

Link Up Evaluation: Final Report

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York Consulting Ltd

**Research Report
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the evaluation of the Link Up programme, undertaken by York Consulting Limited (YCL) on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU).

Link Up programme objectives

- 1.2 The Link Up programme is designed to:

- recruit, train and support 6,000 volunteer Adult Learner Supporters;
- engage 25% of Link Up Supporters aged 50+;
- engage Link Up Supporters in a range of roles and contexts including mentors, frontline workers and learner supporters;
- provide routes from Link Up training into community development or further *Skills for Life* teacher training;
- engage supporters from the most deprived communities in England.

Evaluation objectives

- 1.3 The objectives of the evaluation study are to:

- use management information to describe the profile of participants;
- report on participant progression through Link Up training and towards achievement of the Level 2 qualification, the certificate in Adult Learner Support;
- identify impact on 'host' employers where Link Up supporters work or volunteer and placement organisations in which Link Up Supporters support *Skills for Life* learners;
- identify the impact of Link Up support on learners;
- identify good practice and lessons learned for future roll-out.

Background to the Link Up Programme

- 1.4 Link Up seeks to recruit and train those interested in volunteering to support adults improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills. This aspect of volunteer support is not new. For many years, volunteers have given their time and energy to supporting others in this way. With the development of the *Skills for Life* strategy in 2001, the DfES took the lead in seeking to ensure that adult literacy, numeracy and language were significantly improved. The *Skills for Life* strategy notes “Volunteers can never take the place of trained professional teachers, but evidence indicates that learners of literacy and numeracy make more progress if they receive additional support from volunteers or paid assistants”¹. The three main strands of the *Skills for Life* strategy seek to boost demand, build capacity and improve quality of the provision. The Link Up project touches on all of these objectives:
- boosting demand through improving the skills and capacity of staff, in organisations that have clients with poor literacy, numeracy or language skills and to support Link Up volunteers to spot needs and encourage learners into provision;
 - building capacity by increasing the volume of individuals and organisations able to support *Skills for Life* learners;
 - improving quality by ensuring Link Up Supporters are working within the new national frameworks for adult literacy, numeracy or language teaching. Annex A shows the framework for the *Skills for Life* Teaching Qualifications, within which the Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support sits.
- 1.5 The contexts in which Link Up Supporters are operating are highly diverse. A key aim of the evaluation is to understand the critical success factors, irrespective of setting. The research also provides an opportunity to share practice across Link Up projects and to help enable the Link Up model to be established in other parts of the country.
- 1.6 The Basic Skills Agency (BSA) tendered to DfES to deliver the Link Up programme, starting in November 2001. The pilot programme came to an end in March 2004. An extension period of April to the end of July 2004 was supported by the National LSC to help facilitate the transition from the national pilot programme to the development of locally based and integrated Link Up projects.

¹ *Skills for Life*: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001 p50

- 1.7 Relevant experience that fed into the design of the Link Up pilot included experience from the delivery of the Adult Community Learning Fund and the National Voluntary Organisations Partnership Programme (NVOPP). This experience reinforced the need for the focus of activity to be on the effective combination of the following three elements:
- volunteer management;
 - *Skills for Life*;
 - community capacity building.
- 1.8 The criteria used to select pilot areas included analysis of deprivation indices, regional spread and areas in which *Skills for Life* needs were known to be high. Link Up's national partners were Groundwork Trust, The Prince's Trust, BBC, TUC, Birmingham Core Skills Partnership, City and Guilds, Tesco and the National Tenants Resource Centre. The partners sit on the national steering group along with the project funders and the National LSC, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, National Community Volunteer Organisation (NCVO) and Volunteer England.
- 1.9 Projects were identified in three phases:
- through the partners group (February 2002). This generated project proposals from Groundwork, The Prince's Trust and Birmingham Core Skills Partnership;
 - through Learning Partnerships (April 2002);
 - national adverts in the education and regeneration press called for bids (June 2002). In addition, project bids were also developed with the Army and Prison Services.
- 1.10 The community based projects were in the following 18 areas: Basildon, Birmingham, Blackburn, Brent, Camden, Dearne Valley (Barnsley), Derby, Great Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, Leicester, Middlesbrough, Penwith (Cornwall), Plymouth, Sheffield, St Helens, Stockton-on-Tees, Stoke-on-Trent and Thanet.
- 1.11 The Army project was based in Warminster (Wiltshire), Tidworth (Hampshire) and Hohne (Germany). The prison projects were located as follows: HMYOI Hindley, HMP Holme House, HMP Liverpool, HMYOI Deerbolt, HMP Manchester and HMP Low Newton.
- 1.12 **Table 1.1** shows the location and managing organisation of the projects established in the pilot programme.

Table 1.1: Link Up pilot projects location and managing organisations		
Region	Pilot Area	Managing Organisation
London	Brent	Kilburn into Training and Employment
	Camden	Westminster Kingsway College
South East	Thanet	Thanet Basic Skills Partnership
	Isle of Wight	Community Solutions
North East	Stockton & Middlesbrough	Stockton Voluntary Development Agency
	Prisons Cluster	HMYOI Deerbolt, HMP YOI Low Newton, HMP Holme House
North West	St Helens	Groundwork St Helens, Knowsley, Sefton and Liverpool
	Blackburn	The Prince's Trust
	NW Prisons	HMP Liverpool, HMYOI Hindley (Wigan), HMP Manchester
Yorks & Humber	Barnsley	Groundwork Dearne Valley
	Sheffield	Manor and Castle Training Forum
West Mids	Birmingham	Birmingham Core Skills Partnership
	Stoke-on-Trent	Groundwork Stoke-on-Trent
East Mids	Derby	Derby College
	Leicester	Fern Training and Development
Eastern	Basildon	Basildon Adult Community College
	Great Yarmouth	Learning From Experience Trust
South West	Penwith	Penwith Community Development Trust
	Plymouth	Plymouth Area Groundwork Trust
	Army Link Up	6 AEC (Wiltshire) & 42 AEC (Hohne)

1.13 DfES contracted the programme management to the BSA in November 2001; local project contracting began in Spring 2002, Link Up Supporter (LUS) engagement began in Autumn 2002 and LUS training in early 2003. The training of supporters was delayed until the start of 2003 effectively leaving 15 months for projects to deliver the programme outputs. The delay was due to working with DfES and QCA to develop the qualification specification for the Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support and to define the role of the volunteer to ensure it fits within the *Skills for Life* teaching framework.

Accreditation processes

1.14 Many of the organisations managing Link Up pilots were not learning providers or did not have the City and Guilds approved centre status needed to offer Link Up Supporters the Level 2 ALS accreditation. In order to be able to offer accreditation, this group of organisations needed to work in partnership with learning providers that were a City and Guilds accredited centre or develop their own capacity to offer this. Whilst the development of partnerships or accredited centre status slowed accreditation in the early stages of the pilot, this process has enabled new organisations to become accredited as City and Guilds centres and increased their capacity and credibility as learning providers within their local community.

Capacity building support for pilot projects

1.15 The BSA resourced the Link Up Central team which provided monitoring and guidance to pilot projects, administered pilot programme funding and developed the Link Up training and resources. The capacity building support included a range of activities, as the diverse projects had a range of background and experience (some had little *Skills for Life* background, others had strong community and voluntary sector links, while others had strong project management experience). Support for local projects has included:

- quarterly briefings for project managers;
- two day residential;
- volunteer management handbooks;
- briefing on the training and role of the supporter;
- guidance on placements;
- guidance on the accreditation process;
- fast track guidance on how to run/offer a fast track/intensive course;
- MI template and database training;
- media training delivered by CSV, BBC partner;
- national promotional materials – posters, press, radio, display stands;
- grants for laptops/resources;
- support from BSA central team;
- reporting template;
- quarterly newsletters;
- kitbags;
- Website forum.

Training for supporters

1.16 The BSA recruited a pool of trainers to deliver the Link Up training courses (Units 1, 2 and 3). In addition, local projects were encouraged to identify local trainers to undergo the Link Up Training the Trainers' course. Projects were encouraged to develop their own staff as trainers if this was appropriate, or identify *Skills for Life* teaching staff from their local partners to undergo the training. These individuals would then deliver Link Up to the supporters recruited by the local project. Project managers were present during Module 1 and Module 4 of Unit 1. This was to ensure that the training reflected the local area situation and the needs of the group being trained. Those with relevant *Skills for Life* teaching experience could then deliver Unit 1 themselves. Those without *Skills for Life* experience could co-deliver modules 1-4.

Support for volunteers

1.17 The BSA has supplied a number of resources for Link Up Supporters (LUS). These have included:

- a range of publications; e.g. Basic Skills for Personal Advisors;
- training packs for Units 1 - 3;
- kitbag containing a calculator, notebook, pen and dictionary;
- celebration events and conferences for supporters;
- "Chainmail" quarterly newsletter;
- placement audits;
- other training: dyslexia (Stockton);
- a video about the role of the Adult Learner Supporter.

1.18 Projects have developed local support arrangements for volunteers and the evaluation study seeks to report on the effectiveness of these mechanisms in retaining supporters and encouraging progression.

Early Evaluation Findings

1.19 Early evaluation was commissioned by the BSA from MORI, who obtained feedback from the pilot projects on the achievements and issues faced in the early stages of the set up of the pilot projects. The main conclusions from the early evaluation were:

- initial delays in set up and resources created operational difficulties;
- networking strategies needed to be flexible and adaptive to ensure effective engagement of a wide range of LUS;
- projects were satisfied with the training and it was relatively easy to contextualise;
- projects were effectively targeting agencies that worked with specific groups to ensure that 'non-traditional' supporters were engaged in Link Up;
- concern was expressed about the capacity to establish and support placements;
- key strengths were recognised as the localised focus, skills, commitment and enthusiasm of project staff and supporters, and good communication between Link Up Central and the pilots;
- the need for more staff resource, especially to support the administration and monitoring of the project;
- the importance of support to help share good practice between projects;
- concern about lack of clarification on funding from April 2004;

Policy Context

1.20 In addition to underpinning the *Skills for Life* strategy, Link Up also generates volunteering and community development outcomes. Therefore, Link Up sits within a range of national policy agenda. This is a great strength, however as can be seen below it also creates difficulties for projects seeking continued funding. Those looking to continue to deliver Link Up need to develop their understanding of these wide ranging agenda, how to identify the mutual benefits for their own and partner organisations and specifically the funding opportunities available to take Link Up forward.

1.21 Here we outline some of the main policy areas within which Link Up sits. This analysis is based on feedback from national partners that have been involved in the programme steering group and who, from their knowledge of the Link Up pilot programme, can see the potential for the future development of Link Up within one or more of these policy agenda.

Volunteering and active communities

- 1.22 There is a wide range of national policy development underway seeking to develop and strengthen the capacity of the voluntary sector, and improve the ways in which public sector agencies work with it. The 'cross-cutting review' published by HM Treasury in the "Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery", outlines a range of measures to improve the relationship between government agencies and the voluntary sector.
- 1.23 The LSC's response to the cross cutting review is set out in "Working together: a strategy for the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Learning and Skills Council". This document sets out the LSC's proposed strategy for working with the Voluntary and Community Sector in the following contexts:
- as an employer;
 - as a provider of education and training;
 - as a channel for networking;
 - a source of expertise in planning.
- 1.24 A range of initiatives are also being developed by the Active Community Unit of the Home Office, notably the Futurebuilders programme which seeks to help voluntary and community organisations in their public service work.
- 1.25 Sections Two, Three and Five report on the profile of volunteers and community organisations engaged and the types of impacts reported in relation to:
- The community capacity developed as an outcome from the Link Up pilot activity
 - The added value improved joint working between *Skills for Life* providers and voluntary and community sector organisations.

Neighbourhood renewal

- 1.26 There are 88 areas designated as neighbourhood renewal areas. Within these areas a range of initiatives are aimed at supporting these communities, including the development of the Community Empowerment Network and Community Chests and Community Learning Chests that provide small scale funding to local projects.

- 1.27 The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's (NRU) community participation programmes are now merged into the single Community Programme which provides funding via Government Offices to support community engagement and empowerment. Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (2004-05) are testing new ways in which to deliver local services within the target areas.
- 1.28 Neighbourhood Renewal is driven via the work of Local Strategic Partnerships, working to achieve 'floor' targets. Within these, *Skills for Life* targets are not explicitly set out as a discrete measure. However, engaging a wider range of community based Link Up Supporters can be seen to assist learners in priority groups within the Worklessness, Health and Crime target areas.
- 1.29 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's *Learning Curve*² outlines strategies through actions to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed for neighbourhood renewal. This includes support for professionals and practitioners working locally, and support for residents to develop their own skills in Neighbourhood Renewal.
- 1.30 Sections Four and Five report the feedback from employers and community organisations on the value of the Link Up pilot programme in their area.

Research questions

- 1.31 The following sets out the main research questions for the evaluation:
- (1) **What is the profile of LUS volunteers?** What are their characteristics in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, previous learning experiences and volunteer history?;
 - (2) **How have volunteers progressed** at Unit 1, 2 and 3 and in achieving the Level 2 qualification? How many want to progress to Level 3 and 4 teaching qualifications, and what other skills have they developed? What factors affect progression? How is the National Test requirement viewed?;
 - (3) **What is the feedback from employers** whose 'frontline' staff have had Link Up training? How has Link Up training added value to frontline services? What is the likelihood of sending staff on Link Up training in the future?;

² The Learning Curve: Developing Local Skills and Knowledge for Neighbourhood Renewal: Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2002.

- (4) **What are the views of placement organisations where Link Up Supporters have been placed?** What is the perception of the impact on their organisation? Are Link Up Supporters more beneficial? Has Link Up added value and widened participation? Will they continue to place supporters with learners?;
- (5) Has Link Up helped **build capacity in community organisations?** If so, how?;
- (6) **How has Link Up had an impact on the learners** referred by Link Up Supporters? How many learners have been referred through Link Up? How have learners found the referral process? What has been their learning experience and what are the benefits of being supported by a Link Up volunteer?;
- (7) **What is the potential to sustain Link Up?** How are pilot projects addressing this? Which pilot areas have done particularly well? What are the lessons learned for future roll-out?

Report Structure

1.32 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section Two** – reports on the profile of volunteers from data taken from the management information reported by Link Up projects, and from the survey supporters undertaken by YCL;
- **Section Three** – outlines the profile of pilot projects, their characteristics and approach to the delivery of the Link Up programme. The good practice and lessons learned from the delivery of Link Up are reported in a separate guide that accompanies this report;
- **Section Four** – reports on the feedback from employers that have had ‘frontline’ staff trained by Link Up;
- **Section Five** – details the nature of engagement and impact on voluntary and community organisations involved in Link Up;
- **Section Six** – reports on the feedback from placement providers on the use and value of those trained by Link Up that have supported *Skills for Life* learners. This section also reports on the feedback from *Skills for Life* learners themselves on the value of Link Up Supporters;
- **Section Seven** – summarises the evaluation findings and draws conclusions about the achievements of the programme and future potential for Link Up.

Methodology

1.33 The evaluation programme included:

- visits to six case study pilot projects;
- telephone interviews with all pilot project managers;
- a survey of 1,233 LUS (from the six case study areas).
- qualitative interviews with:
 - all Link Up pilot project managers;
 - 44 Link Up signposters and supporters;
 - 17 placement providers;
 - 13 employers;
 - 54 learners supported by Link Up Supporters;
- analysis of management information (November 2003, April 2004);
- consultations with 12 national partners.

2 VOLUNTEER PROFILE AND PROGRESSION

Introduction

2.1 This section reports the results from a survey of volunteers and the data from the BSA's Management Information (MI) database (as at 29th April 2004) under the following headings:

- programme targets;
- volunteer survey;
- LUS profile;
- progression;
- difficulties faced;
- LUS current status/activities;
- future expectations.

Programme targets

2.2 In relation to Link Up's programme objectives, the BSA management information (MI) reports a total of:

- 6,090 supporters on the database, exceeding the target of 6,000;
- 18% of supporters profiled on the database are aged 50 or over, just below the target of 25% in this age group³;
- 41% of supporters are from the target wards⁴.

Volunteer survey

2.3 As part of the evaluation research a postal survey was distributed to the Link Up Supporters trained in the six case study areas. **Table 2.1** below shows the number of surveys distributed to LU Supporters in each area, the number received and the corresponding response rate. Overall 37% of questionnaires were returned.

³ The 6 Prisons and 1 Army based projects were less able to address this target as their core target groups of prison staff, prisoners and Army personnel had a much younger age profile.

⁴ The figure of 41% relates to the 18 'community based' projects as the 6 Prisons projects were unable to record the home location of prisoner Link Up volunteers.

Table 2.1: Volunteer Survey Response Rate

Link Up Area	No. sent	Returned	Response Rate
Camden	208	72	35%
Penwith	125	53	42%
Army	130	52	40%
Stoke	250	61	24%
Sheffield	390	171	44%
Deerbolt	50	21	42%
Holme House	40	11	28%
Low Newton	40	18	45%
TOTAL	1233	459	37%

LUS Profile

2.4 **Table 2.2** shows the profile of the personal characteristics of those responding to the volunteer survey, and compares this to the profile of supporters reported to the BSA database by all pilot projects. Table 2.2 indicates that the profile of survey respondents (in terms of age, ethnicity and gender) is comparable to that of the 6,090 supporters that were profiled on the BSA's database on 29th April 2004. The key characteristics of the LUS trained is as follows:

- around eight out of ten supporters' ethnicity is 'white European';
- nearly one-in-eight supporters are reported to have a disability;
- just over two-thirds of supporters are female;
- for 10% of LUS, English is not their first language.

**Table 2.2: Profile of volunteers:
survey respondents and BSA MI data⁵**

	% of LUS survey respondents ⁶	% of supporters on MI database
Age	n=449	n=5183
16-19	1	2
20-29	13	21
30-39	25	29
40-49	30	27
50-59	23	18
60-69	8	4
70+	2	1
Ethnicity	n=451	n=5040
Asian	6	3
Black	5	6
Mixed race	1	2
White	83	78
Other	1	1
Prefer not to say	4	4
Disability	n=444	n=6090
Yes	8	12
No	89	86
Prefer not to say	3	1
Gender	n=444	n=5853
Male	29	30
Female	71	70
English is first language	n=441	
Yes	90	Na
No	10	Na

- 2.5 Of the 10% of survey respondents for whom English was not their first language, first languages cited included Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Creole, French, German, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Kurdish, Persian, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish and Yoruba.

Link Up Supporter labour market status

- 2.6 **Table 2.3** shows the labour market status of those responding to the volunteer survey. Two thirds of respondents are in work, either full time or part time. The majority of the remaining third of respondents are volunteers in another capacity as well as being a Link Up Supporter.

⁵ Data rounded to the nearest percent.

⁶ Base: all respondents who provided a response to each question.

**Table 2.3: Labour Market Status
% of volunteers (n=459)**

	% ⁷
In work	66
Full time	43
Part time	23
Full time education or training	8
Carer	9
Job seeker	11
Retired	10
On sick/incapacity benefits	5
Volunteer (other than Link Up Supporter)	15

2.7 Survey respondents were asked about the main focus of, or the main client groups they support as part of their job or volunteering role. Responses were wide ranging, and included:

- adult learners;
- 16-19 year olds;
- children and families;
- adults from disadvantaged areas;
- community;
- forces personnel;
- clients with mental health problems;
- elderly;
- homeless;
- literacy/numeracy/ESOL/IT clients/learners;
- lone parents;
- refugees and asylum seekers;
- unemployed;
- young offenders;
- women prisoners.

Previous qualification levels

2.8 Just under one half of all respondents to the LUS survey already had Level 2 literacy/numeracy equivalents. Just under one quarter of all LUS were working towards the National Tests in Literacy and Numeracy. To date (end of March 2004) the pilots report that they have supported over 600 LUSs to take the National Tests.

⁷ Percentages total greater than 100 due to multiple responses.

2.9 The following shows the proportion of supporters that already have the Level 2 equivalent, those that do not but are working towards them, and those that do not and are not working towards them. This indicates that the pilot projects have encouraged almost half of those without Level 2 literacy or numeracy to work towards the National Tests:

- already have L2 literacy/numeracy equivalents 48%
- I am working towards the national tests 23%
- I do not have L2 equivalent and am not working towards the tests 20%
- unknown/not given 9%

2.10 For some, the motivation to work towards the Tests was the requirement to achieve them in order to gain the Level 2 certificate in Adult Learner Support (ALS). For others (and many of those not seeking to achieve the Level 2) participation in the Link Up training raised awareness of their own literacy and numeracy skills. Furthermore, most pilot providers were able to signpost LUS to *Skills for Life* provision.

Previous experience of volunteering

2.11 **Table 2.4** below shows that over half of the survey respondents had volunteered prior to their involvement in the Link Up project, with just under one third having volunteered in the past year. Thus a significant minority were new volunteers.

Table 2.4: Previous Relevant Volunteer Experience % of volunteers (n=459)	
	%
Ever volunteered	54
Volunteered in the last 12 months	28
Supported basic skills learners	39

Progress through training to date

2.12 **Figure 2.1** gives an outline of the Link Up training units, hours of training and the qualifications that can be achieved at the end of each stage. Completion of the full qualification also requires supporters to undertake a minimum of 8 hours of placement supporting adults under the guidance of a specialist tutor. **Annex A** shows an outline of the training programme for the Level 2 Certificate. In the Link Up pilots, supporters had the option to work towards the full certificate, (become a classroom supporter) or just to take Unit 1 (be trained as a signposter).

Figure 2.1: Link Up Training Units			
Unit	Hours of training	Recognition/Qualification	Role
Unit 1	12 hours	Certificate of attendance	Signposter/Frontline worker/Mentor
Unit 1 + assignment	12 hours	City and Guilds certificate of Unit Recognition	Signposter/Frontline worker/Mentor
Units 1, 2 and 3 + relevant assignments and placement	42 hours	Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support	Adult Learner Supporter

2.13 **Table 2.5** below shows the progression made through the Link Up training units by the supporters profiled on the BSA's database. This indicates that over 80% of Link Up Supporters have completed the Unit 1 only to date, with 19% progressing on to further Units.

Table 2.5: Training progression % of supporters on MI database (n=6090)	
	%
Completed Unit 1 training	82
Completed Unit 2 training	19
Completed Unit 3 literacy training	6
Completed Unit 3 numeracy training	2
Completed Unit 3 ESOL training	2
Completed Level 2 ALS qualification	1

2.14 **Table 2.6** below shows the data from the Link Up Supporters responding to the LUS survey regarding their progress through the training and accreditation process:

- about two-thirds of survey respondents have completed Unit 1 training, with just over one third having gone on to complete their Unit 1 assignment, and nearly a quarter having achieved the Unit 1 accreditation;
- just over one third have gone on to complete the Unit 2 training and just under one fifth have completed the Unit 3 training;
- just under one fifth have taken part in a placement, with just less than that having completed their placement at the time of the survey;
- 4% had achieved accreditation of the Level 2 certificate in ALS.

**Table 2.6: Current status within the LU training and accreditation process
% of volunteers (n=459)**

	%
Completed Unit 1 training	66
Completed Unit 1 assignment	35
Achieved Unit 1 accreditation	24
Completed Unit 2 training	36
Completed Unit 3 training	16
Taking part in placement	18
Completed my placement	16
Achieved accreditation in Level 2 in ALS	4

2.15 The most frequently cited specialism that the respondents have opted for, or hope to take is literacy, with 54% reporting this option. Around one third of survey respondents have opted for, or hope to take the numeracy or ESOL options:

- Literacy 54%
- Numeracy 33%
- ESOL 32%

2.16 The survey feedback indicates that the proportion of supporters that have progressed on to Units 2 and 3 (from the case study areas) is higher than the data reported to the BSA by the projects. This could be due to:

- supporters in the case study areas being more likely to progress than in other pilot project areas;
- the timing of the survey (December 2003), indicating that the supporters reported or the database include those trained in the last quarter of the programme, and who have completed Unit 1 only to date.

Expected progression

- 2.17 Supporters responding to the survey were asked which stages of the Link Up training programme they expected to complete. **Table 2.7** shows their expectations of progression through the Link Up training programme. The majority (66%) of volunteers hope to achieve the Level 2 certificate in ALS. Very few respondents were interested in undertaking the training without working towards the Level 2 qualification.
- 2.18 Twelve per cent of respondents expected to complete only Unit 1, i.e. hope to be “signposters”.

**Table 2.7: Expectations of progression
% of volunteers (n=459)**

	%
Unit 1 training but not accreditation	5
Unit 1 accreditation	7
Unit 2/3 training, including placement	8
Achieve the L2 in ALS	66

- 2.19 The expected achievement of the Level 2 certificate is expressed here as an aspiration. The actual rate of progression and achievement is much lower than this. The actual rate of achievement has been limited by a number of factors. This has included the initial planning assumptions, which assumed that the rate of progression from Unit 1 to 2 would be about 20%. In addition, the slower than anticipated process of accreditation has also hindered actual progression. Finally, the higher than expected level of progression has caused pressure on the demand for placements. Again this factor has led some projects to slow down the rate of progression on to Units 2 and 3 until placements became available.
- 2.20 The difference between the aspiration and actual achievement indicates that many LUSs would seek to progress to level Unit 2/3 at some point in the future (and in several cases after the lifetime of the current pilot). With the uncertainty over the long term future of the Link Up projects, many supporters were concerned that they would not know how, or where to pick up their training in the future.

2.21 The gap between achievement and aspiration also raises the question of advice and guidance for LUS. All supporters have an informal interview or induction with project managers before they begin the Unit 1 training. In some cases the pilot projects have experienced staff able to offer information, advice and guidance (IAG) interviews to supporters, encouraging them to reflect on how the Unit 2/3 training fits within their own job role or personal aspirations, and how to plan future training and development to reach personal goals.

Impact of training on confidence to work with certain groups

2.22 Respondents were asked to state their level of confidence in supporting different groups of learners, and whether Link Up has helped to develop their confidence in this area. The responses are shown in **Table 2.8** below.

Table 2.8: Confidence in supporting different groups of learners % of volunteers⁸		
	Feel confident % (n=459)	Link Up improved my confidence % (n=459)
Learners with very little spoken English	36	31
Learners with low (pre Entry) levels of Literacy	58	44
Learners with low (pre-Entry) levels of Numeracy	46	36
Learners with very low levels of confidence	61	37
Learners with physical disabilities	40	29
Learners with poor mental health	30	25
Learners with learning difficulties	38	32
Learners from ethnic groups (other than your own)	49	30

2.23 The majority of respondents stated that they felt confident in supporting groups of learners with very low levels of literacy, and very low levels of confidence. Just under half of respondents stated they felt confident in supporting learners with low levels of numeracy, and learners from ethnic groups (other than their own). A smaller proportion of learners were confident in supporting learners with very little spoken English, physical disabilities, poor mental health or with learning difficulties.

⁸ % total more than 100 due to multiple responses provided.

2.24 Around one third of respondents stated that Link Up had helped them improve their confidence in supporting learners with little spoken English, low levels of numeracy, very low levels of confidence and with learning disabilities. Only one quarter stated that Link Up had helped develop their confidence in working with learners with poor mental health. Of those who felt confident in supporting learners from each group identified, between 28% and 40% of these respondents felt that Link Up had helped them develop/improve this confidence, with a higher proportion saying that Link Up helped improve their confidence in supporting learners with low levels of literacy, and a lower proportion in supporting learners with poor mental health or physical disabilities.

Difficulties faced

2.25 Less than one third of LUS reported that they had faced difficulties in either the training process or in being a Link Up Supporter. **Table 2.9** below shows the main difficulties faced by this group.

Table 2.9: Difficulties faced % of volunteers who faced difficulties (n=138)	
	%⁹
Time to attend training or complete course work	63
Limited contact with people with basic skills needs	28
Finding a suitable placement	25
The requirement to take the National Literacy/Numeracy test	17
My own basic skills needs	10
Changing requirements of the training	3
Personal reasons	3
Present skills not taken account of	1
Lack of support (expenses, childcare)	1
English not first language	1
Other	4

⁹ % total more than 100 due to multiple responses provided.

2.26 The responses reflect that supporters are at different situations and stages in the training process, and that they operate in different contexts as signposters/supporters. The time needed to attend training or complete coursework is the most frequently cited difficulty faced, and 39% of those who cited this are in full-time work. About one quarter of those who faced difficulties, which represents less than 10% of LUSs responding overall, reported that this was due to limited contact with people with basic skills needs and finding a suitable placement, of whom one third are in full-time work. This indicates that future recruitment and selection needs to ask potential LUS to carefully consider how they will use their training, either in a work or community setting. Although at less than 10% of all those trained, this finding indicates that overall Link Up has been very successful at engaging those working in settings where they come into contact with potential *Skills for Life* learners.

2.27 An additional difficulty reported by supporters was their own literacy, language or numeracy skill needs. Overall six percent of all supporters responding to the survey noted that this was an issue faced that prevented progression towards achievement of the Level 2. However, as we see below, Link Up projects were generally successful in helping those without the required level 2 literacy or numeracy skills to access *Skills for Life* provision and achieve accreditation.

2.28 Other difficulties cited included:

- finding work/placement as a Link Up Supporter on a regular basis;
- the location of courses and placements;
- unnecessary paperwork.

2.29 Section 3 looks at the action taken by the case study projects to support LUSs in the development of their own literacy and numeracy skills, to deliver training in a range of different venues and at different times, and to source placements to try and be flexible to meet the needs of supporters.

2.30 In terms of LUSs comments on paperwork, it was noted by project managers that many supporters were not familiar with the registration and accreditation processes, and that these had to be explained carefully and clearly.

Link Up Supporter – Current Status/Activities

2.31 Respondents to the survey were asked to indicate if they were currently active as a Link Up Supporter. 59% indicated that they were acting as a Link Up Supporter. For those who were not currently a Link Up Supporter, the main reasons for this are shown in **Table 2.10**.

**Table 2.10: Reasons not currently an active Link Up Supporter
% of volunteers who were not a Link Up supporter (n=167)**

	%
I have changed job/situation and am no longer able to take part	28
Awaiting information about next steps, soon to start training or further stages of training/placement	24
Personal reasons have made it difficult for me to continue	22
Training programme didn't interest me/wasn't relevant/didn't suit me	18
Other	8

2.32 Within this group, one quarter state that they are not active because they are awaiting next steps in terms of training or placement activity. Other reasons for not currently being a Link Up Supporter included difficulties finding the opportunity to use the training through work or volunteering. Thus, we can see that amongst those that self-report that they are not active, one quarter are potentially active – awaiting further training etc.

2.33 Overall these findings indicate that amongst those surveyed, **69% were still active or potentially active** as Link Up Supporters. Suggesting a rate of drop out from the initiative of around 30% (over the 12-18 months of operation of the pilot in the case study areas).

2.34 **Table 2.11** shows the activities of those currently active as a Link Up Supporter, the proportion signposting learners and those supporting learners. Just under one third of 'active' respondents are signposting people to provision. The remainder are active in supporting roles. However, this includes the majority of LUS that are currently on placement.

**Table 2.11: Activities as a Link Up Supporter
% of volunteers (n=459)**

	Currently involved in % ¹⁰	Expect to be involved in % ¹¹
Signposting potential basic skills learners to provision	34	34
Supporting literacy learners	29	43
Supporting numeracy learners	20	30
Supporting ESOL learners	16	30
Other activities	3	7

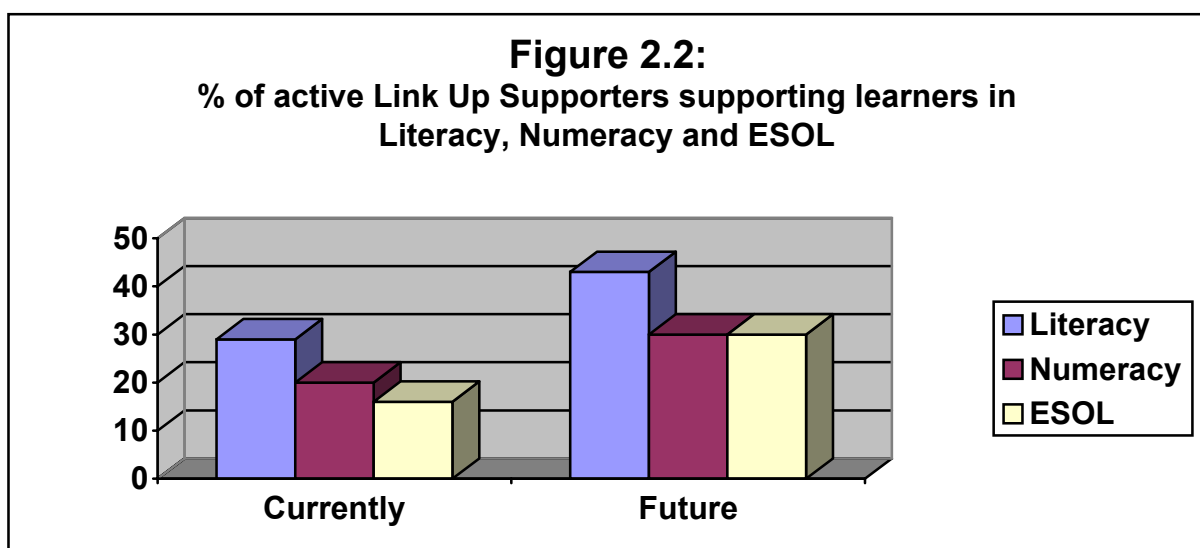
2.35 “Other” learner support activities currently involved in and expected to be involved in include:

- basic IT support;
- family learning initiatives;
- basic life skills;
- social skills;
- dyslexia support;
- youth offenders/prison work;
- hospital programmes for learning support.

2.36 **Figure 2.2** below shows the proportion of active Link Up Supporters that are currently supporting learners in Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL provision. Figure 2.2 also shows the proportion of Link Up Supporters that expect to be active in supporting learners in these course types in the future. Notably, there is an expected doubling of activity by supporters in ESOL provision.

¹⁰ % total more than 100 due to multiple responses provided.

¹¹ % total more than 100 due to multiple responses provided.



Future expectations

2.37 Respondents were asked if they expected to take part in further related training. **Table 2.12** shows the responses.

	% ¹²
Continue training to achieve the Level 2 ALS	22
L3 <i>Skills for Life</i> teaching qualification	34
L4 <i>Skills for Life</i> teaching qualification	27
Other teaching assistant roles e.g. in schools	19
Other training (not teaching related)	7
Other volunteering in the community	10

2.38 Just under one quarter expect to take part in other training and development linked to supporting learners, or to complete the Level 2 ALS qualification in the future. Around one third have expectations to take part in Level 3 and Level 4 *Skills for Life* teacher training. One fifth expect to go on to become teaching assistants. A smaller proportion report that they expect to go on to training related to volunteering in the community (e.g. family support, mentoring), or other non-teaching related training (e.g. mentoring, youth community work, speech therapy).

¹² % total more than 100 due to multiple responses provided.

3 LINK UP PILOT PROJECTS

Introduction

- 3.1 In this section we provide an overview of the key features of the six Link Up pilot area case studies, and initial feedback from projects to the main evaluation research questions.
- 3.2 A common factor emerging from all of the case study interviews to date is the commitment and passion that pilot project managers and staff have for the Link Up programme.
- 3.3 This section also reports on the following:
- project set up;
 - delivery structures and partnerships;
 - strategies for reaching target groups;
 - supporter profile;
 - Link Up training and supporting volunteers;
 - progression;
 - placement;
 - accreditation;
 - literacy and numeracy requirements;
 - sustaining Link Up.

Project set up

- 3.4 The profile of providers leading the six case study pilots illustrates the range of organisations involved in the delivery of Link Up. Across these projects the strategic and service delivery context is very diverse. The case study projects are managed by:
- Army Education Services in Warminster (Wiltshire), Tidworth (Hampshire) & Hohne (Germany);
 - Camden Neighbourhood Learning Unit, Westminster Kingsway College;
 - Penwith (Cornwall) Community Development Trust;
 - the North East prisons cluster includes three prisons with a project manager located in each, with the cluster contract managed by New College Durham;

- Manor and Castle Training, Sheffield;
- Groundwork, Stoke.

Previous relevant experience

- 3.5 Across the six pilot areas, four of the projects have previous experience in supporting literacy, language and numeracy skills development, some of which includes the delivery of *Skills for Life* provision and, for some of the projects, activity to raise *Skills for Life* awareness. Over the last three years the Army has been developing a strategy to deliver *Skills for Life* provision across the service
- 3.6 The Camden, Penwith and Stoke projects have a strong background in volunteer recruitment and management. In addition, one of the three prisons has extensive experience of recruiting volunteers to support their prisoner education service. Four of the projects have a range of community development experience.

Delivery structures and partnerships

- 3.7 The projects all have similar targets of engaging, training and supporting 300 Link Up Supporters. The staffing structures developed to meet these objectives have similar profiles, although there are some interesting differences:
- one project has a full time project manager. The Army and Prison clusters, and the Sheffield project have split the project management role to make two part time posts; The Army has one project manager in Warminster, England and another based in Hohne, Germany. Both work part time on Link Up, but on average more than half a week;
 - in Penwith, the full time project manager changed the role to a part time post to enable the project to take on an additional development worker. The Penwith project also has a community development link worker who works for the project one day per week;
 - all projects, except the prisons cluster, have a full time administration worker (Sheffield also has a part time volunteer admin worker) who works directly with the project manager. In the prisons cluster, the project admin resource is located at New College Durham and oversees the management of the Link Up contract.

Strategies for reaching target groups

3.8 The projects have clearly stated volume and profile targets. With an average target of 300 LUS each, and targets for LUS by age (25% aged 50+) and locality (engaging supporters from deprived wards). Projects describe a range of intensive activity aimed at promoting Link Up and engaging supporters. Key promotional activities include the following:

- Army and Prisons: advertisements and articles in sector journals;
- all – advertisements and articles in local *Skills for Life* newsletters;
- newspaper and radio coverage;
- posters in community venues;
- briefings for partner networks;
- intensive mailshot and visits to community organisations including volunteer bureaux;
- participation in community festivals;
- internal promotion to frontline worker staff.

3.9 The pilot projects report that the most effective recruitment activities are as follows:

- working with established contacts/network links;
- briefings and (repeated) personal contact;
- local press advertising;
- for frontline staff – getting senior managers on the Unit 1;
- word of mouth.

3.10 In addition to the type of activity that has proved successful, projects reported on the key messages that were effective in engaging supporters. The following summarises the key emphasis placed on 'selling' Link Up to potential supporters:

- **Army:** nationally recognised training and accreditation;
- **Camden:** options for progression;
- **Penwith:** Link Up branding – a national initiative, LUS support;
- **Prisons:** for prisoners time and pay and a positive sentence report;
- **Stoke:** being part of a national initiative;
- **Sheffield:** training available to national standards.

3.11 The approach taken by projects to present Link Up as a route to the Level 2 ALS qualification differed. Some project managers stress that this was a key feature of the way the programme was promoted and sold up front. Other projects note that they tended to focus more on engaging people in the Unit 1 as one project worker noted, *‘to hook them in, then, once they are on board, we open up the option of Unit2/3’*.

Recruitment to Link Up

3.12 **Table 3.1** below shows the responses from the LUS survey regarding recruitment. The most frequently cited source of awareness of Link Up is through colleagues at work and press adverts, cited by 28% and 18% of respondents respectively. The least frequently cited sources are through Link Up events, radio adverts and word of mouth from people who are not Link Up Supporters. “Other” sources of information included the church, doctor and community or other projects.

Table 3.1: “How did you hear about Link Up?” % of volunteers (n=459)	
	%
At work through a colleague/manager	28
Press/newspaper advert	18
Info from the Link Up project	16
Link Up poster/leaflet	13
From another Link Up Supporter	12
FE/education/college	10
Advertising/information search	6
Volunteer bureau/organisation	4
Careers information	3
Radio advert	3
Link Up event	2
Word of mouth	2
Other source of information/encouragement	5

3.13 **Table 3.2** below shows the reasons why Link Up Supporters got involved in the Link Up project, with the most frequently cited reason being to learn more about *Skills for Life* issues, which was also regarded as the most important reason. Although just over one third of respondents gave “to be part of the national *Skills for Life* strategy” as a reason for getting involved, it does not rank very highly as an important reason. Just under one third got involved to either improve the quality of support or to provide support to clients/service users.

Table 3.2: “Reasons for getting involved” % of volunteers (n=459)		
	%	% identify as the most important
To learn more about <i>Skills for Life</i> issues	69	23
To get the Level 2 qualification in Adult Learner Support	44	14
To be part of the national <i>Skills for Life</i> strategy	37	6
To improve the quality of support I give to clients/service users	30	11
To support client/service users at work	29	12
To support people in the organisation in which I volunteer	21	8
To be part of a national programme	16	1

Supporter Profile

3.14 Link Up seeks to engage a wide range of supporters from different backgrounds, and with different objectives of becoming a signposter or supporter: the following outlines the ways in which the case studies define their current cohort of supporters:

- **Army:** military and civilian personnel – frontline workers and supporters;
- **Camden:** those interested in community volunteering, some interested in getting into teaching. Few frontline workers;
- **Penwith:** employees of local voluntary and public sector organisations;
- **Prisons cluster:** external volunteers (some interested in getting into teaching), prison staff (frontline workers) and prisoners (supporters);
- **Sheffield:** those interested in community volunteering and some interested in getting into teaching. Some frontline workers;
- **Stoke:** those interested in community volunteering and many interested in getting into teaching. Few frontline workers.

Age

- 3.15 In discussing the target profile for supporters, projects identify a number of activities undertaken to engage LUS aged over 50, including working with voluntary organisations that specialise in providing opportunities for this age group.
- 3.16 In the cases of the Army and the Prison cluster, the age target is felt to be less relevant to them in that their potential pool of supporters has a relatively young profile.

Target Wards

- 3.17 Feedback from the projects differed on how they engage LUS from target wards. Penwith and Stoke indicate that the majority of their activity is within target wards, and as such they are focused on this objective. In other cases, projects were not aware which wards were their target wards. The prison based projects did not have access to prisoners' personal data and it was assumed that many of the LUS who were prisoners lived, or would move to Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Data from the BSA's management information database reports that 41% of Link Up Supporters were from target wards¹³.

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) LUS Recruitment

- 3.18 In Camden, the project recruited a BME outreach worker to progress recruitment in minority ethnic communities. Although positive development activities took place, including the development of resources for LUS with English as a second language, overall the project reports that this activity had limited impact on increasing the number of LUS from these communities. The project noted that there was a strong need to build understanding of the *Skills for Life* agenda (over and above ESOL) before interest could be generated in encouraging volunteers to engage in *Skills for Life* support. The BME focused project was relatively short (i.e. over a couple of months) and the feedback from this and other pilots developing similar initiatives noted the need for more sustained and long term strategies in order to be effective. Within this overall feedback the evaluation identified a number of specific examples of successful engagement of LUSs from BME communities (see Section 5).

¹³ The figure of 41% relates to the 18 'community based' projects as the 6 Prisons projects were unable to record the home location of prisoner Link Up volunteers. The BSA used postcode analysis to report on this measure, based on the LUS address details provided by the pilot projects.

3.19 Despite this feedback from projects indicates that specific initiatives aimed at reaching into BME communities to engage LUSs overall Link Up has been successful in recruiting a diverse range of supporters. 20% of LUSs identify themselves as being in a racial group other than 'white European'. This compares to just over 8% of the population in the areas in which Link Up pilots have been operating.

Monitoring Recruitment

3.20 In terms of monitoring, projects report that they have not actively reviewed the profile of LUS in terms of age and ward to direct recruitment strategies to achieve the target profile. Case study projects note that, given the relative shortage of time (with a shortening of the delivery phase of the projects to, at most, 15 months and for the Army, less than a year) the approach taken to the engagement of volunteers has not been strategic. Rather, project managers describe their promotional activity as, typically "*blitzing every avenue*" or "*a scatter gun approach*", using as many potential existing contacts, and developing new ones to generate interest in Link Up.

Link Up Training

3.21 Camden, Penwith, Sheffield and Stoke have used external trainers to deliver the Link Up course units. The prison and army projects have trained their own staff (who were already experienced basic skills teachers). Camden, Penwith and Stoke have mainly used trainers who work for their main college partner. Sheffield has used a number of freelance-external trainers. The Link Up projects are responsible for arranging the training. Some have faced difficulties in booking trainers at a time when a group was ready to train.

3.22 The feedback from project staff, and LUS on the Link Up training course is very positive. Small scale observation of Unit 1 delivery in two case study areas highlighted that the course:

- engages and motivates mixed groups of learners with different levels of awareness and understanding (as one participant noted "*it is a great leveller*");
- is interactive, suiting all learning styles;
- the Link Up video is a key engagement tool for many in the group;
- it is well paced (Unit 1 delivered over 2 days);

- uses high quality resources.

Feedback on training, support and resources

3.23 **Table 3.3** below shows the volunteers perceptions of the quality of training they received as part of the Link Up project. The majority of survey respondents described the quality of training as either excellent or good (85%), with the remaining few rating it as either OK, poor or very poor.

Table 3.3: “Training Quality” % of volunteers¹⁴	
	%
Excellent	36
Good	49
OK, neither good nor poor	12
Poor	3
Very poor	1

3.24 There were no significant differences between how Link Up Supporters from different projects viewed the quality of the training they received.

3.25 When asked about the most enjoyable aspects of Link Up training most comments referred to gaining an understanding of the literacy, numeracy or language difficulties faced by people, learning about *Skills for Life* and the learning environment in which they trained. Responses by the main themes are shown in **Table 3.4**.

Table 3.4: “What have you enjoyed most about the Link Up training?” % of volunteers (n=459)	
	%
The teaching and learning experience	38
Meeting/networking with others	31
Gaining an understanding in / learning about basic skills	17
Personal/professional development	14
Gaining a qualification	1
Other	5

3.26 The following quotes illustrate these key themes:

¹⁴ Base: all volunteers who provided a response to this question (n=432)

- *“Positive fun learning environment – good variety of materials/exercises to cover diverse range of issues involved in basic skills volunteering.”*
- *“I enjoyed working as part of a group drawn from different backgrounds, and sharing ideas. I found having access to the core curriculum very valuable.”*
- *“A better understanding of the difficulty some people have to live with everyday.”*
- *“The feeling of becoming part of something much bigger than my ordinary work.”*

3.27 When asked what should be changed about Link Up training, most comments focused on how the course is run, as opposed to the content of the course or the course teachers. Many of the comments referred directly or indirectly to the changing requirements of the training. The following quotes illustrate the main themes highlighted:

- *“Before the training clarify how it is organised, where it leads, and spell out the links with levels and qualifications.”*
- *“Set out the whole programme and bring units closer. Give more continuity, the current training programme stretches over too long period of time.”*
- *“Differentiate more and give teachers more freedom to do so. We were a group of graduates mixed with people who just had GCSE level.”*
- *“A lot of the examples given were based on literacy classes. As someone thinking of teaching numeracy, I would have appreciated examples from this field.”*
- *“If I could change some things about Link Up training I would like to change it to a longer period and put more details on it.”*
- *“The need for Level 2 Numeracy has meant more of a commitment than I would've wanted (time-wise); seemingly little flexibility on this issue. I do not intend using numeracy skills in the classroom.”*

Supporting volunteers

3.28 The approaches taken to the provision of support for LUS have varied across the case study projects. Key features include:

- **Army:** tutorials immediately after/day after course, then on regular (monthly) basis. Own newsletter;
- **Camden:** write to Unit 1 completers to explain next steps, active contact to check placements okay, pay childcare costs;
- **Penwith:** each training group attended by a development officer; LUS contacted if they miss a training session; development workers help encourage assignment completion; social events for supporters; own newsletter;
- **Prisons:** training and placements on site, project manager on hand full time; PMs make contact with prisoner LUS on a regular basis;
- **Sheffield:** regular supporter events including training exchange days for LUS to share practice;
- **Stoke:** regular LUS network/support events, 1-1 support from the project manager.

3.29 **Table 3.5** below shows how the survey respondents rated the quality of support they have received from the Link Up project. Most respondents described the quality of support as “excellent” or “good”, with just under one third describing it as “excellent”. Very few rated it as poor or very poor.

Table 3.5: “Quality of Support” % of volunteers¹⁵	
	%
Excellent	32
Good	44
OK, neither good nor poor	20
Poor	4
Very poor	1

3.30 Again, there were no significant differences between how Link Up Supporters from different projects rated the quality of support they received from the Link Up project.

Use and value of Link Up resources

3.31 Survey respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of the materials provided as part of Link Up. **Table 3.6** below shows these results.

¹⁵ Base: all volunteers who provided a response to this question (n=424)

Table 3.6: Rating of usefulness of resources					
	% of volunteers	Of those volunteers who received resource (%) ¹⁶			
	Not received /attended	Extremely Useful	Very useful	Of some use	Not at all useful
Kitbags (n=385)	7	30	37	28	4
Chainmail/newsletter (n=299)	22	10	30	52	9
Local supporters meetings (n=191)	44	20	37	33	10
Training materials (n=393)	6	36	44	19	1

3.32 The results of the survey indicate that the majority of survey respondents received kitbags. In the main, the kitbags were described as being “very useful”. Over three-quarters of survey respondents had received the Chainmail newsletter. In the main, the newsletter was described to be “of some use”. Over half of the survey respondents reported to have not attended any local supporters meetings. Of those who had attended local supporters meetings, just over half described the local supporters meetings as “useful” or “very useful”. The majority of survey respondents had received training materials. On the whole these were described as either “very useful” or “extremely useful”.

Progression

3.33 A much greater proportion of LUS have wanted to progress to take Unit 2/3 training (and the Level 2 ALS qualification) than was originally assumed. Initial planning assumptions were that the progression rate would be 20%. Initial budgeting and project planning was made on this basis. The profile of LUS progressing from Unit 1 to Unit 2/3 to date across the case study pilots has been as follows:

- **Army:** 20% will progress (90% want to);
- **Camden:** 15%;
- **Penwith:** 50%;
- **Prisons:** Deerbolt 70%, Low Newton 10%, Holme House 10%;
- **Sheffield:** 80% wanting to progress;
- **Stoke:** 90% wanting to progress.

¹⁶ n=those who received/attended

- 3.34 In three cases, projects report that they have 'capped' or stemmed the demand from LUS to progress. This has been in response to funding and resource related issues. Notably in the Army cluster, the availability of placements within the Army Education Service is limited. This in turn limits the number of supporters that are encouraged to take Units 2/3 and seek accreditation.
- 3.35 Within the Prisons cluster, Low Newton has capped the rate of progression for budget reasons. At Holme House, a large proportion of LUS are either prisoners or frontline workers. Therefore there has been a greater emphasis on the Unit 1 training. This compares to Deerbolt where the majority of LUS are external volunteers, supporting prisoners in the classroom. The community based projects, notably Stoke, Sheffield and Penwith note that involvement in Link Up has generated significant interest amongst certain supporters to progress to L3 and L4 *Skills for Life* teaching qualifications.
- 3.36 Pilot projects note that in some cases they have not been able to support those wanting to progress on to the Level 3 or 4 courses. Projects reported that they sometimes lacked information about the Level 3 or Level 4 opportunities available locally, or perceived a lack of places available for those wanting to progress. This issue highlights a key consideration for the future of Link Up; the management of the supply and demand for both signposters and Level 2 qualified supporters. Some pilots are effectively linked into local LSC/professional development centres where dialogue about wider planning and resource can take place. However, at the time of survey these linkages existed in only a minority of cases.

Placement

- 3.37 A key role played by projects has been the identification of placement opportunities for those working towards the Level 2 ALS qualification. The following outlines the main sources of placements across the case study projects:
- **Army:** within army education service and 2-3 external providers;
 - **Camden:** partners with placements in varied settings;
 - **Penwith:** placements with the local adult education services who are also the trainers for Link Up;
 - **Prisons:** on site at Prison Education service;
 - **Sheffield:** with local college and other providers;

- **Stoke:** mainly in college and Groundwork programmes.

3.38 The identification and set-up of placements has been a key area of difficulty for most of the case study projects. Issues arising include:

- limited number of internal placement opportunities (Army);
- limited number of external opportunities (some college providers not able to offer placements as they also deliver their 'own' Level 2 ALS courses and the placements for these learners have taken precedence);
- a much larger scale of placements needed than originally planned¹⁷;
- some providers offering placements do not have suitably qualified staff;
- lack of experience of some *Skills for Life* providers in offering placements, and hence a lack of clear policy on this. In addition, some report that teachers have not welcomed the placement;
- lack of clarity on the role of the Link Up project vis a vis the *Skills for Life* provider in supporting/reviewing the progress of LUS on placement;
- LUS not able to attend placements at the time they are offered (during the day).

3.39 To respond to these barriers, projects have:

- capped the number of LUS progressing on to Unit 2/3;
- Sheffield has taken on a placement officer with a specific remit to develop placement opportunities including working with providers to develop placement policy and quality.

3.40 The delays in providing placement opportunities are felt to have had a significant impact on the actual progression rate and those going on to complete assignments and achieve accreditation. As one project manager noted, LUS have "*drifted away waiting for placement and feedback on their assignments*".

¹⁷ Across the 6 pilots, project managers report a potential demand for placements of 1,350 for LUS (75% of Unit 1 completers wanting to progress to Unit 2/3) compared to original planning assumptions of 360 (20% of Unit 1 completers).

Feedback on placements

3.41 Of those volunteers who have progressed to Unit 2/3 of the training programme two-thirds (67%) had been on placement at the time of the survey. Supporters were asked to rate the quality of their placement on a four point scale. **Table 3.8** below shows how those respondents who had been on a placement perceive the quality of their placements. The majority rate it as either “excellent” or “good”.

Table 3.8: Quality of Placement % of volunteers been on placement (n=134)	
	%
Excellent	47
Good	45
OK, neither good nor poor	6
Poor	2

3.42 The types of learners supported on placement were wide-ranging, including:

- young offenders (including drug rehabilitation);
- women prisoners;
- soldiers;
- people with mental health problems;
- people who have dyslexia;
- people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- people for whom English is their second language.

3.43 The volunteers were asked to state the most enjoyable aspects of their placements. The following comments illustrate the responses, the majority of which related to the experience of working with the learners:

- *“Enjoyed practical experience of working with real learners.”*
- *“Learning myself, whilst helping the learner.”*
- *“Gaining insight and experience – putting theory into practice.”*
- *“Working with students on a one to one basis. The teacher was very supportive.”*

3.44 The volunteers were then asked to make any suggestions as to how the placements should be changed. Many commented that “nothing” should be changed, and other comments were that the teachers needed to be more prepared for the Link Up Supporters, and that the placements themselves should offer more continuity:

- *“Teachers need a clearer briefing on Link Up and should have a skills and study pack to work through with the trainee.”*
- *“Greater direction, support and continuity of students”.*
- *“More clarity about what I was supposed to be doing – this was confused and so I did not get the best from it. More clarity is needed for both Link Up Supporters and teacher you’re working with.”*

Accreditation

3.45 City and Guilds provide the accreditation for the Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support (ALS). Some projects either needed to develop their own accredited centre status or work via a partner that could provide this role. Where pilot providers had C&G accredited centre status (particularly those based in FE colleges) they also had to get strand approval to run the 9296 ALS course. The majority of projects have needed to develop their systems and processes of tracking trainees and their progress in the submission of assignments and personal development journals. Even where the project was not the accredited centre, they have needed to develop these systems to ensure effective monitoring of progress.

3.46 The vast majority of projects report experiencing a considerable time lapse between the submission of portfolios for assessment and final feedback from City and Guilds. This slower than expected process of assessment has meant that several projects report that they have ‘lost’ some LUSs who were frustrated by the lack of progress. However, in most cases pilot areas have been able to maintain contact with LUSs to help maintain momentum.

3.47 Pilot projects also report that the delay in accreditation has caused them to hold back the progress of some LUSs, wanting to ensure that Unit 1 accreditation was achieved before allowing progression to the next stage in the training programme.

Literacy and Numeracy Requirements

3.48 There are no entry requirements for those seeking to take the Unit 1 accreditation. However, Link Up Supporters that are seeking to achieve the Level 2 certificate in ALS are required to demonstrate that their own literacy and numeracy skills are at Level 2.

3.49 Three of the six case study projects reported that the requirement for LUS to demonstrate their own personal literacy and numeracy skills at level 2 had had an impact on the engagement and progression of some supporters who may have had personal skills below this level. In these cases, the need for the Level 2 personal skills requirement was also questioned by some, particularly in those organisations with less prior experience in *skills for life* delivery.

3.50 The other three case study projects reported that the literacy and numeracy skills requirement was not an issue for their supporters and recognised such skills were important for supporting Skills for Life learners. At Deerbolt prison and the Stoke project, the project managers report that few LUS have needed to take the test. At Low Newton Prison the vast majority of LUS have taken the test and the requirement is promoted in a positive way within the programme in that “(it) *also helps the supporters know what learners will be going through and how they will feel about the tests*”.

3.51 Link Up Central has worked with the pilot projects to re-affirm the purpose of the Level 2 requirement and assist pilots to develop their own capacity to support and refer Link Up Supporters that need to demonstrate or develop their literacy and numeracy skills to Level 2. This has included improving awareness of and access to *skills for life provision* and the National qualifications in Adult Literacy and Numeracy. In total, across all pilots, over 600 Link Up Supporters have achieved Level 2 Adult Literacy or Numeracy qualifications to date. This indicates that overall, the pilots have been able to explain the need for this requirement and support LUS to access provision where necessary and achieve accreditation. However, the issues raised above also indicate that the need for the Level 2 personal skills requirement the needs to be clearly understood by those organisations seeking to offer Link Up in the future.

Sustaining Link Up

3.52 **Table 3.9** outlines key issues faced by pilot project managers in relation to the sustainability of Link Up beyond August 2004. Some providers are familiar with LSC funding around *Skills for Life*. Others are more familiar with other funding options linked to ESF or community regeneration.

3.53 The comments in Table 3.9 illustrate that the main issues relating to the sustainability of funding are as follows:

- a lack of understanding about the range of funding options available;

- a lack of linkage to or dialogue with strategic partners regarding local targets and the *Skills for Life* infrastructure, and therefore the appropriate 'fit' of Link Up activity;
- the risk of delivery being taken within one organisation (a college), potentially limiting the opportunities to work across areas with a wider range of delivery partners;
- the potential loss of experienced trainers from the pool of Link Up trainers;
- the lack of funding for the support elements, Unit 1 only training and childcare costs;
- difficulty of repeated short term contracts: the cost of bidding and high turnover of staff.

3.54 At the time at which the evaluation fieldwork was undertaken (October 2003 to February 2004) the future arrangements for Link Up were not clear. In late February, transitional arrangements were put in place to centrally support the pilot projects for the period April to July 2004. Furthermore, it was agreed that there would be no central funding for Link Up, but that the value of the Link Up model should be disseminated and local partners encouraged to develop a Link Up programme within the context of existing *Skills for Life* (and other related) strategies.

3.55 To this end ABSSU funded the BSA and partners have run a series of regional dissemination events. These events invited LLSCs, Learning Partnerships, voluntary sector network reps and others representing potential providers. The focus of future development is seeking to embed the development of Link Up within existing strategies at the local level to ensure that any Link Up type programme retains the successful features of the Link Up pilots, and is clearly focused on meeting needs that have already been identified within localities.

4 EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT

Engagement of employers and frontline staff

Degree of focus on employers

- 4.1 Pilot projects have had a varied approach to the direct engagement of employers. For example, targeting employers to train frontline workers as signposters was not a key focus of the work of the Army and Prisons projects. The project based in Camden contacted a range of employers to distribute information about the Link Up training, but did not take the approach adopted by the Penwith, Stoke and Sheffield projects. These projects worked to engage senior managers to negotiate release and set up of training for frontline staff. In some of the other pilot areas, notably Birmingham, the main focus of recruitment activity has been via the employer/frontline worker route.

Types of employers engaged

- 4.2 The type of employers engaged includes a wide range of public sector employers, including the following sectors: health, employment, training, early years/Sure Start and libraries. In addition, pilot projects have engaged a range of voluntary and community organisations to train their staff and volunteers, with the aim of improving the skills and knowledge of those working on the 'frontline' with clients and service users. A small number of private sector employers have also been engaged.

Effective engagement strategies

- 4.3 Project managers have developed a wide range of marketing and sales activities. Key successes are noted in terms of targeting specific sectors, e.g. healthcare, education and training, early years, Jobcentre Plus, prisons and probation, libraries, museums and galleries, Connexions and Careers Guidance. All of these sectors have their own specific *Skills for Life* targets. Tailoring marketing messages has enabled the Link Up project to focus on how Link Up can support the *Skills for Life* related goals of each organisation type.

4.4 Projects also find that successful initial approaches to employers are those that are integrated with other events or materials (rather than setting up one off activities). There has been less focus on promoting Link Up to private sector employers, however tapping into volunteering programmes (where these exist) has proved successful in a small number of cases. One example includes work with a utility provider in the North East of England. As part of their corporate social responsibility, strategy, staff are encouraged to seek out volunteering opportunities in their local community. This has led to four members of staff attending the Link Up training, and two are now regular classroom supporters in one of the local prisons. The experience of working with Link Up has also extended the possibility of the employers working on other joint projects with the prison.

4.5 Pilot projects and employers note the value of face-to-face contacts with managers and staff to engage them in the process. Participants also indicate the value of involving a manager in the training to help raise awareness, and gain commitment for Link Up activity. As one employer noted:

- *“I (the manager) and three staff have taken part in the training. Also one admin support staff member has taken part in the training (but in her own time). The talk by the project manager really inspired people. The talk was also useful, as others who attended the talk are now aware of Link Up, even if they choose not to take part.”*

Issues faced in engaging employers

4.6 The main issues faced by pilots in engaging frontline workers via approaching employers included:

- some lack of clarity about what the training could offer staff and the organisation, and how the signposter or Adult Learner Supporter roles can be appropriately embedded within these roles;
- securing staff release or resourcing cover whilst staff are on Link Up training;
- keeping employers up to date on the activities of staff taking part in training, and the reporting back on the value of the LUS activity in the workplace.

Frontline workers roles

4.7 The following table, **Table 4.1**, illustrates the types of ‘frontline’ roles of those taking part in Link Up.

Table 4.1
Examples of frontline worker roles

Tenant led community learning project

This project offers tasters to engage people in learning in rural and isolated communities. Staff needed training in *Skills for Life* awareness and support as provision can be delivered on site if needed. The job role includes advising people on where to go next, helping them to action plan, and to overcome barriers to learning. Staff have a wide range of backgrounds including social work, to those that have worked with adult education groups, whilst others are community based, or involved in resident groups and associations.

Befriending service

The organisation trains and supports volunteers who provide practical help and befriending to anyone in a family where there is at least one child under five years old. Volunteers undertake 40 hours of training in listening skills, learning and training and child protection. The service identifies the wide range of needs of service users and then places a volunteer with them. The organisation has previous involvement with local *Skills for Life* providers in terms of signposting people there, but this has been little more than providing a contact number.

Jobcentre Plus

The main rationale for involvement is to help advisers in approaching clients, and make them more aware of individuals' needs. This office has not been achieving the targets set by senior managers for basic skills referrals. Link Up was seen as a way to help advisers address customer barriers, and give them the confidence to do so.

Supporting BME employment

Link Up is seen as an extension of the Liaison Officers role in this project, which supports people from BME communities into work, including accessing learning and training opportunities. Three staff and seven volunteers have taken part in Link Up.

Community learning assistant

The organisation has six full time members of staff and eighteen Community Learning Assistants. Their aim is to raise the profile of adult learning in the area by encouraging adults to return to learning. The organisation has had no previous experience of working in the field of *Skills for Life* provision, although the literacy and numeracy needs of clients were recognised.

Delivery of training to frontline workers

- 4.8 In some cases pilot projects have been able to deliver a Link Up course to a group of employees from the same organisation. Where this is the case, this has provided an opportunity for the training materials to be contextualised. This does require additional resources, however it is greatly valued in those cases where it has taken place.

4.9 Conversely, where the staff have attended ‘open’ courses, that include people from other organisations and individuals not in work, a small number of employers have noted that this more generic training did not meet the needs of their staff. Noticeably, this was from two Jobcentre Plus managers, who noted that they had already provided *Skills for Life* awareness training for their advisers. As such the Unit 1 training did not provide them with new knowledge. However, the same employers noted that the Unit 1 of the Link Up training did provide staff with a changed attitude towards those with literacy, language and numeracy skills needs.

The added value of Link Up training
“Link Up took the volunteers through exercises that the Jobcentre’s own training did not cover. It put them in the shoes of the individuals and made them more appreciative of individuals needs. I cannot necessarily attribute this to Link Up but the situation has improved and staff are achieving their basic skills referrals targets more easily”.

Jobcentre Plus manager

4.10 Another employer noted the value, especially for community organisations of mixed groups and shared training.

The value of mixed training groups
“What’s been nice too was that those who have undertaken the training have met with other local agencies who are also trying to do the same kind of thing so it’s been a good bit of networking and common training. It helps to show everybody is working towards the same standard”

Community Development Project Manager

4.11 Some employers have provided time off to train, as the Link Up training has been seen as integral to the job role. However, other employers have not been in a position to release staff for training due to the cost of providing cover for these staff. In these cases, staff have attended training in their own time.

Impact

Impact on job role, employer and community

4.12 **Table 4.2** below shows the responses from the LUS survey on supporters’ own perspective of impact on their job role and workplace.

Table 4.2: Rating of impact on job role, and employer % of volunteers¹⁸

	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
Job/volunteering role					
More job satisfaction (n=348)	37	35	24	2	2
Other work/service targets met (n=326)	14	40	40	1	5
Better links to other projects (n=335)	25	41	31	2	1
Other impacts (n=180)	23	22	51	1	3
Employer or voluntary org					
More aware of basic skills needs of clients (n=349)	59	32	7	1	1
Better able to support clients/service users (n=341)	54	33	11	2	1
Other impacts at work (n=130)	18	22	55	2	4

4.13 For those in work, or volunteering, over 70% agree that Link Up will impact positively on their job satisfaction and help provide better links to other relevant *Skills for Life* projects. Fewer respondents agree that Link Up training will directly impact on achieving work or service targets, although over 50% believe that this is the case. The main other impacts described as strongly impacting on their job role were, a better understanding of people’s needs and the opportunity to provide a better service to clients/service users and improving personal career objectives, as illustrated by the following comments:

- *“Will enable me to better support staff with poor literacy skills so that they in turn can provide a better service to parents and families.”*
- *“Improved career prospects (basic skills teaching).”*

4.14 For those in work or volunteering, over 87% of respondents agree that in the workplace, Link Up training has improved their awareness of the potential literacy, numeracy or language needs of clients/service users and their ability to support these people. “Other” impacts that they strongly agreed would impact in the workplace, relate to increased focus on the *Skills for Life* strategy and better networking:

- *“All staff geared up to taking basic skills issues very seriously.”*
- *“Networking/know where to get info/help.”*

¹⁸ Base: volunteers who provided a response to each question.

4.15 The vast majority of employers interviewed noted positive impacts on frontline services or their organisation as a result of involvement in Link Up. Some of these benefits relate to the development of community networks and linkages. These are discussed further in the following section. Here we report on the benefits to frontline services. The following feedback from a manager of a family befriending service illustrates the ways in which the majority of employers noted improvements:

Impact on frontline services

“It is really good for the families, it opens up more opportunities to offer them, and it is really good for the volunteers improving their skills and encouraging them to develop. It helps volunteers to understand the difficulties the families face increasing understanding of the needs of parents with children and how poor literacy and numeracy of the parent can impact on the child”.

Befriending Service manager

4.16 Although very positive about the training, the same manager sees the potential for further development as follows:

Building on initial training for signposters

Knowing how to offer more opportunities for clients is a slow process. The volunteer will need to build up their relationship so that they are in a good position to broach the subject. They also need to build their local knowledge to be able to provide a personal recommendation to the families – to know about how supportive the provider is and the types of materials they'll have access to.

Befriending Service manager

4.17 Employers also noted the value to their staff of the involvement in Link Up through the recognition of staff's own literacy and numeracy needs, and access to routes to address these.

Helping volunteers develop their literacy, numeracy or language skills

“Link Up also enabled the volunteers themselves to be open and upfront about their own needs – we had two with basic skills needs themselves who were helped to take the tests and were pleased about getting the accreditation”.

4.18 Participation in the Link Up training had, as the employer described, a *'fundamental'* impact on frontline services.

Impact of Link Up on service delivery

“Without the training the staff there wouldn't necessarily have picked up how important it was for our clients to actually address their *Skills for Life* issues. There have been three or four young parents that regularly come to the drop ins that we run that are taster sessions. It became quite clear that they were finding it difficult when they were given any written instructions but I don't think staff had been aware that they had basic skills needs. So now we have been able to contact our local *Skills for Life* provider to come into our unit based on one of the housing estates. The provider can give more individual attention and the Link Up Supporters can be here with them. That has worked really well. Without the Link Up training it would have been hard to identify that as a specific need for the group.

Community based adult learning project

Impact of Link Up on underpinning service targets

“Link Up has really made the organisation think differently about the way it presents things and approaches clients etc. The whole organisation has taken Link Up to it's core. There have been a number of internal dissemination events and people are asking questions and coming forward as a result. Link Up can clearly help us meet one of our national targets “strengthening communities”.

Sure Start Manager

Impact of Link Up on achieving service targets

Link Up has helped a local social enterprise project to hit their own service targets. Supporting vulnerable clients into work in the social enterprise and then moving them on into 'open' employment is one of their main objectives. Often people were too used to working in the organisation and were reluctant to move on. Staff from the organisation trained as LUS. They reported back to their Board and made the case for basic skills training to be delivered for employees. This training has helped a couple of the staff to develop skills and the confidence to move on into open employment and so enabling the organisation to take on more staff.

Link Up pilot manager

4.19 The feedback from both supporters and employers shows that Link Up has had a positive and sometimes very strong impact on both the frontline workers' job role and the organisation in which they work. This has been driven by the work of those pilot projects who have worked hard to identify with employers and managers how Link Up training can add value to frontline job roles, and organisations own objectives

Future Link Up activity

- 4.20 All but one of the employers interviewed expressed interest in future contact with Link Up. All of those interested indicated that they currently have, or will have other staff that would benefit from the Link Up training. In some cases, these are staff in other teams or departments. Half of the employers interested in future contact noted that they expected their involvement to be fairly 'low key' in terms of referring staff, volunteers or service users to Link Up. The remainder, however, wanted to see more sustained links to ensure that Link Up training and the signposting or supporting role was effectively embedded within the work of the organisation.

Ongoing demand for Link Up training

"It needs to be long-term as there are always going to be new staff needing to develop their basic skills awareness and skills. The basic skills agenda is huge and Link Up works really well in getting in with the voluntary and community sector. Its strength will be lost if it is swallowed up by the FE sector and loses this vital link – it won't link up at all!" **Community project employer**

- 4.21 All of the employers working in community-based settings also noted that they have a steady turnover of staff/volunteers. One employer aims to introduce Link Up as part of their induction training programme, so that new staff could more effectively build *Skills for Life* awareness and signposting into their job role.
- 4.22 The majority of frontline staff involved in Link Up had completed Unit 1 (signposting) only. A quarter of the employers interviewed deliver or host community based training or learning activity and all of these organisations saw a continued need for at least some of their staff to progress their training through Units 2 and 3 and ALS Level 2 accreditation. In these cases, the employers noted the value of the community based, flexibility and supportive approach of the Link Up pilots. Several expressed concern that if the Level 2 was offered by an FE college in a more formal setting, that this would present barrier to progression for some of their staff.
- 4.23 The employers interviewed noted the value added of the Link Up project in terms of the support, encouragement and advice that the Link Up project staff provided for Link Up Supporters.

5 VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

Voluntary and community organisations engaged

- 5.1 A core feature of the Link Up programme has been the development of activity at the community level. This has been driven in part by:
- the selection of the 18 areas in which community based projects were chosen. This was via an analysis of indices of deprivation and areas with low levels of adult literacy and numeracy;
 - the recruitment and selection of organisations to deliver the local pilots;
 - the focus of activity by pilot projects in engaging a wide range of community based organisations to identify 'frontline' workers or community based volunteers.
- 5.2 The recruitment and selection process targeted voluntary and community sector networks, and encouraged bids from a wide range of organisations. These included FE colleges (their community outreach teams), community/voluntary sector organisations (several without experience of *Skills for Life* delivery, but with a strong track record in volunteer recruitment and supports), and a number of training providers including one private provider.

Pilot projects and their engagement of voluntary and community organisations

Degree of focus on the voluntary and community sector

- 5.3 The previous section noted that pilot projects varied in their approach to activity with employers. In contrast to this, all but two of the pilot projects had a strong focus on engaging voluntary and community organisations.
- 5.4 The pilots that were less directly involved in engaging community organisations were the Army and Prisons. In these cases their main focus of activity has been on the recruitment of volunteers amongst, for example, prison staff, prisoners, army personnel and civilians. Even within these projects, pilots did extend to include some activity to engage 'external' supporters, through contacting organisations such as the volunteer bureau. However, in one particular case, a prison governor was not willing to promote the recruitment of external volunteers for security reasons.

Type of voluntary and community organisations engaged

- 5.5 The type of voluntary and community organisations contacted and engaged by Link Up is exceedingly varied. They cover a wide range of sector activity from volunteer bureaux to those organisations offering community based services to a broad range of client groups, including ex-offenders, community learning, employment, BME focused projects and those working with people with mental and physical disabilities.

Perspectives of impact on the local community

- 5.6 The LUS surveyed were asked to comment on the impact of Link Up on the communities in which they live or work. **Table 5.1** shows that just under two thirds of all respondents to the LUS survey agreed that Link Up has had a positive impact on their community.

Table 5.1: Rating of Link Up impact % of volunteers¹⁹					
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
Community					
Better partnerships between local agencies (n=318)	22	39	36	2	1
Improved services for local people (n=331)	31	41	26	2	1
Other community impacts (n=138)	16	19	60	1	4

- 5.7 The “other” impacts they strongly agreed Link Up would impact on were:
- *“Confidence building for volunteers themselves and greater feeling of belonging/responsibility in/for community.”*
 - *“Two-way referral to help others to solve their problems.”*
- 5.8 At a more general level, participants in Link Up note that its key strength has been its focus on engaging supporters from local communities (specific feedback from *Skills for Life* providers is reported in the following section). Other stakeholders commented as follows:

¹⁹ Base: volunteers who provided a response to each question.

Delivering Link Up in the community

“Link Up has got people in the community helping people the same as themselves. People will take advice more so from somebody who is a friend or somebody who works in their community, more than they perhaps would from somebody from outside or a college. We've taken the training all over, to lots of different places like community centres and that makes it different. Also the community supports you, it pulls people back together. This is a key achievement.”

Link Up Pilot Manager

- 5.9 An employer, whose staff work in a community learning programme notes that training staff in Link Up has helped improve the quality of their service to community based clients:

Developing high quality provision in the community, improving partnership working between community projects and *Skills for Life* providers

“It's also changed our relationship with our local *Skills for Life* provider. When we first came into operation we thought we would be running *Skills for Life* programmes. Actually we have been able to signpost because I think the (Link Up) training has given us the sense that what's important is getting specialists to deliver those kinds of services. And with that interface, we can bring the people together. We have got the community base, and the *Skills for Life* provider has worked really well with us, so that's been a huge positive. Realistically I think it would be hard for our *Skills for Life* provider, although they are a community focused organisation, to get out and meet individual learners in the way that we do, so it's provided quite a nice synergy - a two pronged approach to the same problem”.

Community Learning Project Manager

Working in BME Communities

- 5.10 Specific activity within the Link Up programme encouraged pilots to place a focus on engaging volunteers from black or ethnic minority (BME) communities. One pilot worked with their local Racial Equality Council (REC) to achieve this.
- 5.11 The co-ordinator of the REC noted that the project had had a very positive impact on their local community, raising the profile of *Skills for Life* agenda, and generating a higher level of demand for training than could actually be met during the lifetime of the project.

Developing BME community awareness and capacity

“*Skills for Life* is a new area for the REC to become involved in. The REC manages a project called Race in to Work, supporting people from local BME communities into employment. The REC has trained 10 people (3 staff and 7 volunteers) in Link Up. I see Link Up as an alternative route to learning for people who want to engage in volunteering. It's informal which is very relevant to BME communities. The REC was involved in the recruitment of 10 LUS from the BME community and found them placements. Our staff supported them while they were doing the training. Retention was critical and the support of the workers was the key factor in successfully achieving this. The REC is very positive about the impact of the Link Up project on the local BME community. There was much greater demand for Link Up training than we were able to fill, demonstrating a good level of demand and need for this role within local BME communities. Link Up has opened up the issue of basic skills within these communities and there are many community activists/volunteers who could work effectively in this role. Having the Link Up project and BME volunteers also helps learners to come forward as a barrier to engagement is the perception that there is no-one from their community involved in delivery.”

Racial Equality Council Project Co-ordinator

- 5.12 Similarly a Sure Start project that has been involved in Link Up noted the reach and relevance of Link Up to communities in which they work, and the specific targets that they are working towards under the banner of ‘strengthening communities’.

Underpinning ‘strengthening communities’ targets

“Sure Start sub-contract through other organisations, 39 in total. Education is the lead body working with others including health, MIND, Psychology Dept., Pre-school Learning Alliance, EYDCP and other voluntary organisations. The Sure Start project has 16 staff that have taken part in Link Up – 8 each time. The team were aware that locally, 60% of their clients leave school with no qualifications and the link to unemployment for many of the clients that they work with. We have a strong volunteers programme, however, have not had any links with basic skills provision before. Everyone involved in the training was very positive. It is almost too early to say how this is feeding through to clients, but it has definitely helped to make staff and volunteers sensitive to needs and less judgemental about the issues some people face. We can really see how Link Up will help us achieve our ‘strengthening communities’ targets.”

Sure Start Manager

6 FEEDBACK FROM PLACEMENT PROVIDERS AND LEARNERS

Engaging placement providers

- 6.1 Five of the pilot projects were based in colleges delivering *Skills for Life* provision. Similarly, the Army and Prisons based projects also had 'in-house' *Skills for Life* provision and therefore direct links to placement opportunities. Of the remaining pilots, half were already working closely in partnership with one provider (who was also delivering the Link Up training). The remainder of the pilot projects needed to develop new working relationships with a range of providers to offer placements to their Link Up Supporters.
- 6.2 Section Four reported on the activity undertaken by the case study pilot projects to engage placements and some of the issues arising. Feedback from the other pilot areas identified the following key lessons learned:
- sourcing variety of placement opportunities is a challenge, but also reaps rewards in terms of developing a range of opportunities to match LUS with placement settings that suit their own interests and life-experiences;
 - a bank of potential placements needs to be established, using *Skills for Life* provider networks. A range of providers can offer an interesting variety of placements and settings;
 - there is a need to target organisations who may have specific placements for target groups;
 - establish with the placement organisations the exact nature of the placement. Some may only want supporters for the duration of the training, others may want them to continue volunteering as an ALS and others may want supporters who wish to progress on to Level 3 or further;
 - encourage placements to interview Supporters and not just rely on Link Up to do so and develop policy/protocol with the provider on this. A good practice guide on placements was developed by the Stockton and Middlesbrough pilot project.

Experience of working with supporters

- 6.3 Five of the Link Up projects were located within FE colleges, for example one project was located in the community learning unit that has been delivering literacy, numeracy and language in the community for many years. In addition, the unit had extensive experience of having supporters in class and training volunteers through pre-existing basic skills adult learner support training²⁰. In this example, the placement provider had well established policy and practices for working with volunteers, however, half of the placement providers interviewed had no previous experience of working with volunteers in their *Skills for Life* provision. In these cases, the Link Up pilot project had much more work to do in order to:
- identify specific placement opportunities;
 - ensure that teaching staff with appropriate levels of qualification were undertaking the placement observation;
 - develop the process by which volunteers are matched to placements;
 - developing four-way communication between the placement teacher, placement provider manager, volunteer and Link Up project staff.
- 6.4 In some cases placements were seen as solely part of the accreditation process. However, in many cases, placement providers have seen the potential for developing the placement into a longer term volunteering opportunity, and a way of increasing the capacity of community based provision in particular. This has raised the importance of matching supporters to their placement.

Matching supporters to learners

“This project has not had volunteers supporting provision prior to Link Up. The manager interviews all the prospective volunteers to ensure that they are capable of working with the client group who are ex-offenders and many are also drug users - we need to be sure that the supporter is aware and confident to work in this environment. We first became involved in August 2003 and have had 7 volunteers, 3 of whom have continued volunteering after their placement has finished.”

Ex-offender training project

- 6.5 For those providers that have not had clear policy or procedure in place to support and review the activity of supporters, involvement in Link Up has promoted the provider to consider options for increasing the number of supporters they use, and of strengthening their own policy and procedures for working with volunteers.

²⁰ Notably, the City and Guilds '928' series

Improving approaches to volunteer support and review

“This provider has previously had other volunteer classroom supporters but did not have any clear policies regarding the placement, review, handling complaints etc with classroom supporters. Previously, this has just been dealt with as and when needed. Having had Link Up Supporters, we are now in discussions with them to take on more supporters and aim to develop a more structured review of LUS on placement and put checks in place to make sure the LUS are getting the most out of their experience.”

Adult education provider

Embedding the supporter role within delivery

- 6.6 For those providers with a long track record of training and working with volunteers, there were few reported difficulties in working with Link Up Supporters. As one experienced placement provider noted “*a good teacher volunteer relationship is the key to effectiveness, without that it is very difficult*”. In some cases, projects, supporters and providers report that there has not been effective communication between the teacher and supporter. This can be attributed to a number of issues. For those teachers that have not had previous experience of working with supporters, the ‘arrival’ of a volunteer has in some instances been seen as an imposition if the process has not been well introduced and clear roles established. In some cases, teachers reported that they had little information about the Link Up Supporter role. Several projects provided briefings for placement providers and these were passed on to teachers to explain Link Up. This information provided detail about the wider project, in addition to information about the requirements of the accreditation/observation process.

Examples of placement activity

- 6.7 The following are illustrations of the ways in which placement managers describe how Link Up Supporters have operated with teachers in the classroom.

<p>Numeracy Entry level 3 supporter</p> <p>“The Link Up Supporter is a full part of the classroom, she has stayed on with us after her placement finished. She is a peer for the learners, she lives locally and is very approachable. The relationship with the learners is excellent, they respect her and get on well with her.”</p>
<p>Literacy mixed level from Entry level 2 to Level 1 supporter</p> <p>“The teacher and the supporter have established a good way of working, the supporter’s role is to help those individuals who need a bit more help particularly with spelling, punctuation and dictionary work.”</p>
<p>ESOL supporter</p> <p>“We have a wide range of classes every week, ESOL, literacy and computing. A lot of our clients have English language needs. The relationship with the LUS has worked very well. They seem well supported and come every week, unlike several of the volunteers we have had in the past. This continuity helps to encourage the learners.”</p>
<p>ESOL and computing supporter</p> <p>“The LUS leads on some group exercises where the teacher feels their knowledge or experience adds value to the class, but mainly they (the LUS) provide 1-1 support for the 2-3 people who most need it in the class.”</p>
<p>Pre-entry literacy and numeracy supporter</p> <p>“In a cookery course for learners with severe learning disabilities each learner has a social services helper or volunteer. The Link Up Supporter fulfils this role for one of the learners – to support her with practical side of cookery, to maintain hygiene and behavioural standards and to support her with language and numeracy. The supporter also provides general support to the group.”</p>
<p>Entry to Employment (E2E) supporter</p> <p>“Initially the learners were unsure about these 'strangers' but they are now so used to them they are part of the team. It gives the teacher a chance to concentrate on other things. Having male volunteers in the group has been important – they are good role models.”</p>

The Quality of Support

- 6.8 In most cases the placement providers (managers and teachers) were very positive about the contribution that the Link Up Supporters have made (see below for the specific impacts reported by providers). The two providers that have a track record in training their own volunteers reported that the quality of support was similar to that which they had previously. More widely, however, providers felt that the quality of supporters was high and in many cases their experience of working with Link Up volunteers was better than previous experiences. One provider noted the following:

- *“(Link Up Supporters are) different in two ways: LUS are much more experienced (in life) and aware of the new curriculum, generally this is much better. However, the others had to teach a particular learner but these (Link Up Supporters) can only support. 9281 training required supporters to made decisions on resources and teach. Overall, however Link Up Supporters help to attract learners that we otherwise would not have contact with, which is great”.*

6.9 Another provider, based in a rural area, with a long track record in recruiting and training classroom supporters noted:

- *“We have been doing this for years and thought we had exhausted all avenues (for recruiting supporters), but we have been really impressed by how Link Up has been able to find people that we have had no contact with before”.*

6.10 The providers interviewed had placed 53 supporters and reported instances in three cases where the supporter needed additional support. In these three cases all were working with vulnerable groups or pre-entry level learners with learning difficulties. The placement providers noted that the ongoing development and review of performance of the supporters needed to be clearly addressed and this could be an ongoing role for the Link Up project.

6.11 One placement provider noted that having a central point (Link Up) responsible for the placement of supporters in local provision was a useful mechanism whereby quality and consistency could be enhanced.

Learner feedback

6.12 The evaluation generated feedback from 54 learners that have been supported by Link Up Supporters, either as part of their placement or where supporters are now in a longer-term volunteering/classroom supporter role. The learners interviewed were involved in a wide range of *Skills for Life* provision including literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes.

6.13 **Table 6.1** shows the characteristics of a sample of 10 of these learners and illustrates the range of learners supported.

**Table 6.1:
Sample of learners supported by Link Up Supporters**

Learner example 1	78 year old white British male
Learner example 2	30 year old white British female learner with severe physical disability
Learner example 3	31 year old white British female jobseeker, dyslexic
Learner example 4	55 year old white British male part time employee
Learner example 5	40 year old white British male with a learning disability
Learner example 6	30 year old Afro Caribbean woman, ex-offender
Learner example 7	58 year old white British female with severe learning disability
Learner example 8	27 year old white British male jobseeker, ESOL learner
Learner example 9	45 year old white British female jobseeker with mild learning difficulties
Learner example 10	34 year old white British female jobseeker

6.14 The feedback from learners was very positive about the role of the supporter, both in supporting their progression and in helping teachers to meet the needs of the class. Teacher feedback on the benefits of Link Up Supporters is reported later in this section.

6.15 The key messages from the learner interviews were as follows:

- learners come from a wide range of backgrounds and with a wide range of support needs;
- Link Up Supporters assist in providing one-to-one support for specific learners in the class in which they are supporting. In some cases this is one individual, but in most cases this is a small sub-group (perhaps 3 or 4 learners) within a larger class, and are available to the learner as and when they need them;
- supporters are also helping learners outside of class in terms of progressing class related goals, for example we see below an example of help to a learner to enter a writing competition;
- learners value the input from supporters in terms of repeating activities and exercises with them to help reinforce learning, this helps to build confidence.

6.16 **Table 6.2** illustrates, for each of these 10 examples how, and in what context, the LUS works with the learner, and the benefits that the learner has reported.

Table 6.2: Examples of how a LUS works with learners	
Example 1	I struggle with writing due to pain from a brain tumour. The LUS provides one-to-one support with computers (saving and retrieving documents) and also with grammar, prompting ideas, discussing ideas. Learning has helped me with my confidence and has brought me out of myself. I have really enjoyed it and been surprised at what I have achieved.
Example 2	The LUS provides one-to-one support during class and at other times. He writes and types for me and helps me with my reading. He helped me enter a literacy competition at the local library and to stand up and read the piece. I wouldn't have done it without attending the class and receiving support from the LUS.
Example 3	The LUS helps with reading, making sense of sentences, grammar, spelling. Due to my dyslexia I find it difficult to remember things, so the LUS helps by going over things again so that I am more likely to remember. The help from the LUS has given me more confidence. When I first came on the course I was very on-edge, now I have settled in more and don't find it as difficult to read out in class. Eventually I want to be a classroom supporter in schools. I feel as I was left on the shelf as a child and want to offer similar kids help and support.
Example 4	I work as a kitchen porter in a care home and live with my wife and daughter. I was Entry Level 2 assessment and am currently on a general basic skills course. I wanted to do the course to improve writing and reading, get help with my dyslexia and learn key words for work. I also want to be able to help my daughter with her homework. The LUS has provided support on a one-to-one basis – reading, writing, spelling, punctuation and help with completing exercises. I hope to do a number course in the near future.
Example 5	Learner 5 suffers from learning disability/difficulty and lives in a residential care home and works part time in sheltered employment nearby. He is currently on a general basic skills course and has attended the (community learning) centre for nine years. The LUS provides one-to-one support in the classroom/group setting as well as support and encouragement with exercises, reading, typing, punctuation, spelling etc. The teachers stress that having a supporter enables the learner to participate in the class and become more independent in his learning activities, such as in choosing learning resources.

Table 6.2: Examples of how a LUS works with learners

Example 6	I started a degree many years ago but never finished it and don't have a job. I really need to get my language better in order to move on. I want to get a job, to support my children and to help with my theatre studies. The LUS works with us individually on our spelling and grammar and helps us be clear about what we are doing. She was introduced as someone to help us out – we are allowed to ask her when we need help and she will sit with us as long as we need. The learning has increased my confidence, especially in supporting my children. Also, it is helping me with my theatre studies, I might do Level 2 (NVQ) and that will mean doing assignments.
Example 7	The supporter provides 1:1 support to the learner. She helps generally with practical cookery tasks and support with language (nouns: naming ingredients and implements and cookery related verbs, stirring etc). The supporter is beginning to build a relationship with the learner. The supporter has helped the learner to be involved in the group and be more independent in her learning.
Example 8	Speaks Turkish as her first language and is at Entry Level 1. "The LUS works with us individually and is someone to talk to about worries about learning. She helps with putting sentences together, spelling and using a dictionary. I feel better that I am trying to improve myself and hope that it will help me to get a job in the long run. The supporter is really friendly and nice. She just sits down beside you and helps out when you need it."
Example 9	I want to learn how to write better, I want to write plays for fun and need to improve grammar and spelling. The supporter works with us individually, particularly helping me with my spelling and grammar – my sentences are really bad and she helps me make them better. It has helped a lot with my other learning [theatre studies] although I have a long way to go. Just having someone there to help and explain things. The teacher is great, but one person can't spend enough time with us all.
Example 10	The volunteer works with us on the parts we find difficult. She has helped a lot with my writing. I'm writing a sports bit for the student magazine. I feel much more confident and enjoy coming here. I can see that I am improving. She helped with sentences and vocabulary particularly – I can now be proud of what I write.

Improved learner progress and outcomes

6.17 All of the providers interviewed noted the value of Link Up Supporters in terms of improving the learning outcomes achieved by learners and in supporting learner progression. The following illustrate the range of responses given by teachers and provider managers on the observed benefits of having Link Up Supporters.

Broadening experience The LUS has brought a new perspective and interest into the class, as an additional literate adult, to discuss their views and be a role model for learners. Those at lower levels are progressing faster.
Providing a community role model The Link Up Supporters are local which is great, this helps lock learners in, they can see what people from their community can achieve.
Developing differentiated learning They (the teachers) have found the whole experience extremely beneficial. Teachers work with a group of between 8 and 15 learners, all referred by the Probation Service as part of probation orders. They have a wide range of learning support needs. Both of the teachers stated that having volunteers in the training has meant that they have been able to develop their differentiated learning and ensured those that need it, get additional support.
Faster progression More supporters has meant a greater level of support in class. This is evident in one area of provision where students have noticeably progressed faster with extra support, notably in spelling and grammar.
Faster completion The supporter enables a different dynamic, it has also meant for us that some learners can move through quicker than expected.
Progression on to other provision Learners' needs are more readily attended to by the support of a LUS and they therefore see this as a good place to come. Some learners who attended over the Summer when a LUS was volunteering have now carried on to take other courses.

Increasing the profile of the provider in the community

6.18 In addition to the value of Link Up Supporters in terms of improving the quality of experience for learners and helping to improve outcomes, several providers also noted that Link Up had helped their organisation develop its profile in their local communities. This had been achieved by:

- Link Up Supporters working in community organisations encouraging the 'brokering' of delivery in community settings;

- an improved learning experience encourages others to recommend courses to their friends and neighbours, thus increasing the centre's presence and profile in the community.

Future involvement with Link Up

6.19 Placement providers were asked about the future role for Link Up Supporters and the Link Up project. All but two indicated that they would be in a position to offer placements for Link Up Supporters in the future. One provider indicated that they were delivering their own Level 2 qualification and that placement opportunities would be offered to these 'internal' supporters. Another indicated that they had a small amount of provision and that their current LUS filled their demand for supporters.

6.20 The following illustrates the feedback from several placement providers on the future potential of Link Up.

Future of Link Up

I would like to see them mainstreamed (ie better linked into longer term funding and structures) but not to lose what is at the heart of it. It can't be delivered through colleges as this would be a barrier to many LUS. It needs central coordination to provide consistency in resources and good IAG for supporters so that they can think about next steps and access appropriate opportunities. Most LUS like belonging to Link Up, they like the brand and it helps tie them in. It contributes to them seeing Link Up as a 'professional' volunteering role. **FE College basic skills co-ordinator**

6.21 Overall, three key issues emerged regarding the future of Link Up from the perspective of the placement providers:

- the prospect of 'mainstreaming' delivery within colleges was viewed as a threat to the potential, in some cases, of Link Up maintaining strong community links, and its ability to source supporters from a wide range of communities and key target groups;
- a recognition of the value of Link Up providing co-ordination and support for LUS which helps to ensure a consistency of approach to the training, support and development of supporters across the local area;
- increasing confusion in the market place as to the 'competition' for participants on other Level 2 Adult Learner Support courses.

7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

- 7.1 In this section we summarise the evaluation findings and draw conclusions about the success of the programme, lessons learned and implications for the future.

Successful achievement of targets

- 7.2 The Link Up programme has successfully pioneered the development of the Level 2 Adult Learner Support qualification and recruited over 6,000 volunteers to take part in Link Up training. A survey of Link Up supporters in the six case study areas indicated that 70% were active in the LUS role. This figure includes many who were still taking part in the Link Up training programme. Further follow-up will be needed to identify the rate of activity in the longer term.
- 7.3 The reaching of this primary target is a significant achievement, given the delays that faced the project due to the work with DfES and QCA to develop the qualification specification for the Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support. This process was necessary to define the role of the volunteer and to ensure its fit within the *Skills for Life* teaching framework.
- 7.4 Specific strategies seeking to engage volunteers from minority ethnic communities have also been successful. Overall, 20% of Link Up Supporters are from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared to a profile of BME population of 8.2% across the pilot areas.
- 7.5 The pilot programme had a specific target to recruit volunteers aged 50+. In some pilots, including those based in workplaces (prisons and the Army) found this recruitment target somewhat difficult to achieve as their main pool of potential supporters were in other age groups. However, many pilots indicated how they had targeted organisations that work with older volunteers in order to seek to engage supporters from the 50+ age group. 18% of supporters profiled on the database are aged 50 or over, just below the target of 25% in this age group²¹.

²¹ The 6 Prisons and 1 Army based projects were less able to address this target as their core target groups of prison staff, prisoners and Army personnel had a much younger age profile.

Effectively supporting *skills for life* learners

- 7.6 Feedback from providers and learners indicates that the role of the LUS is valued in the classroom. This is articulated in a number of ways, notably
- broadening experience;
 - providing a community role model;
 - developing differentiated learning;
 - faster progression;
 - faster completion;
 - progression on to other provision.

Volunteers in deprived communities

- 7.7 The co-funding of the pilot programme by the Active Community Unit of the Home Office, placed a focus on engaging new volunteers into the Link Up programme, and focusing recruitment in deprived areas to ensure that the capacity developed by Link Up was focused on communities in greatest need. Link Up has been successful in achieving its target of recruiting LUS from target wards with 41% of supporters from the 18 community based projects living in these target areas.

New volunteers

- 7.8 Furthermore, Link Up has engaged a wide range of supporters that have never volunteered before, a total of 46% of supporters, many of whom are 'frontline' workers in public services.

Diverse range of delivery organisations

- 7.9 The organisations delivering Link Up themselves are diverse with different levels of background experience in community development, *Skills for Life* and volunteer recruitment.

Prior qualifications levels and National Test requirements

- 7.10 There are no entry requirements for those seeking to achieve Unit 1 accreditation of the Link Up training. Those seeking to complete the full Level 2 certificate in Adult Learner Support are required to evidence personal skills in literacy and numeracy at Level 2.

- 7.11 One half of Link Up Supporters who responded to the survey undertaken in case study areas did not have qualifications equivalent to the Level 2 adult literacy or numeracy qualifications on entry. In the case study areas Link Up helped just under half of these supporters to access *Skills for Life* provision and the National Tests.
- 7.12 Nationally, across the pilot programme 600 LUS, (or 20% of all supporters recruited without L2 attainment) have been supported by Link Up to take and achieve National Tests in Adult Literacy and/or Numeracy.
- 7.13 In some cases, the pilot providers noted that the requirement for LUS to demonstrate their own personal literacy and numeracy skills at level 2 has had an impact on the engagement and progression of some supporters who may have had personal skills below this level. However, other providers reported that the literacy and numeracy skills requirement was not an issue for their supporters and recognised such skills were important for supporting Skills for Life learners.
- 7.14 The Link Up Central team at the Basic Skills Agency has been encouraging and supporting local projects to
- ensure that the need for this requirement is clearly understood;
 - assist pilots to develop their own capacity to support and refer Link Up Supporters that need to demonstrate or develop their literacy and numeracy skills to Level 2;
 - improve understanding of the purpose of the Level 2 personal skills requirement and how this is explained to supporters;
 - encourage pilots to improve the way they refer and support LUS to access *skills for life* provision.
- 7.15 Link Up pilot projects have been improving the way in which they help those supporters that need to improve their personal skills to have access to *Skills for Life* teaching and support that they need. Overall, 600 LUS have achieved National Adult Literacy and or Numeracy qualifications as a result of the support given by their Link Up project.

Progression

- 7.16 The nationally recognised qualification (the Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support) and Link Up branding have been important factors in engaging supporters, employers and senior staff. Just over 60% of supporters want to progress on to Units 2/3 and complete the Level 2 qualification.

7.17 One third of LUS want to progress further to obtain *Skills for Life* teaching qualifications at Levels 3 or 4.

Satisfaction with training and placements

7.18 Satisfaction with the Link Up course, training delivery and materials is very high. The ability of projects to be clear on training opportunities and accreditation requirements has been affected, for some, by the availability of trainers and for many, on the changing assessment requirements.

7.19 The high level of demand to progress from Unit 1 to Units 2/3 has placed a huge potential demand on placements. Sourcing placements has been problematic, even where relationships with *Skills for Life* providers were well established. Projects have not been able to access the variety of placements that supporters would have liked, especially in community based *Skills for Life* provision.

7.20 The lack of placements to meet demand has led to frustration by supporters that have not been able to progress. Those that have been on placements were generally well satisfied with them. The criticisms of placements by supporters were mainly about the need for teachers to know more about Link Up and their role vis a vis teachers working with *Skills for Life* learners.

7.21 Where Link Up projects have been successful in sourcing placements and LUS report high levels of satisfaction with their placement, success factors include

- sourcing a wide range of placements to match LUS background/interest and learner/provision type;
- working with placement providers to agree protocols/policy on matching, briefing and reviewing LUS activity;
- briefing tutors about Link Up.

Impact on Frontline workers

7.22 Just under two third of supporters are in work. Half of these have been engaged as frontline workers, via dialogue with employers.

- 7.23 80% of supporters report that Link Up has improved their job satisfaction and awareness of clients/service users with literacy, numeracy or language needs.
- 7.24 All but two of the employers interviewed reported that Link Up training for their staff had a positive benefit for both the staff involved and the organisation more widely. Link Up training was less beneficial for those employers that have already provided basic skills awareness training for their staff. Link Up training was most beneficial in organisations that had their own specific targets regarding *Skills for Life* but was also found to be beneficial in organisations with service users in *Skills for Life* priority groups.
- 7.25 *Skills for Life* providers also note the value added of Link Up Supporters in terms of both the improvement in learner progression, achievement and retention.

Future demand and continuation

- 7.26 Stakeholders note the potential for continued working with a Link Up type project in terms of identifying demand for training for more staff. This is mainly in the Unit 1 (signposter role). Although community based training/learning projects identified the potential to train more staff that can work in support roles within their organisations.
- 7.27 Employers and placement providers noted that a key strength of Link Up has been its community base and focus that has enabled it to engage a wide range of signposters and supporters from within local communities, the communities and settings in which priority group learners outlined in the *Skills for Life* strategy also live and work. This is a feature that stakeholders feel that needs to be retained in order achieve continued success.
- 7.28 The vast majority of projects want to continue in some form. For some, Link Up is already embedded within their organisation. However, for most pilots uncertainty existed as to potential funding options and routes that could support the ongoing delivery of the Link Up model. Nationally, partners have been working with LSCs and others to raise awareness of Link Up, encourage the development of local planning and partnership to appropriately mainstream Link Up within existing *skills for life* capacity building activities.

Conclusions

- 7.29 The focus of the programme on training targets has meant that engaging and training supporters has been the dominant force behind activities. There has been less focus on the 'exit' strategy or longer-term support and development needs to ensure that Link Up training outputs result in sustained outcomes, helping supporters to maintain their momentum.
- 7.30 In late February 2004 transitional arrangements were in place to centrally support the pilot projects for the period April to July 2004. Beyond this point there will be no central funding for Link Up. However, national partners have been working to disseminate the outcomes and lessons learned from the Link Up pilots to engage local partners and encourage the development of Link Up within the context of existing *Skills for Life* (and other related) strategies.
- 7.31 A series of regional dissemination events have encouraged LLSCs, Learning Partnerships and voluntary sector network reps to work together to seek to embed the development of Link Up within existing strategies at the local level.
- 7.32 The following outlines some key conclusions and issues for consideration in the development of successful Link Up type programmes.

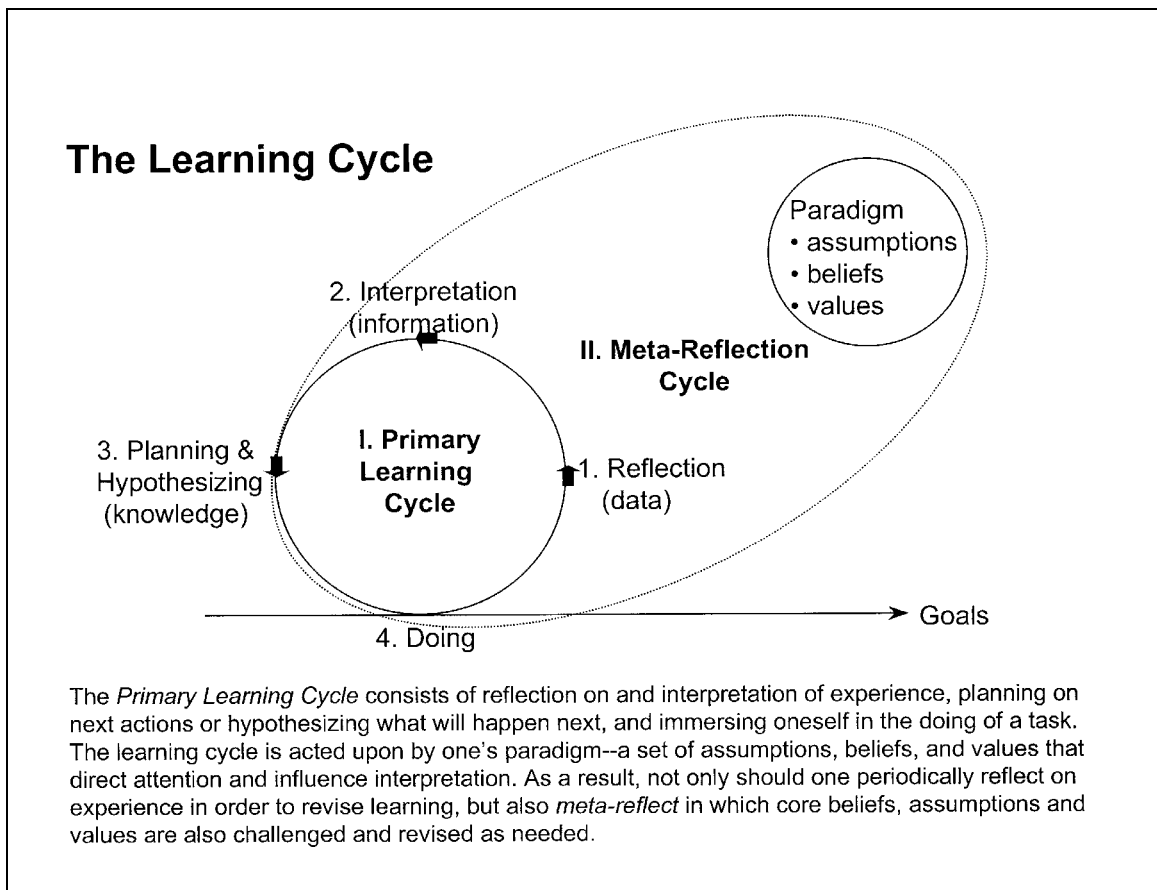
Embedding learning to achieve outcomes

- 7.33 In considering the future role of a Link Up type project, this section analyses the features and achievements of the programme with reference to Kolb's Learning Cycle. David Kolb's model of the Learning Cycle²² refers to the process by which individuals, teams, and organisations learn and more specifically, understand their experiences and consequently develop and apply their skills, knowledge and attitudes. The Learning Cycle contains the following four stages:
- **experiencing** or immersing oneself in the "doing" of a task;
 - **reflection** involves stepping back from task involvement and reviewing what has been done and experienced;

²² Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall

- **conceptualisation** involves interpreting the events that have been noticed and understanding the relationships among them;
- **planning** enables taking the new understanding and translates it into actions to be taken to refine the way the task is handled.

7.34 The logic of the learning cycle is to make incremental improvements in practice or behaviour over time. When this is implemented as a habit or a norm, continual improvement results. Link Up training is found to have successfully achieved its objectives, especially for those that take part in the Unit 2/3 training to put their learning into action and the majority reporting positive outcomes either personally within their own job, or more widely in terms of meeting clients' needs and meeting service targets.



7.35 All units of the Link Up training encourage learners to reflect on their learning and personal development. However, as the above model suggests, increased effectiveness results from repeated reflection and action. When learning and training is driven within an organisation, internal 'ownership' of the outcomes from training encourages this process. A feature of Link Up is that there is no built in process to help ensure that there is ongoing reflection and development of practice by Link Up supporters. Some Link Up pilots have developed events/support for LUS to share practice (beyond the scope of supporting the accreditation process).

7.36 Future Link Up activity seeking to embed effective practice should also build in activity that supports this approach to the continuing development of practice by both signposters and supporters. Building on-going working relationships with those trained would also enable Link Up to:

- get feedback from signposters and supporters to monitor and report back on activity;
- support progression from Unit 1 to Units 2 and 3 and from the Level 2 to Levels 3 and 4 or other related professional development;
- provide feedback to employers on activity and benefits to clients.

7.37 Support for LUS is the core feature of the model that is felt to be unique to Link Up cannot readily be provided by other parts of the local capacity building infrastructure. However, projects need to be effectively linked into the local networks and, specifically, professional development centres, to help ensure linkages to *Skills for Life* professional development and progression opportunities.

Build on success and innovation

7.38 Link Up has been successful within its own terms (in terms of operational targets for supporters trained and their profile). The programme of training and support is valued, of high quality and effective.

7.39 The programme has been innovative in the way it has brought together both at a national and local level, the skills of those working in and with communities and *Skills for Life* experts. Community based organisations have brought with them a knowledge of local agendas, commitment and drive to develop flexible solutions and a knowledge of how to effectively engage and support volunteers. *Skills for Life* experts have brought expertise to the training of volunteers and in the development of placements. This mix of skills and expertise needs to be captured.

7.40 However, given that Link Up activity straddles more than one area of funding/policy/expertise, an issue to address is the need to identify a champion for Link Up activity; key individuals well placed to promote Link Up across a range of policy and delivery networks.

The key focus for Link Up

7.41 There is a wide range of people engaged with different backgrounds and motivations for being involved in Link Up. At one level this has been a great strength of Link Up. But the 'scatter-gun' approach to engaging supporters (driven in part by volume targets) has meant that there is a degree of confusion about what Link Up is really for:

- building *Skills for Life* teaching capacity by providing a route into the teaching qualifications framework;
- developing supporter capacity;
- developing frontline worker/signposter activity;
- encouraging active communities and non-traditional volunteers.

7.42 Across the range of projects Link Up is achieving all of these outcomes, and they are not mutually exclusive. However, to ensure clarity of purpose, it is recommended that Link Up projects identify (with local partners) which of the above are key priorities and focus on one or two of these as main objectives.

Meeting local objectives

7.43 The original volume targets were driven centrally, with limited consultation on what could actually be achieved on the ground. Future Link Up activity could be more effectively linked into local strategies through engaging, for example Learning Partnership *Skills for Life* Strategy Groups, in planning to identify the demand for Link Up Supporters.

Matching supply and demand

- 7.44 To date the process has been driven by the target to recruit and train supporters. What was less clear from the outset was the actual or potential demand for Link Up signposters and supporters within *Skills for Life* provision.
- 7.45 Link Up has generated a much greater than expected level of demand for the Level 2 qualification. This has caused operational difficulties of sourcing placements and meeting the demand for resources to accredit LUS learners.
- 7.46 At this stage of the programme there is a degree of 'pent-up' demand by those wanting to achieve the Level 2 qualification. Some of this will be met in the extension period between April and July 2004. But the outcomes from the pilots indicate considerable potential to tap into demand for Link Up training, notably within deprived communities.
- 7.47 There is also considerable potential demand identified from public sector and community based employers to train frontline staff with at least the Unit 1 to underpin the development of frontline services. Some employers also see the value of the L2 training for their staff where they also provide little community based training and learning services. Currently, the majority of projects are yet to secure clarity as to how this training and development could be funded at the local level.

Opening access to *Skills for Life* teaching at Level 3 and 4

- 7.48 Link Up has also provided a route into *Skills for Life* teaching for many that would not have otherwise considered this as an option. One quarter of those surveyed would like to progress to Level 3 or 4 teaching.
- 7.49 Any future development of Link Up activities needs to ensure that the planning of Link Up is closely linked to other regional or local planning, and delivery of the Level 3 and 4 qualifications to ensure that the potential generated by Link Up is maximised.

Effective delivery models

7.50 The success of Link Up has been the partnership working between community based organisations with the skills and knowledge to engage non-traditional volunteers and *Skills for Life* providers. The Link Up pilots have provided much more than a training programme. Key features of Link Up effective activity include:

- resource activity to support LUS as they progress through their training, to both support attainment and develop and share practice between supporters;
- provide effective advice and guidance built into the engagement, recruitment and ongoing support processes to help clarify how LUS might use Link Up training in their job/volunteering roles or as part of their own career progression;
- the development of good working practices to manage the placement process, notably in how volunteers are introduced and supported by teachers;
- an emphasis on working with managers/coordinators of workplaces and those in community settings to help ensure the Link Up training underpins service delivery targets.

**ANNEX A: THE SKILLS FOR LIFE
TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS
FRAMEWORK**

ANNEX A: THE *SKILLS FOR LIFE* TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Link Up training offers individuals the opportunity to work towards a Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support. Part of the assessment requirements is that the candidate must demonstrate their own personal literacy and numeracy skills are at Level 2. In addition, candidates are required to participate in a placement, supporting *Skills for Life* learners whilst under the guidance of a teacher with a Level 4 *Skills for Life* qualification or equivalent.

The table below shows the *Skills for Life* teaching qualifications framework²³, the role title and definitions of these roles.

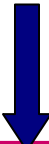
NQF	Role Title	Definition of Role
4	Teacher/Subject Specialist	Leads the learning: leading teaching, responsible for Individual Learning Plans, full diagnostic assessment, teaching, guiding and supporting of teaching assistants (subject support) and learner support.
3	Subject Support/Teaching Assistant (This role may be fulfilled by two types of people: teachers of other subjects who also wish to support literacy, numeracy or ESOL learning, or those for whom the Level 3 role is their sole responsibility).	Supports the teaching process: screening and contribution to initial assessment, contribution to individual learning plans, contribution to teaching.
2	Adult Learner Support	Supports the learner: screening, signposting to teaching assistants/teachers.

The table overleaf shows the training programme for the Level 2 Certificate.

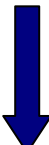
²³ The *Skills for Life* Teaching Qualifications Framework: A Users' Guide. DfES 2003

**LEVEL 2 CERTIFICATE IN ADULT LEARNER SUPPORT
TRAINING PROGRAMME**

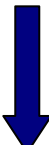
Unit One
Working in the Sector
4 x 3 hour modules



Unit Two
Supporting Learners
4 x 3 hour modules



Unit Three-Literacy
Supporting Learners
4 x 3 hours



Unit Three-Numeracy
Supporting Learners
4 x 3 hours



Unit Three-ESOL
Supporting Learners
4 x 3 hours



Level Two Certificate
in Adult Learner Support



Progression to Level Three/Four

ANNEX B: METHODOLOGY

ANNEX B: METHODOLOGY

The study involved seven key stages: (1) inception and planning, (2) tools design and piloting, (3) six pilot projects case studies, (4) analysis of management information, (5) consultations with national partners, (6) interviews with research with Link Up pilot project managers and (7) analysis and reporting. **Table B.1** sets out some the key research questions for different stakeholder groups.

Table B.1: Key questions for stakeholder groups	
Stakeholders	Key research questions
Case study lead contacts & Delivery Staff	Delivery model, inputs: staff experience and background, training and development, key partners/contact. Progress, issues, barriers, good practice and lessons learned. Impact on workplaces and communities.
Volunteers	Background, experience, motivation, engagement in the training, feedback on training and support quality, progression through units, Level 2 achievement, employing and placement organisation type, involvement with learners, impact on job-role, other anticipated outcomes, progression to further training.
Employing organisations	Value of Link Up training to the organisation, impact on service delivery and staff, demand for further training, continuation. Impact on workplaces and communities.
Placement Organisations	Use and value of volunteers, integration with other learner support and teaching, impact on learners and learning outcomes, future plans and continuation. Impact on workplaces and communities.
Learners	Background, learning programme, experience of referral by Link Up volunteers, experience of support by Link Up volunteers, recommendations. Impact on workplaces and communities.
National Stakeholders	Benefits of partnership working on Link Up. Linkages to other capacity building programmes.
Non-case study pilot areas	Progress and issues, good practice and scope for improvement. Impact on workplaces and communities. Successes in taking the project forward post-funding period.

Case studies

Six case study areas were selected to provide a mix of organisation type and focus. **Table B.2** outlines the case study areas and their key features.

Table B.2: Case Study Areas	
North East prisons cluster	HMYOI Deerbolt, HMP Holme House and HMP Low Newton (a women's prison), managed by New College Durham.
Army cluster	Bases at Warminster, Tidworth and Hohne in Germany all through one contact at Warminster. Supporters include army staff and civilians. Particularly interested in the role LUS can play in supporting learning at a distance.
Camden	FE managed project, urban. Interesting work with black and other minority ethnic (BME) groups, translating training materials etc. Working with a diverse range of organisations and a diversity of supporters.
Stoke	Managed by Groundwork, one of the national partners. Successful local partnership working and close relationship with college.
Sheffield	Managed by Manor and Castle Training, a community based training provider. Very successful recruitment to date. Built on strong existing <i>Skills for Life</i> provision in area, and complementary skills within project staff.
Penwith, Cornwall	Managed by Penwith Community Development Trust. Very much community focused, rural location, working closely with Adult Education.

National consultations and research with other Link Up areas

In addition to the case study research, the evaluation included interviews with national partners. The key aim of this element of the study was to establish the wider strategic context for development and the future potential for the Link Up programme. To ensure that the study generated feedback from all pilots, interviews were undertaken with the non-case study areas. This activity focused on good practice and plans for continuation.

Overall, the evaluation research activities included:

- design and pilot of seven research tools;
- detailed interviews with 6 case study project managers and other key project staff (admin support, development officers etc);

- survey of 1,233 Link Up Supporters from the case study projects of which 459 were returned (a response rate of 37%);
- observation of Unit 1 training (modules 1-3);
- qualitative interviews with:
 - all Link Up pilot project managers;
 - 44 Link Up signposters and supporters;
 - 17 placement providers;
 - 13 employers;
 - 54 learners supported by Link Up Supporters.
- Management information analysis (November 2003, April 2004)
- consultations with 12 national partners.

ANNEX C: NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Table C.1: National Consultations

Name	Organisation
Punita Goodfellow	DfES, covering <i>Skills for Life</i> in the Standards Unit
Jackie Tainsh	ACU, Home Office
Judith Swift	TUC
Annette Wiles	BBC
Lindsay Nixon	The National Tenants Resource Centre
James Cathcart	The Prince's Trust
Anne-Marie Twomey	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
Anita Hallam	Learning and Skills Council
Howard Glenester	Chair – Link Up Steering Group. Emeritus Professor of Social Administration at LSE
Andrew Lambe (SfL QI) & Geraldine Burns	Learning and Skills Council
Leigh Smith (Basic Skills)	Learning and Skills Council

ANNEX D: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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<p>Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU)</p>	<p>The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit is based within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and has been operational since November 2000. The Unit is responsible for driving forward the implementation of the Government's national strategy to improve the literacy, language and numeracy of adults at a national, regional and local level (the <i>Skills for Life Strategy</i>).</p>
<p>Adult Learner Supporter (ALS)</p>	<p>People who support adult learners within a learning environment, by assisting individuals or small groups under the guidance of a teacher or classroom assistant. To become an adult learner supporter, the Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support is required. Training for this qualification can be undertaken through the Link Up project, or through a number of colleges in England.</p>
<p>Basic Skills Agency (BSA)</p>	<p>The Basic Skills Agency is an independent voluntary organisation, funded partly by the government through grants from the DfES and the Welsh Assembly government. The agency's main priority is to raise the standards of basic skills ("the ability to read, write and speak English/Welsh and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general") in England and Wales.</p>
<p>Connexions</p>	<p>Connexions is a government based service which offers a range of support for 13 –19 year olds in order to help them make the transition to adulthood. It aims to provide integrated advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities. This service joins up the work of six government departments and their agencies, together with private and voluntary sector groups, and youth & career services. It offers practical help with choosing the right course and careers, and access to broader personal development through activities like sport, performing arts and volunteering activities.</p>
<p>Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) networks</p>	<p>IAG networks provide free services to adults to assist them in accessing or progressing in learning. Nationally, the Learning and Skills Council funds the provision of IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) to adults. There are a number of IAG networks in England. They are partnerships of local organisations that deliver locally accessible, good quality and impartial information and guidance to adults aged 20+, on opportunities in learning and work. Members of the networks include institutions and groups such as colleges, job centres and religious groups.</p>
<p>Learning and Skills Council (LSC)</p>	<p>The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for education, training and funding for post 16 year olds in England (other than Universities). There are currently 47 individual LSCs across England.</p>
<p>Level 2 qualification</p>	<p>A Level 2 qualification is broadly equivalent to an A*-C GCSE, Intermediate Level GNVQ or Level 2 NVQ.</p>

Link Up Supporter (LUS)	These are individuals who volunteer to support and help adults who want to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills. Roles of the supporters include signposting people in their local communities or workplace, or supporting adults in a learning environment.
National Tests (for Adult Literacy and Numeracy)	The National Tests in Adult Literacy and Numeracy were launched in September 2001 and are based on the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy. They are a measurement of progress and the recognition of individual achievement in literacy, numeracy and ESOL.
Online testing	National Certificate Testing at various levels is offered by a number of examining bodies, such as City and Guilds, Edexcel, OCR, AQA, NCFE and LCCIEB. Most of the awarding bodies offer online screen testing on demand. As soon as the candidate has registered with the test centre, the test can be taken at the candidate's convenience. Results are immediate and if necessary resits can be taken straight away. Paper based tests are still offered to candidates on a monthly and weekly basis.
Regional Development Agency (RDA)	There are nine Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) set up in England as non-departmental bodies. The primary role of each agency is the development of the long-term economic success of their region. Each RDA has five statutory purposes: To further economic development and regeneration; to promote business efficiency investment and competitiveness; to promote employment, development and application of skills relevant to employment; and to contribute to sustainable development. In addition, each RDA must have a Regional Economic Strategy in place.
<i>Skills for Life (SfL)</i>	<i>Skills for Life</i> is the government strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy. It focuses on groups most in need of help, particularly the unemployed, prisoners and those supervised in the community, public sector employees, low skilled people and other groups that are at risk of exclusion. The strategy is designed to ensure that all relevant organisations at both the national and local level can contribute by working to a common set of objectives and a clear national framework.
Indices of Deprivation; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)	The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 (IMD 2000) is a ward level Index, made up of six ward level domain indices. Summary measures of the IMD are presented at district level. The ward level indices, together with the district level summaries are referred to as the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID 2000). The six domains are income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, housing and geographical access to services.

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