



UPSKILLING  
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME



INTERNATIONAL  
WORKFORCE  
LITERACY REVIEW

› ENGLAND

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# 1. Reviewer introduction

This report on workforce literacy policy and practice covers only England as the other United Kingdom countries (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) have separate educational systems and different workforce literacy policies and programmes. Some 84% of the UK population lives in England.

The report is based on a review of literature with commentary based on personal experience. Juliet Merrifield is a researcher and manages a local adult education centre that offers literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as well as other adult learning.

A vignette of her centre may give a picture of one of the many kinds of basic skills providers in England. The Friends Centre was started in 1945 to provide adult education in Brighton and Hove—now a small city with a population of around 250,000. In the mid-1970s the Friends Centre started adult literacy classes, putting it in the vanguard of the adult literacy movement in this country. Today, of the centre's total 1,500 learners per year, around 500 take part in literacy, numeracy or ESOL learning. While most are in discrete courses, some courses embed literacy, language or numeracy within another content area, most commonly work-related. Examples include:

- business English
- literacy embedded in an Introduction to Childcare course
- active listening for young people planning to work at a call centre).

Literacy is also embedded in art and crafts and IT. At the higher levels, most learners work toward one of the national qualifications, but at lower levels courses may be non-accredited but mapped to the national curriculum, using more informal assessment.

Some courses are held at our main learning centre, located within a Children's Centre that also houses midwives, health visitors and social workers. Other courses are in community centres, especially in areas of multiple disadvantage. Some courses are planned for employers, mainly public sector (local Council and the National Health Service). Learners are aged from 16 to 90, and the levels from pre-entry to level 2. Many are working, others are not but they want to increase skills so they can enter further training or get a job. Most classes are in 2.5-hour teaching blocks, which may be spread over periods from 5 weeks to 36 weeks. Some learners take two to three classes a week.

Our planning is responsive to community and learner needs in terms of the structure of the course, its timing and location. The content is shaped around individual learning plans (all mapped to the national curriculum). While the Friends Centre's history is unique, the mix of provision and its flexibility in response to needs and demands is not unusual in England.

## 2. Background to the context of workforce literacy

### 2.1 Employment rates and patterns

The population of the UK as a whole was 60 million in 2000 and is expected to rise to 63 million by 2021. Around 37 million were of working age in 2005 (Bates, 2007). Of those:

- 28.4 million were economically active (working or unemployed but looking for work) in 2005
- 27.1 million were employed;
- 1.3 million were unemployed and looking for work

- 87% of employed people are paid employees and 12% self-employed
- the number of people employed in the UK is rising
- the composition of the workforce is changing, with higher proportions of women and older people (over 50).

The UK's overall employment rate is one of the highest in the G7 countries at almost 75% (Leitch, 2006: 30). Unemployment has declined over the past decade from around 10% of the economically-active population to less than 5%. In particular the level of long-term unemployment (over 6 months) has declined significantly, as has unemployment of disadvantaged groups such as lone parents (whose employment rate has increased by 11% since 1997).

Some eight million (22%) of the UK-working age population are economically inactive. The most common reasons are caring responsibilities, long-term sickness and studying. Employment programmes are targeting long-term sick in particular.

## **2.2 Workforce demographics and projections**

### **Sector profile**

The service sector accounts for about three-quarters of the economy (Leitch, 2006:28). The public sector accounts for about 20%. Large firms with over 250 employees make up 41% of all employment, with small firms (fewer than 50 employees) making up 25%. In addition:

- Women are disproportionately represented in public sector jobs.
- Men are disproportionately represented in manufacturing.
- Younger workers are disproportionately employed in private-sector service industries (such as distribution, hotels and catering, banking and financial services).

### **Occupational profile**

- Women are disproportionately represented in sales, customer care, administrative and secretarial jobs.
- Men have a higher representation in managerial occupations and skilled trades.
- The age profile follows a similar pattern, with younger workers more likely to be in sales and customer services jobs, while older workers are more likely to be skilled trades, process plant and machine operative jobs.

Higher-level occupations (managers, professionals and associate professionals) are predicted to expand over the next decade. Elementary occupations, plant, process and machine operative jobs and skilled trades are predicted to decline.

The recent Leitch report on skills suggests that increasingly, 'skills are a key determinant of employment': just under 50% of those with no educational qualifications are in work compared with nearly 90% of those with graduate level qualifications (Leitch, 2006: 31).

## **2.3 Immigration patterns and volumes**

Compared with many other OECD countries the UK has a low proportion of its population that is foreign-born—8.3%, compared with 19.5% in New Zealand. Immigration to the UK has been driven by skill and labour shortages in sectors of the economy, and has increased since the mid-1990s. 80,000 work permits were issued to skilled workers from outside the EU in 2003, up from less than 30,000 per year in the early 1990s (Spencer et al report for Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2006:2). An additional 30,000 non-EU workers entered the UK on permits for specific low-skill occupation in agriculture, food processing

and hospitality. In Spring 2004 there were 2.8 million foreign nationals living in the UK, of whom 1.44 million were working. An unknown number of people had entered and/or worked in the UK 'illegally'.

While it is widely agreed that immigration to the UK grew significantly following the expansion of the EU in May 2004 to 10 'accession' countries, it is impossible to get firm statistics. The UK government took the decision to allow workers from these countries free access to the labour market because of significant shortages of labour in low-wage jobs. No work permits are required but nationals of eight of the accession states (A8) are required to register their employment through a 'Workers' Registration Scheme' (not required if they are self-employed). By November 2006, 510,000 people from the accession states had registered for employment in the UK, but an unknown number had subsequently returned home (Ibid: 3). Data from the Labour Force Survey suggest that 331,000 A8 migrants were living and working in the UK in April–June 2006.

The UK government has plans to create a new 'points-based' labour migration system, which would regulate immigration of skilled, non-EU workers, and restrict low-skilled immigration from outside the EU (Fox & Gullen, 2006:11). The government expects the EU accession countries of eastern and central Europe to meet the needs for low-wage migration. Only more skilled workers in areas of labour shortage will be accepted from outside the EU.

There is a demand from employers for migrant workers: in a 2005 survey more than a quarter of the 1,300 UK employers surveyed said they planned to recruit migrant workers, and this increased to 30% of public sector organisations and 40% of organisations employing more than 500 people (CIPD 2005). In a study for the Home Office, employers reported that they rely on migrant workers especially in agricultural, hotels and catering, and low-skill parts of the administration, business and management sector. In these low-skill sectors employers believed that their business would suffer or could not survive without immigrants (Dench et al, 2006). Employers reported on labour shortages (and in particular that non-immigrant workers were unwilling to take the posts because of conditions, pay, hours or nature of the work). They cited migrant workers as more motivated, reliable and committed than non-immigrant workers. Language difficulties were the only disadvantage cited.

## **2.4 Growth industries and industries in decline**

Over time the UK is moving from domination by the manufacturing sector to domination by the service sector. Between 1992 and 2002, service sector employment expanded by 3.5 million jobs, and further expansion by 2.1 million jobs is expected by 2012 (Bates, 2006:2). In addition:

- Fewer than 20% of those employed in the UK work in manufacturing or construction.
- 30% of employment is in distribution and transport (including hotels, restaurants and retailing).
- 26% of employment is in business and related services.
- 23% of jobs are in non-marketed sectors (including public administration, health and education).

## **2.5 Qualifications and skills**

Over the last decade the proportion of the working-age population who have degree-level qualifications has grown from 11% to 17% (Leitch, 2006: 10). The proportion with no formal qualifications has declined from 23% to under 15%. As might be expected, degree-level qualifications are more likely to be held by younger people (over 25% of 26–35 year

olds have these, compared with less than 15% of 56–64 year olds). Historically men have been more likely than women to go to university, but in recent years a higher proportion of women than men have entered higher education.

## 2.6 Population literacy statistics

An accurate portrait of skills in the workforce alone, and especially literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills, does not exist. LLN skills are likely to be higher for employed people than for the whole population, given the strong association between unemployment and the lowest LLN levels (evidenced in International Adult Literacy Study (IALS) and other surveys).

The UK as a whole took part in the IALS in 1996. It conducted a further national 'baseline' literacy survey in England alone in 2002–03. The two surveys used different methodologies and different measurement systems and so gave a somewhat different picture of the scale of literacy needs. While the IALS indicated some 23% scoring at level 1, a figure that translated to 7 million adults with literacy problems, the 2002–03 baseline study suggested 16.5% of adults at this level, or about 5.8 million adults.

### International Adult Literacy Study

The International Adult Literacy Study (IALS) was conducted in England, Scotland and Wales in 1996 on a national sample of 3,811 people aged 16–65 (Carey, Law and Hansbro, 1997). Over 20% of the UK population falls into the lowest category, level 1, on all three dimensions (prose, document and quantitative literacy), roughly equivalent to Entry level in Skills for Life.

**Table1: 1996 IALS Summary**

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5
<b>Prose</b>				
All	22%	30%	31%	17%
Men	21%	30%	32%	17%
Women	22%	31%	30%	16%
<b>Document</b>				
All	23%	27%	31%	19%
Men	20%	25%	31%	24%
Women	27%	29%	30%	15%
<b>Quantitative</b>				
All	23%	28%	30%	19%
Men	18%	27%	30%	25%
Women	29%	29%	30%	12%

Source: Ananiadou, Jenkins & Wolf, 2003: 10

Note that IALS data should be treated with caution in making international comparisons, because of the methodological and translation issues (see Hamilton and Barton, 2000). The IALS quantitative literacy is not a good measure of numeracy as it appears to measure reading comprehension more than numeracy skills (see Brooks & Wolf, 2002).

### National Child Development Study

The National Child Development Study (NCDS) is one of two longitudinal studies of people living in the UK who were born at a particular timepoint (this one follows a group of people born in a single week in March 1958). Six principal waves of data collection have been carried out so far on the cohort, and an additional basic-skills survey was carried out in 1995 on a 10% sample cohort (Bynner and Parsons, 1997). This used a specially-

designed literacy and numeracy test, with results grouped as 'very low', 'low', 'average' and 'good'. Just under 20% of the sample fell into the low or very-low categories for literacy and almost half on numeracy, roughly equivalent to Entry levels on Skills for Life.

**Table 2: NCDS Basic Skills Survey 1995**

	Very low	Low	Average	Good	Number
<b>Literacy</b>					
All	6%	13%	38%	43%	1711
Men	5%	11%	37%	47%	799
Women	7%	16%	39%	39%	912
<b>Numeracy</b>					
All	23%	25%	25%	27%	1702
Men	19%	23%	24%	34%	799
Women	27%	28%	25%	21%	903

Source: Ananiadou, Jenkins & Wolf, 2003: 9

### Skills for Life Survey

The Skills for Life survey is a 'baseline' survey of basic skills which was carried out in 2002–03 for the Department of Education and Skills to provide a profile for England of literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT skills among 16–65 year olds (DfES, 2003). It uses the framework of levels developed for the national Skills for Life standards which is not the same as the IALS levels. The Skills for Life standards map to school levels, with level 2 equating to the expected qualifications of 16 year old school leavers (GCSE at A\* to C).

National SfL standards	National Qualifications Framework	National Curriculum (schools)	IALS literacy (according to Dearden et al 2000)	IALS numeracy (according to Dearden et al 2000)	NCDS (according to Dearden et al 2000)
Entry or below		Key stage 2 (age 7)	Level 1 or below	Level 2 or below	Very low (below entry level) and low (at entry level)
Level 1	NVQ 1	Key stage 4 (age 11) GCSE D-G	Level 2	Level 3	
Level 2	NVQ 2	GCSE A*-C (age 16)	Level 3+	Level 4+	

Source: Ananiadou, Jenkins & Wolf, 2003: 12

The Skills for Life survey found that about 16% of respondents were classified at entry 3 or below in literacy and almost half at entry 3 or below in numeracy. Entry 3 is a level at which the Skills for Life strategy expects people to have significant difficulties with the demands of daily life and work. While there were no significant differences between men and women in terms of literacy, women had much lower numeracy scores than men.

**Table 3: Skills for Life Survey 2002–03**

	Percentage of 16-65 year olds	Men	Women
<b>Literacy</b>			
Entry Level 1 or below	3%		
Entry 2	2%		
Entry 3	11%		
(All Entry level or below)	(16%)	(16%)	(16%)
Level 1	40%	39%	40%
Level 2	44%	45%	44%
<b>Numeracy</b>			
Entry Level 1 or below	5%		
Entry 2	16%		
Entry 3	25%		
(All Entry level or below)	(47)%	(40)%	(53)%
Level 1	28%	27%	28%
Level 2	25%	32%	19%

Source: DfES, 2003: 18-19

### **British Cohort Study 1970 (BCS70)**

The most recent insight into the impact of literacy and numeracy skills comes from the second of the two longitudinal studies, the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70). In 2004 all BCS70 cohort members (then aged 34) completed literacy and numeracy assessments, alongside exercises to assess symptoms associated with dyslexia (Bynner and Parsons, 2006:9). Three ways of measuring literacy and numeracy were used:

- self-report of difficulties
- a multiple choice assessment
- an open-response assessment.

Some of the children of the cohort were also assessed and compared with their expected performance on the same assessments. The more nuanced approach to measurement, along with the longitudinal nature of the research, provides some very useful findings:

1. While self-reporting of literacy or numeracy difficulties was low, as it has been in IALS and other studies, very specific questions about difficulties increased the proportion acknowledging them. The study authors suggest ‘the more refined form of questioning is necessary to elicit the full range of problems that people have’ (ibid: 10). In line with other studies, men are more likely to report writing difficulties (spelling and handwriting) and women are more likely to report maths difficulties (multiplication and division).
2. Substantial differences in ‘life chances, quality of life and social inclusion were evident between individuals at or below entry-level 2 compared with others at higher levels’ (ibid). Entry 2 skills were associated with lack of qualifications, poor labour market experience and prospects, poor material and financial circumstances, poor health prospects and lack of social and political participation.
3. There were marked gender differences. Men with poor skills (below E2) were more likely to be single and childless at age 34. Women with the same skills were more typically parents, though often lone parents.
4. The assessment of children for cognitive skills performance suggested that ‘the average scores of children were substantially lower for children of parents with the poorest grasp of literacy and numeracy’ (ibid: 12). The gap was particularly marked between those whose parents were entry 2 and those at level 1 or 2. The evidence of



transfer of poor skills across generations, long suspected and reflected in family literacy programmes, appears to reflect the considerable disadvantage faced by parents at the lowest literacy and numeracy levels, which also affects their children's life chances.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this study was a reminder of the importance of working with people with the lowest skills levels. The targets of the Skills for Life strategy were set at entry 3, level 1 and level 2. They were set at these higher levels to reflect the ultimate goal of the strategy: to achieve the skill levels needed to succeed at work. But the danger of targets, as will be discussed in the commentary, is that 'you get what you ask for', and with this, the shift of focus onto learners who are already functioning at higher levels. The BCS70 study is a salutary reminder that the biggest impact of poor basic skills is at the lowest levels.

## **2.7 Drivers for workforce literacy**

The 2006 Leitch Review of Skills sets out clearly the key policy drivers for government in relation to workforce literacy, within a broader skills policy:

- 70% of the 2020 working age population have already left compulsory education and the flow of young people will reduce—improving schools is not enough, there must be a renewed focus on the skills of adults (Leitch, 2006:4).
- The changing global economy means that 'all work that can be "digitised", automated and outsourced can increasingly be done by the most effective and competitive individuals or enterprises, wherever they are located' (Ibid: 7), meaning that emerging economies like India and China are increasingly competitive.
- The UK's productivity lags behind that of comparator nations: while differences in management practices account for 10–15% of the productivity gap, Leitch argues that skills account for 20% or more.
- The UK economy can be driven forward by increasing the available workforce, and getting some of the more than 20% economically inactive into work (Ibid: 8).
- In the new global economy economic security will depend on having a 'basic platform of skills' that allows individuals to update and adapt to change (Ibid: 9).

Leitch proposed a new commitment to achieving 'world class skills', moving the UK into the top eight in the world at each skills level by 2020. The targets he proposes are 'stretching ambitions': in the case of adult literacy and numeracy more than trebling projected rates of improvement under the existing Skills for Life strategy. By 2020 Leitch calls for:

- 95% of adults to have functional literacy and numeracy (up from 85% literacy and 79% numeracy in 2005); achieving this target this would require a total of 7.4 million adult attainments over this period
- more than 90% of the adult population to be qualified at least to level 2 (up from 69% in 2005); this would require a total of 5.7 million adult attainments over the period
- shifting the balance of intermediate skills from level 2 to level 3; this would require a total of 4 million adult attainments over the period
- more than 40% of the adult population qualified to level 4 and above (up from 29% in 2005) with a commitment to continue progression and an increased focus on level 5 and above skills; this would require a total of 5.5 million attainments over the period. (ibid: 14).

We await the government response to the Leitch report and recommendations.

## **2.8 Education system and statistics**

The school-leaving age is 16, but over 70% of young people remain in education for at least 1 or 2 years after age 16. Some stay at their secondary school, moving into 'sixth form' studies, while others move to a local (FE) college or Sixth Form College to study either vocational or academic preparation courses and take examinations. There are no general requirements for courses of study at this age, but individual students choose courses of study and apply to individual colleges. Most of the rest of the school leavers go straight into employment, but a small proportion of 16–19 year olds are 'not in education, employment or training' (known as NEETs).

Adult education enables people of any age to return to study and pick up qualifications they did not gain at school. Adult literacy, language and numeracy (ALLN) courses traditionally have been free for all adults and a commitment to free classes was part of the Skills for Life strategy. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses were originally included in this commitment to free learning, but from August 2007 will be free only to people on income-related benefits: all others will have to pay the usual further education fee element (currently at 37.5% and on a path rising to 50% of course funding).

The rationale for charging fees to ESOL learners is the scale of demand and the pressure on resources. The LSC's Annual Statement of Priorities for 2007–08 says that ESOL provision and funding 'have expanded well beyond the expectations in the original Skills for Life strategy ... we must focus public investment of those most at risk of disadvantage; and we should not support large-scale demand from those who can pay for their language learning' (LSC, 2006: 25). Free tuition will continue for literacy and numeracy learners, although from 2007–08 only approved level 1 and level 2 skills-for-life qualifications will be funded at the 1.4 basic skills weighting. At entry and pre-entry levels learners may be on other courses provided they are based on the Skills for Life standards and curriculum.

ALLN courses are available at further education (FE) colleges, Sixth Form colleges, or through other LSC-funded provision by local authorities or voluntary sector adult education organisations. As well as college- or centre-based courses, learners may enrol in courses offered in community settings, workplaces, prisons or schools. The mix of provision available in any local area will be highly variable, not every locale will have all the options but most will have at least some options.

## **2.9 Commentary on the context of literacy provision**

Britain has, in common with other industrialised countries, an anxiety about global competition and a conviction that a high-skills economy is the only viable way to compete with growing economies like China and India. The prevailing consensus, shared by government, business and unions, is that only a highly-skilled workforce can maintain Britain's place in the ranks of nations. Given the demographics, the falling numbers of young people entering the workforce and the rising age of retirement, the only way to achieve a highly-skilled workforce in the next 20 years is to retrain those who are already in it.

Nevertheless there are slightly contradictory tendencies. The growth in immigration in recent years, and the policies allowing low-skilled immigrants from Eastern Europe, suggests that there are still low-skilled jobs, which British people do not fill. In trying to make the case for improving skills it can sometimes sound as if all jobs require highly literate and skilled workers, but there are still jobs that place few demands on workers.

The paucity of research showing the outcomes of basic skills learning in adulthood (see section 5) seems to suggest that the skills agenda is based on faith as much as evidence.

Much is riding on a current longitudinal research project under the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) of the Economic and Social Science Research Council, also funded by the NRDC. This will be tracking outcomes from workplace literacy for individuals and for their employers.

### **3. Overview of key policies related to workplace literacy**

A history of the development of adult literacy in England can be found in Hamilton and Hillier 2006. It traces the evolution from the 'campaign' days of literacy work in the mid-1970s to when it entered the mainstream with the Moser report in 1999. The story is one of increasing control from a centralised government and an increasing focus on the economic arguments, as opposed to social or human rights arguments, for improving literacy and numeracy.

The 1996 IALS study provided an additional impetus to a government already inclined to pay attention to literacy, and a policy paper from a committee led by Sir Claus Moser used IALS results, along with other evidence, to make a case for a national literacy campaign. The committee's seminal report, *A Fresh Start*, made a series of recommendations (Moser, 1999).

The discourses in the Moser Committee report about the adult literacy field, and the rationale for a new national strategy, are echoed in the Skills for Life strategy itself (although the government did not see their strategy as implementing Moser recommendations but as going beyond them). In both documents the existing field is seen as inadequate, teaching as poor, with no clear understanding of what is to be taught or validation by qualifications. Both the quality and quantity of basic skills education needed to be increased.

Not all the Moser Committee recommendations were put into effect, and some recommendations were translated into government policy in different ways. However many Moser recommendations were translated directly into policy. These include:

- increases in both the volume of provision and in its quality:
- the development of a national strategy, led by a unit within the Department for Education and Employment (later renamed Education and Skills)
- the development of attainment targets, along the lines of the then new national targets for literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2 (age 11) in schools. The school targets were seen by the committee to have motivated and generated action by schools, and the adult targets were intended to focus providers on achievement at the higher levels of ALLN where people were most likely to be employed or close to employability.
- the development of a national curriculum for adult literacy, language and numeracy, again based on the existing school model:

*Some of the provision already available for adults is excellent, with dedicated teachers and imaginative programmes. But the provision varies from area to area, in quality and in quantity: there simply is not enough provision of study programmes to meet the need. Nor has there been a coherent and consistent set of national standards to guarantee quality in what is taught, how it is taught and in the qualifications that are awarded at the end. Most of the teachers are part-time with little access to training, and the system of inspection needs coordination.*  
(Moser, 1999: 1.9)

- a common inspection framework 'based on clear and transparent standards and consistent with the proposed national quality framework'
- new standards and qualifications for basic skills teachers

- a national promotion campaign to attract new learners into basic skills learning.

### 3.1 Skills for Life Strategy

The Skills for Life strategy is a large-scale, long-term and comprehensive initiative to address the basic skills needs of adults in England. The key policy goals were stated by the (then) Department for Education and Employment in *Skills for Life: The National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills* (DfEE, 2001). This document first outlines the challenge, largely referring to the *Fresh Start* report from the Moser Committee (Moser, 1999)—up to 7 million adults' deemed to have poor literacy and numeracy skills and the resulting cost to those individuals and to society. It outlines the main goal of the new strategy:

*To reduce the number of adults in England with literacy and numeracy difficulties to the levels of our main international competitors – that is from one in five adults to one in ten or better. (DfEE, 2001: 9)*

To achieve that goal, the strategy set out two principal policy objectives:

1. 'To build for long-term success by **engaging potential learners** through every possible means';
2. 'Creating, for the very first time, a thorough, **high-quality literacy and numeracy skills learning infrastructure**' in order to 'raise the standard of all provision, to engage and motivate potential learners, and to ensure that all those involved in literacy and numeracy skills teaching are working towards a common goal'. (Ibid)

Each of these aims has specific objectives:

1. Engage potential learners through:
  - entitlement to free training for all adults who want to improve their literacy and numeracy skills
  - qualifications that will help teachers and learners understand what they have to do to make progress
  - a national promotional strategy.
2. Create a high quality infrastructure to raise standards through:
  - robust national standards, screening and diagnostic assessment, a national core curriculum and new national tests for literacy and numeracy along with materials to support them
  - new professional qualifications for teachers
  - a rigorous and robust quality framework and national inspections.

The policy was ambitious. While around 200,000 adults a year were engaging in basic-skills learning at the time of the Moser report, the national targets set out in the original Skills for Life strategy were 750,000 learners to 'improve their literacy and numeracy skills' by 2004 and 1.5 million by 2007 (DfEE, 2001:15). These are known as Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets, devices characteristic of many areas of government. The PSA target was to be met by 10 priority learner groups:

- 130,000 job seekers
- 40,000 other benefit claimants
- 40,000 prisoners and others supervised in the community
- 10,000 public sector employees
- 50,000 adults in low-skilled jobs
- 110,000 young people
- 210,000 general basic skills learners (including those on learndirect)
- 50,000 refugees and speakers of other languages

- 60,000 parents
- 50,000 people who live in disadvantaged communities.

The Department expected that slightly over a quarter of the 750,000 people in the target would achieve at entry level and the remainder would progress to level 1 or above (ibid: 35). The strategy says that 'from September 2001 all new learners embarking on a literacy or numeracy programme leading to level 1 or level 2 will work towards the national test' (ibid: 48). For learners at entry level 'continuous assessment and portfolio work will remain the route for achievement'.

So that there could be no uncertainty about what 'improve their literacy and numeracy skills' means, the key measure of achievement of the national targets was defined as passing specific tests: the national literacy or numeracy test at entry 3, level 1 or 2, or achieving English or maths GCSE. Entry level 1 and 2 qualifications were developed but do not count towards the target. The tests are part of the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency approved qualifications for skills for life, all based on the national core curricula for literacy, numeracy or ESOL. Although learners may be funded to continue their learning after achieving at Entry 3, level 1 or level 2, each learner can be counted only once towards the target.

However, although the intention was to achieve some precision in monitoring progress toward the Skills for Life strategy, the unique learner number system that would ensure learners are not double-counted has not yet been developed. The National Audit Office examination of the data systems used by the Department of Education and Skills to monitor progress towards their PSA targets raises a number of concerns (NAO, 2006). The data is gathered from individualised learner record (ILR) returns from all LSC-funded providers, which would likely over-count achievements because of learners who achieve multiple qualifications over time and with different providers. The LSC makes a downward adjustment to the numbers for both of these. Part of the data used is from the Prison Service which counts the number of qualifications, not learners, so another adjustment is made (based on an analysis in one prison in 2003 of the number of learners gaining the number of achievements). Data towards the target monitoring also comes from Job Centre Plus, which also counts qualifications, not learners, but no adjustment is made for this.

The tests were chosen as the primary performance-measure for specific reasons:

- to enable a quickly established mass testing regime (using machine scoring rather than human markers, following the fiasco of exam revisions in schools that failed under the weight of demand)
- allowing learners to access testing on demand
- linking the adult literacy and numeracy tests to the parallel Key Skills for school and college students (Brooks, 2004:80).

In addition to the primary targets for passing Skills for Life tests, the Learning and Skills Council adds other performance measures in its funding mechanisms for post-16 education. Key performance measures in providers' three-year development plans include:

- employer engagement measures
- teacher qualifications
- participation measures (full-time equivalents and number of learners at different levels) used for calculation of funding
- success measures (retention and achievement rates).

'New measures of success' are also being developed, although some of these (like value-added) are very difficult to define for adult learning. Most of the new measures of success relate mainly to 16-19 education.

## 3.2 National Skills Strategy

The National Skills Strategy was announced by DfES in 2003 and has been followed by a variety of further publications, including:

- the Skills White Paper—*Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on in Work* (DfES 2005)
- a White Paper on further education reform—*Further Education; Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES 2006)
- the Further Education and Training Bill in November 2006, which takes forward many of the reforms announced. The bill is intended to 'equip learners with high quality skills for productive, sustainable employment and personal fulfilment and to ensure that employers have the right skills for their businesses in a competitive global economy'.

The series of policy initiatives on skills contain a number of challenging reforms, focusing the further education sector on vocational education and workforce development, giving a key leadership role to employers (especially private sector employers), requiring significant increases in quality, monitoring and accountability, and in effect (if not in law) raising the school leaving age to 18. Of these reforms, two in particular introduce fundamental shifts in the way that the sector is funded, and are worth further discussion here: contestability and demand-led funding.

### Contestability

While the earlier funding regime allocated funding on an annual basis to colleges and other providers on a largely historical basis, the 2006 FE White Paper introduced competition for funding as a means of promoting dynamism and innovation:

*To promote dynamism and innovation we will encourage new high-quality providers into the FE sector. New competition arrangements will make it easier for new providers to enter the system, where significant expansion of high quality provision is needed. There will be open advertising, with appropriate development funding and capital incentives, as well as revenue funding, for the successful provider. This will enable good existing colleges to expand, federate or create a Trust, independent and voluntary sector training providers to enter the sector, or wholly new institutions to be established, depending on needs. It will be underpinned by a new LSC remit to promote diversity, choice and specialisation (DfES, 2006: 10)*

So far, contestability has been introduced by the LSC mainly where provision has been unsatisfactory at a college or on an area basis. However, it is clearly one of the 'big new ideas' that is likely to be extended and expanded in the future.

### Demand-led funding

The LSC is beginning to shift funding from planned provision (allocating it to colleges and other providers on the basis of an agreed annual plan) to demand-led provision (in which providers secure funding only if they can successfully get individual employers to contract for their services). Train to Gain is the first effort to create an employer demand-led funding stream, covering work-related skills at Level 2 and Level 3. It is likely to be the model for the future, based on the new FE bill and the recommendations of the Leitch review. The 2006 FE White Paper that led to the Bill noted, in the context of reform of further education:

*We want to make a decisive shift towards a system that is driven by the needs of service users. We will introduce measures that put learners and employers in the*

*driving seat in determining what is funded and how services are delivered (DfES, 2006: 7)*

Individual learner accounts are being trialled again in certain areas in 2007-08, trying to overcome the debacle that their earlier incarnation created.

*For adults, we will progressively build up the proportion of funding that is demand-led and driven by customer choice – particularly through the Train to Gain programme and trials of learner accounts. By 2010, our ambition is that some 40% of the total adult skills budget could be allocated through these demand-led routes, with the majority demand-led by 2015 (DfES, 2006:10).*

### **3.3 Commentary on the policies related to workplace literacy**

Government in England is strongly controlled from the centre. The Skills for Life strategy is both a demonstration of what can be achieved in this way, and the dangers.

In terms of achievement, the Skills for Life strategy is remarkably comprehensive. To make a difference to adult basic skills it was felt necessary to

*... resolve the fundamental issues that have bedevilled adult education for many years. These are the issues of focus, participation, completion, achievement, quality, progression and the resources to deliver and secure them (Brooks, 2004: 31).*

The starting point for policy making was an assumption that existing basic skills education was not working, and that decades of neglect meant that the infrastructure could not handle mere expansion, but needed to be built. Promotion, curriculum, resources, assessment, quality and teaching qualifications were all part of the plan of work. All were to be centrally determined and locally delivered, in the long-standing style of the English education system. A massive increase in funding was to be tied to results, with both carrots and sticks pushing providers to meet the targets.

The government's need to exercise control over service delivery that is carried out by many different organisations, and at a distance, has been met through the ever-growing 'audit culture'. Audits are a means for the government to check and control devolved services, especially in a context of concern about risk and risk management. The audit culture has become highly developed across most areas of the English government, and it is not surprising that once adult literacy, language and numeracy came into the mainstream of the education system it had to meet new accountability demands.

The audit culture is fed by anxieties about the trustworthiness of the agents who deliver public services. It thrives when trust is low. Both the Moser Commission (Moser, 1999) and the Skills for Life Strategy (DfEE, 2001) saw existing basic skills practice as inadequate, with poor teaching, no clear agreement on what should be taught, nor validation by qualifications. As O'Neill said in her 2002 Reith Lectures, the culture of suspicion is a result of a quest for greater accountability which 'aims at ever more perfect administrative control of institutional and professional life' (O'Neill, 2002:46).

Lack of trust seems particularly endemic in education where teachers, while on the one hand expected to be professionals with high levels of training and qualifications, are on the other hand expected to 'deliver' content through procedures established centrally as effective (Mahony and Hextall, 2000). Because so much teaching is behind closed doors and difficult to monitor directly, the focus of monitoring is on 'results'. In order to be tracked, these results must be measurable, and preferably measurable in a cost-effective way. Complex and subtle qualitative outcomes of learning are not easily measurable: tightly defined targets are.

As so often, strengths and weaknesses are linked. The targets were adopted to focus the attention of providers on the achievements that the government wanted to see. Targets have become the main way for the government to shape practices on the ground in a wide range of areas, including health and policing, as well as across the spectrum in education. But targets in other contexts have been shown to produce unintended consequences that distort and confuse policy goals. There are three main issues.

1. Targets and measures may be measurable and cost-effective but may not reflect well the longer-term policy goals (there are examples from policing where concentrated efforts on reducing crime rates within particular neighbourhoods simply results in displacement of criminal activity and increases in crime rates in the surrounding areas).
2. Performance measurement often leads to distortions in which the performance measures are met but this does not advance policy goals (perhaps the most clearcut example is within the NHS, when waiting times in emergency rooms were measured in one week per year, encouraging hospitals to mobilise all possible staff from other wards for that week in order to reduce waiting times).
3. Service providers may be encouraged to 'game the numbers' in their reporting against the specific performance targets (some FE colleges put all their learners through a Skills for Life test regardless of whether or not it was appropriate or needed).

The weakness built into the Skills for Life strategy, then, is its reliance on a narrow measure of success that does not necessarily reflect the broad policy goals of improving basic skills, and that may lead providers to distort their provision in order to get the numbers needed. The results are becoming clear. While the policy targets (1.5 million learners to achieve E3/L1 or L2 qualifications by 2007) have been met, the achievements are dominated by young people, the great majority of whom were already in college for other vocational courses. The National Audit Office (NAO) reported that more than half of the qualifications counting toward the July 2004 target were gained by 16–18 year olds, who had been only 15% of the original target (National Audit Office, 2004: 4). The 2005 annual report of the ALI Chief Inspector notes that half the qualifications were gained by 16–18 year olds who were already enrolled on college courses (Chief Inspector, ALI, 2005:9). While there may be a rationale for improving this group's basic skills, it was not the original driver of the Skills for Life policy.

Looking ahead, the Leitch report ratchets up the targets still further in the interests of getting the UK into the upper quartile of the OECD. He sets ambitious targets for 2020 including '95% of adults to achieve the basic skills of functional literacy and numeracy, an increase from levels of 85% literacy and 79% numeracy in 2005' (Leitch, 2006: 3). While we don't yet know how many of the Leitch recommendations will be accepted by the Brown government, it seems likely that Leitch's thinking is broadly along the same lines as the government's.

## 4 Current workplace literacy provision

### 4.1 Role of government

Responsibility for the education service in England has very recently been split into two departments. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has given way to the **Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills** (DIUS) focusing on workforce skills and higher education, with a separate Department for Children, Schools and Families. Since the split into two departments is so new, the division of responsibilities and goals for post-compulsory education is not fully worked out. Workforce skills are clearly within DIUS, however, and the main policies are as set out in the 2006 Further Education (FE) White Paper *Raising Skills, Improving Life Chance*' (with a subsequent bill currently going



through parliament). The primary focus of the FE White Paper is on the skills needed to sustain an advanced, competitive economy. Various other 'non-departmental public bodies' (NDPBs) have been assigned specific areas of responsibility relevant to workforce literacy.

**The Learning and Skills Council (LSC)** is now responsible for planning and funding all education and training for over 19 year olds, except for higher education. Its responsibilities for 16–18 year olds' education and training will be moved to local authorities, but mechanisms for this are not likely to be in place until 2010. The LSC's annual budget for 2006–07 is £10.4 billion. Workforce literacy (either carried out in educational locations or in the workplace) is one of its main skills priority areas.

*The Learning and Skills Council exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to ensure we have a workforce of world-class standard.*

([www.lsc.gov.uk/aboutus/](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/aboutus/) accessed 30.4.07)

The LSC's major tasks are to:

- raise participation and achievement by young people
- increase adult demand for learning
- raise skills levels for national competitiveness
- improve the quality of education and training delivery
- equalise opportunities through better access to learning
- improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the sector

In addition to funding, the LSC is the main collector of data about individual learners and each provider's delivery against its agreed programme and targets. More information on the LSC's funding of workforce literacy and numeracy is in section 4.8 below.

**The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA)** was set up by the Secretary of State for Education in 2005 as the national strategic focus for quality improvement, to be a single source of expertise and to eliminate duplication and overlap of quality improvement services. Its 'core mission' is 'to enable providers to improve responsiveness to the priorities identified by both the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the inspectorates in their quality assurance roles' (Remit letter 14 November 2005). QIA developed a National Improvement Strategy in January 2007 to map out the changes it expects to achieve. With a 2007–08 budget of £110,494,000 in total, 21% is allocated to Skills for Life in particular, indicating its importance.

**The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)** carries out quality and improvement inspections of all workforce literacy providers. It came into being on 1 April 2007, bringing together four formerly separate inspectorates. It inspects and regulates care for children and young people, and inspects education and training for learners of all ages. More information on quality assurance is in section 4.7 below.

**The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)** has responsibility for the welfare system and for welfare-to-work activities. Its aims are to:

- promote opportunity and independence for all
- help individuals achieve their potential through employment
- work to end poverty in all its forms ([www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/) - accessed 30.4.07).

**Job Centre Plus (JCP)** is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) set up by DWP to be responsible for services to people of working age. It offers help to people looking to move into work and support for people who can't. Jobcentre Plus also provides a range of services to help employers fill their vacancies quickly. Until April 2007 JCP also commissioned and funded skills and learning programmes but that responsibility has now passed to the DWP itself and to the LSC. One of the key functions of JCP is to reduce the unemployment rate among key groups of individuals. The Pathways to Work programme is a large initiative aimed at supporting particular target groups including people receiving incapacity benefit (people with long-term health problems or disabilities) into work. The Basic Skills and Employability programme, administered via the LSC, aims to provide basic and employability skills training intensively to target groups including lone parents, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed and other socially excluded groups, to enable them to enter the workforce.

## 4.2 Models of delivery

A wide range of different models of delivery of ALLN education exist. Programmes may be stand alone ALLN—college based, community based, workplace based. There are also embedded ALLN, in which LLN is embedded within vocational training or other content areas—and these in turn may be college based, community based or workplace based. Learndirect offers self-study LLN learning, either in a learndirect centre or the workplace or at home.

I have been able to find no evaluations comparing the effectiveness in terms of achievement of the different models of delivery of ALLN or within different settings. There is an NRDC study of embedding LLN within vocational courses taught in colleges but this does not compare embedded LLN with discrete LLN<sup>1</sup>.

Adult basic skills delivery in the workplace is being prioritised under the Skills for Life and Skills Strategies in order to reach the large proportion of adults who do not currently enrol in formal college-based provision.

There is evidence that employers are increasingly willing to make provision for basic skills development for their employees. Ananiadou et al cite the 2001 Learning and Training at Work survey of a sample of 3,000 employers in England. Among workplaces with five or more employees some 59% offered at least one of the types of learning opportunities (Ananiadou et al, 2003; 15). While IT and working with others were the most common types (offered by 40% and 37% respectively), 11% offered basic numeracy and 10% basic literacy. The proportions of companies offering basic skills training increased with the size of employer, up to 42% offering numeracy and 44% offering literacy in companies with 500 or more employees.

A recent NIACE survey on learning at work generally (not specifically LLN) found an overwhelming preference among employees for less formal and more experiential ways of learning to improve job performance (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2007). Across all ages, classes, and men and women, 'learning by doing the job on a regular basis' was cited as

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<sup>1</sup> The NRDC study looked at the retention rates and skills for life achievement of a sample of college learners studying for vocational qualifications, comparing those on courses in which skills for life was embedded and those in which it was not (Casey et al, .Retention rates were 16% higher on the non-embedded courses. On the fully-embedded courses 93% of learners with an identified literacy need achieved a skills-for-life qualification compared with 43% on non-embedded courses. It is important to understand that the study did not compare the effectiveness of embedded versus non-embedded LLN, since the learners on non-embedded courses may not have received any LLN teaching at all. The study found that when a single teacher had responsibility for both the vocational teaching and LLN learners were twice as likely to fail their skills for life qualification. As the title of the report says, 'You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering ...'.

quite or very helpful by 82% in total. Taking a course was found helpful by only 54%. The least skilled were least likely to find courses helpful. Nevertheless, the focus of the skills strategy is on courses since more informal approaches to learning are more difficult to quality assure and to manage.

## 4.3 Curriculum and standards

### The National Standards

The National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy provide the basis for the curriculum infrastructure. The literacy standards cover the skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing. The numeracy standards cover the skills of interpreting, calculating and communicating mathematical information. The standards:

- are set at entry level and levels 1 and 2 of the national qualifications framework
- describe three sub-levels of achievement within entry level: entry 1, entry 2 and entry 3
- provide a progression framework for the core curricula in literacy, numeracy and ESOL, which set out clear goals for learners and their teachers
- provide nationally-agreed benchmarks against which the literacy, language and numeracy skills of the adult population can be assessed through national tests and national qualifications. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/teachingandlearning> (accessed 6.4.07)

### The Curriculum:

Core curriculum documents linked to the national standards have been produced for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and for ESOL. Each covers the levels from entry 1 up to level 2 and there is a separate pre-entry curriculum in literacy. The core curricula set out the specific literacy, language and numeracy skills, knowledge and understanding required to meet the national standards at each level. In addition the *Access for All* guidance manual has been developed to provide a guide for teachers of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

As an example of the structure of the curriculum, below is an example of how the skills of vocabulary, word recognition and phonics skills are described at entry 1 and 2.

## Vocabulary, word recognition and phonics

[Home](#) > [Reading](#) > Vocabulary, word recognition and phonics

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### Entry 1

**Rw/E1.1:** [possess a limited, meaningful sight vocabulary of words, signs and symbols](#)

**Rw/E1.2:** [decode simple, regular words](#)

**Rw/E1.3:** [recognise the letters of the alphabet in both upper and lower case](#)

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### Entry 2

**Rw/E2.1:** [read and understand words on forms related to personal information, e.g. \*first name, surname, address, postcode, age, date of birth\*](#)

**Rw/E2.2:** [recognise high frequency words and words with common spelling patterns](#)

**Rw/E2.3:** [use phonic and graphic knowledge to decode words](#)

**Rw/E2.4:** [use a simplified dictionary to find the meaning of unfamiliar words](#)

**Rw/E2.5:** [use initial letters to find and sequence words in alphabetical order](#)

Source: [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum\\_literacy/tree/reading/vocabwordphonic/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum_literacy/tree/reading/vocabwordphonic/)

Clicking on any curriculum item leads to a more detailed explanation of what should be taught, sample activities and guidance notes for teachers.

**Comment:** Lists of competencies of this nature have the advantage of providing a clear and consistent guide to teachers. Their danger lies in breaking down tasks into elements that are, on their own, meaningless. While learners may be able to do them individually, this does not necessarily make someone confident in dealing with written texts. Highly trained teachers, committed to responding to the needs of individual learners, can benefit from an organised framework to help them identify learner's needs. Less experienced tutors may feel tied to this list of competencies; teach them mechanically and in order and fail to adapt them to the needs and the context of those who will use them. The final report of the Chief Inspector of the Adult Learning Inspectorate before it was merged into Ofsted raised similar concerns. He said that providers:

*... tend to offer programmes that are confined to identifying where gaps exist in a learner's skills, providing support and opportunities for practice, then carrying out another assessment – and repeating this cycle until the learner is ready for a test. The result is often a test passed and a qualification gained, but this approach is not likely to help many learners, especially those at Level 1 or below, to build a solid foundation of skills. (CIALI, 2006: 4)*

Similar concerns are raised in the NIACE policy discussion paper on assessment, reviewed below in section 5.3.

## 4.4 Employer engagement

Over the last 10 years employers have played an increasingly influential role in national skills policy and provision. This influence has been codified through a number of quasi-governmental structures (including both 'non-departmental public bodies' or NDPBs and nominally independent organisations licensed by the government).

### The Skills for Business Network

The Skills for Business Network aims to increase the productivity and profitability of the UK by identifying and tackling skills gaps and shortages on a sector by sector basis' ([www.ssda.org](http://www.ssda.org)). It is made up of 25 Sector Skills Councils (SSC), each intended to be an employer-led, independent organisation covering a specific business sector. The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) underpins the network and is responsible for funding, supporting and monitoring the SSCs).

### Sector Skills Councils

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are licensed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (in consultation with ministers for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), and between them cover 85% of the UK workforce. The SSCs have four key goals:

- to reduce skills gaps and shortages
- to improve productivity and business and public sector performance
- to increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce
- to improve learning supply including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards ([www.ssda.org.uk](http://www.ssda.org.uk)).

SSCs develop and agree high-level Skills Agreements between the government, employers and providers. Their role in learning extends beyond workplace skills to the development of the vocational curriculum and qualifications from age 14 upwards.

### **Asset Skills**

Asset Skills, the SSC for the property services, housing and cleaning industry (workforce of 1.4 million and 100,000 employers), has been commissioned by the Sector Skills Development Agency to lead on Skills for Life across the Skills for Business Network, in part because Asset Skills as a sector has a higher proportion of Skills for Life needs than some other sectors. Among the services being developed are:

- employer toolkit training
- skills for Life Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA)
- a funding directory and advisory service
- a brokerage service to assist employers to access training providers
- employer case studies to promote good practice in the sector.

### **Other employer organisations with a role**

Other employer organisations playing roles in Skills for Life include:

- **NHSU**, the National Health Service 'University', which is developing its own Skills for Life and Health Strategy as part of its NHS-wide workforce skills development remit
- **Employers Organisation for Local Government**, which supports Skills for Life events for local authorities and is leading on developing a Skills for Life Strategy for local government
- **Business in the Community**, with a planned network of 40 Skills for Life Employer Champions, a Skills for Life Business Award and engagement of large high-profile employers through work with KPMG's consultancy service
- **liP UK** (Investors in People) which is developing a Skills for Life Guide for employers offered through the network of liP Advisers and Assessors who will receive mandatory training.

The lead role of employers is likely to increase further with a shift to 'demand-led' funding for skills development, already underway through the LSC's Train to Gain initiative (see below) and set to increase further if the recommendations of the Leitch report on skills are accepted by government.

### **The role of the unions**

Unions are also players in the Skills for Life agenda, through union learning reps and Unionlearn, an organisation set up by the TUC a year ago to promote lifelong learning, 'increase workers' life chances and strengthen their voice at the workplace through high quality union learning' ([www.unionlearn.org.uk/about/index.cfm](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/about/index.cfm)).

About 18,000 Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) funded by the government have been appointed and trained, toward a target of 22,000 ULRs and 250,000 union learners by 2010. ULRs' role is to advise and support union members to engage in learning and to work with employers to develop learning agreements. In union-recognised workplaces ULRs have statutory rights for time off for training and carrying out their duties, and the TUC are pressing the government for legislation to formalise ULRs and encourage more employers to negotiate learning agreements. Unions now have formal representation on the main institutional bodies including the LSC and Sector Skills Councils. The TUC is also represented on the national Skills Alliance (Lloyd and Payne, 2006:1).

Despite this growing role it is not clear how much influence unions actually wield. The SSCs are explicitly employer-led and unions generally have one seat alongside voluntary sector organisations. Moreover, as Lloyd and Payne point out, ‘the way in which these bodies are funded, together with their terms of reference, indicate that, despite the rhetoric of an “employer-led” training system, it is the state which is the dominant player’ (Ibid: 2). They and others point to the real differences between the state-licensed system in England and the European model, in which unions have equal representation with employers on vocational education and training bodies, to which the state devolves considerable decision-making responsibility.

The authors also caution against over-statement of the impact of ULRs on workplace training: they are present in only 13% of workplaces with more than 10 employees (covering 40% of the workforce). In some of the sectors where training needs are most acute because they attract the lowest skilled workers (like hotels, hospitality and retailing) there are few unionised workplaces. ULRs are themselves funded by government and their sustainability through political changes is uncertain.

### **Train to Gain**

Train to Gain was launched by the LSC in April 2006 and extended to all areas in August that year. The initiative set up a national network of skills brokers who work with employers to identify their training needs and to select a provider to deliver the training. Colleges and private training providers are funded by the LSC to deliver the training thus commissioned. Their funding depends on convincing employers to agree to work with them, but also on employers wanting what Train to Gain can offer —NVQ level 2 qualifications.

Within Train to Gain, Skills for Life can only be offered to support achievement of NVQ 2 qualifications, not as a discrete need. Most Train to Gain works through 1:1 support of learners in the workplace, although small groups of learners may be convened when possible. The 1:1 funding model is based on the NVQ approach, in which qualifications are not taught but gained primarily through application at work and completion of a portfolio of evidence of skills, prepared with support of an NVQ adviser. It is unlike any other Skills for Life provision in England. Given the funding levels (described below) there can be very little literacy or numeracy learning.

Train to Gain was developed from the Employer Training Pilots (ETPs), run in selected areas over 2 years. ETPs were evaluated by the Institute for Employment Studies, and a number of important issues identified:

- The ETPs were more successful at involving the (relatively few) large employers in their area with 250+ employees than the large number of very small employers who present the biggest challenges in terms of employee skills training (Hillage et al, 2006:2).
- Relatively few of the employers involved were ‘hard to reach’ in the sense of not having previously been involved in government training programmes (between 14 and 25% of the employers in the ETP).
- The evaluators estimate that only about 10–15% of the training through ETP was additional, that is, it would not have occurred in the absence of the scheme. Most of the employers said they would have provided similar training anyway.
- A significant minority of employees taking part in the training (20–33%) were already qualified at level 2 or above and therefore officially ineligible for the programme (Ibid: 3).
- The proportion of employees taking basic skills rose from 10% in the first year to 15% in the third year of the pilots—still a small proportion given that officially employees

were only eligible if they did not have qualifications at L2 or above. The qualitative survey with learners indicated that only half had received some form of skills assessment (Ibid: 5).

- Nevertheless both employers and employees expressed satisfaction with their training programme: 80% of learners said they had learned something new.

Despite these concerns about the ETPs on which it was based, Train to Gain is planned to have an increasing proportion of LSC adult learning funding.

## **Learndirect**

Learndirect is a service developed by Ufi (University for Industry), established by the government in 1998 to provide innovative ways to expand post-compulsory learning opportunities, in particular through e-learning and marketing to employers. Learndirect's goals are to:

- reach those with few or no skills and qualifications who are unlikely to participate in traditional forms of learning
- equip people with the skills they need for employability, thereby strengthening the skills of the workforce and increasing productivity
- deliver innovatively through the use of new technologies.  
(<http://www.learndirect.co.uk/aboutus/>)

Learndirect operates a network of more than 800 online learning centres in England and Wales, providing access to a range of e-learning opportunities especially aimed at work-related skills (including literacy and numeracy).

Since its launch in 2000 more than two million learners have enrolled on almost 4.5 million Learndirect courses. Learndirect offers around 500 different courses covering a range of subjects, including management, IT, skills for life and languages, at all levels. More than three quarters of the courses are available online, allowing people to learn wherever they have access to the internet—at home, at work or at a Learndirect centre.  
(<http://www.learndirect.co.uk/aboutus/>)

In addition to its online learning courses, Learndirect operates a telephone advice and guidance service, free to all learners, that provides information about career options and course opportunities.

## **4.5 Providers**

A range of different kinds of organisations provide Skills for Life learning opportunities, including further education colleges, local education authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations, employers, trade unions and private training organisations.

No information seems to be available on the proportion of Skills for Life provision delivered by different kinds of providers. However, an LSC report in 2007 notes that analysis of individual learner records shows a significant reduction in work delivered by the voluntary and community sector since the 2005 publication of a strategy to create better relationships between the LSC and that sector (LSC, 2007:4). This is despite the evidence that, where such provision still occurs, there are areas of notable success in engaging with learners who are furthest away from the job market.

The reduction in provision by the voluntary and community sector may reflect the increasing focus on workforce learning and work with employers, rather than work in disadvantaged communities.

## 4.6 Other main stakeholders:

Several other national organisations play an influential role in Skills for Life.

### **NIACE (National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education)—[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk).**

NIACE is an independent organisation representing and promoting adult learning in England and Wales. NIACE works to advance the interests of adult learners and potential learners—especially those who have benefited least from education and training. It manages a range of projects, conferences and workshops, publications and initiatives, many of them funded (though not all) by government. NIACE aims for a ‘critical friend’ role with government, in which it works closely with government but maintains a level of independence that the NDPBs do not have.

### **NRDC (National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy)—[www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)**

NRDC was established by the DfES as part of the Skills for Life strategy as a centre for research into adult literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT, and development of good practice. Most of its work is funded by the DfES or other government bodies.

### **BSA (Basic Skills Agency)—[www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk)**

BSA is a small national charity that for over 30 years has been developing and disseminating good practice in basic skills education. Its remit now includes schools in England as well as adult literacy, and in Wales it oversees the Welsh government’s National Basic Skills Strategy. Again, most of its funding comes from the government. Plans have just been announced to merge the Basic Skills Agency with NIACE.

### **NLT (National Literacy Trust) – [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)**

The NLT works to promote literacy in early years and with families and schools. It is funded by the government and by large number of other sources, including trusts and foundations and companies (mainly publishing). The NLT aims to provide a support network, to promote practical initiatives (including Reading Is Fundamental, UK, the National Reading Campaign, Reading Connects, Reading Champions, Reading The Game, Talk To Your Baby and The Vital Link) and to promote a long-term approach to literacy interventions.

## 4.7 Quality assurance mechanisms

Quality drivers were key to the development of the Skills for Life strategy originally, given the perception both in the Moser report and by the DfES of adult basic skills provision being uneven and inadequate in terms of quality and effectiveness. While there is a specific quality initiative for skills for life, it is part of a wider and ever-developing quality system for the post-compulsory education system as a whole.

### **Quality Improvement Agency**

The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) is the lead agency for quality improvement in learning and skills. It was established in 2005 as the replacement for the Learning and Skills Development Agency. It is a registered charity but works in a similar way to the LSC, with a remit letter and funding from the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Its core mission is to ‘improve responsiveness to the priorities identified both by the LSC and the inspectorates in their quality assurance roles’ (DfES 2005:1). The government goal is to tackle the variability in standards within the post-compulsory education sector and to eradicate unsatisfactory provision.



The QIA works with the LSC, Ofsted, Centre for Excellence in Leadership, LLUK (the SSC for the lifelong learning sector) and other partners to develop a Quality Improvement Strategy for the sector.

The QIA focuses particularly on developing capacity for self-regulation within the sector: 'our ambition is for government, funding agencies and the inspectorates to have such confidence in the sector that the shift towards self-regulation is accelerated' (Quality Improvement Agency, 2006:1)

The Skills for Life Quality Improvement Programme (formerly the SfL Quality Initiative) is managed by QIA and designed to support providers (teachers, managers and support staff) in a process of change and self-improvement. Delivered by a national consortium led by the Centre for British Teachers, the programme works to national priorities within a regional system of decisions about where to target support and development. It focuses especially on training and development of staff:

*The Programme sets a high priority on developing the knowledge, skills and confidence of the workforce. It provides opportunities for unqualified and part-qualified staff in all learning settings to gain qualified status quickly. It also stimulates new thinking and enhances staff skills through continuing professional development on a range of issues, for example motivating and engaging learners.*

<http://www.sflip.org.uk/abouttheimprovementprogramm.aspx>

## **Ofsted**

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) recently merged with three other inspectorates to become the single body for quality assurance across a large sector of education and care. A large team of inspectors carry out hundreds of inspection visits a week. Within further education and the publicly funded skills and training sector, Ofsted works within a quality standards framework, the Common Inspection Framework, focusing on the learner experience.

The Common Inspection Framework leads to an overall judgement of how well the provision meets learner needs through five key questions:

1. How well do learners achieve?
2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?
3. How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?
4. How well are learners guided and supported?
5. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? (Ofsted, nd).

To answer the questions and reach an overall judgement, teams of inspectors visit the provider, review data and documentation, observe teaching and learning and interview students and staff. From September 2007 the inspection regime for FE colleges will be proportionate to risk:

- Short inspections for 'outstanding' colleges will last two days, involve two inspectors and result in a short inspection report.
- Colleges judged to be 'good' will continue to receive a light-touch inspection, typically involving four inspectors for one week.
- 'Outstanding' and 'good' colleges will not be inspected again for four years. Furthermore, they will no longer be subject to an annual assessment visit, providing that annual desk monitoring confirms that high performance is being maintained.
- 'Satisfactory' colleges will continue to be inspected by a larger team of inspectors to enable a range of curriculum areas to be evaluated and graded.

- 'Inadequate' colleges will receive a monitoring visit 6 to 9 months after inspection, followed by a full re-inspection after 12 to 15 months.
- Annual monitoring visits will continue for 'satisfactory' and 'inadequate' colleges. (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/portal/site/Internet/menuitem.75d4ee5e2788f064728a0d8308c08a0c/?vgnnextoid=eae12eacbd252110VgnVCM1000003507640aRCRD>)

Inspection teams use a 4-point grading scale to make judgements in terms of overall effectiveness, leadership and management and curriculum areas. Their reports on inspections of individual institutions are published on the Ofsted website.

## 4.8 Funding models

The LSC has been responsible for funding Skills for Life in England as part of all post-16 learning provision except for higher education (where funding is still allocated through the Higher Education Funding Council for England). Skills for Life is one of two major LSC priorities for adults, the other being to reduce the number of adults in the workforce who lack an NVQ level 2 or equivalent qualification. The arrangements will change over the next 2-3 years as 16–18 funding moves to local authorities.

Funding is complex. While there is a core funding formula set out by the LSC it does not specify length of courses or number of learners in a course (see <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/FEFundingGuidance0708.pdf>). Providers will make their own decisions about the length of course needed and how many learners must be on it to make the course financially viable.

In the LSC's funding formula some qualifications have a specific funding allocation (related to the expected time that learners have to be on course to achieve that qualification). Most school or college-type qualifications would be funded in this way, like GCSEs. Other qualifications, including all basic skills learning, cannot be funded at a specific amount because different learners take different lengths of time to achieve them. These are funded on 'load-banded' rates—by blocks of time on course (guided learning hours) with a weighting factor related to the cost of delivering the programme (e.g. horticulture learning aims are weighting E, 1.72 of base rate, a much higher weighting than media learning aims that are A—see Table 4 below). The basic skills weighting of 1.4 relates to the smaller than usual class sizes expected in basic skills—most FE colleges will have 20 or more learners per course in their mainstream departments, but might have 10–15 learners in a basic skills class.

The load-banded funding assumes that learners will pay a fee element, at 37.5% in 2007–08 and expected to rise to 50% of course costs over the next few years. Learners who are on income-related benefits gain 'fee remission' and receive free courses. All learners on skills for life courses, regardless of their income, have had fee remission, but from September 2007 only literacy and numeracy learning will be free while ESOL courses will have an expected fee element (with fee remission for those eligible).

The fee element of funding is a notional one, calculated as a percentage of the total funding determined by the LSC for a learner on a particular learning aim. Colleges or other providers themselves set the actual fee charged to the learner in relation to the local market and competition, widening participation or other local factors. The actual fee charged may be less or more than the LSC's 'fee element', but it is known that the LSC has concerns about colleges not collecting all their possible fee income.

An extract from the 2006-07 load-banded table follows:

**Table 4: Loadbanded rates for FE in 2007/08.**

**National base rates (including programme weighting and assumed fee element)**

Glh range	Assumed fee element	A (1.0)	B (1.12)	C (1.3)	D (1.6)	E (1.72)	F (Basic Skills 1.4)
9-3	£37	£98	£110	£127	£157	£168	£182
14-19	£47	£124	£139	£161	£199	£213	£182
20-29	£56	£149	£167	£194	£238	£256	£230
30-39	£89	£236	£265	£307	£378	£407	£379
40-49	£105	£279	£313	£363	£447	£481	£435
50-59	£121	£323	£361	£419	£516	£555	£494
60-89	£153	£407	£456	£530	£652	£701	£609
90-119	£235	£626	£701	£813	£1,001	£1,076	£876
120-149	£282	£752	£843	£978	£1,204	£1,294	£1,053

Source: <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/FEFundingGuidance0708.pdf> Retrieved 16.7.07

Note that the funding rates in the table are per learner. When a fee is payable the 'assumed fee element' is deducted from the amount of funding awarded by the LSC. 10% of the LSC funding for an individual is dependent on their achievement of their learning aim, usually a qualification. Learners who leave before completing the course will also be only partially funded.

As an example, a group of learners working in a local council rubbish collection service might be on course for 2.5 hours per week for a block of 10 weeks. If nine learners were in the group and all achieved, the provider would receive funding as follows:

25 glh @ the basic skills weighting = £230 per learner x 9 learners = £2,070

If some learners dropped out of the course early, or completed but did not achieve their learning aim, the funding would be reduced.

Funding rates work in retrospect, and are calculated from the actual Individual Learner Record (ILR) which all providers report to the LSC. However, no provider could operate on retrospective funding, so each LSC provider is given an annual funding allocation based on past performance, funding priorities and local funding available. Providers who consistently under-perform when their final ILR returns for the year are complete will have future funding allocations reduced. In a growth period, over-performing providers will have their funding allocations increased (but since adult learning funding outside of Train to Gain is decreasing this is not likely).

In the LSC's Annual Statement of Priorities in October 2006, adult learning funding for 2007-08 is expected to total £2,840,941 (27% of all LSC funding). This is 117% higher than in 2002-03 (essentially keeping up with inflation) while funding for 16-18 year olds is 147% higher in 2007-08 than in 2002-03. Train to Gain funding will be 16% of all adult funding (an increase of 62% from 2006-07). In contrast the share of funding going into the mainstream college-based 19+ funding is decreasing year on year.<sup>2</sup>

The LSC's funding is tied to performance monitoring: providers with weak performance may have their funding stopped and opened out to competitive tender. The FE White Paper noted the width of the LSC's powers of action:

<sup>2</sup> 2002-03 figures from <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/pre2005/ourbusiness/reporting/annual-report-and-accounts-2002-03.pdf> and 2007-08 figures from <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nationalstatementofpriorities-re-oct2006.pdf> both retrieved 16.7.07

*Any provider or provision judged to be failing or coasting will be subject to an improvement notice. Colleges and other providers will receive support to address the problems immediately. If the problems are not addressed within a year, the LSC will be able to act decisively – changing governors, changing the leadership of the college, opening up the provision to competition or seeking merger with or help from a strong provider (DfES, 2006: 9).*

## **Train to Gain**

Although Train to Gain (T2G) is an LSC programme the funding and delivery model is very different from the usual core LSC mode described above. As the delivery model is predominantly 1:1 in the workplace, the funding is per individual test achieved, £720 in total (personal communication from Judith Hinman, NRDC). Most providers translate this amount of money into a model of a maximum of 15 hours delivery (a few more if they can get a small group together, fewer hours if they have to include significant travel time.) In this time the learner has to progress up one level from the initial assessment (at which they must be E3 or level 1—learners who score below this must be funded from core funding). So the average TtG SfL programme is 10–15 hours in total. Providers only get 50% of the funding if the learner doesn't pass the test. Under Train to Gain, Skills for Life can only be offered to support achievement of an NVQ 2 qualification, not as discrete basic skills provision.

## **Learndirect**

Learndirect has a national budget direct from the DfES and independent of the LSC, as well as receiving funding through the LSC to deliver learning within LSC priorities. It is partially self-financing through course fees, which may be paid by individuals or by employers.

## **4.9 Commentary on current workplace literary provision**

The review of the main players in Skills for Life in England shows two aspects that are essential to understanding the system. First, the sheer number of players in what is, after all, not a large country, is remarkable. The raft of 'NDPBs' that have grown up around quality and development, as well as the different bodies set up to broker employer engagement and to define the skills needed, and the other stakeholders involved, form a complex system. They are almost all relatively new or, like Ofsted, have merged and taken on new personas in recent years. For providers in the field just keeping up with who does what is a constant challenge. Several sections of this review had to be rewritten because of changes in the last two months.

The second striking characteristic of the players is how few independent players there are. Most of the organisations listed in the section above are dependent on the government for all or most of their funding. Even the employer organisations and the unions, which have a degree of independence, receive substantial amounts of funding from the government, which can then set the agenda even when the organisation appears to be 'employer led' or 'member led'.

Given the context referred to in the policy section of a high degree of central control in England, it is perhaps not surprising that the government has so many different means of influencing the field. Without true membership organisations (like the American AAACE or COABE) that have a more independent life and financial base, there is a danger that critique will be muted and ineffective.

Looking ahead to the future, there is a strong chance that there will be more institutional changes to come once the new government department for skills gets underway. The future of the LSC is in question as its major 16–19 funding role passes to local education

authorities. Leitch's proposals for demand-led funding place more power in the employer-led organisations and directly in the hands of employers themselves.

One concern about the effectiveness of such a move is indicated by the evaluations of the Employer Training Pilots (ETPs), the precursor to the new Train to Gain programme. The evaluation of the first two years showed that most of the training funded under the ETPs would have been done by employers anyway, without government funding. It raises questions about the whole paradigm of 'demand-led' provision responding to employers. Yet the government is committed to expanding Train to Gain and if Leitch's recommendations are accepted it will become the primary mode of funding workforce literacy in the future.

## 5 Outcomes of literacy provision

Both the Skills for Life strategy (focused on basic skills) and the broader Skills Strategy (focused on workforce skills as a whole) are predicated on the assumption that improving skills will have outcomes in terms of individual learners (especially though not exclusively wages and employment), and in terms of employers and the economy as a whole. Two reviews of existing research on the impacts of basic skills training on individuals and on employers reveal the inadequacy of the research base in substantiating these assumptions (Ananiadou, Jenkins and Wolf 2003 and 2004). Both literature reviews demonstrate that:

*'our knowledge of the effects of adult basic skills provision, in and out of the workplace, is fragmentary and highly inadequate; and that even in the case of more general training for adults the evidence base remains difficult to interpret.'* (Ananiadou, Jenkins & Wolf, 2004: 303)

### 5.1 Outcomes for individuals

Ananiadou, Jenkins and Wolf (2004) summarise evidence relating to individuals' wages and employment probability. While there is evidence that individuals with higher skills benefit in terms of wages and employment, the evidence that engaging in basic-skills learning as an adult increases wage or employment outcomes is less clear.

There is a substantial body of evidence that individuals' basic skills are linked with their earnings and employment. The National Child Development Study (NCDS) longitudinal study of people provides clear evidence of this. In 1995 a 10% sample of these took a literacy and numeracy assessment and results were analysed by Bynner and Parsons (1997). This demonstrates clearly the 'circular relationship between disadvantage and poor cognitive skills in childhood, and poor basic skills, poverty and social exclusion in adult life' (Ananiadou, Jenkins & Wolf, 2004: 293). Similarly the more recent BCS70 study reviewed above shows clearly the significant impact on quality of life of having skills at the lowest end of the basic skills scale (Bynner and Parsons, 2006).

Labour market research by Dearden et al (2000, 2002) on the returns to a wide range of British qualifications, both academic and vocational, showed that there are clear earnings and employment returns to qualifications (the higher qualifications having the most effect). The study also uses IALS data to demonstrate that basic skills (controlling for qualifications) have an impact on earnings. For numeracy skills there is a 'premium' of 6–7% for skills at or above level 1 (Ananiadou et al, 2004: 294). The impact of literacy on earnings is less clear, and results from the data sets for the Dearden study differs from the NCDS data when both are controlled for qualification and family background (see Ibid: 295).

Both NCDS and IALS data shows different effects for men and women. The wage effects of higher numeracy skills are greater for men than for women, while the wage effects of literacy skills are higher for women than for men. In contract, higher numeracy skills have more impact on women's employment chances (Ananiadou et al, 2004:295).

Another study using NCDS data looked at whether improvement in literacy and numeracy since leaving had an impact on earnings (Machin et al, 2001). Researchers used four ways of measuring basic skills improvement

- self-report
- comparing scores of basic skills tests at 16 and 37
- acquisition of qualifications by those whose school-leaving qualifications were below level 1
- report of taking a literacy or numeracy course.

Of these methods of measuring skills improvements, only self-report was associated with higher earnings (and for women at least, an increase in employment). The effect of self-reported numeracy improvement was 3% higher earnings for men, 11% for women. None of the other measures had clear correlations with earnings, including gaining qualifications.

Ananiadou et al also report on recent research in both the UK and Swedish labour markets showing that 'courses followed or low-level qualifications acquired in adult life do not deliver wage or employment benefits in any predictable or reliable way.' (Ananiadou et al, 2004: 298).

The need for further research on the outcomes of basic skills improvement is clear, and a number of studies are currently underway. Of particular importance will be a longitudinal study of approximately 400 employees who have participated in workplace literacy or numeracy courses, and who are being followed up over a 5-year period (part of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and reported at <http://www.tlrp.org/proj/phase111/wolf.htm>).

The study should have preliminary analysis completed in late summer 2007 and should be completed in 2008. The study is tracking both impacts on individuals and on their employers, with the main objective to:

*Identify when and how workplace programmes are effective in improving adults' measured basic skills, as well as their effects on other life-course variables (employment stability, earnings, promotion, enrolment in further educational programmes); and to examine the impact on enterprises of sponsoring such programmes, in terms of potential improvements in productivity and changes in attitudes or commitment to the organisation. (Evans et al, 2005: 1)*

The research includes a series of face-to-face and telephone interviews with learners in four employment sectors, and with fellow employees and managers. Analysis will be both quantitative (looking at a range of outcomes) and qualitative (based on transcribed open-ended interviews with a sample of 70 learners and in-depth case studies in 40 organisations).

## **5.2 Outcomes for employers**

A detailed literature review conducted for the TLRP workplace literacy project concludes that there is remarkably little evidence of the benefits for employers of improving basic skills of employees (Ananiadou et al, 2003: 6). There is no systematic data from the UK, and very limited international evidence.

There is, however, a sizeable body of evidence on the improvements to productivity stemming from workforce training in general. Workplace training is associated with reduced labour turnover and higher levels of commitment to the organisation.

A review of the literature for the Sector Skills Development Agency in 2004 suggested there is convincing research evidence for skills as contributing to higher productivity (Tamkin et al, 2004). The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) have calculated that skills gaps contribute as much as one-fifth of the productivity gap between the UK and Germany. A large longitudinal data analysis for manufacturing industries in the UK suggested that an increase of 5 percentage points in the proportion of workers trained raises value added per worker by 4% per cent (Dearden et al 2000, quoted by Ananiadou, 2003: 24). However, Tamkin et al caution against too simplistic an interpretation of skills to performance:

*'Skills and training are nested within a wider system where organisations use skills differently. Some compete on a quality basis and therefore call on a higher-skilled workforce, others compete on cost and therefore produce goods to a lower specification with a lower demand for skills ... skills are only one aspect of performance. Increasingly the literature reflects the role of good management and the motivation and morale of individuals. (Tamkin et al 2004:1)*

While there is evidence that firms that train more seem to be more profitable, it is also true that 'firms that are already successful and growing also tend to do lots of training, and so can afford to raise everyone's take-home pay. There is no reason to suppose that simply adding training to a company, regardless of what else it does, will dramatically raise profits' (CIPD, 2005: 6). For this reason, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) emphasises the impact of increasing skills not simply in terms of short-term profitability but in terms of reducing staff turnover, increasing motivation and organisational commitment (Ibid).

There is solid evidence from the research literature that workplace training in general reduces labour turnover and increases motivation and commitment. One nationally representative survey of workplaces with more than ten employees found that employees who had had five or more days of training in the preceding twelve months were more committed to the organisation than those who had received less training' (see Ananiadou et al, 2003: 31).

### **5.3 Transfer of knowledge into workplace practices**

No UK research is available yet—will be included in the TLRP/NRDC research findings.

### **5.4 Resulting changes in productivity measures**

See above—no research is available on specific links to productivity measures, or what specific processes led to these, but this will be included in the TLRP/NRDC research.

### **5.5 Evidence of the cost-effectiveness of different approaches to upskill the workforce**

No UK research is available on the cost-effectiveness of different approaches to upskill the workforce, including the return-on-investment measures.

### **5.6 Other outcomes, including social**

No UK research is available yet—will be included in the TLRP/NRDC research findings. More generic research on the wider benefits of learning generally has been carried out by the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning at Birkbeck College (Schuller et al, 2004).

## 5.7 Commentary on the outcomes of literary provision

It is remarkable how little hard evidence there is for such a dominant assumption in public policy—that acquiring basic skills as an adult has impacts both on individual's life chances and on the workforce. Even in terms of acquiring skills more broadly, the outcomes relate more to increasing employee commitment (reducing staff turnover) than to productivity directly. We have no return on investment data on the economic effectiveness of skills for life training. Providers who work with adults on basic skills need no convincing of the value of literacy, language and numeracy learning in transforming people's lives. The lack of evidence may reflect the field's lowly status for so many years. But it is still surprising what an edifice of public policy has been built on so little evidence.

## 6 Literacy capacity-building

### 6.1 Tutor profiles

A partial overview of teaching staff in Skills for Life is available from the LLUK (LLUK, 2007). The analysis uses Staff Individualised Record (SIR) data for 2004–05 from 386 organisations with FE contracts from the LSC (most of these are FE colleges or Sixth Form colleges). The report is incomplete as it does not include people teaching in other kinds of institutions (such as local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations). The LLUK report estimates that a total of 231,884 people were working in these further education institutions (FEIs) in 2004–05, of whom 131,284 were employed as teaching staff. I have not been able to identify data relating to tutors working specifically in workplace or community settings.

Within the SIR study a total of 14,507 people were teaching in the 'foundation' sector that includes (but is not limited to) ALLN. There is good reason to think that a complete picture of the ALLN workforce would be much larger. In an NRDC analysis of teachers who took part in Skills for Life core curriculum training in 2001–03, 23%–43% of the teachers in one of the subjects (literacy, numeracy, ESOL or Access for All) worked in LEA or ACL institutions (Lucas et al, 2004b: 15). The authors thought that this under-represented the LEA/ACL sector and over-represented the FE sector. However, the NRDC data cannot be extrapolated to the whole workforce, so the SIR data is all we have.

More than two-thirds of the foundation area tutors in the SIR report were part-time and 74% of foundation teachers were female. Both the part-time/full-time split and the gender split differed from the average for all FEI teaching staff, with more part-time and more female staff than average employed in this subject area. Breakdown by ethnicity and age was not carried out by subject area. Overall, 87.8% of all FE staff were white and 12.2% black or ethnic minority. The FE workforce is ageing, with more teaching staff in the upper age groups (with the exception of female part-time staff who are younger).

Data on tutor qualifications are also not available for the whole sector, although there is some information in the SIR report (LLUK, 2007:6). This analyses the percentage of teaching contracts held by staff (rather than percentage of staff, and some tutors employed on a sessional basis will have more than one contract) and shows that on average 65% of part-time tutors are 'fully qualified' and 80% of full-time staff are 'fully qualified'. In this context, fully qualified means they hold or are enrolled on one of the following teaching qualifications:

- B.Ed. or BA or BSc with concurrent qualified teacher status
- Certificate of Education (Cert Ed)
- Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE)



- Level 4 FE teaching qualification—Stage 3 (in the case of part-time tutors Stages 1 and 2 of this qualification also count as ‘fully qualified’).

Overall, colleges had met the national target for 60% of part-time staff to be fully qualified by 2006, but had not met the target for 90% of full-time staff to be fully qualified. There is considerable variation among colleges and between regions of the country. The report does not analyse qualifications within subject areas, so there is no information on the qualifications of ALLN tutors, and no data on the subject specific qualifications for ALLN (which were relatively new in 2004–05 so numbers were likely to be small).

In the NRDC report, 53% of the tutors taking part in the Skills for Life Core Curriculum training had a full teaching qualification. Another 7% had only an introductory level teaching qualification and 5% had no teaching qualification at all. Since the programmes were in 2001–03 the proportion with full teaching qualifications is likely to have increased significantly as the new professional teaching qualifications were just starting in that period and have been rolled out fully across the country since then.

## 6.2 Tutor professional development

Teaching qualifications for ALLN have undergone two major restructures since the Skills for Life initiative started. A set of standards for teaching qualifications were initially developed by the Further Education National Training Organisation and a set of approved qualifications rolled out from 2002–2006. From September 2007 a new set of qualifications will be in place under standards developed by Lifelong Learning UK, the Sector Skills Council for the lifelong learning sector.<sup>3</sup>

Since September 2001 all new teachers in further education have been required to gain a recognised teaching qualification. From September 2002 all new literacy and numeracy teachers (and from September 2003 all new ESOL teachers) have been required to gain a subject specialist qualification in addition to a generic teaching qualification. Both qualifications require teaching practice while on course, and satisfactory observations of the teaching and learning by the assessor.

The DfES set targets for FE institutions in terms of fully qualified tutors, and expects all tutors to be fully qualified by 2010. Significant changes underway in teaching qualifications include:

- a minimum core of competence in literacy, language, numeracy and ICT that all teachers need to demonstrate (new national tests to assess these will be trialled from September 2007, and the feasibility of tests for ICT is being reviewed)
- flexible entry routes into the profession, allowing part-time pre-service models of training
- a new award to prepare new entrants to teach—an introductory course giving threshold status to teach. It will be mandatory for any new teacher in publicly funded provision. Those for whom teaching is their major role will be required to progress to a further qualification:
  - Those in a ‘full teaching role’ will be expected to gain a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong learning Sector at level 5;
  - Those with less than the full range of teaching responsibilities will be expected to gain a Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector leading to Associate Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS) status.

<sup>3</sup> Standards are on the LLUK website at [http://www.lifelonglearninguk.org/documents/standards/professional\\_standards\\_for\\_itts\\_020107.pdf](http://www.lifelonglearninguk.org/documents/standards/professional_standards_for_itts_020107.pdf)

- a period of professional formation, post-qualification, by which a teacher demonstrates through professional practice that they meet the standards
- a requirement for a minimum of 30 hr Continuing Professional Development (CPD) per year, and membership of the Institute for Learning, the professional body
- qualifications for principals are also being developed and will be required for all new principals, or current principals taking up a new post, from 2008.

While the qualifications above are intended for new tutors, providers will be required to ensure that all existing tutors have an appropriate qualification by 2010 (enrolling on a course unless they already hold one). These requirements will be built into LSC provider funding contracts. Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and professional recognition schemes are expected to be offered to existing tutors, although take-up of these in the past has been limited, many candidates finding it easier to do the course.

Course fees for all the teaching qualifications are charged by the institution (university or college) offering them, and these vary locally. Local authorities may pay the course fees for Certificate of Education (current generic teaching qualification) courses taken by their residents. Bursaries are being offered by some training providers for specific courses (but not all). Some FE employers will pay course fees for their own tutors to take the qualifications (especially full-time tutors) but by no means all. No data exists on how candidates fund their qualifications.

The NRDC study on new initial teacher education courses for ALLN tutors (Lucas et al 2004a) identified different professional training expectations among staff with different roles and experiences:

- Experienced teachers who were in management or training roles wanted intellectually demanding courses with a high degree of theoretical content, perhaps reflecting a desire to go beyond the more practically orientated initial training they had received.
- Practising teachers with some teaching experience also emphasised the theoretical content of the new courses based in the subject specifications, which contrasted with the practical nature of their previous training.
- New entrants to the profession, while confident about the intellectual challenges of the courses, were much more interested in developing their practical teaching skills (Lucas et al. 2004a).

Continuing Professional Development will be systematised in the new structure, and all tutors will need to register with the Institute for Learning and record at least 30 hours of CPD per year (less for part-time staff, down to a minimum of 9 hours). Until now, CPD has been mainly organised by the learning providers who employ the tutors and therefore is both unrecorded and very variable. Providers vary in whether or not they pay tutors to attend CPD (some require attendance as part of the tutor contract but do not pay, some pay an honorarium for attendance, others include CPD within the contracted hours). Because the CPD system has been so ad hoc, its accessibility and quality have been quite variable. The best colleges will have extensive programmes of in-house CPD and will pay for staff to attend local, regional and national events and workshops. Their CPD plans will be linked to the annual development plan that follows from their Self Assessment Review and designed to address weaknesses and build on strengths.

A recent literature review of international research on teacher education in adult literacy, language and numeracy identifies a number of key issues that need to be addressed in teacher training (Morton et al, 2006: 5). Among the issues identified by the report:

- Teacher education should provide access to conceptual frameworks that allow teachers to 'articulate their own perspectives on learning and teaching and to reflect

critically on the wider institutional, policy, social and cultural issues that enable or constrain their practice'

- Teacher education programmes should move away from an 'application of scientific knowledge' approach and take into account the 'process-orientated and holistic nature of teachers' knowledge.
- Teachers should be 'taught as they are expected to teach'.

### 6.3 Screening and assessment tools

Given the importance of good assessment to the whole process of skills for life learning it is perhaps surprising that it has not received more extensive attention from government, development agencies and researchers. As a study of the impact of summative assessment on learners' motivation says:

*We know very little about how assessment procedures and processes are operationalised and experienced by learners (and indeed tutors) in action in the learning and skills sector, far less how they affect motivation and facilitate or inhibit learning (Torrance and Coultas, 2004: 36).*

I have been able to identify no research to indicate which are the most widely used screening and initial assessment tools, or how many people have been screened. On the other hand, the summative assessment tests at entry 3, level 1 and level 2 are required by government so are consistent across the sector. These tests were developed in 2000–01 to provide a quick outcome marker for the national target and to enable a mass testing regime that did not require experienced markers (Brooks, 2004:42).

#### Screening tools

Screening tools are used to identify people who may have a basic skills need. They are designed to be used by staff who are not literacy specialists—perhaps employment advisers or others who provide advice or information. Probably the best known screening tool is the Basic Skills Agency's Fast Track. This aims to identify learners with literacy skills below level 1 and numeracy skills below entry 3 and uses 20 questions to identify common characteristics of people at these levels.

A more recently developed 'skills check' was developed for DfES by AlphaPlus Consultancy and BTL Group Ltd (<http://www.toolslibrary.co.uk/standard.htm>). The 'Smart Move' skills check has 12 literacy questions and 12 numeracy questions, all multiple-choice and graded in terms of difficulty. The assessor scores the answers against a target score to identify people who need to go through initial assessment.

#### Initial assessment

Initial assessment is a process of identifying learners' starting points in LLN skills, and may be more or less extensive. Some initial assessment tools are mainly designed to establish the learner's level, so that they can be placed in a learning programme within which the tutor will do a more detailed assessment of skills. Others provide a more extensive view of skills. All should identify a 'spiky profile' to some degree – that is learners whose specific skills are at different levels.

The Basic Skills Agency's Initial Assessment is widely used (again, no research to establish how widely and what the alternatives are). There is also an initial assessment to accompany the Smart Move skills check, developed by the same consultancy (<http://www.toolslibrary.co.uk/standard.htm>). The initial assessment is intended to identify skills level from entry 1 to level 2. It has 40 questions, all multiple choice, and all related to the national standards.

## Summative assessment

Skills for Life tests and qualifications for literacy, numeracy and ESOL have been developed by different examining boards at entry 1 to level 2, mapped to the core curricula, and approved as part of the National Qualifications Framework. The pre-entry level does not have a required qualification and many providers use the RARPA process for this and for non-accredited provision at other levels (see below). Use of the Skills for Life qualifications is enforced through funding allocations: the LSC expects to see that 80% of its Skills for Life funding is for learning aims leading to these qualifications.

There has been some controversy over the Skills for Life qualifications, and especially the reading tests which are the measure of the national targets. Because the tests are multiple choice and measure only reading for information, the concern is that they are too narrow as a measure of achievement for a much broader view of literacy.

For non-accredited provision, which has shrunk in size significantly but is still allowed for 20% of provision, Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) was developed. The process was systematised and codified to the extent that it became what some call 'qualifications light'. Nevertheless, versions of the RARPA process seem to be in wide use. Five elements are included in the process:

- course aims are fully stated
- initial assessment of learners' starting points and needs
- discussion and negotiation between teachers and learners to identify appropriately challenging objectives
- formative assessment, checking on progress and giving feedback
- final recognition of progress, recording and celebration of achievement (<http://www.niace.org.uk/Projects/RARPA/Default.htm>).

## Formative assessment

Formative assessment is the subject of increasing interest in the post-compulsory education sector, especially since the publication of a series of booklets for teachers (the 'black box series') on formative assessment in schools (Black et al 2002). International research showed that use of formative assessment by teachers in schools is very strongly correlated with improved learning and attainment, and also that in the context of systems with high-stakes summative assessment, teachers are inhibited from using formative assessment as part of their pedagogical approach (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Ten key principles of formative assessment were subsequently formulated and backed up by the evidence reviewed in Black and Wiliam's report. Formative assessment should:

- be part of effective planning for teaching and learning so that learners and teachers should obtain and use information about progress toward learning goals; planning should include processes for feedback and engaging learners
- focus on how students learn; learners should become as aware of the 'how' of their learning as they are of the 'what'
- be recognised as central to classroom practice, including demonstration, observation, feedback and questioning for diagnosis, reflection and dialogue
- be regarded as a key professional skill for teachers, requiring proper training and support in the diverse activities and processes that comprise assessment for learning
- take account of the importance of learner motivation by emphasising progress and achievement rather than failure, and by protecting learners' autonomy, offering some choice, feedback, and the chance for self-direction

- promote commitment to learning goals and a shared understanding of the criteria being assessed, by enabling learners to have some part in deciding goals and identifying criteria for assessing progress
- enable learners to receive constructive feedback about how to improve, through information and guidance, constructive feedback on weaknesses and opportunities to practise improvements
- develop learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they become reflective and self-managing
- recognise the full range of achievement of all learners (Derrick et al, 2007 based on Assessment Research Group, 2002: 2).

The Improving Formative Assessment project (IFA) led by Dr Kathryn Ecclestone of Oxford Brookes University is working with teachers in three FE colleges, one community school and six adult and community learning programmes over a 2-year period ending in December 2007. The teachers involved in the study work in vocational education and in ALLN (whether discrete courses or embedded in academic and vocational qualifications). About 60 teachers and 200 students are involved in a 'problem-based' approach in which teachers in subject teams identify an improvement to formative assessment that would be important in their particular context, implement it over six months and evaluate its effects on learning and motivation. Key research questions include how teachers think about and use formative assessment, the impacts on learners' motivation, what factors prevent 'deep' formative assessment from taking place, and how far the problem-based approach brings about change in teaching practices.

The project is particularly interested in the distinction between 'formative assessment as instrumental coaching towards summative goals' (or 'instrumental' formative assessment) and 'formative assessment that strives for engagement in genuine learning' (or 'deep' formative assessment). The IFA project expects to produce a number of research products over the next year including two books and a series of 'inside the black box' pamphlets for practitioners.

### **Research and evaluation of assessment**

There is little English research on the effectiveness of current methods of assessing literacy, language and numeracy—whether screening, initial assessment, formative assessment or summative. To meet its own particular research needs for valid, reliable and manageable assessment instruments the NRDC conducted research on 15 instruments used in Britain between 1992-2002 (Brooks et al 2005). The findings are interesting although the purpose was not to assess the value for programme use. No assessment instruments were found that met all the research requirements. Concerns were found with almost all the assessment instruments including definitional issues, floor effects (so that learners at lower levels could not complete), problems with validity and quality. In particular:

- The Basic Skills Agency's Initial Assessment (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) was criticised for the very heavy weighting given to spelling in the literacy marking scheme (Brooks et al, 2005: 18). This potentially discriminates against dyslexics. There were also concerns about the suitability of multiple choice format and the effects of this on validity.
- Target Skills: Initial Assessment (a computer based instrument) was not felt to meet 'the criteria for a good test'.
- Both Number Skills Check and Word Skills Check had problems with validity.

While there has been little research or evaluation directly on assessment of basic skills, some wider research on assessment in post-compulsory education generally is relevant.

There has also been a policy discussion paper from NIACE on assessment within the skills for life initiative.

An important study published by the Learning and Skills Research Centre investigated the impact of different modes of assessment on achievement and progress in the learning and skills sector generally (Torrance et al, 2005). It was the first comprehensive study of assessment procedures and practices across the full range of the learning and skills sector (LSS)—FE colleges, Sixth form colleges, workplace training and adult learning. The study notes the many anomalies of assessment structure and practice, some of which might have arisen in response to different contexts for assessment but which certainly raise concerns about equity and fairness. The authors believe that key-skills tests in particular (on which the skills for life tests were modelled) ‘are not serving the purposes for which they were ostensibly designed, and should be reformed to become uniformly applicable across the LSS or abolished’ (Torrance et al, 2005: 84). They also observe that:

- while assessment methods ‘do not directly affect learners’ choice of award or likelihood of success’, the association of certain awards with extensive written work means they are largely avoided except by students on a purely ‘academic’ track (Ibid: 1)
- clarity and transparency in assessment procedures have had an impact on retention and achievement of learners, as has detailed tutor and assessor support (Ibid: 82). They provide opportunities for detailed communication of the knowledge and competencies required, and coaching, practice, the possibility of retaking modules, detailed support in selecting evidence for portfolios all contribute to rising achievement rates. The skills for life tests illustrate this, since practice tests can be taken repeatedly as part of the preparation, detailed coaching can prepare students for the test, and the test itself can be taken as many times as a student likes.
- the ‘greatest paradox of all’ is the link between transparency and instrumentalism. ‘The clearer the task of how to achieve a grade or award becomes, and the more detailed the assistance given by tutors, supervisors and assessors, the more likely are candidates to succeed; but success at what?’ (Ibid).
- not only ‘assessment of learning’ and ‘assessment for learning’ but also ‘assessment as learning’, in which the assessment itself dominates the learning experience and ‘criteria compliance’, come to replace learning.

Earlier research by the same authors studied the effect of summative assessment and testing on learners’ motivation for learning (Torrance and Coultas, 2004). The study indicates the complexity of assessment in the learning and skills sector, given the many different methods in use, often employed in varying combinations for different purposes. The researchers also note that ‘the use of particular combinations of assessment methods is often driven as much by accountability pressures as by curriculum and pedagogic fitness-for-purpose’ (Ibid: 4).

A final influential report, a policy paper not a research study, is *Testing, Testing ... 1, 2, 3* (Lavender, Derrick and Brooks, 2004). This paper raised concerns about the national adult basic skills targets, both in terms of validity and their impact on the learning process, and argued strongly for ‘assessment for learning’ (formative and interactive) to be a stronger focus and for the narrow summative assessment via national literacy tests to be given less weight.

## **6.4 Resource development—curriculum and teaching resources**

Once Skills for Life became a major part of policy and significant funding was allocated to it, the field became a focus of resource development. While many of the past resources for adult basic skills were developed by organisations like the Basic Skills Agency, which

regularly drew on experienced practitioners to create materials, the lure of profit has widened the organisations developing resources substantially. Government-led (and funded) projects have created many resources to accompany the national curriculum, in terms of assessment (like diagnostic assessment tools), teaching and learning (like teacher packs) and materials directly for learners (like Quick Reads books for learners). Others have been created by the commercial sector. Keeping up with the range of what is available is a challenge for providers, and distributors like Avanti Books continue to provide a valuable service both in their catalogue and in their stalls at provider conferences ([www.avantibooks.com](http://www.avantibooks.com)).

## **6.5 Commentary on literacy capacity building**

One of the explicit goals of the Skills for Life initiative was to create a body of professional teachers in the field. The method chosen to reach this goal was to create professional qualifications that all new tutors would be required to gain and existing tutors persuaded to gain. As a local provider outside a metropolitan area, the biggest problem with the qualifications is that the courses have not always been offered locally (or if offered did not always recruit enough participants to run). The problem has been particularly acute for the ESOL qualifications.

But there is a bigger issue behind the scheduling problems. Most skills for life teaching posts are still part-time – more than two-thirds in the most recent staff survey in higher education. There are more part-time and female (always a clue to status) staff in the foundation sector than any other FE subject area. There are questions about whether the way to create a ‘professional workforce’ can be through new qualifications alone without addressing the structure of employment and the lack of career options more directly.

The qualifications themselves have changed twice within a 5 year period: as with so much else in the Skills for Life strategy the rapidity of change has made it difficult for practitioners in the field to keep up. The time period for all tutors to gain a qualification has been extended to 2010, and given staff shortages in many areas it is not clear what will happen if we reach that time with still unqualified staff in the classroom.

In an initiative characterised by rapid change in almost all areas, the one area that has not changed is the final assessment used to measure achievement of the target, the Skills for Life tests. Criticism by many in the field that the tests are too narrow to be adequate measures of literacy and numeracy learning were echoed by the ALI Chief Inspector, who argued that the test content was inappropriate, the multiple choice format ignored the more significant and relevant skills of writing and speaking, and that the numeracy tests called for too high a level of literacy (Chief Inspector ALI, 2005). He warned that many providers were placing the importance of meeting targets above that of meeting learners’ individual needs.

To conclude, the Skills for Life strategy is an ambitious initiative designed to overcome many years of neglect and underfunding of basic skills education. It is comprehensive, paying attention to each of the factors underpinning successful programmes from tutor training and CPD to defining the curriculum and creating materials, from initial assessment to final testing, from funding to quality assurance. It has made a huge investment in workplace literacy, language and numeracy, and has changed fundamentally the way in which it is conceived, planned, delivered and reported. At the same time it has some deep flaws.

The use of narrowly defined performance targets to direct provision has undoubtedly distorted that provision and resulted in a substantial proportion of the resources going to work with 16-18 year olds who would have been in further education anyway, or to

employees who would have been in employer-paid training anyway. Torrance and Coultas (looking across the further education sector, not specifically at Skills for Life) found that 'many [learners] fear testing and ... there is evidence that this can precipitate drop-out and deter progression' (Torrance and Coultas, 2004: 35). They conclude that 'across the compulsory and post-compulsory sectors as a whole it would appear that summative assessment and testing do more harm than good'.

The effort to control content and process, to define what is taught to whom and how, comes with the danger of taking practitioners' attention away from responding to particular learners' needs. As a recent NRDC study found, many teachers experience a tension between two kinds of professionalism. On the one hand, many tutors have a 'responsive professionalism': 'the capacity to listen to learners in order to fine-tune their teaching to make it relevant to people's lives' (Ivanic et al, 2006: 36). On the other hand, tutors have a 'new professionalism' that is based in the requirements of the Skills for Life strategy to meet targets, deliver the core curriculum, administer the required assessment and comply with procedures and paperwork.

We found that tutors were often faced with a tension between these two types of professionalism. Often the requirements of the curriculum and institutional constraints made it difficult for them to put students' individual interests and motivations at the centre of their teaching. For example, they experienced a tension between the requirement to teach to the test, and serving the needs of students who wanted to work on their writing. (Ibid: 37)

As these final words were being written yet another change is being announced, a 'bonfire of PSA targets' in which the current 110 targets are being reduced to 30. What impact this will have on Skills for Life is unknown. The Skills for Life strategy has had inbuilt tensions, and how these will be resolved over time will determine how far we will look back on it as a success.

## Abbreviations

ACL	Adult and Community Learning (one of the funding streams of the LSC)
ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate (merged in 2007 with Ofsted)
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
CIF	Common Inspection Framework (used by ALI and Ofsted, and by LSC-funded providers in their annual Self Assessment Review)
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (recently split into two, with the Skills for Life Initiative under the Department for Universities, Innovation and Skills)
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRC	Economic and Social Science Research Council
ETPs	Employer Training Pilots (forerunner of Train to Gain)
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FEIs	Further Education Institutions
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFA	Improving Formative Assessment research project
IP	Investors in People
ILR	Individual Learner Record, submitted by providers to LSC
JCP	Job Centre Plus
LEA	Local Education Authority



LLN or ALLN Literacy, Language and Numeracy or Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy  
LSS Learning and Skills Sector  
LLUK Lifelong Learning UK (Sector Skills Council for lifelong learning sector)  
LSC Learning and Skills Council  
NCDS National Child Development Study  
NDPB Non-departmental Public Body  
NEET Not in Education, Employment or Training (used of young people above school leaving age)  
NHSU National Health Service University  
NIACE National Institute for Adult Continuing Education  
NLT National Literacy Trust  
NRDC National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy  
NVQ National Vocational Qualification  
OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development  
OFSTED Office for Standards in Education  
PSA Public Service Agreement  
QIA Quality Improvement Agency  
RARPA Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement  
SSC Sector Skills Council  
SSDA Sector Skills Development Agency  
SIR Staff Individualised Record  
TLRP Teaching and Learning Research Programme  
TUC Trades Union Council  
Ufi University for Industry  
ULR Union Learning Representative

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