

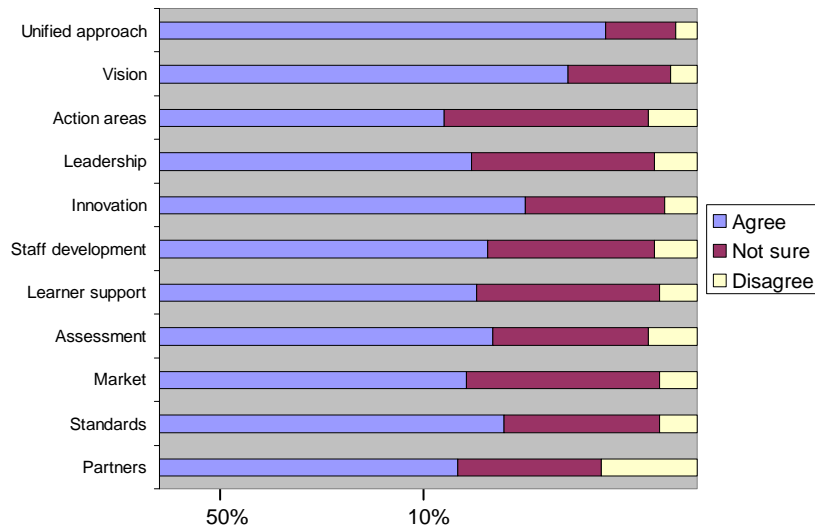
# Progress towards a Unified E-Learning Strategy

Date Published: 8 April 2004

By: e-learning Strategy Unit, Department for Education and Skills

## Headline Messages

Responses to the consultation document launched in July 2003 show that there is widespread support for a unified approach to e-learning and for the Department's vision of the strategic use of new technologies to reform our education system. Over 400 organisations, from all sectors of education, training and the commercial education sector, gave strong endorsement of the detailed proposals (see figure).



For each question in the consultation, over 50% of the respondents agreed with the proposals, less than 10% disagreed. The one exception to this was our identification of partners: many respondents felt that organisations additional to those listed (usually including their own) also had something to offer. The Department has been very encouraged that such a wide range of organisations feel that they want to be an active partner in taking forward the e-learning strategy.

Specifically, respondents want us to focus on 'leadership', 'funding' and 'common technical and quality standards' as the key priorities for action.

## Message from the Secretary of State

"My Department will now be using the consultation responses to drive forward our strategy for using technology to personalise education. We will use the opportunity that the Budget settlement gave us to invest in the levers for change, and to make better use of our existing resources through the use of technology.

I want education leaders at all levels of the system to work with us in meeting this challenge. Their strategic leadership is seen as vital by the majority of respondents - the use of technology must be linked to institutions' development plans, if we are to reach the goal of a more flexible education system, responsive to the needs of learners, parents, employers, and the community. It is good to know that the unions and staff organisations that have responded are keen to ensure that all education staff see e-learning as an aspect of their professionalism.

Understanding and confidence in the use of ICT is slowly migrating across the education system – we want to help the organisations working with front line staff to accelerate that process until all learners can benefit from the advantages of e-learning.

The Government will take responsibility for ensuring a unified approach to standards and quality in the use of technology for learning and delivery. I have asked for a more strategic approach to ICT procurement. And we need more imaginative approaches to funding, to invigorate the e-learning market, address the gaps and quality of e-learning content, and drive pedagogic innovation.

We are now in the process of negotiating roles and responsibilities with our agencies and key partners to plan and implement the agreed actions. We hope to publish the technology perspective on the Department's 5-year strategy in July 2004."

*"The achievement of their potential for all learners: An education workforce empowered to change"* [Towards a Unified e-Learning Strategy].

### **The consultation process**

The Department wishes to thank all those who took the time to respond. In addition to the 430 formal responses, we received further detailed feedback from over 300 individuals at the three main consultation events about the strategy which were held in Sheffield, Birmingham and London ([Summary of consultation events](#)), a further 150 at the ICT Industry and Learners' events, and from the many people who spoke to members of the e-Learning Strategy Unit at a further 120 events where the Department was represented.

Many people have told us about further events they organised to debate the strategy and inform their responses more fully. We are very grateful for the energy and thought that so many people have given to helping us think through how to get the best out of technology for the benefit of education.

The consultation document [Towards a Unified e-learning Strategy](#) set out the Government's plans for embedding the use of e-learning across our education system to: empower learners; make teaching more creative and innovative; offer flexibility; achieve better value; and generate a professional workforce and fulfilled citizens. The consultation period ran from July 2003 to January 2004.

Please [register](#) to receive updates of further developments.

# **Towards a Unified e-Learning Strategy**

## **Analysis of responses to the consultation document**

### **By DfES Consultation Unit, Runcorn**

#### **Introduction**

This report has been based on 430 responses to the consultation document. As some respondents would have offered a number of options for questions, total percentages listed under any one question would exceed 100%. Throughout the report, percentages are expressed as a measure of those answering each question, not as a measure of all respondents.

The organisational breakdown of respondents was as follows:

Education Provider	68
Learner	55
ICT/ILT Co-ordinator	42
Teacher / Lecturer / Trainer	23
LEA	19
Principal / Vice Chancellor	19
Professional Association	14
Head Teacher	8
Employer	7
Union	6
Not Given	35
Other	134

\* Those which fell into the 'other' category, included industry advisers, consultants, individuals and governing bodies.

The report starts with an overview and a summary of written responses to the questions posed in the consultation document.

## Overview

The majority of respondents welcomed the Towards a Unified e-Learning Strategy document. There was widespread support of the description of e-Learning given in the document and most respondents believed that a unified strategy was appropriate. Respondents wholeheartedly supported the vision for e-Learning. Many supported the proposals for innovation in teaching and learning, whilst most respondents believed the action areas for sustainable development were both feasible and appropriate.

Overall respondents were in favour of the action areas for developing the education workforce and the unification of learner support. Generally, respondents supported the proposals for aligning assessment and building a better e-Learning market. Most respondents believed the action areas for assuring technical and quality standards were acceptable.

About half the respondents suggested that the correct partners had been identified, but the wide range of preferred choices put forward made a consensus difficult to reach. Some respondents believed that the document was too education focused and suggested more detail should have been given to the strategy for e-Learning in the workplace.

There were some areas for concern identified by respondents. Funding the strategy was a consistent theme in most responses, with the majority holding the view that the Government should underwrite the costs. There was a consistent belief that education and industry leaders must be convinced of the benefits of e-Learning, in order to drive the strategy forward within their institutions. However, some respondents noted that the lack of e-awareness and e-skills at these senior levels made the need to educate leaders a priority.

The digital divide was a consistent concern expressed by most respondents, as was Broadband access. There was an underlying belief amongst some respondents that the real challenge lay in convincing the disenfranchised of the benefits of e-Learning, whilst they perceived that the cost of hardware and connectivity was prohibitive.

In addition, many respondents expressed a desire for a blended approach towards e-Learning and assessment, retaining traditional pedagogy where appropriate. Other respondents believed that incentives would be needed to gain the support of the education workforce.

On the whole, the strategy was well received by the majority of respondents. Many commented that the strategy was well thought out and expressed a desire to work with the Department in making towards an e-Learning Strategy a success.

## Summary of responses to questions

### Q1: What are your views on our description of e-learning and its benefits? (Ch 1)

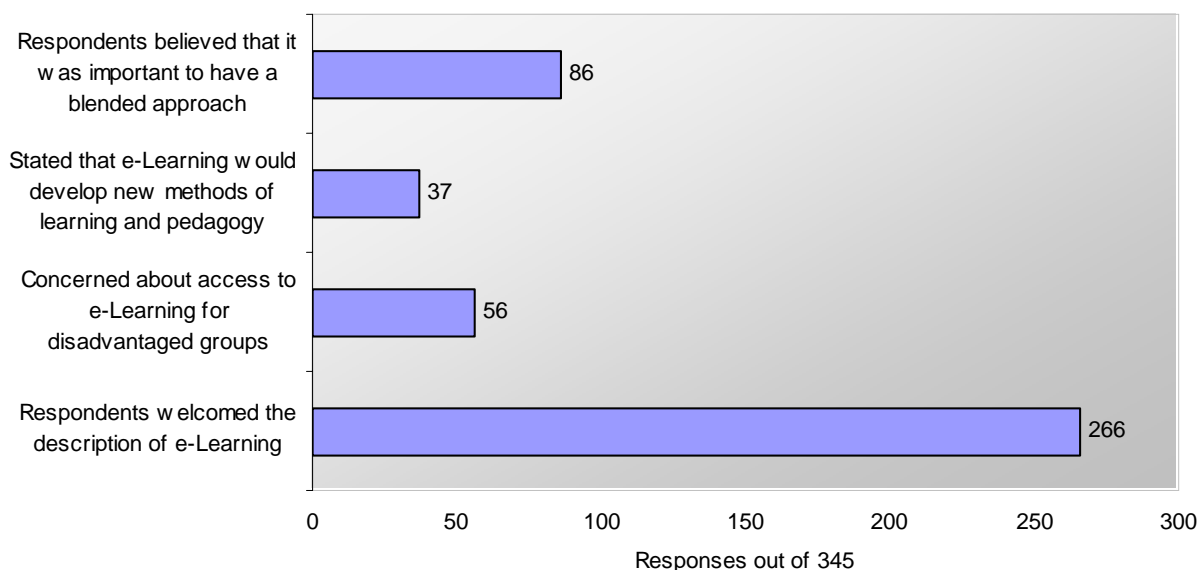
There were 345 responses to this question.

266(77%) respondents welcomed the description of e-Learning given at Chapter 1 of Towards a Unified e-Learning Strategy. 86(25%) respondents believed that it was important to have a blended approach, combining traditional pedagogy with e-Learning.

56(16%) were concerned about access to e-Learning for disadvantaged groups. This was a recurring theme throughout the consultation. The term disadvantaged groups in this context was regularly used by respondents and included:

- People who could not afford Broadband or access to a computer.
- People with disabilities
- Minority ethnic communities
- People with Special Education Needs
- The elderly
- People in rural communities

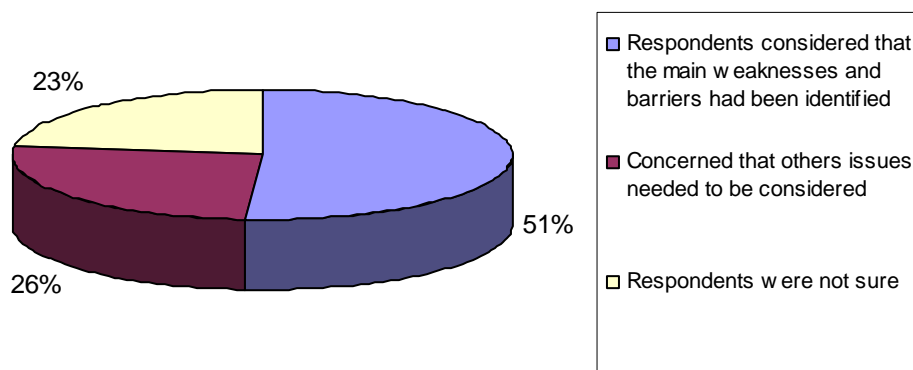
37(11%) stated that e-Learning would develop new methods of learning and pedagogy.



### Q2: Do you think we have identified the main weaknesses and barriers to the use of e-learning? (Ch 2)

There were 402 responses to this question.

205(51%) respondents considered that the main weaknesses and barriers had been identified. 103(26%) were concerned that others issues needed to be considered, whilst 94(23%) were not sure.



Funding was the primary concern expressed by 116(29%). Respondents noted that funding should be available for the long term and not fragmented. For example to have a unified e-Learning strategy would also require a unified funding strategy.

113(28%) were concerned about the digital divide. Respondents used the term digital divide to describe a number of groups throughout the consultation process, to include:

- People who could not afford Broadband or access to a computer
- People with disabilities who could not use conventional IT equipment
- Minority ethnic communities who did not specify English as their first language
- People with Special Education Needs
- Older people
- People in rural communities without Broadband connection
- Schools without IT access / facilities
- Schools without adequate buildings to house IT equipment
- Teachers without personal computers
- Those who fear technology

Respondents noted widespread concern about the digital divide and the impact it could have on the overall strategy.

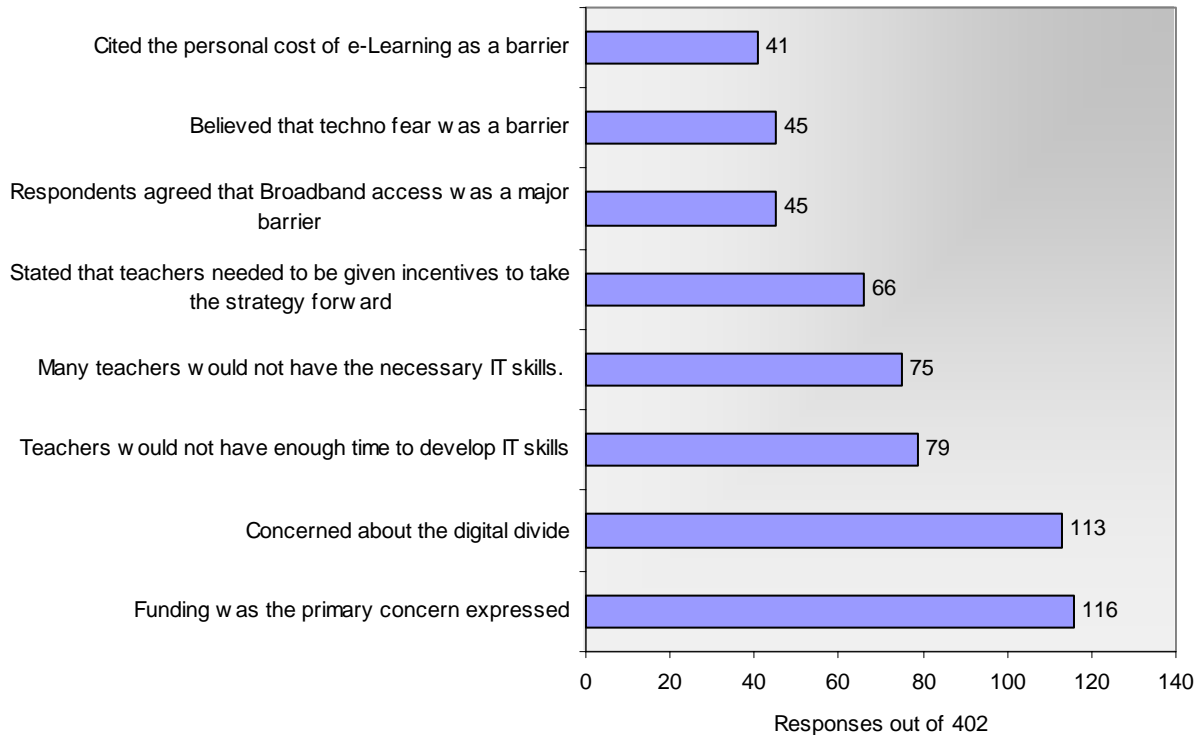
Respondents also identified additional issues to be addressed. 79(20%) believed that teachers would not have enough time to develop IT skills, whilst 75(19%) noted that many teachers would not have the necessary IT skills. Respondents also identified the Laptops for Teachers scheme as a step taken to address this problem, but believed that all teachers should have access to a personal computer.

66(16%) stated that teachers needed to be given incentives to take the strategy forward. Respondents suggested improved career prospects, professional development, laptops, and higher level qualifications.

45(11%) respondents agreed that Broadband access was a major barrier. Areas for concern included rural areas and those who could not afford Broadband. Some respondents noted that less than half of the UK households currently have Internet access.

45(11%) believed that techno fear was a barrier. Although respondents identified older people as a potential group, they noted that this would affect all age groups. Areas for particular concern regarding techno fear were Industry leaders, education leaders and teachers, who had a major part to play in the overall strategy.

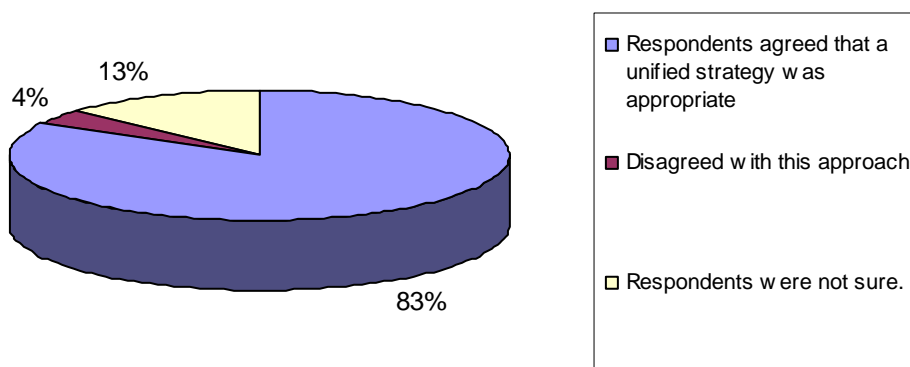
41(10%) cited the personal cost of e-Learning as a barrier. Respondents were concerned that the costs of a home computer package and Broadband was still prohibitive. It was suggested by several respondents that there was little incentive for households to invest in a PC, without seeing tangible benefits. There was also concern expressed that even with clear tangible benefits, many potential learners would still consider the cost too great.



### Q3: Is a unified strategy appropriate? (Ch 2)

There were 375 responses to this question.

310(83%) respondents agreed that a unified strategy was appropriate. 15 (4%) disagreed with this approach. 50(13%) respondents were not sure.

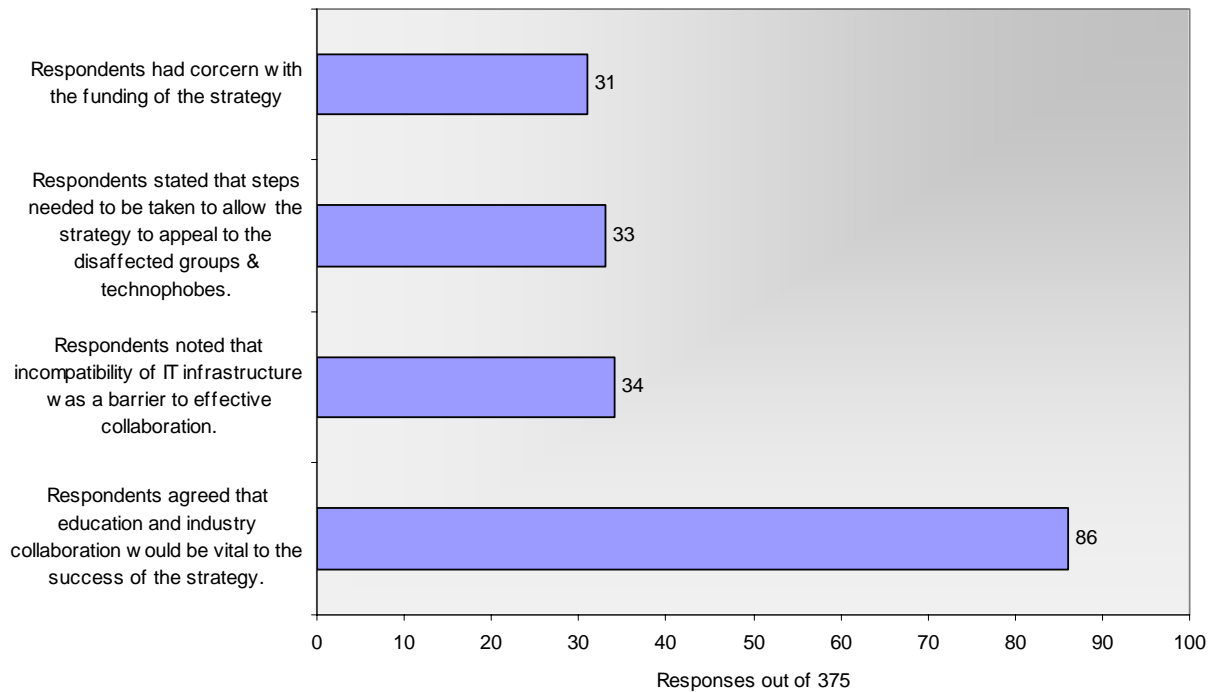


86(23%) respondents agreed that education and industry collaboration would be vital to the success of the strategy. Respondents suggested a number of ways in how this could be achieved, including a Virtual Campus, where resources could be accessed by all education providers. Respondents agreed that cross sector collaboration was fundamental to the strategy. In addition, respondents considered collaboration between software manufacturers, examining bodies and education providers key to the overall strategy.

34(9%) respondents noted that incompatibility of IT infrastructure was a barrier to effective collaboration, particularly amongst education providers. This was a recurring theme throughout the consultation process.

33(9%) respondents stated that steps needed to be taken to allow the strategy to appeal to the disaffected groups and technophobes. Respondents were concerned that many households lacked Internet for reasons of cost and relevance.

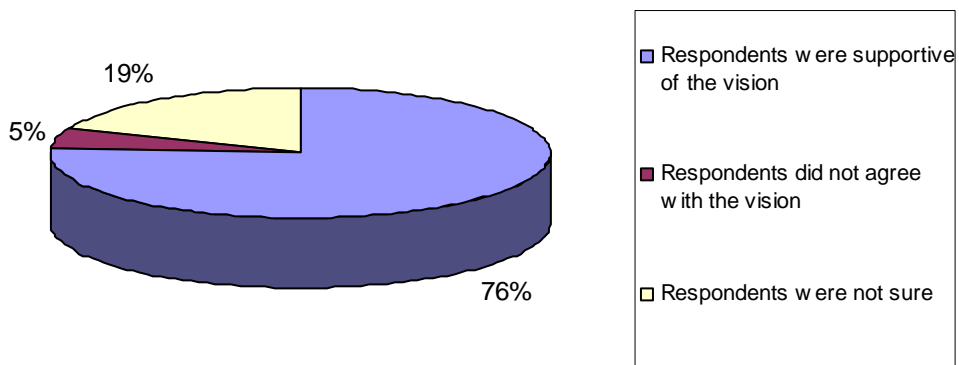
Funding of the strategy was a concern to 31(8%) of respondents.



**Q4: Do you agree with our vision for e-learning? (Ch 3)**

There were 383 responses to this question.

292(76%) respondents were supportive of the vision as described in Chapter 4. 20(5%) did not agree with the vision. 71(19%) respondents were not sure.



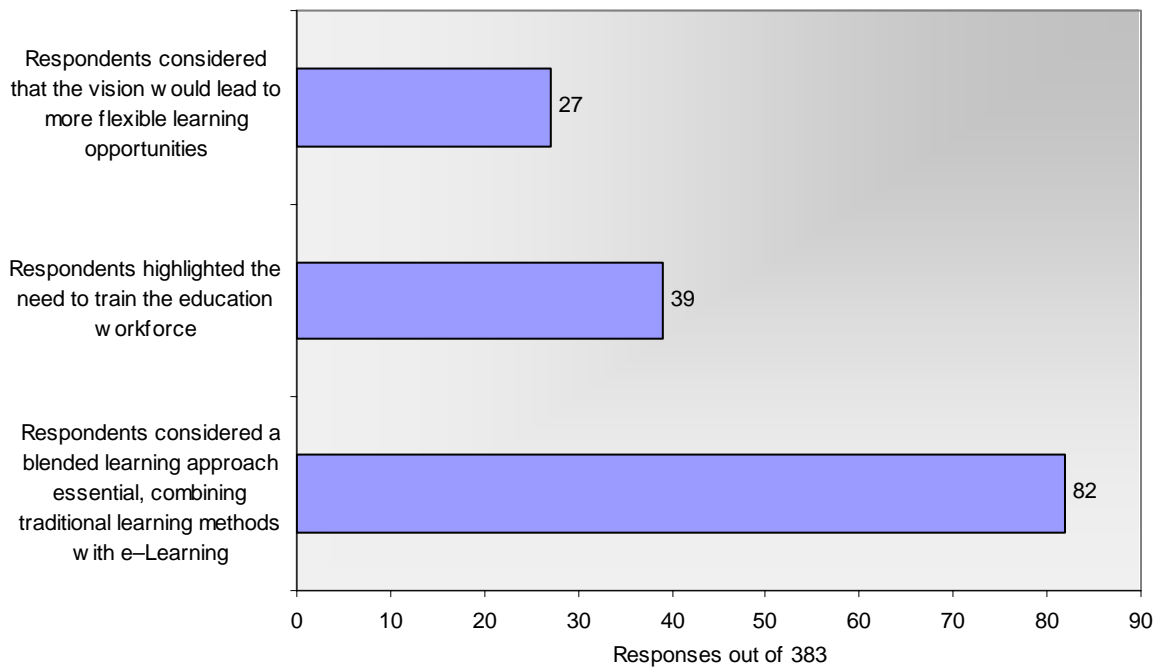


82(21%) considered a blended learning approach essential, combining traditional learning methods with e-Learning. Respondents noted the importance of face to face tutorial support, particularly with distance learners.

39(10%) respondents highlighted the need to train the education workforce, a point mentioned throughout the consultation process.

27(7%) respondents considered that the vision would lead to more flexible learning opportunities. Many examples were given, including:

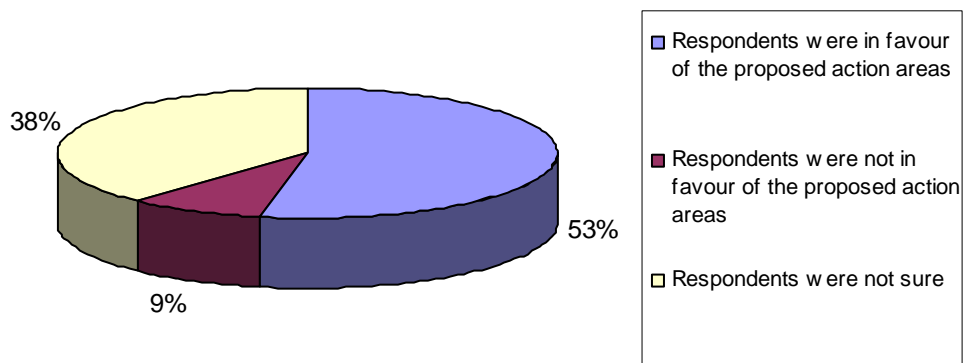
- E-Learning from home for disabled people unable to attend college / school
- The ability to access learning 24/7
- Lesson delivery outside of normal college hours



### Q5: Will the proposed action areas enable the vision to be realised? (Ch 3)

There were 393 responses to this question.

210(53%) respondents were in favour of the proposed action areas, whilst 34(9%) were not. 149(38%) respondents were not sure.



94(24%) respondents identified funding as an issue. Some respondents believed that it was up to the Government to provide the necessary funding, rather than relying on education leaders to manage within existing budgets. Other respondents considered funding was vital to provide the infrastructure to underpin the strategy. Some respondents believed central procurement would provide a solution, whilst others argued that this would prove restrictive.

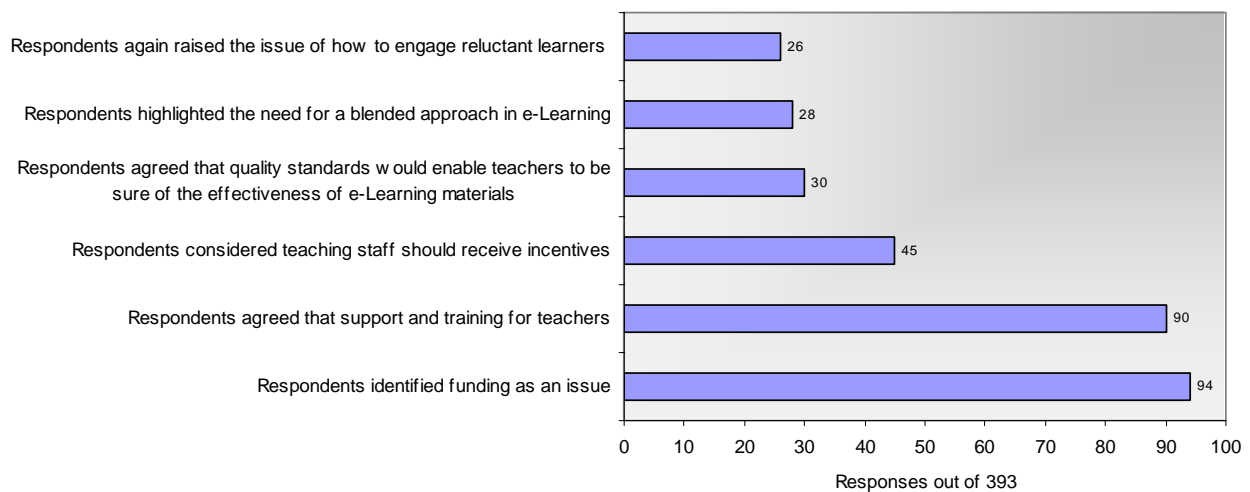
90(23%) respondents agreed that support and training for teachers, as described in the strategic action areas, was a vital element of the overall strategy.

45(11%) respondents considered teaching staff should receive incentives, as described at Question 2, to encourage them to take the lead and innovate in pedagogical developments.

30(8%) respondents agreed that quality standards would enable teachers to be sure of the effectiveness of e-Learning materials.

28(7%) respondents highlighted the need for a blended approach in e-Learning, a recurring theme throughout the consultation process.

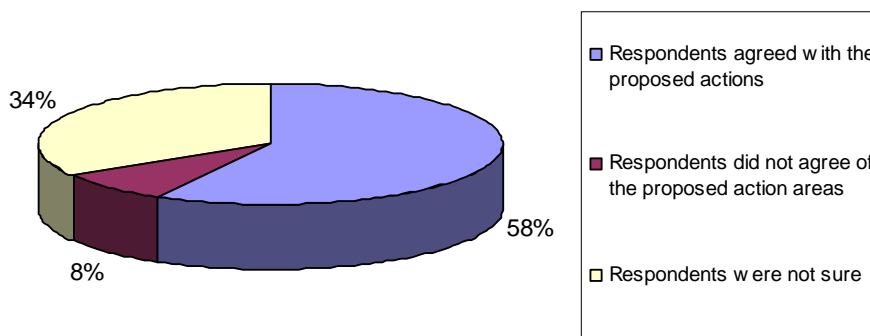
26(7%) respondents again raised the issue of how to engage reluctant learners e.g. the disaffected groups and technophobes in the strategy.



**Q6: Are the proposed actions for leading sustainable development feasible and appropriate? (Ch 4)**

There were 382 responses to this question.

223(58%) respondents agreed with the proposed actions at Chapter 4 of the strategy. 31(8%) did not agree, whilst 128 (34%) were not sure.

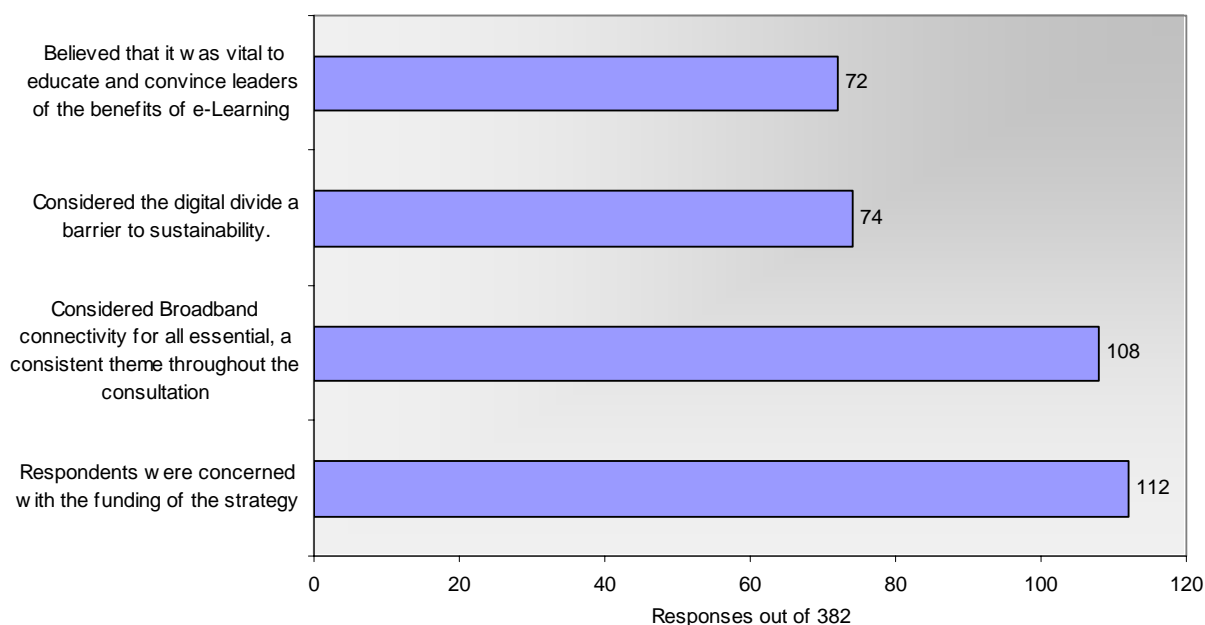


112(29%) respondents were concerned with the funding of the strategy. A common concern amongst respondents was the mention of funding as a longer term aim in the Proposed Actions. Respondents considered that funding was vital to provide the necessary IT infrastructure to all potential learners, in order to achieve sustainability.

108(28%) considered Broadband connectivity for all essential, a consistent theme throughout the consultation.

74(19%) again considered the digital divide a barrier to sustainability.

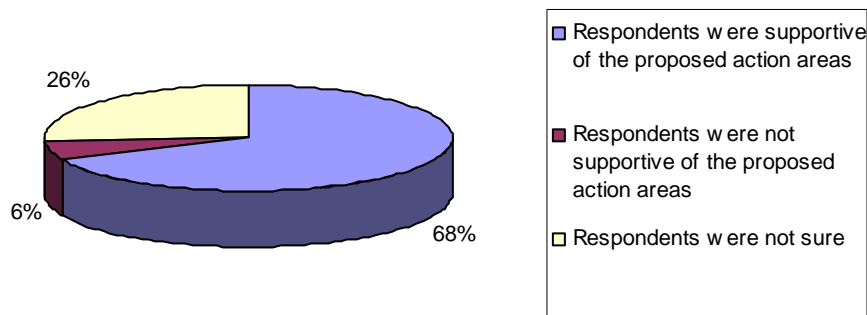
72(19%) believed that it was vital to educate and convince leaders of the benefits of e-Learning. Several respondents noted that it was very often those in a position to influence and change who lacked the IT skills to appreciate the benefits of e-Learning. A number of respondents also extended this argument to teaching staff, who in turn would be reluctant to engage in new pedagogy unless they could understand the benefits. Essentially, respondents believed that techno fear at a high level could hamper sustainable development of the strategy.



**Q7: Are the proposed action areas for supporting innovation in teaching and learning feasible and appropriate? (Ch 5)**

There were 372 responses to this question.

255(68%) were supportive of the proposed action areas. 21(6%) did not agree. 96(26%) were not sure.

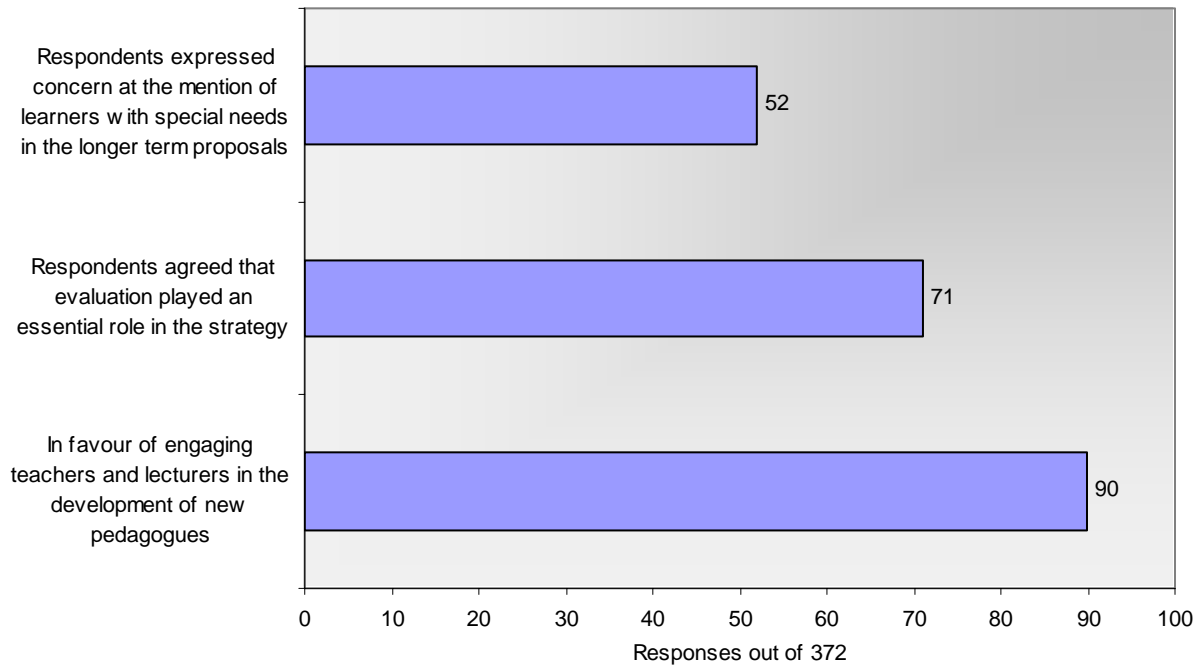


90(24%) were in favour of engaging teachers and lecturers in the development of new pedagogues. Several respondents noted that it was vital to build in recognition and reward for

teaching staff.

71(19%) respondents agreed that evaluation played an essential role in the strategy. A number of respondents agreed that research and development of new products must be shared amongst educational establishments through an R&D forum. Respondents believed collaboration was vital between higher education and industry.

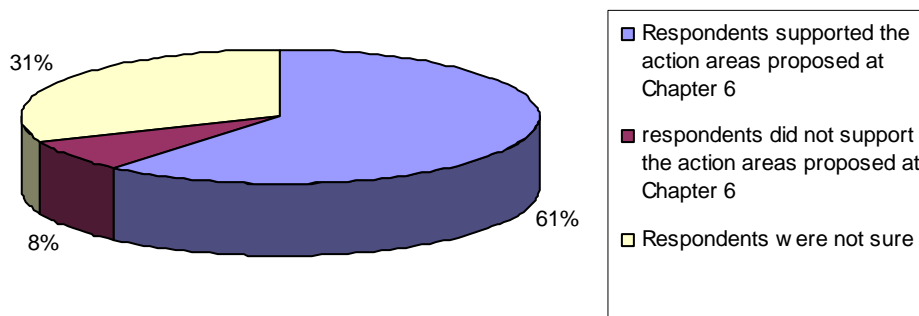
52(14%) respondents expressed concern at the mention of learners with special needs in the longer term proposals. Several respondents stated that accessibility needed a greater profile within the strategy document.



**Q8: Are the proposed action areas for developing the education workforce feasible and appropriate? (Ch 6)**

There were 375 responses to this question.

229 (61%) respondents supported the action areas proposed at Chapter 6. 28(8%) did not. 118 (31%) respondents were not sure.



108(29%) respondents agreed that e-Learning should form part of the Continuous Professional Development of all staff involved in teaching.

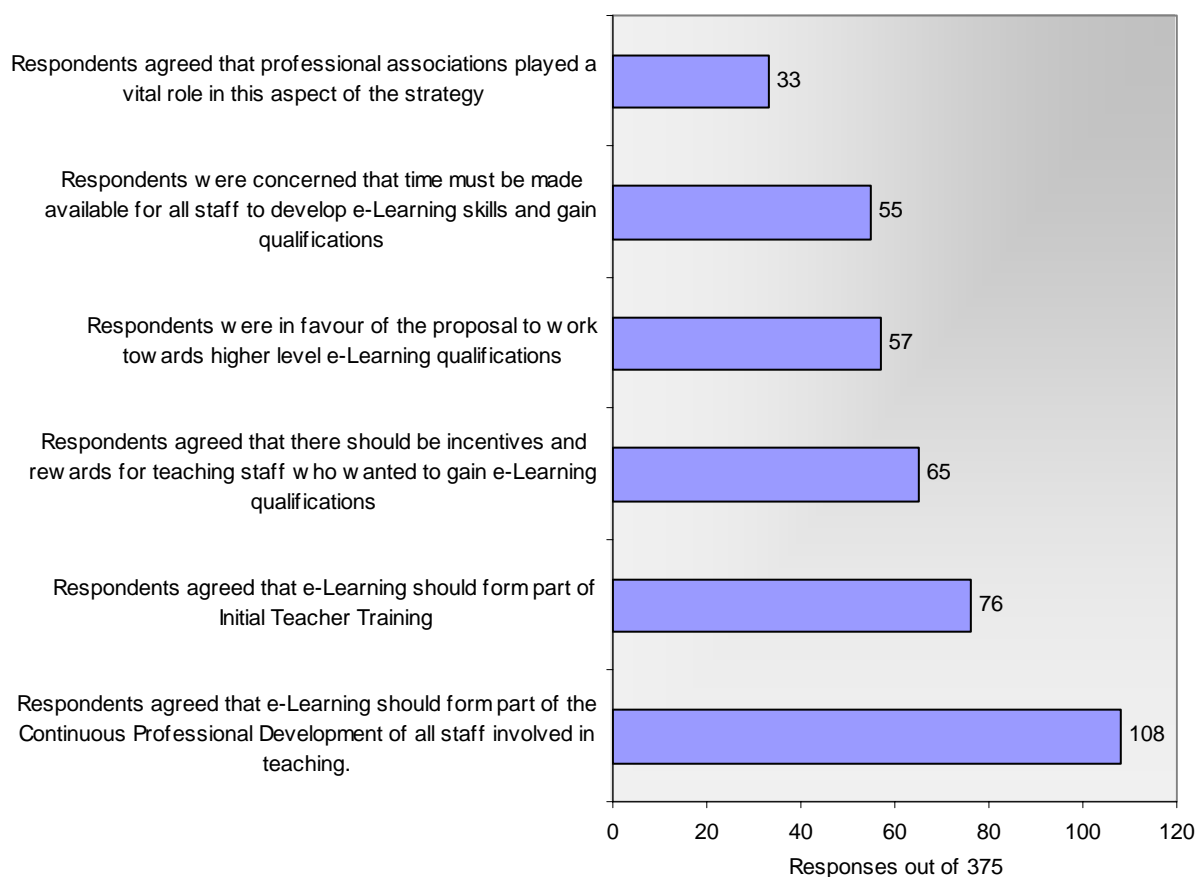
76(20%) respondents agreed that e-Learning should form part of Initial Teacher Training. Several respondents went further, suggesting that e-Learning should be a mandatory part of ITT.

65(17%) respondents agreed that there should be incentives and rewards for teaching staff who wanted to gain e-Learning qualifications. A number of respondents noted that if research was made available to show that e-Learning improved learning that in itself would be incentive enough for most teachers.

57(15%) respondents were in favour of the proposal to work towards higher level e-Learning qualifications.

55(15%) respondents were concerned that time must be made available for all staff to develop e-Learning skills and gain qualifications. A number of respondents made the link between educating and convincing leaders of the benefits of e-Learning and the need for staff to have time away from the workplace to undertake this training.

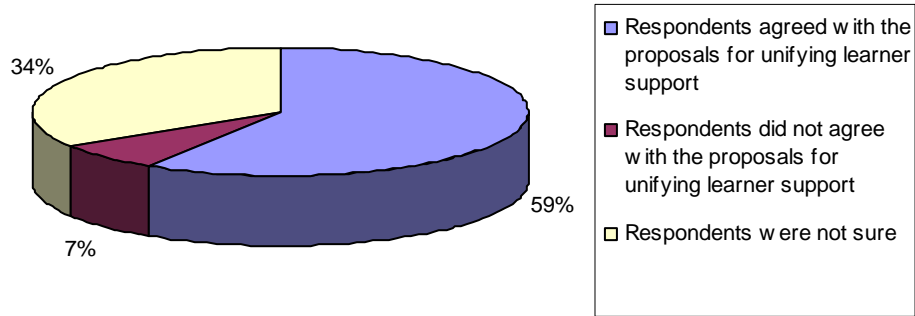
33(9%) respondents agreed that professional associations played a vital role in this aspect of the strategy.



**Q9: Are the proposed action areas for unifying learners' support feasible and appropriate? (Ch 7)**

There were 367 responses to this question.

217(59%) agreed with the proposals for unifying learner support. 25(7%) did not agree. 125 (34%) were not sure.

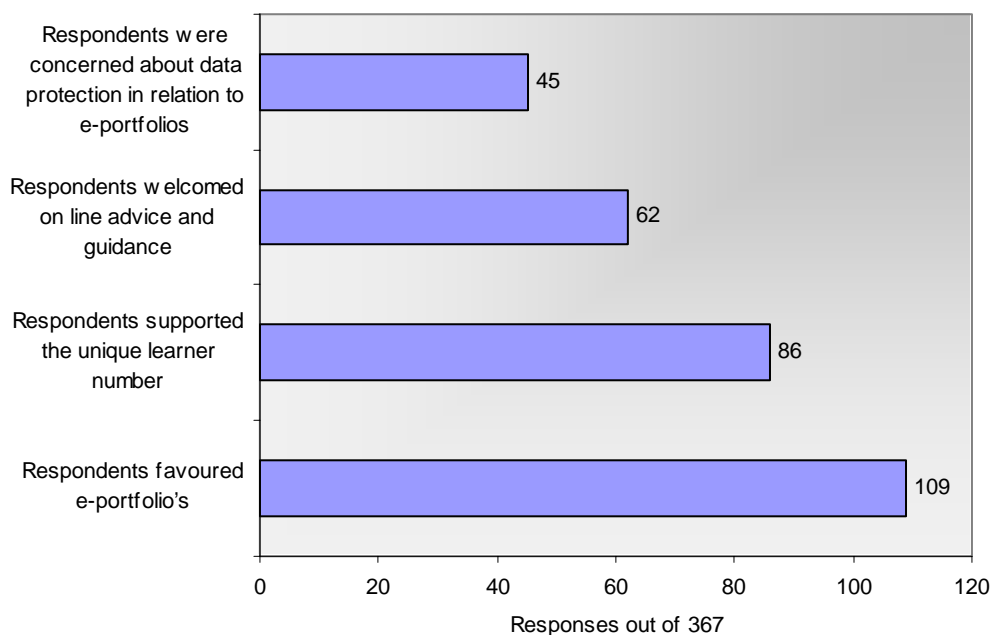


109(30%) respondents favoured e-portfolio's, however, it was noted by several respondents that learners too shared a responsibility for contributing to their e-portfolio as well as education providers.

86(23%) respondents supported the unique learner number. However, others voiced doubts over the feasibility of such a project. Concerns included the proliferation of personal numbers e.g. national insurance, driver numbers, NHS numbers. Several respondents suggested using one of these numbers rather than creating another. Other respondents noted the difficulties faced with Individual Learning Accounts and the need to ensure the credibility of private sector involvement in such a project.

62(17%) respondents welcomed online advice and guidance. Other respondents considered that other types of guidance should be made available e.g. telephone or face to face advice. Several respondents expressed concerns about the feasibility of online advice and guidance, for example the demand for round the clock guidance available for learners.

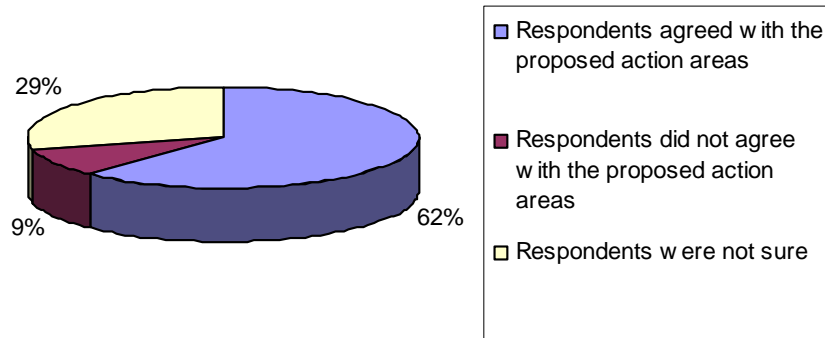
45(12%) respondents were concerned about data protection in relation to e-portfolios. Several respondents noted that current legislation would make it difficult for education providers to share learner information. Other respondents mentioned issues around computer hacking of exam results or plagiarism, given the high level of e-ability amongst many young learners.



**Q10: Are the proposed action areas for aligning assessment feasible and appropriate? (Ch 8)**

There were 365 responses to this question.

228(62%) respondents agreed with the proposed action areas. 32(9%) did not agree. 105(29%) were not sure.



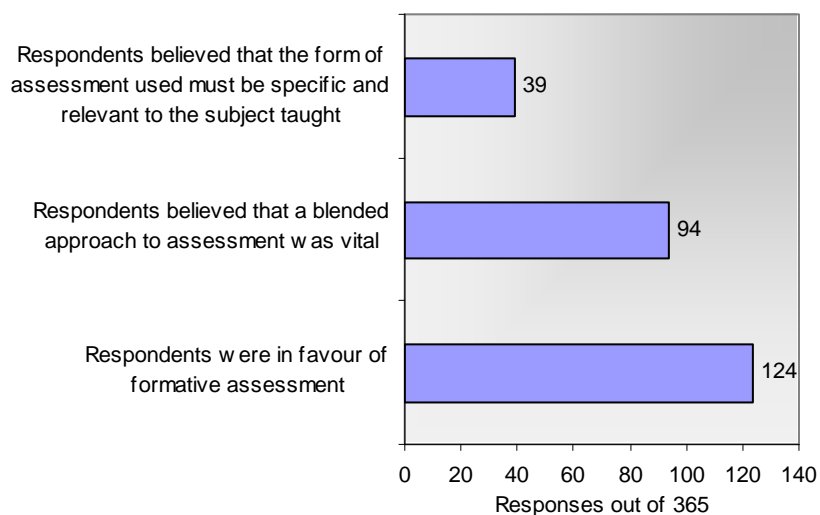
124(34%) were in favour of formative assessment.

However, 94(26%) believed that a blended approach to assessment was vital.

39(11%) believed that the form of assessment used must be specific and relevant to the subject taught.

Throughout the consultation process the issue of assessment had divided opinion amongst respondents. Some respondents believed formative assessment was the way forward and that the curriculum or traditional pedagogical method must evolve to the e-Learning approach. Other respondents suggested that certain subjects would not lend themselves well to formative assessment and that summative assessment was the best approach, particularly in higher education fields such as medicine or science.

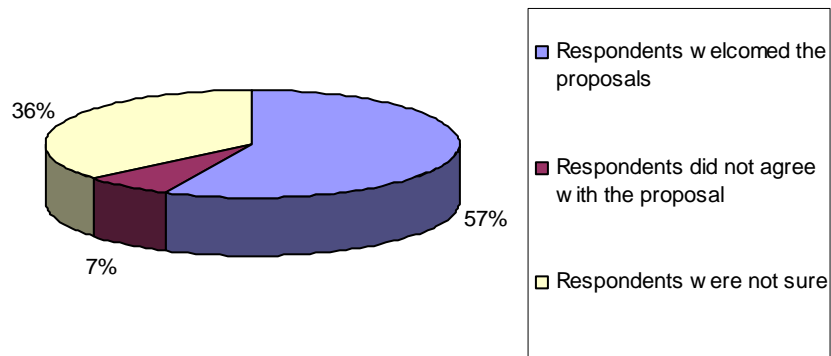
Some respondents noted that assessment could take other forms as well as formative or summative. Examples were given of peer group assessment and the need for face to face student/ tutor contact, particularly with distance learners. However, a number of respondents considered that a blend of assessment methods could offer the right balance, depending on the subject taught and the learner group.



**Q11: Are the proposed action areas for building a better e-learning market feasible and appropriate? (Ch 9)**

There were 365 responses to this question.

207(57%) welcomed the proposals. 26(7%) did not agree with the proposal, whilst 132(36%) were not sure.

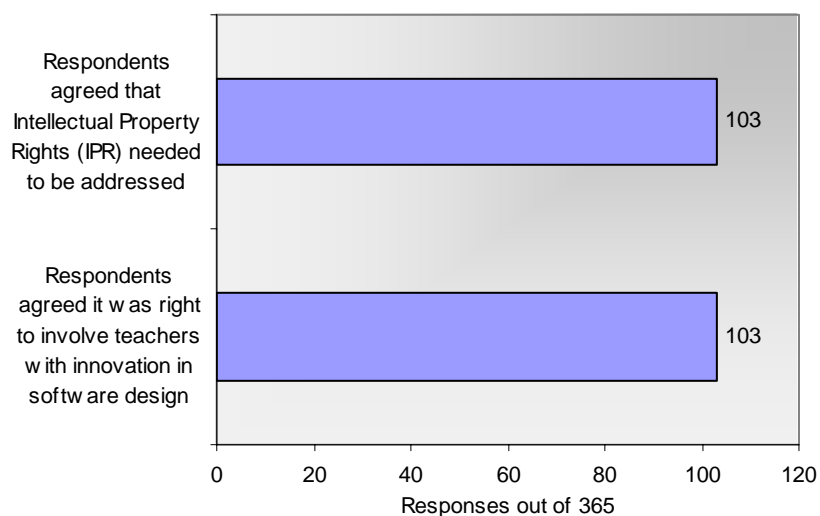


Of those respondents who were less sure, a variety of concerns were expressed. Some respondents considered:

- It was not the role of teachers to be involved in the design of e-Learning products whilst it was not part of ITT.
- Teachers would not have the time to get involved – however if they were given time it should be remunerated on commercial terms.
- Any innovation must be thoroughly evaluated as a widely effective teaching tool.

103(28%) respondents agreed it was right to involve teachers with innovation in software design.

103 (28%) respondents agreed that Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) needed to be addressed. However, a number of respondents expressed the view that IPR must be resolved sooner than suggested in the strategy document, as collaboration between teachers and the software industry was central to the success of the strategy.

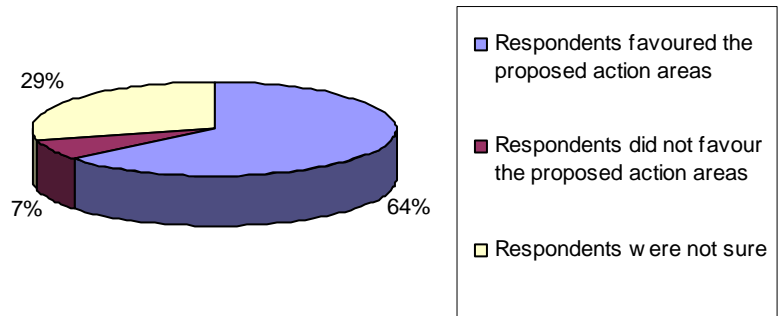




**Q12: Are the proposed action areas for assuring technical and quality standards feasible and appropriate? (Ch 10)**

There were 372 responses to this question.

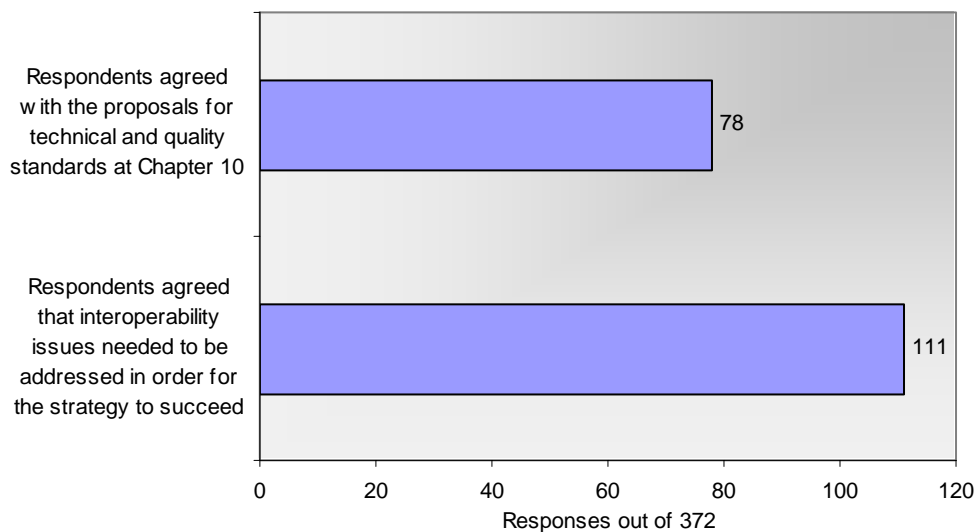
238(64%) respondents favoured the proposed action areas, whilst 25(7%) did not. 109(29%) respondents were not sure.



111(30%) agreed that interoperability issues needed to be addressed in order for the strategy to succeed. Respondents suggested that the ability to exchange data should be international in scope wherever possible. Other respondents identified interoperability between the public and private sectors as vital. However, several key respondents commented that whilst data exchange should be possible across all boundaries, creating standards for the design of software and systems would suppress innovation.

*Note - Although the proposals regarding interoperability were included within the actions in the previous Chapter (9, Q11), most respondents chose to address the issue as part of their response to Chapter 10 (Q12)*

78(21%) respondents agreed with the proposals for technical and quality standards at Chapter 10. However, respondents were divided on the issue of kite marking. Whilst a number of respondents were in favour of kite marking as a way of ensuring standards, there were a proportion of respondents who believed that kite marking would suppress innovation in the design of e-Learning material.



### **Q13: Have we identified the correct partners for the actions?**

There were 335 responses to this question.

185(55%) believed the correct partners had been identified. 61(18%) did not, whilst 89(27%) were not sure.

### **Q14: What actions do you see as the priorities?**

There were 298 responses to this question.

135(45%) respondents considered educating and convincing leaders vital to drive the strategy forward. Several respondents expressed the view that without engaging the support of education leaders, changing the academic culture would be difficult.

94(32%) believed funding a priority, a consistent theme throughout the consultation.

90(30%) respondents stated that technical quality standards were essential for hardware and software. Ensuring interoperability again was a key concern.

76(26%) said agreeing quality standards for assessment would be vital to ensure the academic credibility of e-Learning.

48(16%) respondents expressed the view they Broadband access for all was necessary to achieve the vision of a unified e-Learning strategy, again a consistent theme throughout the consultation.

39(13%) were concerned that improving access to e-Learning for disadvantaged groups must be addressed. This included those affected by the digital divide and those with special needs.

39(13%) respondents believed supporting innovation would be essential to the success of the strategy.

39(13%) agreed that it would be important to evaluate the strategy, as described at Chapter 11.

### **Q15: In your experience what are the most significant achievements of e-learning? (We would welcome your case studies).**

There were 214 responses to this question.

105(49%) respondents said flexible learning was the most significant achievement of e-Learning e.g. the learner can choose a convenient time to learn, rather than having to adapt to timetables.

65(30%) highlighted collaboration amongst learners e.g. chat rooms where discussion can provide peer group support and the opportunity to debate with other students.

53(25%) respondents considered the ability to learn from home a significant achievement, particularly shift workers or those with caring responsibilities.

51(24%) noted that learning was visual and fun and presented more interactive ways of engaging students.

41(19%) respondents noted that e-Learning engaged special needs students, Examples given included the visual appeal for those with learning difficulties or the ability to learn from home for students unable to leave home or hospital.

39(18%) noted that interactive blackboards brought significant benefits for students, in particular distance learners.

29(14%) believed that e-Learning had particular appeal for adult learners e.g. those that had been away from a classroom environment for some time and found learning on their own less intimidating .

28(13%) respondents suggested that e-Learning presented the opportunity to track learner progress, both for the student and teacher through formative assessment.

28(13%) highlighted that young people responded particularly well to e-Learning and believed that collaboration with the computer games industry would reap benefits in the education of younger students.

### **Q16: What do you think should be the respective roles of education leaders, The Government and its agencies and the ICT industry in taking the strategy forward?**

#### **Leaders**

There were 117 responses to this question.

72(62%) respondents considered it was the role of education leaders to drive the strategy forward within their institutions. Several respondents suggested that leaders had to promote the culture of change towards e-Learning. Again, respondents noted that leaders must be aware of the benefits themselves in order to convince others.

27(23%) respondents believed that leaders should enable e-Learning to become an integral part of modern education, setting a clear agenda for change, supporting innovation and developing systems that will enable staff to see the benefits of an e-Learning strategy.

25(21%) highlighted the vital role of education leaders in enabling e-Learning training of staff across their institutions, to underpin the strategy.

14(12%) considered that leaders must ensure the standard and quality of e-Learning material within their institutions.

#### **The Government**

There were 180 responses to this question.

99(55%) respondents believed that the Government should fund the strategy, including the provision of hardware and connectivity to overcome the digital divide. Several respondents noted that in order to involve the population in an e-Learning culture, incentives would have to be provided to engage the significant numbers who currently perceived no benefit from Internet access.

55(31%) suggested that the Government should ensure that standards and quality were adhered to.

52(29%) respondents considered the Government should promote the strategy.

34(19%) noted that the Government had a role to provide advice on the strategy and ensure that the e-Learning remains a top priority for the education and industry sectors.

18(10%) considered that the responsibility for training rested with the Government.

16(9%) mentioned that the Government should provide incentives e.g. competitions for innovation, software design or award ceremonies.

15(8%) respondents believed that the Government should enable e-Learning to become an integral part of modern education.

### **ICT Industry**

There were 92 responses to this question.

62 (67%) considered that the ICT industry needed to provide the innovations in hardware and software to allow the strategy to fulfil its potential.

24(26%) respondents stated that the industry should provide low priced hardware to bridge the digital divide that threatened the success of the strategy.

14(15%) believed that the ICT industry must provide product quality assurance.

11(12%) noted that technical support for education practitioners and e – learners would be a vital element of the strategy.

### **Q17: General Comments**

There were 60 responses to this question.

30(50%) respondents noted that the consultation document was well set out. Several respondents commented that the strategy was clearly explained and well researched.

30(50%) respondents reiterated the point that the Government should fund the strategy.