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Research report

Success factors in informal learning: young adults' experiences of literacy, language and numeracy

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Acknowledgements

Executive summary

This is the final report of the research project *Success factors in informal learning: young adults' experiences of literacy, language and numeracy*. The report covers the activities from phase two of the project (April 2004 to March 2005) and the overall findings of the research.

Research activity in phase two included:

- A consultation exercise on practitioners' training needs and strategies to address them.
- Further work to explore accreditation and recognition of achievement.
- Co-ordination of the work of a Resources Consultation Panel to review teaching and learning materials currently in use.
- Recommendations based on their findings.

The report brings together the findings of both phases of the research project, and makes recommendations for both policy and practice. The report also presents the framework of critical success factors for developing literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) among young adults through informal learning.

Methodology

The project was designed in two main phases over a 20-month period. The first phase aimed to:

- Provide a review of available literature on informal learning theory, and the practice and policy of LLN provision for socially-excluded young adults.
- Map the territory of informal and non-formal LLN provision for young adults across the country through project visits, observations and semi-structured interviews.
- Undertake a wide-ranging postal questionnaire survey of providers working informally to develop LLN among young adults.
- Follow this up with telephone interviews, to explore activities and practices that contribute to the development of young adults' LLN, and determine the extent and scope of this provision.
- Identify approximately ten case study sites for further development in phase two.

The activities of the first phase are documented in the interim report, *Success factors in informal learning: young adults' experiences of literacy, language and numeracy* (2004). The literature review will be published under separate cover in Spring 2006.

The second phase of the project aimed to:

- Identify practitioners' training needs, and strategies to address them, through a postal and online questionnaire and consultation exercise.
- Host briefing events for practitioners in response to the consultation.
- Co-ordinate a Resources Consultation Panel to review and evaluate teaching and learning materials currently in use in work with young adults; and respond to the recommendations of the panel.
- Develop detailed case studies of approximately ten project sites through observation, semi- and unstructured interviews and focus groups with practitioners and learners.

- Further explore accreditation and recognising young adult learners' achievements.
- Identify and analyse the critical success factors for working effectively in LLN development with young adults.

The project was designed and implemented according to a set of guiding values and principles: a commitment to the involvement and active participation of young adult learners, and those practitioners who work with young adults on an informal and non-formal basis. By adopting an action-based and collaborative process of research, the aim was to generate activity and stimulate LLN development, and to raise understanding of LLN teaching practice. It is hoped that the outcomes will, as a result, be more relevant to young adults and practitioners.

Key points

Some of the key findings of the research project are:

- Addressing the needs presented by young adults' attitudes, goals and life experiences was far more influential in guiding their learning programmes than environment, funding or accreditation-related targets.
- Most provision had a target to engage with young adults not in employment, education or training. The priority for practitioners was learners' progression into employment or formal education.
- Practitioners have insufficient information about sources of funding for informal and non-formal LLN work with young adults.
- Most young adult learners fall into the 16 to 19 age group, and there is consequently less attention being paid to the contribution that informal learning can make to the learning needs of young adults aged 19 to 25.
- There was a higher proportion of young men than young women participating in programmes.
- Engaging young adults is an enduring issue of paramount importance to practitioners. This is often more pressing than the LLN elements of provision.
- There is an ongoing debate among practitioners about the benefits of making LLN explicit in learning programmes rather than 'teaching by stealth'.
- Balancing 'hooks' and rewards with learning elements of provision was a constant struggle for practitioners.
- The use of *Skills for Life* initial and diagnostic assessment was closely related to the amount and level of LLN training undertaken by practitioners.
- Some form of initial or diagnostic assessment was widely agreed to be useful, whether specifically LLN related and formal or informal and more holistic. Forms of ongoing or formative assessment were rarely mentioned.
- Across all sectors, embedding LLN was widely believed to be the most effective approach in working with young adults.
- There was a strong desire amongst practitioners to share experiences, but there was not necessarily a common understanding of terminology.
- Practitioners concentrate mostly on literacy, with far less emphasis on numeracy. Oracy is often overlooked.
- Very rarely were examples of provision found that shared the same definition of informal education or learning.
- Practitioners reported a lack of materials to support their LLN work with young adults.

Consequently, the vast majority create their own resources, based on their learners' interests and the needs of the learning programme.

■ There is not always an awareness of existing materials due to a lack of professional networks.

■ Responses to accreditation, assessment and qualifications were mixed, with some practitioners believing them to be a motivational force for learners, whereas a minority saw them as an intrusion into an otherwise informal programme.

■ The way in which accreditation is introduced to young adult learners, and the support offered to them, is central to its success.

■ Training and professional development for practitioners working to develop LLN among young adults is an extremely emotive subject.

■ Most practitioners have very little specific training in the teaching of LLN.

■ Personal qualities and attributes associated with effective youth work, such as patience and empathy, were considered essential; whereas LLN training was seen as desirable but hard to access, and sometimes inappropriate to the cohort.

Recommendations

■ It is critical to acknowledge the individual needs, hopes and experiences of young adults, as distinct from other age groups.

■ Practitioners would benefit from greater clarity about the processes of applying for funding.

■ Programmes would be enhanced by more core funding for the LLN elements of informal and non-formal provision.

■ Practitioners would also benefit from screening and diagnostic tools created for and aimed at young adults, developed in consultation with learners and practitioners themselves.

■ The extension of education and professional networks would promote a shared understanding of terminology and increase the confidence of practitioners working outside the further education (FE) sector and formal provision.

■ Practitioners have emphasised the usefulness of resource frameworks as opposed to off-the-shelf materials or standardised paper-based schemes of work. Such a framework would allow for the flexibility and differentiation crucial to work with the young adult cohort.

■ Practitioner training should take into account and build on their existing skills and experiences. This training also needs to reflect and respect the variety of roles practitioners play.

■ Stronger relationships between local LLN projects and youth service or community projects would begin to break down perceived barriers between sectors.

■ Learning programmes should include elements of accreditation as appropriate to the interests and aspirations of young adult learners.

1 Introduction

There are currently 1.1 million young adults aged 16 - 24 not in employment, education or training in the UK. Young adults in this group are far more likely to experience difficulties relating to literacy, language and numeracy, and consequently can find themselves further marginalised from formal opportunities. This is the final report of the NRDC research and development project *Success factors in informal learning: young adults experiences of literacy, language and numeracy*. This project was a collaboration between NRDC and the Young Adults Learning Partnership (YALP). YALP is a joint initiative between the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and The National Youth Agency (NYA).

YALP researches and develops effective approaches to learning and personal development among young adults aged 16 to 25, who are on the margins of education, training and employment. Its purpose is to foster their capability and integration as young workers, parents and citizens. YALP seeks a closer match between policies and programmes of learning and skills providers and the needs, interests and aspirations of young adults.

In August 2003, YALP began this project, as part of NRDC's programme of research and development, which focused on the contribution of informal[1] education to the development of socially-excluded young adults' LLN skills. The project finished in March 2005.

This research and development project builds on previous research undertaken by YALP in 2001/2 into improving the take-up and achievement of young adults in LLN provision[2]. This provided a snapshot of current LLN provision for 16 to 25-year olds not in formal education, employment or training (the 'NEET' group). It showed that the range and quality of provision varied enormously and that there was a real need for development of practices, materials and policy.

One of the main reasons for NRDC's committment to this research and development project was the need for greater knowledge of practices and materials. It also adresses a key priority within the *Skills for Life* strategy, which seeks to engage and improve participation among young adults aged 16 to 25, particularly those who are not engaged in learning activity, and are at risk of social and economic exclusion. The research corresponded with the widening participation and social inclusion agendas of both local and central government, including growing concerns about the number of young adults not in education, employment or training. The project has particular relevance to the government's *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES, 2002), the white paper, *14–19 Opportunity and Excellence* (DfES, 2003), the skills strategy white paper *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential* (DfES, 2003), and the work of the Tomlinson Group on the reform of curriculum and qualifications for 14–19 year olds. This project also has direct relevance to the achievement of the five outcomes (being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being) that form *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003), and the four key challenges addressed in the most recent green paper, *Youth Matters* (DfES,

1. As part of this research, no attempt has been made to define informal and non-formal education, but rather to explore these terms, recognising that these concepts are contested, and hold different meanings in different contexts. However, the research took as a starting point, provision taking place outside mainstream institutions.
2. Jackson, C and Aylward, N (2002) 'Basic Skills Work with Young Adults' NYA/NIACE Briefing Paper

2005) - particularly engaging young people in positive activities and empowering them to shape the services they receive. Young people's easy access to literacy, language and numeracy provision is central to the paper's aim of achieving an integrated support service, focused on and structured around young people's needs.

The project aimed to:

■ Identify and disseminate practices, materials and resources for work with previously or currently marginalised young adults that encourage the development of LLN skill levels through informal learning.
■ Provide a framework of critical success factors for working informally on LLN skills with young adults.
■ Design, pilot, evaluate and produce learning and teaching materials for work with young adults in informal learning settings.
■ Identify practitioners' training needs and possible strategies to address them.

The project was divided into two phases.

Phase one – August 2003 to April 2004

Phase one initially focused on a review of literature about the theory, practice and policy of LLN skills provision for young adults. This provided a synopsis and critique of significant literature. Phase one also involved 'mapping the territory' of LLN provision through initial visits to projects, a postal questionnaire, case studies and follow-up telephone interviews. The literature review is being published as a separate document.

Phase two – April 2004 to March 2005

The work in phase two built on that in phase one, beginning with the formation of a consultation panel of young adult learners and practitioners. The role of the panel was to examine and assess a selection of teaching and learning resources, identifying their strengths and weaknesses and recommending how they might be adapted and used. The review informed subsequent activity in this area, including further reviews, and an aim to develop a guidance framework for practitioners. In-depth consultation was undertaken to identify any specific gaps in the training available for practitioners, and was followed by three regional briefing events for practitioners. Further work concentrated on a deeper exploration of practitioners' experiences and perceptions of accreditation.

This report draws together the outcomes and findings from the young adults and LLN project. It provides an overview of the main activities undertaken as part of the research and development work, and expands on the emergent themes. It also includes a report on the training needs of practitioners, detailed commentary on the work of the resources consultation panel, and analysis of the work to explore accreditation. Case studies produced as part of the research will be published separately.

2 Main findings

The interim report, drafted in April 2004 and published in November 2004, drew together the emerging themes from research activity between August 2003 and April 2004, including project visits, case studies, a practitioner questionnaire, and follow-up telephone interviews. Although many of the conclusions were necessarily provisional, the themes across sectors, geographical location and programme type were very similar. These themes and findings are strongly reinforced by subsequent research activity from April 2004 to March 2005.

2.1 Target groups

Across all the sites visited as part of the research, it became clear that the strongest determinant of how the learning programme was structured, and how practitioners engaged with learners, was the characteristics and practicalities of working with young adults. In practice, addressing the needs presented by young adults' attitudes, goals and life experiences was far more influential in guiding learning activities than environment, funding or accreditation related targets. Therefore, it is important to go beyond generalisations about the 16 to 25 age group. Across the research sites, approaches do, and indeed should, differ, depending upon the groups attending learning programmes. Successful approaches are characterised at least in part by focusing on the interests and aspirations of individuals or groups of young adults', and taking their experiences as a starting point. This necessitates 'knowing your learner' well, and translating this into a working practice.

> 'It is dangerous to assume one age group will go for a particular strategy.' (Voluntary and community organisation respondent in interview).

Many learning programmes visited, and the case study sites, reflect the current concern with young adults who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Most provision had a target to engage the NEET group, reduce numbers of young adults who are NEET, or prevent young adults becoming NEET in the first place. This is also a main concern of the Connexions service, and the NEET group are considered 'priority one' within the Connexions strategy. They are also one of the core groups for whom Entry2Employment was designed. The priority for practitioners working with these young adults was progression into employment or formal education.

> 'We aim to help them decide which routes to take into employment.' (Voluntary and community sector provider in interview).

> 'We're set up to be linked to the world of work.' (FE provider in interview).

The majority of organisations and projects are also working to engage positively with young offenders, or young adults at risk of offending.

> 'We have a higher than usual percentage of young offenders – we take young people that others would turn away.' (Voluntary and community sector provider in interview).

This is not always a conscious aim – working with unemployed young adults, young fathers or

young adults who have been excluded from mainstream education, for example, is in practice likely to mean working with young adults who have had contact with the criminal justice system. Intervention to prevent (further) involvement in the criminal justice system was not always a priority, but was hoped to be a secondary benefit to improved self-esteem, re-engagement in learning, and personal/social development.

A very high percentage of providers contacted as part of the research reported working with young adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and referred to higher than average numbers of learners with dyslexia involved in provision. Practitioners worked hard to ensure that learning programmes and activities were accessible to a wide range of learners and abilities, and were reflective of diverse learning styles. Accreditation routes were frequently chosen on the grounds of their recognition of achievement at a range of levels.

Making contact with projects working with young adults from black and ethnic minority communities proved challenging. The vast majority of organisations and projects that were visited or interviewed as part of the research were focusing primarily on vocational or lifeskills-related programmes, and young adults involved in this type of provision tended to be from white British backgrounds. Similarly, these vocationally-focused projects more frequently made contact with the research team. Young adults from white British background were more likely to be 'vocationally undecided', and more likely to engage with provision aiming for vocational outcomes.

Although learning programmes often aim to work with young adults from a wide age range, the average age of young adults participating is similar across projects. Most young adult learners fall into the 16 to 18 age group, with a small number of learners between 18 and 21.

> *'We struggled getting a wider age range.'* (Voluntary and community provider in interview).

The age of learners also had a defining effect on provision – many 16 to 18 year olds are beginning to live independently, are working towards their first experience of employment, or are becoming first time parents. Young adults aged over 21 are often at very different life stages, and have different learning needs. The clear learning needs of young adults aged 16 to 18, often pressing, can make engagement easier – by focusing on real and relevant issues that are likely to have a swift, positive impact on their lives. Similarly, the 16 to 18 year old age group are unlikely to have been 'disengaged' from learning or employment for long periods of time, and are consequently easier to make initial contact with than the over 19 age group, who may have been outside education and employment some time, and become disillusioned with the variety of options with which they may have been presented.

Across most of the programmes visited, there was a higher proportion of young men than young women participating. FE providers tended to be working with more young women than providers from other sectors. Many programmes are actively targeting young men but, for others, this gender breakdown was not intended. This may be explained by one practitioner's observation that young men are less focused and consequently *'tend to hang around [for longer]'* (Voluntary and community sector provider in interview). It is her experience that young women *'know what they want, so they don't hang around'*, accessing the support they need, then moving on. Consequently, although providers may be engaging with similar numbers of young men and women, they tend to be working with higher numbers of young men in the long term.

Most learning programmes were working with groups of young adults, with a ratio of around 10–12 learners to every member of staff. However, practitioners recognise the difficulties many young adult learners have with group work, and aim to adopt an individual 1:1 approach with learners, or at least to increase the level of individual support offered to learners.

2.2 Engagement

Engaging with young adult learners means both initially attracting them to learning programmes, and sustaining relationships long term. This has emerged as an enduring issue of paramount importance to practitioners. Many programmes aim to reach young adults not in education, employment or training, and this cohort, by their very nature, are very difficult to find, let alone engage. In practice, finding ways to engage and motivate young adults must come before creating the LLN elements of provision.

> *'It is more often the case that you cannot start with basic skills. Personal development, building confidence and the ability to trust people... are the most common starting points.'* (Youth service respondent in questionnaire).

A strong element of initial engagement is publicity and promotion, and practitioners frequently face problems in developing 'credible' publicity for young adults. Although projects and organisations visited used a variety of methods to publicise their provision, including leaflets, newsletters, websites, posters, flyers and recruitment events, it was widely acknowledged that the best form of publicity in working with young adults is word of mouth: as one provider noted, *'young people believe other young people'*. Young adults are more likely to engage positively with learning programmes, and remain engaged, when friends, family and boyfriends/girlfriends have also been involved. This seems to overcome any perceived stigma around their attendance, and makes young adults feel more confident and in control, and that the choice to attend was a positive one on their part, rather than complying with a formal requirement, or a passive acceptance in the absence of any real choice. Although young adults may initially attend provision where referred by intermediary or sign posting organisations (such as probation officers or social workers), learners were less likely to sustain their attendance in these cases since the referral came from someone in authority, 'part of the system'. Learners were more likely to believe their peers, and feel more confident that their judgement is relevant to learners' lives, and made in their best interests.

Effective publicity is equally important when young adults are referred directly to provision (where the element of 'recruitment' is less important), since it is also instrumental in developing the credibility that leads to sustained engagement. A clear message emerged that using the term 'basic skills' in publicity deters young adults learners.

> *'Sessions are very rarely marketed as "basic skills", or "literacy/numeracy" sessions. We find that this approach simply does not work – learners do not turn up; retention rates are low.'* (Voluntary and community sector respondent in questionnaire).

The manner in which learning programmes are 'marketed' to young adults also has implications for approaching LLN learning – the debate continues over the relative benefits of introduction by stealth rather than highlighting LLN elements.

It is widely acknowledged by providers that young adults also respond well to 'hooks' in order

initially to attract them to provision, and subsequently to promote retention, since 'keeping them on board' is an ongoing challenge. However, balancing these 'hooks' and related 'rewards' (such as computer games, meals, sports wear and vouchers) with the learning elements of the provision is a constant struggle, offsetting the competing pressures of sustained engagement with learning activities. Young adults are a particularly hard group to engage, with their involvement often balancing on a knife-edge. For most programmes, sustained engagement was the main aim, and practitioners were aware of the care needed to create interest and sustain it, while involving young adults in effective learning activities. Nearly all the practitioners interviewed were using some kind of hook to attract young adults to provision, and continued to use this hook, or reward, throughout the learning programme to encourage involvement in learning activities, to recognise achievement, or to promote sustained engagement in the learning. However, some practitioners found their reliance on 'rewards' sometimes compromised the learning activities. Learners became accustomed to the balance being in favour of 'rewards', for example more time spent playing computer games than writing CVs, and responded negatively when the balance was redressed in favour of learning activities.

Another important factor influencing effective engagement is the perceived standing within the community either of the organisation or of the location of provision. Several projects felt that their success in attracting and engaging with young adults was due to the community 'knowing them', and by extension, accepting them. For example, young adults found projects more approachable when the base was 'on their patch' so that they did not have to venture into spaces they would normally avoid.

2.3 Screening, initial assessment and diagnostics

The use of initial/diagnostic assessment, and the types of tool adopted for this purpose was closely related to the amount and level of LLN training undertaken by staff, and the aims or objectives of the learning programme itself. Practitioners who had attended training days on the *Skills for Life* initial/diagnostic assessment tools were far more likely to be using them, and to feel confident in their application throughout the learning programme. Similarly, where the aim of the learning programme was explicitly related to the development of literacy, language or numeracy skills, providers were much more likely to be using the initial or diagnostic assessment tools.

Some form of initial or diagnostic assessment was widely agreed to be useful, but practitioners were seeking varied kinds of information - for some, reading age was more useful than an indication of 'level', just as others preferred to focus on social and behavioural issues rather than literacy and numeracy need. For those programmes with an explicit LLN focus, and where staff felt confident and knowledgeable in this area, use of *Skills for Life* initial and diagnostic assessment tools was fairly common, but the use of more up to date computer-based diagnostic assessments depended upon access to ICT within the organisation. Many of the practitioners interviewed were seeking to generate a holistic 'picture' of the young adult, of their hopes and aspirations, and learning needs and experiences. Practitioners reported that tools such as the Rickter Scale[3], learning styles questionnaires, and Kudos careers guidance software provide valuable information,

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3. The Rickter Scale is a non-paper based assessment and evaluation tool, with open headings.

supporting both the practitioner and the learner in tailoring learning activities to their needs and purposes.

However, an equal number of practitioners opted not to use any 'formal' initial or diagnostic assessment tools, instead undertaking 'informal' assessment, usually via 1:1 conversation with the young adult. This approach was far more common in learning programmes where the LLN content was either not the central aim of the learning, or was very much 'played down' to avoid the perceived stigma attached to 'basic skills' learning. Similarly, practitioners working in these settings were also more likely to avoid 'formal' initial and diagnostic assessments due to concerns that young adults may view them as tests or exams, and consequently be 'switched off' before the learning programme has even begun.

Forms of recorded ongoing or formative assessment were rarely mentioned. However, since many practitioners reported undertaking 'informal' initial assessment, it is likely that any formative assessment is also undertaken informally. Such informal ongoing reviews are a central part of 'knowing your learner', frequently cited as a critical success factor in engaging and motivating young adult learners.

2.4 LLN within learning programmes

In practice, the way in which LLN are incorporated into learning programmes varied widely from project to project. Across sectors, 'embedding' was widely believed to be the most effective approach in work with young adults.

> 'We embed literacy, language and numeracy. They [the learners] wouldn't come if we didn't. They want it to be fun, to be not like school.' (Youth service provider in telephone interview).

'Embedded' literacy, language and numeracy provision has been defined as provision which develops these skills in the context of another course, experience or activity[4]. The *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit state that 'embedded teaching and learning combines the development of LLN with vocational and other skills'[5]. The aim in this case is to develop LLN skills, and skills/knowledge in the subject or area being used as a vehicle. LLN are commonly embedded into sessions such as 'shop and cook' where young adults choose menus, make shopping lists, budget for their purchases, plan and cook the meal, and, of course, eat it at the end! Other popular activities include gym and fitness, calorie counting, darts, media awareness, life skills, sexual health, employability/job search, map reading and journey planning, and financial awareness. Embedding LLN within areas such as motor mechanics, health and beauty, and construction is also an increasingly common approach, as more providers develop their 'vocational offer' in line with policy and funding priorities.

There are a variety of reasons, not always clear-cut, why embedding is the most common approach adopted. One major factor is the perception of LLN by the young adults - the majority of practitioners reported throughout the research that emphasising or highlighting the LLN element of their learning programmes resulted in young adults being 'turned off', demonstrated either through low take-up, or low retention.

4. See Developing Embedded Basic Skills newsletters (2003), a NIACE managed project, jointly commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council and DfES.
5. See the Learning from Experience project web pages at www.niace.org.uk/projects/learningfromexperience.

'The young people don't know they are doing it [LLN]. That reduces stress.' (Voluntary and community sector provider, in telephone interview).

Maths and English are closely associated with the formal education system, and for learners (and indeed practitioners) this can be associated with 'failure'. However, sometimes it seems that feelings and perceptions may be ascribed to young adults, reflecting the assumptions often made by practitioners about their experiences and aspirations. An increasing focus on vocational and pre-employment programmes also provides opportunities for LLN to be embedded in topics or themes that are both real and relevant for young adults.

'Embedding' is a key concept in this work – there continues to be strong research activity in this area, dedicated teaching and learning materials have recently been published, and embedding is frequently referred to in good practice reports and directories. It is seen as a 'new' approach, particularly for practitioners relatively new to the area, who have been working in isolation, or with little training, and searching for information on 'what works'.

A further key reason for a focus on embedding relates to practitioner training, and feelings of confidence. 'Discrete' literacy and numeracy can seem far more threatening to practitioners with relatively little training and/or confidence in this area. This is particularly true for practitioners whose role has recently changed or expanded to include the teaching of LLN. Such practitioners felt much more confident developing sessions on topics such as cookery or budgeting, with the knowledge that some LLN will fall within it, rather than developing a discrete 'maths' session. However, there is a danger that practitioners may leave the LLN learning to chance, rather than actively 'teaching' it.

Within the overarching theme of 'embedding', practitioners were using a number of different strategies which fall roughly along two themes: a conscious effort to integrate LLN across provision, and an 'opportunistic' approach – where LLN learning is identified retrospectively, is unplanned and often unrecognised, by both practitioners and learners. In many organisations, all staff are encouraged to ensure that LLN run through all their sessions, whether the activity be painting and decorating, motor mechanics or life skills. For some, the fact that LLN underpin everything else is the key to their success.

'We do not have a discussion about whether or not the learner will do basic skills, but about how much basic skills they will do.' (Private training provider in interview).

LLN are skilfully embedded in areas of interest to young adults, but then 'drawn out' again, to help young adults to recognise their achievements, and develop their confidence in learning.

A minority of projects visited emphasised the importance of LLN by making them explicit in individual sessions. These projects were running discrete literacy and/or numeracy sessions, either in groups or as 1:1 sessions. Sessions were often organised around a topic of interest – for example buying and running a car, Black History, working in the construction industry, or applying for a job – but the literacy or numeracy content was explicit throughout.

In practice, numeracy is far more likely to be embedded into vocational subject areas or specific life skills sessions, featuring most prominently as an aspect of financial awareness or budgeting. Numeracy was rarely referred to as 'numeracy', and practitioners seemed to feel far less confident about this element of provision, both in terms of their own skills, and the anticipated response from the young adults involved. Consequently, numeracy is far more

often an implicit element of sessions – contained within the activities but not readily apparent or drawn out. By contrast, literacy appears much more explicitly – stated clearly, leaving no room for doubt – and practitioners are far more confident about the incorporation of literacy within their learning programmes.

Although some practitioners spoke of working to develop young adults' communication skills, the development of young adults' 'language' skills, or oracy, receives substantially less attention than literacy and numeracy. Although oracy development often occurs through many different strands of work, practitioners did not mention it as an explicit, or conscious, element of their provision.

The way in which practitioners utilise information and communications technology (ICT) falls into two categories – programmes using ICT as a medium through which LLN skills were developed and any development of ICT skills was incidental; and projects developing ICT skills as the primary aim, with ICT being considered as a 'basic skill' in its own right. For projects using ICT as a medium, in general, using computers and the internet are successful methods of developing LLN, and also function as 'hooks' to attract young adults into provision.

2.5 Terminology

There was a strong desire amongst all the practitioners we contacted to talk about their provision, and to share experiences, but there was not necessarily a shared understanding of the terminology used. This is especially true for practitioners outside the FE sector, who were often working alone, without access to professional 'knowledge-sharing' networks.

LLN provision is often referred to as 'discrete' or 'embedded', but these labels can mask nuances of provision. For many practitioners working in this area, especially those with little or no access to related training, there is a constant search for examples of 'best practice' to support and guide their work. At present, 'best practice' in work with young adults who perceive that learning is unrewarding or irrelevant is commonly believed to centre around an 'embedded' approach. However, distinctions between embedding (which combines the learning of LLN with vocational and other skills, and is made clear to the learner) and contextualising (where opportunities to practice LLN may arise within a session that focuses on another subject area) are not always clear or commonly understood, and again, this situation is compounded for practitioners 'out of the loop'. Similarly, the differences between 'bolt-on' provision (where learners spend the majority of their time in focused vocational or other sessions, and attend separate LLN sessions) and 'discrete' provision (focused sessions, which, although never 'context-free', concentrate on LLN learning) are not always clear.

Similar to beliefs around an 'embedded' approach being most effective for a cohort of hard to engage young adults, there is also a commonly held belief that an 'informal' approach to provision is most successful.

> *'An informal approach works better... you have to make it totally different from school.'* (Youth offending team in interview).

However, there is again no shared understanding of the terminology[6]. 'Informal' is used to mean different things: 'not in a college or school', a non-hierarchical style of relationships, the fact that learners may address their tutor by their first name, a lack of monitoring or

tracking procedures, not seeking accreditation or qualification, or an unstructured approach to sessions. The terms 'informal' and 'non-formal' are often used interchangeably. 'Formal' is conceived of as taking place within a traditional educational establishment, using monitoring procedures, working to targets, or accrediting work/offering a qualification.

The original research focus on 'informal' education is problematic – very rarely were examples of provision found that shared the same definition of informal education. The majority of provision fell somewhere along a continuum of formal, non-formal and informal education – a hybrid of approaches, balancing competing pressures. LLN provision for 16 to 25 year olds is usually facilitated within community venues: youth clubs, community and neighbourhood centres, or specially acquired shop units in town centres – rather than 'formal' educational environments such as schools or colleges. It is not structured around an externally set curriculum, and avoids the stereotypically hierarchical teacher/pupil relationship. However, much of this provision is accredited, or encourages the use of National Tests. It is clear that defining provision as 'informal', 'formal' or 'non-formal' masks intricacies of delivery and development – each project needs to be viewed outside set definitions, within its own context.

> *'We're in an informal – non-formal transition currently because we're starting to use accreditation.'* (Voluntary and community sector provider in telephone interview).

It is also clear that being able to draw on shared and common definitions of practice is an important part of developing practice and overcoming challenges. A lack of understanding of terminology can often cloud issues for practitioners and learners alike.

2.6 Resources

Providers interviewed and visited for the research were using a wide variety of materials and resources in their work with young adults, but reported overwhelmingly that there are simply not enough resources to support their work. Pre-existing materials were criticised for being 'school-like', 'babyish', patronising, irrelevant and inappropriate.

There was a general feeling that the resources available are not appropriate for this age group, either due to content or style, or the fact that many resources are designed around worksheets, which *'assume that the learner is willing to learn'*. Many practitioners struggle to find resources they feel are appropriate for the cohort – attractive and stimulating, 'adult' yet not boring, and easily accessible (or free!).

Consequently, the vast majority of providers were being 'creative' with their resources, improvising and developing activities and materials around young adults' interests, using whatever comes to hand. However, most practitioners do not have the time to develop or adapt quality resources as required. More often than not, providers turn to other materials and resources to support their LLN provision, including newspapers, job or bank account application forms, catalogues, magazines, take-away menus, and the internet.

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6. For further discussion on informal, non-formal and formal education and learning, please see **Success factors in informal learning: young adults' experiences of LLN** Literature Review, forthcoming, NRDC.

Books and worksheets were often felt to be a 'turn-off', because young adults make negative associations between books, school and being 'childlike'. Distinction was made between fiction and non-fiction, since fiction was considered to have stronger associations with school. Despite this, some projects reported young adults, especially younger members of the groups, enjoying completing or working through workbooks and exercises, including resources with an element of self-assessment.

However, since many practitioners are working in contexts where they do not have access to networks that publicise resources, and have little time to search for new material, it may be that they are unaware of resources that do exist. There are four main findings about teaching and learning resources:

- Practitioners do not always have the resources they require.
- Practitioners are not always aware of what resources exist.
- The resources that practitioners use are not always appropriate for the cohort.
- Resources often assume a style of learning which is not the most effective for young adults.

For young adult learners, the key questions are whether they are 'interested' in a resource, and whether they 'understand' it. Young adults are quick to pick up on elements of a resource which they perceive as being patronising, but respond positively where they feel informed, and 'treated like adults'. It would seem that, where the language and theme are appropriate, this can compensate for or overcome any weakness in format.

2.7 Assessment, accreditation and qualifications

Responses to accreditation and assessment were mixed and often contradictory. This area provokes debate, and often disagreement, among practitioners. Three approaches to incorporating accreditation and assessment within learning programmes emerged.

For an increasing number of learning programmes, recognition of achievement is a central element, with the idea or hope that 'as many certificates as possible' will serve as a motivational element for learners. Many practitioners believe that young adults are often overjoyed to receive the first achievement on paper they have ever had. Similarly, certificates are also felt to symbolise '*something to show at the end of the programme*', '*a focus*', and '*a sense of achievement*'.

> '*Accreditation is a great motivator for traditional non-achievers.*' (Connexions service respondent in questionnaire).

However, young adults do not always support this belief. The meaning and value of certificates to young adults is highly individual, and often deeply personal. It is certainly clear that young adult learners respond (eventually) to praise and encouragement, but it is not necessarily true that this recognition has to be in the form of a certificate. Many young adults participate in learning programmes in order to move towards the type of employment they seek, and obtaining certain types of certificates can form an important part of this strategy. However, the certificate offered must hold a perceived value both in aiding the learner to move on, and in the eyes of potential employers. It must also enhance the self-esteem of the learner, rather than detract from it. For example, a health and safety awareness certificate is perceived to have far more currency than a certificate for good attendance on an

Entry2Employment (E2E) programme. Despite this, it is clear that for some young adult learners, certificates rewarding good attendance, team working, or the 'most improved', do genuinely enhance confidence and promote a sense of pride, but it is critical for practitioners to know their learners in order to judge the value of such rewards.

For those programmes incorporating accreditation (which was a majority of provision), a wide variety of awards were offered, including ASDAN, Duke of Edinburgh, Youth Achievement Awards, AQA and OCN units, City and Guilds, the National Tests in literacy and numeracy, and a variety of sporting awards. Practitioners were seeking flexible accreditation that complemented their learning programmes, rather than restricted them. For example, tailoring programmes to collect the evidence or build the portfolio required to achieve a qualification is a common route, but not always practical. A need for units that accredit literacy and/or numeracy achievement via other topics in programmes of personal and social development/independent living skills was expressed. Similarly, the feelings of young adult learners around accreditation also vary – even where the end outcome is perceived as positive in relation to gaining employment, learners are often less willing to undertake the sustained work that goes alongside. This is especially true in portfolio-building that takes place over the longer-term. Consequently, practitioners are seeking increasingly creative and flexible ways to collect evidence and 'demonstrate commitment', particularly methods that avoid learners having to write.

During the course of the research, an increasing number of projects were incorporating National Tests into their provision, but experiencing mixed results. Perceptions of the tests have changed over recent months, and practitioners who previously said they were not appropriate for their learners are now highlighting them as a central strand of their learning programmes. Providers who are already offering the tests noted 'panic' and 'nerves' from young adult learners at the idea of testing in general, especially in English and maths. It was widely acknowledged that young adult learners are resistant to this form of assessment.

> 'We would like to offer the National Tests, but the young people are afraid due to problems at school.' (Voluntary and community sector provider in interview).

The 'achievement profile' has been very erratic – a minority of learners are at a level appropriate to sitting the National Tests, and not all of these learners were willing to sit tests. In many cases, practitioners using the tests as part of their provision find it challenging, in many cases, to convince learners of their value, and to overcome the learners' fears, often intricately linked with past 'failures' at school. An up-front refusal to undertake any exam or test was a common experience for providers. However, the careful introduction and integration of any exam or test by practitioners into provision can result in young adult learners feeling confident to tackle it. For example, a provider working with young offenders had matched individual young adults with mentors who were interested in taking the tests themselves, and encouraged mentor and mentee to work together to prepare for them.

In contrast, other providers (mainly working in the Youth Service and voluntary and community sector) were less concerned, concentrating 'more on engagement than formal outcomes'. In terms of accrediting achievement, some practitioners note that progress that is far more subjective and anecdotal is of greater importance.

> '[Accreditation] could be off-putting to a young person who has little or no academic achievement, and little or no self-esteem.' (Voluntary and community sector provider in questionnaire).

Other practitioners incorporate the offer of accreditation, but are reluctant to let it 'run the programme', since with expectation, failure can follow. Numerous practitioners find that certificates or qualifications do not initially motivate young adults or attract them to learning programmes, although as they engage further in programmes, some young adults become more motivated by accreditation, as a focal point to work towards, but more for personal achievement. The point has also been made that to 'achieve' as a result of sitting an exam or test can successfully turn around self-perceptions as a 'failure' as a result of experiences at school.

Approaches to accreditation are influenced by both practitioners' personal beliefs and experiences, and the targets associated with funding streams. For those programmes seeking to ensure all learners have 'something to show' for their involvement, and whose achievement and progress can be evidenced, this meant presenting a variety of certificates (for example, for attendance, punctuality, supporting friends, or overall improvement) in order that all learners received at least one, and incorporating accreditation as a compulsory (or at least expected) element of the learning programme. For many practitioners, there was a real tension between the achievement of 'hard' outcomes and more anecdotal evidence of personal development – their main aim is to engage with young adults and motivate them to attend provision over the long term long-term, but they acknowledge that much of their funding is target - (accreditation) related. This creates both a pressurised environment, where 'numbers achieving' become paramount, and tensions for those practitioners who are not always able to focus on aspects of learning they feel are most important.

There has been an increasing drive to accredit programmes, or to offer qualifications as a component, and this often features as part of organisational strategies, or areas for future development.

> *'Accreditation is very important for my organisation because it attracts funding… it's a secondary matter for young people.'* (Voluntary and community sector respondent in telephone interview).

Accrediting their programme is often viewed as a sign of quality or professionalism for practitioners, but a minority see is as an unwelcome intrusion into what was otherwise a more holistic and 'informal' programme.

> *'There's been a bureaucratisation of the whole process.'* (Voluntary and community sector respondent in interview).

Providers often feel driven to improve their 'offer' to young adult learners, and can be in competition with other local providers for both funding and learners. Accreditation and awards on offer as part of the learning programme are a central part of the provider's profile and marketing strategy.

Ultimately, accreditation and certification is only useful and effective if they have meaning for the individual, and, where accreditation is included as part of provision, it should be incorporated on an individual basis.

> *'It's about personal satisfaction.'* (Voluntary and community sector provider in telephone interview).

The success or failure of accreditation seems to be about how it is 'sold', and then integrated into the provision. Where it is relevant to learners' own aims and aspirations, introduced sensitively, and with a clear message about its currency, it appears that accreditation and certification can have a positive impact on confidence and engagement.

2.8 Staff training and professional development

Training and development for staff emerged early on as an extremely emotive subject, about which practitioners often became defensive and angry. It is also the area where opinions and experiences across the FE college, local authority youth work and voluntary and community sectors are most likely to differ. From the data collected exploring practitioners' experiences and perceptions of training and professional development, a clear picture has emerged of a group of practitioners who are under-qualified with regard to *Skills for Life*. The majority of practitioners working in this area have very little specific training in the teaching of LLN. This is particularly true for practitioners working in voluntary and community sector organisations, private training providers and youth work settings.

For practitioners working in community settings, many have undertaken some form of 'basic skills awareness' training and, as a consequence, claim to feel 'qualified' and confident in their LLN work with young adults. Practitioners working in the FE sector are far more likely to have teaching qualifications, both non-specific and LLN-related. Similarly, this group of practitioners are also more likely to have attended other *Skills for Life* training, such as core curriculum, diagnostic assessment, or *Access for All* training. For practitioners working in the community, often in isolation, it is difficult to gain access to up to date, accurate and useful information about training and professional development, where professional networks within the FE sector promote information sharing, and ensure practitioners are not 'out of the loop'.

The *Skills for Life* teaching qualifications framework has little relevance for many practitioners working in the community, because roles are far from straightforward, and cannot be easily segregated into supporting the learner, supporting the teaching process or leading the learning. Many practitioners with no specific qualifications are leading the LLN learning in their organisation with young adults. For these practitioners, the emphasis is on engagement and building relationships. This focus supports the sometimes opportunistic (unplanned and unrecognised) approach to LLN adopted by many practitioners.

> Q. In your organisation, who takes the lead in planning and delivering the LLN element of provision with young adult learners?
>
> A. 'No-one. This is left to chance.'
>
> (Connexions service respondent in questionnaire)

However, practitioners working in this area are certainly not under-qualified in general, and bring vast amounts of varied and relevant knowledge to their roles. The majority of practitioners working in youth work settings are highly qualified in youth-work skills, and many have complementary training in areas such as counselling or mentoring. Similarly, practitioners working across all sectors have completed a range of courses, qualifications and certificates, all of which support their work with young adult learners. For many practitioners

working in the youth work and voluntary and community sectors, it is the case that LLN-specific qualifications are not always considered the most important for their role.

There is some disagreement over training needs – whether or not practitioners should pursue specialist LLN training in addition to, or instead of, specialist youth work qualifications, or training that develops their skills in engaging and motivating young adults. From practitioners working in the community, there is a strong feeling that the 'right' people to work with young adults are practitioners initially trained as youth workers, whether or not they have any specific literacy, language or numeracy related training. As one youth service project manager said, *'the ethos of youth work is most important'*, echoing the views of other practitioners that the abilities and empathy required as a youth worker are not only paramount, but also somehow innate – qualities individuals are born with, and cannot learn through training.

> *'Without [empathy and understanding], no qualification or training will prepare you for this type of work.'* (FE provider in questionnaire).

For practitioners working in the community, there was a concern that practitioners trained originally as literacy and/or numeracy tutors might not have the skills or qualities of a youth worker, and may not be able to engage with young adults.

Qualified tutors who have worked in colleges were sometimes reluctant to work with a more challenging cohort. Where tutors were happy to work with this cohort initially, some do not stay because the realities of working with excluded young adults can prove to be more difficult than they originally thought.

Although many youth workers would value the opportunity to enhance their skills and further develop professionally, some are reluctant to undertake training in the teaching of LLN as they see youth work and teaching as two distinct vocations. For both managers and staff involved in delivery, there are concerns about academic ability (for staff, this is often down to a lack of confidence in their own abilities), and the literacy and numeracy skill levels of youth workers and associated practitioners themselves.

Confusion over what training is available and how to access it was prevalent. Even when local courses were known about, capacity, finances and cover presented problems. For practitioners working face-to-face with young adults for the majority of their working week, professional development was often low on the list of priorities. However, training was also identified as the main factor that would help develop provision in the future, increase the staffing, and thereby expand what can be offered as part of provision.

3 Critical success factors

A central aim of the research project has been to provide a framework of 'critical success factors' for working informally on LLN skills with young adults. This framework has been developed using practitioners' experiences and successes, recorded throughout the project. These factors are based on judgements made on what has been learned about practice over the course of the project, and direct views from the field. This framework may be used by practitioners to monitor or assess their own practice, or as a framework within which to develop their current practice.

The framework has been structured around the following four key elements of work with young adults: hooking learners in, engaging learners, sustaining involvement, and facilitating learning and achievement.

Framework of critical success factors	
Hooking learners in	
Keep provision unthreatening	Young adults are far more confident exploring learning and their futures, in spaces where they feel relaxed and in control. Recognise the meaning of local spaces to learners – schools and colleges can appear threatening or child-directed, but community centres can be just as threatening if they are in unfamiliar areas of town. Similarly, whilst one group of young adults may not consider attending groups in local libraries, for others it may be one of the only uncontested sites available to them locally.
Consider the learning environment	Similarly, young adults feel more confident in their surroundings when they have a sense of ownership of the environment. This may involve learners being involved with the decoration or layout of the space, or knowing they have a chill-out area that is their own. This is a crucial factor that signals a departure from the formal education system, where learners are sometimes unable to even visit the toilet without permission.
Utilise new technologies	Practitioners have had great success with using technologies, for instance laptops, palm pilots and digital cameras in outreach, offering young adults the chance to explore new technology as an incentive to joining provision. This also signals respect and trust for young adults. Many will have experience of formal education where access to technology was withdrawn as punishment or a mark of displeasure.
Develop flexibility and open access	It is important to keep engagement in learning programmes flexible – for example, young adults may self-refer and link to other agencies retrospectively, rather than having to follow a pre-set path. Similarly, eligibility and access to programmes should be made as open as possible to support young adults' choices to engage in learning.

Consider learning champions	When considering 'publicity' for learning programmes, it is widely acknowledged that young adults are more likely to believe and trust their friends than other forms of promotion. Providers have had success with young adults acting as 'learning champions' to create links and build trust within the community.
Recognise young adults' life situations	Many young adults fell out of formal education because it was incompatible with demands and responsibilities in their lives. For example, young parents are far more likely to respond to learning opportunities with childcare attached. Similarly, young adults with caring responsibilities find it easier to attend shorter sessions, with no early starts or late finishes. Young adults often experience financial difficulties, homelessness or relationship breakdown.
Explore multi-agency working	Young adults on the margin are often involved with a range of agencies, each working with them in different areas of their lives. Forging strong links between agencies can lead to earlier and more reliable identification of need, and a stronger support net for the young adult. Information sharing is also likely to avoid situations where young adults sit the same assessment four times, or where need is not identified at all.

Engaging learners

Effective engagement must take priority	Forming trusting relationships with young adults must be the primary goal in order to sustain longer-term engagement. Go with learners' communication style and language – do not try to change something that is (at least initially) perceived as central to their identity.
Develop confidence	Initial engagement usually has one clear aim – developing young adults' confidence in relationships with practitioners and other learners, and in the learning process itself. Using simple exercises or tasks to develop a sense of achievement early on is an important strand of this. Similarly, avoiding activities or tasks that could shatter confidence, or engender feelings of failure early on, is paramount.
Make learning relevant and 'useful'	Ensure that the session or programme is relevant to learners' lives at that time, and demonstrate it. Learning which appears to young adults to be irrelevant is often assumed to be 'boring', and results in swift loss of interest.
Build on learners' interests	Young adults have a wide range of interests, many of which they are passionate about. Basing learning activities and programmes on these interests is far more effective at creating interest and enthusiasm, and in developing a sense of group identity.

Offer 'tangible' and quick rewards	Young adults respond well to rewards and prizes, but it is important to know the learners' motivations – some groups may respond to certificates, others to computer games. The key is to make rewards swift, attainable, and tangible.
Create the right environment	It is crucial to work towards an unpressurised, friendly and supportive environment. Of central importance is the quality of relationships between practitioners and learners, and within the group itself, but smaller factors such as the availability of tea and coffee, being able to make snacks such as toast in the centre, or being able to smoke in designated areas also have a strong positive effect.
Work with the right staff	Young adults need to feel that they can relate to tutors or leaders, and for most young adult learners, this means 'not being like teachers'. Practitioners working with young adults need to be 'user-friendly'; aware of the types of issues they may be facing, and non-judgemental in their advice and support.
Listen to learners and create the right relationships	'Knowing your learner(s)' is paramount – listening to young adults helps with breaking down pre-conceived ideas and barriers, on both sides. Young adults need to be treated as individuals, and most importantly, as adults. Knowing your learner can help you find out where they are emotionally and psychologically, and meet them there. It is also a core part of finding out what learners want and hope for from the learning programme.
Explore groups	Get groups of learners together beforehand to explore successful working – recognise the politics of group, territorial issues or concerns about prior associations.

Sustaining involvement

Develop good quality relationships	Developing quality relationships based on respect is key to sustaining engagement with young adult learners. Remember that many young adults will fall back into the 'child' or 'pupil' role by default, so it is important to breakdown the child/adult opposing relationship. Mutual respect should be based on responsibility, and effective compromise within the boundaries.
Consider the use of initial assessment	How practitioners use initial assessment is highly individual, but informal holistic approaches can often be more effective in painting a picture of the learner for the practitioner, and more unthreatening for learners than a 'test' or 'assessment'.
Design structured action plans and learning programme	Initial and diagnostic assessments can be used to create structured learning plans and programmes, negotiated with the learner. In informal settings, in order to move away from formulaic or overly structured learning activities, it may be that these plans are mainly for the practitioner's use. However, by promoting

attendance, punctuality and, above all, learning, young adult learners also benefit.

Create high expectations and reward achievement	Whilst initial high expectations can be too threatening for some young adult learners, having faith in their ability and motivation, and communicating your expectations to them is an important element of developing confidence and autonomy. Many young adult learners are accustomed to 'bad' or disruptive behaviour being recognised or focused on in learning programmes; rewarding and recognising positive behaviour with praise is central to building self-esteem, confidence and motivation.
Allow learners to develop at own pace	Young adult learners are likely to arrive at learning programmes with a wide range of abilities, aims and aspirations. Encouraging ownership of the learning programme, and allowing learners to lead the learning can again promote motivation and confidence in the learners' abilities.
Encourage 'reverse' teaching	Young adults respond to practitioner interest in their experiences, pastimes and skills, particularly where they are encouraged to 'teach' practitioners. Situations where practitioners and learners can learn together are also effective at developing relationships, building trust and breaking down barriers.
Facilitate team meetings	Encourage 'team meetings' with learners, to negotiate boundaries of mutually acceptable behaviour, and explore and record feelings and issues. This also promotes confidence and assurance in group working.
Keep approach informal	Young adults are not resistant to learning itself, but will strongly resist provision they perceive as being related to formal, school-like learning situations. Informality is about approaches to setting, curriculum, relationships, pedagogy and assessment. In practice, creating and sustaining an informal approach can often involve high levels of 'formal' planning and structuring for practitioners.

Facilitating learning and achievement

Recognise the meaning of accreditation and qualifications	Recognise what accreditation or qualifications mean to the group – it may be their principal aim for attending the learning programme, or it may hold no meaning at all. This meaning is often closely related to the perceived currency, or value, of the award to future employment or progression. If the learning programme is vocationally focused, ensure learners see and understand the value of the award you are offering.
Gear programme towards (intended) outcome	If it is hoped that learners will achieve a qualification or accreditation as a result of attending the learning programme, sessions should be geared to this aim. Similarly, if progression into formal education is the intended outcome, strong links should be

built with the local college from the outset. Learners are more likely to respond positively to expectations like this when they are present as an element of the learning from the beginning of the programme. Introducing accreditation, for example, at the end of an otherwise informal or relaxed learning programme can result in learners refusing to engage with it.

Research the requirements of accreditation	In practice, working towards a particular award or accreditation may have a major influence over the learning programme. For example, portfolio based accreditation may necessitate long-term organised evidence collection, or working towards a written test may require more formal practice tests and revision. The requirements of accreditation may not always be compatible with the approach individual practitioners are trying to take.
Tailor learning	When contact with learners has been sustained, and relationships built, it is easier to tailor learning programmes and activities to individual needs. Young adult learners respond best to 1:1 approaches, where their aims and interests are prioritised and incorporated into their own learning. In practice, practitioners are often working with groups of young adults, but have most success where they treat learners as individuals, and move away from 'generic' teaching styles and approaches. Seeking as much homogeneity in groups (for instance age, ability, interest or vocational area, etc.) as possible also helps to promote a sense of individualised learning, whilst simultaneously developing positive group dynamics. Adopting individual and/or differentiated approaches where possible also enables learners to work at their own level without highlighting this to other members of the group.
Consider and assess learning styles	Learning style questionnaires can be very effective in developing learning programmes for many young adults. It is important to recognise that the dominant learning style for young adults is likely to be kinaesthetic.
Project LLN positively	If the practitioner dislikes or is negative about literacy, language and numeracy, young adult learners will be too. Treating literacy, language and particularly numeracy as something to be endured alongside the more exciting elements of the learning programme is a common, but negative, approach. Practitioners can sometime wrongly assume that 'confiding' in learners that they too hated Maths at school or found English boring will develop greater trust or respect. However, selected disclosure, for example, shared experiences of dyslexia or developing a love of poetry despite negative experiences at school, can be very powerful.
Search for appropriate terminology and language	It is important to recognise how individual learners, and groups of learners, respond to different terminology when talking about LLN.

Embed but don't disguise or deceive	It is clear that young adult learners respond more positively to LLN when they are embedded in a subject of interest or use to them. This may be cooking, budgeting, health and beauty or graffiti art. However, this approach is most effective when the LLN elements can be drawn out of sessions, highlighting to both the learner and the practitioner the development work and progress that has taken place. Whilst practitioners may feel that 'teaching by stealth' is less likely to threaten or disengage learners, it can often result in LLN being opportunistic, and unrecognised by both the learners and the practitioner.
Relate LLN to everyday situations	Highlight the ways in which LLN run throughout many real-life situations, and how feeling confident in these areas can make these situations easier for young adults. Learning maths and English in mainstream or formal education was often challenging for young adults due to their perceived irrelevance to everyday life. There is a wide range of day-to-day activities that afford opportunities for LLN to be explored in exciting, innovative ways.
Link to vocational interests	It is likely that many young adult learners are involved in learning programmes to assist them in moving into employment, often related to gaining a 'trade' or access to a profession. Highlighting how LLN relate to vocational areas, and using interests as a vehicle for embedding can have a strong effect on the perception that the learning programme is real, relevant and 'adult'.
Build in LLN – don't bolt on	Practitioners have had most success where literacy, language and numeracy are seen as intrinsic to the learning programme. Whether this is achieved through a strong 'no nonsense' emphasis or a quiet yet sustained inclusion of LLN is dependent on the practitioner, the setting, the curriculum, but most importantly, the learners.
Recognise achievement	Young adults' achievements and progression in LLN can often be rewarded and demonstrated to the learners by involving them in the planning and evaluation of their projects and challenges in the learning programme. This develops a sense of ownership, and relates learning to concrete activities. Where appropriate, young adults may also respond to certificates that recognise attendance, team working, supporting others, or completing the programme. Similar to the importance of perceived value in accreditation, certificates should not necessarily be perceived by practitioners as babyish or patronising. This may be the first certificate the learner has received, so it could be an event to celebrate, or an event with no meaning.

4 Case studies

A crucial part of the early research involved making contact with practitioners working with young adults aged 16 to 25 in various locations, sectors and contexts to develop LLN. A wide range of projects and practitioners were reached through publicity in sector publications, and at conferences. Pre-existing contacts made through NIACE's management of the Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF) and NYA's management of the Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) were explored.

To support the mapping exercise, a short online questionnaire was created to find out more about the different groups of young adults being targeted by, and who were taking part in, informal and non-formal LLN learning programmes. 43 organisations contributed to the survey. The results clearly demonstrated that providers are mostly targeting provision toward young adults not in employment, education or training, and those excluded from mainstream provision. However, young adults with learning difficulties and disabilities are also a priority group. Although young women and young men are both indicated as priority groups, in practice they are more likely to be included as part of another target group, such as young mothers, or young unemployed men.

Groups of young adults targeted against groups actually worked with
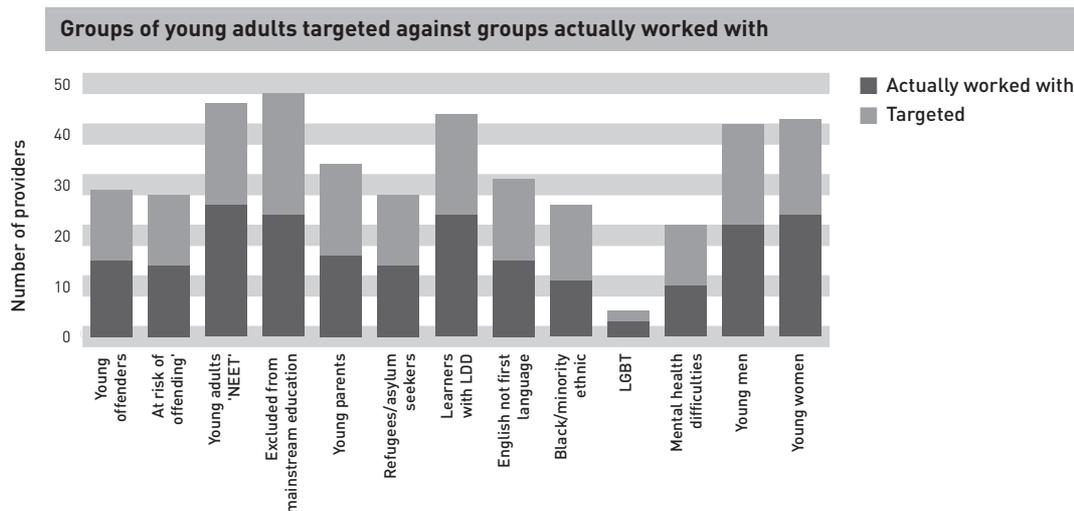
Providers stated that they targeted these groups of young adults for broadly similar reasons: most had a remit to (re)engage non-traditional/disaffected learners, to create learning opportunities for under-represented and 'hard-to-reach' groups, to widen participation, and provide pathways into other forms of learning. 'Improving literacy, language and/or numeracy' was only mentioned by one provider.

As part of the survey, providers also explained the ways in which their approach differed when working specifically with young adults:

- Higher levels of individual support/tailoring of learning programme.
- Adaptation of teaching and learning materials.
- Learning based on young adults' interests and made relevant to their lives.
- Focus on practical activities that recognise preferred kinaesthetic learning style.
- Inclusion of more activities and games (often ICT-related).

■ Concentration on open communication.
■ Development of an informal approach.
■ Consultation with learners as part of the learning process.

Although LLN provision is available to all young adults, and is 'open-access', most providers are directing provision towards groups of young adults who share certain characteristics. The case-study sites are representative of these groups. It is also important to note that young adults are likely to 'share' the characteristics of a number of groups, and that the categories are often interconnected. Therefore, for example, provision targeting young adults not in education, employment or training is likely to mean engagement with a higher than average number of young offenders and young adults at risk of offending.

In the mapping phase of the research, projects were visited to define the parameters of the research and generate information for an initial framework of critical success factors. These initial visits provided information on the range of practices, provision, geographical locations and institutional contexts. This typology was then used to guide the selection of further sites for in-depth case studies, to ensure representation and inclusion of the full range.

The projects visited form a selected sample of provision across England, and are not necessarily entirely representative of practices, approaches or target groups. We are particularly aware that these contacts may not sufficiently represent existing work with young adults from ethnically diverse backgrounds or ongoing work with young adults with learning difficulties/disabilities, but it has proved difficult to make contact with provision of this type. Similarly, whilst these examples of provision are illuminative and illustrative, the knowledge gained from them is not necessarily transferable to other settings. A crucial element of effective engagement with young adults is 'knowing the learner', and tailoring approaches to their individual interests and aims. Where an approach has proved highly effective for one provider or group of learners, the same approach may not be as appropriate for a different group, or in another locality. However, case studies do give insight into practice, real experience and activities, and help to identify issues that may be common to other case studies.

The case-study sites were chosen to represent the diversity of types of literacy and numeracy programmes for young adults. The spread of the case studies also represents the overall geographical spread of projects in contact with YALP as part of the research.

Each case-study visit used a mixture of research methods, according to the setting and the young adult learners involved. These methods included:

■ Focus groups with young adult learners to elicit and share views on their learning experiences, the activities undertaken, and their attitudes towards learning, literacy and numeracy for the future.
■ Semi-structured interviews with practitioners and volunteers.
■ Unstructured observation of activities.
■ Informal conversations with young adults, volunteers, practitioners and key stakeholders.

Where appropriate, interviews with practitioners were tape recorded and transcribed. Where this was not appropriate, contemporaneous notes of focus groups and interviews were taken, particularly with learners, since most young adults were unwilling to have conversations tape-recorded. Some notes from informal conversations (which were often sensitive or confidential) were taken retrospectively.

This strand of the work has generated rich and detailed data, and enabled the framework of critical success factors to be further developed.

The case studies have been designed around the common themes that emerged during project visits and interviews as being central to the development, sustainability and success of provision. However some issues emerged as more central to particular projects than to others, and this is reflected in how the presentation of each case study is structured. These case studies are available to download at www.nrdc.org.uk

5 Practitioner training

This section of the report documents the work undertaken to explore practitioners' experiences of training, and identify training needs related to their work in both engaging and motivating young adults, and teaching LLN.

5.1 Background

Data gathered during phase one of the research project[7] (via project visits, questionnaires and telephone interviews) demonstrated that the majority of practitioners who support the development of young adults' LLN in informal or community-based projects have very little specific LLN teacher training. Relatively high numbers of practitioners had undertaken some form of unaccredited training, such as core curriculum training, or dyslexia awareness, but a small minority had completed an accredited or 'specialist' qualifications, such as City and Guilds 9285.

The initial consultations also documented a feeling that the 'right' people to support LLN work with young adults are practitioners initially trained as youth workers, whether or not they have any specific literacy, language or numeracy related training. As one project manager said, *'the ethos of youth work is most important'*, echoing the views of other practitioners that the abilities and empathy required as a youth worker are not only paramount, but also somehow innate. Several respondents expressed the feeling that practitioners trained originally as literacy and/or numeracy tutors might not have the particular skills and qualities of a youth worker, and may not be able to engage with young adults. There was a general acknowledgement of the problem of recruiting staff, especially when practitioners are preferred to be 'double qualified' – i.e. to hold a qualification in both youth work, and in LLN teaching.

Managers wishing to offer their staff training in LLN teaching appeared confused about the routes and qualifications available, and where to access appropriate courses, as were practitioners attempting to locate their own training. Even when local courses were available, time, finances and cover presented problems. For practitioners working face to face with young adults for the majority of their working week, professional development was often low on the list of priorities.

Most practitioners advocated an approach towards training beginning with youth work training, and adding literacy and numeracy teacher training where necessary. Youth work training was seen as '*essential'*, with literacy and numeracy teacher training '*an optional extra'*. Reaching young adults was seen as the most important element of developing provision, and youth work training and a '*natural empathy with young adults'* were seen as a crucial prerequisite for this.

Dual trained practitioners were seen as desirable, and literacy and numeracy teacher training as '*valuable'*, but the time and cost implications were seen as a barrier to achieving this.

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7. See **Success factors in informal learning: Young adults' experiences of LLN** Interim report (2004) available at www.nrdc.org.uk for further discussion of this phase of the research.

As a result of these findings, an in-depth consultation exercise was launched to explore these themes further, including the experiences of practitioners working in this field with regard to accessing and completing training, and its relevance to their work with young adults and LLN.

5.2 Analysis of results

A questionnaire was devised to explore the emerging themes above and approximately 200 were distributed to practitioners who had responded to the initial, more general, questionnaire[8]. Members of the email discussion group relating to this project, and the larger email discussion group of the LLN Team at NIACE were also invited to request a questionnaire via email. The questionnaire was entirely anonymous, both in recognition of the potentially emotive nature of professional development, and the tensions highlighted from the initial consultations.

A shortened online version of the questionnaire was also developed, and the internet address emailed to the discussion groups. This was also anonymous, as respondents did not have to notify the research team when they completed it, and responses registered automatically.

In total, 37 responses to the paper-based questionnaire were received (a 19% response rate), and there were 61 entries on the electronic questionnaire.

5.2.1 Respondents
Respondents were asked to select the sector into which *the majority* of their work fell. However, most respondents from the paper-based questionnaires selected more than one sector. The breakdown of responses is as follows:

What sector does the majority of your work fall into?

- Adult and community education
- Voluntary and/or community sector
- Connexions
- Youth service
- Further education
- Training provider
- Not stated
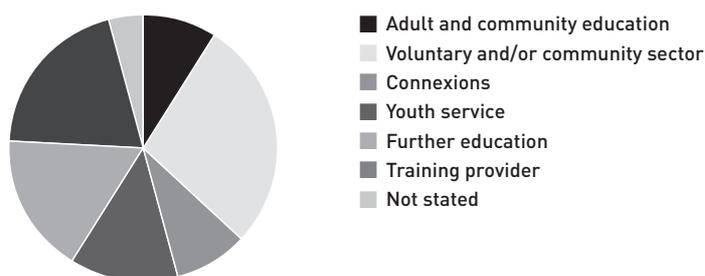
This clearly demonstrates that the greater number of respondents work in the voluntary and/or community sector. This is of particular interest, since a much higher proportion of the respondents to the original questionnaire worked within the youth service (see chart below), despite both questionnaires being sent to the same contact group:

8. For a discussion of the results of this survey, please see **Success Factors in Informal Learning: young adults' experiences of LLN** Progress Report (2005) NRDC.

Sector breakdown of respondents - original questionnaire

- ■ Adult and community education
- □ Voluntary and/or community sector
- ■ Connexions
- ■ Youth service
- ■ Further education
- ■ Training provider
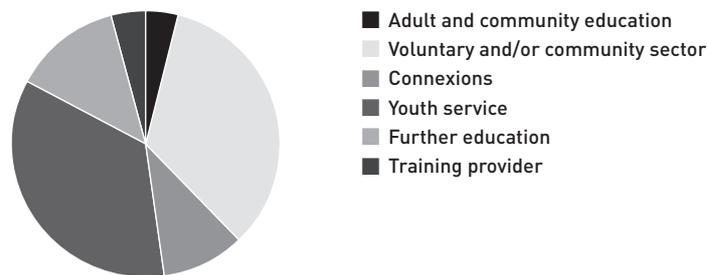
This suggests that practitioners working within the youth service did not complete practitioner training questionnaires they received, and did not respond to invitations to complete the questionnaire via email. This may mean that practitioners within the youth service feel that LLN training is 'not applicable' to them, or it may be an issue of language – that youth workers do not perceive themselves as 'practitioners' in this sense and therefore felt that the questionnaire was not 'for them'.

Looking at the breakdown of responses to the online questionnaire, even fewer respondents identified themselves as working within the youth service, with the largest response coming from the FE sector. This is possibly due to more practitioners from the FE sector having access to ICT, both in terms of the composition of the email discussion groups (the medium through which the online questionnaire was publicised), and in terms of internet access to complete the questionnaire. This may have resulted in certain sectors being unable to complete the online version for a variety of reasons.

What sector does the majority of your work fall into (online questionnaire)?

- ■ Voluntary and/or community sector
- □ Youth service
- ■ Further education
- ■ Connexions
- ■ Adult and community education
- ■ Training provider
- ■ Not stated
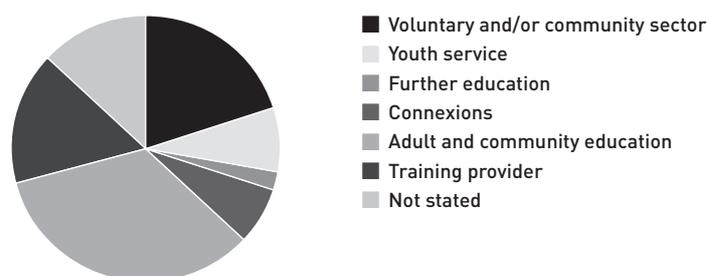
The sector breakdown of respondents clearly impacts upon the data, and, where possible, this will be reflected in the analysis. The responses from the online and paper-based formats have not been amalgamated, in order to demonstrate and draw out these differences in response and experience.

5.2.2 Breakdown of training undertaken by respondents
Respondents to the paper-based questionnaire were asked to specify details of any training they had received in relation to LLN provision or work with young adults. A majority of respondents had attended/completed more than one training course or event.

12	Accredited LLN training (City and Guilds 9281/2/3/5)
8	Accredited youth work training
7	One-day training, e.g. initial and diagnostic assessment
4	Unrelated accredited teaching qualifications, e.g. PGCE or City and Guilds 73/407
1	Unrelated other qualification (CLAIT)
1	Information, advice and guidance (IAG) qualification
5	No qualifications relating to teaching, youth work or LLN

Of the 12 respondents who had completed some accredited LLN training, all were actively working to support LLN skills development with young adults. Of the remaining 25 respondents with no specific LLN qualifications (although they may have attended one-day training or have other non-specific teaching qualifications), 11 either took the lead for LLN provision in their organisation, or shared lead responsibility with others. The remaining 14 were all working to support young adults with LLN, but were not taking the lead in planning and delivering this element of provision.

Q. Who takes the lead in planning and delivering the LLN element of provision to young adult learners?

A. 'No one.' (Voluntary sector/training provider).

'Jointly, because we try to embed it into all activities.' (Training provider).

'No one – this is left to opportunity.' (Connexions).

The above responses seem to suggest that the **Skills for Life** 'definitions of roles' (Teacher/Subject Specialist, Subject Support/Teaching Assistant, and Adult Learner Support) do not reflect the experience of many practitioners in this area, who are sharing responsibility (or taking on responsibility as the need arises) for LLN teaching, supporting and signposting at all levels. Their roles are also not defined by these elements of their work – practitioners working in this area rarely perceive themselves to be teachers or teaching assistants. Job titles such as 'project worker', 'community development worker' or 'mentor' are more common, and better cover the wide range of activities and roles in which practitioners working in this sector are expected to be proficient.

With regards to accredited training only, LLN-related training was more common than youth work training, with only two respondents having completed accredited training in both areas – youth work and LLN.

What accredited training have you undertaken?

■ Youth work only
■ LLN training only
■ Both
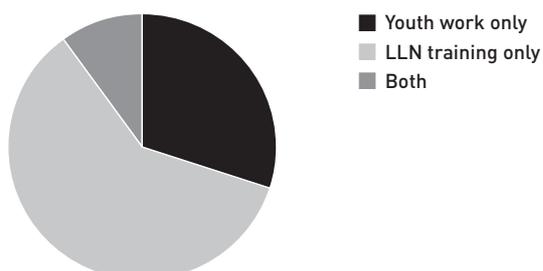
Respondents to the online questionnaire were asked if they had completed any training in LLN or youth work, both accredited and unaccredited (for example, in-house or awareness-raising events) courses.

LLN				Youth work			
Accredited		Unaccredited		Accredited		Unaccredited	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
72%	28%	69%	31%	7%	93%	4%	96%

These results are markedly different from those of the paper-based questionnaires, and may be explained by the differing sector breakdown of respondents.

From the paper-based questionnaire, all respondents who had completed City and Guilds 9282/3/5 considered themselves to be 'qualified to deliver' LLN. Only five of the seven respondents with specific youth work qualifications considered themselves to be 'qualified' in youth work. Interestingly, despite 72 per cent of the respondents to the online questionnaire having completed accredited LLN training, only 57 per cent felt themselves to be 'qualified'. Conversely, although only 7 per cent had taken part in any accredited youth work training, 15 per cent felt themselves to be 'qualified' in this area. It is possible that those respondents working within FE are more familiar with the new *Skills for Life* Teaching and Qualifications Framework and, consequently, the longer routes to 'qualification'. Those working outside FE may be less familiar with the new framework, and perceive that routes to qualification are shorter.

Do you consider yourself to be 'qualified' in...? (paper-based questionnaire)

- ■ Qualified in literacy, language and numeracy teaching
- ■ Qualified in youth work
- ■ Qualified in both areas
- ■ Qualified in neither areas
- ■ Did not respond
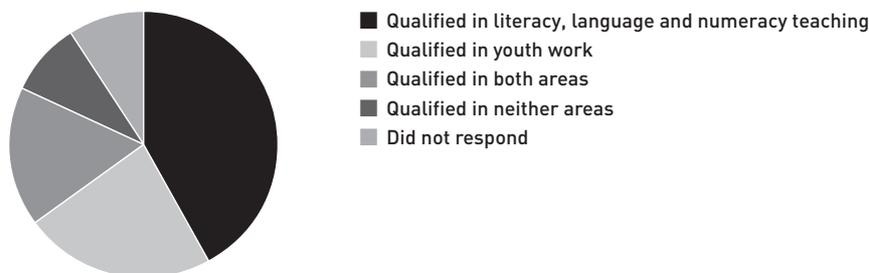
5.2.3 Confidence

Twenty-five out of the 37 respondents to the paper-based questionnaire (67 per cent) felt confident in 'delivering' LLN provision to young adults. Eight specified that they did not. The main reason for not feeling confident was given as a lack of training. None of the respondents who reported feeling unconfident had completed accredited training in LLN teaching/support.

> *'I am unaware of the methodologies and frameworks for such work, including schemes of work, methods of accreditation etc.'* (Youth service worker).

> *'I am not trained or qualified.'* (Training provider).

> *'This is not training offered by the Youth Development Service.'* (Youth Service).

77 per cent of the respondents to the online questionnaire felt confident. Even those who responded that they felt confident would still appreciate further training:

'I would still have appreciated "tips"' in the specialist area.' (Voluntary and community sector).

27 out of 37 respondents to the paper-based questionnaire felt confident working with a cohort of 'hard-to-reach/challenging' young adults.

'I have lots of experience working with disaffected young people.' (FE sector/Youth Service).

'I have never received a greater sense of achievement and fulfilment within a position of employment. You need to establish a working relationship and focus on strengths.' (Adult and Community Education).

'Confidence comes from understanding why learning has been a block; listening and being flexible to change.' (FE sector).

Four respondents did not feel confident. When asked what would improve their confidence, again three out of four responded with *'more training'*.

'This is an area I need to develop.' (Youth service).

'I need a better understanding of methods of engagement.' (Youth service).

Since far more respondents feel confident in working with young adults than have undertaken youth work (or related) training, it would appear that that feelings of confidence in this area are not always related to training undertaken. It is also clear that to those who lack confidence, training is considered to be a powerful solution to these feelings.

5.2.4 'Skills', qualities and personal attributes

Respondents were asked to specify what 'skills' they felt were important in LLN support/delivery for young adults. Respondents were not guided in their choice of 'skills', and were given freedom to respond as they felt appropriate. Many respondents, however, listed what might be referred to as personal qualities or attributes:

'Listening skills, anti-discriminatory practice, unconditional positive regard, share power and ability to give learners control over their learning. Ability to build confidence plus self-esteem.' (Connexions).

Respondents to the paper-based questionnaire identified 36 skills or qualities as being important for practitioners offering LLN provision for young adults. Nine of these (marked ▭) could be considered to be skills that could be covered by training, rather than qualities or attributes. Those marked ▬ could be considered as personal qualities. Time (not necessarily a skill), ability to make learning real/relevant, mentoring/counselling skills and the ability to make learning real/relevant (arguably these are both skills and qualities) are more ambiguous.

	Count	
▬	8	Patience
▭	8	Teaching skills/pedagogical awareness/knowledge of learning styles
▬	8	Understanding/empathy
▭	8	Ability to select/adapt resources and materials
▬	6	Communication skills
▭	5	Subject knowledge
▬	5	Rapport
▬	5	Sense of humour
	4	Ability to make learning real/relevant
▬	4	Listening skills
▬	3	Motivation
▬	3	Being innovative/interesting
▬	3	Flexible
▬	3	Non-judgemental
▬	2	Engagement
▭	2	Knowledge of LLN/curriculum
▭	2	Knowledge of accreditation/assessment
	2	Time
▬	2	Confidence
▬	2	Respect for young people
▬	2	'Worldliness'/knowledge of issues facing young people
▬	2	Tact/sensitivity
	2	Mentoring/counselling skills
▬	2	Fun
▭	1	ICT skills
▬	1	Commitment
▬	1	Perseverance
▬	1	Positive outlook
▭	1	Organisations and planning skills
▬	1	Easy going
▬	1	Stimulating
▬	1	Tolerance
▭	1	Competent in written and spoken skills
▬	1	Imagination
▬	1	Energy
▬	1	Authority

Respondents to the online questionnaire identified 33 'skills', again with nine being more clearly skills rather than qualities.

	Count	
▬	22	Patience
▬	18	Empathy
▬	13	Subject knowledge
▬	11	Communication skills
▬	9	Firm but fair/good classroom management
▬	7	Understanding young adults' issues
▬	7	Flexibility
▬	6	Innovative ideas
▬	6	Enthusiasm about the subject and learning generally
▬	5	Ability to make relevant for the learners
▬	5	Creativity
▬	5	Sense of humour
▬	5	Demonstrates a range of teaching styles
▬	4	Good/adaptable resources
▬	4	Organisational skills
▬	3	Open minded
▬	3	Confident working across a variety of topics
▬	3	Motivated
▬	3	Rapport with young adults
▬	3	ICT skills
▬	2	Listening skills
▬	2	Adequate level of literacy/numeracy level
▬	2	Teaching skills
▬	2	Updating skills/professional development
▬	2	Tenacity/perseverance
▬	1	Genuine Interest
▬	1	Charisma
▬	1	Commitment
▬	1	Prepared to join in
▬	1	Knowledge of local community
▬	1	Time
▬	1	Relevant teaching qualifications
▬	1	Non-judgemental

From both sets of respondents, 'patience' was the most commonly identified quality. Both groups selected the same 'top three' qualities: patience, empathy, and effective communication skills (in terms of developing a rapport). The qualities and attributes identified below, taken from both questionnaires, give an important insight into the reality of working with young adults, and the qualities practitioners identified as vital. Arguably, respondents have in fact prioritised a set of personality traits over skills.

	Count	Skill
Cumulative qualities and attributes		
▬	30	Patience
▬	26	Understanding/empathy
▬	17	Communication skills
▬	10	Sense of humour
▬	10	Flexibility
▬	9	Being innovative/interesting
▬	9	'Worldliness'/knowledge of issues facing young people
▬	8	Rapport
▬	8	Listening skills
▬	6	Non-judgemental/open-minded
▬	5	Confidence
▬	5	Creativity
▬	4	Positive outlook/motivated

Similarly, the 'hard skills' identified begin to demonstrate the training that practitioners feel is crucial for their role. It is interesting to note how few respondents referred to skills developed through 'teaching qualifications' in comparison to personal qualities and attributes:

'Formal training also needed, but a good rapport and understanding of the complexity of this age group [are the most important skills].' (FE sector).

Only a fifth of the number of total respondents mentioned subject knowledge or LLN knowledge. After 'subject knowledge', the ability to select and adapt resources was most frequently mentioned, echoing the findings of phase one, and of the Resources Consultation Panel attached to this project[9]. This is clearly an area that practitioners have identified as central to their experiences and to the efficacy and success of their work with young adults. It is also interesting to note the low priority given to ICT skills, since the use of ICT as a hook or reward in work with young adults is prevalent, and widely regarded to be highly effective.

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9. For further detail on this strand of work, please see section 6 of this report.

Cumulative 'hard skills'

Count	Skill
18	Subject knowledge
12	Ability to select/adapt resources and materials
10	Teaching skills/pedagogical awareness/knowledge of learning styles
5	Demonstrates a range of teaching styles
3	Competent in written and spoken skills
4	ICT skills
2	Knowledge of LLN/curriculum
2	Knowledge of accreditation/assessment
2	Updating skills/professional development
1	Organisation and planning skills
1	Knowledge of local community
1	Relevant teaching qualifications

Respondents were also asked to state whether the training they had attended had covered the skills they identified. Four of the paper-based questionnaire respondents were unable to answer, as they had attended no training. A further three responded that training had covered the skills mentioned 'to a degree'. The remainder responded as follows:

Q: Do you feel that training you have undertaken has covered [the skills you identified in the previous question]?

A:

Paper-based questionnaire		Online questionnaire	
Yes	No	Yes	No
45%	29%	43%	46%

Several respondents commented that training they had completed, or training that is currently available, does not cover the spectrum of skills and qualities required for work in this area:

'I have been trained to work effectively with young people using a variety of tools, but not specifically to enhance LLN.' (Voluntary and community sector/Youth Service).

'At present, no such exact training exists.' (Voluntary and Community Sector/FE Sector/Connexions/training provider).

'Training covered subject knowledge and pedagogical awareness, but not worldliness.' (Voluntary and community sector).

'Yes, to some extent the training was useful in some areas such as resources, raising awareness of barriers to learning and lesson planning. It does not prepare you for working with young people.' (Voluntary and Community sector/youth service).

For those who responded that training had not covered the necessary skills, it was clear that 'experience' played a vital part in gaining and developing their skills:

'Most of the skills listed come with experience, not training.' (Voluntary and community sector/adult and community education).

'Experience and learning through mistakes helped more than formal training.' (Further education sector).

One respondent also raised the issue that such skills cannot necessarily be learned or 'gained':

'I believe you're either naturally good with young people or not.' (Voluntary and community sector).

5.2.5 My role and my training

Respondents were asked to state what they considered their primary role to be. Responses to this question further indicated the complexity of practitioners' roles when working in this area:

'I am an LLN/Basic Skills Tutor, however, a large part of the position is to counsel learners, offer emotional support, as well as advice.' (Adult and community education).

'I am a vocational tutor embedding LLN in ICT and other skills.' (Voluntary and community sector/Training provider).

I consider myself foremost to be… (paper-based questionnaire)

- LLN
- Youth Work
- Neither
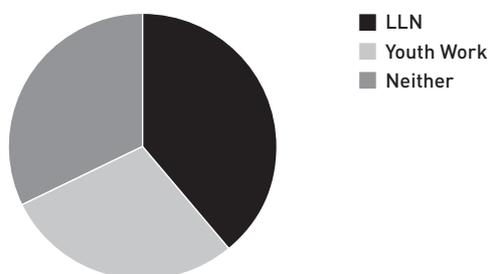
Again, the sector breakdown or respondents to the online questionnaire is reflected in the higher proportion of respondents who consider themselves to be first and foremost LLN teachers or tutors.

I consider myself foremost to be… (online questionnaire)

- LLN
- Youth Work
- Neither
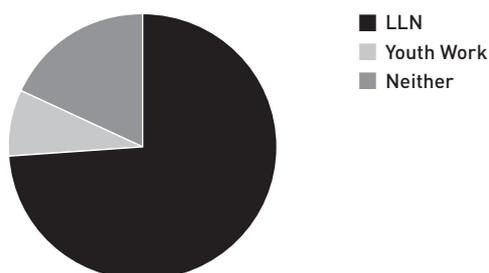
Practitioners who considered themselves to be neither LLN teachers nor Youth Workers responded that their roles were, for example, Vocational Tutor, Informal Learning Tutor, Learning Mentor, Personal Advisor, Teacher or Community Development Worker.

Comparison of responses – paper-based questionnaire			
	Completed accredited training	Feels 'qualified'	'Foremost' role
LLN	13	21	12
Youth work	8	14	9

Comparison of responses – online questionnaires			
	Completed accredited training	Feels 'qualified'	'Foremost' role
LLN	44	35	37
Youth work	12	9	4

Respondents were asked what qualifications they felt were most important when working in this area: LLN teacher training, youth work training, or neither – both have the same value.

> 'Experience of working with the client group – empathy and confidence.' (Connexions).

> 'A qualification in literacy/numeracy is vital, however, a qualification in youth work would enhance my skills.' (FE sector).

Respondents to the paper-based questionnaire commonly said that both 'types' of training have the same value. Those who had completed accredited training in LLN were more likely to say that this is the most important qualification to achieve.

What qualifications do you feel are most important when working with this cohort?
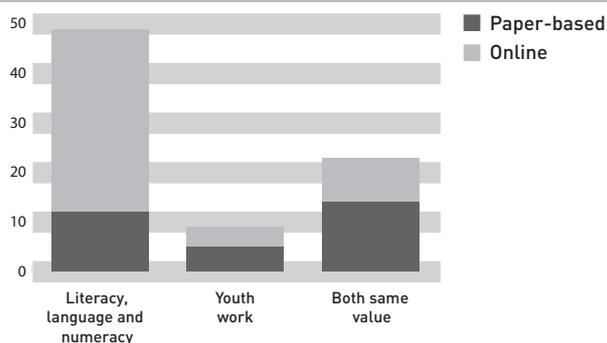
These results demonstrate a very different picture from that revealed by the questionnaire and telephone interviews during phase one. From the initial phase of data collection, most practitioners thought training should begin with youth work ('essential'), adding LLN teacher training where necessary ('an optional extra'). One practitioner interviewed said that youth work training was more important as it is a 'profession', but did acknowledge that literacy and numeracy were perceived as a valuable addition to youth work training courses. The most important element of provision was perceived to be reaching young adults, and youth work

training and a *'natural empathy with young adults'* were seen as crucial prerequisites for this. This disparity may again be explained by the breakdown of respondents in the two data collection exercises. The majority of practitioners who responded to the initial questionnaire, and who were subsequently interviewed by telephone, were based in either youth services provision, or the voluntary and community sector.

Respondents to the paper-based questionnaire were asked whether they felt that a minimum level of training should be required for working in this field. Of those respondents who felt this to be true, j47

three respondents felt it should be a youth work qualification:

> *'Most important aspect should concentrate on working with and understanding young people.'* (Voluntary and community sector).

Six respondents felt it should be a teaching qualification (four said specifically LLN):

> *'How to teach a subject if you don't know it – a requirement to have requisite LLN skills is not required for youth work but is vital when teaching basic skills.'* (Youth service).

> *'Level 2 literacy and numeracy.'* (Adult and community education).

> *'There is much to be said for having a either a teaching or youth work qualification, but, at the end of the day, for certain types of learners that are more difficult to teach 'how to learn', there needs to be stand alone units that both youth workers and teachers can access. For example, how can we teach learners how to 'want' to learn? What do we as teachers/youth workers really know about the different types of motivation?'* (FE sector)

Seven respondents said a joint qualification covering both youth work and LLN:

> *'Basic LLN, plus mentoring/guidance support.'* (Training provider).

> *'A degree, teaching qualification and youth training experience.'* (Training provider).

> *'Level 2 [LLN qualification] on top of youth work.'* (Voluntary and community sector/ FE sector/Connexions/adult and community education).

Fourteen further respondents felt that a minimum level of training is required, but did not specify what this training should be. Only three respondents in total felt that a minimum level should be a degree-level qualification – whether related to youth work or teaching. Five respondents felt that there is no minimum level of training required. One commented:

> *'Anyone with a genuine interest and who cares for the young people could do this.'* (Voluntary and community sector).

During the interviews and project visits in phase one of the research project, a perception emerged that many of the personal qualities and attributes possessed by practitioners working with young adults are somehow 'innate', or instinctive. Consequently, the

questionnaire asked respondents whether they felt that these qualities and associated life experiences might be considered to be of more, less or similar importance to knowledge gained through training. Responses revealed that the majority of respondents felt that 'instinctive' qualities and experience were of similar importance to completing LLN or any adult education qualification, although it is also clear that respondents felt that without such instinctive qualities, training would not fully equip practitioners for this type of work.

> 'I do not believe such qualities are innate or instinctive, but developed. Experience can be valuable, but if used in the correct way. Session/lesson planning is also important.' (Voluntary and community sector/Youth service).

> 'Both are important. If pushed, I would stress the need to understand and empathise.' (Sector not stated).

> 'I've had Basic Skills tutors with little or no concept of dealing with our students, it proved fatal! Little work achieved, no rapport with students etc.' (Training provider).

> 'We can learn curriculum mapping and lesson planning, but not empathy.' (Training provider).

> 'Without qualities stated [empathy and understanding], no qualification or training will prepare you for this type of work.' (FE sector).

Do you feel that innate/instinctive qualities and life experience are of more, less or similar importance to knowledge gained through training?
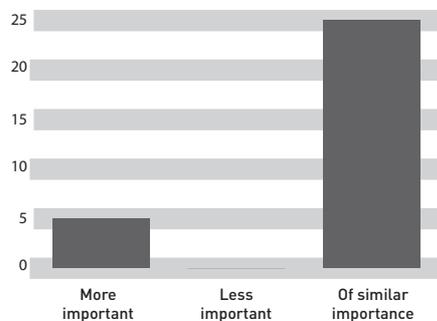
Responding to findings from phase one of the research, which revealed confusion at professional development routes for practitioners working in this area, respondents were asked if they were aware of what training was available to them locally and nationally in both LLN provision and youth work.

Paper-based questionnaire respondents

	LLN				Youth Work		
Yes	**No**	**Not looking for training**			**Yes**	**No**	**Not looking for training**
23	9	2			17	11	4

Online questionnaire respondents

	LLN				Youth Work		
Yes	**No**	**Not looking for training**			**Yes**	**No**	**Not looking for training**
35	13	5			12	27	14

Proportionately more of the respondents to the paper-based questionnaire were aware of what training was available to them locally and nationally for youth work. This is possibly explained by the higher number of online respondents from the FE sector, and their familiarity with teacher training, rather than with youth work training available locally. Far more of the online respondents stated that they were not looking for training in the youth work sector, despite a lower proportion of them having any qualifications in this area compared to the paper-based respondents.

Respondents were also asked how they found out, or could find out, about training in LLN nationally and in their area (respondents were able to make multiple responses). For both groups of respondents, professional networks or consulting colleagues was the most popular answer. However, the responses also demonstrated strong links with local colleges from all sectors.

How have you found out, or could you find out what training is available to you (LLN)?

Legend:
- Pre-existing links with local college
- Helpline
- Website
- Professional networks
- Telephone local college
- I wouldn't know where to go for information
- Other
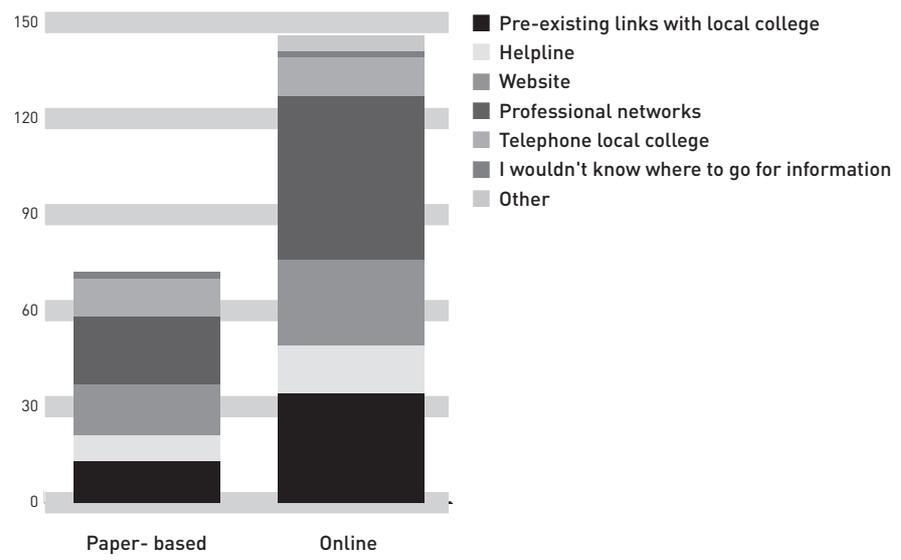
5.2.6 Barriers to accessing training

Respondents were asked what they felt were the biggest barriers to seeking and accessing training for practitioners in this area.

Paper-based questionnaire

Count

18	Lack of time
10	Lack of funding for project/training/cover
6	Lack of knowledge of what's available/professional pathways
5	Lack of facilities/provision in local area
3	Available training not appropriate/applicable to young adults
3	Discrimination
3	Lack of confidence/"daunting"
2	Lack of organisation from colleges
2	Lack of placements
2	Training is not (seen as) a priority
1	Breaking through jargon
1	Lack of required experience/qualifications
1	Low literacy/numeracy levels of staff
1	Poor quality training
1	Practitioners don't wish to access training to work with young adults

Online questionnaire

Count

30	Lack of time
7	Lack of funding/financial support for staff undertaking training
5	Lack of support from managers
5	Lack of awareness of what's on offer
5	Training not applicable
5	Lack of accessible provision locally
2	Not having pre-requisite qualifications
2	Lack of co-ordination in providing information/IAG
1	Lack of confidence
1	Complicated routes to professional development
1	Training not seen as a priority

Both sets of respondents identified very similar issues, with 'time' emerging as by far the most frequently mentioned 'barrier' to seeking and accessing training. Only one of the total 98 respondents said that there were no barriers. The most frequently mentioned issues from both questionnaires are below:

Cumulative responses

Barrier

48	Lack of time
17	Lack of funding/cover/financial support for those undertaking training
10	Lack of facilities/provision in local area
9	Lack of knowledge of what's available/professional pathways
8	Available training not appropriate/applicable to young adults
8	Lack of support/discrimination from employer

Respondents raised difficulties in seeking and accessing training at almost every stage of the process.

Seeking training:

'Discovering what training is available and where. There seems to be information scattered through the website and also local networks and colleges.' (Voluntary and Community sector/Training provider).

Selecting appropriate training:

'Lack of clarity over qualifications.' (Adult and community education).

'A lack of training in working with young adults for basic skills tutors – don't need a full youth work qualification, probably just informal training.' (Adult and community education).

'The City and Guilds 7407 course is only generic in my local area, meaning I will have to undertake extra courses and training to specialise in literacy and numeracy – very daunting.' (Adult and community education).

*'Very cumbersome process, different qualifications, naming of language, literacy and numeracy, e.g. basic skills, **Skills for Life**... nobody seems to know.'* (Voluntary and Community Sector/FE sector/Connexions/Training provider).

'The lack of collaborative work between colleges and informal education providers/projects.' (Training provider).

'No training I know of focuses on the interface between LLN tutor training and youth work training. We have to study them separately and make our own links.' (Voluntary and community sector).

Attending training:

'The literacy and numeracy levels of staff are not high enough to access some training.' (Training provider).

'My own experience was disappointing. My employer refused to pay for my 9285 in case I left my employment.' (Connexions).

'Time to study – level four is portfolio based and heavy on documentation.' (Adult and Community Education).

'There is always the matter of funding! Also – another favourite – time allowed to study properly, and really reflect upon your teaching and learning scenarios/training sessions. I also get the impression, from my own experience, that there is a fast turn over of staff due to the nature of the students they teach (i.e. before I went to work with one particularly troublesome group, they had already managed to contribute to one member of staff going on long term sick leave due to stress, and another two members of staff who refused to teach them!)' (FE sector).

'There is limited provision in my area and I'm daunted by the time scale this will entail.' (Training provider).

5.2.7 What training would you find useful for your role currently, or in the future?
Respondents were asked to identify training that they would find useful for their role currently, or in the future. A list of options was presented (as below) with an option to include areas respondents felt were important.

Paper-based questionnaire responses

Area

27	Embedding LLN into other subjects
23	Integration of ICT into provision
22	Use of games as hook and rewards
21	Use of testing and accreditation with young adults
21	Successfully engaging and motivating young adults
20	Initial/diagnostic assessment
20	Learning styles
17	Adaptation and differentiation of resources
16	Building self esteem and confidence
14	Curriculum mapping
14	Mentoring skills
3	Other

Online questionnaire responses

Area

24	Successfully engaging and motivating young adults
22	Embedding LLN into other subjects
19	Building self esteem and confidence
15	Integration of ICT into provision
14	Use of games as hook and rewards
14	Adaptation and differentiation of resources
10	Initial/diagnostic assessment
9	Use of testing and accreditation with young adults
9	Curriculum mapping
9	Mentoring skills
8	Learning styles
1	Other

Cumulative responses

Count	Area
49	Embedding LLN into other subjects
45	Successfully engaging and motivating young adults
38	Integration of ICT into provision
36	Use of games as hook and rewards
35	Building self esteem and confidence
31	Adaptation and differentiation of resources
30	Initial/diagnostic assessment
30	Use of testing and accreditation with young adults
28	Learning styles
23	Curriculum mapping
23	Mentoring skills
4	Other

It is interesting to note that the online respondents, a significantly higher number of whom are trained in LLN teaching, rated training in 'successfully engaging and motivating young adults' more highly than subject specific training. For the respondents to the paper-based questionnaire, who had significantly less subject-specific training, training relating to LLN provision was consistently identified. Specific aspects of LLN provision, such as curriculum mapping and initial/diagnostic assessment, were identified much less frequently than overarching themes, such as building self esteem and confidence, and developing hooks and rewards. It could be concluded that respondents feel more confident in these specific areas than in the wider themes of engagement, but findings from phase one of this research would suggest that rather than these being the area that practitioners feel confident in, they are considered less of a priority.

5.3 Emerging themes

The responses from the two questionnaires broadly support the findings of phase one, and develop the themes raised. It remains clear that, overall, a minority of practitioners working to develop LLN with young adults have completed accredited training in LLN. The exception to this is practitioners working within the FE sector, the majority of whom have completed accredited training. It is also clear that the level of training undertaken does not necessarily have a bearing on practitioners' level (for example, supporting the learner or leading the learning) of involvement in this type of work.

For many organisations, it is apparent that LLN development is either integrated throughout the learning programme or seen as opportunistic ('left to chance'), and therefore is the (intended) responsibility of all staff members. Similarly, for many projects and learning programmes, the LLN elements of provision are entirely unplanned, unsystematic, and often not recognised by either the practitioner or the learner.

Anecdotal evidence from phase one would suggest that for many practitioners, their involvement in LLN development work was a later addition to their role, in line with organisations' changing priorities for young adult learners. It is these practitioners who are least likely to have completed subject specific training, and who feel least confident in their skills in this area. It is also this group of practitioners who are most likely to be working outside the FE sector, and consequently, have least access to and understanding of the *Skills for Life* teaching qualifications framework.

The findings from phase one that indicated qualifications and/or training in youth work were considered more important than in LLN were not fully supported by the questionnaires. It has become clear that this is an area where views across sectors differ considerably.

Practitioners working in the voluntary and community sector or the wider youth services were keen to highlight personal qualities and attributes in themselves and colleagues that they saw as innate, for example, patience, rapport and empathy. Value was also placed on 'worldliness', or life experience that contributes positively to work with young adults (for example, having been a teenage parent, or having experienced homelessness or bullying). These practitioners positioned these qualities and attributes as more important than teacher training, with the suggestion that practitioners who did not possess these qualities, no matter how much teacher training they had undertaken, would not be as effective in their work with young adults. Since these qualities and attributes are considered innate, the inference was also that practitioners are unable to gain or develop these skills through training.

By contrast, practitioners working in the FE sector were far more likely to highlight formal teacher training as being most important in their work with young adults. There was some acceptance of the role of personal qualities and attributes in engaging with young adult learners, but a greater emphasis was placed on training. The clear suggestion was that although qualities such as empathy and patience are beneficial to initial engagement, without formal LLN teacher training, these areas cannot be developed in young adults, and in some cases, untrained practitioners may be 'doing more harm than good'.

From this questionnaire, what emerged clearly was a feeling that the personal qualities and attributes (sometimes referred to as innate) are critical for practitioners working in this area and a vital foundation upon which to build any further training. Such qualities as empathy,

patience and flexibility were referred to by some respondents as innate or instinctive, and therefore not always related to undertaking youth work training (or training of any type). It would seem that practitioners relate these qualities to the 'type of person' one may be, and that for them, this is the factor which determines the efficacy or success of work with young adults.

Such fixed views, as expressed during initial interviews and project visits, can be destructive, particularly those which position one sector against another. There is a range of people working to develop LLN skills with young adults, all of whom have many qualities and skills to bring to their role. This wide range is a positive element of this field, bringing together as it does practitioners from varying backgrounds and sectors. This is also an opportunity for practitioners to come together, and to challenge these fixed views. The main difference for practitioners is in focus, or starting point. A different sort of training might be more appropriate for practitioners focusing principally on engaging young adult learners than a primary focus on LLN.

Despite feelings of confidence not always being related to training undertaken, much faith is placed in training, and it is cited as the main element that would enable practitioners to feel more assured in working with a challenging cohort. Practitioners were far more likely to identify the skills and qualities to reach out and engage with young adults as important in their work than teaching skills or subject knowledge, yet approximately half the respondents felt that the training they had completed had not covered the skills they required. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority reported confidence in working with the cohort.

Confidence in developing young adults' LLN skills is more difficult to relate directly to training. *Skills for Life* qualifications in this area are available at three levels, and each level relates to a specific role[10]:

Level 2 qualifies the practitioner to 'support the learner', identifying and screening potential learners, signposting learners, and supporting them under the supervision of a specialist teacher.

Level 3 qualifies the practitioner to 'support the teaching process', screening and contributing to the initial assessment, and contributing to individual learning plans and the teaching.

Level 4 qualifies the practitioner to 'lead the learning', taking responsibility for individual learning plans, full assessment, teaching, and guiding/supporting colleagues qualified at the lower levels.

All respondents to both formats of the questionnaire were undertaking work which could be described as 'leading the learning', despite a very small minority being 'qualified' at this level. Similarly, a majority of practitioners to both questionnaires reported feeling confident to 'deliver' LLN provision to young adults. However, it is doubtful that practitioners working outside the FE sector are familiar with these roles or descriptors. This unfamiliarity may lead some practitioners to perceive they are 'qualified' where they may not be. For most practitioners, their role involves elements of all three descriptions of roles above, and the

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10. Taken from **The Skills for Life Teaching Qualifications Framework: A User's Guide**, DfES, 2003

'literacy and numeracy' element often takes second place to other more pressing 'roles', such as mentor, counsellor or advocate. For many practitioners, therefore, it is very difficult to dedicate the time required to training in this area.

Practitioners remain confused about professional development routes, and a significant number mentioned feeling 'daunted' at the length/amount of training required, and the time involved. A lack of time was mentioned by half of all respondents as a barrier to preventing them seeking or accessing training. Practitioners clearly wanted to take up training (only a minority reported they were 'not looking for training'), but were unclear where to find this training, were unable to find funding or cover for the duration of the training, or did not have the support or their manager or organisation to attend the training.

Embedding literacy and numeracy into other subjects was the most frequently mentioned area where practitioners felt more training was needed. Other areas, such as curriculum mapping, or initial/diagnostic assessment were mentioned far less than engaging and motivating young adults, and building confidence and self-esteem. This reflects the perception of practitioners that young adults respond most positively to embedding literacy and numeracy within other subjects (in practice, this often means 'hiding' literacy and numeracy in another subject area so that young adults are unaware of the literacy and numeracy content), and that successful/effective engagement with the cohort is of paramount importance, over and above other elements of delivery and assessment.

5.4 Practitioner briefing events

In response to the findings of the consultation exercise, the research team worked with an independent consultant to develop a one-day awareness-raising, or briefing, event for practitioners, held at three locations across the country. The programme was designed to address the areas that practitioners identified as being most useful to their practice.

Events were held in October 2004 in Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle, to facilitate attendance from practitioners working in all the regions. The day was divided into four interlinking sessions[11], each covering an area as identified by practitioners as a priority – engaging and motivating young adults, embedding literacy and numeracy into other subject areas, selecting and adapting resources, and accrediting literacy and numeracy work with young adults. Incorporated into these sessions were further areas highlighted by practitioners in the questionnaires – mapping learning activities and programmes to the core curricula, using games as hooks, and to develop LLN, use and integration of ICT, and building self-esteem and confidence. A 'group project' was integrated throughout the day, encouraging and supporting delegates to consider young adult learners' interests, develop session plans and ideas, and draw out the LLN opportunities. Practitioners were also encouraged to use the events as networking and information sharing opportunities.

The response from delegates was very positive. Most seemed motivated by an event tailored to their needs, which covered elements of both informal work and engaging young adults, and LLN development work. The events were organised around the principles of sharing and valuing experience, maximising interaction, and exploring a variety of learning styles and

11. For an event programme, see appendix 2 downloadable from www.nrdc.org.uk/successfactors

approaches. One delegate commented '*I found the informal nature much more conducive to learning than the usual style of conference*'. As part of the formal evaluation process, delegates were asked what their expectations and hopes were for the event. Responses included:

> '*To get ideas and information about engaging young adults, as well as share information and ideas with other practitioners.*'

> '*To learn new approaches I can use with young people.*'

> '*Raised awareness and re-motivation!*'

> '*To meet others working in a similar area. To find out about research findings and practical advice.*'

Delegates were asked if there were other areas they would have liked to be included in the event. The most common response was an increased focus on resources. A whole session within the programme had been devoted to resources, but this is clearly an area where practitioners feel they need, or would like, more advice, information and support. This sentiment has been apparent at every stage of the research project. Delegates asked for practical examples, hand-on resources, good practice resources, resources development days, and resources to purchase for their organisations.

6 Resources

6.1 Introduction and aims

One of the main aims of the research project was to review and evaluate a range of existing teaching and learning materials currently used in work with young adults to develop their LLN skills. It was intended that this review would then inform the design, piloting, evaluation and production of additional materials as appropriate.

It became apparent during the early phase of data collection in phase one[12], that locating or adapting effective and appropriate teaching and learning materials with young adults was a time consuming and enduring problem for practitioners. The vast majority of practitioners were eager and anxious for information and recommendations for new resources, and how to locate them.

Resources already in use were not always appropriate, effective or easy to use, and there was a general perception that 'there must be something else out there'. When asked, most practitioners were able to list one or two commercially available resources/materials or websites they were using, but were unaware of others available. Although practitioners were usually aware of some commercially available resources, most were in practice searching for free or low-cost resources, which meant greater demands on time, and 'knowing where to look'.

Most practitioners were creatively developing resources and teaching and learning materials themselves, using either readily available items such as home-shopping catalogues, take-away menus or newspapers, or materials collected by predecessors. However, there was a general sense of dissatisfaction about this situation, and a constant search for materials that were easy to use, mapped to the curriculum (or clearly highlighted the LLN elements of the activity), readily available, and appealing to young adults.

6.2 The Resources Consultation Panel

In order to gain a better picture of LLN resources available, those currently being used, and their appropriateness for work with young adults, a Resources Consultation Panel of practitioners and young adult learners was formed from organisations with which the research team had been in contact during phase one. The research team sought to involve practitioners from across the sectors in order better to represent opinions and experiences, and to ensure that the panel's findings, and lessons learned from the process were of most use. Despite a representative panel from a variety of sectors, it is clear that the opinions expressed are always contingent on their context.

The panel worked to evaluate existing teaching and learning materials, and related processes

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12. For more information on this phase of the research, please see **Success factors in informal learning: young adults' experiences of LLN**: Interim report (2004), available for download at www.nrdc.org.uk

and activities, with the aim of identifying their strengths and weaknesses. It was also intended that the panel would identify any perceived and actual gaps in existing resources.

At the initial meeting, practitioners and learners identified a wide range of teaching and learning materials and activities they were using. The majority of practitioners present were developing learning activities from everyday materials, such as leaflets, magazines, newspapers, job application forms, and financial materials (for example, old cheque books). Learners were also encouraged to bring in their own materials, magazines that interested them, forms they had received to complete or catalogues that had at home. Internet-based or CD-ROM resources proved popular with both practitioners and learners. This type of resource appealed most to the learners, who enjoyed the opportunities they provided for interactivity and independent learning. However, practitioners acknowledged that ICT problems or limited access in the learning environment could often render such resources useless. Practitioners did not feel able to rely on this type of resource with a group of young adult learners. As such, photocopiable resources were often preferred, as they are more reliable and cheaper to access.

From the panel's discussions, it emerged very clearly that context (i.e. the topic or theme) was as important as content (the learning activities). It was noted that making resources specific to individual learners was vitally important, since young adults need to see the immediate relevance of resources to their lives/situations. Developing the importance of theme, larger projects were cited as effective elements of learning programmes. These projects could encompass research, activities and assignments as appropriate, all closely related to the overarching theme (for example, driving and cars was suggested). Such projects also allowed for some differentiation to address the needs of learners working at different levels. Practitioners noted that a group of learners are often working at very varying levels, and learners themselves often have strengths in one area, and development needs in another. Off-the-shelf materials may not always cater for needs of these kinds.

The learners on the panel expressed their dislike of resources and activities that reminded them of being at school. Any kind of worksheet, regardless of appearance or theme was classed as 'boring', since learners 'still need to use a pen'. Learners felt that the language used in resources and materials was babyish, and that focusing on one activity or area of work at a time was also boring – for example a whole worksheet on punctuation or capital letters. They were clear about the importance of the appearance of materials – learners mentioned cartoons, clip art, black and white text-based materials, and brightly coloured childish materials as being factors that put them off resources. Practitioners and learners alike noted that jargon can go out of date quickly, and language varies widely from region to region.

6.2.1 Key questions and scope of enquiry

The panel felt that there were a variety of factors important to consider in reviewing resources:

- Does the resource take into account the range of learning styles present in groups of young adult learners?
- Can the materials be used and applied across other areas of interest?
- Does the resource link to other important issues in work with young adult learners, for example citizenship or career guidance?
- Does the resource link to other example of materials, resources or activities that would support the work?
- Does the resource fit with important life-stage events for young adults, such as leaving home or becoming financially independent?

- Are the materials easily adaptable?
- Is the resource appropriate for a wide range of groups of young adult learners?
- How appropriate are specific details of the materials for young adults, for example format, style, age specificity, and level?
- How effective is the resource? Does it do what it says it will do?

Two pilot frameworks for review were developed with the group (see appendices 3 and 4 downloadable from www.nrdc.org.uk/successfactors). It was agreed that these frameworks should act as a guide for reviewers, but should not constrain responses. Practitioners would try to work with colleagues, and at least six young adult learners to review materials, and the process of reviewing could be used to enhance or contribute to the learning programme. Practitioners chose a selection of resources to review, and were provided with a copy.

The panel reconvened to report on their progress, and to feed back on the review process. All the practitioners on the panel found the review process useful in their practice, but had been hampered by a lack of time to review the materials effectively. Finding time to review the materials in depth, then feed back on reviews proved to be an extra demand on practitioners with very little spare capacity in their daily work. Despite this, the practitioners reported positive benefits of being involved in the review. The materials provoked discussion among staff and learners about areas they would like to explore, and opened up new avenues for future work. It also stimulated ideas for colleagues, and updated them on resources they were unaware of. Using 'new' resources with learners revitalised some sessions, and learners had felt valued when asked to share their opinions and feelings. For some practitioners, it was the first time they had sought learner opinion on teaching and learning materials, and they were surprised at the results. One practitioner commented that she now realised she would have to think harder about her organisation's current practice.

The panel reviewed a total of 16 different resources[13], using the framework for review in different ways.

The panel fed back their reviews and opinions of the resources in a round-table discussion. Several main strands emerged from this discussion, from learners and practitioners.

6.2.2 Initial feedback – messages from learners
- Learners enjoy resources with an element of debate or discussion as there are 'no wrong answers'.
- Resources that promote activities with no writing involved are more likely to involve and engage whole groups of learners, and are more positively received by learners.
- Learners enjoy activities that are 'hands on'.
- Learners feel far more empowered when they are familiar with the subject matter, for example perceptions or experience of car crime or mobile phones.
- Even where a resource is attractive and 'high tech', if the theme is not appropriate, learners very quickly lose interest.
- Resources that encourage learners to focus on themselves and their lives are perceived as more interesting and innovative, and 'different to other learning'. They also open up opportunities for peer mentoring.

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13. For a full list of the all resources reviewed by the consultation panel, see appendix 5.

- Materials which link to ICT applications are well received by learners, and stimulate interest, but technology is not always reliable and when it fails, learner interest soon dwindles.
- Resources that permit learners to type answers, text or responses generate higher levels of engagement than writing tasks. Resources where learners can select responses using a mouse are even more popular.
- Improving the technological features of a resource can impact negatively on the learning process, for example too much time might be spent looking at graphics, waiting for games to load, or listening to the soundtrack rather than working through the learning activities.
- Learners enjoy actively researching topics of interest.
- Both learners and practitioners liked materials in magazine style. They were seen as being creative, informative and less 'babyish'.
- Learners were more engaged with resources covering everyday activities.
- Learners are very sensitive to features that could be perceived as childlike, or being aimed at younger people – this included cartoons, and a resource pack about penpals designed to develop communication skills.

6.2.3 Initial feedback – messages from practitioners

- Resources with a vocational focus are useful as they can be easily integrated into existing provision.
- Practitioners prefer resources that can be used by those who are less experienced.
- Materials that are mapped to the core curriculum are sought after – this is seen as making practitioners' roles easier, and facilitates use by colleagues who are less experienced in LLN teaching.
- Practitioners find it useful to be able to trial materials before purchasing.
- Some practitioners may need training to make effective use of larger packs of materials or schemes of work that require learners to be guided through activities, levels and assignments.
- Learners and practitioners are disheartened by large books or folders of materials with 'masses of information'.
- Practitioners preferred materials that could be 'dipped into'.
- Photocopied materials are not viewed positively by learners or practitioners due to a loss of quality and colour (despite being cheaper), although practitioners do appreciate that material does not necessarily lose its visual appeal when photocopied.
- Learners enjoy interactive resources where they can manipulate some elements, or navigate a personal route through the activities. Practitioners preferred ICT resources where learners are able to save their progress and return to the same point at a later stage.
- Practitioners appreciate materials that suggest or simplify progression for learners.

Following the initial consultation exercise, it was anticipated that practitioners would perceive a gap in resources available for work with young adults, and be keen for new material to be developed to fill this gap. However, the panel reported that they would find a resource guide most helpful, since they recognised that there is a large volume of resources available and in use that most practitioners are not aware of. The panel agreed on the idea of a 'Rough Guide' to resources, which would encompass:

- Information and reviews of currently available resources.
- Case studies of how these resources are being used in work with young adults.
- Some of the findings of the panel to guide practitioners in selecting and adapting resources for their work.

The panel was keen to contribute to this process, and agreed to review the resources themselves for inclusion in the guide. A final framework was developed in consultation with the group, which was to be used as a guide for the second round of reviewing materials (see appendices 6 and 7 downloadable from www.nrdc.org.uk/successfactors). Three further practitioners joined the panel to expand the reach of the work, and the range of resources reviewed[14].

Up to four examples of resources were distributed to practitioners, carefully selected to match the aims and outcomes of their learning programmes, and the interests and characteristics of the learners involved.

Early on in the review process, it became apparent that the review and feedback process required a time and structural commitment from practitioners that was too demanding on top of their existing role. During the course of the review, one project reached the end of its funding, and another practitioner left their post, resulting in some resources not being reviewed, and some reviews not being received. The review process took double the amount of time originally allocated, and unfortunately did not generate enough material to form the 'Rough Guide' that the panel originally hoped for.

Despite the challenges of the process, the panel remained committed to the research project during the review period, and where possible, sustained the work with learners and colleagues to submit reviews of material.

6.3 Lessons learned from the second reviews – learners

Many young adult learners worked with practitioners to review the teaching and learning materials distributed. Learners clearly thought carefully about their opinions, and expressed their preferences for the types of resources that could be used to support their learning:

- Simple and straightforward language is very important to learners.
- Paper-based materials, especially in loose-leaf files, can be confusing or complex to navigate – ICT packages that guide learners through tasks were preferred.
- Learners appreciated clear instructions about how work books were structured, and where to find information or activities they should work on.
- 'Babyish' themes or topics were very quickly noted and criticised. More 'adult-themed' topics, such as budgeting, were let down by the choice of example or task, such as buying sweets (seen as very childish).
- Young adult learners have high expectations of the technical specifications and interactivity of online or CD-ROM based resources – they expect them to be far more innovative than paper-based materials.
- Where a resource is based on a 'technical' topic, such as financial awareness, learners are very aware of language they do not understand, and, based on this, perceive that the resource is not appropriate for them. Using the language appropriate to young adults to refer to technical terms had a very positive effect on learners' opinions of a resource.
- When using computer-based learning materials, learners like to be able to load, navigate and use the materials themselves, rather than relying on the practitioner.

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14. For details of practitioners, learners and organisations represented on the resources consultation panel, please see the Acknowledgements.

- The theme of the resources is very important: '*although it helped me with English and maths, it was about cars which I like*'.
- Where young adults learners were interested in the theme or topic, they were far more likely to state positively what they had learned from the resource.
- This is even more likely where the resource related to a personal interest or was relevant to an aspect of their life: '*[I learned] the cost of catalogue payments, and budgeting them from pay*'; '*I am a learner on a motor vehicle course, so I was interested and learned a lot*'.
- Learners were more interested in topics they had an opinion on: '*Looked at weekly earnings – don't think it is right – interesting*' and '*the group discussions were good*'.

6.4 Lessons learned from the second reviews – practitioners

Despite the challenges of time and capacity, practitioners reviewed a wide range of resources, and contributed strongly to the review process:

- Practitioners acknowledge that online or CD-ROM 'games' will never be as 'exciting' as the computer games learners are likely to play in their spare time.
- Practitioners would like resources to be 'endlessly reusable' or easily adaptable – in practice, this may mean a very simple idea such as a cloze exercise, rather than a complex computer-based learning package.
- Resources that are based around topics such as sexual health are easier to use with young adult learners, since they are more likely to complement existing learning activities.
- Learners responded more positively to 'informative', rather than authoritative or directive content.
- Where a resource is computer-based, it is not always clear to practitioners that learners are developing their LLN skills, rather than their ICT skills.
- There is a careful balance to be struck in computer-based materials – to ensure packages are interactive and visually appealing, but that this does not detract from the learning process.
- Practitioners prefer the links to the core curricula (LLN skill development) to be made clear.
- The personal, social and emotional element of resources for young adults is important.
- Worksheets can be too prescriptive leaving '*no room to discuss topics on a personal level… too much writing, not enough opportunity to engage learner*'.
- Wide ranges of 'styles' of activity are more effective at preventing boredom and disengagement in a session.
- There are some universally appealing topics, such passing the driving theory test, that can make a resource appropriate for the vast majority of young adult learners, regardless of setting, ability, gender or locality.
- Topics that appear to have very little to do with maths or English, or school in general, such as healthy eating, are more popular with learners than topics which might lend themselves more easily to literacy or numeracy learning (such as budgeting).
- Being able to 'physically' do something as part of the learning process is important.
- Resources with no underlying topic (such as 'pure' grammar worksheets rather than healthy eating or DIY-related materials) were less helpful to practitioners generally, as they were more likely to use these for 'ideas' than to use the whole resource in sessions with learners. There is, however, a time implication in following up these ideas.
- The Comic Sans font, although often selected for readability and clarity, is associated with school and being 'boring'.
- Where there is a clear 'right or wrong' answer, it can be demoralising for the learner.
- Being able to photocopy materials was seen as beneficial to the practitioner, but

simultaneously as contributing to resources appearing cheap, boring and childish.

■ CD-ROMs, which compress large amounts of information, are easy to navigate, are a preferred format for materials for practitioners.

■ Being able to 'measure' the progress made in LLN as a result of using a particular resource is not necessarily important to practitioners.

6.5 Emerging themes

For learners, there seem to be two key questions when thinking about resources – 'Am I interested in it?' and 'Do I understand it?' The young adult learners were very quick to pick up and comment on elements of a resource they perceived as inappropriate to them, whether it was considered 'babyish' or too difficult to understand. Crucially, they did not want to feel patronised, confused or belittled. Language, for example, must be 'basic' and have no 'school English', such as grammatical or mathematical terminology. However, technical language was more accepted where it referred to vocational terms.

Learners were far more likely to respond positively to topics they were interested in personally, or that linked to their vocational interests. They also responded to resources that were informative. However, the information must be non-judgemental, and learners will decide what they 'need to know' – it had to be the learner that made the connection between the activity and their life, rather than being told it was relevant. Where learners felt they were being treated like adults, consulted and allowed to express their opinions, they were far more likely to make positive statements about the resource.

When asked what was the most important element of resources for them, learners were most likely to respond in relation to the resource they were reviewing. For example, where learners felt that the language used in a particular resource was too difficult to understand, they were more likely to go on to say that, for them, language was the most important element of a resource. Similarly, where learners felt that the topic or theme of a resource was particularly appropriate, they were most likely to say that this was the most important element.

Responses to the issue of style were much more personal – there was no common agreement of whether colour was preferred over black and white, or pictures preferred over text. Interestingly, whilst there were some comments on format, this is an area learners consider less important. It would appear that getting the language and theme 'right' can compensate or overcome any weaknesses in format. Consequently, learners were happy to tackle paper-based activities on passing your driving theory test, but were more critical of a 'high tech' resource that was perceived as less interesting. One comment on format tied in with learners' need to be 'adult' – where computer-based resources are used, learners want to be able to navigate and use the resource themselves, rather than relying on the practitioner to explain the instructions, load the resource, or move them forward through activities. Young adult learners are potentially more critical of format when using an online or CD-ROM resource, since they are more aware/judgemental of its specifications and capability, comparing it to games or web sites they may use in their spare time – something which is not considered when using paper-based materials.

This has clear implications for publishers who may feel that new resources need to be increasingly visually stimulating, innovative, and 'cool'. Young adult learners are highly sensitive to inappropriate language, terminology that is slightly 'off the mark', or technology

that is not as sophisticated as that which they may have access to through gaming or surfing the internet. Instead, the young adult learners on the panel demonstrated that the theme or content of a resource, combined with straightforward and non-patronising language was often more important that format or style. Activities that allowed them to contribute to their vocational knowledge, draw on their experiences of the 'adult world', and promoted a sense of autonomy in the learning process were most popular.

Learners- What is most important to you, thinking about resources?

■ Language
□ Format
■ Content
■ Style
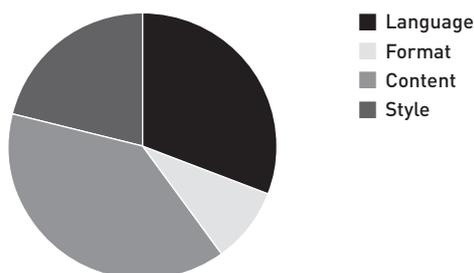
Practitioners - What is most important to you, thinking about resources?

■ Language
□ Format
■ Content
■ Style
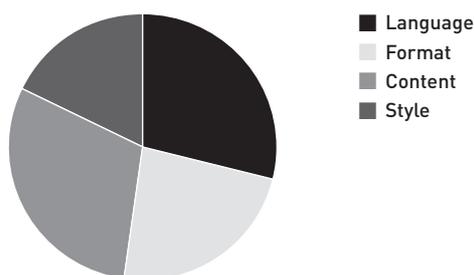
Practitioners were far more likely to say that all elements of a resource are important, equally so in most cases. Practitioners were more concerned about the 'whole' resource, and how it contributed to and affected their practice, whereas learners, perhaps unsurprisingly, were more interested in the tasks or activities they would have to complete, or things they would have to think about, as part of using the resource in their learning sessions.

For practitioners, complexity in a resource often meant more difficulty for them in using it. Simpler ideas, activities or layout made it easier for the resource to be adapted, either for the learner/group, or to be expanded into a longer or more wide ranging session. However, materials that were 'too basic' or required too much time to adapt were not popular.

It seemed that resources were often only one element of provision that complemented other learning activities, or the wider ongoing process of engaging with young adult learners. Therefore, resources that were based around topics and themes of interest, and that lent themselves to a range of activities (covering a variety of learning styles) were most popular. Another important part of this was that the resource was either mapped to the Adult Literacy and Numeracy core curricula, or made it clear how the activities developed LLN skills. This is where computer-based or CD-ROM resources fell down, in that practitioners were not always clear that the learner was developing their skills in these areas, as opposed to developing their ICT skills. Practitioners were not always concerned about curriculum references, but liked to be aware, and feel confident, that the resource was having a positive impact on

learners' LLN skills development. Not being mapped to the core curricula was also seen as something that could potentially require a time commitment at a later stage. Interestingly, practitioners were less concerned about whether or not the resource helped them 'measure' learners' progress in LLN.

Materials produced in CD-ROM format were considered useful to practitioners, in that it is easier to navigate around a CD-ROM, and involves less paper. However, games and online resources are harder to adapt, and mainly lent themselves to individual work. Practitioners felt that the graphics and sound may detract from the learning process itself.

By contrast, practitioners enjoyed resources that allowed them to interact with their learners – themes that promoted discussion, physical activity and wider exploration, and exercises that promoted practitioner and group involvement. As one practitioner said, *'If it doesn't engage me, why should it engage my learners?'* For the learners, it was clear that they were certainly not averse to any of these factors, but that the key element of resources for them (and perhaps of the learning programme itself) is for them to support the learner's identity as a young adult.

There is clearly great potential, and call for the development of a practitioners' guide to resources. Since most of the practitioners on the panel accepted that they would not be able to take off the shelf resources and use them in their work with young adults without some degree of adaptation, most were looking for guidance or a framework of activities within which to explore how a resource could be used. It was important for practitioners to know how activities assisted in the development of learners' LLN skills, yet also provided opportunities to explore personal, social and emotional development. However, it is also clear that the development of such a guide or framework requires a heavy commitment of both time and resources, and is not a task that practitioners can easily contribute to in addition to their day-to-day work with young adults.

7 Exploring accreditation

Accreditation has proved to be an area where there is very little consensus between practitioners, and where it is equally difficult to develop an accurate picture of both practitioner and learner experience and opinion, and about what is happening 'on the ground'.

From the practitioner questionnaire distributed during phase one of the research project, a picture emerged of more practitioners accrediting their work with young adults than were not (68 per cent to 32 per cent), with a third considering using the National Tests in Adult Literacy and Numeracy, and half responding that their future plans did not, and were not likely to, include the National Tests. Open College Network units were the most popular form of accreditation, but the list of other forms of accreditation practitioners were using was extensive. The majority of accreditation options offered were not directly related to LLN, focusing instead on subject areas such as employability, ICT, or personal and social development. Accreditation was also high on practitioners' agendas for the future, with one in four respondents noting that they intended to develop accreditation as an aspect of their provision.

Practitioners' perceptions and opinions of accrediting work with young adults (gathered through face to face interviews, telephone interviews and questionnaire) were varied, and often polarised. Many practitioners believed accreditation to be a *'great motivator for traditional non-achievers'* (Connexions respondent in questionnaire), and that it enables young adults to have 'something to show' for their involvement in a learning programme – *'Once they've achieved, there's no stopping them'* (voluntary sector respondent in interview). The importance of certificates was frequently noted, particularly when learners were awarded one for the first time. For some practitioners, accreditation was a crucial part of their 'marketing strategy':

> *'For the very hardest to reach, they need basic skills, but it's just not interesting enough… it's very important to have accreditation.'* (Voluntary sector respondent in telephone interview)

However, there was an equally strong feeling that accreditation can serve as *'just another barrier'* (Youth service respondent in interview). The vast majority of young adults involved in the provision we visited had overwhelmingly negative memories of formal education – of failure, bullying, authority, exclusion, mistrust, and boredom. For many practitioners, accreditation (and particularly 'tests') were closely associated with formal education in the minds of their learners:

> *'It could be off-putting to a young person who has no academic achievement, and little or no self-esteem'* (Voluntary sector respondent in questionnaire)

And, contrary to the belief in young adults' pride at their first certificate, it was also claimed that *'young people don't have much store in paper'* (Youth service respondent in telephone questionnaire).

Increasingly, accreditation was also viewed as 'professionalising' provision. This was a view particularly prevalent among private training providers, but was also evident among

practitioners who had been previously offering highly informal or non-formal learning opportunities. Respondents recognised that accreditation often made it easier to access funding, and to raise an organisation's profile both locally and further afield.

In order to explore some of the complex issues raised during phase one of the research project, a further in depth questionnaire was distributed to the project database of approximately 175 organisations, with a response rate of 14 per cent.

## 7.1 Types of accreditation available to young adults

Practitioners were asked to provide details of what types of accreditation, if any, were available to young adult learners as part of their learning programme. Most organisations incorporated accreditation into their programme, with only one practitioner responding that their learning programme did not include any form of accreditation or certification (including in-house).

Reasons for not offering accreditation as an option (either at all, or not as part of certain learning programmes) were given, in order of importance, as:

- *'We focus more on engagement than outcomes.'*
- *'Our learning programme is informal, therefore we do not offer accreditation.'*
- *'We do not want accreditation to lead the learning.'*
- *'Accreditation can put pressure on young adult learners, and contribute to feelings of low self-esteem.'*

Respondents were asked the main reason for including accreditation as a part of their learning programme:

What is the main reason for offering accreditation as part of your learning programme?

- Funding requirement
- To motivate learners
- To officially recognise/reward achievements
- To improve progression
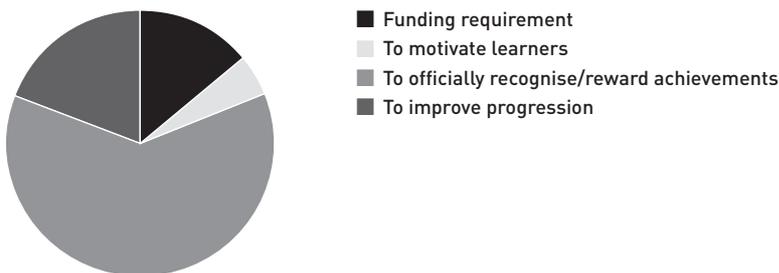
Practitioners were then asked to indicate which of the following were available to learners as part of their learning programmes:

■ In-house certificates (for example, for behaviour or attendance).
■ Internally assessed/moderated awards (for example, Duke of Edinburgh or Fairbridge awards).
■ Externally assessed/moderated awards (for example, ASDAN, AQA or NOCN units).
■ Qualifications (for example, NVQs or the National Test in adult literacy or numeracy).
■ None of the above.

Which of the following are available to learners as part of your learning programme?
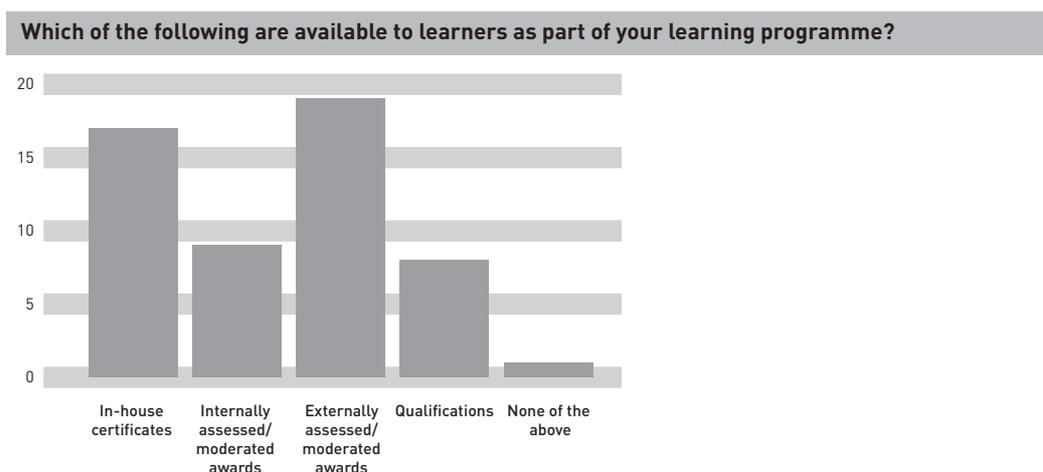
None of the organisations offering in-house certificates offered them in isolation, meaning that every organisation bar one offered young adult learners some form of nationally recognised accreditation or award.

The most popular options for young adults were:

■ OCN units (for example, personal development)
■ The National Tests in Adult Literacy and Numeracy
■ Youth Achievement Awards
■ Key skills awards
■ NCFE awards (for example, money management or IT).

Other options mentioned include AQA units in literacy and numeracy, ASDAN, Duke of Edinburgh, and Getting Connected (OCR accredited). In-house certificates covered a wide range of activities, including digital photography, cooking, independent living skills, job hunting/employability, assertiveness, health and wellbeing, behaviour and attendance, and personal money management.

Slightly over half of the respondents stated that it was intended that learners improved their literacy, language and/or numeracy skills through the achievement of the accreditation (rather than the award focusing on specific literacy or numeracy skills development), with the remainder responding that the development or improvement of these skills was not the primary aim of the learning programme.

Practitioners were asked to explain the reasons for their decision to offer particular

accreditation options. The most commonly stated reasons are as follows:

■ Options are tailored to learners' needs: *'We give young people an opportunity to do an award in a heavily supported environment.'*
■ They fit in well with learning programmes/staff abilities.
■ The award is approved by funders/linked to funding/meets targets: *'We look for all kinds of accreditation for statistics for funding.'*
■ Accreditation supports learners' progression aims.
■ It is necessary to 'prove' learners' literacy/numeracy development.
■ The award allows learner to create portfolios/avoid demanding assessments: *'Duke of Edinburgh award has no demanding written evidence but shows commitment.'*
■ Allows organisations to develop/create their own awards.

7.2 How many learners are working towards accreditation?

For the majority of learners, accreditation was not a compulsory element of their learning programme – *'Our relationship with the young people is one of choice'*. Even where accreditation was not compulsory, the majority of practitioners reported that more than 70 per cent of their learners work towards it as part of their learning programme.

For those learners who did not work towards accreditation, practitioners said it was mainly because the learner was not ready to work towards accreditation, and/or did not want to work towards accreditation. In some cases, practitioners stated that the learner's literacy, language and/or numeracy level was too low to work towards accreditation in the available time.

For organisations where accreditation was a compulsory element of the provision, practitioners were asked if there was ever an occasion when accreditation would not be an appropriate option for the learner. Slightly over half the respondents stated that there is always an accreditation that is appropriate. However, one practitioner commented:

> *'In circumstances where there is a risk that the young person will disengage if accreditation is a barrier, confidence, self-esteem, motivation and understanding need to be cultivated to aid achievement.'*

Another practitioner commented that for young adults working towards awards for personal and social development, it could sometimes be *'too personal'*. Most learners who were not working towards accreditation for the reasons above were often awarded in-house certificates instead.

7.3 Introducing accreditation

Practitioners were asked at what stage of the learning programme they introduced accreditation to young adult learners. Responses were split evenly between 'at the beginning/on the first day' and 'when learners are settled and are familiar/comfortable with the staff/group, or when learner is ready to work towards accreditation'. Only one respondent introduced accreditation to learners when it was time to begin gathering evidence or preparing for assessment.

Practitioners who introduced accreditation at the beginning of the learning programme or on the first day commented on why they selected this particular opportunity:

■ *'So learners know what options there are from the start.'*
■ *'From experience, it is found that most learners want an external qualification that is recognised.'*
■ *'So they can start work on the portfolio.'*

However, for many practitioners, it was crucial to delay the introduction of accreditation:

■ *'Learners need to build trust in the workers/organisation first. Many have had negative experiences of education previously.'*
■ *'So they understand it is an option, not a requirement, but that they will be capable of achieving it.'*
■ *'Learners have built up a relationship with the tutor. Self-esteem and confidence is at a stage where they are ready to try new things.'*
■ *'Because there is more chance that they will take it up.'*
■ *'Often accreditation is a turn off and not the primary aim for the young person… requirements/portfolio appear daunting.'*
■ *'So nobody is put off by misconceptions.'*
■ *'Some young people want qualifications, others had bad school experiences and see accreditation as reliving school, so need time to settle. Sometimes young people achieve things first and we show them how they could have got accreditation and can do so in the future.'*

All respondents felt that the way in which accreditation is introduced can have an impact on learners' responses to it:

■ *'Fear of failing… young people may have not achieved previously for many reasons. Formal learning environments can foster a fear that they will yet again fail.'*
■ *'If inappropriate terminology is used, accreditation can appear frightening. Young people with fear of exams can put up barriers immediately.'*
■ *'If the process or approach is appropriate, then the learner is more willing to participate. They need to 'own' the decision to work towards accreditation.'*
■ *'It may put pressure on certain learners. It may put learners off attending.'*
■ *'If it's not sold in the right way they may not sign up – might think it's too hard.'*
■ *'If it is valued by workers/tutors, young people will value it too.'*

7.4 Assessment

Practitioners were asked to state how the awards offered as part of their learning programme are assessed:

How is/are the award(s) offered assessed?

■ Portfolio (verbal, visual or written)
■ Test/exam
■ Assignment
■ Other
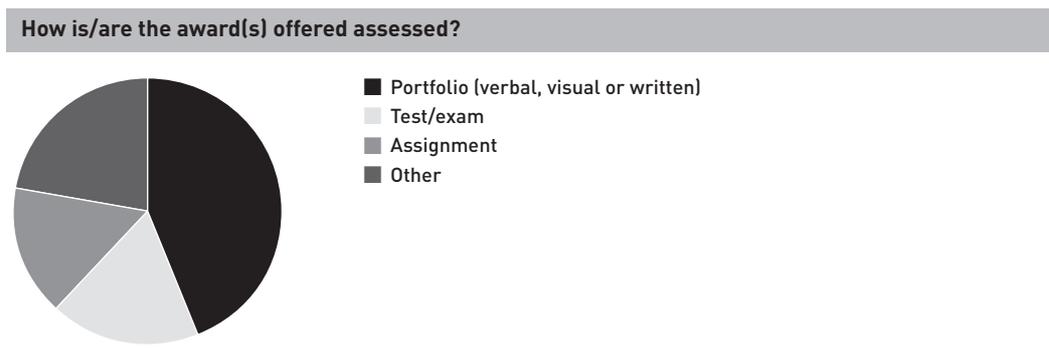
'Other' included witness statements, observations, video footage and photographs, peer assessment, practical tasks, and attendance. Three quarters of respondents agreed that the method of assessment had an impact on the type of accreditation or award selected. Reasons included:

■ *'OCN accreditation seemed to be the most flexible... it allows the learner and the tutor to design new ways of evidencing.'*
■ *'Needs to be skills based assessment rather than knowledge based, and accessible to bigger range of abilities.'*
■ *'Students are not under any time restrictions.'*
■ *'We wanted to have a choice for learners that took into consideration their learning styles.'*
■ *'Staff have little time for paperwork. Minimal paperwork encouraged us to adopt certain awards.'*
■ *'These young people tend not to like tests, portfolios can be done at their own pace, and are directly relevant to the work – tests tend to be detached.'*
■ *'We need practical, hands-on awards.'*

7.5 The benefits of accreditation

Practitioners were asked to state how incorporating accreditation into their learning programme(s) benefited their organisation:

How does incorporating accreditation into learning programmes benefit your organisation?

■ Funding requirement
☐ Attracts learners
■ It improves retention
■ It enhances our profile
■ Measures progress/achievement
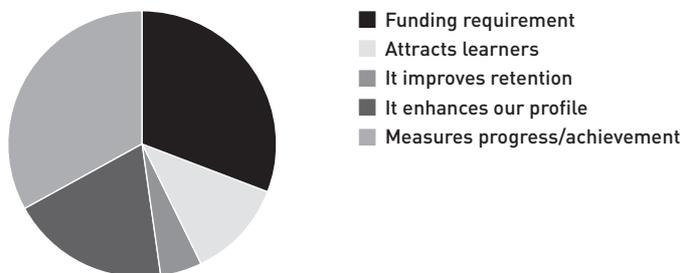
One third of practitioners stated that accreditation is an important tool to measure learners' progress and achievement. However, the same number of practitioners noted that accreditation is a requirement to receive funding, or improves the likelihood of the organisation being successful when seeking funding. A minority felt that accreditation attracted learners to the programme and helped to improve retention. Half of respondents felt that accreditation enhanced their organisational profile. Respondents also noted that accreditation *'assists in matching the curriculum to learners' needs and aspirations'* and *'helps young people gain a positive accreditation experience – they don't think they are "thick" or "stupid"'*. However, it was also noted that accreditation was necessary to *'meet government targets'*.

Almost a fifth of respondents stated that their learning programme was structured around accreditation, or the 'demands' of the award offered (evidence gathering, testing etc). The remainder of respondents stated they planned the accreditation around the learning itself.

Respondents were also asked to state how incorporating accreditation into learning programmes benefits young adult learners:

How does incorporating accreditation into learning programmes benefit young adult learners?

- ■ Provides a focus/structure
- ▢ Contributes to employability
- ▨ Improves confidence/self-esteem
- ▩ Recognises achievements
- ▨ Something to show'
- ■ Likely to lead to progression
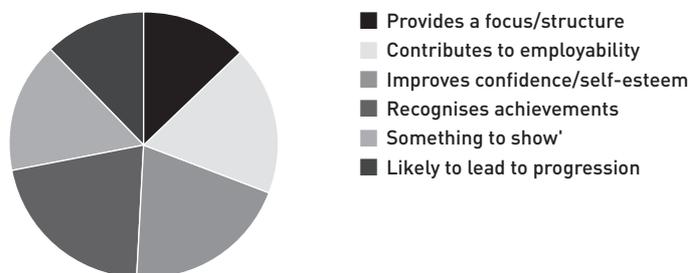
For practitioners, the two most important benefits for young adult learners were the improvement in confidence/self-esteem and the motivating effects of accreditation, and the recognition of their achievements. The contribution accreditation can make to young adults' employability was also important, but it was noted that this depends on the perceived value and level of recognition of the award. Progression on to 'more formal learning opportunities' and the provision of a focus/structure for the learning programme were rated as slightly less important.

7.6 Young adult learners' perceptions of accreditation

Respondents were asked, where young adult learners are negative about accreditation, to highlight the main reasons behind this. The vast majority of respondents signalled negative associations between school/formal education and accreditation/qualifications. More than two thirds of respondents also mentioned young adults' perception of too much work being involved to collect evidence or build a portfolio, and the fear that an exam or test may be involved. More than half of respondents felt that young adult learners were negative about accreditation where they could not see the value of the particular accreditation on offer. Other reasons included *'fear of not being able to succeed'*, *'fear of literacy requirements'*, *'lack of motivation'*, *'unwilling to commit to a course of learning to such an extent'*, and *'hate written work'*.

Respondents overwhelmingly reported young adult learners being resistant to tests and/or exams. This was mainly attributed to a fear of failure, the inter-related low confidence and self-esteem, and again, negative associations with school: *'Bad school experience, seen as judged... judge themselves as failing'*. Apathy, and a lack of understanding of the value of related awards were also mentioned.

Respondents were also asked, where young adult learners are positive about accreditation, to state the main reasons behind this:

Where young adult learners are positive about accreditation, what are the main reasons?

■ Something to put on CV
■ Makes family proud
■ Makes attendance worthwhile
■ Evaluates own learning
■ Sense of personal achievement
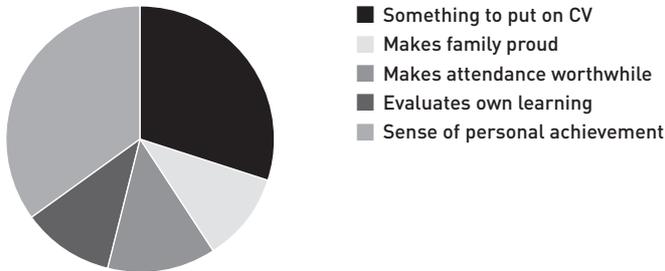
Young adults' enjoyment of a sense of personal achievement was stated most often, followed by an improvement in employability, or being able to enhance their CV. Despite practitioners during phase one of the research project citing young adults benefiting from 'something to show' for their attendance at a learning programme in order to validate it or make it worthwhile, this was highlighted less often.

7.7 Recognising achievement

Respondents were asked what they felt was the single most effective way of recognising young adults' achievements:

What do you consider to be the single most effective way of recognising young adult learners' achievements?

■ Certificates
■ Celebration events
■ Regular praise/positive feedback
■ A reward
■ A nationally recognised award for CV
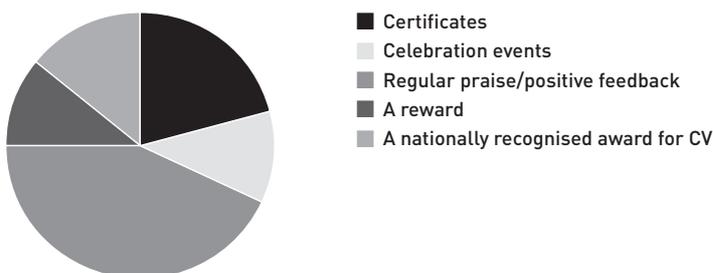
Although 'regular praise and positive feedback' was the most popular response, a significant number of practitioners perceive a high value in presenting certificates to recognise young adult learners' achievements.

Respondents were asked to state how important young adults perceived a range of accreditation options to be:

How important are the following to young adult learners?
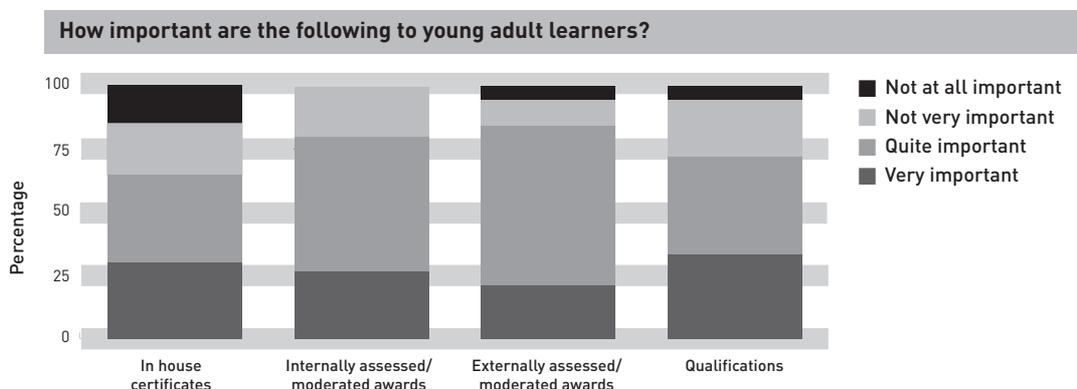
Practitioners were most likely to say that qualifications (for example, NVQs or the National Tests) are 'very important' to young adult learners, and more practitioners stated that in house certificates are not at all important or significant to young adult learners. However, externally (for example, NOCN or AQA units) and internally (for example, Duke of Edinburgh) assessed/moderated awards were more likely to be considered to be 'very' or 'quite important' to young adult learners, in comparison with the other options. Despite in house certificates being most rated as 'not very' or 'not at all important', more practitioners consider them to be the best way of recognising young adult learners' achievements than a nationally recognised award.

7.8 Emerging themes

This questionnaire has highlighted the high numbers of organisations and practitioners including accreditation in their learning programmes for young adults, a higher number than was anticipated based on results from the initial questionnaire in phase one of the research project. This may reflect an increase in the use of accreditation over the time frame of the project. Externally assessed awards (such as OCN or AQA units) remain the most popular options, with the same proportion of organisations (approximately one third) offering the National Tests in adult literacy and numeracy to learners as were doing so (or were considering it) at the time of the initial questionnaire. Although all the organisations who responded to the questionnaire had an aim of developing LLN skills (though this may not have been the primary aim), a minority of organisations selected accreditation options that specifically accredited progress/achievement in this area. For most organisations, it was hoped that LLN skills would be developed or enhanced through the achievement of accreditation in another area – for example, a Youth Achievement Award, a Basic Food Hygiene certificate or an in-house certificate for digital photography.

Although accreditation is not compulsory in the majority of organisations, it would still seem that the majority of young adult learners work towards accreditation where it is offered. Although approximately half of the practitioners responding feel that there is always an appropriate accreditation option for young adults, half do acknowledge that in some cases, young adults are not ready to work towards accreditation, and need to address others issues first (such as personal issues, mental health difficulties or homelessness).

Practitioners and organisations are incorporating accreditation into learning programmes for a variety of reasons – mainly to officially recognise and record learners' achievements, but also recognising accreditation as a funding requirement, its ability to motivate learners, and improve progression, although evidence of the ability of accreditation to contribute towards learners' progression routes was far from conclusive.

There is widespread agreement among practitioners that young adult learners benefit from the recognition of their achievements, and experience personal satisfaction from the completion/receiving of awards. Practitioners also consider that learners benefit in other ways, including contributing to their employability, and providing a structure or focus for learning programmes. However, it is also clear that young adult learners often have very negative perceptions of accreditation, particularly upon arrival at/entry to a learning programme. These perceptions are centred round inter-related associations with school/formal education, failure and lack of confidence, and are particularly strong when working towards an award that includes an exam or test. It would appear that some of these perceptions can be challenged, or overcome, by the way in which accreditation is introduced to young adult learners:

> '[Accreditation] is important, but you must approach young people in a careful way – a lot of young people dropped out [when accreditation was first introduced] – can be very threatening but can be beneficial for self esteem.' (Voluntary sector respondent in initial questionnaire).

There is some disagreement whether this should be at the start of a programme, in order to highlight the range of options available from the start, or whether practitioners should wait until learners have built up trust in the organisation, and developed relationships with the tutors. What is clear is that a major part of this strategy is to support learners in developing their confidence, to see that they are capable of achieving accreditation, and to encourage ownership of their choice. How this is done in practice will vary from site to site, and from learner to learner.

> 'Young adults will do well, focus if they're interested and see value in the qualification or end result.' (Voluntary sector respondent in telephone interview).

Although it was widely acknowledged that young adults are resistant to tests and exams, a third of respondents were incorporating them into their provision. Again, how they are introduced to young adults is critical:

> 'If learners are on board with work and clear why they're attending, testing isn't a barrier. It's about how it's sold and young people are engaged.' (Youth service respondent in telephone interview).

> 'You need to have a strong relationship before testing is introduced.' (Connexions respondent in initial questionnaire).

It appears the 'value' of in-house certificates is still unclear, with respondents indicating that learners are more likely to perceive them to be unimportant or insignificant compared to other forms of accreditation. Despite this, more respondents highlighted certificates as the single most effective way to recognise young adults achievements, than a nationally recognised award. Anecdotal evidence from project visits suggests that the meaning of a

certificate is very personal, and while young adult learners' self-esteem and confidence can be raised through receipt of a certificate, large celebration events (for example, with the local paper or Mayor present) can have the opposite effect. This is particularly true where the certificate is perceived by young adult learners to have little value – for example, recognition of 'supporting others' on an Entry2Employment programme. It is challenging for practitioners to objectively view the value of certificates, particularly, as one pointed out during an interview, since practitioners are often highly qualified professionals, and are likely to have received a variety of certificates throughout the course of their learning. Consequently, it is easy for practitioners underestimate the meaning of a certificate, especially the first one a learner may have received.

Organisations and practitioners are selecting accreditation routes and options for a number of reasons:

■ Their flexibility – in time restrictions, evidence gathering and topic area (particularly where practitioners are able to write their own units).
■ The way in which evidence is collected – portfolios encourage a sense of ownership for learners, and methods such as observation, photography and video footage can 'prove commitment' without involving writing.
■ Skills-based, not knowledge-based – young adult learners can feel more confident in demonstrating their skills (often practical) than in demonstrating their knowledge of subjects.
■ Appropriate for a wide range of abilities.
■ Appropriate for diverse learning styles.
■ No tests or exams.
■ A focus on practical or hands-on elements.

The 'value' of the accreditation is also important – in cases where young adults do arrive at provision keen to work towards accreditation, it is usually an award related to employment, or a qualification that is trade-related. However, even where young adults are motivated by the value of an award (the end result), they are not always equally motivated to work towards it (the process). By selecting awards on the basis of the factors above, practitioners are able to sustain the initial motivation through to achievement.

Practitioners who are most positive towards accreditation tend to work in the FE sector; it is this group who are most likely to be familiar with the range of accreditation options available, and methods of incorporating them into learning programmes. For practitioners working outside FE, there are often concerns around confidence – these practitioners do not view themselves as 'teachers' or 'educators', and in many cases, made a conscious choice not to work in that sector. These practitioners may themselves have had negative experiences in formal education. Accreditation may also be a relatively recent addition to their remit, and could appear threatening. There are also concerns about how accreditation may impact on learning programmes and activities – a challenging and time-consuming factor to consider on top of wider concerns about engagement and motivation. However, although accreditation does mean a different way of working, it does not have to be burdensome. There are many ways of demonstrating the learning that has taken place, many of them are imaginative, creative and enjoyable, and can be developed in consultation with young adult learners.

Accreditation is increasingly a part of informal and non-formal learning for young adults. It is also clear that it can be a successful and beneficial element to provision. However, the key to success when incorporating accreditation is to ensure that it is embedded within a supportive

and enabling environment, fully recognising the fears and motivations of young adult
learners. In practice, this means:

- ■ Exploring what accreditation means to the learner(s).
- ■ Selecting the right award or route.
- ■ Introducing accreditation at the appropriate moment for the learner(s).
- ■ Promoting choice and 'ownership'.
- ■ Recognising and appreciating resistance, suspicion and fear.
- ■ Supporting learners with positive praise and feedback, reinforcing achievement and progress.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Target Groups

Much of the existing informal LLN provision for young adults focuses on the 16 to 19 age group, often in line with the government priority of reducing the numbers of young adults not in education, employment or training (NEET). This research has clearly demonstrated the vital importance of targeting programmes to learners' interests and experiences, and the concentration on the 16–19 'NEET group' has, in practice, been at the expense of groups of older young adults, such as the 19+ age group. Their experiences and life circumstances are often very different from those in the younger age group, and their aims and aspirations are not always addressed by existing learning programmes.

Recommendation 1

It remains critical to acknowledge the individual needs, hopes and experiences of young adults, as distinct from other age groups. Effective provision for this means focusing on the individual, and recognising what each has in common with others, as well as differences. Young adults from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and young adults with disabilities would benefit from increased consideration in future project development.

8.2 Funding

At present, practitioners have insufficient information about sources of funding for informal LLN work with young adults. Existing funding is perceived as being limited by excessively demanding targets, and often does not recognise the length of time required to develop and sustain meaningful relationships with young adult learners.

Recommendation 2

Practitioners would benefit from greater clarity about the processes of applying for funding. A key element is provision of more information on possible sources of funding for work with this cohort, with realistic and appropriate targets needed to secure funding. In order to promote sustainability and effective long-term relationships with young adults, programmes would be enhanced by more core funding for the LLN elements of informal and non-formal provision.

8.3 Screening, initial assessment and diagnostics

Whether or not initial/diagnostic assessment is undertaken, and the type of tool that is used, is closely related to the amount and level of LLN training undertaken by staff, and the aims or objectives of the learning programme itself. Practitioners largely agree that some form of initial or diagnostic assessment is useful, but vary in the type of information they seek. For young adults taking part in informal and non-formal provision, individual needs are not catered for within existing approaches, and current tools may not always be appropriate.

Many young adults with LLN needs have had negative experiences of the formal education system, and are intimidated by tools resembling tests or exams. Similarly, many existing tools, although developed for use with new technologies to improve learner motivation and ease of use, rely on sustained engagement in the task, with no capacity to save work or progress to date.

Recommendation 3

Practitioners would benefit from screening and diagnostic tools created for and aimed at young adults, in consultation with learners and practitioners themselves. Training, both in using and adapting existing tools in work with young adults and in the effective use of any new tools, is a central part of these developments, since practitioners who feel most comfortable and familiar with such tools, and their uses, are most likely to integrate them into their provision. Similarly, the same practitioners are most likely to make positive use of the results of any such screening or diagnostic assessment. Developments would need to take account of information required by practitioners to build a holistic picture of learners, whether this be learning style, reading age, and level, or a more in-depth understanding of learners' motivations, confidence and emotions. Formats must support and motivate both learners and practitioners to access any new tools, and recognise the particular demands of learners, programmes and environment.

8.4 Sharing information, understanding and experience

A clear desire has emerged from practitioners for more information, both in terms of developments in the field and sharing challenges and good practice. The majority of practitioners consulted feel they would benefit from a network of support consisting of meetings, online discussion groups, and newsletters. At present, there is no one source of information, nor a 'first port of call' for practitioners seeking advice, guidance or support. Practitioners have little opportunity to share their experiences and successes, and are often unaware that solutions to problems or challenges even exist.

Recommendation 4

The further extension of educational networks – to include all sectors working with young adults – would promote a shared understanding of terminology and increase the confidence of practitioners working outside colleges and formal provision to define their approach to practice.

Similarly, a lack of shared understanding of terminology can hamper the exchange of information, and contribute towards feelings of isolation and low confidence among practitioners. This research has shown that existing terms and definitions (such as 'informal', 'non-formal' and 'formal') do not adequately represent the scope and variety of work being undertaken, and can distract attention from the success of the provision. Adopting an approach, for example embedding, that has been effective elsewhere, without a confident grasp of how it relates to one's own practice does not necessarily guarantee success for one's learners.

Recommendation 5

Practitioners would benefit from help and support in exploring the development and

integration of effective practice into their own work.

Practitioners are seeking ways to promote to young adults the benefit of LLN learning, and to find language that engages with them, rather than repels them. Additionally, they seek ways to define their own approach to provision.

Recommendation 6

Providing a real forum in which such discussion, debates and explorations can take place, complemented by virtual networks, will enable the development of language with shared meaning and foundations.

8.5 Resources

A central theme throughout the research project has been the perception of a lack of appropriate resources for this cohort. This perception is in part related to a lack of awareness of what is already available, often due to time restrictions or working in isolation. However, even where practitioners have the capacity to search for resources, they comment that they are unable to locate effective and appropriate materials. This is likely to be related to a number of factors: the interests and experiences of young adults as a group can be harder to address than those of older adults, who are often more motivated, therefore less inclined to be switched off by perceived inappropriateness of topic, content or style. Young adult learners, whose engagement is more precarious, need a much more careful tailoring of resources to their needs; consequently it is harder to produce materials that will engage all young adult learners.

Young adult learners are also particularly sensitive to patronising or 'babyish' themes, language or content. The key to engaging young adult learners through the use of resources is to concentrate on topics and activities that the learners perceive are relevant to their lives, and support their identity as adults, rather than as children. These factors have particular implications for practitioners: in order to overcome these challenges, many pre-existing teaching and learning materials require some degree of adaptation. In some cases, practitioners may need to develop whole new schemes of work to take account of learners' interests or needs.

Recommendation 3

Practitioners have emphasised the usefulness of frameworks as opposed to off-the-shelf materials or standardised paper-based schemes of work. Such a framework could include guidance for practitioners on key areas of LLN learning as mapped to the core curriculum, with structures within which effective and tailored activities can be developed. This allows for the flexibility and differentiation crucial to work with this cohort, and ensures that the materials can be updated where necessary to match local or temporal trends and cultures. Such a framework would allow practitioners to develop provision around the 'hooks' and interests identified as being relevant to their particular learners. Practitioners would benefit from resources being directed towards the development of such a framework, rather than further 'off-the-shelf' resources.

However, there are clear training implications in the use of frameworks for adaptation –

practitioners with little or no knowledge of the core curricula are far less likely to feel confident in adapting or creating materials, particularly where there is a funding or other requirement to improve LLN skills.

Recommendation 8

Such training needs to recognise the existing skills and areas of expertise that practitioners are able to bring to learning activities. Practitioners should feel empowered to use a framework and adapt pre-existing materials creatively to fit their learners' starting point, with the knowledge that LLN can be effectively developed using a number of different approaches, with which they will often be familiar.

8.6 Staffing and professional development

This research has demonstrated that the majority of practitioners working with young adults to develop their LLN skills do not have high levels of subject specific training and qualifications. Practitioners cite difficulties in locating and accessing local provision, feeling 'daunted' at the level and amount of training required by the *Skills for Life* teaching qualifications framework, and challenges in finding funding and capacity to train.

However, practitioners are keen to develop their skills and knowledge, and place a high value on training – both in terms of improving their practice, and in developing the learning programmes their organisations are able to offer. A clear gap has been identified in training addressing both the skills required to engage and motivate young adults, and to develop effective practice in LLN teaching.

Although many practitioners based in educational establishments have attended *Skills for Life* training, it has not necessarily been accessible or seemed relevant to those from other sectors, especially those working with young adults. Similarly, for practitioners working in this sector, roles (for example, sign poster, advocate, learner support) are not always clear, which can further complicate access to and the pursuit of professional development.

Recommendation 9

Practitioners would benefit from training that takes into account and builds on their existing skills and experiences, allowing them to develop their practice through an understanding and knowledge of their learners. This training also needs to reflect and respect the variety of roles practitioners play, and the complex skills set involved.

Recommendation 10

In order to break down perceived barriers between the FE and youth work sectors, stronger relationships could be developed by forging links between local literacy, language and numeracy providers and new or existing youth service/community projects. Links with professional development centres would be helpful. These relationships would also facilitate cross-developmental training for practitioners across sectors, building on individual knowledge and experience, and promoting recognition and partnership working.

Recommendation 11

Such developments in training available for practitioners working with young adults would also improve perceptions of professional development for the sector, and encourage the recognition in managers that it is an effective use of resources to commit time to developing confidence in practitioners, and to prioritise their professional development.

8.7 Assessment, accreditation and recognition

Young adults' perception of accreditation is important, and is likely to be different for every learner. For young adult learners, accreditation needs to be viewed as a 'qualification' with currency for employers, rather than a reminder of time spent on a learning programme associated with past failures (for example, within a young offenders' institution, or a pupil referral unit). However, whilst young adults seek accreditation/qualification that is both worthwhile and has currency, this is often too demanding in practice and can dominate the initial aims of the learning programme.

Existing accreditation options can lead practitioners to fit learning activities or programmes into the requirements of the qualification, rather than the individual needs of the learners.

Recommendation 12

For practitioners, accreditation needs to acknowledge and highlight the literacy, language and numeracy element contained within other areas, such as preparation for employment, to recognise achievement in both areas.

Recommendation 13

Of fundamental importance is the recognition of achievement – whether through external accreditation/qualifications or less formal methods. Whatever provision is offered, it needs to include elements of accreditation/recognition of achievement as appropriate to the interests and aspirations of young adults in general, but also to accommodate the goals and ambitions of individuals. The option of accreditation should be available if young adults wish to take it, rather than a requirement imposed by a curriculum.
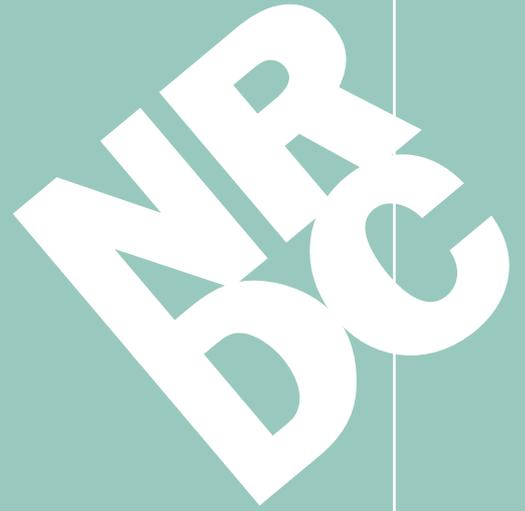
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