESOL provision.

- Family learning is popular but the client group is predominantly mothers. In some areas there is a lack of progression routes from family learning.
- Whilst further research needs to be conducted to establish how best to access the workplace, the use of embedded learning is one strategy which has shown some success.
- Some providers are struggling with the lack of core funding. Other funding issues include the short-term nature of some funding streams, the target-driven nature of LSC funding and the lack of flexibility in the funding.

### **Recommendations for policy**

The findings of this report have led to the following recommendations:

- A number of changes could be made to funding arrangements to facilitate the expansion of literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision in rural areas. Specifically:
  - Funding should give providers the flexibility to work with smaller groups if necessary, thereby making local, community-based provision more viable.
  - Additional funding should be made available to enable providers to pay for tutors' travel costs in rural areas.
  - Long-term core funding needs to be more widely available to enable providers to plan ahead.
- Each area should undertake a full review of localised ESOL need.
- Providers should establish a full picture of the extent of local delivery to ensure more effective partnership working and so that information, advice and guidance can be made available to all learners concerning courses on offer.
- ESOL learners also need clear advice and guidance on how best to utilise their previous qualifications and experience in this country.
- Funders should consider extending family literacy, language and numeracy programmes to allow a greater number of parents to participate, for example, by allowing literacy and numeracy classes linked to the school curriculum to be offered in the evening.

### **Recommendations for practice/ stakeholders**

- Provision should be as flexible as possible to fit with the lives of the learners. In the case of workplace and ESOL provision it appeared to be particularly important to fit delivery around the lives of the learners rather than the administrative requirements of the provider(s).
- Provision should be learner-led with motivations for attending understood within the local context.
- The majority of learners preferred local provision; local in this context refers to accessibility rather than just a matter of geography. Poor infrastructure coupled with isolation meant fitting attendance around other commitments was very difficult; for many, local referred to their village or community.
- Stakeholders need to work in closer partnership and collaboration to provide a more coherent offering.
- Learners have a growing number of providers from which to choose, however information on who is providing what, where and when is difficult to find and often confusing. Practitioners should ensure available provision is clearly set out and constantly up-dated.
- Providers need to consider new ways of promoting the provision which is on offer. The local "Gremlins" helpline set up in of the study areas is an example of good practice in this area.
- We found that the relationship between the learner and the tutor was a key factor for success. The 'people' skills of the tutor are therefore potentially as important as the qualifications.
- It is inadvisable to place ESOL learners in the same provision as literacy and/or numeracy learners.

ESOL learners have very different needs and were found to be often well educated/skilled in their country of origin. The majority of ESOL learners were not found to have difficulty with learning per se. Placing them in mixed provision could be detrimental to their progress.

- Approximately two thirds of the learners were female. Therefore the availability of childcare attached to provision resolves a major barrier faced by many learners, not just those attending family learning programmes.

### **Main research elements; methods, sample, etc**

The study areas consisted of six rural counties in England: Cumbria, Cornwall, Devon, Herefordshire, Lincolnshire and Northumberland and were selected to give a geographical spread throughout England. The project was comparative in nature and used a combination of standard qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques including telephone interviews, postal questionnaires, semi-structured face-to-face interviews, classroom visits and the attendance at key meetings.

Postal questionnaires were sent to 38 policy makers and 415 individual coordinators and tutors delivering provision across the six study areas. We received 18 completed policy questionnaires and 85 from practitioners with a further 69 returned unfilled or void. This gave a response rate of 47 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. Due to the large amount of provision in each study area it was necessary to identify a sample of providers. Using data from the 2001 census three district councils were selected for each area; the district with the lowest population density, the highest population density and the median. In Herefordshire, which consists of only one district, the whole county was sampled. In addition, a random sample of 66 classes were visited and 48 tutors and 214 learners were interviewed; 84 literacy learners, 61 numeracy, 68 ESOL plus one classed as other.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Report outline

This report is divided into seven sections. This first section outlines the background and aims of the study. The second section is a review of the literature. The third outlines the research methodology. Sections four, five and six consist of the main body of findings investigating the nature and level of provision, the learner perspective and views of the policy makers, co-ordinators and tutors in the study areas of rural England.

Section seven discusses the implications of the key findings, suggests areas for future research work and makes recommendations for policymakers and providers involved in the delivery of adult literacy, numeracy and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in rural, urban and semi-urban areas. Many of the issues faced in delivering provision in England's countryside - identified in this research - are not necessarily unique to the six study areas but exasperated by both geographical and social constructions of rurality.

For the purpose of this report the term 'basic skills' will be used to describe adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL and does not include Information and Communication Technology (ICT). An 'adult' is defined as an individual over the age of 19.

## 1.2 Rationale for the project

Nationally rural learners are better educated and trained to Level three or above than their urban counterparts (NOMIS, 2001 cited in Atkin, 2003: 506). However, this apparent advantage risks masking the true picture. The statistics are largely based on postcode definitions of rural communities and hence include the high number of well-educated professionals and middle managers who now live on the urban fringe of our major cities. This study builds on the growing national and international interest in the problems faced by harder to reach rural communities and the delivery of basic skills in times of rapid change. For example, the UK government's move to 'rural proof' policies (DETR, 2000).

Providing adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in rural communities and then engaging learners with that provision is a major challenge currently facing providers and policy makers involved with the **Skills for Life** agenda (DfEE, 2001). Currently **Skills for Life** policy draws heavily on research material grounded largely in the urban context which are often found to be inappropriate and unworkable in many rural areas. For example, funding often requires a minimum number of learners to make provision cost effective. This can be difficult to achieve in sparsely populated areas. The **Skills for Life** learner is often a reluctant or hard to reach learner in the most ideal of conditions and this is exacerbated by factors of rurality. Further, the delivery of provision in rural areas is perceived to be expensive and time consuming due to travel issues. Meeting Learning and Skills Council (LSC) targets in rural areas can therefore be challenging.

## 1.3 Project aims and context

The project aims to identify geographically specific and generalisable outcomes which have wider implications for our understanding of fundamental issues in the delivery of the **Skills for Life** agenda in rural areas. More specifically, the main aims of the project were to:

- 1 Assess the level and nature of support for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in the six rural study areas in both the formal and voluntary sectors.
- 2 Establish whether the nature of rurality is a consideration for those forming and implementing policy in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in the six rural areas.
- 3 Establish what practitioners believe works best in supporting adult numeracy, literacy and ESOL within their areas and whether models of good practice are understood in relation to the effects of rurality.
- 4 Identify effects of rurality on adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL development that are common to the six areas or specific to a particular area.

A case study approach was adopted, using six rural counties in England. These were chosen to give a geographical spread: two of the counties are in the north, two in the south-west, one in the east and one in the west. The six counties were Cumbria, Cornwall, Devon, Herefordshire, Lincolnshire and Northumberland. The geographical position of each county is shown in map 1.

The population densities of these six counties range from 61 persons per km<sup>2</sup> in Northumberland to 141 persons per km<sup>2</sup> in Cornwall and are among the ten lowest in England. Key statistics from the six counties are given below:

**Table 1.1. Key statistics from the six study areas**

County	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population	Population density (persons per km <sup>2</sup> )	% of wards classified as rural	Land use – agriculture
Cornwall	3,563	501,267	141	98%	77%
Cumbria	6,768	487,607	72	74%	68%
Devon <sup>1</sup>	6,564	704,493	107	88%	78%
Herefordshire	2,180	174,871	80	91%	80%
Lincolnshire	5,921	646,645	109	91%	87%
Northumberland	5,013	307,190	61	62%	75%

1. Excluding the unitary authorities of Plymouth and Torbay

Sources: Office for National Statistics: National Statistics Online. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, June Agricultural Census:

[http://www.defra.gov.uk/esg/work\\_htm/publications/cs/farmstats\\_web/default.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/esg/work_htm/publications/cs/farmstats_web/default.htm)

All six counties are characterised by relatively low average wages and a high proportion of small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) with relatively few large companies; unemployment rates are similar to the country's overall rate of 3.4 per cent. The proportion of the population that is over 60 is higher than that in England as a whole, as is the proportion of the population classified as British white.



**Picture 1 - A rural view of the border between Devon and Cornwall**

**Table 1.2. Characteristics of the six study areas**

	% British white	% aged over 60	% unemployment	Number of Large companies over 250 employers	Gross average
Cornwall	97.1%	26.1	3.3	35	£388.00
Cumbria	98.0%	24.1	3.4	40	£413.20
Devon	97.0%	26.7	2.5	55	£387.10
Herefordshire	97.5%	24.9	2.7	15	£378.20
Lincolnshire	97.0%	24.6	2.9	60	£397.10
Northumberland	98.1%	23.2	3.8	20	£399.20
ENGLAND	91.3%	20.8	3.4	6,830	£483.40

Sources: Office for National Statistics: Census 2001. <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/>  
 Office for National Statistics: Commerce, Energy and Industry 2003  
[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_commerce/PA1003\\_2003/PA1003\\_2003pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_commerce/PA1003_2003/PA1003_2003pdf)  
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However, although the six counties are similar in these respects, each has a number of distinct characteristics which have implications for the delivery of adult learning. Table 1.3 shows the basic skills agencies estimates for low literacy and numeracy levels in the six study areas and the national average. The estimates suggest higher levels of 'low literacy' in all of the study areas. The estimates for numeracy levels show a mix of skills although each of the six areas show a higher than average prevalence of 'lower numeracy' and 'very low numeracy' levels in the population.

**Table 1.3. Estimation of population 16 – 60 with poor literacy and numeracy skills**

	Low literacy (%)	Lower literacy (%)	Very low literacy (%)	Total poor literacy (%)
Cornwall	18.6	3.3	4.1	26
Cumbria	17.9	4.2	4.7	26.8
Devon	18.2	3.1	3.8	25.1
Herefordshire	17.7	3.5	4.2	25.4
Lincolnshire	16.3	3.9	3.8	24
Northumberland	17	4.4	4.7	26.1
National Average	15	5	4	24

	Low literacy (%)	Lower literacy (%)	Very low literacy (%)	Total poor numeracy (%)
Cornwall	10.3	7.7	6.2	24.2
Cumbria	11.9	7.9	6.7	26.5
Devon	9.7	7.2	5.8	22.7
Herefordshire	10.3	7.5	6	23.8
Lincolnshire	11.1	7	5.3	23.4
Northumberland	11.8	7.7	6.1	25.6
National Average	12	7	5	24

[Basic Skills Agency, 2004]

**Map 1. Location of the six study counties in England**

### Cornwall

Cornwall has an estimated 697 kilometres of coastline, the longest of any English county and is bound on three sides by the sea. Despite its mining history, the development of tourism and the more recent development of the manufacturing industry, Cornwall remains largely rural and agriculture is the predominant land use. The county contains a wide scatter of small towns and villages and has only nine towns of over 10,000 inhabitants. The largest of these is St. Austell, which had a population of 21,310 in 1998.

In 1999 Cornwall was awarded Objective One status, the highest level of European structural funding available for development. Eligible areas are those that have less than 75 per cent of European Union (EU) average Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For the period 2000–06, Cornwall was one of only four areas in the UK that qualified. Following the expansion of the EU it remains the only area in the UK below this threshold.

Over the last century there has been a considerable decline in the farming and fishing industries in Cornwall. Between 1988 and 1995 there was a 9 per cent reduction in the total agricultural labour force in Cornwall with full-time regular employed workers falling by 24 per cent. Net farm incomes fell dramatically in 1997/98: incomes fell by more than 50 per cent in most farming sectors and by 85 per cent in the worst affected sector of lowland livestock farms. Most of Cornwall's farms no longer generate enough income to support even one person. Cornish agriculture is heavily concentrated on livestock and although there were very few cases of foot and mouth in the county, the BSE crisis affected Cornwall more severely than many other agricultural regions.



**Picture 2 - Fowey bay Cornwall**

There has been a significant growth in tourism in Cornwall and this is now one of the county's major industries, accounting for 11.7 per cent of its GDP. Cornwall attracts more than four million visitors per year and employment directly in the holiday industry and through

additional trade to retail establishments and other businesses is significant. The industry accounts for at least 30,000 jobs, with many more at the peak of the season. However, many of the jobs in this sector are seasonal and rates of pay are relatively low.

New manufacturing industry has been attracted to the county helping to diversify the economy, although the manufacturing sector remains much smaller than in the rest of England and Wales. As a result, the range of job opportunities is generally more limited than in many other parts of the country.

### **Cumbria**

Cumbria is the second largest county in England covering an area of 6,768 square kilometres. The Lake District National Park, the largest National Park in the UK, covers one third of the county and is one of the most popular tourist destinations in England. As a whole, Cumbria receives nearly 15 million visitors a year and over £400 million is directly generated through tourism. The Lake District is one of only a few mountainous regions in England and contains all the land in England over 3000 feet above sea level. The region of high land sits in the centre of Cumbria forming a natural barrier that has influenced the development of the road network as well as settlement patterns within the county. The majority of Cumbria's larger settlements are located around the edge of the county. The two largest towns are Carlisle, with a population of 68,830 in the far north and Barrow-in-Furness with a population of 58,090, in the far south of the county. Although two thirds of the county's population live in urban areas, the county has a higher proportion (15 per cent) of people living in remote rural areas than any other county in England.

Barrow-in-Furness has a strong industrial heritage, growing rapidly from the mid-1800s as a result of the iron and steel industries. The town's shipyards, which developed alongside these industries, also became a major employer. Other parts of Cumbria are also industrial, particularly West Cumbria, where the nuclear industry is based. During the 1980s and early 1990s there was a substantial decline in the manufacturing sector, the shipyards in Barrow were particularly badly affected, and unemployment in Barrow-in-Furness and the two districts in West Cumbria are markedly higher, 6.7 per cent in Barrow, 6.0 per cent in Copeland and 5.1 per cent in Allerdale, than in the other three districts, particularly Eden (1.4 per cent) and South Lakeland (1.6 per cent). Having said this, manufacturing remains a major employer in these three districts, particularly in Barrow (28 per cent) and Copeland (27 per cent).

In contrast, Cumbria's rural economy traditionally relied on agriculture, food processing, mining and quarrying, with some forestry and tourism. Farming, particularly sheep farming, was traditionally the major industry in the Lake District. However, in recent years this has changed significantly and there are many abandoned mines throughout the region and, as in all areas of the UK, employment in agriculture has decreased considerably. Cumbria was severely affected by foot and mouth disease in 2001. There were 893 confirmed cases, 44 per cent of the UK total, making it by far the worst affected area in the country. Just over a million sheep were slaughtered, as well as 215,000 cattle, 39,000 pigs and 1,000 other animals and 45 per cent of farms were subject to complete or partial slaughter. Furthermore, many businesses connected to the tourist trade were seriously affected by the restrictions placed on access to the countryside.

### **Devon**

The population of Devon, which includes the unitary authorities of Plymouth and Torbay in 2001, was just over one million. Three large urban centres, Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay



accounted for almost a half of the county's inhabitants. There are only nine other towns with a population over 10,000 and 70 per cent of the county's parishes have fewer than 1,000 residents. Devon is one of the fastest growing counties in the country and the increase is entirely due to inward migration. This migration was historically due to people moving to the county to retire however, today it is led much more by employment. Having said this, although there is a net gain in population in most age groups, there is a net loss of young adults, with many leaving the area to go to university or college or because of a lack of job opportunities and low wages.

Devon contains Dartmoor National Park, part of Exmoor National Park, five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 210 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and a World Heritage Site. In addition, the South West Coast Path runs along the entire length of both the north and south coasts. The county's landscape and climate attract many visitors each year and it has been a popular tourist destination since the middle of the 18th century, when many people were attracted to its seaside resorts. Tourism now accounts for 8.8 per cent of the county's GDP.

Like Cornwall, Devon is relatively disadvantaged economically and most of the county qualifies for European Union Objective 2 status. This economic disadvantage is in part due to the decline of traditional industries such as fishing, mining and farming. More recently, foot and mouth disease in 2001 severely affected the farming community as well other parts of the local economy.

### **Herefordshire**

Herefordshire is a landlocked county, sharing borders with Wales, Shropshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. It is the smallest of the six areas included in this study, both in terms of area (2180 km<sup>2</sup>) and population (174,871) and arguably the most rural county in England. The county has no large urban centres. Almost one third of the county's population live in its main town, Hereford City, and the only other significant population centres are its five market towns, Bromyard, Leominster, Ledbury, Kington, and Ross-on-Wye with only two of these, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye, having a population above 10,000. The county contains two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Malvern Hills and the Wye Valley.

Herefordshire has a strong tradition of farm cider-making. Bulmers, now owned by Scottish Courage, began making cider on a commercial scale in 1887. Each autumn they press approximately 80,000 tonnes of cider apples from the region's 10,000 acres of orchards to make 65 per cent of the cider consumed each year in the UK.

With the exception of Hereford city and its adjacent parishes, the whole of the county falls within the EU Objective 2 programme and the Rural Regeneration Zone, recognising how the economy has lagged behind that of others in the UK. The programme runs for a period of six years and is due to finish in 2006. According to the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (2002) 'a key factor in the Region's under performance is its continued dependence on manufacturing as a contributor to its GDP.' Herefordshire has a higher proportion of small firms employing less than ten people, compared to the rest of the West Midlands. There are very few large companies and those that do exist such as Sun Valley, Bulmers and Special Metals, are all located in Hereford city.



**Picture 3 - A view of Herefordshire**

### Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire is the fourth largest county in England covering 2,286 square miles. The county has a diverse industrial and economic make-up. 87 per cent of Lincolnshire's land is used for agriculture and the food sector as a whole with agriculture, food processing, packaging, storage and distribution, forming the largest industries in the county. Crops account for 77 per cent of the total agricultural area and the county is the highest producer in England and Wales of a number of crops including open-grown vegetables, sugar beet, potatoes and flowers. The county has a strong electrical and engineering base and the highest number of large companies, (60), of the six areas in the study. Major companies include Pepsi Co., Cummins and Richardsons. Tourism also plays a significant role in the county's economy especially at Skegness on the east coast.

Lincolnshire comprises more than 500 parishes and 22 urban areas and market towns. Lincoln is the largest urban centre, with a population of 97,000, followed by Grantham (38,000) and Boston (36,000). According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000, Lincolnshire has 25 wards which fall into the 20 per cent most deprived wards nationally. Of these, 13 are in the East Lindsey district.

Lincolnshire is often referred to as the home of the Royal Air Force (RAF). Its strategic position on the east coast of England coupled with the flat landscape made it a perfect choice and by the end of the Second World War there were 46 operational airfields. However, today there are only five airfields still fully operational plus a few satellite bases including RAF Scampton, the home of the Red Arrows. The presence of the RAF has had a significant impact on both the local economy and the environment, notably the amount of farmland that was utilised to build the airfields and the increased local population due to the influx of RAF personnel which was estimated to be in excess of 90,000 at its height.

## Northumberland



**Picture 4 - Alnwick Castle Northumberland**

Northumberland is the most northerly county in England, sharing a border with Scotland. With only 61 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, it is also the least densely populated county in England. The population is largely concentrated in the south east corner of the county, where over half of its population lives in just 5 per cent of its total area. The two districts in this south eastern corner, Blyth Valley and Wansbeck have population densities of 1,156 and 916 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (respectively) and contain the county's three largest towns, whereas the remaining four districts have population densities ranging from only 27 persons per km<sup>2</sup> in Berwick-upon-Tweed and Tynedale to 79 persons per km<sup>2</sup> in Castle Morpeth. These four rural districts contain only five towns with over 10,000 inhabitants. A large proportion of the county is included in the National Park and two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the North Pennines and the Northumberland Coast. Together these account for 30 per cent of the county's area. Furthermore, a total of 16 per cent of the county is used for forestry, twice the England average.

The south east of the county developed largely as a result of the coal-mining industry and was the main source of employment in the area. But, from a peak of 30,000 in the late 1950s, the industry now employs only around 1,000 workers in the four opencast and three underground mines still in operation. The decline of this industry has led to high unemployment and deprivation. Wansbeck is one of only 88 local authorities in the country to be eligible for funding under the Neighbourhood Renewal Initiative, set up to enable the most deprived districts in the country to improve services.

Rural Northumberland has traditionally been dependent on farming, fishing and forestry and there are five times as many sheep as people in the county. However, these industries are also in decline and direct employment in these sectors now accounts for less than 4 per cent of jobs. Tourism is a growing industry in both rural and urban Northumberland and is seen as a key area for development by the Northumberland Strategic Partnership.

## 2. Literature review

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The review of literature is divided into four sections. Firstly, it considers adult literacy and numeracy in England, particularly the **Skills for Life** Strategy. Secondly, it looks at ESOL. The third section addresses issues of rurality in relation to adult learning. It includes a discussion of rural proofing and a review of previous research that has examined the impact of rurality on adult learning, including basic skills. The fourth and final part of the review looks at literature published, or soon to be published, specific to the six study areas. Not all of the case studies are academic publications and some are small scale. However, they do provide valuable insights into provision and help to contextualise the study areas.

### 2.1 Adult literacy and numeracy in England and the **Skills for Life** Strategy

The report of the working group on adult basic skills chaired by Sir Claus Moser, *A Fresh Start* (DfEE, 1999), defined basic skills as 'the ability to read, write and speak English and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general,' and is the working definition used in this report. *A Fresh Start* stated that an estimated 7 million adults in England (20 per cent of adults) have literacy levels below that expected of an 11 year old and that the figure for numeracy could be as high as 40 per cent. These estimates are backed up in the more recent **Skills for Life** Survey (DfES, 2003a) where it was estimated that 5.2 million adults (16 per cent) have literacy skills below Level 1, the level expected of an 11 year old, and 15 million (47 per cent) have numeracy skills below Level 1. The figures for England are far higher than many other developed countries. For example, in Canada the figure is 17 per cent for both literacy and numeracy and, in Germany, only 12 per cent and 7 per cent respectively (DfEE, 1999).

In response to *A Fresh Start* the government set up the **Skills for Life** Strategy, aimed at improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. The Strategy aims to improve the basic skills of 750,000 adults by 2004 and 1.5 million adults by 2007 and set aside £1.6 million to achieve this (DfEE, 2001). The funding has not only been used to deliver provision but has also funded national campaigns to raise awareness of the issue, including the successful Gremlins campaign. The implementation of the strategy is co-ordinated by the **Skills for Life** Strategy Unit (SfLSU), formerly known as Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU), based in DfES, and is funded by the LSC. The LSC was set up by the government in 2001. It consists of a national office, 12 councils and 47 regional offices and is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds in England. It covers further education, work-based training for young people, school sixth forms, workforce development, adult and community learning, information, advice and guidance for adults, and education business links.

The **Skills for Life** Strategy identified a number of priority groups, including unemployed people, prisoners and offenders, public sector employees, low-skilled people in employment and others at risk of exclusion. The latter group included homeless people, refugees and asylum seekers and parents with poor basic skills. The Strategy states that 'poor literacy and numeracy skills often run in the family' (DfEE, 2001: 29). The government set targets for parents to improve their skills by 2004. This required an additional 180,000 parents to engage

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<sup>1</sup> These figures refer to the comparisons contained in the 1999 DfEE report *Improving literacy and numeracy: A fresh start* and not the more recent **Skills for Life** survey figures

in learning and thus family learning programmes have been extended. In 2002 the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) undertook an evaluation of all LSC-funded family learning. They found that 40 per cent of LEAs had a higher demand for family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programmes than they were able to supply, that 80 per cent of learners came from disadvantaged backgrounds and that word of mouth was the most effective form of recruitment (NIACE, 2003: 34). The report recommended a more sustainable funding framework and increased partnership working and outreach work.

In addition to the DfES and the LSC, other government departments have a remit in adult education, often referred to as lifelong learning. A number of these are particularly relevant to rural areas. For example, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is responsible for the educational activities of rural agencies and training for small businesses, including farms. Defra has both a policy and funding structure for lifelong learning. The Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) were set up to identify skills shortages within their sector and to influence and develop education and training opportunities. LANTRA is the SSC for the environmental and land-based industries, including agriculture. On a regional level, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have a responsibility to improve the skills base of their region. In recent years the Trade Union Congress (TUC) has become increasingly involved in promoting learning at work through its network of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs). Their responsibilities include identifying needs, promoting and providing information about training, and arranging training via TUC Learning Services. Finally, the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) is an independent organisation which has been working for many years to improve basic skills among both adults and children. They have been involved in, for example, the development of family literacy and numeracy programmes, financial literacy programmes and basic skills quality standards for schools. A detailed description of all the planning and funding agencies involved in lifelong learning is given in Clarke et al., (2002).

The main organisations actually providing adult education in England are the Further Education colleges (FE) and, to a lesser extent, school sixth forms; the local authorities, through adult and community education as well as family learning; Learndirect; and a large number of private or voluntary organisations, including the Workers Education Association (WEA), a large and well established national adult education organisation (Clarke et al., 2002).

*A Fresh Start* made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the quality of available provision. These included the development of a core curriculum, a new system of qualifications based on national standards and new qualifications for teachers. The same recommendations were made for ESOL in a separate report, *Breaking the Language Barriers* (DfEE, 2000). The literacy, numeracy and ESOL curricula were developed by the Basic Skills Agency, (BSA), based on national standards set out by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, (QCA), and were published in 2001. The new qualifications include National Literacy and Numeracy Tests at Level 1 and Level 2 as well as nationally accredited qualifications at Entry Levels 1 to 3. For ESOL, there was a number of pre-existing nationally recognised qualifications. New qualifications are currently being developed and will be available from August 2004 (QCA, 2004). Finally, the new **Skills for Life** teaching qualifications are at Levels 2, 3, and 4. Level 4 is aimed at all specialist teachers, Level 3 at teaching assistants or teachers of other subjects who may need to support literacy, numeracy or ESOL learners and Level 2 at those supporting learners, including volunteers, and those identifying and signposting learners to provision. Since September 2002 all new entrants to adult literacy or numeracy teaching, and since September 2003 for ESOL teachers, have been required to enrol on a FENTO, (Further Education National Training Organisation), approved programme

at Level 4, or at Level 3 if theirs is a supporting role. Existing teachers are also expected to obtain the new qualifications over time, (DfES, 2003b). Colleges and LSC's are working towards agreed targets for teaching qualification levels locally.

## 2.2 ESOL provision and support

ESOL is just one name given to the teaching of English to those who do not have English as their first language. Other terms used for English language teaching include English as an Additional Language (EAL), English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). ESOL has become the accepted term in post-16 education and will be used throughout this report. The report does not cover learners who have come to the UK to study English in a language school for a short period of time or foreign students in higher education accessing language support within their institutions.

It has been estimated that there are between a half and one million adults in this country in need of ESOL support (DfEE, 2000). *A Fresh Start* recommended a separate review group to consider the specific needs of these adults. This group was set up and produced a report entitled *Breaking the Language Barriers*. Four main categories of adults who are speakers of other languages were identified: those in settled communities, mainly but not exclusively from the Asian sub-continent as well as Chinese from Hong Kong; refugees, divided into the sub categories of asylum seekers and settled refugees; migrant workers, mostly from Europe; and partners and spouses of students who are settled for a number of years. The report draws attention to the fact that the needs of these learners will vary greatly depending upon a range of factors including 'their age, aspirations, educational background, language background and aptitude for learning languages,' (DfEE, 2000:9) and that the high level of diversity amongst ESOL students makes the effective planning and teaching of ESOL challenging for providers. This issue was also identified by the Basic Skills Agency in the evaluation of their community-based ESOL programme. In their report they conclude that, 'mixing learners with disparate needs is difficult for the teacher, frustrating and demoralising for the learner and unlikely to result in effective learning' (BSA, 2002: 16). These findings are echoed in a recent review of research into adult ESOL pedagogy carried out by the Lancaster Literacy Research Centre. Their report discusses the diverse previous educational experiences of ESOL learners and how this affects their expectations vis-à-vis teaching practices. The authors conclude that this can create a barrier to learning (Barton and Pitt, 2003). They highlight one project in the USA where this issue was overcome by training immigrants and refugees as ESOL tutors. The review discusses the issue of diversity among ESOL students further, emphasising the fact that some ESOL students may have very little experience of written language and that these learners require a high level of literacy support on top of language instruction.

*Breaking the Language Barriers* investigates some of the issues facing those wishing to access provision and concludes that, 'in rural and other areas where there are few learners there is often a complete lack of suitable provision or a tendency to put ESOL learners and basic skills learners in the same class, even though their needs are very different.' (DfEE, 2000: 14). The report also found a lack of provision in the workplace. Other barriers were similar to those given by other adults not accessing learning, such as work or family commitments, a lack of transport and childcare provision and inadequate information. Another key issue was the lack of ESOL specialists. Similar findings were reported by a recent Home Office study (Griffiths, 2003) which looked at English language training for refugees in London, the East Midlands, and, in less detail, the North East. It concluded that the main

barriers to ESOL provision are the shortage of classes and the shortage of qualified ESOL tutors. In addition, childcare responsibilities, travel costs, and a lack of information and guidance prevented some refugees from attending classes. The Basic Skills Agency identified the need for the provision of free childcare, the reimbursement of travel costs and for providers to offer courses at times when learners are able to attend as crucial to effective delivery (BSA, 2002). Others have highlighted the importance of having tutors with specialist knowledge (Grief et al., 2002: 34).

The government's dispersal policy has seen many asylum seekers being sent to northern and central England for the first time (Guardian, 27 June, 2001). *Breaking the Language Barriers* points to a potential difficulty facing those affected by this policy. Without the availability of appropriate ESOL provision asylum seekers and refugees could become isolated and find it difficult to '...participate fully in everyday life and find employment' and 'will find it harder to settle in areas where there are fewer members of their own communities' (DfEE 2000: 12). A review of the dispersal programme carried out in 2001 also raised concerns over the 'social integration' of those dispersed, the difficulties for local authorities in delivering appropriate services and the effect on local communities. In particular, they found that asylum seekers had been dispersed to areas where there were no existing communities speaking their language, resulting in a lack of support networks for new arrivals (Home Office, 2001). Similar issues will be faced by migrant workers who arrive in areas where there are few or no other inhabitants from their country; this is quite likely to be the case for many wanting to settle in rural areas. *Breaking the Language Barriers* argues that a lack of proficiency in English is likely to affect a person's 'ability to secure employment or advancement in the workplace, to gain benefit from further education, to access community and social services and to participate in community life. It may also limit their ability to be involved with and support their own children's education.' (DfEE, 2000: 10-11). They also argue that a failure to provide English language training results in a significant waste of skills and experience. Many refugees and economic migrants arrive in this country with qualifications, skills and experience but cannot get employment in their area of expertise because of a lack of English (DfEE, 2000: 11). Others have also found that overseas qualifications are often not recognised in this country (Bloch, 2000, quoted in Bloch, 2002).

## **2.3 Issues of rurality for the adult learner**

### **2.3.1 Rural proofing**

Policy makers have, in the past, tended to ignore issues of rurality. They have assumed that what has been found to work in one setting, inevitably an urban setting, can be applied equally to rural areas. However, since New Labour came into government in 1997 they have tried to address this issue and in 2001 the government created the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (Defra), the first government department with specific responsibility for representing the interests of rural areas.

Probably the most important document in recent times to be published concerning rurality was the government's Rural White Paper, *Our Countryside: The Future—A Fair Deal for Rural England* (DETR, 2000). It sets out how the government will tackle issues such as health, education, housing and transport in rural England to achieve 'thriving living communities'. The report called for the rural proofing of all government policies, stating that 'from now on, all government departments will have to consider and report on how their policy decisions will impact on rural communities' (DETR 2000: 6) and 'adjust the policy, where appropriate, with solutions to meet rural needs and circumstances' (House of Commons Environment,

Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 2003). Rural proofing also supports the Defra objective two: 'to enhance opportunity and tackle social exclusion in rural areas' (Defra, 2003: 23). If effective, rural proofing is therefore a safety mechanism used to ensure that government policies not only take into account issues of rurality, but that policies go further and do not actively disadvantage those living in rural communities. Rural proofing helps to appease past critics of government policy. Critics such as Lowerson and Thomson (1994) whose report *Out of Sight, Out of mind* concluded that 'many rural problems are practically "invisible" to national policy makers and [that] this exacerbates a long history of under-provision' (Lowerson and Thomson, 1994: 2).

The Countryside Agency's second annual report on rural proofing outlines the policy areas in which different departments have taken account of rural issues. It draws particular attention to good practice within the DfES (Countryside Agency, 2003). There are a number of initiatives that may have a positive impact on adult basic skills and ESOL provision in rural areas, such as the 'Extended Schools' initiative, widening access to the internet, and addressing transport and childcare issues in rural areas. In addition, the LSC has established a Rural Issues Task Group to consult and advise on rural issues. In 2002 they commissioned Frontier Economics to investigate the possible introduction of a sparsity factor into funding formula in rural areas and, more recently, commissioned GHK Consulting to investigate issues affecting the provision of education and training in sparsely populated areas. The results of these are discussed below. In terms of basic skills provision the evidence for rural proofing is, as yet, quite limited. Having said this, however, some of the nine **Skills for Life** Pathfinder Projects were in rural areas and in 2002 CRG Consulting was commissioned by the DfES to review these projects and to assess the issues affecting basic skills provision in rural settings.

### 2.3.2 The rural context

According to Defra's *Rural Strategy 2004* report, it is estimated that 9.5 million people, or 19.3 per cent of the population of England, live in rural areas. 'Of these 6 per cent live in rural areas where the surrounding region is particularly sparsely populated,' (Defra 2004: 57). All agree that this figure is growing. According to another report commissioned by Defra, *Social and economic change and diversity in rural England*, the main reason for this is inward migration. They found that over the 10 year period between the 1991 and 2001 census, 'there was a net population shift from urban to rural areas of 780,000' (Birkbeck College, 2004: 8).

There are approximately 10,000 rural parishes in England which have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants and for many this figure is much smaller with 75 per cent of these having fewer than 500. The report by the Countryside Agency (2003: 17) states that 'typical facilities such as village halls and typical services such as nursery care, which provide a focus for local activity' can be found in most communities with a population of 2000 or more; 88 per cent of these communities have 'extensive' facilities. However, in communities with a population of 500 or less, only 11 per cent had 'extensive' facilities and 41 per cent had 'limited' facilities. Recent figures indicate that one in six households in rural areas have no access to a car (Clarke et al., 2002) and only one parish in four has a daily bus service (Simmons, 1997). Simmons also comments that it is more than likely that in most of these parishes there will be no public transport at all after six in the evening. All these factors clearly have implications for access to educational opportunities and this is commented upon in the State of the Countryside report: 'people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, face increasing barriers to participation in learning as the degree of remoteness increases.' (Countryside Agency, 2003: 60). Transport, childcare and availability of information and guidance are specifically mentioned.



Simmons (1997), Ryley (chapter 3 in Gray, 2002) and Birkbeck College (2004) discuss the changing nature of rural communities. Those leaving rural areas are mainly young adults seeking employment opportunities elsewhere. Rural incomers are often relatively affluent and are seeking, for themselves and their children, a better way of life. The number of people who are retiring or buying second homes in the countryside is also increasing. An influx of families from urban settings can bring with them many issues. These incomers are often already employed or have no need for employment and have their own means of transport. They are therefore able to travel to meet their needs for shopping, entertainment, education, care, etc. They also bring the problem of escalating house prices and rents, making it difficult for locals, particularly the young, to remain in rural areas. This was found to be an issue for adult learners in a study carried out in rural Northumberland where it was felt that newcomers affect rural communities in one of two ways: either they give very little support to local businesses and community activities and do not contribute their skills because they commute outside the area for work, or they take over the management of community groups causing input from locals to be lost. The report suggests that planning must take account of this culture in rural communities and that consultation must include a cross-section of the community (Tulett, 2001).

### 2.3.3 Barriers to learning in rural areas

Much of the literature on adult literacy and numeracy looks at issues such as barriers to learning, motivations for learning and how to widen participation. In 2001 the National Foundation for Educational Research carried out a review of research on adult basic skills. They found that the main barriers to accessing provision were: fear of the stigma attached to having low literacy or numeracy skills; previous experience in education; practical difficulties associated with the location and timing of courses, i.e. transport problems, work or other commitments, lack of childcare, and so on; and lack of knowledge of available courses due to poor marketing (Brooks et al., 2001). There have been very few studies that have looked specifically at basic skills in rural areas. However, the study by CRG Consulting (2002) concluded that many of these barriers may apply equally in rural areas. Indeed, the study conducted in Northumberland mentioned above found that the top 15 barriers to adult learning, but not specifically basic skills learning, were: distance, cost, travel time, timing of classes, child/dependant care, lack of subject range, venue and course levels, enrolment culture, transport, publicity and access to information, lack of tutors, especially those with an understanding of rural issues, poor previous learning experiences and achievement, basic skills needs, and lack of aspiration linked to limited employment and higher education opportunities (Tulett 2001).

The above study found that many people felt that geographical barriers were a key part of their decision not to engage in learning and that the lack of public transport in the evenings was a major problem, since this was the time that many would be able to access provision. This is consistent with the findings of others, for example Clarke et al., (2002). Many providers are trying to resolve this issue by offering courses in community venues. In addition to solving the issue of travel, this strategy may also help overcome some people's fears or negativity associated with more formal educational venues (Brooks et al., 2001). However, in rural areas outreach work can create further problems. For example, 'Relatively scattered potential cohorts are likely to form small and comparatively expensive groups,' (Lowerson and Thomson, 1994: 2). Indeed, it may be difficult to get enough learners to make the courses viable and this can lead to a lack of choice in programmes available (CRG Consulting, 2002; GHK Consulting, 2003). In addition, in a small rural community there is the problem a lack of anonymity (GHK Consulting, 2003; Tulett, 2001). Those who are already embarrassed by poor

literacy or numeracy skills do not want everyone in their community to know about it. A number of studies have suggested that one solution may be to offer 'covert' basic skills provision within ICT courses, for example, (Tribe, 2002; Whitelaw, 2003).

There has been much rhetoric regarding the potential to use online learning as a solution to both stigma and rural isolation. However, although some studies have shown that ICT can be a valuable tool in adult literacy and numeracy delivery as well as being a 'hook' to encourage learners, learning that is entirely computer-based requires a considerable amount of tutor support and guidance (Gillon et al., 2003; GHK Consulting, 2003); this is particularly the case for basic skills provision. This point is acknowledged by the Ufi/Learndirect 2002 research report conducted by the Institute of Education, University of London, which states that, 'care must be taken to match delivery with preferred learning styles. For most learners the tutor remains a very important element of their learning.' (Ufi/Learndirect 2002: 6). For effective learning, learners often require human contact and support, especially where skills and confidence are low.

Distances in rural areas also have an impact on tutors and the management and co-ordination of provision. Tulett (2001) concluded that networking for professional development and sharing resources and ideas is more difficult in rural areas. These distances and, as mentioned above, the relatively scattered population in rural areas are thought to increase the costs (per learner) of provision. However, the evidence for this appears to be largely anecdotal, and in a study carried out for the LSC by Frontier Economics (2002) it was recommended that research should be conducted into what impact sparsity has on providers' costs. Furthermore, more recent research conducted on behalf of the LSC concluded that 'although...providers in sparsely populated areas incur some additional costs, it is not clear how much they are, or whether the overall cost of delivering provision in sparsely populated areas is higher than it is in urban areas' (GHK Consulting, 2003: 33). They discuss other issues associated with provision in sparsely populated areas, including the range of courses or levels a provider can offer and a lack of opportunities for progression, both in terms of further learning opportunities and in terms of employment. This leads to low aspirations and a lack of motivation to learn. The report suggested that collaboration and strategic planning can help in terms of achieving viable numbers, sharing resources and costs and providing a more diverse range of courses. Working in partnership with employers can also be effective in overcoming barriers and accessing specific groups of learners.

In the rural setting it is important that the needs of communities, individuals and employers are given careful, and often joint, consideration. Rural areas are characterised by high levels of self-employment and a large number of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and therefore employers often regard training provision as uneconomical (Clarke et al., 2002). In addition, employment is often low paid and low skilled and both employer and employee have difficulty in seeing the benefits that further learning will bring (Atkin and Merchant, 2004). In the Northumberland study, it was found that learning programmes do not always meet the needs of the community and are often seen as irrelevant, particularly among farmers. The report recommended that providers should find ways to consult with local people prior to offering courses (Tulett, 2001). This may apply to the mode of delivery as well as the content. NIACE's guide entitled, *A practical guide to developing learning opportunities in the countryside* suggests that informal learning is often an important first step for people who have had little to do with education since leaving school and that this type of learning is characterised by its relevance to people's daily lives, including their work (Payne, 2000).

Although employment in agriculture has declined in recent years, those working in agricultural and other land-based industries form an important employment sector in rural areas. In 2001, LANTRA reported on their analysis of the skills demand and supply across the sector. The report found that, 'although the more accessible rural areas may not have much more than the national average of 3.4 per cent of people working in the sector, between two and three times this number typically work in associated industries. In remote rural areas, the land-based industries can account directly for up to 25 per cent of total employment.' (LANTRA, 2001: 14). They state that this sector, particularly agriculture and horticulture, is facing changing skills demands due to several factors including more technological and knowledge-driven methods of production, the need to diversify in order to generate additional sources of income, the demand for higher quality products and services and increasing emphasis on environmental issues. They report that an estimated 44 per cent of the land-based workforce has either no formal qualifications or qualifications equivalent to the lowest NVQ/SVQ level and that barriers to learning include time pressures, costs, timing and location of courses, a lack of perceived skills gap and of suitable provision and ignorance of the costs associated with a lack of training. The LANTRA report concluded that there is a great need for up-skilling, that innovative delivery methods are needed to successfully engage people, that training delivery will have to become more flexible to allow easier access and that work-based programmes will become increasingly important.

Lowerson (1994) asks whether there exists a distinctive 'rural mindset' which not only leads to differences in terms of needs but also acts as a barrier to participation in learning. He discusses an 'internalised resistance both in individuals and communities,' (Lowerson 1994: 196), such that learning is seen as irrelevant. However, in the report by CRG Consulting it was concluded that 'the key issue here may be the skill with which effective networks and access arrangements are plugged into, rather than in any inherent 'rural mindset' itself' (CRG Consulting, 2002: 5). Whether or not such a mindset does exist, this leads back to the importance of developing programmes that meet the needs of the rural learner and highlights the need for groundwork: 'working in rural areas is a slow, long-term exercise in winning trust, in local negotiation, and responsiveness...', (Lowerson and Thomson, 1994: 200). Others such as Gray, (2002) have also emphasised the importance of development work and improved links with community organisations in attracting learners who would not otherwise participate.

Gender role and attitudes in rural areas can also serve as barriers to learning, for both men and women. According to McGrath (Lowerson and Thomson, 1994) a large number of farmers' wives were traditionally engaged in unpaid agricultural work and their roles were predetermined to fit with existing cultural expectations. However, they conclude that, 'today this is becoming less common, in a world where many young women have developed their own career structures and are less willing to relinquish them,' (Lowerson and Thomson, 1994: 186). This challenges traditional views on the role of women. Atkin and Merchant (2004: 63) found evidence that changes had not taken place in Lincolnshire and Rutland stating that long held views on the '...constructions of rural women as maternal and domestic' dictate learning patterns in rural communities. Further, Atkin and Merchant (2004: 63) state that, 'The lack of interest in and valuing of, literacy and numeracy amongst employers and employees should be understood in relation to particular forms of rural masculinity and femininity...modern farm work is linked to a kind of lonely, isolated and self-reliant masculinity, resistant to training.'

## 2.4 Case studies in the six study areas

Several case studies researching adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision have been conducted in the study areas. Examples were found in five of the six areas; these are shown below.

### 2.4.1 Devon and Cornwall

Devon has a small but diverse ethnic minority population from countries such as China, Bosnia and parts of the Middle East. An Exeter-led ESOL Pathfinder project was recently completed in the county. It is one of only 11 nationwide Pathfinders to be funded by the DfES to 'provide action research into good practice around the provision of English to Speakers of Other Language,' (Exeter-led ESOL Pathfinder, 2003). The Exeter Council for Voluntary Services (Exeter CVS) is the only voluntary organisation in the country to be leading a Pathfinder project. Exeter CVS works with other stakeholders and has excellent links to Exeter College. They work closely with many partners including religious organisations, such as the Islamic Centre, to provide community-based ESOL provision for those in need. Provision is often informal and mixed with other activities such as craftwork classes. Venues are flexible, enabling the learner to be accessed at the point of need. For example, outreach classes are located in local Chinese restaurants. The Exeter CVS also provides training for ESOL teachers, both paid and voluntary. Unfortunately the final report was not available at the time of writing.

Exeter CVS was commissioned by Devon and Cornwall LSC to conduct research into the skills needs of four hard to reach groups in the area. The report, published in June 2002, aimed to identify learning needs, particularly in the area of basic skills, as well as attitudes and barriers to learning. The four groups studied were the homeless, ex-offenders, refugees and those from minority black and ethnic communities. In total, 157 respondents were interviewed; 63 per cent of these were, or had recently been, involved in learning.

Interviewees were asked about their aims for the coming year and what they would need to achieve that aim; 90 per cent of those interviewed identified a need for learning; 64 per cent specifically mentioned basic skills support. However, lack of information or awareness of available or suitable provision was identified as a barrier to learning: 41 per cent of these did not know what course(s) or qualification(s) might be suitable and 54 per cent felt they needed some information, advice and guidance.

It was found that almost 70 per cent of homeless and ex-offenders had had their education interrupted and that many had a negative experience at school which led them to feel let down by 'the system' and suspicious of formal education establishments. These groups wanted learning that was relevant to them and their goals, which in many cases was to be economically active. They also wanted to learn in a small group or one-to-one, in a familiar place, with people from a similar background and with tutors who respected them.

Refugees and people from minority black and ethnic groups were found to come from very mixed educational backgrounds: over a quarter (26 per cent) were qualified to degree level or above whereas some had never received any form of schooling. Many felt they needed to improve their English but some found that, for various reasons, available provision did not always meet their needs. Issues mentioned included the range of levels in the class and a lack of emphasis on communication skills. Cultural issues were also seen as a barrier. Respondents from these two groups stated the need for their qualifications and experience gained in their country of origin to be recognised in the UK so that they can find work that uses their skills.

Many felt they needed information and guidance on learning in order to be able achieve this.

#### 2.4.2 Herefordshire

An independent researcher conducted a case study looking at rural learning in the village of Lingen located in the north west of Herefordshire (Whitelaw, 2003). In Lingen provision is based in the village hall. The paper reports on work in progress and is based on interviews conducted in Lingen as well as with Herefordshire's Lifelong Learning Officer. Whitelaw concludes that within villages such as Lingen there is a strong sense of identification and of shared culture and that this affects people's attitudes towards learning. For example, learners in Lingen want materials to be related to their specific concerns and interests and a tutor who understands 'the country way of doing things,' (Whitelaw, 2003). Often outsiders were seen as being incapable of understanding local culture. IT was found to be a useful way of encouraging those with basic skills needs to come forward: 'learners say that they do not mind admitting to a lack of IT skills whereas they would not acknowledge directly that they needed help with reading and writing.' (Whitelaw, 2003: 2). In the study it was also found that people want provision that is local but, because of the problems of getting enough learners to make courses viable, this is often impossible. However, there are practical problems such as travel costs and time that prevent many learners attending provision in Hereford. More importantly, though, many learners do not want to travel to Hereford as it will put them in 'an environment where they feel they will not belong.' (Whitelaw, 2003: 4).

University College Worcester, as part of a collaborative widening participation project, were funded by the Worcestershire and Herefordshire Lifelong Learning Partnerships to carry out a study to 'give a voice to people who have either been excluded from education as adults or are just beginning to re-engage with education.' (Dinsdale, 2002: 5). The research was carried out through focus group discussion with people from a range of backgrounds, including non-learners, and follows on from a similar study carried out by the same organisation the previous year but which covered only Worcestershire. The study found that the majority of people find out about provision through word of mouth and that 'bite-size' courses are a good way of introducing learners to courses. People joined courses for various reasons including to keep up with the children or grandchildren, to support their work, to get a job, or simply because they felt they had missed out at school. The main attraction of a course was the venue: people want provision that is local, as travelling is difficult and expensive. Those interviewed in the study also said they liked the fact that they knew other people on the course; one group said that it was 'important that people shared an interest and experience, for example in agriculture or rural life.' (Dinsdale, 2002: 11). Basic skills learners wanted somewhere 'private' where it was not obvious what they were studying. Other important factors to learners were the provision of childcare, the timing of the course and the tutor. Factors that prevented people from engaging in learning were work and childcare commitments, the belief that, for women, 'You will end up looking after the kids anyway, so why get an education?' (Dinsdale, 2002: 16), and a lack of awareness of what is available.

#### 2.4.3 Lincolnshire

There are four case studies for Lincolnshire. The first looks at basic skills and small businesses in Lincolnshire and Rutland (Atkin and Merchant, 2004). The second is a report by the Lincolnshire Research Laboratory, *Drivers for Change* (LRL, 2002) which considers the economic picture in Lincolnshire, how it is changing and the need for the skills of the workforce to change with it. The remaining two reports look at ESOL provision (Donkin, 2003; Food and Drink Forum, 2004).

Atkin and Merchant's (2004) study, *The impact of adult literacy and numeracy on small businesses in rural Lincolnshire and Rutland: a case study*, comprehensively reviews existing literature relating to rurality and adult education. Atkin and Merchant find that government reports largely ignore issues of rurality and that existing literature, whilst valuable, is found to be lacking in its ability to examine questions of the 'individual and social and cultural identity in rural area' (Atkin and Merchant, 2004: 9). All too often assumptions are made and stereotypes of rural communities prevail. Further, the authors argue that the **Skills for Life** Strategy 'tends to present an urban or unspecific geographical imagination' (Atkin and Merchant, 2004: 9).

The case study took a representative sample of 40 small businesses in each of the ten Travel to Work Areas across Lincolnshire and Rutland. Questionnaires were sent to these businesses and 15 follow-up interviews were conducted. Of those who responded only 4 per cent felt that employee literacy levels were poor; 6 per cent felt that numeracy levels were poor. According to respondents, none of the employees were accessing support in literacy or numeracy. Just over a quarter of the employers (26 per cent) were aware of local basic skills initiatives and many felt the issue should be dealt with by the education system and the government, rather than the employer. Respondents were also concerned about issues of access and the cost of provision. Rural settings were felt by 35 per cent of respondents to pose particular difficulties for those wishing to access provision, mainly due to travel implications. Employers also argued that employees, especially the younger ones, were uninterested in improving literacy or numeracy skills. Further, improving literacy and numeracy skills was seen as irrelevant to the type of work the employer was engaged in. The report makes many recommendations including that adult literacy and numeracy provision should be integrated into existing forms of training and that such training should become widespread to overcome the stigma and negative connotations often attached to the need for such provision.

The Lincolnshire Research Laboratory *Drivers for Change* report also looks at literacy and numeracy from the viewpoint of small businesses. It finds that 55 per cent of employers in the area have difficulty in filling vacancies and 21 per cent of employers believe there is a skills gap (LRL, 2002: 32-33). Literacy and numeracy were amongst the skills which employers felt needed to be improved. However, according to the results of the Lincolnshire Household Survey of 2000, 34 per cent of the workforce did not think that they needed to develop new skills in the near future (LRL, 2002: 36).

The Boston and South Holland Learning Partnership commissioned an independent consultant specialising in post-16 education to map ESOL provision in the area following basic skills awareness events in November 2002 which identified a growing need for ESOL. The report, *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in Boston and South Holland* (Donkin, 2003) states that it is difficult to establish the true level of need but estimates of the number of foreign nationals in the Boston and South Holland area range between two and five thousand.

Local employers, employment agencies and community groups were contacted, largely by phone, over a two week period in August 2003. Some employers stated that ESOL was not required because employees already had English as a first language. Where this was not the case workers were either sub-contracted and therefore not the responsibility of the employer or their lack of English 'did not impede the smooth running of the operation' as interpreters could be used (Donkin, 2003: 4). The sub-contractors (i.e. recruitment agencies) contacted did not have ESOL programmes in place. Donkin estimated that the proportion of migrant workers accessing ESOL in the area was very low, between 10 per cent and 20 per cent. The report

concludes that many employers and recruitment agencies do not see the benefit to them in offering ESOL provision or simply do not feel that it is their responsibility. However, there were some notable exceptions. For example, Geest, a Boston employer, was working closely with the University of Lincoln, providing ESOL training for approximately 25 employees, the majority of whom were believed to be Portuguese.

According to Donkin, there were a few providers of ESOL in the area but Boston College was the main one. Others were unable to offer provision due to the difficulty of recruiting suitably trained staff. The report concluded that 'the potential demand for ESOL training far outweighs the current level of supply. If anecdotal evidence is to be considered then the imbalance is stark.' (Donkin, 2003: 11). The report recommended an expansion of ESOL training and suggested that best practice should be shared between providers and partnership working developed.

In 2004 the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) commissioned the Food and Drink Forum to investigate ESOL in the food manufacturing sector in response to growing concerns over increasing numbers of foreign workers being employed in the food, agricultural and horticultural industries in the area. The project aimed to investigate the extent of migrant labour, the origin of workers, their level of understanding of English and the skills these workers have through training and employment in their own country.

The food and drink sector accounts for 20 per cent of employment in Lincolnshire as a whole but 47 per cent in the South Holland area. Although there are some foreign workers who have now settled in the area, around 30 per cent of the sector's workforce consists of agency workers and up to 95 per cent of these are foreign migrant workers. The report states that the industry is committed to up-skilling the migrant workforce and several employers were found to be using local providers to offer ESOL but that a 'supply of ESOL and access to IT for learning is needed urgently' and that companies and agencies need to be made aware of the training that is available (Food and Drink Forum 2004: 51). In this study, food manufacturing companies in the Boston and South Holland area were contacted and 52 non-English speaker workers were interviewed, speaking 29 different languages. All but four of those interviewed expressed a desire to improve their English. Reasons given were to have a better life, to integrate better, to get better pay or a promotion, or to gain permanent employment.

#### **2.4.4 Northumberland**

Learning Choices - an organisation in Northumberland providing advice on learning for qualifications or fun in rural parts of the country - carried out research funded by the Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF) into the successful implementation of lifelong learning in rural areas of Northumberland (Tulett, 2001). The report investigated learning patterns as well as barriers to adult learning and how these could be overcome. Many of the barriers found in this study are discussed in section 2.3 above. In the report they discuss rural as a 'place where you are known and therefore held accountable for your actions' and conclude that provision must take account of this. Tutors and members of the community reported on the importance of adults in rural areas being involved in the learning process through consultation, especially in designing teaching and learning programmes, both in terms of content and delivery methods. They also discussed the need for planning to be responsive to local issues.

Practitioners and planners identified particular staffing and funding issues in their areas. For example, many felt the need for funding for development work, where 'fieldworkers' could get out and speak to those in the community in order to attract more learners. There was also a feeling that providers are not actually working in partnership in rural areas. The report

concluded that 'rural areas cannot support multiple organisations delivering learning programs, as this is dividing the few learners' currently accessing programs.' The issue of new providers coming into a rural area to provide short-term programs was also discussed with concerns expressed that this 'upsets the delicate balance of learning provision, which workers try so hard to establish and maintain.' It was suggested that mechanisms should be established whereby new providers could find out what provision was already in place through communication with existing providers.

Access to information was identified as a key barrier to learning: it was found that many people felt that there was a lack of good local information and that many of those offering advice and guidance were unable to empathise with an individual's circumstances or needs. The need to raise awareness of the benefits of learning, as well as the learning opportunities themselves was discussed and several effective ways to do this were suggested, such as organising taster sessions, the use of past students and using local networks for the circulation of promotional materials.

Birkbeck College and NIACE were commissioned by the Countryside Agency to investigate Lifelong Learning in rural areas (Clarke et al., 2002). The report considers the contrast in provision between the north and south of England using the counties of Sussex and Northumberland as examples. They quote statistics from the 2001 National Adult Learning Survey carried out by the National Centre for Social Research, which found that adult learning participation in the south east was 84 per cent but only 69–72 per cent for the north of England. They discuss the heterogeneity between rural areas, concluding that more evidence is needed on how lifelong learning policies operate in different rural areas.

The report focuses on aspects of adult learning which are directly affected by government policies and therefore concentrate mainly on formal learning, which is funded by the LSC and the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). It includes provision by voluntary organisations such as the WEA, which is also now funded by the LSC.

Northumberland is described as a 'Frontier State' because it borders Scotland. Scotland's devolved powers and different funding bodies mean that those living in the north of the county may be unable to access services and provision over the border, thus reducing options of local people. Regional borders, particularly with Cumbria, are also discussed and it is concluded that cross-border initiatives would be very difficult to manage.

The report discusses the population distribution in Northumberland, with the majority of the population living in the south east where there are relatively good connections to services in North Tyneside and Newcastle. The rest of the county consists of scattered, remote communities. They find that 'provision of lifelong learning in these scattered communities is severely constrained by distance, remoteness, thinly-populated communities, absence of culture of learning, lack of connectivity and familiarity with IT and the need for provision to be tailored to the particular local needs rather than generic.' (Clarke et al., 2002: 53). For example, the needs of those in ex-mining communities in the north were found to be significantly different to those in depressed coastal areas in the south. Finally, many of the projects identified by the authors were supported by short-term funding. In many cases when funding stops so too does the provision. This can have a devastating effect on the local community and examples of good practice are lost. Clarke et al., (2002: 55) state that 'it is vital that lifelong learning policies recognise the necessity of sustained funding for some activities, especially in areas of severe deprivation.'



## 3. Methodology

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The study areas consisted of six rural counties in England: Cumbria, Cornwall, Devon, Herefordshire, Lincolnshire and Northumberland which were selected to give a geographical spread throughout England. It should be noted that after initial investigations the two unitary authorities of Plymouth and Torbay in Devon were excluded from the study. Therefore the study area of Devon relates only to provision which falls within the jurisdiction of Devon County Council.

The project was comparative in nature and used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques to enable triangulation of data. The methodological approaches were applied equally across the six study areas and are summarised below.

- Telephone interviews with key stakeholders and organisations.
- Postal questionnaires to policy makers, co-ordinators and practitioners.
- Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with tutors and learners through classroom visits.
- Attendance at strategy and provider meetings.

The project began in September 2003 and ran for 12 months. It was divided into four stages. The first stage was a literature review. In stage two key stakeholders were contacted to establish the level of provision in each study area. The main body of the fieldwork, stage three, was undertaken between February and May 2004. The final three months of the project were used to analyse the data and write the report. Below is a summary of the fieldwork.

### 3.1 Field work

Initially key stakeholders were contacted by telephone to establish an outline of provision. These included the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Local Education Authority (LEA) and FE Colleges. Following this, in-depth telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted with the main providers, both public and private, to gain a more comprehensive picture of the level and nature of provision and to gain an insight into the issues faced in each area in relation to organising and delivering literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision. In total, 60 interviews were conducted with tutors or co-ordinators, 22 face-to-face and 38 by phone. In addition, 39 interviews were conducted with other key stakeholders, as mentioned above. Finally, 29 stakeholder meetings were attended where appropriate. This approach gave further insight into how provision was organised and implemented in relation to issues of rurality.

#### 3.1.1 Questionnaires

Postal questionnaires were sent to all policy makers in the six study areas to establish whether the nature of rurality was a consideration for those forming and implementing policy. In total 38 postal questionnaires were sent to representatives from the LSC, the LEA, the Learning Partnerships, the Rural Development Agency (RDA), the Rural Development Service (part of Defra), the Skills for Life Strategy Unit (SfLSU), formerly known as the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) and the Workers Educational Association (WEA). A copy of the questionnaire can be found in appendix A.

To investigate the views of practitioners a separate postal questionnaire was distributed to individual co-ordinators and tutors delivering provision. A copy of this questionnaire can be

found in appendix B. The questionnaire focused on identifying what practitioners believed were the factors that led to successful provision in their area, what the main barriers to learning were and how they were overcoming these barriers. Due to the large amount of provision in each area a complete survey of provision was not possible. It was therefore necessary to identify a sample of providers within each area. Using data from the 2001 census, three district councils were selected for each area: the district with the lowest population density, the highest population density and the median. Where the median fell between two districts, the one with the lower population density was selected. In Northumberland both Tynedale and Berwick-upon-Tweed have a population density of 27 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, one (Tynedale) was randomly selected as the lowest. In Herefordshire, which consists of only one district, the whole county was included. In total 415 questionnaires were sent to all providers within the districts selected.

Those who did not respond to the questionnaire were contacted by telephone, email or at meetings and sent new questionnaires if required. Final response rates were as follows:

Questionnaires were returned by 18 (47 per cent) policy makers. 69 of the practitioner questionnaires were returned unfilled or were considered void. This happened for several reasons:

- The particular organisation no longer ran basic skills provision.
- We sent more questionnaires than there were tutors.
- A particular tutor worked outside the three sampled districts.

Of the remaining 346 practitioner questionnaires, 85 (25 per cent) were returned.

### 3.1.2 Learner and tutor interviews

In the short time available it would have been impossible to have obtained a complete list of provision in order to select a random sample of classes to visit. Researchers therefore aimed to interview approximately equal numbers of learners in the six study areas, divided as equally as possible between literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

Tutors or co-ordinators from a range of different providers across the six study areas were contacted by telephone and they suggested provision suitable for visits. In total, 66 classes in 54 different venues were visited and 214 learners interviewed. Due to time constraints, it was not always possible to conduct a full interview with the tutor. However, in those cases most tutors were asked their opinions on the issues surrounding delivery in their area; others had been interviewed on the phone prior to the visit. In total, 48 tutors were interviewed at the time of the visit; 35 of these were full interviews.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used for both tutors and learners; these can be found in appendices C and D. The number of learners interviewed in each area is shown in table 3.1 opposite.

**Table 3.1. Number of learners interviewed in each area**

Subject					
County	Literacy	Numeracy	ESOL	Other	Total
Cornwall	16	10	10	0	36
Cumbria	6	11	14	1	32
Devon	15	7	6	0	28
Herefordshire	13	9	11	0	33
Lincolnshire	18	10	14	0	42
Northumberland	16	14	13	0	43
Total	84	61	68	1	214

## NOTES:

1. Other = driving theory for learner with basic skills needs.

2. Six literacy learners and five numeracy learners were doing IT with literacy/numeracy embedded; four ESOL learners were doing Food Hygiene with ESOL embedded; eight of the ESOL learners were in a literacy class, one in a basic skills drop-in class.

There were no set selection criteria for who should be interviewed in each session. In some instances all learners were interviewed, sometimes learners were randomly selected and on other occasions learners were identified by the tutor. Some learners were not interviewed as they were undertaking tests on the day of the visit and others were not interviewed as consent was not given. Where there was a large number of learners attending the class and it was not possible to interview all learners due to time constraints, researchers aimed to interview a representative sample of learners in terms of age and gender. Some ESOL learners were not interviewed due to their difficulties with English at that stage of their course.

Researchers abided by the wishes of the tutors for the most appropriate way to interview learners to avoid disrupting the flow of the session or the concentration of learners. In the majority of cases learners were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. However, on three occasions, group interviews took place; these were all in ESOL classes and were at the request of the tutor.

### 3.2 Methodological and practical problems encountered

Several methodological challenges were encountered during the project.

#### 3.2.1 Questionnaire response rates

Response rates to postal questionnaires are known to be low (Verma and Mallick, 1999: 121). Response rates in this study were 25 per cent for practitioners and 47 per cent for policy makers. There are several possible reasons for the low response rate from practitioners. Questionnaires were sent to each provider's basic skills co-ordinator because researchers did not have names of individual tutors; these co-ordinators may not have distributed them to all their tutors, especially as many only work a few hours a week and, in some cases, not necessarily in the same location as the co-ordinator. It is also possible that questionnaires were left in a tutor's pigeon hole with no explanation as to where it had come from, since only one copy of the covering letter was sent with each batch of questionnaires. This could have led to a poor response. Furthermore, questionnaires were dispatched just before Christmas and may have been overlooked.

#### 3.2.2 Practical issues

There was a large area to be covered in a short space of time and there has been a substantial increase in the amount of activity surrounding the delivery of basic skills as a

result of the government's *Skills for Life* campaign. In addition, it was difficult to access many of the providers for a period of three to four weeks in February and April due to half-term and Easter holidays.

Many of the courses were short-term in nature, especially family and workplace learning. This meant that courses had often ceased and new courses were not yet organised, had moved premises or stopped altogether, between initial contacts in the autumn to researchers requesting visits to view provision. This was particularly the case in Northumberland where private providers had been involved in the delivery of workplace basic skills under the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) initiative, which finished at the end of the financial year, and new contracts under the Employer Training Pilot (ETP) or Equates initiative had not been finalised.

Researchers obviously required permission from the organisation, the tutor and the students in order to carry out the fieldwork. A minority of providers were unwilling to allow researchers to view provision and access to interview learners. There had recently been other research carried out in some of the study areas and this had led to people feeling 'researched out'. In addition, some seemed to view a research visit almost as an inspection that might be critical of their provision and therefore have a negative effect. In some cases, researchers were only granted access to sessions that were seen to be 'good examples', hence our sample could be said to be biased, leading to more favourable responses from learners regarding the provision they attended. However, since this only occurred in a few cases it is unlikely to have had a significant impact on the results obtained.

In a small number of cases, (five), it was difficult to interview ESOL learners due to the language barrier. Occasionally an interpreter was needed in the form of a tutor or an advanced learner within the same group.

By definition, learners interviewed were self-selected: only those who attended sessions when researchers visited were interviewed and included in the sample. Again, this is likely to have led to more positive responses from learners about their course. For practical and ethical reasons it was not possible to interview learners who had dropped out of their courses.

## 4. The level and nature of provision

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It should be noted that information gathered regarding provision was limited to that which individuals and organisations were prepared to disclose. In addition, the situation for each provider may have altered since the interviews took place. Therefore, the following is a summary and overview of provision found at the time of the fieldwork, specifically between February and June 2003 and may contain inaccuracies or gaps and may not reflect the current situation.

The main providers in each area are the colleges and the LEA, via adult community learning as well as family learning programmes. Other key providers include Learndirect and a number of private and voluntary organisations such as the South Wye Literacy Project (SWLP) in Hereford. The majority of provision is funded by the LSC, either entirely, or through co-funding, via the European Social Fund (ESF), for example. However, funding from particular initiatives such as regeneration funding or the ACLF is also drawn upon.

Some projects were found to be reliant on short-term funding making it difficult for organisations to plan ahead. For example, this was identified as a particular issue by staff involved in projects funded through regeneration budgets in the ex-mining areas in Northumberland. Many of these short-term projects were aimed at attracting 'hard-to-reach' learners to give them the confidence to progress to mainstream provision or back into employment.

### CASE STUDIES

*At the time of the study the future of an ACLF project in the Tynedale district of Northumberland was unclear. The project evolved out of concerns for the employment needs of the local people in the late 1990s when the town saw the demise of many of its industries including the coal mines and the paint and plastics factories. Despite being seen as an exemplary model of rural delivery by the local LSC, no decision on future funding was possible until three months after the project was due to end.*

*The successful Newcastle Literacy Project was subsequently piloted in the Wansbeck district of Northumberland. Originally funded by neighbourhood learning and deprived communities funding, the LSC co-financed the pilot for six months. A great deal of time was spent promoting the project and gaining the trust of learners. Based on one-to-one sessions the aim of the project is to encourage learners to access other providers, such as the local college, as soon as they are ready. At the time of this study the project had successfully referred 33 learners onto other courses, was working with 15 new learners and had a waiting list of potential learners. However, it too was in danger of closing due to funding uncertainties.*

*Due to a lack of funding the Middlefield Community Learning Centre in Lincolnshire was under threat of closure. The centre is located in a deprived area of the West Lindsey district and specialises in one-to-one delivery of literacy and numeracy to adults. In June 2003 the centre received ESF and LSC funding to employ a basic skills tutor. Whilst this project began in June 2003 it took a further three months for it to become established. Funded by the ESF and the LSC the project had restrictions on who could participate and what could be delivered. Only learners who fell within a certain postcode were originally able to access*

*provision at the centre. Although the centre ran out of funding and has subsequently closed, in March 2004, the project was given LSC funding via Lincoln College at the eleventh hour enabling it to continue and expand its remit. However, weeks of uncertainty meant it had been impossible for staff to plan for the future or to encourage new learners to attend.*

## 4.1 College provision

The extent of adult provision available in the colleges was variable. As well as on-site provision approximately half of the colleges in the study areas have extensive outreach in the community or the workplace; others were just only beginning to develop outreach provision and a few concentrate on literacy and numeracy support for students enrolled on mainstream college courses. Over two-thirds of the colleges have ESOL provision in one form or another. The table below shows the number of FE colleges in the six areas. Other colleges or universities delivering adult basic skills are detailed separately. It should be noted that, due to time constraints, full details were not obtained for all colleges in each area and the following information may have changed since the research was conducted. Also, in a small number of cases, colleges were reluctant to release details of provision or to allow visits making it difficult to obtain a complete picture.

**Table 4.1. FE colleges in the six study areas**

Area	Number of FE colleges
Cornwall	3 (1 has 8 campuses)
Cumbria	4
Devon	4
Herefordshire	1
Lincolnshire	4 (Lincoln College has 3 campuses, Stamford has 2)
Northumberland	1 (with 2 campuses and 3 outreach centres); Newcastle College also has two campuses in Northumberland.

### 4.1.1 Cornwall

Truro College has employed a development worker to increase outreach provision by raising awareness of available courses with local employers, community groups and other agencies. Individuals who are identified as requiring help can either join a workshop session at the college or tutors will deliver locally. The college attracts learners from a wide geographical area and offers literacy, numeracy and ESOL. The attendance of ESOL learners was reported to be erratic and to fluctuate, creating difficulties in tracking learners and in setting homework.



**Picture 5 - Community outreach to young parents, St Austell College**

Cornwall College has eight campuses with four sites offering adult basic skills. Whilst each site has their own basic skills co-ordinator there is no one individual in overall charge nor did there appear to be an overall policy on the delivery of basic skills across all sites. Outreach provision fluctuates with more on offer at some times of the year than at others. At one campus basic skills has been integrated, where appropriate, into IT courses offered at outreach centres since October 2003. At the time of the study this had been done for literacy and there were plans to use spreadsheets such as Excel to integrate numeracy. Provision to date has been based around individual needs rather than full courses and six learners have taken the national test in literacy. This campus also has several special outreach projects including a community project delivering basic skills to young parents at a youth centre. The project is funded through European Objective One Funding, which has enabled the college to employ a tutor to work alongside youth workers at the centre. Finally this campus is in the process of developing workplace learning with local firms with the assistance of Union Learning Representatives.

#### CASE STUDY

*A freelance contractor, who is also attached to Cornwall College, is engaged in workplace basic skills throughout the county with eight to ten companies at any one time, including the NHS. Provision usually runs once a week, to avoid disrupting production and is designed to fit around shift patterns. Class sizes vary from one-to-one to a maximum of 12 learners. There is also the opportunity to take the national tests in both literacy and numeracy. Whilst the initiative is LSC funded the preparatory work prior to learners enrolling onto courses is not. This initial stage was said to be both time consuming, expensive and, in the long run, unsustainable.*

#### 4.1.2 Cumbria

In Cumbria most FE College provision is on-site with only small amounts of outreach work and workplace learning. One of the sixth-form colleges is also in the process of developing work-based numeracy and literacy programmes.

Lakes College, located in the west of the county in the district of Allerdale, an area of heavy industry, reported a growing demand for ESOL with learners coming from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. Provision is offered twice a week on the main site and twice a week above a coffee shop in the centre of the town to approximately 30 learners. Nationalities included Chinese, Thai, Romanian and Turkish. Teaching at the outreach centre was challenging due to limited resources. The college also offers literacy and numeracy to around 70 learners delivered by six tutors. The basic skills co-coordinator reported difficulties in recruiting suitable qualified staff. Recently the college moved to the edge of the town and some learners were finding it difficult to access provision since the move.



**Picture 6 - ESOL learners in Cumbria**

Carlisle College, located in the north, offers basic skills outreach at two centres, one to travellers in the area and the other for the visually impaired. They also have between 30–40 ESOL students and hope to offer additional support to the Chinese and Bangladeshi communities in the near future and to extend all of their outreach provision.

Furness College, located in the densely populated south of the county, run a number of basic skills and ESOL sessions a week. The number of ESOL learners was reported to be quite low and although there have been a number of Kosovan and Albanian refugees arriving in the area in recent years, many of these were already highly educated. Although most of their provision is on-campus, they do run courses at a few local companies and have some ESOL provision in the community including in a local Turkish restaurant. According to the basic skills co-ordinator, they have not targeted the rural areas around the town where there is 'a lot of unmet demand' due to capacity issues.

Kendal College have around 30–40 learners attending courses on-campus. There is little call in the area for ESOL with only one learner at the time of the study. They have recently appointed two new basic skills development workers using additional LSC funding, one to work in the college and one in the community and the workplace. The college works in partnership with the LEA to avoid overlap and duplication of delivery. They are currently trying to establish workplace learning with the help of union learning representatives.



The University of Central Lancashire (Uclan) has an outreach campus in the district of Eden, in central Cumbria, where family learning and provision for travelling communities is delivered along with ESOL to hotel and restaurant workers, mainly from Spain, Portugal and Bangladesh. In addition, Ullswater Community College, also in the Eden district, has over 50 basic skills and ESOL students accessing provision both in the college and at various community locations. The college is soon to become an online testing centre. Courses are widely promoted using various mediums including the local paper.



**Picture 7 - Learners in mixed provision**

#### 4.1.3 Devon

The two largest colleges in Devon, Exeter College and North Devon College, offer a large amount of varied provision both on and off campus. Currently both are in the process of developing workplace basic skills programmes through the use of designated brokers employed by the colleges; this is under the county-wide New Frontiers initiative which aims to address training needs and basic skills awareness in SMEs.

Exeter College is also delivering an extensive family learning programme (detailed in section 4.3 below) and ESOL in the community including work with asylum seekers. Basic skills are delivered on-site by three tutors to approximately 60 learners and ESOL is offered at set sessions and workshops. Tutors from the college, in partnership with Exeter Community Voluntary Services (CVS), deliver ESOL at the local mosque under the Pathfinder project as well as in eight other locations around the city.

North Devon College has two outreach centres located in the town; one is a traditional community centre and the other is a family centre. In the past the college has delivered in a variety of rural settings. However, at the time of the study there was very little rural outreach activity. Whilst they had received some requests for provision in rural area they had been unable to respond due to the redirecting of staff to workplace learning programmes; the college was in the process of recruiting additional staff to resolve this issue. Workplace delivery took place at approximately 20 companies to nearly 200 learners. The type of provision varied and was sometimes integrated into working practices. ESOL numbers were reported to be low. However, further learners had been identified through workplace delivery

with one company having a 5 per cent need for ESOL, with employees from a number of different countries.

#### 4.1.4 Herefordshire

Hereford College of Technology offers provision both on and off-site and has recently launched a 'Skillsmobile'. The Skillsmobile visits two different villages daily, offering literacy and numeracy provision as well as an on-board crèche. The college has outreach provision in Bromyard and Leominster and has recently opened a centre in Ross-on-Wye. In Bromyard, they are delivering basic skills to mothers at a local garage. This is a joint partnership initiative between the college, the garage owner and the owner's wife who runs a crèche next door to the garage. The sessions were instigated by the crèche manager following the delivering of leaflets by the college basic skills development worker to promote courses in the area. The room was subsequently offered by her husband at the garage. Learners are able to drop their children at the crèche whilst they attend class. The college also ran a 'Drive to Learn' project in three areas of the county which aimed to help those with a literacy need to pass their driving theory test. Learners were offered a number of free driving lessons as an incentive. This initiative has been very successful with 100 per cent attendance and no withdrawals. They hope to find funding to continue and extend the programme next year.



**Picture 8 - Outreach at a garage in Herefordshire**

#### 4.1.5 Lincolnshire

In Lincolnshire all four FE colleges offer basic skills and ESOL provision on-campus and in a variety of off-site locations including access centres, village halls and schools. All are in the process of developing basic skills in the workplace. Lincoln University also runs basic skills classes, mainly in the workplace.

Grantham College has a specialist adult basic skills department called YES located outside the main campus in the town's shopping centre; they also have two permanent outreach centres located in deprived wards in Grantham. YES also deliver throughout Lincolnshire and Rutland. They work in partnership with many organisations including the TUC and a range of local companies and try to avoid encroaching onto the catchment areas of other providers.

However, some provision, particularly in the Boston area, is delivered by special agreement with other providers. Basic skills provision is largely ICT-based with courses tailored to meet the needs of the individual learner. Last academic year, 2002/03, YES delivered basic skills to 1,500 learners and were runners-up in the Beacon Awards.

#### CASE STUDY

*Last year YES ran several innovative projects including pub maths aimed at male learners, supermarket maths/trolley dash aimed at young mothers and including free childcare, and a project aimed at young males in conjunction with the local football club. Learners attended basic skills provision at home games before the start of the match and received incentives such as a free season ticket or a football kit in return.*

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Boston College has several campuses and an extensive basic skills outreach programme covering a wide geographical area. They work with numerous partners including Sure Start, Ad-action for those on drug treatment and testing orders (DTTOs), Fast for the homeless and First College in Skegness. They are also one of the key partnerships in the Butlins Learndirect centre at Skegness. They have a significant number of adult basic skill learners through the probation service. ESOL demand is high and they are running several projects to try and address this issue.

Stamford College has two outreach centres in the town and one in the South Holland district of Spalding. The college has seen a growth in ESOL demand as a result of the increasing migrant workforce in the South Holland area and they currently have more ESOL learners than literacy and numeracy learners. Many of the ESOL learners were reported to be Portuguese but Chinese, Thai, Spanish and Italian learners were also accessing provision. However, not all those recently accessing ESOL were migrant workers some had been resident in the UK for many years. The college has employed a widening participation broker to try and establish provision in the workplace but, despite eight months of preparatory work including much face-to-face contact with employers, progress was said to be slow. All provision is flexible to fit with shift patterns. The college works with a variety of partners including Boston College.

Lincoln College has three main campuses, one in the city of Lincolnshire, one in Louth and one in Gainsborough. In addition, the college has links with the Birchwood and Abbey Access community centres. This academic year Louth offered four numeracy classes and six literacy a week to approximately 80 learners. The Gainsborough campus also offers basic skills three times a week. The main campus has basic skills awareness workshops run in partnership with Home Start and two RAF bases. The college hopes to offer provision to both civilians and servicemen in the near future using Learndirect. The college has a large number of ESOL learners - approximately 60-80 full-time and 25-30 part-time. In contrast with the rest of the county, where a large proportion of the ESOL learners were reported to be migrant workers, many of the ESOL learners at Lincoln College were said to be asylum seekers.



**Picture 9 - Learners at Gainsborough College**

#### 4.1.6 Northumberland

Northumberland College provides on-site provision daily at its main site in Ashington and regularly at its other centres. They are involved in workplace basic skills, particularly with larger companies and work closely with union learning representatives. Demand for ESOL has increased over the last two years and is offered daily at the main site and three times a week off site. The college also has a learning bus, which has the facility to offer online national tests. The bus is taken to community locations as well as local businesses including the TUC learning centre at Blyth District Council.

Newcastle College, funded by Tyne and Wear LSC, has two campuses in the south of Northumberland. They have a small amount of basic skills provision in place and are currently working with one of the local health trusts.

## 4.2 Local Authority provision

Generally speaking, Local Authority provision followed one of three broad models:

- Provision organised locally by basic skills co-ordinators based in one of a number of adult community learning centres or similar, with regional or county-wide co-ordinators.
- Centrally organised provision using regional development workers or co-ordinators, with provision arranged in a variety of venues including libraries, village halls, adult education centres and workplaces.
- Centrally organised provision contracted out to other providers.

Cornwall, Devon, Lincolnshire and Northumberland all deliver adult basic skills using adult community learning centres of one form or another. Cornwall's adult basic skills provision is delivered by Link into Learning, which falls within Cornwall County Council Adult Education Service. They have 30 centres spread throughout the county with the level of provision ranging from full-time to one morning a week. Although the majority of their provision is based in their centres, with learners following individual learning programmes, Link into Learning also provide basic skills provision for Jobcentre plus, the probation service and have extensive

outreach including provision in the workplace to both SMEs and larger companies. Some of these courses are short-term and have a specific focus, for example, 'Sorting out your Debt' or 'Measure up to Metric'. ESOL takes place in a number of centres but predominantly at five spread throughout the county. Link into Learning reached over 5,000 learners in 2001/02.

A similar model is used in Devon and Northumberland where the county council delivers basic skills and ESOL in Adult Community Learning Centres (ACLs) of varying sizes dispersed throughout each county. There are 26 ACLs in Devon and 22 in Northumberland. In each case the county council is also responsible for delivering family learning. In Lincolnshire adult basic skills is offered at 11 adult education centres located throughout the county with the Lincoln area having four permanent centres and a number of others having several outreach centres. Recently regional co-ordinators have been appointed to develop basic skills outreach provision, including in the workplace.

Herefordshire uses a different model of delivery. Here adult learning is located in the Lifelong Learning Development Unit within the local authority. The unit helps to co-ordinate, support and fund provision but does not deliver. Delivery is undertaken either by the college or the South Wye Literacy Project (SWLP), a voluntary organisation that has been delivering basic skills to adults in Herefordshire since in 1975.

In Cumbria basic skills provision, including family learning, is managed centrally by three regional co-ordinators employed by the county council. Whilst Cumbria has a number of adult education centres with managers who organise a range of different courses for adults, basic skills is managed centrally by three regional co-ordinators employed by the county council. Provision is organised in a number of community settings including libraries, village halls, guide huts, church rooms, schools, community development and adult education centres. This is delivered by a bank of around 40 part-time tutors and last year they had approximately 600 learners.

### **4.3 Private providers**

The amount of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision through private training companies varied greatly between study areas. In Devon, Herefordshire and Cornwall no large private providers were found. Cumbria has one major private provider, Rathbone Training, which has several centres and delivers mainly to Jobcentre Plus clients but is also engaged in workplace delivery. A growing number of private providers were found in Lincolnshire and Northumberland. In Lincolnshire there are four main private providers: LaGat, Lodge Training, ITEC and ISIS, all linked to Learndirect. Northumberland has numerous private providers including Zodiac Training, Alnwick District Council Training, CEP Associates and JJ Training. Many of the providers have been delivering in the county for several years and, as in Lincolnshire, have strong connections with Learndirect. In Northumberland a number of the private providers are also successfully delivering adult basic skills in the workplace. JJ Training delivers at three bases located in the south east of the county and has delivered basic skills, including ESOL, in the workplace for the past four years. Provision is flexible to fit with work patterns and often embedded. Since April 2003 they have had over 300 learners taking the national tests. CEP Associates delivers mainly in the south east of Northumberland and has been a basic skill provider for over 16 years and a Learndirect provider for just under two. Previously, the number of basic skills learners was small, around 15–20 per year, but the addition of Learndirect has resulted in a steep rise in take-up to over 150 learners.

#### 4.4 Family literacy, language and numeracy

There are two strands of family learning: family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN), which aims to address basic skills and wider family learning which covers all other aspects of family learning from crafts to parenting skills. It is with the former that this report is concerned.

Spending on family learning as a whole has increased greatly over the last year. For example, in Herefordshire spending has doubled from approximately £30,000 in 2002/03 to £68,500 2003/04. Family learning is usually located within the LEA and takes place during school hours. Up until now it has mainly been in primary schools, although some areas are trying to develop family learning in secondary schools. In each area FLLN is at various stages of development. However, it does appear to be successful, with take-up of provision reported to be high. The client group is predominantly mothers but some fathers and grandparents do attend. There are several types of FLLN courses ranging in length from a two-hour workshop to a 96-hour full course and include Family Literacy, Family Numeracy, Keeping up with the Children (KUC), Early Start, and Playing with Language.

In Cornwall, family learning forms part of the Adult Education Service along with Link into Learning. They offer between 20 and 30 courses annually, mainly in primary schools. FLLN has been running for eight years and the area was one of the first in the country to pilot the programme. Their target for this academic year was 450 learners which they expected to exceed.

In Herefordshire FLLN is provided through a partnership between the Lifelong Learning Development Unit and the college. The family learning officer acts as a broker, organising provision in the schools and the college supplies the tutors to deliver the programmes. This has raised issues over funding and ownership of the learners, particularly in relation to the national tests. Learners are registered with Lifelong Learning Development Unit, which does not have the capacity to offer the national tests, rather than with the college, which does. This has led to on-going discussions as to whether learners who take the national tests at the college are counted towards the college or Lifelong Learning Development Unit targets. Family Learning has been running for five years and currently takes place in seven schools. Numbers are low but said to be increasing. Targets for 2003/04 were to run four family numeracy, five literacy, two Early Starts and six KUC courses. Initially they aimed for nine learners per course with 25 per cent accreditation. However, nine was felt to be too high for the Early Start course and this was later reduced to six. The total learner target was therefore 135.

In Cumbria family learning is run by three area basic skills co-ordinators, one covering the south, one the west and the third the remainder of the county. Family learning targets for 2003/04 were 884 which they did not expect to meet. Six to eight courses run at any one time with most occurring in the south and the east of the county. Coordinators reported that, due to funding restrictions, they are not able to offer courses to all who would like them. Provision can only run in schools where 'need' is presumed to be high.

Northumberland has an overall family learning co-coordinator running three sets of provision at any one time. Provision is concentrated in the south east of the county, often in ex-mining areas, where the population density and basic skills need is highest. There are no formal targets to reach in terms of actual numbers but an 80 per cent target for the engagement of new learners who have not accessed any type of formal education in the past two years was

set. Approximately 30 learners, 10 per school, attend sessions with literacy and numeracy delivered separately. However, there are plans to combine future programmes. The retention of learners was said to be the main issue facing delivery.



**Picture 10 - A family learning numeracy class in Northumberland**

During the life-span of the research project family learning in Lincolnshire was in a state of change. Provision was described as patchy depending on the area and historical influences. However, a new co-ordinator was appointed at the beginning of this academic year, September 2003, and there are plans to extend family learning provision to secondary schools. During the year there were ninety 30-hour family learning programmes including several funded through SRB and the LSC. The total target was 792 learners.

Finally, Devon has two principal deliverers, Devon County Council and Exeter College. The county council has an overall family learning co-ordinator and three area co-ordinators delivering a range of different types of family learning programme at any one time. Exeter College has been involved in delivering family outreach programmes for the past ten years. Currently it is running a 'Families First' project, funded by the LSC and ESF, which is due to finish in December 2004. The majority of basic skills delivery is done covertly, embedded into other family learning. The project has an overall co-ordinator and three part-time brokers. Sessions are delivered by trained tutors from the college. To date 37 family learning courses have been run with approximately half of these incorporating basic skills. The project is exploring funding options for the future to enable the continuation of delivery. Devon also has a third deliverer, Parent Learning Children Learning (PLCL) which runs accredited Open College Network (OCN) 10 and 20 hour courses with basic skills embedded into individual learning programmes. The project aims to encourage parents to become tutors.

#### **4.5 Workplace learning**

The profiles of each study area show all to have a high number of SMEs and a lower than average number of large companies. This has implications for delivery of provision in terms of access, time, space and achieving viable numbers of learners. Many different types of

providers are in the process of developing workplace provision with some colleges in particular, having employed development workers or brokers to undertake this work. In Northumberland, Business Link has been particularly active in accessing the workplace to enable other providers, both public and private, to deliver workplace basic skills. This work was funded under the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) initiative.

The TUC have ULRs who are active in all the case study areas and successfully setting up provision in partnership with a range of local providers. ULRs appeared to be most active in Cumbria and Northumberland. The TUC have eight learning centres in Cumbria and three in Northumberland; they are all Ufi/ Learndirect centres and some offer separate basic skills sessions. There is a push in Northumberland to engage those in the retail sector, particularly the supermarket chains, using the shop workers union USADW. Reasons given for the success of ULRs were that they are well known, people trust them, and they bridge the divide between shop floor and management.

#### CASE STUDY

*The learning centre at Blyth Valley District Council is a portacabin located in the office grounds. Opened in November 2003, the centre is managed by a full time ULR who is seconded to the post from the council where he was a lighting engineer. He is supported by six other ULRs. The centre runs mainly on a drop-in basis and offers Learndirect courses. The manager is not trained to deliver basic skills and this is undertaken by working in partnership with the local college who provide a tutor one morning a week. Learners have the opportunity to take the national tests on-site when the college arranges for the learning bus to visit. At the time of the visit 31 learners had sat the national tests in a mixture of literacy and numeracy with an 80 per cent pass rate.*



**Picture 11 - The TUC learning centre, Blyth**

#### CASE STUDY

*In Cumbria the learning centre at Pirelli Tyres is the most successful in the county and is often used as a model for other companies. So far just short of 400 staff have completed an initial basic skills assessment and it has now been made part of the induction process for*



*new staff. Anyone on the workforce who is not at Level 1 is given 30 hours off work to enable them to work towards the Level 1 national test. Due to the high demand for basic skills training the centre has now employed a basic skills tutor. The centre will also become a test centre in the near future so that learners do not have to go to the college to take the national tests.*

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Some public sector employers in the study areas, such as the NHS and the forces, were found to be engaging in basic skills training. From October 2004, as part of the Department of Health's 'Agenda for Change' initiative and the new NHS pay system, all NHS staff will be obliged to undertake agreed learning and development activities in order to progress up the pay scale. Basic skills will form part of this. Herefordshire NHS Primary Care Trust was one of twelve 'early implementer' sites that put the new system into place from June 2003.

A small amount of forces provision was found in some of the areas. For example, provision to RAF personnel in Northumberland is being delivered on-site at one of the bases by a private training provider whilst the local college works with family members. To date eight personnel have been tested at Level 2, five in numeracy and three in literacy. A further nine were due to sit the Level 2 test and a further eight were waiting to start provision. Northumberland plans to expand the level of provision available. A company who specialises in resettlement courses is working on five RAF bases in Lincolnshire to raise awareness of basic skills amongst both uniformed personnel and other staff. While there is no actual delivery at present they hope to work towards this in the near future.

#### CASE STUDY

*The NHS in Herefordshire has traditionally offered some basic skills provision, particularly for staff taking NVQs or modern apprenticeships; historically this was provided largely by volunteers. In the summer of 2003 provision was increased and formalised with the creation of a designated Skills for Life department funded partly by the LSC and partly by the NHS. The department has three full-time staff who deliver some provision to those at satellite clinics. They also provide basic skills support to drug users, particularly heroin addicts and have a health bus that delivers provision to travellers in the area. From April 2004 all staff in the region - approximately 1,400 - will be assessed. Currently there are over 90 members of staff receiving basic skills provision, either one-to-one or in groups. The need for numeracy was said to be widespread. Provision can be discrete or integrated into work requirements and is flexible to fit with shift patterns. For example, learners can attend a morning session one week and an afternoon session the next. At the moment, many of those coming for provision are self-referred and there is a concern those requiring the greatest amount of support will be the last ones reached*

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All army recruitment offices have a basic skills officer and from April 2004, under the 'Step Up' campaign, all new army personnel have to be tested and undertake basic skills training if found to be below Entry Level 2. Those below Entry Level 1 are deferred from entry to the army, offered advice and directed to an appropriate local learning provider. There are many issues over delivering basic skills to the army including soldiers being redeployed to other locations half way through a course. Short intensive courses are therefore preferred. In Lincolnshire a small number of army personnel are currently accessing provision with private providers and there are plans by Grantham College to expand their delivery to army personnel

into all areas of the county. In Northumberland basic skills has been available for two years. There is only one regiment in the area and learners are sent to a residential course at a college over 50 miles away. The course runs once a month for a week and totals 30 hours of provision. To date 22 learners have completed a literacy or numeracy course at Level 1 and two learners have taken the national test. From June 2004 soldiers in Northumberland will be able to access provision at Newcastle College.

#### 4.5.1 Migrant workers

There were reports in all areas that increasing numbers of migrant workers were employed in factories, on farms and in the hotel and catering industries. In each of the study areas many employers were said to be using agencies to recruit migrant workers from abroad. A large number of migrant workers, predominantly Portuguese, were found in Lincolnshire and in some cases employers were requesting ESOL provision for these workers. Reasons for employers wanting ESOL provision were connected to basic health and safety issues such as the need for learners to be aware of, or take certificates in, health and hygiene regulations in the food sector and restaurants. One company, which employed a large migrant workforce, sought ESOL provision only for those in a position of authority so they could then translate relevant information back into their own language and inform the remainder of the workforce of its content. In other areas ESOL provision took place in several ethnic restaurants and takeaways. Migrant workers are often seasonal and numbers therefore fluctuate. This unpredictability was said to create specific challenges and issues for providers.

#### 4.6 Learndirect

All areas had a number of Learndirect centres, either standalone, or located in community centres, colleges, workplaces or adult learning centres. However, exactly how many were delivering basic skills and how many were able to offer the national tests online was difficult to ascertain. Opinions on the usefulness of Learndirect courses were divided with some knowing of learners who had had a negative experience whilst others felt Learndirect had a vital role to play in the delivery of basic skills in rural areas. In Lincolnshire their presence was said by some to create a climate of competition for learners and raised issues of double funding. There was concern among some mainstream tutors that the majority of Learndirect tutors only have basic skills awareness training and that basic skills learners accessing courses via Learndirect do not receive adequate support. Learndirect courses were seen as inappropriate for entry level learners but as a useful resource for learners working at Level 1 and above. As one provider commented, 'The lower level learner is best suited to traditional provision with lots of support.' The lack of broadband in rural communities and the cost of delivery were further drawbacks for online delivery.

#### CASE STUDY

*The Learndirect centre established in Butlins, just outside Skegness on the east coast of Lincolnshire, has received much media publicity and interest. It has been held up as an example of what can be achieved in rural areas through partnership working. The centre works in collaboration with Butlins, Boston College and the LSC to deliver basic skills and Learndirect courses to employers, holidaymakers and the community, including local businesses.*

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## 4.7 Voluntary and community providers

### 4.7.1 The Herefordshire Literacy Project (HELP)

Herefordshire Literacy Project (HELP) began life as a small voluntary organisation in 1975 using volunteer tutors to deliver one-to-one tuition in people's homes across the county. In the last four years HELP has expanded considerably and now works in three main areas:

- Two years ago HELP received a Local Investment Fund (LIF) grant and set up HELP-Countywide. They now have three co-ordinators based in different parts of Herefordshire. In addition, they have recently received LSC funding to employ a development manager to expand the provision.
- HELP also have a co-ordinator based at Herefordshire College of Technology who manages one-to-one tuition in parts of the city not covered by SWLP. This provision is managed and funded by the college.
- In August 2000, HELP used Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding to set up the South Wye Literacy Project (SWLP), based in the deprived area of the city of Hereford. SWLP deliver literacy, numeracy and ESOL within their centre, in people's homes, in various workplaces and other community venues. They now have approximately 16 groups running each week. In excess of 250 learners have accessed their provision this year.

### 4.7.2 Community Action Furness

Community Action Furness is a charitable organisation which was established in 1993 in response to the downsizing of the shipyard, which caused high levels of unemployment, especially among young people. The focus of the charity is providing training to help young people back into employment. They work collaboratively with a wide range of partners including Jobcentre Plus, social services, Furness College and local community groups. They have received some LSC funding via ESF co-financing but mainly rely on other sources such as trust funds, fund-raising and selling products. They have several sites in the town. However, they recently received some lottery money and will be moving to new premises, enabling several of their projects to be delivered on one site. They have a number of innovative projects including:

- Jibcraft, a workshop in which garden furniture, summer houses, bird tables and other items are made to sell.
- Eureka Catering. They run a community café as well as providing outside catering and buffets for meetings, conferences, etc. They also do a local sandwich run.
- The Furniture Place. Here they restore old, donated, furniture to be sold via a shop in the town's shopping mall. They also repair and overhaul old computers to be lent out. Trainees on these and various other community projects can work towards NVQs or National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) qualifications and are asked when they first join whether they need basic skills support. Many say no at first but if staff see a need they will approach the trainee again once they have settled in and feel more comfortable. They provide one-to-one or group sessions and will embed basic skills into the trainee's vocational training. Trainees can work towards national tests if they wish.

### 4.7.3 Birchwood Access Centre

Located in the shopping precinct on the outskirts of Lincoln, the Birchwood Access Centre opened in 1996. It now employs 11 members of staff as well as numerous volunteers. The centre has been chosen as one of three community projects in the region to receive special funding from the government under the 'learning communities' initiative and is seen as a 'test

bed' for community provision. The funding is for 12 months and amounts to £15,000. One of the main challenges the centre faces is the lack of core funding and it is hoped that this initiative will help to secure future funding for the centre. Learners who enrol at the centre are students of Lincoln College with all the benefits that entails. The centre is multi-purpose: as well as running a number of basic skills sessions throughout the week it offers Learndirect courses, a crèche, a Saturday morning children's club, bingo, general advice, a community larder where food is distributed to those in need, and a whole range of social events. The centre also works with those who have disabilities and/or mental health issues. The centre works collaboratively with many partners including Sure Start, the local council and the college.

#### 4.7.4 Stonham Housing Association

Stonham Housing Association works nationally with hard-to-reach groups, usually in times of crisis and is funded by 'Supporting People'. They have always undertaken some form of basic skills delivery. Originally it was bolted onto the side of other core activities but this was seen as unsatisfactory and now the **Skills for Life** agenda is integral to the Housing Association's ethos. With new government funding they are able to offer the basic skills provision in a more coherent way. The funders require the emphasis to be placed on independent living skills with basic skills embedded into learning. The association has centres throughout the country and runs basic skills provision in five of the six study areas, although numbers were said to be small. Whilst there is a national basic skills co-ordinator, most areas have their own co-ordinator and regional approaches differ depending on local need. In the Midlands, basic skills are delivered at ground level in an integral and relevant way to the client group - for example, by proving basic skills as part of a shopping trip. The regional co-ordinator for the Midlands commented that it was difficult to put basic skills at the top of people's agenda if learners are in crisis with their lives. Cornwall has a short-term financial literacy project for young mums. Cumbria and Northumberland have several projects and plan to deliver in rural areas using laptops. Herefordshire has a part-time developer who delivers basic skills on a one-to-one basis or supports learners attending college provision.

#### 4.7.5 Other organisations

The WEA were found to be involved in a limited amount of basic skills delivery in three of the six areas with most provision taking place as embedded basic skills. For example, in Northumberland the WEA were delivering ICT in the workplace with embedded literacy and numeracy.

The cross-denominational Church National Advisor Group has a remit to engage in adult basic skills delivery. However, whilst they have several projects on-going most appear to be concentrated in urban settlements and no real evidence of provision was found in the six rural study areas.

First College in Lincolnshire delivers basic skills on the east coast of the county and has charitable status. It is an LSC approved provider with a franchising agreement for the delivery of adult basic skills in the area with Boston College. New Link, also a charity delivers basic skills and IT throughout the East Midlands including Lincolnshire.

### 4.8 The probation service

The level of basic skill provision available through the probation service varies from area to area. From April 2004 the probation service was obliged to embrace the **Skills for Life** agenda

and all provision is now funded via the LSC. Addressing basic skills needs is often a condition of a client's Community Punishment Order and failure to attend provision results in the client breaking their terms of the order. The probation service does not, in the main, deliver basic skills but sources out to other LSC-approved providers. Up until now targets in this sector have been small. There are specific issues over delivering to this client group as learners have many other problems to deal with. Retention was said to be a major issue. In addition, in rural areas the low number of those on orders combined with inaccessibility makes delivery to viable numbers particularly challenging.

In Lincolnshire the probation service screens clients at the pre-sentence stage and, if a basic skills need is identified, the client is then referred for a full assessment. The probation service works in partnership with Lincolnshire Action Trust, a local charity, who work with prisoners and offenders throughout the county and have done so for the past seven years. The Trust carries out the assessment and agrees a learning plan with the offender. The Trust's Basic skills training programme is called the 'Employment Key skills Programme' and is delivered at one of the probation offices. The programme has two elements: basic and key skills, and employment training including job searching, CV writing and so on. Basic skills teaching is offered on a one-one basis as clients are often lacking in confidence and many are working at entry level and need this individual level of support. However, recently Move On course have also been offered. Clients are encouraged to work towards accreditation. Basic skills teaching is client-centred, with tutors adapting the programme to a particular client's interests. Once the learner is ready to begin looking for employment, the employment skills aspect of the training programme can be accessed. Should a learner decide they would like to go on to further learning tutors will refer them to outside agencies. The probation service also work with one of the local colleges to provide basic skills to those on Community Punishment Orders.

The delivery of basic skills in Devon, Cornwall, Northumberland and Cumbria was in a period of transition during the time of the study. Traditionally delivery in Cornwall was via Link into Learning and in Devon through the colleges. However, in both counties there are plans to use other providers in the future. Targets in 2003/04 across Devon and Cornwall were 410 commencements and 104 awards. In Northumberland offenders either travel to Newcastle where the probation service run their own programmes, both one-to-one and group work, or are referred to the college or Learning Northumberland, the adult IAG service.

In Herefordshire, the person who organises basic skills for the probation service is LSC funded but works for a third party. Her role is to meet with the clients and act as a go-between. First she interviews the client and then puts together an individual learning plan. Following this three options are possible. The client can attend provision at the college or with another provider, accompanied by herself or a learning mentor, they can receive one-to-one support, or the college can go to the probation offices to deliver provision.

#### **4.9 Jobcentre Plus**

Traditionally, Jobcentre Plus clients are screened after six months of unemployment and referred to a suitable, designated provider if a basic skills need is identified. In Northumberland Jobcentre Plus clients are referred to a number of providers throughout the county. Courses vary and include Basic Employability Training (BET), a full-time 26-week course and Short Intensive Basic Skills (SIBS) which lasts for eight weeks. For some time Lincolnshire and Northumberland have been screening all new claimants and referring them

at this stage instead of waiting for the customary six months to lapse. Lincolnshire is one of 12 areas participating in the government's 'Sanctions' pilot that began in April 2004. The project requires all new claimants to be assessed for basic skills and to attend provision if necessary or face the possibility of sanctions to their benefits.

#### 4.10 Mobile classrooms

The use of mobile classrooms or a learning bus is one approach some areas have adopted to delivering basic skills in rural communities. Mobile classrooms are often multi-purpose and shared by several providers, requiring collaboration between different organisations. In some cases primary function of the bus was to delivery ICT. In Northumberland the college learning bus is capable of administrating the national tests. A Sure Start funded bus incorporates basic skills and ICT provision in Cumbria with the basic skills element delivered via Uclan. The bus concentrates delivery in Carlisle and Penrith, particularly targeting those from travelling communities. Several learning buses operate in Herefordshire, including one run by the NHS and one by the college. In the north of Devon the college runs a mobile classroom and in Cornwall a local community organisation has a multipurpose training bus.



Picture 12 - Inside the mobile classroom

#### 4.11 Continuing Professional Development Centres

Several areas have established, or are in the process of establishing, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Centres to provide tutors with networking opportunities, resources and training. Lincolnshire has a network of ten CPD centres with all but one open at the time of writing. Herefordshire and Cumbria have one centre each. In Devon the learning partnership has set up a virtual CPD centre enabling tutors to find out about training opportunities via the internet. The remaining two areas, Northumberland and Cornwall, are in the process of deciding the best way forward.

### CASE STUDY

*In Lincolnshire each CPD centre has been earmarked to specialise in a particular aspect of **Skills for Life** delivery depending on the specific needs of the local population and the local knowledge base. Centres have been identified as specialising in the following: Louth - literacy, Gainsborough - numeracy, Spalding - ESOL, Skegness - pre-entry and everyday skills, Grantham (YES) – work-based and key skills, Stamford - learning difficulties and disabilities, Lincoln - the delivery of Level 3 and 4 tutor training, Boston - capacity building and Level 2 training, and at Horncastle a range of areas including family learning and specific learning difficulties.*

#### 4.12 Basic skills directory

Northumberland, Cornwall and Devon all produce a basic skills directory, indicating all the providers in the county and the types of course on offer. Herefordshire is in the process of compiling the information needed to produce such a guide. Lincolnshire has no directory but does run a local 'Gremlins' hotline which offers advice on courses throughout the county.

### CASE STUDY

*In October 2003 Lincolnshire LSC implemented a local Gremlins helpline based at Horncastle College. The helpline has been very successful at raising the awareness of basic skills provision in the county. In the first eight months of the helpline being operational it received 205 calls compared to only 48 calls to the national helpline from Lincolnshire and Rutland in the past two years. Calls came from throughout the county, although the majority came from the Lincoln and Horncastle areas (67 and 61 respectively). Of the potential 61 learners in Horncastle, 57 are still on courses and seven have completed and passed the national qualification in literacy or numeracy. The success of the project has been attributed to effective local marketing and the knowledge of available provision by those working on the helpline as well as their ability to follow-up the progress of callers.*

#### 4.13 Learning Partnerships and other networks

Learning partnerships were found to be active in four of the six areas. Structure and effectiveness varied. Funded by the LSC, learning partnerships act as an opportunity for providers to network with other providers, to identify issues relevant to their particular area and to share experiences. Partnerships take on a strategic role and do not deliver basic skills. Several of the partnerships had a number of sub-groups, for example a basic skills sub-group, or were split into several local learning partnerships. In some cases alternative forums meet which serve to fulfil similar functions to that of the Learning Partnership. For example, in Northumberland there is a Basic Skills Quality Forum and an Essential Skills Network Providers Group. In Lincolnshire the LSC organises regular '**Skills for Life** Stakeholder' and 'Get on at work' meetings.

#### 4.14 Key Points

- In all of the study areas delivery of basic skills and ESOL to adults has increased substantially over the past two years as a result of the **Skills for Life** agenda and the increase in available

funding. It is difficult to gain a comprehensive picture of the exact size and scope of delivery due to the changing nature of provision.

- There are an increasing number of learners requiring ESOL provision, particularly in the workplace.
- College provision is variable with some mainly offering basic skills courses to students enrolled on other courses but others are involved in extensive outreach programmes.
- Family literacy and numeracy programmes are expanding rapidly and are becoming increasingly popular, particularly amongst mothers.
- In some areas the number of private providers involved in basic skills delivery is growing.
- Many sectors including the probation service, Jobcentre plus, the NHS and the forces are currently in the process of extending their adult basic skills funding and delivery.
- Many organisations are in the process of developing workplace learning. However, the process is slow and costly.
- There are issues associated with a lack of core funding for some organisations and the short-term nature of alternative funding streams.
- Voluntary organisations play a key role.
- Mobile classrooms are one possible solution to rural delivery.
- All areas are in the process of setting up Continuing Professional Development Centres (CPDs) but it was too early to evaluate their effectiveness.



## 5. Learners

Researchers visited provision in a variety of venues. Size and quality varied, from listed buildings to portacabins. Most of the provision seen took place in schools, adult education centres, colleges and community centres, but a whole range of other venues were visited: learning buses, factories, private training establishments, libraries, a hospital, a shopping centre, above a garage, a takeaway restaurant, a pub, and above a bistro.



**Picture 13 - A primary school in rural Lincolnshire hosts adult learning**

Different styles of provision were also visited, including drop-in sessions, formal lessons with whole-class work and everyone working on the same or similar tasks, and sessions where everyone was working on individual tasks for the whole session, with support from the tutor or volunteer. 12 of the sessions visited ran in the evening, beginning after 17:00; the remaining 54 were during the day.

A total of 214 learners were interviewed.

### 5.1 Profile of learners interviewed

The learners had been attending for anything up to 13 years. The majority of learners (70 per cent) attended once a week. Length and frequency of attendance are shown in tables 5.1 and 5.2.

**Table 5.1. Length of attendance**

Length of time	Number of learners (%)
< 1 month	43 (20%)
1-5 months	61 (29%)
6 -11 months	43 (20%)
1-2 years <sup>1</sup>	39 (18%)
3 years +	28 (13%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>

1. Anything up to but not including three years.

**Table 5.2. Frequency of attendance**

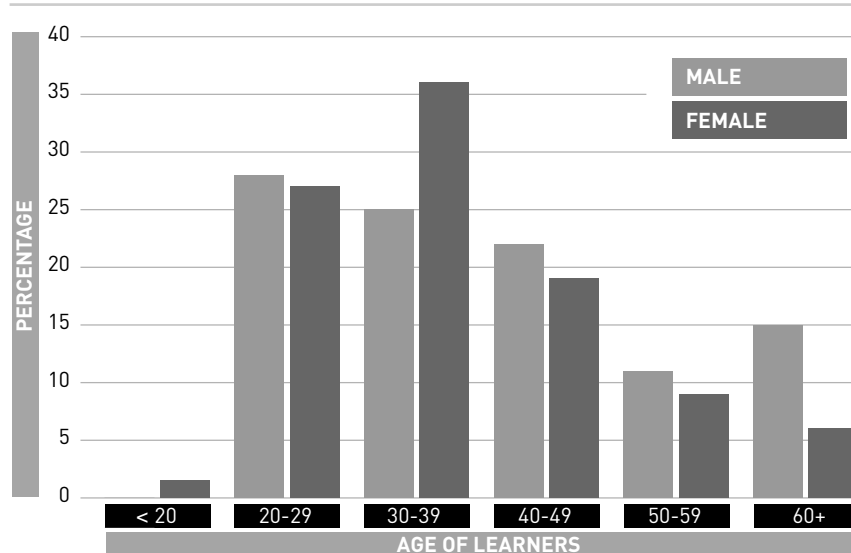
Length of time	Number of learners (%)
Less than once a week	3 (1%)
Once a week	149 (70%)
More than once a week	57 (27%)
Not sure since first session attended	5 (2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>

A total of 361 learners attended the sessions visited by researchers; 129 (36 per cent) of these were male. This ratio is reflected in the numbers of males and females interviewed: out of the 214 learners interviewed 74 (35 per cent) were male and 140 (65 per cent) were female. Ages ranged from 17 to 82 years old, with the majority (80 per cent) of learners falling between the ages of 20 and 50. ESOL learners were generally younger than literacy and numeracy learners. The age distribution of learners is shown in table 5.3.

**Table 5.3. Age distribution of literacy/numeracy and ESOL learners**

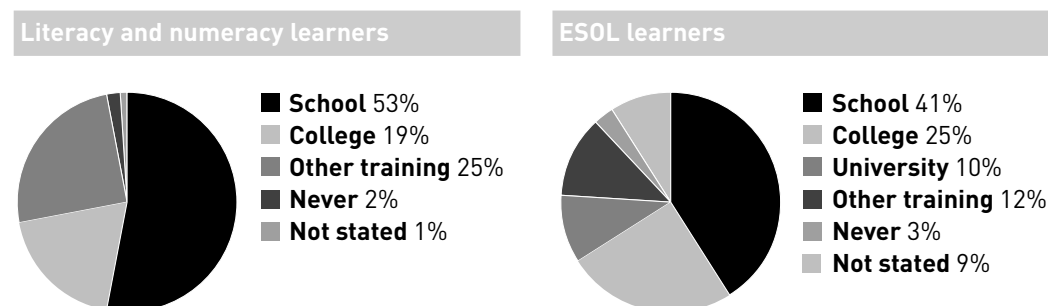
Age group	Literacy/ Numeracy	ESOL	Total
< 20	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	2 (1%)
20-29	29 (20%)	31 (46%)	60 (28%)
30-39	44 (30%)	25 (37%)	69 (32%)
40-49	39 (27%)	4 (6%)	43 (20%)
50-59	18 (12%)	3 (4%)	21 (10%)
60+	15 (10%)	4 (6%)	19 (9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>214</b>

Figure 5.1 shows the age distribution of learners separately for males and females. The percentages aged below 30 years and between 40 and 59 were similar among males and females. However, there was a higher percentage of women than men aged 30–39 (36 per cent compared to 24 per cent) and a lower percentage of women than men aged over 60 (6 per cent compared to 15 per cent). Most of the difference between males and females aged 30–39 years was accounted for by those on family learning courses or those who had progressed to a literacy or numeracy course having just completed a family learning course.

**Figure 5.1. Age distribution of male and female learners**

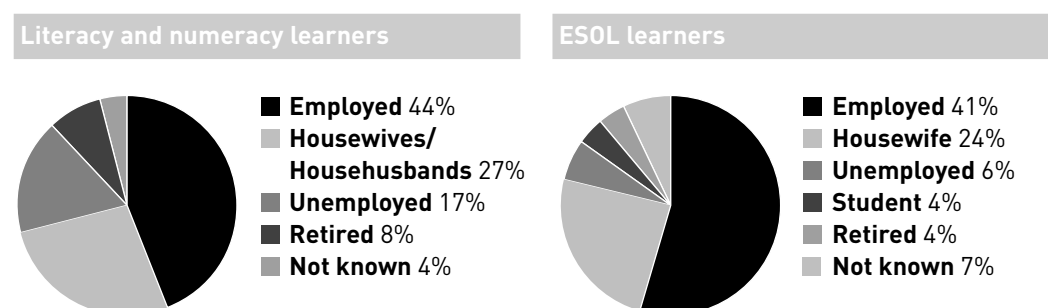
Just over half (53 per cent) of literacy and numeracy learners had not accessed any type of education or training since leaving school; the figure for ESOL learners was 41 per cent. ESOL learners were more likely to have attended college or university than literacy or numeracy learners. Figures for last education or training are shown in figure 5.2.

**Figure 5.2. Last education or training of learners interviewed**



Although researchers did not set out to establish the employment status of learners, it often came up in the interview and was recorded for 203 of the learners. 44 per cent of literacy and numeracy learners and 54 per cent of ESOL learners were employed and 17 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively, were unemployed. Approximately a quarter of both groups were housewives or househusbands<sup>2</sup>. Employment status of learners is shown in figure 5.3.

**Figure 5.3. Employment status of learners**



Issues of employment for ESOL learners are discussed in further detail in section 5.3.3.

ESOL learners came from 28 different countries and had been in this country for anything between two weeks and 41 years, challenging stereotypical notions that the need for ESOL provision is solely a response to the needs of recent immigrants or asylum seekers. Indeed, nearly a third of those interviewed (30 per cent) had lived in England for over five years. Eight learners had been resident in the UK for over ten years with two learners, a husband and wife, residing for 41 years. The nationalities of the ESOL learners and the length of time they had been in this country are given in tables 5.4 and 5.5.

2. Please note we found no examples of 'house husbands' amongst the ESOL learners.

**Table 5.4. ESOL learners - country of origin**

Country	Number of learners	Country	Number of learners
Afghanistan	1	Poland	1
Angola	2	Portugal	2
Bangladesh	9	Romania	2
Brazil	3	Russia	1
China	7	Singapore	1
Egypt	1	Slovakia	2
Hong Kong	4	Solomon Islands	2
Hungary	2	Somalia	1
India	1	Spain	2
Japan	4	Switzerland	1
Korea	1	Thailand	5
Lithuania	2	Tibet	1
Nigeria	1	Turkey	4
Philippines	1	Ukraine	4

**Table 5.5. ESOL learners – length of time in UK**

Length of time	Number of learners (%)
< 1 month <sup>1</sup>	2 (3%)
1-5 months	9 (13%)
6-11 months	9 (13%)
1-4 years <sup>2</sup>	20 (29%)
5-9 years <sup>3</sup>	12 (18%)
10 years +	8 (12%)
Not stated	8 (12%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>

1. These two learners were actually EFL students in a mixed ESOL/EFL class and were only planning to stay in the county for a few months.

2. Anything up to but not including five years

3. Anything up to but not including ten years

## 5.2 Literacy and numeracy learners: motivation, impact of provision on learners and future aspirations

### 5.2.1 Initial motivation for attending provision

The most common reason learners gave for initially attending provision was to help their children. For some learners, attending the course gave them a reason 'to get out the house' and meet new people. Other learners just wanted to become more confident in themselves. A breakdown of the data concerning initial reasons for attending is shown below in table 5.6.

**Table 5.6. Initial reason(s) for attending provision**

Reason	Literacy learners (%) <sup>1</sup>	Numeracy learners (%) <sup>1</sup>	Total (%) <sup>1</sup>
To help child(ren)	18 (21%)	16 (26%)	34 (23%)
Referred or encouraged <sup>2</sup>	21 (25%)	9 (15%)	30 (21%)
Did not do well at school	9 (11%)	18 (30%)	27 (18%)
Learn to read/write/do maths	19 (22%)	3 (5%)	22 (15%)
For confidence / self-esteem	9 (11%)	7 (11%)	16 (11%)
Something to do/to meet people/ to use brain/for the challenge	10 (12%)	6 (10%)	16 (11%)
To get work/promotion/a better job or become more effective at current job	10 (12%)	5 (8%)	15 (10%)
To gain qualifications	5 (6%)	8 (13%)	13 (9%)
To brush up	6 (7%)	6 (10%)	12 (8%)
To learn computers <sup>3</sup>	5 (6%)	5 (8%)	10 (7%)
To enable them to do further studies	5 (6%)	1 (2%)	6 (4%)
To help with daily life	2 (2%)	2 (3%)	4 (3%)
Other <sup>4</sup>	5 (6%)	3 (5%)	8 (5%)
<b>Total (number of learners)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>124 (85)</b>	<b>89 (61)</b>	<b>213 (146)</b>

1. Some learners gave more than one reason. Percentages are out of the number of learners, so add up to more than 100.

2. Referred – by boss, job centre, social services, etc; encouraged – by friend, family member, colleague, etc.

3. Six of these were enrolled on IT courses with basic skills embedded.

4. Other: Spouse/carer became ill or died (three learners), to pass driving theory (two learners), had stroke, 'because I'm thick', 'there was a place so I decided to give it a go (workplace learning)'.

There were some differences between literacy and numeracy learners. The most notable of these was that a higher proportion of numeracy learners came because they felt they had not done well at school, 30 per cent of numeracy learners compared to 11 per cent of literacy learners, or because they wanted to gain qualifications, 13 per cent of numeracy learners compared to 6 per cent of literacy learners.

Examples from literacy and numeracy learners concerning their motivation for joining the class:

*'I need to do it before I do further studies, get the basics in place.'*

*'My daughter (aged 9) when she brings homework home you can't do, it's a bit embarrassing.'*

*'It's something I've always wanted to do, to prove to myself that I could do it.'*

*'Mum passed away. She used to do everything for me. I come so I can cope on my own.'*

*'I'm dyslexic. I thought what will I do when my son goes to school? How will I understand his work?'*

*'[It] gets me out of the house for a few hours.'*

Motivation linked with helping children was naturally strongest amongst, although not restricted to, those engaged on family learning courses. Of the 18 learners taking part in

family learning, all but three said they attended the course because they wanted to be able to help their children and understand what they did in school. Of the three who did not mention helping the children two were referred by the head teacher and one, a grandmother, had come because she wanted to learn how to use a computer.



**Picture 14 - Family learning bridges the age gap**

Those who were accessing provision at work gave a similar range of reasons for attending provision, although a greater proportion, 9/28 (32 per cent) were referred. In one company learners had been referred by their supervisor and the sessions were viewed as part of their training. A greater proportion, 6/28 (21 per cent), also attended because they wanted to learn to use a computer, both for work and at home. These learners were mainly those attending an ICT course with literacy and numeracy embedded.

Several learners linked their reasons for attending provision to their experiences at school. Some had been unable to keep up with the rest of the class and a few reported having been told time and again that they were 'thick'. They had been left to sit at the back of the class as long as they did not cause any problems. Others admitted that they simply did not enjoy school and, at the time, 'could not wait to get out of there'. A few learners had left school at an early age due to bullying or pressure from home to go out to work. Some of the learners who said they had not done well at school enrolled on a course because they wanted to prove to themselves that they could do it or so that they could help their children; others wanted to get the qualifications they had not achieved at school in order to improve their job prospects. Some simply came to a point in their lives where they felt they wanted or needed to learn to read and write or improve their skills. In several cases this was triggered by a particular change in their life, such as having a child, new requirements at work, or a partner falling ill.

*'I was always told I was too thick to learn. I had trouble seeing the blackboard but the teachers just assumed I couldn't learn.'*

*'They said you're a slow learner and you got shoved to the back of the class.'*

*'I wanted to pick up what I missed out on in school. I wasn't able to learn at school. I sat at the back and no one noticed me.'*

*'Didn't want the children to leave school in the same position I did and have the same difficulties.'*

*'I failed maths twice at school so wanted to try again.'*

*'I didn't want to be afraid of maths anymore. I did not enjoy it at school. They made you feel stupid.'*

*'I had problems at school. Teachers only helped the clever ones. I didn't get any qualifications.'*

## CASE STUDY

*'I couldn't read and write when I left school. In my day why educate a farmer's son, they would only be pulling up swedes.' This 62-year-old learner in Herefordshire had always relied on his wife to do the reading but she had recently been taken ill, forcing him to seek assistance at the local centre. The learner worked at the local factory and was a former instructor with the St John Ambulance until they insisted that all instructors took written exams. He also wanted to learn more about the metric system. He had attended for two years and in that time he had been able to fill in the 'B' grade sheets at work and now writes to his sister in Africa – with whom he had nearly lost contact – once a fortnight via the internet.*

### 5.2.2 Impact of provision on learners

When asked what difference the course had made to their life 40, (27 per cent), of the literacy and numeracy learners simply stated that they were better at reading, writing or maths and had not noticed other differences. Among those who had, the most common difference noted was increased confidence. Learners' responses to this question are shown in table 5.7.

**Table 5.7. The difference the course had made to learners**

Difference	Literacy learners (%) <sup>1</sup>	Numeracy learners (%) <sup>1</sup>	Total (%) <sup>1</sup>
Greater confidence/self-esteem	22 (26%)	21 (34%)	43 (29%)
Better skills (reading, writing, maths)	28 (33%)	12 (20%)	40 (27%)
Better able to help the children	14 (16%)	18 (30%)	32 (22%)
Everyday life is easier	8 (9%)	10 (16%)	18 (12%)
Has helped with work	9 (11%)	8 (13%)	17 (12%)
Have met people	9 (11%)	3 (5%)	12 (8%)
Can use a computer	4 (5%)	4 (7%)	8 (5%)
Other <sup>2</sup>	6 (7%)	3 (5%)	9 (6%)
None yet (too early to tell)	12 (14%)	9 (15%)	21 (14%)
<b>Total (number of learners)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>112 (85)</b>	<b>88 (61)</b>	<b>200 (146)</b>

1. Some learners gave more than one response. Percentages are out of the number of learners, so add up to more than 100.

2. Have something to look forward to/gets me out/busier (five learners), have become interested in/have begun to enjoy learning (three learners), I get help with problems.

Learners views on the impact of provision on their life:

*'Before I sat at home and thought there was nothing. Now I have a more positive outlook on life.'*

*'Life has completely changed'*

*'I can now read to my children. A couple of years ago I could not read. I'm more confident and am now able to do training at work.'*

*'It has helped a great deal at work. I have to write a lot of reports.'*

*'I booked a holiday in London via the travel agents, never done it before.'*

*'Can apply maths to everyday life, working out sums at work....bills and wages.'*

#### CASE STUDY

*A 51-year-old learner in Lincolnshire has attended a local community centre for five years. At school she had trouble seeing the blackboard and left school with no qualifications having been told that she was 'too thick to learn'. She had often seen people going in and out of the centre and wondered what they did inside. She was 'too petrified' to go in until she overheard in a café a man having a letter read to him about the birth of his grandchild and decided she did not want to rely on others to read such letters to her. Having decided to attend the access centre she was immediately made to feel welcome. She now works at the centre as a volunteer as well as attending literacy and numeracy sessions twice a week. 'It has completely changed my life. I've learnt to read, write and do maths. I can do the shopping, pay bills, fill in forms. I've read all sorts of books - Jane Eyre, Pride and Prejudice. Also I have so much more confidence. I feel I can do things and I'm much more determined. Certificates are nothing to me. What's important to me is actually doing it and feeling like you're achieving something.'*

#### 5.2.3 Future aspirations

Learners' responses to this question are given in table 5.8 below. Although a third of learners had no specific goal in mind, just wishing to carry on with their course and continue to learn, a high proportion wished to gain qualifications, improve their job prospects or undertake further courses, or a combination of all three. This was particularly the case for numeracy learners: 44 per cent were aiming to get a qualification and 41 per cent wanted to improve their employment prospects, compared to 22 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, among literacy learners. The desire to progress onto other courses for this type of learner is an encouraging sign for the governments 'Aim Higher' initiative. Formerly 'Excellence for Change', the initiative intends to encourage those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who traditionally have not participated in further education into higher education (DfES 2004).



**Table 5.8. What learners hoped to achieve**

Response	Literacy learners (%) <sup>1</sup>	Numeracy learners (%) <sup>1</sup>	Total (%) <sup>1</sup>
Carry on, keep learning/improving	35 (41%)	13 (21%)	48 (33%)
Get work/promotion/a better job or Become more effective at current job	22 (26%)	25 (41%)	47 (32%)
Gain qualifications	19 (22%)	27 (44%)	46 (32%)
Attend college, university or other courses	14 (16%)	6 (10%)	20 (14%)
Help the children	9 (11%)	2 (3%)	11 (8%)
Greater confidence/self-esteem	6 (7%)	2 (3%)	8 (5%)
Other <sup>2</sup>	6 (7%)	4 (7%)	10 (7%)
Not sure	4 (5%)	2 (3%)	6 (4%)
<b>Total (number of learners)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>115 (85)</b>	<b>81 (61)</b>	<b>196 (146)</b>

1. Some learners gave more than one response. Percentages are out of the number of learners, so add up to more than 100.

2. Learn computers (three learners), meet people, pass driving test (three learners), write a book, nothing – just finish this course, 'a better life'.

Examples of what learners said about the future:

*'I want to get GCSEs in maths and English because I would like to get work as a bank cashier or secretary.'*

*'I don't particularly want a qualification out of it. It's just for myself, for confidence.'*

*'Just want to get better at spelling and reading so I can continue to help my daughter.'*

*'I would like to become a classroom assistant. At the moment I'm working towards level 2 in literacy.'*

*I want to get work as an estate agent. I've always wanted to do it but didn't stand a chance before. I want to get my qualifications in maths and English and I'm also starting a computer course at college next term. Hopefully this will put me in a better position to get work, [it] will give me more confidence and better skills.'*

In some cases the response learners gave to this question was the same as that given for their initial reason for attending provision. For some this was because they were interviewed early on in their course; for others, this was not the case. For example, several of those on family learning courses had attended provision because they wanted to be able to help their child or children and, at the time of their interview, this was all they were aiming to achieve. However, in many cases learners had originally attended provision for one reason and now had different ambitions. For example, out of the 34 learners who initially came along because they wanted to help their children, only three said that they had also come to improve their job prospects or to become more effective at their job and none had come to get qualifications. However, at the time of being interviewed 22 of these learners said they wanted to get a job or promotion, to gain qualifications, or to go on other courses. Similarly, there were 85 learners who said they now hoped either to get a (better) job or promotion, to gain qualifications and/or to go on further courses. Out of these 85 learners, only 27 (32 per cent) identified any of these factors as their initial motivation.

### 5.3 ESOL learners: motivation, impact of provision on learners, and future aspirations

#### 5.3.1 Initial motivation for attending provision

Most ESOL learners did not give a specific reason for initially attending; many simply stated that they had come to improve their English, although some did say it was simply to make living in this country easier or so that they could cope better with daily life (see table 5.9). Motivation was explored in more depth when asking the learners what they hoped to achieve by doing the course (see section 5.3.3).

**Table 5.9. Initial reason for attending provision**

Reason	Number of learners (%) <sup>1</sup>
Improve English <sup>2</sup> / to help with daily life	49 (72%)
Referred or encouraged <sup>3</sup>	9 (13%)
To get work/promotion or become more effective at current job	7 (10%)
To help child(ren)	3 (4%)
Other <sup>4</sup>	6 (9%)
<b>Total (number of learners)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>74 (68)</b>

1. Some learners gave more than one reason. Percentages are out of the number of learners, so add up to more than 100.

2. Many of the ESOL learners did not have a more specific reason for attending provision.

3. Referred – by boss, job centre, social services, etc; encouraged – by friend, family member, colleague, etc.

4. Other: To learn to read/write (two fluent or almost fluent speakers but not able to read or write well in English), to increase confidence, to brush up, to gain qualifications, to meet people.

Reasons ESOL learners gave concerning them joining the class:

*'So I can talk to people in the town. So I understand them and they understand me.'*

*'To improve my English and make it correct, I speak but not correct.'*

*'I need to speak more English. Life isn't easy.'*

#### 5.3.2 Impact of provision on learners

When asked what difference the ESOL course had made to them 28 (41 per cent) of the 68 ESOL learners, reported that their English was better but did not specify how this improvement had impacted on them, if indeed it had. However, almost a third, 21 (31 per cent), of learners felt that their daily life was easier as a result of attending provision.

*'It has helped me to talk to others in the area.'*

*'I read the newspapers, watch TV, talk to my husband.'*

*'When I speak to my little boy, when I'm shopping, when I answer the phone.'*

Other differences specified were increased confidence (three learners), finding work or work had becoming easier (three learners), can help the children with school work (one learner), have something interesting to do/keeps me busy/get a break (four learners). A further 15 learners had only been attending a short time and had not yet noticed a difference. Note that some learners gave more than one response and therefore the numbers do not add up to 68, the total number of ESOL learners.

### 5.3.3 Future aspirations

Almost half, 29 (43 per cent), of the ESOL learners interviewed were simply hoping to improve their English to a standard where they felt they could function effectively in British society and particularly in their local community. The remainder of the learners had more specific goals. In particular, 32 (47 per cent) were aiming to improve their employment prospects or become more effective at their current job, eight wanted to get qualifications, three were hoping to undertake college or university courses, and three wanted to be able to help their children with school work.

*'If I can speak English more I can make more friends.'*

*'I hope that it will allow me to get a job [in this country]'*

*'I was a secretary in Brazil. Perhaps in the future I will be able to get a similar job here.'*

*'I want to do a course in computer aided design so that I can change to that kind of work.'*

*'I'd like to get promoted once my English is better. I need more confidence. I'd like to communicate better.'*

As indicated in section 5.1, 35 per cent of the ESOL learners interviewed had attended college or university and a further 12 per cent had attended other training since leaving school. There were several learners who had trained and worked in a particular profession in their own country. For example, researchers interviewed four teachers, two engineers, an accountant, a secretary and several others who had particular skills or qualifications. Two of these learners were working as au pairs in England and intended to return to their own country to work, one was retired, and others were working in low-skilled jobs or not working at all; several of the latter were housewives. They were all hoping that improving their English would enable them to get employment relevant to their skills and experience.

#### CASE STUDY

***A class in Cumbria consisted of Bangladeshi male learners. Learners were mainly working at Entry Level 1. All learners worked in the town but were based in London, Leeds or Bradford. This made delivery extremely difficult as learners not only worked long hours in the local restaurants and takeaways, but worked for three or four weeks at a time and then went home for a week or two to see their wives and children who lived in another part of the country. Two of the learners hoped that improved English would lead to new employment opportunities in the area of computers.***

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**Picture 15 - ESOL learners from Bangladesh**

#### 5.4 Choice of provision

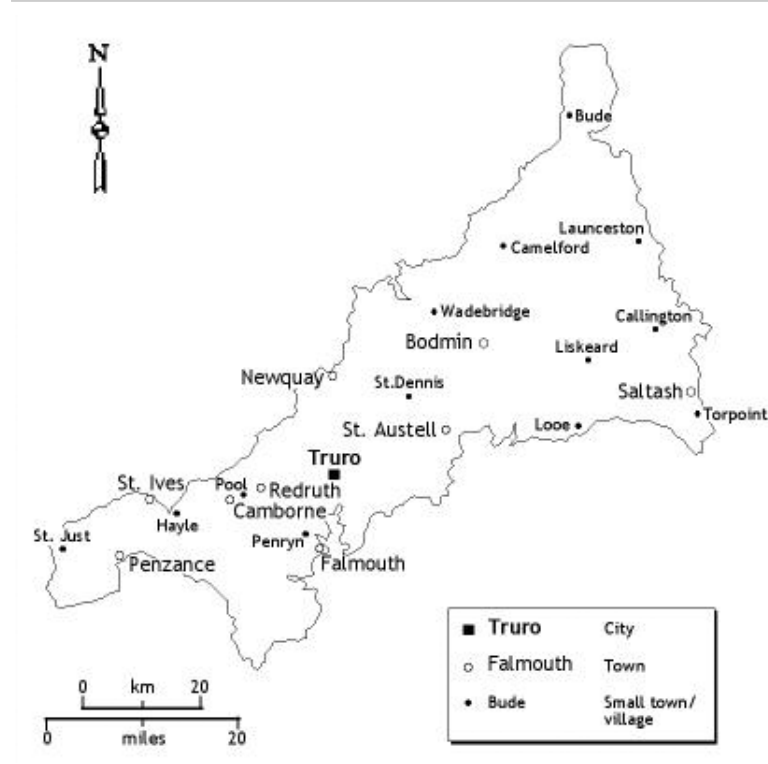
The majority, 171 out of 214 (80 per cent), of all learners interviewed lived in the same town as their chosen provision or attended provision at their place of work. Five learners did not specify where they lived. The remaining 38 were asked how far they travelled to provision and the results are presented in table 5.10.

**Table 5.10. Distance travelled by those not living/working in same town/village as provision**

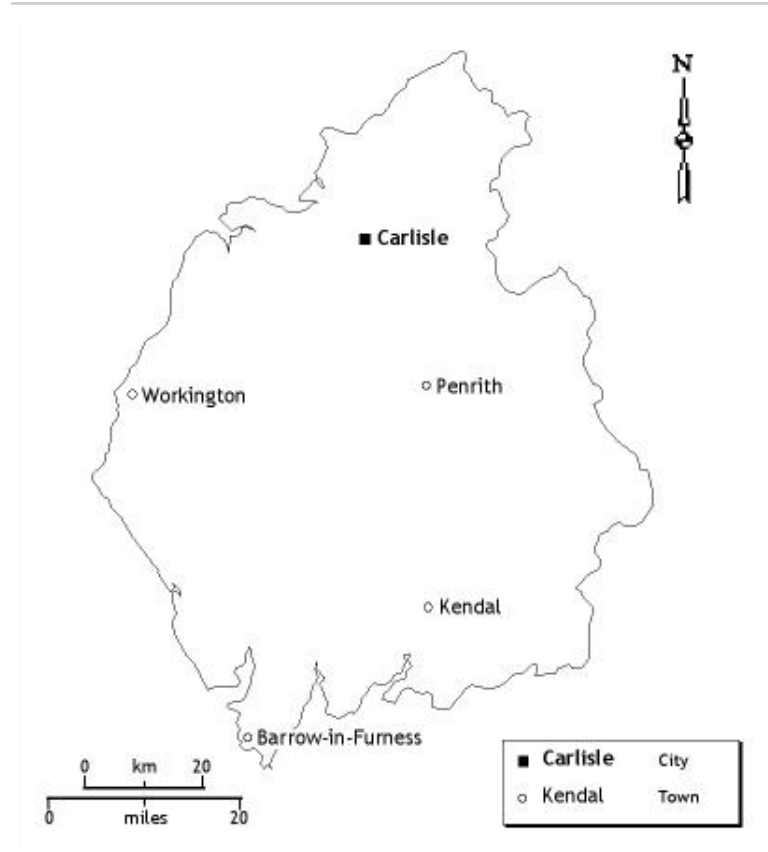
Distance travelled	Number of learners (%)
< 6 miles	9 (24%)
6-10 miles	17 (45%)
>10 miles	12 (32%)
Total	38

The following maps indicate, for each county, the location of fixed centres delivering adult basic skills at the time of the research. Often more than one centre may exist within one location, and provision may be delivered by several providers. Maps 2 and 4 show that there is a good geographical spread of fixed centres in Devon and Cornwall providing learners with many local options and reinforcing the need for centres that are easily accessible to learners. Lincolnshire and Northumberland (maps 6 and 7) also show good coverage in the main. However, in Northumberland a large amount of the provision is concentrated in the South East corner with less coverage in the areas that have a sparser population, namely the West and the North. In the case of Lincolnshire whilst coverage is evenly distributed around the county, centres are approximately 20 miles apart highlighting the need for continuing support with the development of outreach initiatives in the county. Map 3 shows little coverage throughout Cumbria. The majority of fixed centres were found to be concentrated in the South of the county around the Barrow-in-Furness area, with large distances and difficult topography between the remaining centres making local access to provision outside of the main centres of population challenging. Finally, map 5 shows that there are only two permanent or fixed centres in Herefordshire, one in Hereford City where the majority of the population live and the other in Leominster in the north of the county. However, it should be noted that a large amount of the county's provision is delivered by a number of mobile classrooms which aim to reach the learners at local level.

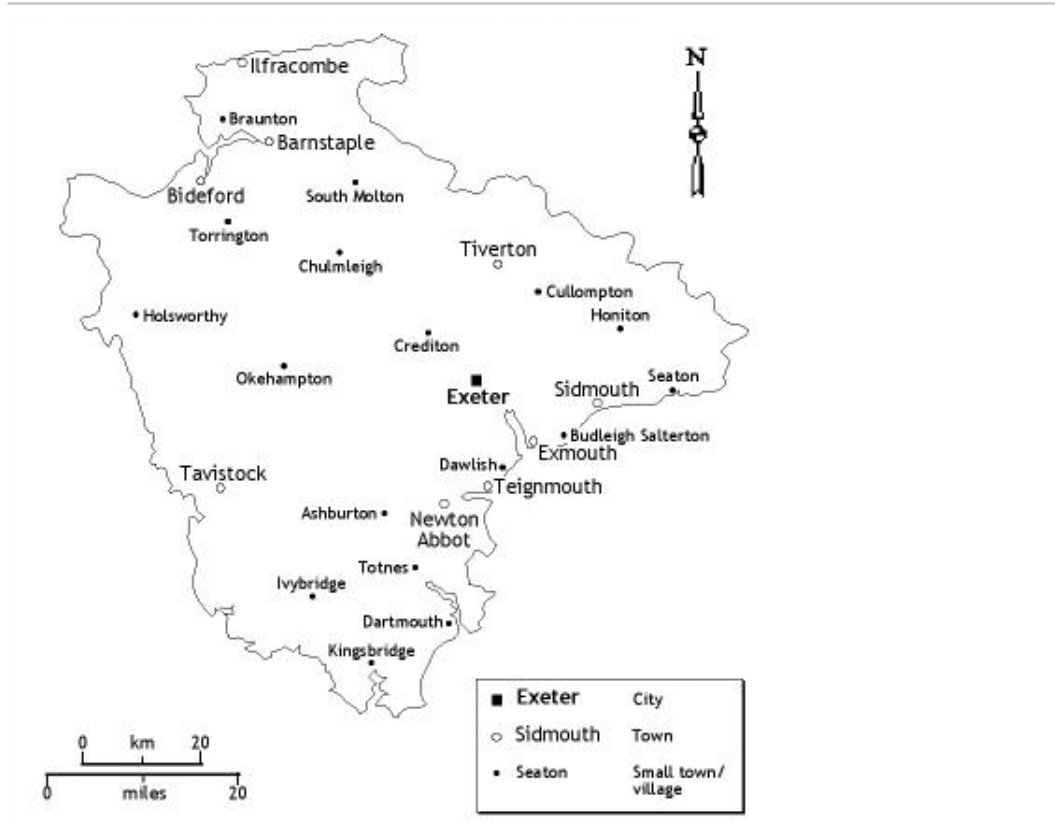
Map 2. Fixed centres in Cornwall.



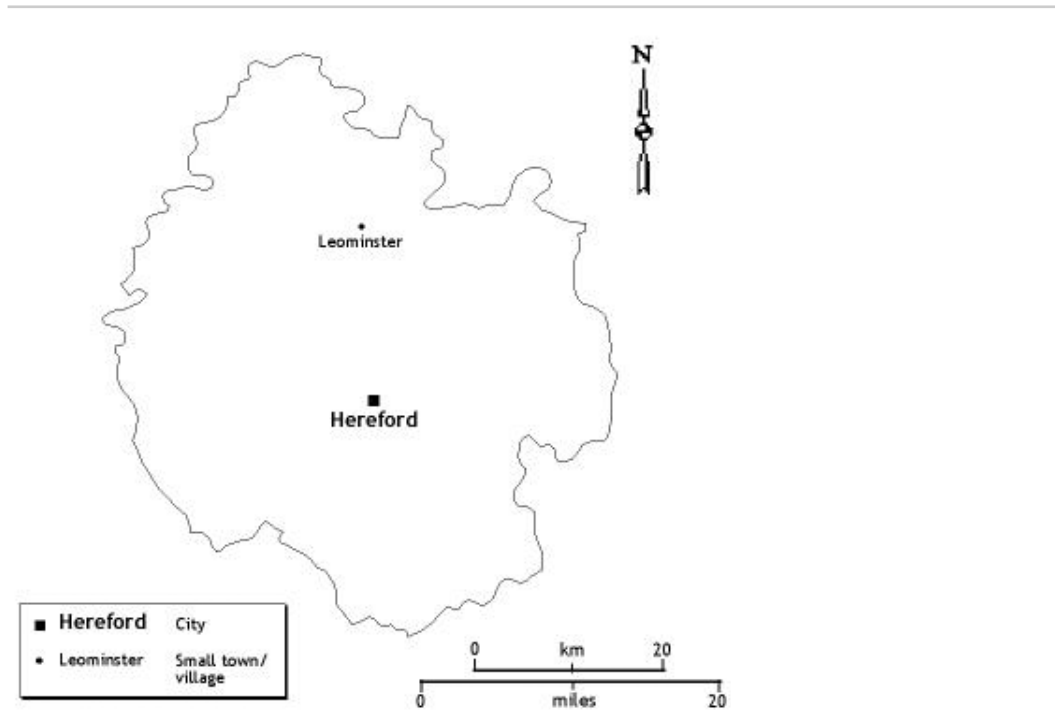
Map 3. Fixed centres in Cumbria.



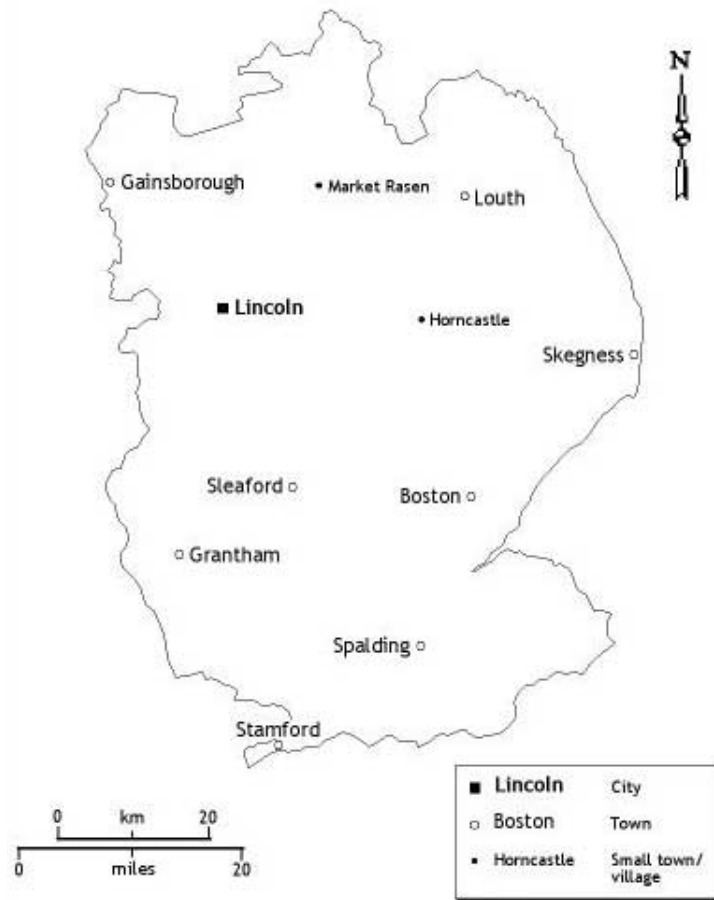
Map 4. Fixed centres in Devon.



Map 5. Fixed centres in Herefordshire.



**Map 6. Fixed centres in Lincolnshire.**



**Map 7. Fixed centres in Northumberland.**



Learners were asked why they had chosen the particular course and venue. Over a third of learners (38 per cent) chose the provision because it was local or convenient including being available at work or located at their child's school. Word of mouth, i.e. recommendation by a friend, family member or referral by a third party such as a social worker, was the second major way of attracting new learners (33 per cent). Only 9 per cent of learners said that they'd attended as a result of seeing an advert and only one learner said that they had deliberately chosen provision outside of their village to avoid being recognised. Various other reasons for choosing a particular course were given. These are shown in table 5.11.

As the table shows, a minority of learners had found, or thought they would find, college too intimidating.

*'You couldn't pay me enough to go to a maths course at college.'*

*'First I went to the college. I hated it. It was just like being back at school. We were in a class and there were the clever ones and then me right at the bottom.'*

*'You get more interaction with the tutor here. At the interview, at the other place, I was just put in front of a computer.'*

**Table 5.11. Reasons given for choosing provision**

Reason	Number of learners (%)
Local/convenient/at work	81 (38%)
Referred/recommended	70 (33%)
Saw advert	19 (9%)
Small/friendly/know others/knew tutor/did other course	16 (7%)
Did not want to go to college/did not like other provision attended	12 (6%)
Learning with the children	10 (5%)
No choice	9 (4%)
Has crèche	3 (1%)
Other provision closed	3 (1%)
Not in own town/village	1 (0.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>214 (100%)</b>

## 5.5 Learners' views on tutors and provision

There was a high level of satisfaction amongst learners with the course they attended as well as with the tutor and support staff: of those who had been attending long enough to form an opinion, none said that they disliked the course or the tutor. However, it should be noted that only those who were currently in the class and not those who had stopped attending were interviewed. Had learners who had discontinued classes been interviewed responses may have differed. Learners praised the teaching ability, patience and understanding of their tutor. The relationship between tutor and learner was important. Learners commented that tutors were not like their teachers had been at school and that they treated them as adults and equals.

*'Explains it well, doesn't leave you behind.'*



*'Not like school, everyone is equal, you don't feel stupid.'*

*'Yes, I had problems at school and didn't get any help. Teachers only helped the clever ones. This is different, you get lots of help.'*

*'They've got time for you.'*

*'Absolutely brilliant! They believe in you.'*

*'They make it fun. I used to hate maths at school. I was made to feel stupid if I didn't understand.'*

*'We have a laugh. If you enjoy it you learn more.'* *'Very supportive.'*

Some learners had been with the same tutor or volunteer for many years and looked upon them as a friend as well as a tutor. There were a few examples of a tutor moving or changing their teaching timetable and learners moving with them. There were also examples of tutors going beyond the classroom for their learners, literally, by collecting and returning learners home so that they could attend provision or visiting them prior to enrolment, giving the learner the confidence to attend.

*'Always there to listen, like friends not tutors...'*

It should be born in mind here that learners who feel they have been let down by the educational system, and therefore their teachers, in the past will perhaps have a rather biased view of someone who, perhaps for the first time in their life, believes in their ability to learn and treats them as an equal rather than making them 'feel stupid'.

One of the hardest things learners reported was actually mustering up the courage to attend provision for the first time. However, once there, learners were able to identify and empathise with others and found it reassuring to discover that they were not the only ones with literacy and numeracy difficulties. Learners were also grateful to find people, i.e. tutors and volunteers, willing to take the time to help them progress.

*'The hardest part is coming through the door in the first place. Once you get here it's fine, you realise everyone's the same and that other people have similar difficulties.'*

*'We all feel the same way. We've all had difficulties with learning in the past, have felt embarrassed. We're all coming because we want to help our children or for other reasons and we really want to learn. Everyone is lacking in confidence.'*

*'[It's] nice to know there are people out there who are willing to share their knowledge with you.'*

## 5.6 Key points

- Literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners come from a wide range of backgrounds and have a variety of reasons for attending provision.

- Learners are often aware of their lack of basic skills and the need to improve but are sometimes only motivated to address their need when there is a change in their circumstances, personal or professional.
- Many basic skills learners interviewed were initially very apprehensive at returning to education, especially where delivery took place in a traditional educational institute. Fear was frequently linked to bad experiences at school.
- Often the initial motivations for literacy and numeracy learners were to be able to help their children, because they did not do well at school or because they were referred or encouraged by someone else. However, later in their course a significant proportion hope to gain a qualification or improve their employment prospects as a result of attending their course; once on a course many ESOL learners were also motivated by a desire to improve their job prospects in this country.
- Despite the fact that, in rural areas, the ethnic minority population is small it is hugely diverse and growing; there is a need for an increase in ESOL provision.
- A significant proportion of the ESOL learners interviewed in this study had been in the country for five years or more.
- Many ESOL learners are not fully utilising their skills and qualifications in this country.
- The majority of learners prefer to access provision locally.
- The relationship between the learner and the tutor is key.

## 6. Views of practitioners and policy makers

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Unless otherwise indicated, percentages quoted below are based on the 103 questionnaire returns. Information from interviews is used where appropriate to support the findings from the questionnaires. Quotations followed by (P) indicate comments by policy makers and those followed by (T) indicate comments made by tutors/practitioners.

### 6.1 Factors for successful provision

In the six rural study areas accessibility and flexibility of provision are crucial for successful delivery. Provision needs to be at a time and location convenient to the learner and this can change from week to week depending on shift and seasonal work. Accessibility, including providing learning in the workplace, was cited as a key factor by 49 (48 per cent) of the 103 respondents and flexibility by 37 (36 per cent). There is also a need to make learning relevant to the individual and/or the importance of being able to offer individual support; these were mentioned by 34 respondents (33 per cent).

Examples of comments regarding these factors:

*'Rural provision is carefully thought out to make allowance for busy times on the farms.....i.e. lambing season - very few farmers will wish to attend training events or to sit exams etc. at that time.'* (P)

*'Community based provision not only means that the transport problem is resolved but also means that provision can be variable based on the particular needs of that community...'* (T)

*'To offer provision at a local venue; make it an enjoyable experience; relate it to real situations such as supporting children with schoolwork.'* (T)

*'...courses to suit individual personal and work needs'* (T)

*'The fact that the centre is used for many community activities therefore it is part of people's lives.'* (T)

Tutors were also identified as a key factor for successful provision: this was mentioned by 44 respondents (43 per cent). There was a mix of responses with some mentioning the importance of qualified or experienced tutors and others reporting specific attributes of tutors, including friendliness, and the ability to empathise with the learner.

*'Motivated, well qualified **Skills for Life** teachers who can enthuse learners and customise/contextualise materials for learners.'* (P)

*'...teaching abilities of the tutors coupled with their own personal qualities, i.e. empathy, understanding of learner's needs, own organisational abilities.'* (T)

Partnership working was also mentioned by a number of respondents. This is discussed in detail in section 6.3.

## 6.2 Barriers, gaps and funding issues

Well documented issues of access, cost, transportation, childcare and the fear of learners becoming 'visible' in small communities are real concerns for many wishing to access provision in rural areas. Travel issues also affect the delivery of provision, as does the challenge of finding sufficient numbers to make courses viable. Other barriers cited included low aspirations, which the 'Aim Higher' campaign is trying to address (DfES, 2004) and little motivation to learn, the shortage of qualified tutors, lack of awareness of available provision and poor venues. Barriers do not stand alone and frequently it is a combination that results in difficulty in delivering provision.

### 6.2.1 Travel

Travel and/or transport issues were reported by 48 respondents (47 per cent). The majority of tutors interviewed flagged transport as one of the main issues for both tutors and learners. The issues included the problem of poor public transport, particularly in the evenings; potential learners not being able to afford travel costs; and travel time and costs for tutors, many of whom are part-time and hourly paid, not being covered. Several co-ordinators said they were unable to cover their whole area because it was difficult to find tutors who were willing or able to travel the distances involved. Tutors ideally needed to be living in a wide geographical area to enable full coverage but this was often not possible. Travel was also an issue for tutors accessing training.

In Cumbria, due to the distances and the topography of the county, journeys were said to be long and difficult. In west Devon several tutors and learners lived in a village seven miles from the nearest provision. They frequently spent a long time waiting for the bus, which then took up to an hour to cover the seven mile journey. Tutors reported having to be out of the house for four to six hours in order to deliver a two-hour session. Many learners were on low incomes and whilst some did receive contributions towards travel costs these were described as inadequate. Comments on travel or transport issues:

*'This is a rural area with a scattered population, and many of those who might most benefit are unable to travel to centres' (T)*

*'Rural area, small groups, lots of travelling to various sites. The practicalities of taking all your resources with you e.g. laptop, books, files etc.' (T)*

*'...small villages a distance from larger centres have no provision or public transport therefore access to provision is difficult.' (T)*

Geographic barriers were also mentioned in relation to progression routes for learners, particularly by those organising or teaching on family learning courses. This is discussed further in section 6.6.

Both practitioners and policy makers also referred to travel costs as a funding issue:

*'The funding doesn't take into account the cost of travel/time/equipment and the 1:1 nature...no economy of scale.' (T)*

*'...costly to send tutors to various rural locations.'* (T)

### 6.2.2 Viable learner numbers

In rural areas of sparse population the number of learners a provider is able to draw upon is much lower than in towns and cities. This was mentioned either as a barrier to learning or a funding issue by 36 respondents (35 per cent). It was the most commonly cited funding issue.

*'The size of the population is such that there are few places where viable groups are possible; this is not helped by transport difficulties.'* (T)

*'Minimum no. of students for economical breakeven is difficult – we work to the same funding criteria as inner city provision although both settings have very diverse needs.'* (T)

*'Hard to get enough groups to be cost effective in rural locations and in small workplaces. It should be possible to fund smaller groups. Colleges will not come out to small towns because not cost-effective, but basic skills students are often those without their own transport.'* (P)

Further, the issue of learner numbers, like that of travel, can not be seen in isolation to other barriers. In three of the areas it was stated that low numbers of learners sometimes resulted in a lack of choice for the learner and in a wide range of levels within any one class, which caused difficulties for tutors in terms of meeting individual needs. One tutor described the problem as:

*'Getting sufficient numbers together in the same place at the same time wanting the same thing and working at similar levels.'* (T)

As well as identifying low numbers as a barrier, 21 respondents (20 per cent) felt that this issue meant there was a lack of provision in rural areas within their county. Regarding gaps in provision:

*'There are many because of the 'thin' population in difficult to reach areas.'* (T)

*'We need more access points to cover geographical area but our available money is much less than most LSCs.'* (P)

### 6.2.3 Fear and stigma

A large proportion of tutors and policy makers, 38/103 (37 per cent), reported that learners felt stigmatised, were frightened or lacked confidence. This was the second most commonly stated barrier to learning, with only travel and transport issues coming higher. A number of tutors felt that the issue of stigma was exacerbated in small communities where there is not the same anonymity as would be found in an urban area. However, whilst only one learner interviewed actively sought provision in a town outside her community it is impossible to say how many learners did not participate in learning because of the stigma attached and the fear of becoming 'visible' in their community.

*'Everyone knows everyone, stigma attached to **Skills for Life** learning'* (T)

*'...the people in need often not perceiving that they have a need, those that do have a need afraid of admitting it.'* (P)

*'In an area of sparse population there is an increased problem of stigma...'* (T)

*'...knowledge of each other in small communities - often people prefer to have their tuition where they are not known.'* (T)

Fear or lack of confidence was often thought to be a result of bad experiences at school, 12 respondents (12 per cent), specifically mentioned this.

*'Bad school experiences, having developed coping strategies, travel, childcare, being in school grounds, it needs others to say its ok.'* (T)

*'Fear of it being too much like school, boring, pointless.'* (T)

*'Many have had terrible experiences at school....takes a lot of courage.'* (T)

Some tutors felt that 'basic skills' was a label that led to increased stigma and were using alternatives such as '**Skills for Life**', 'Move On', and 'Get On'. They also felt that the high profile of the **Skills for Life** campaign and its advertising, for example the Gremlins campaign, had motivated some learners to come forward and had gone some way to de-stigmatising the issue of seeking help for literacy and numeracy.

#### 6.2.4 Attitudes and motivation

27 respondents (26 per cent) felt that lack of motivation was a barrier in their area. Reasons given for lack of motivation included the limited progression and employment opportunities in rural areas, leading to low aspirations and the belief that there is no value in up-skilling, or that improving literacy or numeracy skills is low down on a person's list of priorities. Furthermore, some potential learners have enjoyed successful careers or have led a full life in spite of low literacy or numeracy skills either by developing coping strategies or by choosing a lifestyle that does not require these skills.

*'Low expectations; the belief that you don't need qualifications for manual work.'* (T)

*'Outlying areas very sparsely inhabited and still very traditional thinking about learning. It is still very easy to work on the land without literacy and numeracy skills.'* (T)

*'They don't see any benefit in changing how they currently get through life'* (T)

*'Due to the high level of employment in the area there is little incentive for those with low skills to improve them. Often they already have a job they can cope with...Extra qualifications are not required in the view of the learner'* (T)

*'High employment rates, particularly in manual work in the area means there is little perceived need for literacy or numeracy skills.'* (T)

*'Need acknowledged but low down on priorities.'* (T)

*'In the big wide world they just don't need it they have managed fine without it...'*

*'People manage their lack of reading, cover it up.'*

Several tutors felt that people living in some rural communities are reluctant to embark on courses held outside their community. Others felt that traditional values and attitudes in some rural communities led to non-participation.

*'...communities tend to be insular. This results in some communities being reluctant to try courses that are not situated in their localities and with known tutors. Additionally newcomers...may experience the same sense of exclusion.'*

*'...very independent and resistant to intrusion, particularly the men. They have survived for years without education so why do they need it? This attitude gets passed down to children.'*

*'Still not seen as a good thing for women to get educated...'*

Gender issues were also cited. In Herefordshire one co-ordinator felt that women were more likely to be supportive of their husband or partner in trying to address a basic skills need than a man would be of his wife. In Northumberland a tutor commented that women are more willing than men to admit they have a basic skill need.

### 6.2.5 Tutors

The lack of qualified tutors was cited as both a barrier and a gap in provision by all six areas, 27 respondents (26 per cent) identified this as an issue. It was reported as being particularly difficult to find numeracy and ESOL tutors.

Although many tutors felt that the introduction of new standards for tutors was a good idea, they also felt that this was creating further staffing issues since the introduction of the new qualifications has come at a time when all providers are increasing capacity to try to meet government targets. Thus providers have an increasing number of learners and are therefore unable to release their staff for training. Furthermore, in some areas there has been an issue of finding tutors with the qualifications and experience needed to provide the training, particularly at Level 4, thus tutors wanting to undertake the training have not been able to find a suitable course to attend.

*'It's good that basic skills is coming in line with the rest of the teaching profession'*

*'Learners deserve well qualified tutors'*

*'Demand for 'courses' is growing but lack of qualified tutors is prohibitive.' (T)*

*'Insufficient tutors/co-coordinators. Mainly part-time and difficult to keep good staff when trained. Difficult to find release time/costs for staff training.' (T)*

Again, despite the widespread support for the principle of raising standards among tutors, some reported that colleagues had left or were considering leaving the profession as a result of the new requirements. Several felt the Level 4 training was too academic and not particularly relevant. In Northumberland specialist training for those delivering **Skills for Life** in the workplace was offered under the 'Breaking down Barriers' programme. However, despite 15 tutors expressing an interest in the programme, only six enrolled and two completed the course. The introduction of the new Level 2 was also said to have reduced the number of volunteers coming forward.

*'The first stage is a lot to do for someone who is just volunteering.'* (T)

*'A barrier to recruitment.'* (T)

*'Good idea but not thought through carefully. Some people already have teaching qualifications and many years' experience; having to go on yet more training will put some off.'* (T)

*'Doesn't cover much on teaching strategies, practical help not good.'* (T)

*'It will exclude some good volunteers who might not be able to do the level 2 training.'* (T)

#### **6.2.6 Lack of awareness of available provision**

Both tutors and policy makers reported a lack of awareness regarding the provision on offer despite increased publicity campaigns, both locally and nationally. Concerns were also raised over a general lack of awareness of what basic skills provision actually encompasses.

*'The right information is not always there for the public – misunderstandings about what basic skills provision is (i.e. it is not just for entry level)'* (P)

This issue was mentioned by 21 respondents (20 per cent) and is discussed further in section 6.3.2.

#### **6.2.7 Other funding issues**

As indicated in section 6.2.2, learner numbers was by far the most commonly reported funding issue. The fact that tutor travel costs are not covered was also a key issue, mentioned by 14 (14 per cent) respondents. Again, this has been discussed previously, in section 6.2.1. Learner numbers and travel seemed to be the two main problems for rural delivery, with many feeling that extra funding should be allocated to take account of this.

*'...difficult to establish a broad base of provision to engage learners. No consideration for the added expenses and issues of rural provision – transport, low learner numbers.'* (T)

*'Area costs uplift should be applied to rural areas.'* (P)

*There were several other funding issues mentioned, some of them very closely linked to each other. For example, 9 respondents expressed concerns about the target driven nature of funding and several of these felt the emphasis on meeting targets has led to a lack of funding available for learners working at Entry Level 2 or below.*

*'LSC seem to drive provision in accordance with the government agenda without any thought for growing the entry level students to a stage where they would be able to move on to level 1 and 2.'* (T)

*'Funding for lower levels...harder to obtain as government targets dictate national qualifications. It would be advantageous to both providers and learners if funding were more flexible.'* (T)

*'Statutory provision would be good – LSC funding too difficult, not of enough value and too output driven to be of practical benefit to us.'* (T).



This last comment links to some of the other funding issues highlighted: the complexity of the funding system (ten respondents), the lack of core funding available, particularly for community-based provision (six respondents), and the short-term nature of much of the funding (six respondents).

*'No core funding to continue with successful work – only money for new projects – you can't keep inventing projects.'* (T)

*'Need a full-time person to work out funding arrangements.'* (T)

*'Lack of consistent funding. Too many hoops to jump through...'* (T)

*'The LSC fund an ever-decreasing number of providers.'*

*'Everything is geared to college and training providers. Community learning struggles to find funding.'* (T)

### 6.3 Strategies being used to overcome barriers

Partnership working was identified either as an important aspect of successful provision or as a strategy being used to overcome barriers. Another strategy being used is to raise awareness of local provision, either through increased publicity, the use of development work in local communities or the workplace, or by offering short taster sessions. Other strategies frequently mentioned were closely linked to the factors identified as either barriers or success factors. For example, the recruitment or training of tutors, offering support for childcare or travel costs, outreach work and being flexible in terms of timing or student numbers or in terms of the courses on offer. In the latter case this included adapting learning programmes to individual needs or embedding literacy, numeracy or ESOL into other courses. Table 6.1 below shows the number of respondents who identified these as strategies being used.

**Table 6.1. Strategies being used to overcome barriers to learning**

Strategy	Number of respondents (%)
Raising awareness through:	
• Increased publicity	24 (23%)
• Development work	16 (16%)
• Offering tasters	5 (5%)
Being more flexible (e.g. in terms of timing, student numbers, type of courses on offer ...)	33 (32%)
Partnership working	29 (28%)
Increasing outreach, including in the workplace.	
In some cases, via use of mobile training units.	24 (23%)
Recruiting and/or training tutors	24 (23%)
Offering financial support for transport and childcare or providing childcare on-site	15 (15%)

### 6.3.1 Partnerships

40 (39 per cent) of policy makers and tutors identified partnership working either as an important aspect of successful provision or as a strategy being used to overcome barriers. Many providers were working closely with employers, ULRs, IAG providers, libraries, schools, health and social services, Jobcentre Plus, various community groups and other providers.

*'Close working with learning partnership groups to ensure continuity and blanket cover.'* (P)

*'A co-ordinated approach from all providers rather than everyone looking for the same business.'* (T)

*'Information, advice and guidance services to be embedded into all post-19 LSC funded provision'* (P)

*'Providing a range of provision in partnership with paid/voluntary sector...'* (T)

*'We offer a wide range of sign-posting working with many other partnership agencies (e.g. careers, job service, etc).'* (T)

In addition, and as discussed in chapter 4, providers within all areas were working together to provide staff training and each county had one or more cross-provider group that met to discuss developments and to share good practice. However, a lack of partnership working and competition for the same learners was also identified by several providers as an issue.

*'The problem of competition for few learners means that centres are under-funded...'* (T)

*'Lots of money/time has to be expended to develop business often with little/no return; often other providers simultaneously doing the same!'* (T)

Two providers in one community made an informal agreement not to run the same classes, especially in relation to ESOL, to avoid competing for the same small pool of learners. However, one of the providers ignored this agreement and offered ESOL without consulting the other provider, which already had an ESOL course running. In the East of Lincolnshire one tutor commented on the rise in the number of private providers in the area having seen **Skills for Life** as a way of 'making some money.' In Cornwall, despite good working partnerships between the key organisations and efforts at strategic level to prevent competition for the same learners, evidence from tutors indicated that competition did exist. One provider felt that there were enough learners for everyone and that providers should work in partnership with others and share good practice rather than indulge in a 'bun fight' for learners. Several providers reported competition for learners in Northumberland and there was said to be little in the way of partnership working between the main providers. There was particular tension in Northumberland with regards to an agency from outside the area offering learners financial payments to take the national tests, an offer that providers inside the area were unable to match and which local providers felt was unethical.

### 6.3.2 Raising awareness of available provision

As mentioned above, various methods were employed to raise awareness concerning the level and nature of provision on offer. Although some providers were using increased advertising,

many felt that word-of-mouth was more effective. In some cases capacity building funds were used to employ development workers who promoted provision to both learners and other agencies in the community.

*'Closer ties to local community through visits to inform. Try to build ESOL groups by word-of-mouth throughout communities. (T)*

*'Get out into the community – talk to groups – offer bite size courses as tasters, as much publicity as possible, including local press and radio and word of mouth.' (T)*

Some co-ordinators or development workers were using the National Tests to promote their provision.

*'Altering advertising to reflect positive outcome of National Tests.' (T)*

## **6.4 Issues specific to workplace learning**

### **6.4.1 Barriers**

As discussed in previous sections, a large number of providers are trying to develop provision in the workplace. However, progress is reported to be slow and time consuming and, in some cases, much of the preparatory work is poorly funded or not funded at all. Many employers were said to be reluctant to engage in educating employees, particularly in literacy, numeracy or ESOL, which are not seen as a priority. Training becomes even less of a priority when the company is busy. Rural areas tend to have a high proportion of smaller businesses and this causes further problems when trying to develop workplace learning. Companies may not have enough learners to make courses viable and it may be increasingly difficult to justify the release of employees for training.

*'...difficult to educate employers to see the need to improve their staff's literacy, numeracy and language skills.' (T)*

*'Retention drops as companies get busy e.g. Christmas in food industry.' (T)*

*'Workplace basic skills under development. Building links with employers challenging due to high percentage of SMEs' (P)*

*'Local employers have not fully recognised the value of the national test....they do not ask for the qualification when they advertise job basic skills. Learners are not motivated to work towards the national test because they don't see the immediate value to their working lives.' (T)*

A further barrier identified was shift work, with learners being able to attend one week but not the next.



**Picture 16 - Learners at work**

#### 6.4.2 Strategies being used to overcome these barriers

Providers recognise the need for greater flexibility of delivery both in terms of timing to fit around shift patterns and in terms of tailoring provision to both the employer's and the learners' needs. Several providers are offering employers courses such as Health and Safety, ICT, report writing and Food Hygiene and subsequently embedding basic skills into this provision. For example, in an Indian Takeaway in Exeter, a number of employees were being taught Food Hygiene with ESOL embedded. A similar project has been running in the food industry in Lincolnshire.

Offering ICT in the workplace was seen by providers as an effective 'hook' for both employers and employees. Employers see ICT training as having greater relevance to the workplace and learners are more likely to come forward for an ICT course. Many learners do not want to admit to having literacy or numeracy needs but ask for ICT assistance. Once learners have been attending a course for several weeks they gain confidence and become more positive about learning. It is at this stage that literacy and numeracy can be introduced. Other providers offer tasters in a wide variety of subjects to engage learner interest before offering literacy and numeracy provision.

As mentioned in chapter 4, some providers are working in partnership with ULRs to establish provision, for example, in Northumberland Business Link work closely with the TUC and act as a conduit for private providers in the area. Here they have successfully delivered all types of workplace learning, including basic skills, and are using a provider network as a forum to meet and discuss relevant issues.

In Lincolnshire, Devon and Cornwall innovative methods of raising awareness of basic skills issues in the workplace have been found in the form of plays. The plays, performed by two separate companies, are delivered in a variety of venues including shops floors. 'No Problem' is performed and written by two local women originally from Devon and Cornwall and is funded by Plymouth FE College. The play was performed at the basic skills agency national conference where it was well received and is now set to go national. 'Green Paint' is performed around the East Midlands by professional actors and aims to raise awareness of all **Skills for Life** issues in the workplace. This play, sponsored by the LSC, is interactive in nature requiring audience participation.

## 6.5 Issues specific to ESOL provision

According to practitioners, the demand for ESOL in most of the study areas has increased rapidly over the past 12–18 months. This has largely been attributed to the increasing numbers of migrant workers in rural areas. However, some believe it may also be partly due to the government's refugee dispersal programme, which has led to the settlement of refugees in new areas. Also, some who have been established in England for a number of years are now accessing provision for the first time.

Lincolnshire has a particular challenge in meeting the growing ESOL need due to the large number of migrant works in the area. The East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA), (2004), estimates that there are between 30 and 40 different languages other than English predominantly in the south the county. Further, the report estimates that there are 8,000 Portuguese speakers in the Boston area alone. Thus, all four FE colleges in Lincolnshire are engaged in trying to meet the demand for ESOL. Many of the migrant workers are employed in the food sector and one college is delivering food hygiene courses to the Portuguese.

Of the 103 who returned questionnaires, 28 reported having no experience of ESOL provision and did not respond to questions specifically about ESOL. The figures below are therefore based on 75 questionnaires.

### 6.5.1 Barriers

Despite the increase in demand for ESOL, in some areas there are few ESOL learners in any one place and this can result in provision not being offered because it is not viable to run. This was identified as the main barrier for ESOL provision and was mentioned 28 of the 75 respondents (37 per cent). In some cases this led to ESOL learners being placed in literacy classes, which was not thought to be effective. In fact, one tutor identified this as a barrier to effective learning and 17 (23 per cent) felt that specialist ESOL tutors were key factors for successful provision. Furthermore, as was the case for literacy and numeracy, small numbers of learners can also result in groups comprising a wide range of levels, which can create challenges for ESOL learners and tutors, especially since a significant part of ESOL learning consists of speaking and listening.

The transient nature of some ESOL learners and the fact that many work shifts, unsociable or long hours, were also reported as being barriers to effective provision (13 per cent of respondents), as was the lack of qualified ESOL tutors (15 per cent of respondents). Furthermore, 15 respondents (20 per cent) reported ESOL as a particular gap in their provision. Finally, 11 respondents felt that lack of awareness regarding available provision was preventing learners from coming forward. This was attributed to the isolation of potential learners and the lack of networks through which they might find out about provision.

Comments regarding barriers for ESOL provision:

*'Migrant workers often stay weeks rather than months. Scattered population.'* (T)

*'No established communities for foreign language speakers, through which learners can hear about ESOL provision.'* (T)

*'Immigrant workers work long hours therefore time to learn is difficult.'* (P)

*'We have a large number of asylum seekers in Lincoln and provision is very stretched. Shortage of ESOL experts' (T)*

*'Specialist ESOL tutors are vital. ESOL teaching requires a different approach from literacy and numeracy teaching.' (T)*

*'Small number of students so students isolated, if there is a group great diversity of levels.' (T)*

*'Teaching ESOL learners and native English speakers in the same class is a big barrier to success.' (T)*

### **6.5.2 Strategies being used to overcome these barriers**

Several strategies are being used to overcome the above barriers including allowing learners the option of attending classes at different times each week to enable them to fit learning around shift patterns or taking the learning to the place of work.

*'Classes spread over a week both am and pm to meet the learners needs as many work in restaurants and require a choice of attendance.' (T)*

In Lincolnshire one provider is trying to address the issue of the lack of specialist tutors by training ESOL learners to become tutors. Here ESOL demand, especially from Portuguese workers, is high and is difficult to meet by conventional means. One learner has already progressed from learner to tutor. In her mid twenties, the learner came from Lisbon, Portugal in April 2003 with her husband, who also attended ESOL provision. She has a degree in biotechnology but was unable to find work in Portugal. Whilst this learner is happy assisting and teaching for now she hopes to find employment locally using her original qualifications, especially now that she has a good standard of English. Her desire to move on to employment more suited to her qualifications highlights a potential problem that could be faced by the provider with this innovative scheme.

## **6.6 Issues specific to family learning**

### **6.6.1 Barriers**

Travel was not a significant issue for the majority of family learners interviewed since most lived locally and had to come to the school daily to drop off and collect their children. However, travel time and costs remained a significant issue for tutors and co-ordinators. One co-ordinator stated that she sometimes identifies a school that would like to participate in a FLLN programme but is then unable to find a tutor living close enough to make it feasible. Travel was also mentioned as a barrier in terms of progression routes for those accessing family learning courses. In most villages there is no alternative provision, so learners have to travel to the nearest college or adult education centre if they wish to progress onto further courses. Tutors reported that if learners do not have their own transport then they are very unlikely to be able to attend as public transport is limited or non-existent.

*'V. limited due to geographic limits. There are colleges in main towns but public transport is inadequate.' (T)*

*'Varied – robust in places, fragmented in others...in more rural areas travel etc. is a major problem.'*

A lack of childcare in rural areas was also mentioned as an issue by those involved in providing family learning. Whilst co-ordinators will cover childcare costs this does not resolve the issue if there are no childcare facilities available locally.

*'Childcare is the biggest problem – many of the villages have no provision at all, not even any childminders.'* (T)

*'Other children to look after and no childcare.'* (T)

The other main barriers reported by those providing family learning courses in rural settings were the lack of space or suitable premises, learner numbers and the problem of trying to reach the 'right' learners. Rural schools are often small and may not have the space available to host family learning sessions. This was said to be a particular issue in Cornwall, where they have the highest number of schools with fewer than 50 pupils in the country. Furthermore, in small schools there are, by definition, a limited number of parents making it difficult to find sufficient learners for courses to be viable. A headmaster in Devon found they often had to wait until new parents came through the system before a course could be repeated. Having said this, some of the family learning co-ordinators and tutors interviewed reported that their courses are very popular and the problem has not been getting sufficient numbers but having to turn parents away. Some said that attracting the right sort of learners, i.e. those with a basic skills need, has also been an issue.

There were conflicting opinions regarding the issue of stigma and embarrassment in family learning. One co-ordinator felt that stigma was not a major issue as learners were able to hide their own need under the banner of wanting to find out what the children are doing at school so that they can help them. On the other hand, in another area it was flagged as a significant issue, especially in small communities where everyone knows everyone else. The co-ordinator there commented, 'I know there are three or four families that would benefit but may not come.'

All but one of the learners on the FLLN courses visited was female. Whilst the take up by grandparents was reported to be good in some places, few fathers attend. By their very nature, family learning courses exclude anyone who is working within school hours and this is more likely to be the father.

#### **6.6.2 Strategies being used to overcome these barriers**

In several of the counties, a careers advisor, or tutor from the local college or adult education centre, are asked to come and address a class before the end of their course regarding options for progression. In others they simply offer advice and guidance on suitable opportunities. Lincolnshire is trying to arrange follow-on courses in the schools. Here several learners were interviewed who had recently completed a family numeracy course in the school and were now attending a follow-on numeracy course. This strategy appeared to be working well but is dependant on the availability of space at a school and the support of the head teacher. In Herefordshire the college 'Skillsmobile' often parks outside the village school and the schools have been very helpful in advertising this provision. Several learners who were on family learning courses were accessing provision on the Skillsmobile at the time of our visit.

## 6.7 Barriers and motivation: differences between literacy and numeracy

A number of tutors felt that there are no differences between numeracy and literacy in terms of barriers to learning. Among those who did identify a difference, issues of motivation (16 tutors) and stigma/acceptability (13 tutors) were the main factors identified. Most tutors who identified a difference believe that people feel it is more socially acceptable to admit poor numeracy skills than poor literacy skills, although two tutors did say the opposite. This could lead to the assumption that greater numbers would come forward to access numeracy provision. However, the reality seems to be the opposite and perhaps the fact that it is socially acceptable means that people feel it is not something they should or need to address. Reasons for motivation to learn, or lack of it, were linked to various factors such as past experience and perceived relevance. There were also some indications that some tutors only see the relevance of numeracy up to a certain point.

Comments on acceptability, demand for courses and motivation:

*'The learner whose numeracy is cause for concern may well adopt a far more open posture when expressing their wish to brush up on their skills. The learner with problems with their literacy may on the other hand be more guarded in their approaches to the centre veiling their need behind the ulterior motive, such motives can be expressed as a wish to learn how to use a computer' (T)*

*'Observation only: numeracy uptake is less than half of literacy' (T)*

*'Numeracy is seen as a difficult subject and personal barriers because of past experience seem to be greater than those perceived by those who study literacy.' (T)*

*'Many not so bothered with numeracy, either because they feel it is not so important to them, or they are frightened to try. Fear of failure is a big barrier, so is the feeling that they simply do not need numeracy to find work' (T)*

*'Anything beyond basic numeracy is often seen as irrelevant.' (T)*

Comments indicating tutors' perceptions of relevance:

*'Easier to bring students up to level where they can cope with everyday demands in numeracy.' (T)*

*'Literacy is more pertinent to adults in their everyday lives.' (T)*

*'I wonder if succeeding in numeracy is more difficult because it is not a day to day issue that has to be faced whereas literacy and language are used at all times to communicate.' (T)*

*'Qualifications (in maths) often go beyond life/work use.' (T)*

*'Literacy is a greater need therefore this is what we concentrate on delivering.' (T)*



## 6.8 Key Points

- The barriers faced in delivering effective provision are numerous. Travel, learner numbers and fear or stigma were the three most common barriers identified. Numerous strategies are being used to overcome these barriers.
- Travel costs and the lack of public transport has an impact on the accessibility of provision to learners and also affects the delivery of provision, since tutors' travel costs are not covered by the funding.
- In sparsely populated areas it can be difficult to get a sufficient number of learners in one place to allow courses to run; community-based provision is essential in order for learning to be accessible to those who do not have or cannot afford transport, however, this is often not economically viable.
- Low aspirations linked to limited training and employment opportunities may be a key barrier to learning in rural areas.
- Family learning overcomes some of the barriers. However, the client group is limited and the barriers remain an issue for progression.
- Successful provision needs to be flexible, accessible and needs led.
- Many feel that potential learners are not aware of the provision available in their area. In addition to publicity, a variety of strategies such as development work or taster courses are needed in order to raise the awareness of available provision to those in need.
- There is a lack of suitably qualified tutors, especially in numeracy and ESOL, but training opportunities in rural areas are limited.
- Partnership working is important especially if competition for learners is to be avoided.
- Employers need to see the benefits that improving the basic skills of the workforce will have for their company.
- Some providers are struggling with the lack of core funding. Other funding issues include the short-term nature of some funding streams, the target-driven nature of LSC funding and the lack of flexibility in the funding.

## 7. Discussion and recommendations

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### 7.1 Nature of provision

Adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision in all six study areas, in both the formal and voluntary sectors, was found to be extensive, complex and continually changing. A huge variety of courses were on offer in a wide variety of community, educational and workplace settings, including in mobile classrooms. Some courses were short-term, ranging from two-hour tasters to courses lasting a number of weeks; others were long-established courses where learners had been attending for a number of years. Family literacy and numeracy courses were found to be widespread. All providers have seen an increase in demand for ESOL provision and are trying to meet this demand. The increase was said to be largely, but not exclusively, due to the growing number of migrant workers in rural areas. Effective partnerships, Continuing Professional Development centres and networks had been, or were being, established to increase awareness and share information, widen access to learning and increase the availability of tutor training.

All providers are trying to expand their provision in order to meet government targets but many are finding it challenging for a number of reasons. 'Getting the learners in' was found to be a key issue for many, i.e. having to constantly think of ways to attract new learners. At the same time providers have to contend with a shortage of qualified tutors, a lack of funding and numerous practical barriers.

### 7.2 Practical barriers to learning

Those delivering basic skills in rural areas face many of the same issues as those in urban areas but certain factors exacerbate these challenges. Whilst 'rurality' was found to be a consideration for those forming and implementing policy in each study area, it was also an integral part of their delivery. Rurality was taken as a given obstacle that they were constantly trying to overcome. In line with the findings of others, the main challenges were viable numbers, transport, access, working patterns and childcare. Competition for learners was also found to be a growing problem due to the increased profile of basic skills which has caused an increase in the availability of funding and, consequently, a growing number of providers.

The inflexibility and target-driven nature of LSC funding was highlighted by many as an issue in rural areas. Rural outreach was said to be difficult to maintain without the guarantee of a minimum number of learners. Many providers mentioned that a lack of core-funding resulted in a great deal of time and resources being expended in seeking alternative funding, particularly since much of the funding is short-term in nature. The short-term nature of the funding also made it difficult for providers to plan for the future and, in some cases, to provide a consistent, quality service to the learner. The findings of this report are in line with those of others. For example, in March this year (2004) the Times Educational Supplement (TES) FE Focus reported that colleges were turning away adult learners in need of basic skill assistance due to a lack and inflexibility of funding and in some cases they had been forced to axe the kind of basic skills courses which attract reluctant adult learners. The principal of Bishop Auckland College in County Durham, a largely rural area, reported having to reduce the number of basic skills courses, 'leaving adults with nowhere to go'. She pointed out that

many with basic skills needs are poor, do not have a car and are unable to access provision elsewhere. She also stated that, 'For many, the local college is the only provider. There is a strangulation process brought on by the funding rules. We need more trust.' (TES, 26 March, 2004: 1). Many examples were found of short-term projects in local communities that were in danger of closing due to a lack of core funding. This echoes the calls of Clarke et al., (2002) for sustained funding streams.

Two further key issues in rural areas which could be addressed by more flexible funding are travel and learner numbers. Both have been flagged up as key issues in other rural adult learning studies (Clarke et al., 2002; Lowerson and Thomson, 1994; Tulett, 2001). The issue of travel has several facets. The results of this study show that, on the whole, learners are not travelling long distances to access provision. A proportion of learners do not have private transport and public transport is often non-existent, particularly in the evenings. Therefore available provision in the nearest town may be inaccessible. On the other hand, provision in small villages may fail to attract sufficient learners to make it economically viable. In areas of sparse population further issues associated with low numbers of learners were also encountered, including an inevitable lack of choice in the range of courses available, both in terms of levels and timings. Insufficient numbers made meeting the needs of the individual challenging for the tutors and often resulted in gaps in provision, especially for ESOL. This has also been highlighted as an issue in other areas (CRG Consulting, 2002). The use of mobile classrooms in rural communities is one strategy being used to overcome the barriers of travel and low numbers and has also proved invaluable in other parts of the country (Payne, 2000). Their flexibility enables providers to respond to demand and negates the need for learners to travel to a designated centre.

Family learning also appears to be an effective way of resolving some of the practical barriers to learning. As most communities have a primary school provision can be usually be offered locally. Furthermore, although the challenge of finding sufficient numbers may be encountered if the school is very small, in the majority of the study areas FLLN was reported to be very popular, particularly among mothers, with one co-ordinator reporting having to turn learners away because courses were over-subscribed. However, whilst FLLN seems to be an effective way of attracting sufficient numbers, it does have some disadvantages. First, because of its nature, it is not suitable for parents who work during school hours and, since more women than men are the primary carer staying at home to look after the children, FLLN does little to reach fathers. Second, it does not always attract those with the greatest need. However, the popularity of family learning could be capitalised on. The primary motivator for many learners, even those not on an FLLN course, was to enable them to help their children with school work. In fact, it was the most common reason for attending literacy or numeracy provision. One way of attracting more working parents may be to offer literacy and numeracy classes in the evening that are linked to the school curriculum.

This said, offering provision in community venues across a wide geographical area creates travel problems for tutors. Tutors are obliged to cover their own travel time and expenses and in many rural areas, due to the nature of the roads, even short journeys can be extremely time-consuming. This was commented upon in all areas, but particularly in Cumbria where the topography has a significant impact on travel times. Many of those interviewed would like to see extra funding that takes into account the difficulties of geographical context. Distances and travel times in rural areas can also create problems for tutors wishing to access training and networking opportunities and can also lead to feelings of isolation.

The above links to another challenge faced by providers. All of the study areas are experiencing a great deal of difficulty in employing sufficient numbers of qualified tutors, particularly for numeracy and ESOL. This issue is echoed across the whole country, as found in the TES/National Institute of Adult Continuing Education survey (2004). The survey found that, 'About three quarters of senior managers say there is a significant shortage of suitably trained and qualified staff at almost all levels.' Shortages were most severe for numeracy. They also reported reliance by colleges on, 'an army of under-qualified, hourly-paid and part-time tutors' (TES FE Focus, 14 May, 2004: 1 & 4). In the case study areas the shortage of training opportunities is also making it difficult for providers to address this issue. Furthermore, even when courses are offered it is difficult to release basic skills tutors for training and many are expected to attend in their own time and at their own cost. CPD centres have been designed to address some of the issues surrounding tutor shortages, training and a lack of resources and support. However, it was not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of these centres at the time of writing as all were in the very early stages of development.

The lack of available childcare was another practical barrier to learning cited in the six areas. This has also been recognised by others (Countryside Agency, 2003; Dinsdale, 2002; Lowerson and Thomson, 1994: 182). Those on family learning courses were offered childcare costs but in some communities there was no childcare available and learners were therefore unable to attend. Good examples were found of providers working in partnership with others such as Sure Start to provide childcare and several of the sessions visited, for example the travellers bus in Cumbria, had a crèche attached to the provision.

Whilst not an issue specific to rural areas, meeting government targets was a key concern for a number of those interviewed. Many literacy and numeracy learners, particularly those working at lower levels, require a great deal of individual support and encouragement and this has implications for ideal class sizes, staffing and, consequently, funding. Some learners may take a long time, sometimes years, to get to the point where they contribute to government basic skills targets; others may never reach this level. Moreover, although many learners did want to see some form of accreditation for their achievements, for others this was less or not important. Whilst it is recognised that policy makers need to set targets and have proof in the form of 'hard' outcomes, it should also be recognised that 'soft' outcomes are valuable achievements for many basic skills learners and that these cannot always be quantified.

Finally, some learners said that they had been unaware that adult literacy and numeracy courses existed in their community: '*Heard about it on the radio. Never knew there were places like this before.*' This has been found by others (Brooks et al., 2001; DfES, 2003a) and may explain why some adults are not coming forward. The government has tried to address this issue through the Gremlins campaign and the introduction of a national helpline. However, only 19 of the learners interviewed in the study said they had attended provision because they had seen an advert and only four of these mentioned the 'Gremlins', either as the way they had heard about provision or as the reason they had been motivated to address their literacy or numeracy needs. Most of the providers interviewed were trying to raise awareness of their provision and, although some were doing so through increased publicity, many felt that word of mouth was a more effective way of attracting new learners, a finding supported by a number of other studies (CRG, 2002; Tribe, 2002). Co-ordinators or specially employed development or outreach workers were raising awareness by contacting job centres, social services, employers, health centres and other agencies and community groups. Some providers offered tasters or short courses as a way of encouraging reluctant

learners and this has previously been recommended as a useful strategy for attracting learners in rural communities, (Gillon et al., 2003).

### 7.3 Attitudes and motivation

Practitioners and policy makers need to understand the motivations, fears and needs of learners to ensure effective delivery of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Although non-learners were not surveyed in this study and therefore it is not possible to give the actual reasons for adults not attending provision, interviewing learners who did attend did provide some insight into possible explanations as well as information pertaining to the factors that motivate learners to attend.

The *Skills for Life* survey found very few adults felt they had a problem with reading, writing or maths, even those at the lowest literacy or numeracy levels. This may well be the case with a significant number of adults and could go some way to explaining why many are not seeking literacy or numeracy courses. However, many of the learners interviewed stated they had always been aware that they had a difficulty with literacy or numeracy but had not accessed provision for a number of reasons. Some did not have the confidence, felt that they were unable to learn, or were afraid that it would be too much like school. A number had other priorities such as work or family commitments. Others were simply too embarrassed or unaware that any such provision existed. Many of these learners had developed coping strategies to hide their lack of skills and only sought help when a change in their circumstances resulted in them seeing a reason to address their need. For example, some learners had had children and wanted to be able to read stories to them or help them with homework. Others had always relied on a partner or parent and only sought help when this support was no longer available perhaps as a result of illness. Finally, a number of learners decided to join a course because of changing requirements at work. Ward and Edwards (2002) also found that motivations were often linked to a turning point in an individual's life.

In rural areas other factors may lead to a lack of motivation to learn. In all six areas average weekly wages are lower than the average in England, between 14 per cent and 22 per cent lower, (New Earnings Survey, 2003. Office for National Statistics: Census 2001). Rural areas are also characterised by limited training and employment opportunities (Simmons, 1997: 48). Both tutors and policy makers identified this as a reason for lack of motivation in the six study areas, stating, for example, that there is '*little perceived need for literacy or numeracy skills*'. This finding is supported by other studies (GHK Consulting, 2003; Tulett, 2001).

An example of the enduring attitudes towards education in rural areas was found in an article published in the Hereford Times earlier this year. A couple from the area were charged with failing to ensure their children attended school. The father felt there was no need. Both parents had received a limited education themselves. The father left school in his early teens to work on a farm and the mother to look after her younger siblings when she was ten. The father thought that, 'When it came to education what had been good for him was good for them' (Hereford Times, 2004: 3). It seems that a certain proportion of adults do not believe that learning will be of benefit to them and this attitude can sometimes be passed down from one generation to the next. For example, potential learners for FLLN programmes, especially programmes located in deprived areas were often identified by head teachers because of a family history of difficulty in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills. These attitudes towards education and the perceived lack of benefits it will bring present a challenge to providers and policy makers alike.

This study found that the main motivations learners gave for attending literacy or numeracy provision, either initially or as a motivation for continuing, were to be able to help their children with homework, because they were referred by an outside agency or encouraged by friends or relatives, because they had not done well at school, to improve their job prospects or become more effective at their current job, to increase their confidence or to gain qualifications. These findings are also in line with others (Brooks et al., 2001; Ward and Edwards, 2002). Motivating factors for ESOL learners were found to be similar, although a significant proportion attended simply to enable them to cope better with daily life in this country and a greater proportion wanted to improve their employment prospects.

Preliminary findings from another NRDC research project regarding learner motivation '*Making numeracy teaching meaningful to adult learners*' have recently been published in the Guardian (June 8th 2004: 14). The study conducted by King's College London was carried out at three FE colleges in different parts of England to establish why adults are motivated to attend numeracy courses. They found that learners gave many different reasons but that few returned to improve their employment prospects or because they believed they had a skills gap that affected their daily lives. The most common motivation was that many had failed maths at school and they wanted to prove to themselves that they could do it, rather than for day to day living. Maths was viewed as 'signifier of intelligence.' Others were motivated by a need to be able to support their children in maths or as a way of accessing a specific qualification or course. Similar reasons were given in our study. However, although not many of the numeracy learners we interviewed said that they had initially come along because they wanted to find a new job or promotion, 25 out of the 61 (41 per cent) said that this was now what they hoped to achieve as a result of attending provision. This is compared to 22 out of 85 literacy learners (26 per cent) for this study and conflicts with the findings of the King's College London study where it is stated that, '...few of these motivations are related to perceived needs in employment...'.

Many tutors felt that the stigma attached to having literacy or numeracy needs prevented people from attending provision. Others have also found this to be the case, particularly in small rural communities where everyone knows everyone else (CRG Consulting, 2002; Tulett, 2001). Many providers have recognised this problem and feel that removing labels such as 'basic skills' has helped. A number of the learners interviewed talked about being embarrassed by their lack of literacy or numeracy skills, but only one learner said that she had deliberately chosen to attend provision outside of her own community to avoid being identified. However, as indicated above, it is impossible to tell how many others were not attending provision because of the fear of being 'discovered'.

In summary, it is clear that adults have a range of different reasons for attending literacy, numeracy or ESOL provision and that these motivations can change over time. For example, learners who originally attend because they want to be able to help their children with school work may decide they wish to gain qualifications in order to help them get a job. If people have different reasons for attending provision then they are also likely to have different needs. What is relevant to one learner may not necessarily be relevant to another. For example, a learner wishing to become more effective at his or her job is likely to have different learning needs from someone wanting to help his or her child with homework. There are also many different barriers that prevent potential learners from attending. Some have childcare or work commitments, which may change from week to week, others may not be able to attend unless provision is offered locally. In contrast, some may not wish to attend because the provision is local. Bearing all this in mind, it is clear that it is not a matter of 'one size fits all' and that offering a choice is key to attracting learners.

## 7.4 Workplace learning

Employees with low skills are one of the government's priority groups in terms of adult basic skills provision. Increasing literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision in the workplace is an area that providers in all of the study areas are trying to develop. However, all are finding this challenging for a number of reasons. Firstly, each of the six study areas has a high proportion of SMEs, which creates barriers in terms of viable learner numbers and employer costs. Secondly, many providers are finding it difficult to engage employers who may not see learning as a priority for their workforce or may simply see it as someone else's responsibility. This was also found by others to be the case (Atkin and Merchant, 2004; Brooks et al., 2001). Even employers who have a large number of foreign workers requiring a certain level of English in order to understand and comply with health and safety regulations, for example, do not necessarily see it as their responsibility to offer ESOL training for these employees. In a study carried out in South Lincolnshire many companies felt that the responsibility lay with the agencies who are recruiting the workers (Food and Drink Forum, 2004).

In the evaluation of the basic skills pathfinder extension activities, the need to make courses directly relevant to employers was discussed. They state that 'course content was particularly important for employers' and that 'using actual documentation and forms from workplaces as training exercises and, more broadly, using workplace products and processes to contextualise basic skills training was a highly successful strategy' (Barnes et al., 2003: 89). In the six study areas the use of ICT to engage learners in the workplace has also been found to be valuable. Others have embedded literacy, numeracy or ESOL into courses such as First Aid or Food Hygiene to make learning more relevant. TUC learning representatives appear to have been another successful way of engaging employers, particularly in the north, in areas that are traditionally union strongholds due to the coalmines and heavy industry. In areas that have been traditionally less unionised, such as the south west, union learning representatives and workplace learning appear, in general, to be less successful. Whilst most of these industries have now disappeared, or significantly declined, it seems that the need for new types of training in the workplace to ensure employment opportunities for those in the areas has perhaps benefited providers trying to deliver basic skills in the workplace.

## 7.5 ESOL

As mentioned in previous chapters, the demand for ESOL in these rural areas is increasing significantly, largely as a result of increasing numbers of migrant workers. However, others who have been in the country for a number of years are also accessing ESOL provision for the first time.

Several practical barriers, including many of those discussed in section 7.1, make ESOL provision in rural areas a particular challenge. The type of ESOL learner found was diverse, in line with the findings of others (DfEE, 2000; Barton and Pitt, 2003), requiring provision ideally to be available at different levels. However, this is often impossible in sparsely populated areas where there may only be a few non-English speakers in any one place and any one time. Furthermore, this, together with the lack of specialist ESOL tutors, can result in ESOL learners being taught alongside English speakers in literacy courses, which is far from ideal (DfEE, 2000; Barton and Pitt, 2003). The pilot programme by YES in Grantham to train learners to become tutors to try and increase tutor numbers is similar to one found in the USA by Barton and Pitt and may be one way of overcoming the shortage of ESOL tutors. The

ever-changing nature of the ESOL population in rural areas, coupled with the problem of shift work, causes attendance to be erratic and presents further challenges for delivery to this cohort.

## 7.6 Key points

- Learners prefer provision that is locally available.
- There is a lack of suitably qualified tutors, particularly in numeracy and ESOL.
- In all areas providers feel they are in competition with each other for the same learners; partnership working is crucial if this is to be avoided.
- Transport, access and childcare are major barriers to learning in rural areas, along with the issue of attracting a viable number of learners.
- Tutors need to have greater training opportunities and to be adequately compensated for the cost of their time and travel to rural areas.
- Word of mouth was the most effective method of promoting classes and encouraging new learners to attend.
- Learners are often aware of their lack of basic skills, they think they cannot learn or have other priorities and therefore develop coping strategies and are unlikely to seek help until such time as they see a need. This often occurs after a change in their circumstances, personal or professional. This has implications for those involved in encouraging new learners to attend provision.
- Learners' reasons for attending a course often change over time from helping their children to gaining qualifications or from gaining confidence to aiming for a new or better job.
- Despite the fact that in rural counties the resident ethnic minority population is small and diverse there is a growing need for an increase in dedicated ESOL provision.
- Family learning is popular but the client group is predominantly mothers. In some areas there is a lack of progression routes from family learning.
- Whilst further research needs to be done to establish how best to access the workplace, the use of embedded learning is one strategy which has shown some success.
- Some providers are struggling with the lack of core funding. Other funding issues include the short-term nature of some funding streams, the target-driven nature of LSC funding and the lack of flexibility in the funding.

## 7.7 Recommendations

The findings of this report have led to the following recommendations:

- A number of changes could be made to funding arrangements to facilitate the expansion of literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision in rural areas. Specifically:
  - Funding should give providers the flexibility to work with smaller groups if necessary, thereby making local, community-based provision more viable.
  - Additional funding should be made available to enable providers to pay for tutors' travel costs in rural areas.
  - Long-term core funding needs to be more widely available to enable providers to plan ahead.
- Each area should undertake a full review of local ESOL needs.
- Providers should establish a full picture of the extent of local delivery to ensure more effective partnership working and so that information, advice and guidance can be made available to all learners concerning courses on offer.
- ESOL learners also need clear advice and guidance on how best to utilise their previous qualifications and experience in this country.



- Funders should consider extending existing family literacy, language and numeracy programmes to allow a greater number of parents to participate, for example, by encouraging literacy and numeracy classes linked to the school curriculum to be offered in the evening.

### **7.8 Areas for further research**

- The impact of Continuing Professional Development Centres in rural areas.
- How rural areas are meeting the growing demand for ESOL.
- A full cost analysis of the delivery of rural basic skills provision.
- A full investigation into the size of the migrant workforce in rural counties, especially Lincolnshire, and the impact this has on the delivery of effective provision and the implication for safe working practices.
- Successful strategies being used to establish basic skills provision in workplaces.

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# Appendix A.

## Policy makers'/funders' questionnaire

---

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you consider to be the key factors for success in providing adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in your geographical area?

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2. What do you consider to be the main barriers to providing adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in your geographical area?

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3. What strategies are being used, or may be used in the future, to overcome the above barriers?

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4. What aspects (if any) of government policy regarding adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision are either difficult to implement or inapplicable to your geographical area?

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5. Are there any gaps in adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL provision in your geographical area? Please specify.

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6. What, if any, are the funding issues in your geographical area?

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7. Do you consider 'rurality' to be an important aspect of policy? (Please explain your answer)

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---

If you would like to be kept informed about our research please tick here:

*Thank you very much for your participation.*

# Appendix B.

## Coordinators' and tutors' questionnaire

---

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Job title: \_\_\_\_\_

Centre Location(s) (e.g. Branston village hall):  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you consider to be the key factors for successful adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision in your geographical area?

i) literacy and numeracy

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ii) ESOL

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2. What do you consider to be the main barriers to adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL learning and/or provision in your geographical area?

i) literacy and numeracy

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ii) ESOL

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3. What strategies are you using (or plan to use in the future) to overcome the above barriers?

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4. What progression routes are available to your learners? (If none, please state reason[s].)

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5. In your experience, are there any differences between adult literacy and numeracy in terms of success factors and/or barriers to learning?

i) success factors?

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ii) barriers?

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6. In your opinion, are there any gaps in literacy, numeracy or ESOL provision in your geographical area?

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7. What, if any, are the funding issues in your geographical area?

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Would you be happy for us to visit one of your centres to speak to some learners?

Yes  No

If you would like to be kept informed about our research please tick here:

*Thank you very much for your participation.*

# Appendix C.

## Literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners semi-structured interview schedule

---

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Venue \_\_\_\_\_

Course \_\_\_\_\_

Gender M  F

Age \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been coming / how often do you attend / what motivated you to come?
2. How do you find the timing and location of the class? Is it easy to access?
3. When did you last access education / training? At what level?
4. Why did you choose this particular course / venue?
5. What do you think of the tutors and support staff?
6. What do you learn and how is it relevant to you? (at Work / home / children)
7. What difference has the course made to your life?
8. What do you hope to achieve by doing the course / future plans / what will you do next?
9. Would you recommend the course to others? If yes, Who?
10. ESOL only – Where do you come from / live in the area?
11. Anything else to add?

## Appendix D.

# Semi-structured interview guidelines for tutor interviews

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Location

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Date

Course

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1 - Do you think local employment patterns have an effect on BS courses (i.e. lambing / farming / harvesting / tourist industry and seasonal migrant workers, ESOL)

2 - Do you work with other partners? Do you think this is more important in rural areas than in urban areas?

3 - What motivates BS learners? Why do you think some are not motivated to learn?

4 - Do you make your learning programmes relevant to the learners? In what way? (especially for farmers).

5 - What are the general perceptions of the BS learner in this area? (levels)

6 - How do you attract different types of learners (i.e. not just those at the lowest levels)?

7 - What is the take up of literacy classes compared to numeracy? If there is a difference why might this be?

8 - Is community-based provision important in your area? For what reasons?

9 - For ESOL students - does rural isolation effect the learner and/or ESOL provision and if so how?



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- LLU+, London South Bank University
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- King's College London
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