Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

www.cymru.gov.uk

Qualitative research with seldom-heard groups

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Research

Qualitative research with seldom-heard groups

Audience National and local bodies in Wales concerned with education, training and skills in Wales.

Overview The purpose of this research project was to qualitatively investigate barriers and triggers to participating in education, learning and training. The research focussed on the experiences and viewpoints of two distinct, seldom-heard groups in Wales: those with basic skills needs, and employees lacking qualifications.

Action required None – for information.

Further information Any questions on the evaluation can be addressed to:
Julie Owens
Senior Research Officer
Social Research Division
Department of the First Minister and Cabinet
Welsh Assembly Government
Unit 6, St Asaph Business Park
St Asaph
Denbighshire
LL17 0LJ
Tel: 01745 538540
e-mail: Research2@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Additional copies This document can also be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website at: www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Related documents None.

Contents   Page

Qualitative research with seldom-heard groups

Summary

Background

- The Welsh Assembly Government commissioned GfK NOP, in consortium with Maguire Policy Research and Arad Consulting, to undertake a multistage research project to qualitatively investigate barriers and triggers to participating in education, learning and training. This research focussed on the experiences and viewpoints of two distinct, seldom heard groups in Wales: those with basic skills needs, and employees lacking qualifications.

- This research was undertaken in four regions across Wales (Urban South, Rural North, Post-industrial South and Heads of the Valleys) and included individuals from seldom heard groups as well as regional stakeholders who work with individuals from seldom heard groups.

- The four-stage iterative research programme was designed to ensure the findings generated were valid and reliable. The four stages undertaken were:

  1. Consultation with stakeholders via email.
  2. Focus groups with seldom heard individuals.
  3. Workshops with regional stakeholders.
  4. Case study interviews with seldom heard individuals.

Key findings - barriers to participation

- The main barriers (excluding cost and time) to participating in learning and training noted by participants can be summarised under two broad themes: a lack of confidence and personal fear of failure, and limited aspirations and awareness of opportunities. Looking that these two themes in more detail:

Lack of confidence

- A lack of confidence was observed in all sample groups and was a significant barrier for individuals who felt they had not reached their potential whilst at school. Poor experiences of school or perceived 'failures' in an educational context had often led to a negative perception of education and a lack of self-belief.

- As a result, many seldom heard individuals reported that they had avoided commitment or taking on responsibility (such as undertaking training or accepting a promotion) due to a fear of failure.

- Coping strategies were often used by individuals on a daily basis to avoid exposing perceived weaknesses or to mask a lack of confidence. However, although individuals had often developed coping strategies to manage any difficulties they faced in their daily lives, participants were

unable to extend these strategies to an educational context, where they felt they would be at a deficit. Indeed, one of the main coping strategies among individuals seemed to be the avoidance of any kind of learning environment.

Limited aspirations

- o Limited aspirations within employment and education were also seen to be a significant barrier to participating in training. Most seldom heard participants did not view themselves as working towards a career. Instead they tended to take accessible and convenient employment opportunities, often following in the footsteps of family or friends. Related to this, several individuals noted that they had followed a path that had been 'expected' of them.
- o Very few participants wanted to or felt able to leave their current situation, and instead were focussed on maintaining their current situation. Individuals' priorities were primarily based around family and work, and they did not associate themselves with the possibilities offered by academic success. As a result, very few participants looked to continue learning or re-train.

Key findings - triggers to participation

Three main triggers to participation noted by seldom heard individuals and stakeholders included the ability to achieve a tangible outcome from training, familiarity and support offered by providers (as well as other intermediaries), and the availability of flexible, relevant provision.

- o The most common trigger noted by the seldom heard individuals that took part in this research was that they would want a guaranteed or tangible outcome from training. Most commonly this was described as gaining a job although qualifications were also valued by the sample group.
- o Familiarity of the learning environment and the support offered by a trusted intermediary were also cited as important to participants who were weary of the unknown and wanted to minimise the any confidence issues that they may have had. Individuals valued feeling comfortable within a learning environment, whether due to familiar locations (e.g. workplace or community centre), people (e.g. their work colleagues or people of similar ages or backgrounds) or tasks (e.g. work related), the more likely they will be to participate.
- o Flexible and relevant provision was also requested by participants who felt that they would undertake training if it fitted into their current lives and was something they would enjoy or have an interest in. Many participants described how they had not completed courses because they had not enjoyed them or that they had found it too difficult to learn when they had other commitments to attend to (e.g. family life or work).

Policy implications

Stakeholders and seldom heard individuals were given the opportunity to explore ideas for overcoming barriers to participation generated in the focus groups and workshops. These ideas were tested during case study interviews with a small number of the focus group participants. Based on each of these stages, the main policy implications emanating from this research include:

- o A need to provide tangible, 'hands-on' incentives (e.g. work placements) as part of courses that are aimed at those who are unemployed.

- o A need to engage more employers in finding 'smarter' approaches to overcoming attitudinal barriers (e.g. incorporating basic skills training within courses designed to improve workplace skills or within courses to provide practical everyday skills in topics such as cooking, ICT and/or manual work).

- o A need to recognise the skills gained from informal and part-completion of courses as well as greater flexibility in recognition of learning.

- o Marketing should target different life-stages (e.g. becoming a parent) and use real-life stories that seldom heard groups can relate to. Peer-marketing should also be encouraged as an approach to engaging seldom heard groups and de-mystifying the learning environment.

- o Further promoting family learning and specifically marketing training courses that could help parents support their children's education could have benefits for both parents and children.

- o Collaborative working between learning providers and other practitioners who work directly with seldom heard groups should be encouraged - both in recruiting and supporting learners. This was seen as an important approach to engage individuals 'as they are' and to build on existing good relationships between trusted intermediaries and seldom heard groups.

- o More taster courses should be made available in familiar environments (e.g. workplaces or with familiar people), enabling seldom heard individuals to experience learning in a non-intimidating environment.

1. Background to the Research

GfK NOP, in consortium with Maguire Policy Research and Arad Consulting, were commissioned to undertake a three year programme of customer research on behalf of the Department for Children Education Lifelong Learning and Skills of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Customer Research Programme's inception phase - which ran from April-September 2007 - identified 'seldom heard' groups for whom DCELLS currently has limited intelligence to be one of the key customer groups for the programme.

In particular, two seldom heard groups were identified which would be prioritised during the early stages of the Customer Research Programme (CRP). These were:

- Employees lacking qualifications.
- Those with basic skills needs.

For these groups, the Customer Research Programme (CRP) plan noted a need *"to understand individuals' motivations and attitudes to participation in employment/learning, barriers to participation, and likelihood of engaging in the future".* The Customer Research Programme (CRP) plan proposed that a qualitative approach should be adopted in gaining this understanding; utilising approaches such as focus groups with members of these seldom heard groups across a range of localities in Wales. It was also proposed that workshops with representatives of relevant stakeholder groups could be undertaken in these localities as well as case studies to supplement and illustrate the issues raised in focus groups and workshops.

1.1 Background to the scoping phase

It was agreed that the consortium would undertake a scoping phase in order to explore the current evidence base in relation to the barriers and triggers to participation facing these groups as well as current gaps in intelligence. The scoping phase also offered an opportunity to discuss the proposed approach with a small number of key stakeholders at a strategic level as well as exploring possible geographic areas, types of stakeholders and issues to be addressed in the primary research. A scoping report was produced to outline findings from this phase and proposed an approach for undertaking qualitative research with both seldom heard groups.

The scoping report outlined the importance of addressing basic skills needs and improving the levels of workforce skills in the economy. Studies by McIntosh (2004) and the University Of Wales Swansea (2003) outline the cost of poor basic skills to individuals and the economy whilst a wealth of recent policy research and strategy documents emphasises the need to improve workforce skills levels[1]. Focusing on those already in employment is a key challenge for policy makers with various programmes targeting funding at overcoming barriers to training those in

---

[1] For example *Skills that Work for Wales* (2008), the Leitch Review report *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy - World Class Skills* (2006) and *Promise and Performance* the Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales, led by Sir Adrian Webb (2008).

employment in recent years (e.g. Union Learning Fund, Learning Worker Pilot, Step Up Pilots). Meanwhile other studies[2] reinforce the need to support those with basic skills needs and those who lack qualifications, both in finding and maintaining employment.

The importance of gaining a better understanding of the barriers and triggers to learning for those with low basic skills levels and employees lacking qualifications is also evidenced by the results of NIACE Dysgu Cymru's Survey of Adult Participation in Learning in Wales 2007[3] as well as NIACE's recent England and Wales surveys[4].

The 2007 NIACE Dysgu Cymru's Survey noted that *"since 2003 the gap in participation between socio-economic classes has widened so that adults in socio-economic classes AB (upper and middle classes) and C1 (white collar workers) are now more likely to be engaged in learning than C2s (skilled manual workers) and DEs (including semi-skilled, unskilled working classes and pensioners)".* The survey also found that the proportion of unemployed adults who were engaged in learning had fallen from 44 per cent to 39 per cent, and for those working part-time had fallen from 61 per cent to 55 per cent. In contrast, the proportion of those in full-time employment who were learning had risen from 52 per cent to 57 per cent.

National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) surveys of adult participation in learning in England and Wales have also indicated a continuing trend for participation rates in learning to be lower among respondents with no qualifications, those with basic skill difficulties and adults living in the most deprived areas. In terms of progress over time, the NIACE survey report 2008 notes that *"no increase in participation at all has been secured over the last ten years for those in socio-economic groups DE (including semi-skilled, unskilled working classes and pensioners), the semi and unskilled workers, unemployed and retired people".* This implies a need to understand the barriers and triggers to learning in more detail, as well as policy responses that involve collaborative solutions between stakeholder organisations who have shared goals.

1.2   Scoping phase conclusions and rationale for this research

The scoping phase found that a great deal of information on identifying and defining those with basic skills needs and employees lacking qualifications is available. Evidence is also available outlining the headline barriers to participation faced by seldom heard groups. In terms of barriers to learning, most studies in the UK confirm the validity of McGivney's (1992)[5] broad categories of reasons for non-participation. These were:

- Lack of information.

---

[2] The University of Wales, Swansea & WELMERC (2002), *Identifying Barriers to Economic Activity in Wales*, Department of Economics, University of Wales, Swansea.
[3] Aldridge, F., Furlong, C. and Nettleship, S. (2007) *Wales: Moving Towards the Learning Country.* NIACE and NIACE Dysgu Cymru. This survey was boosted to achieve a Wales sample of 1000.
[4] Aldridge, F., Lamb, H. and Tuckett, A. (2008) *Are we closing the gap?* NIACE, Leicester.
[5] McGivney V (1992). *Motivating unemployed adults to undertake education and training.* Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

- Situational barriers – time and cost.

- Institutional barriers – the unresponsive system.

- Dispositional barriers, which encompasses 'attitudes, perceptions and expectations, and are closely related to cultural influences'.

Other studies such as the 2007 NIACE Dysgu Cymru survey, Hillage and Aston (2001), Future Skills Wales (2003), OECD (2001) and Welsh Assembly Government (2005) broadly confirm these findings. However, many of these studies highlight familiar findings in terms of barriers relating to cost and time without 'digging deeper' in terms of attitudes, motivations and possible ways of overcoming these issues.

The scoping phase research and consultations reinforced the views expressed during the Customer Research Programme (CRP) inception phase, that there remain gaps in intelligence, as far as in-depth qualitative information is concerned, about the barriers and triggers to participation in learning by employees lacking qualifications, and by those with basic skills needs. In particular, there is a dearth of evidence about how those barriers may be overcome in practice. Furthermore, most studies examining barriers to learning and employment tend to focus on generic barriers, without reference to the influence of the local context and examples of good practice which have been applied at the local level to address these barriers.

This may explain why recent studies by the Economic Advice Division of the Welsh Assembly Government and NIACE Dysgu Cymru have aimed to engage stakeholders, to examine multiple barriers to learning, and to develop typologies in relation to the barriers faced by specific groups (e.g. lone parents) in accessing learning opportunities. These studies are also seeking to look at barriers and triggers to participation in more detail, and seek to go beyond traditional headline findings and to develop more detailed typologies of individuals.

However, whilst both of these studies show similarities in terms of approach, they are complementary to this study. For example, neither of these studies examines the specific seldom heard groups identified in the CRP inception phase and neither study seeks to engage seldom heard individuals directly via focus groups.

The scoping report reviewed existing and ongoing research in relation to the seldom heard groups, confirmed definitions of the groups and identified gaps in current knowledge. The scoping report concluded that there are both gaps in intelligence and a demand from national level stakeholders for this research.

A methodology was proposed for the qualitative research including a stakeholder consultation by e-mail, focus groups with individuals, stakeholder workshops and case study interviews. This methodology was approved by the Welsh Assembly Government early in 2009.
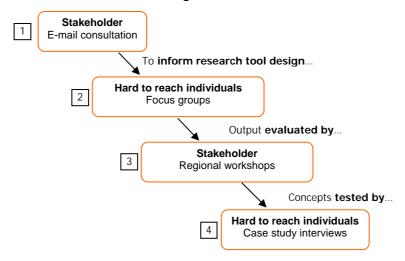
1.3   The primary research overview

Given the weight of previous evidence as well as anecdotal indications about the need for additional research to be undertaken in Wales, this study set out to utilise the expertise already available to the Welsh Assembly, via stakeholder

organisations, as well as collect primary first hand evidence from individuals who lack formal qualifications or have basic skills needs.

The study was designed to follow a linear process, whereby the experience and expertise of stakeholders was consulted at various points in the research process in order to inform the engagement with seldom heard individuals.

Illustrated below are the four stages of the research:

This research focused on two sample groups in detail;

1. Seldom heard groups via focus groups and case study interviews.
2. Stakeholders via e-mail consultations and regional workshops.

Four key geographical areas were identified during the scoping study for this research to focus on. These were:

- o **Urban area:** Cardiff.
- o **Rural area:** Gwynedd/Ynys Môn.
- o **Post industrial area:** Neath/Port Talbot.
- o **Heads of the Valleys:** Merthyr Tydfil.

This piece of research was designed with a staged methodological approach to engage with individuals from seldom heard groups as well as sector stakeholders in a structured, linear process. In total, four stages were undertaken. Each stage built on the previous one, with the findings from each feeding into the next element of the research methodology. The purpose of each stage of the research process will be examined in turn.

Stage 1. Stakeholder involvement: E-mail consultation

The e-mail consultation was designed to introduce the research programme to stakeholders in each geographical region as well as allow researchers to tap into the local knowledge of organisations and individuals who worked with relevant seldom heard groups. This initial stage of the research process aimed to engage with stakeholders and ensure that they felt part of the research process.

The stakeholder e-mail consultation focussed on exploring some of the known barriers and triggers to participating in learning in each of the geographical locations. The consultation also asked stakeholders to comment on issues that need to be addressed in order to encourage greater participation in training and education. The findings from this consultation were used to help design the line of questioning used in the focus groups discussions.

Stage 2. Seldom heard individuals: Focus groups

Sixteen focus groups were held across Wales, looking to explore the issues that prevent individuals from participating in learning. Eight focus groups were held with individuals with basic skills needs and eight were held with employees lacking qualifications.

The focus groups allowed individuals to discuss issues they had with education, training and learning as well as more personal issues. General topics surrounding ideal learning environments and learning capabilities were also examined.

The findings from the focus groups, together with the e-mail consultation were combined to create a preliminary findings presentation that was used in the regional workshops to stimulate debate amongst stakeholders.

Stage 3. Stakeholder involvement: Regional workshops

Four regional workshops were held; each lasting half a day with stakeholders who had participated in the e-mail consultation as well as additional, relevant stakeholders also attended the events.

During the events the preliminary findings from this research programme were presented to stakeholders. An opportunity to discuss these findings was offered in the form of breakout sessions combined with brainstorm sessions which sought to identify national and local solutions to the issues identified in earlier stages of the research. These practical solutions were then taken forward and tested in the case study interviews.

Stage 4. Seldom heard individuals: Case study interviews

Eight case study interviews were undertaken with seldom heard individuals who had participated in the focus groups. These individuals were selected on the basis that they had an interesting story to share about their life and the reason they did not have many formal qualifications and/or basic skill needs.

The practical solutions suggested in the stakeholder workshops were tested as concepts with each individuals as well as allowing space for additional suggestions to be made by the participants.

The story of each individual was charted and their motivations and barriers to education discussed at length in a one-to-one depth interview.

An overview of the recruit approach and a detailed methodology is contained in the annex of this report.

1.4   The report structure

The next four sections of this report outline the findings from each of the research stages. Each section contains a short introduction to the methodology, a summary of the key findings followed by a more detailed analysis of the qualitative data collected. Each section ends with a summary of the learning points that were taken forward into the next stage of the research programme.

2. Stakeholder Consultation

2.1 Introduction

As the first stage in this programme of primary research, the aim of the stakeholder consultation was to build on the evidence already identified in the scoping report (previous research) and to add local context to the four regional areas to be researched.

Once recruited, each stakeholder was asked to respond to a set of five open ended questions sent to them via e-mail. Each stakeholder was given a two-week period within which to share their opinions with the research team.

The questions asked of the stakeholders were purposefully open to ensure that each question was equally applicable to the different stakeholders taking part. The questions were designed to:

- o Investigate barriers and triggers to learning.
- o Tap into local knowledge of training provision and basic skills needs.
- o Identify local priorities and opportunities for change.
- o Inform the design of the next stage of the research programme, i.e. focus groups with members of the public.

2.2 Barriers to participation

The first question asked of stakeholders enquired about possible barriers to learning amongst the target audience. This question aimed to go beyond the well documented and recognised barriers of time and money and explore other, more specific issues relevant to each area. Each stakeholder was asked to identify up to three significant barriers to participation.

Question 1:

From your experience, what are the three most important issues, apart from time and money, that prevent people from gaining qualifications or improving their basic skills?

Issues	No. of responses
Lack of confidence	9
Bad experience of education	5
Attitudes of peers and family	5
Coping strategies/skills gap not recognised as an issue	4
Stigma of 'basic skills'	3
Lack of awareness of training/learning opportunities	3
Lack of suitable learning options/options not accessible	3
Lack of ambition/lack of motivation to improve	3
Fear of not keeping up with class/fear of failure	2
Want to keep training need a secret from employer	2
Do not recognise the benefits of learning	1
Do not recognise the link between basic skills and work	1
Childcare	1

The two main themes that were identified in the responses to this question were:

➢ Reaction to past learning experiences.
➢ Disposition to learning.

Reactions to past learning experiences:

o Lack of confidence.
o Bad experience of education.
o Fear of not keeping up with class/fear of failure.

Almost all stakeholders cited confidence as a significant barrier for individuals considering training and/or up-skilling. Nine of the twelve stakeholders felt that

individuals would not feel capable of learning again nor would they feel comfortable re-entering a formal learning environment.

Many stakeholders suggested that this lack of confidence would be based on previous negative learning experiences. This could relate to poor relationships with teachers, a fear of falling behind other learners or an unwillingness to risk failure.

Another significant issue that related to confidence was cited as individuals' fear of failure when learning. Many of the stakeholders spoke of a mentality where to be seen to perform badly was not acceptable and therefore avoid when possible. Therefore, individuals would avoid confronting their basic skills needs and ultimately not improving their weaknesses.

Disposition to learning

- o Attitudes of peers and family.
- o Coping strategies/skills gap not recognised as an issue.
- o Lack of ambition/lack of motivation to improve.
- o Do not recognise the benefits of learning.
- o Do not recognise the link between basic skills and work.

In addition to barriers based on learning experience, stakeholders also suggested that some individuals viewed learning negatively and did not recognise the benefits training could provide.

Stakeholders described how individuals might be influenced by the views and opinions of their friends, family and cultural environment when thinking about learning and training. If learning is not thought to be of value, the concept of learning would once more not be seen as a useful exercise. Therefore, coping strategies are often developed in order to avoid training; individuals adapt their lives omitting elements that might require skills/knowledge they do not have (e.g. choice of job, preferred forms of entertainment). Once these coping strategies are established, the link between work, and education, training/qualifications diminishes as individuals no longer have to confront their skills gaps.

Another suggested barrier related to individual attitudes, is that of limited personal ambition and a lack of motivation to improve. This was linked to adaptive coping strategies, whereby individuals avoid situations outside of their comfort zone and therefore did not seek to improve their current skills.

It was also suggested by stakeholders that such negative attitudes towards learning promote a 'make-do' attitude in which individuals are happy to live to their current abilities and not aspire to move beyond current financial position or qualifications level.

Other barriers

- o Stigma of 'basic skills'.
- o Lack of awareness of training/learning opportunities.
- o Lack of suitable learning options/options not accessible.
- o Want to keep training needs secret from employer.
- o Childcare.

Other barriers mentioned by stakeholders were more tangible such as childcare and a lack of suitable learning opportunities in the local area. However neither of these issues were thought to be insurmountable.

Stakeholders felt that there was a lack of organised and accessible information to allow individuals to identify training and learning opportunities that would suit them. This was described as both a logistical problem, with regard to collating all information, as well as a motivational issue insofar as individuals are not actively seeking learning opportunities in the first place.

The final group of barriers identified in this consultation was the stigma of basic skills in the eyes of the target audience. Stakeholders felt that some individuals would actively conceal their skills gaps from their employers, family and friends for fear of an unfavourable reaction. One stakeholder suggested that individuals would not want to request basic skills training from their employers as this would reflect badly on them. Also the term 'basic skills' was not well received by many stakeholders who suggested that it has too many negative associations and therefore off-putting for the target audience.

2.3 Triggers to participation

Having discussed the barriers to training and education, stakeholders were then asked why individuals would return to learning. Focusing on the target audience, stakeholders drew on their personal experience in their current role.

Question 2:

What do you think prompts people with low basic skills or few/no qualifications to return to training and education?

Issues	No. of responses
Want to help (grand) children to learn	6
Referrals for 16-19 yr olds/employer requirement	5
Change in circumstances (to allow training)	5
Want to improve skills/want to improve prospects	3
Threat of redundancy	3
Skills thought to be beneficial in personal life too	2
Advertising and promotion of learning	2
Support and encouragement/mentors	2
Seeing others gain from learning	1
Suitable learning environment	1
Increased earning potential	1

Triggers to participation (as identified by stakeholders) could be grouped into three main themes; external prompts, motivation and wanting to improve, and perceived improvement of the learning experience.

External prompts:

- o   Want to help (grand) children to learn.
- o   Referrals for 16-19 yr olds/employer requirement.
- o   Change in circumstances (to allow training).
- o   Threat of redundancy.

External influences that directly affect individuals were the most commonly cited trigger for returning to learning. These influences were seen, to some extent, to be out of an individual's control and were therefore more likely to trigger learning.

The most common external prompt for returning to learning was to help children/grandchildren with their school work. This prompt was thought to be most important for females.

Stakeholders also noted that in some instance choice to return to learning was not given to individuals. Examples of enforced learning included referrals by Jobcentre Plus for 16-19 year olds to colleges or training providers, employees being made to take part in compulsory training in order to remain in their working role or to avoid redundancy.

Want to improve/motivation:

- o   Want to improve skills/want to improve prospects.
- o   Skills thought to be beneficial in personal life too.
- o   Seeing others gain from learning.
- o   Increased earning potential.

In contrast to the external prompts discussed above, stakeholders felt that many individuals return to learning because they want to (without encouragement from others) and are motivated. Given that the target audience for this research focussed on individuals with few or no qualifications, it should not be surprising that a proportion of these individuals would want to address this fact by re-entering education or training.

Suggested motivations included wanting to improve employment prospects (whether that be to achieve promotion or to get a better job elsewhere) and self-improvement (the desire to gain qualifications and to restart learning).

In addition to personal and professional motivations it was also suggested that the influence of others, such as a positive role model or an example of how a person has benefited from learning, could inspire the target audience to return to learning. It was noted that role models close to an individual (e.g. family or friend with similar circumstances) would be most likely to have an impact.

Perceived improvement of the learning experience:

- o Advertising and promotion of learning.
- o Support and encouragement/mentors.
- o Appropriate learning environment.

As mentioned in the previous section, perceptions of the learning environment can be a barrier to education and/or training. Therefore, improvements to the learning environment could potentially combat this barrier. Suggested improvements to the learning environment included creating a less formal environment, ideally not at a school or college as well as providing training somewhere local and accessible.

Improvements have been communicated via advertising, both nationally and locally, to increase the public's awareness of training opportunities. This type of marketing has also gone some way to repackage learning and make it appear modern and less intimidating. Added support such as mentors (pre and post training support) have also reduced the barriers for individuals and succeeded in encouraging greater participation.

2.4 Issues to be addressed

In order to gain more of an insight into the issues that stakeholders felt still needed to be addressed, they were asked to identify areas where they felt positive changes could occur to encourage greater participation. Many of the suggestions made related specifically to the experiences of stakeholders and the client groups that they work with. However, there was some consistency across stakeholder groups in terms of how basic skills needs could be better addressed.

Question 3:

What issues need to be addressed in order to encourage individuals to improve their basic skills and/or qualifications?

Issues	No. of responses
Remove stigma of 'basic skills'	5
Repackage basic skills	5
Embed and support basic skills in employment/other training	4
Raise awareness about basic skills in workplace	3
Funding for individuals	2
Flexible provision	2
Support individuals (holistic approach)	2
Avoid cancelling courses	2
Focus on learning experience (not just quals)	2
Transport	1
Childcare	1
Facilities for learners with disabilities	1
Funding for providers	1
Signpost unsuccessful job candidates to training	1
Target young people	1
More joined up working between organisations	1
Tailor provision to address individual's skills gaps	1
Offer less intimidating learning environment	1
Limitations of the benefit system versus learning	1
More 'Quality Mark Basic Skills' tutors	1
More local/accessible learning locations	1

The most common responses to this question fell under two themes - 'basic skills is an outdated term' and 'addressing the known barriers'. These are explored below.

'Basic Skills' is an outdated term:

- o Remove stigma of 'basic skills'.
- o Repackage basic skills.

At least half of all stakeholders suggested that the use of the term 'basic skills' was outdated and should change. The term 'basic skills' was generally disliked by stakeholders regardless of which sector they worked in. It was felt that the phrase carried with it a stigma, and therefore would be an area that learners would not want to admit to having a weakness in. It was suggested that work should be done to re-label basic skills (e.g. as essential skills) as well as create positive associations with current training available.

Address the known barriers:

- o Funding for individuals.
- o Flexible provision.
- o Support individuals (holistic approach).
- o Focus on learning experience (not just qualifications).
- o Tailor provision to address individual's skills gaps.
- o Offer less intimidating learning environment.
- o More local/accessible locations for learning delivery.
- o Transport.
- o Childcare.
- o Facilities for learners with disabilities.

Stakeholders also listed some known barriers to participation that they thought could be tackled in a practical way to encourage more learning. These included offering more accessible learning through flexible, tailored courses, better locations for teaching and more support for individuals throughout the learning process.

Practical issues such as transport, childcare and provision for disabled students were also mentioned as possible solutions to current barriers. However it was noted that these solutions would also be costly to those who provide training and/or local authorities.

Other suggestions:

- o Provider related:
  - ▪ Funding for providers.
  - ▪ Avoid cancelling courses.
  - ▪ More 'Quality Mark Basic Skills' tutors.

- o Info & guidance:
  - Signpost unsuccessful job candidates to training.
  - Target young people.

- o Work related:
  - Embed and support basic skills in employment/other training.
  - Raise awareness about the need for basic skills in the workplace.

- o Policy related:
  - More joined up working between organisations.
  - Address the limitations of benefit system versus learning.

Other, more specific suggestions were also made by stakeholders, some addressing issues faced by providers and training delivery (e.g. funding for providers, ensuring there are enough qualified tutors to therefore avoid cancelling courses). Some stakeholders mentioned the importance of informing specific client groups (e.g. target young people and support workless individuals back into training). Employment issues were also raised by a few stakeholders, specifically the benefits of promoting learning and training as a path to employment and promotion in the workplace. Lastly, a small number of stakeholders also suggested that changes should be made to basic skills policy making, in particular to avoid individuals not being correctly signposted to organisations due to a lack of joined-up working and/or for fear of losing current benefits.

2.5   Improvements to local offering

The fourth section of the email consultation asked stakeholders to suggest changes that could be made in their local area. In addition to improvements, stakeholders also suggested which organisations should be involved in delivering change.

Question 5:

How can different partners, nationally or locally assist with these changes or improvements? Who needs to be involved?

Generally, stakeholders suggested a joined up approach involving a number of different organisations ranging from national organisations to local initiatives (both public and private). It was suggested that a more regional approach should be taken, facilitating more local provision and focusing on local skills gaps. Regional Strategic Partnerships were cited as best practice by providing joined up planning.

When discussing what exactly could be changed, a wide range of ideas were put forward which at a local level (in response to question 4) have been grouped into four themes below.

Question 4:

Are any changes or improvements to provision and support necessary in your area to promote participation?

Below are the themed responses to question 4.

Changes to improve awareness:

- o All year round promotion of learning.
- o Regional area promotion of learning opportunities.
- o More links between national and local support services.
- o Raise awareness of funding opportunities for employers and individuals.

Stakeholders thought that the level and variety of provision offered to potential learners is not always visible enough to those who need to access it. It was acknowledged that learning opportunities are advertised and the benefits of learning broadcast, these messages appear at the beginning of the academic year and are not consistently shared throughout the year. Some stakeholders thought that it would be beneficial to extend promotion and advertising throughout the year so that individuals and employers would also be able to access additional information about learning opportunities, funding, as well as flexible training options.

Changes to help employers:

- o Promote the Employers Pledge more.
- o Employers need to signpost more.
- o Centralised information for employers (to avoid competition between agencies and providers).

As some stakeholders were also employers, their role as a training provider/facilitator was emphasized as an important catalyst to learning. It was suggested that more impartial information and guidance should be offered to employers who sometimes feel that they are being sold training rather than offered the most suitable provision for their workforce. In order to avoid such situations, it was suggested that a comprehensive list of training providers and courses should be available in each region. This would enable employers to select appropriate courses and provide better signposting for their employees.

Changes to learning offering:

- o Improve flexibility and accessibility of provision.
- o Delivery of in-home tutoring as well as classroom based.
- o More community education.
- o Do not penalise learners for missing class.
- o Taster courses offered to build confidence.

o Provide pre and post support to those who would not normally engage in learning.

o Confidentiality offered when supporting individuals.

o Basic skills are not divorced from other areas of life (e.g. suicide, knife crime, substance misuse).

o Support learners where English is not their first language.

Stakeholders highlighted a number of issues regarding how training could be improved upon delivery. These can be grouped into two distinct themes: more flexible provision and more support for learners.

With regard to more flexible provision, stakeholders again revisited the barriers to participation and suggested solutions. Ensuring that learning opportunities fitted the needs and lifestyles of potential learners was deemed important, as well creating a structure within training provision that builds individuals' confidence rather than knocking it.

Regarding greater support for learners, stakeholders felt different types of learners had quite distinct needs, for example, the specific needs of disabled individuals were referred to as well as language issues for those who do not have English or Welsh as their first language. Basic skills needs should be placed in the context of each person, as many individuals have multiple needs/issues, not just education and training needs.

Changes to funding and staffing:

o Funding to be automatically provided for anyone up to Level 2.

o More training of tutors.

The final issues mentioned by stakeholders that could address participation levels were funding and teaching. It was suggested that funding should be automatically provided to those taking training up to Level 2. This would ensure a base level of skills as well as reduce the issue of affordability amongst individuals and employers.

A small number of stakeholders were also concerned with the number of tutors available to teach courses. It was noted that more training had been offered recently, however this initiative would need to continue and not act as a temporary fix to a current problem.

2.6   Examples of good practice/initiatives:

A number of different initiatives were mentioned by stakeholders throughout the workshops as examples of approaches that helped to overcome some of the barriers to learning and employment faced by the two seldom heard groups in their area. These initiatives tended to fall into one or more of the following categories:

o Initiatives focussed on increasing employer engagement.

- o Initiatives aimed at engaging harder to reach individuals partly by providing pastoral support, guidance and/or brokering for individuals to access learning (among other services).
- o Pre-learning programmes (e.g. Skillbuild).
- o Collaborative initiatives between employers, providers and third parties targeting harder to reach groups.
- o Programmes aimed at increasing employment/economic activity.
- o Strategic regeneration initiatives with elements of all of the above.

In terms of initiatives focussed on increasing employer engagement in learning and workforce development, the 'Employers Pledge' was mentioned by a number of stakeholders (including employers). It was felt that this was an effective approach to overcome many of the barriers to learning faced by employees through committing the employer to up-skilling their workforce.

Union-led learning was also frequently referred to as an effective means to provide employers and employees with the incentive and support to engage individuals in learning. A number of stakeholders referred to Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) projects and particularly to the benefits offered by such partnerships between employers, employees and Union learning representatives who could help identify needs as well as offer advice to overcome some of the attitudinal barriers faced by individuals. In particular, it was felt that this approach helped individuals overcome any initial setbacks experienced during their early stages of engagement.

Trust was frequently cited by stakeholders (and appeared to be a key issue for individuals) as being of importance in terms of who provides advice and guidance to harder to reach groups. Many of the examples of good practice referred to by stakeholders were projects that used 'neutral' third parties to engage individuals on their own terms and gradually introduce the idea of re-engagement in learning. A number of examples were referred to including:

- Youth engagement programmes managed by Rathbone Cymru:
  - o Rathbone Cymru is currently developing youth engagement programmes through out-of-hours and street-based delivery by youth workers. Rathbone Cymru's team of Youth Engagement Workers offer a variety of activities and advice and guidance services in community settings to engage some of the hardest to reach young people not registered with Careers Wales who are experiencing, often multiple barriers to learning in some of the most deprived communities within Wales.

- Communities First officers working with individuals who are NEET in South Riverside (Cardiff).
- Union learning representatives (through WULF projects):
  - o e.g. The Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) e-learning provision project provides participants with a one-to-one tutor for IT to fit into the lives of learners. The ability to learn online and receive

support results in more motivation to learn and access to learning is greater.

Many stakeholders emphasised the importance of pre-learning programmes that help to re-engage seldom heard individuals before they embark on a formal learning course. Pre-Apprenticeship Learning Programmes (PAL) were noted as good examples of programmes to support individuals with basic skills needs prior to progressing onto an apprenticeship. Individuals undergo a comprehensive diagnostic assessment to identify specific basic skills needs and an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is designed and tailored for each individual to suit their specific needs and requirements. On successful completion of the programme, a further basic skills assessment is completed to determine progression and improvement in basic skills. This programme is primarily delivered on a one to one basis by qualified experienced basic skills tutors. Skillbuild was also referred to as a programme that is effective in achieving many of these goals.

In terms of programmes to address unemployment and inactivity, the Job Match programme (Heads of the Valleys) was noted as an example of good practice by stakeholders in Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil. Within the Heads of the Valleys the project has, over the last 3 years, engaged economically inactive individuals by providing opportunities for training, volunteering, work experience, employment and career development. The project was initially developed and piloted in Blaenau Gwent and was approved for rollout across the Heads of the Valleys region. The Want2Work programme (a joint Jobcentre Plus and Welsh Assembly initiative) was also noted as a good practice initiative aimed at boosting employment in selected areas across Wales.

Many stakeholders referred to collaborative initiatives at strategic level that aimed to bring together the work of various organisations with shared goals to target harder to reach groups more efficiently and effectively. Regional Strategic Partnerships were referred to by several stakeholders as a good vehicle for achieving this goal although several stakeholders also felt that partnership working needed to filter through to practitioners as well as policy makers and managers. The Regional Strategic Partnerships aim to improve the strategic planning of the provision of learning that meets the training and learning needs of the wider community. These partnerships include a range of relevant and interested parties, together with the local authorities and formal education providers across different sectors.

More broadly, the Môn a Menai regeneration initiative was noted as an example of a strategic approach to address the needs of the economically inactive in North West Wales.

2.7   Learning points for the research programme

Following this phase of the research, recurring themes were identified, taken forward and then tested in the focus groups with individuals from both the seldom heard groups. This enabled some of the following themes to be explored in more detail:

- o Discussing the most important barriers and triggers to learning.
- o Exploring how the term 'basic skills' was perceived by individuals.

o   Identifying the differences between interest based learning and more formal learning with a more specific aim.
o   Understand where education and training information is sourced by individuals.
o   Exploring perceptions of what an ideal learning environment might be.

3.   Focus Groups with Seldom Heard Respondents

3.1   Introduction

This section outlines the key findings from the second stage of this research. Focus groups were conducted with individuals from both seldom heard (HTR) groups in the four regional locations.

A total of eight focus groups were held amongst employees lacking qualifications (two in each location), and eight amongst those with basic skills needs (again, two in each location). Groups were further segmented as follows:

- Single gender focus groups conducted with three age groups – 16-18 year olds, 19-25 year olds and individuals aged 50+.

- Within each seldom heard category, one focus group was conducted with individuals of mixed gender and age from BME groups.

- The remainder of the groups were conducted with participants of mixed age, gender and ethnicity.

- One group was also conducted in the medium of Welsh, with individuals who had basic skills needs and spoke Welsh as their first language.

Each group included between 6-8 participants, and lasted for 90 minutes. A full breakdown of the sample included in the research, is available in section 2.

3.2   Key findings

The key findings from this stage of the research relate to individuals' experiences of and attitudes to work, education and training. The focus groups explored the influence of personal characteristics, such as age, lifestage, gender and ethnicity, and external influences, such as the local economic context, availability of learning opportunities and individuals' previous experiences of education.

In identifying triggers and barriers to learning, participants also described their attitudes to 'formal' (school-based), 'informal' (pleasure-based) and 'practical' (skills-based) learning, and their definition of success based on their own achievements and the achievements of others. This provided insights into how participants viewed themselves and their individual circumstances, how this influenced the potential for taking up training, and the types of training they are likely to engage in.

The findings outlined below refer to responses from across all groups and highlight similarities and differences between the different groups, focusing on the core influences affecting the likelihood and ability of participants to engage in training.

3.3   Triggers and barriers to learning

Several triggers and barriers to taking up learning were discussed in the groups. Participants' responses were similar, irrespective of location, gender or age.

The responses given by participants reinforced the views presented by stakeholders in stage one of the research, (see section 3) and with the findings of previous research conducted in this area (e.g. McGivney, 1992), reiterating the most common issues faced by seldom heard groups in taking up learning.

3.3.1 Triggers

The primary triggers identified as being central to taking up learning or training were characterised as being based around tangible outcomes, interest, life stage and experience.

Tangible outcomes

Tangible outcomes were described as instances in which embarking on a course would result in some form of immediate benefit or instant gratification. Participants expressed a preference for engaging in learning through activities and hobbies undertaken in their daily lives resulting in these types of tangible outcomes.
The desire for work-related outcomes from learning was prevalent among both employees lacking qualifications and individuals with basic skills needs.

For unemployed participants, the most desirable outcome of learning was being able to find work. The prevailing view amongst these groups was that they would be willing to take up a course if it resulted in employment. In light of the current economic downturn, individuals were more sceptical of the usefulness of training and suggested that employment would have to be guaranteed in order to encourage them to enter into training. This reflected the broader need expressed by individuals for wanting to see an immediate benefit from learning.

> *"A lot of people if they're going to do training schemes, are they going to be despondent to find that there's no jobs at the end of it? They'll say 'what's the use of training if there are not jobs at the end? What's the use of committing myself to this learning if there's nothing there at the end of it?"*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

For those in employment, there was also general agreement that training should directly result in getting a better job. However, any new employment would need to be an advancement on their current position. Employed participants also expressed a willingness to engage in training if they were at risk of redundancy. Again, individuals felt that any training taken up would need to result in a guarantee of keeping their jobs.

> *"If there's more chance of keeping your job, you will try anything"*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Training was viewed by the majority as a practical exercise and it was suggested by many that learning a practical or work-related skill would be of great value in increasing their skills base. Several participants felt that training should result in qualifications that would be recognised by employers.

"I went for a job with a security company and they put me through the training with the proviso that if I passed I would get a job straight after it. You don't mind doing it then because you know you have got something out of it."
(Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

The tangible outcomes associated with hobbies were wide ranging, from being praised for a meal you had cooked to learning a new skill. While it was accepted that formal learning would not necessarily result in a tangible outcome, participants said they would be more likely to engage in training where this was the case.

Interest-based learning

Outside of employment, training was described by several participants as a way of developing competence in activities that were of particular interest. Some individuals had taken courses based on their interests, such as DIY, cooking or crafts and were more engaged in this type of learning, as they felt confident about being in an environment where they were equally competent in a skill shared with other learners.

Other types of interest-based learning undertaken by participants involved learning new skills such, as ICT. In these instances, participants' interest was based on the fact that they were learning not only a new skill, but a skill they deemed to be essential for increasing their options and expanding their capabilities. Participants were also aware of the social benefits associated with being able to use the internet. Learning based on interest was described by many participants as more informal and easier to grasp than training geared towards formal qualifications.

"You have got to be very interested in it. I mean, if you don't do anything where you need it I don't think you are going to concentrate on it.
(Female 50+, Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

Interest-based learning was perceived as something individuals would choose to do in contrast to formal learning, which was associated with being mandatory or with classroom learning. Due to this, many were of the opinion that they would approach interest-based training with greater confidence and would gain confidence from learning in an environment without pressure.

"It's less stressful isn't it? You go at your own pace, you've got nobody telling you. You're in your own surroundings, and a lot of people feel comfortable in there own surroundings without anybody breathing on them all the time."
(Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Life stage

Individuals often referred to moments of transition in their lives that would encourage them to take up learning opportunities. The most frequently mentioned example of this type of change was that of becoming a parent. Both male and female participants described instances of being unable to help their children with homework and said that this experience had prompted them to consider taking up some form of learning. ICT was considered to be an important tool for assisting children with their

homework and the acquisition of ICT skills was put forward as the most likely form of training in which parents would engage.

> *"You want to encourage your children to do well so it's setting them an example."*
> (Mixed group, Employees, Porthmadog).

Very few participants said they would take up courses in core subjects such as English and Maths in order to help their children. Instead, the general consensus was that parents focussed their attention on making sure that their children understood the importance of education, were being taught properly and were working hard at school. In reality, although moments of transition had given participants cause to reflect; very few had actually taken up learning as a result.

> *"It wasn't until lately – I recently had a kid – that I started thinking about my future."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

Experience of others

Individuals' propensity to be influenced by the behaviour and example of friends, colleagues or family who take up learning opportunities emerged from the focus groups. Participants who had seen others around them take up learning commented that they felt inspired by them. After talking to others about their experience of learning or even observing the learning environment themselves, a few participants said they felt less intimidated by the prospect of formal learning and felt as though they might be capable of completing a course. The example of others also gave these participants a view into how they would go about enrolling for a course, and provided them with a source of advice and support should they decide to do so.

> *"I thought she's dyslexic and she got a degree … and it's just really brilliant to know that she got that far after her teachers said she wouldn't amount to anything."*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

Amongst those with older children, some described how their children had gone on to take up training for a profession they had wanted to pursue. Seeing their children go into further education and training was said to be inspirational to some parents and a trigger to taking up learning themselves.

> *"She's a walking textbook, I'd like to be like that, brilliant at it all."*
> (Female 19-25, Employee, Neath).

For a few younger participants who had seen their peers go on to take up training after leaving school with few qualifications, this was sometimes described as a motivator to undertake learning themselves. Younger participants were particularly motivated by those who had gone on to be successful as a result of doing a training course.

3.3.2 Barriers

Participants described a number of barriers that would prevent them from taking up learning opportunities. Barriers were wide ranging and varied amongst the different groups who participated in the research. As with the triggers to learning, the barriers mentioned by individuals reinforced those identified in previous research. In the case of some of the barriers mentioned, it is possible that these were used by participants to mask other more deep-seated psychological barriers, relating to a lack of self-confidence or self-esteem. For many participants, it may have been the case that they felt more comfortable identifying more visible concerns, as reasons for non-participation. For example, it may have been easier for people to say that they might be over-qualified or lacked time or money, than to admit that they felt fearful of the classroom environment, or that they lacked motivation.

The main barriers to training raised by participants were as follows.

Cost

The cost of training was the most frequently mentioned barrier across the groups. This was especially an issue for employees, who felt that they could not afford to take time away from work to become involved in training. Employees also perceived that free learning opportunities were only available to the unemployed. Unemployed participants disagreed with this, stating that, while some courses were free, these courses were often low quality, whereas the kinds of courses that would be most useful were too expensive. Participants across the groups felt a wider range of courses should be available at low or no cost. Many also felt that additional costs such as childcare, transport and refreshments should also be covered.

> *"It is all down to money at the end of the day the only thing that is stopping them going forward is money. You can't afford to go to college if you have got family to bring up."*
> (Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

> *"You should not have to pay for training. It should be free by the Government. The Government have closed all these bloody jobs down. It should be free by the Government, to provide people with work. You shouldn't have to pay for it."*
> (Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

Transport

Transport was commonly an issue for those living in rural locations who described a situation where they were unable to attend training courses because they were often too far away. Individuals noted that fewer learning opportunities were available in rural locations, and therefore, if participants wanted to take up a course, they would have to travel greater distances. Across the groups, many participants complained about the standard of public transport and their ability to travel to courses. Those who had looked for courses commented that they had often found the course they wanted to do was not available locally, which meant that they would be required to travel. Overall, participants felt that more courses should be available locally so they

would not have to travel long distances to attend. Failing this, it was suggested that the cost of travel be subsidised by the course.

> *"For places around here you need to drive. There are not enough jobs around here so people around here need to drive to travel for work. People living around here need to drive for like four hours to work."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

Childcare

For female participants, fitting in learning around their childcare responsibilities was a primary concern. Although individuals noted that there were daytime courses available, these courses were often said to be too far away from schools. It was also stated that the courses did not finish early enough or start late enough for mothers to fit them in around the school run. Mothers also said they would struggle to pay for any additional childcare that may be required while they were on a course. It was suggested that childcare be provided on site to allow mothers to participate in courses. Alternatively, courses could be held close to or in schools to allow mothers to accommodate their children's needs. It was also suggested that any childcare provided should be free.

> *"If I go to do the training, at the end I'll get a job which will affect my child care and other responsibilities."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Benefits

Many unemployed participants feared that they would lose their benefits if they enrolled on a course. Those in receipt of housing benefit felt that they may lose their homes, as well as their income, if they engaged in full-time learning. Although a full-time course was seen as offering the best chance of gaining employment, these participants feared that going into full-time education would result in losing benefits. The 'benefits trap', whereby the income from taking up a full-time job would not necessarily offset the loss of benefits, was also a frequently mentioned issue. These participants were unsure as to whether they would be able to support themselves adequately if they took a job. Participants wanted assurances that they would not lose their benefits once they took up learning or began working.

> *"At the moment it's not an option. If I tried to go back into school now I'd lose my flat and I'd have nowhere to live."*
> (Male 19-25, Basic Skills, Neath).

Learning environment

Due to negative experiences of formal education, many participants were wary of re-entering a learning environment where they may be subjected to the same experiences. Participants were particularly concerned about the idea of formal teaching and resistant to being 'told what to do' by their teacher/trainer. Many also said they were not confident about being in a learning environment again and would feel afraid that they would not be able to keep up with the course or with the rest of

the class. There were concerns that the level of the course would be too high and they would struggle to keep up.

> *"A lot of people have trouble with somebody standing in front of them and telling them 'right this is what you've got to do', 'you've got to write down this'. And that's what puts a lot of people off training I think."*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

Some older participants were worried that they would be placed in a classroom with younger learners and would not feel comfortable under these circumstances. Many participants were also concerned about assessments and said they would not want to have tests or homework to complete. There was a strength of feeling that they wanted a supportive and informal learning environment where they did not feel under pressure and were able to learn with individuals who were of a similar age, background or ability to them.

> *"If you are trained by someone much younger than yourself then you might feel undermined by that person."*
> (Female 50+, Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

It was suggested that 'forum' style learning, which would involve more open sessions, where learners would contribute to the teaching of the session, would be more beneficial than having just one 'teacher'. Many individuals felt that learning from individuals who had direct experience of working in a particular field would help to make them comfortable in a learning environment. Participants also suggested taster courses which would allow them to view the learning environment and assess their own ability to participate in the course before fully committing themselves.

> *"Rather than just being taught by one teacher, it should be people of the same ilk telling you."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

Fitting into current life

Employees in particular felt they would struggle to fit a course of learning into their current life. Many said they were too busy to take up training as they preferred to use any free time they had to wind down and engage in more enjoyable activities. Many said they would not have the time to commit themselves to a course, and therefore would not enrol. It was thought by some that it would be pointless taking up a course they knew they would not be able to complete. Employees wanted more flexibility in training courses to allow them to engage in learning during their own time. There was limited enthusiasm for internet training, as many said they would prefer to be in an interactive and social learning environment. However, there was scope for work-based learning which would allow participants to gain qualifications as part of doing their current jobs.

> *"It has got to fit in with the family life. Say I wanted to go and retrain and I have got a young family then this retraining has got to fit in with the children. Training is usually during the day isn't it?"*
> (Female 50+, Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

> *"As soon as you say well I can't do this, I can't do these times, they're not interested."*
> (Female 19-25, Employee, Neath)

Being over qualified

Some individuals said that they feared becoming overqualified for many positions if they took too many training courses. Focus group participants offered examples of highly qualified individuals working alongside them in low paid or low skilled jobs, and therefore felt that it was not worth engaging in training only to end up in jobs they were already able to get. Also, several individuals mentioned incidences where people had been turned down for jobs because they were overqualified. As a result, some participants feared that they would be excluded from certain sections of the job market if they were too highly qualified. They wanted guarantees that they would still be eligible for all types of work if they undertook training. It was also suggested that training should be geared towards particular jobs so that qualifications would be more relevant.

> *"I can give you certain examples where people have gone for qualifications, gone for jobs and they have told them they are too qualified for that job. My daughter works as a supervisor. She went to a retailer and they said "You are too qualified". She went somewhere else for a job and the same words came back – "Too qualified for us."*
> (Male 50+, Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

> *"A friend of mine is highly qualified. He's got a PhD in mathematics and all that, now he's working in a take-away because he can't find a job."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

Lack of qualifications

There were a few instances where participants had looked into the possibility of taking up learning but had been put off by the requirement for pre-entry qualifications. Some felt intimidated by the fact that they lacked qualifications and would not apply for certain courses on this basis. Some participants were unclear about the requirements for entering many courses and did not apply in case they were rejected. It was felt by many that course outlines could be clearer about their requirements and, if participants were not able to meet these requirements, they should be able to have a trial period on the course to see if they were able to keep up. Where courses seemed out of their reach due to the entry requirements, it was suggested that it would be useful to speak to others who had been on the course to get advice, information and support to help them make their decision to participate.

> *"[What] if we don't have any qualifications and they're asking that we have to have those qualifications first before we can go to the training."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Economy

Individuals spoke about the effect of the economy on the job market and commented that the lack of available jobs meant there was limited impetus to take up learning opportunities. Many wanted instantaneous results, in the form of work, from taking up a course and, without this guarantee, they were unwilling to engage. Participants were aware that it was unlikely that they would receive guarantees of work and therefore said that they would not bother to take up training. A potential solution to this which was suggested was that work-based trial training periods should take the place of theoretical, classroom-based learning. This would allow participants to be assessed on their capabilities while on the job, rather than being assessed on theoretical knowledge. Participants felt that on-the-job training placements were more likely to result in the offer of full-time employment.

> *"These days, there are so many people out of work that you could go and train up to be something and at the end of it not get a job."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

Participants also suggested that training provision should be more practical and relevant to particular industries. As outlined above, practical training was thought to be the most useful form of training, as individuals would be prepared to go into a particular line of work once they were trained.

3.4   Local focus

The research took place across four regions in order to capture local issues surrounding work, education and the provision of training. Although similar attitudes to a number of the topics prevailed across the four locations, some issues and trends were unique to the setting of the groups.

3.4.1 Heads of the Valleys (Merthyr Tydfil & Aberdare)

For male participants in these locations, the most common source of work had traditionally been in the mines or in the Armed Forces. It was suggested that most men had tended to go into one of these lines of work, so there was little consideration of any other options.

> *"It was either the pit or the Army. You either went to the Army or you went to the pit."*
> (Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

The most common issues raised in the groups here was the lack of jobs available locally since the closure of local mines and more recent closures of other large employers. Many participants had worked in the mines and had been made redundant since the mine closures. Some were angry that they had not been provided with any alternatives and training opportunities once the mines had closed.

"The Government was quick enough to close all these industries down and not thinking twice about the workers, so it is their prerogative to get their act together and provide at least training free of charge for the people that they made redundant at the time."
(Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

The perception was that, as there were so few jobs available locally, people had to travel to Cardiff to work. Many were disgruntled by this and did not feel that transport links were adequate enough for them to travel for work.

"In these valleys, the major problem is that any decent work is in Cardiff, there is no access to get to Cardiff and if you don't drive there are no feasible transport facilities to get to Cardiff."
(Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

"The valleys are very, very short of work… The smaller villages have been hit really badly compared to the cities."
(Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

3.4.2 Gwynedd

Individuals in Gwynedd were most often employed seasonally, as the local economy was based around tourism. Most participants had experiences of working in local cafes or restaurants during the holiday seasons.

"There are no jobs where you don't go home stinking of food or drink."
(Female 16-18, Basic Skills, Barmouth).

Transport was also an issue for participants from north Wales. Travelling was often necessary due to limited local resources in the form of work and training facilities but public transport was limited and services were irregular. Individuals who did not have cars struggled to travel for work or learning. Full-time work was perceived to be very scarce in Northern locations and participants struggled to find regular work throughout the year. Many aspired to have a full-time permanent position of any kind in order to avoid being reliant on seasonal positions.

"I just want a job where you can sit down all day in a shop and not smell at the end of it."
(Female 16-18, Basic Skills, Barmouth).

The Welsh language was widely used by focus group participants in Gwynedd, and individuals with low levels of literacy, also struggled with reading and writing in Welsh. Some individuals with basic skills needs commented that despite having Welsh as their first language, they found written Welsh to be more difficult than English because of differences between written and spoken Welsh. Those who also had low literacy levels in English also encountered difficulties with written Welsh.

"My heart sinks when I see a form in Welsh and I think 'where am I going to start with this?"
(Mixed group, Employees, Porthmadog).

3.4.3 Cardiff & Bridgend

In Southern locations, there was a more diverse range of job opportunities and participants were more able to explore different lines of work during their careers. Despite this, the type of work available in urban locations was often low paid and low skilled and, as a result, participants were more likely to move frequently from job to job.

> *"When you're in school, you don't realise that when you finish school, the kind of jobs you're going to be able to have without qualifications are going to be monotonous and boring."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

> *"My life's taken 50 different turnings."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

The culture of 'job hopping' in Southern locations meant that participants appeared to have less clearly defined career paths and seemed to be more flexible in their approach to work. Some appeared to be more concerned about working for enjoyment than about earning a high wage.

> *"Sometimes, the money isn't that good, but it's the enjoyment of the job as well."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

A higher number of participants in the South had attended training courses of some kind and there appeared to be easier access to local learning opportunities. However, as some of them had attended numerous courses, they tended to have a slightly more negative view of training and they were more sceptical of the view that learning would lead to work. These participants had also been affected by the declining job market and many did not feel that taking a training course would result in employment.

> *"People are training and training and training. They're doing one after the other, because when you finish one, there's nothing out there to do with that training. So you're taking up another course again for something else in another direction and there's nothing there. People are just continually doing courses and not getting jobs."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

3.4.4 Neath-Port Talbot

The views of participants in Port Talbot were similar to those held in Merthyr Tydfil in that the types of job opportunities available were primarily in factories or the Armed Forces. In this location, individuals, particularly males, were often reliant on the steelworks for employment. Alternative work was most often found in local supermarkets or other retail venues.

> *"I went straight from school into a factory. My parents found me a job and I went into the factory. I just stayed there."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

"There are not a lot of options –you go into the steel works."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

Participants had a slightly more positive view of their ability to find well paid work without gaining qualifications. This view may have been based on previous ability to take up factory work and develop a career in this industry. There were some examples of individuals who had started out as trainees or factory workers and had advanced to management positions.

"You can leave school with no qualifications and still get a great job."
(Male 19-25, Basic Skills, Neath).

"I was lucky enough to be kept on my YTS scheme, I've been there 23 years now, and worked all the way up from a fitter to an area manager."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

Despite this view, participants were aware of the diminishing job market, and many commented that finding work locally depended on connections rather than on ability or qualifications.

3.5 Additional findings from the focus group research

3.5.1 Community culture and tradition

It emerged throughout the groups that participants often assumed that they would fall into the traditional roles occupied by other family members. For females, this meant having children and raising a family, while for males, there was an expectation that they would go into work and support their families upon leaving school. Some were likely to 'learn a trade' and work in this trade throughout their lives, while others would job hop but always stay employed. Very few participants questioned these traditional roles or suggested that they might deviate from them.

"Where I come from, we just didn't bother, you just think when you leave school you just work in a factory or you have children and you probably won't work and that's the end of that."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

Across the groups, there also appeared to be a cycle within families and communities which saw young people following their family members in choosing their professions. Several participants described how previous generations of their family had worked in a particular trade and said they had never considered any other line of work for themselves.

"All my uncles were fitters, my grandparents were fitters, my father was a fitter. When I left school I was going to the steel works and that was it."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

"My sister was a carer for the council, and my mother used to be, so that's how I got into it."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

Older participants also drew a distinction between grammar school and comprehensive school attendees, stating that those who attended comprehensive schools were aware that they did not have any prospects of further education. These participants commented that they had had to carve out another route for themselves as they knew early on in their lives that they would not be able to advance in education.

> *"You didn't care about prospects or I didn't anyway … grammar school educated lads were more geared but we were in a secondary school. Once you go to secondary school, you think 'ah well, that is it now. I will just live out my full years, get out and get a job."*
> (Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

Older participants commented that they had never had any intention of continuing in education, as it was not deemed affordable. It was suggested that 'middle class people' had the option of remaining in education after the age of sixteen as their families were able to continue supporting them financially, while families from lower socio-economic groups relied on their children to work in order to contribute financially to the home. Some participants who felt they could have succeeded in school said they were under pressure to contribute financially to their families and, as a result, education was not deemed a priority.

> *"Only well-off people would end up going really far and going to university because you didn't have a lot of money in your family so you wouldn't be able to afford it anyway."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

> *"Even if you were brainy, a lot of our parents couldn't afford to send you off to college or university."*
> (Female 50+, Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

Some participants raised the issue of the lack of role models in their communities and felt this had had a negative effect on them. Some suggested that they had not achieved very much because they had not been expected to. Those who did achieve were seen as breaking the mould.

> *"I'm not saying my parents are thick, but they never went to university. There are no role models."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

> *"Llanedeyrn's a top place, that's where I'm from, but people in Llanedeyrn; you don't expect them to be barristers or whatever."*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

3.5.2 Access to learning

Knowledge of locally available learning opportunities varied dramatically across the groups. Employees in particular had very limited knowledge of learning opportunities available outside of a work context. For those who were unemployed, knowledge of training provision was often limited to the information provided by Job Centres.

Many unemployed participants relied on job centres to provide them with information regarding training. Very few participants, employed or unemployed, were actively pursuing training. Participants knew of or had used the following sources for training:

- o Learndirect.
- o Local colleges.
- o Job Centre Plus.
- o Careers Wales.

"What's that place on the telly? Self learning on TV, Learn Direct or something like that."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

When asked where they would go to obtain information on learning opportunities, participants mentioned libraries, internet, radio, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Civic Centres, magazines and leaflets from local colleges and local newspapers. Very few individuals mentioned specific information sources and not many participants were actively engaged with the sources they mentioned.

"There is a magazine that comes around every now and again with stuff from the college."
(Female, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

"The CAB, they do courses like accountancy and stuff like that."
(Female, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

"They do advertise locally. Neath college advertise on local radio."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

Those who were had sought information on learning opportunities from the above sources had mixed experiences of the help and information they had received. Some said they had received one-to-one support and advice which they found useful but others felt the advice they were given was confusing and sometimes inconsistent.

"I had a long chat with this woman, but I didn't really understand what she was going on about, and then I asked her to explain a bit more and she wasn't interested."
(Male 19-25, Basic Skills, Neath).

"[Careers advice in the past] tried to turn me away from what I wanted to do."
(Male 19-25, Basic Skills, Neath).

"Years ago when you might have gone to the job centre you were on a one to one basis with somebody … now you've got to pick up a phone and press all these buttons."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

Knowledge of available learning opportunities was even lower amongst employees. Most employees had not considered taking up training outside of work and as such

had not sought information or guidance on any sources of training. Some employees perceived learning to be primarily aimed at the unemployed as those without a job had more time to attend courses and were thought to be eligible to free training.

> *"I've never looked to see what's available. I've never needed to do it so I've never looked."*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

> *"When you're training you don't get paid while you're training, so you've got to think about the money aspect as well. Say the training is for a month, you've got to go for a month without money. If you've got a mortgage to pay, how are you going to pay for that if you're going training?"*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

In Gwynedd, accessing training was perceived to be more problematic due to the difficulties of travelling to attend courses in a rural area. In these locations participants were less aware of local learning opportunities. Those who had searched for specific training courses had found that courses that interested them were not available locally, and were put off by the prospect of having to travel further afield.

3.5.3 Coping strategies

The views of all participants on taking up learning opportunities were very much based on their current circumstances, for example, their employment status, length of time out of work and level of confidence. These factors influenced the extent to which they felt that engaging in training would improve or enhance their lives. Coping strategies were used by all participants to some degree, to deal with their basic skills issues, for example, having post sent to a relative's address to avoid having to read letters. As a result of these coping strategies, many individuals noted that they had successfully avoided similar situations which they felt unable to cope with. These individuals therefore did not feel as though they would benefit from undertaking learning, particularly in subjects that they had not done well in at school.

> *"How many qualifications do you have to have in maths? How far do you have to go for it to be any use to you? I can count. When I left school I could do something with decimal points and things like that. It wouldn't take me much to pick it up again. What do we need maths for?"*
> (Male, 50+, Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

> *"When I left school I never had any trouble in doing basic maths and English. I can spell, I'm no brainbox but I'm not thick."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

> *"I have trouble sometimes in thinking of an easy word and I have trouble spelling it but I don't mind asking. I try to work my way around that word and think of something else. Even if it is an extra two lines, I will try and miss that word out and write the extra two lines to get to the point … it doesn't affect my life to the point where it worries me."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

Some individuals felt that they were not using 'school-based' skills in their daily lives and they were therefore relatively unaffected by their lack of qualifications and basic skills. However, individuals did note when seeking work or when complying with job requirements specified in an application form.

> *"I didn't have any proper qualifications and I still was working so I felt a lot of worth … It's very hard to find a job without any proper qualifications."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

> *"I wasn't satisfied [in my job] because the salary was so low. I need a lot of qualifications for me to do something else."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

For many participants, the ultimate goal for having a fulfilling life was to be in work. Therefore training would only be undertaken with a view to getting or keeping a job. The main concern raised by those lacking qualifications was how employers might respond to any gaps in their CVs. Many participants were addressing this concern by avoiding applying for positions that required skills in subjects that they did not have qualifications in. This meant that they avoided confronting their lack of qualifications as it was not a requirement for the jobs they applied.

> *"To look after other people's children you don't need maths and you don't need English, you don't need anything like that. You just go on a six week course and write little things about each subject … it's amazing how easy that is to do."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

> *"I wanted to be a travel agent, and I knew I didn't need a lot of qualifications."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

Although participants recognised that they had limited qualifications, the coping strategies they had developed when finding and maintaining work meant they did not always recognise themselves as having 'basic skills' needs. Furthermore, attending basic skills courses did not appear to be a priority for participants, as improving their basic skills would not necessarily make up for the shortfall in their qualifications when applying for jobs. Also, improving basic skills was not seen to be essential for the types of jobs individuals were applying for. Instead, participants placed a higher value on gaining qualifications that were directly related to their field and would therefore be recognised by potential employers. This finding reflects individuals need to see immediate tangible benefits from learning in terms of a new or better job.

> *"I have got no qualifications at all, no GCSEs or nothing and I am getting through life fine. All right, the money is a bit crap but I am still living. I can still support myself."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

> *"I think training is a really good thing because training gives you the chance to do what you want to do. They never taught you anything like that at school. You can scratch school off the list. Training beats school."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

Across the groups, a number of participants showed enthusiasm for self-employment. Participants recognised that, while being self-employed required them to have a wide range of skills, including managing finances, it also meant they could avoid an open job market where they would face competition and might have to complete application forms and be interviewed. This enthusiasm for self-employment could therefore be seen as another possible coping strategy for individuals lacking qualifications or with basic skills needs.

3.5.4 Confidence

As highlighted during the scoping stage of the project and in previous research (McGivney), confidence emerged as the most common factor preventing people from taking up learning opportunities. Addressing confidence as a barrier to learning during the groups was problematic as the coping strategies individuals had developed meant that many were sometimes reticent to admit that they had confidence issues. Participants spoke mainly of the basic skills difficulties they faced as a result of not achieving academically, particularly the effect this had had in their ability to read or spell. However, many individuals spoke indirectly about confidence, presenting it in terms of things they would like to be able to do better. Confidence was primarily perceived as an issue when participants were confronted by situations that forced them to step outside of their comfort zones, such as in a job interview.

> *"You need education, not so much for jobs but as a confidence builder more than anything. I think if you have got the qualifications and you apply for the job and you go to the interview it gives you more confidence and maybe you can get the job."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

> *"If you are going for a job which you need a qualification in school for and you did well at it you know what you are talking about. You can talk confidently because you know what you are not going in there and not knowing anything about it."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

Confidence issues were often closely connected with low qualifications, bad experiences at school and rejection within the job market. Those who seemed to be worst affected by confidence issues tended to be those who had been out of the job market for long periods of time, quite often females who had stopped working to raise their children. Employees who had been in a job throughout their working lives appeared to be less affected by confidence issues. However, confidence was noted by employees lacking qualifications as a reason why they were less likely to take up promotions and to apply for better positions within their sectors.

> *"I was sent on a course a couple of years ago with all the managers. I lasted two hours … They threw me out and then I was back at work and happy in my greasy overalls."*
> (Mixed group, Employees, Port Talbot).

"I bottled it totally once … I've done (training) before, but this was like a level up, and I knew I could be exposed, as not being a graduate or something. I just thought, I just can't do this. I was pretty confident at the time, but I just made up a story. I kicked myself afterwards, I was gutted."
(Mixed group, Employees, Port Talbot).

Negative experiences whilst at school were also raised by individuals as a contributor to low confidence levels and therefore as a barrier to learning. Where participants had experienced bullying at school, which was most commonly raised by female participants, this was said to be a major contributing factor in their inability to gain qualifications. Although several participants expressed a desire to take up formal or informal learning opportunities, their negative experiences had left them feeling intimidated by the prospect of entering a learning environment. This was then compounded by the impact of their lack of qualifications when looking for work. Many participants also commented that, having not acquired any qualifications at school, they would fear feeling that they lacked intelligence and being branded as such by potential employers, teachers or fellow learners.

"I would be an bit nervous about going because there's people with more experience … and then you think it makes me feel inadequate so I'm not going to go there'. I might look stupid."
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

"It stops you from trying, it stops you from asserting yourself because you're thinking you're going to be knocked back, and because you weren't very good in school you're thinking 'well I haven't got a good CV so is it worth it, to be humiliated?"
(Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

Low levels of confidence also prevented many participants from completing courses they had started in the past. Several individuals also gave examples of beginning training courses and failing to complete them for a variety of reasons including becoming pregnant, finding a job and losing interest once the course has started. The most common reason given for leaving a course was lack of enjoyment of the course subject. However, it came to light throughout the group discussions that, for many participants, fear of assessment and the difficulty of the courses were also driving factors in causing them to leave courses before them had completed them.

"I went to college and I hated it. It was just like school again to me … it was just too hard for me and I dropped out."
(Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

3.5.5 Limited aspirations

Across the groups, participants showed very little desire to advance beyond their current circumstances. Employees in particular showed little desire for getting a promotion. Aside from affecting their ability to find work, which was a primary concern amongst all, the prevailing view was that not having qualifications had not fundamentally damaged participants' ability to have fulfilling lives. Although many individuals accepted that they could have achieved more educationally, they

generally expressed contentment with their lives and very few said they were unhappy with their circumstances. However, further discussion revealed that many felt they could and should have achieved more in their lives. When asked to compare themselves to those they viewed as successful, they saw themselves as equally happy and content but not as ambitious and proactive.

> *"I have thought about different things. You do think "I wish I had gone a little bit further in this particular job or that particular job". The opportunity was there."*
> (Male, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

> *"I'm ambitious because I want to get somewhere in life but I'm indifferent because I don't really care what I do."*
> (Female 16-18, Basic Skills, Barmouth).

Participants often justified the view that they did not require 'formal' qualifications by stating that these types of qualifications were only required by those who wished to pursue professional careers in subject related fields. Many held very similar values across the different groups in regards to work, with the most common view being that the primary purpose of working was to be able to support your family and have to be independent. Beyond this, there was a limited desire among individuals to progress in terms of developing a career. In some circumstances, participants had turned down promotions because they feared the additional responsibilities and pressures of being in a higher position.

> *"Maths, Science and English [aren't necessary] unless you really want to use them when you leave school as in become a scientist or maths to become an accountant."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

> *"I trained to be a welder. I had a City & Guilds in welding and technical drawing but I never took it up … I rented an ice cream van because I made more money selling ice creams than what I would have as a welder."*
> (Male, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

Participants had mixed views about people they described as being successful. Success was most often associated with overcoming the odds and there was a sense of admiration for those who had similar life stories to them but had worked hard to achieve their goals.

Positive examples given included:

- Those who had not gained qualifications at school but had returned to education at a later date.
- Women who had returned to education after raising their children.
- Those who had started their own business.

Having high aspirations was associated with risk taking and bravery, characteristics which few participants saw themselves as having. However, achieving highly was

also related to being stressed and tired and some participants said they would be unwilling to sacrifice the relative comfort to take on a more stressful position.

> *"I had my own business for 11 years building with five or six boys under me and you were stressed because you were constantly thinking about it. I remember going bolt upright in bed and thinking 'I haven't done this. I haven't done that'. It is constant. It is not 8 until 4.30. It is 8 until you close your eyes in the night."*
> (Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

Participants were particularly complimentary of those who had remained within the community despite their success. Where successful individuals had moved away from the community, participants often commented that they had been ruthless or selfish in nature. The accomplishments of these individuals were often made light of and described as luck.

> *"There's a deep rooted belief that they have in themselves that's more prominent in them that it is in other people."*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

> *"Not everybody's got the opportunities to do like other people have."*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

3.5.6 Attitudes to education

Group participants were wide ranging in terms of the qualifications they had gained and the skills and abilities they had developed over time. All participants had qualifications at level 2 or below which included those with extremely low literacy and numeracy skills, those who had gained some secondary level qualifications and a few that had attempted A-levels. A small number of participants had attended college and gained qualifications related to their field. These courses included engineering, business, childcare, hairdressing and catering.

There was a generally negative response to the term education; in most cases it was immediately associated with school. Many participants said that they did not enjoy their time in school and this was reflected in their descriptions of poor teaching, bullying and general 'bad times'. Some BME participants also felt they were subject to racism from both teachers and staff, which affected their attitudes to education and their ability to succeed.

> *"I just thought school was a waste of time. I hated it. I couldn't wait to leave."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

> *"I liked [school]. The school wasn't the problem it was the people who were teaching within that school environment … if things could've been different, I think a lot of black pupils would've done far better that what they actually did in that school environment, Because there were barriers there."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Those who had enjoyed school valued the social aspects of making and seeing their friends. Outside the realm of socialising, school was often described as 'boring' and associated with 'hard work' and there was a general lack of enthusiasm for formal education. In Gwynedd, participants also complained about the difficulties of travelling to school due to poor transport links.

> *"I just wanted to play my guitar. Schools and exams were just inconvenient."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

> *"I just liked socialising. That was about all that I liked in school."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Despite negative attitudes to formal education, the majority of individuals recognised that doing well in school would lead to better prospects and more options in the future. Education was also connected with knowledge and opportunity with a number of participants commenting on the value of qualifications and education in general. The large majority, especially those with low basic skills levels, also recognised that they were at a disadvantage having not engaged fully in education.

> *"You need the education to get a decent job. I got no GCSEs and work is coming up now. If you haven't got the qualifications there is nothing going on so we are doing lesser jobs than what we should be doing … If I had more qualifications now I would be in a bigger job than what I am doing now. I would do a lot better. You need the qualifications to get a good job really."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

> *"If I'd known what I know now, I would have paid attention."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

Individuals often blamed their lack of qualifications on the quality of the education they had received at school. The shared view, particularly amongst older participants was that they were not encouraged by teachers and were left to their own devices at the back of the classroom. Several participants spoke of an education system where pupils were only supported if they were particularly good at a subject or were especially enthusiastic; however these pupils were not in the sample for this research. Many felt they were denied the support they required and teachers did not care if they passed or failed.

> *"They taught the people who wanted to learn. If you didn't want to learn they just sat you at the back of the class and you played cards. As long as you were there and you were a statistic, they were quite happy."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Bridgend).

> *"I don't think it was a case of not being bothered, I think it was a case of nobody really paid you any attention … unless you were really good at something."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Among older participants, there was general agreement that gaining qualifications was not seen as important when they were in school. The availability of jobs and the

types of jobs available meant that school leavers were able to gain employment relatively easily without having qualifications. Very often participants commented that they had viewed school as an inconvenience and had been anxious to leave and begin their lives.

> *"I went to secondary school in Aberdare and it was a total waste of time. The teachers had no interest in teaching us. I didn't care less. Kicking a ball around the yard was all that I was interested in. I couldn't wait to get out of school."*
> (Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

Many older participants were of the opinion that the educational opportunities available to young people today were a vast improvement on what was on offer when they were at school. The general consensus amongst older groups was that, had they been afforded the same opportunities as today's young people, they would have left school with many more qualifications. They maintained that teaching had become fairer, and pupils were able to receive equal attention and support in the classroom. Those with older children commented that they encouraged their children to make the most of the opportunities available to them and paid close attention to their schooling to ensure this was the case.

> *"My kids going to school now, it's fantastic. They've got computers and everything. If it was like that when I was in school I probably would've ran to get there before everybody else."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

> *"If there was a child now today in the same position as me in school, the teachers would actually pinpoint that child and would actually push that particular child to bring the child up to scratch with the rest of the class. It wasn't like that when we were in school. If you didn't know something you basically just didn't know it."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Despite the improvements in the education system perceived by older groups, these attitudes were not shared by the younger groups. Younger groups appeared to place less value on qualifications than older participants. Although they spoke of encouragement from parents, younger participants still had a sense of apathy toward school, which reflected the attitudes older participants had maintained when they were in education. In some cases, the attitudes of younger participants appeared to suggest that they felt that there had not been improvements in the quality of education and teaching. Although younger participants spoke of encouragement and careers advice provided to them through school, there was a sense that information and support given in later school years had come too late.

> *"[There was] too much pressure. If you do well at school they said 'do more, you can really do this' and I thought 'I don't want it now."*
> (Female 16-18, Basic Skills, Barmouth).

Younger participants had in many cases already decided that they would work or start families after leaving school and would not continue into further education.

Young females in particular placed a high priority on having families and raising children while males expected to find work immediately after leaving school. Most had anticipated working in manual trades that did not require qualifications and also used this as justification for not applying themselves in school. Younger participants, particularly 16-18 year olds seemed to be less concerned about changes in the job market and were not aware how this would affect them. Some younger participants, having experienced the difficulties of finding work, admitted that they had been naïve in their judgement and regretted not having qualifications to fall back on.

> *"When I was at school, I never thought it was going to be so hard to get a job*
> *… If I'd known then what I know now I'd have studied harder at school instead*
> *of following the crowds."*
> (Male 19-25, Basic Skills, Neath).

The majority of participants expressed regret at not having achieved to the best of their ability at school. However, the common view amongst participants of all ages was that the time for education and 'schooling' had passed. Many participants did not feel that returning to formal education would be a great benefit to them as they had already tailored their lives to accommodate for the fact that they did not have qualifications. The resulting sense was that gaining basic skills or qualifications in core subjects would not make up for what was they had missed out on 'first time around'. Individuals did not see the immediate benefits of improving basic skills and or returning to education and tended to view more advanced and potentially 'valuable' qualifications as being out of their reach.

3.5.6 Attitudes to work

Overall, participants expressed a preference for practical, 'hands on' work. The majority of employees were working in low skilled positions, primarily within manual or retail sectors. Also, there was a tendency among many participants, particularly females, to gravitate towards industries that involved an element of caring such as childcare, nursing or hairdressing. However, there was a diversity of employment within the groups, which included teaching assistants, postal workers, security guards and administrative workers. Individuals' occupations varied across the four locations and those from post-industrial areas had often worked in factories or mines. In Gwynedd, individuals were often employed in seasonal jobs and fewer participants were in permanent positions.

Participants very rarely mentioned career prospects and most did not appear to think about employment plans in the long term. Young participants in particular tended not to think in terms of a career path and were focussed on short term goals such as making enough money to support their current lifestyle. Many working in industrial areas commented that they had assumed they would have jobs for life working in the mining industry and had not planned beyond this. For participants living in these areas, there were alternative job opportunities within the Armed Forces or in other manual trades.

There was a culture of job hopping among focus group participants in Southern locations and in the North, where participants spoke about the ability to move between several jobs over the course of their working lives. This was primarily

described by older participants who maintained that there had been a wealth of jobs available to them upon leaving school. Many described how they had based their decision to accept an offer of employment on factors such as distance from home, working hours, pay or interest in the job. Older participants spoke of a working culture, when they were young, where people could leave a job they were not enjoying and start a new job the following day.

> *"When I was a youngster I worked in the pit. I finished in the pit in the summer and went on the buses in the summer and then back to the pit for the winter jobs were two a penny in them days."*
> (Male, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

Work was primarily seen as a means to an end by individuals. Descriptions of work were fairly negative and included 'boring', 'stressful' and 'tiring', which may have been a reflection of the types of jobs they were doing. However, participants did show an appreciation for the value of working and employees were especially grateful to have jobs. They spoke of the benefits of working such as having a steady income, being able to afford small luxuries and having a sense or purpose.

> *"[In construction] you get good pay. You don't really think what it's all about, it's good money, it pays the mortgage and that's it."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

Unemployed participants were also vocal about the benefits of working and many commented that being employed would make them feel more useful and give them something to do with their time. Several commented that they found pleasure in having a daily routine, and appreciated the security they would gain from being employed. These participants, as with those in employment, were not especially concerned about the type of work they did but did prioritise the social elements of working. Job satisfaction was often connected with social life, camaraderie and teamwork, and many participants sought work based on these criteria.

> *"I used to work with children and it was very rewarding … and I felt financially secure as well when I had my salary and income coming every week … I had financial independence and it was very rewarding."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

> *"When you start work, you feel less stupid and inadequate than other people."*
> (Mixed group, Basic Skills, Port Talbot).

Being employed was also associated with financial independence and stability. Many participants spoke about the need earn money to support their families. This was frequently mentioned by male participants, while females frequently discussed fitting work around other priorities such as childcare. As previously mentioned, several participants placed high value on self employment as a method of maintaining flexibility and control over their working lives. A few male participants working in manual trades had trained in their chosen professions and worked as contractors on large jobs. They viewed this as preferable to working for larger companies as they were able to make more money and maintain their autonomy. Some female participants had taken up jobs they could do at home, such as

child minding, or had taken positions in the children's schools in order to manage childcare.

> *"I've always worked. I've never found it difficult to get a job. This one, my main reason for going into this was the hours and fitting in with the children. That was the main criteria for me. It's not my dream job but it does fit in with everything else."*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

Participants were on the whole very knowledgeable about their own industries and most were aware of any qualifications needed to work in chosen professions. Those working in manual trades were particularly critical of 'short courses' which claimed to fully qualify people to work in professions which, they felt, required a number of years of training. Amongst the older participants, both male and female, many felt strongly that the experience they had developed through years of working was more valuable than qualifications and outweighed the relevance of some practical qualifications currently on offer. Despite this, many felt they would not be considered for positions if they were up against younger candidates.

> *"If you go for a job it is exactly the same thing. You could be a 21 year old and I could be a 54 year old and they would take one look at me and I could be 100 times more qualified than you and they look at me and it goes straight in the bin."*
> (Male 50+, Employee, Aberdare).

3.5.7 Attitudes to training and learning

Several participants had undertaken some form of training. This was primarily work-based training that had been mandatory for participants to be able to do their jobs. Work-based training included qualifications required to work in a particular industry, such as Health and Safety for manual industries or childcare for nursery work. Outside of work-based training the most common training course undertaken was ICT. ICT courses were mostly taken by older focus group participants as it was suggested that it was an essential skill required for work and modern living. A small number of participants had taken college courses in construction, engineering, crafts and other trades.

Some individuals' responses suggested that they had developed informal, unrecognised maths and English skills through work-based learning. For example, participants who had started their own businesses described how they had needed to develop skills which would allow them to successfully manage their finances. Only one participant said he had taken an NVQ in business skills. Others said they had built up a skills base through practical on the job learning and experience.

> *"I got an NVQ in business planning. I did that from home. I had retired from the factory and I got a bit bored. I decided to start my own computer company. I had that for five years. In the process they would pay me to train to be able to manage and set up a business."*
> (Male, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

In comparison to the terms 'education' and 'work', participants had far more positive views of training and its value. Training was described as 'interesting', 'enjoyable' and 'rewarding' and did not carry the same negative connotations as education as it was associated with more choice and freedom. Some participants said they took pride in undertaking training as it was an individual decision rather than a forced one. Training was more closely connected with the tangible outcomes and instant gratification gained through pleasure-based learning. It was also associated with the wider concept of learning which was seen by most as a positive thing. Participants wanted to be able to see the results of their efforts and favoured a step-by-step approach to learning that would allow them to do this.

> *"If someone applies for a job, you have to wait for a reply. If you cook something, you don't have to wait; whenever people eat they will praise you. There's no agonising wait or anything."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

> *"When I was doing hairdressing, I always used to say 'I'm training to be a hairdresser'. People respect that."*
> (Female, 19-25, Basic Skills, Neath).

It was recognised that training could lead to qualifications and further skills but there was more of an association with specific job related skills rather than general education. Several participants said they would be willing to take up training in order to prepare themselves to go into a particular line of work. Once in work, participants said they would also be willing to do on the job training in order to develop skills that would enable them to do their job well (although not all would seek promotion through training).

> *"You learned from actually being in the salon, starting from the bottom, sweeping floors and making teas and coffees, then it was washing hair, then you started to blow dry and put curlers in. It's on the job training really."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

Individuals prioritised a supportive learning environment where they would be guided rather than pressurised. This was highlighted as one of the key differences between formal and informal learning and was the crux of what would influence numerous participants' decisions in taking up training. Participants were in agreement that training courses should be predominantly practical with a small percentage of theoretical work as this was best suited to the type of learning they felt they could engage in. There was a consensus among most participants that they fell into a category of people who responded best to 'hands on' learning, therefore, it was felt that training courses should be tailored towards these strengths. Across the groups, the large majority of participants said there should be an 80:20 split between practical and theoretical elements of training courses.

> *"Stick me on a job, show me what to do, I'll know. Give it to me written ... and then you've got a test at the end, I would completely fail."*
> (Mixed group BME, Basic Skills, Cardiff).

The overwhelming majority of participants expressed a preference for work-related training. It was suggested that people could be placed in employment and trained on the job rather than having to train first. Apprenticeships were mentioned by several participants as an ideal for of training which allowed learners to fully develop their skills in a particular trade. Apprenticeships were described as an ideal form of training, preferable to short courses that professed to equip learners with all the relevant skills required to work (e.g. as a tradesperson).

> *"I've got a diploma in nursery nursing but I just had to do what I was doing daily and I got that diploma at the end of it … you don't have to go to college to get something, because there is training in the job."*
> (Mixed group BME, Employees, Cardiff).

> *"These are six or 12 month courses and they are qualifying as plumbers, as electricians. They are coming out with a certificate that they can operate a screwdriver. You were talking five years before to do one of them courses."*
> (Male, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

Overall, participants had an appreciation of the benefits of learning and understood the importance of developing skills. However, individuals expressed a desire for these skills to be practical and applicable to participants' lives and job prospects. Participants had less appreciation for training that did not seem to directly engage with their current needs. It was suggested that training would be most engaging if it was directly related to future plans, chiefly in terms of gaining employment. In this sense, participants were forward-thinking in regards to training and were considering training that would realistically result in some tangible outcome. Many participants' view of formal (school-based) qualifications was based on their negative past experiences of education and therefore was not something they planned to revisit in the future. However, participants recognised their need for such qualifications and there was some appreciation for the integration of this type of qualification into training for other skills.

> *"A guarantee at the end of it that it could improve our lifestyle and earn us more money but without that guarantee at my age it wouldn't be worth it."*
> (Female, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

> *"The courses are not constructive enough for people of our age, to be taught the basic skills."*
> (Male, 50+ Basic Skills, Merthyr Tydfil).

Participants' views on how training courses should be structured varied dramatically. The overwhelming result was that there was no 'one size fits all' template for structuring courses. Participants had a variety of needs, all of which they felt should be catered to.

> *"So basically what we are saying is the perfect training would be loads of different types of training. That is what it is coming down to. We have all got different types of training."*
> (Male 19-25, Employee, Aberdare).

3.6 Learning points for the research programme

Although the circumstances of the focus group participants varied across the groups, their concerns regarding work and training were very similar. Individuals' poor experiences of school and perceived 'failures' in an educational context seemed to affect their attitudes toward what they could achieve in future and diminished their likelihood of engaging in activities that might result in further failure. Negative previous experiences at school meant that individuals required assurances about the learning environment, and their ability to cope with the pace and pressure of learning. Although they had developed coping strategies to manage any difficulties they faced in their daily lives, participants were unable to extend these strategies to an educational context, where they felt they would clearly be at a deficit. Indeed, one of the main coping strategies among individuals seemed to be the avoidance of any kind of learning environment. Although they did not reject learning, low levels of confidence meant that they were unlikely to enter an environment that could potentially expose their vulnerabilities.

Participants also had low expectations of themselves and their prospects. It appeared that these expectations were established very early on, as individuals assumed that they would follow similar paths to family members and friends who had also often left school without qualifications. This meant that attitudes towards the importance of education were formed early in life, and seemed as unlikely/difficult to change. This was demonstrated in younger participants who, despite an improved education system and encouragement to learn still did not appear to place a high value of qualifications.

As a result of these low expectations, individuals' life plans were focused on maintenance, rather than progression. Maintaining a job and a family appeared to be more manageable as individuals were familiar with what was required of them. As most had not actively participated in learning since being in school, they were less familiar with what would be required of them if they undertook formal learning. This fear of the unknown often caused individuals to reject 'formal' learning in favour of more familiar and less intimidating alternatives, such as practical learning and learning with similar types of people.

Despite having low expectations and having had poor experiences themselves, participants were generally positive about the potential offered by learning and respected those who had been academically successful. However, their own priorities were primarily based around family and work, and they did not associate themselves with the possibilities offered by academic success.

The main difference between those in employment and lacking qualifications, and those who were unemployed was their sense of fulfilment in being able to provide for themselves and their families. Those who were employed saw themselves as equally happy and fulfilled in their lives as those who had qualifications, as they were able to support themselves and enjoy 'nice things'. Employees and those with basic skills needs did not differ greatly in their attitudes toward education, other than the sense that employees felt they had less to gain from engaging in learning, as they did not see the need to progress in their roles. Associating learning with tangible benefits, employees were less able to see how taking up learning would improve their already

52

comfortable lives. For those who were unemployed, tangible benefits were linked to the desire for practical skills that would be immediately transferable to the workplace. Basic Skills training did not appear 'practical' in this sense, and so fell outside of the training individuals felt they required.

4.   Stakeholder Workshops

4.1   Introduction

Stakeholder workshops were designed to act as sounding boards to discuss, review and add to the preliminary research findings. Having already engaged with stakeholders in the initial stages of this research programme via email and during the scoping exercise, the four regional workshops offered networking opportunities as well as a chance for professionals to share relevant thoughts and experiences with the rest of the research team. Each workshop included a presentation, deliberative breakout groups and a question and answer session.

Evidence from the email consultation and the focus groups were presented to stakeholders and their reactions sought. This allowed the research team to understand the issues that face stakeholders when negotiating many barriers and triggers to participation.

The next sections outline stakeholder reactions to the preliminary findings, the discussions regarding local needs and the priority issues that were taken forward into stage four of the research programme (i.e. the case study interviews).

4.2   Key findings

The broad outcomes from this stage of the research can be categorised under two themes: stakeholder reactions to barriers and triggers, and stakeholder discussions about how best to encourage participation.

Regarding barriers to participation, most stakeholders were aware of the barriers presented to them. These were grouped into attitudinal barriers, barriers regarding provision, and barriers regarding employment.

Triggers to participation interested stakeholders more as they were thought to lead to changes in behaviour. Highlighted triggers from the focus groups and e-mail consultation included the need for tangible outcomes from training, learning must be interest based, and that situational barriers may change and create an opportunity for individuals to up-skill.

In discussions regarding how to improve participation, stakeholders suggested:

- Engagement with individuals 'as they are'.
- Encourage recognition of experience and informal learning/training.
- Demystify the learning environment, make it less intimidating.
- Give people choices and freedom to make decisions in regards to training.
- Outline the tangible outcomes of training courses.
- Devise practical courses which incorporate basic skills.

- Coordination between related organisations was also a main outcome from this stage of the research. The workshops illustrated the interest stakeholders have regarding working together while at the same time, the workshops also illustrated a general lack of awareness with regard to what is offered to individuals with basic skills needs by other local organisations.

The next sections will outline the research findings in greater detail:

4.3 The Barriers (excluding time and money)

4.3.1 Preliminary findings

Three broad groups of barriers were presented to the stakeholders attitudes to learning, provision and delivery of training and education, and the link between employment and basic skills. These findings were identified and developed from the focus groups with seldom heard individuals and the email consultation with stakeholders.

Access

Barriers including confidence to learn again, negative experiences of education and the learning environment as well as family and peers not recognising the benefits of learning.

Issues around the term 'basic skills' and the stigma associated with it were presented together with the propensity many individuals had to ignore their own basic skills needs.

Provision

Providing training and education that is appropriate and accessible can be an issue in some parts of Wales, thereby limiting the number and types of learners able to participate.

This inflexibility or inability to provide suitable provision can also lead to additional expense/funding issues, as well as issues related to fitting training into an already busy schedule, especially if childcare needs to be organised.

Employment

A lack of career aspirations was noted as a barrier to addressing basic skills needs for individuals. This was reinforced by an acceptance and aptitude by many to change jobs to avoid confronting their lack of skills.

In addition to the coping strategies above, individuals were not interested in the benefits of training/education. Instead some individuals suggested that they could become over qualified by understanding training which could hinder them gaining employment.

Reinforcing the negative impact training could have on individuals was the threat of losing benefits by returning to learning was discussed as a reality.

4.3.2 General reaction to barriers (excluding time and money)

In general, the barriers highlighted in the workshop presentation (see above) were already known by most of the stakeholders.

Discussions common to all workshops are outlined below. These have been organised, following the three barrier typologies identified by Veronica McGivney; these are: situational, institutional and dispositional barriers.

Situational barriers

Although stakeholders did not discuss time and money as situational barriers, other issues such as childcare and transport were raised in all workshops. Stakeholders discussed many of situational barriers as issues that could be overcome by offering more flexible training provision and more accessible sources of funding.

Institutional Barriers

Lack of awareness of service provision was also discussed in all workshops. Across all regions, stakeholders spoke of a lack of comprehensive information about training provision and funding. A more coordinated, regional approach offering a central point to identify training options was suggested as essential for all organisations and employers who signpost their clients/employees.

The learning experience was also a common theme to all workshops. It was thought that the difficulties raised by potential learners about the training environment could easily be overcome with some more thoughtful and flexible training options. Issues such as finding alternative venues to replace the traditional classroom environment, allocating fewer students to a class, and avoid placing older learners in classes with young students were discussed.

Dispositional Barriers

From the workshop discussions, it became apparent that dispositional barriers were viewed as topics this programme of research could explore in more detail. Given the staged methodology, stakeholders were eager to suggest ways in which issues such as individuals' confidence, lack of role models and perceived inability to learn could be unpicked in the case study interviews.

All workshops discussed the term 'basic skills' in some detail and questioned whether it was still a viable phrase to use. The stigma associated with the term was recognised as off-putting for some individuals and therefore a new term should be considered to replace it.

Discussing the limited aspirations of individuals with few qualifications was of interest to many stakeholders. Although this barrier was not a surprise, overcoming limited ambition amongst the target audience was seen as a high priority and the result of a more complicated mix of experience and influences.

4.4　The Triggers

4.4.1　Preliminary findings

To summarise the triggers identified in the focus groups and the stakeholder e-mail consultation, three themes were identified: training prompted by life experience, the need for tangible outcomes and for training to be interest based.

Tangible outcomes

Individuals spoke of the need to receive immediate, tangible benefits from the training they take part in. Therefore gaining employment, reducing the threat of redundancy and learning work-related skills were viewed as possible triggers to participation.

Interest based

Genuine interest in what is being learnt was important when deciding to return to learning and complete training. This was specifically noted as influential for older individuals.

Greater interest in training could also lead to greater confidence in learning and in turn overcome some of the already cited barriers to participation.

Life experience

Often individuals are unable to take part in training due to other factors outside their control. Examples of these include caring responsibilities, anti-social working hours or personal illness. Once these factors have been removed or passed, individuals felt more able to participate in learning.

Becoming a parent or grand parent was a very influential trigger for some.

4.4.2　General reaction to triggers

Stakeholders were more interested to hear about the triggers identified in the research than the barriers.

Discussions centred around three broad themes:

- Learning opportunities and outcomes.
- Employment and benefits.
- Support and guidance.

4.4.3　Learning opportunity & outcomes

Stakeholders spoke of how life-changes can trigger individuals to participate in learning. Examples such as having a child/grandchild, improved health or a reduction in caring responsibilities could all provide individuals with an opportunity to learn.

These opportunities were also identified with regard to changes in situational barriers i.e. improved transport provision or training providers offering on-site childcare.

Another opportunity identified by stakeholder that could help encourage individuals back into learning was access to funding (thus minimising the cost of training). Funding is important for both individuals and sponsors (employers or employment agencies) as cost is often a decisive factor when considering training up to Level 1. Many stakeholders believed that more funding opportunities, combined with greater awareness of the opportunities on offer, would result in greater participation in training and education.

Regarding perceived outcomes, stakeholders recognised that individuals would want to gain a sense of achievement at the end of a training process. However at the same time this would need to be tempered by recognition that a fear of failure among many individuals means that informal learning may be more appropriate for them, particularly as a route back into learning. Appropriate accreditation and/or qualifications that are valued by learners and employers should be made available.

4.4.4 Employment and Benefits

Stakeholders viewed gaining employment as an important factor to encourage those with basic skills needs or few qualifications to return to learning. It was also thought that employers played an influential role to signpost, fund and provide training opportunities.

When in employment, stakeholders felt that employers could encourage and support more training amongst their workforce. This could be achieved by signing up to the 'Employers' Pledge' or by up-skilling staff to a similar vocational qualification standard. As mentioned earlier, employers need to believe that the qualifications that are being worked towards and being offered by training providers will enhance their workforce. Stakeholders also discussed the possibility of employers taking a more divisive role, by requiring staff to take part in training to keep their job or avoid redundancy (particularly relevant in the economic climate of 2009). However it was noted in this research, when conducting the focus groups, that some individuals had actively avoided promotion, and in turn work-based learning, in a bid to not address their basic skills needs. Therefore training and up-skilling was more relevant to those out of work than to those who were already in employment.

If an individual is out of work with basic skills needs, a lack of training and education can be seen as a barrier to employment while returning to education and learning could improve employment prospects. Therefore, it was suggested by stakeholders during the workshops that 'brush up' courses in literacy, numeracy and ICT should be made available, if not mandatory, for all jobseekers. It was argued that training while unemployed would be a productive use of time as well as raising the skill level of the local community. While unemployed, stakeholders felt quite strongly that an individuals benefit payments should not be reduced if they decide to address their basic skill needs. The 16 hour rule was cited as problematic in this case.

4.4.5 Support and guidance

From speaking to individuals in the focus groups as well as stakeholders in the workshops, there appeared to be little coordination of information about courses (nationally or regionally), or criteria to judge the most suitable approach to learning. However, some stakeholders spoke of instances of good practice that they were aware of in their local area/in another region regarding information sharing (e.g. Regional Learning Networks and attempts by Jobcentre Plus to create local training directories). In addition to creating centralised information, effective use of the information must also be achieved.

Stakeholders suggested that organisations and individuals that signpost appropriate training must be seen as an 'honest broker'. If trusted, these organisations and individuals will have greater influence when recommending and/or suggesting training.

Similarly, offering support to prospective learners was also cited to increase the attractiveness of training. Many stakeholders spoke of mentoring schemes, extended support offerings (pre and post training) as well as greater awareness of, and support to overcome, other barriers to training while learning. A more personal approach to training and support was desired by most stakeholders who felt it would address some of the confidence issues faced by individuals with basic skills needs and/or employees with few qualifications. Providing effective support for learning and prospective learners could also result in increasing aspirations and motivation to learn as the concept of returning to education/training would appear less daunting.

The final trigger identified and echoed in all workshops was that of recognising each individual's skill base and working with them to recognise and reward the distance travelled when learning. Traditional qualifications were thought to reward learners who have a similar education and training starting point. However many individuals with basic skills needs and/or employees with few qualifications have missed out on some formal education and therefore would need additional help to move forward. Therefore it was suggested that it would be advantageous for these individuals to gain recognition for tackling these issues prior to starting formal training (e.g. awarding a certificate for meeting the requirements of entry level training – a similar concept to the Access courses offered in further education).

4.5   Local Focus

The workshops were run in four geographical regions chosen to represent communities that have been highlighted as economically deprived and/or with known skills gaps.

Having discussed the common themes that arose in the workshop sessions held across Wales, this section will draw upon the some of the key differences between each of the workshops, relating to specific regional issues.

4.5.1 Urban (Cardiff)

Stakeholders in Cardiff agreed that identifying basic skills need amongst the target group was easier than signposting individuals to suitable training. They spoke of provision issues whereby the most needy were the least likely to come forward to participate in training and therefore procedures would need to be put in place to improve engagement with the hardest to reach.

Mandatory training was discussed in Cardiff and was regarded favourably as an effective training strategy. Stakeholders discussed the benefits of mandatory training of the long-term unemployed to the local labour market while compulsory up-skilling of employees was thought to be a valuable way of modernising and creating a specialised workforce.

Below is a summary of the main barriers and triggers identified in the Cardiff workshop:

Barriers	Triggers
o The term 'basic skills' should be reconsidered. o Value to training is low. o Lack of motivation to learn. o Perceived inflexibility of provision. o Lack of capacity and resources within organisations to provide suitable training. o Lack of accreditation seen as a barrier to work based learning. o Organisations not collaborating or aware of each others' work. o Culture of job-hopping to avoid training/confronting basic skills needs.	o Remove stigma of basic skills training. o Disguise basic skills training within other learning/interest based activities. o Taking training to individuals rather than asking for them to leave their own environment (e.g. home tutoring). o Mentoring schemes. o Direct engagement in communities. o Web-based tools for accessible anonymous learning. o Work-based learning to be more flexible.

4.5.2 Post-industrial (Port Talbot)

Sharing information was of prime concerns for stakeholders in Port Talbot and instances of good local practice were discussed during the workshops. As not all the stakeholders were familiar with the work of other organisations attending the workshops, it was taken as a sign that more work was to be done to coordination provision. Stakeholders used this workshop to exchange information about their own organisation and the work that they had done with seldom heard individuals in the local area. An informal environment was created to allow stakeholders to discuss their areas of interest and expertise. Local initiatives were discussed and evaluated, while details of lesser known training programmes, funding offerings and information sources were also exchanged.

The main outcome of this workshop was a call to move beyond the strategic level viewpoint and to appropriately engage and inform the hardest to reach groups about learning opportunities. Local good practice was shared, specifically regarding the participation of those who are NEET, which was a significant issue in Port Talbot.

Below is a summary of the main barriers and triggers identified in the Port Talbot workshop:

Barriers	Triggers
o Family influences and disposition to training. o Older individuals feel less confident in their ability to learn. o Learning environment inappropriate for many (especially older individuals). o Low aspirations of those who are NEET. o Stigma surrounding 'basic skills'. o The availability of well paid jobs that did not require qualifications. However it was noted that the job market is changing and this situation could change.	o Greater joined up working – including a range of organisations (e.g. training providers, employers, unions, schools and colleges, employment/careers centres etc). o Regional Learning Partnerships. o Vocational delivery of basic skills. o Provide accessible training initiatives for parents. o Greater marketing of learning options, including a regional strategy. o Funding as a 'stick'.

4.5.3 Heads of the Valleys (Merthyr Tydfil)

Defining local problems was one of the main topics discussed in the Merthyr Tydfil workshop. It was recognised that a deficit in basic skills within a community may not simply be an education and training issue. Multiple barriers may overlap resulting in more complicated needs and therefore a less conventional approach to tackling problems. Issues surrounding race and culture were discussed in Merthyr Tydfil more than any other region where training provision for ethnic minorities was thought to be inadequate and should be more tailored to meet the specific needs of different BME groups.

Gaining recognition for qualifications earned was also explored together with the suggestion that some qualifications are less valued by employers (e.g. NVQ). Vocational qualifications were questioned by stakeholders as not encouraging the process of learning nor improving learner confidence to develop their skill base. Lack of confidence within seldom heard individuals was thought to be the main barrier to learning in Merthyr Tydfil.

Below is a summary of the main barriers and triggers identified in the Merthyr Tydfil workshop:

Barriers	Triggers
o Funding strategies encourage only 'safe bets' to be sponsored (i.e. those who are likely to complete training and gain accreditation) rather than those who may drop out of training and not complete the course. o State of the job market discouraging employers to invest in training combined with 'scheme sickness' (employers starting to view training as an unproductive use of work time, likening it to a sick day). o Few organisations/opportunities for individuals to be prompted to (re)train.	o Recognised value of qualifications and training by employers (e.g. NVQ). o Concentrate on increasing individuals' confidence and recognition of skills already possessed. o Move to service industry as a result of factories closures.

4.5.4 Rural (Gwynedd - Barmouth)

The workshop in Barmouth discussed how to provide suitable service provision to a dispersed rural community. Situational barriers were most prevalent in this workshop, with stakeholders citing transport, childcare and funding (potential benefits trap) as significant barriers to participation.

Stakeholders in Barmouth also viewed the medium of Welsh as a barrier and a trigger to learning. Due to the fact that the Welsh Assembly was a significant employer in North Wales, stakeholders spoke of adults seeking to learn the Welsh language to improve their employment prospects. However for young people who were not top students, the potential advantage of learning in both English and Welsh at school was not seen as an advantage. Stakeholders gave examples of seldom heard individuals attempting to gain employment after leaving school without sufficient language skills in either language.

Below is a summary of the main barriers and triggers identified in the Gwynedd workshop:

Barriers	Triggers
o Low awareness of training opportunities. o Low learner confidence. o Employment seen as the ultimate goal of training, this can also lead to inertia when employment is not gained.	o Parents wanting to help children with school work. o Financial incentive. o Being accepted in the community (ability to speak Welsh). o Breaking the generation gap. o Positive examples of the benefits of training.

4.5.5 Learning points for the research programme

During the workshops, breakout sessions were run with stakeholders to identify ways in which participation could be improved. Stakeholders were asked to think about the issues relevant in their local area as well as viewing the problem from a national perspective. The ideas generated are listed below:

- Devise practical courses which incorporate basic skills:
  - Disguising basic skills courses as courses designed to provide practical everyday skills in topics such as cooking, ICT and/or manual work.

- Promote training that could benefit parents who want to help their children with their school work:
  - Outline the tangible outcomes of training courses.
  - Mandatory training for local labour market via employers or employment services.
  - Offer guaranteed work placements as part of courses.

- Give people choices and freedom to make decisions in regards to training:
  - Offer short 'taster' courses that can contribute to completing a full course.
  - Offer apprenticeships as an alternative to classroom based education.

- Demystify the learning environment, make it less intimidating:
  - Using peers and/or mentors to whom individuals can relate (according to age, ability, background) in order to encourage learners not to give in to setbacks.
  - Provide more introductory sessions to show individuals the benefits of learning and help overcome the fear of the unknown associated with applying for courses.

- Ongoing support and mentoring of individuals after completing training (individuals are not just left at end of course):
  - Promote learning with peers. Training providers should recognise that some individuals, especially older learners, would like to train with others similar to themselves.
  - Encourage recognition of experience and informal learning/training.
  - Market the benefits of learning to employers using case studies and/or face-to-face events where successful employers can share their experiences with others.
  - Link learning and skills to areas of 'real world'. Illustrate how training can enrich other areas of individual's life.

- Engagement with individuals 'as they are':

  o No entry requirements to training.

  o Recognition of cultural aspects that might impact on the learning process.

  o Use web-based tools that allow individuals to access information about learning and identify any basic skills issues they may have while remaining anonymous. This assumes individuals are able to access and work ICT technology.

From this exercise, stakeholders emphasised the need to inform individuals about the learning process. By actively supporting and encouraging individuals to explore training possibilities available to them, the possibility of up-skilling would appear achievable.

5. Case study interviews

5.1 Introduction

Eight case study interviews were conducted following the stakeholder workshops. Eight individuals who had already attended the focus groups were asked to continue their participation in this research programme and met with a GfK NOP researcher, in their own home, to discuss their views and opinions about basic skills, training and qualifications.

Each interview lasted two hours and incorporated detailed discussions about education, employment, daily routine, information sources together with learning and associated barriers. In addition to discussing their personal stories, each individual was asked to evaluate a set of seven practical concepts identified in the stakeholder workshop that could be taken forward by DCELLS or other agencies to address basic skills need in seldom heard groups. These concepts were:

1. Learning can improve other areas of your life, not just allow you to get a job/qualification (e.g. health, social life).
2. Internet software tools (e.g. a game or test you can do yourself) can be used to identify people's learning needs and tell them about organisations that can help them. These can also be used for learning.
3. There should be more learning opportunities for parents. This will increase parents' confidence/knowledge and will mean they can help their children with their schoolwork.
4. People who take up training should be able to gain recognition for other skills they have gained (e.g. communication, organisation skills etc).
5. Taster courses should be on offer to those considering taking up training. Some may lead to qualifications, but they do not necessarily have to.
6. Mentoring or support from other learners should be available before, during and after training so what has been learnt can be used after course has finished.
7. Hearing about real people and real stories of people who have improved their lives is useful when encouraging people into learning.

5.2 Key findings

The main barrier to learning for the eight seldom heard participants that took part in the case study interviews was confidence. Whether individuals lacked confidence in their own abilities to learn, lacked confidence when in a learning environment or maintained a sense of inadequacy since leaving school, all case study participants stated that they would find it hard to return to training/education.

In addition to confidence issues, most case study participants had limited awareness of education, training and job possibilities open to them. Many had not considered returning to learning as they felt that the local training provision was not relevant to them. However, in most instances the case study participants were not motivated

enough to thoroughly research provision in their area. A similar lack of motivation was seen amongst the sample group when it came to employment prospects. Most participants viewed working as a means to pay their immediate bills and to afford to purchase occasional luxuries. None of the sample group felt they would have a career (defined as good job they enjoyed with promotion prospects), rather their employment would be defined by the low skill job opportunities in available to them.

Although lacking formal qualifications, the eight case study participants were highly motivated when inspired to do so however, taking on formal responsibility was often avoided for fear of failure. Some undertook voluntary work while others were self employed in order to gain a sense of achievement without the risk of letting others down.

Finally, it was observed that some individuals had developed literacy and numeracy skills outside of the formal education environment and therefore did not feel that they did not need to participate in basic skills training. These participants were aware that their CV contained gaps and may well not impress potential employers, however they managed to avoid such questions by applying for work via friends and family instead of completing formal a formal application procedure. A common example of this was in construction whereby the reputation and of the work of a builder or plasterer is given more weight than his/her academic CV.

The remainder of this section will focus on the opinion and reaction of the case study participants to the test concepts outlined above. More detailed summaries of the case study interviews can be found in the annex to this report.

5.3   Test concepts

During the stakeholder workshops, participants generated several ideas for how to engage seldom heard groups into training. Idea generation was based on stakeholders' previous experience of working with seldom heard groups. Some concepts were related to schemes that were already in place, while others were generated in response to the barriers faced in encouraging seldom heard groups to engage.

Following the workshops, researchers from GfK NOP, Arad consulting and Maguire Policy research developed the ideas put forward by stakeholders. This involved grouping common themes from across the workshops and refining the suggestions into concepts that could be assessed by participants. The test concepts were seen as a 'way in' for seldom heard groups and were aimed at tackling the barriers faced prior to engagement and at the early stages of participation, which were priorities highlighted across the stakeholder workshops.

The concepts were presented to each of the case study participants in a random order. Each participant evaluated and prioritised the concepts based on their own preferences. Where participants did not agree with a concept, they were asked how it could be developed or refined to suit their needs.

The concepts tested are ranked below according to popularity amongst the seldom heard participants.

5.3.1 There should be more learning opportunities for parents. This will increase parents' confidence/knowledge and will mean they can help their children with their schoolwork.

Stakeholders were aware that seldom heard groups were more likely to engage in training at particular life stages and raised the importance of providing resources for people at key points. The most prominent of these was parenthood, with a particular focus on parents with children of school age as parents were thought to be more aware of their own limitations once their children were in education. In many cases, training was already being provided for parents through schools, but it was felt to case study participants this could be expanded to include a wider range of subjects and skills. It was suggested that parents could be invited into classrooms to learn alongside their children to encourage bonding and, as well as participating in courses run by schools in the evenings.

Reaction to the concept

Providing training opportunities for parents was very well received by both current parents and those who did not have children. Most participants recognised that becoming a parent could trigger them into addressing their basic skills needs and possibly returning to training/learning. Participants viewed this concept as useful for themselves as well as drawing on their own personal experience as a student.

> *"I know my mother was always gutted that she couldn't help us with our homework."*
> (Male, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

Parents were eager to help their children with academic studies, with many viewing their lack of qualifications as a wasted opportunity that they did not want their child to repeat. Participants also wanted to avoid a situation whereby they were unable to help their children with schoolwork. It was felt that by offering specific training to parents, this could be avoided.

> *"I reckon they should do that because I was saying to my partner the other day that I dread to think what it is going to be like when she is at school. When she comes home with homework and she is like, 'can you help me?' I'll have to say 'ask your Dad'."*
> (Female, Employee, Rural North).

Some participants were already aware of the training provision for parents in their local area. One participant had already signed up to an ICT course at her daughter's school. Courses developed for and offered to parents were thought to benefit both parents, by improving basic skills, and their children through better homework marks.

> *"It does what it says on the tin doesn't it? It is to better the child."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Rural North).

Although this concept was well received, one participant did have reservations about returning to a school environment and which might embarrass her children.

However, upon further discussions, these reservations appeared to relate to her general lack of confidence and negative experiences when at school herself.

> *"You can't give somebody confidence. If you've had a bad experience with education, it's very difficult to forget that. You've got to be a pretty strong person to think 'oh well, stuff it. I'm different now."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Urban South).

5.3.2 Taster courses should be on offer to those considering taking up training. Some may lead to qualifications, but they do not necessarily have to.

The use of taster courses was put forward by stakeholders as an ideal method of dispelling many of the fears seldom heard groups had expressed about entering training. Concerns about being in an intimidating learning environment, being taught to a too difficult/advanced level, having an unapproachable teacher/trainer, and learning in a group environment could all be addressed by giving people an opportunity to take part in training for a short period of time. This would allow individuals to assess their ability to cope with a training course and understand what would be expected of them if they took up the full course. Individuals would also be able to familiarise themselves with the process of applying for a training course, and would be able to sample courses to find one that was best suited to them it was suggested to case study participants that by introducing taster courses it would prevent people from dropping out of training courses when they felt they no longer enjoyed the course, or were unable to cope.

Reaction to the concept

Taster courses were thought to be a risk-free approach to training, allowing individuals to re-enter the learning environment without the pressure of gaining a qualification or achieving a certain grade.

> *"You know what you are letting yourself in for and you know what you are capable of doing."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Heads of the Valleys).

One case study participant had seen her sister benefit from taster courses. Her sister had undertaken a taster course a few years ago which gave her confidence to go on to enrol in a university course. This success story was thought to illustrate the benefits of taster courses leading to more training and education.

> *"She didn't have anything to lost, she didn't pay, it was just a taster course."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Urban South).

Participants made a number of suggestions regarding how best to offer taster courses. Suggestions included locally taught courses (to minimise transport costs), free courses (to eliminate any financial barriers), as well as removing the need for a minimum set of qualifications to attend the course (therefore individuals of all abilities would be able to enrol on a taster course).

For those participants who had already undertaken training in the past, there was a concern about the practical use of a taster course, when only a small amount of information can be taught in a limited amount of time.

> *"Taster courses on something like psychology are fair enough but if you're doing something physical you can't really do a taster courses. You can't really do two weeks of plastering or something like that. It just wouldn't work."*
> (Male, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

Overall it was thought that taster courses offered individuals an opportunity to be realistic about their training options and challenge any fears they might have about returning to education/training. Taster courses were described as giving individuals a chance to 'try out' subjects they may never have considered as well as 'testing the water' without the fear of failure associated with more formal training offerings.

> *"Well before you set about it, if you do a taster course you would be able to see whether you will enjoy it or whether you will catch on. It would be a good think I think."*
> (Male, employee, Heads of the Valleys).

5.3.3 Hearing about real people and real stories of people who have improved their lives is useful when encouraging people into learning.

Gaining qualifications was seen as something that was out of reach for people from seldom heard groups. Many people could not see themselves ever being 'well qualified' or gaining qualifications they had missed out on in the past. It was suggested to the case study participants that real life stories of people who had achieved success as a result of taking up training would allow seldom heard groups to see how they could benefits from training. If individuals were able to see others from their community participating in training and being successful as a result, training would appear more realistic and available to those from seldom heard groups. It was also suggested to the case study participants that, along with written case stories, those who had taken training courses could go out into the community and approach others, telling them about the benefits of training and the effect if had on them. This would allow people to ask questions about what training courses were really like, which could allay some of their fears about engaging.

Reaction to the concept

Real life stories were a well known genre for many within this group of seldom heard individuals. Most had read real life stories in magazines, seen television programmes as well as picking up promotional material in Job Centres and doctor's surgeries. It was felt that such stories could be inspirational if the individuals in the scenarios were similar to the audience hearing about them.

> *"I think that any story where someone improves their lives through learning is really inspiring."*
> (Male, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

It was thought to be essential that seldom heard individuals could relate to the characters in each case story for this concept to be successful. If the characters featured in the case stories differed greatly from the seldom heard individuals viewing them, the content could not appear relevant and ultimately ignored.

> *"You feel as if they're the same as you."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

> *"It's nice to hear the success stories but it wouldn't motivate me to do it because somebody else's life doesn't really matter. It's just my life and my loved ones."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Urban South).

A more personal approach to real life stories was suggested by participants with many wanting information passed on in person, via word of mouth, rather than by literature. This request could relate to the low level of literacy amongst the target audience. By speaking to individuals directly, it was thought that more personal and honest experiences could be shared as well as offering the opportunity for others to learn from the mistakes of past students.

> *"It is good to get peoples' opinions who have done that course as well because they can teach you like, pass on to someone else what they learnt."*
> (Female, employee, Rural North).

5.3.4 Mentoring or support from other learners should be available before, during and after training so what has been learnt can be used after course has finished.

Once people had identified a training course, it was felt that they would need extra encouragement and support to complete the course and to effectively use their qualifications. To help people to get the maximum benefit from their course, it was suggested to case study participants that mentors could be allocated to individuals to provide one-on-one support and address any issues and concerns. As many were intimidated by the learning environment, a mentor could help individuals to cope with the demands of a training course and answer any questions that they did not feel comfortable asking their trainer, or asking in front of the class.

Reaction to the concept

Having access to a mentor was thought to improve the confidence of learners. Many case study participants spoke of confidence issues which they blamed for their lack of learning in the past. Improving confidence and feeling supported were described as the main benefits to having a mentor.

> *"Because the thing is, I need support before and also after because I need help with my confidence to do it in the first place and then to use it."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Heads of the Valleys).

Individuals wanted an accessible mentor, someone they could call upon as and when they needed help and guidance. Being accessible was important to the

case study participants who suggested that mentors could be contacted via the telephone and email in order to receive immediate feedback.

The concept of having someone who can be relied upon before, during and after training was attractive and to some extent built on current copying strategies used by individuals who regularly ask for help with difficult tasks (e.g. completing forms, answering queries).

Although participants wanted accessible mentors, there were concerns about the level of involvement mentors would want to have in learners' lives. Case study participants wanted to control the relationship and not feel pressured by their mentor.

> *"I'm not sure about that. I'd feel as if they were monitoring you, checking up on you."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

> *"I would just want support if I needed it. I wouldn't want somebody on my back constantly. I would just want somebody there if I needed help or assistance, to be able to ask them and if they saw me going wrong they could put me on the right line."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Urban South).

Therefore it was suggested that mentors should be similar to those they mentor. In doing so, it was thought that the learner would feel that they would relate to their mentor and, in some case, be inspired by them.

> *"You think, well if they can achieve that and they were the same level as me it must be achievable."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

5.3.5 People who take up training should be able to gain recognition for other skills they have gained (e.g. communication or organisation skills etc).

Although seldom heard groups were more likely to take up a training course for a specific skill, it was suggested that they could also develop from 'soft skills', such as communication, that could be formally recognised by trainers. Soft skills were thought to be important to seldom heard groups, by expanding their skill base and proving useful when seeking employment or promotion in a current job. Therefore those participating in training would also develop their soft skills, and in turn increase their confidence in the workplace or when applying for a new job. It was suggested to case study participants that those in training would not have to do anything additional to gain qualifications in soft skills, instead it would be the responsibility of trainers to pick up on the skills being used in training, and to award qualifications/certificates to those who were able to demonstrate their competence.

Reaction to the concept

Receiving recognition for skills that are demonstrated during a training course or learning process was welcomed although the practicalities of this initiative were questioned by participants.

This concept highlighted the difference between skills and educational attainment/qualifications. This recognition was appreciated by many participants who felt that their lack of formal qualifications did not mean that they were unskilled.

> "Some people are better at communicating than others, some people have got better organisation skills than others. I think people should get recognition for that. Because it's not necessarily a qualification, it's a skill."
> (Female, basic skills needs, Urban South).

It was generally felt that the concept of gaining recognition for skills when training was beneficial although not enough to motivate individuals to participate in learning. It was seen as a nice added extra for achieving something worthwhile.

> "You can never have too many qualifications. I don't think it's definitely needed but it's nice to have recognition. Maybe if you did something above and beyond the call of duty then definitely but I wouldn't expect a communication certificate for talking to my teacher. I'd expect it if I successfully rallied together a group of my fellow pupils and got them to do a study group or something like that."
> (Male, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

> "I think to do it in the very beginning would be off putting but if they see how well you're getting on and say 'hey you're doing this anyway, shall we have a go?' You are not going to lose anything. I think it would build you're confidence as well, rather than throwing it at you all at one go."
> (Female, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

5.3.6 Learning can improve other areas of your life, not just allow you to get a job/qualification (e.g. health, social life).

During the workshops, stakeholders suggested that seldom heard groups may reject training as they did not recognise any immediate benefit in gaining qualifications. Due to the declining job market, many were sceptical that participating in training would result in a job/promotion. Therefore it was suggested to the case study participants that training should be repositioned as a more holistic process that could enhance peoples' lives more generally, rather than just academically or financially. Some stakeholders felt that if individuals were able to recognise that training may improve wider aspects of their lives, they would be less intimidated by the prospect of engaging and participating.

Reaction to the concept

This concept was not easily understood by many of the participant who found it difficult to acknowledge the additional, personal benefits that learning and training and offer. As a result this concept received a mixed response from participants who did not view it as a trigger to participating in training.

A few participants saw the value of developing social skills and how these skills could be useful in the workplace (e.g. the potential to increase confidence in

day-to-day activities). In doing so it was thought that the practical outcomes of learning would make whole process more enjoyable for seldom heard individuals.

5.3.7 Internet software tools (e.g. a game or test you can do yourself) can be used to identify people's learning needs and tell them about organisations that can help them. These can also be used for learning.

The use of media to promote and encourage seldom heard groups into training was at the forefront of the discussions in all the stakeholder workshops. Many felt that Internet software was not being used to its full capacity to identify those with basic skills needs and direct them to appropriate training sources. The Internet was seen as a useful method of engaging seldom heard groups as they may already have access to the internet and be familiar with online gaming and applications such as IQ tests. Games were thought to be a non-threatening method of identifying learning needs and marching them to available training provision.

It was suggested to case study participants that online games could also be used as a training tool by allowing those with basic skills needs to participate in simple maths and English games that would enhance their skills. By training/participating online, individuals could learn at their own pace and would also be able to avoid a classroom learning environment, which might be intimidating.

Reaction to the concept

The Internet was thought of as a tool that most individuals could access however, from this sample, not all participants enjoyed/felt comfortable using the web.

Online applications and tests were thought to overcome some of the situational barriers many participants faced when considering the re-entering the learning environment (e.g. not in a classroom, completed on own, anonymity granted). However others felt that this impersonal approach would offer learners less help and support than face-to-face contact.

> *"I know it's the same as testing you but you're not in a room full of people having a test. It's quietly done."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

> *"I could do it myself and nobody else could see what I do."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Heads of the Valleys).

> *"Having someone explain and give you support, which is something that the internet can't really do."*
> (Male, basic skills needs, Post-industrial South).

The use of the Internet was thought to be a good starting point for some as information is easily accessible. However concerns were raised about using online tools for an extended length of time (e.g. Learn Direct), which participants felt did not engage with people enough to make them complete their course.

> *"I think you've got to be extremely motivated to do that and I'm not sure if I am."*
> (Female, basic skills needs, Urban South).

73

6. Policy Implications

6.1 Focus Groups

Overcoming the multiple barriers to learning faced by individuals in both seldom heard groups is a complex challenge that has implications for both the content and marketing of learning provision. The complexity of deeply entrenched barriers such as low confidence and self-esteem, negative previous experiences of school, no sense of learning being something which will be of future benefit, and a lack of support from within the family, require a number of different solutions and incentives to enhance participation in learning. These solutions would need to be targeted at both individuals and employers, with the support of providers and other stakeholders, in order to succeed.

Many of the barriers and triggers noted by focus group participants related to their need to see tangible benefits to undertaking any sort of learning. Participants, particularly those from younger groups, placed a low value on qualifications as a result of not being able to see such immediate benefits. Policy makers could consider, therefore, how types of tangible outcomes could be offered within courses and how these could be marketed to harder to reach groups. The benefits noted most often by individuals included gaining employment and/or a better job.

Offering guaranteed job placements after completing courses could be a valuable approach to providing incentives for unemployed individuals to take up learning. For example, if participation in, and successful completion of a course was followed by a placement of, say, six weeks, with an employer, thereby providing the individual with the prospect of being able to 'prove' themselves to the employer, there would be a real incentive for those seeking work to undertake the course.

Clearly, the support and involvement of employers would be integral to such a scheme, and a wage subsidy would need to be provided, possibly on a similar model to that operated by GO Wales for graduates. However, it would enable providers to emphasise in their marketing that individuals could gain hands-on work experience as part of a learning opportunity, as well as the benefits of the course itself. Providers could also emphasise the practical skills individuals would gain from courses in their marketing literature, and how these skills would affect their daily lives.

Attainment of a qualification, or some recognition of achievement, could also be extremely important for those who have failed to achieve during their compulsory education. In order to attract traditional non-achievers into taking a first step into learning activity, funding could be made available for short 'taster' courses, with some recognition of individuals' participation.

For employed individuals, providing tangible incentives to employers is a vital step in overcoming this barrier. Individuals who had participated in learning had usually been involved in mandatory training and therefore the role of the employer in encouraging individuals to learn is vital. Using 'role models' from employers identified by stakeholders as examples of good practice may be a route to encourage other employers, particularly those within their sector, to follow similar routes.

Learning providers and the Welsh Assembly Government could consider developing a list of business role models and funding visits by representatives of 'role model' employers to similar businesses in order to demonstrate the benefits to be gained by encouraging learning among the workforce.

During the focus groups, many individuals, while demonstrating positive attitudes towards learning, expressed negative attitudes towards what they perceived to be the 'learning environment'. These complex attitudinal barriers were often based on previous experiences and require different solutions for different groups.

The unfamiliarity of a learning environment seemed to be an important barrier for those in employment. Enabling learning in the workplace during introductory sessions and holding courses among familiar people (e.g. groups of co-workers) in a more traditional learning environment could help build confidence and overcome negative perceptions of learning. Consideration could be given to providing start-up funding to support the introduction of employee development schemes, whereby employees are able to engage in a range of learning activities, usually on company premises and in association with colleagues. The benefits to employers, in terms of their workforce's skills base, increased retention of workers and job satisfaction, was evident in similar pilot schemes introduced by Training and Enterprise Councils in England and Wales during the 1990s and resulted in companies sustaining the schemes after the initial funding support had expired.

Among those with basic skills needs, the coping strategies employed by individuals included avoiding recognising these needs. This vindicates the approach taken by many employers and providers in 'disguising' learning aimed at targeting basic skills as part of mandatory training or training for job-specific tasks (e.g. Health and Safety or ICT).

The low aspirations expressed by many individuals, as well as the low expectations of other family members, were one of the most common barriers to learning cited during the focus groups. Marketing campaigns could be aimed at raising the aspirations of young people and, in particular, challenging their attitudes towards the paths that they or others may have expected to follow. Timing such campaigns to coincide with specific transitional points, such as leaving formal education or becoming a parent, could also help encourage learning among some groups. The role of information, advice and guidance practitioners is also vital here.

Focus groups confirmed that parents and other family members have a significant influence on the aspirations of young people and their attitudes to learning. These findings reinforced the findings of recent qualitative research into parental engagement undertaken through the Customer Research Programme and confirm the importance of the parental engagement agenda being pursued by the Welsh Assembly Government. Marketing could also, therefore, be targeted at parents, focussing on raising aspirations and encouraging more positive perceptions of learning among young people.

The positive attitudes shown towards the potential offered by learning and the respect shown towards those who had been academically successful suggests that the use of individual role models may also help encourage learning among seldom

heard groups. Providers could be encouraged to use role models who have overcome barriers faced by individuals as ambassadors for their courses. These could be tied in with introductory presentations in workplaces. It would be important here to derive role models from those who had been successful in and inspired by learning, and were from communities which are characterised as containing large proportions of 'seldom heard' individuals.

6.2 Stakeholder consultation - Workshops and e-mail

The stakeholder workshops in Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Gwynedd and Neath/Port Talbot explored a number of examples of good practice and suggestions for improving the type, organisation and marketing of provision in Wales. A number of common themes emerged in the discussions including:

- The need for flexibility in funding for provision, particularly in relation to taster courses, unaccredited learning and other types of provision that are better suited to harder to reach groups.

- The value of using brokers that individuals can relate to and trust - whether peers, community workers, youth workers and family - in attracting individuals to learning and, crucially, in maintaining learning and helping to overcome initial barriers.

- The perceived stigma attached to the term 'basic skills' and the unhelpfulness of the term in attracting harder to reach groups.

- The need to provide tangible 'hands-on' incentives such as short work placements alongside courses aimed at the unemployed, as well as incentives for employers to provide such placements.

- The need to engage employers in finding 'smarter' approaches to overcoming attitudinal barriers among employees and the need to provide easily accessible resources for doing this (e.g. online tools for improving basic skills through other topics such as ICT).

- The value of cross-sector working and the appetite for more collaboration at practitioner level across sectors, not just at strategic levels.

6.3 Urban area: Cardiff

Stakeholders agreed that poor perceptions of learning, fuelled by negative experiences of education and a fear of further failure act as a barrier to learning among individuals. Many also felt that peer mentoring or personal advisors could be used more widely by providers and employers in order to overcome poor perceptions of learning and a fear of the unknown.

Some stakeholders also described examples of employers who had helped employees to gain confidence and new skills by holding sessions which were described as aiming to improve the quality of work within an organisation. These sessions involved group discussion, reporting and presentations among small groups of familiar colleagues in a familiar work setting, with these skills being developed under the guise of a different goal (e.g. preparing for future legislative requirements or challenges within the sector).

Stakeholders suggested that training providers and the Welsh Assembly Government could consider engaging employers through emphasising how this type of approach could help both employers in improving their working practices and employees in gaining new skills through the process of discussing working practices. Peer mentoring programmes could complement this type of approach.

Several stakeholders felt that employers making training mandatory across an organisation helped to overcome a number of barriers among harder to reach groups by taking away the stigma of individuals admitting to basic skills issues by having to choose to take part. In terms of employees, this was suggested as an approach that could be built in to any local labour agreements or procurement contracts by public sector bodies. It was also suggested that training could be made mandatory for individuals who had been unemployed for more than a certain period of time or for young people who would otherwise be NEET.

It was suggested by some stakeholders that the Welsh Assembly Government could make online resources available, enabling organisations to improve individuals' basic skills through web based programmes. For example, online games could be aimed at improving both ICT skills and basic skills, enabling organisations to encourage individuals to take part in courses aimed at improving the former.

6.4   Post industrial area: Neath/Port Talbot

Stakeholders in Neath/Port Talbot also agreed that using training in areas such as ICT or Health and Safety could help overcome the stigma associated with basic skills training or negative perceptions of education. ICT, in particular, was noted as a topic in which most employees 'had never failed' and was therefore a good topic for attracting seldom heard groups into learning.

Improving the co-operation between different sectors was identified as a priority in Neath/Port Talbot. It was noted that the voluntary sector manages Neath/Port Talbot learning network and that this works particularly well in ensuring that the statutory and voluntary sectors collaborate effectively at a strategic level. However, it was suggested that better links could be made at an operational level between practitioners from different sectors. Some felt that, whilst information sharing works well at the strategic level, the key lessons and good practice examples that could be used to engage the hardest to reach groups at practitioner level may be being missed.

For example, stakeholders noted that better links could be made between local youth work staff, who are able to engage many of the hardest to reach young people, and learning providers. It was felt that many disengaged young people trust youth work staff who may therefore be better placed to promote some learning opportunities. At the same time, it was recognised that this process needed careful management in order to maintain trust between youth workers and providers. Ensuring that networking opportunities are available for youth workers to be aware of the type of educational provision in local areas could help achieve these goals.

The South West Wales regional learning network is currently examining how providers can be more efficient in terms of ensuring that providers offer a

specialisation in particular areas of learning and avoid duplication within a geographic area. The establishment of a Regional Skills Observatory has been proposed as an approach to monitor how successfully the partnership achieves its goals.

Stakeholders felt that promotional literature on learning should target learners at key points of transition (e.g. on becoming a parent, when a child enters school or on retiring). It was suggested that, alongside information on parenting and child health received from health workers, new parents should be given marketing literature on basic skills and other skills that could help them best provide for their child.

Stakeholders also described situations where parents with basic skills needs could have a negative influence on the development of skills in their children, particularly during teenage years in situations where parents may feel intimidated, due to being unable to help their child with their work. It was suggested that learning plans need to take into account the needs of parents in order to help them support their children's engagement in learning more effectively. Family learning centres were mentioned as an example of good practice that could be used more widely in helping parents overcome barriers.

Stakeholders in Neath/Port Talbot also emphasised that peer-led marketing was an effective tool and that this had been used effectively in many trade union-led learning campaigns. It was recognised that basic skills courses needed to be marketed very carefully to avoid putting off individuals who were considering taking them up.

6.5   Heads of the Valleys: Merthyr Tydfil

Better inter-agency working was considered to be vital to making progress in addressing the needs of individuals with multiple barriers to learning, particularly as the funding for interventions tends to be sliced up between different agencies. It was felt that there is a need for 'big, brave policy and funding interventions by the Welsh Assembly Government'. One suggestion was that Welsh Assembly Government funding could be used to fund partnerships, (e.g. between voluntary organisations and FE colleges) and that this could enable a wider range of people to be recruited to learning activities. This collaborative working between agencies would have a local focus, resulting in more coordinated delivery of relevant learning provision.

In terms of funding, it was felt that more flexible learning programmes, which are better suited to the profiles of potential learners with multiple barriers to learning, should be made available. At the same time, participants felt that it was necessary to ensure that funding for these programmes is not restricted to payment only on completion of a full qualification.

It was stated that there should be greater recognition of 'soft' outcomes, such as increased confidence and self-esteem. The notion of 'distance travelled' was considered to be important, and stakeholders felt that this could be recognised by providing certificates or recognition for reaching certain milestones or for demonstrating progress against an individuals' initial situation. This could be an especially valuable approach for people who have never had any tangible reward for

learning. It was noted that a range of tools for measuring distance travelled is already available and that these could be assessed in order to identify and map the most appropriate mechanisms for recognising soft skills.

The role of Community Development workers and outreach workers was considered to be crucial in helping people to develop the confidence to participate in learning. Where people have been 'damaged' in some way, this may require a long-term, 'slow build' process – starting with getting people to think about themselves. Linking with the Jobmatch scheme (as part of Want2Work) was mentioned as a way of engendering confidence and the aspiration to move on in people.

Some stakeholders also felt that, rather than concentrate funding for training on Levels 2 and 3, more funding should be channelled towards preparatory programmes, such as Skillbuild. It was asserted that the new Policy Effectiveness Framework is starting to have an impact in terms of aligning funding to accredited/recognised achievement.

For those with literacy deficiencies, it was recognised that there was a need for a qualification which can be built towards i.e. the learning should be tailored to the individual rather than to the qualification.

As far as ethnic minority groups are concerned, stakeholders felt that there should be a recognition that there are many different groups, each with their own specific issues which affect participation in learning, and therefore there needs to be bespoke solutions to the problems of these groups i.e. there is no common 'ethnic minority group' solution that can be applied to all groups.

In assessing the prospective outcomes of learning, the extent to which they are recognised and valued by employers needs to be taken into account. This is not to say that all learning should have accreditation attached – more that, where there is accreditation (e.g. NVQs) this is not necessarily valuable if it is regarded as being of little use by employers.

It was suggested that the Employer Pledge could be amended to make it easier for smaller employers to release staff. Participants noted that employers currently find it much more difficult to do this than do larger employers.

Examples were provided of initiatives which seek to tackle the issue of cultural identity and soft outcomes:

- At Gurnos, Communities First is introducing learning on aspects such as how to behave at work;
- In Cardiff, the South Riverside Communities First initiative is providing tangible support, through ACL, for third sector organisations, with the emphasis on learner well-being rather than just qualifications.

The importance of the role of ACL in impacting on 'cultural identity' in families and communities was emphasised. A suggestion was made that this should be preceded by individual mentoring in schools, to facilitate the acquisition of 'appropriate beliefs'.

First and foremost, however, there should be greater clarity about what the 'problem' is – is it skills deficiencies, or is it something more deep-seated, rooted in cultural identity. Convincing people about the benefits of learning is difficult, but a vital underpinning element.

6.6　Rural area: Gwynedd/Ynys Môn

One of the main differences between Gwynedd and the other stakeholder groups were the relative prominence of rurality as a barrier to learning in discussions. Stakeholders felt that the geography of North West Wales dictates that ease of access to the internet is vital in order to enable access to opportunities and engagement in activity.

Flexibility in funding arrangements is important, and should be encouraged to allow for the disparate needs of individuals. One suggestion was that funding should be made available, to a greater extent, for taster sessions to attract individuals into learning. Stakeholders perceived there to be inflexibility in accessing funding for non-accredited learning despite the clear benefits of such opportunities for harder to reach groups.

It was noted that voluntary work opportunities may enable individuals to demonstrate evidence of having gained 'soft' skills, but there needs to be flexibility in allowing unemployed individuals to participate in these types of opportunities without losing out on existing entitlements such as unemployment benefits. Stakeholders felt that the Want2Work interactive initiative in Rhyl has been particularly effective in helping the economically inactive to acquire skills.

Stakeholders suggested that there should be fewer, but bigger initiatives, with an 'honest broker' to advise people on what option would be in their best long-term interest. It was noted that an initiative designed to provide such an 'honest broker' service was in operation in the Môn a Menai region, with collaboration from JCP, Careers Wales and NIACE.

Mentoring was also felt to be a valuable approach by stakeholders in Gwynedd. It was suggested that this would involve working with families, tracking and sustaining contact with individuals, defining the skills they possessed, and setting simple goals for progression. It was also felt that employers needed to be brought into the provision and planning of learning activities, to enhance its credibility and impact.

As in other stakeholder groups, the term 'basic skills' was not seen as a helpful term through which to engage seldom heard groups. Stakeholders felt that it may be time to jettison 'basic skills', the title of which carries a stigma and is regarded as being too narrow. However, stakeholders also felt that basic skills teaching, in whatever form, should be delivered by qualified staff.

A.   Methodology

This piece of research was designed with a staged methodological approach to engage with individuals from seldom heard groups as well as sector stakeholders in a structured, linear process. The research approach and methodology undertaken for each stage is outlined below:

     i.   The recruitment approach.

Seldom heard groups

Two seldom heard groups were selected for inclusion in the research based on the findings highlighted in the scoping exercise completed prior to this piece of research. The scoping exercise identified two (non-exclusive) groups to be included in the research sample. These were:

Those with basic skills need:

Defined as those with basic skills at below Level 1.

Employees lacking qualifications:

Defined as employees without qualifications at CQFW Level 2 or above.

Before the recruitment phase of this research began, a number of different approaches were considered in order to successfully and sensitively identify and engage with the two key groups of seldom heard individuals. Two approaches were compared and contrasted in order to identify the right strategy. These were:

- o   Stakeholder organisations to refer individuals to the research programme.
- o   Free-find approach to identifying individuals using a screening questionnaire.

It was recognised that although liaising with organisations that work directly with seldom heard individuals would result in a more efficient way of identifying relevant participants for the research, it would also put the study at risk of sample bias. The risk of sample bias was identified when considering the types of individuals' organisations would put forward to take part in the research, i.e. individuals who have already engaged with a service, possibly related to their worklessness or basic skills needs, individuals who represent the most articulate or encapsulate the cause of the stakeholder organisation.

A free-find recruitment approach was therefore selected as the most efficient and unbiased recruitment approach however it was not selected without its potential difficulties. A free-find approach is a less targeted approach when compared to stakeholder referrals, however it was thought that given the research was taking place in four distinct geographical areas of interest to the research study, taking a

screening approach in certain locations (e.g. near the Job Centre Plus) would result in an effective recruitment technique.

The scoping consultations with stakeholders explored a range of possible approaches to defining basic skills needs with sensitivity and discretion. The screening questionnaire was developed with DCELLS using agreed definitions of Level 1 and Level 2, and was administered by a trained recruiter, to identify suitable individuals to take part in the focus groups and case study interviews.

Within the overarching definition of those with basic skills need and employees lacking qualifications, other seldom heard groups were recruited to this research. These included BME individuals, older males and older females as well as younger individuals who may fall into the NEET category (not in employment, education or training).

Stakeholder representatives were recruited from organisations and services with an interest in increasing participation among seldom heard individuals. All local stakeholders for the email consultation exercise and those who went on to participate in the local area workshops worked with seldom heard individuals; with most organisations identified via the scoping study. The sample was also supplemented by additional desk research prior to the recruitment phase to identify relevant organisations in the four research locations in Wales.

A variety of organisations were selected to take part in this research. Stakeholders from the following areas were recruited: employment/careers agencies, community organisations, training providers, education, employers, and unions.

B.   Overview of the research programme

Stage 1. Stakeholder involvement: E-mail consultation

Stakeholders were initially identified through a scoping exercise that was carried out prior to the primary research project starting. A selection of stakeholders from a range of organisations were contacted in each of the four geographical regions and asked to take part in an e-mail consultation exercise. The geographical locations were:

- o Urban area: Cardiff/Bridgend.
- o Urban area: Cardiff/Bridgend.
- o Rural area: Gwynedd/Ynys Môn.
- o Post industrial area: Neath/Port Talbot.
- o Heads of the Valleys: Merthyr Tydfil.

Each stakeholder was initially contacted by telephone and then asked to participate in the research project as a whole (i.e. inviting them take part in both the e-mail consultation and attend the stakeholder workshops at a later date). This recruitment process also sought to increase local awareness of the research programme

amongst relevant individuals and organisations, regardless of whether they were able to participate or not.

In total, twenty four stakeholders were recruited to take part in the e-mail consultation. Of the twenty four, twelve stakeholders were able to complete the consultation document in timeframe provided for this stage of the research. Each stakeholder expressed their personal and professional point of view when responding to the consultation and not that of their employer organisation. Stakeholders from a range of sectors took part:

- o Employment/careers agency (two stakeholders).
- o Local council (one stakeholder).
- o Educational background (one stakeholder).
- o Union (four stakeholders).
- o Employers (three stakeholders).
- o Community organisations (one stakeholder).

The five e-mail questions were:

Question 1: From your experience, what are the three most important issues, apart from time and money that prevent people from gaining qualifications or improving their basic skills?

Question 2: What do you think prompts people with low basic skills or few/no qualifications to return to training and education?

Question 3: What issues need to be addressed in order to encourage individuals to improve their basic skills and/or qualifications?

Question 4: Are any changes or improvements to provision and support necessary in your area to promote participation?

Question 5: How can different partners, nationally or locally assist with these changes or improvements? Who needs to be involved?

Stage 2. Seldom heard individuals: Focus groups

Sixteen focus groups were undertaken as part of the second stage of this research project; four groups in each of the four regional locations. Individuals were recruited to take part in the research project using a free-find methodology. Below is the breakdown of the 16 focus groups by region and sample group:

Region	Sample One: Basic Skills Needs	Sample Two: Employees
Post industrial area: Neath/Port Talbot	**Focus Group 1:** Males 19-25 years	**Focus Group 2:** Females 19-25 years
	Focus Group 15: mixed gender mixed ethnicity spread of ages	**Focus Group 16:** mixed gender mixed ethnicity spread of ages
Rural area: Gwynedd/Ynys Môn	**Focus Group 3:** Females 16-18 years	**Focus Group 14:** mixed gender mixed ethnicity spread of ages
	Focus Group 6: Males 16-18 years	**Focus Group 12:** Welsh language group mixed gender spread of ages
Urban area: Cardiff/Bridgend	**Focus Group 9:** BME only mixed gender spread of ages	**Focus Group 10:** BME only mixed gender spread of ages
	Focus Group 11: mixed gender mixed ethnicity spread of ages	**Focus Group 13:** mixed gender mixed ethnicity spread of ages
Heads of the Valleys: Merthyr Tydfil	**Focus Group 5:** Males 50+ years	**Focus Group 4:** Males 19-25 years
	Focus Group 7: Females 50+ years	**Focus Group 8:** Males 50+ years

Each focus group lasted 90 minutes and was moderated by a member of the GfK NOP Research team.

The key benefit of focus groups at this stage of the research programme was that it facilitated empathy and relationship building between participants. This enabled the research team to identify commonalities amongst participants regarding basic skills and make them explicit during the focus groups, dispel the stigma during the discussions. This enabled the groups to talk openly about their basic skills needs and discuss with others in a similar position.

Where appropriate, group tasks were included to aid discussion and maintain energy levels during the groups. Care was taken to ensure that tasks do not exclude any participants and, particularly when carrying out research amongst those who may have low basic skills, it was important not to use tasks which rely on literacy and numeracy skills. At no point will participants be asked to demonstrate their basic skills.
The topic guide centred on four broad areas of investigation, setting out to:

- Understand attitudes towards employment and learning in general.
- Explore the effects of past experiences on attitudes.
- Explore triggers and barriers to participation.
- Understand likelihood of participating in the future, and factors affecting this.

Projective techniques such as personification exercises, locus of control diagrams and word association games were also used during the focus groups in order to extract attitudes and opinions that were difficult/embarrassing to articulate.

Stage 3. Stakeholder involvement: Regional workshops

In total, 41 stakeholders attended the dissemination workshops from across Wales. Workshops were held in Cardiff and Bridgend (urban), Merthyr Tydfil (Heads of the Valleys), Neath/Port Talbot (post-industrial) and Gwynedd (rural). Stakeholders who took part in the initial e-mail consultation as well as those from other organisations were invited to attend the events. Stakeholders from a range of sectors took part: can list go in annex:

- Employment/Careers Agency (x6).
- Council/Government (x16).
- Education background (x7).
- Community organisation (x3).
- Training provider (x2).
- Employer (x5).
- Union (x2).

As well as stakeholders, three facilitators attended each workshop to ensure that all relevant information was noted down during the events. On average, 10 stakeholders attended each workshop. Workshops.

Each workshop lasted half a day and followed a set structure beginning with a general welcome and outline of the research programme. The workshops were arranged into three sections:

- Presentation of the preliminary research findings.
- Discussion of local needs.
- Prioritise issues to be taken forward into the next stage of the research programme.

The preliminary findings presentation in the workshops were based on data collected in the stakeholder e-mail consultation and the focus groups held with individuals with basic skills needs and employees with few qualifications. Evidence from both research stages was analysed and disseminated.

Stage 4. Seldom heard individuals: Case study interviews

Eight case study interviews were conducted in total. Each case study interview offered a unique insight into the lives of individuals, tapping into potentially sensitive and personal areas of their lives and enabling the research team to understand not only their attitudes toward basic skills and further training but also what situational factors impact on their ability or desire to improve their basic skills. Four employees lacking qualifications, and four individuals with basic skills needs were recruited to take part in this final stage of the research. The case study participants were identified from the focus groups i.e. that had already participated in stage two of the research programme.

Each case study interview took the form of an extended interview with participant observation, lasting approximately 2-3 hours. During these extended interviews, the researcher spent time with the participant in their home, and accompany them as they carry out day to day activities, interviewing them as they do so.

As the research topic is potentially sensitive, it was thought to be advantageous to interview individuals who had already participated in the research, and therefore develop an already established rapport created earlier in the research process.

The topic guide used to during this stage of the research set out to explore the motivations, barriers and triggers to learning, training and education experienced by each individual. In addition to this the case study interviews tested a number of concepts that were generated in the stakeholder workshops. These concepts were:

1. Learning can improve other areas of your life, not just allow you to get a job/qualification (e.g. health, social life).
2. Internet software tools (e.g. a game or test you can do yourself) can be used to identify people's learning needs and tell them about organisations that can help them. These can also be used for learning.
3. There should be more learning opportunities for parents. This will increase parents' confidence/knowledge and will mean they can help their children with their schoolwork.
4. People who take up training should be able to gain recognition for other skills they have gained (e.g. communication, organisation skills etc).
5. Taster courses should be on offer to those considering taking up training. Some may lead to qualifications, but they do not necessarily have to.
6. Mentoring or support from other learners should be available before, during and after training so what has been learnt can be used after course has finished.
7. Hearing about real people and real stories of people who have improved their lives is useful when encouraging people into learning.

C. Case study interview summaries

Case study interview 1

(Port Talbot - Basic Skills).

Background

Case study 1 was conducted with Ms H, a 40 year old from Port Talbot. She lived with her two daughters, aged 18 and 15 and was divorced. Ms H was unemployed but occasionally did some hairdressing. Her main hobbies are crocheting, sewing and knitting. She also enjoys going out with friends.

> *"I trained and I fell pregnant just before I would have done the exams. Because of my morning sickness I couldn't do any exams."*

Ms H had always lived in the same area. Her parents lived across the road from her and ex-mother in law lived close by. Her parents were elderly and she spent the majority of her time caring for them and for her mother in law. Growing up, her mother worked in a pub and her father was a window fitter. She had a brother who was also a window fitter and a sister who worked for the DVLA. Ms H was not sure if parents got any qualifications. She and her brother both left school without qualifications but her sister did get some qualifications and went on to college. Her daughter was doing an NVQ in hairdressing. As with Ms H, she started on a YTS for a year and then went to college.

Employment

Ms H left school at 15 she did not take any of her exams because she did not think she would pass them. She did a YTS hairdressing course after leaving school but left because of pregnancy. She was on the course for just under a year before leaving. She went back to hairdressing 2 years later but fell pregnant again so had to leave the course. She also did a YTS computer course, which she completed at the time. After having her children, Ms H took a job analysing charts for a lorry company. Whilst working for the company, she was moved to the deliveries department but was unhappy as she felt uncomfortable on the roads. Ms H worked in the company for 18 months but was dismissed when the company went in administration.

Ms H was last in full-time paid work 18 years ago. While her children were at school, Ms H worked as a dinner lady on a part-time basis. The job was convenient for her as it allowed her to fit her work routine around caring for her children. Ms H also worked at the school voluntarily for a while but stopped this because she was aware that other people were being paid for the same work and being offered training. She was upset by the fact that she was not offered any training and thought that she may have been able to take up a paid position if she had been trained properly. At the time, her daughter was also leaving primary school so she felt there was no need to continue working there.

> *"It was a job share because we couldn't earn more that £15 at the time. So one mother would do 2 days and we shared it that way."*

"They had these courses where they took 5 or 6 people on and they were getting paid and I thought well surely they should have offered that to me … It really annoyed me because I thought I could have trained and had something at the end of it but they were just using me for nothing."

Ms H was trying to find work in local supermarkets where some of her friends were working and was waiting on help from the local Job Centre in CV writing. She volunteered as secretary/managing director of a youth forum in the local area and part of her role required her to write a CV in order to apply for lottery funding. She had asked a friend, a local councillor and chairperson of the youth forum, to help her with writing a CV. Her friend offered to help but ended up writing the CV for her.

"They're [Job Centre] going to send me on a training course to learn how to write a CV because I just don't know where to start."

"When [my friend] wrote it out I thought 'good God, is that really me?' It was me but I've never thought of myself in that way."

Daily routine

Ms H's routine involved organising her children and taking care of her ex-mother in law and her parents. On most days she took her mother and mother in law out to do their shopping and did things for them around the house. Ms H spent a lot of time taking care of others and did not have much time to herself. She often put off doing housework and preferred to be out of the house.

"[I prioritise] everyone else besides myself. I do sometimes have five minutes to myself but not very often."

Information sources

Ms H got most of her information from watching TV, reading newspapers or from "hearsay". She did not watch TV during the day as she was not usually in the house but she enjoyed watching soaps such as Hollyoaks and Eastenders in the evening. When at her parents house, Ms H would sometimes watch 'how to' programmes such as 'How it was Made' with her father. She would sometimes watch ITV news in the evening but not regularly. Ms H had Virgin media digital television in her home as she could not get Freeview in her area. She would watch soaps 'on demand' if she missed something. The channels she watched most frequently were channel 4, ITV, BBC1 (only for Eastenders) and BBC2 (Springwatch). On digital television, she enjoyed watching old TV channels such as Challenge TV, which screened old game shows. She also sometimes watched the shopping channel. She did not watch Welsh channels, other than S4C, as she did not speak Welsh.

"Even though I'm not working I just don't get any time. People think because I don't work I don't do anything."

"I can't understand it. I can pick up some words but I would love to go and learn Welsh because I feel totally ignorant that I don't know it."

Ms H would sometimes read The Sun newspaper but would not buy the paper herself. Her mother and mother in law both bought daily tabloid newspapers so she would read the paper if she was at their homes. For local news, she would read the Welsh Mirror and occasionally the Evening Post. She rarely listened to the radio but sometimes listened to Radio 1 or The Wave in the car.

> "If I'm at my mother in law's I'll read The Mirror but it's very rare that I buy a paper … You hear the news anyway and you think buying the paper is a waste of money sometimes."

> "More often than not I turn [the radio] over when they're talking because it does my head in."

Ms H did not use the internet very often and did not feel very confident using computers. She would only use the internet for a particular purpose but had been on the internet recently to look for jobs on the job centre plus site. She found this difficult as she could not locate the information she wanted. She assumed this was because she had made a mistake when inputting details of the locations where she was looking for work.

> "I put in for local and they were sending me everywhere and I thought I didn't get it right."

Long term plans

Ms H was looking for a job rather than a career, but career wise she was interested in working in care and felt she had enough experience of care from looking after her parents and mother in law. She had also help care for her elderly next door neighbour before she moved to a nursing home. Ms H was aware that she would need qualifications to become a carer and did not think her experience would count for much. Ms H's brother had suggest she start her own business looking after the elderly people in the local area but she felt she would not be able to do this as she did not have he maths skills to be able to keep accounts.

> "You've got to have the NVQ. Some will take you without it but you need to have experience which I haven't got. Well I have because I've worked with old people, like my in-laws … I wouldn't mind doing a care NVQ and going into caring but you've got to be working and I've got no qualifications to put down on my CV."

Learning and barriers

Ms H had a positive view of training and said she enjoyed the variety of doing training. Recently she had trained in crafts which was her main hobby but had stopped training because she felt she had become too advanced for the course. She had certificates for crocheting and a sea cadets award for designing and fitting a kitchen. Ms H didn't think that these certificates would help her to find work as they were not for work-related skills. At this time in her life, Ms H felt is would be good to go back into training as she was aware that her children were getting older and

would not be at home for much longer. Ms H said she would want to go onto the same course as her daughter if she were to return to training.

> "I've had a few things but nothing which you could sort of put in an achievement folder and say 'give me a job because I can crochet.' I could go and teach it but don't ask me to do the paperwork."

Ms H said she would feel more confident if the people she was on a course with were on the same level as her. She would also prefer to have someone on the same level teaching the course and keeping a slow pace. She had previously visited her daughter on her hairdressing course college and had found the atmosphere very laid back. She felt that she would be able to manage training if the environment was similar to what she had observed on her daughter's course. Ms H would felt that it would be beneficial to observe a course before she signed up so she would be away of the set up and would feel more confident.

"If you went into a slow [level] of learning and then if you got on alright you could move up a bit rather than going in at the deep end and thinking 'I can't cope with this'. If you could learn in stages and you could ask for help."

Ms H was unsure of the application process for training courses. Her daughter had filled out her own college application forms so she has never experienced the process. She said she would find it difficult to write letters, fill in forms and plan her time. At present, she avoided writing letters and would prefer to speak to people on the phone instead. She also worried that if she applied for a course she would be asked about her previous qualifications and would not have anything to show.

"I do feel as though the paperwork side of things holds me back. This is why applying for jobs and stuff like that. If I'd done more English and maths at school I could have done it, but I don't feel as if I can do it now … How dull would they think I am if I spelt something wrong or put stuff in wrong?"

There were a number of factors that had affected Ms H's confidence over the years including her relationship with her husband and her experiences of bullying at school. Ms H was overweight and had been bullied because of this. She felt that her weight was still a barrier and affected her confidence when applying for jobs. Ms H suffered from panic attacks when going out in public and was sometimes unable to leave her house. She was put on antidepressants by her doctor for other medical issues but has continued to take them as they have made her feel more relaxed. She hid her confidence issues from family and said she would not have revealed her problems if her daughters had been in the room. Ms H admitted to having limited literacy and numeracy skills which was also a factor affecting her confidence. She struggled to read and write and would often rely on her daughters to help her. She kept important documents at her parent's house as she felt that they would be safer there. She also said she would throw letters away if she was unable to read or understand them.

> "I'm not very good a putting things down on paper. I can't spell, I spell as I speak. If I was reading, I'd read over the same line over and over. Somebody said I could've been borderline dyslexic but I've never really gone down that

road but seeing other people, how they've got on with it, I think 'well I should have had help when it was there."

If Ms H were to look into going back into training she would contact a Further Education organisation or got to the local College. She would pick up a leaflet from the council or phone the education office for advice to ask for free courses and tasters. For IT courses she would go to a local School or library.

Case Study interview 2

(Port Talbot - Basic Skills).

Background

Case study 2 was conducted with Mr W, a 22 year old male from Port Talbot. Mr W had lived in Port Talbot his whole life. He lived with his mother and siblings until late 2008 but had family problems so left home. He had moved from flat to flat since leaving home and had been living in his current flat for 6 months. The flat he is in at the moment is a Housing Association accommodation. The rest of Mr W's family still lives in Port Talbot. He felt he had become the 'black sheep' of the family because he   wanted a career which was different to that of the rest of his family who did not want to progress at work.

> *"They all live within 2 minutes of each other and there's me who is kind of on the outskirts."*

Mr W was one of 11 children and the only male child. He was the third eldest of his siblings. His eldest sister went to college to do childcare and was at university. His other older sister left school without qualifications but was helped into a job by a friend and was a deputy manager of a hairdresser.

> *"[My eldest sister] is pursuing her dream and she's much happier for it."*
> *"[My older sister] fell into it. It's not something that she would have done had she make an effort in school."*

Since Education

Mr W left school at 18. He took his GCSEs however he failed English, maths and Welsh. He was allowed to study psychology A-Level based on his other GCSEs at college but failed. He felt he had been distracted by friends and messed about at school and pointed to this as the reason behind his failure. He had been to Welsh school and sometimes struggled to speak about particular concepts in English. Mr W expressed regret at not gaining his A-levels. He commented that he had been disappointed in himself after receiving his exam results and wished he could have done it again.

> *"I grew up with Welsh so when I talk about things I still slip into talking Welsh, and it's really difficult … If I had that coupled with even the basic GCSEs, English, Maths, Science, Welsh, it would've helped me a lot."*

After leaving college, Mr W attempted to find work in electronics as this was a particular interest of his. He also looked for manual work in building and labouring. He thought that this type of work would be most appropriate as he did not have qualifications. He eventually managed to find a job as an admin assistant at a car company. He commented that he had been lucky to get the job as he did not have a good CV but was able to make a good impression in an interview. Mr W had enjoyed his job and was able to progress very quickly. He started out writing up appointment sheets but was able to impress his employers and was given more and more responsibilities. At the time, Mr W had also been responsible for caring for his disabled mother. The increase in responsibility meant that he lost the flexibility of the job and couldn't maintain it while looking after his mother. He ultimately had to leave his job after nine months and wasn't able to find another job that fitted in with caring for his mother. He started doing voluntary work in a hospital for the mentally disabled but had to leave his post because one of the patients got attached to him and followed him home.

> *"People look at my CV and they pull a face because on paper it looks horrific. I was there because someone took that chance and gave me that opportunity and it was really good for me because I knew that I could do it and it was my way of showing people that the qualification part didn't really mean anything."*

Daily routine

Mr W was signed up to a training association and attempted to find work. He was referred to the association by Job Centre Plus but was attending many more times a week than he was required to because he was so eager to find a job. The association had sent him on a number of work placements and he was coming to the end of a work placement at the time of the interview. His placement involved helping a man open a family shop and his job involved mostly manual labour, cleaning out the shop and going to the cash and carry. He was leaving the placement because he felt there was nothing for him to do and ideally he wanted to go into care and support work. The training association were trying to find him some more appropriate work experience. Mr W used to suffer from 'adaptive sleep disorder', which would cause him to wake up late in the afternoons and be unaware of the time. As a result, he has had to stick to a routine of waking up at 7am. He went running or swimming in the morning and then met friends in town before going to the training association. His placement began in the evening.

> *"They send you on placements around where you live to try and get experience in something that you want to do … They're helping me to make a better covering letter, try and sell myself a bit more."*

> *There's a nursing home right close which I've asked about and they're going to try and get me into there now."*

Information sources

Mr W very rarely watched TV. He spent several years in a born again Christian church where TV was not allowed and had not returned to watching TV since he left. He estimated that he spent a maximum of ½hr a week watching TV.

He would watch Whitton News and the news in Wales if anything. He rarely listened to the radio. Mr W spent most of his time reading books. He estimated that he would spend about 7-8 hrs a day reading Mr W would borrow books from the library as he did not have the money to buy books. He visited the library 3-4 times per week to return books he had read and take out new ones. For news, Mr W read the Evening Post and the Metro. He did not read the newspaper everyday, only when travelling or to catch up with the news.

> *"It's just for me to keep up to date really. I'll try and catch the news every now and then so I don't look like an idiot when people ask me 'did you hear about this?"*

> *"I mostly read. I'm a massive fan of reading. I read all the time so I get most of my information from reading."*

Mr W did not have the internet but sometimes used the computer in the library to go online. He used the internet about once per week and would usually check Facebook and thisissouthwales.co.uk. He occasionally played games on line but couldn't name any. If he needed any information, Mr W would usually call a friend and ask them to look it up on the internet for him.

> *"I get different bits of information from everywhere and I piece it all together, then I know what's going on. But I wouldn't say there's one particular place where I go and get everything from."*

Long Term plans

Mr W had recently found out through a friend that a bank was looking for Welsh speakers to work in their call centres. The job was not listed online but he had a contact at the training association, who had a family member working at the bank. Mr W had been given an early warning so was first to apply for the position. He had received a call to say he was going to have a telephone interview. Mr W hoped to be working for the bank in the near future although this is not his long term goal. In the longer term, Mr W wanted to return to full-time education and gain some qualifications. He hoped to be able to return to education once he was settled in a full-time job.

> *"It's going to start out phoning customers or something like that but there's room for progression. Hopefully if I show I'm good at a certain thing I'll be able to move into another department. Call centre work isn't exactly my mission."*

> *"It's not my dream job. I would love to go back into psychology ideally, or something to do with care or, failing that, electronics. But at the moment I'm just taking what comes and I'm happy with whatever's thrown my way really."*

Employment

Mr W has been looking for work for the past year but has described himself as "very unsuccessful" in being able to find a job. He felt that this was because he let himself down on paper. Mr W had lost confidence in the process of looking for work. He had

initially thought he would find something in the first couple of months of looking but as time had gone on, he realised how difficult it was going to be. Mr W reasoned that his failure to find work was due to the level of competition around and the fact that employers were more likely to take on those who had achieved qualifications in school. Mr W felt he would continue to lose confidence if he was unable to find work in the coming year, particularly as he was with a training association and felt that they should be able to find him something. Although Mr W described himself a confident person who was ready to get 'stuck in', he also had some personal factors affecting confidence, such as his tendency to talk with a stutter when nervous.

> *"Someone who made an effort [in school] has got 100% more chance of getting a job than someone like me. As a prospective employer it would not matter to me if this person was outgoing and confident. The first thing I'd look at would be qualifications and grades."*

> *"Over the last year I've applied for thousands of jobs, and one out of a thousand said 'maybe'. I honestly thought at least one person would've said 'oh go on then I'll give you a go', but it's been unanimous really. It does knock your confidence because I'm not even being given the opportunity to show what I can do."*

Learning and barriers

Mr W was on the board of trustees for his housing association who had asked him to be a member of the board as a voice of the young people in his area. He had the responsibility of trying to increase the number of young people on the board, as well as making decisions about the running of the Housing Association. He had been on a number of training courses as part of his role. These included negotiation training, effective speech communication, training on how to deal with other board members and how to use the power of the veto. He had to do a maths aptitude course when signing up for training because he failed maths his GCSE.

> *"It was a bit embarrassing really. It just makes me think that an employer wouldn't really want to go through that hassle."*

Mr W had a love of learning and said he had enjoyed his time in school. He wanted to go back into formal education but didn't know how. He needed advice on how to get started and felt that the information sources he had been to gave inconsistent advice. Although he would have gone to career's advice as a first stop, he felt they had been unhelpful in the past so would not return to them. If he were looking for advice now, he would most likely go to the Housing Association, as they had helped him to take up training in the past.

> *"I've had one person say it won't cost you anything and then one person saying it's going to cost you such and such because you're 22 and another person saying if you're under 25 it's ok. It's just total confusion. I've spoken to what I believe are the professionals and not one of them could give me a straight answer."*

Mr W would go back and retake GCSEs and A levels but felt as though he may have left it too late. He would be willing to put money aside to go back into school if he was working. He felt more determined to learn now that he had been at school because he would be taking responsibility for himself and not learning because he had to. Mr W also felt that he was in a better environment for learning than he had been when he was a school. He believed he wasn't able to learn at home because he had a big family and was constantly being interrupted. Mr W would be happy to re-learn subjects he had failed in the past but said that he would feel a sense of frustration in doing this. He would be happier, and perhaps more at ease learning about new things as he felt that this would be more interesting.

> "I want to make something of myself and I want to do something with my life. I hate the fact that I can't get off the ground. There's this feeling of disappointment because I know in myself that I could have done better and I can do better but because of my own stupid fault I'm not being given the opportunity."

> "It's really frustrating because I'm looking at it and it's familiar but it's not there. For me it's really annoying when I'm looking at something and I know that I know it but I can't quite remember."

For Mr W, the main barrier to going back into training would be the price of going back and the fear of losing benefits. He did not have any issues with time or the level or type of learning environment, although he needed a quiet environment to be able to concentrate. Despite not having a car, transport was not seen as a major issue. Mr W did not have a problem using public transport, however, he acknowledge that it could potentially be problematic depending on how far he has to travel. Mr W had no issues with the types of learners he would be in a class with and said he would enjoy mixing with different types of people. He also had no concerns about the type of trainer teaching the course. He did not fear assessments and felt he was confident enough to take exams and tests. He also had no issues about the potential of becoming overqualified.

> "At the moment it's not an option. If I tried to go back into school now I'd lose my flat and I'd have nowhere to live."

> "It's that important to me that if I did go back into education I would fit things around it. It would be the first thing on my list."

Mr W was identified as someone with basic skills needs based on his academic achievements (no English, Welsh or maths GCSEs). However, as with other individuals in this research who are identified as having basic skills needs, he has continued to learn without formal help.

> "I don't think you can [overcome basic skills needs]. I think it's such a big hole … you can't write on a CV 'I haven't got my maths but I'm good at maths.'"

Case Study interview 3

(Cardiff - Basic Skills).

Background

Case study 3 was conducted with Mrs K, a 27 year old from Cardiff. Mrs K was married with three children, one daughter aged 8, and two sons aged 2½ and 14 months. She was a housewife and lived in her father in law's home with her husband, children and in-laws. She had lived in the home for just over 10 years. Mrs K was born in Pakistan. She came to the UK as a child but her parents didn't think that the UK was a good environment and did not think education would be good for her. She went back to Pakistan to get married before coming back to Cardiff. Mrs K had some relatives living in Birmingham and in Cardiff. She had a brother who was working in Cardiff and a sister who was a housewife and was doing basic skills training. Mrs K had another sister who had also started off doing basic skills training and gone on to university.

> "[My parents] didn't encourage me to be educated here."

> "One of my sisters did an access course, because she didn't have any formal qualifications, like GCSEs or A-levels. When she got a bit more independent. She applied for a law degree and she's been offered a place in university."

Daily routine

Mrs K's daily routine involved taking her children to school in the morning, going shopping, cooking lunch and dinner for brother in-law and father in-law, cleaning, washing, and generally tending to the house. In the afternoons, she picked her children up from school, fed them and took them to mosque lessons. After her children had gone to bed, she would spend some time on the internet. Mrs K was happy being in a comfortable home and looking after her children but wanted to do a part-time course for 2-3 hours a day.

> "I have seen many people who have regrets for managing their career first rather than having their families. Some of my relatives are highly qualified and in highly paid professions but they are regretting not having time with their children."

Information sources

Mrs K watched TV for about one hr per day. She watched Asian channels or quiz shows like 'The Weakest Link', 'Countdown' or 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire'. She did not watch any particular channels usually watched whatever her husband or children were watching. She had Virgin media and usually watched BBC, ITV, Zee Cinema and B4U (Bollywood for You). She did not watch any Welsh language channels and did not speak Welsh. He daughter watched Welsh TV but was not being encouraged to speak Welsh by the family.

> "If I listen to the TV while I'm doing something [I hear about] these courses or this university. I'll try to look at the TV and listen to the news."

Mrs K read what she described as 'simple' newspapers such as The Mirror. She also read the Echo, the Post and the Metro and would also read Capital Time to look for training or job opportunities. She read news about schools or local events and looked for jobs and furniture. She occasionally listened to Kiss 101 and sometimes Radio 1.

> *"I love to read newspapers but not ones with difficult English. I just read for fun."*

Mrs K was only allowed to go use the internet for 1 hour in the evening. She would go to the local council site and used Google searches to look for jobs. She also shopped online for clothing, jewellery and footwear from Asian sites, as well as checking her favourite high street clothing shops for sales. She also emailed relatives and looked on education sites. She had looked at Learn Direct and International Correspondence School (ICS) courses online and had seen their adverts on TV. She would sometimes get flyers through the door about training courses from the local adult centre.

> *I'll always go to educational sites and try to browse whatever is available and what would be suitable … I don't have enough information about online courses and home studies and if I do find them the cost is really putting me down"*

> *"The centre I used to go to does new courses every year."*

Mrs K used to use You Tube but had to delete her account. She was not allowed to use social networking sites because some local girls who had Facebook pages had run away and her family feared she would do the same. She also used to play Sudoku and Maze online but did not have time once her internet usage was restricted. She had originally stopped playing because she had a pay as you go connection and could not afford to stay online for long. She was using Ebay to start a business with her husband, buying and selling second hand items.

> *"I used to be on Facebook, I wasn't allowed to put my photo there but I gave my address to people I knew and we could send messages to each other but I'm not allowed to use MSN or Facebook anymore."*

Long term plans

In the long-term, Mrs K wanted to become an accountant or a pharmacist. She had grown in confidence from studying recently and felt she would be able to go back into full-time education once her children were older in school full-time. She felt her husband would be less protective when this happened.

> "*Before I couldn't even think of having basic skills training and then going into higher education but now it's changed and I can … I'm more independent and confident now with my decisions, what I want to do with my life, with my education. I'm quite ambitious so hopefully when I'm highly qualified I can start a job."*

Employment

Mrs K enjoyed working with children. She used to provide one-to-one care to an autistic child and worked part-time as a play worker for about 2½ years, but had to stop because she was not qualified. She went into training and qualified as a play worker, completing her CACHE level 2 qualification 4½ years ago, but had not worked since. She was unable to apply for jobs because she had to stay at home and look after her children.

> *"I managed to do CACHE level 2 which is a recognised qualification which will get me into a job."*

> *"I can't apply for any jobs at the moment because of my children and child care problems."*

While she had been working, Mrs K had been offered courses by her employers including food hygiene, first aid and IT basic skills. She was unable to take up the courses because she already had two part-time jobs. She wanted to go back and do the courses if she had the opportunity. Mrs K enjoyed working and felt it gave her self confidence. She also felt she could learn about other people and cultures, get up to date qualifications and gain financial independence. She had recently been offered work as a translator at the adult centre along with her sister but her husband did not think it would be the right job for her.

> *"The time wasn't suitable, sometimes no one was there to look after my daughter so I had to compromise."*

Mrs K felt she would need good references, qualifications and experience to get a good job. She did not feel very confident when working because she did not have any qualifications. She got her as a play worker job through a recommendation and did not have an interview. She relied on help from her sister and sister in law in filling out forms. She also felt that she was sometimes stereotyped because of her traditional dress and limited English.

> *"They can summarise whatever I say and write it down in sophisticated English."*

> *"Because of my dress, my scarf and stuff I think people undermine me sometimes … If my English was perfect and my occupation was doctor or lawyer or accountant maybe they would treat me different."*

Learning and barriers

Mrs K went to primary school in the UK but returned to Pakistan before starting secondary school. She went to school in Pakistan for a while but was unable to study before she was married because she was not allowed. When she returned to the UK, she took several basic skills courses at the adult centre close to her home. She was working towards GCSEs but had to stop training after she had her first son.
She trained at the adult centre intermittently at ages 16, 19 and 22 but has not returned as she is not allowed to put her children in a nursery. Mrs K felt her

husband was supportive of her studying as she had given him a family. She was confident that she would be allowed to return to education once her children were older.

> "When I came back I started to improve my language skills, basic skills and I learned English."

> "After completing my family I will do higher education and then I intend to work as well."

Mrs K had finished basic skills level 2 courses in English and Maths. She was also offered a course to prepare her for interviews (communication skills), which was running in the centre when she was doing basic skills courses and working part-time, but she was unable to fit in an additional course. If she were to go back to training, Mrs K would do GCSEs. She was originally taken to the adult centre by her sister in law and introduced to the staff. She had since told other parents about the adult centre and knew several people who are doing training.

> "At that time I didn't have time to manage four courses."

> "I recommended my teachers and the class I used to go to. They went there and a couple of them managed to get up to 5 GCSEs. One of them is going to University this September."

The main barrier to going in to training for Mrs K was her family and domestic responsibilities. Her husband worked full-time although she still received some benefits and was also worried about the cost of training. She was also unaware of whether she would be allowed to attend a course with men. She enjoyed assessments but did not know if she would have time for homework. Mrs K preferred to study outside of home but although she had a car, she was restricted in using it.

> "I don't know if I would be allowed to because of having males in the same classroom. When I was studying there were mixed people but I don't know how my husband would react."

> At the moment I am negotiating with my mind and my husband talking about it. He is very encouraging."

Mrs K described Cardiff as having a wealth of training facilities with free child care and day nurseries. If she were looking for a training course she would go to Career Wales for help or ask advisors visiting the local adult centre. She would also go to CAB.

> "I think we have loads of opportunities where I'm living but it's your personal circumstances."

> "You can browse on the internet for college courses, you can ring them up and ask them for prospectuses, you can go to different centres and see their course leaflets. You have loads of different places you can go."

Case Study interview 4

(Bridgend - Basic Skills).

Background

Case study 4 was conducted with Ms R, a 42 year old from Bridgend. Ms R had two daughters, aged 19 and 11. She was a registered childminder but had stopped working to look after her eldest daughter who had health problems. She had lived outside Bridgend for the past two years but was hoping to move back as all of her friends and family were there.

> *"My eldest daughter recently had heart surgery so I've been having a bit of a break from work taking care of her."*

> *"It's not that far away from Bridgend but far enough."*

Friends and family

Ms R's parents were retired. Her mother was a machinist and father was a double glazer. She had a brother who was a facilities manager in a shopping outlet – in charge of security and cleaning staff. He left school with no GCSEs and started off as a security guard and worked his way up. She felt her brother had a better quality of life financially but that she had a better relationship with her children.

Ms R had a friend who had done a social work degree as a mature student but she did not feel she would be able to achieve what he friend had. Her eldest daughter was in college doing a BTEC diploma in childcare and worked part-time in a local cinema. She had passed her GCSEs and A-levels and got into university but couldn't go because of her health problems.

> *"It's fantastic what she's achieved and that's what I want for my children. I didn't want them to be the same as me. I wanted better for them."*

> *"I just haven't got the confidence to do it. I don't think I've got the ability to do it. If I couldn't do it in school, what's going to be the difference now?"*

Daily routine

Ms R's daily routine involved taking her daughter to school, doing housework and shopping. Her daughter swam for the county and in the evenings she would take her to swimming lessons. Her daughter's swimming had become her main priority and commitment. She enjoyed her involvement with her daughter's swimming team and had learned the techniques of the swimming strokes through watching and being involved.

> *That's been a learning process because it's surprising how much it involves. I do enjoy that."*

> *"I put myself on the back burner and everything seems to revolve around the children. I sometimes feel like I'm not really a person. Everything just revolves around the girls."*

Information sources

Ms R watched some TV, mostly in the morning and at teatime, and sometimes before going to bed. She liked dramas and watch soaps such as 'Hollyoaks' because her children watched them. She also enjoyed watching cooking programmes such as 'Come Dine with Me' and 'Celebrity Masterchef', and some documentaries. She also watched Big Brother. She did not watch any particular channels, but was more likely to watch digital channels than terrestrial. She did not watch any Welsh TV and was ashamed that she did not speak Welsh.

> *"I don't watch the news or anything like that. I don't watch the telly a great deal … I've got sky plus so if there's anything I want to watch I just press the record button."*

> *"I watch S4C but it will be English speaking."*

Ms R got most of her information from the internet. She spent approximately 2hrs online everyday, including 30 minutes on Facebook, and shopped online. She would sometimes spend less time online depending on what she is doing, but would check Facebook everyday. Ms R did not read newspapers but would look up local news on Wales Online. She would occasionally play Solitaire on the computer. She only listened to radio in the car and would listen to Bridge FM, Red Dragon and Radio 1.

> *"If I wanted to find out anything specific I would probably go online."*

> *"Because I don't watch the news, if I've heard that something has happened in the news I would go on the BBC news website rather than sit there and watch the whole of the news."*

Employment

Ms R left full-time education at 15. After leaving school she waitressed and worked in hotels. She stayed in the hospitality trade until she had her daughter at 22 and didn't go back into that type of work because of the unsociable hours. There were no real opportunities for progression in previous roles.

Ms R went into childminding when her children were young because it enabled her to work and stay at home with them. She did not want to go back into childminding as her children were older and did not need her at home. Ms R enjoyed working and wanted to go back but was having a hard time getting over her daughter's illness and was being treated for depression. She described the benefits of working as financial and being able to meet people. She did not have particularly high aspirations and prioritised other aspects of her life, primarily her children, over work.

> *I don't want this big high profile job. I would just like to get up in the morning, go out to work, come home in the evening and do what I had to do with my children … I've never had big ideas and big expectations. I've never wanted the world."*

Long term plans

Ms R ideally wanted to work with children outside the home, but knew she would have to train for this. She felt more confident doing child minding because it was something she knew and would consider going back to childminding rather than starting something new. She had had appointments with the job centre and looked for work but had been unsuccessful in finding anything. Ms R felt that the fact she had children and was a registered childminder should qualify her to work in a nursery and was upset by the fact that she would not be considered for this type of work because she did not have the qualifications.

> *"It gets to the stage that you do need qualifications, you do need experience. Unless you want a job working on the till in Tesco's."*

> *"It always seems that you either have to have experience or you have to have qualifications. If you haven't got them you haven't got a lot of hope really. … Don't tell me I haven't got the experience and I haven't got the qualification. The qualification I've got is life skills. But you can't tell people that. They're not going to take you on."*

Learning and barriers

Ms R said she had hated school and had got in with the 'wrong crowd' at a young age. She described school as 'a waste of time.' and had only enjoyed home economics. She did not let her lack of qualifications affect her confidence and said she did not feel as though not having qualifications stopped her from doing anything she wanted to do. She described herself as equally confident about learning now as she had been when she was at school but acknowledged that having confidence is the most difficult thing about learning.

> *"I feel as though as a person I'm more confident now…but as far as learning is concerned, maybe not."*

> *"Because I haven't got maths and English it doesn't stop me doing the job that I want to do."*

Ms R said she did not have general difficulties in day to day life but would find information from other people to be able to help children with homework. She did not think her lack of qualifications was an issue now and said she would not be interested in relearning academic subjects. She also had no interest in learning new things other than the skills for the kind of job she wanted to do. Ms R did training to become a childminder but had never done any other training. She believed she had 'basic skills', meaning she is able to 'get by' with the knowledge she had. She felt she did not have any difficulties with understanding and would find out about things she did not understand. She would not do basic skills training because she did not have the confidence.

> *"If it wasn't a necessity I'd just give up."*

Ms R would take up training now because she did not need to stay at home for her children, and could care for children while training to support herself, depending on how long the training would take. She felt it was more important to have a relevant qualification, such as a BTEC or CACHE qualification, rather than academic qualifications. She described formal and informal learning as being of equal value, and placed high value on life skills, values and morals.

> *"Nothing has to be done for me. If I want to do it I have to do it myself."*

The primary barrier to returning to training or work was Ms R's own confidence. She had a difficult time with her daughter, which she felt had held her back. The cost of the course was also an issue and she was unsure if she could get help to train while on benefits. Ms R did not have a car but the local college was within walking distance and she was able to get a bus. Childcare was also not a big issue as her children were older and her family live locally, but she would need to get into a new routine for herself and her children and did not want to be away from children too much.

> *"At the moment I don't know if I'm strong enough to do it … It's not because I don't want to, and it's not because I'm lazy, it is just how I'm feeling at the moment. Maybe I'm just not quite ready to do it, even though I know it will improve my life."*

Ms R had no concerns about being overqualified or being with other learners, as she felt able to mix with others. Her main concerns were about the learning environment based on past experience, and she worried that a training course could be like school, particularly if she did not like the trainer. Assessments were another big concern as she disagreed with exams and did not want to have to do them. She was also worried that she would be taught at too high a level and would not be able to keep up.

> *"I see the state my girls get into when they've got to do an exam and I don't think it's right. It should be an ongoing assessment of somebody's ability."*

> *"If you're taught at too high a level for your ability you're bound to fail."*

If Ms R wanted to go back into training she would see what courses were available at the local college. She had been to the college with her daughter but was not interested in anything currently on offer. If she were to sign up to a course at the college, she would go onto the college website in the first instance, and look in the childhood study section. She would then go to the college open day to further discuss joining. Ms R would need the college to provide support and advice on cost, the length of course and what the course could offer.

> *"There's a huge spectrum of things you can do, from childcare to engineering to drama."*

> *"I would look at the different levels and what that qualification can offer you. What employment you can go into after achieving it."*

Case Study interview 5

(Aberdare – Employee).

Background

Case study 5 was conducted with J, a 21 years old from Aberdare. He lived with his father and sister in a terrace house. His parents divorced when he was young and now maintains contact with his mother via Facebook. His father is a self-employed taxi driver. J is a roofer and also works as a window fitter occasionally. He has been working for eight months in total.

J's family settled in Aberdare when J was in secondary school. His family moved around the country quite a lot while he was of primary school age and hence did not stay at one school for very long. He found this disruptive. J did not finish school as he was expelled for fighting. He also took recreational drugs from a young age (13 years old) which affected his schooling. Once expelled from school he was referred to a YTS where he gained some labouring qualifications and made some new friendships.

J is very active. His main hobbies are BMX-ing and working out in the gym. He has a home gym in the spare bedroom in his father's house which he uses when he is at home. He also uses his friend's gym which is located in a garage. This garage is the hum of his current friendship group, where he spends most of his free time listening to music, playing Xbox and customising their BMX bikes.

J started riding a BMX bike two years ago and has learnt tricks with his friends. He took part in his first national BMX competition last summer and came third out of 400 competitors. Although J enjoyed competing, he was not happy to come third. His ambition is to come first in the competition this year which would entitle him to an all expenses paid trip to Australia to compete in the next competition.

Employment

J was diagnosed with ADHD once expelled from secondary school which meant he was unaware why he found it difficult to remain in class for long periods of time. He would often leave the classroom and play football with his friends during the school day. J therefore only enjoyed active lessons at school such as PE, science and art. Due to J's behaviour, he was expelled from school at 15 years old, without any formal qualifications.

> "I feel bad and that. I feel like I chucked most of my life away and I could have made it better and that. If I had stayed in school and got the education I wanted and that I would feel a hell of a lot more confident. Definitely when it comes to like reading and writing."

He was referred to the local YTS where he learnt carpentry, bricklaying, and painting and decorating. He attended YTS for nearly two and a half years. J preferred the method of engagement to that used at school as he felt that the teachers treated him

like an adult and allowed him to learn at his own pace by trial and error. J completed the YTS scheme having said that he enjoyed his time on the scheme.

> "It was good. I enjoyed it. It was a lot better than school there. Hell of a lot better. It was like you didn't have so many people around you telling you what to do. They say this is what you've got to do, let's see how you get on and that. And it was like a new skill really. You got to learn it and that. So we concentrated more like."

Once J had completed his YTS and gained some qualifications, he was unemployed for a while. During this time he had made some new friends and his old friendship group was beginning to disband due to a number of individuals having more serious issues with drugs (culminating in the death of one of J's friends). At this point, J and a number of his friends decided to stop taking drugs.

> "It was just like we all noticed if you carried on like, we weren't going to get anywhere."

J's first job was as a window fitter, working for a friend's father. He did not have to go through a formal recruitment process to be hired and was given on the job training and gained a formal, vocational qualification. J stopped window fitting when there were too few jobs in his local area to continue being employed by his friend's father. This did not affect him too much as J was only employed on a casual basis. At this point J moved to roofing which is his current job where he works with a friend (albeit still on a casual job-by-job basis).

> "I decided to look for another one [job] then and my friend said, 'here you are, like I've got a roof-fitting job if you want it?' and I said yes. So I've been doing that."

J has never completed a formal job application process, nor had he a written CV. However J does value working very highly and would not want to be unemployed as he wants to remain independent.

> "It's just going out and doing something instead of being sat in the house bored. Earning money mainly. Standing on my own two feet instead of relying no other people and that."

> "It's people I know and my friends. [When] you're not working, [they say] 'come with me and get yourself some money. I'll show you what to do, train you up and that'."

When thinking about the difference between a job, a 'good job' and a 'career', J identified two significant differences. He felt that a 'good job' was enjoyable for whoever did it, while a 'career' was both enjoyable and something that would be pursued long-term in the future. In contrast, 'a job' was not long-term nor would it have to be something enjoyable.

Daily routine

J does not have a set routine during the working week as he is employed on a casual, job-by-job basis. When he is working J usually travels to North Wales to work on properties. Therefore he would get up for work at 5am and start work at 7.30/8am. After working a full day he would return to his home and then socialise with friends. Generally J spends two days a week at home without work.
"[When I'm at home] I spend time with my girlfriend or I just go on the weights, listen to music and that."

During the weekends, J would work out in the gym during the day and then socialise with his friends during the evening. He would go drinking and possibly clubbing in his local area or travel to other towns/cities nearby.

Information sources

J does not access news or the media very often. He does not like to watch television and thinks that it is 'boring'. He occasionally watched DVDs at home but rarely watches programmes.

He doesn't buy any newspapers although his father does buy The Sun which he occasionally reads the sports pages.

J does listen to the radio, BBC Radio 1, which he listens to with his friends on a Friday night. He does not listen to the news on the radio, only music.

Although J has a computer he uses it very rarely. He estimates that he spends 15 minutes a week online. He didn't use computers much at school and so does not feel very confident when using it. However he does use the computer to access Facebook which is his main line of communication with his mother.

> *"I don't bother much. If I've got time I'll go on but if not I don't find it interesting that much."*

> *"I am on Facebook but that's just to keep in contact with my mother and that…I check my mail and that's about it."*

As J leads such an active life he does not come into contact with information sources regularly. As he has ADHD he also finds concentrating on reading, listening to a radio programme or watching television quite difficult.

> *"When it comes to books and that I don't think I've got time for it. I look at it and say 'sod that like, I can't be arsed'."*

Long term plans

J found it difficult to project his thoughts to the future. When asked where he saw himself in two years he was not able to articulate a clear answer. Instead he saw himself continuing to work in roofing and as a window fitter for the near future.

When asked about long term aspirations, J spoke of wanting to secure a permanent job. He also spoke of his ambitions as a BMX rider and his aim to win a competition in the near future.

> "To me, making a life for myself after everything that I've been through over the years and that…if I can achieve in something, its something good for me."

J was aware of his limited qualifications and the impact this has on his employability. He wants to gain more qualifications and is not afraid to take new courses and diversify his vocational skills or to work towards promotion.

> "The way I think of it, the more qualifications I get, the easier it's going to be to find a proper job and a permanent one like."

However, J was not sure about his future employment if he had to apply for a job formally. As he had never done so, he was nervous about the prospect of a job interview and said he was much happier working with the skills and his current employers rather than do a new type of job or apply to work for an unknown employer.

> "I wouldn't have the confidence to like go for the interview and that."

J would ideally like to be self-employed in order to avoid the issues of job applications as well as the possibility of increasing his earning potential as he would be the boss (like his father who is self-employed).

An alternative to being self-employed that J considered during the interview was the option to help other young people who were experiencing problems with drugs. He wanted to help young people who were in a similar position to him when he was young. This would draw on his own personal experiences and ability to connect with other people (the social aspect of work that he currently enjoys).

> "I would probably like to help people really in the same situation as how I was when I was a kid. When it comes to drugs and that, I would probably like to help them and get them clean and off it."

Learning and barriers

J liked the social aspect of school, which is also what he likes about working. J completed all the courses he has started since leaving school and values qualifications and what they bring to his working life. J enjoys his current job as he is able to be physically active at the same time as earning money and being sociable. This combination was enough for him to continue training and gain a trade.

> "Its like I enjoy working out as well on window fitting, like they're not exactly light. So you're working out the same time as fitting and that. You're meeting new people. I don't know, it's just something I do really like. I enjoy it."

> *"I've got a trade. I have got a window fitting trade now and my mate's putting me through the roofing. So I'd be confident enough to go and get a job doing something like that, and the painting and decorating, bricklaying etc. I've got them qualifications."*

However, J does not think that he would be able to learn in a formal environment again. The aspects of training and work that he enjoys are vocational and very hands-on and therefore he does not think he would enjoy, or be able to learn in a school-like setting again.

> *"Yes I would love to. I would like to learn a lot more and that but I find it hard and difficult now. Now I am older I find it's harder to learn than I was younger. It's a lot harder now."*

Since leaving school and the YTS, J has worked towards his Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card which assesses his awareness and adherence to health and safety regulations. Although he was awarded a card, he did not study for the assessments as he felt the questions were 'common sense'. In contrast, he is also learning to drive and during the interview he mentioned that he was worried about the theory examination. The theory examination, taken when learning to drive in the UK, is a series of multiple choice questions that must be passed in order to take a practical driving test.

J was taking his driving theory test seriously and had been told by a friend that he might be eligible to receive additional help in the examination. However, even with the news that he would be able to have a someone to help him read the questions in the exam, J did not feel confident. As J did not feel confident he did not want to study for the exam and therefore did not enjoy this type of learning.

> *"I reckon learning is good but it's got to be something you enjoy doing. If you don't enjoy it you ain't going to learn. If you enjoy doing something you would stick your head to it and you will learn about it."*

Other barriers identified by J when it came to learning were cost and travel. These barriers were interlinked as J felt that he could not afford the travel expenses. He felt that training would more likely than not be offered during the working day and so he would have to miss out on a day's wages in order to attend training. Having said this, J would consider training after work although if it was only one or two hours a week.

Case Study interview 6

(Aberdare – Basic Skills).

Background

Case study 6 was conducted with Mrs R who is 50 years old and is married with two children and three grandchildren. She has always lived in the same part of Aberdare and has many of her close family living nearby. Her son is 20 years old and is married with three children while her daughter is 19 and she is still at college.

Mrs R left school without any formal qualifications although she says that she enjoyed school. She liked the social aspect of school although she didn't have many friends. She is dyslexic and had a number of problems at primary school with regard to teachers not giving her enough attention and help when learning. Consequently Mrs R felt she was unable to do well at school because she was not taught to read and write while at primary school. Therefore, when she entered secondary school she was already behind and never managed to catch up. As a consequence, Mrs R lacks confidence both socially and in her academic abilities.

> *"In my own words it is like, I wish I had them [qualifications] so that I could better myself and be more confident in myself. By not having them I haven't got the confidence or the right mind to do things."*

Since leaving school Mrs R had taken steps to improve her literacy and numeracy. She was spurred on to do this once she started a family. She also realised that she was actually better at some subjects than she had previously thought (e.g. maths) and so started to feel more confident in her abilities. She described herself as a very practical person, having come top at school in metal work and enjoying wood work.

> *"I loved school. I was thick at school and stupid. I am much better now."*

> *"I can read and I can write but I am not brilliant at it, you know."*

Having said this, Mrs R still had problems reading out loud or writing when being watched. She described a number of coping strategies she had for dealing with her lack of numeracy and literacy, most notably the use, or lack of use of her glasses to avoid reading and writing. Often she would claim to have forgotten her glasses and therefore unable to read or complete a form.

> *"But to fill a form out, no, I wouldn't be confident and stuff like that. And to fill a form out, I had to do one yesterday and I didn't have my glasses on, so I genuinely didn't have my glasses with me and I had to fill in this form and I had to put my name and address and stuff like that. Yeah, I can do it but I get embarrassed with my handwriting."*

As well as her glasses and embarrassment about handwriting, Mrs R also spoke of a time in the supermarket when she was unable to write her address on the back of a cheque when being watched by the cashier and other shoppers.

> *"A couple of years ago we used to have a big Co-op and there were no cards and we used cheque books…I know how to spell my address but I couldn't spell it. I wrote three cheques out and I couldn't put my address on the back of the cheque. In the end I said to the woman, I said 'I am sorry I can't do it. Can you write it on there?' and she wrote it on."*

During the interview Mrs R spoke a lot about other people in her life rather than disclosing details about herself. She organised her life around the important people in her life and so kept busy by helping others.

Employment

Although not currently working, Mrs R had worked in a bakery for many years packing cakes. She was initially given the job through someone she knows and was soon promoted to supervisor. This was the only job she ever did between school and falling pregnant with her first child. Unfortunately while working at the bakery Mrs R injured her back lifting boxes and was never able to return after having her children. Although Mrs R was worried about her promotion at the bakery as it involved paperwork, she was pleased to receive recognition for her work.

> *"I got promoted because I worked hard and I did what I had to do, you know, so I was quite pleased."*

Although the bakery job was the only paid employment Mrs R has ever done, she has had a number of voluntary posts since having her children. Her first voluntary post was in a nursery looking after babies and infants while she currently undertakes voluntary work with the elderly. Although Mrs R considered returning to full-time employment she prefers to volunteer rather than work as it suits her nervous disposition and does not challenge her confidence issues.

> *"With voluntary work I can walk away from it. If you are working I couldn't walk away. I'd have to commit myself to it. I don't like letting people down so with voluntary work it's different to paid work."*

This suggests that Mrs R does not want to fail, nor does she want to be in a position whereby she is obligated to someone or something. Therefore, by volunteering she is able to remain flexible regarding her commitments and still have enough time to devote to her family.

Daily routine

Mrs R has a very rigid daily routine which she has organised around her family. She normally gets up at 6am and takes her daughter on her paper-round in the car. Once she returns from the paper-round she has a shower and some breakfast.

She usually starts the day by dropping her daughter off at college and then visiting one of the elderly people in her area for an hour before going into town to shop. She would then pop into visit her own grandmother who lives locally before returning home.

At home she would do some housework before looking after her grandchildren. She would then collect her daughter from college and prepare dinner. After dinner Mrs R would be able to spend some time with her husband, watch television, do some knitting or reading and then go to bed at 10pm.

Information sources

Mrs R gets her information from a number of sources however she generally relies on the television for news and current affairs. By her own admission, Mrs R enjoys watching the news and makes an effort to know what is going on in the world. Mrs R watches the television in the evenings as she has no time during the day. She would generally watch the news on ITV Wales however as she does have Sky, she does sometimes watch BBC News 24 and Sky News.

As she relies on the television for information, she doesn't buy newspapers. However, her husband does buy The Star and the local newspaper, The Leader, on occasion which she does read. Generally Mrs R would choose to read the headline stories and those about celebrities/true life stories about local people.

Mrs R also listens to the radio when driving in the car. She generally listens to music when in the house however when driving her daughter to and from college, and on the paper-round, she listens to Radio Wales.

> *"I quite enjoy it because on Thursday mornings they are talking about different things and good topics and stuff like that. It is quite enjoyable."*

Long term plans

Mrs R does not anticipate many major changes in her life in the next few years. She described her life as 'slowing down'. Mrs R has actively rejected change in recent years whereby requesting that her husband refuse a job he was offered five miles away. Although five miles is not very far away, Mrs R did not want to move from her current location in the centre of town, near her family and friends.

Regarding career and working aspirations, Mrs R does not see herself in employment again. She does not think that she has the confidence to work again, nor does she want to take the associated risks involved with working (e.g. fear of failure, challenging literacy issues, confidence when in company).

"I wouldn't have the confidence to be able to work with people and I would be afraid of being rejected so I would lose more confidence again."

Learning and barriers

Although Mrs R did not leave school with any formal qualifications, she is still eager to learn. For her one of the main barriers is the fact that she is intimidated by the learning environment.

Contrary to the way that she describes herself as someone who lacks confidence, Mrs R enrolled on a number of training courses since leaving formal education. She has taken steps to improve her literacy, completed a first aid course as well and started a computing course. Although she describes the reasons for participating in learning were not her own, she still signed up to the training.

Once Mrs R left school, she said that an advisor at her local college suggested that she improve her literacy by taking a one year course. Although this wasn't her original intention, she nonetheless signed up and completed the course.

> *"I left secondary school and I went back to do reading and writing. I went back to a school to do that…I was going to talk to someone and they said it was a good idea, so I just went on and did it. I did that for a year."*

She enjoyed this course as she felt that she was offered greater support as a learner and was with older students who did not intimidate her.

She then signed up to a computer course after she had had both of her children. Her motivation to learn about computers was to be able to help her children when they came to use the new technology.

> *"I did start doing a computer course and the first two weeks I was fine and the I was, it was getting too technical, well writing and stuff like that and I didn't want to know anymore…I needed to learn for the children because computers were new out then and all that, it was about 15 years ago maybe. So we just, they had just started coming out and we bought one and I needed to use it for the kids to use it and stuff. And that's why I went."*

However, she didn't finish the course as it involved more writing than she had anticipated. She had thought it would be a practical only course.

Mrs R also took a St. John's Ambulance first aid course when she was volunteering at the children's nursery. She did not have to pay for this course. This course she found practical and useful at involved role play and the use of props (e.g. human dummies). She completed this course twice as each certificate only lasts for a set amount of time. Although this could be seen as an achievement, Mrs R did not recognise it as such possibly because it was a practical certificate and therefore she did not find it as challenging as the computer course.

Looking to the future, Mrs R would like to continue learning and suggested that she would like to take a food hygiene course online. Cookery is one of her hobbies which she feels confidence at, having catered for one hundred guests at her sons wedding.

She would like to gain a formal certificate that would allow her to cater for other occasions if the opportunity presented itself. However, Mrs R suggested that she take the food hygiene course online which would allow her a level of anonymity that would 'protect' her from her fears; fear of failure, inability to learn and confidence with other learners.

> "As you get older you do learn less. I can't hold things in my head and that really annoys me, you know, I can read something over and over and over and I still don't know."

When discussing the ideal training environment, Mrs R had a number of barriers that would need to be overcome in order to encourage her to participate in training again. These were fellow learners, the teacher and exposure of basic skills issues:

> "[I would like] a very small class, people my own age who are the same temperament as me I might manage…and a very understanding teacher, who was a woman…and reading to myself. I don't want to read out loud, don't ask me!"

Case Study interview 7

(Barmouth – Employee).

Background

Case study 7 was conducted with B who is a 51 year old married man living with his wife and 21 year old son. He is a plasterer and has done manual work since he left school. He recently decided to open a stall in the local indoor market selling body building supplements in order to provide a job for his son and a new career for himself once he becomes too old to be a plaster.

Most of B's spare time is spent at the gym where he has been body building for over twenty years. He started going to the gym to lose some weight when he first got married and then discovered that it boosted his confidence and it made him feel healthier. This was important to him as he was a thin boy when at school who suffered from asthma. Body building made him a strong man, in contrast to the weak boy he was at school.

At school B felt that he did not mix with the right types of boys and consequently he did not complete his formal education. Often playing truant, B would hang around with other boys his age smoking in the local fields instead of going to school. When he was at school he suffered from shyness and would not ask the teachers for help when he did not understand something. Consequently his grades slipped and he became disinterested in school altogether.

> "So I wasn't stupid, it was just I think that I left one little village and moved to another village and I got in with a, they weren't a bad bunch of boys as such, they weren't always in trouble but they didn't care about learning and all that and I got in with them and running the streets and I just think that I got led astray."

Having taken the eleven plus exam and upset at his inability to perform well at exams, he steadily dropped from the A stream class to the C stream class. When he finally left education he was intent on earning money and having an independent lifestyle.

B has had to have two operations on his elbows, one operation on each. Each elbow had tendon problems caused by plastering and then body building. Once his elbows became weak he started to consider what he would do after plastering; as he knew that his body would not allow him to be a full-time plasterer forever.

As a couple, B and his wife have lived a quiet life; saving money to pay off their mortgage. This financial security has bought confidence to the couple. Now that they have succeeded in their goal, they felt that they could take the risk in opening the market stall as they had accumulated enough savings to make the venture affordable. At the time of the interview the stall was successful and B was thinking about opening another shop or market stall in a nearby town.

> *"Hopefully with a striving business in the market perhaps another one shop in another, perhaps Merthyr or Ponty, and if that happens then I can give him a full-time job running one. Me, a fulltime job running the other and that would be happy days."*

B is very focused on ensuring that his son is provided for and that he has a source of income. B is aware of the errors he made as a young person and does not want his son experience the same mistakes. Therefore, B spoke a lot about his only son and his aspirations for him.

> *"So what I have messed up in my time I have made sure he has done right in his time."*

Employment

B left school and took a series of casual jobs that enabled him to earn enough money to live the life that he wanted as a young man. He rejected the offer of an apprenticeship in favour of better paid, unskilled work that was plentiful at the time. He gradually started to work in the building trade and finally settled as a plasterer as he enjoyed it the most.

> *"The only thing that bailed me out is the fact that there were more jobs about then. My father put a plumbing apprenticeship right in front of me, four pounds a week the deal was and because I could go on a pot for eleven pound a week I said shove the apprenticeship I don't want it and I am going out to work and I am going to earn proper money and that was it. Stupid, stupid."*

He was self-employed for a while when he was young, supplementing his income with other odd jobs he sourced locally. Once he was a little older he found that plastering work was more forthcoming as his clients preferred to employ an older tradesman.

> *"I started my own business then because I had, I was a fully fledged plaster then. I found it really hard starting off back then because we didn't have a penny. People tended to trust an older plasterer than bring a young lad in."*

Although B was happy as a plasterer he did consider becoming a pub landlord. Initially this appeared to be a simple application process however once he looked into the procedure more closely he discovered that he and his wife would have to take an exam. This put him off the application based on his exam performance at school and therefore they did not pursue it.

B has only applied for one job since becoming a plaster and that was for a part-time position at his local gym. He claimed that he experienced ageism in the application process as he was not asked to attend an interview. The job he was applying for was a low level gym assistant, something which he felt he had more than enough experience. In addition to possible issues with his age, B also feels that his work early work history and lack of formal qualifications also let him down when applying for work.

> *"Application forms, I have always found them a nightmare to be truthful. The main reason I find them a nightmare is that I have no qualifications when I left school. NO A levels, no O levels, nothing."*

Since applying to the local gym, B has not made any other job applications nor does he intend to now that he had his new market stall business.

B opened a market stall in early 2009 selling body building supplements. He decided to open the stall to provide employment for his son and a source of income for himself when he stops plastering. He is currently working part-time as a plasterer and part-time on the market stall. The concept of the market stall business is based on B's interest in body building and using that as a spring board for a new business. Given that B already have substantial knowledge and experience of body building and the supplements to take, this enterprise seemed to be relatively easy venture to set up.

Daily routine

B currently has two part-time jobs, plastering and the market stall. He alternates his days between the two roles however the plastering work would usually take president over the market stall as the nature of the work would be project based.

When not working B spend his free time at the gym or at home with his wife. He rarely socialises outside of these two settings. When relaxing B likes to go for meals with his wife rather than go to the pub.

B and his wife like to watch the television in the evening and are both in bed by 10pm each night.

Information sources

Generally B receives most of his news and information via the television. He watches the News at Ten on ITV Wales each night. He does not buy a local or national newspaper regularly however he does read his colleagues papers on occasion if he has a spare moment on the building site.

B likes sport and so listens to Real Radio which has a lot of sports coverage. He would also watch the football highlights on the television although he does not have Sky television.

B also likes to watch nature documentaries and so watches these on the Freeview channels.

B uses the computer to source the stock for his market stall as well as to communicate via email with a number of business contacts. However he is not very computer savvy.

Long term plans

When B was young he did not have any long term plans, he was happy to leave school without a goal in order to earn money.

> *"I didn't have no idea. I didn't have a vision."*

Now B is very focussed and has a long-term employment plan. His new market stall will hopefully provide him with enough money for his retirement and a relaxing lifestyle that is not too extravagant.

> *"I would like to see us, me and my wife, going on holiday two or three times a year. I would love that. I like going on holidays even if it is only for a long weekend. That would be happy days."*

B is focusing on his son and trying to help him succeed. However during the interview, B realised that he should not be challenging his son about his prospects as there were many similarities between how his son is now and how B was at the same age.

> *"My main objective at the moment is to make sure that he is setup, that is my main objective."*

For B, personal improvement and development is not a goal. As B has paid his mortgage and already has some savings in the bank, he is no longer worried about his lack of formal qualifications. As B is a plasterer, he has never had to use formal qualifications to be commissioned; rather his manual work spoke for itself. Therefore B's main objective is his new market stall.

> *"Yes because at fifty one I don't see, I am not striving to get better and better. The only thing that I want to strive to do now is get my business better and better."*

Learning and barriers

As mentioned above, B is not interested in addressing his lack of formal qualifications or basic skill needs. B feels that although his CV appears to be lacking formal certificates of academic achievements, this does not represent his grasp of language or his mathematical ability. B stated that he did not have a problem with learning. He was just not ready to learn when at school, proven by the fact that he has learnt many skills since leaving school.

B did consider enrolling on a gym instructor's course a few years ago whereby he was awarded a grant to do the training. Inspired by his interest in body building and going to the gym, B wanted to change careers and make his hobby his profession. However, once accepted onto the course, B discovered that he would have to take an exam at the end of the instructor's course; something he previously did not know about. Based on the fact that there would be an examination assessment and the fact that he felt too old to be a gym instructor, B decided not to take the course and not to change careers.

> *"I went to the Job Seekers or whatever you call it, I forget…and they said I had a hundred pound grant for it but it was only payable to the company whoever tool me on, you know, but I was disillusioned about my age, who would want me? In the back of my mind a bit of bad rot set in with me just running myself down like."*

Since opening the market stall B has gained more confidence and would reconsider the instructor's course if he didn't already have two part-time jobs. Given the positive response he has had from the new business venture and the fact customers often come to ask his advice, he has grown in confidence and his abilities.

> *"It's still a confidence thing isn't it? If you haven't got it, you haven't got it but now I have the shop I have got confidence now. I am stood there and people come in and ask me."*

Case Study interview 8

(Barmouth – Employee).

Background

Case study 8 was conducted with an 18 year old female who had recently had a child. When W attended the focus group earlier in the research programme she was pregnant and working. Therefore W had gone through a number of life changes since the last time she participated in the research.

W and her boyfriend lived in a flat on the seafront. W had been working as a waitress but is now a full-time mother. Her boyfriend works in a shop and his mother, who also lives in the flat, is studying reflexology.

W lived in a number of different places in Wales while growing up. He mother was in the Army and so she changed schools many times before settling in Barmouth. Barmouth is a seaside town with a lot of seasonal employment. There are very few full-time permanent jobs in the area and so career aspirations are often low amongst local young people. W did not have any career aspirations while growing up in Barmouth. She knew that she no longer wanted to be in education however beyond that assertion she was not sure. Initially W wanted to be a forensic scientist as she had seen a programme on television about the profession but she was put off by the fact that she would not qualify until she was in her twenties. Therefore, once W had completed her GCSEs she didn't know what she wanted to do next.

For her GCSEs, W picked three options that interested her at the time, ICT, textiles and child development. She felt more comfortable with doing 'hands-on stuff' as she disliked sitting still in a classroom for an entire lesson. She was easily bored at school and was often sent out of lessons for being disruptive. W did enjoy the social aspect of school and she made a number of good friends there.

> "Looking back I only went for fun. Like I only went to school to go and see my mates."

Once W left school she moved with her boyfriend to a town further north where her mother lived. W's boyfriend was promised a job by family friends based in the town while W enrolled in college to do business BTEC. She hoped that the subject would help her later on when she planned to join her boyfriend working for her step-father.

> "It was okay actually. It was a lot better than I thought it was. I did quite well in that but I reckon that was because I was with a totally different bunch of people than from down here because I didn't know anyone up there."

Although W completed school and her BTEC, she still has trouble with basic English and Maths.

> "So I have trouble with my maths. It was English as well because my spelling is atrocious. My spelling and handwriting are just awful and you need them everyday as well."

Employment

While W was at school she was a waitress in a hotel, chambermaid and worked in a tearoom. It was usual for young people to work in the evenings and weekends while still at school to supplement their pocket money in order to buy things and/or go out at the weekends. Most of the jobs available in W's local area are in the service sector.

> "Because most of the work is just waitressing or just in a shop and you don't really need a lot of qualifications for waitressing. You don't need any really so, and just to work in a shop you just need communication skills, customer service but apart from that there is not really a lot."

W's most significant job to date was with a high street retailer selling homeware. W had to apply for this position formally, completing an application form and attending an interview. W was not hopeful she would get the position as she had never applied for a job before, nor had she ever been to a job interview. Because of this, W was not aware that she would have to also complete a basic maths test when at the job interview. However, W passed the maths test and despite her fears about completing the application form, she was offered the job.

> "I don't really trust myself filling forms out on my own. I've always got them wrong."

W enjoyed the social element of retail as well as the opportunities she was given to break the routine of shop-floor work. She was asked to redecorate the shop windows as well as reorganise the shop-floor. She found these tasks challenging and creative.

When W and her boyfriend moved north, she was unemployed for a short amount of time. During this time, W registered with her local Job Centre Plus in order to find temporary employment, as she was already pregnant. Unfortunately W did not find the advisors at Job Centre Plus to be very helpful, given that she was a young pregnant woman. Most advisors she met with were unable or unwilling to offer her practical advice or help. It wasn't until she spoke to the under 18s advisor that she felt that her situation was being listened to.

Daily routine

W's daily routine changed significantly once she had given birth to her baby. At the time of the depth interview she was still finding a routine that fitted her new life and that of the other people she shared the flat with.

Information sources

W did not read the national or local newspapers on a regular basis however she would read real life stories in magazines.

When it came to current affairs, W would watch the television news from time to time however she preferred to watch DVDs instead of television programmes. She said she used to watch S4C when she was younger but now she generally watched ITV Wales and Channel 5.

W does not own a computer and therefore does not access the Internet very much. She can access social networking sites such as Facebook on her mobile telephone, which she uses to keep in touch with her school friends. She also mentioned that she finds out some news via Facebook when her friends update their status. W does not listen to the radio.

Long term plans

Now that W is a mother, she is concentrating on her new responsibilities. She is not sure what her long term plans are, except for staying in the local area and possibly

working again in the future. She was not able to project beyond the next two years whereby she considered nursery for her child allowing her to have more free time.

> *"To be honest I have no idea. I haven't got a clue to be honest. Hopefully I will have a job, just a couple of hours or something in between while she is somewhere, either in like a nursery for a couple of hours, you know, but I haven't got a clue."*

Learning and barriers

Although W has a business BTEC, her English and Maths GCSE grades are below C grade. She is concerned about this as many employers require this on their job application forms.

W is not currently considering training again however she did speak of her experiences of successful learning in the past. For this she referenced her time in the Cadets at school. W enjoyed the Cadets as it combined a number of elements of school life that she enjoyed, socialising and participating in practical tasks, as well as addressing some of the issues she had with the traditional classroom setting, (i.e. formal teacher pupil relationships and the ability to learn through trial and error). W enjoyed her time in the Cadets and was eager to learnt whilst there.

> *"I don't know, it was the fact that you got to meet everyone from all around different areas and you got on well with all the instructors and you could have a laugh but at the same time you were learning."*

> *"So if I am left to do it on my own it is a lot easier but if someone else tries to sit there and do it with me I get a bit frustrated and I get like, I can't do it anymore and turn myself off."*

W also spoke about how she managed to secure a place at college despite not achieving the desired grades for her course. W had to negotiate with the course administrators in order to be allowed to enrol on the BTEC. In doing so she had to enter into an agreement whereby she would prove her worth and desire to learn. This informal contract was struck based on a personal level rather than an academic one. Therefore, making W's participation in the training less standard than that of other students.

> *"The college said that I would have to really prove that I will learn and I could actually do what they were giving me as I got a U in ICT at school."*